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## **Police cancel Christian gathering**

AFP (25.12.2004) / HRWF Int. (27.12.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- POLICE in Beijing cancelled a gathering of Christian activists on Christmas Eve, preventing two from leaving their homes and forcing the owner of the venue not to rent the place out, activists have said.

Hua Huiqi, a Christian dissident, said he and others planned to have a party Friday night at a restaurant in Beijing's Sanyuanqiao district to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

"The police did not allow Qi Zhiyong and Zhang Qianjin to leave their homes. They also forced the landlord not to let us use the place, so the activity was canceled," Hua said.

Qi and another Christian confirmed the incident.

"Last night, police refused to let me go out," Qi said from his home Saturday.

The Christians and many others like them in China prefer to worship outside the government-controlled state-sanctioned or "patriotic" churches and each year try to organise worship activities on their own, often clandestinely.

Those who are especially active and considered sensitive figures have faced crackdowns every year around this time.

"These days, we try to go to the streets to send the Gospel to people. There were around 1000 Gospel leaflets that we have distributed, but the police did not allow me to go out from December 12 to 21," Hua said.

Christmas is increasingly being celebrated as a major holiday in China as businesses try to capitalise on the commercial aspects of the holiday while many people also seek spiritual guidance to help them cope with a rapidly changing society.

The Government, however, maintains tight control over churches, banning proselytising and discouraging the growth in parishioners, despite passing a new regulation on religion recently which it says will protect the right to worship.

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## **"Religious distortion" and religious freedom**

By Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 News Service (25.11.2004)/HRWF (29.11.2004) – Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Recently, a Tibetan Buddhist visited Beijing's Yong He Gong Lamasery, which is reportedly the largest and most well preserved Buddhist lamasery in China today, and a major tourist attraction. The visitor later made some observations to Forum 18 News Service about the ostensibly functioning lamasery.

The visiting Buddhist remarked that the lamasery was "like a museum", with a monk sitting curator-like in each hall. It was notable that there were toilets on the territory of the lamasery, even though "this is considered defilement". On one side of the lamasery, there were six bowls filled with water in front of an image of Tsonkapa, the founder of the Buddhist school to which the monastery belongs, when there "should be seven at the very least - it shows spiritual indifference to ritual".

The visitor also observed that a mandala, an image created over many hours with coloured sand, lay carefully preserved in a glass case, while it would normally be destroyed as a symbol of impermanence: "That's the point." Curiously, tantric deities depicted in sexual union - they symbolise the union of wisdom and practice" - were covered up with cloths, while, unlike similar monasteries, rows of low benches used by monks during rituals in the main temple had individual electric lamps, and no sign of sacred texts or instruments in constant use.

Furthermore, two thrones also stood in the main temple of the lamasery, one described as belonging to the Panchen Lama, containing a large portrait of the late tenth Panchen Lama alongside a smaller portrait of Gyaltsen Norbu, the boy claimed by the Chinese government - but disputed by the Dalai Lama - to be the eleventh incarnation. The second throne, described as belonging to the Dalai Lama, was empty.

These observations are important because they concern the degree to which "religious distortion" - defined here as religious teachings and other activities that differ from mainstream doctrines and practices - is an everyday event in China. Even more importantly, these observations raise the question of the extent to which the communist state is responsible for these distortions.

These distortions are found at all levels of Chinese society. At one level, religious distortions include the appointment, and recognition, of religious leaders that bypasses normal religious customs and practices.

The case of the Tibetan Panchen Lama best illustrates this distortion. The ultimate decision to recognise the Panchen Lama, the second-ranking Tibetan Buddhist leader, is traditionally one of the powers held by the Dalai Lama, the religious and political leader of Tibet. However, as a result of state intervention, the Panchen Lama who was recognized by the Dalai Lama has been effectively under house arrest since 1995, while another boy has been appointed by the communist regime to that position.

This is no surprise, given the fact that the state has maintained an active campaign to denounce the Dalai Lama for his "betrayal" of the Chinese "motherland". The Chinese state has portrayed the Dalai Lama as a "political leader engaged in separatist activities," which, according to the state, is contrary to his claim as a religious leader. According to the Chinese communist authorities, this invalidates the Dalai Lama's traditional prerogative of selecting the Panchen Lama.

Another example of religious distortions is the result of the state's insistence that the Roman Catholic Church at the Vatican cannot "interfere" in the affairs of the Chinese Catholic Church. The resulting distortions are that, firstly, the Vatican is not officially permitted by the state to recognize Chinese bishops - although in practice, most Chinese bishops have actively sought and received "unofficial" sanction by the Vatican - and, secondly, that public references to the Pope as the supreme Catholic church authority are discouraged. The regime has justified this policy by stating repeatedly that the Vatican is a foreign state and that the "Chinese people" will never permit foreign interference in their internal affairs, including religious matters. Yet, it is ironic that while the state implores the Chinese Catholics to engage in "self governance, self support, and self propagation," it has nevertheless felt necessary to interfere in the affairs of the Catholic community, including the power to appoint senior clerics and lay leaders.

Of course, religious distortions are not simply limited to issues involving the selection of religious leaders. They also concern questions over the interpretation of doctrines that are fundamental to the life of a religious community.

For example, in recent years, Bishop Ding Guangxun, the former head of the state-sanctioned Protestant Chinese Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), has been actively promoting a campaign for what he describes as "theological construction," that will, in Bishop Ding's words, "weaken those aspects within Christian faith that do not conform with the socialist society." Pastors and seminary students have been "encouraged" to attend sessions that discuss his essays on this topic, which were first published in 1998. Academic theologians, such as Ji Tai, and students who challenged this agenda at the Nanjing Seminary Protestant theological college, were removed from the seminary.

As Tony Lambert, an expert on the Protestant community in China, points out, the central principles of Ding's "theological reconstruction" aim to overturn many of Christianity's central tenets - such as justification by faith, which Bishop Ding described in the April 1999 issue of the Nanjing Theological Review, the only officially permitted theological journal, as "politically reactionary and theologically incorrect." Other Protestant doctrines overturned include the reliability and inerrancy of the Bible, and the necessity of having faith in Christ as the sole path to salvation.

The attempt on the part of the state to reinterpret religious doctrines is also seen among the Islamic communities in China. According to Kahar Barat, an expert on Uighur affairs, the state-sanctioned Islamic associations in China have recently begun to compile new interpretations of the Koran and other Islamic texts. He noted that, in September 2003, a conference on the new "interpretations" of the Koran was held in Urumqi [Urümqi] in

Xinjiang in north-west China. The results of ongoing and completed doctrinal reinterpretations can be found in different parts of China. For example, female imams are a unique phenomenon that is not seen in any Islamic community outside China.

These doctrinal issues are directly related to the contents of religious teachings and the curricula for religious education.

According to some Protestant observers, sermons delivered at Protestant churches permitted by the state are not allowed to include references to the second coming of Christ and the accompanying day of judgment, which Bishop Ding describes as "a deception of the masses [and] contains no love of socialist society." In religious education, many observers have noted the fact that political indoctrination and the contents of government regulations are regular components of the curricula in state-approved institutions of religious education, particularly those in politically volatile areas such as Xinjiang and Tibet. This practice continues today. A Christian pastor who recently visited China obtained a copy of the daily academic schedule for a relatively new seminary. According to this copy, government regulations on religious affairs are required to be taught to the students on a daily basis.

These examples illustrate the extent to which state repression has directly resulted in religious distortions.

There can be no denying of the fact that state-sponsored repression has continued unabated. Some would even argue that the situation has worsened. According to Bob Fu, a former house church leader, in the first nine months of 2004, 400 arrests were made of house church leaders. Individuals have been beaten to death by public security officials for distributing Bibles and other biblical tracts. Others have been detained and arrested for printing Bibles and other religious literature. Still others, including the elderly, were imprisoned for sending children to Sunday school classes. It is not officially permitted to give any religious instruction to people under the age of 18.

In the light of these repressive conditions, it would seem that distortions are the norm, not the exception. Indeed, the state's power to determine religious orthodoxy has especially contributed to religious distortions.

As Ji Wenyuan, a vice-director of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Beijing, stated at an international conference on religion and law held at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in October 2004: "A religion must be accepted not only by its own congregation, which follows its teachings, but also by non-believers who can live with it".

Religious organizations that either cannot or are unwilling to obtain government approval are automatically deemed illegal. Once an organization has been classified as illegal, all its activities are automatically considered to be illegal and subversive. As Joseph Kung, an advocate of the underground Catholic community in China, stated, activities such as celebrating the mass and prayers for the dying - which are orthodox Catholic practices - immediately become illegal and unorthodox if they are undertaken by a priest who has not been permitted by the state to perform these activities.

Similarly, the government ensures that government approval precedes the carrying out of normal religious rites. For example, as indicated in an earlier Forum 18 article about Xinjiang, the state strictly prohibits married Muslim couples from receiving religious rites before obtaining state marriage certificates.

Through these repressive measures, the regime creates an atmosphere that indirectly promotes religious distortions. For example, according to Ngawang Sangdrol, one of the famous 14 Tibetan Buddhist "Singing Nuns," Chinese officials have said that there is no formal ban on displaying photographs of the Dalai Lama in the homes of Tibetan people, but government policy and practice have effectively banned such displays. This permits

Chinese officials to claim that the absence of such displays in Tibetan homes is the result of voluntary decisions, and not an outcome of coercive state policies.

The 14 "Singing Nuns" acquired this nickname in 1993 when, whilst in jail, they smuggled out tape recorded songs of love and devotion to Tibet. For this offence of "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda," they had their prison terms doubled or tripled.

The state's repressive policy has also led to the isolation of Chinese religious communities from religious communities outside China. This state-induced isolation has itself also been responsible for many religious distortions. Many observers have noted that, in regulating the extent and the nature of contact between Chinese religious communities and believers and their foreign counterparts, state policy has encouraged the growth of unorthodox practices. An example of this is the Chinese phenomenon of female imams, mentioned earlier.

Isolation has also effectively contributed to the growth of "cults" and "sects" that are not only unorthodox in their doctrines, but also have harmful effects on Chinese society. Protestant Christian observers inside and outside China have lamented that the lack of regular contact with foreign Protestant groups has contributed to the formation of groups like Eastern Lightning. These groups not only spread teachings contrary to widely-accepted Christian doctrines, but they also engage in criminal activities such as kidnapping.

However, it is also interesting to note that isolation may not only have negative implications for the growth of religion in China. For example, with regard to the phenomenon of female imams, the outcome of the isolation may actually mean that traditional practices are observed. Dr. Khaled Abou el Fadl, a prominent Islamic legal scholar, has noted that the Hui Muslim community in China, by permitting the employment of female imams, is actually more faithful to Islam's long tradition of female legal scholars than Muslim communities outside China.

In addition, isolation may be welcomed by local religious leaders precisely for doctrinal reasons. Despite the concern shared among house church leaders about the negative effects of isolationism, many have also welcomed the isolation because it meant that Chinese Christians would not be susceptible to the negative influences of cosmopolitanism and consumerism that are perceived to be plaguing the churches in Western societies. In fact, many observers have noted that many Chinese house churches are even more fundamentally conservative in their doctrines than the most conservative churches in North America.

Moreover, it is easy to forget that some Chinese religious communities have long histories of independence from non-Chinese communities that pre-date communist rule. The most prominent example is the "Three-Self" movement of Protestant Christianity in China. The original concept of "Three Self", which stands for "self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating," was introduced in 1851 by Henry Venn, founder of the Church Missionary Society. The idea was that indigenous churches must be self-reliant and not depend on missionary-sending churches and groups for financial and administrative support. Of course, as is well known, this concept was later expropriated by the communist regime for its own political purposes.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that many religious communities in China are not just passive recipients of state directives. For example, despite the state policy that religious education is prohibited for children under 18 years of age, Uighur Muslims continue to establish private religious schools that train minors. Similarly, underground Protestant house churches conduct secret private worship services and religious education courses. In many cases, pastors from state-sanctioned churches provide clandestine support to these house churches for the conduct of these activities.

Notwithstanding the above illustrations of state interference, the state may not be guilty of all the religious distortions. To be fair, other factors must be taken into account. For example, religious distortions may be attributed to broad socio-economic trends, such as commercialization and consumerism.

On this note, one may point out that the descriptions of the lamasery in Beijing by the Buddhist observer can also be applied to numerous Buddhist temples and monasteries around the world, even those in free societies. Putting aside for a moment the issue about the unorthodox nature of the displays in the Beijing lamasery, the presence of toilets on the grounds of the lamasery, while understandably offensive to devout Buddhists, is quite practical for economic reasons, particularly since the lamasery in question is a major tourist spot. The fact is that the existence of a large number of Buddhist institutions in China and around the world depends on the financial income generated by tourism, and the decision to establish such facilities might easily have been made by the religious leaders in that lamasery. Of course, in this particular example of the lamasery in Beijing, it is more likely that the decision was made by the government, probably through the relevant state-sanctioned religious organization.

Another factor is that individuals, independent of the state, have made decisions that result in religious distortions. This should be of no great surprise, even in a society that is ruled by an authoritarian regime. After all, China is no longer a totalitarian state in practice if not in rhetoric. And notwithstanding the state's continued desire to maintain control over all aspects of society, it simply does not have the resources to fulfil this desire.

As Jason Kindopp, an expert on the Protestant Christian communities in China, observed: "Political authorities in most locales lack the resources and or willingness to mould individual congregation?. They may still manipulate the selection of lianghui [CCC and TSPM] representatives and limit the church's engagement with broader society, but authorities in most urban and rural areas make little effort to penetrate individual congregations?." The sheer size of the country and the fact that the central government continues to face difficulties in ensuring that the provincial and local authorities act in accordance with central directives, means that individuals and groups can easily fly under the state's radar screen.

The emergence of Eastern Lightning, which is viewed by both the underground house churches and the government as a "cult," illustrates this point. Ironically, the case has in fact resulted in cooperation between the affected house church groups and local police in tracking down the Eastern Lightning. Even the Falun Gong, with a set of doctrines that is a unique blend of Buddhist, Taoist, and modern scientific principles, can be analyzed from this perspective. In fact, it offers an even more interesting case because Li Hongzhi, the founder of the group, received state approval and support prior to his fallout with the communist regime.

Despite these examples, no one should deny the dominant role of the state in causing religious distortions in China. Ultimately, as the most powerful player in society, the state has determined the range of choices, if not the choices themselves, that are available to religious communities when it comes to religious practices and doctrines. Given this fact, what must be done to reduce the role of the state in making substantive choices on religious matters?

Many outside observers have advocated that the state permit increased contact between religious communities in China and their foreign co-religionists. This approach has so far met with mixed results. The most significant reason is that the communist state remains suspicious of foreign religious influences in China. Thus far, contacts, at least those that have been officially sanctioned, have been limited to visits by major foreign religious figures, including the Rev. Billy Graham, and other activities that in the main resemble social services. Some foreign religious groups have openly supported state-sanctioned religious communities in activities such as the building of religious venues, and foreign clerics have even been invited as teachers. However, given the post-11 September 2001

world, it is unlikely that such contacts would gain the state's blanket approval, particularly in the case of contacts between Muslims in China and their co-religionists in the Arab world.

Given the fact that the state remains the chief obstacle to religious freedom, and therefore the chief source of religious distortions, and the difficulties of persuading the Chinese government to conform to international human rights standards, an increasing number of foreign experts and advocates are suggesting that foreign governments and groups should focus on pressing the communist regime to observe its own growing body of laws and regulations.

These individuals have noted that, in recent years, the Chinese government has promulgated laws and regulations on religious affairs that, while falling somewhat short of international standards, are nevertheless in general compliance with internationally accepted norms. As Pitman Potter, a scholar on Chinese legal affairs, has pointed out, whilst it may be difficult to get the Chinese government to establish laws that are in complete conformity with internationally accepted notions of religious freedom, the next best thing is to invite the Chinese communist state to "take its own legal system seriously."

However, as is widely reported, Chinese officials have displayed a tendency to make their practices contradict their rhetoric. For example, as mentioned earlier, while Chinese officials have told foreign government officials that there is no prohibition against religious education for minors, written documents and actual practices suggest otherwise.

