



# CHINA'S *Next Generation:*

NEW CHINA, NEW CHURCH, NEW WORLD.

BY LUIS BUSH, BRENT FULTON &  
A CHRISTIAN WORKER IN CHINA



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## An Introductory Word *from* Luis Bush

What a difference a decade makes! Over the last ten years the nation of China and the Chinese Church have changed significantly; so has the world. It's a new China. It's a new Church. It's a new world. China's Cultural Revolution that ended in the late 1970s was followed by a 20-year-long spiritual harvest spanning the 1980s and 1990s. It was an awakening that many have called the greatest revival in history; but now we must face the reality that this phenomenal harvest is over. The year 2000 marked a turning point, the dawn of a new era.

**W**hen I returned to Beijing recently, I couldn't help but think of a meeting in that same city ten years prior. Eighty servants of God had gathered for what would be an extraordinary time of prayer and in-depth discussions. The assembly included the main families of the house church, pastors from the Three Self Church, and the entrepreneurial and educated leaders from China's emerging urban church. Following that meeting I communicated with Brent Fulton of China Source to glean from his wisdom and verify facts and figures about the historic move of God that had been happening across the world's most populous nation. At that time we were working independently; now Brent and I are working together to issue a new report, bringing to the world the realities of the current situation and bringing to the Church in China some crucial words of encouragement.

On my latest visit to China I was especially heartened in meeting with emerging leaders from the Beijing Forum and other groups. I listened with great interest to their stories—heartfelt accounts filled with a passion and determination to raise up a new generation from the 4/14 Window to bless the nation of China. I was repeatedly reminded that so much has changed over the past decade. This is indeed a new China in which a new Church has emerged in a new world. We are honored to bring the details to your attention in the report that follows.

# A NEW CHINA



Dramatic changes have taken place in China's recent history. Since opening up to the outside world in 1979, China has been transformed from an isolated land populated primarily by peasant families to a veritable powerhouse of economic activity.

Its rate and scope of urbanization are unprecedented in human history—from less than a quarter of China's people living in cities in 1980 to more than half today. At its "coming out party"—the 2008 Olympic Games—China wowed the world with spectacle even as it reminded the global community of China's longstanding place in world history. China's economic might is being felt the world over as Chinese companies invest far and wide in an effort to secure the energy and material resources needed to fuel China's continued development.

Less noticed, but of greater eternal significance, is China's spiritual change. The church in China has exploded in what is arguably the fastest growing church movement in history. Purged in the fires of persecution and steeped in a deep dependence on God, the church has expanded in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In the absence of trained pastors, Bibles, church buildings, and many of the other trappings associated with organized church activity, the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, stood firm during China's darkest days then boldly advanced as China began its process of reform and opening.

Today China faces the challenge of another major transformation, from its role as a center for cheap manufacturing—"the world's factory floor"—to a consumer-led economy with strong information and service sectors, and a rapidly growing middle class. During this era the church as well faces a major transformation as it seeks to move from the fringes to the center of society, becoming salt and light in every sphere and joining the worldwide Christian community in fulfilling the Great Commission. Central to this transformation is reaching and discipling China's next generation—the youth of today who enjoy a level of material prosperity unimaginable to previous generations, but who are searching for deeper meaning for their lives. How the church embraces this challenge will have lasting ramifications for the future of not only the church, but also China itself and its impact on the rest of the world.

*The church in China has exploded in what is arguably the fastest growing church movement in history.*

# A NEW CHINA: *Urbanization*

At the end of 2011, for the first time in China's long history, more than half of her people were living in urban areas. According *The Urban Blue Book: China City Development Report No. 5*, published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 51.27 percent of China's population were living in cities.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2000 and 2010, China continued to urbanize at a pace and scale never seen before in world history (see chart on page 7).<sup>2</sup> The urban population of China has risen from 18 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1990, to 44 percent in 2007 and now to more than 50 percent today.<sup>3</sup> From 2000 to 2010, China added approximately 205 million urban residents over 10 years, more urban residents than in any country except for India and the United States. China's urban population expansion was 2.5 times the estimated increase in rapidly urbanizing India.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally an agrarian economy, China now has 60 percent of its people employed outside the agricultural sector. An estimated 250 million peasants comprise China's "floating population," living at least part of their time in the cities. With urbanization has come a yawning gap between the standard of living in the city and that in the countryside, with a 68 percent increase in income disparity since 1985.<sup>5</sup>

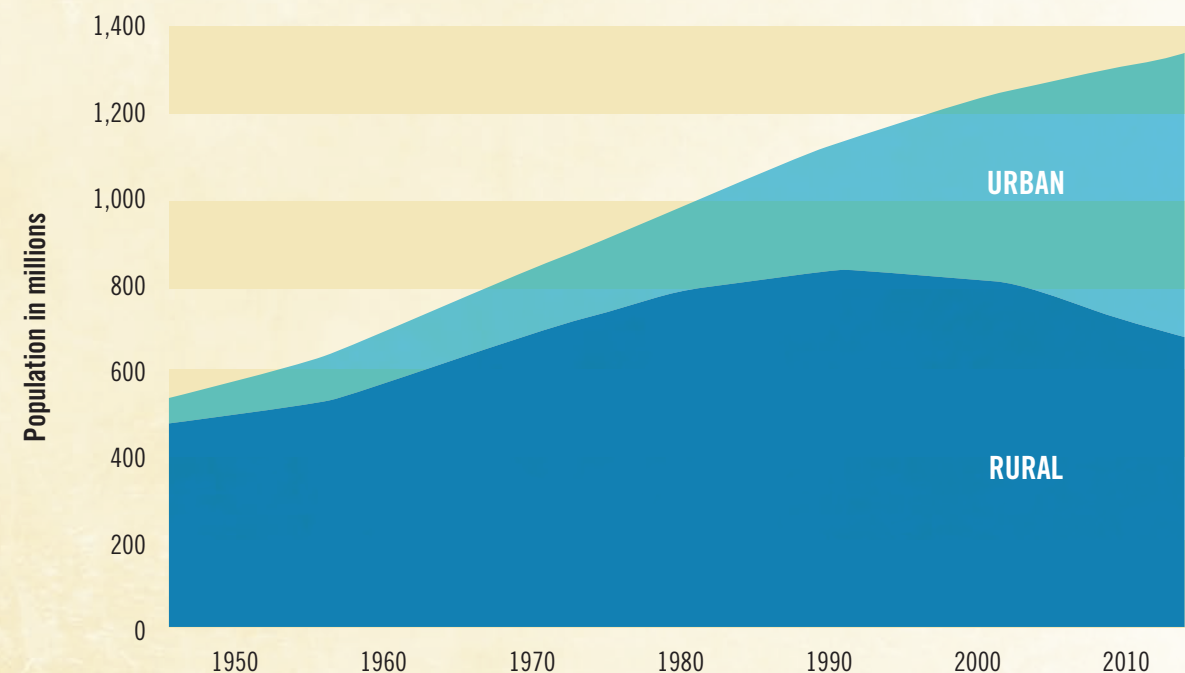
The urbanization China is experiencing today is but the beginning of a massive demographic redistribution. Speaking during a panel discussion convened by *TIME* magazine and the World Economic Forum in 1999, Hu Angang, a professor at Qinghua University predicted, "China's population also is expected to become more urbanized in the next 50 years. Eighty percent of the population will move to urban areas....500 million people will move, changing their lives, changing culture, changing values."<sup>6</sup> According to McKinsey Global Research, by the year 2025, China will have 221 cities of more than a million people. By the year 2030, fully one billion of the world's people will be urban Chinese.<sup>7</sup>

