



CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES CHINA PRAYER LETTER



JUNE 2018

Dali and The Bai People

For centuries the Bai people have resided in and around the picturesque city of Dali in Yunnan Province. The city's ornate and skilfully crafted buildings and temples are backdropped by forested hills and snow-capped mountains. Dali is famed for its towering ivory coloured pagodas and the beautiful Lake Erhai.

The Bai are many concentrated in the fertile plains that surround Dali city with the rest spread throughout the Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan and Hubei provinces. They are skilled as cormorant fishermen and tea, tobacco and rice farmers and are gifted with artistic talent, notably in batik work. Bai were the creators of the spectacular 'Lion Dance'. Dali has always been famous for its prolific supply of marble, which some say, gave the people their name (Bai means "white" in Chinese). Some of the marble used in the great Taj Mahal of India was obtained



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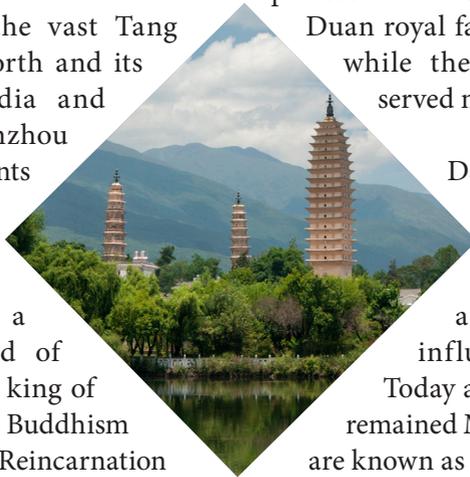
from Dali and transported over the Himalayas.



Tourists

flock to Dali to see what was once the capital of the powerful Nanzhou Kingdom. Melded in 737 AD from 6 smaller tribal kingdoms, the Nanzhou Kingdom punched above its weight, clashing with the Tang dynasty and even remaining undefeated after a battle against a force of 70,000 Tang soldiers. Counter offensives were also launched, reaching as far as Chengdu. Stretching southward, the kingdom's armies attacked and conquered territories in what is now Myanmar.

Situated between the vast Tang territories to the north and its trade partners India and southern Asia, Nanzhou prospered as merchants and traders passed through. But in addition to trade, Nanzhou became a hub for the spread of Buddhism. The 11th king of Nanzhou established Buddhism as the state religion. Reincarnation is a core belief.



In

the 10th century the Nanzhou kingdom declined and ended with the assassination of the entire royal family. Not long after, a new dynasty was established and Nanzhou was replaced by the Kingdom of Dali. For three centuries the Duan royal family ruled over 37 tribes and, in contrast to the Nanzhou Kingdom, maintained good relations with their Northern Han neighbours. Mahayana Buddhism remained as the dominant religion and ten of the 22 Dali kings gave up their throne to become monks.

Then, in 1253, the sweeping Mongol conquest reached the Dali Kingdom. The Dali king surrendered and was rewarded with the title of Maharaja of Yunnan, ruling as vassals to the Mongols under the supervision of Mongolian imperial princes and Muslim governors. Dali's Duan royal family reigned in Dali while the Mongol governors served nearby in Kunming.

Dali was an important military outpost for the Mongolians and they introduced a significant Muslim influence into Yunnan. Today a few Bai villages have remained Muslim and the people are known as 'Hui'. Marco Polo was said to have visited Kunming and wrote: "In it are found merchants and artisans, with a mixed population, consisting of idolaters, Nestorian Christians and Saracens or Mohametans..."



In the 14th century Ming armies drove out the Mongols and since then Han Chinese have migrated into the Dali area and intermarried with the Bai. Today many Bai speak Chinese and they are one of the most heavily sinicized of China's 56 official minorities. The Bai have their own language which is nowadays written with Chinese characters.

