

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN32722
Country: China
Date: 17 December 2007

Keywords: China – Protestants – Christians in Zhejiang – House churches

This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.

Questions

- 1. Is there information about the treatment of Protestant Christians and house churches in Leqing, Zhejiang Province over the past 3 years?**
- 2. How were Christians treated in Zhejiang Province in 2006 and 2007?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Is there information about the treatment of Protestant Christians and house churches in Leqing, Zhejiang Province over the past 3 years?**

This response will look at the following topics:

1. [Leqing](#)
2. [Protestants in Wenzhou](#)
3. [Protestants in Leqing \(Yueqing\)](#)
4. [Protestants in China](#)

Leqing

Leqing (also known as Yuecheng or Yueqing (乐清市)) is a county-level city in the prefecture-level city of Wenzhou, in the province of Zhejiang in south-east China. The Leqing administrative region and city lie to the immediate north-east of Wenzhou, and the relative distance between Leqing (appearing on the map as the city of Yuecheng) and Wenzhou can be seen in this map – Attachment 1. Heyan (He Yan) could not be located in any of the sources searched. A Chinese language map of Leqing City appears at Attachment 2.

Baizhangji was located approximately 65km south west of Wenzhou in Wencheng County (文成县). For a reference map showing the location of Baizhangji relative to Wenzhou, see Attachment 3. It is difficult to find specific information on the treatment of Protestant Christians and house churches within this local township level, however further information was found on their treatment in Wenzhou city (which encompasses Baizhangji), and in general across Zhejiang province and these also appear below. A Chinese language map of Wencheng appears at Attachment 4.

Protestants in Wenzhou

Zhejiang is home to the largest number of Protestant Chinese in the country, estimated at around 1.8 million in 2004 (out of a province population of 47 million – see Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp. 276-77 – Attachment 5, see also Lambert, T. 2005, 'How many Christians in China?', *China Insight Newsletter*, OMF website, August/September <http://www.us.omf.org/content.asp?id=45076> – Accessed 14 March 2006 – Attachment 6). In particular, Wenzhou, in the southern part of the province, is also home to the largest concentration of Christian churches in China. Lambert explores the number of Protestant Chinese in Zhejiang in *China's Christian Millions*:

In 2000 there were at least 2,600 registered churches and about 3,500 registered meeting-points. This may be a very conservative figure as in the same year, TSPM sources revealed there were 2,000 registered churches and 2,000 meeting-points in the Greater Wenzhou region (the "Jerusalem of China") alone. There are, however, only 120 registered pastors in the province, helped by a massive force of over 7,000 voluntary church workers and 970 elders. The church growth in many parts of Zhejiang is staggering. For example, Ruian had only 8,170 Christians in 1950 but 90,000 by 2000! (Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp. 276-77 – Attachment 5)

Lambert and Anderson also provided a broader overview of the house church networks in Wenzhou:

WENZHOU NETWORKS

Wenzhou, the "Jerusalem of China," is in the southeast part of the coastal province of Zhejiang. There are officially 700,000 adult believers in the TSPM churches out of a population of 7 million. This means there are as many Protestant Christians in Wenzhou as there were in the whole of China pre-1949! There are over 2,000 legally registered churches open in the Greater Wenzhou municipality. The Wenzhou people are great traders in such goods as footwear, leather jackets and clothing. They travel all over China and the Christians spread the gospel and set up their own fellowships wherever they go. Many of the Chinese churches in Europe, especially in France, Spain and Italy, have been set up largely by Wenzhou believers many years ago. They are also active in Russia and Eastern Europe.

There are several large Wenzhou networks. Some leaders have traveled overseas and appealed for funds for "Back to Jerusalem" and other projects. However, actual leaders still in Wenzhou have stated firmly that they do not need overseas funding as their fellowships are quite able to raise significant funds for evangelism. (Many members are well-off entrepreneurs.) This is important: if the actual leaders within China are saying they do not need to rely on foreign funding, why are others who have left China for some years still raising large sums? The biblical principle of self-support of the indigenous local church is at grave risk. Wenzhou leaders confirm they are only in the initial stages of considering taking up the BTJ challenge.

Overseas, some have claimed that the Wenzhou house-church networks could number 12 million. Even though their evangelists and businessmen have traveled all over China setting up new fellowships this is probably an estimate on the high side.

The Wenzhou leaders are better educated and probably more theologically literate as well as being more engaged in business and society than the rural-based groups. In recent years, some younger leaders have accepted Reformed theology particularly through the influence of the popular Southeast Asian pastor Stephen Tong, and have challenged the teaching of some older leaders on the perseverance of the saints and other doctrines. With their international connections, churches in Wenzhou seem to have embraced a wide variety of doctrine and worship-styles from Hong Kong, Taiwan and further overseas. Young people's work and Sunday schools are flourishing in many areas. A brief government crackdown a few years ago when some house-church worship and training centers were demolished seems to have had no long-term effect on the growth of the church (Anderson, S. E. & Lambert, T. (ed.) 2006, 'House-Church Networks – An Overview (Part 1)', *Cogitations Blog*, 26 March <http://cogitations.typepad.com/cogitations/2006/03/index.html> – Accessed 7 July 2006 - Attachment 7).

