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Graham Cousins



# Women in China

## *Holding Up the **Heavier Half** of the Sky*

**John LeMond**

**M**ao Zedong argued that China's Confucian worldview held Chinese women to be nothing more than chattel, nonentities in a nexus of male-dominated social, political and economic relationships. Rejecting the inevitability of this reality, Mao declared that "women hold up half the sky," implying that women were equal to men in both their abilities and responsibility to follow the party in advancing the socialist revolution. This dictum became a rallying cry for those who sought, under the leadership of the Communist Party, to change forever the humiliating and oppressive situation of Chinese women.

Following liberation in 1949, women began to be depicted in socialist art as strong leaders, martyrs and model workers,<sup>1</sup> serving alongside men, even leading men, as they marched together into a bright red future. Almost overnight, it seemed, the status of Chinese women had risen from ci-

pher to salience, a giant step toward the creation of a brave new world.<sup>2</sup>

More than thirty years later, Margery Wolf published a study of the lives of Chinese women in the post-Mao, early-Deng era of modernization; she titled her study "Revolution Postponed."<sup>3</sup> Her research showed that while there indeed had been significant improvement in the lives of Chinese women under Communism, as compared with the feudalism of the preceding era, for most Chinese women the revolution had not delivered on the promise of gender equality, much less on a genuine liberation of women. There are those who would argue that it was impossible for Mao even to conceive of such equality because he himself continued to be influenced in his understanding of gender by the ineluctable expectations of Confucian society, which understood all personal (for our purposes, gender) expectations to be subsumed within the greater needs of the whole Chinese people.<sup>4</sup> Mao believed that women held up half the sky, but not a distinctive half. Chinese lib

Mao believed that women held up half the sky, but not a distinctive half. Chinese liberation was the liberation of the nation, and women were not expected to claim any special recognition.

Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China  
**China SOURCE**

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In 1978, following Mao's death two years earlier, Deng Xiaoping began to move China toward a market economy with the popularization of slogans such as "It doesn't matter whether the cat is white or black; if it catches mice, it is a good cat" and "To get rich is glorious." While Chinese women had failed to achieve real equality under the leadership of Chinese socialism, at least the early period of Communist Party rule had seen women's official status in society rise to that of co-revolutionaries with men, providing them with a ratio-

lar Deng-isms was, "Let some get rich first."<sup>5</sup> That the "some" usually did not include Chinese women was not of general concern in the face of drastic economic restructuring.

Virtually overnight even the semblance of equality between men and women disappeared, and women began to find themselves relegated to menial agricultural production in the countryside and to low-paying factory jobs in the urban areas. While it cannot be argued that capitalist Chinese society always and in all places is inherently male-biased, it is indisputable that Chinese women overwhelmingly bear the weight of economic liberalization and

rather than constructive, with comprehensive plans for national mental health programs.

Perhaps because of the very difficult position of women in today's China, some women's groups have been organized over the past two decades for the support of women in general and within various fields of endeavor. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), the leading official organization for women, describes itself as "a multi-tiered organization with local women's federations and group members at every divisional level of government," the purpose of which is "to represent and to protect women's rights and interests, and to promote equality between men and women."<sup>9</sup>

There are also groups such as the China Women's Association for Science and Technology, and the China Association for Women's Journals and Periodicals. In addition, there are several centers for the study of women's issues in academic institutions, including the Study Centre for Women in Social Development of China at the Hebei Social Sciences Academy in Shijiazhuang, the Women's Study Center at Fudan University in Shanghai, and the Women's Study Center located at the Party School of the CPC in Beijing. However, it should be noted that such organizations and study centers are relatively few, and, except for the ACWF, they involve a minority of women at the very highest levels of China's social structure.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of China's women are poor, relatively uneducated and live in the countryside with little or no access to educational, medical or legal resources. While the small number of or-

Chinese women overwhelmingly bear the weight of economic liberalization and are faced with a crushing array of social problems as a result.

nale for possible future improvement in their overall circumstances. However, the new period of capitalism, termed "socialism with Chinese characteristics," abandoned even the pretense of gender co-responsibility and urged all Chinese citizens to use whatever means possible, short of political reform, to create wealth. This meant that those within Chinese society with power and influence, usually men who were able to generate vast sums of capital, were held up as the new models of Chinese patriotism at the expense of anyone who happened to find themselves without the necessary connections to such power, influence and wealth. After all, another of the popu-

are faced with a crushing array of social problems as a result. Violence against women has reached epidemic proportions including rape, kidnapping, forced prostitution, spousal abuse, sex-selective abortions and female infanticide. Even the government-sponsored All-China Women's Federation has released reports in which it is estimated that 30 percent of Chinese households experience family violence, and that more than 100,000 families fall apart each year because of such violence.<sup>6</sup> It is, therefore, no wonder that suicide among women is on the rise.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the Chinese government's response too often has been authoritarian, with calls to "ban family violence,"<sup>8</sup>

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**ChinaSource**  
Partnering Resources with Vision

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ganizations which currently concern themselves with women's issues have the potential to provide significant support and research as China develops over the next several decades, this offers scant hope for the millions of women who today bear the brunt of the social upheaval caused by China's period of economic transition.<sup>11</sup>

One indicator that does point toward the possibility of significant change in decades to come is the rising educational level of Chinese women. Government statistics for the year 2000 show that the average number of years of formal education for female students was 6.5, and that over 97 percent of elementary school-age girls are enrolled in school. The percentage of students enrolled in Chinese institutions of higher education who are women has reached more than forty percent.<sup>12</sup> Still, these figures paint an overly optimistic picture. While a high percentage of girls are enrolled in elementary school, many attend only periodically, being required by their families to put the needs of farm and household before formal schooling.<sup>13</sup>

There is no question that the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China have taken a genuine interest in the situation of women in contemporary China. The Chinese constitution provides for the equal protection of women,<sup>14</sup> there are growing numbers of women filling official government positions,<sup>15</sup> and the educational level of women continues to grow. But significant and long-lasting change remains frustratingly slow for those many millions of women who find themselves part of China's huge new economic underclass.