More recently, at the above mentioned October 2004 international conference on religion and law, one religious affairs official noted that the government was revising its religious policy with the aims of curbing state arbitrariness and allowing greater autonomy for religious communities. Yet, at the same conference, another religious affairs official essentially stated that the state would never relinquish its control over religious matters. In the light of these contradictory attitudes amongst officials, whilst it is important to encourage the Chinese government to observe its own rules and regulations, it may be even more urgent to press the state to recognize and clarify the contradictions it displays.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

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## **Controls on religion tightened**

### ***Promised 'changes' at odds with widespread crackdown on Chinese Christians***

by Xu Mei

Compass Direct (16.11.2004)/HRWF (18.11.2004) - Email [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Last week before his resignation as U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell said relations between China and the U.S. were at the best point they had been in more than 30 years, according to Agence France-Presse. However, that relationship may change as further evidence emerges of a widespread crackdown on the Chinese church.

A series of arrests and raids occurred during the months of September and October, indicating that a new crackdown was underway, even as the government professed its willingness to change.

Pastor Cai Zhuohua, a well-known house church leader, was among those arrested. Cai and his wife are currently awaiting trial in Beijing.

On November 9, Compass reported that Chinese officials had publicly declared a new openness to changes in religious policy. However, that promise was tempered by the words

of Ji Wenyuan, deputy director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), who said China's situation was unique and any change must be carefully considered.

Meanwhile, evidence has emerged that the government issued three new internal directives in August calling for much tighter control of religion. The information was published in the September issue of a Chinese-language magazine printed in Hong Kong.

According to the report in *Zheng Ming*, the new directives address three issues: the conversion of Communist Party members, the growth of religion and religious organizations across the country, and the increase of religious activity on university campuses.

The first document, dated August 12, deals with the issue of Communist Party members converting to religious faiths. The government admits that over the past three years, 230 top Party cadres in a handful of provinces became believers and were dismissed from the Party as a result.

The new edict re-affirms that no Party member can openly or secretly join any religious organization. A thorough purge of those who had secretly converted is expected.

The second document, released on August 17, calls for much tighter control of religious affairs by Communist Party officials. A detailed investigation was ordered into the growth of religion and religious organizations in every part of the country.

In typical Chinese style, the document lists "Four Don'ts" and "Five Prohibitions" which from now on would govern religious affairs.

The Four Don'ts basically rule out the establishment of any form of relationship with a foreign religious organization.

The Five Prohibitions spell this out in greater detail. Chinese religious organizations are prohibited from establishing any "subordinate relationship" with overseas religious bodies. They are also banned from using propagation of religion to carry out social activities "of a political nature" and from undertaking any religious activities which are contrary to the Chinese constitution.

Religious organizations are also prohibited from making converts or setting up religious organizations among Party, government or judicial organs.

This second document reveals the extent to which religion, particularly Christianity, has grown in recent years. It states that "hostile religious forces" have infiltrated the government at many levels. The government is particularly concerned about religion becoming a powerful rallying force for unemployed workers who are a growing segment of the Chinese population.

The blunt statement that religion is still an "important component part in the overall strategy of the West against China" proves that stereotypical Maoist images of Christianity are still very much alive in Beijing's ruling circles.

Alarming, this second document calls for a specific crackdown on the "rampant" growth of religious believers in 10 provinces: Guangdong, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Beijing, Fujian, Zhejiang, Hunan, Hebei, Henan and Chongqing.

Meanwhile, a third policy document released on August 22 prohibits all religious activities in institutions of higher learning. No religious rites or buildings will be allowed on university campuses, and any teaching staff or students who belong to the Communist Party but attend religious meetings will be forced to resign from the Party.

### ***Directives Already Enforced***

This comprehensive yet secretive tightening of religious controls may account for the closure of four printing presses in recent months and the September arrest of Pastor Cai Zhuohua, a prominent Beijing house church leader.

Pastor Cai, 32, was kidnapped by three plain clothes police officers on September 11. Cai's wife and two other relatives were arrested on September 27.

Chinese sources told the U.S.-based China Aid Foundation that the pastor faces an extremely harsh sentence because of his role in Beijing house church leadership and his alleged role in the printing and distribution of illegal religious materials.

Officials apparently found about 200,000 copies of the Bible and other Christian literature in a storage room managed by Cai.

However, authorities may convict Cai on trumped up criminal charges such as tax evasion or illegal business management rather than purely religious charges.

According to a China Aid source, the government has labeled this "the most serious case of overseas religious infiltration since the founding of the People's Republic of China."

Another source told China Aid that this case is part of a broader national campaign that began in June against the underground church and so-called "illegal" or unauthorized religious publications.

### ***Olympic Pressure***

The Chinese government is no doubt aware that a full-scale crackdown on the Chinese church at this point in time would lead to an international outcry, particularly in the lead-up to the Olympic Games, to be held in Beijing in 2008.

Religious issues are a potential source of embarrassment for the Games. At the recent South East Asian Games held in Vietnam in December 2003, some Vietnamese Christians seized the opportunity to protest on the steps of government buildings, attracting international media attention and severely embarrassing the Communist government.

As one source in China told Compass last week, this new crackdown may be an effort to "tidy things up" before the Olympics, to prevent similar incidents in Beijing.

China's desire to increase its standing on the international scene may account for the public promises made in October to soften religious policy. These promises were perhaps an effort to deflect attention away from an increasingly serious crackdown on the Chinese church.

As one China observer told Compass, "The government seems locked into a defensive mindset which makes it unwilling to consider reform -- let alone the liberalization of China's repressive system of religious control.

"Recent serious ethnic disturbances among Chinese Muslims in central China, as well as the explosive role of religion on the international scene, may cause [the Chinese regime] to further retreat from necessary updating of its religious policies.

"If so, this will only make the 'problem of religion' more intractable in the longer term."

*New regulations issued in a policy document on August 17:*

### **The Four Don'ts:**

1. In religious affairs, do not establish a subordinate relationship with any foreign religious organizations.
2. Do not establish any relationship with any foreign international organization of a political or religious nature.
3. Do not join or attend religio-political activities held by foreign religious organizations.
4. Do not attend or become involved with religious or political activities of any overseas religious organization.

#### **The Five Prohibitions:**

1. To prohibit [Chinese] religious organizations or bodies from establishing any subordinate relationships with overseas religious organizations or bodies.
2. To prohibit religious organizations from using propagation of religion to carry out social activities of a political nature.
3. To prohibit them from undertaking any activities through the propagation of religion which oppose or challenge the Chinese constitution.
4. To prohibit them from making converts or setting up religious organizations among Party, government or judicial organs.
5. To prohibit religious organizations from setting up political organizations under the pretence of propagating religion and making converts in rural areas.

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## **China announces 'change' in religious policies**

***Government officials discuss new regulations while raids and arrests continue***

by Sarah Page

Compass Direct (09.11.2004)/HRWF (10.11.2004) - Email [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - In a two-day international conference on religion and law held in Beijing on October 18 and 19, Chinese officials said they were open to changes in religious policy.

During the conference, Zhang Xunmou, director of the policy and legal department of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA, formerly the Religious Affairs Bureau), said the days of issuing administrative orders on religious affairs were over. New laws would set clear limits on the authority given to local officials to control religious activity.

Zhang said existing laws and regulations were now inadequate after two decades of reform. He also claimed the new approach would be a paradigm shift in China's religious policy.

However, Ji Wenyuan, deputy director of SARA, emphasized that China was unique and cautioned against the adoption of religious policies from the West, the *South China Morning Post* reported on October 23. In the past, Chinese Christian converts were accused of "collaborating" with the West and corrupting Chinese culture.

Asia News said the changes in religious policy were a positive step forward, but only if the government recognized religious freedom as a basic human right. On October 25, the news service quoted an anonymous source in Hong Kong who said the announcement was merely "cosmetic" -- a move aimed at "sheltering China from international criticism against its harsh religious policy."

Zhang Qianan, a professor at Peking University, confirmed to reporters that while the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, this freedom was only available to groups recognized by the state.

Indeed, Ji's cautious admonition of "change, but not yet" was borne out in a wave of arrests and raids carried out on Christians in October.

In mid October, a building belonging to a house church leader was raided by police. "They took everything from her -- all she has left is a mattress," one source told Compass. "They watch her place all the time and someone is stationed outside the house 24 hours a day, seven days a week." Bibles were also confiscated in the raid, along with other Christian literature and tapes.

In late October, another house church leader reported that authorities were watching him closely. One of his church meeting points was raided in the last few days of October, and many believers were arrested, beaten and questioned.

Information obtained during questioning led to raids on several other meeting points for the same house church network. The believers have now scattered and their pastor has gone into hiding.

One ministry reported a sharp increase in persecution throughout September and October, with a large number of arrests. One co-worker was beaten to death after she was arrested by police. A 70-year-old Chinese believer was also arrested in Xinjiang province; this man was hospitalized after a severe beating.

Another co-worker was arrested in Shaanxi province. Police confiscated all of the family's belongings, "right down to their very last chair."

Perhaps more significantly, four printing presses were shut down within the space of a month, when police discovered they were printing illegal Christian materials. One press operator was puzzled by the raids, saying "... we have never seen this type of crackdown before."

Another source who verified the closure of one printing press said the owner was arrested and held on false charges while his warehouse was emptied of thousands of Christian books.

Officials said the new regulations proposed at the conference would strengthen the self-government of registered churches and reduce administrative costs for SARA. Tax laws and levies would also be applied to registered churches, some of which had amassed considerable wealth.

An article in the *Shanghai Daily* on October 19 seemed to indicate that changes were already underway. The article said the Bible would be placed on a recommended reading list for students in the city, along with a popular series of Kung Fu books. However, some parents interviewed by the newspaper said they were concerned that students would be adversely affected by what they read in the Bible.

After the changes were announced, deputy director Ji said that Beijing must tread carefully in making these reforms. He emphasized that social stability and harmony must be the basis for any new laws, stating, "A religion must be accepted not only by its own congregation, which follows its teachings, but also by non-believers who can live with it," according to an article in the *South China Morning Post* on October 23.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell met with Chinese officials on October 25 to discuss human rights violations, *The New York Times* reported. Talks ground to a halt earlier this year after the U.S. proposed a resolution against China at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Li Zhaoxing, China's foreign minister, assured Powell that China was now willing to re-open the dialogue on human rights abuses.

## **Xinjiang: Linked religious practice and state control levels?**

By Igor Rotar

Forum 18 News Service (11.10.2004)/HRWF (12.10.2004) - Email [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - The Chinese authorities maintain far fewer controls on religious life in the mountains and foothills of Altai [Altay] in the far north of the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region than elsewhere in the region, Forum 18 News Service found on a visit to the remote area in the second half of September. This appears to be partly because, as Forum 18 observed, religious practice is extremely low among the majority ethnic Kazakhs, as well as among Chinese and most other local minorities.

The mountainous Altai region is divided between four states - Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China - yet essentially forms a single unit because of its geographical and ethno-cultural peculiarities. Chinese Altai has very little in common with the rest of the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (historically known as Eastern Turkestan) and resembles its neighbours - the Altai and Tuva autonomous republics of Russia, and Mongolia - more than the Central Asian countries.

Over sixty per cent of the population of Chinese Altai consists of Kazakhs, with the Chinese coming second numerically. Also living in the area are several hundred Tuvins, whose ancestors fled to Chinese Altai after the colonisation of Tuva by Tsarist Russia, as well as several hundred Russians, Mongols and Dungans.

The local Kazakhs who have preserved their semi-nomadic way of life are not, as a rule, deeply religious. Among the Kazakhs, Islam is practised at a superficial level in everyday life and is closely bound up with pagan rites. Visiting Kazakh villages, Forum 18 saw many people smoking, including elderly women, while alcoholism is a serious problem. Neither of these phenomena is at all characteristic of the Uighurs living in Xinjiang's central and southern regions, who are noted for their high level of religious observance.

Also noticeable is that, unlike the Uighurs, the Kazakhs prefer to send their children to Chinese-language schools. This has resulted in large-scale assimilation of Altai's urban Kazakhs by the Chinese. It is probably the low rate of religious observance among the Kazakhs that explains why, in practice, the work of Kazakh mosques is hardly subjected to control by the Chinese authorities.

By contrast, Dungan mosques in the area are subjected to fairly strict control. On 21 September, in the Dungan mosque of the town of Burqin, 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of the district centre of Altai [Altay], Forum 18 saw an instructional display outlining banned activities, which the authorities had compelled the local imam, Musa Ma, to put up in his office.

Banned activities included teaching religion "privately"; allowing children under 18 to attend a mosque; allowing Islam to influence family life and birth planning behaviour; propaganda associated with terrorism and separatism; religious professionals acquiring large sums of money; the declaration of "holy war" (jihad); and promoting "superstitious thoughts". However, the imam-hatyb of the ethnic Kazakh mosque in Burqin, Emanzhi Takhty, told Forum 18 that there was no such display in his mosque and the authorities had not instructed him on how the community's life should be regulated. "We are not as religious as the Dungans. Our mosque is closed during the whole week and it's only for Friday prayers that about thirty people come," he told Forum 18 in the town on 29 September.

Takhty said he does not need to check whether the Kazakhs who get married at the mosque have been registered at the Registry Office. "That's because, unlike the Dungans, who only take seriously a marriage ceremony performed according to Sharia law, Kazakhs always register their marriages at the state institutions. Nor did anyone tell me children were forbidden to come to the mosque, though in practice minors very rarely come to the mosque."

The Tuvins are even less religious. Although formally Tuvins are Buddhists of the Lamaist persuasion, they are more pagan in their ritual practices, including those of shamanism. On visiting two Tuvin villages, Kanas and Koma, Forum 18 could find no Buddhist shrines, as the local inhabitants do not appear to need of them. The only form of religious rite practised by the local inhabitants which Forum 18 could discover was the annual ritual of worshipping the hills, pastures and lakes, which takes place at special sacred sites. As the Tuvins explained to Forum 18, the authorities do not prevent them carrying out this ceremony.

The local Russians also have a low level of religious commitment. Until the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, Russians formed a sizeable part of the local population. An overwhelming proportion of the local Russians were Old Believers, whose ancestors had fled to this area to escape persecution by the Tsarist authorities in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. A few purely Russian villages - Kom, Kalton, Chunkur and Kok-tagai - even existed in Chinese Altai. However, during the Cultural Revolution, practically all the Old Believers emigrated to the Soviet Union.

The Russians had quite a strong influence on the culture of the native peoples of Chinese Altai. Local inhabitants told Forum 18 that it was the Russians who taught local Kazakhs and Tuvins to build wooden houses with timber frames (the outer appearance of Kazakh and Tuvin villages is practically indistinguishable from traditional settlements of Siberia) and to use Russian bathhouses. Quite a few words have entered the languages of the Kazakhs and Tuvins of Chinese Altai from Russian, including "mashina"(car, machine), "shofyor" (driver, chauffeur), "rul" (steering wheel), "gazeta" (newspaper), "vilka" (fork) and "butylka" (bottle).

Local people told Forum 18 that, until the Cultural Revolution, the village of Kom was divided into two parts: Russian and Tuvin. The Russian Kom had over a hundred houses. As all the Russian families had many children, the total number of Russians was about a thousand. "The Russians did not have a church and used to come together for services in their homes," village resident Tursanbekhan told Forum 18 on 22 September. "However, they had a cemetery of their own. After the Russians left, the crosses on their graves rotted away and the graveyard became completely neglected. Nowadays even the traces of the Russian graves can hardly be detected any more - the local inhabitants let their cattle graze there."

There are now fewer than a hundred Russian "half-castes" (one of whose parents is Chinese) in Chinese Altai and almost all of them are Orthodox by denomination. "There was no Orthodox church in Chinese Altai even before the Cultural Revolution, now there are very few of us left, so we don't try to open an Orthodox church," Vasily Tolkachev, an active member of Burqin's Orthodox community, told Forum 18 on 20 September. "However, on all religious festivals we come together and hold a service ourselves. The Chinese authorities do not try to stop us from doing so. What's more, as Orthodox Christians, we are even supposed to have an additional day off work for Easter."

