

WINTER 2022

VOL. 24, NO. 4

ChinaSource Quarterly

Chinese Christians in the New Era

Peter Bryant,
Guest Editor

華源協作
CHINASOURCE



About ChinaSource

For the past 20 years, ChinaSource has been a trusted platform facilitating the flow of critical knowledge and leading-edge research among the Christian communities inside China and around the world and engaging them in collaborating to serve the Chinese church and society.

As China continues to grow and change, the church in China is doing the same. With over 100 years of collective China-ministry experience, the ChinaSource team is strategically positioned to help bring knowledge, clarity, and insight to groups engaging with China.

Content

ChinaSource's content is aimed at providing reliable, balanced, and relevant information to those who serve China. All of ChinaSource's content resources can be found on the website: www.chinasource.org

Partnerships

ChinaSource's partnerships are aimed at playing a catalytic role in bringing together the right people, asking the right questions, and influencing Christian thinking about China. We partner with individuals, organizations, churches, and interested groups who share our vision to see China's Christians engage the society inside and outside of China as they contribute to and influence the global church conversation for the advancement of God's Kingdom.

Training/Consulting

Under the ChinaSource Institute, ChinaSource provides its training/consulting services packaged in a variety of products and services that are easily accessible to a wide audience. A full list of our offerings can be found on our website: www.chinasource.org

Engagement

ChinaSource is committed to actively engaging with China in order to better connect and amplify the voice of Christians in China. We hope to act as a conversational bridge between the church in China and the global church. Whenever and wherever the church in China is being talked about, ChinaSource aims to be part of the discussion. This is primarily done via our network of Chinese Christians, conferences, research, events, and through media.

www.chinasource.org

To access embedded links to resources and other related articles, please go to the online version of this *ChinaSource Quarterly* (<https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-quarterlies/chinese-christians-in-the-new-era/>).

ChinaSource Quarterly

Winter 2022, Vol. 24, No. 4

In this issue . . .

Editorial

[Reflecting Together on the New Era](#)

[Page 2](#)

Peter Bryant, Guest Editor

Articles

[A Decade of Change and Future Prospects](#)

[Page 3](#)

Peter Bryant

Read about four areas in which China has changed most in the past decade and their significance for the church in China.

[China's Place in the World](#)

[Page 7](#)

Brent Fulton

Fulton discusses Xi Jinping's "China Dream" that envisions a new role for China on the world scene. He looks at three arenas where Xi seeks to establish China's superiority.

[The Church in China: Living in Babylon](#)

[Page 10](#)

Luke Wesley

The author recounts personal stories showing how much things have changed in China since 2015, as evidenced by the CCP's increased control, repression, and persecution.

[Where Is the Chinese Missionary Movement Headed in the New Era?](#)

[Page 14](#)

Xingwu Lin

Xi Jinping has put forth a grand vision and blueprint for China's future. The Chinese church seems eager to evangelize but over the past ten years has experienced significant restrictions and struggled to find the proper response.

[Chinese Christian Nonprofits and Reshaping Perceptions of Evangelism](#)

[Page 18](#)

Caleb Ai

Since Chinese Christians see evangelism as their most important mission, the author explores the evolving relationship between nonprofits and evangelism, as well as the significant impact on theology and practice that nonprofits can make.

[Expatriates Serving in China's New Era: Recent Developments, Future Prospects](#)

[Page 22](#)

Swells in the Middle Kingdom

Many expatriate workers, increasingly finding difficulties in ministering, turn to serving the church in China remotely. The author explores the issues influencing whether expatriate Christians can continue to live and minister within China.

Book Review

[China's Vision for the World](#)

[Page 26](#)

Reviewed by Joann Pittman

The World According to China looks at policy decisions made by the Chinese government in light of Xi's call for the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese state." The author details Xi's vision of "China... regain[ing] centrality" in a global world.

ChinaSource Perspective

[A Deep Well](#)

[Page 29](#)

Kerry Schottelkorb

Resource Corner

[A Reader's Guide to Laws and Regulations of the New Era](#)

[Page 30](#)

References covering national level changes in China in regulations and administrative measures pertaining to religion.

EDITORIAL

Reflecting Together on the New Era

By Peter Bryant, Guest Editor



Early in the year, the ChinaSource staff were reflecting on what unique events were occurring this year. They realized that 2022 marks the first decade of leadership by China's current leader, Xi Jinping. President Xi himself has characterized this time period as the start of China's New Era. With an important Party Congress occurring in October, ChinaSource felt this is the time to take stock of the changes and new directions China has been pursuing and what these mean for Chinese believers in their church activities and individual lives.

As we began to discuss this topic with others, we found a high level of interest. A group of trusted ChinaSource advisors met to discuss this topic and make suggestions. As we started to pull together the winter issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly*, the voices of those who wanted to contribute multiplied. Given the importance, breadth, and complexity of this topic of Chinese Christians in the New Era, we decided to dedicate two issues to covering various facets of this topic. In this winter issue, we look at some of the macro and global impacts. In the spring issue we will focus more on the impacts on church life and ministry.

To set the stage for this winter issue, we first look at the broader trends of the New Era. Then ChinaSource founder, Brent Fulton, continues with an article about China's place in the world. There is almost no country and no place that is not affected by what happens in China. Luke Wesley then provides a perspective from local churches and pastors of what the changes have looked like on the ground. He also calls us to renewed prayer for the church in China. Two Chinese writers explore various aspects of how the Chinese church is reaching out. On the domestic front, Caleb Ai, explores Chinese Christians' involvement in meeting social needs through Chinese Christian nonprofit organizations. Xingwu Lin explores the changes and challenges for China's indigenous missions movement as Chinese churches and missionaries reach out globally. Finally, we look at what the New Era has meant for expatriate Christians involved in ministry in China and what we can expect for the future.

We include a review of a new book by one of America's foremost China scholars about how China sees the world since China is increasingly affecting all areas of life and work regardless of which country we live in. The Resource Corner attempts to bring together the large number of new laws and regulations affecting Christian activity in China that have come into effect during this first decade of the New Era.

With the completion of the 20th Party Congress, we have Xi Jinping continuing for an unprecedented third, five-year term as China's leader. Watching the domestic news and reports leading up to and subsequent to the Party Congress, it seems we can expect a continuation and further development of the themes, emphases, and trends that started during the first ten years of the New Era.

Over the last 30 years Peter Bryant (pseudonym) has had the chance to visit, to live for extended periods of time, and to travel to almost all of China's provinces. As a Christian business person, he has met Chinese from all walks of life. He has a particular interest in marketplace ministries and business as mission and enjoys working with emerging Chinese leaders.

A Decade of Change and Future Prospects

By Peter Bryant

“It is time to file away whatever I knew about China and get out a blank sheet of paper,” was my comment speaking at a 2014 conference. I could see China was heading in some new directions and my prior understanding of how China worked was increasingly irrelevant. This decade, 2012–2022, is referred to in China as the start of the New Era (新时代). In this issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly*, we want to explore what the new changes have been and what these portend for the future of the Chinese church and China ministry. One former diplomat commented and warned that we must deal with the China that is, not the China we want. The purpose of the current issue is to help readers understand where China is headed so that we can better pray, support, and engage with brothers and sisters in China.



Image credit: [David Travis](#) on [Unsplash](#).

As we approached various potential writers, everyone expressed how important this review would be. We started early in the year to give our writers time for reflection. We also knew the important Party Congress would be held before our publication.¹ I have not asked or expected our writers to be prophets. Trying to predict China’s future has always been an invitation to being proven wrong. Instead, I have asked them to prayerfully reflect on what they have seen in this New Era and to share their perspectives on the future. I have prayed that they would be like some of King David’s men who were described as “men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”²

The most common association of the New Era is with China’s current leader, Xi Jinping, partly because President Xi was the one who began to use this phrase. While President Xi’s leadership has had an undeniable impact on China’s trajectory, there have been other important global and national changes that have contributed to the New Era being different from what we have known previously. These include:

- Chinese Communist Party resurgence under the leadership of Xi Jinping
- Economic growth (China became the world’s second largest economy)
- Social media (WeChat started in 2011)
- Pervasive surveillance—IT/Big Data/AI/facial recognition
- Coming of age of the 90s and 00s generations in a rapidly aging society
- Rising nationalism
- Urbanization—a majority of China’s population resides in cities for the first time in its history
- COVID-19 pandemic and China’s dynamic zero-COVID response

I see these factors coalescing into four macro shifts that are impacting China and Chinese society generally while also affecting the Chinese church and individual Chinese Christians:

1. Change from administration to ideology
2. Securitization of everything
3. Rise of national pride and nationalism
4. Centralization of power

Below I provide a brief explanation of each shift.

Change from Administration to Ideology

The Party has been reclaiming control of many sectors of society and life. In 2017, the Party Constitution was updated to include the phrase, “Party, government, army, society, and education—east and west, south and north, the party leads on everything.”³ There has been a reversal of the previous efforts to separate Party and government functions. China’s ideological renewal has been a synthesis of Marxism, Confucianism, and China’s five thousand years of “excellent traditional culture.”

For Chinese churches one of the most significant impacts has been the merger of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) into the Party’s United Front Works Department (UFWD).⁴ While SARA was an administrative department under the government and generally considered one of the weaker departments, the UFWD is one of the major divisions of the Party and has considerable power, budget, and influence. The UFWD has been called the Party’s “secret weapon.”⁵

Unregistered churches had previously been criticized and penalized for not obeying the rules (an administrative approach). Increasingly churches are being criticized for believing things that conflict with Chinese culture (an ideological approach) or current national/Party policy. This new approach has been implemented under the banner of Sinicization of religion in China.⁶ This ideological approach is more challenging for churches to navigate and touches on many core theological beliefs and church practices.

Securitization of Everything

Increasingly all areas of life are seen and managed through a security lens. This has been articulated in terms of comprehensive national security (总体国家安全)—national security, food security, cyber security, cultural security, and more.⁷ Comprehensive security is seen as a prerequisite for China’s continued development. Looking at the current global and domestic environment, China’s leaders increasingly talk about “struggle” (斗争) to overcome the obstacles and challenges.

This trend toward securitization has been enabled by massive advancements in IT technology. Big data, AI, facial recognition, and so on have become daily realities as they have been widely applied in creating what some call a surveillance state⁸ or digital Leninism.⁹ Real name registration for almost all transactions and ubiquitous use of cellphone technology have enabled real-time monitoring down to the individual level. The efforts to control the effects and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have only hastened these processes. Today China has the world’s most advanced techno-autocracy and is exporting these systems to other countries.

For churches and individual Christians all relationships with overseas groups and individuals are seen through a suspicious security filter as potentially threatening and carriers of unwanted foreign infiltration and subversion. The increase in security and surveillance has made it difficult for local churches to meet in large groups. However, some of the same IT technology has allowed the creation of many online communities that have

helped overcome barriers between individuals and churches.