The situation of women in China provides both opportunities and challenges. The primary challenge for China's women over the next several decades, faced with ever-accelerating change and increasing pressure to adapt to the new demands imposed by a market economy, is survival. Most will survive, but at what cost to China's social fabric? Opportunities exist, but will Chinese women be prepared to take advantage of them? The full entry of



## China's Women

- Women form 48.4% of the total population
- Approximately 70% of women live in rural areas (400 million)
- A woman's life expectancy is 72 years
- The illiteracy rate for women over 15 is 25% (85 million)
- Women form 45% of the labor force

### Suicide

- Rate for women is 25% greater than for men
- Women in rural areas are three times more likely to commit suicide than urban women

### The church

- Women compose 70% of active Christians
- Many congregations are 90% female

Sources: Worldbank's "Summary Gender Profile" for China, 1999 [<http://genderstats.worldbank.org>]; "Women's Issues in Rural China," Japan Lutheran Hour, Dec. 1995 [[www.jlh.org/asia\\_lut/dec\\_95/li-hua.html](http://www.jlh.org/asia_lut/dec_95/li-hua.html)]; "Suicide Rate Among Chinese Women 25 Percent Higher than Men," *Reuters*, April 4, 2002; and "Holding Up Half the Sky," *Pray for China Fellowship*, OMF International, Feb. 1996.

China into the community of developed nations, while demanding extreme sacrifices from those on the bottom of the economic ladder, will also bring about unimagined social change within China. The level of education will necessarily rise to meet the demands of the new economic realities; with education will come not only new skills, but new ways of seeing the world and of understanding one's place within that world. The question, then, is how will Chinese women survive this period of wrenching change? Will they take advantage of new opportunities and emerge in mid-century as vigorous participants in the life of the new China? The answer to this question is complex, and the Christian church is uniquely placed to participate in providing options.

The market-capitalist image of all people as primarily consumers, and of women as objects for possession and

consumption, is quickly becoming part of the fabric of daily Chinese life. Research already has shown that the dominant image of the ideal woman in Chinese advertising (the contemporary counterpart of the former Maoist propaganda) is that of a diamond bedecked girl with a wealthy husband on her arm.<sup>16</sup> Christianity offers Chinese women radically different options for understanding themselves in the modern world that is now being thrust upon them—models that will lead to freedom rather than to a new kind of captivity. The equality of all people before God, both women and men, reflects the image of God. It declares the ultimate value of each human life, regardless of gender, because each life is a creation of God. It heralds the revolutionary notion that in Christ there is neither male nor female and no person is the slave of another: both are new

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# A New Marriage Law in China

Kim-Kwong Chan

**B**efore the opening of China, almost all Chinese citizens were employees of the State. Their working units (or farming communes) provided all their social supports, welfare and housing. As a consequence, marriages often took place among workers within the same working unit to avoid complications with housing allotments, children's education and residential registrations. Traditionally, the senior leader of a unit—who often served as a matchmaker as well as a marriage and family mediator—officiated at the marriage which was registered with the unit's personnel office. The unit kept tabs on birth rates and issued certificates for the right to bear a child in keeping with the allotted birth quotas. Unit leaders also had the duty of a traditional village patriarch making sure that every marriage and family within their units lived happily.



Graham Couzens

The extended family, rather than the individual, was considered a single social unit. Caring for members within an extended family is, by law, the responsibility of other able family members. Divorce has been highly discouraged for it would upset the delicate distribution of valued resources such as housing, care of the elderly and children, and community equilibrium. Further, divorce was regarded as politically incorrect and was frowned upon. Because of this, China once boasted of being the most stable society with a virtually zero divorce rate—an argument for socialism being superior to capitalism as regards social stability.

During the past twenty years of "Opening and Reform" policy, the average Chinese citizen has been much better off economically and has a greater degree of freedom in choosing careers,

housing, way of life, and diverse social expressions. However, with the rapid privatization of state-owned enterprises, the traditional working unit has disintegrated and social welfare has shifted from the unit to the individual and local governments. With this shift in the social paradigm, social trends have entered that Chinese authorities describe as decadent habits of the West. These include an increase in divorce, extramarital affairs, keeping mistresses, bigamy, abandonment of the elderly, domestic violence, child and spousal abuse, divorce mediation on property and child custody and various new grounds for divorce. All these new marriage and family developments are beyond what the Family Law (adopted in 1980) can handle; therefore, after a long debate, on the 28th of April, 2001, the Standing Committee of the Na-

tional People's Congress of the People's Republic of China passed a revision of the Marriage Law (adopted in 1980) to reflect the social changes occurring in China in the areas of marriage and family. This Revised Marriage Law (RML) introduces new elements to deal with emerging marriage and family issues in Chinese society vis à vis the rapid social changes.

## Highlights of the RML

**Mistresses:** The RML forbids the cohabitation of a spouse with a non-spousal person. This clause is meant to address the epidemic situation of keeping a mistress, especially among the newly emerged entrepreneur class. There has long been a Chinese tradition of having a concubine—often as a symbol of social status. China's Communist Party stresses monogamy as part

of the equal right (for women) social policy and, in the early 1950s, abolished the institution of concubinage. Prior to the 1980s, few could really afford to have a mistress because there was simply no means for private residency with the exception, perhaps, of the senior national leaders. However, since the mid 1980s, more and more Chinese are engaged in private business and there is an emerging class of multimillionaires.

Thus, it has become fashionable for rich merchants to keep a mistress, as long as they can afford it. Several surveys suggest that few successful businessmen in Shanghai and Guangdong are without a mistress—a symbol of success. Since no marriage takes place, there is no bigamy. Children born out of wedlock are protected by law and enjoy equal rights as citizens; therefore, there may well be a de-facto family composed of a man and his mistress. The birth quota does not apply to them for there is a) no legal family, b) no working unit involved, and c) the capacity to afford the penalty fee if caught. This epidemic situation with mistresses has seriously challenged the monogamous marriage system as the original spouse can hardly do anything to prevent her husband from taking a mistress—there has been no legal ground to prohibit it. Furthermore, wives are often victimized as the husband frequently channels most of the financial resource to the mistress. If a wife can obtain a divorce, she can claim half of her husband's total assets. However, keeping a mistress does not provide grounds for divorce because it is not bigamy. Thus, this new clause is meant to plug the legal loophole by providing legal grounds for prosecuting those who keep a mistress and making possible grounds for divorce. Now, those who keep a mistress must be careful because their wives can file for divorce with the possibility of receiving half of the couple's total assets if a divorce is granted.

