

CHINESE WOMEN FACE DEPORTATION REVERSAL: CLINTON OFFICIALS REJECT HARSH BIRTH-CONTROL POLICY AS GROUNDS FOR ASYLUM.

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Body

In the **Chinese** city of Wenzhou there is a hospital with the lyrical name of East Wind. Hu Shuyue and Chun Nan remember it well.

Hu was strapped to an operating table there for a forced abortion when she was six months pregnant with her third child; Chun Nan was ordered to East Wind to be sterilized after the **birth** of her second son.

"I will never forget that," said Hu, 40, wincing at the memory. "I am so sad, so bitter."

Both **women** fled China by paying **Chinese** gangsters to smuggle them into the United States aboard the Golden Venture cargo ship, which ran aground near New York City in June 1993 with nearly 300 passengers.

The **women** sought political **asylum** in America, saying they were fleeing the **harsh birth control policies** of China.

But that has not been enough to satisfy immigration **officials** and, now, after two years of detention, Hu and Chun Nan are on the verge of being sent back to an uncertain fate in China.

The likely **deportation** of Hu, Chun Nan and other **Chinese women** is threatening to raise a fresh political storm for the **Clinton** administration.

Accepted for admission

In recent years thousands of illegal immigrants have used fear of coercive **birth-control** measures in China to gain admission to the United States.

But President **Clinton** decided last August to take a tougher approach to **Chinese asylum** cases, officially reversing the more lenient **policies** of former President Bush.

Conservatives in Congress and elsewhere say **Clinton** is being too tough -- sending **women** with legitimate fears of prison or serious political harassment back to China.

"I'll be done for if I have to go back to China," said Chun Nan, 44, who only wanted her given names printed, keeping her family name anonymous.

A total of 13 **women** -- most of whom have had forced abortions or sterilizations in the past -- are among the first group of Golden Venture passengers being forced back to China.

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They are being held in Bakersfield, and their departure could come within days. Hundreds of others could follow. About 1,000 illegal Chinese immigrants are being held at INS facilities around the country.

"Most of these women have been horribly victimized in China, and I'm shocked that this is not grounds for asylum," said Richard Cook, an attorney in New Orleans who is representing the women. "They are absolutely terrified. They are all looking at long prison times or fines at the least."

Supporters in Congress

Many on Capitol Hill are taking up the cause of the Golden Venture women. Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J., chairman of the subcommittee on human rights, said Congress would consider putting into law a guarantee of asylum for people who are forced to have abortions or sterilizations.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, told the president he guaranteed such legislation would pass Congress.

Lory Rosenberg, a legal expert for the American Immigration Law Foundation in Washington, said in a letter to the INS that there has been "blatant disregard for the rights of these women to be released on parole or even considered for release."

She said the Golden Venture episode has made "a mockery" of Clinton's new policy.

During the administration of President Bush, asylum was granted to all Chinese who suffered under the country's coercive family planning rules. That policy, established in 1990, triggered a flood of illegal Chinese, many of whom cited fear of family planning in seeking refuge here.

To stem that flood, Clinton tightened the political asylum rules, omitting fear of family planning.

He said he would make special exceptions for some of the worst cases of suffering and abuse. Clinton envisioned that as a humanitarian safety net. But the net is not catching any of the women from the Golden Venture.

The president has left it up to the Immigration and Naturalization Service to stop deportations in hardship cases. But immigration attorneys fear that the INS will take an equally hard line with the nearly 800 other Chinese men and women in detention who are seeking asylum under similar family-planning complaints. To be sure, Bush's policy of favorable treatment for Chinese because of China's family planning rules was a magnet, drawing thousands of illegal immigrants. They came by plane, they came by boat. At the height of the wave in 1993, there were more than 100,000 illegal Chinese immigrants.

Some had credible complaints; others used family-planning coercion as a convenient argument.

The grounding of the Golden Venture brought the problem of illegal immigration from China to a head. The image of a decrepit vessel running aground not far from the Statue of Liberty prompted the Clinton administration to take a tough stand.

To make the smugglers suffer, the INS detained their cargo -- people like Hu and Chun Nan -- so the people couldn't find jobs and pay off their debts to the gangsters. The debts were large, too. Each passenger owed the smugglers, called "snakeheads," about \$30,000 each.

Under direction from Clinton, all 285 Golden Venture passengers were detained in facilities across the country. Hu and Chun Nan were locked up in New York, before being transferred to New Orleans. Two weeks ago, they were flown to Bakersfield.

Inside the visitors room of the Kern County Detention Facility here, Hu seemed anxious and perplexed about many things.

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Why is she locked up behind barbed wire? Why was she flown here in shackles from New Orleans two weeks ago? Why has she spent nearly two years behind bars like a criminal?

Where is she going next?

Hu could speak no English, but her face, with one eye twitching nervously, implored what her voice could not: Get me out of here.

In all likelihood, that won't happen.

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