

Chinese slave ring busted; 33 mentally disabled men set free

By Sari Schutrump-Boward
STAFF WRITER

Thirty-three mentally disabled men, who were forced to work as slaves at a building site were rescued by police forces from a Chinese slave-ring on March 20.

According to BBC News, at least three people who are suspected of keeping the slaves are detained.

"They took people from the country," said Associate Professor of Political Science George Guo. "Once they arrived in the city they were sent to work in the construction field, and there was no way to go back."

BBC News reported that the men were discovered in a dirty room in Hulan, a city in the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang.

"I assume Hulan is an extremely politically and economically backward place where people do not get sufficient education," said sophomore Xiaoyi Zhang, a China native, and a former Guilford student in an e-mail interview. "They have to sell labor at an extremely low price to just stay alive, which leads to rich people coming in and seizing them for labor exploitation."

According to The Beijing Times, the police said "Many of the 33 detainees could not speak coherently, or clearly remember their names or where their families lived."

One detainee has been there for three years.

The men were rounded up at the bus and train station. They were swayed to get into cars by gangs who were offering work.

"This was an organized crime," Guo said. "They buy the men tickets and once the men arrive they are immediately approached and gone forever."

The Beijing Times reported that anyone who attempted to escape were beaten and terrorized.

"These men will most likely suffer from

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), due to the seriousness of the trauma," said Debra Taylor part-time lecturer in psychology in an e-mail interview. "PTSD can last for several months to many years, depending on the nature of the trauma and how well the person is able to deal with the trauma."

According to BBC News, college students raised attention to the ring when they called the police after witnessing a man who jumped to his death from the seventh-floor window.

Zhang said that it is difficult to completely control slavery.

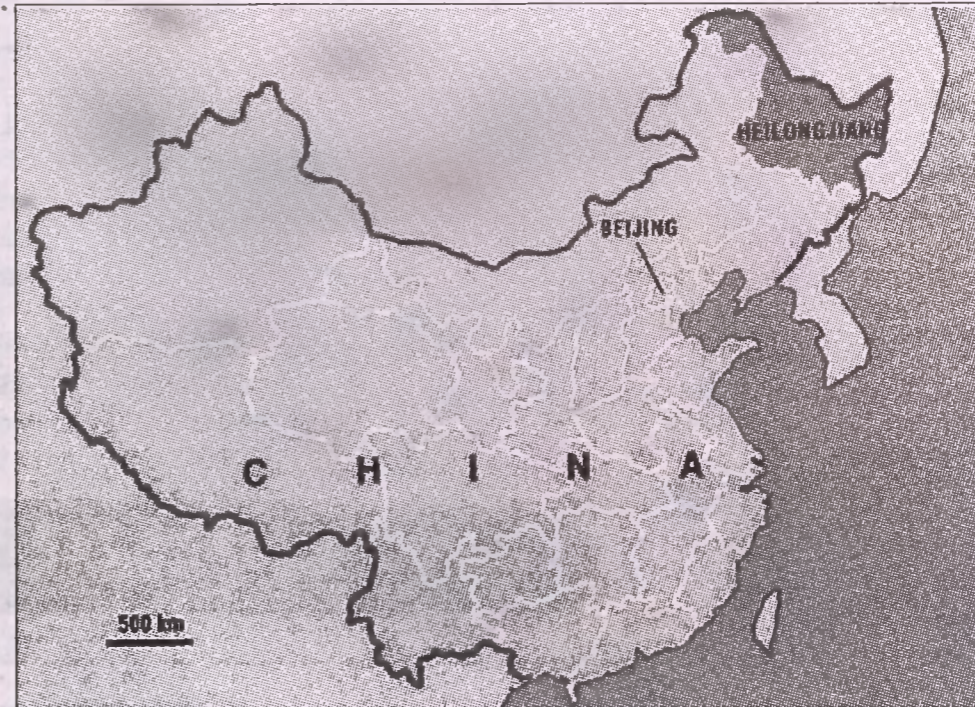
"I think China is becoming more regulated in such issues," Zhang said. "However, to completely clear out slavery takes a considerable amount of time and effort because slavery today takes different forms and scales. It is hard for people to spot and identify them when it happens underground."

According to BBC News, a local website reported that the city's government donated money to the victims who wanted to return home, and arranged jobs for those who wanted to work in the city. The men with the serious mental disabilities were sent to local asylums.

"I think these men should be allowed to return home, as it should help them to restore feelings of safety and comfort," Taylor said. "However, these men should receive treatment before beginning a new job, especially since employment was the source of the trauma."