**Property Issues:** In the RML, there are clauses that define property (asset) allocations in case of divorce. In the past, there were few privately owned

properties for most goods were owned by the State. In the case of a divorce, it could be a messy affair. How do you divide among the individual members of a typical extended family the “right” to live in a state-provided housing unit allocated to a couple with two children and four grandparents? How do you decide on an alimony amount based on salary income when an average Chinese worker's income is often constituted of the salary and a bonus, and the bonus may often be higher than the salary but not legally part of it? How does the court decide the valuation of potential income from any patent rights or from business capital gains when both these

leaders of work units or local party branches mediated marriage incompatibility using political pressure that forced couples to remain together and even to tolerate a dysfunctional marriage or family. This was based not on legal rights but on the traditional role of a patriarch as well as on political authority. Today, such mediation is often less effective than in the past, and family members trying to resolve such differences by their own means often leads to violence stemming from long suppressed grudges. The RML is meant to protect the victims. It provides legal grounds for the victim to prosecute the offender for compensation and for the

*In China, the concept of marriage covers the union between two families, not just two individuals. In the Marriage Law, it also includes the rights and obligations of members within the family.*

types of wealth have previously been non-existent in China? These new issues are arising as China changes its economic structure—from a planned to a market economy, from state-owned to privately-owned enterprises. The RML attempts to update China's legal framework to reflect the socioeconomic changes swiping across the country.

**Domestic violence:** The RML also contains clauses to prohibit domestic violence, abuse among family members and abandonment. Domestic violence has existed in all civilizations and Socialist China is not immune to it. However, in the past strong political pressure existed to conform to socio-political norms, such as the preservation of the institutions of marriage and the family, mutual support and tolerance among family members as politically correct. As the political pressure to conform lessens and the desire for individual rights and expression increases, suppressed social behaviors emerge such as divorce, homosexuality, anti-social behavior, domestic violence and extramarital affairs. In the past,

government (the Prosecutor's Office and the Public Security apparatus) to intervene legally. Without such a clause there is little the Government can do in a domestic violence case for, traditionally, family matters have resided within the family and outsiders cannot interfere.

**Abandonment:** Abandonment is becoming an increasing concern as mobility increases and familial tensions rise. In China, the concept of marriage covers the union between two families, not just two individuals. In the Marriage Law, it also includes the rights and obligations of members within the family. For example, by law children are obligated to care for their parents and the same is true among siblings. (An older brother would care for a younger sister should the parents not be available.) Therefore, the extended family is the basic social welfare unit of Chinese society, founded in tradition and enshrined in the Marriage Law. With the increase in the population's mobility—over 100 million are migrant workers—many are not living with

their families. They simply abandon their original families as they establish new ones in the cities or towns where they have migrated to work, and where they have found a new lifestyle and wealth. The original family members, often in poor and backward rural areas, lose their means of financial support. Often they hear nothing from their family member who now works in a city and has just disappeared.

The old Marriage Law stated that obligation was between parents and children and between siblings. The RML extends the obligation to three generations and widens the lateral relational network as well as the type of support (no longer defined by age but

by ability to earn a living). For example, grandchildren have an obligation to care for grandparents. Brothers and sisters have the obligation to care for their siblings if due to a handicap they are unable to make their own living. These obligations extend even to parents who have re-married (there is obligation to care for a biological parent even though he/she is re-married). In short, the Government codifies family as the basic social support unit and, from the State welfare system, will care only for those in need who have exhausted all other means of support from their extended families.

lence, extramarital affairs, an increase in violence and husbands taking mistresses. In the RML, there is a clear listing of grounds for divorce such as bigamy, non-spousal cohabitation, domestic violence, drug or gambling addictions, separation for more than two years, prolonged disappearance and so on. These grounds, which reflect current legal practices in other countries, offer a way out for family members suffering in a dysfunctional marriage or family system.

The RML is a step the Government has taken to cope with the changing socioeconomic dynamics in China. Many experts argue that this RML will make divorce easier further cor-

rupting the institutions of marriage and the family. Others argue that there is more social damage if people are forced to live in a dysfunctional family or a marriage that is beyond salvage. The intent of the RML is to protect victims in a fair and just way. No matter how the arguments go, there is clearly a strong challenge to the traditional marriage and family institutions in China as Chinese enjoy more wealth and freedom. Such a challenge will surely intensify as China enters the global economic network via WTO accession.

ter houses in major cities, but these resources are far from sufficient. There are increasing numbers of NGOs in China focusing on these issues—mostly in urban areas. However, there are few resources to help families in rural areas where many family tensions—often violent ones—exist. It may, perhaps, be an opportunity for many ministerial

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Non-governmental Agencies

**Divorce:** The RML also allows for increased grounds for divorce. Under the old law, grounds for divorce were arbitrary and decided upon by the work unit or court. However, these decision-makers had conflicts of interest that influenced against granting a divorce. Thousands upon thousands of dysfunctional marriages have resulted. All too often these marriages have caused suffering stemming from domestic vio-

In addition to the legal realm, as demonstrated by the RML, there are many agencies in China that are working closely with these issues. One of the most vocal groups is the Women's Federation of China that has been constantly lobbying for more protection for female victims of divorce, violence and abandonment. There are hotlines, legal aid, counseling centers and shel-

groups to share their experience, resources and values in family and marriage ministry and provide direct assistance to those in need in China. Currently, many Hong Kong-based Christian social services centers have numerous joint programs within China (some with Christian-based groups such as the YMCA, others directly with local churches in China, and yet others with government or civil social service group linkages) that provide training and services on marriage and family issues. Such joint ventures are just beginning and both sides are becoming familiar with each other's systems and values. There is also an increasing



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openness for Chinese authorities to incorporate outside social resources.

### Considering the Future

Will social issues such as increasing family and marriage break-ups, single parents, reconstituted families, homosexuality and children's rights, so hotly debated in the West, soon become issues in Chinese society? What can Chinese society do to confront such drastic social changes? Can some of the lessons and experiences gained in the Western world become paradigms for Chinese society to consider? As China stands at this historical juncture, it is important that she ask: What are the core values of a family and of a stable and civil society? Along with its economic values, should China adopt (as some Western political powers and NGOs strongly advocate) the liberal social views of the West—such as individual rights, freedom and choice—as the basis for Chinese social values in the future? Or, should China hold on to and revitalize its traditional cultural values on society and family with less stress on individual rights and freedoms and more on communal and familial interests? Would this preserve the social stability that seemed to work for more than two thousand years until modern times? Does Christianity have anything to offer in terms of social values that would contribute to the building of the new Chinese society that is in the making? Would such offerings be practical and realistic taking into consideration the seeming failure of Christianity to confront the liberal social trends in the West on marriage and family issues? All these newly emerging questions challenge not only our ministerial outlook on China, but also our very own convictions on the fundamental value of marriage and family regardless of where we are.

**Rev Kim-Kwong Chan, Ph.D., D.Th.** is the executive secretary for Mission and Pastoral Formation of the Hong Kong Christian Council and coauthor with Dr. Ted Yamamori of a forthcoming book, *Holistic Entrepreneurs in China*. ✍



Graham Cousens

## Impacting an Empire

### *The Morrison Center takes on a prime challenge in China ministry*

*Joshua Snyder*

Challenges in China ministry span the centuries. Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, faced a cantankerous ship owner on his initial voyage to China in 1807. “And so, Mr. Morrison, you really expect you will make an impression on

challenges to ministry, while different from those Morrison faced, remain.