Understanding the treatment of Protestants within a given area is difficult, given the broad interpretation of the governments 'freedom of religious belief' policies across the provinces, and indeed, across cities and counties within these provinces. Nonetheless, there is some general information regarding the treatment of Protestant Christians and house churches in Wenzhou over the past 3 years. A recent report in the *Marist Advocate* observed the changes in the government's treatment of Protestants:

Religious activities that are not under state control are considered illegal in China, and are often categorized as “illegitimate religious activities” and “cultic groups” in order to facilitate shutdown. Independent house churches face the brunt of this legislation.

Bob Fu, the leader of China Aid, said that one of the newest developments is a strategy that labels Protestant movements as “cults”, allowing the government to justify repression. And yet, despite persistent and often violent persecution, the underground church in China is growing stronger every day.

...

“There are no ‘denominations’ as such in China, only different kinds of Protestant house-church networks and some basically underground Catholic networks,” said Aikman, the author of *Jesus in Beijing*. “Although Christians tend not to see themselves as revolutionaries, house churches have become one of China's few bulwarks against government power. **In Wenzhou, a city in coastal Zhejiang province known among Chinese Christians as ‘China's Jerusalem’, 15 to 20 percent of the population is Christian, a fact that gives the church leaders much greater authority in confronting local party officials.**”

...

Finally, it is because of this evangelical fervor that underground house churches refuse to register with the Chinese government.

House churches refuse to register Chinese Religious Affairs Bureau and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement because of the tight restrictions that would be placed on them—restrictions that most evangelical Chinese Christians see as destructive to the faith.

When a house church registers with the government, its activities are restricted to Sunday worship. Evangelism outside the church building and home meetings and prayer meetings are

also forbidden. For evangelical Christians, this removes all opportunities for the church and its members to grow in their faith, an unacceptable condition for most believers. Finally, authority of the church is given over to the government. This is perhaps the most important issue evangelical Chinese Christians have with government registration. Evangelical Christians respect Christ as the head of the church, and refuse to give up control to the state (Kneifel, K. 2007, 'Christians In China Face "Olympic Persecution"', 2008 Olympics bring attention to persecution of Christians', *Marist Advocate*, Spring <http://www.academic.marist.edu/faculty/modele/advocate/stories2007/story11.html> – Accessed 14 December 2007 – Attachment 8).

One source of recent confrontation between Protestants and local authorities has surrounded the destruction of religious buildings. *BosNewsLife*, a Christian news agency, reported on the destruction of churches in Wenzhou in 2007:

Three "Prayer Mountain" church buildings in China's Wenzhou city of Zhejiang province are facing "imminent destruction" by the local government, fellow Christians and human rights watchers said Saturday, July 14.

Local authorities reportedly issued an ultimatum to destroy the three churches by next week. Most of the local house church leaders have been warned they will be arrested if they resist the government destruction efforts, said religious rights monitoring group China Aid Association (CAA).

The three buildings built about 10 years ago on three different mountains were used as areas where believers pray everyday. Up to 800 believers gather at every building for larger meetings, once a month, Christians said.

"Because there are more 'house churches' than the government sanctioned churches, the local government has been determined to destroy these church buildings by accusing the believers of following an evil cult," said religious rights monitoring group China Aid Association (CAA).

HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT

The "Prayer Mountain" churches are apparently seen as part of the rapidly spreading house church movement in China. The term 'house churches' refers to congregations held in homes of individual Christians or in other buildings outside the state-supported denominations.

From 1997 to 2003, the local government bombed or occupied 11 house church buildings at Yongjia County alone, CAA claimed.

"To destroy church buildings used for prayer is very deplorable," said Rev. Bob Fu," a former house church pastor and current CAA president." We urge the Chinese central government to help stop this type of barbaric acts by the local government."

INCREASED CRACKDOWN

Human rights groups claim Chinese authorities have stepped up a crackdown on Christian activities ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics to deter Chinese and foreign Christians of preaching the Gospel to people outside their own communities.

Chinese officials have argued however they only carry out the law. They say Christians are free to worship in China's official Protestant and Catholic churches ('China province to destroy 'Prayer Mountain' churches' 2007, *BosNewsLife*, 14 July – Attachment 9).

A Canadian Research Response also reported on smaller scale activities in Wenzhou in 2001:

In some areas, underground Bible study groups and Sunday schools have gained the attention of authorities, who believed these gatherings could foment dissent (ibid. 8 Mar. 2004; ibid. 24 Dec. 2003; Washington Post 24 Dec. 2002). In Wenzhou in 2001, for example, the local Religious Affairs Bureau circulated a document banning Sunday school, and later conducted church raids (ibid.). However, in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, pilot projects for Sunday schools had begun in some churches, and the central government reportedly informed foreign officials that such schools were legal (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006, CHN100387.E – *China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 7 September – Attachment 10).

