



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



SEPTEMBER 2019

## Shui Minority

400,000 Shui minority people live in China, mainly in Sandhu Shui Autonomous County in southern Guizhou Province along the upper tributaries of the Pearl River. They can easily be told apart from the Miao, Buyi and Dong people who also live there by their head dress, which is usually white. In the region's fertile soils and moderate climate, they raise livestock and grow rice, crops and fruit.

The Shui are descended from the ancient Baiyue, or "Hundred Yue," peoples who lived along China's southeastern coast before the Han Dynasty. The Shui took part in uprisings against the Qing dynasty's taxation and joined the Taiping rebellion, but overall, they have good relations with the Chinese.

The name "Shui" means water and water and fish are an important part of Shui culture. Local rivers abound with fish, and many Shui have carp ponds. Fish sculptures can be seen on rooftops and in



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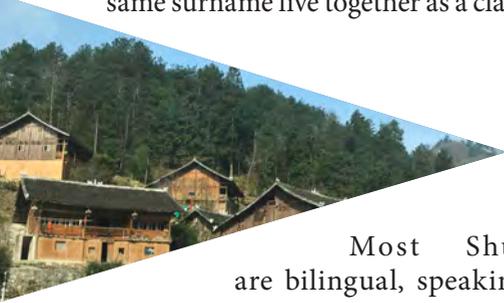
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their decorations. Many Shui still live a subsistence lifestyle in their isolated villages in the picturesque valleys and forested mountains. Families with the same surname live together as a clan.



Most Shui are bilingual, speaking Mandarin and their own indigenous language. The most common dialect, Sandong, has over 70 consonants. They also have an ancient Shui script, which has around 4000 characters. However, it is generally only the Shui village leaders who are able to read this, and Chinese characters are used in daily life.

The Shui are skilled in folk art, notably in paper-cuts, stone-carving, silver jewelry, and batik. The women's intricate horsetail embroidery has been passed down over 700 years but sadly fewer young girls are learning the art.

Superstitious practices stemming from ancestor worship and polytheism control all aspects of life. For example, during a wedding procession, it could be bad luck for the procession to chance upon a coffin (the couple may die soon), a bird crossing the road (the couple may become ill), thunder (a Shaman must be called to drive out ghosts), or a pregnant woman (the bride will be infertile). During

the first thunderclap in the spring season, the ground cannot be ploughed for three days. Doing so would offend the thunder god, resulting in disastrous weather.

Shamans are called on for their help with the more than 900 gods, including approximately 300 principal spirits, which subdivide into three types: protective, kind and wicked. Shamans inherit their techniques to determine the will of the spirits from fathers or uncles.

The Book of the Shui is very important in their religious ceremonies and is the Shui code for ethics and behavior. It gives instruction on how to calculate the most favourable day for every activity. The Shui have their own calendar with the ninth lunar month beginning the year. The New Year is celebrated with the Shui's grand 49-day Duan Festival. Families and friends get together to feast on the traditional stuffed fish, raise Jiuqian wine bowls with loud shouts, beat brass drums, and enjoy horse racing.

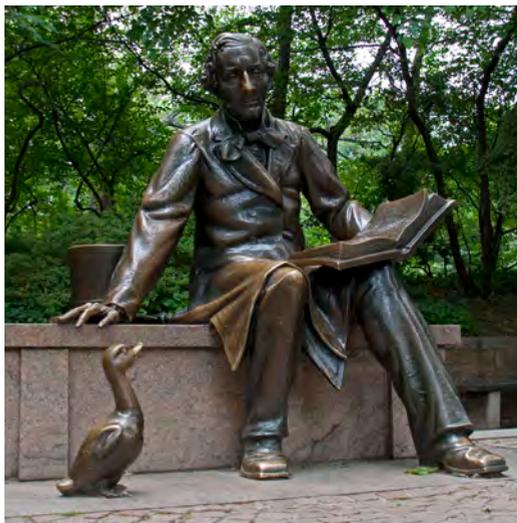
According to the Joshua Project, French Catholic missionaries went to the Shui in 1884. By the early 1900s some 30 Catholic churches and 5,000 Shui Christians existed. However, all the believers were put to death or fell away during the anti-Christian movement of 1906. Today there are reported to be only "a small number of Christians" among the Shui. Another source adds, "a handful of Catholic believers remain." A breakthrough came in late 1997 and 1998 when approximately 100 Shui people came to Christ and were being disciplined by Chinese believers.

