

# CHINA RESOURCE JOURNAL

Analysis of Current Trends in China



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## SEEING BEYOND THE CONFUSION

There is something about human nature that makes us attracted to accidents and seeing other people's pain. You know what I'm talking about.... You're driving on the highway and traffic is going along great. Then, all the sudden, the traffic flow comes to an immediate halt. You look out down the highway to see if there is an accident, but you don't see a thing. Thirty minutes later, you come to the scene of the 'accident,' only to find that a guy is changing a flat tire, and everyone has stopped to look. In most of America, we call this phenomenon 'Rubbernecking.' In Chicago, they call this type of slow down 'Gaper Delay.' Whatever you call it, it is a very interesting piece of human nature. American researchers have found that a car with a flat tire on the side of a highway often causes as much slow down as a real accident would due to rubbernecking. The slowdown in traffic persists even after the accident scene has been cleared if traffic is dense. Traffic experts call this phenomenon a phantom accident. This behavior can potentially cause additional and sometimes more serious accidents among the distracted rubbernecks.

When it comes to Christianity in China, we're afraid that the Western Church continues to look for the phantom accident, those events of persecution and repression that just aren't there. It is time for Christians in the West to get beyond old paradigms and stereotypes of China and see with 'open eyes' what God is doing, and we have a commitment to continually bring these new events to light. In a reoccurring series in our China Resource Journals, here are some additional key events that are happening in China today as we analyze current trends:

### 1. The Evolution of China's non-profit Sector

The Chinese government is in the process of making some significant changes to help and improve the non-profit sector in China. In late 2004, for example, the Ministry of Civil Affairs announced a new framework to recognize the foundations that finance charity in China and to offer them a variety of

tax deductions, including exemption from stamp duty. Legislation institutionalizing the framework is currently under review. Officials have also initiated discussions on a comprehensive philanthropy law that would create a certification process for nonprofit organizations and provide tax deductions for individual and corporate donors, which are intended to develop the sector. The market economy in China has helped government leaders understand the role and utility that non-profit organizations can play in advancing society. In addition, Christian non-profit organizations are gaining an increasingly large legal standing in Chinese society. The Chinese government sees these Christian non-profits as a way to maintain social stability, while meeting the needs in their respective areas of service. We know of several Chinese non-profits that were founded to meet needs in certain areas, and an increasing number of overseas non-denominational ministries that have gone through the registration process and now have their headquarters offices in China.

### 2. Emerging Democratic Elections and Human Rights Concerns

When we think about China, we don't think about it being a place where democratic elections are being held. But slowly, Chinese officials see elections at the local level as a another way to maintain social stability. The Chinese government began direct village elections in 1988 to help maintain social and political order in the context of rapid economic reforms. Today, village elections occur in about 650,000 villages across China, reaching 75 percent of the nation's 1.3 billion people. The widespread popularity of these elections led to a revision in Chinese law to include procedures that guarantee electoral openness, fairness, and competitiveness. The changes forbid local Communist Party committees from intervening in the nomination phase and encouraged more elected village officials to challenge party control in the villages. The success of village elections also prompted experiments of public election of township leaders the next highest level of government in three provinces. This change toward

Continued on page 2

allowing more Chinese to have a say in the governmental process is also opening up the Chinese peoples' minds to increased involvement in civic and human rights concerns. An increasing number of Chinese Christians are becoming interested and involved in a movement to hold Chinese government and public security personnel accountable to hold to how Chinese laws read on issues like religion and human rights. A recent ChristianityToday.com article quoted Fan Yafeng, an influential constitutional scholar in Beijing, who said, *"We are seeing the intersection of law and religion in China. More and more Chinese public intellectuals say that only Christianity can provide a solid foundation for the rule of law in China."* <sup>1</sup>

A big part of what's fueling this movement toward governmental accountability among Christians is the major movement toward Christianity in Chinese intellectual communities. Intellectuals such as prominent Beijing lawyer Gao Zhisheng, writer Yu Jie, whose 2003 book 'Fire and Ice' sold over a million copies as a critic of the Chinese government's corruption problems, and scholar Fan Yafeng each represent a new wave of Chinese who are taking a new approach toward Christians in China and their engagement with the government. Many of these Chinese intellectuals are providing seminars on what Christians rights are according to the law to help rural Christians know their rights. This new focus on legal rights is sweeping China. In addition, many intellectuals are advocating a above-ground, yet unregistered church approach they normally call a 'family church'. Yu Jie, while on a recent trip to America, stated the movement's goals nicely, *"Christians need to change from 'silent resilience' to a more practical approach. Christians have to change."* This approach recognizes the Chinese constitution's freedom of religion as stated in Article 36, *"....citizens of the PRC enjoy freedom of religious*

1. [Http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/009/39.106.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/009/39.106.html)

2. [Http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30146-2004Dec27.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30146-2004Dec27.html)

*belief. No state organ, public organization, or individuals may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion."* These Christians are taking a stand that what they believe in is inherently theirs as citizens of the People's Republic of China. This push has put Chinese governmental leaders in a difficult position between it's talk about upholding rule of law and really upholding rule of law, which it has been doing in sporadic measures. 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."* <sup>2</sup>



Things are changing in Shanghai, and all throughout China today.

Major shifts in Chinese society are happening today. The Chinese people are increasingly using changes in governance to stand up for themselves in ways we could not have imagined that long ago. And as we in the West get beyond our 'gaper delay,' and actively engage in today's China, we see a place where religious freedoms, rule of law and the Chinese government's governance are changing every day.

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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.

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