Extended Response to Information Request

CHN33638.EX 3 February 2000

China: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

General Information

Protestantism is one of China's five officially recognized religions and, like the others (Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam) is monitored by a "patriotic association," the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, which, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), is "a key part of the state bureaucracy" reporting to the Religious Affairs Bureau (Jan. 1992, 3). In the context of Chinese religious policy, "three-self" refers to Chinese religious organizations as "self-administering, self-supporting and self-propagating" and is part of a broader strategy to eliminate foreign influence from religious affairs (ibid. Oct. 1997, 13). According to HRW, however, another organization also plays a national role in Protestant affairs in China:

Protestants, (whom the Chinese refer to as Christians), including Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists and Presbyterians, responded to the "three-self" policy by dropping their denominational ties and uniting in a single "post-denominational" church. The Chinese [China] Christian Council, representing the one church, was admitted to membership in the World Council of Churches on February 18, 1991, with the permission of the Chinese government (ibid. Jan. 1992, 4).

A subsequent HRW publication, , further clarified the organizational aspects of Protestantism in China:

The two organizations responsible for Protestant affairs are the China Christian Council (CCC), which is directly involved in internal pastoral affairs, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), concerned with the relationships between individual churches and the Chinese government. According to its 1997 constitution, the TSPM's objectives are to foster patriotism among believers, strengthen unity among Christians, and protect church independence and autonomy. It is also charged with protecting the unity and stability of the nation and building spiritual and material civilization, all under the leadership of the Communist Party and the people's government. According to one of its officials, the TSPM was not established to control Christianity's development but to defend it against imperialist control.

In recent years, Chinese officials appear to have promoted the importance of the China Christian Council at the expense of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, in part to assuage the historical antipathy of the Protestant community to the latter. Many believers suspect TSPM leaders of being atheistic, committed to promoting the party's interests rather than those of rank-and-file church members. In addition, believers resent the role the TSPM has played in persecuting congregations that have resisted registration. Church officials, on the other hand, stress the accomplishments of both organizations, such as arranging for Bible printing and distribution, helping negotiate the return of
church property expropriated during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), easing registration requirements, and bringing local level persecution to the attention of central authorities (Oct. 1997, 13).

According to the Website of the Amity News Service (ANS) a news organization affiliated with the China Christian Council (CCC), "The China Christian Council sees itself as an umbrella and service organization for all Protestant Christians in China, whether they are worshipping in churches or private houses" (n.d.). The reference to worshipping in private homes reflects the practice of Protestants not affiliated with registered CCC or TPSM churches. The United States Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999, states that

According to foreign experts, perhaps 30 million persons worship in house churches that are independent of government control, although estimates by some house church groups range as high as 80 million (9 Sept. 1999).

According to Amity News Service (ANS), it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics regarding the number of Christians in China, owing, in part, to problems of definition and the large numbers of unbaptized believers (Sept. 1997). Nevertheless, ANS estimated in September 1997 that there were between 10 and 14 million Protestants in China. A table taken from the ANS Website entitled "Some Facts and Figures on the [Protestant] Church in China" is appended to this Extended Response.

Dr. Kim-Kwong Chan, an Honorary Research Fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who has published extensively on the subject of Christianity in China, stated that Protestantism in China is predominantly a rural phenomenon, with the greatest concentrations of Protestants found in the coastal and central provinces, particularly Yunnan, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (27 Jan. 2000).

**Treatment of Unregistered Protestants**


In areas where considerable unofficial and unregistered religious activity takes place, local regulations call for strict government oversight of religion and authorities have cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. Some house church members maintained that authorities had renewed efforts in the last half of 1998 to register house churches and to harass or to detain those who resist, especially in Henan and Shandong provinces. In other areas registered and unregistered churches are treated similarly by authorities, existing openly side by side, and many congregants worship in both types of churches and enjoy greater freedom to profess and practice religion than in the past (9 Sept. 1999).

The Annual Report makes additional references to the campaign against unregistered religious groups, including Protestants:

 Authorities particularly targeted unofficial religious groups in Beijing and the provinces of Henan and Shandong, where there are rapidly growing numbers of unregistered Protestants, and in Hebei, a centre of unregistered Catholics.