The Chinese authorities' relatively liberal religious policy in Altai is explicable, as they strictly control only the more influential religious communities who might pose a threat to the monopoly of the state Communist ideology. For example, the Chinese authorities exercise strict control over Xinjiang's Uighur and Dungan mosques, as well as local Chinese Protestant communities, who have links with their fellow believers abroad.

Despite the fact that in law religious communities can function only once they have registered with the state, the authorities usually shut their eyes to the activities of unregistered religious communities among national minorities, if their members are elderly people. "The authorities do not prevent about ten Russian old women or men, who are Pentecostals, meeting for a religious service, even if their religious community is unregistered," one local Pentecostal who wished not to be identified told Forum 18 in the town of Ghulja (Yining in Chinese), the capital of Xinjiang's Ili-Kazakh autonomous district. "Clearly they realise that the Russian Pentecostals are not dangerous in any way. As soon as these old people die, the Russian Pentecostal community will cease to exist."

Speaking to Forum 18 on 5 September in Ghulja, the local church warden, Galina Merkuleva, also confirmed that, even before the authorities returned and registered the local Orthodox church in 2002, they did not stop the Orthodox believers assembling. This attitude on the part of the Chinese authorities can be explained by the fact that the Orthodox community of Ghulja consisted of only several dozen elderly people. However, in December 2003, the authorities detained visiting Kazakhstan-based Fr Vianor Ivanov, keeping him under house arrest, as well as questioning virtually all the Orthodox believers in the city, before deporting him to Kazakhstan.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

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## How the public security system controls religious affairs

By Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 News Service (29.09.2004)/HRWF (30.09.2004) - Email [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Among the most shocking television images in recent years are those of Chinese police - more commonly known as "public security officers" - beating Falun Gong protestors in Beijing's Tiananmen Square before dragging them into waiting vans to be taken to detention centres. Several years after the height of the state repression of the Falun Gong movement and its practitioners, religious believers in China continue to suffer at the hands of public security officers.

In the first half of 2004 alone, hundreds of believers have been arrested and detained. In recent incidents, more than 100 house church leaders were arrested by public security officers and military police on 6 August in Tongxu County, Kaifeng City, Henan Province. The same day, police arrested eight Roman Catholic priests and seminarians in Quyang County, Shijiazhuang Village, Hebei Province.

Meanwhile, public security agents throughout China maintain active surveillance over Falun Gong practitioners, punctuated by periodic crackdowns. According to the Falun Gong, over 100,000 practitioners have been sent to reeducation-through-labour (laojiao) camps operated by the public security system. In Xinjiang and Tibet, public security officers work against individual believers and organisations in the name of countering "terrorism", "splittism" and "extremism".

Despite the public security system's prominent role in the state's "management" of religious affairs, little is understood outside China about this massive system of state control, its significant impact on how religious affairs in China are managed, and the nature of the discussions on religion and "cults" by members of this community.

As its name implies, the public security system - the police - is directly responsible for maintaining public order and internal security. Public security officers are involved in apprehending drug traffickers, corrupt officials and petty criminals. They also guard government and commercial office buildings, direct traffic and patrol the streets.

Yet these visible functions only scratch the surface of the public security system's immense powers and jurisdictional responsibilities. In effect, the men and women of the public security system are the Communist regime's eyes and ears to ensure the state's control over all aspects of China's political life, society and economy. Public security agencies hold extraordinarily detailed information about their objects of interest. For example, they maintain data on the size of each "cultic" group and its membership, the extent of its geographical influence and its foreign connections.

Public security agents oversee internal as well as external security. To maintain external security, public security agents oversee the foreign travel of Chinese citizens and foreigners' entry into the country. The People's Armed Police - made up of former People's Liberation Army officers and soldiers and managed jointly by the Ministry of Public Security and the Central Military Commission - maintain border security. Public security agents also have counter-intelligence responsibilities.

Internally, in addition to preventing and cracking down on major and petty crimes, public security officers provide protection for senior Communist and government officials. They also manage the household registration system (hukou), which maintains an individual file on every citizen. Moreover, they regularly police the Internet for undesirable materials.

The public security system also operates the appeals office (xingfang), which is where citizens can file grievances against state officials. Furthermore, the public security bureaucracy operates the notorious reeducation-through-labour system that imprisons many dissidents, including religious believers, without due process.

The public security system is a massive bureaucracy that extends from the Ministry of Public Security - led by a member of the powerful Communist Party Politburo - in the central government in Beijing down to police stations in the townships and villages of the hinterland. Like other government agencies, a public security organ functions at each level of government.

At the level of province or "autonomous region" - such as Tibet and Xinjiang - the public security department oversees the entire province, most of which have populations numbering in the tens of millions. Henan, for example, home to most of China's underground Protestant house churches, has over 90 million people, making it the country's most populated province. According to the 2000 "Chinese Public Security Encyclopaedia", among the chief responsibilities of these provincial public security departments are researching and analyzing social conditions in their provinces or regions; drawing up policies and countermeasures to maintain public security; and guiding and coordinating sub-provincial public security authorities.

Each provincial public security department contains numerous offices, each of which has clearly delineated responsibilities. These range from directing traffic and firefighting to maintaining political and economic security. In some cases, religion offices are established within the provincial departments to meet the needs of local conditions. Major municipalities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing - which are equivalent to provinces in their status within the administrative system - possess public security bureaus that possess similar functional offices as their provincial counterparts.

Subordinate to the provincial public security departments are a myriad of public security branches and police stations at the levels of prefecture, county, township and village. At each level, the public security offices are accountable to the public security offices of the level immediately above them, creating a firm chain of command. At the same time, public security offices at each administrative level are also subordinated to the Communist Party headquarters and the government at that level of administration.

One major effect of this "vertical and horizontal accountability" is that public security offices at every level of the administrative hierarchy are held liable by their superiors - those within the public security system and non-public security officials at their corresponding levels of administration - should they fail to maintain effective control over their respective areas of responsibilities. This system thereby puts great pressure on public security offices at each level to "perform". This system can be seen in action simply by examining the state's repression of the Falun Gong movement.

When the central government in Beijing became annoyed with the regular influx of Falun Gong protestors from areas outside the capital, it threatened provincial governments with punishment if they were unable to control their respective populations from making their way to Beijing. This threat was then relayed from the provincial governments to their respective subordinates at the prefecture, county, township and even village levels. These government leaders naturally turned to public security officials at corresponding administrative levels for the execution of these directives. At the same time, it is clear that public security officials also received similar orders from their superiors within the public security system. In addition to directives issued within the public security system, public security officials were also pressured by government leaders at corresponding administrative levels to ensure the effectiveness of enforcement. This "systemic" factor partly explains some of the most egregious abuses against Falun Gong practitioners as well as adherents of other religions and beliefs.

In theory, the central government's State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) oversees religious affairs in China. A key function of SARA and its subordinate offices is registering religious groups and venues. In general, these offices are tasked with ensuring that individual believers and groups comply with state regulations. To meet this objective, like most Chinese bureaucracies, there are provincial and local SARA offices, allowing the agency to keep an eye on all religious organisations, individuals and activities throughout the country.

However, it is important to note that SARA lacks enforcement powers. Once SARA has determined that religious groups are either illegal - meaning unregistered - or that they or individual believers are conducting illegal activities, the matter would then be turned over to the law enforcement agency - namely, the Public Security Ministry and its subordinate offices.

Widely held is the view that the Chinese Communist state is deeply suspicious of religion and its impact on political life and society. It maintains an ambiguous position that religion is likely to endure for a long time, but still needs to be closely controlled.

This ambiguous stance can also be seen in the analysis of religion within the Chinese public security community. An entry entitled "religion and crime" in the "Chinese Encyclopaedia of Public Security" states that on the one hand, "religion has a preventive function with regard to crimes; it can reduce crimes." Moreover, "there is no connection between religion and criminal behaviour." Religion "can neither reduce crimes nor produce crimes." Yet, on the other hand, "under certain conditions, religion can cause crimes – for example, crimes caused by religious fanaticism and religious wars."

The encyclopaedia entry concludes that "religious activity can exceed a country's legally permissible boundary, such as disrupting public order, harm the health of the citizens, obstruct state education system, etc. [It can] even be used by political enemy forces to engage in activities that counter the current socialist system. This causes the use of religious beliefs to commit crimes that possess strong political colourings, and generates a stark contrast with using superstitious activity to commit financial and sex crimes."

The Criminal Law has already bestowed on the public security bureaucracy the power to crack down on "cults" and "heresies". Indeed, the public security system gains legal entry

into the realm of religious affairs by virtue of its legal responsibility to eliminate "cults", which are considered socially deviant, anti-Communist, and therefore to be eradicated.

Article 300 of the Criminal Law provides punishments for those who "organise or make use of superstitious sects, secret societies or heretical organisations, or utilize superstition to disrupt the implementation of state laws and administrative rules and regulations". The "Chinese Public Security Encyclopaedia" also includes entries about the prohibition of "feudal superstitions," "cults," and "secret societies". In addition, the state has apparently adopted an unwritten policy that "illegality" is synonymous with "cults", providing the public security system with even greater latitude to arrest, detain and imprison religious believers without due process.

A review of recent Chinese public security journals reveals a significant interest in the issue of religion and "cults" among researchers in the public security community. A key theme of these analyses is the alarmist emphasis on the rapid growth of "cults" worldwide.

Moreover, these analyses often go to great lengths to distinguish "cults" from orthodox religions. For example, in one article written by a faculty member of the People's Public Security University in Beijing, published in the June 2003 issue of the Journal of Shanxi Police Academy, "cults" are distinguished from religions in the following areas.

First, whereas religions establish "superhuman" deities as the objects of their beliefs, cults establish human leaders as deities. Second, whereas religions emphasise helping their adherents to focus on the here and now - even though religions also possess apocalyptic visions - "cults" advocate the impending destruction of the current world. Third, whereas religions are organized and possess well-defined rules to regulate the behaviour of their adherents, "cults" use deception and other means to force their adherents to engage in immoral behaviour, disobey laws and regulations, and engage in violence. Fourth, whereas most religions do not advocate the overthrow of governments, "cults" see governments as the personification of evil and advocate their overthrow. Given this perception of the nature of "cults", the writer argued that the state must establish effective countermeasures to contain their growth.

In the June 2003 issue of the Journal of Hunan Public Security College, a faculty member of the college wrote that the state must take six steps to achieve this objective. First, various state agencies, including public security and religious affairs organs, must cooperate to actively "elevate ideological understanding". Second, propaganda and intelligence work must be strengthened. Third, the state must accelerate the "construction" of "spiritual" and "materialist" "civilisations." In other words, economic development must be broadened and accelerated and more people educated.

Fourth, public security officers need to be careful in their use of weapons in their crackdowns against "cults" so as to prevent others from accusing the state of using inappropriate force to enforce the law. Fifth, during the enforcement of the law, public security officers need to distinguish between the criminals and the victims and must follow legal procedures. Finally, the writer recommended that the Chinese government increase its cooperation with foreign governments, with particular emphasis on adopting the procedures and institutions of foreign states, such as France, Malaysia and Japan.

In looking at this list of countermeasures, the lack of imagination is striking. The repeated emphasis on improving "ideological understanding" and strengthening propaganda smack of Communist thinking. Related to this point is the fact that some of the proposed countermeasures reveal a basic lack of understanding of the factors that contribute to individuals having a religious belief. By suggesting that economic development and high educational standards would lead to greater secularisation and thus the demise of "cults" (and religions, of course), the writer maintains the Marxist materialist position and is thus blind to the fact that many religious adherents and "cult" followers are well-educated and

economically well-off. Indeed in major urban areas in recent years, Christianity has grown tremendously among college-educated young professionals.

However, perhaps the most troubling aspect of this list is its recommendation that China follow the examples of foreign states such as France and Malaysia. The article made direct reference to the anti-cult commission recently set up by the French government and its usefulness in controlling the growth of "cults". The article conveniently overlooks the many criticisms that were levelled against the French government for establishing a mechanism that essentially provides the state with power to define what constitutes an orthodox religion and "cult" and the capacity to prosecute any groups that are determined to be "cults".

At the same time, "unorthodox" views on the topic also get an airing within the Chinese public security community. For example, an article in the February 2003 issue of the Journal of Hunan Public Security College criticised Article 300 of the Criminal Law for its lack of "logic" and broad "generalisation". The author pointed out that Western countries, unlike China, do not have laws that apply specifically to "cults". These countries only prosecute adherents to "cults" for activities that violate "concrete" laws. He contended that Western practices are more "scientific" and more "rational" than their Chinese counterparts. The author concluded that it is useless to try to stem the tide of "cults" by prosecuting them through criminal laws and advocated either abolishing or significantly reforming Article 300.

Yet, lest we become too engrossed in this "unorthodox" thinking, the author of the article reminded us several times that he is not a "cult" sympathiser or even one who is agnostic about the nature of organisations that have been determined as "cults". He agreed with his peers in the public security community on how far the proliferation of "cults" threatens Chinese society. He argued that "cults" endanger society because they hold beliefs that devalue human life, destroy the balance of social order, and endanger the "guiding role" of Marxism in China's "ideological realm" as well as the Communist Party's political leadership.

According to the author, his opposition to Article 300 of the Criminal Law and similar criminal laws against "cults" is based on his belief that such laws and practices only exacerbate the situation by forcing more "cultic" adherents to become martyrs while driving many "cultic" groups underground.

These are without doubt disturbing views, particularly given that public security officers are at the frontline of executing state laws and government policies. In this regard, Western observers broadly agree that the Chinese public security system must undergo serious reforms. Indeed, as seen above, many Chinese officials and scholars agree that reforms of the current police system are much needed, whatever their political or ideological motivations may be.

For these "reformers", changes must also take place in areas other than religion. For example, earlier this year, there were reports that China's senior policymakers were considering abolishing the infamous reeducation-through-labour system. Murray Scot Tanner, a noted American expert on the Chinese public security system, also observed that an intense debate has developed within the public security community about the need to abolish or reform the use of torture.

However, in the end, what is surely recognised is that reforming the public security system is insufficient to guarantee the protection of religious freedom or any other human right. The reason is simple. The public security system is merely an "instrument" of state repression. Views held by members of that community are simply extensions of those maintained by China's senior Communist leaders.

This is not to say that local officials do not take things into their own hands. They certainly do. However, for the most part, they have been able to escape prosecution. For example, Article 251 of the Criminal Law states that government officials who illegally deprive citizens

of their religious freedom may be sentenced to up to two years in prison. However, no instance has become known of officials prosecuted for this type of violation. Without the sympathetic support of their superiors in higher levels of government, it is doubtful that these officials could have escaped prosecution.

Unfortunately, it is likely this trend will continue in the foreseeable future. In this regard, the arguments of the author of the article criticising Article 300 of the Criminal Law contain some truth. He argued that the key to resolve the "cult" problem is improving "the social structure" and raising the "quality of the principal participants of social activities". Similarly, the key to resolving the state's repression of "cults" and religious groups that the state deems to be "cultic" is to instil in the Chinese official culture - and the population at large - the perspective that no one, including the state, has a right to determine whether a religion is orthodox. This determination certainly cannot be made on political or ideological grounds.

Furthermore, for the "rule of law" to mean anything, laws must be created - to the extent possible - not as instruments of political, social or ideological interests. They must instead be "constructed", to use Communist parlance, on the understanding that individual rights must be protected even as the interests of the majority are respected.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

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## What you can't do in a mosque

By Igor Rotar and Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 News Service (28.09.2004)/HRWF (29.09.2004) – Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 21 September, Forum 18 News Service studied a display that the authorities have ordered local imam Musu Ma to hang in his office in the Dungan mosque in the town of Burqin, 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of the district centre of Altay [Altay], in the far north of China's north-western Xinjiang-Uighur autonomous region. The display - believed to be typical of those required by the authorities in mosque offices and normally hidden from public view - spells out what the authorities will not allow in a mosque, including teaching religion "privately", allowing children under 18 to attend and allowing Islam to influence behaviour in the areas of family life and birth planning.

The Dungan mosque serves mainly members not of the Uighur population (the largest Muslim community in Xinjiang) - or at least the majority of worshippers are not Uighurs. Most of the Muslims who attend, according to the display, are Hui - Muslims of Han Chinese ethnicity - and Dongxiang. Musu Ma reported that similar displays hang in the offices of virtually all the imams of Xinjiang's mosques. Such displays are known to exist in Hui mosques in Beijing and elsewhere in China, while places of worship of other ethnic minority faiths - especially Tibetan Buddhist temples - are believed to have similar displays.

