

CHINA RESOURCE JOURNAL

Analysis of Current Trends in China



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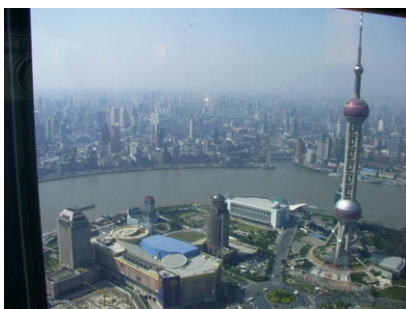
A MINISTRY OF CHINA RESOURCE CENTER, INC.

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THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the China Resource Journal! Our hope in publishing this journal is to use our understanding of China and our experience in China to clarify Western perceptions of Christianity in China, thereby helping the Western Church engage more effectively in God's work in China. God is so wonderfully at work in China, even within very high levels of government in China. Much of our focus in our China research is keeping track of what's happening politically and socially that effects people of faith in China and keeping our 'ears to the ground' when it comes to Christian activity in China.

The last 15 years have specifically been very significant ones for China's Christians. When Mao Zedong and the Communists took control of China in 1949, they wanted to transform China into both an economic power and a socialist state. In order to accomplish this, the Communists brought all economic sectors under the control of the Communist party. State-run industries and communal farms became commonplace. After Mao's death, China came under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. It was during this time that China began reforms in its economic and political systems, changes that were aimed to bring the government up to speed with the world community. The first of these main changes began to take



Shanghai has more in common with Seattle than other cities in China

place in 1979. But it has been in the last 15 years that we've seen the biggest fruit of those changes to their economy, bringing it out of the old socialist system and into gradual market-oriented reform. The Chinese economy has nearly quadrupled in its size in the last 15 years. Prior to reform, the Chinese government relied on its tight control over the labor, housing, and food markets to enforce its political goals. As the Chinese people continue to experience more economic freedoms and the freedom of choice that comes with a free market economy, they began to want more freedom in other areas of their lives. The expansion of market forces is increasing the scope of civic and political liberty even in the absence of political democratization. China's rapid economic development has significantly liberalized its political system. This is significant for us as Westerners to recognize as those who want to advance God's Kingdom

in China. These changes signify new ministry opportunities that were not possible in China 20 years ago. Here's a brief look at some of these changes:

1. Less ability to control the Information sector

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, the Chinese government tried to maintain a grip on the information sector and repeatedly launched campaigns against liberalization tendencies in the mass media. But these efforts have failed miserably. Although the government has been able to keep relatively strict controls on television and radio networks which it operates, it has effectively ceded control of much of the print media to the private sector. Today, China has an efficient, privately controlled network of publishing companies, printing facilities, and retail distributors. In addition, the introduction of new information technology, including electronic mail, fax machines, satellite television transmission and video CD and DVD players has further reduced the state's capacity for social control. This all has led to new opportunities, not only for Bible printing, but also for Christian radio and television programming.

2. Improvements in Chinese Law

One of the most direct effects of China's economic reforms on its politics and its laws has been the subtle but significant change in normal political behavior. The rise of public opinion and the everyday citizen's exposure to the West has led to a couple of key changes within the country.

Rule of Law, Governmental Officials held accountable

As common citizens understand more about how the world works, and how other countries are operating, they increasingly want more accountability of its governmental officials. They also want the laws in China to be administered more evenly. In the past, Chinese governmental officials saw themselves above the law, which led to widespread abuse of their power. As a recent Washington Post article exclaimed, "*a momentous struggle underway in China between a ruling party that sees the law as an instrument of control and a society that increasingly believes it should be used for something else: a check on the power of government officials and a guardian of individual rights. How this conflict unfolds could transform the country's authoritarian political system.*" This need to govern more responsibly is on the radar screen of all governmental officials. At their September 2004 annual

Continued on page 2

Start of Something from page 1

planning session, National government leaders said that “the life and death of the party” rests on “improving governance.” This growth in consciousness towards officials conduct and performance is a wonderful trend that we can encourage as we engage with governmental officials in China. We can directly influence them and aid in the decrease both in the level and scope of political repression in China, in addition to reaching them with the Gospel.

