



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



MAY 2019

## Wang Yi

The light emanating from the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu was certainly not “hidden under a bushel.” The church, nicknamed the “Church on the Hill”, and its outspoken pastor, Wang Yi, have been very public and transparent with their beliefs and activities. This church was unregistered and yet included a presbytery, a seminary and a classical Christian school. Its service information and staff contact details were openly available and sermon podcasts were available online.

This is not to say that this unregistered church has been able to operate unhindered. It has been challenged by local authorities on the church’s legal right to hire or rent venues but twice charges were dropped.

Prior to becoming Christian in 2005, Wang Yi worked as a law professor at Chengdu University. He had a strong secular media presence as a columnist, blogger



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and writer on current affairs, legal and social issues and film reviews and he was included in the 2004 list of "50 Most Influential Public Intellectuals of China" by Southern People Weekly.

While a non-believer Wang had defended house churches facing persecution by the government. It was through this experience with Christians that he found faith, being baptised in 2005. Shortly after his conversion he was one of a group of Chinese human rights advocates, who met with former U.S. President George W. Bush at the Whitehouse to discuss freedom of religion.

In 2008 Wang Yi gave up his University position to become pastor of Early Rain Covenant Church. Because of his background as a social activist, officials kept Early Rain Covenant Church under close surveillance.

That same year a magnitude-7.9 earthquake hit China's Sichuan Province taking 87,600 lives. Early Rain Covenant Church immediately became a receiving station for Christians from across China who rushed to Chengdu to provide aid.

It's possible that some may call Wang Yi a political activist. If the definition of a political activist is "a person who campaigns to bring about political change." Then this is most definitely

not Wang Yi. He does not want to overthrow, or even change, the

government of China. To quote Wang Yi, "The gospel can rule the human heart under any institution. The gospel can save souls under any institution. The gospel can give man freedom in any situation."

In 2015, to clarify the church-state relationship from a house church perspective, Wang Yi along with another pastor and five elders of the Early Rain Covenant Church published a document titled "Reaffirming our Stance on the House Churches: 95 Theses". It echoed Martin Luther's famous 95 Theses, which was nailed to the door of the All Saint's Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517 igniting the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Wang's theses boldly explained the underground church's stance on topics such as "God's Sovereignty and Biblical Authority", "Against the Sinicization of Christianity", "The Relationship between Two Kingdoms and the Separation of Church and State" and "Against the Three-Self Movement", and "Affirmation of the Great Commission".

Wang Yi gave sermons that clearly aimed to prepare his congregation to remain faithful to the gospel in the face of persecution. This day came on the 9th December 2018, when Early Rain Covenant Church was shut down and over 100 church members were arrested. He and his wife were charged with "inciting subversion of state power" an allegation that has a penalty of up to 15 years in prison.

Since then the pressure on the remaining congregation has been huge. 300 in total have been arrested with 28 remaining in criminal detention. Church members have been constantly monitored, followed, and threatened. Authorities have pressured landlords and employers, causing these Christians to lose their jobs and their homes. Some have been forced to move back to their hometowns.

48 hours after his arrest the church released his letter titled "My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience" written two

months earlier in anticipation of this event. In it he affirms the gospel demands that disobedience of faith must be non-violent and says, "As the Lord's servant John Calvin said, wicked rulers are the judgment of God on a wicked people, the goal being to urge God's people to repent and turn again toward Him. For this reason, I am joyfully willing to submit myself to their enforcement of the law as though submitting to the discipline and training of the Lord." The Declaration has been translated and is available online at the China Partnership website.



# International Short-Term Teams

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# Guangzhou Whistleblowers

Late last year we first heard the news that the well-known Rongguili Church in Guangzhou City had been closed down by the authorities as an illegal unregistered Church. The 5000-member church was founded by Samuel Lamb who survived a grueling 20 years interned in labour camps for refusing to register the church. Since its closure the church people have been left with a difficult choice. Either they must attend a State-controlled Three Self Patriotic Movement church (this goes against the conscience of many Rongguili church members) or they try to avoid the law by meeting secretly in small groups (2-3 people). The later could incur a steep penalty.

The current crackdown on the nation's religious groups began in February last year after the Chinese religious regulations were revised. Subsequently anyone accused of providing a venue for an "illegal religious event" can face a fine of between 20,000 yuan and 200,000 yuan.