Most of this urbanization is concentrated on China's east coast, which is estimated to have seen more than 80% of China's urban growth between 2000 and 2010. The already crowded cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and Shenzhen received a massive influx of urban migrants, particularly around the manufacturing centers in the Pearl River Delta and Shanghai corridor. Meanwhile, as a result of China's one-child policy, overall population growth is tapering off, increasing only 1.1 percent from 1990 to 2000, and at half that rate from 2000 to 2010, during which time China added a relatively modest 75 million people.<sup>8</sup>

China's decision in 1978 to begin its economic reforms and the way in which Deng Xiaoping crafted its new path of economic development produced a distinctively Chinese form of capitalism which led to urbanization. In Deng's Marxist-inflected reboot of Lee Kuan Yew's Singaporean capitalist-meets-Confucian soft authoritarianism he made it clear that performance should be the main consideration in the economic and social advancement of individuals. In other words, professionalism and results should count more than ideology or class identity. Furthermore, he emphasized the important role of academics and scientists for the future of the economic development and the international standing of China.



**China: Urban & Rural Population**  
1950–2010



## Shanghai: An Astonishing Transformation

Shanghai's riverfront area bustles with activity day and night, as it did the evening that we were there with thousands of other people in August 2012. Within a mile of where we stood, a huge percentage of global financial transactions are processed in Shanghai's skyscrapers. A mere twenty years before, this was predominantly a rustic farming area.



## A New Urban Under Class

Visitors to China often remark at the speed with which cities, or large portions of cities, seem to suddenly appear. Pudong and Shenzhen have risen literally out of nothing to become urban showpieces and major financial centers. The “Bird’s Nest” stadium that became the much heralded centerpiece of the 2008 Beijing Games was erected at unprecedented speed, along with dozens of other Olympic venues, several new subway lines, and major beautification projects across the city.

None of this would be possible were it not for hundreds of millions of migrant workers streaming into China’s major urban centers. They are the silent, or at least unacknowledged, partners in China’s rush to lead the way in global urbanization.

Not only are these urban migrants building the infrastructure of today’s and tomorrow’s cities; they have become integral to the very functioning of urban life. To them are relegated jobs most city dwellers would be unwilling to take themselves. Those who make it a bit higher up the social ladder find employment in the burgeoning service industry, waiting on tables, cooking, cleaning, or working in the homes of China’s growing middle class. In the Pearl River and Yangtze delta regions tens of millions of young migrants labor on the world’s factory floor, making the goods that have fueled China’s meteoric economic growth for the past decade. Take away the migrants and—as city dwellers are reminded every spring during Chinese New Year—the city ceases to function.

Despite their central role in creating the China of today, most urban migrants enjoy very little of the wealth and prosperity they have helped make possible for others. Their presence is, at best, tolerated by city dwellers who acknowledge the need for them yet still look upon the migrants as out-of-place peasants. They have few prospects of improving their lot because of the household registration (*hukou*) system which controls Chinese citizens’ place of residence. This two-tier citizenship system, dating back to the 1950s, affects around 250 million people who represent the new Chinese underclass, exacerbating the gap between rich and poor in the cities.<sup>9</sup> Since providing needed services would legitimize their presence in the city—up until now a legal gray area—government has been loath to guarantee migrants access to proper housing, healthcare, and education. New labor laws and a willingness in some quarters to provide long-term vocational training suggest that the business sector may play a more positive role in the future, but the migrants’ employers have traditionally taken little responsibility for the migrants’ welfare.

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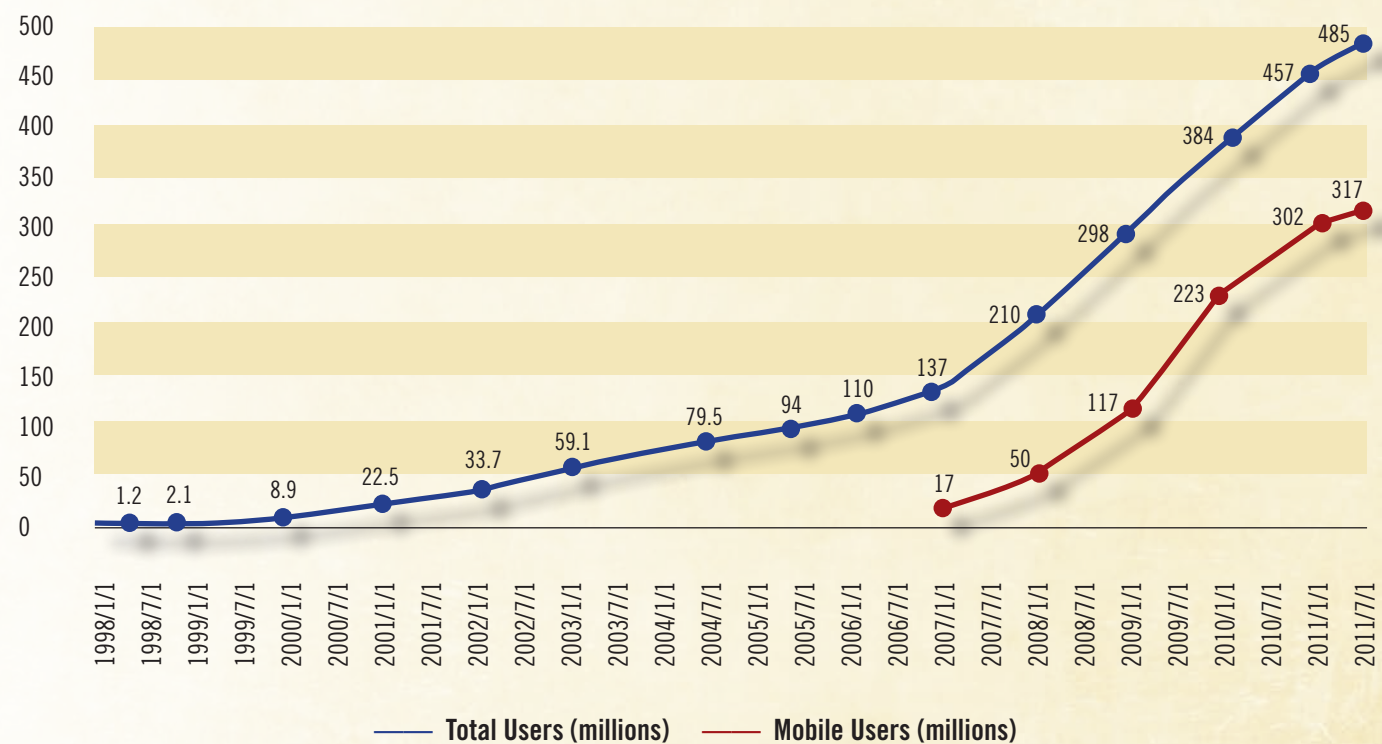
# A NEW CHINA: *Media and Technology Influence*

What China was lacking in technology 30 years ago it has more than made up for as it has leapfrogged traditional communications to media to become one of the most connected countries in the world! A generation ago the idea of a personal telephone in one's home was unheard of, unless one's family was particularly privileged. Today, although wired telephones in every home still may not be the norm, personal mobile phones are considered a necessity. Even for migrant workers with no permanent home and very few personal possessions, the mobile phone is a lifeline to family back home and to job opportunities in the city.

