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## **Shanghai cracks down on Churches**

### ***Chinese police drag a South Korean pastor away as he gives his sermon.***

Radio Free Asia (28.12.2012) - Authorities in Shanghai launched a crackdown on unofficial Protestant churches over Christmas, raiding meetings and threatening to deport a South Korean pastor.

Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, who heads the nationwide Protestant Chinese House Church Alliance, said police raided the Zhenguang house church in Shanghai's Pudong New District on Sunday.

"They were having a meeting, and the police charged in, and detained a South Korean pastor for two hours," Zhang said in an interview on Friday.

"They let him out, but they are going to repatriate him," he said.

A Zhenguang church member surnamed Liu said she had been present at the service.

"They dragged Pastor Hu away as he was giving his sermon," she said. "He was ordered to leave the country immediately and to return to South Korea."

She said police had taken the names and addresses of all present at the service, and questioned them regarding any involvement with the doomsday cult Quanneng Shen, or Eastern Lightning.

"They told us on no account to have any dealings with the Eastern Lightning group, and we told them that we don't have anything to do with evil cults," Liu said.

"There is a lot of publicity material around here from Eastern Lightning," she added. "Their leaflets are everywhere."

### ***Clashes***

Following violent clashes between police and the Quanneng Shen ("Almighty God"), or Eastern Lightning, sect in central China this month, police have detained more than 400 sect members in northwestern Qinghai province.

The move follows a nationwide campaign to root out the pseudo-religious group that authorities believe advocates doomsday theories and confrontation with the ruling Chinese Communist Party and government, according to official media reports.

The sect, which has been designated an "evil cult" by the authorities, "uses the name of Christianity to recruit members, expands its influence through illicit means, and carries out illegal underground activities and crimes," the China Daily said in a recent report.

Repeated calls to the Zhenguang house church office in the Xiangshan New Village residential compound went unanswered during office hours on Friday.

But a Zhenguang member who declined to be identified said the church had now changed its phone number.

"I haven't heard from them recently, because things have been very tense recently," she said. "This has never happened to them before, and they are frightened."

"This is a newly established church. It has only existed for a couple of years," she added.

She said Zhenguang had a following of 20-30 believers. "I don't know why they got raided. I think it's pretty strange."

The U.S.-based Christian rights group ChinaAid said the detained pastor was surnamed Hu, and was taken away in the middle of giving his sermon.

Police officers raided the service on Sunday, along with officials from the municipal religious affairs bureau, grabbed Hu, and ordered the congregation to disperse, ChinaAid said in a statement on its website.

"Hu was held for two hours and...told he would be expelled from China," the group said.

### ***Late by a week***

Meanwhile, police in the eastern province of Shandong warned members of another house church not to gather over Christmas, followers said, prompting them to hold their festivities a week late.

"Christmas should have been last week, but we are holding it a week late," said a follower of a house church in Shandong's Dongying city surnamed Liu.

The group had come under increasing pressure to join China's official Three Self Protestant Association and subject itself to official regulation, he added.

"It's because there are a lot of us," he said. "But it's not good for our brothers and sisters to always worship separately."

"We want to buy a larger place, but they won't let us build a church, and the Three Self Association took away our land and demolished our old place," Liu said.

He said many of China's unofficial Protestants were coming under pressure from police now.

### ***Pressure***

And in the southwestern province of Sichuan, more than 1,000 Protestants had been warned by police not to gather over Christmas, according to local pastor Li Ming.

"The police are harassing us and threatening us," Li said. "But they haven't detained us."

"They are putting pressure on us not to gather for worship, not to do anything, but we do it anyway; they haven't taken any action," he said.

Officially an atheist country, China nonetheless has an army of officials whose job is to watch over faith-based activities, which have spread rapidly.

Party officials are put in charge of Catholics, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Protestants. Judaism isn't recognized, and worship in nonrecognized temples, churches, or mosques is against the law.

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## **More Tibetans detained**

### ***Chinese authorities detain and sentence Tibetans as protests surge against Beijing's rule.***

Radio Free Asia (12.12.2012) - Chinese authorities in Qinghai province have detained five Tibetans in the aftermath of a self-immolation and sentenced eight students to prison terms for their role in protests, sources said Wednesday, amid a crackdown on assertions of national and cultural identity in Tibetan-populated regions.

The detentions on Wednesday in Dokarmo in Qinghai's Tsekhog (in Chinese, Zeku) county came days after a 17-year-old nun, Benchen Kyi, set herself ablaze on Dec. 9 in the latest of a wave of self-immolation protests against Chinese rule.

"Five people were taken into custody in the Dokarmo area, where a teenage nun [had] set herself on fire and died," Shawo Dorje, a Tibetan living in Switzerland, told RFA's Tibetan service on Wednesday, citing contacts in the region.

Authorities detained Aku Tsonдру, the 49-year-old head of the Dorje Dzong monastery in Tsekhog, along with a 47-year-old lay tantric practitioner named Chakthab and Shawo, the head of a local religious center in his 30s, Dorje said.

Also detained were two nuns: Choedron, who is in charge of discipline at a local nunnery, and Rigshe, who is the sister of another self-immolator named Sangye Dolma, Dorje said.

The school attended by Benchen Kyi has been temporarily closed, with all students sent back to their respective homes, Dorje said.

Thousands of local people had reportedly attended the cremation ceremony for the 17-year-old nun, whose death brought to 95 the total number of Tibetan self-immolations since the wave began in February 2009.

Since late October, Chinese officials have responded to the burning protests by punishing the families and associates of self-immolators and by deploying paramilitary forces and restricting communications and travel in the areas where self-immolations have occurred.

### ***Prison terms***

The detentions in Dokarmo follow the sentencing of eight Tibetan students for their role in protests at the end of last month that opposed Chinese ridicule of the self-immolators and called for the protection of Tibetan language rights.

The eight, who were students at a medical school in Chabcha (in Chinese, Gonghe) county in Qinghai's Tsolho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, were sentenced by a Qinghai court on Dec. 5 to five years in prison, Dorje said.

"The students were sentenced on Dec. 5 on charges of their involvement in a mass students' protest in Chabcha on Nov. 26. They were either school prefects or class monitors," Dorje said.

On Nov. 26, more than 1,000 students led by students from the Tsolho Medical Institute had protested over the release of an official Chinese booklet that disparaged the Tibetan language and ridiculed Tibetan self-immolation protests as acts of "stupidity."

Dorje identified the sentenced students, who ranged in age from 18 to 23, as Rabten, Wangdu Tsering, Jampa Tsering, Choekyong Kyab, Sangye Dondrub, Dola Tsering, Tsering Tashi, and Kunsang Bum.

"Other students from this school are still being called to the local police station for interrogation in groups of seven or eight," Dorje said.

Chinese paramilitary police have also surrounded a teacher training school in neighboring Malho (in Chinese, Huangnan) prefecture, and have detained 18 students, including one named Sangye, in connection with the protests, Dorje said.

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## **House Church Christians detained**

### ***Police break up an 'unofficial' church meeting about the meaning of Christmas.***

Radio Free Asia (11.12.2012) - Authorities in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong detained 16 Christians and beat up their main preacher in a major urban park after they held a meeting in public about the meaning of Christmas, Christian activists said on Tuesday.

Evangelical preacher Cao Nan and eight people with him were detained in a raid on Saturday by nearly 40 officers in Shenzhen, who dragged them off to the local police station, the U.S.-based ChinaAid group said in a statement on its website.

However, Cao himself told RFA after his release that the total number detained was 16.

"I was the main person who was injured," Cao said in an interview on Tuesday. "I have an injury to my face, and bruises on my legs...and neck."

Cao said all 16 were released late on Monday.

"I was held for the longest, for 23 hours, while the others were held for about seven hours," he said. "When they were interrogating me, they said I was being held on suspicion of impersonating a religious official and disturbing public order."

"When they let me go, it was with a verbal warning," Cao added.

### ***Official visit***

The raid came as president-in-waiting Xi Jinping made a visit to the city, laying a wreath of flowers at the feet of a bronze statue of late supreme leader Deng Xiaoping.

However, Xi's visit was notably lacking in the usual trappings of high-level Chinese security, with no traffic restrictions in the city during his visit.

Cao said the group had just begun its meeting in one of Shenzhen's parks, when he noticed police in black uniforms begin to approach them.

"There were 100-200 people attending," he said. "They lifted us up, four of them to each person."

Also detained alongside Cao were seven workers at local Christian groups Guan'ai Center and the Meilin Church Gospel Team, ChinaAid said.

Cao, an independent evangelist, has been preaching in Shenzhen for a number of years, and is well-known to several unofficial Protestant "house churches" and their pastors.

### ***Landlord pressured***

Zhao Jianjun, pastor of the unofficial Zhongfu Gangtou church in Shenzhen, which has also been repeatedly harassed by the authorities, said Cao had been preaching about Christmas in Shenzhen's Lizhi Park.

"They were attacked by police from [Shenzhen's] Futian District," he said.

Elsewhere in Guangdong, house church pastor Li Peng said his Dongguan-based group was facing eviction from its premises after police put pressure on their landlord to terminate the lease for their church premises.

"The landlord agreed to give us an extension of three months, which ends on [Thursday]," Li said.

The Christmas period is considered a sensitive time for China's management of its population of unofficial Christian believers.

ChinaAid warned Christians in mainland China not to risk provoking the authorities in the run-up to Christmas.

"With the approach of Christmas, the government's persecution of Christians will escalate," it said. "Therefore, believers need to respond with finesse while continuing to serve faithfully."

### ***'We just keep growing'***

According to Henan-based pastor Zhang Mingxuan, who heads the nationwide Protestant Chinese House Church Alliance, Protestants in Nanjing have recently also been detained and questioned by police.

"In the past few days, they have detained a few people from churches in Nanjing who were spreading the good news," Zhang said.

He said those detained were released on the same day.

The Chinese authorities have charged Christian groups with "engaging in illegal religious activities" and have demanded that they register along with other officially sanctioned "patriotic churches." Many church members have refused to do so.

Zhang said the frequent crackdowns on Christians are unlikely to affect the following of house churches in China, however.

"We have so many Protestants, and so many groups overseas that are closely concerned with the progress of religious freedom in China," he said. "The authorities in mainland China are afraid that we just keep growing, and getting stronger."

"It's normal for believers to get locked up."

### ***Surveillance, raids***

House churches, which operate without official registration documents and without the involvement of the local religious affairs bureaus, come in for surveillance and repeated raids, especially in the more rural areas of the country, according to overseas rights groups.

The State Department's 2011 Religious Freedom Report that reviewed the situation across the globe last year slammed China, saying there was a "marked deterioration" in Beijing's respect for and protection of religious rights in the world's most populous nation.

It cited increased restrictions on Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns and clampdowns on religious practices as well as "severe" repression of Muslim Uyghurs in the volatile Xinjiang region.

Officially an atheist country, China nonetheless has an army of officials whose job is to watch over faith-based activities, which have spread rapidly.

Party officials are put in charge of Catholics, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Protestants. Judaism isn't recognized, and worship in nonrecognized temples, churches, or mosques is against the law.

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## **China arrests 500 followers of religious cult over Mayan apocalypse rumours**

### ***Quasi-Christian religious group the Church of the Almighty God accused of spreading rumours that world will end on Friday***

The Guardian (19.12.2012) - Chinese authorities have detained 500 people belonging to a quasi-Christian religious group called the Church of the Almighty God for spreading rumours that the world will end on Friday, according to the country's official news agency Xinhua. Four hundred of the arrests, which have taken place over recent weeks, were in the north-western Qinghai province and the remainder in eight other provinces.

"The Qinghai police bureau stated that the police had stormed numerous centres belonging to the Almighty God cult, arresting more than 400 members and confiscating over 5,000 items including banners, DVDs, slogans, books, computers, speakers, and cell phones,"

Xinhua reported, adding that the group has "advanced anti-detection capabilities".

The report was not specific about which government department had orchestrated the arrests. "It's the government - which part of the government, nobody knows," said Zhou Xiaozheng, a sociology professor at Renmin University in Beijing. "The government controls the media, so nobody's allowed to report on it."

Human rights groups say Chinese authorities maintain a vast network of shadowy, extrajudicial agencies that crack down on dissidents and unauthorised religious groups. The most notorious of them, the 610 Office, was established in 1999 to control the spiritual group Falun Gong. The group was outlawed that year after thousands of

followers staged a silent protest outside of the Communist party's central leadership compound in Beijing.

"Though Falun Gong remains the primary focus, its targets now include house church Christians, Buddhists and other religious or spiritual groups," said a 2011 report on the office by the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation thinktank. "Today, based on extrapolating from district-level numbers on local government websites, we estimate it retains at least 15,000 officers."

Theories that the world will end on 21 December, the last day on the cyclical Mayan calendar, have gained incredible momentum in China. Much of the furor seems inspired by the Hollywood film 2012, a box office hit in China, which used the so-called "Mayan apocalypse" as its central premise.

Central propaganda authorities have instructed Chinese media outlets to dampen their coverage of the rumoured cataclysm. "Strengthen positive guidance and forcefully guard against the creation and spread of rumours, as well as working up panicked feelings," said a leaked directive posted to the internet by the Berkeley, California-based China Digital Times. The terms Almighty God and Eastern Lightning, another name for the group, have been blocked on the country's most popular microblog Sina Weibo.

The Almighty God group was founded in the 1990s by self-proclaimed grand priest" Zhao Weishan in central Henan Province. Among the group's core tenets are the belief that a female Jesus Christ will save adherents from the end of the world and that it must fight a decisive battle against the "Big Red Dragon", its word for the Chinese Communist party. Zhao left China for the United States 12 years ago seeking religious asylum.

"They're saying the bible is outdated," said a leader of an unofficial church in Beijing who requested anonymity. "They make sure their interpretations are very adapted to Chinese culture, so it's easy for Chinese people to understand what they're preaching."

Hu Xingdou, an economist at Beijing Institute of Technology and well-known commentator on China's social issues, said quasi-religious groups are proliferating outside of the country's major cities.

"In general you're beginning to see a moral vacuum in Chinese society," he said. "Corruption is terrible, the wealth gap is terrible, everyone just wants to make more money. All of these bad things create the ideal circumstances for the growth of a cult."

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## **China cracking down on doomsday group**

***More than 100 members of Almighty God have been arrested. The group warns that the world will end Dec. 21 and urges members to wage war on the Communist Party.***

Los Angeles Times (17.12.2012) - Authorities have in recent weeks arrested more than 100 members of a fringe Christian-inspired group known as Almighty God that is prophesying the world will end Dec. 21, according to state media.

Members of the group had been distributing apocalyptic literature and sending text messages throughout China when the government began detaining them this month. On Dec. 8, police arrested 34 members in Fujian province, which lies on China's southeastern coast. On Thursday, they arrested 37 members, including seven

leaders in Xining, a city in the west-central province of Qinghai. There have also been arrests in Sichuan and Hubei provinces and elsewhere.

"Dec. 21 is approaching, and on that day half of the world's good people will die, and all evil people will die out — only if you join the Almighty God movement can you avoid death and be saved," warned a pamphlet confiscated by police in Shaoxing city, in the eastern province of Zhejiang, and quoted by state media. A text message predicted, "Great tsunamis and earthquakes are about to happen around the world."

Perhaps more threatening to the Chinese government, the group also urged followers to wage war on what it called the "big red dragon," referring to the Communist Party.

In Henan province, authorities said that the suspect held in a slashing attack that injured 23 schoolchildren Friday had acted "under the influence of doomsday beliefs." It was unclear, however, whether the authorities were linking the man to the same group.

The suspect, Min Yongjun, had believed a local woman who had been telling villagers that "the end of the world is coming and the Earth will explode," Ouyang Mingxing, a deputy director of Guangshan's public security bureau, told the state-run Global Times. The official added that police found more than 70 pamphlets in the woman's home.

Unmonitored religious sects are regarded as a serious threat by the Chinese Communist Party. Falun Gong, an indigenous religious group that began agitating against the government in the 1990s, likewise calls for the party's downfall.

The government's wariness stems in part from the powerful influence such groups can exert in a land largely devoid of organized religion but riddled with a lack of trust, said sociologist Zhou Xiaozheng of People's University.

"Because China has no established religion, people looking for a way to set their minds at ease may turn to cults," said Zhou. "People don't believe in what the government says, so they may wind up believing in wild rumors."

Major rebellions against Chinese authority have sprung from Christian sects in the past. The Taiping Rebellion in the 19th century, started by a man who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ, led to civil war and contributed to the fall of the last Chinese dynasty.

Several Protestant groups currently active in China have published accounts of their dealings with the Almighty God movement, also known as Eastern Lightning. According to the Christian Research Journal, a man named Zhao Weishan founded the movement in Heilongjiang province in 1989. Zhao later moved to Henan province, where he began to teach that Jesus Christ had returned to Earth in the form of a Henan woman named Deng. Zhao reportedly immigrated to America in 2000.

The Almighty God movement has given other religious groups and the government cause for concern. Some Protestant groups say the sect — which one group, China for Jesus, estimates is 1 million strong — has engaged in kidnapping, coercion and blackmail directed against other churches.

Doomsday theories have proved popular in China in recent years. The film "2012," which describes a set of catastrophic geological events, set box-office records when it was released in China in 2009. Columbia Pictures released a 3-D version for the Chinese audience late this year.

Chinese authorities are trying to keep people from taking the latest apocalyptic scenario too seriously, warning that the rumors are causing "unrest and panic buying ... undermining social order and cheating people out of their money," as the official China Daily newspaper put it.

Stores in some areas were reported to be out of candles because of predictions of three days of darkness.

Scientists have been urged to speak out in public about the fallacy of the predictions.

"Dec. 21 is the winter solstice and it's just the change of seasons.... The day is short and the night is long, but it's a normal, natural event," Yang Guang, an astronomer at the National Astronomical Observatories satellite observation station in Changchun, was quoted as telling the China Daily.

At least one company in the southern city of Kunming was reported by state media to be offering its employees a day off work and survival kits — partly as a joke.

Fears of a fast-approaching day of reckoning have also provided inspiration to Chinese inventors. A farmer in Hebei province and a businessman in Yiwu, a town south of Shanghai, separately developed large survival pods for use in case of calamity. The Yiwu entrepreneur said customers had ordered 28 pods for delivery before Dec. 21.

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## **China cracks down on "slay red dragon" doomsday cult**

Reuters (14.12.2012) - China has launched a crackdown on a cult it says is calling for a "decisive battle" to slay the "Red Dragon" Communist Party, and which has been spreading doomsday rumours, state media said on Friday.

In recent weeks, hundreds of members of the "Almighty God" group have clashed with police, sometimes outside government buildings, in central Henan, northern Shaanxi and southwestern Gansu provinces, according to photos on popular microblogs.

(The group) has "incited followers to launch a decisive battle with the 'Big Red Dragon', to make the 'Red Dragon' extinct and to establish the reign of the kingdom of the 'Almighty God'", the provincial Shaanxi Daily said on its website.

It added that the sect's followers have been distributing leaflets saying that the world will end in 2012.

China's Communist Party brooks no challenge to its rule and is obsessed with social stability.

It has particularly taken aim at cults, which have multiplied across the country in recent years. Demonstrations have been put down with force and some sect leaders executed.

"The State Bureau of Religious Affairs has already documented the group's cult nature, has outlawed it and is presently harshly cracking down," the Shaanxi Daily said.

It did not say how many followers the sect had.

The State Bureau of Religious Affairs did not answer repeated calls from Reuters seeking comment.

Former President Jiang Zemin launched a campaign in 1999 to crush the Falun Gong religious group, banning it as an "evil cult" after thousands of practitioners staged a surprise but peaceful sit-in outside the leadership compound in Beijing to demand official recognition of their movement.

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## **China removes Shanghai Catholic bishop from state-run church post**

### ***Bishop had sworn loyalty to Pope Benedict***

World Watch Monitor (12.12.2012) - In a move characterised in Western media as a fresh challenge to Vatican authority, China's state-run Catholic Church has revoked the title of the auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai.

Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who is in his mid-forties, was ordained in July. His appointment had the rare approval of both Pope Benedict XVI and the state-run Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CCPA). Both lay claim to the leadership of China's Catholics, who are said to number up to about 12 million. Both claim authority to appoint Bishops, and each denies the authority of the other.

The revoking of the Bishop's title and reports of his house arrest have been condemned in the United Kingdom as "a shocking indignity" by Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). UK spokesman John Pontifex condemned the move as "undue interference", adding: "This situation will undoubtedly cause relations between the Vatican and China to be more strained. That the Bishop is reported to be under house arrest is a shocking indictment of the current situation."

At his ordination, Ma Daqin publicly announced he no longer could remain a member of the state Catholic Church. He refused the laying on of hands and communion from a bishop who had not been recognised by the Pope. Ma Daqin has not been seen in public since, and has reportedly been placed under house arrest.

AFP said a spokesman for the CPCA confirmed that the Bishop had been dismissed from his post. As yet no official statement has come from the Vatican, but its press office referred to a recent statement in the Italian religious affairs magazine *Tripod*.

"The situation remains serious," wrote Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. "Some bishops and priests are segregated or deprived of their liberty, as has recently happened in the case of the Bishop of Shanghai, Ma Daqin."