Now, to make matters worse, any displaced Rongguili church members who wish to pray and worship together have a price on their heads. Guangzhou City's Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs posted a notice on their website offering reward money in exchange for information. They are seeking to tempt neighbours, co-workers and even family members to tip-off illegal religious meetings including gatherings in private settings. Whistleblowers are assured

maximum confidentiality and according to an article posted on 29th March 2019 in the South China Morning Post, they can receive between 5,000 and 10,000 yuan for tips leading to the arrest of a non-Chinese religious leader, 3,000 to 5,000 yuan for information leading to the closure of a foreign religious group, and between 100 and 3,000 yuan for tips about locally organised gatherings and their leaders.

Rewards are offered in a first come first served basis. If two whistle-blowers report the same group only the initial informant will get paid.

The intent of the law is to encourage the public to be actively involved with weeding out violent extremists and terrorists, and those that threaten national security, public safety and national unity. One wonders why the public would not already be quick to report a person they truly believed were a danger to public safety without the need for a financial incentive?

Engaging neighbourhood scouts is by no means a new concept for China and since April last year there have been other cities and counties offering rewards for information on 'illicit religious gatherings'. However, Guangzhou is of note because of the high rewards and the timing close on the heels of the Rongguili church closure. For Guangzhou's underground Church, already forced out of their church buildings, they will now struggle to know who to trust.

# Attitudes to Adoption

Adoption is not a new concept to China although Chinese historically would seldom consider adoption or even foster care, other than to meet the requirement to provide a male heir. In this case adoptions would frequently be among kin, often a younger male cousin, in order to continue the family line and care for the parents in their old age.

Some views on adoption are deep rooted in Chinese culture. Others are evolving with the changing economy, social media, increasing wealth and even foreign influence.

Most of China's orphan population have some degree of health problem. In a typical Confucian approach, a handicapped child could not meet the duties expected of providing for parents in old age, and therefore would never be considered for adoption. But as their career possibilities improve in the modern era, they are being recognised as valuable to society.

Inclusive education, along with training and support for schools still has plenty of room to improve. Nevertheless, as China has lifted out of poverty the government has made significant strides in improving healthcare and provides healthcare coverage to 95% of the population as well as unemployment insurance and housing and pension funds. Medical coverage



as yet only reimburses a portion of medical fees and wealthier citizens are increasingly turning to private insurance.

It is clear that parents now do not need to rely on their children to the same degree as in the past. It would be wonderful if this translated to a rise in the number of China's handicapped orphans 'coming home' to Chinese families.

In 1992 China began to allow foreigners to adopt from China. Between 1999 and 2016 China has adopted out over 267,000 children with almost a third of these finding homes in America. One young woman returned to China years later to find her birth parents. Newspapers reported her story when no less than 50 women responded to her advertisement in the hope she was their biological daughter. Although she was unsuccessful in her search, her story started conversations across China

on the topic of adoption.

The stigma regarding adoptions in China is slowly easing up. But according to ECNS China News, “the general reluctance to adopt is reflected in the figures. In 2016, there were 460,000 orphans registered nationwide, but only 16,000 successful adoptions.” Regarding these in-China adoptions, it would be fair to guess that they denote the healthiest children.

There have been complaints that foreign parents were taking the healthy children. In response, in 2017, requirements for overseas adoptions have been made more stringent and wait times longer so the number of babies leaving China has dropped. In 2016, there were 2,231 children adopted to America and among these were many special needs children.

In attempts to avoid the negative social stigma which still exists around adoption, many people have turned to the black market to find a child. Babies may come supplied with false records including a hukou (household registration).

Thankfully, Xi Jinping’s crackdown on these illicit crime rings has had some success.

There is still a significant portion of adoptions that occur informally in China without the control or consent of the government.

Early Rain Covenant Church, which has shut down by the State early last year, was hoping to challenge attitudes and encourage people to think about adoption. In 2016 World Magazine spoke to a leader in the church’s pro-life ministry, Johnny Fan. They reported that, “As Fan studied what the Bible has to say about adoption, he realized adoption is not just a last resort, but “it’s what God is calling us to do.” So Fan has added a focus on adoption to the group’s mission, and in March he invited an American couple to speak at the church about their experience adopting two Chinese children. With 200 church members in attendance, many felt convicted and eager to learn more about adoption and foster care.”



# PRAYER POINTERS

## Wang Yi

Pray for Wang Yi, his wife Jiang Rong, and the other members of the Early Rain Covenant Church who remain in criminal detention facing trial and prison for their faith. Pray for the police and authorities who have detained them.

Pray for church members whose jobs and accommodation have been lost after their employers and landlords have been pressured by the authorities. Pray that the Lord will meet their needs.