Rise of National Pride and Nationalism

Chinese people have good reasons be proud of their progress and development. For example, China has built the world's largest high-speed rail network and is now helping other countries upgrade their rail systems. Having replaced Japan as the world's second largest economy, China is playing an increasingly significant role on the global stage. China is the largest trading partner for more than 100 countries. China has rolled out a series of concepts and programs (BRI, GDI, GSI, SCO, and community with a shared future for mankind)¹⁰ that are affecting countries around the world.

Along with increased economic, technical, and military strength, China has seen a rise of national pride and nationalism. The core of the "Chinese Dream" is for the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese people." This is coupled with a view of the world summarized by, "The East is rising, and the West is declining."¹¹ China's leaders tend to look to China's past where for centuries China was the preeminent power in Asia and beyond. When thinking about solutions to current challenges, they are equally likely to look into China's several thousand years of history of managing a large empire for inspiration for today's challenges.

Regardless of their views about the Party, it is hard to find Chinese who do not love their country and are proud of its progress. A 2020 Harvard Kennedy School report found that 95% of Chinese people are "relatively satisfied" or "highly satisfied" with their government.¹² Young Chinese have come of age in a period that many see as some of the best years to be alive in China. The education system and media control have given consistent messaging about how China had been subrogated by Western imperialists and now how China has risen.

Social media has provided an outlet for China's youth to express their interests in seeing their country continue to develop and grow, taking its rightful place in the world. These nationalist sentiments can take on an anti-foreign tone. China's leaders have long had a healthy suspicion about "hostile foreign forces." When translated into China's foreign policy actions, these have resulted in what has been called "wolf warrior diplomacy" coupled with a belief that history is irreversibly on China's side. The results have been seen in surveys that have tracked China's favorability rating among various Western and Asian countries.¹³ For example, the unfavorable view of China rose in the UK from 35% in 2012 to 69% in 2022. In the USA, the 2022 unfavorable rating was 82%. These surveys do not break out Christian demographics, but we suspect that the sentiments are similar to the overall national cultural outlook.

These negative sentiments are a growing challenge for ministries focused on China and Chinese people. On the positive side, China's expanding international reach has grown at the same time as an indigenous missions movement. Chinese churches see themselves as playing a key role in the global missions efforts. When China announced its Belt and Road Initiative many Chinese Christians identified this as God opening opportunities for outreach and mission.

Centralization of Power

After the disaster of the Cultural Revolution and the start of reforms in the late 1970s, the Party developed a consensus leadership model with the top Party leader serving two five-year terms. This system has been fundamentally altered in the past decade. After the recent Party Congress, President Xi has started an unprecedented third term. There is no apparent timeline or process for naming a successor or handing over power. His mother is currently 96 and his father lived until he was 89. In another ten years President Xi will be as old as President Biden is today.

President Xi has been explicit about his goals and timelines. He has provided a clear vision of what China will become in the New Era. Even with the strong headwinds of COVID-19, the Party reached its first 100-year goal of eliminating absolute poverty and achieving a moderately prosperous society (小康社会) in time for the centennial celebration of the Party's founding in 2021. China has now moved to focus on the second centennial goal of building China into a "strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country" by 2049. There are intermediate goals set for completion by 2035. Anyone interested in China should pay attention to what China says.

In the run-up to the 20th Party Congress, the nightly news and other media were filled with reviews of the progress of the New Era across every province and sector of society. Listening to the reports of the Party Congress and the ongoing follow up, my impression was one of continuity—continuity in themes, emphases, and trends. The outlines and goals of the New Era are already set.

The story of what God is doing in the Chinese church does not show up in the evening news and, like a mustard seed, is hard to see at times. I have seen churches closed during the New Era, and yet within a few months, more, but smaller churches, are opened. Rising standards of living have not erased the hunger to know the purpose of life. The external environment has not gotten easier for Chinese brothers and sisters, but the wind of the Spirit blows where God wills.

My blank sheets of paper from 2014 have some new notes and additions about the New Era as highlighted in this issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly*. I have learned a lot working with the various writers. I hope that your own understanding and interest in what God is doing in China is increased as a result of reading their thoughts and perspectives.

¹ Party Congresses occur every five years. The 20th Party Congress was held in Beijing, October 16–22, 2022.

² See 1 Chronicles 12:32.

³ “党政军民学，东西南北中，党是领导一切的。” Communist Party Constitution, revised 2017. Accessed October 11, 2022. <https://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/>.

⁴ Joann Pittman. “Goodbye, SARA.” *ChinaSource Blog*, April 2, 2018. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/goodbye-sara/>. See also Joann Pittman, “A ‘New’ New Normal?” *ChinaSource Blog*, May 28, 2018. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/a-new-new-normal/>.

⁵ Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle. “The United Front Work Department: ‘Magic Weapon’ at Home and Abroad.” *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 6, 2017. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-magic-weapon-home-abroad/>.

⁶ Jackson Wu. “7 Reasons Why Sinicization Is Not Rhetoric This Time.” *ChinaSource Blog*, May 1, 2019. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/7-reasons-why-sinicization-is-not-rhetoric-this-time/>.

⁷ Katja Drinhausen and Helena Legarda. “‘Comprehensive National Security’ Unleashed: How Xi's approach Shapes China's Policies at Home and Abroad.” *Merics*, September 15, 2022. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://merics.org/en/report/comprehensive-national-security-unleashed-how-xis-approach-shapes-chinas-policies-home-and->. This concept covers sixteen security areas deemed essential to China's development.

⁸ Emily Feng. “‘Surveillance State’ explores China's tech and social media control systems.” *NPR*, September 7, 2022. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/07/1118105165/surveillance-state-explores-chinas-tech-and-social-media-control-systems>.

⁹ Joann Pittman. “Digital Leninism.” *ChinaSource Blog*, November 27, 2017. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/digital-leninism/>.

¹⁰ BRI = Belt and Road Initiative; GDI = Global Development Initiative; GSI = Global Security Initiative; SCO = Shanghai Co-operative Organization.

Continued on page 13

China's Place in the World

By Brent Fulton

A key feature on China's political landscape over the past decade has been the shift from the "hide and bide" doctrine that had guided China's foreign policy since the Deng Xiaoping era to a decidedly more aggressive stance under Xi Jinping. While the beginnings of a more confident China had already begun to emerge in 2008, with the Beijing Olympics and the global financial crisis—which China's leaders interpreted as evidence of the weakness of the US-led economic system—China's move toward center stage has accelerated since Xi's rise to power in 2012 and the start of what China calls the "New Era."



Image credit: [James Coleman](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Under Deng Xiaoping, the implicit message was that China was prepared to abide by international norms. Cultural and educational exchanges, as well as dynamic interaction between Chinese and Western governments, along with their respective business communities, served to underscore this understanding and ostensibly strengthen the myriad linkages that would draw China more fully into the existing global system.

Xi Jinping's "China Dream" envisions a different role for China on the world scene. Xi first used the term in a speech to Politburo members given at the Chinese National Museum shortly after he came to power in 2012. The setting was the "Road to Revival" exhibit, which glorified the Party's role in bringing China out of the humiliation it suffered at the hands of imperial powers, paving the way for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people. Today China has a once-in-a-hundred-years opportunity to reclaim its role as a great world civilization. Standing in the way of the rising East is the declining West and the prevailing international system, which favors liberal democracy over other forms of government and imposes on China rules and values that run counter to Chinese norms. Closer to home, Xi opposes continued US hegemony in Asia and the ideological incursion of Western ideas into Chinese society.

Xi's push to lead China onto center stage is playing out in three arenas: the geographical, the legal/institutional, and the rhetorical. While we can expect increasing conflict in all three arenas, there may also be opportunities for Chinese Christians to spread "positive energy" (borrowing a phrase from the Party lexicon) in ways the regime did not anticipate.

Redrawing the Map

During the past decade, Xi Jinping's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has seen a doubling of Chinese investment abroad, making China the world's number one overseas investor. Key to the BRI has been the desire to head off conflict in the Pacific and the South China Sea by opening up a westward land route to connect with Eurasia and beyond.

"The BRI's main accomplishment," says Boston University professor Min Ye, "was to provide a cohesive and permissive environment for state agencies and businesses to search for a way out [of domestic industrial overcapacity and slowing economic growth]."¹ BRI investment peaked in 2016. In the years since, projects

have aligned more closely with China's strategic interests, with fewer bridges and railways and more ports, as well as increased attention to the "Digital Silk Road," China's investment in the global cyber infrastructure.²

A number of the "corridors" linking China to the rest of the world are strategically tied to regions within China. According to Raffaello Pantucci, author of *Sinostan: China's Inadvertent Empire*, investment in the former Soviet bloc countries in Central Asia is an extension of Beijing's Xinjiang strategy. "It's really about trying to improve the prosperity in this border region around Xinjiang to help improve its prosperity and stability," says Pantucci, "If you're going to make Xinjiang economically prosperous, you're going to have to find a way of connecting it to the world."³

Leaders in BRI recipient countries describe China's approach as distinctly transactional, not tied to a larger transformational vision. The title of Pantucci's book comes from his observation that "Central Asia is now part of China's empire," yet the Chinese have no central plan for the region. China does not see itself as a hegemon. In keeping with China's longstanding policy of noninterference in other countries' domestic affairs, the Chinese practice of focusing on tangible investments without criticizing or seeking to alter existing political arrangements makes China an attractive partner.

At the same time, China's "no-limits" partnership with Russia, along with the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Strategic Initiative (GSI), signals its goal of creating an alternative to the existing unipolar Western-led international order.⁴

China's Rules

The Xi regime seeks to challenge the dominance of global norms and institutions. The expansive GSI vision of "common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable" global security introduced by Xi at the April 2022 Boao Forum includes not only military capability but also environmental security and freedom from threats of terrorism and religious fundamentalism.⁵ At the heart of the GSI is the concept of "indivisible security," namely that no nation can strengthen its security at the expense of others.⁶ The Global Development Initiative, proposed by Xi to the UN General Assembly in 2021 and billed as an "expansion" of the BRI, seeks to support the UN's 2030 sustainable development agenda by invoking "Chinese wisdom" to protect individual economic rights, improve global governance, and promote "greener and healthier global development."^{7,8} The latter is an area where China is already leading the world through its advances in renewable energy and electric vehicles.⁹

Xi's extensive mention of "national security" in his political report at the 20th Party Congress underscores the priority placed on mitigating global threats to the regime.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the magnanimous rhetoric contained in the GDI and GSI, it remains to be seen whether China is proposing a new order that can attract global support or whether it will be seen as merely seeking to create a world in which China and other authoritarian regimes can pursue their own interests unhindered.¹¹

Telling China's Story Well

Among the Chinese leadership, the longstanding narrative of China being bullied by the world is being replaced by a new narrative that says China is misunderstood. Built on the conviction that "whoever rules the words rules the world," Chinese foreign policy and media organs seek to develop and wield their discourse power, or *huayuquan*, to challenge the existing international architecture and build a new understanding of China's place in the world.¹² This more aggressive posture is seen in China's "wolf warrior diplomacy" and in its outward facing media. Chinese media have internationalized, and increasingly sophisticated market analysis is used to target specific audiences using both state and nonstate actors.¹³

Described as a “magic weapon,” the Party’s United Front Work Department is responsible for winning hearts and minds through soft power operations abroad. Following Xi’s pronouncement in 2015 that the entire party should be involved in united front work, the department’s status has been elevated, resulting in more aggressive efforts to win friends among overseas Chinese, academics, and China-friendly politicians abroad, while utilizing these relationships to marginalize anti-China elements.¹⁴ While popular social media such as Facebook and Twitter are banned in China, armies of *wumao* (“50 cent”) commentators and unpaid highly nationalistic “little pinks” aggressively patrol these and other platforms, defending China’s position on sensitive issues and calling out businesses, high-profile athletes, and celebrities for inadvertently “hurting China’s feelings.”¹⁵

Navigating a Changing World

For Christians in China and globally, the country’s repositioning presents new opportunities. Peter Bryant has written about the potential synergy between China’s BRI strategy and the Chinese church’s emerging mission movement. The tragic execution of two Chinese missionaries in Pakistan in 2018 highlights some of the challenges. This high-profile incident raised Chinese government concern that such missionary activity could negatively impact the BRI, resulting in greater scrutiny on Christians both inside and outside China.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the desire of people in many parts of the world to learn Chinese, and the openness of countries to foreign investment from China, provide potential paths for Chinese Christians serving cross-culturally.

