



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES CHINA PRAYER LETTER



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## Youth Under Pressure

“Renounce your faith or you will not get qualified from this university”. A well-known state university in northern China has recently told its students they must deny their faith or face consequences that will affect their entire future.

Young Christians in China are now being put under tremendous pressure to choose between their God and their careers. The students have been told that any interest in Christian activity will be detrimental to their advancement.

Christian students have spoken to CCSM stating that they were asked to complete a questionnaire which included queries about their religion. Fearing that there could be repercussions for responding truthfully about their faith these students felt obliged to lie about their belief or leave the questions blank. Answering honestly could lead to further investigation of students and their families and bring



In  
this  
issue

Youth Under  
Pressure

Child-Friendly Festivals

Theology in the TSPM

The Martyrs' Legacy

Wumeng

Choosing to Stay

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trouble.

Among the northern university's Christian students, only one has courageously stood his ground and refused to deny his faith. At the time of this report no consequences have been applied by the university.

Similar reports were published by the Bitter Winter Magazine on the 13 January 2019. According to their information, a university in the city of Qingdao issued an online Religious Awareness Questionnaire for University Students in November 2018.

One student recounted five of the questions:

1. Do you acknowledge the existence of God?
2. Have you been to any religious venues? Why would you go to a religious venue?
3. If there are religious students around you, do you think that their speech and

behavior affect your normal study life?

4. Do you have religious beliefs? The options include: "Not currently, but perhaps I will in the future." "I will not have religious beliefs even in the future." "Yes, my faith is Buddhism / Islam / Christianity / etc."
5. Do you think that there is a conflict between religious beliefs and communist beliefs? The options include: "There is a conflict in some respects." "There is no conflict at all." "They are fundamentally contradictory." "I'm not sure."

Two separate sources have told CCSM that their universities are encouraging students to report on fellow students who adhere to a religion. In efforts to stamp out religion on campuses career incentives have been offered enticing students to inform on other students. In China's highly competitive education system it is likely that students will seize all opportunities to secure their future and so faith conversations overheard on campus could cost students dearly.



# Child-Friendly Festivals

Growing up in the West, Christmas was the paramount festival. On Christmas Eve young children lie in bed so excited they cannot sleep. Try as they might to squeeze their eyes closed the expectation of a chubby white-bearded man climbing down my chimney with a whole sack of toys is just too much. They had been wondering all the month prior what treasures he would bring. With every television advert leading up to Christmas they were fuelled with fresh hope for a new doll or the latest toy.

Later they would question how Santa could actually fit down the chimney. Rumours leak that it was parents, and not Santa, who placed the presents under the tree on Christmas eve.

I recall a neighbourhood Christmas party. Santa's famous booming laugh rang out from the roof of the house. Everyone ran outside and there he was climbing down a ladder with his bulging sack. As Jingle Bells rang out, Santa mounted his reindeer (a horse dressed in a white-trimmed costume complete with antlers and a shiny red nose!). A mass of frenzied bodies dived on the ground as he began

tossing out lollies for all the children.

Christmas time is so much fun for children. The traditions are many; dressing the Christmas tree and placing the star on top, decorating the house, putting out the Christmas stockings, wrapping the presents and writing cards. Towns and cities glitter with flashing lights and tinsel. Beautiful and catchy carols are sung, and the nativity characters carefully arranged, reminding the children what the excitement is all about.

And then there is the food! Chocolates, candy canes, Christmas pudding, truffles and untold other delights. Secret family recipes are passed down to the next generation. It was the only time in the year you were allowed to eat and eat and eat.

Chinese children are also enthralled with the Christmas season. In fact, it seems that Western festivals such as Halloween, Easter and Valentine's Day are superseding their interest in traditional Chinese festivals.

Just prior to last Christmas Li Aixin wrote in the opinion section of the Global Times despairing that “fewer and fewer traditional elements can be found in Chinese festivals. Offering sacrifices to the moon in the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, participating in dragon boat races in the Dragon Boat Festival, solving riddles attached to lanterns during the Lantern Festival... these activities have changed to merely eating dumplings, moon cakes and yuanxiao, glutinous rice flour dumplings with sweet stuffing.”

Yet he questions, “Do we really need to boycott Western festivals?” He answered his question with the remark that these Western festivals are no more than shopping festivals and a time for the Chinese people to have some fun.