Lord Alton, of the British Parliament's House of Lords and a prominent spokesman for human rights and religious liberty, spoke to World Watch Monitor about Bishop Ma's case. He'd been delighted when the Bishop had been appointed in July. "Since the Cultural Revolution, we've seen in Shanghai a wonderful period in which Church-State relations have much improved. But Bishop Ma's resignation at his ordination was over the fact that it isn't appropriate for the State to control a Bishop. It's a big issue for China, one which has not gone away. This is an incredibly important case, which the world should not lose sight of".

Lord Alton went on: "Within China's ruling Communist Party, there's an enormous groundswell of opinion that China needs to adopt deeper values if it's to resist the corruption that's blighting the country. Even if members don't believe in Christianity themselves, they know that the Christian faith can help bring those values. So, on the one hand, they now want Christianity, but on the other hand they want to so tightly control it. It leaves people like Bishop Ma in an impossible situation. This will not enhance deeper values in China, nor respect for Christianity".

According to Catholic websites UCANews and AsiaNews, supporters of Bishop Ma, who include nuns, have been punished or forced to attend "political education" classes.

Cardinal Filoni stated: "Control over people and institutions has intensified." He went on to lament the absence of freedom of religion in China and called on the "whole Church to defend the legitimate rights of Chinese faithful."

John Pontifex said ACN was also "increasingly concerned" about the number of cases where "episcopal appointments have not been respected, where there has been undue interference."

Asian Catholic news agencies portray Bishop Ma as having taken a principled stand by refusing to submit to the authority of the state-run Church. Pro-Vatican press reported he received long applause at his ordination for announcing his decision to resign from the CPCA. They say he was placed under house arrest immediately at the diocesan seminary in Sheshan and is still being held there.

Observers say the clash over authority aggravates tensions between the Vatican and Beijing, which have been difficult since the Communist Party assumed power in 1949.

One of Bishop Ma's predecessors, the first Chinese national to be ordained Bishop of Shanghai in 1949, spent over 30 years under house arrest.

China and the Vatican cut diplomatic ties in 1951, after the Holy See gave official recognition to the Nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan, where it still has an embassy. In 1957, the Chinese authorities placed the official Catholic Church under the control of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA). By doing so, the atheist state assumed to itself the power to appoint its bishops.

The Chinese Catholic Church now is divided between the official, state-sanctioned Church, and the Church that is loyal to Rome and rejects the authority of the state over its affairs.

Estimates as to the number of Catholics in China vary. Official sources say around 5.7 million Chinese are members of the state-run Church; unofficial estimates range up to 12 million. Millions more worship in underground or unofficial churches, which remain loyal to the Pope.

However, State-Church tensions did not start with Chinese Communist Party rule.

Lord Alton says they date back to the earliest days of Christianity in China in the 1500s, and Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci. One of the founders of the Jesuit China Mission, Ricci had a difficult relationship with the Emperor, although he persisted in learning Chinese, according to Cambridge historian Mary Laven.

"Even Mao Tse Tung during the Cultural Revolution ordered that Ricci's shrine should not be destroyed or desecrated," Lord Alton said. "So there's an acknowledgement that Christianity brings good to China: however there's a traditional desire to control this".

Chinese official news agency Xinhua's English website has no report yet on the Bishop's removal from post.

China is ranked No. 21 among the 50 countries that are most hostile to Christians, according to the World Watch List published by Open Doors.

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## **China-led restrictions on Falun Gong**

Forum 18 News Service (10.12.2012) -Russia has stepped up pressure on followers of the Chinese spiritual practice of Falun Gong in recent years, Forum 18 News Service notes, using literature bans, deportations and close surveillance to limit their activity. As with Moscow's long-standing refusal to allow a pastoral visit by the Dalai Lama to Russia's Buddhists, this seems intended to please Beijing.

Falun Gong is an Eastern spiritual practice popularised in China since the early 1990s by its founder, Li Hongzhi. It follows in the tradition of qi gong, a combination of meditative exercise and natural therapy widely and uncontroversially practised in China for fitness and health. Li's variant adds a strong moral-spiritual component, however; all thoughts and actions must harmonise with the universal principles of Truth, Compassion and Endurance. Although distinct from Buddhism, Falun Gong has that faith's same goal of spiritual enlightenment.

While the Chinese authorities long regarded Falun Gong positively, they launched a harsh state crackdown on practitioners from 1999.

Beijing has since claimed Falun Gong to be "an out-and-out evil cult" that "concocts a whole set of lies and heretical fallacies to deceive people", in the terms of a November 2003 statement issued by the Chinese Embassy in Australia.

Falun Gong practitioners maintain their movement's growing influence in fact led to the crackdown in China. "The Chinese Communist Party couldn't tolerate any other formations or leaders being popular," Moscow-based practitioner Juliana Kim told Forum 18 on 15 November. "Their ideology is built on struggle, the search for enemies – and here the enemy is yourself, your passions and weaknesses."

### ***Who follows Falun Gong in Russia?***

Kim's Moscow group includes a wide variety of ages and ethnicities, she told Forum 18. She herself is an ethnic Korean, native speaker of Russian who was raised in Uzbekistan, a destination for Koreans deported from the Russian Far East by Stalin in 1937.

Kim encountered Falun Gong eight years ago after becoming interested in Eastern mysticism through writers such as Helen Blavatsky and Nikolai Roerich, popular in Russia. The practice suited her because "I wanted to stay boss, and you don't have to be a member, donate money or follow rules," she told Forum 18. Initially anxious about falling into a "sect", she was "cautious until satisfied that practitioners aren't fixated or zombified."

### **Chinese pressure**

Falun Gong practitioners in Russia believe they are harassed in order to satisfy Beijing. "Not wishing to quarrel with China, our government violates our Constitution, and our rights are violated," 59-year-old Yuri from Abakan (Khakassia republic, southern Siberia) commented to the website forum of Novaya Gazeta newspaper on 18 December 2011.

There is some evidence of this. Seen by Forum 18, on 9 September 2005 the Media Registration and Licensing Department within Russia's Culture Ministry rejected an application to register Falun Gong Today newspaper due to Article 8 of the 2001 China-Russia treaty "On Neighbourly Relations, Friendship and Co-operation". This provision bars signatories from "allowing the creation or activity on their territory of organisations or groups that harm the sovereignty, security or territorial integrity" of the other.

## ***Buddhists affected***

The same treaty – or China's position – have been repeatedly cited by Russia's Foreign Ministry as grounds for rejecting Buddhists' annual requests for a pastoral visit by the Dalai Lama of Tibet. This is despite Buddhism's informal status in Russia as a supposedly privileged "traditional" religion, Forum 18 notes.

Again refusing a visit in 2012, Deputy Head of the Foreign Ministry's Asia Department, Georgy Zinoviev, explained that the Dalai Lama's March 2011 announcement of his withdrawal from politics "has not led to any progress", while his more constructive dialogue with China's leadership "would allow His Holiness to make a trip to our country in the foreseeable future," the Russian-language website Save Tibet reported on 26 September.

Zinoviev refused to elaborate further on his late September letter to Russia's Buddhist organisations. "I set out everything I could in the letter to them," he told Forum 18 from the Foreign Ministry on 10 December. "If you have any further questions, you must send an official enquiry."

"I live in Russia, not China," monk Tenzin Chinba of the Association of Tuvan Buddhists told the website in response. "When a vital question for Russian Buddhists is being decided, why is it proposed that the 'negative evaluations' of the Chinese People's Republic should guide us?"

The Dalai Lama visited the Russian republic of Kalmykia for one day in 2004, but has not visited Russia's other traditionally Buddhist regions – Buryatia and Tuva – for 20 years.

## ***Restrictions***

Russia's Falun Gong practitioners admit they do not suffer severe restrictions as in China. "The fuss raised in Europe is holding the Russian authorities back," believes practitioner Juliana Kim. Specifying Falun Gong and the Jehovah's Witnesses, a 14 February 2012 European Parliament resolution expressed "deep concern about the misuse of anti-extremism legislation" against civil society organisations and religious minorities, as well as "the improper banning of their materials on grounds of extremism" (Resolution RC-B7-0052/2012, Point K.14).

Yet Moscow's comparatively relaxed attitude could also be due to the small number of active Falun Gong practitioners in Russia, Forum 18 notes. According to Kim, approximately 50 people attend weekly public meetings in Moscow, with other significant groups found in St Petersburg, Krasnodar, Rostov-on-Don and Irkutsk. Up to 400 gather for an annual conference near Moscow, she added. Approximately 20 people attend regular meetings of the Krasnodar group, its chair Mikhail Sinistyn told Forum 18 from that southern city on 27 November.

## ***Literature ban***

Falun Gong practitioners are under pressure, however. The harshest restriction is the inclusion of their core spiritual text "Zhuan Falun" on the Federal List of Extremist Materials (see forthcoming F18News article).

"It's like the Bible for Christians," Falun Gong practitioner Mikhail Sinitsyn explained to Forum 18. "We can't share it with others by publishing or distributing it. Naturally this decision also puts limitations on those who are interested and would like to practise."

A lawyer, Sinitsyn noted that people should be able to keep a single copy for personal use. Yet a single copy of "Zhuan Falun" was confiscated on 27 July 2012, when police detained four Falun Gong practitioners in the Pacific port of Vladivostok, the Falun Dafa Information Centre reported on 31 July. According to Juliana Kim, the interrogators were mainly concerned about whether the practitioners intended to demonstrate at or disrupt September's APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation) summit, held in Vladivostok and with senior Chinese officials participating.

Falun Gong practitioners have removed "Zhuan Falun" from their Russian website to avoid its closure, Sinitsyn told Forum 18. While the title is still featured on foreign-hosted domains, he did not know how far Russian regions have succeeded in implementing restrictions on accessing them. On 6 June 2011 Samara's Industrial District Court ordered five internet providers on its territory to limit access to a website – redacted in the text of the ruling seen by Forum 18 – that featured "Zhuan Falun".

Similar court orders have targeted other religious literature controversially ruled extremist. Since early 2011, websites featuring writings by Said Nursi, an Islamic theologian from Turkey, have been blocked in Krasnoyarsk and Lipetsk regions. Since late 2011, access to Jehovah's Witness websites has been blocked by courts in Buryatia, Chuvashia and Mari El republics, Altai and Transbaikal krais, Belgorod, Ivanovo, Kemerovo, Krasnodar and Lipetsk regions.

### **Surveillance**

Despite the ban on "Zhuan Falun", Falun Gong practitioners are able to meet regularly to read and discuss the movement's literature. The Moscow group gathers at weekends at premises belonging to a university whose administrators know its identity, Juliana Kim told Forum 18. Mikhail Sinitsyn said his Krasnodar group is small enough to meet in private homes.

Sinitsyn spoke to Forum 18 shortly after returning from a talk with officials of Krasnodar region's "E Centre", the section of the Department for Interior Affairs that deals with extremism. Falun Gong practitioners in the nearby cities of Novorossiisk and Korenovsk had been summoned for similar meetings at the same time, he noted. Yet while unusual, Sinitsyn did not find this troubling. Newly appointed officials "just wanted to know who we are," he explained to Forum 18.

During his conversation with them, they acknowledged that they do not view Falun Gong as a threat to society, Sinitsyn added, "but it seems there is some kind of pressure from above."

As with the recent detentions in Vladivostok, state harassment is more likely if the authorities expect Falun Gong practitioners to stage a public event critical of China's religion policy, according to Juliana Kim.

In September 2012 Russian blogger and Falun Gong practitioner "Analitik" reported that an organiser of this year's Falun Gong conference was telephoned by the FSB security police and asked to provide a list of participants, which the organiser refused to do. "Of course, this is rather strange – after all, the FSB have known us for 15 years (..) and nothing has happened in all that time to justify their concern in any way. They must just really love us."

### **Deportations**

While that conference went ahead as planned from 15-18 September near Moscow, Kim told Forum 18 that two Ukrainian Falun Gong practitioners were barred from Russia when

they tried to attend the event. Travelling by overnight bus from the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, Yevgeny Brug was removed at the border, while Alla Lavrinenko was detained for 24 hours at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport before being sent on a flight back to the Crimean city of Simferopol.

Brug did not receive any kind of document or explanation as to why he was being refused entry to Russia, he told Forum 18 from Kiev on 4 December. "They just said you're denied entry to the Russian Federation." Nor did he receive a stamp in his passport indicating that he had been barred.

In fact, Brug has not received any official confirmation on any of the several occasions he has been denied entry to Russia in the past six years, he told Forum 18 (he has also been admitted several times in the same period). The first refusal was in 2007, when Brug was already inside Russia and arrived at a Moscow railway station on his way to the annual Falun Gong conference. Stopped by police and informed that he was in the country illegally, he was ordered to leave, he told Forum 18.

Brug's post-conference plans to marry a Russian citizen (also a Falun Gong practitioner) in her hometown of Nizhny Novgorod had to be delayed and the location changed to Kiev, he added.

Brug is certain his Falun Gong connection is behind the travel ban. While living in Moscow in 2006, he was detained when reporting on a Falun Gong demonstration outside the Chinese Embassy and when attempting to take a train to St Petersburg with other Falun Gong practitioners before the G8 Summit, he told Forum 18. Police took his passport details on both occasions.

Like fellow Ukrainian citizen Brug, Alla Lavrinenko did not receive official confirmation on being refused entry to Russia on 13 September. Border guards at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport said she was on "a list of people refused entry" but added that they did not know why, she told Forum 18 on 4 December. When Lavrinenko asked for written confirmation of this, border guards refused, telling her that she would receive a full explanation from a Russian state representative as soon as she landed back in Simferopol. "But there was no Russian state representative in Simferopol Airport," she remarked to Forum 18.

On later telephoning the Russian Consulate in Simferopol, she was told they had nothing to do with the incident, she said, and advised to contact Domodedovo's Border Guard Service.

"Where did you get this number?" a representative of Domodedovo's Border Guard Service demanded as soon as Forum 18 explained that confirmation of the deportation of a female Ukrainian citizen was the reason for calling on 4 December. "All questions to the press service of the FSB!" he instructed, before ending the call.

A spokesperson at the FSB's press service told Forum 18 on 6 December that questions are only accepted in writing. By email the same day, Forum 18 asked for confirmation of Lavrinenko's deportation – and the grounds for it, if confirmed.

In early June 2009, a Moldovan Falun Gong practitioner whose passport details had been taken by FSB officers at the 2007 Moscow conference was also denied entry to Russia and returned to the Moldovan capital, Chisinau. "I didn't believe at the time that they would include us in their entry black list," the practitioner told Forum 18 soon after the entry denial. "In Moscow airport they put no stamp in my [Moldovan] passport, they simply drew up a document which they would not give me."

According to Juliana Kim, Russia's Falun Gong practitioners did not experience obstruction until 2007, when OMON riot police cordoned off the Moscow conference "as if we were extremists, terrorists". While heavy-handed restrictions are still rare, she pointed out that the public stigma of such actions is damaging in Russia as well as China. "For years under the communists people have been taught that if the state persecutes someone, there's a reason for it."

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## **Three-Self church's application to stage protest against illegal demolition of church property is rejected**

ChinaAid (26.11.2012) An official Three-Self church in northeastern China has been denied permission to stage a public protest against the planned illegal eviction and demolition of their church property by real estate developers working hand-in-glove with the local government.

Since 2010, the Chengjiao Street Three-Self Church in the city of Yushu, Jilin province, has been trying to reach an agreement with the developers who want to demolish their property. But because of the collusion between the property developers and the local government, the church has been unable to reach an acceptable agreement. Furthermore, the church and its members have been the target of threats and harassment. When church members tried to submit a formal complaint to the government in accordance with the law, they were blocked at every turn.

Among the most egregious incidents was the beating of two women believers by the developers on July 20. In the three months following the attack, church members tried repeatedly to submit their complaint to various relevant government departments. But the Yushu offices of various national-level government departments refused accept the complaints about the victims' medical bills and compensation, and also would not carry out their legal responsibility to investigate the criminal liability of the suspects and their illegal infringement of rights. Having no other recourse, church representatives in October applied for a permit to stage a protest march during which they would "bear six banners with slogans...make speeches along the way and shout slogans." Their application was rejected by the Yushu Public Security Bureau (see scan of the document; click to enlarge).

After Christian lawyers in Beijing were asked to intervene, a church member representing the majority of the congregation submitted an application for administrative review, seeking a decision on the legality of the Public Security Bureau's Oct. 30 "Notification of Rejection of Permit for Protest March."

According to sources, the developers' outrageous behavior and the government's openly siding with the developers are because the two parties have already formed an interest group that enjoys the behind-the-scenes backing of the Yushu mayor, Zhao Guojun. His cellphone number is 13804390506

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## **Weibo and advancing freedom of religion or belief**

Forum 18 (26.11.2012) - The popular Chinese microblog Weibo has served as an effective means for individual religious adherents to express beliefs and to voice criticisms about phenomena concerning religion. It has also served as a platform for

news about freedom of religion or belief violations. However, Weibo's limitations are evident in that criticisms of the state, especially of the central political leaders, are limited and can only be indirect. Moreover, there is no indication that it has been able to mobilise effective collective action to address specific cases. So Weibo has yet to demonstrate an ability to be used to effectively protect religious freedom.

### ***Chinese microblogging***

Since being founded in 2009, Weibo, a microblog that has elements of Twitter and Facebook, has become one of the most popular Internet platforms in China. According to the 30th Survey Report of the China Internet Network Information Center of 28 September 2012, as of June 2012 there were 538 million Chinese Internet users. In October 2012, the Singapore-based China Internet Watch reported that China's Data Center of China's Internet (DCCI) indicated that nearly 90 percent of China's Internet users are Weibo users. This means that the number of Weibo users, at approximately 450 million, is more than the entire population of the United States and is almost equal to the population of the European Union.

Weibo is the generic Chinese term for microblogging. There are several Weibo providers. Sina Weibo is the best-known provider and is the one that most Chinese think of when referring generally to Weibo. However, according to Steven Millward, a Shanghai-based social media expert, Tencent Weibo has the largest number of registered users with 469 million as of June 2012. Sina Weibo has approximately 370 million registered users and over 36 million average daily active users. Netease Weibo is third, with over 260 million registered users.

### ***Internet censorship***

China has long imposed censorship on the Internet, including of foreign-based websites. Foreign sites which have been blocked include those related to the persecution of Christians and other religious faiths, the Dalai Lama, the Falun Gong religious movement, the Muslim Uygurs of Xinjiang and a number of Catholic sites. Most such sites remain blocked today.

Chinese search engines prevent searches for sensitive terms, including religious freedom-related terms such as "Falun Gong" and "Dalai Lama", or provide only links to state-sponsored sites proving the government's view.

However, the growth of the Internet, including more Chinese-based websites, the spread of new platforms – such as Weibo – and tools, including proxies, have made such censorship more difficult.

### ***Weibo and state-society relations***

According to Professors Guobin Yang and Craig Calhoun of the University of Pennsylvania and New York University, respectively, Weibo has displayed even faster speed, greater reach, and more interactivity than other Internet vehicles, such as websites used by Chinese environmental activists to oppose the building of dams on the Nu River in south-western China. As a result, Weibo has accumulated many achievements during its short period of existence.

For example, in July 2011, two high-speed trains collided outside Wenzhou, in the eastern coastal province of Zhejiang. News of the collision – which led to 40 deaths and injuries to 191 people – was immediately posted on Weibo. Tens of millions of users posted and re-posted information about the collision while engaging in discussions. According to a 28 July 2011 New York Times report, when Weibo exposed the local government officials' directive to lawyers that the latter should not accept cases from the families of victims without the former's approval, the local government immediately withdrew the order and apologised. According to the same New York Times report, when

Weibo users discovered and criticised the local government's decision to bury the first train to cover up the incident, local officials quickly unearthed the train and sent it for analysis.

But despite Weibo's achievements, no one should deny the presence of the state. As stated by a China-based American with the alias Martin Johnson who founded two websites, Greatfire.org and Freeweibo.com, which monitor Internet censorship in China: "The reason why Weibo exists is because the [Communist Party of China] allowed it to." Indeed, the communist state has incentives to support Weibo. As Reuters noted in a 31 October 2012 report, industry executives in China indicated that the government can use Weibo to obtain "real-time feedback on policies and a method to take stock of the public mood." The same report quoted Michael Anti, a Chinese blogger and journalist, as noting that the Chinese central authorities can use Weibo to take action against local officials and rival factions. According to Anti, if Weibo "is a battlefield .. the government seeks to occupy it, not destroy it."

So Weibo may become a vehicle for political change in China - or serve as a means by which the Communist Party remains in power. The verdict is still out on which side will eventually win the day.

### ***Weibo and freedom of religion or belief***

Religion and religion-related topics are popular topics on Weibo sites. Based on a review of Sina Weibo from mid-October 2012 to early November 2012, Forum 18 has found that Buddhism has by far been the most popular religion mentioned. A large number of Weibo users engaged in discussions and postings about Buddhist-related topics, even potentially sensitive ones.

For example, the controversy surrounding the stock listing of sacred Buddhist sites elicited much discussion on the platform. In particular, news that a Vice President of the state-approved Buddhist Association of China had criticised the planned stock listings was posted and discussed.

According to Christians in China, an English-language website written by people inside and outside China, Christianity "is thriving on the fastest-growing and most powerful. media platform ever seen in history". The author of one article on the site, "Christianity on China's Microblog", noted that prominent Chinese Christians, including those from Taiwan, have used Weibo to publicise their faith and have attracted large followings. For example, Pan Shiyi, a real estate tycoon who is a Christian, has six million followers on Weibo, while an unnamed Taiwan actor and his wife, both Christians, have four million followers.

