1. What is known of the treatment of house church Christians in Jiangyin Town, Fuqing City, as compared with reports of the attitude of authorities to unregistered Christian worship in Fujian generally?

The 2009 US Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC), *Annual Report* states that Christians and Protestants who worship in unregistered congregations are closely monitored in China, in general. Members of unregistered churches or house churches may be subjected to monitoring, harassment, detention, imprisonment, and church closings. The report lists several examples of harm occurring throughout China; however, the only incident listed in Fujian Province was a report of a government ‘strike hard’ campaign against Local Church members, a group labelled as a cult and one which draws frequent attention from government authorities. The absence of reports of systemic harassment of unregistered Christians in Fujian in the CECC Report lends credence to several other reports listed below, which indicate that there is a higher level of tolerance in Fujian Province than in other regions of China.

The 2009 US Department of State (USDOS) *International Religious Freedom Report – China* states that generally there is increased official tolerance for unregistered Christian groups, cults excepted, that are not challenging the authority of the state. It adds that level of toleration varies by location. It is likely, based on additional reports located, that Fujian Province falls into this category of being more tolerant. The report states:

> Government officials allowed increased space for some unregistered religious groups it viewed as non-threatening. A branch of the State Council also held an unprecedented meeting with a delegation of "house church" leaders. The house church leaders requested that the Government allow registration independent of the PRAs. Several Chinese academics supported the request. The ability of unregistered religious groups to operate varied greatly depending on their location. Officials in some areas detained Protestant and Catholic believers who attended unregistered groups, while those in other areas did little to interfere with the worship or social service activities of such groups.

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Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce government policy regarding unregistered churches and illegal religious activities, although the extent to which officials interfered with the activities of unregistered churches varied and depended largely on local conditions. Urban house churches in some areas limited the size of their meetings to a few dozen individuals. In nonurban areas, some house churches were able to hold meetings that hundreds of individuals attended with which local authorities did not interfere. Some unregistered religious groups had significant membership, properties, financial resources, and networks. House churches faced more risks when their memberships grew, they arranged for regular use of facilities for religious activities, or forged links with other unregistered groups or coreligionists overseas.

The USDOS report also includes a list of incidents of government actions against religious members, including arrests, detention, and church closings; however, none of the examples occurred in Fujian Province.\(^4\)

The 2009 US Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2009\(^5\) also indicates that some regions in China are more permissive than others. Examples of restrictions in the report do not reference Fujian. Again, based on the additional reports it is logical to conclude that Fujian is one of the Provinces where unregistered house churches are tolerated to a greater extent. The report states:

> Enforcement varies by region and unregistered religious activity is tolerated in some provinces. Some Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and members of spiritual movements have refused to join the officially-sanctioned religious organizations due to their reluctance to: 1) provide the names and contact information of their followers; 2) submit leadership decisions to the government or to one of the government-approved religious organizations; and 3) seek advance permission from the government for all major religious activities or theological positions. During the past year, Protestant house church groups and underground Catholic priests faced pressure to register with government-approved associations increased.

Among the reports indicating strongly that Fujian falls into the category of a more permissive environment for unregistered house churches is a 2009 profile of the Protestant Church in Fujian Province by Global Chinese Ministries.\(^6\) This report notes that there are large numbers of unregistered house churches operating in Fujian even including non-mainstream Protestant groups, which are more likely to be monitored by the government. There is no mention of Jiangyin Town, or any other areas in Fujian which are subjected to harsher treatment by authorities. The report states:

> There are also large numbers of independent house churches in Fujian. … Today some in this movement hold their own meetings on TSPM church premises – others continue as unregistered house churches. The Little Flock churches are


particularly strong in Fuqing County, where probably about half of the more than 100,000 believers belong to this grouping. In fact, Fujian seems to be home to a large number of independently-minded Christians. Apart from the Little Flock there are at least 80,000 members of the True Jesus Church in the province – this is another indigenous Chinese church which was founded nearly a century ago. **In general, local government in Fujian seems fairly tolerant of unregistered believers as it is rare that one reads of cases of persecution of house-church Christians in this province.** Whether registered or unregistered, the church in Fujian would appear to have a bright future as it “holds forth the Word of Life” and demonstrates the love of Christ actively in society.

Another indication that there is greater tolerance in Fujian was provided in a report from an outside expert. Philip Yee, Elder of the “The Church in Melbourne” (Local Church) relayed that even unregistered groups labelled as cults by the government, which generally draw harsh attention from authorities even in Fujian, have also experienced great toleration recently. On 9 February 2009, Philip Yee provided updated advice on the situation of the Local Church (“Shouters”) in Fujian in Research Response CHN34321:

> As we understand it, the local churches in China are viewed differently in each province. Certain provinces allow the local churches to register with the authorities and once they have done so, they are allowed to worship. However, in other provinces, including Fujian province, the local churches are regarded as illegal gatherings, however as we understand from some members who come from this province, there is not much arrests as before. There is now more dialogue between members of the local church and the authorities.

> …The same situation applies, as far as we understand from speaking to members who come from Fuqing city, that while the authorities do not recognise the local churches, there is not much arrests as before.

A November 2008 report by the Country Research Section of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *China’s Protestants and Catholics*, provides a similarly positive description of the level of tolerance shown toward Christians in Fujian, excepting those groups labeled cults such as “Shouters” and Eastern Lighting. The most recent reference to Christians in Fujian in this DIAC paper is to an August 2008 report by UCAN (*Union of Catholic Asian News*) on the situation of Catholics in the lead up to the Olympics. This paper indicated that “local officials have not imposed restrictions or given warnings to underground communities in Fujian…but that priests there are conscious of not organizing large-scale activities during this sensitive time”.