Although Buddhism is still the predominant religion, the Bai like to “cover their bases” when it comes to spiritual assistance and many villages will include Buddhist, Tao and Confucian temples or shrines as well as practicing their own unique Benzhu religion. Benzhuism is polytheistic and incorporates aspects of animism. In fact, Bai worship pretty much anything, including natural objects, such as stones and trees; ancient deities, such as the God of the Mountain and the God of the Sun; historical heroes from various ethnic groups; legendary characters from folklore; and kings, princes, generals or ministers of the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms. However, all of

these ‘deities’ act as subsidiaries to what they call ‘ngel zex’, or ‘benzhu’ in Chinese, which translates as the ‘local lord’. Each village has its own special benzhu, usually a character connected historically to their location, who is a mediator between them and the gods.

Estimates put the number of Bai Christians at around 50,000 amongst a population of 1.93 million Bai. Most of these Bai believers live in rural areas in the mountains and in Fugong County to the west.

Bai believers have seen their communities suffer the social impacts of urbanisation with broken families and divorce. They have worked together with radio gospel ministries to produce and deliver programs that speak biblical truth and guidance for marriages and families. Most Bai, however, have yet to receive witness of the gospel. The words of John Kuhn 70 years ago remain true today, “No wide-spread work of evangelization will ever be done among them until the message is taken to them in the Minchia [Bai] tongue.”

Sinicizing Chinese Christianity

In 2016 Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics became cemented into the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Constitution. Since then Chinese policy makers have been hastening to include this concept of ‘Chinese Characteristics’ otherwise known as ‘Sinicization’ into their strategic planning.

Subsequently, The Outline for the Five-Year Plan for Promoting the Sinicization of Chinese Christianity was churned out in March this year by the two Protestant government-sanctioned national committees: the China Christian Council (CCC) and The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). On reading this Planning Outline it

becomes apparent that ‘Sinicization’ of Chinese Christianity has much more to do with promoting the communist socialist government and its core values and less to do with developing a church with traditional Chinese characteristics.

The Planning Outline declares that “To drive forwards the process on the Sinicization of Christianity, the following principals must be observed: Embrace and support the leadership of the CCP. Be guided by the core values of socialism and endorse the system, ways, theories and culture of our country’s development. Based on Biblical teachings, stick to the fundamental beliefs and core teachings. Insist on independence, autonomy and self-administration of the

International Short-Term Teams

- 
- *Mercy
 - *Medical
 - *Intercession
 - *Trekking
 - *English Cultural Exchange

June 2018:	Medical Team
July 2018:	Mercy Team & Summer Camps
August 2018:	Medical Team
September 2018:	Trekking & Intercession Teams
October 2018:	Cycle Team & Mercy Team
December 2018:	Cultural Exchange Team

church and persist with the direction of ecumenism.”

It goes on to state the intention of training and developing preachers, church personnel and volunteers to endorse the core values of socialism to their flocks. The church can expect to see much more state influence in seminaries and theological schools, on-the-job training and in state directed publications, even materials for daily prayers.

Perhaps the most concerning item in the planning document is the intent to reinterpret the Bible and write annotations for it. This follows on from the removal of all Bibles from China’s online shopping sites earlier this year. Currently the Amity Press is the only government sanctioned Bible printer in China and their Bibles may only be distributed through government authorised churches and seminaries. This raises the question of which editions of the Bible will be made available to the next generation.

Another item mentioned in the plan was the objective of engaging in public charity and working hard to serve the community. The plan aims to promote the registration of Christian social service organizations, train professionals and improve the standard of operational management and professional skills. Time will reveal if registration and training become a hurdle or a help to the church as it seeks to reach out to the community.



Also expressed was the aim of stimulating Chinese artworks such as calligraphy, seal carving and paper cutting as manifestations of Christian faith. The aim is to “promote the churches’ worship rituals, sacred music and hymns, pastoral clothing, church buildings etc. To integrate them with Chinese elements including spiritual qualities of the Chinese nation reflecting Chinese characteristics.”