Many of the Weibo postings on religion are self-expressions of personal faith. For example, one active Muslim Weibo user is a female university student, who regularly posts personal declarations of faith. In a similar vein, on 3 November, a Catholic user posted the following statement: "Thank God that I was born in a Catholic family with devout Catholic parents.."

### ***"Without religious freedom, there can't be a real Constitution!"***

The topic of religious freedom has been very popular on Weibo. Since April 2012, users have engaged in discussions about the connection between the state Constitution and religious freedom. A scholar from Peking University in the capital Beijing wrote: "Without religious freedom, there can't be a real Constitution!"

Other users have also criticised the current state of freedom of religion or belief in China, either explicitly or implicitly identifying the government as being responsible for the problems. "In foreign countries, including Taiwan, there are Bibles or Buddhist sutras in

the hotel room," a user wrote on 1 November. "That is religious freedom!" On 2 November, a user responded to a posted news item that the authorities in the Tibetan Autonomous Region would provide accident insurance to Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns with this comment: "The Tibetan people said: What's given to them is not what they wanted; all they want is religious freedom."

A news report was posted on Weibo about the public announcement by Shanghai's newly-ordained auxiliary Bishop, Ma Daquin, that he would resign from his post in the state-approved Catholic association immediately after his ordination. Bishop Ma's announcement resulted in the state's decision to close indefinitely the Catholic seminary with which he is affiliated. On 2 November, one Weibo user responded with this posted comment: "In fulfilling its earthly obligation to obey Caesar, the Christian shepherds and their lamb must not contradict the basic nature of the church. A regime that deprives a religious organisation of autonomy, and attacks and divides religious workers through personal threats and bribes is not qualified to say that the country under its rule has realised the separation of state and religion, and religious freedom."

There seem to be clear indications of different levels of interest in discussing religious freedom from Weibo users of different religions. For example, the number of postings about religious freedom as it applies to Protestant Christianity and Catholicism is significantly greater than the number for other religions. Some space is allowed on Weibo for discussions on religious freedom in Tibet and Xinjiang, but the number of posts is significantly fewer than for posts dealing with freedom of religion or belief as it affects Christian churches. Likewise, posts are few on topics connecting religious freedom and Buddhism or Daoism, which may reflect the general Chinese perception that religious freedom is not a problem for those religions.

References to the term "religious persecution" can also be found on Weibo. However, such references generally occur in the context of discussing Western history. Based on an admittedly short timescale snapshot of activity on Weibo, Forum 18 did not note references to this term in the context of contemporary Chinese politics.

### ***Weibo and promoting freedom of religion or belief***

Based on the available information, including a snapshot of the activities on Weibo, it seems that individuals enjoy considerable space to discuss religion-related topics on Weibo. Followers of religions have used it as a platform for declarations of faith. In this sense, Weibo has become a vehicle for interested parties to promote their religion and its virtues. At the same time, Weibo also permits overtly non-religious users to post criticisms about religion. This could be significant, as the state currently generally refrains from criticising religion due to concerns that anti-religious rhetoric might promote social instability.

That religious freedom has been such a prominent discussion topic is also interesting. As suggested earlier, the state may be allowing such discussion because it wants to get a sense of the "public mood" on this sensitive political topic. That postings about religious freedom violations involving local Protestant Christian groups have been allowed suggests that the central government may be using Weibo to monitor the behaviour of local authorities, which have been the primary violators of religious freedom. This may indeed serve as an incentive for the state to maintain Weibo. On this note, Weibo continues to include postings about the situation of Beijing's Shouwang Church, which garnered international attention when it was not permitted to worship in the building it has purchased. However, it should be noted that the latest postings about the church were dated October 2012.

Nonetheless, Weibo has limitations. First, discussion of religious freedom has involved mainly scholars and intellectuals, which suggests that it is not yet an issue with broad mass appeal in China. Second, while religious freedom violations are points of discussion,

Weibo's potential to mobilise people to defend religious freedom has not been used. The postings about religious freedom violations that Forum 18 has observed have been individual expressions of indignation about the violations, or support for the victims of those violations. No posting seen by Forum 18 has called for collective action.

This observation matches observations made by others about the Internet's limitations in China. Gary King, a professor of political science at Harvard University, and his two doctoral students, had conducted a survey entitled "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," which involved over 1,000 Chinese websites. The survey was conducted in the first half of 2011. King and his associates concluded that Chinese Internet censors have generally targeted postings that call for social mobilisation.

In addition, religious topics that are deemed sensitive, such as Falun Gong, which has been banned by the state, cannot be found on Weibo. When Forum 18 searches for the term "Falun Gong" on Weibo the entire website shuts down on the computer, even though Forum 18 is allowed to return to Weibo through a different webpage. Interestingly, the term "Dalai Lama" can be found on Weibo, but the context is invariably historical and theoretical.

Forum 18 is not able to determine how quickly postings are deleted. However, according to experts, censorship can take place either immediately or several months. For example, according to Chi-Chu Tschang, a MBA student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who carried out a project on Weibo in May 2012: "The fastest a post was deleted on Sina Weibo was just over 4 minutes. The longest time it took for the censor to get around to deleting a message on Sina Weibo was over four months."

Censorship appears to be one of the few forms of "punishment" levelled against violators of the unspoken rules. As described above, another form of punishment is either the appearance of an error page or the blanking of the page altogether. Tschang also observed that Weibo administrators have issued notices to violators that their postings would be deleted. Sina Weibo has also indicated that repeat offenders could be prevented from posting new materials for up to 48 hours and, in some cases, even have their accounts cancelled.

However, Forum 18 is not aware of additional punitive measures, including personal interrogation, physical harassment, or arrest, in connection with religious freedom discussions on Weibo. Nonetheless, there are reports suggesting that posting negative stories on the Internet can result in arrests for the poster, as indicated in a 23 November 2012 report by the New York Times about the arrest and detention of a former journalist in the south-western province of Guizhou.

Both foreign residents and local Chinese residents are allowed to post information on Weibo. In December 2011, the Chinese authorities issued regulations that required all Weibo account holders to disclose their real names when registering to use the platform. However, Sina Weibo revealed in its filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission that it has not always complied with this regulation "for reasons including existing user behaviour, the nature of the microblogging product and the lack of clarity on specific implementation procedures.." Other than this requirement, no documentation appears to be necessary. Forum 18, for example, was able to register a Sina Weibo account without providing any identity documentation.

The relatively light punishments certainly should not act as a permanent deterrent to anyone wishing to post sensitive comments. In this sense, it may be that postings on Weibo can be far more "politically incorrect" than writings on printed media, including newspapers, magazines and books. Yet, it is also telling that there do not seem to be many postings that fall into clearly taboo areas.

For example, criticisms of the central leadership have not been observed on Weibo, even though criticisms of local authorities can easily be found. Internet users in China are not allowed to criticise the country's top political leaders. As Reuters suggested on 31 October, this may reflect the fact that censorship rules are formulated at the central government level with little input from local authorities. Therefore, censors tend to concentrate on postings that make specific references to central political leaders. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that Weibo users, especially Chinese residents, have adopted some form of self-censorship.

It appears that Weibo is advancing religious freedom in China to some extent. But it is not yet (if it ever will be) an effective means for people to mobilise to actively defend their rights to freedom of religion or belief. For now, Chinese Weibo users will have to be content with the ability to express their religious or non-religious beliefs publicly, which would have been unthinkable in China not very long ago.

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## **Police detained 9 Christians and send two to labor camp for holding free medical clinics and evangelizing**

ChinaAid (30.10.2012) - Nine Christians providing medical services in rural areas of Inner Mongolia were detained by local police who also confiscated medical equipment and sentenced two of the Christians to labor camp.

On July 26, six Christians set out from the city of Tongliao in Inner Mongolia for rural parts of the autonomous region, stopping in places such as Jarud Banner, Tuquan County in Hinggan League, and the village of Shumugou, in Alide Sumu (township), in the Horqin Right Front Banner, where they held free medical clinics and evangelized among those who came for medical attention.

Five days later, on Aug. 1, they were in the hamlet of Zhongxinbu, in Shumugou village, Horqin Right Front Banner, in the city of Ulanhot, where they were providing medical services to the local people. Around 4 p.m., a local resident warned them that the police might be coming and advised them to leave quickly, which they did. However, they were stopped on the road by Domestic Security Protection agents of the Public Security Bureau, who detained them at the Horqin Right Front Banner police station and confiscated their van, medical equipment including an EKG machine and a laptop.

At 5 p.m. on Aug. 3, the Horqin Right Front Banner's Domestic Security Protection agents notified the families of the detainees and said they were being held for engaging in illegal evangelism. However, the Domestic Security Protection agents never provided the families with the legally required written notifications of their detention. It was not until Aug. 22, when the wife of Chen Hong, one of the detainees, went to the Domestic Security Protection Squad that she was able to get hold of the formal detention notice, but the families of the other detainees still have not received the formal written notifications. The deputy squad head asked Chen's wife questions related to the religious beliefs of the detainees. The reason given for their detention was that they were suspected of using cult activities to interfere with law enforcement.

### ***The six detainees were:***

Chen Hong (male) (of Tongliao city, Inner Mongolia)  
Sun Yuefen (female) (of Ulanhot, Inner Mongolia)  
Yinhua (Mongolian) (of Tongliao city, Inner Mongolia)  
Ren Zhimin (of Heilongjiang province)

Liu Di (from Nen River County, Heilongjiang province; enrolled in Harbin Medical College)  
Pan Wenwen (from Changbai county, Baishan city, Jilin province Baishan Mayor White County; enrolled in Changchun School of Medicine)

On Sept. 1, the Re-education Through Labor Management Committee of Hinggan League handed down its decision notification sentencing Ms. Sun and Ms. Ren to two years in a re-education-through-labor camp.

Following that, authorities detained several others who were involved in this evangelistic effort.

On Sept. 22, the Xuetian police station in Tuquan County in Hinggan League took Dai Suqin into custody and detained her for 10 days.

On Oct. 8, the police station in the town of Baoshi, Huquan county, Hinggan League, took Wang Xiao into custody and held him for 10 days.

On Oct. 11, the same police station took Zhai Fuling into custody and detained her for 10 days.

Zhang Kai, a well-known Christian lawyer from Beijing, and several other local lawyers are jointly handling the case, and the six victims, including Ms. Sun, have submitted a request for an administrative review of their case.

ChinaAid is closely monitoring the case and calls on the new Chinese leadership to respect the legal right to religious freedom and to totally abandon the ultra-leftist road of the Hu-Wen regime in openly trampling on human rights and religious freedom. ChinaAid urges the local government to immediately release Ms. Sun.

See an earlier report of ChinaAid on this case: <http://www.chinaaid.org/2012/09/seven-christians-criminally-detained-in.html>

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## **Christian Human Rights defenders in Jiangxi applying for demonstration were brutally beaten by the police**

China Aid Association (22.09.2012) - China Aid has learned that on Wednesday local time (September 19, 2012), the prominent Christian human rights defenders and independent candidates Sister Liu Ping and Brother Wei Zhongping went to Yushui Branch of Xinyu Public Security Bureau of Jiangxi Province to submit their application for a protest demonstration. There, they were illegally brutally beaten, verbally abused and frisked for 11 hours by the police officers of security brigade of the Public Security branch.

Following is the record of Sister Liu Ping and Brother Wei Zhongping in which they describe in details how they were violently treated inside the security brigade of Yushui Branch of Xinyu Municipal Public Security Bureau:

Three independent candidates and human rights defenders of Jiangxi province Liu Ping, Wei Zhongping and Li Sihua made an appointment on the morning of September 19, 2012 of going to Yushui Branch of Xinyu Municipal Public Security Bureau to submit the "Application for Demonstration" by which Liu Ping will protest against two courts in Xinyu City and Yushui District that refused to accept, file or reply to the five administrative lawsuits. As Li Sihua had to bring his daughter to see a doctor and then drop her off at the school, so only Liu and Wei went there first and Li would go there later.

However, the unthinkable brutality occurred. Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping arrived at 8:30 at Yushui Public Security Bureau and left at around 19:40 in the evening. They left the police facility with wounds all over their body. In these 11-some hours, the police officers in the branch violated the law when they were supposed to enforce it. They locked up the applicants and beat them up. It's hard to imagine such a barbarian brutality occurred in a law enforcement agency in a so-called "society under rule of law" in China.

In Xinyu's "Anti-Japanese Patriotic Demonstrations" on September 16 and September 18, these three independent candidates of Jiangxi found in their photos a large number of plain-cloth police officers and other "stability maintenance" personnel. This fully proves the following two facts:

First of all, it proves the claim that the patriotic demonstration was spontaneous is a lie. Secretary of Committee of Political Science and Law went to the scene to direct the demonstration. DSPS police officers, armed guards and security patrol officers and other "stability maintenance" personnel all went to the streets. Besides, one could see everywhere the mysterious "plain cloth agents."

Second, the photos taken by the three independent candidates prove another fact: the plain-cloth police officers who again and again illegally detained them and treated them violently appeared in the demonstration. In the photos, after Liu Ping recognized the perpetrator who, during the Two Conferences (the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference), put a black hood on her head, escorted her back to Xinyu from Beijing, threw her into an illegal jail and robbed her, she immediately put the photos online and called on people to conduct a search for the physical location and name of the perpetrator.

Wei Zhongping also saw in the photos those hired roughnecks of the government who, during the Two Conferences (the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference), threw her into an illegal jail, broke three of her ribs and one transverse bone. While these photos can provide evidence for the future trial of historical crimes, they also increase the risk of these independent candidates. Yesterday, the incident in which Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping were illegally locked up and beaten occurred under such a background.

On the evening of September 18, a police officer surnamed Shu from Tieshan Police Station of Yuanhe Branch of Xinyu Municipal Public Security Bureau tried to "talk" with Liu Ping and his request was rejected as Liu Ping wouldn't let him in. On the early morning of September 19, the "stability maintenance" people from Liu Ping's work unit again went to her home and wanted to take her to Xiannu Lake and spend a few days there. In fact, they wanted to place her on house arrest for a few days. Liu Ping said she had to go with Wei Zhongping to submit an application for the demonstration. Then the "stability maintenance" people requested that they go with them in submitting the application and then they go to Xiannu Lake.

At around 8:30 on September 19, Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping, accompanied by the "stability maintenance" people, came to the gate of Yushui Branch of the Public Security Bureau. After Wei Zhongping took a photo of Liu Ping, Liu Ping sent the photo to her micro-blog on QQ, saying that she came to the place to submit an application for demonstration in protest against the courts' deprivation of the client's right to lawsuit and that their purpose is to protect the law and the citizens' right to lawsuit. However, her legal act of taking a photo and sending it on her micro-blog became the excuse of Yushui police in treating her violently.

At this time, the "stability maintenance" people from Wei Zhongping's work unit heard about the news and hurriedly arrived at Yushui Public Security Branch in an attempt to

talk Wei Zhongping out of it. After they got inside the gate of the Public Security Bureau, the police officers closed the gate and said: "None of them shall leave here!" Again, it looked like a situation of late September of last year when Lawyer Wang Cheng from Hangzhou was beaten behind a closed gate. The police mistakenly took the "stability maintenance" people as those who came to apply for the demonstration. They were forced to stay in the lobby and their cell phones were robbed during which they dragged the people. What a scene!

Not long after Liu Ping was "taken inside" from the lobby, Wei Zhongping was also "taken inside." "Taken inside" is a special phrase used by the police. Those people who have been "taken inside" would shiver at its bloody connotation. While the "stability maintenance" personnel from the work units of respectively Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping were embarrassed by their own kind, they have accidentally witnessed that Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping were "taken inside" by the security brigade just because they applied for demonstration in accordance with law.

The security brigade was remodeled upon a quadrangle courtyard of the former detention center. There is only one entrance/exit into and out of it. The facility is well sealed on all sides. After Liu Ping was "taken inside," she reiterated again and again that she was there to submit an application for demonstration. As the leaders of her work unit were waiting for her in the lobby, she would like to leave as soon as she submitted the application. However, at 9 o'clock, she was pushed into the interrogation room in the innermost of this police facility. A woman police officer with the police number 050529 wanted her to take off all her clothes. After she searched her body, she wanted Liu Ping's cell phone. Liu Ping asked why and whether she had a legal basis for doing so.

While they were arguing, and before Liu Ping put on her pants back, Hu Ping, deputy brigade leader with the police number 051110 dashed in and tried to grab her cell phone. Liu Ping wanted him to issue a list of confiscated items and she recorded on her palm Hu Ping's police numbers as 051110 for Hu Ping, 051247 for He Liang and 050529 for the woman officer. He Liang and the woman officer brutally and rudely wrung both arms of Liu Ping behind her back and beat her. They pried open her palm and erased by force the police numbers. He Liang called Liu Ping an old scoundrel woman and a counter-revolutionary. He also said how can such people as she engage in democracy and how can just a few people like her overthrow the Communist Party.

The two police officers surrounded Liu Ping and beat her there. When Liu Ping struggled, He Liang yelled that Liu Ping was assaulting the police. At this moment, a plain cloth police officer used a DV to videotape Liu Ping. Liu Ping wanted them to go through the legal procedure. They forced Liu Ping to sit there for an interrogation and a written record. Liu Ping wanted him to show her the police certificate. When he asked her a question, Liu Ping would reply: "Please show your police certificate." At this question, He Liang talked to himself and tried to pretend making the written record. At about 9:20, Hu Ping who had grabbed Liu Ping's cell phone again broke in and beat and verbally abused Liu Ping: "I respect even murderers, but I can never tolerate such a shameless brat like you. Whenever I see you, I want to beat you up and I'd like to see whether you still dare to come here!"

He Liang took by force Wei Zhongping's badge with the word "citizen." When Hu Ping saw that Liu Ping was also wearing a badge with the word "citizen," he asked Liu Ping: When you were in the demonstration yesterday, did you shout the slogan 'Long live the Republic of China!' Did you shout 'Down with the corruption!' All you can do is put up your thighs and sell.... You the counter-revolutionary even dare to start an illegal demonstration. You are only good enough to be a chick and sell your..." When Liu Ping said in protest that she wanted to be a citizen, not a pig, the brutal Hu Ping hit her with both his hands and his feet. He hit her on the head, slapped her on the face and stomped on her feet.

For a day there, Liu Ping didn't have anything to eat or drink and she was so hit that she vomited yellow and bitter fluid. She declared to the two police officers in a feeble voice: "I have a serious cholecystitis and gall-stones. There can be a perforation at any time." The two police officers said while beating her: "You won't die as a hospital is right beside us." They stopped beating only when they were tired. Then, they did a DNA, took a photo, fingerprinting and palm printing, etc. on her so as to build up a database on this "criminal suspect." Liu Ping asked them on what ground they were doing these, but she was too feeble to resist.

At 19:40, that is, over 11 hours after Liu Ping was "taken inside," she was thrown out of the gate of the police bureau with her tired and bloody body. Liu Ping's cell phone was "confiscated" by Hu Ping as a tool of the crime. They did it without going through any procedure. In fact, it was robbery. At the gate of the police bureau, Liu Ping begged the boss who had a melon stand to lend his cell phone so that he could call Li Sihua. When Li Sihua went there, they called 110 for police. Then a police vehicle with the license plate number Jiangxi-K011B arrived with six police officers. Only an assistant police officer with the number X00090 asked Liu Ping several questions while other police officers went into the police bureau. When one of them waved, the rest went into the vehicle and left the scene.

Wei Zhongping came out only a few minutes before Liu Ping. Inside there, he was also frisked and brutally beaten and verbally abused for over 11 hours. Likewise, he didn't have anything to eat or drink and they didn't allow him to urinate. Likewise, he was also forced to sign and leave his fingerprint on the written record of interrogation of the "criminal suspect." Likewise, they also built a database by drawing his DNA sample and his fingerprint. Likewise, they never showed their police certificates or went through any legal procedures for the compulsory measures.

Wei Zhongping said: "We've come here to submit our application for the demonstration. There are no facts or evidence that suggest we are criminal suspects. It is you who have committed crimes. You didn't go through any legal procedures in illegally detaining and beating us. This is a vicious criminal act." Wei Zhongping's arguments on the basis of reason brought him a round of brutal beatings. Though he reiterated that he had not fully recovered from a bone fracture, it did not prevent "people's police" from beating him brutally.

After Li Sihua took his daughter to a doctor and then sent her to school, he couldn't get hold of Liu Ping or Wei Zhongping. At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he concluded that something bad must have happened to them. Since they ran for people's delegates as independent candidates, the three of them have become the targets of high sensitivity and stability maintenance in Xinyu. They are constantly arrested, detained, beaten and robbed. On their part, however, they persist in appealing from the district to municipality to the provincial authorities and to central authorities. They defend their rights step by step in accordance with law and step by step they apply for the openness of information, administrative reconsideration, administrative lawsuit and even establishing criminal cases.

They take up law as a weapon in defending their rights. Their bold civil actions against the authorities who violate the law have cornered some "stability maintenance" officials and made them desperate. This is especially true when the photos they took during the September 16 and September 18 demonstration showed several plain cloth police officers were in the crowd. After their photos were put online and after the netizens searched for their physical locations and identities, this has actually put their personal safety in jeopardy. Therefore, Li Sihua concluded that when Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping went to submit their application for demonstration, they could have "turned themselves into the net."

