

China Detains Canadian Missionaries on Spying Charges

A Canadian couple detained in China on suspicion they stole state secrets are safe but under constant guard, according to messages they passed on via the Canadian embassy, their son said this week.

Kevin and Julia Garratt, who ran a coffee shop on the Chinese border with North Korea, were detained on Monday, their family members have said.

“A Canadian representative has met with both my mother and father for 30 minutes each and they passed on messages saying they are safe and eating well and have a nice place to stay, although they are under constant guard,” Peter Garratt told Reuters.

In a separate interview, he said: “It seems so surreal and kind of crazy, like where did this come from?”

The couple from Vancouver opened a cafe called Peter’s Coffee House in Dandong, an important gateway to reclusive North Korea, in 2008.

Peter Garratt said Chinese authorities who met with him would not tell him where his parents were being held, but that the facility was somewhere in or around Dandong.

The investigation into the Garratts comes a week after Canada took the unusual step of singling out Chinese hackers for attacking a key computer network, lodging a diplomatic protest with Beijing.

It is unusual for foreigners to be charged with violating China’s state secrets law—a serious crime that is punishable

by life in prison or death in the most severe cases.

Christian Faith 'Not Related'

The 21-year-old Garratt, a self-described Christian and student in China's northeastern city of Dalian, said he did not believe his parents' religious beliefs led to their detainment.

"My parents are definitely Christian and they don't hide that, but it doesn't seem to fit with what the allegations are. I don't see how that could be related to this case," he said during an interview on the banks of the Yalu River looking out at North Korea.

"They were detained and then brought home to pick up some stuff and then brought to the facility where they are now being held," said Garratt, the third of four children, the rest of whom live in Canada.

The Garratts' restaurant, which offered North American fare such as french toast and hot dogs, has a view of traffic flowing across the Yalu River, which separates China from North Korea.

The cafe will be closed while the Garratts are being investigated, Peter Garratt said.

Beijing is very sensitive about its relationship with Pyongyang, which has been hit with several rounds of sanctions from the United Nations over its banned nuclear and ballistic-missile programs. Chinese aid, details of which are a state secret, have kept the North's flailing economy afloat.

Dandong is a stopover for North Korean traders and officials traveling between North Korea and northeast China.

It is also a magnet for foreign reporters seeking information on one of the most isolated countries in the world. The city is home to an air force base, according to Chinese military

blogs.

China is Canada's second-most important trading partner after the United States, and bilateral trade is growing. Total Canada-China trade was C\$69.8 billion (\$64 billion) in 2012 and C\$72.9 billion in 2013, according to official Canadian data.

In July, Chinese prosecutors charged British corporate investigator Peter Humphrey and his American wife, Yu Yingzeng, with illegally obtaining private information.

The couple were detained last year following work they did for the British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline and their trial is set for Friday in Shanghai.

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