There were many religious detainees and prisoners. In some cases, public security officials have used prison or reform-through-education sentences to enforce regulations. Prominent Protestant house church leader Xu Yongze continues to serve a 3-year reform-through-labor sentence in Pingyuan prison in Henan for allegedly disturbing public order. The Government's 1997 White Paper on Religious Freedom stated that Xu had violated the law by promoting a cult, preaching that the Apocalypse was near, and asking worshipers to wail in public spaces for several consecutive days. Group members deny these charges. Xu's colleagues Qin Baocai and Mu Sheng continue to serve reeducation-through-labor sentences. In September 1998, a group of leaders from house church networks met in Henan and issued a public communique calling on the Government to enter into a dialog with unofficial Protestant churches, to release all religious prisoners, and to redefine what constitutes a "cult." In December 1998, another communique set forth a common theological creed and a joint position on relations with the Government (ibid.).
Over thirty Protestant house church leaders from Henan, Shandong and Anhui were arrested in late August 1999 (Newsroom 26 Aug. 1999; ibid. 13 Sept. 1999; AFP 28 Aug. 1999; ibid. 9 Sept. 1999). According to AFP, five of the leaders were administratively sentenced without trial to terms of up to three years in December 1999, with one other leader sentenced to an indefinite term (26 Dec. 1999). The report further states that the others detained were released after paying fines of 2,000 to 10,000 RMB [CAN$350-$1750]. A similar incident occurred in Henan in 1998 (Newsroom 26 Nov. 1998).

In 1999 there were also a number of reports regarding a Guangzhou house church leader named Li Dexian who had reportedly been detained nine times in eleven weeks and was under pressure to join the registered Protestant Church (ibid. 20 Jan. 2000; 18 Nov. 1999). According to one report, Li Dexian preached freely on 1 February 2000 "without police interference" (Newsroom 2 Feb. 2000).

According to the BBC, in a report on the extension to other unregistered religious groups of the campaign against Falun Dafa (Falun Gong; Falungong) practitioners, 103 leaders of underground religious groups were arrested in late November and early December 1999 (9 Dec. 1999). The report states that "The activity of the mainly Protestant home church movement has alarmed the Chinese government, which requires all religious practice to be limited to officially registered places of worship" (ibid.). Dr. Chan similarly stated that the Falun Dafa crackdown has affected unregistered Protestant groups (27 Jan. 2000).

According to Britt Towery, an American who has spent most of the last forty-three years as a Southern Baptist missionary in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, harassment of Christians is not part of a coordinated nationwide policy but "is usually local in nature somewhere and carried on by an uninformed cadre or someone with a grudge against someone in the group" (27 Jan. 2000). Dr. Chan similarly emphasized the regional character of harassment by the authorities, stating that "It mainly depends on the local cadres" (27 Jan. 2000).

**Relations Between "Underground" and Registered Churches**

According to both Dr. Chan and Mr. Towery, instances of conflict between the registered and unregistered churches are frequently local in nature. Dr. Chan emphasized that the personal relationships between local leaders often determine the relationships between the churches (27 Jan. 2000). Dr. Chan further stated that registered churches could give rise to 'off-shoot' unregistered churches and that the reverse could also happen (ibid.), stating that splits in unregistered groups could see some factions registering while others continued to practise as unregistered churches.

According to Mr. Towery:

The unregistered meet openly and with generally no complaint from the registered. Of course there are local differences, just like in America, where not every pastor gets along with other pastors. It is not always political, but some consider others too liberal, etc. (27 Jan. 2000).

**Protestant Forms of Worship in China**

Dr. Chan made the following general comments regarding Protestant practice in China:

I have been invited to preach at more than 300 churches in China all over the country and I felt as much at home as in any other churches in the West. They may vary in liturgical tradition depending on their background (Anglican or Baptist) but are basically similar to their counterparts in the West (27 Jan. 2000).

Dr. Chan also stated that Chinese Protestants would opt for a Christian burial, and that it had become increasingly popular, even among non-Christians, to have wedding ceremonies in a church (ibid.). With respect to differences between Protestant practice in China and in the West, Dr. Chan stated that "the lack of open collection of money (offering) is the only element that is missing in most of the church services in China" (ibid.).

Mr. Towery corroborated Dr. Chan's general statements regarding Protestant practice in China:

Of all the many [registered and unregistered] churches I attended or visited in 20 provinces I would say the services were much like any other Protestant service in the world. Hymns, prayers, sermon. Baptism is done according to the convert's request or the local church's custom: sprinkling, immersion or pouring. Any of these is accepted. Most go with the tradition they were taught (27 Jan. 2000).

Dr. Towery added the following comments regarding funerals, marriage and baptism:
Funerals and marriages are Christian in nature if the persons involved are Christians. Both have some Chinese slants to them but are pretty much the same as anywhere. China is so big and varied that there are lots of ways of doing things like this (ibid.).