The Party’s attempts to challenge international norms and institutions invite a thoughtful Christian response. Diaspora Chinese Christians in leadership positions in business, academia, media, government, and other sectors have an important role to play in interpreting and mediating the cultural interplay taking place. A thorough biblical critique would fully support neither the liberal values of the current Western-led system nor the socialist alternative promoted by China’s leaders. Rather than defaulting instinctively to their respective cultural positions, Chinese and non-Chinese Christians have the opportunity to instead come together and formulate an alternative approach.

Finally, as China’s leaders engage in a battle of words, it is all the more important to seek out and listen to the stories of China’s Christians, as well as those of foreign believers who have firsthand knowledge of China. These are the China stories that can bring an eternal perspective to the drama playing out on the world scene as China continues moving toward center stage.

¹ Min Ye. “Ten Years of the Belt and Road: Reflections and Recent Trends.” *Global Development Policy Center*, September 6, 2022. Accessed October 24, 2022. https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2022/09/06/ten-years-of-the-belt-and-road-reflections-and-recent-trends/?utm_content=220278315&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&hss_channel=tw-905477617775771654.

² “The World According to China with Elizabeth Economy.” *China in the World Podcast*, January 28, 2022. Accessed September 20, 2022. <https://soundcloud.com/chinafile/the-world-according-to-china-with-elizabeth-economy>.

³ “The New Great Game: How China Replaced Russia in Kazakhstan and Beyond.” *Chinese Whispers*, August 22, 2022. Accessed September 20, 2022. <https://player.fm/series/chinese-whispers/the-new-great-game-how-china-replaced-russia-in-kazakhstan-and-beyond>.

⁴ Amitrajeet A. Batabyal. “China Has a New Global Development Initiative, but Who Will Actually Benefit from It?” *The Conversation*, August 4, 2022. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/china-has-a-new-global-development-initiative-but-who-will-actually-benefit-from-it-187561>.

⁵ Chu Daye, Zhao Juecheng, and Liu Xin. “Xi Proposes Global Security Initiative at Boao Forum, ‘Sends Signal of Peace, Stability amid Global Turmoil’.” *Global Times*, April 21, 2022. Accessed September 23, 2022. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1259907.shtml>.

⁶ Ovigie Eguegu. “Will China’s ‘Global Security Initiative’ Catch On?” *The Diplomat*, June

The Church in China— Living in Babylon

By Luke Wesley

“We are in the battle” were the concluding words of a message received from a Chinese colleague in June 2019. I knew these were increasingly turbulent times in China and that our friends might encounter strong opposition.

Since new religious¹ regulations officially went into effect in February 2018, Christians, and other religious groups (especially Muslims), have faced increased restrictions and growing government oppression. The news I received was simply one expression of a concerted government effort to control and reshape the church in China. For me, it represented much more than that. It was a call for prayer on behalf of and solidarity with our Chinese brothers and sisters in Christ.

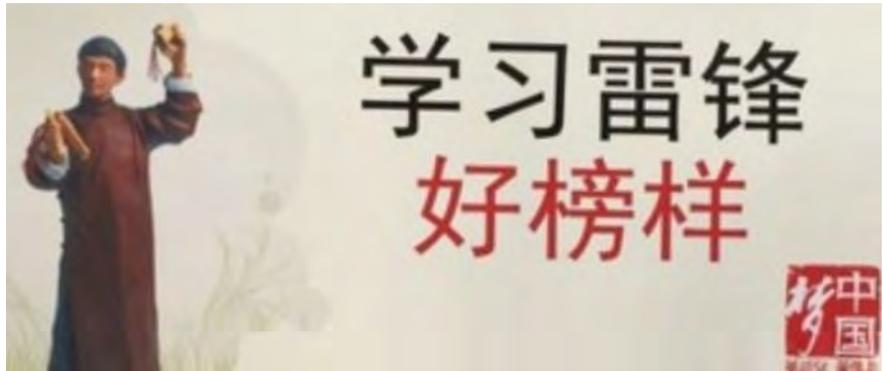


Image Credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

The email noted above described how, on a June Sunday morning, just as the worship service was preparing to begin, approximately 15 officers representing security, religious affairs, and local police, burst into the large, rented room that had housed the church for several years. The police took charge and commanded everyone to provide their name, phone number, address, and ID card. Then a leader from the Religious Affairs Bureau read China's new religious regulations and announced the Christians must immediately stop meeting as a “house church” and worship at the local, government-recognized, (TSPM²) church. Finally, the officials demanded that Pastor Timothy end the service and send the congregation away. The officials took Timothy to their office for five hours of questioning and interrogation before releasing him.

This was the fourth time since November 2018 that Timothy had been interrogated. Typically, the police asked, “Why was he not associated with the government-recognized church?” and whether foreigners were involved in the church meetings. They also asked him about denominational affiliation, why he had traveled to Hong Kong, and why he had signed a house church statement³ that was made public in August 2018? This document, eventually signed by 458 Chinese pastors, affirmed their responsibility as Christian pastors to proclaim the gospel and to challenge the government when it contravened God's law, including the repression of Christians. The main drafter, Pastor Wang Yi, and over 100 members of the Early Rain Covenant Church were arrested in November 2018 in a highly publicized event. Pastor Wang is still in prison.⁴ The key themes Chinese officials consistently emphasized with Timothy were that contact with foreigners, denominational connections, and theological study abroad are all very bad.

A knowledgeable Sinophile and friend recently wrote, “Everything changed in 2015 when Xi Jinping was able to get total power in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Everything we used to say and believe about China, and even Russia, is no longer true. These are times of closing doors, not opening doors.” Signs of this change are widespread and progressively more visible.

Life in Babylon

In 2018, I remember seeing posters that evoked images from the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), that terrible decade of chaos, mindless destruction, and irrational repression at the climax of Mao's life and rule. These posters stretched across the front of my favorite noodle shop. Across the street at a public school stood a poster admonishing all who passed by to “Study the Lei Feng Spirit.” This was another Cultural Revolution

icon. I marveled and wondered: How could the Chinese collective memory be so short? Had they already forgotten the horrors of this tragic period? Six or seven years ago, if you had described the current repression in China—similar to the dark days of the Cultural Revolution—I would have replied, “That is not possible.” But present-day reality cannot be denied. Evidence of the CCP’s desire to control and repress, along with its willingness to persecute, is everywhere.

Late in 2019, I stood outside a large church building in the Chinese city where I live. It was a TSPM church and the pastor who greeted me that Sunday morning is an old and dear friend. We had not met for some time, so we were both excited at this unexpected reunion. After warm greetings, the Chinese pastor pulled me aside and said, “Be very careful. It’s worse than it appears. I know, I’m on the inside. Even during this Christmas season, we are very limited in what we can do.”

Shortly after the conversation noted above, I received a message from ministry colleagues who had traveled to an area near the border of Yunnan and Vietnam. My friends were unexpectedly detained by the police in one of the towns and interrogated for six hours. Only one local brother was allowed to travel on to his home village. Three others were sent back by bus the next day. Before they were released, the authorities searched their computers and phones looking for Christian materials in the White Miao (Hmong) language.

My friend perceptively noted, “What they do not realize is that persecution cannot stop the work of the gospel, and as in the Cultural Revolution, this might even result in a revival in the church.”

Later I learned that in December 2019, the Chinese government prohibited White Miao Christians from reading the Bible in their own language and from preaching in their mother tongue.⁵

I recall in 2018 hearing that Chinese officials were forcing Christians, especially elderly believers in rural areas, to remove pictures of Jesus or other Christian subjects in their homes and, in their place, put up pictures of Chinese President Xi Jinping. If they did not comply, officials threatened to withhold their retirement benefits. It all sounded a bit too sensational and draconian to be taken seriously.

Nevertheless, when I met a good friend and rural TSPM church leader, I asked him if this could possibly be true. The reaction on his face shocked me, as did his reply. It was indeed true and happening in his area.

This all suggests that unless there is some radical change in the Chinese government and its restrictive policies, Christians in China will continue to experience significant suppression and persecution in the future. The “Golden Age” of relative openness and rapid growth for the house church movement (1995–2015) is over and we have entered a new era in which survival is now a central concern.

The recently concluded 20th Party Congress resulted in solidification of Xi’s position. Hope for more openness and less religious persecution is unlikely to be fulfilled. As my knowledgeable friend put it, Xi Jinping’s appointment to a third term at the Party Congress “will seal the end of the ‘open-door policy,’”⁶ though due to economic reasons, China will still be much more open than under Mao.” My friend suggested that while “TSPM churches will be allowed to have meetings,” their activities will be significantly restricted. Sunday schools and ministry to youth will either be prohibited or highly restricted.

I concur with his assessment that this is part of Xi's hardline policy to restrict and eventually wipe out religion. The CCP leaders have a long-term perspective and believe that if the children and youth are not reached in the next 40 or 50 years, there will be no real Christian church, only a few that will operate as window dressings.

However, my friend perceptively noted, "What they do not realize is that persecution cannot stop the work of the gospel, and as in the Cultural Revolution, this might even result in a revival in the church." House churches will still operate for the foreseeable future but will be forced to keep the meeting numbers to no more than a few dozen.

The Future: Hope in a Foreign Land

Life in "exile" is, of course, challenging. The challenges come from two directions. First, there is the obvious *external pressure*. One friend of mine was recently interrogated from 8:00 am until 9:00 pm. When he said he needed to pick up his children at their school, the officers replied, "You need to answer our questions, or you may never see your children again." This external pressure is visible, expected, and may take different forms. Recently, a Chinese friend told me, "At the beginning of this investigation, the police were very tough and strict, but now they try to be friends and create a friendly atmosphere for each conversation." He noted the police often bring gifts and seek to manipulate him by using various psychological ploys. Whether through high-tech surveillance, sophisticated psychological maneuvers, or brute force, external persecution can be anticipated and recognized for what it is. The end result is also predictable. As Paul declares, "And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14). Faithful perseverance is required. But, as the Holy Spirit gives strength, the church will grow (Acts 4:31).

