

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

Please provide information about the Roman Catholic underground church and how it is viewed by the authorities in:

- 1. Nanping, Fuqing City, Fujian Province from 2001 to date; and**
- 2. Tongshan County, Xianning area, Hubei Province, from October 2003 to date.**

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine
UNHCR *REFWORLD* UNHCR Refugee Information Online

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue <i>Jesus in Beijing</i> <i>China's Christian Millions</i> <i>Operation World: 21st Century Edition</i>

RESPONSE

Please provide information about the Roman Catholic underground church and how it is viewed by the authorities in:

1. Nanping, Fuqing City, Fujian Province from 2001 to date.

The sources consulted indicate in that Fujian province, as in the rest of China, there is an official Catholic church called the Catholic Patriotic Association, which owes its allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party; as well as an “underground” or “unregistered” Catholic church which maintains its allegiance to the Vatican. The underground church has suffered crackdowns and arrests from time to time over the years. Fujian has generally been regarded as one of the areas of China that applied regulations on religion more liberally than others, but some recent sources indicate that that there has been an increase in restrictions there. The following reports examine the situation of Catholics in Fujian province and/or Fuqing City, but no material was found on Nanping specifically.

The May 2005 report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom states in its section on China:

The government...continues its repression of the unregistered Roman Catholic Church in China, which maintains its allegiance to the Vatican. There are at least 20 Catholic bishops or priests under arrest, imprisoned or detained, including Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been in prison, in detention, under house arrest, or under strict surveillance since the 1970s. **Clergy in Hebei, Fujian, and Heilongjiang provinces were harassed, detained and arrested during the past year.** In October 2003, Hebei provincial officials reportedly arrested 12 Catholic priests and seminarians attending a religious retreat. In August 2004, Bishop Gao Kexian dies of unknown causes in a prison where he had been since 1997. In September 2004, the Vatican issued a statement condemning the arrest of eight priests and two seminarians during a religious gathering in Hebei. In April 2005, one week after the death of Pope John Paul II, authorities in Hebei arrested a bishop and two priests, reportedly for their continued refusal to register with the Patriotic Catholic Church (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2005, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May <http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2005annualRpt.pdf#page=1> – Accessed 20 October 2005 – Attachment 1).

A recent RRT research response looks at the situation of Catholics in Fuqing and in Fujian. It states that there are thought to be between 200,000 and 400,000 Catholics in Fujian (this includes members of both registered and unregistered churches), which has a population of about 34,300,000. There are about 150,000 Christians of all denominations in Fuqing. This response also looks at the archbishop of Fuzhou diocese in Fujian, named Shudao Yang: his life and history, the years he spent in prison between 1955 and 1981, and several subsequent arrests and periods of detention (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17483*, 29 August – Attachment 2).

An older RRT response dates from December 2002 and contains more details information on Catholics in Fujian. Question 2 discusses Christians in general in Fujian, including references to Catholics specifically. It quotes sources such as the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada and DFAT, which indicate that most of the Catholic churches in Fujian are not affiliated with the Catholic Patriotic Association and remain loyal to the Vatican, and that there is a higher degree of tolerance towards unregistered churches in Fujian than in some other provinces. However, a chronology is included of official harassment of churches and clergy between 1999 and 2002, and this includes some reports of raids on underground Catholic churches and detention of clerics. Question 3 looks specifically at Changle City in Fujian, which has a large number of Catholics, mostly belonging to unregistered churches. There had been a number of raids, church demolitions and arrests of Catholic priests and

bishops in the area (RRT Country Research 2002, *RRT Research Response CHN15645*, 23 December – Attachment 3).

The following reports on Catholics in Fujian date from the last three years.

A July 2005 report on the appointment of a new bishop in Shaanxi states:

News of Dang's appointment was undermined by a report from the Cardinal Joseph Kung Foundation that priest Lin Daixian, 40, nine parishioners and a seminarian were hauled in by police in the southeast province of Fujian.

The Connecticut-based religious freedom group said police burst in as mass was being celebrated in a private home in Pingtan on July 25.

It said "police beat savagely the parishioners who tried in vain to prevent the arrest of Father Lin" and that many suffered broken bones and teeth as well as injuries to the head that caused severe swelling.

Police refused to comment ('China appoints new bishop as police arrest underground priest' 2005, *Agence France Presse*, 29 July – Attachment 4).

