



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN39238 – Henan Province –
Local Church – House Churches

23 September 2011

Background note

There is a distinction between Local Churches and house churches in China. DIMA advice from 2006 broadly defined house churches as Christian, in particular Protestant communities or congregations “not registered with the government”, and “informal gatherings, usually in small groups of no more than fifty in a member’s home”.¹ The Local Church, however, is “an indigenous Christian movement founded by Watchman Nee in the early 20th century which officials refer to as the ‘Shouters’”.² The Local Church is banned, dubbed an ‘evil cult’ by the Chinese government.³

The Government’s treatment of unregistered church members varies from place to place. There are some areas where, if an unregistered Catholic Church is established, the local officials immediately destroy the building, disband the community, issue fines or place people under detention. In other areas there are prominent unregistered Catholic churches that are simply ignored by officials. In urban settings, however, the Chinese Government is less willing to tolerate religious activity that openly contradicts Party lines.⁴

1. Please provide a list of all sources since 2008 that specifically report on the treatment of followers of the Local Church in Henan province.

Local Church

Limited information was located that specifically reported on the treatment of followers of the Local Church, in Henan province, and that was dated 2008 or more recently. The following relevant sources were located:

- The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China reported that, in January 2009, Henan security officials arrested a man after he responded to an anonymous call to pick up books and videos associated with the Local Church. The man had previously spent 14 years in prison for his association with the Local Church.⁵
- The China Aid Association reported that 50 house church members were arrested in December 2008. Officials had accused the Christians of belonging to a “Shouter evil cult”. Of the 50, three church leaders were sentenced to one year of re-education

¹ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2006, *House Churches In China*, 29 March

² Congressional Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report – 2009*, 10 October, p.139

³ US Department of State 2011, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – China (July-December)*, 13 September, Section II

⁴ Clark, A.E., 2006, ‘Two Chinese Churches? Or One? An Interview with Fr. Daniel Cerezo, Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus’, Ignatius Insight website, June

http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/aclark_chinesechurch_jun06.asp – Accessed 1 September 2009

⁵ US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, p.139

through labour. A further 20 were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention and a 1,000 Yuan fine.⁶

- A November 2008 report by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) stated that reports of suppression of the Local Church by Henan authorities had decreased; however, reports of harassment of Henan house church followers more generally had continued.⁷

House churches generally

Reports relating to the treatment of house church followers in Henan province more generally were located, the reports describing raids on churches, detention of members and targeting of church leaders across several provinces. Pertinent reports published during 2011 included the following:

- A monitoring report by the Open Source Center stated that security forces had reportedly raided an underground church in Wei County, Henan. The report stated that “dozens” of church members, including two Korean pastors, had been detained overnight.⁸
- In April 2011, *Radio Free Asia* reported that a house church pastor in Fanxian County, Henan had repeatedly had the front door of his house sealed by bricks; the pastor’s neighbours sealed the front door of his home on instructions from the government.⁹
- The most recent Human Rights Watch annual report mentions that, on 11 March 2010, police and government officials interrupted a legal training session which was being held at a house church in Fancheng County, Henan. Three attendees were temporarily detained.¹⁰ The China Aid Association reported that the training session aimed to teach church leaders to defend their religious rights.¹¹
- A China Aid Association annual report dated March 2011 contains a list of reports relating to the ill treatment of Christians by province. Some of these reports relate to house church followers from Henan, and are included in the lists of 2010 and 2009 sources, below.¹²

Pertinent reports dated 2010 included the following:

⁶ ‘Three Christians Sentenced to One Year of Re-education Through Labor in Zhoukou, Henan’ 2008, China Aid Association website, 6 January http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1120 – Accessed 6 January 2010

⁷ Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008, *China’s Protestants and Catholics*, November p. 38-39

⁸ ‘Highlights: PRC Sociopolitical Issues on Internet, 12 May’ 2011, Open Source Center website, 12 May https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/ CPP20110512464001 - Accessed 20 September 2011

⁹ ‘Police Seriously Injured Two Christian Leaders in Shaanxi and Henan with Electric Baton and Block Door with Bricks’ 2011, Radio Free Asia, China Aid Association website, 12 April <http://www.chinaaid.org/2011/04/police-seriously-injured-two-christian.html> - Accessed 20 September 2011

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch 2011, *World Report 2011*, 24 January

¹¹ ‘Henan Police Interrogate Pastors to Disrupt Church Legal Training’ 2010, China Aid Association website, 11 March <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/03/henan-police-interrogate-pastors-to.html> – Accessed 20 September 2011

¹² China Aid Association 2011, *2010 Annual Report Chinese Government Persecution of Christians & Churches in Mainland China January - December 2010*, March, p. 21-22