China today is home to the largest population of internet users on the planet, topping a half billion in 2012. Along with the dramatic rise in internet usage has also come a corresponding popularity in the use of smartphones to get online. Nearly half of all the smartphones shipped in the first six months of 2012 were shipped within China. For many Chinese, the phone is the preferred means of accessing the web, sending email and texts, and expressing themselves through short messages on *Weibo*, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter.

For all the talk of the "Great Firewall of China," (the elaborate security measures the government has put in place to regulate what is available online), the internet has created a new social space in which Chinese can organize around issues of common concern. Experienced users wanting to sound off on political issues stay one step ahead of government censors by using code words, abbreviations, synonyms or foreign language equivalents of terms that have been banned by China's internet police.

**Number of Chinese Internet Users**



Of particular note is the scope and diversity of Christian content originating within China. Literally thousands of sites featuring Christian content are being hosted in country. These include: individual church sites, both registered and unregistered; online magazines; forums on various topics such as family life or childhood education; Christian publishers; curriculum providers; and several daily online Christian newspapers. Unless these sites post political content, they are generally left undisturbed by authorities. Thousands of other Christian individuals and groups utilize *Weibo* to carry on conversations, promote or comment on posted material, and announce upcoming activities. A sampling of what can be found on today's Chinese Christian internet (translated into English for non-Chinese readers) can be found at [www.chinesechurchvoices.com](http://www.chinesechurchvoices.com).

# A NEW CHINA: *Family in Transition and Chaos*

With the rapid urbanization of the last thirty years the Chinese family has undergone irreversible change. China's one-child policy and a growing affluence among urban Chinese have resulted in dramatically shrinking families. The traditional pyramid-shaped Chinese family, characterized by multiple children and grandchildren at the bottom and a proportionally smaller number of older family members at the top, has been turned upside-down. Absent an adequate social safety net, hundreds of millions of aging citizens will be at the mercy of China's "one-child" generation to meet their needs. Meanwhile China's working population has begun to plateau and will be in decline in a few years, exacerbating the imbalance between the aging population and those able to support them.

Rapidly changing values and increased personal freedom have given rise to skyrocketing divorce rates in China. In some metropolitan areas it is common, even fashionable, for young women to have been married more than once. Government officials are notorious for keeping mistresses, and businessmen often expect that karaoke or massage parlor entertainment will be included in client meetings, which run late into the evening. As can be seen on page 14, young people today have dim hopes regarding their own future family life.

Nearly 40 percent of youth surveyed said they believed anyone who gets married should be prepared for the prospect of divorce, and 53 percent disagreed with the statement that they will be happy in their marriage.



## Youth Desperation:

Youth in China today undoubtedly represent the most privileged generation of any in China's history. Globalization has brought iPods and McDonald's, and the legacy of China's one-child policy is that these "one and only" children are the sole recipients of the affection of multiple sets of grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Previous generations of youth in China have been characterized by their unique struggles and corporate experiences shared against the backdrop of China's unfolding political history. Nearly a hundred years ago the May Fourth generation made its mark as it stood against the oppression of China by imperialist powers following World War I. In the wake of the Second World War, revolutionaries in the 1940s joined Mao in ushering in the new China. Later the "lost generation" of the Cultural Revolution again cast its lot with Mao, only to be discarded in the countryside following a period of

nationwide chaos. The June Fourth generation was left similarly disillusioned as the leaders whom they hoped would bring true reform to the nation fell from grace and their own fortunes fell with them.

This generation of Chinese youth has no shared struggle, no defining life and death experience. In spite of the attention and material prosperity these youth enjoy, this generation is perhaps the most alienated. Today's youth describe themselves as increasingly distanced from their parents and teachers. Browbeaten by unrealistic pressures to succeed in a highly competitive society, many retreat to the security of internet chat rooms or spend hours playing online games with friends. While many in the church are today awakening to the need to reach out in new ways to youth, successful models for such ministry are hard to come by.

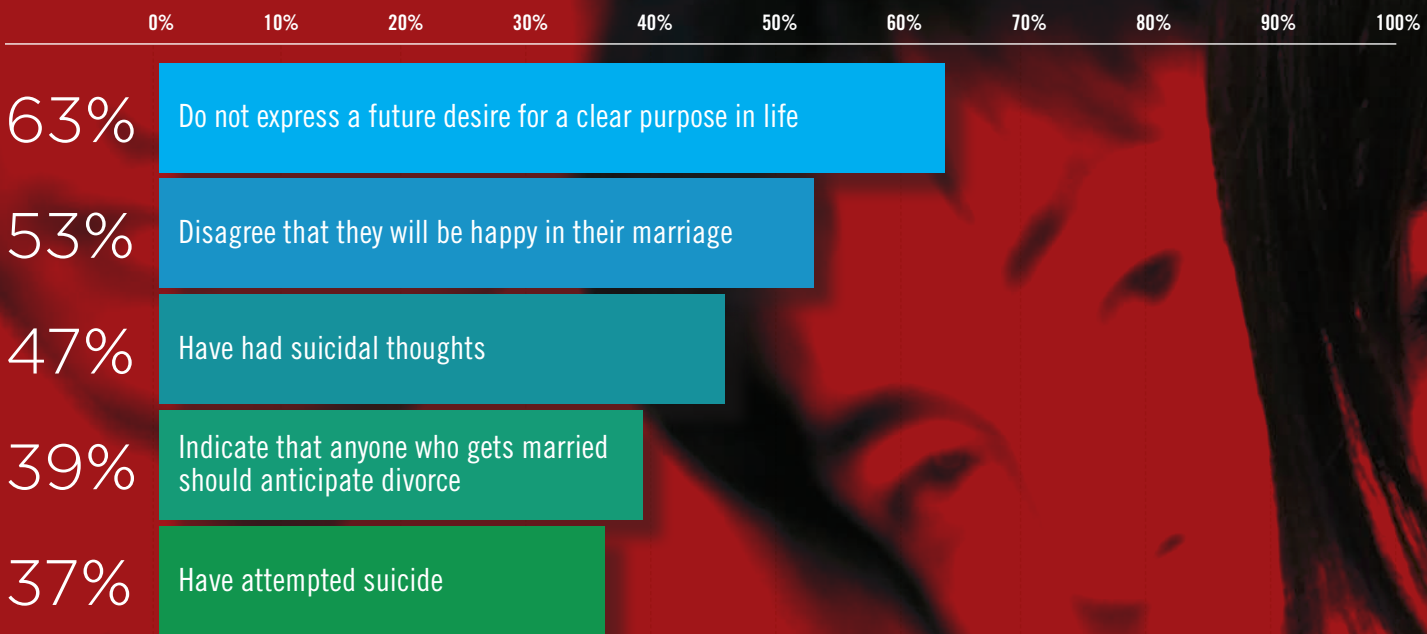
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Of particular concern are the children coming from the rural areas to the city, who feel abandoned. They have no school to go to. They feel marginalized from society. They lack role models.