Today, poorly-trained foreign workers who have not been through an adequate selection process pose one of the primary challenges in China according to ministry leaders and the Chinese church. “There is a virtually unanimous consensus in the China ministry community that foreign workers are being poorly prepared,” said Gary Russell, executive director of China Harvest. Until now, no one has known of any North American-based

“Mr. Morrison, you really expect you will make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese Empire?” — “No, sir. I expect God will.”

the idolatry of the great Chinese Empire,” the owner inquired. “No, sir,” replied Morrison, “I expect God will.” And God has.

During Morrison’s term of missionary service, he baptized less than a handful of people; now the church numbers in the millions. Nevertheless,

training center that prepares individuals specifically for China service. In response to this trend, a handful of ministries have joined in partnership to establish the Morrison Center.

Lack of Preparation

Mr. Russell, co-founder of the Mor-

risson Center, had his own eyes opened to problems in selection and training of workers several years ago. One young woman from the States wanted to serve in China long-term. Through China Harvest she found a position in a Chinese city and began her service. Initially, her character defects had remained hidden, but once in China, before long, she broke up the marriage of one of the local Christians, began an immoral relationship and ruined her Christian testimony.

“Everything seemed to be in order,” Russell said. “Then she went over there. It was totally destructive. I saw a casualty that I had recruited and

nor did they have the time to follow through on their concerns.

In 1999, China Harvest encouraged Calvary International and World Indigent Mission, both of whom had no previous involvement in China, to send people to China. In return, the two groups asked Gary Russell how these people would be trained. He had no answer for them. This encounter gave rise to initial discussions on the establishment of a training facility during a meeting on mobilization in November 2000. In early 2001, Mr. Russell and Dr. Mak achieved a breakthrough in their discussions. Through their dialogue they saw they shared the same vi-

Preparation at the Morrison Center consists of a cross-cultural, intensive, three- to four-month program designed as pre-field training for families and individuals prior to their move to China. The end product of this training program is excellence in the worker going to China. That excellence means some academic equipping such as cultural and historical knowledge and some non-academic equipping in areas such as emotional maturity, family stability and flexibility. The Morrison Center is a place where experience on the field can be simulated. Issues and difficulties can be identified before going to the field. Thus, much focus will be on spiritual formation and on preparing one to serve in a country like China.

Courses will come in modules. Teachers, each with a different background, will conduct training sessions for one or two weeks. Subjects will cover a wide-range of topics yet not deviate from the focus of serving in China. The curriculum will be both practical and academic, enabling students to practically apply and practice a range of skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for long-term effectiveness in China.

Students will learn about China’s history and its implications for contemporary society, the history of missions and the church, a strategy to acquire Mandarin or some other dialect, cross-cultural dynamics and change, Chinese lifestyle and family culture, culture shock and culture stress, the effects of transitioning into life in China when first making the move there, attitudes and perspectives necessary for working with a team and much, much more. While the Morrison Center is not a full-time language school for the study of Mandarin, a full-time instructor from Mainland China is on location for language training and practice and to help students understand Chinese culture, history, literature, and society.

The board of directors for the Morrison Center recently chose the Center’s first director, Tim Frazier. Tim and his wife, Vicky, have been in

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**The Center is designed for those interested in long-term China service—not for those interested in short-term ministry trips. Any interested agency may have its workers attend the Center.**

helped. This got me thinking.” Incidents like this are not confined to China Harvest. Other agencies have had similar experiences. However, not all problems are so extreme. They range from immorality to immaturity, from emotional pain to egoism and from marital problems to money matters. Though the Morrison Center can in no way address every single problem, it can be a beginning by providing basic preparation and identifying problem areas.

### The Center’s Beginnings

Two men, Gary Russell and Dr. Rudolf Mak, director of Chinese Church Mobilization with OMF International, have spearheaded the effort to establish the Center. Dr. Mak has long considered the need for such a training center. About four or five years ago, he and another Chinese leader, based in the States, recognized the need for basic training for both overseas Chinese and Caucasians. However, they did not know what to do

sion for a center. Later that spring they formed a launch committee for the school. Then, in September 2001, the two men, along with a group of other leaders in the China ministry community, gathered and gave the Morrison Center its name and laid out a time line.

### The Morrison Center

The Center, scheduled to open in September 2002, is a cooperative joint venture established as a separate entity by a number of China ministry agencies. As a cooperative effort of numerous ministries it can serve a broader range of the body of Christ. Dr. Mak believes that if a single agency were to sponsor it alone, it probably would not work because of a lack of wider appeal and endorsement by other agencies.

The Center is a “China-focused, cross-cultural school launched to train long-term workers.” Thus, as its name indicates, the Center focuses on China—not Thailand, Taiwan or Malaysia—just China.



The Chinese people are very proud of their long and glorious history. Nevertheless, this pride does not include the women of China. Throughout the history of China's feudal society, the social status of women not only could not match that of men's, but women often were regarded as "sources of trouble." More than two thousand years ago Confucius said that "only females and unethical people are difficult to transform." This statement was virtually a death sentence for women in China's feudal society where they were put in the same category as unethical people. Feudal Chinese ethics and rites had been a heavy weight laid on the shoulders of Chinese women. While men were at the center of traditional feudal society, women were excluded from all political systems. Even at the family level women still ranked at the bottom. An old Chinese proverb states: "The emperor is the head of the ministers, the father is the head of the children, the husband is the head of the wife." There were other proverbs specific to women that reflected clearly on the status of women in society and at home. Examples include: "Follow father at home, follow your husband after marriage, and follow your sons after your husband has died;" and "Follow a chicken if married to a chicken, follow a dog if married to a dog."

In ancient Chinese literature women were not honored for their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters but were evaluated mainly based on whether they were considered immoral women who seduced men, or women who followed traditional ethics and rites. The most important thing for a Chinese woman was to maintain her "ethical purity." To do this she was supposed to endure everything even when she was treated inhumanely.

Mao Zedong, along with the leaders of the Communist Party, recognized that women would be an important force for their revolutionary cause. Therefore, before they marched out, they had already developed the "equality between men and women" slogan to attract women to the communist revolution. From a political viewpoint, this was a very successful move that drew many women to the revolutionary cause before 1949.