The head of the security brigade called Li Sihua to make an appointment at about 4 o'clock so that he would give Li a reply on the application for the demonstration. In order to look for the whereabouts of Liu Ping and Wei Zhongping, Li Sihua had to go there alone. Compared with September 11 when Liu Ping accompanied him to submit the application for the demonstration, he felt there was a special tension in the air. After receiving special examinations and questionings, he was taken into a small room for frisking where they found his cell phone and micro video camera. He was "persuaded" into going back and they asked him not to get entangled in this and make troubles.

Li Sihua insisted that his application for demonstration is legal and strongly demanded that the police issue a written notice in reply. He said: "The reason why I am applying for the demonstration is to protest against the courts for not giving me a reply as the law requires. Besides, you treated your clients in the same way by not giving a reply in writing. So I will likewise protest against you. The reason why I have brought my micro video camera is to get some evidence showing the legal procedure I have gone through." Yet, no matter how many times Li Sihua said this, he has never got a reply in writing.

Li Sihua was not permitted to be "taken inside." In this way, he was spared the physical torture, but he couldn't find the whereabouts of Liu Ping or Wei Zhongping. This made him all the more convinced that Liu and Wei had been under the police's control. As he was ready to get online to spread this news, he got a call from Liu Ping. On that night, these three independent candidates of Jiangxi got together in the home of a woman surnamed Li who is a human right defender. They looked at each other in tears and they were speechless for the conspiracy and brutality of the police who "locked them up and beat them." Is it really true that when they pin their hope to the political reforms inside the system to promote the process of democracy and rule of law, it is like asking a tiger for its skin as the Chinese saying goes?

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ChinaAid has been paying close attention to the fact of continuous persecution that the independent candidates Sister Liu Ping, Brother Wei Zhongping and others have suffered in recent years in their defense of human rights in accordance with law. We are shocked and angry at seeing they have been brutally beaten and abused by the police for submitting an application for a protest demonstration. When such a criminal incident of serious violation of the law occurred on the eve of the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, it has fully shown China is far from a society of rule of law. We strongly denounce the brutality committed by the people's police against the innocent citizens and we call on the central government in China to go with the tide of history and start the political reform in the system in the real sense of the word and build a true civil society under rule of law.

ChinaAid has learned that two Christian human rights lawyers respectively from Beijing and Guangzhou - Xiao Guozhen and Sui Muqing have promised to represent Ms. Liu Ping and they are preparing to take legal actions by suing Xinyu Municipal Government and Xinyu Municipal Public Security Bureau.

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## **Shouwang Church takes legal action against cops for religious persecution**

South China Morning Post (23.09.2012) - Shouwang Church leader submits document accusing officers of repressing worshippers Shouwang Church, one of the mainland's most influential unofficial Protestant churches, has taken legal action against Beijing police for preventing its congregation from worshipping for more than a year.

The church's pastor, Jin Tianming, last Friday filed an application for an "administrative review" - a legal step that enables citizens to contest government actions - with the Beijing municipal government. A church elder verified the authenticity of the content of the application, which was posted online.

In the document, Jin accused police of barring the church from moving into a 16,000 sq ft office space it had bought for more than 26 million yuan (HK\$32 million) and preventing it from renting another worship venue. He complained that police had illegally confined him and other church leaders at home since April 9 last year - a day before the church attempted to worship outdoors - and harassed many of its worshippers.

Police detained 169 worshippers at that outdoor service and every Sunday since, scores have continued to show up in defiance of the government.

Jin said in the application that members of Shouwang's congregation had been detained more than 1,600 times at 90 police stations, each time for up to 48 hours over the past year and five months. More than 60 people had been forced to move house and quit their jobs under government pressure.

"This is obviously repression of citizens' religious freedom and the church's right to practise its faith," Jin wrote.

A staff member at the Beijing government's legal affairs office said Shouwang's application had been rejected.

Jin could not be contacted yesterday. A church elder, who declined to be named, said Jin was one of six church leaders who had been confined in their homes by police for more than a year. Many other senior church members are barred from leaving home on weekends.

He said the church has refused to give in to official pressure to disband even after four leaders and scores of worshippers left the church, adding that the church split was a "painful wound in its heart".

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## **The marketisation of religious sites**

Forum 18 (12.09.2012) - The lack of property rights for religious communities is a major obstacle to the realisation of genuine religious freedom in China. According to Chinese law - in particular the State Council's 2004 Regulations on Religious Affairs - only the government, notably the religious affairs agencies at every administrative level, can approve the establishment of religious sites. Only after the sites are registered can management committees be created to operate those sites. The membership of such management committees is most likely to have been already vetted and approved before they were formed.

But even once such hurdles have been overcome - or in the absence of such permissions - religious communities' control over religious sites remains precarious.

***Sacred mountain IPO***

On 3 July, China Daily, the largest English-language newspaper in China, reported that the management committee of Putuo Mountain (Putuoshan in Chinese) in China's eastern Zhejiang province had announced that the "Putuo Mountain Tourism Development Co., Ltd.", a subsidiary company of the committee, would be listed on the Chinese stock market in order to raise funds to further develop the well-known tourist site. According to China Daily, the tourist site's management committee expected to raise approximately 750 million Yuan (680 million Norwegian Kroner, 90 million Euros or 120 million US Dollars) through the stock market listing.

Putuo Mountain is an island with beautiful beaches, green hills, and tree-lined roads. It is under the jurisdiction of Zhejiang Province's Zhoushan Prefecture, which is located on China's east coast, within several hours' driving and ferrying from Shanghai.

But Putuo Mountain's fame has little to do with its natural scenery. Its claim to fame is based largely on the fact that it is one of four sacred Buddhist mountains in China. Approaching the island, visible from afar is the 33-metre statue of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, a popular deity for Buddhist adherents in south-eastern China and Taiwan. Buddhist monks and nuns reportedly make up approximately one-third of the island's population of 3,000.

Putuo Mountain is not the first sacred Buddhist mountain – or indeed Chinese tourist site with religious ties - that may be listed on the stock market. The three other sacred mountains are also now listed or planned to be listed.

According to China's Global Times, a popular tabloid newspaper affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily, Emei Mountain in the south-western province of Sichuan was successfully listed on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in 1997. Managers of Wutai Mountain in the northern province of Shanxi announced in 2011 that they planned to list the famous Buddhist site. Meanwhile, the managers of Jiuhua Mountain in Anhui Province, located north of Shanghai, are reportedly launching a third attempt to list the Buddhist site after failed attempts in 2004 and 2009.

### ***Moral indignation***

Managers of these sites have argued that listing them on the stock market would benefit everyone by obtaining the funds necessary for site maintenance and upgrades. Moreover, they promised that religious operations would not be affected. According to China Daily, Mao Jiantao, deputy director of the Putuo Mountain's management committee, stated: "The IPO [initial public offering] will not affect normal religious operations, and will help perfect the infrastructure to ensure tourists visiting the mountain will be able to enjoy better services." However, many are not impressed by such statements.

Although the first reports about the plan to list Putuo Mountain on the local stock market appeared in July, the general issue of such possible listings has been ongoing and the government appears to have been monitoring the situation closely. On 6 June, Xinhua News Agency, the most authoritative Chinese central government news agency, reported that Liu Wei, a mid-level official in the central government's State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), remarked at a Shanghai meeting that SARA is opposed to efforts by local governments to list religious sites on the stock market.

"Listing the temples on the stock exchanges harms the legal rights and damages the image of the religious community. It also harms the feelings of the believers," Xinhua quoted Liu as saying. "Developing the economy should have its limits and should not cross the moral lines."

### ***Opposition***

On 20 July, according to a report on the website of the Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television corporation, Master Xuecheng, a vice president of the state-approved Buddhist Association of China, stated that plans to list Buddhist sites on the stock market seriously damage the image of Buddhism. He also took the opportunity to urge that all Buddhist temples and sites should be open to the public free of charge.

Even non-religious persons have joined the opposition, among them Ye Tan, a well-known business commentator in Shanghai. On 4 July, she wrote on her blog, which has received nearly 100 million visits since May 2006, that experiences outside China indicate that cultural assets, including religious venues, should not be governed by for-profit motives. According to Ye, any suggestion that listing the religious sites on the stock market is meant to protect religion is a lie and masks the desire of state officials to profit from things they do not own. She described such listings as "a disgrace to China's religious and philanthropic sectors, and a disgrace to the stock market". As of 16 August, the blog posting received over 45,000 views.

The planned listing of Buddhist sites on the stock market has provoked widespread interest in the subject. As of 24 August, over 2,000 comments about the issue have been posted on Weibo, one of China's popular microblogs. Most have opposed the plans. One author wrote that there is a fundamental incompatibility between religion and the stock market. Another wrote that even in Western capitalist countries, one has never heard of religious sites being listed on the stock market.

### ***Weakness of religious interests***

Overwhelming opposition to the plan appears not to have derailed or even slowed the efforts to list the Buddhist sites on the stock market. The long-standing planning has continued. Setbacks have not removed the idea completely from the minds of the state managers.

In addition, the government's expressed opposition to the plans at this time should be examined in light of the larger political context. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is due to hold its national congress to select its new top leaders soon. The party-state is therefore interested in avoiding issues that fuel popular discontent. One means to control the atmosphere is to clamp down on potential troublemakers and trouble spots. Another is to show that the state is on the side of popular opinion. This may be the reason for SARA's comments in June, and the stated opposition is in keeping with the populist agenda of the outgoing Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao administration.

But SARA's grandstanding and the fact that the Buddhist sites' management committees, which are run by the local governments, have not backed down reveals SARA's institutional weakness. As a sub-cabinet level government agency with no power of enforcement and little resources, SARA must rely on other members of the state bureaucracy for political, policy and fiscal support. This is especially the case with SARA at the sub-national levels. It is no coincidence that in many localities, religious affairs are operated out of the local public security, or police, bureaus.

SARA's expressed opposition is also weak, given that the SARA official who made the comments was a mid-ranking deputy department chief who was speaking at an unnamed conference in Shanghai. It is therefore of little surprise that local governments have in general ignored the opposition. Moreover, the bureaucratic reality is such that SARA's policies will be difficult to be implemented at the local levels because, as mentioned, SARA officials and agencies at the sub-national levels are heavily dependent on the support of the local party-states.

### ***Little voice***

Similarly, religious groups have little voice on issues that concern their interests due to their low political status. It is telling that Mao Jiantao, the aforementioned deputy director of Putuo Mountain's management committee, stated that it is "totally unnecessary" to consult the Buddhist authorities in Putuo Mountain about the plan to list the site on the stock market.

The religious groups' lack of voice on matters concerning their interests has forced them to accept the status quo, mainly because they have no alternative means to support their religious activities.

Professor Fenggang Yang, an expert on religion in China at Purdue University in the United States, wrote in his 2011 book, "Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule", that many of the challenges facing religious groups in China have to do with the country's "chronic shortage of supply" of religion.

According to Yang, despite the spiritual awakening in China over the last 30 years, which resulted in rapid increases in the number of religious adherents, the increase in the number of legal religious venues has not kept pace. According to Yang, in 2009 the ratio of religious venues to religious adherents in China was 1 to 10,000. In comparison, in 2010 the ratio in Taiwan was 1 to 1,350. Already in 1997, the United States achieved a ratio of 1 to 857.

The shortage of legitimate religious sites means that all Chinese religious believers are forced to accept the status quo. The alternatives, such as the Protestant house churches, are highly risky and, as is the case for Buddhist and Daoist practitioners, few. Most religious believers have little choice but to continue to visit the legitimate religious sites even though they may oppose certain practices by their managers, as in the case of the Buddhist sites. It is small wonder that religious venues in China are always overflowing with people.

In economic and political terms, this means that Chinese religious believers possess neither the "voice" option nor the "exit" option. They are essentially doing the best they can within the parameters set by government managers. But as a result, religious believers are unlikely to obtain all they would like to receive in their spiritual quest.

### ***State control of religious sites***

The fundamental problem is clearly an institutional one. In other words, the controversy over the plans to list the Buddhist sites on the stock market is a direct consequence of the party-state's policies and practices.

First, as mentioned earlier, religious interests are not well-respected by the party-state. This is reflected by SARA's institutional weakness and the fact that local government officials do not feel compelled to consult religious leaders before taking actions that will impact religious interests.

Second, like most resources in China, religious assets are under government control. And even those religious assets not under government control in practice are perceived by government officials to be state properties to be dealt with whenever and however the state wishes.

In December 2005, Catholics in and around Tianjin protested at the local government's failure to return religious property seized during the communist period, AsiaNews reported at the time. They also protested at a violent attack on priests and others who protested against the refusal to return the property.

In the case of the Buddhist sites mentioned in this analysis, religious leaders have little say in those assets because they are preserved and managed not as religious sites but as cultural/tourist sites. As a consequence, they are managed not by religious believers but by government officials. For example, senior local CPC and government officials, who do not have religious affiliations, constitute Putuo Mountain's management committee. Similarly, according to Human Rights Watch, Tibetan Buddhist lamaseries are now operated by non-Tibetan Buddhist officials.

Although Protestant Christian churches are for the most part managed by church leaders, local government officials remain undeterred and have taken actions to "seize" control of church properties by whatever means. According to China Aid, a US-based advocacy group for China's Protestant Christian house churches, in June the management committee of a legally-registered Protestant Church in Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province, was forcibly removed so as to allow the local government to demolish the church to be used eventually for commercial purposes.

Unregistered religious properties, which are mostly associated with unregistered religious groups such as Protestant house churches and are therefore illegal, have no protection. The government can take action against them at any time. After members of Beijing's Shouwang Protestant Church bought an apartment for it to use to meet in 2009, government pressure on the seller prevented it from moving in.

It appears that only those religious leaders with strong political resources, such as the chief abbot of Henan Province's Shaolin Buddhist Temple, have been able to withstand the efforts of local state officials to control religious resources.

Existing state practices clearly violate the party-state's own regulations. According to the 1994 State Council's "Measures for the Registration of Places for Religious Activities", the management committees of religious venues should be constituted by "citizens who profess religious beliefs". Yet, as indicated in this analysis, religious sites in China are often managed by non-religious state officials.

In other words, the fundamental issue of control over religious sites involves the question of who - religious groups or government officials - should be the legitimate "owners" of religious sites. Although the state legally owns all lands in China, the question of property rights is still relevant because the recent controversy involving the IPO listing for the Buddhist sites concerns who and which groups can decide how religious properties ought to be managed. And Chinese experts have adopted the perspective of property rights in their analyses of the recent controversy.

### **Why no say?**

Zhang Zhipeng, an economist affiliated with the Nanjing Army Command College and the Centre for Religious and Cultural Studies at Lanzhou University, wrote in July 2012 that the recent controversy is a consequence of unclear property rights. Zhang argued that a solution to the problem is to define clearly which parts of a cultural/tourist site belong to the religious authorities and which parts to the local government. He maintained that a clarification of property rights would better preserve the religious integrity of those sites.

But Zhang's proposal does not address the even more basic question: why do religious authorities have no say over the management of any cultural site that derives its value primarily from its religious affiliation?

That the Buddhist authorities can make no claims to the Buddhist sites is detrimental for several reasons. For the Buddhist community, the lack of property rights means that it

can derive little to no financial benefit from the stock market listing, if it happens. Even more fundamental, as mentioned above, the lack of property rights means that the Buddhists are barred from making decisions about properties that derive their value from being sacred Buddhist sites.

In this respect, listing the Buddhist sites on the stock market will most likely result in more non-Buddhist interests - i.e. shareholders - making decisions about them, which may further reduce the sites' religious integrity. Should that happen, the consequence may be that those sites will become increasingly less Buddhist, resulting in fewer Buddhist pilgrims to those sites, ultimately exacerbating the current shortage of Buddhist sites.

The Chinese state has long used the economic resources at its disposal to control religious groups. It therefore stands to reason that local state officials are unwilling to relinquish control over religious sites, which also offer potentially lucrative profits for the local governments and their officials.

### ***Displeasure***

Although it is uncertain how long the state can sustain its current practices without causing major social disturbances, the recent controversy concerning the planned listing of the Buddhist sites on the stock market suggests that ordinary people are beginning to voice their displeasure. In order to prevent greater discontent, the state needs to address the issue of the control of religious venues in a satisfactory manner, which means that it needs to allow religious leaders to exercise greater power over religious sites.

This measure, if implemented, would naturally advance religious freedom in China. In this manner, the promotion of religious freedom would be good not only for religious communities and individual believers; it would also be good for the state.

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## **A house church in Gushi County, Henan is suppressed; a Christian coworker is beaten and injured**

China Aid Association (18.09.2012) - ChinaAid has learned that last month, August 2012, government authorities raided a Sunday service in a house church in Gushi County, Henan Province, during which a church worker was brutally beaten by the police and seriously injured. The police also interrogated a female Christian and confiscated her cell phone.

On August 26, 2012, more than 30 Christians of a house church in Fangji Town, Gushi County in Henan Province, held their usual Sunday service. At about 10 am several dozen people from Gushi County Bureau of Religion, TSPM churches, the County DSPS (Domestic Security Protection Squad), and the Township Police Station broke into the site of the Sunday service and declared that the gathering was illegal. They ordered the people to disperse immediately and warned them not to gather illegally in the future. Some Christians argued with them questioning the trampling of their freedom of belief. An official from the Bureau of Religion said they could go to a TSPM church. These believers told the official that they were originally from a TSPM church, but they found the pastor there seriously distorted the principle teachings of the Bible, and was leading those attending astray, and that because of this they left the TSPM church. The official from the Bureau of Religion and the DSPS officers said they must register; that otherwise they would be declared a cult and be banned. The believers argued with them in legal terms and the government officials had nothing to say in reply, but threatened: You will see how we are going to punish you!

Two days later, Brother Yi who has a background of formal theological training and who has served in this house church was taken by force twice to the Township Police Station where he was told to tell them every aspect of this house church. They also demanded he promise that he would not participate in the activities of this church in the future. Brother Yi refused and was brutally beaten by them for nearly two hours, suffering serious injuries to his neck and throughout his midsection. Since returning home, he has rested for two weeks but has not recovered from the injuries sustained in the beating. Sister Wu, another member of the church, was taken to the police station and was interrogated for several hours, during which she was repeatedly threatened. The authorities have not returned the cell phone they confiscated from her; because of this, Sister Wu went to the Supervision Brigade of the County Public Security Bureau, seeking relief, but they refused to accept her case.

According to Sister Wu and Sister Yao, during the past six months, the suppression and persecution of some house churches has been escalating. Half a year ago, the local government gathered information on all house churches; threatened every member of the house churches; and demanded that they join the TSPM churches (almost every town has a TSPM church). However, as some of the pastors of the TSPM churches have completely gone astray in their teaching and conduct and forsaken the principled teachings in the Bible, brothers and sisters of many house churches have come out of the TSPM churches. The Christian base in Gushi County is very solid and there is a high percentage of people who are Christians. Besides the factor of faith, there is also an economic factor behind the government's suppression of house churches. Registration at a TSPM church requires a amount of registration fees, and a certificate of membership for every believer of a TSPM church also carries a fee. Besides this, registered church need to pay 10 percent of donation received to the Bureau of Religion and to a TSPM church one level over them. The annual inspection fee on TSPM system churches provides significant additional income to the government. Thus only TSPM churches are viewed as authentic and legitimate, while house churches are declared to be dangerous cults, heretical, and illegal.

ChinaAid strongly denounces the government's illegal and barbaric actions in suppressing and persecuting house churches and Christians. We worry about the continued escalation in the persecution of house churches in various places across mainland China during the past year, and we call on the Chinese government to take immediate and effective measures to stop the persecution of house churches in those regions of China, and to safeguard rights the Constitution and international laws ensure to all Chinese citizens (including freedom of religion), and to ensure that these fundamental rights of the citizens are not violated. We are paying close attention to developments in the persecution of this house church in Gushi County, and we pray to our Heavenly Father to strengthen the persecuted brothers' and sisters' faith, and to finally lead them out of Egypt. May all the glory be to the Lord!

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## **Hubei, a church burned - Catholics call for justice**

By Jian Mei

Xiantao (AsiaNews) (18.09.2012) - A church in Caibang village, a suburb of Xiantao city (Hubei), was burnt down deliberately on Sept. 14, a Catholic source told AsiaNews. Parishioners, the source said, there grieved, demanded justice and called for religious freedom in China. Local Catholics call for prayers and concern for the case of violating their right of religious freedom, he said.

According newspaper Xinde Shijiazhuang (today's edition), quoting Father Li of Hanyang diocese, the Church community filed a complaint with the religious affairs and public security offices of the Hubei provincial government in order to defend the legal right of the Church.

Meanwhile, today, Catholics from other parts of the country responded online with indignation. Parish priest Father Zhang Wei posted pictures of the devastated church and a statement dated Sept. 15 online that gave an account of the incident and asked for justice for the Catholic community. The doors were dismantled deliberately.

On Sept. 15, Father Zhang and his parishioners reported the case to police of Xiantao city and demanded the government to conduct a thorough investigation into the arson and penalize those responsible for the damage of the church. The church, which could accommodate about 100 people, was nearly destroyed by fire and many furnishings of the community had been dismantled on purpose. The church was considered an oratory and was registered with the government.

"Catholics - said the *AsiaNews* source - are angry at the indifferent attitude of local government officials toward this tragedy."

"The parishioners reported to local police and officials who were not willing to help."

The church was built in 1993 with the help of Msgr. Zhang Boren of Hanyang, the local underground bishop. The site chosen was the same where the old church stood, before it was demolished under Mao in 1954. Bishop Zhang died in 2005 at the age of 90.