- The *Voice of America* reported that, on September 29, police raided a house church meeting in Nanyang, Henan. Over 30 people were given ten days' detention, including an American pastor and a Russian pastor.¹³ There was also reportedly a raid on a Nanyang house church in April 2010 during which several followers were detained. Families were reportedly not given any documentation regarding the detention of their relatives, or receipts for money paid in exchange for their release.¹⁴
- A China Aid Association media release dated 20 September 2010 notes that Henan Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, also known as "Pastor Bike", had been detained multiple times over the preceding ten years. Pastor Mingxuan is reportedly known for his efforts to support house churches, and is chairman of the China House Church Alliance.¹⁵
- Another China Aid Association report stated that "several" house church followers in Yucheng County, Henan were detained in April 2010. The detainees' relatives were reportedly asked by the police to pay "living expenses" of 500 Yuan per prisoner in exchange for visitation rights.¹⁶
- The US Congressional Executive Commission on China stated that, during 2010, a Henan District Court reportedly refused to hear a case regarding an administrative decision whereby two house church members were sentenced to one year of re-education through labour.¹⁷

Relevant reports were also located regarding the treatment of house church leaders and followers from 2008 and 2009:

- In August 2009, the China Aid Association reported that police raided a house church in Xiayi County, Henan, interrupting a gathering. Two leaders were detained. A call from a church member to *Radio Free Asia* about the raid was monitored by Chinese authorities, who later arrested and detained the caller.¹⁸
- The China Aid Association also reported that in July 2009, house church Pastor Dou Shaowen had been "secretly transferred to Shifo re-education through Labor Center in Zhengzhou city, Henan province". Dou and his wife received one-year sentences for engaging in 'illegal activities'; five other members of their church received 15 days' detention and a fine. In addition, government officials "raided and forcibly abolished and sealed Rock Church's building". Before being transferred to the Shifo centre, Dou was reportedly held in Baimiao Re-education Through Labor Center in Zhengzhou, where he was "given inhuman treatment... was forced to squat... worked 18 hours a

¹³ 'House Church in Henan Raided on Mid-Autumn Festival Day' 2010, Voice of America, China Aid Association website, 29 September <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/09/house-church-in-henan-raided-on-mid.html> – Accessed 20 September 2011

¹⁴ '4-year old Boy Seized in Raid on House Church in Henan, 7 Members Detained' 2010, China Aid Association Website <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/05/4-year-old-boy-seized-in-raid-on-house.html> – Accessed 20 September 2010

¹⁵ 'Pastor Bike Detained at Liu Yunhua and Gao Jianli's Trial' 2010, China Aid Association website, 20 September <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/09/pastor-bike-detained-at-liu-yunhua-and.html> – Accessed 20 September 2011

¹⁶ 'Henan Police Unlawfully Fine, Sentence Believers to Labor Camps' 2010, China Aid Association website, 9 April <http://www.chinaaid.org/2010/04/henan-police-unlawfully-fine-sentence.html> – Accessed 20 September 2011

¹⁷ US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2010, *Annual Report 2010*, 10 October,

p. 111

¹⁸ 'Henan Christians Sentenced after Interview with Foreign Media' 2009, China Aid Association website <http://www.chinaaid.org/2009/08/henan-christians-sentenced-after.html> – Accessed 20 September 2011

day” and was forced to sleep in a room with 70 other people. According to China Aid Association, conditions at the Shifo centre were thought to be worse.¹⁹

- According to a January 2009 *Asia News* report, Chinese repression against ‘domestic churches’ has led to the demolition of buildings and to the arrests of house church members. Four women from Henan were arrested and sentenced to 15 days imprisonment for “organizing illegal religious activities”.²⁰
- A *Compass Direct News* article stated that in November 2008, the China State Council’s Research and Development Centre conducted meetings with “academics and lawyers, many of them house church members, and a delegation of six Protestant house church leaders from Beijing, Henan and Wenzhou”. One church leader involved in the talks stated that the government “wanted to evaluate whether house churches posed a threat to the regime and to ask why they rejected the leadership of the Three Self Patriotic Movement”. However, despite these talks, raids on house churches and arrests of members reportedly continued.²¹
- A Henan house church pastor who had been sentenced to re-education through labour for being an “evil cult leader” was reportedly released in December 2008 for medical reasons.²²

2. Deleted

¹⁹ ‘Rock Church pastor secretly transferred to Re-education Through Labor camp’ 2009, China Aid Association website, 13 July

http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1246&month=07&year=2009&nc=7f51b46202e1f88e977c26c8381d337c – Accessed 22 July 2009

²⁰ ‘Beijing does not recognize domestic churches, and persecutes them’ 2009, *Asia News*, 16 January
<http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=14230&geo=6&size=A> – Accessed 20 January 2009

²¹ ‘Officials in China grapple with spread of Christianity’ 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 5 February
<http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/china/1981> – Accessed 5 February 2009

²² ‘China Releases Key House Church Leaders; Massive Detentions Continue’ 2008, International Christian Concern website, 4 December http://www.persecution.org/?p=10791&upm_export=print – Accessed 20 September 2011

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