There is, however, a second source of pressure: *internal pressure*. This, too, is noted by Paul: "some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry" (Philippians 1:15, cf. 1:18). This internal pressure afflicts the church as its leaders and congregants face the inevitable questions that arise when one lives in a context of persecution. How bold will we be in our witness? Where can we meet and how many should gather together at one time? What if a member of our church is implicated by the police? These and countless other questions must be faced and have the potential to foster tension and division.

I recently sat and prayed with a Chinese pastor who had been "visited" by the police who knocked on his door and, asked, "Do you pastor a house church?" My friend responded forthrightly and, as he did, he felt a strong sense of the Holy Spirit's presence. He said the experience served to confirm his call to ministry, feeling that Jesus' promise in Luke 12:11–12 was fulfilled in his life in that moment. Yet, while he sat on our couch, he received a text message from a leader in his church questioning whether it was wise for him to continue to serve as the church pastor. His presence might cause unwanted scrutiny and be too risky. It was a painful moment, a hard blow to handle. Would his church now abandon him after he had refused to deny Christ?

Fortunately, this story ended well; my friend continues to serve as this church's pastor. This cautionary tale reminds us that persecution often brings pressure that can only be resolved as the church faces challenges "with one heart and one mind." Perhaps this is why I love the prayer in Acts 4:23–31 and find it filled with meaning for every church, but especially those facing persecution. When the church has a clear sense of mission—a clear purpose—it is united. Thus, the Christians are described in Acts 4:24 as raising their voices "together" (ὁμοθυμαδὸν) in prayer in response to their first experience of persecution. It is no coincidence

that the book of Acts contains 10 of 11 occurrences of ὁμοθυμαδὸν found in the New Testament (note especially Acts 1:14; 2:46), for this term speaks of the rich unity and sense of purpose that marked the early church. This term is beautifully translated in the Chinese Union Version (CUV)⁷ with the expression “同心合意” (“with one heart and one mind”). Persecution has a way of focusing the church’s attention on its central purpose.

May this Spirit-inspired sense of unity and purpose mark the Chinese church as it seeks to live as disciples of Jesus in a “foreign” land.

¹ ChinaSource Team. “Churches Prepare for New Regulations.” *ChinaSource Blog*, October 03, 2017. Accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/churches-prepare-for-new-regulations/>.

² TSPM=Three Self Patriotic Movement. The TSPM was created in the 1950s to bring all China’s Christians and churches under government control. References to the “open church” or “government-recognized” church are churches that are part of the TSPM system.

³ SCI China Correspondent. “439 Chinese Christian Leaders—and Counting—Sign Joint Statement Affirming Religious Freedom.” *The St. Charles Institute*, September 5, 2018. Accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.stcharlesinstitute.org/voices/2018/9/4/198-chinese-christian-leadersand-countingsign-public-joint-statement>.

⁴ “Who Is Wang Yi?” *China Partnership*. Accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.chinapartnership.org/who-is-wang-yi>.

⁵ “China Imposes Restrictions on Hmong Christians.” *ChinaAid*, December 8, 2019. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://chinaaid.org/china-imposes-restrictions-on-hmong/>.

⁶ The “Open Door Policy” is shorthand for the “Open and Reform Policy” (改革开放) which was announced in December 1978 and has been a guiding policy for China’s development since then. The vast improvements in the livelihood of the Chinese people since then are usually attributed to this policy.

⁷ The Chinese Union Version (CUV) is the main Bible translation used by Chinese churches around the world. See Mark A. Strand, “The Origins of the Chinese Union Version Bible.” *ChinaSource Blog*, September 10, 2018. Accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/the-origins-of-the-chinese-union-version-bible/>.

Luke Wesley (pseudonym) is a cross-cultural worker who has lived and served in China for most of the past three decades.

A Decade of Change and Future Prospects

[Continued from page 6](#)

¹¹ Chris Buckley. “‘The East Is Rising’: Xi Maps Out China’s Post-Covid Ascent.” *New York Times*, March 3, 2021. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/world/asia/xi-china-congress.html>.

¹² Edward Cunningham, Tony Saich, and Jesse Turiel. “Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time.” *Ash Center*, Harvard Kennedy School, July 2020. Accessed November 10, 2022. https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/final_policy_brief_7.6.2020.pdf.

¹³ Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy. “Negative Views of China Tied to Critical Views of Its Policies on Human Rights.” *Pew Research Center*, June 29, 2022. Accessed October 17, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/29/negative-views-of-china-tied-to-critical-views-of-its-policies-on-human-rights/>.

Over the last 30 years, Peter Bryant (pseudonym) has had the chance to visit, to live for extended periods of time, and to travel to almost all of China’s provinces. As a Christian business person, he has met Chinese from all walks of life. He has a particular interest in marketplace ministries and business as mission and enjoys working with emerging Chinese leaders.

Where Is the Chinese Missionary Movement Headed in the New Era?

By Xingwu Lin

Since Xi Jinping assumed the role of Chinese President in 2013, he has put forward the grand vision of the Chinese Dream, the historical mission and future realization of the "Two Centennial Goals"¹ along with the strategic blueprint of the Belt and Road Initiative. Under this national vision and blueprint for development, the Chinese church has also been eager to go abroad and participate in global missions. However, in the past ten years, Chinese churches have experienced the shock of cross and church demolition incidents,² the impact of the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" implemented in 2018,³ and the grid-based monitoring system brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As Xi Jinping continues to lead China's New Era, where is China's church and missions movement headed? This article looks at the future of China's missionary movement from three perspectives: the assimilation of ethnic groups with the state and the Party, the Sinicization of religion, and the increased use of grid-based management.

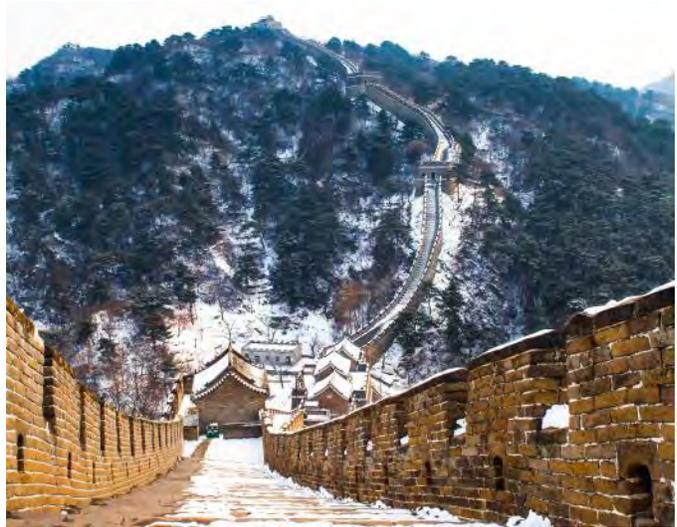


Image credit: [Rafik Wahba](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Ethnic Groups-Party-State Assimilation: In November 2012, at the First Plenum of the 18th Party Congress, Xi Jinping explicitly linked together the entirety of national progress, socialism, and national rejuvenation, saying:

Socialism with Chinese characteristics carries the weight of generations of Communist Party members' ideals and explorations, has been sustained by the hopes and dreams of countless noble and selfless people, is the fruit of the struggle and sacrifice of tens of thousands of revolutionary martyrs, and embodies the struggles and application of people of all ethnic groups in the country. It is the inevitable choice of the development of Chinese society in modern times. It is the choice of history and the people.⁴

In 2013, Xi Jinping successively put forward the vision of the Chinese Dream and the Belt and Road Initiative. Internally, he said that the Chinese Dream is "realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation in modern times."⁵ Externally, he proposed the Belt and Road Initiative strategy of great power diplomacy in order to exert greater influence internationally. Xi Jinping combined the state with the nation:

To promote the spirit of patriotism, we must respect and continue the legacy of the Chinese nation's history and culture. The understanding and acceptance of the motherland's long history and profound culture is an important condition for the cultivation and development of people's patriotic feelings.⁶

To implement the above-mentioned grand vision, in the report of the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping proposed "upholding and strengthening the Party's comprehensive leadership."⁷ Chinese politics under the leadership of Xi Jinping, for the past ten years, has ended the separation of the Party and the state. This is a return to the "Party and state" system before the era of reform and opening up. Looking at the past ten years, the boundaries between the Party, the state, and the people have been blurred. As the people, the Party, and the state

have been increasingly integrated, national identities are being constructed in an environment of political correctness and ideology.

Sinicization of Religions: Xi Jinping emphasized at the 2021 National Conference on Religious Work:

We must lead the various religions in China with core socialist values and immerse them in Chinese culture. We must support religious circles in interpreting religious thoughts, canons, and teachings in ways that meet the requirements of a time of progress. We must prevent the penetration of Western ideology, and consciously resist the influence of extremist ideological trends.⁸

From this, we can see the development of the Sinicization of religion which combines political ideology with the prevention of the intervention of external forces. Xi Jinping believes:

We must further promote the Sinicization of China's religions, lead, and support our country's religions to take the core socialist values as their guide and increase the awareness of religious people and believers towards identifying with the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.⁹

This definition indicates the essence and connotations of the Sinicization of religion. The development of the Sinicization of religion will lead to greater pressure on Chinese churches. Ethnic minorities and ethnic religions will also face the influence of an overbearing Han culture and even face the crisis of assimilation.

Increased Grid-Based Management: Xi Jinping has expanded the entire understanding and practice of national security over the past decade. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, he put forward a discussion on "a holistic view on national security." He emphasized:

Hold fast to a holistic view on national security. Coordinating development and security, enhancing the awareness of danger, and being prepared for danger in times of peace are a major part of our Party's important principles for governance of the country. We must adhere to the supremacy of national interests, take the people's security as a prioritized mission and political security as a fundamental task, coordinate external security and internal security, homeland security and security of our citizens, traditional security and non-traditional security, individual security, and common security. We must perfect the national security system, strengthen national security capacity building, and resolutely safeguard national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests.¹⁰

Under such a view of national security, one of the ways to implement national security is through the combination of big data and grid-based management. The "Decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform" proposes to improve the social governance method, innovate the social governance system, and improve the grass-roots comprehensive service management platform along the lines of grid management and socialized services. The implementation of this gridded supervision falls to the district committees and the sub-district offices at local levels.¹¹ This not only reduces criminal behavior in the community, but also affects the original forms of meeting of house churches. From the management of the COVID-19 pandemic to the restrictions on cross-border movement of personnel by using health codes, the impact of grid management is evident. These systems also bring many restrictions and troubles to local missionaries serving among ethnic minorities.