The church is located in a suburb of a new development site, where local authorities arranged for farmers to sell their lands to developers. Most of the farmers have been relocated except the church. According to *AsiaNews* sources, local Catholics suspect the arson is related to the relocation of the church property.

## **Report in Depth: Public Security Bureau unlawfully attacks Sunday school summer camp of Urumqi Church in mid-Summer**

China Aid (14.09.2012) - In July and August of this year (2012), the Public Security Bureau of Shayibak District and Midong District in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, raided the summer camp of a house church, administratively detaining nine female summer camp teachers, imposing a fine, and beating people. By now these persecuted Christians have filed an administrative review according to the the law.

Beginning on July 1, 2012, Bao Ling, Lu Xia, Wang Xingxing, Luo Qinqin and some other Christians of Urumqi City gathered 73 teenagers together for summer camp activities in a rental room at the address of No. 14, South Alley, East Road, Unit 1, Cangfanggou, Shayibak District, Urumqi, teaching the contents and culture of the Bible. On July 3, the "Department on Preventing and Handling Cult-Related Crimes" of the Public Security Bureau of Shayibak District, Urumqi, suddenly sent a "notice of summon" to Bao Ling, Lu Xia, Wang Xingxing, and Luo Qinqin, etc. requiring the nine of them to come to the "Department on Preventing and Handling Cult-Related Crimes" for questioning at 3:30pm on July 3. The summons was made on the grounds of "being on the suspicion of carrying out illegal activities in the name of social organizations."

At 3:30pm on July 3, the nine Christian women, including Bao Ling, Lu Xia, Wang Xingxing and Luo Qinqin, arrived at the "Department on Preventing and Handling Cult-Related Crimes" of the Public Security Bureau branch office in Shayibak District on time to receive questioning. On the 4th of July, after having been questioned by the police, the Public Security Bureau branch office in Shayibak District meted out administrative punishment to the nine Christian sisters (including Bao Ling) of 14 to 15 days of detention and fines ranging from 500 to 1,000 yuan, citing the reason of "gathering teenagers for illegal Christian training activities." On July 19, the nine sisters including Bao Ling, Lu Xia, Wang Xingxing and Luo Qinqin were released from the detention center successively, but they all refused to pay the fines.

After Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing and Luo Qinqin were released from administrative detention by the police, they resumed the Sunday School summer camp activities for teenagers on July 20, but reduced the number of attending children to only 28. They moved the location of summer school activities to Sister Bao Ling's home at Liushuzhuang Village, Yangmaogong Township, Midong District of Urumqi, which is a village ranch house with a courtyard.

In the afternoon of July 23, the security staff of Liushuzhuang Village took two policemen from Yangmaogong Township Police Station to Bao Ling's home to inspect. Citing the excuse that Bao Ling's dog needed to receive vaccine shots, the police made Bao Ling open the door of her home and let them in. As the police entered the courtyard and saw the twenty-plus children in the place, they asked Bao Ling to dismiss the training class for children right away and also called the Police Chief of Yangmaogong Police Station. The police chief summoned Bao Ling's husband Chen Xin'an to the police station and asked him in person to dismiss the class held at his home. Under tremendous pressure, Bao Ling decided to dismiss the summer camp. However it was not possible for them to find vehicles to send all the children back to the city, which was quite far away, by the end of the day, since it was getting late, there were many children, and transportation in the village was not readily available. Moreover, these children did not want to leave. As a result, Bao Ling decided to send them back to the city on the next day.

At about 9am on July 24, 2012, up to 10 people who claimed to be policemen forced their way into Bao Ling's home without showing any legal papers to identify themselves. At that time, Bao Ling was chopping vegetables in the kitchen to prepare breakfast for the children. Hearing that over 10 strangers had broken into the house, Bao Ling came out of the kitchen, with the kitchen knife still in her hand. She asked these people who just broke in to show their IDs, but they refused. So Bao Ling asked them to leave. These people claimed that Bao Ling was threatening them because she asked them to leave with a knife in her hand. Then the person in charge among them made a phone call to report that someone intimidated them with a knife when they enforced the law. Shortly after the call was made, over 100 policemen and government agents arrived consecutively and surrounded the courtyard of Bao Ling's home. Husky policemen quickly cuffed up four sisters, i.e. Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, Luo Qinqin, and Fu Yajuan. In the commotion and collision at the scene, Bao Ling's mother, who is over 70 years old, was pushed to the ground by the police and lost consciousness on the spot. Frightened children cried and screamed. All the people in the courtyard were forced into police vehicles, mini-buses and the vehicles of the Neighborhood Affairs Office, and taken to different places. Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing and Luo Qinqin were taken to Yangbaogong Police Station for questioning by Captain Ren of the Anti-cult Squad of Urumqi Municipal Public Security Bureau. After interrogation, Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing and Luo Qinqin were detained in the detention rooms in the basement of the police station. At 11pm that night, the three of them were taken to the detention center. Before their detention, the police only briefly showed them the Notice of Punishment Decision of 15-Day Administrative Detention. The police asked them to sign it, but the three Christian sisters refused to yield to the unjust ruling and did not sign. The cited reason for administrative

detention is "gathering minors for illegal Christian Bible-teaching activities and disrupting normal religious order." At 12pm on August 9, the three Christian sisters, i.e., Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, and Luo Qinqin were released.

In the whole process of seizing people and searching Bao Ling's home, the police did not show their IDs; nor did they show a search warrant. After the search, the police confiscated a large number of items from Bao Ling's home, mainly various Bible-related materials. At the police station, the police beat the women, punching them in the head and slapping their faces while interrogating Wang Xingxing, Bao Ling and Luo Qinqin. Wang Xingxing, in particular, was struck down to the ground and brutally beaten. None of the people committing the violence at the police station was in police uniform.

After the police violently took Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, and Luo Qinqin away, they ordered the Liushuzhuang Village to shut off electricity for Bao Ling's home for 10 days. The supply was not resumed until 10 days later.

On August 13, 2012, the four Christian sisters, Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, Luo Qinqin and Lu Xia hired Mr. Bright, a Christian rights defense lawyer in Beijing, to come to Urumqi to give them legal assistance. The process of administrative review was initiated to redress their grievances. Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, Luo Qinqin, and Lu Xia filed administrative review according to the law to the People's Government of Urumqi Shayibak District regarding the administrative punishment made on the 4th of July. And the three of them, Bao Ling, Wang Xingxing, and Luo Qinqin filed administrative review according to the law to the People's Government of Urumqi Midong District regarding the administrative punishment made on July 25. If the government upholds the decision of the Public Security Bureau in the administrative review, the Christian sisters will start the procedure of administrative lawsuit according to the law to defend citizens' rights of religious belief and also to provide necessary education on the law to the two branch offices and police stations of Urumqi Municipal Public Security Bureau.

China Aid Association was astounded and infuriated by this case of savage persecution and urged Urumqi Municipal Public Security Bureau to correct the wrong decisions, unlawful actions, and brutality of its two branch offices immediately, and to apologize to believers being persecuted. The social stability of Xinjiang has a significant impact on the whole nation. It is hoped that the law enforcement agencies of Xinjiang will avoid abusing power, violating the law when implementing it, and provoking the anger of the public. Otherwise, the capital city of Xinjiang will suffer more turmoil and the public will lose confidence in the authorities.

Click on small pictures to see enlarged versions: Notice of Summons, the Administrative Punishment Decision made by the police, sister Bao Ling's home where Sunday School was held, the list of confiscated items and documents.

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## **Shaanxi Christians sentenced to labor camp for "cult" activities, file suit against local authorities**

China Aid Association (12.09.2012) - Two Christians from central China's Shaanxi province who are serving labor camp sentences for "cult" activities are suing the local authorities for failing to inform them or their families of the punishment.

On Jan. 13, Liu Xinxing went to the home of Xue Yuxia in Guodong village, in the town of Hejiaji, Zizhou county, where the two women and some other Christians engaged in some Christian activities. Because of this, Liu and Xue were put under criminal detention

by the county Public Security Bureau for "suspicion of organizing and using a cult to undermine law enforcement."

A month later, on Feb. 13, Yulin's Re-education through Labor Management Committee issued a decision statement, coded Yu Lao Zi (2012) No. 02, saying that Xue and Liu had joined a cult called "Total Scope Church," and that, pursuant to Clause 3 of the "Supplementary Stipulations on Re-education through Labor," State Council Document No. 56 (1980), the two were being sentenced 18 months of re-education through labor. This document, however, was never given to Xue and Liu.

According to Liu, "They just told me to sign my name. As for what I was signing, I had no idea at all. And we never saw any decision statement for re-education through labor."

Liu's mother traveled from her hometown Henan province to the Zizhou county Public Security Bureau to get some information on her daughter, but the people handling this case refused to see her. It was not until the end of May 2012 that she learned through sources that Liu had already been sent to the provincial Women's Re-education-Through-Labor Management Center of to serve her sentence.

On June 13, five months after her arrest and four months after her sentencing, Liu's family got the decision statement of the labor camp sentence, which they obtained only through the help of attorneys. (Click on the photos above to enlarge.)

Liu's family hired the human rights attorneys on June 12 to provide legal assistance, and on June 13, they went to submit their administrative lawsuit to the Yuyang District Court of Yulin. The court has accepted the case, and a hearing was set for July 17. It was canceled, however, because the sister of the chief judge was involved in a traffic accident, and a new court date has not been set.

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## **Langzhong court in Sichuan violates the Law in refusing filing a case, persecuted Christian appeals to People's Congress in accordance with law**

China Aid (11.09.2012) - On May 30, 2012, a house church located in Zhanggongqiao Village, Qili Office in Langzhong, Sichuan province, that has a congregation of over 1,000 members was raided and banned by the authorities. The private property and the assets of the church were confiscated. Sister Xie Deyue, the hostess of the house, was summoned. The person in charge of the church is Pastor Li Ming. In June, Xie Deyue and the believers hired human rights attorneys in accordance with legal process and submitted their application for administrative reconsideration. In August, Langzhong Municipal Government communicated its decision that the church was engaged in "illegal religious activities" and that the "penalty was properly rendered."

Following this, Xie Deyue and other house church members submitted an administrative lawsuit in accordance with the law, but Langzhong Municipal Court refused to file the case. For this, Xie Deyue wrote a letter to the Standing Committee of Langzhong Municipal People's Congress and stated her reasons in accordance with the law. The following is the full text of her statement:

**August 20, 2012**

**Dear respectable Standing Committee of Langzhong Municipal People's Congress:**

According to the Chinese Constitution and the related laws, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress has the right to supervise the court. I have heard Langzhong Court is notorious within the Sichuan court system for not filing cases. In the past, this did not have anything directly to do with me; however, now it not only concerns my interests, but more importantly, I worry that Langzhong will sink into an abyss if such misadministration continues unchecked. This is because I have found that the worse the judicial environment is, the poorer the economy will be, and the poorer the economy is, the worse the judicial environment will be. Conversely, the more developed a place is, the better the judicial environment is, and the better the judicial environment is, the more developed the economy will be. This is called the Matthew Effect. The better the judicial environment is, the more likely investors are to invest because the investment enjoys legal protection. If there is no legal protection, there is risk of not being able to recoup the principle of the investment, much less to earn profits. I wonder whether you have been to Jiangsu or Zhejiang provinces. The economy in these provinces is the most developed in China and the judicial environment is known to be especially first-rate within China. I'd like to know whether Langzhong People's Court will be required to make its dutiful contribution to improve the environment for the rule of law in our local area. If they are permitted to continue to arbitrarily refuse to file cases as a means to discourage the free exercise of legal rights, I believe a large number of potential investors will be scared away from investing in the development of our economy.

Though my case may be considered a comparatively small religious one, the case itself has great significance and it makes me concerned about the future prospects for Langzhong. The reason I am concerned about Langzhong is because I feel Langzhong is the place in Sichuan province where people enjoy the least religious freedom (though I don't think Langzhong ranks at the bottom of the list in the nation); Langzhong also has the worst environment for the rule of law. Elsewhere in Sichuan, few churches have been raided by the local authorities, not even the famous house church led by Brother Wang Yi in Chengdu. In comparison, Langzhong is the only place in Sichuan where house churches are routinely raided. Is Langzhong a special administrative region of Sichuan? Is its law different from that of the rest of Sichuan? I don't think there are different laws that apply to different areas of Sichuan. As a judicial organ, the court is the last entity citizens have recourse to in seeking legal relief. The court should know and thus abide by the law more perfectly than all other departments. The state and the common people pin their hopes on it to correct erroneous conduct of administrative agencies. Otherwise, why does the state have the People's Court try the administrative cases in which the administrative agency is the defendant? Why should the common people go through all of the trouble they do to have the court sue the administrative agency for wrongs if the court may capriciously ignore legal requests? While cases can be filed in all other courts in Sichuan, they often cannot be filed in Langzhong. For instance the last time I went there to file a case, I was told that some leaders in the court did not approve filing the case. This made me realize first-hand that the judicial environment in Langzhong is the worst in Sichuan, though I don't think it is the worst in the nation. However, what brings me pains is that I am a resident of Langzhong which happens to be the worst in these aspects in Sichuan.

While I myself think my case may be viewed as a minor one, yet the reason why I resort to law and go through the legal procedure for redress is because I want to let the people of the world see whether Langzhong Court is abiding by the laws of the land. Why is it that cases which can be filed within other areas of Sichuan (as stipulated by the law) cannot be filed in Langzhong Court? If the court does not respect the law in this way, what hope can we pin on the judicial environment of Langzhong? I certainly hope that the Langzhong court can be held to the same judicial standards as the courts in the rest of Sichuan, instead of being permitted to notoriously obstruct justice. Once the

environment comes to be known for ignoring the rule of law, investors will not dare to come to Langzhong. Who would want to invest in a place where they cannot even file a case, let alone try a case in accordance with the law?

Though my case may be viewed as a minor and insignificant one, yet it can be used to test whether the judicial environment here is able to be reformed. Isn't the court supposed to provide for judicial justice? The major newspaper the People's Daily is closely following this case in its reports to see whether Deng Xiaoping's native place upholds the rule of law 30-plus years after he proposed for the rule of China through the rule of law. Not only people in China are concerned about this, but many people throughout the international community are also concerned as well; therefore, the People's Daily is planning to follow this case in its English reports. Many people in the international community are vitally concerned to know the environment of the rule of law and the status of religious freedom in Langzhong through that report. I'm sure Langzhong will become famous because of this. However, as a resident of this place, I sincerely hope Langzhong will take this opportunity to show to the world that it is reforming and improving.

I have learned from some friends that the reason why the people in the international community are concerned about human rights and the rule of law in Langzhong, and thus in China, is not because they love China more than we ourselves, but because they love themselves more than they love the Chinese. They think that if China does not respect the human rights of the Chinese themselves, how can they respect the human rights of foreigners? If the environment for the rule of law is very poor in China, do the foreigners dare to invest in China? The reason why they are highly concerned about what may be considered a minor case is to learn the general trend and determine where our human rights and rule of law are headed. Doesn't the Chinese government often say to the international community that it wants a peaceful rise. When people want to know whether China is really having a peaceful rise, they don't want to hear what we are saying, but what we are doing. If we don't do a good job in protecting our own human rights and rule of law, how can one believe that we are rising peacefully? If we do a good job in this regard, then rather than worrying about whether it is safe to invest in China, perhaps international investors and business people will vie with each other in seeking to do business in China!

It is my firm belief that this case will become a touch-stone whether there is freedom of religion in Langzhong and whether its environment for the rule of law is changing for the better. This case also tests whether Langzhong is willing to continue to be at the bottom of Sichuan in these most important two respects. I sincerely hope the Standing Committee of the People's Congress can urge the People's Court to file and try the case in accordance with the law and urge the court to create an excellent judicial environment for Langzhong so that investors from various places of the world and guests can feel that Langzhong is a place where one can feel safe and welcome.

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## **Seven Christians criminally detained in Inner Mongolia; nearly ten attorneys willing to defend them**

China Aid (06.09.2012) - A case in Inner Mongolia of seven Christians being criminally detained on cult-related charges that was publicized on the Internet by well-known Christian rights defense lawyer Zhang Kai has generated a wide social media response.

Zhang posted this on his microblog on Aug. 31: "[Authorities in] Ulanhot, Inner Mongolia criminally detained seven Christians for the crime of 'using a cult to undermine

implementation of the law.' Among those detained are several medical school students who went to the countryside to popularize medical knowledge among herdsmen and preach the gospel. This afternoon, two Christian lawyers went and asked to meet with them, but were barred. Quite a few Christian lawyers are prepared to go and offer legal assistance. More lawyers are welcome to join their defense."

Many netizens, including lawyers and scholars, among them the well-known Chinese-American sociologist Yang Fenggang, responded to this Internet post, unanimously condemning the unlawful violation of freedom of religion.

Citizen Shen Yang said, "File a lawsuit against [the provincial government in] Hohhot and bring local governments back in line with the constitution."

Attorney Yang Xingquan, "I'll be in Russia on business for a week. Please don't stop forwarding this micro-blogging message. Hope it will be forwarded 10,000 times! Hope they when I return to China, they will have been set free. If their arrest was authorized by the procuratorate, I would offer them my legal services pro bono. Brothers and sisters, please continue to fervently pray for them!"

A self-reliant cat, "I know a person who works at a re-education-through-labor camp. He said it has many Christians who are being re-educated through labor. (It's not clear to me how one differentiates this religious group [from others]; in any case, it is one that believes in the cross.) One of them was a relatively well-known missionary who tried to evangelize him. He beat the missionary so bad that he was not able to utter a word. There is a small, old church in a certain village in the area of my hometown, which is a county-level city. A few days every year, this church holds activities and all the government agencies send people to spy on it.

Zhang Kai also posted, "Almost 10 attorneys in China are monitoring this case and have expressed willingness to go there and defend them. Someone said, 'The detained Christians might be sent to re-education through labor. We will closely watch this case. If they are indeed sentenced to re-education-through-labor, we will help them file for an administrative review and file a lawsuit according to the law.'"

Finally, brother Zhang Kai made a profound analysis and summary of the "phenomenon of Ulanhot missionary case," saying, "The Ulanhot missionary case has had a great impact on China, and the people watching it are not just those in the legal and religious fields. Even those even in the entertainment industry are starting to talk about it. Americans believe that freedom of religion is the first and foremost freedom and that it concerns the happiness of each of us. The day we realize that religion is more important than life is the day that China is ushered into a new age."

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## **RFA exclusive report: Gangtou House Church in Shenzhen forced by authorities to vacate recently rented facility**

Radio Free Asia (04.09.2012) - Only 20 days after a house church with several dozen believers in Longgang District, Shenzhen, settled into a new venue for gatherings, the landlord demanded that the leasing contract be terminated. The landlord of the facility being used by the church told the reporter of this station that he came under the pressure of the authorities and that he had no alternative but to comply. This comes on

the heels of many house churches in Dongguan, Guangdong province, being shut down by the government.

Shortly after three house churches in Dongguan, Guangdong province, were sealed off and ordered to shut down by the authorities, Zhongfu Gangtou Church, Longgang District of Shenzhen, was targeted for suppression by the authorities. Du Yaping, a missionary from Zhongfu Putian Church, Gaobu Town of Dongguan, told this station on Tuesday: "When I was chatting with a brother last night in Shenzhen, his place came under close watch by the neighborhood committee. The neighborhood committee put pressure on the landlord. He has been there for only 20 days and they have signed a 2-year contract. Now, they want him to move out. He belongs to our system (Zhongfu), but he is in Shenzhen."

### ***Authorities continue persecution of house church to newly leased gathering site.***

The reporter contacted Zhao Jianjun, a missionary of Zhongfu Gangtou Church in Bantian Neighborhood in Longgang District of Shenzhen. He stated: "(Not long ago), we had a gathering in Huawei Base in Bantian, Shenzhen. Then, the neighborhood office and the community station put pressure on the landlord and told us to move out. Then, we moved to Bantian Neighborhood. Only two weeks after we moved here, the neighborhood office and the working station again found the new landlord and put pressure on him, saying he can't rent the house to us."

He said he negotiated with the neighborhood office on Monday and the people there were vicious in their tone. They discriminate against Christians: "Yesterday, we went to the neighborhood office and negotiated with them. The director in charge of the stability maintenance went rampant in the talk. He said 'Are there any Christians left in Shenzhen?' I said: 'We are Christians. Why can't there be Christians?' Obviously, he discriminated against us Christians. I was very angry, so I got into an altercation with him."

The reporter called the Stability Maintenance Office of Bantian Neighborhood Office, but no one answered the call.

According to Zhao Jianjun, the landlord told him that he came under pressure from the officials: "The landlord told us the neighborhood office, the working station, and several departments of our superiors sent notices to order him to make us move out. If we don't move out, they will seal off his place."

### **Reporter: How long a contract did you sign with them?**

**Answer:** We signed a 2-year contract. He said if the government pushes them like this, he has to commit the breach of contract unilaterally. I said to him that he doesn't have to be afraid of them and that if something happens, we can face them together. Moreover, we haven't violated the law and they don't have the right to punish you.

### ***Landlord acknowledges being pressured to evict house church.***

The reporter contacted Mr. Chen the landlord. He acknowledged coming under pressure from the neighborhood committee: {Mark, even though this part is a direct quote, I recommend making a couple minor edits to aid comprehensibility:} "People from the neighborhood committee, the village, and the head of the village came to me and told me not to rent the place to you (the church). I found they were very unreasonable to make this demand. However, when they demand eviction, there is nothing we can do but comply. When one wants to live here, he has to register before he can do so. We

live here and there's nothing else we can do. You don't know how much pressure I feel.”