He rather suggested that to ensure the



continuance of Chinese festivals into the future they must be made more attractive to Chinese children.

If Li Aixin’s suggestion is taken up, could it be possible we will see some new child-friendly traditions emerge?



# Theology in the TSPM

*Part 5 of an article by Robert Menzies, “The Future of the Church in China: Why China’s House Churches will Prevail”. This article was written in 2017, just prior to the persecution of the house churches beginning in 2018. Robert asks the question, “What would happen if the TSPM and the house churches were actually allowed to exist on equal footing?”*

*In his essay he compares the TSPM churches and the house churches in three key areas: church structure, theology, and worship patterns. In this excerpt he looks at the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Theology:*

The theology of the TSPM churches, tends to be conservative and Evangelical.

Many might find this hard to believe, but it is nevertheless true. This being the case, it would appear that here we might find significant similarities between the TSPM and the house churches. While this is often the case, there are still important differences.

Perhaps the most significant difference is the fact that the TSPM leadership and the leading TSPM seminary in Nanjing, in striking contrast to the majority of believers who sit in the pews, have been strongly influenced by liberal Protestant thought in the West.

The best example of this is Bishop Ding Guangxun, who for decades sought to impose the liberal perspectives he gleaned from his student days at Union Theological Seminary (New York) upon the Chinese believers under his supervision.

Bishop Ding is perhaps best known and criticized for advocating “justification by love” rather than “justification by



faith.” Ding clearly sought to downplay the distinction between Christians and non-Christians as well as the need for evangelism.

Some years ago a good friend of mine who happens to be a TSPM minister and leader described how he and other local TSPM leaders were supposed to promote “Bishop Ding Thought.” Thus, a local gathering of TSPM ministers in the province had been arranged. With a wink, however, he told me that they would not be featuring Bishop Ding’s theological agenda; rather, they would highlight other more edifying themes.

Here we see the nature of the

challenge that many TSPM pastors face. They often have to serve under leaders and instructions that are rooted in a non-Christian, Marxist view of the world. These challenges did not end with Bishop Ding's death. They are an ongoing part of life within the TSPM.

I spoke with a leader in one of the larger TSPM seminaries in China who talked of a contemporary movement within the TSPM that calls for the transformation of Christian theology so that it is more compatible with the prevailing ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. This

movement was also encouraged more recently by Wang Zuoan, a senior official for religious affairs. In 2014 Wang declared that "the construction of Christian theology should adapt to China's national condition."

This is an attempt to steer Chinese believers away from their own conservative, Evangelical roots and towards Western liberal thought. In other words, the liberal theology espoused by TSPM leaders like Bishop Ding is far from indigenous.

## The Martyrs' Legacy



The 10th division of the red army poured into an isolated city in Anhui Province. It was December 1934 and they were in a strategic retreat from the nationalist armies in what was to be known as the infamous "Long March."

John and Betty Stam had only recently been placed in Tsingteh as missionaries with the China Inland Mission and

had a 3 month old daughter named Helen. Betty had been born in the United States but was reared in China as the daughter of missionaries.

Tsingteh's magistrate warned the Stams about the approaching communists but when they decided to leave it was too late.

Entering the mission station the communist soldiers robbed the Stams and then took them to a local jail. The frightened baby began to cry and a soldier suggested the baby should be killed. When another prisoner spoke out in protest the soldiers turned on him and asked if he would be willing to die for the foreign baby. They killed him but little Helen's life was spared.

The next morning the Stams were forced

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Youth Under Pressure

Pray for the young Chinese believers who are being asked to stand up for their beliefs.

Pray for those that have denied their God to protect their career. Pray that God will continue to strengthen their faith.

Ask God to protect those who have stood up for Him. Pray that any threats to their future careers will come to nothing.

## Child-Friendly Festivals

Praise God that 2000 years after Jesus birth Christmas is still celebrated in China and around the world.

Pray that Christians in China will be allowed to continue celebrating this festival.

Pray that Christmas and Easter celebrations will remain as an important tool for sharing the message of the season.

## Theology in the TSPM

Pray that the believers in the TSPM will not be led astray by the liberal theology that advocates “justification by love” rather than “justification by faith.”

