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28 November 2003

CHN41862.E

China: Whether the translated text of the Bible used in Patriotic churches differs in content from the English version (July 2002-November 2003)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Executive Assistant to a research professor, expert on China affairs and the former China research specialist at the United State's Department of State, sent the following information to the Research Directorate regarding the Biblical text used in China's Patriotic churches:

Upon inquiry, Protestant house church leaders inform us that they have not found any content changes in the Union Version Bible that the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) prints. The Union Version has been the main version used in China since the early 1900s, and is very highly respected. A few geographic names have been updated to their modern names and a few characters in some vocabularies have been updated to their contemporary equivalents. But these don't really count as changes. The Bible text remains sound and intact. This version is still the authority to most believers, either in house churches or Three Self churches. Many house churches will buy these Bibles printed by the government, to avoid causing their suspicion. Other modern versions are used only as references.

The TSPM has also printed a Modern Translation of the Bible. This has been sold in different government churches for about 5 years. It has some changes; for example, "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 is changed into "young woman," as well as some other subtle changes in the translation. However, I believe that these changes would be comparable to changes that have been made in some modern English translations, and I would not consider that something unique to China. There have been several modern Chinese translations (paraphrases) published in recent years, and I am not sure if the TSPM is printing one of these or if perhaps they have published their own (Executive Assistant 20 Nov. 2003).

The Executive Assistant added that one Bishop was met with significant opposition after he allegedly suggested modifying the Bible (ibid.).

Moreover, according to an Associate Professor of political science and former political counsellor with the Canadian Embassy in Beijing, China's Patriotic churches use an 1870 translation of the Bible that has not been edited (13 Nov. 2003).

For further information on the availability of Chinese language Bibles in China and whether there are textual differences between the English and translated versions, please refer to CHN39075.E of 3 July 2002.

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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Executive Assistant to a research professor, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. 20 November 2003. Correspondence.

Associate Professor of political science, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario. 13 November 2003. Correspondence.

Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

Unsuccessful attempts to obtain information from Amity News Service and The Voice of the Martyrs.

Internet sites, including:

Amity News Service

Amnesty International

Center for Religious Freedom

Forum 18 News Service

Human Rights in China

Human Rights Watch

The International Association for Religious Freedom

International Religious Freedom Report

The Voice of the Martyrs

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