Recently, at least three house churches in Dongguan have been sealed off and ordered shut down because they had not registered with the authorities. Therefore, their gatherings were declared illegal. The believers told the reporter that the officials wanted them to join the government-sanctioned “TSPM churches” but they refused to do join the communist front-church. Last week, five representatives on behalf of the believers in their respective gathering sites went to negotiate with Dongguan government. One of them, Du Yaping, mailed an application for administrative reconsideration to the municipal government, insisting that they repeal the penalty decision made by the Bureau of Religion. The authorities are supposed to give an answer whether they accept the application or not within five days. Tuesday is the fifth day. Du Yaping told this radio station: “Today is the fifth day. At 12 o'clock, I came back from there (the municipal government). The employees in the Section for Administrative Reconsideration said they have read our application for administrative reconsideration. Besides this, they told me to return with photocopies of my ID card and a written statement detailing how the incident happened. They said they will then give me an answer in another five business days.”

This radio station previously reported that the gathering site for a house church in Gaobu Town was sealed off by the authorities in late August on the charge of “illegal gathering.” Moreover, the authorities shut off the water supply and the electricity. The officials said they will do this unless they join the government-sanctioned TSPM church. In the meantime, Zhongfu Wanmin Church in Tangxia Town was forced to move out by the landlord for the same reasons and circumstances as above. Later, it was reported that a house church in Huangjia Town was also sealed off and shut down.

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## **Islamic revival in China: CCP tolerance or strategy?**

By Faaria Volinski

Huffington Post (04.09.2012) - Five years ago, when I considered the issue of Islamic practice in China, three things immediately came to mind: Xinjiang, restriction, and incompatibility with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However, after a year of field research in southwest China's Yunnan Province, this picture has diversified in my mind. Yes, issues pertaining to religious freedom in China exist in droves, but at the same time Chinese Muslims in the right place at the right time are reviving Islamic practice at an astonishing pace without significant government interference.

Recently, sprinkled amidst numerous articles that describe how Muslim activity is restrained in China, more and more material depicts CCP tolerance of Islam insofar as it aids China's economic development and foreign policy interests. After reading a New York Times brief on Muslim fasting restrictions during Ramadan in Xinjiang, you can find an article in The Economist that says China converted hundreds of workers to Islam so they could work in Mecca on a China Railways project to build a monorail between Mecca and surrounding holy sites.

As one of the world's biggest oil consumers, China's ties with Saudi Arabia have grown closer over the past decade. In February 2012, The China Post published an article confirming Saudi Arabia as China's biggest trade partner in West Asia, with two-way trade exceeding \$43 billion in 2010. China has also allowed a private, local initiative to build what is now, according to statistics provided by Iran expert at Yunnan University's School of International Relations Yao Jide, China's largest mosque in Shadian, Yunnan Province. According to Taiwanese Professor of International Affairs Beatrice Leung, China

is "willing to trade religious relaxation for foreign policy advantage." And for China's relationship with Saudi Arabia to continue, China must show respect for Saudi culture, traditions and religion.

During my year of research in Yunnan in 2009, I made a trip to Shadian. As my van rounded the hilltop bend I saw the village standing dwarfed in the midday sun by towering minarets and green domes. Women roamed through the streets in colorful headscarves, past homes with gold Arabic lettering over the doorways. Arabic calls to prayer rang out loudly in the streets. It was almost impossible to tell that this town was the site of the July 1975 Shadian Incident; a time when mosques were destroyed and hundreds of Muslims killed during the Cultural Revolution.

The multi-ethnic minority family I was travelling with, made up of Hui, Bai and Mosuo ethnic minority members, launched into the backstory of the new mosque and told me how it was modeled after Arab architecture. When we reached the mosque, the Hui men of the family left for afternoon prayers. As I joined the other women in preparing a halal meal for lunch, I began to think about why Islam flourishes in Shadian today. Why do Muslims here receive drastically different treatment from the CCP than those in Xinjiang?

Starkly different government treatment toward Muslims in Xinjiang and those in Yunnan suggest that Chinese government tolerance of Islam is highly strategic. In Xinjiang, Islamic sermons have strict time limits, Muslims must pray inside a mosque in their residential area, and Ramadan and Hajj activities are carefully restricted. But there is far less government interference in Yunnan, where Muslims can pray in more than one mosque and observe Ramadan rituals in groups. Yunnan has attracted attention from major Islamic centers around the world through its development and revival of Islamic education, ritual and architecture. As economic development in the region continues, mosques pop up at an alarming rate, featuring elaborate Arab or middle-eastern design and mosque-based Islamic schools brimming with eager, young scholars.

In his book *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Pomona College Professor of Anthropology Dru Gladney emphasized the fact that Yunnanese Muslims belong primarily to the Hui minority group. "The Hui have been significant players in China's efforts to maintain close political-economic ties with largely Muslim, Middle Eastern nations," he wrote. Hui Muslims speak Mandarin and are geographically scattered across China. In the eyes of the CCP, Yunnanese Hui, more so than Hui anywhere else in China, pose the least "threat to national stability" because they harmoniously coexist with over two dozen different minority groups.

On the other hand, Muslims in Xinjiang belong to the Uighur minority group and make up almost half the province's population. Uighurs speak mainly their own Turkic language, and are isolated and heavily concentrated in the Tarim Basin region. Five countries with majority Muslim populations border Xinjiang: Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Uighurs feel ethnic, cultural and religious tension with the officially atheist Han Chinese and remain relatively segregated. Xinjiang is considered one of China's most politically sensitive regions. It makes perfect sense that the Chinese government keeps a firm grip on Xinjiang, while appeasing critics of its religious policies with relative tolerance, and even some religious tourism, in Yunnan.

After a week in Shadian, I moved to Dali Autonomous region in northwestern Yunnan. I met Zhang Hongyun, a teacher at Dali Muslim Middle School in Wuliqiao village. Zhang said he could never have imagined that he would openly practice and teach Islam in China. During the Cultural Revolution, his grandfather memorized hundreds of Islamic scriptures before they were destroyed and kept Islam alive in his village through word of mouth. Now, at the age of 35, Zhang publicly runs prayers and religious classes as a

respected member of his community. He has studied Arabic in Beijing, traveled to Malaysia, and he made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 2007.

"I have seen Islam change drastically over the years through the eyes of my grandparents, my parents, and now in my own life," said Zhang. "Islam can flourish in China." He sits cross-legged in a concrete classroom, looking indistinguishable from the average Han Chinese citizen save for the white prayer cap perched on his head.

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## **Teenaged Tibetan monk 'self-immolates'**

BBC (17.08.2012) - A teenaged Tibetan Buddhist monk has burned himself to death in south-west China, the latest in a series of such protests against Chinese rule, rights activists have said.

The monk, 18, is reported to have set himself alight in Sichuan province.

Tibetan exiles said local people blocked a bridge to stop police from moving in after the incident.

About 42 Tibetans are believed to have set themselves alight since March 2011 in Tibetan-inhabited parts of China.

Many of them are believed to have died.

Chinese state media has confirmed some incidents but not all. Foreign media are banned from the region, making reports hard to confirm.

### ***'Encouraging separatism'***

The monk in Tuesday's incident was identified as Lobsang Lozin.

He set himself ablaze and died immediately in Bharkham county in Sichuan province as he marched towards a government office, the India-based Central Tibetan Administration - or government-in-exile - said in a statement.

Local government and police in Bharkham, known as Maerkang in Chinese, could not immediately confirm the suicide.

But the government-in-exile said that a large group of armed police were moving towards Bharkham following the incident.

Activists say that Mr Lobzin was a member of the Tsodun Kirti Monastery in Bharkham. Two other monks from the same monastery set themselves on fire in March, they say.

Most self-immolations occur in ethnically Tibetan areas outside Tibet.

China's leaders accuse the Dalai Lama, the Tibetans' exiled spiritual leader, of inciting the self-immolations and encouraging separatism.

He rejects this, and both activist groups and the government-in-exile say the self-immolations are protests against tight Chinese control of the region and religious repression.

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## Changing climate for religious NGOs?

Forum 18 News (12.07.2012) - Religious non-governmental organisations (RNGOs), both local and international, exist in China - but those that are legally registered as non-profit organisations are often linked to either the representative bodies of the five state-approved religions or other state organisations. Both the legally allowed and other RNGOs have mainly devoted their efforts and resources to supporting the neediest people in China, especially migrant workers and their families, orphans and victims of natural disasters, Forum 18 News Service notes.

Most of China's existing religious NGOs have been able to carry out the activities they have been set up to do. Yet the state does not allow them to conduct religious activities, such as overt sharing beliefs. Activities that can be described as political - such as lobbying to change laws - are also not allowed. Many secular and religious NGOs involved in development work worldwide often see encouraging legislative change as a mainstream part of their work.

So, despite RNGOs often operating quite successfully in China, like all NGOs they face an uncertain legal environment, a generally hostile political environment, and an apathetic social environment.

The numbers of RNGOs are increasing, and their activities and geographic reach are expanding. For example, since the 1990s rising numbers of Chinese Buddhist RNGOs at all administrative levels have provided scholarships to impoverished children, managed orphanages and provided disaster relief. Dr Andre Laliberte of Ottawa University also noted in his essay "The institutionalization of Buddhist philanthropy in China", which appeared in the 2009 edited volume "State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China" that Buddhist RNGOs have operated beyond their immediate geographical confines.

### **China's RNGO landscape**

Many of the known domestic RNGOs are affiliated with one of the five state-approved religions - Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholic Christianity or Protestant Christianity. These religions are formally represented by seven national state-controlled organisations, but the reality of Chinese religious life is far more diverse than the state-imposed religious monopolies.

### **- GONGOs**

Many RNGOs linked to state-approved religions can be identified as government-organised NGOs (GONGOs), due to their extensive political, legal, personnel, and financial connections to the state. We can therefore expect GONGOs to be susceptible to state control to a great extent. Nonetheless, as scholars have noted, GONGOs have in recent years tried to push for more autonomy vis-a-vis the state. One way is to seek non-state funding sources so as to reduce their dependence on the state. Perhaps the most internationally well-known example of this NGO type is the Amity Foundation, which is affiliated with the two state-approved Protestant Christian organisations: the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC). And like many GONGOs, Amity has established partnerships with non-state entities, including international RNGOs, partly as a means to achieve greater independence from the state.

However, not all domestic RNGOs affiliated with local state-approved churches, temples and other religious sites are necessarily GONGOs, in the sense that they are susceptible to extensive state control. Examples of such RNGOs include an orphanage operated by a

local Patriotic Catholic church in Hebei Province, which surrounds the capital Beijing, and a "Signpost Youth Club" affiliated with the Patriotic Catholic Ningbo Diocese in Zhejiang Province, which was reported by Dr Carol Lee Hamrin of George Mason University in a 2007 online essay entitled "Faith-Based Organizations: Invisible Partners in Development Chinese Society" that was published by the Global China Center. These groups might be affiliated with state-permitted religious bodies, but the extent of their state ties is unlike that for many GONGOs. For one, they may not have official non-profit registration status, as is the case with the aforementioned Hebei orphanage.

### **- Hybrid NGOs**

Indeed, many domestic RNGOs exist which were created by neither the state nor the state-approved religious institutions, but whose leadership has connections to state-approved religious institutions. Researchers on Chinese NGOs have referred to this type of NGO as "hybrid" NGOs.

The Jinde Charities, China's first Catholic NGO, is an example of a hybrid RNGO. Its founder-leader is a state-approved priest, Fr John Baptist Zhang Shijiang. But the organisation was neither explicitly created nor did it receive significant funding from either the state or the state-approved Catholic Patriotic Association. Jinde was founded in 1998 in Hebei Province's capital city of Shijiazhuang and is legally registered with the government.

Hebei has long been the centre of Catholicism in China and is home to about a quarter of China's Catholic population. Many of the most prominent cases of violations of religious freedom have also taken place there. Bishops Su Zhimin (last arrested in 1997) and Shi Enxiang (last arrested in 2001), two prominent Chinese Catholic dissidents whose whereabouts have remained unknown since their last arrest, were Catholic leaders in Hebei.

### **- Unofficial RNGOs**

Despite the increasing prevalence and prominence of RNGOs, Forum 18 is only aware of one incidence of a RNGO that is affiliated with a house church. Ray Wang of the University of California, Riverside, informed Forum 18 in June 2012 that a group of house church Christians based in the Shanghai area has been attempting since 2010 to register their group as a non-profit organisation. However, this case appears to be an anomaly since Wang told Forum 18 that the great majority of house churches have engaged in charitable activities, without formal organisation and registration.

Similarly, individual religious adherents have formed groups to engage in charitable activities without registering as non-profit organisations. Dr Hamrin of George Mason University wrote in the aforementioned 2007 essay about a school established by a young Christian couple in Chengdu, Sichuan Province for local handicapped youth. She also reported that a group of Christian businesspeople in Zhejiang Province's Wenzhou City, which is known for its long history of Christianity, established a "fellowship" to provide flood relief and community service. It is not clear whether and how the fellowship's founders were affiliated to the officially-approved Protestant Christian church.

The legal connection between non-profit registration and a religious body's certification as a religious meeting place is not obvious, in part because each is governed by a different legal document. Therefore, even if a house church group can achieve non-profit registration, which seems highly unlikely given the present political environment, the house church to which it is affiliated may not be certified as a legal site for religious meetings. Moreover, the same house church-affiliated RNGO in all likelihood would not reveal its religious identity, which seems to be the case with the aforementioned Shanghai-based group.

Co-operation also occurs between registered and unregistered RNGOs. Some non-registered Chinese NGOs and foreign donors have arranged to supply funds via Jinde for activities. These are used to support the construction of buildings for local churches, and to train nuns and priests in different Chinese regions. In all likelihood, these activities are conducted with the approval of the local state-approved Catholic Church and the local government.

### ***- International RNGOs based outside China***

International RNGOs in China vary in terms of legal status and organisational size and reach. The American Christian NGO World Vision does not have an "independent" legal status in China even though it has been operating in the country since 1982. Based on the group's 2011 annual report, its China operations appear to be an extension of its Hong Kong office. Put simply, like many international RNGOs, World Vision in China has been operating as a representative office of its Hong Kong operations.

The Chinese government has allowed international RNGOs like World Vision to operate in China because these organisations provide valuable financial and technical services to address important developmental issues like poverty alleviation and the needs of the marginalised groups, such as the education of the children of migrant workers. In these cases, the state's political support is even more important than legal certification. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the list of state partners on World Vision's website does not include any representative bodies of the five state-sanctioned religions.

However, the Taiwan-based Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation - active in China since helping with flood relief in 1991 - obtained official Chinese government approval in 2010 as an RNGO. Tzu Chi's case, however, may also be unique given its Taiwan origins and the Chinese state's interest in establishing positive relations with prominent Taiwan groups as a means to support the Chinese state's overall policy of reunification with Taiwan. Tzu Chi has also made it very clear that it does not engage in any over religious activities and activities that violate state policies and regulations.

Smaller international RNGOs include Hong Kong's Christian Action, founded in the early 1950s to work with refugees in Hong Kong. It has been active in rural and urban social development projects in the mainland since 1996.

Although both Taiwan and Hong Kong are considered territories of the People's Republic of China, both politically and legally, organisations and residents from those regions are treated de facto as foreigners. For example, both Hong Kong and Taiwan residents are issued travel and residence permits that are separate from those of mainland Chinese residents.

An important point to highlight here is that most of these international RNGOs have made it a policy not to engage in explicitly religious activities. This does not necessarily mean that they do not conduct religious activities at all; instead, they do not advertise them and make sure that they are known in general as charities rather than as religious groups.

### ***- International RNGOs based inside China***

Lastly, there are international RNGOs that are based in China with a focus on addressing very specific needs in China. One organisational attribute that is often shared among these groups is that they have operated in China largely as legal representative offices of Hong Kong-registered organisations. Yet, despite this foreign connection, for all intent and purposes these groups are working strictly in China and were established with the sole purpose of serving the needs specific to China. This characteristic distinguishes these

international RNGOs from World Vision and Tzu Chi, which have global reach and for which China is only one area of that global reach.

An example of this type of international RNGO is the Beijing-based New Hope Foundation. Its founders are a Christian British and Australian couple, one of whom is a physician who had previously worked with SOS International, an international medical organisation with a presence in China. The RNGO has been in operation since 2000 and has focused on providing care, including medical procedures, to abandoned Chinese babies who are either terminally ill or who have surgically correctable deformities.

### ***RNGOs as social welfare providers***

RNGOs working in China have served mainly as providers of social welfare (shehui fuli). They have also been involved in disaster relief. The government has actively encouraged this. In a February 2012 policy "opinion" issued by the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China, the State Council's National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Taxation, RNGOs are explicitly encouraged to engage in disaster relief, provide support to disabled persons, service the elderly and toddlers, conduct poverty alleviation, offer tuition support to needy students, participate in environmental protection efforts, and build public facilities.

According to the 2011 annual report of Jinde Charities, the RNGO spent over 15 Million Yuan (14,372,215 Norwegian Kroner, 1,919,260 Euros, or 2,355,500 US Dollars) to sponsor a wide range of activities. Based on the distribution of organisational expenditures in 2011, emergency aid has been the RNGO's most important task. In 2011, Jinde spent over 8.5 Million Yuan (8,145,410 Norwegian Kroner, 1,088,000 Euros, or 1,334,475 US Dollars) to support disaster relief effort in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan and Hunan Provinces. Jinde claimed that its funds and efforts helped over 30,000 residents in these provinces.

Jinde also sponsored a wide range of activities in addition to disaster relief. Its annual report recorded that it had spent nearly 2 Million Yuan (1,916,935 Norwegian Kroner, 256,080 Euros, or 313,990 US Dollars) to support orphans and disabled children, rural development, and improving medical and sanitation facilities in impoverished Chinese regions. The Catholic RNGO had also spent nearly 700,000 Yuan (670,910 Norwegian Kroner, 89,620 Euros, or 109,900 US Dollars) to support Aids patients and Aids prevention campaigns. Jinde also provided scholarships to students in China's impoverished regions, monetary and volunteer support to the elderly in those regions, and held volunteer training programmes for college students with the aim of sending the trained volunteers to local communities to serve pre-school children and disabled children in different provinces and cities.

### ***Registration***

Like non-religious NGOs, a continuing challenge is the difficulty of obtaining legal, non-profit registration status. Several legal documents, notably the "Regulations for the Registration and Management of Social Organisations," lay down the registration criteria for religious and non-religious NGOs. Additional registration criteria for RNGOs - notably the submission of information about the religious organisation's historical background, doctrines and key publications - are spelled out in the "Implementing Measures for the Registration and Management of Religious Social Organisations". The legal requirements, particularly funding requirements and the ability to obtain a state sponsor, have proved to be insurmountable challenges to the great majority of Chinese NGOs.

As a result, many either remain unregistered or register as commercial enterprises. This is a less cumbersome process, but does not necessarily grant NGOs a secure future. For

example, the Beijing-based Gongmeng NGO was closed down in 2009 by the municipal authorities, on the charge of operating as a non-profit entity with a commercial business licence. Its founders were also arrested. Gongmeng had attracted official hostility - which found its form of registration an easy excuse for closure - as a group of Chinese lawyers campaigning for the rule of law in China.

Although establishing an NGO without state affiliation is not impossible, doing so often means that the NGO will not obtain state approval as a legally-registered non-profit organisation. Without this legal certification, the group will always be vulnerable to crackdowns by government agencies without legal recourse.

### ***Religious activities banned for RNGOs***

On 28 June the China Aid Association reported that the Chinese Theological Society, a Hong Kong-registered RNGO founded by a group mainland Chinese and Hong Kong theological educators, was forced by officials of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) to halt a scheduled training camp for mainland Chinese students. The camp was in Guangdong Province, which lies across from Hong Kong. According to the China Aid Association, the Theological Society has applied for non-profit certification on mainland China, and the society's mission was to develop theological education there.

Like the unregistered Chinese Theological Society, registered RNGOs are prohibited from engaging in explicitly religious activities. The February 2012 policy opinion gave details about activities RNGOs are encouraged to undertake, but it also listed activities that RNGOs are prohibited from undertaking.

For example, they must not "destroy social order, harm the physical health of Chinese citizens, obstruct the state's educational system, as well as other behaviours that harm the national interest of the state [and] the public interest of the society, and the legal rights of the citizens". This wide ranging and unclear ban allows officials to arbitrarily impose restrictions for almost any reason.

RNGOs are also barred from sharing their beliefs as they conduct charitable activities. Many RNGOs worldwide see sharing beliefs while doing charitable activity as unethical, and so would themselves - independent of any government regulation - ban those who work for them from doing this. This is also the case for Chinese RNGOs. For example, Ray Wang told Form 18 that international Christian RNGOs did not advertise their religious affiliation when they took part in disaster relief efforts, such as those that took place in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in Sichuan Province.

While these RNGOs do not share their beliefs with those they try to help, this does not mean that they try to conceal their religious affiliations. Jinde's founder Fr Zhang, for example, told the New York Times in 2002 it does not engage in sharing beliefs, but local officials have noticed its religious affiliation. Similarly, the foreign leaders of the New Hope Foundation do not hide their Christian beliefs.

### ***Influence of international RNGOs***

The February 2012 policy opinion states that RNGOs "must not be controlled by foreign forces and must not receive foreign aid, contributions, and offers of collaboration that involve [pre-determined] political and religious conditions". But this has not stopped international RNGOs from being models for domestic Chinese RNGOs.

