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Extended Response to Information Request

CHN33598.EX

27 January 2000

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

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

General information

Catholicism is one of China's five state sanctioned religions and, like the others (Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam) is monitored by a "patriotic association" which, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), is "a key part of the state bureaucracy" reporting to the Religious Affairs Bureau (Jan. 1992). According to the Freedom House report *The Catholic Church in China*, the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) was accompanied by controversy and conflict (1987, 23-4; see also Madsen 1998, 37-40). Central to this controversy was the implementation of the "three self" policy; that Chinese religious organizations should be "self-administering, self-supporting and self-propagating" (HRW Oct. 1997, 13). According to Human Rights Watch, this created a division between the "open" Catholic Church (also referred to as the government-sanctioned Church or the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) Church) and the "underground" Catholic Church (also referred to as the "Universal Church" or the Vatican-affiliated Church):

Catholics in China face a particular problem, because the 'three-self' policy requires severance of all links with the Vatican and local election of Bishops, rather than appointment by the Pope. For believers the link with the Vatican is not a political matter, as Chinese authorities view it, but goes to the heart of what it means to be Catholic. Many Catholics have therefore defied government decrees and organized underground groups (1982, 3).

According to the United States Department of State *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999* there are 4 million followers registered with the open Catholic Church in China, 4,600 churches and 5,000 clergy (9 Sept. 1999). Xinhua, writing in January 2000 set the figure at nearly 5 million followers and 5,000 churches (6 Jan. 2000a). The Vatican has estimated that the underground Catholic Church has "as many as 10 million adherents" (*Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* 9 Sept. 1999). A detailed table of 1996 statistics for both the open and underground Churches, taken from the Website of the Hong Kong [Catholic] Holy Spirit Study Centre, is appended to this Extended Response.

Treatment of Catholics

According to the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999*, harsh treatment of Catholics associated with the underground Church persists, with reports of harassment, arrests, fines and detentions (9 Sept. 1999). Human Rights Watch also reported on harassment of Catholics in China in 1999:

The government continued its long-standing campaign to force Catholic congregations to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. The campaign, centered in parts of Zhejiang and Hebei provinces with large Catholic populations, was marked by detentions, disappearances, ill-treatment, fines, and

harassment. A series of arrests in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, that continued into September, forced some clergy into hiding. In one still unexplained incident, Father Yan Weiping, from Hebei, was found dead on a Beijing street on May 13. He had been detained that same day while saying Mass (December 1999).

On 23 January 2000, the United States-based Cardinal Kung Foundation, an advocate of the underground Church in China, reported on the arrests of five Catholics in Hebei, including the underground Church Bishop.

Relations between the Open and Underground Churches

According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) publication *China: State Control of Religion*:

The Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference, the leading national structure, is charged with implementing the "three-self" policy and approving the selection and ordination of bishops. The three-self policy, designed to remove foreign influence from religious affairs, maintains that all religious organizations should be self-administering, self-supporting, and self-propagating. The appointment of bishops goes to the heart of China's dispute with the Vatican, since it directly challenges the Pope's authority. The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) is a mass organization of laity and clergy. Its purpose, under the leadership of the party and government, is to unite all Catholics in patriotism and to assist the Catholic Church in implementing the three-self policy (HRW Oct. 1997).

The same report states that in 1997 there were indications of a blurring of the distinctions between the two Catholic Churches:

Although there is no hard and fast line dividing the two sets of Catholics, members of the underground church recognize the authority of the Vatican, refusing either to register their churches or to obey the dictates of the Religious Affairs Bureau or the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. In some areas, the divisions are sharp and bitter; in others, official and underground clergy openly cooperate. In some cases, members of the officially-recognized clergy have secretly made their peace with Rome (*ibid.*).