Also encouraging is the trend towards Chinese citizens turning to the court system to find legal justice. About 4.4 million civil cases were filed in the last year alone, more than double of the total a decade ago. This surge in legal activity is coming from the belief that everyone, even party officials, can be held accountable under the law, a belief promoted by a new generation of lawyers, judges and legal scholars. The party appears torn by this rising legal consciousness. It recognizes the value of an impartial judicial system to resolve disputes in a country with growing social tensions and an emerging capitalist economy, and it sees the potential of citizen lawsuits to curb corruption and improve governance. But this also means continued changes to the way that they operate. They are being forced to change their operations to fit the way that the country is changing.

3. Loosening of control over religion

With the loosening of governmental control at almost all levels, the government also has to rethink their repressive attitude towards religion in China. Increasingly at all levels, China's Christians are able to do more to express their faith openly than at any other time in Chinese history. In a recent Wall Street Journal Article, a teacher of an unregistered seminary puts it best when he says that “*You have to realize that China is not a strict place.... If your relations with officials are good, you can do whatever you like...*” This statement nicely summarizes what we are continually finding as we investigate the current situation. In May 2005, we interviewed a Beijing house church pastor who told stories of using the local Kinko's to produce a massive amount of tracts and other Christian material. His eight house churches worship freely and openly without fear of government intervention.

So What About the Persecution Stories?

With all of these positive changes in Chinese society, it would make sense that the repressive government attitude towards Christians would be on a decrease.... If you thought that, you're right! For those persecution stories that do exist, we feel that there are two factors that we in the West need to take into account. First, although the Chinese government is making huge strides in the areas of rule of law and police accountability

of abuse of civil liberties, the distance they need to cover to bring China into the 21st Century is daunting. The way that Chinese governmental officials historically have looked at their role in enforcing morality and “correct” behavior and ideas has been a very active role. This is slowly changing as they engage more with the world in the 21st Century. But changing the direction of a ship that has 1/5 of the World's population (1.3 Billion people) takes time and perseverance. In rural areas of China in particular, the police officials are at the end of the line when it comes to training and corrective opportunities, and the system of holding these officials accountable is still weak. By contrast, in the United States police face pronounced formal limitations on their right to search, use coercion and force, arrest, and interrogate citizens. These come from both outside the police (the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government) and in the form of bureaucratic rules within the police. In addition, the United States uses a system where governmental prosecutors can bring charges against police using a grand jury. The grand jury is a group of citizens who hear the charges and the evidence, then make a determination of whether to indict police with a crime. In China, this system is not yet in place in the same way. There is a tremendous amount of interest in China in further developing this system, and many from China are coming to Western countries to learn about how to implement further controls on police abuse of power. In rural areas of China, police officials who already may have a bias against Christians or who don't understand them because Christianity is not historically ‘Chinese,’ they may harass people of faith, even though China's constitution clearly protects these Christians. It seems clear that whatever harassment is taking place is not a coordinated effort from top Chinese government leaders, as some have suggested, but rather isolated cases of rural police officials without proper training and accountability measures.

Secondly, we believe that there is a culture in Western Christianity that has an insatiable desire for persecution stories, in much the same way that one would slow down for an automobile accident, our ‘car crash culture.’ As one church missions leader told us recently, “*If you want to get the West excited, concerned, involved, donating, visiting, and praying for the saved and unsaved in China, stories about the persecution and hardship is what drives the movement. Unfortunately, people don't get excited at the same level about helping put students into seminary, helping developing churches or sending national missionaries into the fields where there is not persecution going on.*” Many missions leaders reporting on China know this paradigm about American Christians, and use these stories to raise money for their own organizations, and haven't taken the time to research the validity of the stories. The China Resource Center has a heart to bring the true situation of the Church in China to America and is developing a number of programs to bring the truth to light.

In The Next Issue: Analysis of recent persecution stories in China

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1. We exist to serve the growth and development of the Church in China through theological training, Bible distribution, Church building and other partnership opportunities.
2. We exist to enhance the China ministry culture and clarify Western perceptions of Christianity in China through extensive research and education, thereby equipping China ministry leaders, workers and the Church in the West to more effectively advance the kingdom of God in China.

For more information about CRC, ways you can partner with us, or to inquire about our speaking schedule, please contact us at 303-332-8884 or Mike@ChinaResourceCenter.org

