

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

**Research Response Number:** CHN17561  
**Country:** China  
**Date:** 7 October 2005

Keywords: China – Christians – Shouters – Underground churches – Fuqing City

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT 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.

---

**Questions**

- 1. Are ‘Shouters’ a Christian group? Please provide details.**
- 2. Are they illegal in the PRC and do they operate underground?**
- 3. Is there any particular information about their activities in the Fuqing City area?**

**List of Sources Consulted**

Internet Sources:

Google search engine

UNHCR      *REFWORLD*      UNHCR Refugee Information Online

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

**RESPONSE**

- 1. Are ‘Shouters’ a Christian group? Please provide details.**

Sources indicate that the Shouters consider themselves to be a Christian group. However, many commentators and more mainstream Christian groups consider the Shouters to be a cult

of Christianity, or even heretical, since they have adopted some unorthodox beliefs and practices, and use a non-standard edition of the Bible. The group is illegal in China, and there have been reports of arrests of group members for over 20 years.

A 1994 paper on the group by Human Rights Watch states:

The Shouters, who refer to themselves simply as Christians were an outgrowth of an indigenous Chinese religious sect, variously known as the “Local Church,” the “Assembly Church,” “Christian Assemblies” or the “Little Flock.” The original group, particularly strong in the provinces of Zhejiang, Henan, Fujian, and Guangdong, was founded in 1922 and is associated with the religious philosophy of Ni Tuosheng (1903-1972), better known as Watchman Nee. Imprisoned in 1952 during a government campaign aimed at the “bourgeois” private sector, Ni was accused of “having stolen a [huge amount] of national medicine, information, and property.” He was sentenced in 1956 to a fifteen-year term as head of a counterrevolutionary clique, and died shortly after his delayed release in 1972. 2

Ni’s disciple, Li Changshou, or Witness Li, who differed with Ni on tactics and doctrine, was primarily responsible for organizing the Shouter splinter movement. Its roots date back to the mid-1930s when “Local Church” congregants added external vocalizations, such as “Oh, Oh Lord” and “Amen,” to quiet prayer.

The Shouter creed is evangelical, mystical, subjective, intuitive, apocalyptic, and individual. 3 According to Shouter literature, believers reject any human thought that goes beyond what the Bible says because they consider it the completed divine revelation. Thus, Bible reading is central to religious practice, and it is the duty of every Shouter to go out and preach the gospel to relatives, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. The Shouters then “nourish” the converted by visiting their homes regularly and leading them in Bible reading, singing, and prayer. Members meet in small groups with neither “appointed speakers or teachers.” Anyone moved to preach can, although it is usually the already recognized leaders, or elders, who do so. There is no professional ministry, and each local group is autonomous. Congregants meet clandestinely in each others’ homes; hence they are categorized with other Protestants who resist association with the official Chinese Christian Church, as “house church” members.

The Shouter creed has brought its members into open conflict with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the official body responsible, under the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), for monitoring all Protestant affairs.’ The intrusion of Party doctrine and politics into religion in the official churches violates the sect’s principle that the church is not and should not be a human institution. The Shouters’ interest lies strictly in Bible study; they eschew involvement with broad social, political or economic matters and resist participating in socialist campaigns. The evangelical nature of Shouter practices violates the Religious Affairs Bureau’s three-fix policy. Shouters also resist government restrictions on what legitimately can be preached; in particular they resent government curbs on sermons dealing with the “second coming,” a central tenet of Shouter faith. The Chinese government regards the belief in a “second coming” as inherently antithetical to development, in fact, to the very need for development (Human Rights Watch Asia, 1994, *China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect*, June, Vol.6 No.6 – Attachment 1).

Two RRT Research Responses, while not particularly recent, are very comprehensive in providing details of the history, beliefs and practices of the Shouters and the attitude of the Chinese authorities towards them. Any attachments to these responses can be provided on request.