One Hope, a mission providing God's Word to children and youth worldwide, has conducted research on the attitudes, behaviors and values of youth between 13 and 18 years old. Out of the 44 countries where One Hope is active, China comes out on top in two areas that indicate that the youth are screaming on the inside. First, almost one-half had suicidal thoughts in the three months prior to volunteering to complete the research project questions. Second, more than one-third had actually attempted suicide. Hope is fleeing for the teens of China.



This generation of Chinese youth has no shared struggle, no defining life and death experience.





# A NEW CHURCH

In an article titled *Jesus in China*, Pulitzer Prize Winning *Chicago Tribune* correspondent Evan Osnos, after weeks on the road in China begins with the statement: “Christianity’s rapid rise is reshaping the officially atheist nation, its politics and the way many Chinese view the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Osnos’ observation points to the phenomenal development of the church, but it also naturally raises many questions. How is this church reshaping the nation? How large is it? What is its structure? Its leadership? Its relationship to the government?

Facts about the church in China may be more readily available than they were 10 or 15 years ago. But more information does not necessarily produce greater clarity. Often the opposite results.

As we launch into this section, here are some observations, along with a few thoughts on why making sense of the church in China is so difficult.

The church in China is growing. All would agree that the church in China has grown dramatically from less than one million believers at the middle of the last century to its current number today. We just can’t agree on the number; depending on who is counting, it may vary from less than 30 million to more than 100 million. The fact is that no one knows the true number, in part due to the diversity of the church and the larger political environment in which it operates, both of which are discussed below.

The church in China is diverse. Christians in China generally worship within one of three “streams.” The officially recognized church operates under the auspices of the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), a political organization charged with overseeing the church on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. Traditional rural house church movements emerged during the Cultural Revolution when all religious worship (including that under the TSPM) was banned. They subsequently experienced revival and phenomenal growth. With the urbanization of China, the spiritual center of gravity appears to be shifting to a new stream, the unregistered urban church. This latter group, composed largely of first-generation believers, is not affiliated with either the TSPM or the rural house church movements.

Under the umbrella of the TSPM and its sister organization, The China Christian Council (CCC), there are some 60,000



Our visit to the 7000-member Haidian Church, with many in their midst related to the premier universities of Beijing, left a deep impression on our hearts that this was a life-giving congregation—from the standing-room-only worship service and the message to the meeting with the pastor in his study and lunch with fifteen of the younger leaders in the church.



registered churches, plus several hundred thousand affiliated meeting points. Church personnel and facilities must be approved by the government. One seminary and 20 Bible schools under the CCC graduate around 200 pastors per year. As the only entity allowed to print and distribute the Bible in China, the China Christian Council enjoys a virtual monopoly on the provision of scripture. Approximately 4-5 million copies are published annually, and these are made available primarily through the registered churches.

The traditional house church movements grew out of suffering and have been characterized by a simple but deep reliance on God, a powerful prayer life, and signs and wonders performed by the Holy Spirit. Their growth in the late 1970s and 1980s was fueled by aggressive evangelism, as new believers, many of them young women in their teens, were sent out two-by-two to plant churches across China. These movements had to remain loose and flexible in the face of persistent government pressure, yet internally they had a hierarchical leadership structure, with one key “uncle” at the top who set the theological tone for the group.

Until 1999 the major house church networks, all of which were primarily rural, believed that if a Christian moved to the city he “loved the world” (based on 2 Tim. 4:10, “*For Demas left me having loved this world.*”). By 2000 the attitude shifted from seeing the move of families to the city as repugnant to acknowledging it was inevitable. In 2002 the leader of one of the five major networks became the first to go, moving his family to Beijing. As others have since followed suit, the sober realities of rapid urbanization have been felt in a new unfriendly culture, threatening the transmigrated Christian families in a way that far surpasses what they experienced in the countryside. They were now nuclear families rather than extended families. The traditional social support structures were gone. Evangelism and church planting would need to be carried out differently, as they could not follow the natural relationship lines of family connections as before.

The third “stream,” the unregistered urban church, traces its roots back to the significant turning to Christ that occurred among Chinese intellectuals following the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. Its growth has also been fueled by the witness of Christian English teachers on Chinese campuses, as well as outreach to Chinese students and scholars studying abroad, many of whom have since returned to China as believers. Members of these churches tend to be more cosmopolitan in outlook, aware of what God is doing in the larger Body of Christ globally and often connecting with Christians outside through the internet, visits overseas, or participation in international conferences. Their sense of calling to engage their society with the Gospel is seen in their work in areas such as education, outreach to the poor, publishing, media, and cultural events. They worship in apartments or rented office spaces. Although these meetings are technically not legal, they are, for the most part, left alone provided they do not get too large or involve political activities.

Devoted Christians can be found within all three streams. All would agree that the church is struggling to keep up with the demand for trained leaders and other resources. Relations between the groups vary, depending on location, from open antagonism to mutual avoidance to generous cooperation. Not a few leaders within the emerging urban church came out of the TSPM, where they still maintain friendships and the hope of greater cooperation in the future.

**Christianity is not illegal in China.** While the foregoing discussion should have made this obvious by now, many outside reports on the Chinese church are still delivered *sotto voce* with a furtive glance as if to say “Shhh, don’t tell anybody, but look what the Christians are doing.” The Chinese government knows what the Christians are doing. Its opposition to Christianity is not ideological (as it was during the Cultural Revolution). Rather, it is the government’s preoccupation with stability above all else that limits the growth and influence of any group that could possibly threaten the Party’s grip on society (particularly if the group in question is perceived as having foreign ties). Hence the continued TSPM monopoly on official church activity, limits on the number of churches opened, pastors trained and Bibles printed, exclusion of religion from the education system and the mainstream media, and great reluctance to grant a legal platform for Christians outside the TSPM umbrella to worship or to serve their society.

**Policy doesn’t change; practice does.** The Party’s religious policy, spelled out in 1982, has not changed substantially in 30 years. Yet there has been a sea change in the climate for Christian activity. The last decade in particular has seen the emergence of Christian bookstores, Christian publishers, Christian-run private schools, counseling centers, business conferences, Sunday school conferences, children’s camps, and a plethora of Christian websites emanating from within China—all happening legally and, in most cases, unobstructed. As in most other areas of life in China, there is a large and growing gray area between what is legally protected and what, in actuality, is tolerated by authorities.

