



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



DECEMBER 2019

## The Race Toward A Cashless Society

Cash is rapidly going out of fashion in China. In fact, most Chinese would find it plain inconvenient to fumble in a handbag or wallet to look for the right coinage when their phone is already in their hand. At a restaurant, a quick scan of a QR code can bring up the menu. In the same app you can order your meal and then pay the bill.

One survey, taken in 2017, found that 92% of citizens in China's largest cities use the Alipay or WeChat Pay as their main form of making payments. Even in the rural areas the survey reported 47% use these digital payment services. Some shops are already declining to accept cash. And soon, the ease of using a phone to pay for public transport, tolls, eating out, retail shopping, medical bills and virtually all aspects of life is soon likely to see the end of cash altogether.



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

However, up until now, tourists to China have not been able to enjoy this handy technology. It has been impossible for foreign visitors to load money onto these digital payment apps without having a local phone number and a Chinese bank account. Although, some of the more enterprising travellers might find a workaround by asking a Chinese friend to send money to their phone's WeChat Wallet via a Hong Bao (Red Packet). To add to the frustration, cards familiar to foreigners like Visa and Mastercard are not accepted by many vendors inside China.

But a lot has happened very recently in the world of digital currency.

Firstly, Alibaba Group has just obtained 33% equity in the Chinese domestic company Ant Financial which owns Alipay, Yu'e Bao (the world's biggest money market fund) and the credit-rating system called Sesame Credit. Shortly afterwards, on the 5th November, Ant Financial announced the release of a payment app called 'Tour Pass' especially designed for tourists and short-term visitors to China to engage with China's wallet-free shopping environment.

Getting started with Tour Pass only



takes a few minutes. After downloading the Alipay app onto a smart phone, use the International version and search for Tour Pass. It is a mini program within Alipay. Long press on the app's icon to save it to your favourites for easy access. All that's needed to set it up is a foreign phone number, a passport number and a valid visa. Select the amount to load from the options available and follow the directions to link it to a western credit or debit card.

Tour Pass does have some limitations. The maximum cumulative amount that can be loaded onto Tour Pass is only RMB2000 (around \$US285) and at the end of 90 days any residual balance is refunded. So, it is not ideal for hotel payments or larger expenses, but it is very handy for smaller daily costs such as buying a coffee, hailing a taxi or even donating to a street beggar.

Only days after Alipay's Tour Pass was released, rival tech giant Tencent announced its payment platform WeChat Pay would also accept links to international bank cards.

A letter from Alibaba Group to its investors, posted on its website on the 15th of November announced their overall goal and strategy for the future. It reads:

"Globalization is the future of Alibaba Group. We firmly believe the marriage of digital technology and commerce will bring about unprecedented change that will not be limited by borders."

# Chinese In A Jewish Homeland

In the 1990s Chinese farmers began to move into Russia's under-populated far east, attracted by large farms with low rents. Many of the region's farm collectives had been abandoned after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Chinese production companies also began moving in from the early 2000s, investing in greater numbers after the 2008 global financial crisis. Thousands of Chinese are now employed there, both on Russian owned and Chinese owned farms. And farmers are trying to bring more migrants across the border, shunning the Russian workers who they view as heavy drinkers and somewhat unreliable. This has caused some friction. BBC Russian calculated that Chinese citizens owned or leased at least 350,000 hectares across Russia's five far eastern regions; the Amur Oblast (region), the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (JAO), Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai,

and Zabaikalsky Krai. The majority of Chinese are in the JAO, also known as Birobidzhan.

Birobidzhan was created by the Soviet government as a Jewish homeland and alternative to Zionism. In 1924, Jewish unemployment exceeded 30%, partially due to pogroms and because USSR policies prohibited people from being craftspeople and small businessmen. Plans began for the agricultural settlement of Jews and Birobidzhan was selected as the location.

However, according to Russian Lieutenant-General Pavel Sudoplatov, "The establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Birobidzhan in 1928 was ordered by Stalin only as an effort to strengthen the Far Eastern border region with an outpost, not as a favour to the Jews". Even so, the Jews finally had a place to freely express their belief, practice their traditions and speak Yiddish.

## International Short-Term Teams

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Photo credit: Marco Fieber, Flickr.com



That year 654 Jews arrived to settle, but before the year was over nearly half had left because of the severe conditions. Summer rains had flooded crops and an outbreak of anthrax killed the cattle.

The territory has warm, wet summers and bitterly cold, dry, windy conditions in winter. Its hills were covered with virgin forests of oak, pine and cedar, and also swamplands. To make colonization more enticing, the Soviet government allowed private land-ownership. This led to many non-Jews settling in the oblast to get a free farm.

By the 1930s, a massive campaign developed to entice more Jewish settlers to move there. In one instance, leaflets promoting Birobidzhan were dropped from an airplane over a Jewish neighbourhood in Belarus.

