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THE BLESSED CHINESE ROAD MAP

If you've been a faithful reader of the China Resource Journal, you know that we have taken great pains to give accurate analysis of current trends in China, especially in regard to freedom of religion issues in China. You also know that we've stated on a number of occasions, both in the Journal and The China Resource Podcast that governmental attitudes toward people of faith in China is evolving and changing. Given this, you can imagine our delight at receiving word about a speech that China's President Hu Jintao gave on December 19th. The speech, given in Beijing by Hu who had overseen the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee Political Bureau second collective study on contemporary world religion and China's religious situation. This is the first time the Party Central Committee Political Bureau organized a collective study of religion and also the first time that the top person in the Party spoke officially about religion, giving his whole speech to the topic.

The collective study and resulting speech did not come as a surprise to us in that we've been seeing the 'writing on the wall,' with what we've now seen as a clearer road map for the intentions of the Chinese Federal Government. The road map started to reveal itself with the development of the Department of Christian Studies departments at many of China's top universities at the start of the 21st Century (For more information, please see our May/June 2007 CRJ). Following close behind was the now famous story found in David Aikman's book, *Jesus in Beijing*, published in 2003. Mr. Aikman begins his book by recalling a speech he had heard from a Chinese academic specializing in the study of religion for China's premier academic research institute, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In the speech, the academic was asked to research what factors accounted for the pre-eminence of the West all over the world. He and his team studied everything from the historical, political, economic and cultural perspective. After finding that the West's preeminence did not come from military might, or from a better economic or political system, they were left with only one conclusion. *"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 was what 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. Dr. Aikman also quotes the former President of China, Jiang Zemin, who was asked the question as he was leaving his office of the President, *"If, before leaving office, you could make one decree that you knew would be obeying in China, what would it be?"* President Jiang, with a broad smile on his face, answered, *"I would make Christianity the official religion of China."*



U.S. President Bush with Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2006

Given this information, it was clear that the Chinese government had now an intense interest in taking what had made the West so powerful and using that force in it's own quest for social stability and its own growing power on the World stage. We then began to hear stories of local Religious Affair Bureaus (RAB)

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in major cities doing the most to make life easier of people of faith. Most recently, we've been hearing repeated stories of American pastors and lay leaders who are being recruited to teach Christian ethics in government and education circles in China (more on this in the next issue!). As Fenggang Yang, a Chinese national, and now a Perdue University sociology professors states, *"China's increasing global role is undisputed in economics and politics, but religious changes-China's ongoing transition from a secular state to a religious state are often overlooked in the West."* Professor Yang is a member of the religious and Asian studies programs in Purdue's College of Liberal Arts and is directing a three-year project focused on training Chinese scholars to study religion and improve Americans' understanding of religious issues in China.

President Hu's speech seems to us to be 'the next step' in the evolvement of the Chinese Government's thought on people of faith in China. In the speech, President Hu made a couple of key comments. He mentioned the positive role that religious believers have in promoting economic and social development, which is similar to the early 20th Century thought that the Protestant ethic, a code of morals based on the principles of thrift, discipline, hard work, and individualism, is closely tied to the spirit of capitalism. He also mentioned in the speech that at all levels of Chinese government they are realizing that religious belief are going to be a constant in Chinese society for the foreseeable future, so it is the government that needs to change to meet their needs. In addition, Hu mentioned in his speech that together with people of faith, the Chinese government wanted to work together to make for a patriotic citizenry, have mutual respect in belief among the Chinese people and promote social harmony. The role of religion in Chinese society is now portrayed as necessary and constructive. Also very notable is the final comment of President Hu's speech in which he stressed the training and promotion of religious professional, saying the CPC would help and support religious groups to improve self-governance and, voice the opinions of its followers and protect their legal rights and interests. The tone of his comment indicates to us that this should be viewed as complaint against the current state of affairs within the RAB workers realm of influence.

There are a few of key notes we'd like to make on the heels of this speech that are important for those of us who are watching the development of religious affairs in China. The first thing we note is that the instruction he gave was authoritative and intended for the government bureaucracy nationwide. We also note that religion in China under Communism is set in a neutral setting for the first time and does not have to bear the burden of history nor to be cast in suspicious and negative roles. What has traditionally been said about religion by Government leaders is uncharacteristically not mentioned in Hu's speech. (In China, what is not said is often more important than what is said.) Also important to those of us who either are sending people into China, or are working together with Chinese nationals, there is another "first" in this speech. This is also the first time that the Chinese government brought up the topic of religion without simultaneously warning about the dangers of Western infiltration and subversive activities. In the past, you could not hear a speech about religion from a Chinese government official without also hearing about how the Chinese people had to be careful that religion would always have ties to Western Imperialists who wanted nothing more that to take over China. Finally, since the official religious organs (like the Three Self Patriotic Movement, or TSPM) were not highlighted in this speech, it indicates to us that the Chinese Federal government knows what we know: That the registered church bodies, like the TSPM, are decreasing in influence and as long as social stability can be maintained, the government is willing to allow Chinese Christians to live within the Chinese Socialist society with an increasing amount of autonomy.

What an exciting road to be on as we continue to track the path of the Chinese Government! We hope that the Government continues down this path, and lend our full support to participating in any way we can to serve China. And we also hope that this path continues to lead people of faith down a road of continued openness in practicing and adhering to their faith!

In The Next Issue: The Increased Interest in Christian Ethics in China

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We exist the 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