## When Christians are Persecuted

Reports of Christians being detained, harassed, fined or otherwise hindered from living out their faith have led many to conclude that persecution is the norm in China. Yet while such incidences do occur, a much larger number of Christians engages seemingly unhindered in a wide variety of activities on a daily basis.

Where, then, is the tipping point? Why are some (in reality, most) activities ignored, while others are attacked with a vengeance? A review of numerous cases through the years suggests the following “triggers,” which are likely to prompt official action directed against Christians.

**Foreign involvement** (real or perceived) will greatly increase the chance of activities being restricted. The presence of foreign personnel or funds suggests to Chinese officials that these activities are being engineered or at least supported from abroad, perhaps for political ends. Christian groups can run afoul of the government by receiving foreign funding, allowing foreigners to preach or teach, or utilizing overseas entities as a mouthpiece when they face government pressure.

Related to this first trigger would be whether the Chinese Christians are perceived as having **political motives**. Criticizing the government, taking an activist stance on sensitive issues such as urban migrant or ethnic minority rights or AIDS, or supporting those who do would likely provoke a negative response. Leaders even in the official church, although enjoying a somewhat protected status, risk quick censure and loss of position should they become involved in any unsanctioned political activities.

The **size and scope** of unofficial Christian groups is also a factor. It is generally considered safe to have unofficial “house” meetings of 30-40 people. A group that is part of a larger network, particularly if the network spans several provinces, is more likely than an isolated entity to draw official attention.

Complicating the effects of these factors are the **political winds** that blow frequently across China, sparked by the efforts of top leadership to address some pressing issue or crisis. While generally not directly related to Christian activity, these political winds can nonetheless create great difficulties for believers.

**Criminal activity** on the part of Christians is obviously grounds for prosecution (although it can be missed or conveniently overlooked by outside observers eager to identify cases of “Christian persecution”).



Finally, the degree of **corruption and greed among local officials** will have considerable bearing on how Christians are treated. If Christians are seen as an easy mark for fines—particularly when it is known that the believers in question can attract funds from overseas—then local officials may prey upon them for personal gain. Anti-crime campaigns with quotas for a certain number of arrests can also prompt local officials to crack down on Christian activities that had previously gone on unhindered. On the other hand, in areas where Christians enjoy good relations with officials (some of whom may be believers themselves), church activities are less likely to encounter interference by local authorities, unless or until a directive comes down from higher in the system requiring official action.

## The Size of the Church in China

In an article by *TIME* magazine in partnership with CNN, June 2, 2011 Ursula Gauthier cited a 2006 survey indicating “that about 300 million Chinese (31% of the population) practice a religion. Government estimates put that number far lower. Among Chinese religious practitioners, two-thirds declared themselves Buddhists or Taoists. The remaining third (100 million people) are Christians.”

Estimates of the number of Protestant Christians vary from the official TSPM estimate of 23 million (which includes only those in the registered church) to 105 million, the figure put forth by Paul Hattaway following intensive research on unregistered Christian groups in China, to the 100 million listed in the 2010 World Christian Database. Concluding their own exhaustive review of the data, global Christianity researcher Todd Johnson and his colleagues state, “An estimate of between 70-100 million Christians seems reasonable...”<sup>11</sup>

While it is impossible to arrive at a completely accurate figure, the significant growth of the church during the past three decades points to two important realities. Prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, there were less than one million Protestant Christians in China. The exponential growth that has occurred in the years since, particularly following Mao’s death in 1976, is nothing short of remarkable and represents perhaps the fastest church growth in the history of the Church. Secondly, although growth is shifting from the countryside to the cities as China urbanizes, it is continuing, putting China on track to have the world’s largest Christian population, perhaps by the end of this decade.



## The Changing Face of Christian Leadership in China<sup>12</sup>

“Chinese Christian Leader.”

Depending on where one has been or what one has read about China, this phrase might conjure up images of a rugged rural house church evangelist itinerating between villages in China’s vast heartland, or of a white-haired minister in a state-approved city church, preaching to a congregation of grandmother types quite similar to the pastor.

While still accurate in many parts of China, these images do not begin to portray the spectrum of diversity that exists among Christian leaders in China today. They are found not only in traditional church roles, but are scattered throughout the society as the church takes on a new and profound significance in China’s rapidly changing society. Here we attempt to sample some of that diversity by presenting portraits of some very different leaders within the Chinese Christian community. Some are actual individuals; others are composites drawn from several similar leaders who shall remain anonymous.

### God in the Marketplace

While on a domestic flight back to South China, I (Brent) reached into the seat pocket in front of me and took out the in-flight magazine. Inside was a lengthy article on the Chinese economy. I didn’t recognize the author’s name at first, but the young, energetic face staring back at me somehow looked vaguely familiar. Looking at the characters underneath the photo, I realized the author was Zhao Xiao, a prominent economist and President of the Cypress Leadership Institute. The oft-quoted professor, who also teaches part-time in a university in Beijing, co-founded Cypress with a mission to “empower servant leaders to be salt and light in society through commerce, culture and education.” Zhao and his colleagues pursue this vision through writing and publishing, conferences for business leaders, and training Christian educators.

Zhao traces his own faith journey back to research he did in the United States earlier this decade for a paper entitled “Market Economies with Churches and Market Economies without Churches.” His understanding of the need for a foundation of morality to undergird the economic system became required reading in Chinese economic circles and has informed recent Party discussions about the need for an economic system based on trust. Having experienced church life in America, Zhao to begin studying the Bible—not in an effort to find God, but rather in an attempt to satisfy himself that God does not exist. “Three months later, I admitted defeat,” Zhao said. “[The Bible] talks about the history of the relationship between God and human beings, and this kind of book does not exist in China.”<sup>13</sup>



What Zhao Xiao is seeking to accomplish at the macro-economic level, Brother Wang, a business owner in a city east of Beijing, is pursuing at the grassroots of China's highly entrepreneurial business community. I intersected with Wang as he returned on a red-eye flight from an overseas trip. Over coffee and rolls at Starbucks he explained that he was

originally from Wenzhou, an eastern seaboard city famous for its large network of entrepreneurs, who can be found literally all over the world peddling their wares—and planting churches. Sometimes called “The Jerusalem of China,” Wenzhou boasts the highest percentage of Christians of any city in China.

Brother Wang does double duty, representing a large international company while also serving as a regional overseer for believers in several provinces who are affiliated with the Wenzhou church network. Wang's latest endeavor involves launching a fellowship of likeminded entrepreneurs in his city for the purpose of mutual encouragement. Together they help one another to solve business problems, study scripture, hold each other accountable in their personal and family lives, and seek ways of impacting their community. While our conversation started along the lines of business, before long we were discussing the topic closest to Wang's heart—how to encourage his two teenaged sons in their faith. With

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divorce rates skyrocketing (even among Christians) and most parents too busy to spend time with their children, a stable family life has become a casualty of China's rapid economic growth and social change.

### More than Half the Sky

A popular Chinese saying asserts that, “Women hold up half the sky.” If the truth be told, most in China would likely agree that it is much more than half. In the Chinese church this would certainly appear to be the case.