Yet at the same time *New American Media* reported that:

Situations vary dramatically across China depending on local governments' attitudes to Christianity and home churches. **Wenzhou city, renowned for its commodity business in Zhejiang Province, one of the economically most developed areas in China, is called China's Jerusalem for its large Christian population. People are largely free to worship.** But in some less developed provinces, such as Henan in central China, home church goers are interrogated or even arrested from time to time ('Christian Home Churches Gaining in China' 2006, *New American Media*, 2 August – Attachment 11).

For further recent reports on Christians in Zhejiang Province, see [Question 2](#).

Protestants in Leqing (Yueqing)

Tony Lambert makes specific mention of Leqing County in his paper 'God's grace — in Germany and Guizhou':

For over twenty years Wenzhou has been a center of Christian revival. Leqing County has at least 100,000 Protestant Christians and in Yongjia County nearly 20% of the population are officially registered as Protestants (Lambert, T. 2001, 'God's grace – In Germany and Guizhou', *Overseas Missionary Fellowship*, February
http://onebillionwait.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm Newsletter_2001_2006/gcm_feb_2001 – Accessed 17 December 2007 – Attachment 13).

Limited information was found on the treatment of Protestants and the house church movement in Leqing. The information that was found tended to be dated. Joe McDonald reported of the destruction of religious buildings in Leqing (Yueqing) in 2000:

China is demolishing hundreds of churches and temples in a crackdown on unauthorized worship in a southeastern coastal area known for its flourishing religious life, officials said Wednesday.

One temple demolished Tuesday was run by local Communist Party officials who fleeced worshippers, state media said.

The demolitions began at the start of December in rural areas around the port city of Wenzhou, said a spokesman for the city Foreign Affairs Office. He said some buildings in Wenzhou itself might also be destroyed.

"In rural areas, religious superstition is still very rampant," said the spokesman, who would give only his surname, Zhou. "The government's goal is to demolish those illegal buildings as well as correct those decadent rural lifestyles."

A spokesman for the Wenzhou city propaganda department, Lu Tianlei, said as many as 450 buildings have been destroyed. Most were in the Ou hai district of Wenzhou and in nearby Yongjia and Yueqing counties, Lu said.

A Hong Kong human rights group put the number of destroyed buildings much higher at 1,200. The Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy said the buildings were being dynamited and some were more than a century old.

The communist government, which recognizes only five religions, is in the midst of a crackdown on the Falun Gong meditation sect and other unauthorized religious activity. It accuses many illegal groups of defrauding or abusing followers.

A religious revival has swept China in recent years. Lively underground church movements service Catholics and Protestants, who refuse to worship under state control. Unorthodox groups influenced by Buddhism, Christianity and other faiths have also sprung up.

Traditionally isolated from central government control by the sea and inland mountains, Wenzhou has a free-spirited reputation as a spot where religion and private enterprise and smuggling and other unauthorized activities flourish.

In Yueqing, the Yangshan Temple was run for profit by local officials, China Central Television reported on its Web site. It said they kept donations from worshippers and then auctioned rights to run the temple for 500,000 yuan (dlrs 60,000). There was no word on whether the party officials were punished.

The temple was demolished Tuesday, the official newspaper Wenzhou Chaoshang News said on its Web site. The Information Center in Hong Kong said it was more than a century old. Neither state media nor the rights group described which sect the temple belonged to.

The area around Wenzhou has numerous small Christian churches built by European traders in the 18th and 19th centuries, though it wasn't clear whether they were targeted in the crackdown.

Officials gave conflicting accounts of whether the demolitions were linked to the national crackdown. Zhou, the Foreign Affairs Office spokesman in Wenzhou, said they were a local initiative.

"This could be a good example for other cities," he said (McDonald, J. 2000, 'China destroying hundreds of churches', *Associated Press*, December – Attachment 14).

A number of articles report on the same process of destruction during 2000, and the Member may be interested in reviewing a BBC monitoring service article that provided further details on events during 2000 ('Wenzhou church, temple demolitions likened to Cultural Revolution' 2000, *BBC Monitoring Service*, December - Attachment 15). There is little information on the general treatment of Christians or house churches in Leqing during recent years.

Protestants in China

An ideal starting point for information on the treatment of Protestants and house churches throughout China is the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*. The report notes in general that:

There were many reports of repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and house churches during the reporting period. The national religious affairs ministry, known as State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), stated that friends and family holding prayer

meetings at home need not register with the Government, but the regulations on religious affairs (RRA) state that formal worship should take place only in government-approved venues. There were many reports that police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) interfered with house church meetings, sometimes accusing the house church of disturbing neighbors or disrupting social order. Police sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further house worship in the venues. Police interrogated both laypeople and their leaders about their activities at the meeting sites, in hotel rooms, and in detention centers. Leaders sometimes faced harsher treatment, including detention, formal arrest and sentencing to reeducation or imprisonment (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90133.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 12).

Under ‘Section II. Status of Religious Freedom’, the report notes that:

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Constitution limits protection of religious belief to activities which it defines as “normal.” The Constitution also states that religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign domination.” **The Government restricts lawful religious practice largely to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and attempts to control the growth and scope of activities of both registered and unregistered religious groups.** The Government tries to prevent the rise of religious groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party. Nonetheless, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

...