Thank God that many in the TSPM state churches hold fast to their biblical, conservative, evangelical roots and do not espouse false teachings.

Pray that the false gospel of “salvation through good works” will not get a foothold in the Chinese Church.

# PRAYER POINTERS

## **The Martyrs' Legacy**

Thank God for the vibrant and active church that has grown up in Wuhu and Anhui in the time since John and Betty Stam lost their lives.

Pray that the local church will continue to be as bold as this couple in sharing their faith despite the new wave of persecution.

Thank God for the generosity of the Wuhu Church in helping fellow believers.

## **Wumeng**

Praise God that he has made a way for His message to reach the people of the Wumeng mountains.

Pray that the fire of the gospel will continue to spread among the Wumeng people, changing hearts and bringing His peace and freedom.

Pray that more resources will become available in the Wumeng language.

Pray that the Wumeng leaders will receive adequate teaching.

## **Choosing to Stay**

Pray for those expats who remain as workers in sensitive areas within China. Ask God to keep them safe and encourage them.

Pray that they will continue to be effective in their role and that their lights will continue to shine despite the restricted environment.

Pray for those new believers in minority groups and sensitive areas whose teachers and mentors and been expelled.



**Chinese Church Support Ministries**

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to travel 12 miles to Miaosheo. The soldiers stopped overnight at a house and John was tied to a pole. Betty however managed to pin some money to her baby daughter's nappy and hid her in a sleeping bag. She left her behind in a room.

Miraculously the infant did not cry and arouse attention for 27 hours until the soldiers had left the area. Two days later the local believers found her. After a long and perilous journey, they managed to get her safely to Betty's parents.

As Betty and John were marched on a shopkeeper who knew them bravely pleaded for their lives. The soldiers searched his house and discovered a bible and a hymnal. He and the Stams were taken to a mountain called Eagle's Point. John and Betty were beheaded along with the Chinese believer.

Over 80 years later, a young woman named Dory, John and Betty's great great niece, is on the staff of Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). In 2016 she travelled to China to meet with persecuted believers and to share their stories. She had the opportunity to visit Wuhu City in Anhui Province where her martyred relatives were buried. Dory was warmly welcomed by the local believers.

They told her that despite being one of the poorest provinces in China, it is the province with the highest percentage of



Christians. It is a place where many Chinese believers have suffered for their faith.

The young couple's story has since inspired generations of both Chinese believers in the area and foreign workers who followed.

Dory found the local church was alive, active in their faith and vibrant. She was taken to a local church and shown bags of aid in the process of being packed for another church that needed it.

She noted that, "These guys mean it when they say they want to follow Jesus."

*When we consecrate ourselves to God, we think we are making a great sacrifice, and doing lots for Him, when really, we are only letting go some little, bitsie trinkets we have been grabbing, and when our hands are empty, He fills them full of His treasures. --Betty Stam*

# Wumeng



The southwestern province of Yunnan is home to hundreds of tribes and minority people groups with distinct dialects, languages and cultures. Paul Hattaway's book, *Operation China*, describes 234 of China's 490 ethnic groups living in Yunnan. The Church has yet to reach the vast majority of these groups. Very few are aware of the need for salvation or have been told of the Creator God.

However, a few of Yunnan's diverse people groups have heard and accepted the message and are no longer labelled as "unreached". One of these is the Wumeng people.

Around 54 000 Wumeng people live in four counties of Zhaotong Prefecture, in northeast Yunnan. They have lived in the Wumeng mountains for around 300 to 400 years. Today, they are officially recognised under the Yi Nationality. Among the different Yi groups there is only limited mutual intelligibility and the Wumeng must revert to Chinese to

communicate with other Yi tribes.

On top of the language barriers, the Wumeng are a proud people and choose not to intermarry with their neighbours, Yi or otherwise. Families have been known to cut off members who have married outside the Wumeng.

In the past they were relatively wealthy landowners and slaveholders. Their situation was described by the protestant missionary Samuel Clarke of the China Inland Mission, who wrote that "two days to the north of Anshun begin the estates and residences of the large Nosu [Yi] landholders, which stretch away as far as Zhaotong, Yunnan, one hundred and fifty miles away as the crow flies."

Like many of Yunnan's tribal people the Wumeng have practiced polytheism, ancestor worship and a composite blend of beliefs and practices that includes elements of Buddhism and Taoism.

