

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

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Underground churches – Registered churches

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**Questions**

- 1. Could you provide an idea of how well circulated the Pope's letter to Catholics of June 2007 was in China? Would it be readily available to both members of the underground and registered churches?**
- 2. Would such a document be discussed in Chinese Catholic Churches outside China – such as in Australia?**

**RESPONSE**

- 1. Could you provide an idea of how well circulated the Pope's letter to Catholics of June 2007 was in China? Would it be readily available to both members of the underground and registered churches?**

On the 7 March 2008, the Cardinal Kung Foundation was contacted for information on these questions. The Foundation is a Catholic organisation based in the United States which advocates and reports predominantly on the underground Church in China. The Foundation's reports are widely used and have been considered credible and reliable by the Vatican and Amnesty International (RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Cardinal Kung Foundation: 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 7 March – Attachment 1; Olesen, A. 2007 'Bishop who led underground Chinese congregation dies in custody' *Associated Press Newswires*, 12 September – Attachment 2; Townsend, T. 2002, 'Keeping a Finger On China's Pulse' *The New York Times*, 12 May <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=980CE1DD1030F931A25756C0A9649C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> – Accessed 14 March 2008 – Attachment 3).

On 10 March 2008, Joseph Kung responded to the request with the following information:

Thank you for your inquiry. What I state here is entirely my personal opinion, formed by information that I have been able to collect from variable sources through our contacts.

Please read the attached two news articles, reporting the banning on internet in China of Pope Benedict's letter to China. This is significant. This means ordinary Chinese, even with the access of a computer, will have difficulty to report and to read the Pope's letter to China from the internet.

It is therefore the Pope's letter to China issued in 2007 is not readily available to both members of the underground and registered churches.

I believe that all Roman Catholic Bishops in China, both in official and unofficial church, have the ability to obtain a copy of the Pope's letter to China in 2007. I personally have transferred many copies to various underground bishops in China.

I also believe that most Catholic priests, both in official and unofficial church, have ways and means to receive a copy of the Pope's letter from their bishops.

I also believe that some active and educated lay Roman Catholics have ways and means to receive a copy of the Pope's letter, mostly from their overseas contacts.

Primarily due to the obstacles made by the religious bureau of Chinese Government, it is not easy to receive a copy of the Pope's letter by ordinary lay Roman Catholics. For those living in a large city, it may be easier for them to receive a copy from somewhere. The smaller the city is, the more the difficulty to receive a copy.

For those ordinary underground Roman Catholics, it is much more difficult for them to receive a copy. For those villagers living in a very rural or remote areas, they would need some extraordinary effort before they could get a copy of this 20 plus pages letter from the Holy Father. However, in spite of the fact that most underground Catholics may not have the copy of the entire letter from the Pope, I believe that they may have a general idea of the letter through the advice from the underground priests. However, I must emphasize that it is entirely possible that some of them may have never heard of the Pope's letter due to communication or other problems. China being so big, many underground areas may not have the privilege of a Catholic priest to visit them more than once or twice a year (Kung, Joseph 2008, Email to RRT Research & Information: 'Knowledge and distribution of Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Catholics in China', 10 March – Attachment 4).

The two articles attached by Joseph Kung to his email are from the AsiaNews.it website. They are provided here. The first, dated 3 July 2008, refers to difficulties in accessing the Pope's letter from certain websites but concludes by stating that "the papal letter reached the Chinese Catholic community":

Beijing (AsiaNews) – The Letter of Benedict XVI to the clergy and the faithful of the People's Republic of China has disappeared from Catholic websites which featured it after its publication. Meanwhile, in China, it is impossible to open the Internet site of the Holy See.

This was confirmed by Chinese priests and lay people, official and otherwise, who manage the various portals. Some had uploaded the text in simplified Chinese as soon as it was published, but they received a visit from government representatives who "convinced" them to remove it.

...Anyhow, the papal letter reached the Chinese Catholic community: sources of *AsiaNews* in the country said it was sent by fax or delivered by hand, or else accessed from the Internet thanks to decoy websites which managed to elude government censorship ('Beijing removes Papal Letter to Chinese Church from web' 2007, AsiaNews.it website, 3 July <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9711> – Accessed 14 March 2008 – Attachment 5).