At the top of the Chinese-language display at the Dungan mosque are photographs of the mosque leaders while underneath are photographs of officials of the mosque management committee. The display is divided into sections setting out the restrictions on the mosque's activity. The top right hand section lists the five items that should not be brought into the mosque, including personal and family disputes; disputes over marriage and birth planning; youths under the age of 18; and statements and "illegal propaganda materials" associated with the "three forces" of terrorism, "splittism" (the official term for separatism) and extremism.

The display sets out the prohibition on religious professionals acquiring large sums of money and material goods for presiding over weddings, funerals and other ceremonies. It also

warns against performing the reading of the "Nikha" (the Muslim marriage contract) to couples who have yet to receive marriage certificates from the state authorities.

In addition to the other prohibitions, one section lists a further ten items that must be resolutely cracked down. These include the propagation of ethnic separatism, the declaration of "holy war" (jihad) and inciting religious fanaticism; using religion to intervene in administrative, judicial, education, marriage, and birth planning matters; using religion to promote reactionary views such as "pan-Islamism" and "pan-Turkism"; holding "private" religious classes and acquiring "private" students in religious venues and by religious professionals; and promoting "superstitious thoughts".

Also required, according to the display, is that the mosque's "democratic management committee" (DMC) should conduct regular sessions for religious professionals and laypersons propounding legal regulations and party policies. Such committees are party-appointed bodies that oversee what goes on in each religious venue.

Similar "democratic management committees" are known to exist in Tibetan Buddhist temples. The International Campaign for Tibet reported that they have been set up "in all monasteries and nunneries" in Tibet to implement Party policies and regulations. "DMCs act as the eyes and ears of the Party in monasteries and nunneries," it reported. "In conjunction with ad hoc government 'work teams', DMCs search for suspected dissidents in monasteries and nunneries. A number of monks and nuns have been expelled from their institutions and even arrested on the recommendation of their DMC."

Forum 18 notes that national-religious committees, which form part of the administration of every city, at least in areas of China with large ethnic minority populations, also maintain control over the lives of believers. Communities may only function once they have registered with the national-religious committee, and their leaders have to be drawn from people whose candidacy has been approved by the authorities. The leaders of all religious communities have to attend meetings of the national-religious committees. At the meetings, officials explain to leaders of religious communities what policy they should pursue with believers.

The display also requires all religious venues to display land certificates, building certificates, imam qualification certificates, operating permit, joint management contract, and the appointment certificate of the head of the religious venue.

Musu Ma told Forum 18 that the mosque can conduct marriage ceremonies and celebrations of childbirth only with the specific permission of the authorities. He also emphasised that the authorities do not prevent children from being circumcised.

Forum 18 saw posters in mosques in Kashgar (southern Xinjiang) in 2003 stating that underage children were not allowed to attend mosque, but did not see such posters this September in the cities of northern and central Xinjiang. Believers who preferred not to be named told Forum 18 that such posters are not generally hung at mosque entrances, but usually there are displays in the imams' offices containing detailed instructions from the authorities, which will only be shown to foreigners with the utmost reluctance.

Interestingly, such displays are not compulsory in non-Muslim places of worship. For example, Forum 18 found no such displays in Xinjiang's two Orthodox churches, in the towns of Ghulja (Yining), capital of Ili-Kazakh autonomous prefecture, or Urumqi [Ürümqi].

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## Will Orthodox Christians soon be allowed priests?

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 News Service (22.09.2004)/HRWF (23.09.2004) A notable improvement in the situation for China's Orthodox may be traced to the installation of Hu Jintao as the country's leader in 2002, a Chinese Orthodox source from the southern coastal city of Shanghai has maintained to Forum 18 News Service. Russian Orthodox priest Fr Dionisy Pozdnyayev, based at the Institute for Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong, is similarly hopeful that life for Chinese Orthodox is beginning to improve. "Things are opening up gradually under the new younger leadership," he remarked to Forum 18 on 18 September. "Not as fast as we would like, but changes are taking place".

The Chinese Orthodox Church, founded on the work of a Russian Orthodox mission, was granted autonomy by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1957. However, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 soon brought its activities to a halt. Orthodox churches - like places of worship of all other faiths - were systematically destroyed across China. Only after the Cultural Revolution was over did certain religious communities have the opportunity to reopen places of worship, though under tight government control.

One obvious new development for the Orthodox is the possibility of new clergy. After the death on 16 December 2003 in the capital Beijing of 80-year-old Fr Aleksandr Du Lifu, the only indigenous Orthodox clergy in China are Fr Mikhail Wan and Protodeacon Evangel Lu in Shanghai. But, in addition to their advanced years, the absence of an officially recognized Orthodox community in their city and the harrowing experiences the pair suffered during the Cultural Revolution mean that they do not perform services, Fr Dionisy told Forum 18.

Since 2003, however, 15 Chinese Orthodox have been studying in several Orthodox theological seminaries in Russia with the permission of China's State Administration of Religious Affairs. "Now they are happy for Chinese to become priests," the Shanghai Orthodox source remarked to Forum 18 regarding this development.

While consultations with the Chinese authorities on the issue are indeed continuing, according to Fr Dionisy, it has yet to be decided whether the Chinese seminarians currently in Russia will be allowed to become priests in China when they complete their theological education. "They could also serve in the Chinese diaspora in the Russian Far East," he pointed out to Forum 18. "The main thing is to have them ready."

In the meantime, while Fr Dionisy serves the liturgy in the Russian embassy in Beijing approximately every six weeks, "Chinese citizens are not permitted to attend," he told Forum 18. On 11 April, for example, Russian television news reported that citizens of Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia & Montenegro and Ethiopia attended the Easter liturgy at the Beijing embassy. Fr Dionisy additionally ministers to an Orthodox community of foreign citizens in Shenzhen in the southern coastal Guangdong Province, some 30 minutes by suburban train from Hong Kong. The Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate is also active in the region.

Metropolitan Nikitas (Loulias) of Hong Kong and South East Asia told Forum 18 on 29 June that his Church has two parishes in Hong Kong and Taipei, where "ethnic Chinese are Orthodox Christians and active participants in the life of the Church".

It is however possible for foreign religious personnel to minister to citizens of mainland China if they are invited by an officially recognized religious community and have the special permission of the state authorities, Fr Dionisy assured Forum 18. One example as on 18 December 2003, when Fr Dionisy conducted Fr Aleksandr Du Lifu's funeral in Beijing's

Catholic cathedral with the permission of the local Patriotic Catholic bishop, Michael Fu Tieshan.

More recently, Yekaterinburg and Verkhoturye Orthodox diocesan newspaper reported on 8 July that Abbot Moisei (Pilats) of the Monastery of the New Russian Martyrs in Alapayevsk, some 120 kilometres (75 miles) north-east of the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, spent two weeks in June ministering to the Parish of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God in Harbin. Having studied Chinese independently, the newspaper reported, Fr Moisei was able to hear confessions in both Russian and Chinese. According to Fr Dionisy, this visit took place with the permission of the local state religious affairs department.

By contrast, the Chinese state authorities appear particularly sensitive towards foreign citizens engaging in unsanctioned ministry to their nationals. Fr Vianor Ivanov, a Russian Orthodox dean from Kazakhstan, was kept under house arrest for a week in December 2003 by officials in the north-western region of Xinjiang after bringing Orthodox literature and baptismal crosses into the country, baptising local Russians and dedicating the Orthodox church in Ghulja (Yining).

In addition to those in Harbin and Ghulja (Yining), two other Orthodox churches are currently open to Chinese nationals in Urumqi and Labdarin (Inner Mongolia). According to the Shanghai Orthodox source, these all open to believers for prayers on Sundays and a few major feast days, and are the only locations of Orthodox icons in China. A second church in Harbin, St. Sophia's, has been restored by the state authorities but currently houses a museum, while in Shanghai, local Orthodox are reportedly unhappy that the two surviving historical churches house restaurants.

Fr. Dionisy told Forum 18 that while discussions continue with the Shanghai authorities about turning the restaurants into museums, these have not so far touched upon the possibility of opening them up for worship. He was unable to confirm whether a new Orthodox church might soon be built in Beijing. "The primary issue is restoration of the church on embassy grounds, but the Chinese authorities will have to address this question at some point, especially with the 2008 Olympics, when there will be many Orthodox guests."

For those Orthodox without a church, the only possibility for worship is private prayer. "You can pray at home with your family - maybe 5 or 6 people - but a gathering of 20 or 30 in a private home wouldn't be allowed," the Shanghai Orthodox source told Forum 18. "They [the authorities] would start asking questions. But they turn a blind eye up to a certain point."

He estimated there to be 3,000, mostly elderly, Orthodox in China, including some 500 in Urumqi and 200 in Beijing. While most of the 50 who attend prayers in the Harbin church and many of those in Xinjiang look Russian but have Chinese citizenship, he said, others – including those elsewhere in Manchuria and in Shanghai - vary from being half Chinese, half Russian to looking entirely Chinese but identifying themselves as Orthodox because a grandparent was Orthodox. According to Fr Dionisy, those in Labdarin have Russian roots and speak Russian, while the younger generation speaks Chinese: "For most Chinese Orthodox, Chinese is more important, they have preserved traditional connections with Russia but their mentality, lifestyle and everyday language is Chinese."

One outstanding problem for Chinese Orthodox is a shortage of liturgical texts, according to the Shanghai source. Those used by the psalm-reader in the Harbin church are in Old Chinese and Church Slavonic (the liturgical language of the Russian Orthodox Church). But, he said, the prayers used by Chinese Orthodox at home are all in an antiquated translation last fully intelligible 70 years ago, which younger people find especially difficult to understand. Forum 18 has viewed one such prayerbook, printed by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad's Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, near New York, in 1985. According to the source, such texts began to circulate in China only around 1999.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

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## **Imams and mosque education under state control**

By Igor Rotar

Forum 18 News Service (15.09.2004)/HRWF (16.09.2004) Although the local Uighur Muslim population is not as devout as in the south-west of China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, Forum 18 News Service found in early September in the town of Turpan in Xinjiang's north-east that local Muslims (most of them Uighurs) are as harshly controlled by the Chinese authorities as in the south-west. The town of 65,000 people is situated in the Turpan Depression. At 150 metres (500 feet) below sea level, the depression is the lowest place in China, though the highest temperatures in the country have been recorded here.

The imam-hatyb of Turpan's central Janubikuk mosque, Sirojdin Abdurakhim, admitted to Forum 18 that all the imams are appointed by the authorities. The imam-hatybs also have to attend regular meetings of the national religious committees (which are responsible for work with religious believers) at the town administration. "At the committee we are told what mistakes are allowable at a mosque," he told Forum 18 in Turpan on 10 September. "We are ordered to preach the concept of peace to believers and to explain to them what harm is done to Muslims by the terrorists who operate in the name of our religion."

Although, unlike in the south-western city of Kashgar, Forum 18 did not find any posters in mosques banning young people under the age of 18 from attending, Abdurakhim admitted to Forum 18 that children are not allowed to attend mosques. "The authorities instruct us to tell parents that their children must complete their education before they can start to attend mosque," he told Forum 18. However, this order is not observed too rigorously and Forum 18 observed several children in Turpan's mosques.

Abdurakhim also admitted that children are not allowed to study Islam. Even adults may only study the faith in mosques where the imam-hatybs have received specific authorisation from the authorities, though Forum 18 did see posters in a number of mosques stating that instruction in Islam was permitted in them.

Separatist tendencies are far less developed among Turpan's Uighurs than among fellow-Uighurs in Kashgar and in other cities of south-western Xinjiang such as Hotan. Speaking to Forum 18, local Uighurs themselves ascribed their relative loyalty to Beijing mainly to the fact that Turpan is much closer to central China than are the cities of south-western Xinjiang and that it therefore fell under Beijing's influence earlier.

Nevertheless, Turpan's Uighurs, like their fellow-Uighurs in the south-west, prefer to pursue a policy of voluntary "apartheid" towards the Chinese. Local Uighur men hardly ever marry Chinese women.

They also refuse to eat in Chinese-owned restaurants because the food is not prepared in accordance with Muslim law. At the same time, Uighurs in the Turpan area are far less devout than those in the south-west. Even during Friday prayers Forum 18 counted no more than 50 believers at Turpan's Janubikuk mosque. In south-western Xinjiang, round 30 per cent of married women wear the Islamic veil, but Forum 18 saw no woman with her face covered in Turpan.

It is worth noting that, as local Muslims told Forum 18, between 1983 and 1996 underage children were not prevented from attending mosque or from studying Islam. Forum 18's sources maintained that during this period, Muslims faced almost no restrictions from the authorities. It is possible that Beijing has stepped up its policy against Muslims because the Chinese authorities have concluded that religion is clearly an underlying cause of Uighur separatist sentiment.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org/>

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## **Xinjiang: Security service investigation followed Orthodox priest's deportation**

Forum 18 News Service (09.09.2004)/HRWF (09.09.2004) – Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In the wake of the detention and eventual deportation from China last December of Kazakhstan-based Russian Orthodox priest Fr Viarion Ivanov, who had been working among the Russian Orthodox minority in the Ili-Kazakh autonomous prefecture in China's north-western Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, Forum 18 News Service has learnt that the Chinese security services began an investigation into what Fr Ivanov had been doing in the region.

Local Orthodox told Forum 18 in the prefecture's capital Ghulja in early September that virtually all the Orthodox believers in the city were questioned by the security services about Fr Ivanov's activity after he was deported.

Dean of Zharkent district in the Astana and Almaty Orthodox diocese, Fr Ivanov was arrested by Chinese customs officials in December 2003 after trying to bring Orthodox literature and baptismal crosses into China, he told Forum 18 on 6 September from Zharkent, a town on the Kazakh side of the border with China, 350 kilometres (220 miles) east of Kazakhstan's commercial capital Almaty.

Fr Ivanov was taken to Ghulja, 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of the Kazakh border and 600 kilometres (375 miles) west of Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi. He was held under house arrest in a hotel for one week and each day was taken for questioning by the state security services. Fr Ivanov was then deported back to Kazakhstan. All his religious literature and baptismal crosses were confiscated.

"They questioned me for five hours a day. The special services representatives proved to be amazingly well-informed," Fr Ivanov told Forum 18. He said they knew all about his previous visits to Xinjiang, where he had baptised local Russians and dedicated Ghulja's Orthodox church. "They had clearly come over the border into Kazakhstan and visited Zharkent to gather information about me."

"I myself am not surprised by what happened to Fr Ivanov," an Orthodox representative told Forum 18 from Almaty. "China remains a communist country with all that goes with that." The representative pointed out that Xinjiang has just two Orthodox churches, in Ghulja and in Urumqi, and neither has a priest. "Chinese law bans foreign priests from working in the country on a permanent basis and there are simply no local Orthodox priests left in China."

One politically well-connected local Russian, Nikolai Lunev, a deputy for the tenth All-Chinese Political Consultative Council, a consultative body incorporating China's national minorities, played down any difficulties for the Orthodox. "I myself have not heard anything about Ivanov being deported, but I met him in Urumqi and warned him that under our legal system a priest could work in Xinjiang only with the permission of the

authorities," he told Forum 18 on 2 September in Ghulja. "If he was deported, that is his fault because he broke our laws."

He regarded as "decisive proof" that Orthodox believers have "full rights" the fact that in 1992 the authorities restored at their own expense the Church of St Nicholas in Ghulja, which had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

An elder at St Nicholas Church, Galina Merulyeva, agreed with Lunev. "Under Chinese law we do not have the right to hold meetings if our community is not registered. Now we can meet publicly for prayers in our own church, which we simply would not have been able to do without the help of the authorities," she told Forum 18 in Ghulja on 3 September.

However, some in Ghulja's Orthodox community are far more sceptical about the authorities' goodwill than Merulyeva and Lunev, pointing out that the church was not rebuilt on its original site, where the plot remains vacant, but in the Russian Orthodox cemetery.

