

Chinese Christian Bookstore Owner Released

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A Chinese Christian bookstore owner and two-dozen people associated with his case were released on bail Jan. 4, according to China Aid Association (CAA). Chinese officials have decided against a trial for Shi Weihan, dismissing criminal charges against him.

In late November, Weihan, 37, was arrested in his bookstore near the Olympics Village in Beijing along with his younger brother and his wife, Jin Zhang, who were released after questioning, CAA said.

Weihan and the others were charged with illegal printing and distribution of Christian literature. According to Chinese law, a formal arrest warrant must be issued or the accused must be released after 37 days of administrative detention. Chinese authorities were unable to proceed with charges against Weihan due to "insufficient evidence," CAA said.

Meanwhile, Zhou Heng, a house church leader in Xinjiang who was arrested Aug. 31 for receiving three tons of "illegally printed" Bibles, remains in jail despite being arraigned on the same charges as Weihan, CAA said.

Worship in China, which is atheist, is allowed only in party-controlled churches, and organizers of home churches face harassment, arrest and terms in labor camps or prison. Though Christian retailers can now legally operate, they are prohibited from selling Bibles.