Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: CHN30140
Country: China
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Keywords: CHN30140 – China – Lianyungang – Shengxin Church – Sacred Heart Church – Catholics

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

Questions
1. Please advise if there is any information on the Shengxin Church (which means Holy Heart in English) in the applicant’s area.
2. Please advise if there is any information on Catholics in the PRC generally.

List of Sources Consulted

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Factiva: Reuters Business Briefing
BACIS: Country Information
REFINFO: IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
FIRST: RRT Library Catalogue
1. Please advise if there is any information on the Shengxin Church (which means Holy Heart in English) in the applicant’s area.

[Note: “Shengxin Church” may also mean “Sacred Heart Church” (圣心堂) in English (‘Sacred Heart Cathedral’ (undated), China Travel Service website http://www.chinats.com/guangzhou/guangzhou667.htm – Accessed 3 May 2006 – Attachment 1).]

Country sources suggest that the Shengxin Church is the Catholic Sacred Heart Church located in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province. No information was found in the sources consulted on members of this congregation.

One Catholic Chinese-language internet source (http://www.catholic.tj.cn/p/Jhzn/Hdq/Jsaa/Njmm/200511/10319.html)\(^1\) mentions a Sacred Heart Church in Lianyungang (highlighted in red in Attachment 3) as follows (with an unofficial English translation by RRT staff):

南京教区简介
Nanjing Diocese Brief Introduction

…
圣堂简介:
Brief introduction to the churches:
…
连云港圣心堂
Lianyungang Sacred Heart Church
地址: 江苏连云港市双池街卫生巷2号 邮编: 222003 电话: 0518-5451727
Address: Jiangsu, Lianyungang City, Shuangchi Street, No. 2 Weisheng Lane Postal Code: 222003 Telephone: 0518-5451727
…
连云港圣心堂
Lianyungang Sacred Heart Church
地址: 江苏新浦区双池街卫生巷2号 邮编: 222003 电话: 0518-5451727
Address: Jiangsu, Xinpu District, Shuangchi Street, No. 2 Weisheng Lane Postal Code: 222003 Telephone: 0518-5451727


This appears to be the same church as an unnamed Catholic church in Lianyungang identified in the Guide to the Catholic Church in China albeit with two differences:

\(^1\) A search on the samspade website, which provides registration details of domain names, reveals that www.catholic.tj.cn was registered on 23 October 2004 and will expire on 23 October 2007. The administrative email address is China-based. No other information was found in relation to the www.catholic.tj.cn website (‘www.catholic.tj.cn’ (undated), samspade website http://www.samspade.org/t/lookat?a=www.catholic.tj.cn – Accessed 3 May 2006 – Attachment 2).
Lianyungang (Xinpu)
(223 km east of Xuzhou)
Catholic church
Address: Weisheng Lane, Shuangchi St.,
Lianyungang, JIANGSU [222000]
Priest: Ge Qineng
Sister: Wu Xiaoman

How to get there?
The church is not easy to find and the priest may be away. It takes a half an hour walk, north of the regional bus station along the Jianguo road (Charbonnier, Jean 2000, Guide to the Catholic Church in China, China Catholic Communication (Singapore), Singapore, pp.468-469 – Attachment 4).

Charbonnier notes that the church is in Suzhou Diocese whilst the www.catholic.tj.cn document refers to it as being in Nanjing Diocese. There are also different postal codes – 222000 as compared to 222003 (Charbonnier, Jean 2000, Guide to the Catholic Church in China, China Catholic Communication (Singapore), Singapore, p.464,468-469 – Attachment 4; ‘南京教区简介’ [Nanjing Diocese Brief Introduction] (undated), www.catholic.tj.cn website http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:bsCapWDECqsJ:www.catholic.tj.cn/p/Jhzn/Hdq/Jsaaa/Njmm/200511/10319.html+%E8%BF%9E%E4%BA%91%E6%B8%AF,%E5%9C%A3%E5%BF%83%E5%A0%82&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1 – Accessed 3 May 2006 – Attachment 3).


2. Information on Catholics in the PRC generally.

Catholicism is one of the five main religions in China. There are two Catholic hierarchies in China, the government-authorised church (under the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and an “underground” church of clergy loyal to the Vatican. According to the US State Department the Chinese government does not allow the CCPA to recognise Papal authority in many fundamental matters of faith and morals. Also, the government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See – obstacles to the establishment of diplomatic relations include the Pope’s role in selecting bishops, the status of underground clerics and the Vatican’s recognition of Taiwan (US Department of State 2005, ‘Religious Demography’, ‘Restrictions on Religious Freedom’ in International Religious Freedom Report 2005 – China, 8 November – Attachment 6; Bradsher, Keith 2006, ‘China Installs Another Bishop, Angering Vatican’, The New York Times, 4 May http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/04/world/asia/04bishop.html?pagewanted=print – Accessed 5 May 2006 – Attachment 7; US Department of State 2006, ‘Freedom of Religion’ in Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – China, 8 March – Attachment 8).