Bringing the Church, in particular the underground church, under the heel of the CCP is no doubt on the government’s mind as the rapid growth of believers is said to now have surpassed the number of communist party members. But China’s Church has already been through the fire and we can expect them to continue to pray for their government despite the trials ahead. The real challenge for China’s church in the future will be how to safeguard the vital truth that we are “justified by faith in Christ alone” in the face of the CCP’s brand of Christianity where good works and good character make you a good Christian.

Free Bible Online



In January 2017 the Chinese Communist Party of China made a web-based Bible obtainable free online at the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) website <http://bible.ccctspm.org>. The handy website offers the reader the ability to compare bible passages and versions side by side and to search by keyword or by scripture verse. In addition the website has an audio Bible function and verse of the day.

The two Chinese Versions available are The Revised Chinese Union Version (RCUV) and the Chinese Union Version with New Punctuation (CUVNP). Both are available in three languages; traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese and English. A further free download of a Chinese English Bible is available in .rar format from www.ccctspm.org/bibleload.

The Online Bible was made available on the TSPM website prior to the removal of all Bibles from online stores which took place on the 30th March this year.

At the same time CCSM sources told us that online searches for Bible apps, such as WeDevote, Olive Tree and YouVersion, were still showing but were displaying a message to

the effect that they were not currently available.

It appears that these Bible apps were quickly restored for China's online viewers to download and are currently accessible. However there are concerns among Chinese Christians that these could be shut down in the future.

Despite the access to the God's Word online, there is a portion of Chinese society that would be reluctant to visit the TSPM's Online Bible website or download the currently remaining available Bible apps. This sector is the composed of Chinese Communist Party Members, and prospective members, who are required by law to be atheist. Being found to have a faith, or show an interest will, under the current regime, get them smartly ejected from the Party.

The CCP is the largest political party in the world and growing. It has over 94 million party members as of 2017. CCP membership gives them a distinct advantage when applying for jobs with the government or state-owned-enterprises.



PRAYER POINTERS

Dali And The Bai People

Pray that the Bai believers will find new and creative ways to reach out to their Buddhist, Muslim and Benzhu neighbours with the truth of the One True God.

Pray that God will pour out his Holy Spirit to empower them with boldness as they share the gospel and that he will provide signs and wonders to confirm their testimony of Christ.

Pray that the Bai will be set free from generations of false religion.

Thank God for those that work in radio and other ministries reaching out to the Bai. Ask God that He will continue to bless and protect these ministries.

Sinicizing Chinese Christianity

Pray that the Sinicization of the TSPM Church will not succeed in introducing a false “justification by works” doctrine.

Pray that God will help believers to find safe places to fellowship outside the TSPM should they decide not to be part of it.

Pray that any false interpretation of the Bible will come to nothing. The curse in Revelation 22:18 is for those who add or remove from God’s Word and also those that knowingly teach from false scriptures. Pray for the leaders, pastors and teachers of the TSPM.

Free Bible Online

Praise God that people in China still have access to an online Bible and Bible Apps.

Pray that these will remain available in the future.

Pray for those Communist Party members that come to faith and have to make hard decisions that affect not only them but their families and future as well.

Cut out this note and slip it into your Bible to help you remember the June prayer topics for China

PRAYER POINTERS

Going the Distance

Praise God that we can disciple new believers across oceans and borders.

Thank God for the friendships and connections formed during a short term team visit.

Pray that God will help team members to be in tune with the Holy Spirit when they decide who to speak with and what to say.

Pray for the organisers of the short term teams as they plan future team itineraries. Ask God to open doors and lead them to locations where they will be effective.

Preparing for Persecution

Thank God He is with the Chinese believers and is close to them through their times of trouble.

Pray that God will use this persecution to bless and refine his Church, pruning them only so they will be ready to bear more fruit.

Pray for those that are suffering for their faith. Ask God to strengthen them and their families and provide for them. Pray for those that face fines, penalties, loss of jobs, detainment and even prison for their belief.

Pray for those that persecute them.