Every aspect of the missions movement in modern China—from the Back to Jerusalem movement started in the 1990s,¹² the development of local cross-cultural missions brought about by the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan in 2008, the Mission China 2030 movement mainly promoted by Chinese urban churches in 2013,¹³

the missions education movement that seized opportunities and a new perspective on missions, to the recent acceleration of Mission China and the altar of joint prayer meetings due to the pandemic—reflects that the Chinese church has gained momentum and is on the verge of bursting forth. However, under the special circumstances of the greater era, where should the missionary movement of the Chinese church go? In response to the above three trends of forceful change, I have the following three suggestions for the missionary movement of Chinese churches.

The Construction of National Identity: In the face of the trend and influence of the amalgamation of people, Party, and state, more attention needs to be paid to the construction of a Christian identity. Under the influence of media, education, film, and television, the identity of the common people is being constructed subtly and unconsciously. Thus, self-identification with patriotism and nationalism is being molded by unnoticed control. This also affects the religious identity of Christian disciples and the church. From past encounters with Chinese missionaries who serve overseas, I have noticed how ethnocentrism affects the distance and tension between them and the groups they serve. Based on this, the issue of identity must be embedded in the process of disciple formation, biblical teaching, theological education, and missionary formation. Let the kingdom identity of the Triune God be the foremost identity of every child and the people of God. Only when the self and another meet, are we able to understand our own sense of identity more deeply. And only when connecting and communicating with another will kingdom identity be expanded. The training of missionaries today begins with understanding the language, culture, and worldview of others, which are all very necessary. However, if missionaries do not have greater awareness and understanding of their own sense of identity, it is difficult to truly reach across to others. The first step in missions may not be to reach across to where others are right away, but rather to reach beyond oneself!

If missions is the grand narrative of God's redemption, it means that this narrative connects the many small stories of you and me to the history of missions, continuing to write... the missionary story of God's love for the world.

Development of the Local Situation: For the Chinese government today, the Sinicization of religion is a response to the memory of humiliating history and the threat of Western culture. The difference between the two is the historical harm that religion has brought, and the threat that religion poses to national territory today. What they have in common is the weak adaptation of religion to the Chinese culture and system. This can be an opportunity for the Chinese church to reflect: How can the church be more capable of local communication, using the language that local people can understand to communicate the gospel? How can the church do theology in these special circumstances of Chinese politics, culture, and society? On the topic of cross-cultural

mission, how can missionaries respect the nationality, culture, and living habits of people in different cultural situations, rather than dominating others with their own culture, ideology, and values? These basic attitudes and values may be different from the Sinicization of religions implemented by the current government, but just as “the Word became flesh,” Christ’s church ought to imitate him and enter different cultural groups with an attitude of humility, ministering to others with a servant identity.

Creative and Flexible Connections: In the post-pandemic era and the escalation of grid management, we are increasingly aware that the concepts and models that we were familiar with in the past are now being chal-

lenged and broken one by one. Our conception of the church in the past was as a center for gathering. Today, churches are beginning to share the gospel, worship, and fellowship through more flexible and creative small groups and networks. Originally centered on a certain region or location, today's missions are being implemented in a decentralized or polycentric and localized way. Today people often use the acronym "VUCA" to describe today's world: volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. This also shows that in the future missions will have to face a new normal, and we need wisdom, grace, and creativity from God to face it. If missions is the grand narrative of God's redemption, it means that this narrative connects the many small stories of you and me to the history of missions, continuing to write and proclaim the missionary story of God's love for the world by imagining the promise and ultimate fulfillment of God's kingdom.

Conclusion: Although the missionary movement of the Chinese church is experiencing great restrictions and challenges, just as Paul was bold to preach the word of the kingdom of God and teach the things of the Lord Jesus Christ in a restricted and imprisoned environment, no one forbade him to do so (Acts 28:31). I deeply believe that the more the church is in difficult circumstances, the more it experiences the grace and power of God.

Translated by ChinaSource. [Original Chinese versions, in simplified and traditional characters, available for download on the ChinaSource website.](#)

-
- ¹ "Two Centenaries." *Wikipedia*. Accessed October 19, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Centenaries.
 - ² 浙江強拆十字架運動. 中文維基百科. Accessed October 20, 2022. [浙江強拆十字架運動 - 維基百科, 自由的百科全書 \(wikipedia.org\)](#).
 - ³ 中華人民共和國國務院令: 第686號. 中華人民共和國中央人民政府, August 26, 2017. Accessed October 20, 2022. http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content_5223282.htm.
 - ⁴ 习近平. 全面贯彻落实党的十八大精神要突出抓好六个方面工作. 人民網, January 4, 2013. Accessed September 18, 2022. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0104/c83846-20083095.html>.
 - ⁵ 习近平足迹与要论: 实现中华民族伟大复兴就是中国梦. 中新网, March 15, 2013. Accessed September 18, 2022. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2013/03-15/4645548.shtml>.
 - ⁶ 用文化的力量厚植青少年爱国主义情怀. 新华网, December 6, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2022. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-12/06/c_1125315067.htm.
 - ⁷ 朱家梅. 新时代坚持和加强党的全面领导的基本经验. 人民網, April 14, 2022. Accessed September 20, 2022. <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0414/c117092-32398739.html>.
 - ⁸ 怎樣深入推進我國宗教中國化? 習近平這樣說. 人民網, December 8, 2021. Accessed September 30, 2022. <http://politics.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2021/1208/c1001-32303068.html>.
 - ⁹ 深入推进我国宗教中国化——深入学习贯彻习近平总书记在宗教工作会议上的重要讲话精神之二. 中国民族宗教网, December 8, 2021. Accessed September 30, 2022. <http://www.mzb.com.cn/html/report/211230604-1.htm>.
 - ¹⁰ 网格化党建统领社区治理创新. 人民網, November 27, 2014. Accessed September 30, 2022. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/1127/c40531-26105462.html>.
 - ¹¹ 中共中央關於全面深化改革若干重大問題的決定. 人民網, November 15, 2013. Accessed September 30, 2022. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2013/1115/c64094-23559163.html>.
 - ¹² Brent Fulton. "Is 'Back to Jerusalem' Biblical?" *ChinaSource Blog*, February 7, 2018. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/is-back-to-jerusalem-biblical/>.
 - ¹³ Karin Butler Primuth. "Launching China's Biggest Missionary-Sending Initiative." *ChinaSource Blog*, November 13, 2015. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/launching-chinas-biggest-missionary-sending-initiative/>.

Xingwu Lin is a cross-cultural researcher who has been following and accompanying the Chinese church and missions movement for many years.

Chinese Christian Nonprofits and Reshaping Perceptions of Evangelism

By Caleb Ai

Looking at the development of Chinese Christian nonprofits, as well as all Chinese nonprofits, there are two dates that stand out—the years 2008 and 2016. These two important milestones separate the recent development of nonprofits into three periods.

Before 2008

Sadly, historically nonprofits were not popular in Chinese society because the concept of a nonprofit was very unfamiliar in Chinese culture. In China, before 2008, many nonprofit organizations such as the Red Cross were state-owned.¹ Private nonprofits were few and far between. Ordinary Chinese people thought that nonprofits did things that the government should do. The general attitude toward nonprofits in Chinese society, including the Christian mindset, was one of indifference.

From 2008 to 2016

There is a general consensus that the Chinese nonprofit sector took off after the devastating Sichuan earthquake in 2008. Shocked by the magnitude of the devastation, thousands of Chinese Christians around the country rapidly mobilized and rushed to the center of the earthquake zone to assist. This massive response was unprecedented and was the beginning of many Chinese Christian nonprofits.

Facing this massive natural disaster and the start of the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese government needed help and resources. Mobilizing the entire nation to handle this huge social crisis was the only solution. For the first time in Chinese history, the government accepted help from all social sectors. This change in approach was the big push that not only promoted the significance of nonprofits but set Chinese nonprofits onto a fast development track.

In addition, challenging social problems, the result of thirty years of rapid economic growth, began to emerge. Acknowledging the power and impact of nonprofits during the 2008 earthquake reconstruction, the government gradually adopted a positive posture to encourage the development of private nonprofits. A big wave of nonprofit registrations, including Christian nonprofits, arrived!

Then, from 2008 to 2016, the nonprofit sector experienced a short “honeymoon” with the government.

From 2016 until the Present

The winds started to shift in 2014 with the government’s increasing control of ideology and increasing suspicions regarding the motivations and intentions of nonprofits. Christian nonprofits and foreign nonprofit organizations with operations in China were particularly suspect. In 2016, two very important laws affecting the nonprofit sector were promulgated: the Charity Law² and the Overseas NGO Law.³ The Charity Law was designed to control domestic nonprofits while the Overseas NGO Law was designed to control foreign nonprofits.⁴ The primary concern about overseas nonprofit organizations was the suspicion that foreign ideology would invade China through these programs and foreign funding of Chinese nonprofits.

The Charity Law combined with the Overseas NGO Law put numerous Chinese Christian nonprofits in danger



since many were funded directly by foreign churches or supported by overseas funding.⁵ The Overseas NGO Law allowed the Chinese government to apply strict controls on foreign nonprofits and cut their financial ties with local nonprofits. Many foreign nonprofits subsequently decided to close their operations, some of which had existed in China for a long time.⁶

Another serious impact to Christian nonprofits was that the Charity Law prohibited sharing information about religion. Any nonprofit in violation could be ordered to shut down. Consequently, Christian nonprofits sought answers to the question: Without mentioning the gospel, could a Christian nonprofit continue its ministry? This discussion continues among Christian nonprofits and churches today. Churches insist that a Christian nonprofit must present the gospel as a clear, evangelical message; most Christian nonprofits question whether explicitly presenting the gospel is the only way to witness for God in their work and service.

Since the 2016 implementation of these two laws, the government has also tightened the registration requirements of new nonprofits, and the growth in the number of new Christian nonprofits has slowed considerably.

How Chinese Christians React to Nonprofits

Historically, the relationship between nonprofits and the majority of Chinese Christians has resembled parallel lines that do not intersect. Recently however, this pattern has changed, driven by internal and external forces.

Traditionally, most Chinese Christians have a deep theological conviction that a real Christian must engage in evangelistic activities. The definition of evangelism among the majority of Chinese churches is to vocally

Many...Christians realized the need to look at our faith more holistically and to serve the community and society as salt and light.

Speak the name of Jesus in front of nonbelievers and *bring* them to church to *baptize* them. These three “indicators” have always been given the highest priority in our faith. It is normal for our pastors to check on how many people we shared the gospel with and brought to church. However, pastors seldom encourage or organize their congregations to serve their community or help people in need. Most pastors think helping others is good but *cannot* be counted as evangelism. A senior church elder, who is also one of my mentors, told me that helping the community does not make you a good Christian and is not part of evangelism.

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake was a resounding bell that awakened many Chinese Christians to consider whether our faith could be proclaimed by helping others and how we could glorify God in the presence of people in need.

