Questions

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RESPONSE

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Current information on the situation and treatment of Yiguan Dao practitioners in China, including in Fujian, consulted for this response is generic in nature. Evidence does indicate that Fujian province is where Taiwan-based groups focus their proselytizing activities on account of the strong presence of Taiwanese business interests in the province. No specific reports of arrests or detention by the Chinese authorities were found after 1994 in the sources presented below. The sect remains banned in China and, according to one expert, authorities do “crack down” on groups when they are discovered.

On 12 October 2007, Associate Professor Philip Clart (from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia), who has published on the Yiguandao in China, was contacted, provided with a detailed background on the case, and asked to comment on the treatment and situation of followers (RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to Philip Clart ‘Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal’, 12 October – Attachment 1). He replied on 13 October 2007:

In the past, I have been approached in similar cases by the Canadian refugee board. I can confirm in general terms the following facts:
(1) Yiguan Dao is a proscribed religion in the People’s Republic of China, and was radically stamped out by the Communist government in the 1950s.

(2) Efforts are under way by Yiguan Dao groups outside China (principally in Taiwan) to make converts in the People’s Republic and re-establish the religion there. The province of Fujian is a centre of such activity due to the strong presence of Taiwanese-owned companies and joint ventures in this area.

(3) The Chinese authorities do crack down on such cells when they are discovered.

Thus, the details of the case you describe sound plausible enough; however, I am in no position to evaluate this specific case without further information (such as the Chinese characters for the name [and] … samples of the pamphlets, information on which particular subgroup of Yiguan Dao … , information on Yiguan Dao-specific rituals performed by the group, etc.).

I hope that you will find this information helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance (Clart, P. 2007, Email to Research & Information ‘Re: Yiguan Dao in China’, 13 October – Attachment 2).

Professor Clart’s entry on the Yiguan Dao for the 2005 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* concludes with the following statement on the religion in China at present:

…the sect continues to maintain a strong presence in Hong Kong even after the colony’s return to China, and it is proselytizing actively and successfully among the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Australia, North America and Europe. In the PRC the Yiguan Dao remains illegal, but since the 1980s it has gradually been re-establishing itself as an underground movement through the efforts of missionaries from outside the mainland and in particular Taiwan. In the face of widespread government crackdowns on unauthorized religious activities, these missionary endeavours are conducted in great secrecy and it is not clear how large a following the sect has regained in the PRC (Clart, P. 2005, ‘Yiguan Dao’, in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* ed E.L. Davis, Routledge, London, pp.699-700 – Attachment 3).

The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) published on 17 March 2006 the 10th *European Country of Origin Information Seminar*, held on 1-2 December 2005 in Budapest. The report includes the views of Mr Thomas Weyrauch, author of several books on China, including *Yiguan Dao – Chinas Volksreligion im Untergrund* (Yiguan Dao – China’s Underground Popular Religion). He provided the following information at the seminar in 2005:

I will soon publish a book about the group called Yiguan Dao, a Daoist sect. It is a revolutionary group, they fought against the Qing-Dynasty, and they were loyal to the Republic of China. When the Republic of China was in danger, they fought against the Japanese invaders as well as the Communists. And when the Communists rose to power, most of the leaders of the Daoist sect were arrested and killed by the Communists, if they could not escape to Taiwan. **So this is still the policy of the government and of the system** (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) 2006, 10th *European Country of Origin Information Seminar – 1-2 December 2005, Budapest, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website, p.19, 17 March [http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/4451d8c64.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/4451d8c64.pdf) – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 4).
Research Response CHN17602 of October 2005 contains information on the beliefs and practices of Yiguan Dao (RRT Country Research 2005, Research Response CHN17602, 14 October – Attachment 5). This Response cites research conducted in 2005 by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC), who consulted two academic experts neither of whom had any recent information on the situation of Yiguan Dao followers in China. The IRBC research concludes by stating that:

…While the professor emeritus commented that “it is unlikely that [the sect] still exist[s] [in China]” (9 Dec. 2004), the secretary general of the World I-Kuan Tao Headquaters, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, noted that the religion is still being practiced in China, though not in public (15 Dec. 2004). The Headquaters did not provide further information on sect followers in China (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, CHN43233.E – China: The treatment of Tian Dao (also Yiguan Dao, various other spelling) followers by authorities; any reports of arrests in Guangdong (2001-2004), 6 January – Attachment 6).