"Under Chinese law the land occupied by churches destroyed during the Cultural Revolution ought to be returned to the religious communities, but the plot where the Orthodox church once stood has been given not to the religious community but to a private individual who is not an Orthodox believer," members of the Ghulja Orthodox community, who preferred not to be named, told Forum 18 on 4 September. "Had they given the plot of the former church back to us, we could have rented part of the land to him, which would have enabled us not only to restore the church but also to support the poor members of our community from the remaining funds."

The Orthodox also expressed their disappointment that every time they want to ring the church bell, they have to ask the authorities' permission. The authorities told the Orthodox that these restrictions are in place because Muslims are not allowed to issue the call to prayer using loudspeakers, and China treats believers of different faiths qually.

Orthodox believers in Tacheng, a town near the Kazakh border, 600 kilometres (375 miles) north-west of Urumqi where there is another sizeable local Russian population, have had less success re-establishing church life. "Our church was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. So far, unfortunately, it has not been restored," the head of Tacheng's Russian community, Valentin Belyakov, told Forum 18 on 6 September. "But we have appealed to the authorities to help us restore it."

Belyakov also expressed concern about the city's Orthodox cemetery. "The cemetery is in a derelict state. Building clay is constantly being deposited around it. We also hope to resolve this issue soon with the help of the authorities," he told Forum 18.

The head of the Hong Kong Orthodox parish of the Apostles Peter and Paul Fr Dionisy Pozdnyayev, who works with Chinese Orthodox believers under the auspices of the Moscow Patriarchate, told Forum 18 of his overall optimism regarding the future of Orthodoxy in China. "It is possible to find a common language with the Chinese authorities," he told Forum 18 from Hong Kong on 6 September. "The main thing is not to break the laws of the country and to make requests directly to the republic's authorities."

He admitted that there is just one Orthodox priest and one deacon in China at present, but believed it is possible to resolve this issue. "If a request is made, the Chinese authorities will very likely give permission for Chinese citizens to study in Russia's Orthodox seminaries. Fifteen Chinese citizens are already studying in Russian seminaries," Fr Pozdnyayev declared. "The main thing is not to demonstrate independence and to respect Chinese law."

China's national authorities have so far prevented the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church destroyed in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 from reviving. Beijing's last

surviving Orthodox priest died last December, while the city authorities have repeatedly denied requests to allow a parish to be reopened in the city.

The history of the Russian community in Xinjiang can be divided into four stages: from the start of Russia's colonisation of Central Asia until 1920; the period after 1920, when White forces were driven out of Russian territory into Xinjiang; the period after 1932, when people unhappy with collectivisation in the Soviet Union fled to Xinjiang; and the period from 1954 to the present, when Russians have left Xinjiang for Australia and Russia.

By about 1925 the picture of Russian settlement in Xinjiang had become established, and it remained unchanged until the second half of the 1950s. Ghulja became the centre of the Russian diaspora, with Tacheng and its surrounding districts next in terms of population, followed by Urumqi. In the 1930s, the Russian population in Ghulja and Tacheng approached several thousand and Ghulja even had a Russian-language newspaper.

After China's Cultural Revolution, virtually all Xinjiang's Russian population emigrated to Australia and the Soviet Union. According to official statistics around 2,000 Russians live in Xinjiang-Uighur autonomous region. However, almost all of them are of mixed race, with one Russian parent and one Chinese parent. Most of these people or their parents were deported from the Soviet Union on Stalin's orders after relations between the Soviet and Chinese governments deteriorated.

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## **China jails Falungong followers for promoting 'cult'**

ABC News (30.08.2004) / HRWF Int. (31.08.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- China has sentenced two Falungong followers to 10 years in jail for manufacturing and spreading the group's promotional materials.

Wei Yumi and her sister Wei Yufen were convicted by a court in Qingdao city, in the northeastern province of Shandong, for activities related to "cult" organisations.

The court heard the sisters were arrested in May after they were found mass producing and copying audi-visual promotional materials for Falungong in two rented houses in Qingdao.

The Falungong was outlawed as an "evil cult" by China in 1999.

The group claims at least 1,600 of its members have been tortured or beaten to death since a crackdown was launched years ago.

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## **8 underground priests and 2 seminarians arrested**

[Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org) (17.08.2004) / HRWF Int. (24.08.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Eight priests and two seminarians of the underground Catholic Church in China were arrested Aug. 6 in Hebei province while attending a religious retreat, the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation reported.

Among those arrested in Sujiazhuang village were Father Huo Junlong, the administrator of Baoding Diocese in Hebei; Father Zhang Zhenquian of Baoding; and Father Huang of Sujiazhuang. The names of others arrested were not immediately known.

About 20 police vehicles and a large number of security policemen surrounded Sujiazhuang and conducted a house-to-house search to arrest the priests and seminarians. Those seized are now detained in the Baoding Security Bureau.

Nine out of the ten religious arrested this time belong to the Baoding Diocese. Bishop Su Zhi-Ming, the underground Catholic Bishop of Baoding, was arrested by the government in October 1997. He was last seen publicly last November, while hospitalized in a Baoding hospital.

Auxiliary Bishop An Shuxin of Baoding vanished after his arrest by the government in March 1996.

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## **Chinese court sentences 3 activists to prison**

by Christopher Bodeen

AP (06.08.2004) / HRWF Int. (09.08.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- A Chinese court on Friday sentenced three activists in the independent Protestant church to up to three years in prison for leaking state secrets, a court official and overseas church activist said.

The independent church refers to loosely affiliated groups whose followers worship outside the Communist Party-controlled official Protestant church.

The court in the eastern city of Hangzhou found Xu Yonghai, Liu Fenggang and Zhang Shengqi guilty of passing on information to an overseas magazine about a court case involving another member of the independent church, the China Aid Association said.

Liu was also found guilty of passing on information about the destruction of unofficial churches outside Hangzhou in a crackdown last year, CAA reported. Liu received a three-year sentence, Xu two years and Zhang one year, the group said.

A judge at the Hangzhou court's No. 1 criminal division confirmed the three men had been sentenced, saying their cases were now closed. The judge, who identified himself only by his surname, Zhang, declined to give further details.

The cases against the men apparently stem from their efforts to publicize last year's crackdown on unofficial churches. Hundreds of ministers and worshippers were reportedly detained in sweeps by police and dozens of churches destroyed.

China stages such crackdowns to enforce its insistence that Christians worship only in government-controlled churches. Despite harassment, fines and the possibility of prison, millions of Protestants and Catholics continue to attend unauthorized assemblies, including in private homes.

Chinese officials deny violating religious freedoms, saying detained activists are criminals who violated Chinese law and threatened national security.

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## **Chinese religious movement is questioned**

*Many believers say the "Three Grades of Servant" movement is a cult*

by Xu Mei

Compass (06.08.2004) / HRWF Int. (09.08.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Mr. Xu Shuangfu, leader of the controversial Three Grades of Servant (TGS) movement in China, was arrested along with 90 other co-workers and followers in April 2004. Some overseas reports immediately tagged the TGS movement as an orthodox Christian house church network, suffering persecution from Communist authorities. However, the evidence emerging since the arrest suggests otherwise.

According to sources familiar with the movement, the TGS was founded in the late 1980s in the largely rural province of Anhui. By the year 2000, it claimed a nationwide membership of over one million followers, with large numbers of disciples in Anhui, Sichuan and northeast China.

Xu Shuangfu, the founder of TGS, is aged somewhere in his sixties, although with his long beard he looks considerably older. He is also known as Xu Shengguang, a name which means "holy light." The long hair and beard are more akin to traditional Daoist ideas of a divine sage than to Christianity.

Sources say Xu travels from place to place in the utmost secrecy. Wherever he stays overnight becomes a "Holy of Holies," forbidden to ordinary sect-members. TGS evangelists sleep in "the Holy Place," while ordinary believers hold their meetings in the so-called "Outer Court".

Through these arrangements, Xu clearly claims divine status. The God of Israel in the Old Testament allowed only the high priest to approach Him (though only once a year) in the innermost sanctuary of the Jewish temple.

The cult also claims to be the only true church. According to Xu's teachings, salvation can be gained only through membership in the TGS.

Xu uses Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25 as the basis for the church to be divided into "three grades of servants." Those in the highest grade are known as apostles. Xu has appointed himself as the "Great Servant," and disobeying his commands is seen as disobedience to God himself.

Xu also claims absolute power as the only mediator between God and man. Believers are told not to confess their sins to God directly, but to Xu, thereby replacing Jesus Christ with a human deity.

TGS has a ruthless system of control over its followers. Again according to sources who prefer not to be identified, those who disobey Xu are beaten and those who dare to leave the cult may risk death. Xu and his sister have amassed much wealth from their followers through this tight system of control and allegiance.

There is no doubt that the Chinese government has on occasion wrongly labeled certain house-church movements as dangerous sects or cults. But there is also no doubt that such cults do exist in China.

TGS seems to be a case in point; both the unofficial house churches and the official 'Three Self' church in China have condemned the movement as a cult.

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## China's crackdown on Christians

### *Authorities step up hard-line measures*

[Zenit.org](http://zenit.org) (31.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (02.08.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- China seems determined to restrict the spread of Christianity in the country. Authorities are now using the same tactics against Christian churches that they deployed to quash the Falun Gong spiritual movement, the Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

The crackdown, ordered late last year by the China's political leadership, according to the Journal, is being carried out by an offshoot of the task force that coordinated the campaign against the Falun Gong. The main focus is on the rural zones, where religious fervor is on the rise.

"The spread of Christianity is really worrying the government, so it has become a target," said Kang Xiaoguang of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to the Wall Street Journal.

The government is targeting what it terms "cults," which are only loosely described. In practice the term is applied to whatever groups have not received official permission to operate. Apart from the continued persecution of Catholic groups that do not submit to official control, the government is particularly worried about evangelical and Protestant groups, who have been rapidly expanding.

### *Chronicle of persecution*

Two groups active in documenting religious persecution, the Center for Religious Freedom, a division of Freedom House, and Compass Direct, have collected news on the crackdown by authorities from a wide range of sources. Among the reports from past months are the following items.

-- July 22. More than 100 religious leaders were arrested in the western province of Xinjiang. The arrests came during a meeting organized by the Ying Shang Church, a large house-church network headquartered in Anhui Province. The arrests came shortly after 40 house-church leaders were arrested while attending a training seminar in Cheng Du City in the province of Sichuan.

-- July 19. Chinese authorities detained and interrogated house-church leader Samuel Lamb after worship services on June 13. Ten of his co-workers were also detained and interrogated. This is the first time in 14 years that Chinese authorities have taken repressive steps against Lamb, who reportedly hosts 3,000 worshippers per week at his meeting place in Guangzhou.

-- July 5. A 34-year-old woman was beaten to death in jail on the day she was arrested for handing out Bibles in Guizhou province. Police arrested Jiang Zongxiu on June 18 on suspicion of "spreading rumors and inciting to disturb social order," according to the local press. Her mother-in-law, Tan Dewei, was arrested with Jiang but later released. She said police kicked Jiang repeatedly during interrogation.

-- June 23. The Vatican strongly protested to China over the arrest of three Catholic bishops

-- one of them 84 years old -- in the previous month. The statement called the bishops' arrest "inconceivable in a country based on laws." The 84-year-old bishop of Xuanhua was arrested May 27. Another two bishops, from Xiwanzi and Zhengding, were detained for several days in June.

-- May 24. Gu Xianggao, a teacher in a house-church group, was beaten to death by Public Security Bureau officers.

-- May 16. Two Catholic priests, Lu Genjun and Cheng Xiaoli, were arrested May 14 in An Guo, Hebei province, by government security policemen. The priests were set to begin classes for natural family planning and moral theology courses. Father Lu was previously arrested on Palm Sunday 1998 for a short period. He was arrested again shortly before Easter in 2001 and detained for three years.

-- May 10. Chinese Christians gave evidence of persecution at a special meeting called by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in April. The speakers testified to beatings, imprisonment, torture and harassment. Female members of the South China Church also testified to torture and sexual assault at the hands of police officers. Their evidence was supported by documents and a video showing the destruction of a church in Zhejiang province.

### ***Religion feared***

An in-depth look at the reasons behind the government's persecution of religious groups was published March 31 by the Norway-based human rights group Forum 18. The 10th National People's Congress that concluded in Beijing on March 14 included an amendment to the Chinese Constitution, stating that "The state respects and safeguards human rights."

Forum 18 observed that this new provision aroused skepticism among commentators, given that the constitution already contained safeguards protecting human rights. Those safeguards have not impeded past violations.

In fact, the report noted that on March 5, the very day the meeting opened, Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar in Heilongjiang province was arrested. And on the same day, police arrested, detained and beat Hua Huiqi, an unofficial house-church leader in Beijing.

A major factor behind the repression, according to Forum 18, can be found in the Communist ideology. Official policy bars Communist Party members from adhering to any religious belief or participating in religious activities.

And even if Communist ideology is no longer so popular, as recently as November an article in the People's Daily, the Communist Party newspaper, entitled "A Historical Study of the Communist Party of China's Theory and Policy Concerning Religion," inveighed against religion.

"To uphold the fundamental opposition in world outlook of Marxism and religion," stated the article, "it is of course essential to uphold the fundamental opposition of science and religion. Religion is an illusory, inverse reflection of the external world, whereas the task of science is to understand the objective world in accordance with reality, advocating seeking truth from facts and pursuing objective truth."

Forum 18 said that the government further fears religion because it represents a threat to the Communist Party's ability to mobilize the masses, particularly the peasantry. Officials estimate there are at least 100 million believers of all faiths throughout China, and authorities are worried that religious organizations could repeat what happened in the past, when religion was a key factor in popular revolts.

### ***Concern over human rights***

China also continues to maintain tight controls over political expression and organization. An April 14 press release by Amnesty International (AI) outlined some of the concerns over human rights in China.

-- Crackdown on Internet users: By the end of March, at least 60 people had been detained or imprisoned after accessing or circulating politically sensitive information on the Internet.

According to AI the Internet censorship practiced by the Chinese government is the most extensive in the world, and many of the toughest controls have been issued since 2000.

-- Death penalty: China continues to execute more people than the rest of the world combined. Executions are carried out following trials that fall far short of international fair-trial standards. AI declared that the death penalty continues to be used extensively and arbitrarily as a result of political interference. And people continue to be executed even for nonviolent crimes such as tax fraud and pimping.

-- Torture, unfair trials and administrative detention: Ill-treatment remains widespread in police stations, prisons and labor camps. As well, those accused of both political and criminal offenses continue to be denied due process and detainees' access to lawyers and family members is severely restricted. China's economic progress in recent years has yet to be matched by advances in religious and political liberty.

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## Officials in Shanghai to `update` rules on religion

AP (21.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (22.07.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Authorities in Shanghai are updating rules on religious worship, reportedly focusing on controlling Internet use by the faithful and coping with a growing number of foreign churchgoers.

The new rules are to be issued in October, said an official of the city's Minority and Religious Affairs Administration.

But he wouldn't give any details of the changes.

"They will both delete outdated items and add new items to suit the changing social environment," said the official, who would give only his surname, Jiang.

Authorities are looking for ways to monitor Internet use by religious groups -- an issue not covered by current rules, the Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post said, citing unidentified sources.

The amended rules also call for creating a ``watchdog" to monitor foreign worshippers and for groups of foreign followers and clergy members to ``coordinate" with the government and state-monitored churches, the Post said.

China's officially atheist government allows worship only in state-sanctioned churches.

Chinese citizens are not usually allowed to attend services for foreign residents.

The regulations give no reason for this, though authoritarian China often segregates different groups in order to help control them.

Foreigners in Shanghai can take part in officially allowed religious activities but are prohibited from setting up their own religious groups or proselytizing.

City officials are issuing the rules because they felt an urgent need to "keep up with change," according to the Post.

The revised rules recommend setting up additional locations for foreign-language services and increasing the number of languages used, the report said.

Foreign-language services now are conducted in English and Korean. Shanghai has as many as 60,000 foreign residents.

Many of them come from Germany, France and other countries where languages other than English are spoken.