With respect to the texts used in Chinese Protestant Churches, Dr. Chan stated:

The Bible which the Chinese Christians use in China is the "Union" translation version completed in 1921. This is the "standard" version used in the Chinese speaking Christian world, be it in HK, Taiwan or in China. It is called the "Hehe Ben" version. In China, it is printed in Nanjing both in simplified characters and the old script. There is also a national standard Hymn book edited by the China Christian Council called "zan mei shi". It is a collection of different hymns from various denominational backgrounds plus a few that have been written by Chinese Christians. Every Christian in China should know of it and it is easily available in any Church in China (28 Jan. 2000).

Protestantism in Fujian

Adherents.com a Website "collection of over 41,000 adherent statistics and religious geography citations," citing a 1994 publication by Tony Lambert, states that a group called the Little Flock, "China's largest indigenous church grouping, is particularly strong in Fuzhou" (n.d.). The Website cites the same source as stating that Fuqing County, south of Fuzhou, is another centre for the Little Flock (ibid.).

Another local Chinese Protestant group found in Fujian is the True Jesus church (Amity News Service June 1996; Woo Mar. 1996). In a paper delivered to a conference entitled Modernization, the Church and the East Asian Experience, Jean Woo, formerly of the China Bureau at the National Council of the Churches of Christ, commented on the situation for True Jesus and Little Flock practitioners. Ms Woo made specific reference to Fujian province, referring to two Protestant theological students from Fujian, Huang Chaozhang and Wang Jiaguo:

These groups are not very "underground." Huang Chaozhang comes from Fujian where they are very strong and active. In Fuzhou a huge True Jesus Church sits on a tiny island in the middle of the Min River and next to a bridge with heavy traffic. It is very visible. Wang Jiaanguo's family came from a Little Flock background. They are not at all anti-Three-Self, or in any way opposed to the China Christian Council (Mar. 1996).

According to a June 1996 report by the Amity News Service, congregations of the True Jesus Church in Fujian "have kept themselves apart from local Christian councils."

According to Dr. Michael Szonyi, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, who has researched popular religion in Fujian extensively, Protestantism in Fujian is characterized by strong overseas connections (31 Jan. 2000). As an example, Dr. Szonyi referred to a strong tradition of Methodism among overseas Fuzhounese, traceable in part to a missionary in the early twentieth century named Huang Naixiang (ibid.). According to Dr. Szonyi a strong Methodist tradition persists in the Minqing area, Northwest of Fuzhou, and there is also a strong missionary tradition generally in the Northeastern part of Fujian, particularly in the Fu'an region (ibid.).

What follows is a chronological listing of recent references to Protestant persons, churches and activities in Fujian:

4 February 1998   Huangzhi church in Lianjiang county opened (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 59, citing Tian Feng [publication of the CCC])

April-May 1998    Delegation of nine members of Fujian province and Fuzhou City CCC visited Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore in response to invitation from World Federation of Chinese Methodists (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 71, citing Tian Feng)

18 May 1998       Reverend Wang Xiangsheng dies at age of 86, former standing committee member of Jiangyang City Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 66 citing Tian Feng)

July 1998         Provincial Christian Women’s Committee held
its first general meeting on 2 and 3 July 1998 (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 50, citing Tian Feng)

July-September 1998
CCC/TPSM in Zhangzhou Fujian run two-month volunteer training course “to respond to growing need in registered churches and meeting-points and also in those preparing to register which have not formally decided on their staffing requirements” (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 64, citing Tian Feng)

15 August 1998
Church opened in Zhenhe county (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 59, citing Tian Feng)

23 August 1998
Church in Jianning reopened after renovations (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 59, citing Tian Feng)

July 1999
Conference held in Fujian on "self-propagation" attended by Cao Shengjie, chair of the "Self-Propagation Committee" (Amity News Service Nov. 1999)

For additional information regarding Protestantism in Fujian please consult CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999; for information concerning Catholicism in Fujian, please consult CHN33598.EX of 27 January 2000; both available in Regional Documentation Centres, REINFO database and on the IRB Website at <http://www.irb.gc.ca>.

This Extended Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Extended Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Facts and Figures on the Church in China (Amity News Service, based on estimates presented to the Sixth National Christian Council, January 1997)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Full-time Church Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Training Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminary Graduates (since 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial CCs and TSPMs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibles distributed (since 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Distribution Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymnals distributed (since 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions to the church magazine Tian Feng</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Issue Papers, Extended Responses and Country Fact Sheets

_____ 9 September 1999. "Members of Underground Church to be Tried 'Soon'.” (FBIS-CHI-1999-0909 9 Sept. 1999/WNC)


Chan, Dr. Kim-Kwong. Honorary Research Fellow, Chinese University of Hong Kong. 28 January 2000. Correspondence.

_____ 27 January 2000. Correspondence.


The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.