Dr. Richard Madsen, a professor of sociology at the University of California at San Diego also indicates that the Vatican and leaders of the open Church are in contact in his book *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*:

In some places, secret emissaries from the Vatican visited Chinese Church leaders, often under the guise of tourists, and recited memorized directives in Latin conveying official Vatican approval for certain bishops to be leaders of their dioceses even though their appointments had also been approved by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. Published reports in the West state that as many as one-third of the bishops of the open Church have received such Vatican approval, and reliable unpublished reports put the number considerably higher (Madsen 1998, 41-2).

According to the November-December 1999 issue of *Tripod*, published by the Hong Kong Holy Spirit Study Centre, an underground bishop succeeded a bishop of the open Church in Gansu province after the latter's death in September 1999, an event that was welcomed by priests of both churches. The same publication reported that a bishop in Henan province, who had formerly been with the underground church, had been installed in the CPA Church, becoming a member of the government-sanctioned Bishop's Conference of the Catholic Church of China (*ibid.*). *China's Catholics* notes similar cooperation and solidarity in Fujian province. Citing a Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) report of 1994, it reported that an "officially recognized Catholic community has helped an 'underground' community build a new church" (Madsen 1998, 61).

A 21 May 1999 UCAN report printed in the *China Study Journal* cited an underground church leader as admitting that "the divided church has seriously affected laypeople's family and religious life" (August 1999, 52). The report, which is attached to this Extended Response, describes a household in Mindong diocese, Muyang town, Fujian, in which some family members belong to the open and others to the underground church (*ibid.*). The report concludes:

While there is some open-underground church cooperation even in Fujian, where some Catholics make pilgrimages to the open church-run Rosary shrine in Changle and at least one church is shared on a set schedule, dialogue between leaders of the two sides has been mostly futile. (*ibid.*, 53).

According to the ZENIT News Agency, the Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong, Bishop Zen Ze-Kiun expressed disappointment regarding the refusal of the Chinese authorities to allow a papal visit (7 Sept. 1999). However,

Bishop Zen stated that Catholics in China were essentially united:

'I want to clarify something about China, because many maintain that there is a net difference between the so-called two churches. In reality, this is a division created not by Catholics, but by the government. Even the so called Patriotic Church is made up of Catholics, and it is a public secret that the Holy Father has 'secretly' recognized a large number of Bishops of that Church.'

According to Dr. Kim-Kwong Chan, an Honorary Research Fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who has published extensively on the subject of Christianity in China, efforts to normalize relations between the Vatican and the CPA Church have resulted in intense pressure on underground Catholic clergy (15 Dec. 1999). According to Dr. Chan, some underground clergy have been detained; although not formally arrested, they have been held incommunicado and subjected to "intense patriotic education" (ibid.).

According to media reports, Vatican officials expressed "amazement" and "disappointment" at the ordination of five new bishops by the Catholic Patriotic Association, on 6 January 2000, the same day that Pope John Paul II ordained 12 new bishops (ANSA 4 Jan. 2000; BBC 4 Jan. 2000; Xinhua 6 Jan. 2000a). According to Dr. Madsen, this move has caused consternation even among followers of the open Church, and may drive Catholics to the underground Church, adding that he had heard reports that seminarians associated with the CPA had refused to attend the ordination ceremonies (26 Jan. 2000).

Catholic Practice in China

Dr. Richard Madsen, in *China's Catholics*, cautions against applying knowledge of the Catholic Church in the West directly to Chinese Catholicism:

Knowledge about the Catholic Church in the West, especially in a country like the United States, cannot, however, be applied straightforwardly to Catholicism in China. Prejudgements will be quickly contradicted by the realities of Catholic life in China, an experience that will thus quickly (more quickly than if one were studying a religion about which one knew too little to be surprised) push one to ask hard and potentially productive questions about why the Church in China is so different from the Church in the West (1998, 5).