But nowadays as many as 10 percent have come to follow the Christian faith. Without a doubt, this uptake of the gospel would not have happened without the prayers, sacrifice and hard work of dedicated Christian workers who left their homes to come to this remote place.

The Paris Foreign Missionary Society worked in Zhaotong as far back as 1780. They were followed by the China Inland Mission and the Methodists in the twentieth century. On Christmas Day, 1905, Samuel Pollard recorded in his diary: "This Christmas for the first

time we have had [Yi] visitors. More than thirty came as a result of the preaching of Mr. Wang. They are a strange-looking lot, much wilder than the Miao, and fiercer-looking. One of them was a Yi wizard who taught me some characters. They say there are about eight or nine hundred families who wish to come. Does this mean that salvation for them has come at last?"

Today there are believed to be approximately 5000 Wumeng believers meeting in small house fellowships throughout the mountains.

## Choosing to Stay

For almost two decades China has enjoyed a fairly tolerant enforcement of its religious law. The covert Underground Churches that came out of the Cultural Revolution became so open and accepted that they became known as Family Churches or House Churches and have thrived and multiplied. Some even ran schools and kindergartens. These House Churches are not registered within the State's Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) system as required by law. (Their reasons for not registering are many and varied). But the authorities were content to simply monitor the illegal churches, as long as no-one caused any trouble. Some provinces were less tolerant than others but overall the authorities of the atheist Communist Party and the House Church movement seemed to have an

understanding.

The relaxed environment had allowed for many foreign students, teachers, businessmen and even NGOs to work in China in positions where they could discretely demonstrate or share their Christian faith.

Abruptly, this period has come to an end. As many are aware, in 2018 China began vigorous enforcement of its religious law. In the last year, House Churches have been closed down and their believers are struggling to meet together, even twos and threes under the nation's overwhelming surveillance network. A strong focus of the current regime is the removal of any Christian expats



who have any connection to sensitive groups or minority people's or who have drawn attention to their outreach. Starting in the northwest last spring and spreading nation-wide the systematic expulsion of these foreign workers has been causing trauma and grief for those forced to leave at short notice. Some have been given 48 hours, others 10 days to leave China. Some have chosen to leave before being pulled in by the authorities, or have been asked to return home by their sending organisation. By doing this they will avoid their visa's being cancelled and a 5-year ban on returning to China. They will also avoid their house and devices being investigated possibly alerting the authorities to others in their networks.

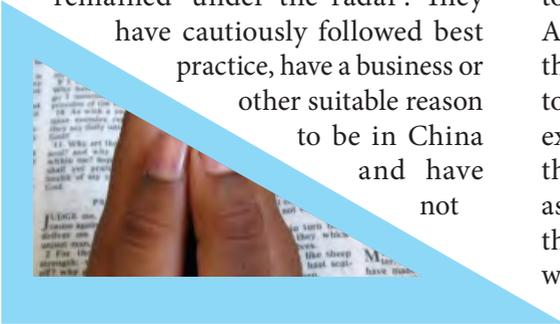
Determinedly and no doubt prayerfully, a few in sensitive areas have chosen to stay. These are ones that thus far have remained 'under the radar'. They have cautiously followed best practice, have a business or other suitable reason to be in China and have not

drawn attention.

They know that any day, at any time, they and their families may be called in for interrogation and required to leave. The uncertainty must be a heavy burden.

These workers risk a lot to stay on and know the price they may have to pay. When told to go, they must pack up their lives and leave their work and their friends. They have spiritually invested so much into the people and nation. In addition, some have invested financially. A foreign worker in a northern region had invested heavily in a foreign company in China. When he was required to leave, he walked away with nothing.

Foreigners such as English teachers, lecturers and business people are welcomed in China and China's current direction is to continue to open up to foreign trade. Although there are rumours circulating, there is no evidence of a nation-wide hunt to find and expel all foreign Christian expats. Nonetheless, for the time being, there is a call to caution and discretion as foreign workers watch and wait to see the how this current round of expulsions will develop.



## CCSM UK

PO Box 5857  
Sheffield, S10 9GG  
T: 0114 229 5796  
National Director: Martyn Wells  
[uk@amccsm.org](mailto:uk@amccsm.org)  
[www.amccsm.org](http://www.amccsm.org)

