

CHINA RESOURCE JOURNAL

Analysis of Current Trends in China



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CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN CHINA

Ethics, noun: a set of moral principles; a theory or system of moral values.

--Webster's Online Dictionary

Christian Ethics is a topic that we in the West may take for granted given the Christian moral foundation of our culture. But in China, given the rapid changes in Chinese culture and society, there are many in governmental circles that have been searching for a societal 'glue' to hold the changing pieces together. In the last 20 years, top Governmental think-tank type organizations in China have been studying and discussion this foundation and its merit for an emerging China. This ethical search in China was first reported by David Aikman in his 2003 book, *Jesus in Beijing*. As reported in the last issue, he quotes a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *"But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. That Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this,"* said the researcher. Much of their research comes from the study of the effects of a Protestant work ethic. This study, first brought to light by Max Weber's 1905 book, 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,' states that capitalism, which China has now fully embraced, evolved when the Protestant ethic influenced large numbers of people to engage in the secular working world. This ethic, developed from Biblical standards of grace, mercy and an engagement with the 'unsaved' world, was put into place as Christians developed their own enterprises and engaged in trade and the accumulation of wealth for investment. In other words, the Protestant ethic was a force behind an unplanned and uncoordinated mass action that led to the development of capitalism.

As a part of this nation-wide interest in Christian ethics, Chinese universities have opened Christian or Religious studies departments as an effort an academically approach Christian ethics and their value to the future of China. Chinese academicians in the fields of literature, history, philosophy and the social sciences have attempted to re-build their theoretical foundation in a more open context. Many Chinese professors of philosophy, foreign languages, literature, art, history and social sciences have taken an interest in Christianity as an academic subject of research. Within this group of professors, some have come to faith in Christ. In China, this group is commonly known as "Cultural Christians." They do not attend or identify with any church, but their goal is to make Christianity a visible force as China searches for a new intellectual order in the 21st century. They promote Christian ideas and values in the Chinese academic context. Their influence in these Chinese Universities has grown, and the emergence of these Departments of Christian Studies is the natural outpouring of their efforts. One of these professors has high hopes to develop this department into a national center for biblical studies. He has already formed a small library, and he has big plans for this department. This causes us to stop and ask: If the Chinese government intended to strongly persecute Christians, why did they allow these departments to exist? These departments are breeding grounds for the next generation of great Christian thinkers and leaders in China. From them will come the next generation of Christian scholars, writers, and missions leaders. Of course, we think we can answer our own question; time and time again, we see trends indicating that policy makers in China see Christians as a benefit to society. Miikka Ruokanen, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Helsinki, takes this perspective: "In modern China, Christian faith is no longer a controversial choice. Christianity, along with other religions, has gained some public sphere and recognition in recent years."

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As we've been tracking this development, a most surprising discovery has taken place. Given the nature of our work in China, people in the West often talk to us about China. During one such conversation, a friend told us of his Birmingham, Alabama pastor who had been asked to come to the Central Party School in Beijing, which is the highest institution in China to train Communist Party officials, to teach a two-week course on Christian Ethics. He is one of 20 Western pastors who have been invited to come and teach at the School. The Christian Ethics course, now mandatory for all Party School students, has received top priority in funding and classroom space. The importance of this situation cannot be underscored enough given the prominence of the Party School and the position of the President of the School, Xi Jinping. Xi, who is also the Vice-President of People's Republic of China, is next in line to become President of the People's Republic of China when current President Hu Jintao finishes his term in 2012.



Xi Jinping, Vice President of the PRC

As we continue to analyze and watch the continued development in China, this trend is one we will definitely keep our eyes on. With the development of a Christian Ethic in Chinese society comes the continued acceptance that Christianity should be a regular part of Chinese society. This acceptance then leads more Chinese people to investigate the claims and promises found in Christianity. What they will find is that Christianity not only makes for a great ethic, but also has eternal life change as a part of its claims as well.

Preview on our new Book: **The Chinese Puzzle**

It is with great pleasure that we announce our first book on China and her Church: **The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the pieces together for a deeper understanding of China and her Church.** In the book, we attempt to clarify perceptions of China and her church in 7 Chapters. We've tried to keep this book short enough that one could read it on a North America to China flight, but long enough to cover the main points. By the time you get off the plane, you will have finished the book and will be ready to engage with China.

We want to help you understand China and her Church. There is much confusion. Does persecution exist? Can Christians in China worship freely? As a Westerner, how may I most effectively pray for and engage in China? Many people are confused by these questions and issues. China is like a huge puzzle, with many pieces and moving parts; it's hard to identify all that is happening today in China. I hope you will embrace this book as your complete picture to put together the Chinese Puzzle. China is experiencing some monumental, head-spinning changes, and even the most discerning China analyst may find it daunting to keep up. Information flows from multiple sources, and much of it seems contradictory; this doesn't facilitate our understanding of China and her church. There are also some in the West who pose as 'China Experts,' even though they haven't been to China in many years, they don't speak the Chinese language, and they are therefore functioning with old paradigms which foster old stereotypes of China.

In writing this book, I hope to give you many more pieces to the puzzle that may deepen your understanding of China and thereby Christianity in China. With many more pieces to the puzzle, I believe you will be able to pray more effectively for China, engage with what God is doing there, and see China from a much more balanced perspective. As we finish the first decade of the 21st century, the situation in China is ripe for increased Western engagement based on mutual understanding, and I hope this book serves as a catalyst to strengthen and deepen that understanding.

The book will be available for purchase by late-May 2008 at Amazon.com, Christianbook.com and other online retailers.

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We exist to serve the rapid growth and development of the Church in China, thereby equipping Chinese Christians to grow in their walk with Christ and effectively reach China for Christ.

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