In a minority area near one of several borders that China shares with its ethnically diverse neighbors, I met Pastor Zhang, a diminutive yet winsomely confident provincial leader in China's official Protestant organization, The Three Self Patriotic Movement. Herself an ethnic minority who has gained the respect of the country's predominately Han Chinese political leadership, Zhang is typical of many strong evangelicals within the “official” church who serve to interpret the interests of believers to China's ruling party while seeking to carve out a larger social space for Christians. Told by a foreign friend living in the city that churches here numbered more than 30, we were quite impressed—until we ran the number by Zhang and she corrected us: “No, we currently have 82 churches.”

Having attended a service the evening before in which we noted that the ushers, song leader and pastor—not to mention the majority of the congregation—were all female, we were interested to hear Pastor Zhang's take on the perceived gender imbalance within the church. While acknowledging the problem, she went on to explain that the church was seeking to address it by creating more activities that would appeal to men. Along these lines the church had recently secured a piece of property outside the city and was preparing to construct one of China's first Christian retreat centers, one of the main purposes of which will be to host family activities in which men will feel comfortable participating.

Like Zhang, Sister Li has spent most of her life serving in the church. As a young evangelist who became a respected leader in one of China's major rural house church movements, Li has witnessed both the glorious revival at the heart of one of

the fastest growing church movements in history, as well as the pain of broken relationships, burnout, and oppression at the hands of local political leaders. Coming out of a church culture that had encouraged young women to remain single in order to fully dedicate themselves to serving the Lord, Sister Li has—like many of her fellow evangelists—subsequently married and now lives a somewhat more settled life as she raises school-aged children.

Today the movement's top leader is no longer in China. Various splinter groups have emerged out of what was once viewed as a rather monolithic church structure. Sister Li now spends her time focused on equipping Chinese Christians for cross-cultural outreach, in fulfillment of the “Back to Jerusalem” vision that was given to the Chinese church in the 1940s and has been revived in recent decades. Partnering with experienced missionaries from outside China, she facilitates the training of a handful of evangelists in areas including language learning, cross-cultural communication, comparative religions, and vocational skills that will enable them to serve as “tentmakers” once they are overseas.

### A Cup of Cold Water

For the past few decades it has been assumed that the powerhouse of the Chinese church was in the countryside, where a small army of evangelists like Sister Li labored amidst massive revival. However, since the late 1990s the church's center of gravity has been shifting to the cities. Here a new generation of leaders is pioneering a different kind of church among China's urban influencers. Predominately college educated, many have overseas study and work experience and advanced degrees. While generally not in direct opposition to the officially sanctioned churches under the TSPM, these leaders nonetheless choose to work outside the official umbrella.

The massive earthquake in Sichuan province in 2008 proved to be a turning point for China's emerging urban church. A key figure in the church's response was Brother Job, an intellectual and professional from a city in Eastern China who typifies the new awareness among urban believers of their God-given role in society.

Within days of the quake, Job and his colleagues from cities across China were on the scene, coordinating the delivery of emergency supplies donated by churches around the country. Only a few months earlier, in the aftermath of some of the most devastating snowstorms in China's recent history, these same leaders had gathered to discuss how they as Christians could do a better job responding to such crises in their country. Little did they know at the time that God was preparing them for protracted involvement in Sichuan. In Job's words, “The May 12th earthquake thrust underground Christians churches in China onto the surface, from the sidelines onto center stage. They became sons of light, building a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.”

In the years since the quake Christians have not only provided relief supplies; they have also been instrumental in erecting and staffing temporarily schools, rebuilding homes and caring for orphans. To meet the demand for services and coordinate the efforts of Christians from around China, the believers formed—with the blessing of the local government—an NGO called China Christian Love Action. Evidence of local officials' regard for their work came some





months after the quake, when they indicated that a museum would be erected to remember the quake and those who responded, and that they wished to include a flag with the CCLA logo—a cross emblazoned with the group’s name—in one of the displays.

Surveying these portraits of leadership one cannot but help but be encouraged by the church’s incredible potential to glorify God in a multitude of ways amidst a rapidly transforming society. As China’s role in the world has changed, so has the role of the church in China, and so have the roles of leaders within that church. These roles are multidimensional and multifaceted, taking the church beyond its traditional four walls and living out what it means to be salt and light in every corner of society.

One is also sobered, however, by the realization that none of these leaders is older than 50 and that they have virtually no older leaders to whom they can look for guidance in facing the many challenges that confront them with each new day. Apart from a few older “uncles” who emerged out of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s, the previous generation of leadership simply does not exist, as no pastors were formally trained in China from the early 1950s to the early 1980s.

With China’s emerging role in the world, the issues that these leaders confront in days to come will no longer be limited to matters of their own country. Together with Christian leaders globally, they will be called upon to decide and act in ways that have implications beyond China’s borders. Hence the importance now for the international faith community to update and fill out its understanding of China’s emerging Christian leaders, and for these leaders to build new bridges to the church outside China.

## The Church in Society

China is now in the grip of a moral crisis.

In the months prior to this book being written, the Chinese internet was brimming with talk about the lack of morality in society. And the problem is not just associated with the very rich or the political connected—concerns shared in western countries—but with the population at large. This has been precipitated in part by a spate of recent incidents in which people have failed to come to the aid of fellow citizens caught in accidents or medical emergencies. In one case a two-year-old girl in Guangzhou was hit by a car and left dying in the street while eighteen passers-by did nothing to help her. The case riveted China, causing people to ask what sort of society is being created.

China’s people, including some of its leaders, are increasingly asking what role the church can play in addressing this moral void.

Journalist Evan Osnos writes, “As communism fades into today’s free-market reality, many Chinese describe a ‘crisis of faith’ and seek solace everywhere from mystical Taoist sects to Bahai temples and Christian megachurches. After centuries of foreign efforts to implant Christianity in China, today’s Christian ascension is led not by missionaries but by evangelical citizens at home. Where Christianity once was confined largely to poor villages, it is now spreading into urban power centers with often tacit approval from the regime.... It reaches into the most influential corners of Chinese life: disillusioned intellectuals are placing their loyalty in faith, not politics; tycoons fed up with corruption are seeking an ethical code; and Communist Party members are daring to argue that their faith does not put them at odds with the government. The Church in China today is wanting to making a positive contribution to a new China.”<sup>14</sup>

One urban pastor went on record as saying, “We think that Christianity is good for Beijing, good for China. But it may take some time before our intention is understood, trusted, even respected by the authorities. We even have to consider the price we may have to pay.”<sup>15</sup>

I (Brent) sat across from a Chinese Christian in the lobby of a Beijing hotel as he rearranged the cups and plates on the coffee table between us. Having cleared a space at the center of the table, he pointed to a cup sitting at the edge, near one corner.

“The church is here,” he said. “So concerned with its own internal problems, it doesn’t recognize there is this growing empty space in the center of society.”

This space, representing China’s growing crisis of faith, was created by China’s leaders following the death of Mao Zedong.