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## **Government blocks religious websites**

By Felix Corley and Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 (21.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (22.07.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- In what is believed to be the largest survey to date of how far the Chinese government's Golden Shield internet firewall denies access to religious websites, Forum 18 News Service has established that while Chinese internet users do have access to a range of websites based outside the country that cover religious themes in Chinese or other languages, certain religious sites appear to be consistently blocked because the Chinese government does not like their content. Victims of automatic barring are sites that cover the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, the Falun Gong spiritual movement, sites about the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang, sites run by the Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement, sites in Chinese detailing persecution of religious communities in China and a perhaps surprising number of Catholic sites. Not blocked are sites in European languages covering religious freedom issues, even those covering repression within China.

### ***Internet censorship***

While overall internet usage in China may be low by developed country standards, it has been rapidly growing, especially in the capital Beijing and the developed coastal region. The official China Internet Network Information Centre put the number of Chinese with access to the internet in June 2004 (its most recent figures) at 87 million. This number had been doubling every six months, but is now levelling off.

Internet censorship is part of a comprehensive attempt to censor all means of communication. While printed publications have long been censored in China, the authorities have also tried to keep up with technological developments. The Global Internet Policy Initiative warned in June of new technology from a Chinese firm that monitors "subversive" SMS text messages sent by mobile phone.

In a bid to maintain control over the internet, all internet service providers (ISPs) as well as internet content providers are required to be licensed by the government. Organisations such as Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, Human Rights Watch and the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China have reported extensively in recent years on China's denial of access to specific political, human rights, opposition and independent news websites.

In a bid to help remove "unacceptable" content from the web, the authorities launched a website in June encouraging web-users to report such "illegal" sites, including those on religious cult activity, violence, pornography or politically sensitive subjects. The website, <http://net.china.cn/chinese/>, is sponsored by the Internet Information Service Work Committee of the China Internet Association. After getting on the relevant page, which is indicated at the top of the homepage, "reporters" must provide their real name, gender, email address, telephone number, addresses, and the name and URL of the offending sites. They are then asked for details of the violations by the offending websites and the category of violations. There are eight categories, including "promoting cults" and "promoting violent superstitions". Other categories include sites that "violate constitutional principles", "attack the party and the government" and "violate social ethics (or morality)". There is one all-

encompassing category called "other illegal and harmful messages". The "reporters" are assured of the confidentiality of the information they provide, but are warned that they bear personal responsibility for reporting erroneous information.

### ***Forum 18's tests***

To provide a reliable snapshot of the extent of censorship of specifically religious sites, Forum 18 tested several hundred religious sites of all sorts, including sites in a variety of languages (Chinese, Korean, Russian and Western languages) maintained by different denominations (including Christian, Muslim, Daoist, Buddhist, Jewish, Baha'i, Mormon, Falun Gong and Jehovah's Witness), overseas Chinese-language religious communities in South East Asia, Australasia and North America, religious rights groups, human rights groups, religious news agencies and magazines, religious educational institutions, religious political movements and foreign governments.

The tests were carried out over a two-month period - from mid-May to mid-July, which included the politically-sensitive date of 4 June, which marked the fifteenth anniversary of the violent crushing of pro-democracy student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in Beijing - and looked at access in a variety of locations in China. All the sites found by Forum 18 to be inaccessible in China were accessible in Europe and North America.

### ***Some religious sites blocked***

Access was impossible to the wide range of sites maintained by the Falun Gong movement (including [www.falundafa.org](http://www.falundafa.org), [www.faluninfo.net](http://www.faluninfo.net) and [www.flgjustice.org](http://www.flgjustice.org), which details the Chinese government's campaign against the movement). Sites relating to the Dalai Lama were almost entirely inaccessible (including [www.dalailama.com](http://www.dalailama.com) and even [www.dalailama.org](http://www.dalailama.org), a site held by a commercial company which has no information about the Dalai Lama himself). However, Forum 18 gained access to specific sites in Western languages covering the Dalai Lama's visits to Western countries (such as the site covering his May/June 2004 visit to the Scottish city of Glasgow, [www.dalailama2004.org.uk](http://www.dalailama2004.org.uk)), although it was unable to gain access to an Australian site ([www.dalailama.org.au](http://www.dalailama.org.au)), which covered his 2002 visit to that country. Material in English on the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Nobel Peace prize in 1989 is accessible in China on the Swedish-based website of the Nobel Foundation.

Permanently inaccessible were various websites of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), an Islamist political movement that aims to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate ([www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org](http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org), [www.khilafah.com](http://www.khilafah.com), [www.khilafah.com.pk](http://www.khilafah.com.pk)). The sites have material in up to seven languages and offer information by email in up to nine, though Chinese is not among them. Curiously, two other sites - [www.hizbuttahrir.org](http://www.hizbuttahrir.org) and the Danish-based site [www.khilafah.dk](http://www.khilafah.dk) - seem to have avoided barring so far. An apparently unrelated US-based site, [www.alkhilafah.info](http://www.alkhilafah.info), an "anti-terrorism portal" which contains English-language reports and often graphic pictures of what it regards as victims of "atrocities against Muslims", including in the traditionally-Muslim province of Xinjiang, is not blocked.

The barring of the sites maintained by the human rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and Chinese exile human rights groups like Human Rights in China has long been documented, but Forum 18 found that specific Christian religious rights sites that report on persecution within China – especially those in Chinese – were also inaccessible. China Aid Association ([www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org)), a US-based group with up-to-date reporting on harassment of Protestant house churches, was inaccessible at all locations and on all the occasions Forum 18 tried to gain access. Also inaccessible were the sites of the US-based Committee for the Investigation of Persecution of Religion in China ([www.china21.org](http://www.china21.org) and [religiousfreedomforchina.org](http://religiousfreedomforchina.org)), which contain information in Chinese and English on persecution of Protestants. Indeed, on two separate occasions when trying to access [religiousfreedomforchina.org](http://religiousfreedomforchina.org) in Beijing, Forum 18 was directed to a commercial site [www.prescriptiondieting.com](http://www.prescriptiondieting.com).

Similarly inaccessible was the site of US-based religious freedom group Free Church for China ([www.freechurchforchina.org](http://www.freechurchforchina.org)), as was the site of Free the Fathers ([www.ftf.org](http://www.ftf.org)), a US-based group highlighting the plight of Catholic priests who reject the government-sponsored Catholic Patriotic Association and remain loyal to the Vatican. Also inaccessible was the Italian-based site Asia News ([www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)), which has a wide range of religious news in Chinese, Italian and English covering a variety of faiths.

The Fides Vatican missionary agency site ([www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)), which was reported to have been blocked when it added a Chinese-language section, was accessible, as was Vatican Radio's Chinese section and Taiwan-based Radio Veritas in Chinese. Beijing officials declared back in 1998 when Fides launched its Chinese-language service that they hoped the Vatican would not use the Internet to "interfere in China's internal affairs, including religious affairs".

Although a range of Chinese and English-language sites run by religious communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other countries of the region (including Muslim, Daoist, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witness and Mormon sites) were accessible, a handful were inaccessible. Catholic sites in the region were generally accessible, including the official Church site in Taiwan and that of the Jesuit-run Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong. However, the main site of the Hong Kong diocese ([www.catholic.org.hk](http://www.catholic.org.hk)) was mostly inaccessible. On one occasion, Forum 18 could gain access to the English-language section of the site, but not to the Chinese-language section. On another occasion the page started to load, only to fail. Also inaccessible was the Taiwan-based website of the Chinese Divine Word Missionaries ([www.svdchina.org](http://www.svdchina.org)). Freely accessible was the site of the official Church agency, the Union of Catholic Asian News.

One source told Forum 18 that the Hong Kong Catholic diocese's website was blocked after the deterioration of relations in 2003 between Hong Kong Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kun and the mainland authorities. Improved relations as evidenced by his recent visit to Shanghai have not so far led to the renewal of access from China to the diocesan website.

Sites about missionary activity in China and those aiming to convert readers to a particular faith were not generally blocked. Forum 18 found only the Taiwan-based site of China Ministries International ([www.cmi.org.tw](http://www.cmi.org.tw)), a Protestant missionary and aid group founded by the late Jonathan Chao, and its South Korean-based counterpart [www.cmikr.com](http://www.cmikr.com) to be permanently inaccessible.

Sites containing religious scriptures and other holy books in Chinese (Muslim, Christian, Daoist and others) did not appear to be blocked. Nor was the Russian Orthodox Church's site on Orthodoxy in China blocked, although it contains historical information on the Church in China and prayers in Chinese.

Forum 18 found no sites by the international headquarters of major faiths (such as those of the Vatican, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Orthodox patriarchates, the Adventist Church, the Baha'is, the Mormons) or of international religious organisations (such as the Muslim World League, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Baptist World Alliance and the World Evangelical Alliance) to be blocked. Nor was the site of the Hong Kong Christian Council (despite its criticisms of Hong Kong's Basic Law) or the Christian Conference of Asia.

Websites which present a rosy picture of religious freedom in China - such as the US-based site of the Amity Foundation of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement ([www.amityfoundation.org](http://www.amityfoundation.org)), the US-based Christianity in China ([www.christianityinchina.org](http://www.christianityinchina.org)) which declares that it "aims to be positive", or the British-based Friends of the Church in China ([www.thefcc.org](http://www.thefcc.org)) - are not blocked.

General religious freedom and religious tolerance sites in Western languages (such as [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org), [www.religiousfreedom.org](http://www.religiousfreedom.org) and the site of the International

Religious Liberty Association and of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom) are not blocked. Nor is the site of the Atheist Network. Sites relating to persecution of faiths not related to China (such as [www.thepersecution.org](http://www.thepersecution.org), covering persecution of Ahmadi Muslims, or [www.muslimuzbekistan.com](http://www.muslimuzbekistan.com), covering persecution of devout Muslims and Hizb-ut-Tahrir members by the Uzbek authorities) are not blocked. Nor are sites run by foreign governments relating to religious freedom (such as the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and the US State Department, where even the annual religious freedom report on China is freely available in English).

The decision by the Chinese government to prevent the use of foreign internet search engines as a surrogate way to retrieve webpages from blocked sites has already been widely reported. A search for "Dalai lama" in English on the Chinese version of Google brought up numerous references on foreign websites, but Forum 18 could not access most of the actual pages either directly or through the cached version, though references on domestic websites were accessible. Searches on the Chinese version of Yahoo – whether in English or in Chinese characters - and on the English-language Google site from within China brought similar results. On one occasion when Forum 18 tried to search for "Dalai lama" using the Chinese characters on the Chinese version of Google, the server could not be found.

Unlike in Saudi Arabia, where for specific blocked sites a message appears stating bluntly that access is "not allowed", Chinese servers either tell the customer that the site is unavailable, that there is an error, or that the site cannot be found. On other occasions the attempt to access the site simply times out.

More research needs to be done on where the barring is taking place, whether at the national gateway or on ISP servers, although it is known the Chinese government is devoting a vast level of resources to creating increasingly sophisticated software to bar "unwelcome" material more efficiently.

### ***Penalties for "unacceptable" web use***

Not only is the government working hard to deny access to unwelcome content. It has taken steps to prevent religious communities and individual believers within China trying to use the internet for what it regards as unacceptable purposes. Article 19 of China's regulations on registering domain names, which went into force in September 2002, bars the registration of domain names if the site is used to harm state interests. Clause 5 of the regulations bans websites that violate "state religion policies or propagate cult and feudal superstition".

Amnesty International reports that Zhang Haitao, a computer engineer from Jilin Province, was arrested as far back as July 2000 for creating a Falun Gong website within China. Charged with subversion, it remains unknown whether he has been sentenced or where he is being held.

Just as those posting what are regarded as subversive political contributions to bulletin boards have on occasion been given long prison terms, those using the internet to post religious news the authorities does not like can be punished. Several Falun Gong practitioners who used the internet to distribute news about the plight of fellow-practitioners have been given long sentences.

In the first known crackdown on Christians who used the internet for similar purposes, in November 2003 the police arrested a computer technician who posted articles online supporting Protestant house churches. Zhang Shengqi was detained in the northeastern city of Jilin and charged with leaking state secrets. The police suspected Zhang of helping Protestant church historian Liu Fenggang post information about the crackdown on house churches in the eastern city of Hangzhou. Liu, a veteran pro-democracy campaigner, was also detained in Hangzhou on state secrets charges. The two – together with a third man

who had printed Liu's reports – were originally charged with "inciting the gathering of state secrets" but this was changed to "providing intelligence to organisations outside China". They were tried in March 2004, though no sentence is yet known.

Despite the ever-present threats, internet users often contribute direct comment to political and even some religious bulletin boards. One viewed by Forum 18 contained discussions about religion, including Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama, which were quite supportive of these communities and critical of the government. Even more interestingly, most of the discussants were based in China. Another bulletin board on house church issues is billed as the only internet bulletin in China that serves "spiritually pure and upright brothers and sisters". Forum 18 found the discussions on this board to be particularly fierce, with several participants vehemently criticising the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the churches it sponsors. Other contributors took a more moderate line, but were instantly attacked as "unbelievers" (a common epithet among house church adherents for members of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement). Another Chinese-based religion site included discussions primarily on the metaphysical aspect of religion.

### ***Why are sites blocked?***

The findings of Forum 18's survey correspond with the general perception of a Chinese state that remains deeply concerned about maintaining internal stability and by extension, the continuation of Communist rule. Nearly all blocked websites have content critical of the government's policy on religion, while groups like the China Aid Association and the Committee for the Investigation of Persecution of Religion in China provide detailed accounts of state repression. From the state's perspective, these websites, by virtue of their content, publicly question the legitimacy of the Communist state and may thus serve as agents of agitation and "public disorder" within China.

Alongside persistent worries over internal stability, the Communist government remains highly sensitive to perceived threats to China's territorial integrity. This appears to be the primary factor behind the decision to block websites that support the Dalai Lama or the Uyghur Muslims, who advocate territorial independence, or "separatism" in official Chinese parlance. This "external" factor may also account for the surprisingly large number of Roman Catholic websites blocked, albeit with a slightly different twist.

The Roman Catholic Church has never been known to be a supporter of "separatism". However, in its ongoing dispute with the Chinese government, it has retained diplomatic ties with Taiwan (against the Chinese government's express wishes) and has insisted that the Vatican has the right to train and appoint Chinese Catholic clerics. The Chinese Communist state vehemently opposes this view, insisting that all religious communities in China be "self-supporting" and not subject to foreign influence, a perspective based on the historical view that Western religions were instrumental in creating China's semi-colonial status for the 100 years between the middle of the 19th century and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Today, this perception – that foreign states harbour little genuine goodwill toward China – has been applied to the state's crackdown against Falun Gong, which may provide another justification for the blocking of Falun Gong websites.

These factors certainly do not discount the significance of ideological "contradictions", to use Marxist parlance, in the state's decision to block certain religious websites. However, that many others are accessible in China provokes speculation about the state's attitude toward religion. While proclaiming that the Communist state has now embraced religions in general would be going too far, the decision to permit access to some religious websites may reflect a more utilitarian conception of religion. In other words, while Communism remains antithetical to religion, religion can still serve as an instrument to realise Communist objectives. This utilitarian view of religion can be seen in internal Communist Party and government documents.

Given the plethora of websites with religious content deemed to be "anti-China", it is surprising that the Chinese state has not encouraged the mass organisations representing the five "recognised" religions, as well as appropriate state agencies, to use the same medium for a "counter-offensive". Other than the Amity Foundation, which essentially serves as an Internet surrogate for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the China Christian Council, neither the Daoist Association of China, the Catholic Patriotic Association nor the Islamic Association of China hosts or sponsors websites.

The Chinese Association of Buddhism sponsors a website ([www.buddhism.com.cn](http://www.buddhism.com.cn)) that functions somewhat like the Amity Foundation for the Protestant Christian groups. Other related groups operate websites too. A qigong site ([www.chinaqigong.net](http://www.chinaqigong.net)) seems to be affiliated with the China Qigong Scientific Research Society. The China Anti-Cult Association also maintains a website ([www.anticult.org](http://www.anticult.org)), which mainly attacks Falun Gong. A Chinese government site gives its views on Tibet ([www.tibetinfor.com.cn](http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn)), which contrasts sharply with the blocked foreign site [www.tibet.com](http://www.tibet.com). The government's State Administration for Religious Affairs does not appear to host any website of its own.