The second article, published on 9 October 2008, in detailing attempts by the government to limit the letter's influence, also gives some idea of the use and availability of the letter:

Rome (AsiaNews) – Brain washing Catholic priests to convince them of the “error of their ways”; in short of having **published and distributed the Pope's Letter to China's Catholics**: it is taking place in Nanning, a major city of the autonomous Guangxi region, (south west China), where the government has launched a campaign to counter the Vatican “penetration” in the life of the Church. Meantime in Qingxiu district, close to Nanning, **police sequestered and destroyed copies of a parish letter** which carried parts of the papal document.

June 30th Benedict XVI published a Letter to the Catholics of China with which he exhorted them to live the Christian mission and witness for the good of their country and to draw closer to the underground and official Church, asking all of those involved to witness with greater courage their unity with the Holy See. In turn, with cordial and respectful terms, the pontiff requested that Chinese authorities respect the religious freedom of the faithful and the appointment of bishops.

Beijing's reaction to the Letter at the time of its publishing was bland. **But according to AsiaNews, sources the documents distribution has been gravely impeded in a variety of ways.**

What is happening in Qingxiu district is emblematic. There the provincial Office for religious affairs (ORA) has set up an emergency group comprising more than 12 public entities (from the United Front to the district commissions to the police) whose job it is to “draw up a plan to stop the pastoral letter”. An official document from the ORA is a perfect example of what happened in Kanglelu parish: **with the permission of its bishop the parish published its newsletter (“Compass”) with extracts taken from the Pope's Letter.** The secretary of the communist party and the local government gave “maximum attention to the case” gathered together the priests forcing them to a “work of political thought” (in short brainwashing) so that “by learning from their mistake, they may continue to raise the standard of love for the motherland and the Church, and strongly oppose the words and activities of the Vatican”.

The publication of extracts from the papal Letter is judged to be “an activity which damages the Nation and its people”. This explains why copies were sequestered and the publishing house that printed the newsletter closed down.

**Since the Letter's publication the United Front, the ORA and the Patriotic Association (PA) have organised conventions and seminars the length and breadth of the country, gathering priests, nuns and bishops. The theme under discussion is the modernisation of the Church (finances, restoration, seminars,...) but also the pope's Letter.** According to AsiaNews sources in China, in some of these seminars the PA vice-president, Antonio Liu Bainian, violently attacked the papal document judging it a new attempt at “imperialism” and to “colonise” the Chinese Church, along the lines of what happened to the country in the past under Colonial powers. In Liu Bainian's mind, the need for religious freedom and independence in the appointment of bishops is the equivalent to making foreign “concessions”, such as the territorial areas subtracted from the control of the central

government by western powers during the 19th century ('Guangxi: stop the Pope's Letter, even by brain washing' 2007, AsiaNews.it website, 9 October <http://new.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=10506> – Accessed 14 March 2008 – Attachment 6).

A 4 July 2007 news article by the journalist Robert Saiget in *The China Post* gives some idea of the reception and knowledge of the letter upon release within two official Catholic Church communities, one in Beijing the other in south-western China's Chongqing municipality. Saiget indicated that while the letter was not mentioned during mass at these churches and was not reported on by government press services, the priest from the Chongqing municipality did explain that "many knew about it thanks to the Internet" (Saight, Robert J. 2007 'Chinese Catholics largely in dark over pope's letter' *The China Post*, 4 July – <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/international/2007/07/04/114095/Chinese-Catholics.htm> – Accessed 14 March 2008 – Attachment 7).

## **2. Would such a document be discussed in Chinese Catholic Churches outside China – such as in Australia?**

Little information was found on whether the Pope's letter would be discussed in Chinese Catholic Churches outside China, including in Australia. Several attempts were made to contact people and organisations within the Catholic Chinese community in Australia by telephone and email, including the Office of Immigration of the Catholic Church and the Australian Catholic Chinese Community (ACCC), but no response or information has yet been received from them (RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Australian Catholic Chinese Community (ACCC): 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 7 March – Attachment 8; RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Sr Ann Laidlaw, Executive Director Catholic Immigration Office: 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 13 March – Attachment 9).