After 1949, Mao advocated the slogan "Women hold up half the sky." Women became a political resource and entered the work force at all levels of society. To show their commitment to them, the Chinese government set up women's federations at various government levels to specifically handle women's issues. Cadres were designated in places such as state run factories, schools and hospitals to

handle women's affairs. Within the communist party women participated at all levels of party committees and in the National People's Congress. In addition to their involvement at local levels, there were female government ministers, mayors and county magistrate. Women were often credited with their contribution to the revolutionary cause.

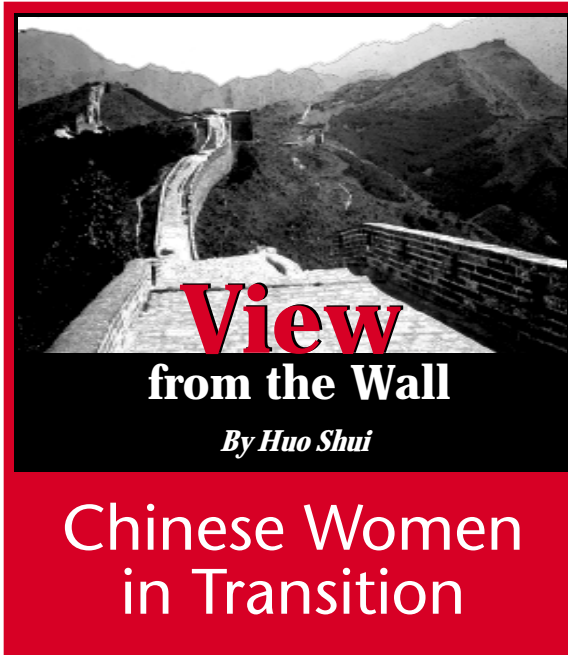
However, it is not difficult for those who live in China to see that men still occupy the center stage of the powerful elite. Male domination in the society is still largely unchanged. Most women in government are still merely symbolic and decorative. Discrimination against women remains common.

The market economy and economic reform of recent years have brought much change to Chinese society—including the role of women in the society. Many women from rural areas entered the cities as migrant workers taking jobs as nannies, street vendors or shopkeepers. Just as many women pour out their sweat in coastal cities in joint venture companies cranking out products labeled "Made in China."

Additionally, there are women who remain in their hometowns working as cheap laborers. As women in China contribute to society by filling most of the cheap labor jobs, they actually do "hold up half the sky."

The first social change for women occurs at home when they become more aware of their rights to speak up and make decisions. Because most Chinese women work, their income contributes significantly to the family's finances. Furthermore, women are also responsible for household shopping which allows them to have more control over their family's finances. It is uncommon in China today for a family to have the husband as the sole bread winner while the woman stays home to take care of the children. A typical family has two wage earners and women, therefore, have become more independent. The old male chauvinists may today suffer from *qi guan yan* disease. (*Qi guan yan* means bronchitis, but it also sounds like the phrase "the wife controls tightly"—a well known play on words). From a sociological perspective, this transformation is one of the most significant in family relationships.

Today, women in China are more involved in the economic development of the nation than at any other time in Chinese history. They experience a world beyond just their home, husbands and children. Today they are much more independent than at any time previously. Although Chinese women as a whole have not been granted all the rights they deserve, nevertheless the market economy has created more opportunities and choices for them. Ironically, it is the mar-



ket economy with its strong bent towards capitalism that is bringing forth this “liberation” for Chinese women—not socialism.

At the same time, economic reform also brings forth unprecedented problems for China’s women. Many old state-run enterprises were forced to lay

off workers. Women and senior citizens were hit the hardest. “Laid-off female workers” has become a new term that one can now see in many newspapers. While many local governments have regarded helping these “laid-off female workers” as one of their highest priorities, there are still large numbers of unemployed women who are forced to find ways to support both themselves and their families as they have lost not only their jobs but insurance and pensions. Many young women from the ru-

ral areas without marketable skills have little choice but to work in the sex industry. At a time when morality does not have clear boundaries and ethics receive only lip service, many wealthy men are taking concubines. As a result, the divorce rate is gradually increasing

## What women in China need most are not slogans about equality or increased pay to match that of men’s but to feel that they are truly valued and respected by the society.

every year. Domestic violence, bigamy and cohabitation have surfaced as social concerns. The traditional family model is facing unprecedented challenges in today’s China. In some poor areas of the country women are sold as slaves. Issues such as equality for women in education and in the work force continue to make headlines in the mainstream media. Having entered the World Trade Organization, China is now going through a fundamental transforma-

tion. Chinese women are fighting so that their rights will be advanced and preserved not only for political propaganda but in real terms in society. What women in China need most are not slogans about equality or increased pay to match that of men’s but to feel that they are truly valued and respected by the society. Women’s liberation must come in terms of society’s recognition and respect for their lives, values, and free wills. Society must experience a complete social transformation regarding how it views women. Without it, women are merely pawns in the overall revolutionary and economic causes. Behind every famous female minister, professor, doctor, judge, or entrepreneur, there are many more ordinary women quietly working under the shadow of social prejudice. A long road still lies ahead for the women of China to achieve complete liberation.

*Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Tian Hui.*

### Women in China

Continued from page 3

creations and friends of God.

The majority of women in China continue to hold up the heavier half of the sky, and their suffering can never be minimized. However, they now have the promise of rest and a lighter burden through increased opportunities for education, a gradually higher standard of living, social awareness of women’s rights and new options for imagining their world in a new way.

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## Peoples of China

# China's Minority Women

Lynn Savage

**O**n a fall midnight Granny Yang\* silently slips out of bed to carry out the special sacrifice to "Sasi," the grandmother goddess of the Dong people. She waits until no other family member can watch. This sacrifice is a tradition observed by the oldest female in every family.

As she prepares, she frets about Ermei who has gone to work in Hainan. Ermei assembles toys in a factory. Because the family had no money for school fees—and because educating a daughter who eventually will live with a husband's family is money down the drain—Ermei only completed fifth grade. With little education and no marketable skills, a factory job was the best she could find. Ermei sounded miserable in her last letter home: low

Gamei trembles as she ties the sash to her traditional dress. Tonight will be her first night to dance around the fire for tourists who come to the lake to see Mosuo culture. Several months before, her best friend sobbed as she told Gamei about the government worker who came up after the dance. The man openly fondled A'Li then led her off to his bed. Bruised and bleeding, A'Li crept away as soon as the old litch started snoring. At fourteen Gamei does not want to lose her virginity to a strange man who pays to exploit her.