Other, more dated references to the permissive environment assessed to exist in Fujian, indicate a history of greater tolerance. None of these reports mention Jiangyin Town, or describe areas of Fuqing, as unusual locations of greater restrictions on religious activity in Fujian. These reports are as follows:

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• Tony Lambert, an expert on Christianity in China, in his 2006 edition of China’s Christian Millions,\(^{10}\) describes Fuqing City as “China’s Second Jerusalem” due to approximately 26% of the population being Christian. He also reports that Fuqing city has the “second greatest number of churches in the whole country”. He further notes that in 2006:

Fujian has a thriving and rapidly growing Christian community. As a coastal province in the south-east, it was one of the first to be evangelised from the early nineteenth century. By 1949 there were about 100,000 Protestants. Official estimates of numbers of Protestant Christians in 2004 were 1,179,000

… In general, the official religious policy has been applied relatively liberally in Fujian, although there have been occasional crackdowns on house churches and “underground” Catholics.

• In 2000, the political counsellor to the Canadian Embassy in China visited Fuzhou and Fuqing and reported:

There is a high degree of religious tolerance in this part of China.

… Various forms of Protestant religious expression thrive in metro Fuzhou. The numbers of faithful grow rapidly year by year. There is much evidence of construction of new churches to meet the increasing demand for places of worship. Diversity of religious expression seems more extensive here than in other parts of China…\(^{11}\)

2. Is "Mother's Day" celebrated in China and was it on 9 May this year? Could the writers mean a day in the church calendar such as Mothering Sunday?

According to several sources, China celebrated Mother’s Day on 9 May in 2010, the same date as Australia, which is on the second Sunday in May.\(^{12}\)

3. What is known about the checking of mail sent to China from overseas?

Very little specific information was located regarding the scope and prevalence of government inspections on postal mail coming into China from overseas. This finding is not unexpected given secrecy measure that are most likely in place surrounding such checks. One current source indicates that inspections do occur with some regularity and another source reported in 2003 that authorities open and inspect international mail. Chinese postal and customs laws also contain provisions for inspecting mail. It is difficult to estimate the capacity for authorities to inspection all mail coming in from overseas.

The Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the U.S. website contained one reference to examination of international mail, stating that under Customs Law of the PRC\(^{13}\) Article 49,

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international mail is delivered within China only after it has been ‘examined and released by Customs.’ Article 49 of the law, promulgated in 1987 and amended in 2000, states:

Article 49 Inward and outward postal items shall be posted or delivered by the postal service concerned only after they have been examined and released by the Customs.

The 2003 report Privacy and Human Rights 2003 published by the organisation Electronic Privacy and Information Center & Privacy and Human Rights states that: ‘[Chinese] Authorities also opened and censored domestic and international mail.’ This was the only source indicating a systematic and possibly widespread inspection framework.

Articles included in the Postal Law of the People’s Republic of China, revised and promulgated in 2009, provide for an expectation of privacy in sending and receiving mail. However, if a need for protecting national security arises officials may inspect correspondence. Article 3 states:

Article 3 The freedom and privacy of correspondence of citizens shall be protected by law. No organization or individual shall infringe upon the freedom and privacy of correspondence of citizens under any pretext, provided however that as needed for protecting the national security or investigating criminal offences, the public security organs, national security organs or procuratorial organs may inspect the correspondence of citizens under the statutory procedures.

National security laws are very broad in China and under Postal Code Article 37 material which advocates a ‘cult or superstition’ may be illegal. If religious material not authorised for publication in China came to the attention of Customs and Postal inspectors, Article 37 would apply. The Article states:

Article 37 No entity or individual shall use mail to send any item which contains anything that:

1. incites the subversion of the state’s regime, overthrow of the socialist system, split of the state or undermining of the unity of the state, or compromises the national security;
2. divulges any national secret;
3. spreads rumors to disturb the social order or undermine the social stability;
4. incites ethnic hatred or discrimination to undermine the ethnic solidarity;

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5. advocates any cult or superstition;

6. spreads any obscene, gambling or terror information or abets the commission of a crime;

According to Article 61\textsuperscript{17}, if a violation of mail content is found, postal inspectors may seize material, unseal mail, and otherwise inspect any ‘correspondence suspected of containing any item prohibited’ and make inquiries of individuals regarding the materials in question. Someone receiving illegal materials may be investigated under this provision. Article 61 states:

Article 61 A postal administrative department shall perform the functions of supervision and administration according to law, and may take the following measures for supervision and inspection:

1. entering a postal enterprise or express delivery enterprise or any other place where any violation of this Law is suspected to make an on-site inspection;

2. inquiring of the relevant entities and individuals about the relevant information;

3. consulting or copying the relevant documents, materials and vouchers; and

4. upon the approval of the person in charge of the postal administrative department, sealing up any place related to the violation of this Law, seizing the means of transport and related articles used for the violation of this Law, and unsealing mail or express mail other than correspondence suspected of containing any item prohibited or restricted from delivery for inspection.

4. Deleted

5. Deleted.

Attachments


5. DIAC Country Research Section 2008, China’s Protestants and Catholics, November, pp. 39-41. (CISNET)