A recent *Gospel Post* article on the same incident makes the interesting point that in this incident, and in similar recent raids in other provinces, it is the local authorities, not the central government, who have been responsible for implementing official policy on religion. They enjoy a wide latitude, and "anecdotal accounts suggest that local authorities have perpetrated religious freedom violations to serve the financial and political interests of local officials." It goes on:

This is a consequence of the policy of decentralisation in the post-Mao era, which is characterised by economic reform. This policy encourages local authorities to take the initiative in promoting economic development in their areas, so reducing their dependence for constant guidance on a resource-poor central government. At the same time, the career progress of local officials is based on how successful they are in achieving economic development (Hornemann, Magda 2005, 'China: Is central or local government responsible for religious freedom violations', *The Gospel Post*, 5 September

<http://www.gospelpost.com/article/editorial/246/section/china.is.central.or.local.government.responsible.for.religious.freedom.violations/1.htm> - Accessed 21 October 2005 – Attachment 5).

An August 2005 report describes the death at 88 of Xie Shinguang, the bishop of the diocese of Mingdong in Fujian. He had served four separate prison terms during his life, totalling 28 years, and "according to the Vatican was kept under surveillance by the authorities until his death". His diocese was said to number 75,000 followers ('Underground Chinese bishop dies' 2005, *BBC News Online*, 28 August – Attachment 6).

A 2005 list of Christian prisoners in China by the Open Doors group mentions that Zhang Ruipin, an underground Catholic priest from Fuzhou in Fujian was arrested in 12 April 2003 ('Christian prisoners list' 2005, *Open Doors*, January – Attachment 7).

A July 2002 news report states that "thirty Roman Catholic worshippers, including 25 children, were detained for holding an illegal summer vacation church service in southeastern China's Fujian province, police officials and a US-based religious group said Sunday". The article goes on to state that the government crackdown on unregistered churches seemed to have intensified recently: "in May, two unofficial Catholic churches in Fujian province were

razed by the police, while last year, authorities flattened five large churches in Changle and nearby Fuqing city” (‘30 Catholics in southeastern China detained for underground services’ 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 21 July – Attachment 8).

A May 2002 report gives further details about the two churches torn down in Changle city. The churches were “relatively small, with 40 to 50 regular parishioners each”, and they were demolished using bulldozers. The five churches torn down the previous year in Changle and Fuqing were larger, each having about 2500 for Sunday services. 20 to 30 priests from the churches were detained for about 10 days. A priest commented that there seemed to be a crackdown underway, and that four or five other churches had been demolished in 2000 (‘Unofficial Catholic churches demolished in south China: report’ 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 21 May – Attachment 9).

Two older reports from the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board are included as they provide useful background material on Christians in Fujian:

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, ‘Catholicism in Fujian’ in *CHN33598.EX – China: Catholic Church and Catholicism in China; treatment of Catholics; relations between the underground and open Churches; differences between Catholic worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the underground Church and the open Church; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 27 January <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/ndp/ref/?action=view&doc=chn33598ex> – Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 10.
- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *CHN33002.EX - China: Freedom of religious practice and belief in Fujian province*, 8 October http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=6&cid=50 – Accessed 25 August 2005 – Attachment 11.

2. Tongshan County, Xianning area, Hubei Province, from October 2003 to date.

Among the sources consulted, no material was found relating specifically to Catholics in Tongshan County or Xianning area. The following reports are about Catholics in Hubei province. There was not as much material available on Hubei as on Fujian; however, some reports were found that indicate that there have been some arrests of clergy over the past two years.

It has been estimated that 0.3% of the population in Hubei province (60,653,000) are Catholic [about 181,959: this includes members of both registered and unregistered churches]. Protestants and house churches total about 2% (Johnstone, Patrick & Mandryk, Jason 2001, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*, Paternoster Lifestyle, 6th ed, Cumbria, p.173 – Attachment 12).

An October 2005 news reports describes the death of the underground Catholic bishop of Hanyang, a city in Hubei. Bishop Zhang, who died at 90 years of age, had spent 24 years in prison and labour camps from 1955 until 1979 for his refusal to renounce the pope (‘Zhang Bairen; died Oct.12; Catholic bishop jailed 24 years for defying China’ 2005, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 16 October – Attachment 13).