FieldPartner

YOUR GUIDE TO CROSSING CULTURES

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Chinese Church Support Ministries

Seeking to serve, strengthen
and support the church and
the people of China

A dilemma arises for those that come to faith after joining the Party. If they regularly visit an online Bible or download a Bible app they risk being tracked and reported back to the Party. Those CCP members that become Christians may opt to leave the Party. But others choose to remain, keeping their beliefs secret. If found out, in the past they may have been passed over for promotions but in the current environment they will lose their job and their pension.

A little about the two Chinese Versions (CUVNP and RCUV) available on the CCC's TSPM website:

Both versions available on the TSPM website are based on the original CUV, which was translated by a panel whose members were from many different Protestant denominations. They used the English Revised Version as a basis and

original manuscripts for crosschecking.

Work began on the RCUV in the early 1980s with about 30 Bible scholars. Their goal was to update the language of the CUV while keeping as much of the original translation as intact as possible, ultimately resulting in an update of 15% of the New Testament and 20% of the Old Testament. The revision to the New Testament was completed in 2006 and to the entire Bible in 2010. This version was consecrated on 27 September 2010 at St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong

In 1988, the United Bible Societies published CUVNP after the revision of the diction, punctuation and paragraphs from CUV because the punctuation and the layout of the text of CUV were too old-fashioned, different from the current Chinese grammar.

Going the Distance

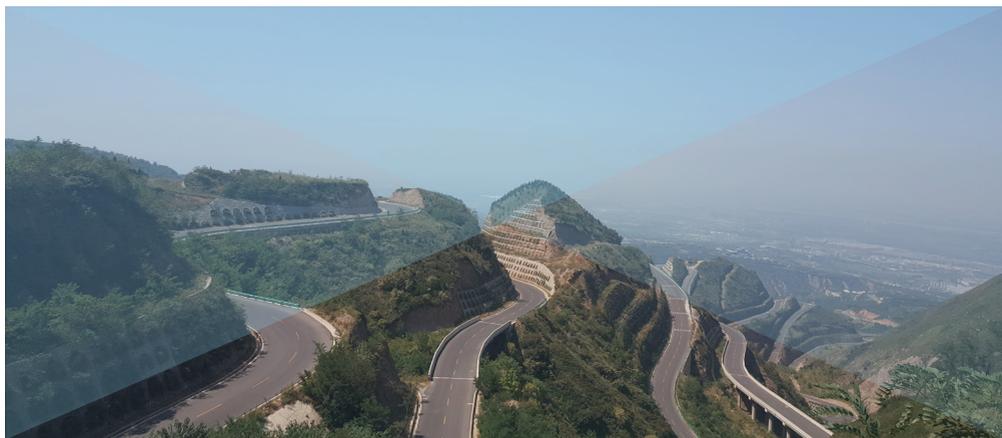
“What is the point of a short-term team? Aren't they just hit and run? Is it really effective?” These questions are often followed up with the proclamation, “Short term teams are just a glorified holiday.”

Over the years CCSM has taken many teams into China and during these trips friendships have made between foreigners and Chinese nationals. Though the initial meeting might have been brief, a connection has been formed. Through the power of the pen, or more accurately...

the tap of keys, these friendships have continued and grown despite the distance between homelands.

The social media platform WeChat is the favourite medium used for communication. New acquaintances soon become friends and gradually open their hearts and their lives and trust is earned. Chinese friends gain the confidence to ask questions about why their foreign friends have faith in Christ.

One correspondent had this to say:



“I had the privilege to go on my third trip with CCSM, spending around two weeks each time on the ground. Many think this is way too short to build lasting relationships. To the contrary, thanks to apps like WeChat, I was able to stay in contact with a select handful of students, continuing to have input into their lives from thousands of miles away.

This extended to doing Bible study every day and feeding the hunger for the Truth with one of them. After that student became a Christian, she revealed to me, that when she met the CCSM team, she promised her friend: “I will not become Christian, I just want to know more about the Bible”. God however had different plans, as she later made a commitment while another team was in her town the following year!”