Just as the state seems to be under-utilising the power of the Internet, there is also little indication that repressed religious groups other than the Falun Gong movement have used it as a platform for information exchange, mobilisation and coordination. For example, none of the unregistered Protestant "house church networks" has an Internet portal. This does not mean that individuals are not using electronic mail to communicate with each other regularly. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, at least some Chinese religious adherents are prepared to engage openly online in fierce discussions about religious doctrines and state policies toward religious communities. However, these individuals are certainly concerned that a website, even as it may advance the cause of the group, can also bring publicity that might harm their existence and that of their groups.

### ***Censorship is religious freedom violation***

Censorship of websites by restrictive governments has been noted in a range of countries, from China to Saudi Arabia to Iran to Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan. All of these to a greater or lesser extent bar access to religious websites the authorities do not like. Forum 18 has established that in Uzbekistan, sites deemed sympathetic to Muslims opposed to the regime of President Islam Karimov are routinely blocked (see F18News 19 June 2003 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=86](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=86) ). Saudi Arabia bars Arabic-language and foreign-language Christian, Baha'i and numerous other religious sites.

But the censorship of religious websites in China is more extensive and more expensive than in any other country of the world. The sheer number of Chinese with access to the internet and number of religious websites with Chinese-language content, combined with the level of state control over free religious practice, makes the censorship of religious sites a severe restraint on the religious rights of all residents of China.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

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## **Chinese house churches newly targeted as more than 100 leaders arrested**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (21.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (22.07.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- More than 100 house church leaders were arrested in Xinjiang Autonomous Region in North West China on July 12. More than 200 military police, Public Security Bureau (PSB) and other officers arrived in 46 military and police vehicles. They surrounded the group as they were meeting for a retreat at the

Retreat Centre for Railroad Workers in Section 5 of Liu Gong Town, Chang Ji Zhou District in Xinjiang. No warrants or other official documents were shown in making the arrests.

The report of the incident, which comes from China Aid Association (CAA), an organisation closely linked to the Chinese house church, states that 30 believers remain under PSB detention near the place of arrest. Most have been transferred back to their home areas where they are being detained by local PSB. Several are held in the 'Transformation and Study Centre' where they are being interrogated and pressurised to renounce their faith, on penalty of being formally charged and tried if they refuse to do so.

Those believers who had travelled from outside the province are subject to specific investigation due to it being illegal to cross a provincial border to hold religious meetings without the approval of the official Religious Affairs Bureau and state-controlled Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). The PSB has already contacted home villages to obtain further information on the religious activities of those arrested.

The meeting was sponsored by the large Anhui-based house church network, Ying Shang Church. Wang Yu Lian, a leader in the church for over 20 years, is amongst those arrested and currently being held in Xinjiang. Jin Da is the 34-year-old General Secretary of the TSPM of Ningbo City in Zhejiang province and is responsible for 46 TSPM churches. He is also reported to be sympathetic to the house churches and is among those arrested.

This incident is the latest in a pattern of increased persecution and arrests targeting the unregistered house churches of China. A number of reports have emerged of a new campaign directed by central authorities to crackdown on unregistered Protestants. A report last month from an inside source disclosed that the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party had convened a secret meeting which called on the Party and every level of government to crackdown on illegal religious activities. It also directed the Department of Propaganda to carry out a campaign to promote atheism.

Alexa Papadouris, Advocacy Director of CSW, stated: "We are deeply concerned about this fresh crackdown on unregistered Protestant churches in China. There has been a significant increase in reports of arrests targeting the house churches. We call on China to respect her international obligations and the fundamental right of religious freedom. Christians in China simply seek to follow their consciences and religious convictions, but are accused of illegal activity because of China's illegal violation of international standards. We call for the release of all those held for their religious beliefs and encourage those sympathetic to their plight to raise their concerns with the Chinese authorities and their political representatives."

***Notes to editors:***

Further arrests took place last week in Cheng Du City in Sichuan Province at a training seminar when 40 house church leaders and a Taiwanese couple who were leading the seminar were arrested. The 40 have been released, but the whereabouts of the Taiwanese couple is not known.

These mass arrests follow the arrest in Wuhan City in Hubei Province on 11<sup>th</sup> June of about 100 members of the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF). China Aid Association reports that the remaining detainee from the arrest, 39-year-old Pastor Xing Jinfu, a senior CGF leader, has been transferred from Hubei to an undisclosed location in Henan Province. CAA quotes a reliable source as stating that Pastor Xing has been tortured by his interrogators to force him to disclose information about CGF's activities. Sadly, this account is consistent with the frequent reports of torture of detained Christians.

On April 27 2004, Gu Xianggao, a 28-year-old teacher in the Three Grades Servants house church, was beaten to death in custody in Heilongjiang Province. He had been arrested only a day earlier during a series of major raids targeting the group. His parents were given 230,000 RMB (£15,000) and ordered not to speak about the situation.

## **China steps up attack on 'illegal' religious activity**

### ***Detention of Samuel Lamb sparks wide concern***

by Xu Mei

Compass (19.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (20.07.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Chinese authorities detained and interrogated well-known house church leader Samuel Lamb, or Lin Xiangao as he is known within China, after worship services on Sunday, June 13. Ten of his younger co-workers were also detained and interrogated.

Taken to a local police station in Guangzhou, all were released by the following day. Pastor Lamb reported the unpleasant experience to an overseas visitor to his house church in the center of Guangzhou a few days later.

The significance of Pastor Lamb's detention lies in the fact that this is the first time in 14 years that Chinese authorities have taken repressive steps against him. The last time he was detained was on February 22, 1990, when 60 Public Security Bureau (PSB) officers detained him overnight and confiscated large amounts of Christian literature.

Since then, apart from the occasional "friendly" visit to his house church, the PSB has left Lamb relatively undisturbed. The number of Christians and inquirers meeting openly at his new meeting place has grown to over 3,000 each week.

Lamb's previous meeting-place at Damazhan was demolished as part of a city development plan a few years ago. He relocated to larger premises nearby.

These latest detentions, therefore, came as a complete surprise. Sources in China say it is no coincidence that just two days earlier, on June 11, authorities detained 100 leaders of the China Gospel Fellowship house church network in the central city of Wuhan. They, too, were later released after detailed interrogation.

Reliable reports out of China received at the end of June indicated that, prior to these recent incidents of repression, a high-level Politburo meeting convened and members issued a secret directive calling for a crackdown on all "illegal" religious activities, such as unregistered house church meetings.

Some observers think Chinese authorities may be over-reacting to high profile publicity concerning house churches and the "Back to Jerusalem Movement." Reports on these topics circulated in Western media have focused attention on the spectacular growth of the Chinese church and could have prompted the recent crackdown.

Beijing was chosen to host the 2008 Olympics on the tacit understanding that China would continue to open her doors to the world and act as a civilized member of the world community.

Repression of religious believers and denial of basic human rights are in flagrant breach of both the Olympic spirit and the United Nations agreements to which China is a signatory. The international community will be watching the Chinese government closely over the next few years in the run-up to the Games.

## Woman dies over Bibles

AFP (04.07.2004) / HRWF Int. (12.07.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- A 34-year-old woman has allegedly been beaten to death in jail on the day she was arrested for handing out Bibles in southwest China's Guizhou province, state media said on Sunday.

Police in Guizhou's Tongzi county arrested Jiang Zongxiu, a farmer, on June 18 on suspicion of "spreading rumours and inciting to disturb social order", the Legal Daily said.

They had planned to detain her for 15 days, the report said, alleging Jiang died in police custody the afternoon she was arrested.

Her mother-in-law, Tan Dewei, who was arrested with Jiang but later released, told reporters police kicked Jiang repeatedly during interrogation.

Police later informed Jiang's family she had died of a sudden illness and turned over her body to the family, but relatives saw the body was covered with bruises and blood stains, the report alleged.

Jiang's husband and other villagers in neighbouring Chongqing municipality, where Jiang lived, said she was in good health before the arrests and was responsible for doing most of the family's farm work.

### ***Bibles not easily available***

An operator manning the phones at the Guizhou police station on Sunday said she was not aware of the incident. Other police officials could not be reached for comment.

The incident has generated a strong public reaction in Jiang's hometown in Chongqing's Jijiang county, the report said, with local residents demanding an investigation into the cause of death.

Jiang's case highlights increasing public disgust with police tactics and China's continuing crackdown on religious practitioners.

The Chinese government, while allowing people to practice state-approved religions, such as Christianity, in government-sanctioned churches, forbids proselytising.

Bibles are banned from book stores and are not easy to obtain.

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## Arrest in China of 100 house church leaders confirms trend

by Xu Mei

Compass (28.06.2004) / HRWF Int. (30.06.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Chinese police arrested 100 house church leaders on the afternoon of June 11 as they gathered for a retreat in the central city of Wuhan. The retreat was organized by the China Gospel Fellowship or CGF, one of the largest house church networks in China.

Those arrested included Xing Jinfu, 39, who has already been arrested three times in the past for church related activities. The 100 leaders are being held at an unknown location, according to the China Aid Association which first received the news.

On the same day, Shen Xianfeng, senior leader of the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF), was placed under house arrest.

The arrests are the latest in a series of incidents this year which seem to indicate a renewed crackdown against unregistered churches.

At the National Religious Working Conference held in January 2004, Communist officials were urged to "recommit to supervising religious activities and to guard against the influence of foreign church affiliated groups."

According to Asia News, the state council then gave RMB 450 million (54.4 million dollars) to the Religious Affairs Bureau to build a team of expert cadres and eliminate unregistered religious groups.

A second Provincial Religious Working Conference was held in Guangdong province from May 20 to 21. A directive issued after this conference called for every level of government to work together "to subdue the religious penetration of antagonistic overseas forces in the name of religion."

Reports of arrests began to filter out of China in April, when the New York-based Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China reported that Xu Shuangfu, group leader in the controversial Three Grades Servants house church movement, was kidnapped while visiting the northeastern province of Heilongjiang.

On April 26, more than 90 of Xu's co-workers and fellow believers were arrested. One of them, 28-year-old Gu Xianggao, was beaten to death in police custody on April 27, according to a report by China Aid.

However, sources in China told Compass that the Three Grades Servants movement is included on the government's list of "evil cults." Most Christian groups in China believe the Three Grades Servants movement is actually a cult, which illustrates the complex religious demography in China. With so many churches driven underground, it is often difficult to distinguish between orthodox Christian churches and heretical cults.

China Aid also reported the arrest of well-known house church leader Zhao Wenquan on May 9 in Meng Cheng county, Anhui province. A report by the Associated Press confirmed Zhao's arrest and claimed that, "Over the past year, scores of church leaders have been detained and church meeting places demolished."

Zhao was released 14 days after his arrest. China Aid investigators said Zhao suffered only "minor beatings" and was in good spirits after his release.

The Catholic Church has also been targeted. Joseph Kung of the Cardinal Kung Foundation reported that two Catholic bishops, Wei Jingyi and Jia Zhiguo, were arrested in March and April. On May 14, Lu Genjun and Cheng Xiali, both priests in the underground Roman Catholic Church, were added to the list.

Another source who declined to be named reported the arrest of 40 Protestant believers from a house church near Wuhan in early May. On May 29, 13 of those arrested were still in custody. Some of those released had been fined as much as \$120.

Yet another source reported the expulsion in early 2004 of three foreigners who had been working with Chinese house church believers in southwest China.

These events show that the Chinese Communist Party has not made any significant changes to its religious policy under the leadership of President Hu Jintao.

The Communist Party has also broken trust with the CGF, whose leadership thought they had achieved a rapprochement with authorities after an incident involving the cult group Eastern Lightning in 2002.

In April of that year, 34 of the top CGF leaders were kidnapped by members of Eastern Lightning. In desperation, members of the CGF approached the government in Beijing and appealed for help to secure their release.

In return for information about Eastern Lightning, the government assured CGF leaders that their own movement would be taken off the official list of "dangerous cults."

Shen told Compass in an interview earlier this year that the CGF were more open in their meetings as a result of these assurances. However, some leaders have concluded their trust in the government was misplaced.

Many house churches across China continue to wrestle with the issue of official registration. The mass arrest of CGF leaders is likely to confirm the deep-seated belief of many house church Christians that the Communist Party cannot be trusted.

China has sought to portray itself as a modern and civilized society in the lead-up to the Olympic Games in 2008. However, recent incidents prove that China still has a long way to go in its progress towards true religious freedom.

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## **Chinese bishop is released in Hebei**

Zenit.org (20.06.2004) / HRWF Int. (22.06.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of the underground Church's Diocese of Zheng Ding was released Friday after five days of detention, a U.S.-based watchdog group said.

Joseph Kung, president of the Connecticut-based Cardinal Kung Foundation, said the prelate had been arrested June 13 by two policemen in Hebei province in northeast China along with Trappist Father Placid Pei Ronggui.

Kung gave no details about the release, and there was no word on the bishop's whereabouts. The priest had been released earlier, but details weren't available.

Bishop Jia Zhiguo heads one of the most active dioceses in the province, which has about 1.5 million Catholics.

The 69-year-old bishop has lived almost all his episcopal ministry under house arrest. Authorities arrested him last April but allowed him to celebrate Mass. He was also detained in March 2003 and in March 2002, a few days before Holy Week.

Following the bishop's arrest last April, the Holy See described his detention as inadmissible in a state of law.

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## **More than 100 Chinese house church leaders arrested in new crackdown**

China Aid Association (15.06.2004) / HRWF Int. (17.06.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- The China Aid Association has learnt that more than 100 leaders of the China Gospel fellowship (CGF) were arrested on June 11, 2004. The arrests took place at Wuhan city, Hubei province (mid east China) while these church leaders were meeting together. According to a senior house church leader and an eyewitness of the arrests, about 50 police, believed to be from the Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Wuhan City, raided the church meeting at around 2pm and arrested all of the participants, including one of the senior CGF leaders, Mr Xing Jinfu.

Mr Xing, 39, has been arrested at least three times before for his church activities. He was sentenced to three years re-education through labour in 1996 for his 'illegal preaching'. The whereabouts of those arrested are still unknown. On the same day, according to a reliable source known to the China Aid Association, the well-known leader of the CGF, Pastor Shen Xianfeng, was put under house arrest in a residential area of Wuhan city after the PSB thoroughly searched the house where Mr Shen was recovering from leg injuries. The CGF was established in the mid-1980s and is one of the five major Chinese house church groups with an estimated membership of at least five million.

The China Aid Association also learned from an internal source in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that its Politburo had recently convened a special secret meeting discussing 'How to deal with religious affairs in China'. According to the source, a secret directive was issued after the meeting, calling on every level of the Chinese government and the Party to crack down on 'illegal religious activities'.

The directive also urged the CCP's Department of Propaganda to carry out a special media campaign to promote atheism. Bob Fu, president of the China Aid Association, said: "Given the recent massive arrests of unregistered religious leaders in different areas in China, the international community should be alarmed and take concrete actions to urge the Chinese government to fulfil her signed pledge to protect her citizens' religious freedom mandated by relevant international human rights covenants."

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## **A struggle for spiritual freedom**

by Philip P. Pan

Washington Post (10.03.2004) / HRWF Int. (11.03.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- The young Chinese monk had travelled more than a thousand miles to study with Buddhist teachers here. He had built a crude cabin in the mountains, and made it his home. But then police decided to force him to leave, part of a campaign to control a sprawling religious settlement in this remote Tibetan region in Sichuan province.

As officers at a guardhouse finished the paperwork to expel him, the young monk pulled a hood over his shaven head to hide a smile. "I'm not really going," he whispered, before stepping into the freezing cold and moving down the road as ordered.

A few hours later, the monk returned, slipping past the police and climbing a narrow, twisting road through falling snow in a local vehicle. In a valley ahead, wisps of gray smoke rose from a vast encampment as crowds of monks and nuns in red robes strolled along paths among assembly halls, temples, market stalls and cabins.

"There are so many people here," said the young monk, Ji, who asked to be identified only by his surname. "How can the police make me leave if they can't find me?"

His expulsion and quick return to Larung Gar, one of the world's most influential centres for the study of Tibetan Buddhism, was a small twist in a profound conflict now unfolding in

China.