Taiwan's Tzu Chi Foundation and Hong Kong-based Buddhist associations have influenced mainland Chinese Buddhist RNGOs with the former's successful approach of combining "involvement in the provision of social service with avoidance of any political advocacy",

as Dr Laliberte has noted. A further influence on these mainland Chinese Buddhist organisations has been the former's "theological innovations".

The most significant impact that international RNGOs have had is in the area of funding. The Patriotic Catholic Jinde, for example, has received support from the Holy See-controlled Catholic charity Caritas Internationalis and its various members. This is a little-noticed point of contact between the Holy See and China. Chinese Buddhist RNGOs have been financed by Hong Kong-based RNGOs, such as the Cihui Foundation. The Protestant charity World Vision in China has provided funds to local non-state schools for the children of migrant workers in major Chinese cities, such as Beijing.

The significance of international funding for domestic RNGOs cannot be overestimated. Raising money in China is difficult. The state provides little money, and only to those RNGOs with state connections. Corporate donations are also limited by legal provisions that make it difficult for corporations to gain tax credits even when they contribute to registered organisations, including GONGOs.

Furthermore, most of the population has limited financial means and many think that NGOs are non-profit organisations and hence should not solicit funds. This perspective stems from the fact that non-profit institutions such as hospitals and schools were subsidised by the state before 1978. So many Chinese citizens believe - wrongly - that today's Chinese NGOs are also subsidised by the state.

As a result of this shortage of Chinese funders, even Chinese GONGOs and others with strong state affiliations have been "encouraged" to seek international donors. For example, the Amity Foundation, which claims to be China's largest charity, has relied a great deal on foreign money to operate its many projects. It has established a Hong Kong office as a means to improve its international fundraising capacity. For GONGOs like Amity, establishing international funding relations is not only practical, but as mentioned earlier it is also a political means to secure greater organisational autonomy vis-a-vis the state.

### ***Relations with the state***

In 2010 the Chinese government instituted a policy requiring Chinese NGOs to provide documentation about international donors' foreign registration status and notarised copies of grant agreements between the international NGOs and the domestic NGOs. The difficulty was that the government gave no indication of how and where the notarisation could take place. The problem was especially acute for NGOs without proper non-profit registration because they were unable to find state organisations, such as the civil affairs agencies that have the authority to register non-profit organisations, which were able and willing to notarise such agreements. The resulting concern was therefore no surprise.

Although the Chinese government has generally provided little money to the RNGOs, the state's influence should not be dismissed. In fact, the state is more significant for the RNGOs' survival than international donors for a number of reasons.

First, the state confers legitimacy on RNGOs. John Tai, who interviewed the leaders of approximately 40 Chinese NGOs for his recently-completed doctoral dissertation at the Washington, DC-based George Washington University, told Forum 18 that the state's ability to grant legitimacy to NGOs is one of the main reasons that Chinese NGOs want to establish state linkages.

In general, NGOs in China are not institutionalised, meaning that they are not recognised as legitimate social institutions. This is reflected in the fact that Chinese NGOs do not enjoy widespread public trust. Indeed, Tai pointed out that the results of the 2008 East Asia Barometer survey of the National Taiwan University showed that the great majority

of Chinese survey respondents displayed little to no trust in NGOs. Yet, at the same time, the respondents expressed considerable trust in the central government. Even local governments, which have been the objects of public discontent in recent years, enjoyed greater public trust than NGOs. Therefore, state approval, whether in legal or political terms, can be a valuable asset for Chinese RNGOs.

This trust in state institutions - even heavily-criticised ones like the police and trade unions - and lack of trust in non-governmental institutions - such as churches - is reflected in other surveys.

Second, the state provides the platform for RNGOs to conduct their work. For example, the New Hope Foundation's work on sick and physically deformed babies needs the goodwill of local social welfare institutes, which are run by the state. By law, only the government is permitted to operate orphanages in China. These orphanages are generally referred to as social welfare institutes. Without co-operation from these state-run institutes, the New Hope Foundation would have no hope of carrying out its work.

These and other reasons make it important for RNGOs to work with the state and avoid state hostility. One reason - but not necessarily the most powerful reason - for RNGOs to avoid sharing beliefs and other overtly religious activities is because this helps them to maintain their presence in China. RNGOs and all other non-state organisations know that they are closely watched by the Chinese government.

### ***Future of Chinese RNGOs***

It is important not to dismiss the challenges that face RNGOs operating in China. Like non-religious NGOs operating in the country, the legal and political environment remains less than friendly. Existing legal stipulations on organisational registration and restrictions against certain activities are unlikely to be lifted in the foreseeable future. Raising money remains difficult, especially in light of the economic downturns in Western countries in recent years. On top of that, RNGOs are not allowed to openly share their religious values.

Not much has been written about the extent to which RNGOs, both domestic and international in origin, are already contributing to social welfare provision and disaster relief. Indeed, despite the presence of RNGOs in disaster relief efforts in mainland China in recent years, both international and Chinese media have virtually ignored the presence and contributions of the RNGOs. The rise of these organisations has important implications for possible future improvements in religious freedom on mainland China.

Also unexplored has been how far such RNGOs might wish to engage in other non-profit activity - especially that linked specifically to their religious inspiration - which is currently barred to them.

However, the future of RNGOs is not necessarily bleak. As they increase in number, and as they continue to demonstrate their positive contributions to social and political stability, the Chinese government at all levels and the general population are likely to regard them more favourably. Even though state policies have remained restrictive, the attitudes of individual state officials and the viewpoints of individual state agencies do vary, with some more supportive of NGOs in general and RNGOs in particular than others, giving many hope for the future. Indeed, optimism in the future combined with caution has remained the attitude of leaders of RNGOs operating in China. Only time will tell whether their optimism will be rewarded.

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**Chinese police raid religious school; 12 kids hurt**

By Alexa Olesen

(07.06.2012) - State media reported that staff at a religious school in heavily Muslim far western China set off explosives to fend off a police raid and that 12 children were burned. An overseas rights group, however, blamed tear gas used by paramilitary forces for the injuries.

The Tianshan news portal for the Xinjiang region said the 12 were hospitalized after the raid Wednesday, but didn't say how badly they were hurt. Three police and two of the three staff at the school in Hotan city also were injured, it said.

Dilxat Raxit, a spokesman for the German-based World Uyghur Congress, said the school was teaching the Quran and that paramilitary officers used tear gas on the children.

"Both sides were involved in a clash and then authorities used tear gas causing injuries on both sides," Dilxat said.

Calls to the Hotan Public Security Bureau rang unanswered. The Tianshan report said 54 children were at the school when police raided it.

The Global Times newspaper on Thursday quoted Xinjiang government spokesman Hou Hanmin as saying the children were between 6 and 10 years old and had been barred from seeing their parents. Hou said upset parents reported the school to police.

The report said the school was on the fifth floor of a residential building and that fire destroyed much of the floor.

China allows only a small number of licensed religious schools, mostly at the university level. The government has stepped up a campaign against illegal schools in Xinjiang, a sprawling region that borders Central Asia and is home to millions of largely Muslim ethnic Uighurs (pronounced WEE'-gurs) who say they have been marginalized by China's majority Han.

Last month, courts in Kashgar sentenced nine men to prison terms ranging between six to 15 years for their involvement with illegal religious schools or religious instruction.

The sentences were announced at three separate public hearings in Kashgar on May 31, the Kashgar Daily reported online. The heaviest sentence, a 15-year jail term, was handed down to Sadike Ku'erban for inciting separatism by spreading "extremist religious thought and inciting others to wage a holy war," the report said.

It said he ran a network of illegal "home schools" in four different parts of Xinjiang over 10 years that taught 86 students, including 16 under 14 years of age.

An official with the Kashgar Intermediate People's Court on Wednesday confirmed the trials took place but refused to provide any details. Like many Chinese bureaucrats, he would give only his surname, Zhang.

China allows different faiths to practice their religion but only in state-backed churches and mosques.

Many Uighurs resent Chinese rule and controls on their religion and culture, and the region has occasionally seen violent unrest.

In July 2009, rioting between Uighurs and Han Chinese killed nearly 200 people in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi. Uighur activists say the riots, which were followed by retaliatory attacks by members of China's majority Han ethnic group, were the result of decades of pent-up frustration with Chinese rule.

The government says it has vastly improved living standards in ethnic areas.

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## **China detains 100s in Tibet capital**

Beijing, China (31.05 2012) - Hundreds of people have been detained in Lhasa after two men set themselves on fire in the Tibetan regional capital on Sunday in protest against Chinese rule, a US-based broadcaster reported.

Radio Free Asia said Chinese security forces had rounded up hundreds of residents and pilgrims in the wake of the immolations, the first significant protest in the heavily guarded city since deadly anti-government riots in 2008.

It quoted a local source as saying about 600 Tibetans had been detained and those from outside the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) had been expelled.

At the time of the protest, Lhasa was filled with Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims who had travelled to the city to celebrate Saga Dawa - the anniversary of Buddha's birth.

The two protesters, who were both from outside the TAR, set themselves on fire in front of the famed Jokhang Temple, a popular pilgrimage destination in the centre of Lhasa.

Police immediately put out the flames and one of the two men survived, according to state news agency Xinhua. His current whereabouts are not known.

Sunday's incident was the first of its kind in the Tibetan capital, which has been under tight security since deadly anti-Chinese government riots broke out there in 2008.

Residents of Lhasa said the city was under even tighter security than usual following Sunday's protest, with police and paramilitary officers out in force.

### ***Identity checks***

One resident contacted by AFP on Monday said police were carrying out identity checks in the streets and that mobile telephone signals had been blocked.

Free Tibet, a London-based campaign group, also said it had received reports that Tibetan residents in Lhasa had been arbitrarily detained in the wake of the protest.

Tibetans have long chafed under China's rule over the vast Tibetan plateau, saying that Beijing has curbed religious freedoms and their culture is being eroded by an influx of Han Chinese, the country's main ethnic group.

Beijing insists that Tibetans enjoy religious freedom and have benefited from improved living standards brought on by China's economic expansion.

### ***Mother of three***

Meanwhile, AP reported on Thursday that a Tibetan mother of three has died in the latest in a recent wave of self-immolations to protest Chinese rule.

The woman set herself on fire outside a Buddhist monastery Wednesday afternoon in an ethnically Tibetan region of western Sichuan province.

She died at the scene, according to London-based Free Tibet and US government-backed broadcaster Radio Free Asia.

That would mark at least the 35th Tibetan self-immolation since March of last year to draw attention to China's restrictions on Buddhism and call for the return from exile of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

Chinese authorities have confirmed some of the self-immolations but not all.

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## **Government plans to eradicate house churches**

Compass Direct News (25.04.2012) – China's government is engaged in a three-phase campaign to eradicate Protestant house churches, according to a statement released Friday (April 20) by the China Aid Association (CAA). The government's strategy was clearly outlined in a document released last September during a training class for "Patriots in the Christian Community" run by the State Administration for Religious Affairs, according to an unnamed CAA source.

From January through June of this year, the document called for local authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of house churches nationwide and create dossiers on each of them. In phase two, for the following two to three years, authorities would strongly encourage unregistered churches to affiliate with the government-approved Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM); and in phase three, to be completed within 10 years, churches refusing to comply would be shut down, according to the CAA. Officials would also ban the words "house church" and all reports on house churches from websites and other media and replace the term with "house gatherings" – a term that would refer to groups meeting in sites affiliated with the TSPM.

In a recent random survey conducted by the CAA's source in several provinces, over 95 percent of house church leaders said they had already felt the impact of these investigations, while 85 percent said local religious affairs departments had already created a dossier for their group.

"Since the beginning of 2012, we have noticed an increase in the frequency of persecution," the CAA said in a press statement. "In addition to the continuing persecution of Shouwang Church in Beijing, the number of similar cases has risen 20 percent over last year and has spread into other areas, including Christian education, publication and bookstores."

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## **Wave of Tibet immolations among history's biggest**

By Gillian Wong

Associated Press (02.04.2012) - Dozens of Tibetans have set themselves on fire over the past year to protest Chinese rule, sometimes drinking kerosene to make the flames explode from within, in one of the biggest waves of political self-immolations in recent history.

But the stunning protests are going largely unnoticed in the wider world — due in part to a smothering Chinese security crackdown in the region that prevents journalists from covering them.

While a single fruit seller in Tunisia who lit himself on fire in December 2010 is credited with igniting the Arab Spring democracy movement, the Tibetan self-immolations have so far failed to prompt the changes the protesters demand: an end to government interference in their religion and a return of the exiled Dalai Lama.

Still, experts describe self-immolations as, historically, a powerful form of protest, and the ones in Tibet might yet lead to some broader uprising or stir greater international pressure on Beijing.

The Tibetan protesters have burned themselves in market places, main streets, military camps and other symbols of government authority in western China, mostly in a single remote county. Most of the protesters have been members of the Buddhist clergy. The latest were two monks, aged 21 and 22, on Friday.

"In scale, this is one of the biggest waves of self-immolation in the last six decades," said Oxford University sociologist Michael Biggs, who studies politically driven suicides. "Particularly that it's in one small area of China and in one small ethnic group, definitely, in terms of the intensity compared to the population, it seems to be much greater."

The pace of 32 self-immolations in little more than a year is more rapid than the suicide-by-fire protests that punctuated the Vietnam War and the pro-democracy movement in South Korea, experts say. It is surpassed only by the more than 100 students in India who burned themselves to protest a caste-based affirmative action proposal in 1990, Biggs said.

Shocking to most people's sensibilities, self-immolation is calculated, desperate and powerful, Biggs and other experts say. Its effects can be far-reaching, evoking sympathy in people unrelated to the cause and calling the like-minded to action.

For Buddhists, as most Tibetans are, burning the body is seen as a selfless act of sacrifice, especially in defense of religion, and it carries a resonant history.

In the 6th century, the Chinese monk, Dazhi, used a red-hot iron and a knife to burn and then peel the flesh from an arm then removed the bones and set them on fire to protest limits on the Buddhist community ordered by a Sui dynasty emperor, said James Benn, author of "Burning for the Buddha," a book about Buddhist self-immolation.

Sometimes the distinction is blurry between political protest and suicide. In Afghanistan, for example, self-immolation is a common way for women to commit suicide. Many self-immolations have been reported in Tunisia since fruit seller Mohammed Bouazizi's act, but experts say most of them were likely suicides for personal reasons, not protests.

As a modern protest tactic, fiery suicide was effectively invented by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who sat in a lotus position on a busy Saigon street in 1963, had other monks pour gasoline on him, then struck a match. Reporters had been called beforehand.

The monk was protesting the South Vietnamese government's discrimination against Buddhists and his act touched off anti-war sentiments in America and undermined support for the U.S.-backed regime.

"When someone stands up to violence in such a courageous way, a force for change is released," Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh later wrote about Duc's immolation in a book about nonviolent social change. "Accepting the most extreme kind of pain, he lit a fire in the hearts of people around the world."

So far, the Tibetan protesters have failed to get what they want.

Each immolation has prompted authorities to heighten the security that has smothered the area since an uprising against Chinese rule in 2008. The security cordon has kept journalists out. Searches of Tibetans and Internet and mobile phone service suspensions keep the message from spreading.

Without the graphic images of a person ablaze, the immolations have yet to produce an iconic symbol the world can latch onto.

Also, China's emergence as the world's second-largest economy and its growing diplomatic clout make it less likely that foreign governments throw any substantial weight for the Tibetan cause.

"There's a real sense that Thich Quang Duc and the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire in Saigon in 1963 were able to change American foreign policy and therefore bring down the government in South Vietnam," Biggs said. "But of course, there's no leverage that anybody in the West has over China that is comparable."

The protests are unlikely to sway a Chinese population that has come to associate the tactic with the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement after five of its members set themselves on fire on Tiananmen Square in 2001. China used the event — in which a woman and her 12-year-old daughter died — to support its claim that Falun Gong is an "evil cult" and justify a brutal crackdown.

The Chinese public, in any case, has little sympathy for Tibetan appeals. Many in the Han Chinese majority adhere to the government's position that Tibetan protesters want to split Tibet from China.

Still, in the Tibetan areas, the immolations have often been followed by mass demonstrations — underscoring the power the protest has in galvanizing a community.

In January, a 42-year-old monk named Sopa in Qinghai province drank kerosene and threw it over his body before setting himself alight. Radio Free Asia quoted a source as saying his "body exploded in pieces" before police took it away. Residents reportedly smashed the windows and doors of a local police station to get the body back, then paraded it through the streets in protest.

"Self-immolation is an extraordinarily effective psychological tactic," said John Horgan, a terrorism expert at Pennsylvania State University who is leading a project to compile a database of self-immolations in the world.

"Because self-immolation doesn't result in the killing of innocent bystanders, it is often characterized as an extremely noble gesture, borne out of frustration and helplessness," Horgan said.

Self-immolations don't have the same negative associations as suicide bombings, but tend to generate the same amount of publicity, Horgan said.

"When there's a really pervasive frustration and all options are used and not working, then self-immolation as a tactic or protest is taken seriously," said Ben Park, a Pennsylvania State University expert on self-immolations in South Korea between 1971 and 1993.

Park said around 70 people, many of them young rural migrants in the country's cities, set themselves on fire in protest against authoritarian rule in Korea over those two decades. "They don't want to die. They prefer living to death but they feel that they have to do it."

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## **A post-Communist managerial state and freedom of religion or belief**

By Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 News Service (20.03.12) - Violations of freedom of religion or belief in China have been widespread, persistent, and egregious. Recent widely-reported incidents have reinforced this view. Despite this, religious communities of all kinds have been growing rapidly. An answer to this puzzle lies in the fact that the Chinese Communist Party's attitude toward religion – and therefore towards the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief - has, to a large extent, reflected the views of the modern Chinese elite and the Communist state's institutional predecessors that religious beliefs have been impediments to modernisation. This has led to a political approach that could be characterised as managerial, which allows the state to retain the will and power to control religious communities.

The managerial approach that one can observe in China is more practical and flexible than an ideologically-oriented one in that the state does not view the eradication of religious beliefs as the ultimate political end. This leaves room for religious communities to manoeuvre and even grow. In this respect, the future of religious freedom in China is not necessarily bleak.

### **A picture of contrasts**

On 9 February two Tibetan Buddhist monks were killed in Sichuan Province by Chinese security forces for their participation in a 23 January protest against China's rule over Tibet, Radio Free Asia reported. A day before the killing, another Tibetan monk attempted a self-immolation in Qinghai province for the same reason. On 17 March, a Tibetan farmer became the most recent case of self-immolation. This brought to 29 the number of Tibetans known to have attempted self-immolation over the past year, of which 21 are known to have died, according to FreeTibet.org. Many were monks, former monks or nuns.

Meanwhile, Dossiertibet reported on 11 February that hundreds of Tibetans were held in Lhasa after they returned in January from attending a religious gathering in India. Even more recently, according to Human Rights Watch, the Chinese government has changed its management policy with respect to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Effective January 2012, instead of employing "loyal" Tibetan monks, the state would appoint government officials to manage those monasteries.

While the Tibetan Buddhists struggled, the Chinese Protestants were facing their own challenges. As a result of government intervention, the capital Beijing's Shouwang Church has continued to be deprived of access to a permanent physical home. In the

process, church members have been subjected to police arrests and other forms of harassment as they tried to assemble for worship outdoors. Even foreign Protestant Christians seemed unable to avoid the government's repressive measures. According to the China Aid Association, a Canadian businesswoman of Chinese descent was kidnapped and denied food and water for two days by Chinese security agents in January 2012 after visiting the leader of Shouwang and a house church in Shanxi Province.

By most accounts, the attitude of the Chinese Communist Party to religious freedom has not changed in recent years. Violations of religious freedom have persisted alongside other human rights violations. Amnesty International, for example, wrote in its 2011 report: "The Chinese government responded to a burgeoning civil society by jailing and persecuting people for peacefully expressing their views, holding religious beliefs not sanctioned by the state, advocating for democratic reform and human rights, and defending the rights of others." Similarly, Human Rights Watch stated in its 2011 report: "China continues to be an authoritarian one-party state that imposes sharp curbs on freedom of expression, association, and religion."

Yet, while the Chinese government and its agents perpetrate these religious freedom violations, religions in China have experienced growth and vitality that have not been seen for decades. In addition to the extraordinary growth in the number of religious believers, religious venues and activities have been highly visible.

Protestant churches across China are packed with worshippers on a regular basis. The enormous state-permitted Beijing Haidian Christian Church, located in the heart of China's Silicon Valley, is filled wall-to-wall each Sunday with worshippers. Forum 18 has on one occasion witnessed a member of the church staff passing out leaflets about the church's services to pedestrians in the busy commercial area surrounding the church. Shanghai's famed Community Church, which is located in the area known among foreigners as the old French Concession, has routinely witnessed a large number of participants in its Sunday worship services. Many have to sit in the church's courtyard due to the lack of seating inside the sanctuary. Even unofficial churches have been packed with people. Forum 18 has attended one such house church in Beijing's Haidian District.

The Christian community has not been the only Chinese religious community that has experienced tremendous growth. For example, Forum 18 has visited Buddhist temples across China, from Beijing to Chongqing, which is China's largest city with nearly 30 million residents extended over more than 80,000 square kilometres (31,000 square miles). Whether incense burning has been sustained (*xianghuo wang*) has commonly been perceived as an indicator of the vibrancy of a Buddhist temple. By this measure, Chinese Buddhist temples have achieved tremendous vibrancy. The throngs of people who visit those Buddhist sites to offer prayers and consult Buddhist monks further attest to Buddhism's popularity in China.

