

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#) > [Research Program](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

19 October 2012

**CHN104189.E**

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China: Estimates of the number of Christians, particularly in the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Liaoning  
 Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### 1. National Estimates of Christians

Estimates	Methodology	Source
40 to 130 million	Range of numbers from other sources	Malek 2011, 33
55 to 100 million	Range of numbers from other sources	Hamrin <a href="#">Nov.-Dec. 2009</a>
70 million (in 2011)	Based on a 2007 survey with house churches members by a Chinese polling firm and follow-up interviews by researchers at Baylor University, Texas	Stark <a href="#">et al.</a> <a href="#">May 2011</a>
67 million (mainland China, 2010)	Based on various sources, including surveys, church membership and government reports	Pew Research Center <a href="#">Dec. 2011</a> , 58, 97
105,316,752 (in 2011)	consulted more than 2,000 published sources such as internet reports, journals, and books, as well as interviews with house church leaders ( <a href="#">ibid.</a> <a href="#">n.d.a</a> )	Asia Harvest, <a href="#">n.d.b</a>

#### 1.1. Challenges in Estimating the Number of Christians

A 2011 report on Christianity worldwide published by the Pew Research Center, a US-based "nonpartisan fact tank" (Pew Research Center [n.d.](#)), indicates that "significant challenges" exist in estimating the size of the Christian population in China, and that numbers can range between one and eight percent of the population ([ibid.](#) [Dec. 2011](#), 58). Reasons for this difficulty listed in the report include the lack of questions regarding religion on the national census and membership in unofficial churches ([ibid.](#)).

In a statistical overview of religion in China, the China Center (China-Zentrum), a German non-profit organization that focuses on research and awareness-raising of Christianity in China (China Center [n.d.](#)), indicates that the following are issues with obtaining accurate statistics:

1.) Statistics on religions are a sensitive topic for local officials, who often do not want to have any census ...; 2.) Statistics are also a sensitive topic for the faithful themselves, since they still do not dare to acknowledge their religiosity publicly, not knowing how, by whom, and for what purposes such data might be used; 3.) Those who are not yet baptized do not readily identify themselves as 'Christians'.... (Malek 2011, 33)

Similarly, an article authored by three professors at Baylor University, Texas, in *First Things* published by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, a New York-based "interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society" (*First Things* [n.d.](#)), points out that a lot of Chinese do not want to participate in surveys because "it remains somewhat risky for Chinese

to be identified as Christians" (Stark et al. May 2011).

According to the authors of the *First Things* article, estimates of the number of Christians in house churches are not based on "solid data but rather on intuition and anecdotal accounts of largely Western observers" (ibid.).

## 1.2 Registered and Unregistered Christians

The Chinese government requires that groups that are part of the five official religions register and operate through the sanctioned state authorities (*The Guardian* 18 Dec. 2009; US 2012, 1). A March 2012 article by the Episcopal News Service (ENS) indicates that there are 20 to 40 million registered Christians in China (ENS 14 Mar. 2012). Estimates for unregistered Christians, those who belong to unofficial house churches, includes the following:

Estimates	Methodology	Source
30 to 60 million	Not indicated	<i>Christian Post</i> 5 May 2012
40 million	Government figures; date and exact source not indicated	RFA 22 Aug. 2012
50 million	Based on an independant survey carried on since 2007 by a scholar who is also a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	<i>China Daily</i> 3 Dec. 2009
40 to 80 million	Range of numbers from other sources	<i>The Telegraph</i> 24 Apr. 2011
60 to 90 million	Range of numbers from other sources	<i>The Guardian</i> 18 Dec. 2009
80 million	Data established by a Chinese academic; includes 70 million Protestants and 10 million Catholics	<i>The Guardian</i> 22 June 2012