A story on Bishop Zhang's funeral is of interest, as it states that he would be buried by priests of both the official church and the underground church, and that a public funeral was authorized for him by the provincial government of Hubei ('Funeral authorized for Chinese underground bishop' 2005, *Global Catholic News*, 14 October http://www.catholic.net/global_catholic_news/template_news.phtml?news_id=78295&channel_id=2 – Accessed 21 October 2005 - Attachment 14).

A 2005 article from the online *Journal of Church and State* states of recent events in China:

Police arrested Monsignor Julius Jia Zhiguo of the underground Catholic Church of Zhengding (Hubei Province) on 5 January 2005. Zhiguo became a bishop in 1980 and has often been in prison or under house arrest. He was arrested six times in 2004, provoking a protest from the Vatican. ('China' 2005, *Journal of Church and State*, Volume 47, Number 2, Spring. http://www3.baylor.edu/Church_State/journ2005Spring.htm - Accessed 21 October 2005 - Attachment 15).

A 2003 article from the John Mark Ministries web site states that there had been several arrests of Catholic clergy in the city of Baoding in Hubei:

CHINESE POLICE ARREST PRIEST FROM UNDERGROUND CATHOLIC CHURCH In a further sign of an apparent increased crackdown on dissidents and active Christians, China detained a Roman Catholic priest after holding a secret Christmas mass, reported the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation. Rev. Dong Yingmu, 37, was captured on his way to hold a Christmas mass, but his imprisonment only came to light recently. Foundation President Joseph Kung said the priest was picked up in Baoding, a city in the central province of Hubei that has a large underground church. "He had finished one secret mass and was on his way to conduct another when the police detained him," he said. China allows only state-monitored worship, and underground Catholics are frequently arrested and harassed. **Vatican officials say that more than 50 underground Chinese Catholic bishops or priests have been detained or live under house arrest or police surveillance in Baoding. Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported that two bishops and eight other priests belonging to the underground Catholic diocese of Baoding are being held in various prisons and labor camps.** News about Yingmu's detention came shortly after 55-year-old democracy activist Wang Bingzhang, a Chinese citizen with U.S. residency status, was sentenced Monday, Feb. 10, to life in prison on what his friends say are false charges of spying for Taiwan between 1982 and 1990 and setting up a terrorist network. The Chinese government denies that the sentence violates freedom of religion and expression of political opinions. (Assist News Service/CSW) 'Chinese police arrest priest from underground Catholic church' 2003, *John Mark Ministries*, 13 February <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/10674.htm> - Accessed 21 October 2005 – Attachment 16).

List of Attachments

1. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2005, *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, May <http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2005annualRpt.pdf#page=1> – Accessed 20 October 2005
2. RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response CHN17483*, 29 August

3. RRT Country Research 2002, *RRT Research Response CHN15645*, 23 December
4. 'China appoints new bishop as police arrest underground priest' 2005, *Agence France Presse*, 29 July
5. Hornemann, Magda 2005, 'China: Is central or local government responsible for religious freedom violations', *The Gospel Post*, 5 September
<http://www.gospelpost.com/article/editorial/246/section/china.is.central.or.local.government.responsible.for.religious.freedom.violations/1.htm> - Accessed 21 October 2005
6. 'Underground Chinese bishop dies' 2005, *BBC News Online*, 28 August
7. 'Christian prisoners list' 2005, *Open Doors*, January
8. '30 Catholics in southeastern China detained for underground services' 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 21 July
9. 'Unofficial Catholic churches demolished in south China: report' 2002, *Agence France-Presse*, 21 May.
10. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, 'Catholicism in Fujian' in *CHN33598.EX – China: Catholic Church and Catholicism in China; treatment of Catholics; relations between the underground and open Churches; differences between Catholic worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the underground Church and the open Church; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province*, 27 January <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/ndp/ref/?action=view&doc=chn33598ex> – Accessed 25 August 2005
11. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *CHN33002.EX - China: Freedom of religious practice and belief in Fujian province*, 8 October http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=6&cid=50 – Accessed 25 August 2005
12. Johnstone, Patrick & Mandryk, Jason 2001, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*, Paternoster Lifestyle, 6th ed, Cumbria, p.173
13. 'Zhang Bairen; died Oct.12; Catholic bishop jailed 24 years for defying China' 2005, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 16 October
14. 'Funeral authorized for Chinese underground bishop' 2005, *Global Catholic News*, 14 October
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<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/10674.htm> - Accessed 21 October 2005