# Taking God out of the Classics

The famous writer Hans Christian Andersen wrote: “Time is so fleeting that if we do not remember God in our youth, age may find us incapable of thinking of him.”

Hans Christian Andersen was a master of fairy tales. He knew what it was like to struggle in life from an early age. He was raised in the slums of Odense, Denmark and was always on the edge of society. Yet he struggled to reach university and won international literary fame. With his incredible imagination and beautiful poetic prose, he wasn’t afraid to bring the deeper emotions and spiritual elements into his writing and this is perhaps why he was so loved.

Both parents and children could relate to, and even learn from, his characters.



He penned reflections of his own life’s tragedies and triumphs into his stories. “The Ugly Duckling,” “The Tinderbox,” “Thumbelina,” “Little Claus and Big Claus,” “The Princess and the Pea,” and “The Little Mermaid” are doubtless to be familiar titles.

Hans Christian Andersen wrote, “Every man’s life is a fairy tale written by God’s fingers.” However, now it appears that God has been ‘written out’ of Andersen’s fairy tales by the fingers of the Chinese

## International Short-Term Teams

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Communist Party.

Andersen's folk tale, the Little Match Girl, is featured in a primary school textbook (ISBN: 9787107201325) that is intended to teach Chinese children to understand other cultures. The story tells of a barefoot and penniless girl who is forced to sell matches in the freezing snow. She remembers her grandmother telling her "when a star falls, a soul goes to be with God." The CCP textbook rewrites this as "when a star falls, a soul leaves the world."

The textbook also tampers with the writings of another legendary volume, Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. When his hero is shipwrecked Defoe wrote that he rescued three "bibles" from the ship. The CCP schoolbook simply has him recovering just "a few books."

Furthermore, famous Russian playwright and short-story writer, Anton Chekhov's "Vanka" was also altered. Numerous references to Christ, prayer and God have been chopped, removing a significant part of the story.

Sadly, this is indicative of what is happening all through China's education system under the guise of sinicization. Sinicization has very little to do with raising up Chinese culture and much more to do with rejecting foreign religions and embracing the CCP

core values, of which atheism and unquestioning obedience to The Party feature strongly. The CCP is working to instill these qualities in children as early as kindergarten age.

Bitter Winter recently published an article reporting on schools who had held oath ceremonies and signing events pressuring children to firmly resist religious belief, promise not to enter any religious venues and to steadfastly follow the Party. Signs instructing students to resist religion are placed in primary and secondary schools. Teachers and students at some schools have been threatened with expulsion if they uphold religious beliefs.



They reported that in March this year "police in Beijing's Fangshan district questioned a grade six classroom about whether any of their family members are religious, even offering a 500 RMB bribe to informants."

As these times in China make it more and more difficult to speak openly of the Saviour, especially to children, it becomes necessary to reveal Him through our lives, becoming His lantern shining in the dark.

As Hans Christian Andersen said himself in the very first chapter of his own autobiography, "The history of my life will say to the world what it says to me – there is a loving God, who directs all things for the best."

# Give Me Your Phone

Earlier this year I spoke to a student who told me that during the first week of their university year students are now being asked to complete a questionnaire. It asks about any faith the student may have.

She explained that most student believers leave the answer to this question blank, but those who had declared their faith as 'Christian' were being pulled in for discussions with their lecturer and were told that they will not be able to pass their degrees unless they first renounce their faith. She described a personal friend who had recently experienced the enormous disappointment of being denied a qualification after four years of study. He could not renounce his faith in Jesus.

In addition, she said, students suspected of having a faith are being singled out and asked to hand over their phone for inspection by their lecturer. My jaw dropped. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Your lecturer asks to see your phone?

That would never happen in the west. Surely this is a gross intrusion of privacy? The lecturer would be hauled over the coals! The right to guard a phone from prying eyes has nothing to do with keeping secrets or concealing illicit photos. Privacy is just an inalienable right. Something we all desire. Isn't it?



“What are they looking for?”, I asked.

She said, “The lecturers are required by the universities to search the phones for Christian group chats or messages which might be evidence of a belief. If they find religious content, they snap a screenshot and send it to their superiors. They also send details of any of the student's Christian contacts. Having a VPN installed is also considered an offense and reported.”

She explained that soon after, the student's family and friends get a knock on their door and are greeted by officials asking to come in for a 'cup of tea' meeting. They are warned of the serious consequences of not giving away their faith.