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC) states that registration does not require a congregation to join either the TSPM or the CCC. However, nearly all local RAB officials require registered Protestant congregations and clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice that appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Before the passage of the RRA, **a few Protestant groups reportedly registered independently of the TSPM/CCC. These included the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province (where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists) and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province.** It was not clear whether these religious groups registered as meeting points of pre-existing religious organizations or as religious organizations themselves. The (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a PRA in a few parts of the country.

Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refused to register or affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Others did not seek registration independently or with one of the PRAs due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Others state that TSPM theology places submission to the state’s authority above submission to Christ’s authority and refuse to join on these grounds. Some groups disagreed with the TSPM/CCC teachings that differences in the tenets of different Protestant creeds can be reconciled or accommodated under one “post denominational” religious umbrella organization. Many evangelical house church groups also disagreed with the TSPM’s admonitions against proselytism, which they consider a central teaching of Christianity. Unregistered groups also frequently did not affiliate with one of the PRAs for fear that doing so would allow government authorities to control sermon content.

During the reporting period, the Government rejected attempts by several unregistered religious groups to register. Some groups reported that authorities denied their applications without cause or detained group members who met with officials when they attempted to register. The Government contended that these refusals were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements. A few unregistered religious groups were able to register as "meeting points" of one of the PRAs (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90133.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 12).

The Member may also be interested in exploring a recent DFAT report on Protestants and house churches in the nearby province of Fujian (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, Country Information Report No. 06/42 – *Failed asylum seeker return decision*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 7 August 2006), 25 August – Attachment 16) and also an academic paper on house churches and religious freedom in China by May Cheng (Cheng, M. 2003, 'House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China', *China: An International Journal*, March – Attachment 17). A recent DIMA Issues Brief on *House Churches in China*, reported:

When PRC government announced the new Regulations on Religious Affairs it described them as something of a paradigm shift in the way that the government treats religion. The regulations sparked mixed reactions from church leaders and human rights groups, with some viewing them as "promising little improvement for believers who do not wish to follow the official government policy."

In December 2004, Amnesty International commented that the new regulations "...do nothing to reduce the restrictions on underground churches, merely defining the supervisory role over religious affairs for various government departments and offices."

HRW included the new regulations amongst its Human Rights Concerns for the 61st Session of the U.N. in March 2005, describing them as made to "consolidate controls on freedom of religious belief and expression." HRW also added that although the regulations were "...ostensibly designed to protect believers, the regulations strengthen requirements for any group hoping to register as a legal religious institution" and that regulations requirements were vaguely worded and allowed authorities extraordinary leeway to close institutions, levy fines, dismiss personnel, and censor texts. Legal experts also criticized the vague wording of the regulations mentioning for example that although Article 3 guarantees protection of "normal" religious activities, the term "normal" is not defined (DIMA Country Information And Protection Support Section, 2006, *House Churches In China – Issues Brief* – Ref: CHN290306 – Accessed 13 December 2007 – Attachment 18).

Further general information on Protestants and house churches in China can be found in the UK Home Office's *Country of Origin Report*:

19.01 As reported by the BBC on 9 November 2004, "Getting reliable numbers about the number of Christians in China is notoriously difficult. Estimates vary between 40m to 70m Protestants, only 10 million of whom are registered members of government churches. The situation is similar for Catholics. Of the estimated 15 to 20 million Catholics in China, less than half belong to state-approved churches, which put authority to Beijing before authority to Rome."

19.02 This report continued, "Both Catholics and Protestants have long complained of persecution by the Communist authorities, and human rights groups claim the problem is getting worse." According to the same source, about 300 Christians are detained in China at

any one time, and that number is due to rise (based on information from the Jubilee Campaign). This report also stated, “China’s Christian population – especially those who refuse to worship in the tightly regulated state-registered churches – is seen as one such threat.” Furthermore the report stated, “Those Christians who want to avoid the state-controlled religious movements meet in unofficial buildings or even each others’ homes – hence their description as ‘house churches’ – risking fines, imprisonment, torture and even, in some cases, death” (UK Home Office 2007, *Country of Origin Report: China*, UK Home Office website, 30 April, p. 55 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/china-100507.doc> – Accessed 12 December 2007 Attachment 19).

More detailed information appears from the China Aid Association in their *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province*:

During the period covered by this report, from January 2006 to December 2006, the Chinese government continued its general crackdown on unregistered house churches, but the strategies used have changed to some degree with the shifting domestic and international situation.

Reported incidents of raids on house churches have decreased in 2006 as compared to previous years. This tendency became clear in the second half of the year. Another development is that, although Public Security Officials still held house church leaders detained in the raids for extended periods, most church members were released after short interrogations on the spot. **This strategy effectively decreased the number of arrests, but had the effect of transferring the pressure onto the church leaders, who were sometimes held for weeks or months.** There is clear evidence that a number of these leaders were tortured and physically abused during the time they were held.

...

Another new development was banning house churches as cults; repression of unregistered Protestants for involvement in cults became more prominent in mid-2006. After being classified as a cult, house churches in Langzhong city, Sichun province were severely persecuted in 2006.