Xiao Luo struggles to forgive her father. Since coming to know Christ, she feels an obligation to forgive. She knows Christ has forgiven her. However, she grew up hearing the story of how her father tried to kill her when she was born. He already had two daughters

and hoped for a son. Her father's sister grabbed the infant out of his hands and took Xiao Luo home to raise her. When she was ten, Xiao Luo's father gave permission for her mother to bring her home. Home was not happy. Xiao Luo's father often got drunk and beat her mother. She often went hungry. Food was scarce because of flood or drought. By Bouyei custom, the men ate first and the women and children ate whatever was left which seldom included meat. Xiao Luo's father always begrudged her school fees. Through her own hard work she earned a scholarship to attend college.

Xiao Luo enjoys teaching school. She tries to encourage her students. Often she invites boarding students home for a meal. She knows most of them can only afford a bowl of rice flavored with a spoonful of sour vegetables. She worries that she might not be able to marry because her father does not want to provide a dowry for number three daughter.

Soo Lian lives with fear. She went before the Wa elders to

**Many issues faced by minority women in China are those faced by Chinese women as a whole. Minority women, however, are more vulnerable.**

pay, filthy work area, crowded dorm room shared with young women from several provinces. Ermei hates the hot, noisy city and longs to return to her cool mountains. She wants to sing mountain songs under the moon. Like any well-brought up Dong girl, Ermei can sing three days without repeating herself. She mourns, as well, that there are no young Dong men with whom to sing songs of love and longing.



Graham Cousins



divorce her husband. When her husband returned from harvesting opium in Myanmar, he brought more than money home. Soo Lian now tests HIV positive. She has watched neighbors waste away and die of this mysterious illness. One good friend had been kidnapped while working in village fields, carried across the border and forced into the sex trade. Her friend was beaten and thrown out of the brothel when the boss learned she had AIDS. Rumor says one woman with HIV infected more than forty government officials who slept with her. Soo Lian is angry that her husband infected her with the dread disease. She worries about how she will care for herself. She cannot read and does not speak Mandarin. How will she find food when she has no strength to work in the fields? How can she pay the hospital for medicine? She considers suicide. The one thing she has is pesticide.

Many issues faced by minority women in China are those faced by Chinese women as a whole. Minority women, however, are more vulnerable.

Often living in remote farming households on marginal land, they struggle under the specter of poverty, uneducated and unaware of resources or alternatives to the life they have always known.

### Critical Issues

A list of critical issues faced by minority women in China would include:

- **The right to live.** China's one child policy does extend to the minorities, despite "common knowledge" that members of minorities can have multiple children without penalty. By statistical probability, 33 million girl children are "missing"—unborn—each year. In spite of a government campaign to convince parents that girl children should be valued as much as boys, feticide and infanticide of girl children are common. Suicide is a major problem among rural women, the number one cause of death among women ages 15-34.

- **The right to eat.** Malnourishment results from too little food available but also from such local traditions such as men—but not women—can eat pork, or that men eat first, women and children afterwards.

- **The right to receive an education.** Nearly 80 percent of non-enrolled

marginally productive land, sometimes with their husbands or other family members, more often alone as husbands or sons have migrated to cities to find work. A tradition among some minorities is that any money a man earns is his to spend as he wishes; any money a woman earns belongs to the family. Of China's "floating people" who have left home to seek work and send money home, many are young women, average age 20. They often live and work in sweatshops or as maids in hotels, coping with appalling conditions and receiving minimal wages.

- **The right to own land.** In most minority cultures land traditionally passes down to sons. In a recent survey a young minority woman stated that in her area a woman could inherit her family's land rights only if she had no brothers. A widow or divorcee has no place. Children stay with the husband's family, and her dowry would not be returned.

- **The right to choose one's spouse.** Although minorities who live close to cities or who have been largely assimilated allow a young woman freedom to choose a mate, self-contained communities and remote villages still work through local matchmakers and consult *fengshui* specialists to arrange marriages for the young people. Among minorities in Southwest China, the maternal uncle still has the right of refusal for marital matches. Gradually, young people are being given more say in determining their futures, but numerous festivals still commemorate star-crossed lovers.

- **The right not to be exploited sexually.** Historically, the Chinese portrayed minority women as exotic and promiscuous. Pornographic art shows minority women—not Han—unclothed and in provocative postures. In some areas, tourist-hype promotes prostitution with minority women, and even young girls opt to enter the profession to earn money or are sold into prostitution by relatives. A related problem is the kidnapping of women to be transported to areas far from home and sold as wives.

- **The right to health.** Poverty and malnutrition, a shortage of trained medical

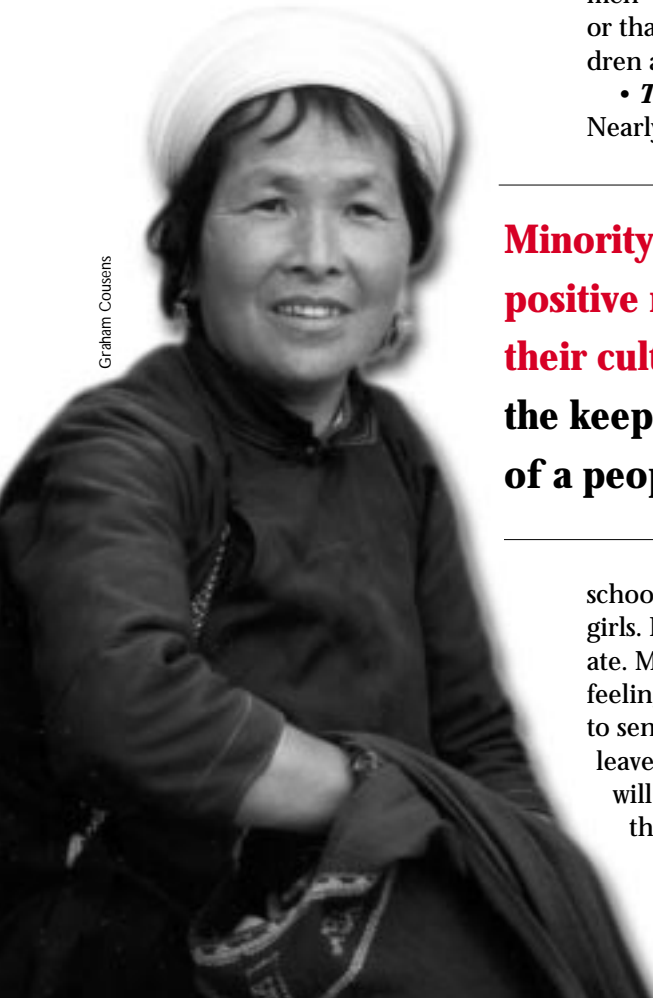
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**Minority women have a positive role in preserving their cultures. They are the keepers and transmitters of a people's traditions.**

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school-age children in rural areas are girls. Most minority women are illiterate. Many do not speak Mandarin. The feeling persists that it is not important to send girls to school because they will leave the family when they marry and will not contribute to the welfare of the birth family.