An extensive Research Response in 2003, Research Response CHN15735, examined the early history of Yiguan Dao in China, its beliefs and practices as expressed in Taiwan, and the adverse treatment of followers in China from the 1950s to the most recent reports of the early 1990s (on the treatment of followers see answers to questions three and four; on the history of Yiguan Dao in China, see question two; and for an explanation of its basic tenets, see question one of RRT Country Research 2003, Research Response CHN15735, 19 February – Attachment 7). This Response also contains the most recent reports that have been of the detention of Yiguan Dao practitioners by the police: in 1994 in the province of Fujian. These were reported on in IRBC research completed in 1997:

Six Tian tao priests from Taiwan were detained by police in Quanzhou, Fujian in 1994 for proselytizing and setting up altars in the cities of Quanzhou, Fuqiao, Nanan, and Zhangzhou, all in the province of Fujian…. UPI reported that twelve temporary temples in Fujian operated by Yi Guan Dao (Way of Unity, Way of Celestial Light) sect members were torn down in 1993 (1 Sept. 1993) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1997, CHN26564.E – China: Information on the location of Tian Dao (Way of Heaven or Secret Light sect, also known as Tian Tao, Tien Dao, Tien Tao, or Tintao) temples in Chang Le County, Fujian and whether there have been arrests or persecution of Tian Dao adherents in Chang Le County, Fujian, 30 April – Attachment 8).

Research Response CHN15735 also quotes IRBC research of 2001 which makes some further reference to Fujian province. A former doctoral candidate writing on popular religion indicated that if Yiguan Dao followers do exist in Fujian, they are “likely” to have learned it through Taiwanese businessmen or tourists:

…Even with the relative opening of religious freedom in China, Yiguandao remains a universal villain in the Chinese press. The sect remains very illegal and, given the intensity of past government propaganda against it, is not likely to be accepted by the PRC government anytime soon. Until the recent (1999) campaign against Falungong, which was overtly modeled on the 1951 push against Yiguandao, many religious groups could exist quietly, with the implicit acceptance of local authorities. Even under these circumstances, Yiguandao was not likely to gain any sort of acceptance. However, with the increased scrutiny of local religion, Yiguandao would certainly not be able to exist openly. If any believers do exist in Guangdong and Fujian, they are likely to have learned the faith secretly and relatively recently from Taiwanese businessmen or tourists, who have been known to proselytize in the PRC.

Given the intensity of pressure against the sect, I would be rather surprised to see any sort of Yiguandao remaining in Fujian or Guandong at all, except, as mentioned, in the
context of relatively recent missionization from Taiwan. Even this would have to be very deep underground. The sect was traditionally strongest in North China, and it certainly does not exist there today. I have seen Chinese government reports (Fandong huidaomen jieshao, Quanzhong chubanshe, 1985) that mention fears of a revival of Yiguandao in remote inland provinces, but nothing specifically relating to Fujian or Guangdong.

Unfortunately, I do not have any data concerning arrests or detainment because these figures are rarely released by the Chinese government, and because Yiguandao has such notoriety in the PRC that such arrests would very likely be conducted in secret (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2001, CHN36541.E ‘China: Reports of arrests and detention of Tian Dao (also Yiguan Dao, various spellings) believers in the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong (2000)’, 6 April – Attachment 9).

A request for information on the current situation of Yiguan Dao was also sent by Email on 9 October 2007 to Dr. Benjamin Penny, an academic from The Australian National University who specialises in religious and spiritual movements in contemporary China (RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to Dr. B. Penny ‘Refugee Review Tribunal request for information’, 9 October – Attachment 10). No response has yet been received from Dr. Penny.

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:
United Nations (UN)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website http://www.unhcr.org/

Search Engines

Databases:
FACTIVA (news database)
BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)
REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

List of Attachments

1. RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to Philip Clart ‘Request for information from the Refugee Review Tribunal’, 12 October.


8. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1997, *CHN26564.E – China: Information on the location of Tian Dao (Way of Heaven or Secret Light sect, also known as Tian Tao, Tien Dao, Tien Tao, or Tintao) temples in Chang Le County, Fujian and whether there have been arrests or persecution of Tian Dao adherents in Chang Le County, Fujian*, 30 April. (CISNET China CHN26564.E)


10. RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to DR. B. Penny ‘Refugee Review Tribunal request for information’, 9 October.