...

The Chinese government continues to maintain strict control over the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), which leads the registered Protestant church in China. For example, the local Religion Administrative Bureau evicted Pastor Hu Qinghua, a pastor of a TSPM church in Pinglu, Shanxi, in June 2006.

The Chinese government also continues to restrict relationships of unregistered Chinese Protestants with fellow believers abroad, in contravention of international human rights standards. Meetings between house church leaders and Protestants visiting China to conduct theological or organizational trainings were raided in Henan province, Yunnan province, and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Officials have banned some house church leaders from traveling abroad, including the famous legal scholar Dr. Fan Yafeng. Senior government officials continue to incite suspicion of overseas Christians by accusing them of religious infiltration intended to weaken China

(China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, pp. 2-5 http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 20).

Broader information on the treatment of Protestant Chinese and of their house churches can be found in the above cited *International Religious Freedom Report 2007* (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90133.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 12) and in Tony Lambert’s research (see Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp. 276-77 – Attachment 5, and Lambert, T. 2005, ‘How many Christians in China?’, *China Insight Newsletter*, Overseas Mission Fellowship website, August/September <http://www.us.omf.org/content.asp?id=45076> – Accessed 14 March 2006 – Attachment 6). Relevant material from these sources has been quoted above, but the Member may be interested in this material for more information or a broader perspective.

2. How were Christians treated in Zhejiang Province in 2006 and 2007?

There is limited information on the general treatment of Christians (Protestants) in Zhejiang province in 2006 and 2007. Most reports from the past two to three years refer to specific cases of arrest or the destruction of religious buildings. The *International Religious Freedom Report 2007* observed that:

Police sometimes closed unregistered places of worship, including Catholic churches and Protestant house churches with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. **The Government closed churches in Zhejiang, Jilin, and Fujian Provinces during the reporting period. In some cases local officials destroyed the properties of unregistered religious groups. SARA considers unregistered churches to be illegal, although SARA has stated that prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in private homes are legal and do not require registration. In some areas unregistered house churches with hundreds of members met openly with the knowledge of local authorities. In other areas house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends were proscribed. House churches could encounter greater difficulties when their membership grew, when they arranged for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forged links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches were generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas could number in the hundreds.** It was also difficult for registered groups to register new places of worship, such as churches and mosques, even in areas with growing religious populations.

...

In July 2006 officials demolished a large house church that was under construction in Xiaoshan County, Zhejiang Province. Police reportedly beat hundreds of house church members who arrived to protest the demolition. Officials reportedly had denied repeated requests for permission to build the church. The Government claimed to have offered the church alternative sites on which to build the church. However, the religious group said that the suggested properties were not suitable for building a church (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90133.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 12).

The China Aid Association also reported on events in Zhejiang province:

CAA has compiled a set of statistics outlining, the number of arrests, the number of detentions (for over 10 days), and the number of imprisonments (for more than a year) that have been reported to them by reliable sources during 2006. Given the population the geographical size of China as well as the desire of Public Security Officials to keep such arrests hidden from the outside world it would be impossible to measure the exact number that have occurred.

According to CAA sources alone, the government detained over 600 Christians in 2006. This figure is less than 2005 when more than 2000 arrests were reported. This reflects

the Public Security Officials new tactic of interrogating church members during a raid rather than officially arresting them. Most of the reported detentions in 2006 were church leaders.

The three provinces where the most arrests took place were Henan, Zhejiang, and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The Protestant house church movement is particularly strong in Henan and Zhejiang provinces.

...

By comparison, the local officials closed and demolished more house churches in 2006 than 2005. Three house churches were demolished in Zhejiang province in 2006, including the large ongoing building of a house church in Xiaoshan (China Aid Association 2007, Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006, January, p. 3 http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 20).

The *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province* also provided statistical information on events, arrests, detentions and imprisonments in Zhejiang, and some extracts of these are provided below (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 20).

Province	Zhejiang	Henan	Anhui	Xinjiang	Beijing	Sichuan	Inner Mongolia	Jilin	Shandong	Hubei	Yunnan	Shaanxi	Jiangsu	Guangdong	Gansu	Fujian	Shanghai
Events	4	5	4	5	5	Unknown	3	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Arrests	72	174	79	57	3	Unknown	13	42	77	31	89	0	13	0	0	0	1
Detentions	5	4	38	22	0	14	3	2	5	10	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Imprisonments	8	2	1	0	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Persecution by Province in China from January 2006—December 2006

Province	Zhejiang	Henan	Anhui	Xinjiang
Events	4	5	4	5
Arrests	72	174	79	57
Detentions	5	4	38	22
Imprisonments	8	2	1	0

Persecution by Province in China (Zhejiang Province)

Date	Description	Punishment	Arrests
3-2	2 Christians detained in Shanyang County (山阳县)	Detention	2
7-29	A Church building in Xiaoshan (萧山) destroyed.	Church Destroyed	
7-29	60 Christians arrested in 7.29 Xiaoshan event (萧山教案)	Detention	60
8-15	Writer Zan Aizong(管爱宗) was under custody for 7 days.	Detention	1
8-21	A Church building in Shaoxing (绍兴) destroyed.	Church Destroyed	
12-11	Writer Zan Aizong(管爱宗) was put under house arrest.	House Arrest	1
12-14	A Church building in Shaoxing (绍兴) destroyed.	Church Destroyed	
12-14	Tu Shichang was put under house arrest.	House Arrest	1
12-22	8 Christians sentenced to imprisonment for involvement in 7.29 event.	Imprisonment	8

Summary: 3 Churches destroyed, 72 arrested, 5 detained, 8 imprisoned.