A year ago, China announced a nationwide crackdown on enslavement and child labor when a man was sentenced to death and 28 others were jailed after they were involved in a slave labor scandal that had hundreds of people in a brick factory in northern China.

Shelini Harris, assistant professor of religious studies and peace and conflict studies, who teaches a human rights class said in an e-mail interview that slavery is



The province of Heilongjiang, where a slave ring in the city of Hulan was busted last month, is highlighted on this map of China. The slave ring was holding at least 33 mentally disabled men for work on a construction site.

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illegal in China.

Harris said that Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifically prohibits slavery.

The article states, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

According to Harris, slavery is forbidden in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 8.

The article states that "1. No one shall be held in slavery: slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. 2. No one shall be held in servitude. 3. a) No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor ..."

First-year China native, JoJo Jun Gao, rarely hears this type of case on the news.

"The slave-ring case is very unusual in China," said Gao in an e-mail interview. "If it is usual you would see it on the news everyday or it would not make the news at all. It is against the law to hold slaves in China. It is a criminal case. It does not reach to the higher decision-making inner circle."

Zhang believes that while China is still

transforming into socialism there are some problems that have not been fixed.

"I am rather surprised," Zhang said. "Such phenomenon rarely happens under socialist institution. Socialism is intended to help build a harmonious society, where people love one another and bear equal rights. However, China is still not yet fully transformed into socialism, and is still in the beginning phase; therefore unfavorable things can easily happen, such as the slave-ring."

Guo hopes that the media coverage will continue to push the government into reacting to these cases.

"The government is passive right now, but they face a challenge from the media coverage," Guo said. "The government has a passive attitude. This will still take time." Harris believes that people ignore the fact that we still benefit from slavery.

"People choose to ignore where their cheap food and other material items come from, and would rather think that slavery has been eradicated," Harris said, "rather than face the fact that their privilege is predicated on other people's enslavement and misery."

Iraq War turns five; more than 4,000 U.S. casualties

By Jake Blumgart
SENIOR WRITER

March 20, marked the fifth anniversary of the on-going Second Gulf War. Four days later the official number of United States military personnel who had died passed 4,000. Ninety-seven percent of those killed died after President George Bush declared major combat operations over.

"The Iraq War is our longest sustained engagement in quite some time," said Lisa McLeod, assistant professor of philosophy, who is currently teaching a course on just war theory and pacifism. "It is longer than our engagement in Korea, in the First or World War Two. It is going to be hard in the long run for this to look like a good idea."

Despite the much-vaunted troop surge that committed an

additional 21,500 U.S. soldiers to the conflict, violence remains endemic throughout the country. The most recent fighting between Coalition forces and the Shiite paramilitary group the Mahdi Army is ongoing and has cost 240 lives across the country since March 25.

"(The war) is a shambles, it really is like Vietnam all over again," said visiting assistant professor of political science Robert Duncan. "Our arrogance, our hubris never ceases to amaze me. We are trying to impose democratic idea of government while completely disregarding centuries old cultures, religions, and tribal identities in the area. We'll be there until the next election when we get some sanity in the White House."

According to many pundits, the cost of the war cannot only be

calculated in blood and treasure. Perceptions of American prestige and "moral capital" abroad are at an all time low.

"America after the invasion of Iraq is no longer the superpower it was before," said John Simpson, World Affairs editor for BBC News in an opinion column for that news service. "We have seen how hard it is for the Americans to deal with a few thousand lightly armed volunteers ... The U.S. state department finds it much harder nowadays to be taken seriously when it criticizes other countries for their use of torture and arbitrary arrest."

Opposition to the war at home remains high. The legitimacy of the war and the duration of the occupation dominates the presidential campaign. Ending the war is a priority for both demo-

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cratic candidates.

"We need to begin this withdrawal (from Iraq) immediately because this war has not made us safer," said presidential hopeful Barack Obama in his Jan. 28 response to George Bush's State of the Union address. "The only way we're finally going to pressure the Iraqis to reconcile and take responsibility for their future is to immediately begin a responsible withdrawal."

According to BBC News, tens of thousands of protesters marched against the war in cities across the United States and

66 percent of American adults polled by CBS News oppose the war.

Presumably, these numbers reflect the views of Guilford's students, faculty and staff. On-campus anti-war activism has been scarce, with the exception of Quaker-led candlelight vigils to mark the fifth-year anniversary.

"It is surprising to me that Guilford students haven't been more vocal," McLeod said. "Guilford, like America, suffers from a lack of engaged public discourse either local or global."