Another remarkable movement in the Chinese Christian world that occurred during the years 2008 to 2016 must be mentioned since it slowly changed the theological views of many Chinese Christians. During those years, God mobilized a huge missions movement in China. Courses such as “Perspectives”⁷ and “Kairos”⁸ were introduced in China. I was in the first “Perspectives” training cohort in 2012 in Shanghai. From those efforts, many Chinese Christians’ theological ideas were transformed. One result was that more Christians realized the need to look at our faith more holistically and to serve the community and society as salt and light. I am not sure if it was merely a coincidence that the registration of Christian nonprofits in that period hit a record high. I do think transformed theology certainly helped many Chinese Christians open their minds and realize

that serving the community is also a mission to fulfill.

When the revised Regulations of Religion Activities arrived in 2017, governmental suppression affected many Chinese house churches. The regulations required that all churches must register, or public gatherings would not be allowed. Pastors of any churches that violated this regulation would bear legal responsibility. Since many pastors worried about losing their freedom to preach if the government took over the church, lots of house churches decided to stop church activities and break congregations into home groups or move around renting places for Sunday services.

Surprisingly, despite the suppression of the Regulation of Religion Activities in 2017, more and more house church pastors expressed their willingness to find opportunities to serve the community or help people in need such as disabled children, orphans, and so on. We received many requests for information about how to register a nonprofit. Personally, I think the ongoing transformation of theological viewpoints was the key factor rather than the suppression caused by the revised regulations.

Looking back at how nonprofits developed among Chinese Christians, we see it reflects the way Chinese Christian theological perspectives have developed over time, and the breakthroughs in the holistic understanding and significance of being a Christian.

Next Steps

Continuous Transformation: Even though lots of Chinese Christians now see the value of nonprofits, there are still many Chinese Christians who argue that doing good things (what nonprofits do) and sharing the gospel with nonbelievers are totally different activities. Therefore, the need to address theological views in order to transform perspectives on what it means to live as a Christian still exists so that we can agree that what nonprofits are doing is a way to witness and glorify our God.

Capacity Building: With the increasing requirements for professionalism, nonprofits must focus on how to improve their skills in order to operate with more wisdom and achieve high effectiveness. Christian nonprofits need to pursue excellence not only because of higher standards of transparency, credibility, and professionalism, and in order to seek needed wisdom to be able to survive amid governmental suspicion, but also because service quality from Christian nonprofits glorifies God in the presence of their targeted service groups. From surveys we conducted among Chinese Christian nonprofits in 2016, 2017, and 2020, the number one challenge was the lack of skills to operate their ministries. Therefore, if nonprofits are to play a critical role in helping Chinese Christians live out their faith and honor God, capacity building is an extremely important step to improve ministry effectiveness.

Conclusion

As Christians, we are living in a spiritual battle to restore the peace and glory created by our Lord. Every Christian is a soldier on the field. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). “To visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27) is the calling from the Lord—not a choice.

Surprisingly, despite the suppression of the Regulation of Religion Activities in 2017, more and more house church pastors expressed their willingness to find opportunities to serve the community or help people in need such as disabled children, orphans, and so on.

We hope more and more Chinese Christians will fulfill this calling to be salt and light, to light up the darkness, and to heal the brokenness in our society.

¹ China has a category of non-profits known as GONGOs (government organized non-governmental organizations). The Red Cross is one example of this type of Chinese NGO.

² For an English translation of the Charity Law (and a reference to the Chinese original), see Twelfth National People's Congress, "2016 Charity Law," *China Law Translate*, March 16, 2016. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/2016-charity-law/>. The United Nations Development Programme office in China has also produced Chinese and English handbooks of the Charity Law. See "Handbook of Charity Law of the People's Republic of China." *UNDP*, August 27, 2018. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.undp.org/china/publications/handbook-charity-law-people%E2%80%99s-republic-china>.

³ Formally "The Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in Mainland China." See "English Translation of China's New Law on Overseas NGOs," *China Development Brief*, March 5, 2016. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.org/reports/the-peoples-republic-of-chinas-law-on-the-management-of-the-activities-of-overseas-ngos-within-mainland-china/>.

⁴ The government department overseeing the Charity Law is the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The government department overseeing the Overseas NGO Law is the Ministry of Public Security. In the original drafts of the Overseas NGO Law, the governing authority was changed from the Ministry of Civil Affairs to the Ministry of Public Security reflecting concerns about the activities of overseas NGOs.

⁵ Overseas funding is specifically addressed in the Overseas NGO Law such as:

- Article 5: "Furthermore overseas NGOs that conduct activities in mainland China must not engage in or fund for-profit activities or political activities. They must also not illegally conduct or fund religious activities."
- Article 32: "Units or individuals in China shall not be hired by, accept financial support from, or represent or covertly represent overseas NGOs that have not legally registered a representative office or filed temporary activities within China."
- Article 46: "An overseas NGO without a registered representative office or without a filing of its temporary activity commissions or funds units and individuals within China to carry out activities within China"

⁶ Estimates of overseas NGOs active in China prior to the enactment of the Overseas NGO Law range as high as more than 7,000. (See "The Foreign NGO Law and Its Implementation—Legal Path for Foreign NGOs in China." *Dentons*, March 4, 2021. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/articles/2021/march/4/the-foreign-ngo-law-and-its-implementation>.) In the first four years after the enactment of the Overseas NGO Law, the number of registered organizations dropped to 576 with almost half of these being trade or business associations.

⁷ "Mobilizing God's People for God's Global Purpose." *Perspectives*, Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.perspectives.org/>.

⁸ "Kairos Course." *Simply Mobilizing USA*. Accessed November 11, 2022. <https://simplymobilizing.us/kairos-course/> and "Kairos Course." *Mairangi Bay Community Church*. Accessed November 11, 2022. <https://www.mairangichurch.org/copy-of-alpha-course>.

Caleb Ai (pseudonym) is the leader of a Chinese nonprofit that empowers Chinese Christian nonprofits by providing capacity building programs and motivates and propels Chinese Christians to practice their faith by participating in solving social problems via nonprofits. Caleb earned his bachelor's degree in China and master's degree in the US majoring in computer science. Prior to joining the nonprofit sector in 2016, he worked at leading IT companies in both the US and China. Currently, Caleb and his wife live in China.

Expatriates Serving in China's New Era

Recent Developments, Future Prospects

By Swells in the Middle Kingdom

At a recent gathering of more than 100 China ministry professionals, I was struck by how many of the attendees operated with the assumption that the era of expatriates living and ministering within China's borders was over. Only a handful of those in attendance had any plans to live and work in China while most of the conference focused on ministering from a distance. While there is real value to serving the Chinese church remotely, is it the case that expatriate Christians can no longer live and minister within China?



Image Credit: [ConvertKit](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Where Are We Now?

There is no denying that nearly all aspects of expatriate ministry within China have become significantly more difficult since Xi Jinping rose to power in 2012.

First, a series of new and revised regulations have effectively shrunk the space for acceptable foreign activity within China.

- A new law in January 2017 governing, and dramatically constraining, the operation of overseas NGOs within China.¹
- A February 2018 revision and tightening—especially with respect to overseas religious organizations and activities—of China's regulations on religious affairs.²
- Beginning in late January 2020, the myriad of restrictions on public gatherings and travel associated with maintaining the zero-COVID policy within China.³
- The July 2021 Double Reduction Policy that effectively closed private tutoring services across the nation.⁴
- The March 2022 Internet Religious Information regulations, intended to eliminate unwanted online religious activity.⁵

This evolving regulatory environment effectively constricts the sectors of society where expatriates can work and interact with Chinese people—particularly Chinese youth, historically a key area of employment and ministry for many expatriates living and working in China.

Second, attitudes within both official and unofficial China have changed as well. The perceived success of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing combined with China's relative stability during the 2007–2008 global financial crisis to convince Chinese people, and especially leaders within the Chinese Communist Party, that China was on the ascendancy and the collapse of the West was all but certain. This newfound confidence found expression in the adoption (with tacit support from Xi Jinping) of “wolf warrior diplomacy” by many of China's senior diplomats and government officials.⁶ An explicit rejection of the long-standing Chinese policy from Deng Xiaoping of “hiding our strength and biding our time,” the overall effect of this more aggressive posture on the

global stage has been a deterioration in nearly all of China's international relations—seen most notably in heightened tensions over Taiwan.⁷ With more and more nations growing disillusioned by the burdensome debt created by China's Belt and Road Initiative and alarmed by China's projection of force in the South China Sea and the Taiwanese Strait, China has squandered decades of hard-earned good will leaving the nation with only a small and uninspiring list of allies.⁸

Under Xi Jinping, the Chinese Communist Party has countered these setbacks overseas by heightening nationalist messaging at home, resulting in increased official suspicion of all foreigners in China—particularly Westerners. This can be seen not only in the chill that now accompanies so many expatriate interactions with Chinese officials, but also in the renewed emphasis on domestic counter-espionage and political thought control (抵制境外宗教极端思想渗透, i.e. resist infiltration of foreign extremist religious ideas) and the heightened government screening and review of all foreign activities within China.⁹ One of the more alarming expressions of this determination to resist foreign influences occurred in 2018 during a series of apparently coordinated crackdowns on overseas religious organizations that led to the expulsion of some expatriate mission workers and the subsequent departure of large numbers of expatriate ministry workers from China. Altogether, this now pervasive nationalist messaging means that for a growing number of the Chinese public, it is once again considered risky and dangerous to associate with foreigners.

One simple way to view these developments is through two trends in China that have been gaining momentum under the rule of Xi Jinping: politicization and securitization.

Politicization refers to the *reversal* of the post-Cultural Revolution trend driven by Deng Xiaoping to create separation between the Chinese Communist Party and the state and to allow Chinese citizens some areas of life that were not directly monitored and supervised by the Party. Since Xi's 2012 promotion, the Party has reinserted itself into all areas of life—most visibly through the return of political study sessions, the growing influence of hyper-local block committees on all aspects of life, and the renewed emphasis on political thought control throughout the education system. Religious activity is similarly being supervised much more closely by the Party as security forces persist in closing unregistered fellowships and intimidating religious practitioners across the country. Naturally, this determination to eliminate all allegiances or worldviews that are hostile to the continuing rule of the CCP is also very suspicious of all expatriates.

Securitization refers to the vast *expansion* of China's domestic security apparatus—increasing not only the number of security personnel and their budgets, but also their remit to monitor more and more aspects of life in China. Under Xi Jinping, approval from security officials has been (re)inserted as a key step in a growing range of bureaucratic procedures, while seemingly every inch of China's territory has been blanketed by a multifaceted suite of surveillance technologies. From required retina scans on workplace time-punch clocks and real name contact tracing on all cellphones, to the AI-powered facial recognition software behind China's network of ubiquitous security cameras, Xi's China has become a panopticon state, where the Party can observe and thus potentially interfere in all aspects of life within China's borders. COVID-19 and its resultant personal and national isolation has only accelerated both these trends, resulting in a China today that is significantly less open to foreigners than the China of ten or more years ago.