A 1999 response covers:

- The various other names by which the group is known (Section 1B);

- Its relationship to (or identity with) other groups following the same tradition, called the Local Church, Local Assemblies, Christian Assemblies, Assembly Hall and Little Flock (1B);
- Its history and founders (1D) and leaders (1E);
- Beliefs and practices of the Little Flock and the Shouters and differences between the older and newer groups (1F);
- Regions where they are most prevalent – of note is the fact that Fujian is one of the main provinces in which Shouter activity has been reported (1G);
- Its influence on other groups (1H);
- The attitude of the Chinese authorities (Question 2-3);
- Reports of arrest and harassment of Shouters from 1983 onwards, including a 1996 incident in Fujian (Question 4) (RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December – Attachment 2).

It is of relevance to this request that Question 5 of the above response focuses on Fujian Province, stating that Fujian was a stronghold of the Little Flock beliefs before the Communist takeover and remains a strong area of Little Flock belief today. The group's founder, Watchman Nee was from Fujian. Fujian is said to be one area where the Shouters are active and from where there have been reports of government harassment of Shouter groups. Please see the full response for further notes and references on Fujian (RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December – Attachment 2).

A 2003 RRT Research Response provides at Question 1 further information on the Shouters/Local Church, including the fact that many regard them as a “cult of Christianity”. Question 2 provides further reports on the attitude of the Chinese authorities and recent arrests, including several about a Hong Kong businessman Lai Kwong-keung and two other Shouters who were sentenced to prison in a Fujian court for smuggling bibles into China. Other arrests in Fujian are also mentioned (RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response CHN16195*, 29 September – Attachment 3).

## **2. Are they illegal in the PRC and do they operate underground?**

Little detailed recent information was found on the Shouters. The reports below indicate that the group is still illegal and operates underground; and that along with other banned groups they have been subject to crackdowns by the Chinese authorities in recent years.

The 2005 US Department of State report on human rights in China states in the section on religion:

**The authorities continued a general crackdown on groups considered to be “cults.”** Premier Wen Jiabao, in his address to the NPC in March, stressed that government agencies should strengthen their anti-cult work. These “cults” included not only Falun Gong and various traditional Chinese meditation and exercise groups (known collectively as “qigong” groups) but also religious groups that authorities accused of preaching beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine. **Groups that the Government labeled cults included** Eastern Lightning, the Servants of

Three Classes, **the Shouters**, the South China Church, the Association of Disciples, the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Way of the Goddess of Mercy, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, and the Family of Love. Authorities accused some in these groups of lacking proper theological training, preaching the imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war, or exploiting the reemergence of religion for personal gain. The Eastern Lightning group was accused by the Government and some other unregistered Christian groups of involvement in violence.

Actions against such groups continued during the year. In April, over 100 members of the evangelical group the “Servants of Three Classes” were detained in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. Most were released, but Gu Xianggao died in custody, allegedly as a result of beatings by police (see Section 1.c.) **Police also continued their efforts to close down an underground evangelical group called the “Shouters,” an offshoot of a pre-1949 indigenous Protestant group.** In 2001, Gong Shengliang, founder of the South China Church, was sentenced to death on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault. In 2002, an appeals court overturned his death sentence, and Gong was sentenced to life in prison. In the retrial, four women from his congregation claimed that, prior to the first trial, police had tortured them into signing statements accusing Gong of raping them. The four women, who were found not guilty of “cultist activity” in the retrial, were nonetheless immediately sent to reeducation-through-labor camps. In the retrial, the court also dropped all “evil cult” charges against the South China Church. During the year, elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity (US Department of State 2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004-China*, 28 February – Attachment 4).

The US Department of State report on religious freedom for 2004 contains little detail on the Shouters in particular, but does state:

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as “cults” in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. **Christian-based groups that the Government considered cults were subjected to increased government scrutiny during the period covered by this report** (US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report 2004: China*, 15 September – Attachment 5).

Also relevant is this extract from the same report, which indicates a hardening of government attitudes towards religious cults:

In November 2003, the CCP Central Committee held a high-level meeting in Beijing attended by Politburo members and other high-ranking officials responsible for overseeing religion. In January, a national work conference on religion organized by SARA was held to outline concrete actions to “strengthen religious work.” **The conference advised that officials should guard against Christian-influenced “cults”** and avoid negative influences, including “foreign infiltration under cover of religion.” Conference attendees also raised concern about circulation of foreign religious materials addressing the growth of Christianity in the country, including a documentary film entitled “The Cross” and a book entitled “Jesus in Beijing.” **Subsequently, many provinces convened their own local work conferences.** For example, in February the Fujian Province conference noted that unauthorized establishment of religious venues and icons “interferes with the Government’s administration of religious affairs, affects the normal activities of patriotic religious groups, helps the development of evil cults and illegal religious powers, and gives foreign countries opportunities to conduct religious penetration.” The 2004 national work conference was a contrast to a landmark 2001 conference at which President Jiang Zemin spoke about the sustained role of religion in society and raised questions about the traditional Marxist concept of

opposing religion (US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report 2004: China*, 15 September – Attachment 5).