For 2,000 years, China’s people had consistently had a shared belief system. Following Mao’s death, one young woman, writing an anonymous letter to a Chinese youth magazine, famously made the statement, “There is no God in China anymore.”

Mao’s death signaled the end of shared spiritual belief in China—the first time in two millennia that China’s people had no official creed or object of worship. Whether Mao’s successors consciously realized this is open to question. Faced with the impossibility of continuing down Mao’s path, they instead took a sharp turn and embarked on a bold program of modernization. Deng Xiaoping, who emerged as China’s strongman in 1979, refused to answer the question of correct belief, stating simply that “to get rich is glorious.”

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In the words of Paul Liu, a professor in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, up until that time the Chinese people had belief, but they didn’t have anything to eat. Now, thirty years later, most Chinese people have enough to eat, but they have nothing in which to believe. In a society riddled with corruption, Deng’s glorious vision of a prosperous nation is quickly losing its shine.

Hence, the growing empty space at the center of the table.

Will the church be able to take its place at the table? According to Liu, the answer depends on the church’s ability to address two fundamental challenges.

One is training up capable leaders within the church who can command the respect not only of their fellow believers but of the watching society at large. These leaders need to confront the feeling among many Christians that the church is simply a refuge from a hostile world or a means to personal happiness and fulfillment.

Secondly, the church needs to move intentionally from the fringes of society, where it has largely existed for the past 60 years, and into the center. Only by doing so will the church be able to provide a response to the crisis of faith left by a declining Communist Party and a lack of moral direction in society.

Not surprisingly, these two challenges mirror those faced by China as a nation. Whether the church’s future development simply reflects the symptoms of the larger society’s ills, or whether the church leads the way in addressing them, depends on how well the church meets its own internal challenges in this decade.

In November, 2008, the Research and Development Centre of the State Council (China’s equivalent of a Cabinet) hosted the first-ever official consultation on the house church, drawing together scholars from various universities, government researchers, officials, and a half dozen recognized unregistered church leaders. One of the house church representatives

in that meeting spoke of the need for the house church to communicate with the government, while at the same time holding firm on the position taken unanimously by the house church leaders participating in the meeting:

“Only God can control the spirituality of faith; no worldly authorities have the right to control a man’s spirit.... House Churches (any true church) will only submit to Christ and reserve the right to make decisions on their own, and they would rather die than to accept the control of any worldly authorities... The government has been entrusted by God with the authority to maintain external public order. If the government can limit its governing to areas of maintaining public order in external conduct, then according to the teachings of the Bible, the House Church will definitely obey those in authority within the boundary that God has set.”<sup>16</sup>



Churches are now being asked to help society with a view to leverage their influence. Churches are getting more involved in the life of the community as a whole. Some churches are now operating homes for the elderly. Many orphanages are run by Christians.

Christianity continues to gain ground as a legitimate area of intellectual pursuit as well as a legitimate topic within China’s ongoing social discourse. As recently as 15 years ago, there was only one Christianity Research Institute in a Chinese university which was independent of the religious bureaucracy and control. Today there are more than 30.

The strides that are being accomplished for the cause of religious freedom are primarily a result of the efforts of China’s own people from within the country through positive interaction with their government. Chinese officials are watching and carefully weighing the future role of the church in Chinese society. In this very fluid environment, the international Christian community has an opportunity to be proactive in supporting Christians who are carving out a new space for the church in Chinese society.

*“Only God can control the spirituality of faith; no worldly authorities have the right to control a man’s spirit...”*

# A NEW WORLD

The meteoric rise of an economic giant can be observed in its capital accumulation and an expansion in international reserves. The figures at the left below, indicating the foreign reserves of China from the year 2000 to 2011, tell the story.<sup>19</sup> So does the chart below comparing GDP growth between the U.S and China in 2011.



The “China Dream” espoused by Chinese President Xi Jinping is not only a dream of prosperity, but also one of China recapturing its rightful position within the international community. If the opening ceremony at the 2008 Beijing Games was China’s “coming out” party, its growing global influence today is evidence that China’s rise has significant and long-term implications for the world at large.

China is experiencing a third diaspora. Since China began reopening to the outside world in the early 1980s, a growing flood of Chinese migrants has managed to reach literally every corner of the globe. From South Africa to Ukraine, from Peru to Australia, 18 million Chinese have moved abroad legally, along with many others entering countries illegally, and have settled in 150 different countries since the reforms of 1978 through the year 2008. They are by no means a homogenous group. Professionals, business men and women, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, students and the wealthy, for a variety of reasons are leaving China, some for the short-term and others long-term.

This migration is also of historic proportions, as Mainland Chinese are quickly outpacing those from all other traditional sources of Chinese migration, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, combined.

Napoleon said: “Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world”<sup>17</sup>

Nobel economist Robert W. Fogel, a renowned China scholar, predicted that by 2040, China’s economy will grow to reach a GDP of \$123 trillion representing 40% of global Gross Domestic Product.<sup>18</sup>

Statistics drawn from diverse locations provide more perspective:

- There are at least 40 million overseas Chinese outside of greater China (Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao). Among them, there are at least 20 million Mainland Chinese migrants who began to immigrate from China since the 1980s.
- Less than a decade ago, Vancouver had only a handful of Mandarin speaking congregations or churches. Today, close to seventy percent of Chinese churches are Mandarin speaking or have some sort of Mandarin ministries.
- The Chinese population in Japan has increased four-fold since 2000. Today, one-third of all foreigners and two-thirds of all foreign students are Chinese.
- It is estimated that 750,000 Chinese have immigrated to Africa to work.
- Presently, about 500,000 diaspora Chinese are residing in the Middle East.

China’s “great leap outward” has two clear implications for the expansion of the gospel among and through the Chinese. This outward migration comes at a time when Christians in China are increasingly zealous to take the gospel beyond China’s borders. The “Back to Jerusalem” vision has animated much of the church with a sense of mission. Providentially, the growing ability of Chinese believers to go abroad, including to countries that do not welcome traditional Christian workers, provides a means of putting feet to this vision.

Meanwhile the growing presence of millions of Chinese in diverse locations across the globe hastens the call toward those in these places potentially open to the gospel message—if the church had sufficient resources and equipping to reach out to them.

The common denominator in both these opportunities is the great need for more cross-culturally trained workers. These are needed both among Chinese believers who find themselves—intentionally or through various circumstances—living abroad, as well as among Christians in these “host” countries where more and more Chinese are settling. Where Chinese congregations already exist, leadership needs to welcome the reality that the future growth of their churches will likely be due to the influx of new members from China. Where Chinese Christians are currently few in number, local bodies will need to be challenged with the God-given opportunity before them. Language learning and much cultural adjustment on all sides will be necessary steps in ensuring that China’s outward migration becomes both a great ingathering as well as a great blessing to the nations to which the Chinese are now going.