The report concluded that:

The province-by-province report shows that Zhejiang and Henan provinces, where the Protestant house Church movement is particularly strong, had the worst persecution against house churches in the past 12 months. 246 pastors and believers were arrested in 9 raids from January 2006 to December 2006, 3 churches were destroyed, 10 were sentenced to imprisonment, and many of the arrested were abused while detained.

...

“Zhejiang and Henan province should be put on notice having the worst religious persecution record,” said Rev. Bob Fu of CAA, **“It is morally imperative for any conscientious foreign investors in Henan to address this serious issue”** (China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January, p. 20 http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007 – Attachment 20).

As these extracts suggest, most recent reports on the treatment of Chinese Protestants in Zhejiang surround the destruction of religious buildings, and subsequent protests and riots (involving arrests and detentions) surrounding this destruction. The *China Rights Forum*'s 'News Roundup' of March 2007 reported the following:

On December 23, a court in Xiaoshan, a suburb of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, sentenced eight Christians to various terms of imprisonment for “inciting violence” in connection with a mass protest against state demolition of a non-state sanctioned church. The China Aid Association reported that Pastor Shen Zhuke was sentenced to three-and-a-half years after a 12-hour trial, while Pastor Wang Weiliang was sentenced to three years, and Feng Guangliang and Luo Bingliang to two years and one year respectively. Another four Christians received suspended sentences of one to three years, and were expected to be released soon. Tens of thousands of Protestant Christians live in Xiaoshan, giving rise to growing conflict with local authorities over unauthorized churches. State media reported that the protest from July 26 to 29 involved more than 1,000 people and resulted in the injury of at least 10 government workers. (Reuters) Rights defense lawyer Gao Zhisheng was given a suspended sentence on December 22, after more than four months of detention and periods of effective house arrest since early this year on charges of incitement to subvert state power. Immediately following his sentence, he disappeared. As of January 3, Gao Zhisheng's whereabouts still remained unknown. He has been physically abused and his family has undergone constant harassment ('News Roundup: Trial Developments' 2007, *China Rights Forum*, 23 March, Human Rights in China website, p.15

In 2006, Time magazine noted:

Although Christians tend not to see themselves as revolutionaries, house churches have become one of China's few bulwarks against government power. **In Wenzhou, a city in coastal Zhejiang province known among Chinese Christians as “China's Jerusalem,” 15% to 20% of the population is Christian, a fact that gives the church leaders much greater authority in confronting local party officials.** In 2002, for example, a campaign of protests and appeals to Beijing led to the reversal of a city government decision to ban Sunday-school teaching. **In Hangzhou, local officials say the clash--about which TIME was the first to hear eyewitness accounts--stemmed from the church builders' long-running defiance of government regulations.** The county government's statement contends that three alternative sites had been offered to the Christian community's representatives but were refused by church leaders.

Chinese authorities insist that they are not hostile to religion as long as it is practiced according to their rules. At officially sanctioned churches like St. Paul's in Nanjing, a near puritanical attention to order is maintained. There are rows of wooden pews, a pulpit from which the sermon is preached, even a signboard on which hymn numbers are posted. The pastor of St. Paul's, Kan Renping, 38, says his congregation has grown from a few hundred when he took over in 1994 to some 5,000 regular worshippers today. Many have to watch the proceedings on remote TV from four satellite chapels in a nearby building. Despite the growth, Kan isn't a proselytizer. “Anyone is welcome to come in and have a chat with me about religion,” he says. “But if people want to come in and talk politics, that we don't like. We only want to concentrate on religion here” (Elegant, S. 2006, ‘The War For China's Soul’, *Time Magazine*, 20 August – Attachment 22).

Whilst a source from the *Washington Post* reported the following conflict:

Nothing illustrated the boldness of Zhejiang's Christians more clearly than the hasty building of an illegal house church this summer in a suburb of Hangzhou, the provincial capital. When local officials demolished the church, a massive riot ensued, with 3,000 protesters facing off against thousands of uniformed riot police, security guards and plainclothes police.

It was the most dramatic example in a series of arrests, raids and demolitions of churches considered illegal by the authorities. Some observers said the riot was only the latest chapter in a long-running battle between authorities and the more outspoken of China's growing population of 45 million to 65 million Christians. Other activists said it represented a stepped-up persecution of unregistered congregations.