Pray for the Early Rain Covenant church members that they will be able to love those who persecute them.

Pray that the church members will find a way to continue to fellowship.

## Guangzhou Whistleblowers

Thank God for the Chinese believers who are willing to accept persecution in order that they can hear and share the full gospel.

Pray that Rongguili church members who have been displaced from their church building will find ways to continue meeting together for support, worship and fellowship.

Pray that other Chinese will see their persecution and will question what is so precious that these people risk fines, property confiscation and careers.

## Attitudes To Adoption

Praise God that conditions for orphans are improving in China.

Pray that the church will lead the way in and changing negative attitudes to adoption.

Pray that more of China's orphan children will have a loving family, a future and a home.

Pray that God will bless those in government that advocate for the orphans, especially in the area of education.

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Paying Respect

Thank God the He has provided a way for all mankind to have eternal life in a world that will be free from sin and suffering. Pray that all Chinese will have opportunity to know about His salvation plan.

Pray for wisdom for China's leaders as they seek to find ways to address the problem of overcrowded cemeteries.

Pray that when families meet together to remember their loved ones that the Lord will provide openings to share with their families about the sure promise they have in Jesus; the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

## Subtle Restrictions

Thank the Lord for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the good work He does in our lives.

Pray for the pastors in the TSPM as they operate under the restrictions of the State. Pray that they will experience and share the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit to change lives and to build the Kingdom.

## News from CCSM UK

Pray for joy and peace to be the daily experience of Christians in China.

Pray that their joy and peace would point to Jesus and the challenges and persecution would lead to the church growing.

Pray that children are able to hear about Jesus and be taught how to live as a Christian as they grow up.

Pray that these children would put their trust in Jesus and prove him to be faithful.



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and support the church and  
the people of China

# Paying Respect

Each year, during the month of April China sets aside three days as national holiday so families can come together to remember and pay respect to their dead. This holiday is known as Qing Ming or the Tomb Sweeping Festival. It is also known as Ancestors Day and the Festival of Pure Brightness.

There were about 9.9 million deaths in China in 2018. Dealing with these numbers presents the problem of increasingly limited burial space. For centuries, Chinese have buried their dead in caskets in graves or family tombs. Being buried close to ancestors is an important tradition giving identity with traditional family locations. But in recent years, out of necessity, China has largely banned the burial of bodies. There are exceptions given to 10 ethnic minorities.

In the urban areas cremation is the norm with the ashes interred in tombs in cemeteries, columbaria, or sepulchral vaults. Burial of ashes at sea is being presented as a modern alternative in Shanghai. The service is onboard a ship which takes the family out to a designated location. There the ashes blended with flower petals are scattered onto the ocean. The service has been subsidized by the government. In Jiangxi Province last year the government introduced a zero-burial policy, buying back coffins from families who had already paid for them.

As use of graveyards diminishes this will no doubt affect how families conduct their



activities on Tomb Sweeping Day. In a typical traditional ceremony, the family members come together at the grave sites of their deceased and incense will be burned while a prayer is given to ask the ancestors for their blessing. Then while the younger ones clean and decorate the gravesites with joss paper the older ones will present dishes of fruit and food to their ancestors. Family members may also spend time communing with the dead. The family spend time together sharing stories and memories of the loved one who has passed away. Then joss money (imitation paper money) is burnt to pass it to the dead relative to support them in the afterlife where needs are thought to be similar to life on earth. According to Chinese mythology, joss money might even be used to bribe Yanluo, the Judge of the Dead, in the hope he will hold their ancestors for a shorter period of time.

In addition to burning paper currency the family may offer other items such as paper effigies of cars, houses, computers and luxury items. This practice has recently been deemed vulgar and outlawed in

China because of environmental concerns. People are now being encouraged to leave flowers rather than burning paper money or chat to loved ones on WeChat rather than burning paper messages. Many cemeteries provide online memorial pages where you can burn virtual candles and environmentally friendly digital gifts for the deceased.

In the West, you may consider respect for parents to be a gradually eroding virtue but filial piety (Chinese: 孝, xiào) is still a value infused in Chinese culture. Like the concept of love in the Bible, xiào is more than an attitude or emotion. It has been described as “Love with responsibilities”. Xiào encompasses deference, obedience,

support and fulfilling family obligations. According to Confucian teaching it even goes beyond the grave, supporting parents after death according to a specific code of rites and rituals.

