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Analysis of Current Trends in China



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The Body of Christ in China Redefined

Most Westerners want to define the Church in China in black and white terms, that Chinese Christians participate in either the registered church or the unregistered (house) church. In reality, there are 4 different church groups that operate in China, and understanding these groups is an important step in understanding the Church in China, and how we as Westerners can be most strategically involved. In this article, we'd like to try to help you understand the 4 different church groups in China and how they make up the larger Body of Christ in China.

1. Registered Churches

These churches are registered with their local China Christian Council (CCC). The CCC is overseen by the State

Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) bureau, which has both a national and local scope. The CCC has the role of assisting the local churches in its day to day operations. In addition to Sunday morning worship services and Sunday School, the CCC also oversees the 18 seminaries in China and conducts a certain amount of public relations with overseas Chinese and foreign Christian visitors. Within this framework, SARA administers the Protestant Church in China and these churches have been through a tremendous amount of change in the last 10 years.

Often misrepresented and mischaracterized in the West, these churches are largely urban with trained professional clergy and church buildings and are the backbone of the nationwide movement since 1979 to recover old church buildings, open seminaries and Bible schools, publish Bibles and literature, sponsor public works of compassion. Largely Evangelistic and broadly Orthodox at the local level, these churches are the 'public face' of Christianity in China and offer Chinese the opportunity to go to a church building on Sunday mornings and allow their children to receive teaching at the children's Sunday School classes, which are also very common. The 55,000 registered churches in China are also the main place where a Bible can be purchased for those who want them.



This church in rural Hebei province was built in 1918 by American Missionaries, and is still meeting the needs of local Christians.

2. Meeting Point Churches

These churches often meet in homes or other non-church structures and are legally registered with the government but are led by lay elders rather than professionally trained clergy. Many times those who participate in meeting point churches have no registered church building in their area, but have no issues with the registration process. Amongst those who we've talked to who participate in this type of church, they report that there is no problems in government officials trying to control their activities, and they see registration as a positive. They also have access to all CCC Publishing material, but also have contacts with unregistered Church.

3. Unregistered House Church

These church groups mostly meet in apartments, and tend to be urban, led by long-time Christians who have a legacy of grievances with the government or the Three Self Patriotic Movement dating back to the 1950s. These church groups are often a part of a 'network' of other unregistered churches, and these networks often share training resources. Many urban participants also attend registered church activities, and often use the registered church Bibles as their source for good Bibles. For the persecution that does happen as a result of the lack of 'rule of law' in China, most of it happens to those who are leaders in the unregistered churches. Mostly, though, the local governments tolerate these groups. Their meetings are half-kept secrets.

4. Rural Christian Groups

This church group, although the largest in numbers is also the hardest to characterize. Located in villages and in the countryside, they are far away from organized churches in cities or towns. Although largely not registered as the meeting point churches are, their meetings are publicly known. Registration of churches is a "city" concept, and it has little meaning for the rural groups. It is the fastest growing segment of the church in China, and it presents the most concern because of its lack of resources and training often in remote areas of China. Because of the remote locations of these Chinese Christians, it is also the church group in China that is most vulnerable to false teaching and heresy. Church and seminary leaders in the cities have told us repeatedly of the needs in the rural areas for lay and pastoral training, theological education, and Bibles. With our Bible Distribution events and theological training teams, it is these rural Christians that we desire to serve as they grow and develop.