Dr. Madsen offers the following general comments regarding Chinese Catholics:

In their social practices, however, Catholics [in China] act like an ethnic group and have done so all the more since being persecuted under the Maoist regime and discriminated against during the Deng Xiaoping regime. ... Although Catholics define themselves as people who believe in the God Teachings, as distinguished from the Big Teaching (*xin da jiao*) - that is, rural Chinese folk religion - they in practice consider as Catholics people who seem basically agnostic. They distinguish between the 'true believers' (*xinde zhen*) and the 'indifferent' (*lengdan*, literally 'cold and weak'). The extremely indifferent never set foot inside a church, never pray, and profess skepticism about all Catholic doctrines (1998, 54).

According to Dr. Madsen for some rural Chinese Catholics Catholic identity operates in a manner that is analogous to ethnicity, and is an identification that remains with the person, regardless of their level of practice:

If people have grown up Catholic and live in a Catholic family, they cannot avoid using Catholic ceremonies to express their social identity - their membership in a particular family and lineage - even if they do not believe the tenets of the Catholic faith. As long as they need such membership, which they will as long as they live and work close to their rural home, they retain a Catholic identity.

...

Clearly, for some rural Catholics, the God teaching is a genuine faith. They believe the doctrines and use them to give meaning to their personal experience. They are committed to praying regularly and to receiving the sacraments. They are willing to suffer for their beliefs. Whether or not they genuinely believe its teachings, however, for most rural Catholics their religion is a status, inherited from their parents, that they cannot cast aside even if they wanted to (1998, 54-6).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, Dr. Madsen stated that it is difficult to distinguish members of the underground and open churches solely on the basis of their practices and rituals (11 Jan. 2000). Dr. Madsen also stated that Chinese Catholicism is generally more conservative than Catholic practice in other parts of the world, having more in common with Catholic practice before the Second Vatican Council. The Council,

held in 1961-65, had a modernizing influence on the Catholic Church world-wide (*Encyclopaedia of Religion* 1987, 435), however, the texts that emerged from the Council only began to appear in the open Church in the 1980s (Madsen 1998, 139).

Dr. Eriberto Lozada, a professor of anthropology at Butler University in Indianapolis who has undertaken field research regarding Catholic communities in southern China, also commented on the significance of the Second Vatican Council in terms of Catholic practice. However, he stated that the circulation of post-Council texts in the open Church have brought its practices more into line with Catholic practice elsewhere to the extent that "Mass in most official Churches is identical to Hong Kong or Taiwan" (12 Jan. 2000). Dr. Lozada further stated that "Sometimes, the 'underground' church has practices that could be called into question in terms of their orthodoxy."

Dr. Madsen stated that a practice that defines Catholics in Chinese society is their funerary rituals (11 Jan. 2000). Dr. Madsen also makes this point in *Chinese Catholics*:

Even the extremely indifferent participate in the one ritual that distinguishes them from all non-Catholics - Catholic funerals. Virtually all rural Catholics bury their dead in a way that is similar to yet distinct from that of non-Catholic peasants. ... What distinguishes God Teaching from Big Teaching funeral rituals is that the family members do not kowtow to the casket, do not burn incense sticks and mock paper money, and do not set out offerings of food at the grave site. These are the rituals of 'ancestor worship' that were the objects of the Rites Controversy; they were permitted by Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century but proscribed in the early eighteenth century by Pope Clement XI. Instead of performing these forbidden rites, Catholic peasants will sprinkle holy water on the casket and say prayers for the dead. On the burial mounds or tombstones, instead of the little platform on which non-Catholics place offerings of food, there is often a simple cross.

Even those who were born into a Catholic family but are now skeptical of all Catholic doctrines, never go to Church, and never pray will give a Catholic funeral to their parents (1998, 54, 55).

Dr. Michael Szonyi, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, who has researched popular religion in Fujian extensively, also emphasized the importance of funerals within the Catholic community in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate (17 Jan. 2000).

Dr. Madsen made additional general comments, adding that practising Chinese Catholics would normally be exposed to the Catholic practices of baptism and communion, although in some areas, where there was a shortage of priests, Catholics might undergo "home baptisms" prior to receiving a baptism from a priest (20 Jan. 2000). According to Dr. Madsen, devotions to the Virgin Mary figure prominently in Chinese Catholic practice (*ibid.*). Dr. Madsen also stated that many Chinese Catholics have Christian names although he added that these tend to be quite simple and show little variety (*ibid.*).