## 1.3 Estimates of Catholics

Estimates	Methodology	Source
5.7 million	Data published by the review <i>Xinde</i> (Faith)	Malek 2011, 34
over 6 million (registered)	Data from the China's State Administration for Religious Affairs	US 2012, 3
9 million (in 2010)	Based on various sources, including surveys, church membership and government reports; includes 5.7 million registered Catholics and 3.3 million unregistered	Pew Research Center Dec. 2011, 59, 97
12 million (unregistered)	Unprecised "independent" estimates	AFP 6 July 2012
12 million (in 2011)	Not indicated	HSSC [2011]

The *Blue Book of Religions for 2010*, which is published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), indicates that the number of Catholics is between 6 and 12 million (Malek 2011, 32, 34, 35). The author of the China Center's article notes that "this is the first time that admission is being made that the number of Catholics is larger than in the official figures" (ibid.). According to the Pew Research Center report, estimates of Catholics in unregistered congregations are made difficult in part due to the possibility of "double counting in some Catholic dioceses where churches and bishops are affiliated with both the official and unofficial churches" (Dec. 2011, 59).

## 1.4 Estimates of Protestants

Estimates	Methodology	Source
16 million (in 2010)	Data from the China's State Administration for Religious Affairs	US 2012, 3
23 million	Data from the <i>Blue Book of Religions</i> for 2010, published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Malek 2011, 51

Estimates	Methodology	Source
34 to 36 million	Not indicated	Malek 2011, 51
58 million (in 2010)	Based on various sources, including surveys, church membership and government reports; includes 23 million registered Protestants and 35 million unregistered	Pew Research Center Dec. 2011, 59, 97

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011* notes that a CASS study indicated that 70 percent of Protestants worship in registered churches, while 30 percent do so in unregistered churches or private residences (US 2012, 3). The Pew Research Center report lists the following regional distributions for Protestants in China: 42.5 percent in East China; 29.2 percent in Central China; 11.4 percent in Northeast China; 6.6 percent in Southwest China; 4.9 percent in North China; 3.8 percent in Northwest China; and 1.6 percent in South China (Malek 2011, 52).

## 1.5 Estimates of Orthodox

The China Center article noted that, according to various sources, the number of Orthodox Christians in China is between 8,000 and 20,000 (Malek 2011, 53). The Pew Research Center study estimates that there are 20,000 Orthodox Christians (Dec. 2011, 97). According to a representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, there are around 15,000 Orthodox Christians in China and they are mainly located in Beijing, Shanghai, Heilongjiang, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia (Interfax 16 Mar. 2011).

## 2. Provincial Numbers: Fujian, Guangdong, and Liaoning

### 2.1 Fujian

Asia Harvest, a US non-profit organization as well as an "inter-denominational Christian ministry" working with Asian church leaders in China and other countries (Asia Harvest [n.d.c](#)), has published an ongoing study of the estimated number of Christians in China (*ibid.* [n.d.a](#)). The Asia Harvest study states that the number of Christians in Fujian in 2011 was 5,360,810, which is 14.31 percent of the population of the province (*ibid.* [n.d.b](#)). The same source reports that there are 3,453,069 Protestants and 1,907,741 Catholics (*ibid.* [n.d.b](#)). According to OMF International, a missionary movement that promotes the creation of churches in East Asia (OMF [n.d.](#)), the Three-Self Patriotic Movement indicated that in 2008 there were 830,000 baptized Protestant members in the province (OMF Apr. 2009).

Corroboration of the above information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 2.2 Guangdong

The Asia Harvest survey notes that in 2011, the number of Christians in Guangdong totalled 4,250,887, or 4.55 percent of the population of the province; there were 3,462,591 Protestants and 788,296 Catholics (Asia Harvest [n.d.b](#)). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 2.3 Liaoning

The Asia Harvest survey indicates that in 2011, there were 3,262,293 Christians in Liaoning, which is 7.11 percent of the provincial population; there were 2,839,055 Protestants and 423,228 Catholics (Asia Harvest [n.d.b](#)). A report by the Australian Refugee Review Tribunal mentions a 2006 OMF publication called *China's Christian Millions*, which indicates that, according to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, in 2002 there were more than 600,000 Protestants in Liaoning (Australia 29 June 2010, 2).

Corroboration of the above information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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