A search of the website of the official Catholic newspaper in Australia, *The Catholic Weekly*, indicates that two articles focused on the Pope's letter: one on 28 January 2007 ('Pope to write to China's Catholics') several months before its release, and a second on 8 July 2007 ('Pope looks to unity'). The second of these articles could not be located on the newspaper's website but is referred to in the Letters page of the newspaper of the following week, 15 July 2007 (Wooden, C. 2007 'Pope to write to China's Catholics', *The Catholic Weekly*, 28 January <http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=1&subclassID=3&articleID=2727&class=News&subclass=World> – Accessed 17 March 2008 – Attachment 10; 'Letters' 2007, *The Catholic Weekly*, 15 July, <http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=2&subclassID=5&articleID=3309&class=Comment&subclass=Letters> – Accessed 17 March 2008 – Attachment 11).

On the 13 March 2008 the above question was forwarded to Joseph Kung of the Cardinal Kung Foundation, for information with regard to the United States (RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Cardinal Kung Foundation 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 13 March – Attachment 12). A response was received on 14 March 2008:

The mainstream Catholics in the United States, either due to language or distance between the US and China, are not familiar with the situation of the Catholic Church that is in China. I am

not aware that any U.S. diocese has sponsored any forum, meeting, or conference to discuss or study the Pope's letter to the Chinese Catholics.

The Chinese Catholics in United States are estimated to be around 100,000. However, they are scattered all over the United States. Also, because they came from different parts of China, (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland and second generation of immigrants) and speak different dialects, (Mandarin, Cantonese, Fujinese, Swatownese, Shanghainese, and English), they are not cohesive even in the same parish. The best example is the largest Chinese parish in New York City's China Town, the Transfiguration Church. It is one parish with 3 or 4 communities separated by origins, dialects, and education levels. The largest Chinese faith communities in the United States would still be less than five hundred families. There are not many Chinese clergies or lay ministers who have enough interest, knowledge and capability to organize any study group, forum, or meeting to discuss about the Letter. As time goes by, due to the Chinese government's suppression and the low-key handling by the Hong Kong Diocese, **many Chinese Catholics in United States would just have heard about the Letter, but know little or nothing of what is the Letter all about.** I am afraid that I do not know the situation in locations other than the United States (Kung, Joseph 2008, Email to RRT Research & Information 'Knowledge and distribution in United States of Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Catholics in China', 10 March – Attachment 13).

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

#### **Non-Government Organisations**

Cardinal Kung Foundation website <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/>

#### **International News & Politics**

*The New York Times* <http://query.nytimes.com/>

#### **Region Specific Links**

*The China Post*- <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/>

*AsiaNews.it* website <http://www.asianews.it/>

#### **Topic Specific Links**

*The Catholic Weekly* <http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/>

#### **Search Engines**

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

### 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)

RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Cardinal Kung Foundation: 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 7 March.
2. Olesen, A. 2007 'Bishop who led underground Chinese congregation dies in custody' *Associated Press Newswires*, 12 September. (FACTIVA)

3. Townsend, T. 2002, 'Keeping a finger on China's pulse' *The New York Times*, 12 May  
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=980CE1DD1030F931A25756C0A9649C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> – Accessed 14 March 2008.
4. Kung, Joseph 2008, Email to RRT Research & Information: 'Knowledge and distribution of Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Catholics in China', 10 March.
5. 'Beijing removes Papal Letter to Chinese Church from web' 2007, AsiaNews.it website, 3 July <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9711> – Accessed 14 March 2008.
6. 'Guangxi: stop the Pope's Letter, even by brain washing' 2007, AsiaNews.it website, 9 October <http://new.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=10506> – Accessed 14 March 2008.
7. Saiget, Robert J. 2007 'Chinese Catholics largely in dark over pope's letter' *The China Post*, 4 July –  
<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/international/2007/07/04/114095/Chinese-Catholics.htm> – Accessed 14 March 2008.
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9. RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Sr Ann Laidlaw, Executive Director Catholic Immigration Office: 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 13 March.
10. Wooden, C. 2007 'Pope to write to China's Catholics', *The Catholic Weekly*, 28 January  
<http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=1&subclassID=3&articleID=2727&class=News&subclass=World> – Accessed 17 March 2008.
11. 'Letters' 2007, *The Catholic Weekly*, 15 July,  
<http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=2&subclassID=5&articleID=3309&class=Comment&subclass=Letters> – Accessed 17 March 2008.
12. RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Cardinal Kung Foundation: 'Request for Information from the Refugee Review Tribunal', 13 March.
13. Kung, Joseph 2008, Email to RRT Research & Information: 'Knowledge and distribution in United States of Pope Benedict XVI's letter to Catholics in China', 10 March.