The 85-year-old church, in the suburban district of Xiaoshan, had its own building before government officials turned it into a hospital many years ago. Since then, members had haggled with officials for compensation and a new location, most recently rejecting a government-approved spot beside a noisy highway. “Xiaoshan people have the tradition of family or house gatherings and they're rich, so they want more freedom,” said Chen. “It's hard for the government to regulate them and tell them where to build their church.”

Tired of delays, church members decided in July they couldn't wait any longer. Hundreds gathered in Xiaoshan's Cheluwan village to build the church by hand. They began on a Monday, one group encircling the site to serve as protection with a second group working in rotation through the night. Some volunteers cooked while others stood above one another on metal scaffolding, handing up bricks, sand, cement, shovels and rope.

By Saturday morning they needed only to lay the roof. But on the afternoon of July 29, authorities sent several hundred trucks, four bulldozers, and thousands of riot police, security officers and non-uniformed guards to the scene. Police used bullhorns to order everyone to disperse.

“Stop all illegal activity,” the police demanded, as bystanders used their cellphones to photograph their arrival. “Nobody should obstruct state officials who are executing their public function. Nobody should make up facts, spread rumors or disturb social order.”

A riot broke out as church members tried to stop the demolition. More than 50 people were detained and many were beaten, said an attorney for the detained, who interviewed and photographed the injured. Six church leaders remain under arrest for instigating violence and interfering with the law. Prosecutors will decide whether to formally charge them this month.

The head of the village, who said his surname was Wang, insisted there had been no injuries and complained that the church was unregistered and illegal.

“They’re absolutely lawless. They consider God to be the most powerful authority and ignore the law,” Wang said in a telephone interview. Official state media reported only that an illegal building had been dismantled, but news of the riot, arrests and beatings spread quickly among Christians.

“This would only happen in Zhejiang. In other provinces, Christians wouldn’t dare to build a church this way,” said a preacher in a registered Three-Self church in Hangzhou that has several thousand worshipers. He asked not to be named because religion is such a sensitive topic.

“The authorities pay no attention to what you preach, so long as you don’t talk about political issues,” the preacher said. “The law in China is very fluid. They can regulate but people sometimes do what they want.”

In Xiaoshan, however, residents now live in fear. There is an ongoing investigation into who leaked news of the riot to foreign media. One villager said police have been waiting outside the homes of active Christians and posing as journalists.

“You can’t speak loudly or talk to outsiders or strangers. There are plainclothes police paying close attention to the houses where Christians live,” he said. “They stop people on the street, and in the middle of the night. They ask where the leaders have gone” (Fan, M. 2006, ‘In China, Churches Challenge the Rules: Bold Congregations Risk Official Wrath’, *Washington Post*, 1 October – Attachment 23).

An additional report on this clash appeared in *BBC News*:

There have been clashes between police and Christians protesting against the demolition of a church in eastern China’s Zhejiang province, reports say.

The violence occurred when up to 500 police tried to break up a 3,000-strong protest, a rights group said.

Twenty people were hurt, including four who were seriously injured, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy said.

...

Xiaoshan, a suburb of the provincial capital Hangzhou, has a sizeable community of Protestants.

The rights group said the provincial authorities had issued orders in June to crack down on “illegal religious buildings”.

But one resident suggested the move was less about religious freedom than money.

“They wanted to build a church, but the government said the land is too valuable for that,” the woman told Reuters news agency (‘China clash as church demolished’ 2006, *BBC News*, 31 July, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/5231106.stm> – Accessed 13 December 2007 – Attachment 24).

The Member may also be interested in reading follow up reports on the detention of those who resisted police (‘Zhejiang: Six underground Protestants detained without charge’, 2006, *Asia News*, 25 October. – Attachment 25).

The above cited Canadian Research Response also notes the 2004 arrests of church leaders in Zhejiang:

Amnesty International reported arrests of various church leaders in 2004, mostly in the eastern provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Hebei (BBC 9 Nov. 2004). According to the religious rights organization Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), in 2004 authorities also rounded up a group of underground Protestants who had appeared in an American videotape about the activities of an unregistered church in an undisclosed part of China (UPI 20 Feb. 2004) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 7 September. IRB Website http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=449522 – Accessed 17 October 2006 – Attachment 26).

Arrests, detentions, destruction of churches, and the restriction of religious practices within Zhejiang have been sporadic over the past three years. With the restriction on the freedom of press in China most reports refer to specific events of a larger scale, as the above citations have shown. Over the past few years several religious leaders have been imprisoned for ‘leaking state secrets’ about the destruction of religious buildings in Zhejiang (Chan, K. 2005, ‘Chinese Protestant “House Church” Leader Released from Prison’, *The Christian Post*, 9 February http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050209/15476_Chinese_Protestant_%27House_Church%27_Leader_Released_from_Prison.htm – Accessed 14 December 2007 – Attachment 27). Beyond this there is little more reliable information available on the general treatment of Christians (Protestants) in Zhejiang. Some additional information is available on Catholics, and they appear to be targeted more for arrests and detentions, but this has been omitted from this response. Should the Member require additional information on Catholics this will be readily available.