Founded 24 years ago, Larung Gar grew into the country's largest monastic community, with as many as 10,000 residents, before the ruling Communist Party began trying to control it and to expel settlers in the late 1990s. Its struggle to survive the crackdown and maintain its independence from the party illustrates how the faithful are pushing the bounds of freedom of religion and association in China -- and what happens when the state pushes back.

The Chinese government allows people to worship only in party-run churches, mosques and temples, considers any autonomous religious organization a potential threat and routinely imprisons priests, monks and others. But Larung Gar's ability to survive and flourish suggests the party is no longer able to crush all independent spiritual activity, or is unwilling to risk the popular backlash that might result if it tries.

A quarter-century after China abandoned Mao Zedong's rigid version of socialism in favor of free-market reforms, the Chinese enjoy greater prosperity and personal freedom than ever under Communist rule. But the state still attempts to maintain control over a broad spectrum of society, from public affairs to the arts and religion.

The friction that results is a defining characteristic of life in modern China, where people are testing, and often redefining, the limits of what the authorities will permit. Controlling this popular pressure -- sometimes with repression, sometimes with restraint -- is one of the central challenges confronting the party as it seeks to preserve a monopoly on power at a time of rising social discontent and wrenching economic change.

### ***Steering clear of politics***

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, a heavysset man with a broad, weathered face, founded Larung Gar. A charismatic leader, the khenpo, or abbot, presented himself as the reincarnation of a teacher of the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, and as a holy figure who could discover artifacts hidden by ancient Buddhist leaders. He was known as a brilliant scholar and an eloquent speaker, even in his later years, when he was partially blind and could not walk without support.

When Jigme Phuntsok established Larung Gar in western Sichuan in 1980, this desolate valley 13,000 feet above sea level and 600 miles northeast of Lhasa was entirely uninhabited. At the time, China was only beginning to recover from Mao's destructive Cultural Revolution, which hit Tibetan areas particularly hard and interrupted the education of a generation of monks and nuns. Jigme Phuntsok was one of the few senior lamas who made it through the period without being imprisoned or tortured, and his academy quickly came to be seen as a haven. Students flocked there from across Tibet and Tibetan areas in neighboring provinces.

For years, Larung Gar thrived. The khenpo's teachings tapped into Tibetan nationalism by recalling the glory of the ancient Tibetan empire, and he welcomed adherents of all Buddhist sects, not just his own. But as Larung Gar grew, Jigme Phuntsok was also careful to steer the community away from politics, his followers said, discouraging activities that might be viewed as supporting Tibetan independence, which is fiercely opposed by the Chinese authorities. Still, the party was never fully comfortable with him.

Larung Gar escaped largely untouched when the party cracked down on monasteries across Tibet in the late 1980s and the 1990s, jailing and defrocking thousands of monks who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama. Though teams of party officials began visiting Larung Gar on occasion in 1998, they never seized control or expelled monks for political reasons, as they did elsewhere.

The encampment was spared in part because regional party leaders in Sichuan adopted more lenient policies than those in Tibet. The khenpo also cultivated local officials. "Everyone who knew him respected him," said Zuzu, the former party secretary in Sertar county who served as the regional police chief from 1981 to 1996.

Even after Jigme Phuntsok visited the Dalai Lama in India in 1990, he managed to escape serious trouble. When party officials questioned him, he told them he considered the Dalai Lama a religious figure and did not discuss politics with him or support his cause, his followers said. He also told the party officials that he rejected a generous offer by the Dalai Lama's followers to remain in India, and turned down their request to speak on the Voice of America, Zuzu said. But most important, the monks who flocked to the academy frequented local businesses and deposited their savings in local banks. "Sertar is a poor place," Zuzu said, "and the academy helped our finances greatly."

### ***Threat of huge crowds***

Larung Gar is a 24-hour drive from the nearest city, Chengdu. The road snakes through a breathtaking range of mountains, but the miles are marked by falling rocks, icy surfaces and treacherous, cliff-side turns.

By the late 1990s, Chinese party officials outside the region began to see the khenpo and his quiet community in the mountains as a threat. For them, the first signs of trouble were the crowds.

When Jigme Phuntsok ventured out of the valley and visited other Tibetan areas, residents mobbed his vehicle and herdsmen descended from the mountains on horseback to greet him. Huge audiences gathered to receive his teachings when he visited other parts of China, too, including Guangxi, Yunnan, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang and Shanxi provinces.

One Tibetan official from a nearby county, who asked not to be identified, said officials in Sichuan began receiving complaints from counterparts in other provinces who were alarmed by the large gatherings. Before long, she said, Sichuan began responding by dispatching police to escort the khenpo back to Larung Gar. Eventually, they banned him from traveling.

But party officials were unwilling, or unable, to shut down his academy. Even today, Larung Gar is largely independent. At noon, the place is bustling with monks and nuns heading to and from classes, or chattering as they line up at small shops to purchase food and supplies.

As a gar, or monastic encampment, the academy is more loosely organized than a monastery -- and more difficult for party officials to control. There are no formal admission procedures, so monks who evade police checkpoints come and go freely, often returning to their home monasteries after a few weeks of study. Classes do not follow a strict schedule, so party officials have not been able to regulate what is taught. Residents also study on their own or privately with individual teachers.

Ji, the monk who sneaked back into the encampment, said he moved here in the summer of 2000. Like most students, he used funds donated by Buddhist friends to build a cabin -- a one-room structure with hanging sheets that divide it into a bedroom, study and kitchen.

A typical day for him and other students begins early and ends late. They prepare and eat their meals alone, most often rice and vegetables, or butter and barley bread. Beyond study and prayer in their cabins, there are classes on Buddhist texts, medicine, literature, history and philosophy, which can range in size from 30 to 500 students, and lively theological debates in the assembly halls.

Most of the students are ethnic Tibetans like Dorbcha, 30, a monk who spent two years in Larung Gar in the 1990s and returned for further studies in January. He said he traveled

here to pursue a Buddhist education free from the restrictions imposed by the government elsewhere. "This is a special place," he said. "Religion is important to Tibetans, so Larung Gar is like a treasure."

But the academy has also attracted large numbers of Han, China's main ethnic group. There is rising interest in religion and spirituality -- from Falun Gong to Christianity -- as people try to cope with rapid social change and the vacuum left by the collapse of Maoist ideology.

Du Renzhong, 32, a computer programmer from Shanghai, recalled that he embraced Tibetan Buddhism and came to the settlement after weighing Christianity and Islam. "I came here to study because I'm not interested in the things people most think are important, like modern life or family," he said.

During the late 1990s, local officials tried to persuade Jigme Phuntsok to reduce the population of the encampment, sometimes even prostrating themselves before him, his followers said. But the khenpo told the officials that because he didn't ask the students to come to the valley, it would be wrong for him to ask them to go, said one senior teacher.

"He believed teaching was the most important thing," the teacher said. "On that point, he would not compromise."

The pressure on Jigme Phuntsok came to a head in 1999, when Yin Fatang, a retired senior military official who had once served as the party chief in Tibet, visited Larung Gar, local officials said. The officials said Yin was stunned by the size of the encampment and wrote a report to Jiang Zemin, then China's president, urging a crackdown.

By showing leniency and allowing Larung Gar to develop, Yin argued, Sichuan province was undermining the party's policies regulating monasteries and religious activity in Tibet. He warned that residents in Tibet could demand similar freedoms and that Larung Gar could become a breeding ground for Tibetan nationalism, officials said.

The party also appeared worried about the khenpo's ability to attract devoted followers and funding from a broad cross section of Chinese society. At the time, the party was struggling to crush the Falun Gong spiritual movement, which had been banned as a cult after staging a huge protest in Beijing in 1999. Stories about Jigme Phuntsok's mystical skills may have reminded party leaders of Li Hongzhi, the Falun Gong leader who claimed similar powers.

In the summer of 2001, police and other officials from across the region converged on Larung Gar, demolished about 2,400 homes and evicted several thousand residents. The party also attempted to set a limit of 1,400 residents on the settlement. The idea was not to wipe out the settlement, but to reduce its size and try to place it more directly under the party's control.

Authorities focused first on evicting the estimated 1,000 Han students, sometimes climbing on roofs and listening down smokestacks for voices speaking Mandarin. The officials also concentrated on Larung Gar's convent, expelling more than 3,000 nuns, witnesses said.

Thenkyong, 30, a monk who moved here in 1990 from a nearby prefecture, said the authorities posted notices on walls and buildings throughout the settlement telling residents to go home. Then, officials from his home prefecture found him and pressured him to cooperate.

He agonized over what to do, but eventually agreed to leave after officials told him that staying would mean trouble for his teachers. "Obviously, everyone wanted to stay. But the more that stayed, the more problems there would be for the monastery," he said. "It was a very difficult decision."

Thenkyong said Jigme Phuntsok "specifically instructed us not to try to stop this. He specifically advised us not to be violent and to remain calm." As a result, crowds of monks and nuns, murmuring prayers and wailing in grief, stood by and watched as their homes were destroyed. There were no large-scale protests or confrontations.

Thousands of people who had devoted themselves to Buddhist study, many of whom had no families and had planned to stay in Larung Gar until they died, suddenly found themselves adrift and homeless. Two nuns reportedly hanged themselves in despair. And many residents who had shown little interest in politics turned against the party.

Ji said he spent part of the crackdown hiding in the homes of Tibetan friends before fleeing Larung Gar. He found his cabin intact when he returned months later, but was angered to see how many others had been torn down.

"The government says China has freedom of religion, but look what it did," he said, pointing out a hillside that had been cleared. "In an authoritarian system, we don't even have the right to live in the mountains."

Soon after the crackdown, though, many of the monks and nuns who were evicted began to return. Those who lost their cabins moved in with those who did not. Residents are unwilling to discuss how many people live here now, saying that doing so could prompt evictions again. But judging from the size of the settlement, well over 3,000 people reside in Larung Gar, more than in any monastery in Tibet or the rest of China.

New students continue to arrive, too. But watchful local officials now occupy several rooms in one of the academy's buildings, and the party has blocked construction of new homes in the valley.

"That's the biggest problem now," said a senior teacher. "We'll be able to maintain what we have, but it will be difficult to develop any further." At the same time, he said, hundreds of senior monks educated at Larung Gar are teaching at monasteries across Tibet and the rest of China.

Despite orders to stop teaching, the khenpo continued to meet with small groups of students until he was hospitalized in late December. He died on Jan. 7, prompting another tug of war with the government. His disciples wanted to let his body lie in state for as long as possible or embalm it, so more of his students could return to Larung Gar and offer prayers. But the government wanted to cremate Jigme Phuntsok's body at an early date and limit the number of visitors.

Two weeks after the khenpo's death, the government prevailed, and his body was cremated. Police set up roadblocks across the region to discourage attendance at the ceremony, and monasteries across China were ordered to keep their monks away.

But a crowd of at least 50,000 made it to Larung Gar, residents estimated. Many monks said they evaded the roadblocks by hiking through the mountains.

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## **Chinese police detain church head**

AP (05.03.2004) / HRWF Int. (09.03.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- Police beat a leader of an underground Christian church and his wife during a campaign to stifle dissent during the annual meeting of China's legislature, a human rights group alleged Saturday.

Beijing police deployed 1,000 officers to control dissidents as the National People's Congress opened its session on Friday, Human Rights in China said. It cited unidentified sources in

Beijing.

Hua Huiqi, a church leader and housing activist, was taken to a police station on Friday and badly beaten after he complained that he was being illegally held under "effective house arrest," the rights group said in a statement.

Hua was taken to a hospital, the group said. While his elderly parents were visiting him there, it said, police ransacked their home and the family returned to find cash and a bank book for an account holding the parents' life savings missing.

When Hua and his wife, Wei Jumei, complained to police in their home district of Fengtai about the missing money, officers beat both of them, hitting Wei so hard that she lost a tooth, the rights group said.

A police officer who answered the phone Saturday at the Fengtai police station denied that the incident occurred.

Another dissident, Zhang Chunzhu, has been detained at a Beijing hotel since Tuesday, while police watched the home of Jia Jianying, the wife of detained dissident He Depu, the group said.

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## **Crackdown on house-churches**

WEA Religious Liberty Commission (24.02.2004) / HRWF Int. (25.02.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- In January 2004, top cadres of China's Religious Affairs Bureau and the policy-making United Front Work Department met for the annual National Religious Working Conference.

During that meeting, communist leaders screened a new, four-hour digital video, "The Cross: Jesus in China", written and directed by pro-democracy leader and Christian Yuan Zhiming, and produced by USA-based "China Soul for Christ". The cadres were also briefed on the new book, "Jesus in Beijing", by journalist and former TIME magazine correspondent in Beijing, David Aikman.

Timothy C. Morgan reports for Christianity Today magazine that "Both the video and book document the stunning growth and vibrancy of Christianity in China. The video has been classified as 'political matter', and Public Security Bureau officers are confiscating CDV copies of the widely distributed series and other Christian literature".

AsiaNews reports, "At a National Religious-Work conference in January, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Jia Qinglin, urged all party groups nation-wide to recommit to supervising religious activities and to guard against the influence of foreign church affiliated groups. He declared that the energy of the people must be directed instead to building up a prosperous society. The State Council has given 450 million yuan (around 56 million euro) to the Religious Affairs Bureau, to build up a team of expert cadres and eliminate unregistered religious groups. Suspicious factions are to be rooted out and replaced by 'patriotic' forces, religious sources said."

CBN News published a report by Gary Lane that included statements by Peter Xu (pastor of the "Born Again" movement) and Tianyun Samuel (Brother Yun, author of the book "Heavenly Man"). Both have been imprisoned several times in China for their Christian activity. Both have found refuge in the U.S.A.

Gary Lane quotes Peter Xu as saying, "The Cross [video] is a look at the growth of the

house church movement in China, but the hardliners say it is subversive and undermines national religious policy. They have called for all copies of the DVD in China to be confiscated, and the house church leaders depicted in the video to be detained for questioning." (Link 3)

Gary Lane notes in his report that "Xu's sister Deborah, who was arrested January 24th because of her evangelistic activities, cannot be found. Xu says, 'We don't know where she is. we don't know where she is locked in. Her health is very weak.' Xu asks that Christians worldwide pray for his sister, and other Christians who have been arrested for the sake of the Gospel."

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## Freedom of "normal" religion

WEA Religious Liberty Commission (24.02.2004) / HRWF Int. (25.02.2004) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) -- In October 2003 the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) of the City of Qingdao, China, promulgated its "Policy and Regulations with regard to Banning Secretly-Established Christian Gathering Places".

Qingdao is a major costal city in the province of Shandong. While this is a local document, it is based on the official policy of the Chinese Communist Party and would therefore conform to national standards.

The RAB policy is divided into five sections:

- I) "The Communist Party's basic view and policy on the issue of religion"
- II) "Freedom of religious belief enshrined in the Constitution"
- III) "Laws and regulations concerning religion"
- IV) "Harms of secretly-established gathering places and self-claimed preachers"
- V) "Several proposals on dealing with secretly-established Christian gathering places".

The document makes it quite clear that freedom of "normal" religion is protected by the constitution and by law. In section III point 1 the term "normal" is clearly defined as registered. "Through registration, the society may distinguish abnormal illegal activities from normal religious activities conducted at religious sites."

Section I, points 7,8 and 9, establish that it is the purpose of the Patriotic Church to act as a "bridge" linking the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the church, so the CCP can "channel religion", thus "safeguarding the social stability". Section II point 3 states that patriotic believers are an "efficient barrier" of defence, protecting China from foreign interference, infiltration and invasion.

Section IV describes "self-claimed preachers" (preachers not recognised by the CCP) as law-breakers who "greatly impede the implementation of the religious policy". It is alleged that "self-claimed preachers" set up their illegal religious sites in order to collect money, raise issues, create factions, seduce believes into wrongdoings, and to establish more secret gathering places. They also "conduct superstitious activities, distort religious teachings, spread heresy, and instigate believers to turn from registered religious sites to secretly-established gathering places, thus disrupting normal religious activities". They also provide illegal sites for criminals and facilitate the activity of cults.

Finally, section V opens with the statement, "Secretly-established Christian gathering places and self-claimed preachers must be banned." It then gives procedures to deal with, and if needs be punish, those participating at various levels: 2. the ignorant, 3. the nominal, 4. the devout, and 5. the leaders.

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