- **The right to work productively.** Most minority women still farm



personnel and reliance on traditional spiritist healers contribute to health problems among minority women. Inbreeding and lack of iodine in the diets of mountain women result in mental health problems among their children. Deaths related to childbirth are common—many minority women still spend a month in confinement and delay the celebration of birth for a month to six weeks after the child is born. HIV/AIDS is a growing concern and already a major problem in Yunnan which is susceptible because of cross-border drug trafficking and prostitution.

### Positive Aspects

The government is aware of the needs of minority women but bemoans the fact that the needs are great and economic resources are small. Some members of the People's Congress are urging the government to promote the organization of charity organizations to relieve the pressure.

Minority women have a positive role in preserving their cultures. They are the keepers and transmitters of a people's traditions. Rural girls learn from birth the songs, the crafts and the chores which are part of their people's history. They retain elements of costume peculiar to the people group and even to their individual village. Many take pride in their heritage and resist efforts to assimilate them into mainstream culture. As women across China organize to solve the problems of poverty and ignorance, minority women add teaching their heritage to the agenda.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement is moving to harness the energy of women for the glory of God and the work of the church. One example is Yingjiang County in Yunnan where representatives of more than 12,000 Lisu and Jingpo Christian women from 180 villages formed a Women's Affairs Committee to address the problems of poverty and heresy. From the sale of traditional handicrafts, they gave offerings to purchase two typewriters capable of printing in minority script and a photocopier so that educational and

devotional materials in their native languages could be produced. They also have organized Bible memorization and recitation competitions.

### Future Outlook

The needs are overwhelming and the government is impotent. Hope for the future of minority women in China lies primarily in their own hands. Their best hope is found in Christ. Observers, both past and present, have noted that people in Christian villages and Christians within traditional villages are healthier and wealthier. They have found a dignity and a purpose. As the women of Yingjiang have learned, the Gospel means "good news" for today and for the future.

\*Names and individuals mentioned are fictional composites based on interviews with minority women and those who work with them.

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*Lynn Savage has been involved in community development work in Asia for the past ten years.*

### Impacting an Empire

Continued from page 8

full-time Christian service for more than 22 years, serving in pioneer church planting in Mexico and Russia and in recruiting, training and development for several North American agencies.

The Center is designed for those interested in long-term China service—not for those interested in short-term ministry trips. Any interested agency may have its workers attend the Center. The Center is open to all regardless of denominational affiliation, their type of work or who they will be serving with in China. Students not already affiliated with an agency will be intro-

## Did God impact the "idolatry of the great Chinese Empire" in Robert Morrison's day? Indeed He did.

duced to a range of options, and an attempt will be made to connect them with a suitable organization as part of their training at the Morrison Center.

### Impacting the Empire

Training at the Morrison Center will not nullify ministry challenges, but it will help to minimize them, not only for the China worker but also for the national church. Did God impact the "idolatry of the great Chinese Empire" in Robert Morrison's day? Indeed He did. Will God continue to impact that great land? Surely that is His desire. As committed Christian workers prepare for China service, they offer themselves as instruments through whom God can continue His work.

*Joshua Snyder, M.A., is a China researcher and analyst.*

If you would like more information about the Morrison Center, please contact Morrison Center director, Tim Frazier at <[mc@securenym.net](mailto:mc@securenym.net)>

## Book Review

# A Parable for the New Century

*Witnesses to Power, Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China* by Tetsunao Yamamori and Kim-Kwong Chan, Paternoster Press, 2000. ISBN 1-8422-7041-9, 109 pp. Available from Gabriel Resources, PO Box 1047, Waynesboro, GA 30830; toll free: 1-8-MORE BOOKS or email: info@omlit.org; cost \$7.69 plus S/H.

A review by Joshua Snyder

Ofentimes the average Christian outside China has a simple view of the Chinese church. To him the Church is a center of revival and an object of persecution. This is true, of course. Yet the Church in China is so much more. It is a parable for the new century. It tells the tale of men and women who, in the face of severe consequences, stand for Christ. It tells the tale of evangelistic

The Introduction itself is worth the read because it does what it is supposed to do: it introduces the church in China—its growth, its relationship to the government, and its relationship to overseas believers.

fever that bears lasting fruit. It tells the tale of God's power.

*Witnesses to Power, Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China* faithfully recounts this parable to us as it tells stories of unsung Chinese gospel heroes. The stories stir and instruct the heart, teaching the way of Christ by way of example. It is a balanced portrayal of the Chinese church, both now and in recent history. Most of all, it brings light to the mind darkened in its understanding of the Chinese church. In so doing, *Witnesses to Power* explains the recent voluminous growth of the church as best as the authors, Tetsunao

Yamamori and Kim-Kwong Chan, themselves know how to. In short, this 109-page book is a quick but solid and well-rounded meal on the church in China and how it grew over the past century.

The Introduction itself is worth the read because it does what it is supposed to do: it introduces the church in China—its growth, its relationship to the government, and its relationship to overseas believers. In humble fashion it presents factors that, in addition to the work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual vitality of believers, influenced the startling growth of the church in recent history. Among those reasons given are

the Chinese perception of Christianity as an improvement on traditional Chinese beliefs, Christianity's highly flexible and successful organizational form, the evangelistic nature of Protestantism and the self-respect and enhanced personal identity it offers.

The stories themselves come from such remote regions as Xinjiang to rural, minority areas of the Southwest. Men and women, Han and minorities, intellectuals and rural pastors—the people presented encompass China's entire spectrum. There are stories of evangelism and persecution, victory and suffering, courage and trials. Sev-

eral of these stories Dr. Chan was privileged to hear first-hand.

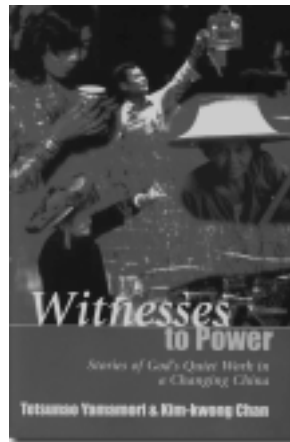
Women feature prominently in the book. The first story takes place during the turbulent years of the Cultural

Revolution and is about a young lady in Xinjiang who was left fatherless thanks to over-zealous Red Guards. Left alone since her mother had died when she was two, she faced the tribulations of the Christian life armed with a single, powerful word spoken to her by her imprisoned father: "In times of trial, learn to depend on Jesus." This word preserved her life one cold, winter evening at the age of fifteen when she

despaired of life and wanted to end it all. The word returned to her with greater strength than the wind that blew outside. That word also kept her strong in the face of expulsion from university because of her faith. She considered disgrace for the sake of the gospel of greater value than worldly attainments.