Apart from these reports, no recent material was found on the Shouters.

A recent article for the New York Times is of general interest as it discusses the growth of religious cults in China in recent years (Kahn, J. 2004, 'Violence taints religion's solace for China's poor', *The New York Times*, 25 November – Attachment 6).

### **3. Is there any particular information about their activities in the Fuqing City area?**

It was noted in the answer to Question 1 that Fujian Province is regarded as a stronghold of Shouter belief, and that the founder of the group, Watchman Nee came from Fujian.

The following reports refer specifically to Fuqing City, which is in Fujian Province.

A 2002 report from the Christian newsletter *Compass Direct* states that the Hong Kong businessman arrested for smuggling bibles was taking them to Shouters in Fuqing, where the group is very strong [Li was later released and allowed to return to Hong Kong]:

Li [or Lai Kwong-keung in Cantonese] and two others, Lu Zhudi and Linxifu, were arrested in May 2001 when Li tried to transport 16,280 copies of the Bible to Fuqing county in Fujian province. Li had reportedly already taken 16,800 copies into China in April. On December 10, 2001, the local court at Fuqing accused them of belonging to an "evil cult" and of "distributing cultic material." This indictment came at a time when China's top leaders had called for a renewed crackdown on all cults and for tighter control of religious affairs.

Li was seeking to supply copies of the Recovery Version of the Bible – published with notes by Witness Lee – to members of the Local Church in Fujian. Fuqing county may have nearly 100,000 members of this church. Proscribed and persecuted for nearly 20 years inside China as a cult, the Local Church is popularly known as "The Shouters" for shouting God's name at their meetings. Witness Lee was the right-hand-man of the much better known Watchman Nee, who founded the church in Fujian province in the 1930s. While Nee died a martyr in a Chinese labor camp in 1972, Lee went on to organize the church into a tight-knit structure controlled from his headquarters in Anaheim, California (Mei, Xu 2002, 'Bible smuggler sentenced to jail', *Compass Direct*, 15 February – Attachment 7).

A 2004 report described the release of one of the three who were arrested, Yu Zhudi:

A Fujian Christian says he will resume his evangelistic work after serving a three-year jail term for smuggling Bibles.

Yu Zhudi, 46, was released on Sunday in the town of Baisha, near Fuqing city in Fujian province.

"On the surface I am now free, but it's not that simple," he said. "I will likely be followed and my phone may be tapped."

Mr Yu was arrested in May 2001 along with Lin Xifu and Hong Kong businessman Lai Kwong-keung. The men, who belonged to an underground evangelical group called the Shouters, were apprehended while smuggling 16,280 Bibles from Shenzhen to Fuqing.

They were convicted of “using a cult to undermine the enforcement of the law”. Mr Lai received two years in jail and the other two three-year terms. All were fined 150,000 yuan. Mr Lai and Mr Lin were released on health grounds in 2002.

Public security officers searched the homes of Mr Yu’s mother and son several times while he was in jail, he said (Wan, Freda 2004, ‘Freed bible smuggler keeps his faith intact’, *South China Morning Post*, 9 March – Attachment 8).