Dr. Lozada, provided an additional general comment regarding the overall similarity between Chinese Catholic practice and that found elsewhere, stating:

[I]n general Chinese Catholics have the same beliefs, practices, holidays, and ceremonies as Catholics in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Catholics throughout the world (there are some different emphases, such as the importance of Assumption Day in the Chinese liturgy) (12 Jan. 2000).

Catholicism in Fujian

Information regarding Catholicism in Fujian is scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. Dr. Szonyi stated, as a general comment, that the Catholic community in Fujian includes large numbers of personal converts (as opposed to historical converts) and is characterized by extensive overseas connections (17 Jan. 2000).

What follows is a chronological listing of recent references to Catholic persons, churches and activities in Fujian:

- n.d. A 1997 index of Catholic Churches in mainland China on the Website of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong includes references to two Catholic churches in Fujian: West Gate Catholic Church, 164 Guxi Road, Fuzhou City, Fujian 350000; and Gulangyu

- Sacred Heart Church, 34 Lujiao Road,
Xiamen, Gulangyu, Fujian, 361000
- 3 May 1998 Han Xiaogang ordained as a priest at Cheng Guan church, Fu'an Cty in a ceremony officiated by Bishop Zheng Changcheng of Fuzhou (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 41; citing the "Journal of the Catholic Church in China")
- 27 July 1998 Fuzhou City Catholic Patriotic Association held its fourth Representative Assembly; Rev'd Xu Zhihui elected chair and Rev'd Zhang Kangguang elected general secretary (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 36; citing the "Journal of the Catholic Church in China")
- July-August 1998 Fuzhou City held a month-long summer camp for children at Fan Chuan Pu church (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 42; citing the "Journal of the Catholic Church in China")
- December 1998 Father Cai Bingrui of Fujian is listed among the participants in a conference of the Liturgy Committee of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 29; citing the "Journal of the Catholic Church in China")
- 15 April 1999 13 underground churches destroyed by government officials in Changle in early March for having been built without permission; Catholics in Fuzhou still able to celebrate Easter liturgy, although some forced to do so clandestinely (China Study Journal Apr. 1999, 31; citing UCA News)
- July 1999 Bishop Xie Shiguang and an unspecified number of priests of the underground church in Mindong, Fujian reported to be under house arrest (Tripod, Nov.-Dec. 1999, citing UCA News)
- 27 September 1999 Bishop Joseph Zheng Changcheng of Fuzhou cited in article on Sino-Vatican relations (China Study Journal Aug. 1999, 51; citing UCA News)
- 6 January 2000 Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong diocese in Fujian among bishops ordained by CPA (Xinhua 6 Jan. 2000b).

For additional information concerning Catholicism in Fujian please consult CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999, CHN31907.E of 26 May 1999 and CHN26745.E of 30 April 1997, available in the Regional Documentation Centres, REFINO database and on the IRB Website at <<http://www.irb.gc.ca>>.

This Extended Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Extended Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Appendix

Estimated Statistics of Chinese Catholic Church, 1996	
Number of Catholics	10,000,000
Number of Dioceses	138
Number of Bishops	

-- in the Open Church	70
-- in the Underground Church	60
Number of priests:	
-- in the Open Church	1,000
-- in the Underground Church	1,000
Number of Sisters	
-- in the Open Church	2,000
-- in the Underground Church	2,000
Number of Seminaries:	
-- in the Open Church	24
-- in the Underground Church	10
Number of Seminarians	
-- in the Open Church	1,000
-- in the Underground Church	700
Number of Novitiates:	
-- in the Open Church	40
-- in the Underground Church	20
Number of Sisters and Women in Formation:	
-- in the Open Church	1,500
-- in the Underground Church	1,000

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Attachment

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