The Qing Ming Festival dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 - 476 BC). But evidence of belief in life after death is evident back as far as the Shang dynasty (around 1700 BC). Tombs have been unearthed with household implements, food and other items that the deceased may need in the afterlife. The incredible terracotta army in Xi’an is the most famous example of using replicas of earthly needs for the life to come.

## Subtle Restrictions

*Part 8 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 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 exert he focuses on the topic of TSPM worship patterns:*

The rural church was packed with people. They listened attentively as the minister, a Chinese pastor from Hong Kong with charismatic leanings, spoke passionately about the work of the Holy Spirit. A Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) pastor and friend had brought us to this place to meet with local believers and speak to them. As the minister from Hong Kong came to the end of his sermon, he challenged the congregation to seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

He then did something that, in my

22 years of experience in the church in China, I have never seen a TSPM minister do. He called for anyone who wanted to be filled with the Spirit to come forward for prayer. The believers streamed down to the front of the church. The visiting minister then encouraged our TSPM pastor-friend and I to join with him as he prayed for the people who now filled the altar area. I joined him and together we began to pray with and for the believers. Many began to cry out and pray in loud voices.

I glanced at my TSPM friend, who was still standing in his place among the pews and wondered how he would respond. I knew that what was happening was unique for most TSPM churches, which tend to shy away from any hint of emotion in their services. As the volume of prayer grew and the prayer time reached its climax, our TSPM friend strode to the front of the church and in a loud voice began to pray a concluding prayer. The message was clear: he was not comfortable with what was happening and felt that he needed to stop the meeting. The believers quickly dispersed back to their seats and the service came to an end.

Again, this story illustrates a striking difference between the TSPM and the house churches. The TSPM church lives with very real restrictions. The manner in which these restrictions are followed and enforced varies widely, depending on the local government and church leadership. But the restrictions are there nonetheless, and they do impact the life of the church.

We have already noted that the

government does influence the selection of leaders and it does restrict the settings in which the church can meet. But the government also influences the theology and practice of the church in a more subtle way. If compliance with government regulations is a key concern for church leaders, then will they not naturally be more controlling in their handling of church life? Will they not inevitably be less open to allowing Spirit-led people to engage in ministry for fear that they might break the rules?

Certainly many ministers in traditional churches in the West are reluctant to give opportunity to untutored lay people to speak or exercise public ministry in the church. It is often viewed as simply too risky. However, when much more is at stake than simply suffering through an embarrassing moment or facing a disgruntled parishioner, how will leaders respond? Understandably, the context of church life in the TSPM encourages leaders to avoid taking what may be viewed as unnecessary risks. It encourages them to exercise more control.

## News from CCSM UK



*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (or direct your paths)* Prov 3:5-6 NIVUK

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*  
Romans 15:13 NIVUK

I want to encourage you to pray for China, to keep on praying for China. We

want to see the Kingdom of God increase and ultimately fill the whole of China. We believe this is God’s desire for that land. We believe that God answers prayer and that in his word – the Bible, we see examples of answered prayer and requests from God’s servants, such as Paul for prayer for him and for his service to God.

Through prayer we come to align ourselves with God’s heart, and demonstrate we trust him (verses above). We come in submission in prayer asking that his will be done, in our lives and in the world.

We pray that the Christians in China will trust God especially when their church is closed, when they are threatened with loss of job, or loss of social standing because they are a Christian.

We trust that God will not only keep his people safe, but that more and more will be drawn into his kingdom, even

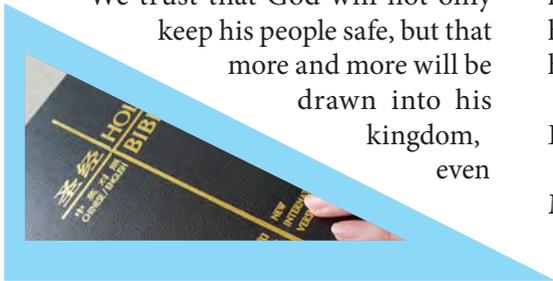
during this time when to be a Christian is becoming “unacceptable” to the government.

We trust that God will protect the children and that parents and other adults will find ways to teach the children about Jesus and the Bible, even when they cannot attend a church.

While we can go into China, either long or short term we will, while we can supply literature and SD cards to China we will, but we can pray now, we can pray even if China should be closed – God is not limited by governments and prayer reaches around the world.

As the verses from Romans demonstrate, God can fill us and the believers in China with joy and peace, as we trust in him. He can also empower us through the Holy Spirit so that we overflow with hope. The world we are in needs this hope, and we are called to share our hope we have received from God.

Every blessing,  
Martyn Wells



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