Persecution Stories in China: A Primer

In our next edition, we plan on having a whole edition devoted to the use of persecution stories to report on Christianity in China. One of the issues that lies at the heart of our ministry is to bring a fresh perspective to the way that Westerners see China because the Church in the West is not 'seeing' China correctly. And in the United States, there are high profile non-profit organizations who are playing off of our 'car-crash' culture, and are intentionally dramatizing stories of persecution in China to feed off of our insatiable hunger for persecution stories, and our negative perceptions of Communism. And while missions leaders have told us that people don't get excited about China without those stories, our question is: What if the stories are not true, or are missing key parts of information that add so much depth to our understanding? Shouldn't we as Christians value truth over everything else? We have had too many experiences in reading a story here in the U.S., only to find out through research that there was so much more information that added understanding to the story to believe that this misinforming is accidental. We have to assume that when it happens over and over again that the reporting agencies like using these stories because they have more sizzle than stories about the peaceful growth of God's people in China. We'll give some key examples in the next edition, but there are three key issues that we can bring up here to get you thinking in preparation for our March/April 2006 edition.

1. The key-word to always use: Communism

Most stories about Christianity in China always bring up the fact that the Chinese government is Communist. Because Communism has such a negative social stigma in the West, it is sure to play on the heartstrings of Westerners. But as you look at the rapid changes that have happened in China, it's hard to call China a Communist State. According to [Wikipedia](#), Communism refers to a 'theoretical system of social organization and a political movement based on common ownership of the means of production. As a political movement, communism seeks to establish a classless society.' With state-run industries being shut down daily in China, and with the private ownership of land, business, and cars becoming commonplace, China is quickly distancing itself from its Communist past. Far from a perfect situation, the Chinese government is making rapid changes in many areas of governance within the framework of the Chinese cultural background. (For more information on these changes, see CRJ Nov/Dec 2005)

2. How much persecution in China?

If you strictly relied on sources of information like Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), you'd think that the Chinese

government was looking to stamp out Christians in China all together. But a quick search of the VOM website indicates otherwise. In doing a search of the stories they had about persecution of Christians in China in 2005, they had 8 stories of persecution of Christians in China. We assume that if there were more stories, they would be sure to report on them. If you were to add up the number of daily Christian worship and fellowship activities that the 60 million Chinese Christians are participating in over the course of a year, having just 8 stories is not an epidemic of persecution. In addition to this, we've been able to find out 'the rest of the story' on at least 2 of the 8 stories (tune in to the March/April edition for more) and this additional information adds so much to our understanding of these stories. In both cases, the stories that VOM reported as persecution from high levels of the government are in fact either border control or modernization of cities issues more than they are stories of persecution of Christians. (Note: We are currently trying to contact VOM staff for their side of the story as well.)

3. What standards are we using when we report about China?

The China Resource Center is leading the way on an initiative called the Council for the Enhancement of the China Ministry Culture (CECMC). In June 2006, the CECMC will have its first meeting of China Ministry leaders to talk about a standard to be used when reporting on Christianity in China. Some of the standards that have already been discussed are:

- We commit to only talk or write authoritatively about any aspect of Christianity in China unless we have 1st hand knowledge or information. (I Peter 2:1)
- We are committed to seeking out the truth about Christianity in China, and will only communicate what is accurate and true. Therefore, narrative about events must be current, complete and accurate. References to past activities or events must be appropriately dated. There must be no material omissions or exaggerations of fact or use of misleading photographs or any other communication which would tend to create a false impression or misunderstanding."
- We commit to these additional communication standards:
 - If a story we communicate happened in the past, we will make note of it.
 - If we find out that we communicated or printed a story that was not factually correct, we will retract the story and make the correct changes.
 - If we paid money to get a story, we will make note that the story was paid for.

For those who are interested in attending the CECMC meetings in June, please contact our office.

In The Next Issue: Analysis of recent persecution stories in China continued

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1. We exist to serve the growth and development of the Church in China through theological training, Bible distribution, Church building and other partnership opportunities.
2. We exist to enhance the China ministry culture and clarify Western perceptions of Christianity in China through extensive research and education, thereby equipping China ministry leaders, workers and the Church in the West to more effectively advance the kingdom of God in China.

For more information about CRC, ways you can partner with us, or to inquire about our speaking schedule, please contact us at 303-332-8884 or Mike@ChinaResourceCenter.org