The self-immolations by Buddhist monks and other Tibetans, and the experience of the Shouwang Christian Church have demonstrated the ongoing limits to religious freedom in China, even as religious communities have at the same time been vibrant and growing. As the state and its agents have been the primary perpetrators of religious freedom violations, these contrasting situations suggest a need for a deeper understanding about the Chinese Communist state and its attitude toward religion.

### **A managerial state**

An understanding of the development of the Chinese Communist state's religious policies must recognise that its attitude toward religion has, to a large extent, reflected the views of the modern Chinese elite and the Communist state's institutional predecessors. Put simply, since the middle of the 19th century, Chinese thinkers and members of the

political elite have been disdainful towards religion and religious believers. The elite has consistently seen religion, or "superstitions" as they characterised religious beliefs, as the obstacle to China's modernisation. In their eyes, spiritual beliefs have made China less resistant against the onslaught of modern Western countries and less capable of adopting new technologies and associated ideas and practices to face western colonisation of China.

Chinese Communist leaders have been no different. The earliest Chinese Communist leaders were direct ideological descendants of the non-Communist Chinese modernisers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For the Chinese Communist leaders, including Mao Zedong, the most important priority was to modernise China and turn it into an advanced country that could compete effectively against the Western colonisers. In a related fashion, just as China needed to undergo modernisation, it was also necessary for it to become truly independent vis-a-vis foreign, notably Western, governments. Anything that stood in the way of achieving this objective should be removed.

This perspective has resulted in pragmatic – in terms of the elite's understanding – state behaviour toward religions and religious believers. On the one hand, the Communist state engaged in systematic repression of religions and religious believers. For example, soon after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the Communist state engaged in a systematic effort to wipe out indigenous spiritual beliefs, because they were perceived to be associated with local traditions that had hindered development progress. Likewise, the state systematically repressed and co-opted foreign religions, notably Christianity, in an effort to remove any channels through which hostile foreign forces could overturn the newly-established Communist regime and the socio-economic system that it was trying to create.

On the other hand, the Chinese Communist state has allowed religions and religious practices to continue in regions populated by ethnic minorities. The official reason for this approach was that religious beliefs and practices constituted the cultural core for many ethnic minorities. So to adhere to its policy of allowing ethnic minorities greater autonomy, the state allowed religions to continue in ethnic minority regions. To put it more bluntly and in practical terms, the Chinese Communists allowed religions in ethnic minority communities, because the state did not have the capacity to eradicate them without causing such an enormous disaster. In other words, the Chinese Communists were very pragmatic.

The Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 represented the peak of ideological fury in Communist China. During this period religious communities and believers were driven underground. However, the Cultural Revolution was not the end of the Chinese Communist experience. Indeed, one can now see that the Cultural Revolution represented an unusual period in the short history of the Chinese Communist state.

Pragmatism returned with the reform era, when China's political leaders made a conscious decision to set aside ideological considerations and return to the task of modernising the country. Following the state's recent emphasis on "social management" as the key political task, the Chinese Communist state has become a "managerial state". Reflecting this shift in the state's primary political interest, since the beginning of the 21st Century, Chinese Communist leaders have emphasised the importance of maintaining social stability, even when such a policy approach could harm the nation's modernisation.

Ideological rhetoric has not and will not disappear completely in China. Echoing other senior Chinese political leaders, Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun of the Communist Party's United Front Department stated in December 2011 that communism and religion are incompatible and that members of the Communist Party must disavow religious beliefs.

Such statements are interesting for many reasons, one of which is that they clearly indicate that members of the Communist Party have been following religious beliefs.

In a series of writings that culminated in the book entitled *Democracy Without Accountability*, China scholar Lily Tsai has noted that local Party officials have participated in local religious practices and even adopted religious beliefs. Over the past ten years, reports have circulated inside and outside China that Protestant Christians have been working at the highest level of Chinese government. In addition, many practitioners of the spiritual movement Falun Gong were apparently senior members of the Chinese military and the Chinese government. In fact, Falun Gong's founder had originally received state support for his organisation and activities. In other words, the Falun Gong movement and other qigong (philosophical and health) movements were promoted by the Communist state.

It remains to be seen what impact religious belief among officials may have on the view held by Chinese political elites since the 19th century that religion is "superstition" and a barrier to modernisation. Similarly, it is not clear to what extent official thinking has reflected the view of the Chinese elite. Yet, a change in this elite view could have a very positive impact on the future of freedom of religion or belief and interlinked human rights in China.

In contrast to statements such as those by Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun, other senior Chinese political leaders have made very different statements. For example, Hu Jintao, the President of China, has reportedly stated that religions could contribute to social stability. And Wen Jiabao, the head of the Cabinet, was reported in February to have emphasised the need to protect the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists when meeting the state-approved Panchen Lama.

It is wise to be hesitant before making a blanket assertion that all official statements hostile to freedom of religion or belief, such as Zhu's, are merely rhetoric. There are die-hard ideologues in China arguing for the need to eradicate religion, but they are a dying breed. But Zhu is probably not one of them, since his statement was followed by the argument that allowing Communist Party members to adhere to religions harms the Party's organisational integrity – a pragmatic, not an ideological, argument. Zhu was primarily, if not solely, concerned about the negative effects that religious belief could have on Party members' esprit de corps. As a senior Party official, and a leader of the top Party agency with jurisdiction over religious affairs, Zhu's public statement was probably carefully vetted and so may provide a good idea of the Party-state's current view.

### **The Chinese managerial state and freedom of religion or belief**

The Chinese Communist state has gained considerable fame for its role in leading China's economic transformation. In following this path, the state has not been guided by its proclaimed Communist ideology. Virtually every Chinese citizen Forum 18 has met in China, including government officials, have when these matters have been discussed said: "No one believes in Communism anymore in China." This defining characteristic of the Chinese Communist state's contemporary approach follows its inheritance from non-Communist Chinese modernisers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

What happened to religious freedom in the early years of the People's Republic was the consequence of a modernising non-democratic state guided by a long-held elite view of religion as "superstition", but which had a limited capacity to effect systemic changes. In that context, the state had allowed religion to continue when it had no power to change the status quo. But where religion and religious believers were seen as a barrier to state initiatives, then the state took action to serve its own ends. Marxist ideological rhetoric against religion has been at its most prominent when elite political struggles have seen an attack on religion as useful in serving the goals of political factions.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist state has shed almost all its Marxist ideological baggage. Its central concern has been the modernisation of the country, and, perhaps even more importantly, remaining in power. The state sees the precondition for this as the maintenance of social and political stability. Therefore, religious communities, religious believers, and religious practices have been allowed to exist and even grow so long as they do not impede the state's goal of modernising the country while ensuring the continuing rule of the Communist Party.

This approach has recently been seen when the State Administration for Religious Affairs, along with the Communist Party's United Front Department, the State Council's Development and Reform Commission, and other relevant state agencies, announced in late February a new policy regarding religious groups' involvement in charitable activities.

On the one hand, Chinese religious groups were encouraged to establish foundations and non-profit organisations to serve the needs of the society and its members. This reflects the state's recognition that religious groups can contribute positively to social development and so assist the government. On the other hand, religious groups were warned against sharing their beliefs while engaging in charitable activities, and engaging in activities that would "destroy social order, harm the physical health of Chinese citizens," and behaving in such a way that would "harm the national interest [and] the public interest of the society". The state has a continuing concern about foreign connections, so religious groups engaged in charitable activities "must not be controlled by foreign forces and must not receive foreign aid, contributions, and offers of collaboration that involve [pre-determined] political and religious conditions".

The Chinese managerial state retains the will and power to control religious believers and communities, and this may be a source of pessimism about the future of religious freedom. Indeed, many may dispute the notion that China is a managerial state. However, this managerial state is more practical and flexible than an ideologically-oriented state, as can be seen by contrasting the China of the Cultural Revolution with today's China. And there is within it much room for religious communities to manoeuvre and even grow.

In the current context, political limits to freedom of religion or belief remain in China. But within those limits religious believers and communities have the opportunity to grow and spread their influence. Therefore, the future of religious freedom in China is not necessarily bleak.

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## **Monks prefer to abandon their monasteries rather than remain under the regime's control**

AsiaNews (14.03.12) - Chinese authorities forcibly closed a number of Buddhist monasteries in Nagchu Prefecture (Tibet Autonomous Region). In order to stop anti-Chinese protests, they have sent in 'work teams' to seize the monasteries and transfer rights and authority over them to the Chinese government even though these facilities are privately-owned. Because China's Communist rulers are imposing ever-tighter controls, monks are opting to abandon their monasteries.

Late last month, one such 'work team' visited the monasteries of Taklung and Choelung as part of the central government's attempt to stop self-immolation by Buddhist monks, as 28 have already done. Once inside the monasteries, officials tallied all of their assets and ordered the monks not to conduct any transaction without official approval.

In both places, officials organised 'patriotic re-education', i.e. brain-washing sessions to turn dissidents away from their fight.

When one of the monks asked the officials whether such a practice did not violate religious freedom as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution, he was ignored. However, this led the monks to leave the facilities. Eventually, the same thing was repeated in Bekar, Drong-na, Rabten and Roggyen. After a re-education session, the monasteries were closed for lack of monks.

Given the turn of events, the authorities have tried to get the religious back into the monasteries, ordering civilians not to give them refuge or shelter.

In Layok, village chief Soegyam was sacked for disobeying the order. In explaining his action, he told government officials that the monks do not want to live under constant suffering and surveillance.

On the other hand, the local population reacted to the monks' departure with great concern, fearful that people might not receive the religious and spiritual assistance the monasteries usually provide.

In Layok, hundreds met to call on the government to change its decision. Demonstrators said that the dead could not be buried without the monks performing the necessary rituals. Communist officials responded by telling them to bring the dead and the money so that they could do the job.

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## **Campaign of persecution against underground Church**

IRPP (28.02.2012) - Chinese police have launched a bitter campaign of persecution against underground Catholic communities in Inner Mongolia. Within weeks, several priests were arrested, others have had to hide to avoid being captured, dozens of communities throughout the territory have no opportunity to participate in the sacraments, and many priests are forced to undergo brainwashing sessions on religious policy, while the seminary has been closed. According to AsiaNews sources in the region, the escalation is due to the general political situation, in an attempt to ensure security ahead of the first important meeting of the National Assembly, scheduled for March 5 next, during which the succession to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, respectively president and prime minister will be decided. But there are also conflicts within the community, linked to the ambiguity of the official bishop, Msgr. Paul Meng Qinglu, approved by the Holy See, but vice-president of the Patriotic Assembly, an organization deemed "to be incompatible with Catholic doctrine."

The underground Catholic community of the Diocese of Suiyuan (Inner Mongolia) counts about 30 thousand faithful with 35 priests and 90 nuns. For a long time, almost 20 years, the community flourished thanks to the general disinterest of the authorities who placed no obstacles as long as the faithful met discreetly in private homes or small buildings.

On 30 January, six priests were arrested at a rally (see 02/02/2012: No news about five underground priests arrested in Inner Mongolia). Among them the rector of the underground seminary, Fr. Joseph Ban Zhanxiong, whose seminary was closed on February 14. All students were forced to return home.

On 31 January the diocesan administrator, Fr. Gao Jiangping, was arrested along with another priest.

The nearly 30 priests who remained free have all gone into hiding to avoid being imprisoned. Since last Sunday, February 19, the faithful have not been able to participate in any celebration to avoid the priests being forced from their hiding, given the large presence of security forces.

Meanwhile, four of the priests arrested Jan. 30, were released, but they are forced every day to report to the police and are subjected to indoctrination sessions on the religious policy of the government, akin to brainwashing.

They were also forced to concelebrate a Mass in the presence of the official bishop of Hohhot, Msgr. Meng, and two other priests of the official community. Sources told AsiaNews that the two priests were dragged to concelebrate against their will, "and were physically present, but not praying, not even moving a finger."

The underground community and the Diocese of Suiyuan does not exist according to Chinese government: on the orders of political authorities, its ecclesiastical territory was absorbed by the diocese of Hohhot in the 1980s. The official community consists of about 2 thousand faithful since April 2010 and has a bishop, Msgr. Paul Meng Qinglu, recognized by the government and the Holy See. At his ordination, Msgr. Meng had hoped for a reconciliation with the underground community. But he later participated in the illicit ordination in Chengde (see 20/11/2010 Chengde, eight bishops in communion with Pope participate in illicit ordination) and was appointed vice-president of the Patriotic National (09/12 / 2010 Assembly elects new leadership, causing major harm to the Church). So far it is unclear if after all these gestures he has asked for forgiveness and to be reconciled with the Holy See.

Given the ambiguity of his position, many underground priests prefer not to join the official community and ask questions of the Vatican, which on the one hand, states that the Patriotic Association is "incompatible" with Catholic doctrine (because it wants to build a Church independent of Rome), while on the other, the Holy See accepts the compromise that a bishop linked to the pope participate, moreover in a position of great responsibility, in the same organism.

Some priests of Inner Mongolia say Msgr. Meng is increasingly becoming "political" and following the directions of the Patriotic Association. For others, however, is the government who wants to wipe out the underground community to have a greater control over the entire situation.

The need for greater control is derived from two facts. At the provincial level, last year in Inner Mongolia riots have broken out led by shepherds against mining policy of the government, which pollutes and destroys the land and pastures. Nationally, there is the need for total control for the upcoming meeting of the National Assembly to be held in Beijing in early March. On this occasion, the succession to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao should be clear, with the passing of the baton to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang. Because of this, the regime is cracking down on dissidents, stifling riots, destroying the resistance in Tibet and Xinjiang. And those who also pay are the Catholics (and Protestants) of Inner Mongolia.

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## **Chinese Muslims clash with police over mosque**

Worldwide Religious News (03.01.12) - Hundreds of Muslims in a northwestern China village trying to prevent the demolition of their mosque clashed with police, causing several deaths, Hong Kong media and residents said on Tuesday.

Fighting between police and members of the largely Muslim Hui ethnic group broke out on Friday in Ningxia region, adjacent to Inner Mongolia province, after authorities declared their newly built mosque illegal, the South China Morning Post said.

Hundreds of residents in Taoshan village confronted police armed with teargas, truncheons and knives, the newspaper said.

A Taoshan resident told Reuters he was away at the time of the clash, but that his relatives in the town believed five people, including one of their relatives, had been killed.

The resident, Jin Haitao, said villagers believed the dead included another two elderly woman, a young man and two people from nearby areas.

Residents of nearby areas complained that telephone links with Taoshan had been cut, making it impossible to verify what had happened.

"They were just trying to hold a religious activity but the authorities would not allow it. They demolished the mosque and now they've covered over the ground, because there was so much blood on the ground," Jin said.

A man who answered the telephone at a police station in the nearby town of Hexi said an incident had occurred with Hui protesters, but he gave no details. Calls to the public security bureau in nearby Tongxin county went unanswered.

### ***Sporadic Unrest***

A small business owner in Tongxin, three km (two miles) from the mosque site, told Reuters that the village had been sealed off.

"It's ridiculous, I am a Muslim, and Muslims need a mosque. They are just ordinary people, coming together for religious purposes, not to overthrow Communist Party rule," the man said.

China has experienced sporadic unrest among its Muslim minorities, most notably involving the Uighurs, a Turkic language-speaking people native to the country's western Xinjiang region.

There are about 10 million Hui in China, making them the country's largest Muslim group. In many parts of China, the Hui have blended in with the predominant Han Chinese culture, all but abandoning Islam except for some traditions, such as circumcising male children and avoiding pork.

But ethnic tension has led to some unrest. At least seven people were killed in the central province of Henan in 2004 after a car accident involving an ethnic Han Chinese and a Hui sparked rioting.

In 1993, a cartoon ridiculing Muslims led to police storming a mosque taken over by Hui in northwestern China.

Uighurs in Xinjiang rioted against Han Chinese residents in 2009 and at least 197 people were killed, according to official estimates.

China's ruling Communist Party says it protects freedom of religion, but it maintains a tight grip on religious activities and allows only officially recognized religious institutions to operate.

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## **Chinese authorities again deny facility to Shouwang Church**

### ***Outdoor worship, arrests resume***

By Sarah Page

Compass Direct News (03.01.12) – Authorities in China again thwarted efforts by Shouwang Church to lease a worship facility at the year’s end, and the Beijing congregation again met outdoors on Sunday (Jan. 1) – resulting in the arrest of 48 members, sources said.

“The church tried three times to rent three different venues, but it was all to no avail because of the authorities’ intervention,” a source close to the church told Compass. “On Dec. 17, Shouwang signed a rental contract with a landlord for its new indoor worship venue. Two days later, the church’s books and some other belongings were moved into the new rented space.”

In the days that followed, however, the landlord terminated the contract due to pressure from “the local police station, the housing management office and leaders of various government agencies,” church leaders announced to members on Dec. 23.

Church leaders had initially arranged to have an indoor meeting on Sunday (Jan. 1) in a room they had leased from the Beijing Parkview Wuzhou Hotel on Dec. 17, according to a post on Shouwang’s Facebook page. But due to police interference and the cancellation of the lease, they moved to Plan B – a continuation of the outdoor worship services held every Sunday since April 10.

Shouwang began meeting outdoors last year after authorities blocked their attempts to rent worship venues or use a building they had purchased. Church leaders had hoped the situation would change early in the new year.

“The outdoor worship service has come to an end,” Shouwang had announced on its Facebook page. “We first want to offer our thanksgiving to God ... We also pray that God will continue to open a way for us.”

The post also described how the church had recently signed three leases with landlords in Zhongguancun, the area where the church has worshiped since it was founded, but that all three were revoked.

### ***New Year Arrests***

Police detained at least 48 church members who gathered for outdoor worship on Sunday (Jan. 1), releasing 40 of them by midnight, Shouwang’s governing committee stated on its Facebook page.

Early on the morning of Dec. 25, church members had arrived at Zhongguancun square only to find it heavily guarded with industrial-strength rails blocking access, the committee reported. Police arrested 41 Christians who attempted to worship at the square, releasing all but one by midnight. The final detainee was released at 3 p.m. on Dec. 26.

During the 38 weeks of outdoor worship in 2011, police detained almost 1,000 church members and held many more under house arrest, according to the committee.

One church member who shared his testimony on the Facebook page on Dec. 26 said that the Christians detained indoors usually felt sorry for those waiting outside in the cold as they were able to "read books and have fellowship in a warm room." But on Christmas Day an officer interrogated him, taunting him for being afraid to give his home address and threatening to "hold you for more than 10 days so that you will lose your job. I will find out where you live and force you to move."

"As for my job, no one can fire me if God does not allow it," the church member wrote. He also advised other church members, "How long they detain you has nothing to do with whether you cooperate with them or not, just as God's love for you has nothing to do with what you do. So do not be afraid, and be brave in speaking out as the Holy Spirit guides you."

His advice was timely as Shouwang church plans to continue meeting outdoors until a more permanent solution is found, and officials seem just as determined to stop them.

"By arbitrarily detaining peaceful religious believers in the capital city on the first day of 2012, Beijing authorities show that they are determined to continue their crackdown on independent religious groups in the coming year," China Aid Association President Bob Fu stated on Sunday (Jan. 1).

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## **48 Chinese Christians detained New Year's Day**

Baptist Press (03.01.12) - Beijing authorities detained 48 members of a large persecuted house church on New Year's Day, marking a total of more than 1,000 church members who have been taken into police custody during the church's 38 weeks of attempting to hold outdoor worship services.

"By arbitrarily detaining peaceful religious believers in the capital city on the first day of 2012, Beijing authorities show that they are determined to continue their crackdown on independent religious groups in the coming year," Bob Fu, president of China Aid, said.

"In defiance of universal values and in violation of its own laws and constitution, which guarantees religious freedom, China's communist leaders are walking further down the road of the wrong side of history," said Fu, a former Beijing house pastor who was imprisoned for his beliefs.

Among those taken into custody Jan. 1, 30 were believed to have been released by 10 p.m. and the remainder were held overnight at various police stations across the city, China Aid said. Many other church members had been kept under house arrest beginning Friday, the watchdog group said.

Shouwang Church began meeting outdoors in April after being evicted from its rented meeting space and after authorities prevented the church from gathering in a portion of an office building it had purchased.

The church tried three times to rent three different venues, but Beijing authorities have ordered landlords not to rent to them, China Aid said.

Police arrest the Christians before the services even start and typically free them within 24 hours. China's Domestic Security Protection Squad has maintained constant

surveillance outside the homes of senior church leaders, while police have camped outside the doors of other church members from Saturday night until noon Sunday, when service times technically are over, according to China Aid.

Compass Direct News Service reported that early on Christmas morning church members arrived at a public square only to find it heavily guarded with industrial-strength rails blocking access. Police arrested 41 believers who attempted to worship at the site that day, Compass said.

On the church's Facebook page, one church member said Christians who were detained indoors usually felt sorry for those waiting outside in the cold as they were able to "read books and have fellowship in a warm room," Compass reported.

The Facebook post explained that the believer was interrogated on Christmas Day with an officer taunting him for being afraid to give his home address and threatening to hold him long enough for the man to lose his job, Compass said.

Despite the ongoing persecution and winter weather, Shouwang Church leaders say they plan to continue meeting outdoors until a solution is reached.

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