Precise figures on the number of Catholics in China are difficult to determine. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada cites the following estimates:

According to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), in June 2004, there were 5.2 million Catholics in China, with an average of 70,000 people being baptized each year (China Daily 21 June 2004; see also Xinhua 21 Apr. 2005). However, the
total number of practitioners in both the sanctioned Catholic Church and in the unofficial Roman Catholic Church in China is difficult to ascertain (Economist 21 Apr. 2005; see also BBC 9 Nov. 2004) and reported numbers vary among sources consulted by the Research Directorate. The Economist states that Chinese authorities “try to prevent surveys by foreign or Chinese researchers that might challenge the official view that Christianity is still a marginal phenomenon” (21 Apr. 2005). The Vatican estimates that altogether there are approximately ten million Catholics in China (The Economist 21 Apr. 2005; International Religious Freedom Report 15 Sep. 2004, Sec. 1), while the BBC states that about eight million people belong to unregistered churches, in addition to the more than five million who practise in the state-sanctioned Church (8 Apr. 2005). Other sources put the estimated total number of Catholics in China at 12 million (Calgary Herald 8 Feb. 2004; IHT 5 April 2005; Tripod Autumn 2004) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, CHN100386.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005), 7 September – Attachment 9); and

There are reportedly 70 bishops and 1,200 priests serving at least 90 dioceses under the authority of the CCPA (China Daily 21 June 2004). Estimates of the total number of bishops belonging to the unofficial Church vary from 46 to 50 (Cardinal Kung Foundation n.d.; Tripod Autumn 2004). The Holy Spirit Study Centre, the research branch of the Diocese of Hong Kong principally concerned with the situation of Catholics in mainland China (Holy Spirit Study Centre n.d.), estimated that there are about 1,000 priests in the unofficial Church, along with 1,700 nuns and 10 seminaries (Tripod Autumn 2004) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, CHN100386.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2001-2005), 7 September – Attachment 9).

The US State Department has reported that the treatment of unregistered groups varied regionally. It continued:

…For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In other localities, however, officials worked closely with registered and unregistered Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups to accomplish religious and social goals (US Department of State 2005, ‘[Introduction]’ in International Religious Freedom Report 2005 – China, 8 November – Attachment 6).

A recent Human Rights Watch report states:

It is notable that when meetings of Catholic congregants remained small, discreet, and apolitical, officials often turned a blind eye. Reported detentions followed the celebration of masses that attracted large numbers, for public celebration of important Catholic feast days and during pastoral retreats (Human Rights Watch 2006, ‘China: A Year After New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted’, 1 March http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm – Accessed 17 March 2006 – Attachment 10).

The US Department of State also writes in its human rights report for 2005:

…Authorities particularly targeted unofficial religious groups in locations where there were rapidly growing numbers of unregistered churches, or in places of long-seated conflict between official and unofficial churches, such as with Catholics in Baoding, Hebei Province, or with evangelical underground Protestant groups in

This report also outlines the detention of “underground” clergy and lay leaders in China as follows:

Detention of “underground” Catholic bishops, priests, and lay leaders who refused to join the government-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Church continued during the year [2005]. In April a Vatican spokesman complained of the January detention of Hebei Province Bishop Zhao Zhendong, and the separate March detentions of Zhejiang Province Bishop Lin Xili, Hebei Province priest Zhao Kexun and lay-worker Gao Xinyou. On April 1, Bishop Yao Liang of Xiwanzi in Hebei Province and Father Wang Jinling were detained for a few days prior to the pope’s death. Other underground bishops reportedly were kept under heightened surveillance at the same time. In July one such bishop, Jia Zhiguo of Hebei Province, was confined to his home, the sixth time authorities had detained him in an 18-month period. In July Fujian Province police reportedly detained and abused a priest, Lin Daixian, and 10 other Catholics. In November six priests from Zhengding, Hebei Province, were detained. Two of them, Wang Jingshan and Gao Lingshen, were reportedly beaten. Seven underground Catholics from Zhaoxian, Hebei, reportedly were detained in late November. Six were released, but priest Gao Baojin remained unaccounted for. In November the Vatican condemned the beating of 16 nuns, one of whom was blinded and another partially paralyzed. The nuns, from an officially recognized church order, were attacked as they attempted to prevent demolition of a Catholic school in Xian.

In Hebei Province, where approximately half of the country’s Catholics reside, friction between unofficial Catholics and local authorities continued, as authorities punished many underground priests and believers who refused to join the official Chinese Church. On September 2, priests Pang Yongxing and Ma Yongjiang reportedly were detained for providing religious services to underground Catholics in Hebei Province’s Qingyuan County. Reliable sources also reported that Bishop An Shuxin, Bishop Zhang Weizhu, Father Cui Xing, and Father Wang Quanjun remained detained in Hebei Province. According to reliable reports, Bishop An was last seen four years ago. There was no new information about underground Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been unaccounted for since his reported detention in 1997. Reports suggested that he had been held in a government-run guesthouse near Baoding, Hebei Province. The government continued to deny taking coercive measures against him (US Department of State 2006, ‘Freedom of Religion’ in Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – China, 8 March – Attachment 8).


List of Attachments

2. ‘www.catholic.tj.cn’ (undated), samspade website

3. ‘南京教区简介’ [Nanjing Diocese Brief Introduction] (undated), www.catholic.tj.cn website
   (http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:bsCapWDECqsJ:www.catholic.tj.cn/p/Jhzn/Hdq/Jsaaa/Njmm/200511/10319.html+%E8%BF%9E%E4%BA%91%E6%B8%AF%E5%9C%A3%E5%BF%83%E5%A0%82&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1 – Accessed 3 May 2006)


    (http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm – Accessed 17 March 2006)