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

MSN Encarta World Atlas <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/mapcenter/map.aspx>

Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International News & Politics

Asia News <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&size=A>

BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.shtml>

Asia Source http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/archive.cfm

Far Eastern Economic Review <http://www.feer.com/>

Asian Human Rights Commission <http://www.ahrchk.net/index.php>

Databases:

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Yuecheng, MSN Encarta World Atlas
<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/MapCenter/MapPrintPreview.aspx?lat=28.139741656818703&long=120.70680803280086&alt=10&mapsize=Large&mapstyle=Comprehensive&mapstyleselectedindex=0&selectedent=37341&entityname=> – Accessed 17 December 2007.
2. ‘乐清地图’ (Map of Leqing County, Wenzhou, Zhejiang’) (undated),
<http://www.9654.com/m/leqing.htm> - Accessed 17 December 2007 (via <http://www.guang.net/cn.asp?zj>)
3. Baizhangji, MSN Encarta World Atlas
<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/MapCenter/MapPrintPreview.aspx?lat=27.904243665343173&long=120.29953153225261&alt=10&mapsize=Medium&mapstyle=Comprehensive&mapstyleselectedindex=0&selectedent=39070&entityname=> – Accessed 13 December 2007.
4. ‘文成地图’ (Map of Wencheng County, Wenzhou, Zhejiang’) (undated),
<http://www.9654.com/m/wencheng.htm> - Accessed 17 December 2007 (via <http://www.guang.net/cn.asp?zj>)
5. Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp. 276-77.
6. Lambert, T. 2005, ‘How many Christians in China?’, *China Insight Newsletter*, Overseas Missionary Fellowship website, August/September
<http://www.us.omf.org/content.asp?id=45076> – Accessed 14 March 2006.

7. Anderson, S. E. & Lambert, T. (ed.) 2006, 'House-Church Networks – An Overview (Part 1)', *Cogitations Blog*, 26 March
<http://cogitations.typepad.com/cogitations/2006/03/index.html> – Accessed 7 July 2006.
8. Kneifel, K. 2007, 'Christians In China Face "Olympic Persecution"', 2008 Olympics bring attention to persecution of Christians', *Marist Advocate*, Spring
<http://www.academic.marist.edu/faculty/modele/advocate/stories2007/story11.html> – Accessed 14 December 2007.
9. 'China province to destroy 'Prayer Mountain' churches' 2007, *BosNewsLife*, 14 July. (CISNET 'China' CX181361)
10. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, *CHN100387.E – China: Situation of Protestants and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005)*, 7 September. (REFINFO)
11. 'Christian Home Churches Gaining in China' 2006, *New American Media*, 2 August. (CISNET 'China' CX158517)
12. US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – China*, 14 September <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90133.htm> – Accessed 12 December 2007.
13. Lambert, T. 2001, 'God's grace – In Germany and Guizhou', Overseas Missionary Fellowship website, February
http://onebillionwait.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2001_2006/gcm_feb_2001 – Accessed 17 December 2007.
14. McDonald, J. 2000, 'China destroying hundreds of churches', *Associated Press*, 13 December. (FACTIVA)
15. 'Wenzhou church, temple demolitions likened to Cultural Revolution' 2000, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 30 December. (FACTIVA)
16. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, Country Information Report No. 06/42 – *Failed asylum seeker return decision*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 7 August 2006), 25 August. (CISNET 'China' CX160293)
17. Cheng, M. 2003, 'House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China', *China: An International Journal*, March. (CISNET 'China' CX141345)
18. DIMA Country Information And Protection Support Section 2006, *House Churches In China – Issues Brief* – Ref: CHN290306 – Accessed 13 December 2007. (CISNET 'China' CHN290306)
19. UK Home Office 2007, *Country of Origin Report: China*, UK Home Office website, 30 April, sec. 18, 19, 21 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/china-100507.doc> – Accessed 12 December 2007.
20. China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province: From January 2006 to December 2006*, January

http://chinaaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/2006_persecution_report.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007.

21. 'News Roundup: Trial Developments' 2007, *China Rights Forum*, 23 March, Human Rights in China website, p.15 http://hrichina.org/public/PDFs/CRF.1.2007/CRF-2007-1_Roundup.pdf – Accessed 12 December 2007.
22. Elegant, S. 2006, 'The War For China's Soul', *Time Magazine*, 20 August. (CISNET 'China' CX160804)
23. Fan, M. 2006, 'In China, Churches Challenge the Rules: Bold Congregations Risk Official Wrath', *Washing Post*, 1 October. (CISNET 'China' CX162856)
24. 'China clash as church demolished' 2006, *BBC News*, 31 July <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/5231106.stm> – Accessed 13 December 2007.
25. 'Zhejiang: Six underground Protestants detained without charge' 2006, *Asia News*, 25 October. (CISNET 'China' CX164030)
26. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *CHN102492.E – China: Reports of raids on Protestant house churches; frequency and location of raids (2005 – 2007)*, 22 June.
27. Chan, K. 2005, 'Chinese Protestant "House Church" Leader Released from Prison', *The Christian Post*, 9 February http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050209/15476_Chinese_Protestant_%27House_Church%27_Leader_Released_from_Prison.htm – Accessed 14 December 2007.