

CHINA RESOURCE JOURNAL

Analysis of Current Trends in China



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ENGAGING WITH THE ENEMY (WHO ACTUALLY MAY BE YOUR BEST MINISTRY TOOL!)

We will strive to respect local government and regulations; and the culture, history, and aspirations of the Chinese people.

-The second Foundation on the Ethical Foundations for China Service

To many of those Westerners who are members of the China-concerned community, the topic of Engaging with Chinese governmental officials makes about as much sense as putting a bullet through their head. Their rationale is that since the Communist Party in China has taken such a hard stance in the past on trying to control religion, of course it would make sense to stay as far away from governmental officials when trying to reach Chinese for Christ.

While this approach has dominated the China Ministry culture since the 1980's when China reopened to the West, over the last 10 years, a new ministry model is emerging that both honors Chinese governmental officials in their God-given authority, and still meets the need to reach the 1.2 billion who are still without Christ in China. The basic premise of this ministry model is simple: Rather than going to China afraid of government officials, there are new opportunities to approach officials in partnership. It is well understood in government circles that most Westerners are Christians, and the implication is that how we act will reflect negatively/positively on Christianity. Most China watchers agree that there is no longer a need to hide our identity as Christians.

Robert Cheeley, who has lived and working in China for many years summarizes the situation well in David Aikman's 2003 book, *Jesus in Beijing*: *"Chinese Christians will tell you without exception that they are gaining freedom, We are just on the verge of something happening when Christianity is going to be completely tolerated. We say to government groups, 'Will you allow us to let the Chinese church into areas of orphanages, arts, education? Without hesitation, they reply, 'Yes, but you have to get permission for it first.'"* Xing Zihui, a teacher in an unregistered seminary agrees. In a 2005 Wall Street Journal article, he states, *"You have to realize China's not a strict place, If your relations with officials are good, you can do whatever you like, as long as there's no trouble."*

We think everyone likes to be treated with respect, to be looked in the eye, to have their hand shaken. Chinese Governmental officials are no different. It has often been stated that the only thing they fear when it comes to Westerners in China is that which they don't know about. More and more, we are hearing of people that are taking this engagement approach in China, with wonderful results. And just think of the new ministry models that may be possible as the officials are able to trust Westerners through our emerging relationships with them. Independent Bible Training Schools, Chinese Universities asking us to come and teach Christianity, etc. are within our reach. By practicing the ethic of reciprocity, or in Christian circles known as the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would want to be treated, makes sense in a place like China where credibility is earned and relationships go a long way. Here are a couple of stories that serve as examples of this new trend in China.



The varied activities of The Church in China

As I'm sitting in the cafeteria, eating with my friend Bob, I listen to his story with intention. He recounts for me a meeting he had to sit in on as the local representative for the International Fellowship in his city (population 10 million) in China. His story goes something like this: "As the representative for our fellowship, I have to go to a city level Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) meeting once a month. I don't do much at the meeting, except for give a 2 minute report on our Fellowship. But my report is given at the end, so I have to sit through the whole 2 hour meeting. So this meeting I was just at was very interesting. The leader of our city's RAB meeting gets up to start the meeting and announces that he's just gotten word from the National government that they need to do more to make life easier for their city's Protestant Christians. So the whole two hour meeting is a brain storming session for the city's Government leaders on how they

Continued on page 2

can encourage the Christians for their city. In hearing all of this, I was so impressed with the level of dialogue that was taking place that when it came time for me to give my presentation, I asked for an additional amount of time to address the whole crowd. I tell them how encouraged I am by the level of dialogue and I pledge to help them achieve their goals in any way possible. They ask me if I could be on a task force to help in this process, and I am compelled to help and serve them in this way.”

With the onset of the SARS virus in 2003, many in Beijing were scared and afraid of this unknown virus. Chinese people tend to be more worrisome about illness than Westerners do, and in Beijing, the scare level is at its peak. People stopped going to work, stopped traveling out into the city, and the city went almost into shutdown mode. The Beijing city government needed to get people back to work and back out into the stores. After many late night strategy sessions, they determined that they need to set up counseling centers to be available to educate Beijingers on the SARS virus and to calm the fears that have gripped the city. During one of these sessions, the vice-mayor of Beijing stood up and mentioned that he knows an American that lives across the hall from him in his apartment building that has a counseling background. That night, he approaches his American friend, a man that he respected because of the two years he had gotten to know him and the many dinners that the two families had shared together. The American, in China as a staff member of a large evangelical organization, has a Master's degree in Counseling and is thrilled to work with the Beijing government to serve them in this way. In all, they were able to set up 13 counseling centers in Beijing for the SARS crisis. Having the counseling, much of it based off of Christian principals was such a benefit to the city of Beijing, after the SARS crisis was over, they were compelled to keep two of the centers open, one of which has a 24-hour counseling hotline that anyone throughout China can call for free counseling.



Two workers disinfect during the Beijing SARS Crisis

Practical Applications for Getting Started

So you may be asking yourself, “Sounds great..... How do I get started?” Here are three suggestions on getting started in engaging with Government officials:

1. Figure out how the system works in China

Being good learners in China is key in an environment that we may not be familiar with. Go into China as a learner and be willing to take suggestions from Chinese friends. Andrew Kaiser, with Evergreen China in Taiyuan jokes that his full-time job is to have lunch with Governmental officials. Of course there are many additional things that he does, but he has a priority to be the guy who is meeting with Taiyuan officials, both to see how their operations work and to then continually ask how Evergreen can serve them and meet the needs in Taiyuan and in Shanxi province.

2. Don't be afraid of Chinese governmental officials at all levels. They're not the enemy!

It is becoming clear that the Chinese government is seeing Christians, both Western and Chinese, as a benefit to society. Through multiple conversations with many different people who are engaging at different levels, it is clear to us that Chinese leaders are exploring topics like volunteerism and non-profit work to see how China could benefit by expanding the capabilities in China. We as Westerners, with a long history in both these areas, have the opportunity to be a benefit to the Chinese as they explore these areas.

3. Be careful not to bring your own agenda before we learn of the agenda of the local Chinese agencies.

As Westerners, we are often stereotyped as one's who come into a 'missions' situation thinking we know all the answers. Although we often have vast ministry experience and training, we should always recognize that the Chinese always know best what is happening in their local areas. Being willing to set our agendas aside allows for greater cooperation as this allows our Chinese partners to ask us for help as needed. Then we can bring in our expertise, but it is on their terms. This type of attitude speaks volumes to our Chinese friends, and shows we are not just looking to be 'in charge.'

Join the Conversation! We'd love to hear your opinions and personal experiences at 1-303-8727-TALK!

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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