All of this has come at a price: China is losing foreign experts and becoming less attractive to foreign investors; there are fewer expatriates studying or teaching in China and far fewer exchanges between China and other countries; China's approval ratings are plummeting in nations around the world; most significantly, the Chinese economy is no longer growing at the dramatic rate it has enjoyed for the past few decades. So far, China's government seems willing to pay this price for increased domestic security and control. But with growing discontent over youth unemployment, the brutal education system, regulatory attacks on private

industry, ongoing restrictions on travel, the crumbling housing market, and the inhumanity of China's zero-COVID policies, how long will Xi and his Party continue to stay the course?

What Does This Mean?

It is important to recognize that China today is not closed to expatriates. On the contrary, China still needs, and indeed welcomes, foreigners to work in many sectors of Chinese society. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has, however, adjusted its regulatory processes and shaped the worldview of its officials in order to ensure that only the "right" kinds of expatriates are allowed to reside in China. Practically, this means requiring much higher professional qualifications and experience from would-be foreign workers while, at the same time, increasing regulations and scrutiny in sectors of the economy where the Party is particularly nervous of foreign infiltration (e.g., education and NGO or social services). This will make it especially difficult for younger people to live and work in China, shrinking the pool of potential expatriate China workers with real experience. Meanwhile, for those qualified candidates seeking employment in areas where China wishes to increase foreign participation (biotech, Olympic and professional sports, semiconductor manufacturing, AI, and so on), the immigration process has never been more streamlined.

Heightened professional requirements and expectations means fewer expatriates in China as many are already being turned away from the sectors of society that have traditionally been more conducive to Christian witness (education, youth work, social services, poverty alleviation, and other areas). At the same time, the politicization and securitization of Chinese society leaves fewer opportunities for expatriates to engage in ministry outside of their daily life and work routines without compromising their long-term China residency. Finally, seemingly inescapable surveillance means gathering with local sisters and brothers is now much more difficult than even a few years ago, while regular travel for anything other than tourism or work reasons is no longer sustainable (one of the key lessons of 2018). So, for the foreseeable future, expatriate ministry within China will be smaller in numbers and scope.

In general, the shrinking expatriate Christian community that remains will no longer set up new ministries or run existing ones and, over time, will likely even find it difficult to work within Chinese ministries. Instead, China-based expatriates will shift to the role of observing their Chinese sisters and brothers push ahead in ministries of their own. Expatriates will still provide support on the ground, but that support will become increasingly practical, personal, and pastoral. It will include things such as a safe listening ear, help with maintaining healthy ministry families, practical advice on daily living and ministry operations, a model of endurance and faith in the face of hostility and fear, a daily physical reminder that our Chinese sisters and brothers are not alone. This kind of ministry certainly feels smaller, but it is also deeper and much more intimate.

This smaller ministry will also be much more costly—both financially and psychologically. The professional burdens placed upon would-be expatriate workers are only going to increase, compounded by the stresses of living under unpredictable covid restrictions and heightened official scrutiny and suspicion. Expatriates may be tempted to sacrifice integrity in order to gain certain kinds of ministry opportunities, perhaps reverting to some of the habits and "007" practices of China ministry from the early years of Opening and Reform. While we certainly need to develop appropriate security practices for this new and challenging environment, it is vital to remember that a witness founded upon dishonesty is ultimately an untrustworthy witness.¹⁰

Is It Worth It?

While a straightforward cost-benefit analysis suggests that this work is not worth the trouble, cross-cultural ministry has always at its core been about planting tiny mustard seeds and then hoping that by God's grace they will grow into something that gives him glory. Instead of viewing ministry through strategic eyes, we

need to see through kingdom eyes.¹¹ Faithfulness and true biblical fruitfulness should be our measure of success, rather than “return on investment” or the number of notches on our spiritual belts. Often in ministry less is actually more as we live out the gospel irony of seeing ourselves and our ministry decrease so that he may increase.¹²

God never “finishes” with anyone or any place. The real danger at present is that God’s people will decide to give up on China because we think it is too difficult or too unpopular. But just because something is hard does not mean God no longer wishes us to do it. For centuries, women, men, and children have been inspired to follow God to the ends of the earth by reading biographies of Christian missionaries from around the world. One of the things that makes these biographies so compelling is the simple fact that *when things got difficult the missionaries stayed*.¹³ It is precisely their endurance in the face of suffering that so profoundly demonstrates the power and truthfulness of their Christian faith.

¹The National People’s Congress Standing Committee. “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China, 中华人民共和国境外非政府组织境内活动管理法.” *The China NGO Project*. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinafile.com/ngo/laws-regulations/law-of-peoples-republic-of-china-administration-of-activities-of-overseas/>.

²“Religious Affairs Regulations 2017.” *China Law Translate*, September 7, 2017. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-affairs-regulations-2017/>.

³“Chinese Government Response to COVID-19.” *Wikipedia*. Accessed November 7, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_government_response_to_COVID-19#Zero-COVID_policy.

⁴“Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden on Students in the Compulsory Education State from Homework and Extracurricular Training.” *China Law Translate*, November 3, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/two-burdens/>. And “China Releases ‘Double Reduction’ Policy in Education Sector.” *JDSUPRA*, August 24, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/china-releases-double-reduction-policy-1019987/>.

⁵“Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services.” *China Law Translate*, December 20, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/internet-religious-information/>.

⁶“Understanding Chinese ‘Wolf Warrior Diplomacy.’” *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, October 22, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/understanding-chinese-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>.

⁷Tobin Harshaw. “Emperor Xi’s China Is Done Biding Its Time.” *Bloomberg*, March 3, 2018. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-03-03/emperor-xi-s-china-is-done-biding-its-time>. And Kurt M. Campbell and Mira Rapp-Hooper. “China Is Done Biding Its Time: The End of Beijing’s Foreign Policy Restraint?” *Foreign Affairs*, July 15, 2020. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-07-15/china-done-biding-its-time>.

⁸Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy. “How Global Public Opinion of China Has Shifted in the Xi Era.” *Pew Research Center*, September 28, 2022. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/09/28/how-global-public-opinion-of-china-has-shifted-in-the-xi-era/>.

⁹“抵御境外宗教极端思想渗透与新疆意识形态安全建设,” 搜狐 *Sohu.com*, July, 30, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. https://www.sohu.com/a/480360196_121124715. And “Provisions on Efforts on Counter-espionage Security Precautions 反间谍安全防范工作规定.” *China Law Translate*, April 26, 2021. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/counterespionage-precautions/>.

¹⁰1 Peter 2:12; 2 Corinthians 4:2.

¹¹Brent Fulton. “What if Christianity Is No Longer Successful?” *ChinaSource Blog*, August 22, 2022. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/what-if-christianity-is-no-longer-successful/>.

¹²Amy Young. “When I Say Fruitful, You Think What?” *ChinaSource Blog*, September 12, 2022. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/when-i-say-fruitful-you-think-what/>. And Andrew Kaiser. “Less Is More: Discipling Believers in a Cross-Cultural Setting.” *ChinaSource Blog*, March 22, 2009. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/less-is-more-discipling-believers-in-a-cross-cultural-setting/>.

¹³Swells in the Middle Kingdom. “Can I Leave Now?” *ChinaSource Blog*, April 8, 2020. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/can-i-leave-now/>.

BOOK REVIEW

China's Vision for the World

Reviewed by Joann Pittman

The World According to China by Elizabeth C. Economy. Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2022. Hardcover, 304 pages. ISBN-10: 150953749X; ISBN-13: 978-1509537495. Available from [Polity Books](#) and [Amazon](#).

If you are or have been a China news junkie (like me) you are probably somewhat up to speed on many of the prominent, and not so prominent, China stories that have dominated the airwaves over the past decade since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012.

A Huawei executive is arrested at the airport in Vancouver and placed under house arrest while awaiting extradition to the United States.

A new Chinese social media app, Tik Tok, takes the world by storm, prompting fears of data mining and calls for it to be banned.

A coach in the NBA posts a tweet in support of protesters in Hong Kong, leading to China cancelling broadcasts of NBA games and an eventual apology on the part of the coach in question.

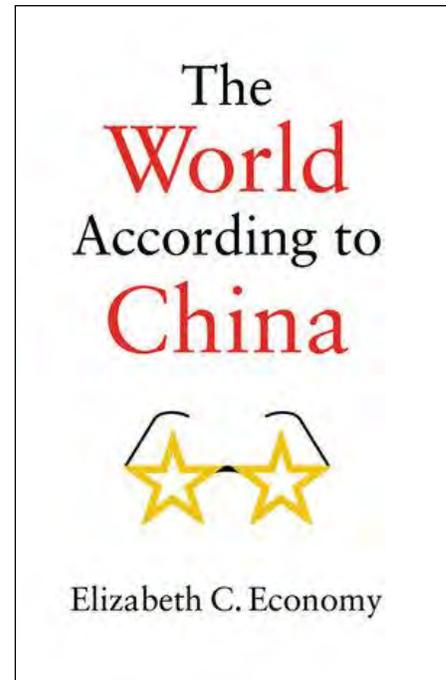
As a global pandemic gets underway and makes its deadly spread around the planet, China successfully prevents Taiwan from being a part of world-wide efforts at detection and prevention.

China closes its borders to the outside world and keeps them closed for three years (so far) in an effort to "defeat" a virus, causing severe economic, social, and mental distress.

These are just a few of the many stories that Elizabeth Economy unpacks in her new book, *The World According to China*. How are we to understand these events and the broader policy decisions made by the Chinese government? What are they trying to achieve? Setting these stories within the broader context of Xi's call for the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese state," Economy lays out in detail how Xi "envisions a China that has regained centrality on the global stage; it has reclaimed contested territory, assumed a position of preeminence in the Asia Pacific, ensured that other countries have aligned their political, economic, and security interests with its own, provided the world's technological infrastructure for the 21st century, and embedded its norms, values, and standards in international laws and institutions" (p. 2).

Elizabeth Economy is a long-time China watcher and the author of three previous books on China. She is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and a senior fellow for China Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. She is also a senior advisor in the US Department of Commerce.

Economy structures her book around six different strategic themes that drive the Chinese Party-state, followed by some concluding observations. In the first chapter she looks at government's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Avoiding some of the contentious political debates outside of China about the origin of the virus, she focuses instead on helping the reader understand what is driving China's zero-COVID response, a response that seems increasingly baffling to the outside world.



In the second chapter, she looks at China's use of hard power and soft power to exert its will on the international stage. One of its most potent hard power weapons is its economic clout which gives it the ability to use its "market leverage to try to coerce other countries and foreign businesses to do its bidding" (p. 31). One weapon of soft power is the rise of Tik Tok, which provides a platform to "give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world" (p. 65). Soft power is also wielded through the global network of Confucian Institutes which are housed on university campuses worldwide.

In chapter three, the focus is on China's claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea and over Taiwan. Of particular interest is how China was able to exert its will in Hong Kong, effectively bringing an end to "One Country, Two Systems" a full 19 years before its designated expiration date. Despite a positive trend in cross-strait economic and cultural relations, Taiwan remains an important piece of unfinished business from the civil war in the 1940s. China cannot ultimately achieve the great rejuvenation it seeks without regaining sovereignty over Taiwan. In China's view, issues related to the South China Sea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are purely internal matters and no one else has a say in what happens. Furthermore, these are the most dangerous flash points in Sino-everyone relations and have the highest risk of leading to armed conflict, something that would change everything for everyone.