But be warned! Short term teams are not for the faint hearted. Often itineraries are packed to the brim and travel over long distances can be required. As one doctor said after participating in a three week medical team, “I went on

a short term team in my holiday and after I got home I needed a holiday!”

When a Chinese correspondent chooses to make a decision as a believer, this is just the beginning. They may not have Christian friends or family to help them. A correspondent said, “We are very eager to connect them with local church communities, but also provide tools, so they can study the Bible for themselves. We are committed to provide ongoing discipleship, well past our time on the ground.”

Some Christian organisations offer Bible study courses and these can be a great tool. Precept Ministries International is one such well respected organisation that offers group studies and Bible induction programmes.

One thing we hear from our CCSM team members is that God is at work in China. So as a member said, “Don’t witness and walk away. We hold the door open so they can see Jesus.”

Preparing for Persecution



A new era has arrived for the Church in China. What are Chinese Churches doing to prepare and respond to the changing environment?

Although illegal under Chinese Law, unregistered churches have been largely ignored by law enforcement in China over the last decade. Pockets of repression have occurred but in many areas the underground churches were able to operate quite openly as Family churches.

But now this has changed and in the last two years we have seen a dramatic rise in restrictions and persecution. Media and watch-groups have been reporting the developments as the situation continues to tighten:

Family churches shut down. Crosses on buildings pulled down. A 50,000 member megachurch demolished. Massive fines for unregistered meetings, even in small groups. Facial recognition surveillance cameras routinely installed in churches ready to identify CCP members or under-aged church attendees. In home surveillance using smart TV's and phones. Social Media surveillance. Internet censorship. Bibles removed from online stores. Church raids, police harassment, detainments and arrests. Property confiscations. Social rating systems with the power to inflict broad reaching penalties. Isolation from brothers and sisters overseas, no travel

offshore for Christian training without permission. Etc. Etc.

The list is extensive and it appears that this season could continue for some time to come. Because of China's extensive power and influence in global trade, it is not likely to be challenged.

To weather the storm in this new setting China's church is already taking measures to allow it to endure and grow:

- Family churches have been divided into smaller cell groups to meet without drawing the attention of neighbours or authorities. Forward thinking family churches have already appointed, equipped and trained small group leaders. Groups are reduced to 3-4 members. Even some official churches have reported pastors being fined for gatherings of over 20 people.
- Meetings are held on days other than Sunday so as to be less obviously Christian.
- Members vary their meeting locations.
- Removing Sim cards from phones and switching off internet connections to avoid GPS locations being transmitted when meeting together.
- Accessing Christian resources

from MicroSD card versions of Bibles, teaching videos, commentaries, podcasts etc. Using apps that do not require an internet signal and do not save or send usage data. In addition they can be copied and shared discretely.

- Preparing churches to be ready if a member is detained or arrested or action is taken against the church. Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu posted an article, “When the Police come knocking (House Church Edition)”. It gives in depth guidance on Christian conduct and legal advice for these situations and is well worth a read.
- Embracing the positive advantages provided by the favourable climate for creating and operating NGO’s.

will find a way to download, distribute or sell Christian material. As the saying goes, “If the door is half open, two hundred Chinese will run through!” Censorship-defeating tools are obtainable to the more technically inclined and are constantly being developed.

But the strongest tool lies in the hands of the Christians in China and their Christian brothers and sisters abroad. It is to return to the place of prayer. God has promised to give his people the capacity to continue despite the discouragement. The Lord is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him. Nahum 1:7 (NLT)

Just this year CCSM information sources are telling us there are around 150 million Christian believers in China. This is encouraging news as these numbers are higher than previous estimates. In difficult times those with a real heart for Christ and the Great Commission grow stronger and the others will drop away. This is not the first time China’s believers have been sifted and pruned, only to see a stronger and larger church emerge.

If there is even the slightest loophole or crack in the Great Firewall guarding China’s internet, then the enterprising Chinese



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