I asked my contact why the students didn't question the teacher's rights to look at their phones. After all nothing is

more valued and tightly clasped than a teenager's cell phone. It is a register of the young person's life, their heartthrobs and heartaches, achievements, inner thoughts and opinions. In the West there would be an outcry and the lecturer would be shamed for asking to see a phone.

Worldviews are very different in China. Teachers are highly regarded, and privacy is not expected. In China, a person wanting solitude can even be viewed as untrustworthy, closing a door is tantamount to concealing something. "What do you have to hide?" Communalism is valued more than the

fierce individualism of Western culture. So, an individual's rights are subject to their family, community and nation.

In an honour-shame society it would be disgraceful to not to hand the phone over and possibly dishonouring to the teacher to refuse them.

My contact explained that they relinquish their phones to the lecturer because they respect their teachers. But, added wryly, that since this has been happening the Christian students keep a second phone safely hidden, installed with VPN, for use their communications with Christian friends.

## Castaway but not Abandoned

Passing the baton is the greatest moment in the timeline of any mission work. That moment when you know the work will continue without you. Effectively, you have worked yourself out of a job. As individual's, handing on to others what has been sown into our lives, is also a thrilling part in the Christian journey.

Many years ago, a couple from New Zealand saw a desperate need in China and bravely decided to dedicate a large portion of their lives to a small group of orphans. Not only had these children been abandoned because of their disabilities but their futures were without hope and without purpose. The New Zealand couple knew that the worst disability they faced was to believe they were not loved.

A large part of the couple's work was meeting the physical and medical needs of the orphans. Providing additional care to what the orphanage could provide at the time. To those that were able, they taught them crafts and gave them education. But far and away the greatest work was to love the children.



Years later this work continues, now in

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Shui Minority

Pray that the eyes of the Shui will be opened to see who Jesus is.

Pray that God will build His church among the Shui on solid foundations.

Thank God for the people who have gone to work among the Shui. Ask that He will water the seeds already sown. Ask that the few Shui Christians there are will be blessed and multiply.

Pray that the name “Shui” (meaning water) will reflect a people who know the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Taking God out of the Classics

Pray for children who, at such a young age, are put under pressure to deny their faith. Pray that parents will be given wisdom in guiding their children and that the children will be led by the Holy Spirit.

Pray for His peace to surround the children, and their parents, as they face religious persecution in kindergartens and schools.

Praise God that he can take any situation we present to Him and turn it to be used for His good purposes.

Declare His promise that He has plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future.

Pray for the Christian teachers who are asked to act against their belief and whose jobs are threatened.

## Give Me Your Phone

Pray that students that have been denied their qualifications because of their Christian belief will find employment. Pray that they will be blessed in all their endeavours.

Pray that when the student’s faith is challenged and their futures appear to be ruined, that they will continue to trust in the Lord.

Pray that this trial will help to raise up strong and courageous young men and women of faith.

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Castaway but not Abandoned

Pray that God will complete the work of healing from trauma in the lives of these orphans.

Pray that these orphans will be shining witnesses to the power of Christ's forgiveness and love.

Pray that these orphan youth will be able to disciple others to find freedom, hope and purpose.

Praise God that all have purpose, love and acceptance in Him. Pray that this long-term charity work will be provided with the human and financial resources to allow these young lives to go further.

## Return to Zero

Praise God that His ways are higher than our ways. Ask that He would be with those suffering under the "Return to Zero" campaign.

Pray for church members who have been sent by authorities to their hometowns and villages. Pray they will find opportunities to share the gospel with family and friends. Pray they will find suitable work and Christian support.

Pray that believers in China will not miss opportunities to reach out to people of other faith communities.

## Local News From CCSM UK

Pray that God will stir churches, and your own church, to be active in sending.

Pray for obedience to send and to go.

Pray that the openings in China will continue to be available.

Pray that "The Lord of the harvest will raise up workers" and that a new sense of calling will come the churches in the UK.



**Chinese Church Support Ministries**

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the people of China

the hands of indigenous Chinese. It has grown and its location has changed but at its heart it is fundamentally the same. As a staff member said, “The work we do is to give traumatised children a chance to know that someone loves them, and that the Father loves them.”

Earlier this year three disabled members of the group and some support staff left their welfare home to take part in a conference for disabled orphans on the topic of trauma and healing. This was the first time these teenage orphans had left the Welfare Centre to participate in their own learning. And, it was also their first time on a plane. They were very excited!

