

At the Funeral for an Immigrant, Anger and Sorrow

By Jane H. Lii

As the church choir sang softly for her soul to rise safely to heaven, Gao Liqin lay in a simple blue wooden coffin in her finest attire: a white ruffled shirt and a frayed chocolate-colored wool coat.

Clutching a picture of his dead wife and weeping, D. M. Zhang an immigrant from Fujian, China, sobbed uncontrollably yesterday at Chinatown's Ng Fook Funeral Home. In broken sentences and disjointed words, he asked aloud in Chinese: what had unleashed the wrath of fury of his wife's captors that they would kill her in such a brutal way?

On Sept. 2, seven days after Ms. Gao's abduction, her captors, enraged that her family in Fujian had come up with only \$5,000 of the \$38,800 they had demanded, gang-raped her and cut off her finger, the police said. They then tried to kill her by suffocating her with a plastic bag over her head and smashing her skull with a television set, investigators said. When she would not die, her captors strangled her with a phone cord and set the house on fire, the police said.

Ms. Gao, who was abducted on her way home from a Queens sewing factory by four youths on the evening of August 26, is one of the 11 hostages the kidnappers are holding, the police said. So far, only two victims — a man who had been shot in the neck and a woman who was beaten and gang-raped — are now free, and only one of the suspects, Xu Xing Ying, has been arrested.

The cases are only the latest in the surging wave of crime against Fujianese immigrants, many of whom came to America illegally, paying up to \$30,000 for passage. Unable to be absorbed by the insular Chinese community and find jobs, some have turned to crime.

Kidnapping has become the crime of choice because the punishment is significantly less than for drug trafficking. To make it harder for American law enforcement officials to trace the money, kidnappers demand the ransom be paid in China.

Angered by this latest wave of terror, Chinese immigrants met with police officials last week to demand more police attention to the kidnapping problem.

To care for her husband, who had become ill after coming to the United States - Ms. Gao had left behind their children, a girl, 13, and a boy, 6, and embarked on her own journey here last year, paying \$37,000 for falsified travel documents. After her arrival, she worked in a Queens garment factory, earning \$1,500 a month, said her husband, Mr. Zhang.

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To save money, the couple rented part of a one-bedroom apartment in Corona and spent virtually no money other than for basic clothes and food, Mr. Zhang said. Each month, they send home \$2,000 to pay off the exorbitant smuggling fees.

Before receiving word of his wife's death, Mr. Zhang had anxiously waited by the phone for news from China. He felt a sense of relief when told by his brother-in-law in Fujian that he and relatives had paid \$5,000 in ransom for his wife's release.

"I thought the money would spare her life," he said.

Mr. Zhang said he knew something went wrong when the kidnappers did not release his wife after the partial payment. "Instead, they demanded more money," he said. "I knew she was dead." ■