A long and comprehensive October 2002 article describes activities of the group in Fuqing and elsewhere in Fujian. It is referred to as the Local Church or Living Stream Ministry for most of the article, though the term “Shouters” is mentioned. Points made include:

- The group is banned, but functions efficiently underground;
- There is a widespread network of volunteers and preachers that supports the group in Fuqing and other parts of China; it provides resources like Recovery Bibles and tapes of Witness Lee to members, and transports speakers from America;
- The Fuqing group has strong connections to the Living Stream Ministry of Witness Lee in Anaheim, California;
- American followers of the group risk arrest or deportation by taking banned materials to China;
- There are descriptions of meetings by group members in houses and remote farms;
- One group met three times a week. Christmas and Easter are celebrated;
- One Fuqing member had been arrested eight times since 1983, and had once been kicked and punched by police after a raid on a meeting because he refused to talk about it;
- Living Stream officials claim 800,000 believers in China;
- Recovery Bibles are also printed in China, in contravention of copyright, and are copied onto CD-ROMs on home computers;
- The light sentences handed out to the Hong Kong businessman and others charged with smuggling bibles in 2001 were possibly due to the international outcry surrounding the arrests (Gittelsohn, John 2002, ‘Living Stream/Secret passages’, *The Orange County Register*, 13 October – Attachment 9).

No other recent material on Shouters in Fuqing was found among the sources consulted. The following older reports mention Fuqing.

A 1994 Amnesty International report states:

Amnesty International has also received information about three members of a banned protestant group, known as the “Shouters”[1], who are said to have been arrested on 23 December 1993 in Fujian province. Lin Zilong, He Xiaping and Han Kangrui were reportedly detained at their homes by public security bureau officers and are reported to be “under investigation for religious reasons”. Lin Zilong is known to have been detained previously for being a leader of the

“Shouters” group. The three arrested are Lin Zilong, a farmer aged 79, from Qianlin village, Yuxi town, Fuqing city, Fujian province, who was last known to be detained in Fuqing city Detention Centre; He Xiaping, a farmer aged 53, from Nanlu village, Jiangjing town, Fuqing city, Fujian province, thought to be detained in Jiangjing town detention centre; and Han Kangrui, a farmer aged 48, from Haiyou village, Longtian town, Fuqing city, Fujian province, currently believed to be detained in Longtian town detention centre. It is not known whether they have been charged or tried. It is reported that Lin Zilong’s family are permitted to take food to him every day. Lin Zilong, a district leader of the “Shouters”, has reportedly already spent seven and a half years in prison after being detained in 1983 (Amnesty International, 1994, *China: Protestants and Catholics detained since 1993*, March AI ASA 17/06/94 – Attachment 10).

The 1994 Human Rights Watch report also mentions this incident, adding other details:

...on December 23, 1993 in Fuqing County, Fujian Province, Lin Zilong, a seventy-nine-year-old peasant from Qirilin Village, Yum Township, and five others were arrested at a meeting in his house. This was Lin's fifth arrest. His fourth, in 1983, resulted in a ten-year sentence (date of release unknown). During one of his prison-terms, Lin composed hymns which were smuggled out of prison and published in book form. During his 1993-94 detention which lasted close to three months, the police wanted more information about the hymns and their publication. They also wanted to make sure Lin understood very clearly that the Shouters were still classified as a banned counterrevolutionary organization. Of the five arrested with Lin, only two have been identified: He Xiaping, a fifty-three-year-old peasant from Nanlu Village, Jiangjing Township, and Han Kangrui, a peasant from Haiyou Village, Longtian Township, forty-eight years old. Han was held in a detention center in Longtian; He Xiaping in a detention center in Jiangjing; and Lin in Fuqing City. It is not known whether Han and He have been released (Human Rights Watch Asia, 1994, *China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect*, June, Vol.6 No.6 – Attachment 1).

### List of Attachments

1. Human Rights Watch Asia, 1994, *China: Persecution of a Protestant Sect*, June, Vol.6 No.6
2. RRT Country Research 1999, *Research Response CHN13854*, 17 December
3. RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response CHN16195*, 29 September
4. US Department of State 2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004-China*, 28 February
5. US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report 2004: China*, 15 September
6. Kahn, J. 2004, ‘Violence taints religion’s solace for China’s poor’, *The New York Times*, 25 November.
7. Mei, Xu 2002, ‘Bible smuggler sentenced to jail’, *Compass Direct*, 15 February
8. Wan, Freda 2004, ‘Freed bible smuggler keeps his faith intact’, *South China Morning Post*, 9 March
9. Gittelsohn, John 2002, ‘Living Stream/Secret passages’, *The Orange County Register*, 13 October

visited on 3/27/2015

10. Amnesty International, 1994, *China: Protestants and Catholics detained since 1993*,  
March AI ASA 17/06/94