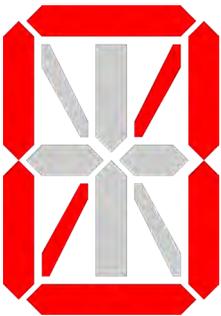
They were also a little afraid and worried. To travel long distances with disabilities is challenging and takes careful planning. They prayed together and overcame their fears.

At the conference they listened to a speaker who had spent his childhood and

teenage years in an orphanage. He had experienced abandonment and betrayal by those he should have been able to trust. His incredible story through rejection and bitterness to forgiveness, acceptance and freedom has been an inspiration to thousands of people. Now a millionaire businessman and family man, he had many lessons and much hope to share with the orphans.

Every orphan has trauma: they think they are not good. They believe it was their fault their parents abandoned them. Often, they are angry at God, with their parents and with people who may have let them down or mistreated them in the orphanages. These disabled welfare center orphans might never be whole in body, but Jesus has made a way for them to become whole in spirit and free to be who they were created to be.

After returning, they shared what they had learned with other students, transferring the blessings to others.



## Return To Zero

The clampdown on religion in China seems to be accelerating rather than abating. Reports have

emerged of a government initiative against the Family (Underground) Church called “Return to Zero”, which

sources told Persecution.org, aims to “dismantle the scale [of churches], dissolve the organization, and dismiss the church.” The campaign is supervised by the Central Leading Group for Inspection Work and expected to expand over



the whole country in the next two years.

Already we have seen the Family church retreat underground. Any congregants caught in church raids have been sent back to their home villages and had identification cards confiscated, eliminating their ability to travel. The few Communist Party members caught attending church have lost their jobs or resigned. Across the country, students are under pressure to deny their faith or fail their courses and authorities have been offering rewards to report 'illegal' Christian gatherings. Sharing the gospel has increasingly been restricted.

Ominous as it sounds, the response from Christians to increased persecution in China is not what you expect. One young Christian pointed out, "When it's more difficult it's more of a challenge! Believe in God. Only He can build His church."

She pointed out that Christians are not the only ones facing oppression. And, as persecution hits other religious

communities it has, in some places, actually become safer to share the gospel. People think twice about reporting a family member who has decided to follow Christ, as it would only draw the authorities' attention to their own strong beliefs. Something that persecuted faiths are trying to avoid at the moment.

Muslims in Xinjiang are currently experiencing mass internment, and extreme cultural and religious persecution. What began there under the umbrella of 'sinicisation' is also now being deployed in Gansu Province. Last month, Bitter Winter posted photos of Longnan city, Qingyang city, Pingliang city and Jilin City where Islamic signs have been replaced with Chinese ones, and some Muslim buildings and structures have been torn down and replaced with Chinese style structures, sparking fear and concern among the Muslim community. Also, in August, Vision Times reported that in Beijing, Arabic signs and religious symbols across the city must be pulled down and replaced with Chinese language signs. Hotels

and restaurants advertising “halal” food must use the Chinese term “qing zhen.”

The Return to Zero campaign apparently aims to eliminate Christianity from the public sphere. Historically this has not been the most effective strategy for the CCP. Christians, those who have become believers in the cities and who have been sent back to their family villages, take the gospel with them. Those that have upheld their faith despite harsh repercussions have raised questions among their friends. “What is so important that you would give away an education or career?” Those that are suffering in prison still

have purpose. In the darkest hours a light can shine most brightly.

When the church is stripped to zero it is at its strongest.

*“And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”* 2 Corinthians 12:9-11 (NASB)

## Local News from CCSM UK

*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.* [Acts 13:1-3]

Is your church a “sending church”? Does it pray about sending members from the congregation out from the church to serve God in other parts of the world? Does your church ask God who he wants to go out?



The Antioch church sent out Barnabas and Saul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and these two servants maintained their links to the church as we see in Acts 14:27 “... they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done ...”

They were obedient in going and eager to share when they returned.

We need churches to seek God for those people they can send out. CCSM and other organisations can help to prepare and identify opportunities and share valuable experience, we can support



those in China, but the pattern from Acts is for a church to send, for those on mission to be sent.

There are many opportunities to serve God, to share the gospel in China. It will not always be quick, nor easy, nor comfortable, but God calls us to go and he calls churches to send.

Together the willingness to go and the action to send can be used by

God for great blessing.

Is your church a sending church? Ask your leaders how they are seeking God for people to send. Is the whole church praying for some to be sent out? Please do contact me if you would like to talk about this more and hear more about what God is doing in China. I could be part of the challenge and encouragement for your church.

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