Another story is about Granny Jie, a woman used of God during her lifetime for the ministry of the gospel. When she was 95, Dr. Chan met her and interviewed her. In the early years of the Communist regime, she had received a vision from God telling her that persecution was soon to come. During the period of persecution that followed, many fell away from the faith, but Granny Jie stood strong. She led home meetings when the church doors closed.

In the early 80s, she and the other Christians read that the government would allow churches to reopen. However, for nearly ten years the government's oversight proved ruinous to the church. Then in 1992, she and others argued their case with the government and won the right to select their own leadership. Even at the age of 95, she continued to wake at 5 am to begin her daily prayers. Her faith was simple. She believed that when she was ill, the Lord would heal her. And he did. Not only would he heal her, but he would





also heal others through her prayers.

*Witnesses to Power* dedicates an entire chapter to signs and wonders. Wei Dongbei fell from a roof and was paralyzed. After coming to faith in Christ, he started to walk again with the aid of a crutch. Two of Heng Xin's oxen ate grass poisoned by pesticides. Both fell to the ground. A local Christian came and prayed for the animals. The Lord healed them both. For 25 years Chen Jianguo was possessed by an evil spirit that caused him to disturb the entire village. Once he accepted Christ, the spirit left him. Now he worships God and his mind is free.

Stories worthy of note in this book are those detailing victories of the Gospel. One in particular is the story of Pastor Yesu, a member of the Lisu minority, who journeyed to numerous Dulong villages in the northern part of the Dulong Valley in Southwest China. In some instances whole villages came to Christ through his team's itinerant ministry. Visible fruit, however, was not borne in every village. In one, not a person stood up to receive the Gospel. Though dismayed, Pastor Yesu in his heart said, "I believed that the seed had been sown and that one day it would germinate and bear fruit. Then we would be overjoyed."

This book opens the eyes of Western Christians. It says, "Many Western Christians have viewed China as a target field for missions. But most Chinese have been converted by other Chinese, not by Westerners. Typically, a handful becomes Christian during a period of contact with an overseas missionary. From then on, those few do the preaching and church planting." This is not to minimize the role of Western Christians in China. Rather, it challenges any arrogance that might think the growth of China's church and the evangelism of China's unreached peoples lies solely upon the shoulders of the church in the West.

One unexpected gem mined from this book is an appendix on the Lisu. This chapter contains material laden with profound missiological import. It details how Christian teachings transformed life for Lisu Christians and

even enhanced their economic situation. For instance, Christian morality claimed ground on the battlefield of Lisu marriage customs. If a man initiated a divorce, he would reclaim all he had paid to acquire his wife; if a woman initiated it, she would pay back twice the amount she received from her husband. Moreover, men could have concubines while teens slept together before marriage. Missionaries initiated a transformation of these norms, insisting that Christian marriage be monogamous, a couple never divorce and no one engage in premarital sex. This is one of many instances in which Christian teaching transformed Lisu society. This appendix provides a model for ministry among unreached people groups not only in China but worldwide.

There is little to nothing in this book with which one can take issue. It does not unfairly condemn either the registered church or the unregistered church. It does chronicle the quiet, oftentimes unseen work of God in China. For the average Christian in the pew, the book is an instruction manual on the Christian walk, in particular as far as evangelism and persecution are concerned. Thus, for anyone who wants a quick but substantial read on God's work in the Chinese church, this is the book. Pick it up, devour it, and share it with whomever you meet—and don't forget to learn from it. After all, it is a parable and a parable instructs anyone who will listen with an open heart.

*Joshua Snyder, M.A., is a researcher and analyst for ChinaSource.*

## Resource Corner

### *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*

By George Scipione. A 23-lesson course syllabus translated from the English by Dr. Samuel Ling. Dr. George Scipione is director of the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship in La Mesa (San Diego), Calif. He is a first-generation disciple of Jay Adams, the author of nouthetic (biblical) counseling. **This publication is FREE.** Available electronically only. Email your request for this course to: Dr. Samuel Ling at: <sling@chinahorizon.org>.

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## WATCH FOR . . .

*Competent to Counsel by Jay Adams* (translated by Dr. Samuel Ling). To be released in Chinese in Taipei late in 2002 and *Christian Counselor's Manual* by Jay Adams currently being translated into Chinese by Dr. Robert Chang.

# More Than Half the Sky

**W**hen it comes to the church in China, it certainly may be said that women hold up more than “half the sky.” From a long tradition of “Bible women,” to the present-day role of female evangelists and pastors, women have figured prominently in the growth and development of China’s church.



Brent Fulton

This prominent role stands in stark contrast to their traditional place in Chinese society, which has long viewed them as second-class citizens. Despite advances in the status of women in the years since 1949, women in China continue to suffer discrimination and injustice, particularly in China’s rural areas. The widespread practice of selective abortions and the relative lack of opportunity afforded girls and young women in many parts of China are symptoms of a lingering belief that women are somehow less valuable than men.

How fitting, then, that God should choose those shunned by their own society to play a prominent role in building His church in China. As

Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:28, “He has chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.”

American writer and counselor John Eldredge’s book, *Wild at Heart*, provides an unlikely source for some insights into the role of women in the church in China. Although writing primarily for and about men, Eldredge makes the observation that women have been created with three fundamental needs: a need to be wanted, the need to be part of a shared adventure, and the need to be delighted in.

Applying Eldredge’s analysis to China, one can see how the church has, for many women, helped fulfill needs that would otherwise go unmet. In a society where girl infants are routinely abandoned or given away and young women are valued only for the price they might command as unwilling brides, the call of a loving God who wants a relationship with His children has an understandable appeal. Many Chinese women, in answering God’s call, have found themselves partners

with Him in the greatest adventure of all and become some of the most zealous and effective evangelists the church has ever known. Finally, listening to the testimonies of these dedicated servants, one notes that the feeling of rejection so common among many rural women has been replaced with the recognition that they are indeed beautiful before God, for he delights in them.

The lack of male leadership in many parts of the church is certainly cause for concern, and the current situation of women in the church is by no means ideal. However, we can see how that, in the unique circumstances of China, God has met them at their point of need and gifted them for extraordinary service. We have much to praise Him for, and also much to learn, as we consider our sisters in China who hold up “more than half the sky.”

*Brent Fulton, Ph.D., is the president of ChinaSource and the editor of the ChinaSource journal.* 卍

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