The subject of chapter four is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's signature foreign and economic policy initiative, with a focus on how it enables China to not only build railroads, highways, and ports, but to also exert their political, economic, and security preferences on the "partner" nations. Economy notes that by 2020 there were 140 countries that were participating in the initiative (p. 97). While actual statistics are hard to come by, she suggests that China has invested more than \$70 billion in BRI projects worldwide (p. 98). Even though the Sri Lankan economic collapse happened after this book was written, this chapter helps us understand the role of BRI in that event.

In chapter five, she looks at the technology sector. When it comes to technology, the stories that garner the most attention in the West are the censoring of social media posts or the so-called "Great Firewall." Those stories are, in many ways, small potatoes. According to Economy, what China really wants is to "lead the world's technological transformation over the 21st century" (p. 23).

Her focus in chapter six is on China's attempts to influence global governance. These efforts are particularly notable in how China participates in and works its will in international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization. In October, China was able to use its influence in the UN Human Rights Commission to block a resolution calling for an investigation into China's treatment of the Uighurs. In the early days of the pandemic, China was also able to influence the messaging coming from the World Health Organization.

In the final chapter, she offers her thoughts on how the world, particularly the United States, should respond to these strategic ambitions, laying out a few broad conclusions. First of all, the overarching strategic priorities of the Chinese Party-state are sovereignty and stability. This has been evident in China's response to COVID-19.

Second, even as China seeks to export its authoritarian model and limit international criticism of China's policies, these attempts have not been universally accepted. While there are nations (near and far) who do align themselves with China, there has been some resistance. Therefore, we should not assume that China's success in these endeavors will be inevitable.

Finally, the biggest challenge that China poses to the rest of the world comes not from military or economic

might, but from China's attempts to influence norms and institutions of the current world order.

If you are looking for specific references to how the Party-State views religion, you will be disappointed. However, while the book does not address religion directly, it is helpful for those of us interested in religious life in China and in reaching out to Chinese, to have a better understanding of the context within which Christians in China live out and practice their faith.

From a strictly geopolitical standpoint, this book can be sobering. There is much that divides China, and many nations of the world and an increasing number of them see China's rise as a major threat. As Christians, though, despite what is going on between the nations we call home and China, we must not allow those issues and concerns to override our commitment to reach out to Chinese (whether in their country or ours) with Christian love. We must not let political ideas and debates become barriers to the gospel.

Read the book. Then pray. Then love your Chinese friends.

Our thanks to Polity Books for providing a copy of [The World According to China](#) by Elizabeth Economy for this review.

Joann Pittman, BA, MA, is Vice President of Partnership and China Engagement and editor of ZGBriefs. Prior to joining ChinaSource, Joann spent 28 years working in China as an English teacher, language student, program director, and cross-cultural trainer for organizations and businesses engaged in China. She has also taught Chinese at several colleges and universities.

China's Place in the World

[Continued from page 9](#)

8, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/will-chinas-global-security-initiative-catch-on/>.

⁷ Batabayal.

⁸ "China's Global Development Initiative Is Not as Innocent as It Sounds." *The Economist*, June 9, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/06/09/chinas-global-development-initiative-is-not-as-innocent-as-it-sounds>.

⁹ AFM Editorial Office. "China Is Leading in Renewable Energy Investments." *Asia Fund Managers*, September 1, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.asiafundmanagers.com/us/china-is-leading-in-renewable-energy-investments/>.

¹⁰ "National security" appeared 60 percent more often in the 2022 report as compared to 2017. See David Bandurski.

"Buzzword Babble." *China Media Project*, October 21, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/10/21/buzzword-babble/>.

¹¹ Michael Schuman. "How China Wants to Replace the U.S. Order." *The Atlantic*, July 13, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/07/china-xi-jinping-global-security-initiative/670504/>.

¹² Nadège Rolland. "China's Vision for a New World Order." *NBR Special Report #83* (Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, January 2020), 7, 9-10. Accessed September 23, 2022. https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83_chinasvision_jan2020.pdf.

¹³ "1 Key for 1 Lock: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Targeted Propaganda." *Insikt Group*, September 28, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://www.recordedfuture.com/1-key-for-1-lock-chinese-communist-party-strategy-targeted-propaganda>.

¹⁴ James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini. "Inside China's Secret 'Magic Weapon' for Worldwide Influence." *Financial Times*, October 25, 2017. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/fb2b3934-b004-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4>.

¹⁵ Linda Jaivin. "Little Pinks and Their Achy Breaky Hearts." *Inside Story*, December 3, 2021. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://insidestory.org.au/little-pinks-and-their-achy-breaky-hearts/>.

¹⁶ Peter Bryant. "Chinese Missions Along the Belt and Road." *ChinaSource Quarterly*, Summer 2020. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/chinese-missions-along-the-belt-and-road/>.

CHINASOURCE PERSPECTIVE

A Deep Well

By Kerry Schottelkorb



To the outsider so much of what Christians are now facing in China seems ill timed and unbearable. However, I found myself reading the winter issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly* with full-

ness-of-time lenses (See Galatians 4:4–5). Contributors to this issue see Immanuel's presence, guidance, and timing, even when interminable suffering is involved. As Xingwu Lin concludes: "I deeply believe that the more the church is in difficult circumstances, the more it experiences the grace and power of God."

In his lead article, guest editor Peter Bryant orients us to the issue's themes. "The purpose of the current issue is to help readers understand where China is headed so that we can better pray, support, and engage with brothers and sisters in China." Brent Fulton calls on us to intentionally focus on the stories of Chinese Christians both in the mainland and abroad as they bring us an "eternal perspective to the drama playing out on the world scene as China continues moving toward center stage." The closer we look, the more we see the Spirit of Jesus Christ calling and leading his people into fresh redemptive and transformational encounters, in days of favor and tribulation. There is so much here to engage with and prayerfully consider:

- "China's expanding international reach has grown at the same time as an indigenous missions movement. Chinese churches see themselves as playing a key role in the global missions efforts" (Peter Bryant).
- "Some of the...IT technology used for security and surveillance has also allowed the creation of many on-line communities that have helped overcome barriers between individuals and churches" (Peter Bryant).
- "The desire of people in many parts of the world to learn Chinese, and the openness of countries to foreign investment from China, provide potential paths for Chinese Christians serving cross-culturally" (Brent Fulton).
- The church in China is demonstrating that "persecution often brings pressure that can only be resolved as the church faces challenges 'with one heart and one mind.'" (See Acts 4:23-31.) Unity is not an end in itself. "When the church has a clear sense of mission—a clear purpose—it is united" (Luke Wesley).
- In an age when patriotism and nationalism blur the identities of Christians worldwide, God's people in China are hearing the call to "let the kingdom identity of the Triune God be the foremost identity of every child and the people of God" (Xingwu Lin).
- Christians in China are looking at their faith more holistically, seeking out ways of being salt and light in their community, not only through proclamation but through demonstration of the love of God. "Transformed theology certainly helped many Chinese Christians open their minds and realize that serving the community is also a mission to fulfill" (Caleb Ai).
- On the one hand, "for the foreseeable future the expatriate ministry within China will be smaller in numbers and scope." On the other hand, "the immigration process has never been more streamlined for qualified candidates." Ultimately, "the real danger at present is that God's people will decide to give up on China because we think it is too difficult or too unpopular" (Swells in the Middle Kingdom).

This issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* aimed at giving us a better understanding of our Chinese brothers and sisters, and it has succeeded admirably. We frequently affirm the vital importance of hearing and learning from fellow believers in China so that we can grow and serve together. Too often, an understanding of what China's Christians face each day is missing. In this issue, we are offered thoughtful articles that do just that, providing us with rich draughts of wisdom and experience. We will be drawing from this deep well for some time to come.

Rev. Kerry Schottelkorb is the president of ChinaSource.

RESOURCE CORNER

A Reader's Guide to Laws and Regulations of the New Era

During the first decade of the New Era (2012–2022) there have been changes in laws and regulations that have impacted the church and Christians in China. A number of these have been cited in various articles in this issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly*. Here we pull together references for your convenience and further reading.



When reading Chinese regulations about religion, it is important to keep in mind that these apply to all five recognized religions in China (Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Daoism, and Islam). There are often heightened concerns where ethnic affairs overlap religious affairs such as in cases of Tibetan Buddhism and Muslim ethnic groups.

This summary covers just the national level changes in regulations and administrative measures pertaining directly to religion. There are other more specific laws and regulations that also affect Chinese Christians in various areas of their life and ministry. One example would be detailed laws and regulations that affect areas such as media (print, TV, movies, and livestreaming).

[The summary is available as a downloadable PDF on our website.](#) Whenever possible we have included links to both the original Chinese and to an English translation. Links to helpful articles for context and analysis are also included. The items are arranged as follows:

- Religious Regulations Affecting Churches
- Policies Affecting Churches
- Religious Policies and Regulations Affecting Expatriates
- Laws and Regulations Affecting Nonprofits and NGOs

Note: All the URLs provided were active as of November 12, 2022.

ChinaSource Publications

ChinaSource Blog

A platform where China ministry practitioners and experienced China-watchers offer timely analysis and insight on current issues relating to the church in China. Posts feature voices from those inside and outside China.

ZGBriefs

For those who want and need to keep up on what is happening in China, we monitor more than 50 different news sources and curate the most relevant and interesting stories out of China each week.

ChinaSource Quarterly

Providing strategic analysis of the issues affecting the church and Christian ministry in China, the Quarterly encourages proactive thinking and the development of effective approaches to Christian service.

Newsletter: The Lantern

Our monthly newsletter keeps you abreast of how ChinaSource is responding to opportunities to serve with the church in China and of related items for prayer. To subscribe to any or all of our publications, visit www.chinasource.org.

ChinaSource Online Courses

Under the ChinaSource Institute, we offer online modules and on-site training on a wide variety of cross-cultural and orientation topics. Content is focused on the China context and geared to those involved in Christian ministry.

- ***Serving Well in China*** - Are you preparing to serve in China, or maybe you're already there? Are you working with Chinese students in your home country? This course will help you serve well where you are.
- ***The Church in China Today*** - The religious climate in China, especially for Christians, may be messy but it's not beyond understanding. This course offers a comprehensive overview, ranging from a historical understanding, to the struggles it endures in present day, to common misconceptions about the state of the church.

For more information, visit www.chinasource.org/institute/training-courses

ZGBriefs

Relevant news on China and
the issues that impact its church



[www.chinasource.org/
resource-library/zgbriefs](http://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/zgbriefs)

Subscribe Now

華源協作
CHINASOURCE



info@chinasource.org



www.chinasource.org



[chinasource.org](https://www.facebook.com/chinasource.org)



[@ChinaSourceOrg](https://twitter.com/ChinaSourceOrg) [@ZG_Briefs](https://twitter.com/ZG_Briefs)