## Impact on Africa

“Chinese investment in Africa has boosted economic development and local tax revenue and employment. Moreover, China’s direct investment in Africa will increase its exports of machinery and technology to Africa....”<sup>20</sup>

Fueling China’s urbanization requires a steady and increasing supply of energy and raw materials. The resources China needs, including oil, water, minerals, and land, can be found in abundance throughout the African continent. In return for these resources, China is investing heavily in infrastructure projects. China-approved companies can be found in 49 African nations. An estimated 750,000 Chinese have moved to Africa, and 75,000 more are going each year. Nearly half of the Chinese are found in South Africa, 75% of these being from Mainland China. Substantial numbers are also in Angola and Nigeria. Many of these are small entrepreneurs, lured by the opportunity to start their own businesses. Others come as contract workers on specific energy or infrastructure projects, working long hours and living in closed compounds with little interaction with the larger society. Despite obvious potential opportunities for ministry, Christian activity among the Chinese, directed either at other Chinese or among Africa’s own peoples, is limited. No more than 12 Chinese churches or fellowships exist on the entire continent, with only a few hundred Chinese participants. High turnover, language and culture barriers, and the low education level of many Chinese coming to Africa are seen as significant barriers to sustainable ministry by and among Chinese.<sup>21</sup>

## Chinese in the Middle East

As in Africa, Chinese coming to the Middle East in recent decades represent a mix of contract workers, small entrepreneurs, and professionals, with about a half million currently living in the region. While believers are estimated at only one percent, over the past 15 years some 20,000 diaspora Chinese have come to faith in Christ. Fellowships have been started in all the major cities except in Saudi Arabia. In addition to reaching other Chinese, these fellowships also

seek to reach non-Chinese family, friends and relatives (e.g. in the case of Chinese married to local residents). In the spirit of the “Back to Jerusalem” movement, between 100 and 150 intentional cross-cultural workers have been sent from China to the Middle East since the 1990s. These have faced numerous hardships, including lack of support from their sending churches, difficulty in learning a new language, significant cultural barriers, visa issues, lack of career and life skills, and family pressures. In recent years more of those being sent are being prepared with specific language and culture training, in cooperation with other international entities that have experience in the region. These Mainland Chinese workers are also being joined by overseas Chinese believers who come with professional skills and the means to live long-term in the Middle East. Summing up the contribution of Mainland

As in Africa, Chinese coming to the Middle East in recent decades represent a mix of contract workers, small entrepreneurs, and professionals, with about a half million currently living in the region.

Chinese in the area, one long-time observer remarked, “Several Arabic church and mission leaders have expressed that the greatest encouragement from the Chinese workers is their spiritual fervency demonstrated through their prayer and willingness to suffer (including martyrdom) for the Lord. Although their practices and networks are still in an infancy stage, we expect that, like the parable of the mustard seed, their impact on global mission will grow with time as more Chinese cross-cultural workers, responding to God’s call, will come to serve long term in the Middle East.”<sup>22</sup>

## A Clear Mandate for the Global Church

The face of Christianity in China is changing. China’s role in the world is changing. What happens next hinges upon the values, aspirations, and abilities of China’s next generation. The next gen church in China does not feel indebted nor enabled. We must raise up a new generation from the 4/14 Window to transform China and the world. We are left without a choice—only an obligation. This is the time. This is the opportunity.







# RAISING UP A NEW GENERATION FROM THE 4/14 WINDOW IN CHINA TO BLESS THE NATIONS: *Practical Implementation*



## **Designing Tactics: Strategic Programs** <sup>23</sup>

### ***Institutional Affiliation***

- Need to have listeners who will pay attention and give time to youth within the institution
- Develop institutional responses to the needs of youth as identified by the youth themselves
- Involve youth in finding solutions and preparing programs to help youth
- Curriculum to build self esteem through empowerment and giving responsibility in the institution
- Offer youth opportunity to respond to the social context
- Give youth a better global context to prepare for success through international interaction with positive and constructive international youth networks

### ***Media Relevance to Help Youth***

- Design positive media-based play opportunities for children and youth to interact with parents
- Create opportunities for children and youth to produce media that can be used and promoted to encourage their creativity
- Identify international media that will encourage positive attitudes and behavior in children and youth; conduct research to see the level of appeal the media will have with youth and children

### ***Family Systems and Improved Function***

- Develop affinity groups (groups of men, women and those with similar interests) to help families apply positive ideas that will strengthen relationships
- Organize activities to promote the quality of family life: camps, outings and events for all family members to participate
- Courses for parents on marriage enrichment, weekly family times, relationship building

### ***Development of leadership role models***

- Encourage listening mentor relationships
- Encourage new leadership models that emphasize relationship rather than authoritarian and domination models
- Encourage greater awareness among leaders of the challenges faced by youth and children; areas of influence and information
- Develop leaders to whom youth can relate and accept as friends
- Help parents become relevant role models and to adapt to the new ways children think and process information; learn to keep up
- Encourage families to serve as role models for other families

### ***Need for Life skill development***

- Empower youth to learn effective communication techniques
- Communication techniques that are transparent can be modeled
- Messages from institutions and parents should be informed and authoritative
- Activities such as camps should focus on specific intensive training for life skills and values formation rather than entertainment and lecture
- Give youth opportunity to care for those in need and to volunteer in the community
- Create places where youth have opportunity for counseling on questions, life skills and problems

# Conclusion

Someone once said that everything is true somewhere, at some time in China. This statement couldn't be more true in today's China. Somewhere in China there are still believers being persecuted for their faith, but for all the people that are being persecuted, many are able to worship freely. In fact, some companies prefer to hire Christians rather than unbelievers because of their integrity and ethics. In one city alone, it is believed that the Christians amount to 10% of the population and many businessmen are strong believers.

In some areas in China there is bitter animosity between the house and registered churches but for each place where there is bitterness there are thousands of house churches that are being allowed to continue. In fact, house church leaders have open discussions with local government officials and are permitted to rent and even purchase office space to hold their meetings. Also, there are cities where both the house and Three Self Churches work together, and some house churches meet in Three Self Churches!

In China there are certain versions of the Bible that are not printed and are not permitted in the country but for all the versions of the Bible that are not printed or permitted here there are several versions that people can freely purchase in bookstores and online to send to their friends. In fact, the Three Self Church has printed millions of Bibles in country and make them available at their bookstores.

It's a new day for China, for the Church in China and for the World. We thank the Lord for the harvest that was brought in the past, the maturation of the Chinese church and for the economic strides that have made China the second largest economy in the world. However, if all this is to continue China needs to go to the next level of its maturation and reach the next generation, the 4/14ers! Now is the time for the Church of China to come together to preserve the harvest so it will last many more generations.

At the recent Asian Church Leaders Forum, over 100 Chinese church leaders signed a pledge to "commit ourselves to raising up younger leaders of the next generation" and to "pass the vision of evangelization onto the younger generation and proclaim the salvation message of the old rugged cross with creative methods." We are excited that the church in China has embraced reaching the next generation so that a new chapter in China's great harvest history can be written and passed on!

The theme of this year's 4/14 Global Summit IV was "Rooted and Released". The Chinese Church has an opportunity to partner with the family to help plant deep roots in the next generation so that they may be released to carry on His Work. ■

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