After WWII there was renewed interest in Birobidzhan as a home for Jewish refugees. The Jewish population grew to 46,000–50,000 in 1948, around 25% of the entire population of the JAO. However, in 1948, Stalin's anti-Jewish purges made living in the JAO unappealing. Jews

were no longer able to get jobs or attend graduate school. Numbers in the area continued to decline. In 1996, 872 Jews emigrated to Tel Aviv.

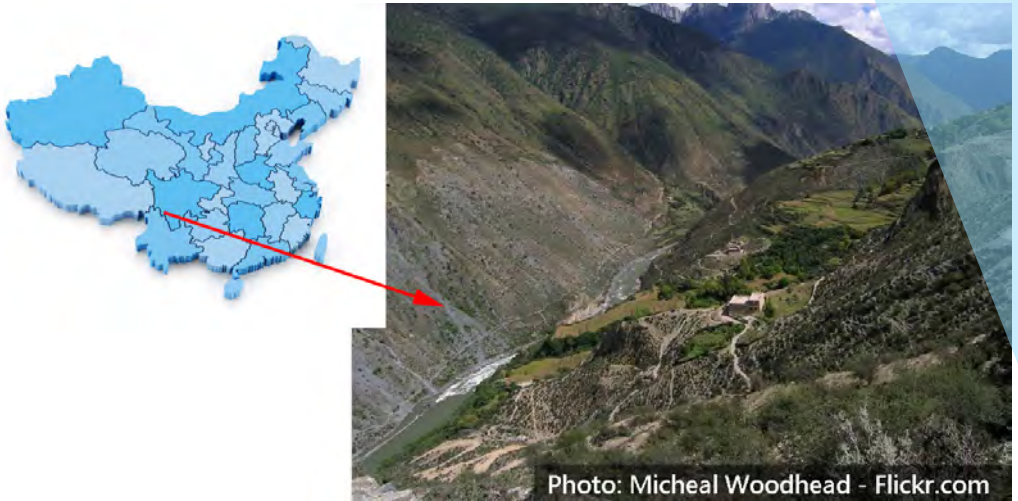
Today Jews make up only around 1% of the region's population, although Jewish culture is still celebrated in the region through statues, street names, Jewish feasts, Yiddish courses, dance and theatre troupes and a synagogue.

Now, following three decades of planning and discussion, China and Russia's Jewish Autonomous Oblast are to be joined by a 1.28km long bridge across the bordering Amur (Heilongjiang) River. A separate 2.2km rail bridge is also nearing completion with both bridges expected to be in use in early 2020. These will serve the China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor and are part of the Belt Road Initiative. Special Economic Zones are to be established on both sides of the river.

Currently freight is transported across the frozen river in winter by a pontoon bridge and, after a delay while the river thaws, ferries are used in the warmer months.



# Shixing 史兴 (Xumi 旭米 / Sumu 粟母)



Around 2000 people, calling themselves the Shixing (pronounced ‘Sher-shing), live along the fast flowing Shuiluo 水洛 River Gorge and its downstream tributary, the Chongtian River. They reside in eleven villages making up the Shuiluo Township. Shuiluo is in the western part of Muli Tibetan Autonomous County, which is in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. Shixing are counted under the Tibetan Minority Group.

Muli’s mountains and pine forests lie at an average altitude of 3,000m above sea level with the mountain trails leading to the Shixing villages rising to an altitude of 4,680 meters (15,000 ft.)

One visitor to the Shixing described the remarkable variation in terrain: 'We found the stifling heat in the gorges of the Shou Chu (Shuiluo) next to unbearable,

especially as we passed from cool forest regions to a temperature of over 100° Fahrenheit within a couple of hours. [Source: *Operation China, Asia Harvest*]

Shixing cultivate a wide variety of cereals, vegetables, fruit and livestock. They grow walnuts to produce oil and practice forestry. The Shixing also cultivate rice, distinguishing them from the other ethnic groups in their area. Terraced hillsides surround the Shixing villages which have been described as "peculiar conglomerations of huts built one against the other, with flat roofs, permitting one to step from house to house over the entire village." It's said their irrigation methods were passed down from god-like ancestors.

Several hundred years ago Naxi kings erected watchtowers to guard the

Shixing villages, very likely because of the gold found in the Shuiluo River. Prior to 1949 and communist rule, Muli was a semi-independent theocratic kingdom, ruled by hereditary lama kings. Local households were expected to provide gold and other produce to the Gelugpa (Yellow sect) Buddhist monastery in Muli.

In the 1990's the Shuiluo Valley became the site of a modern-day gold rush after State logging company tracks provided some access. In 2001, the first road was put through to Shuiluo Township to further support the gold industry.

The Shixing are neighbours to a mix of other people groups - Pumi (Chrame) and Khampa Tibetans, Muli Mongolians, Mosuo and Naxi. Of necessity, they must be fluent in at least three languages to get by, yet each culture has remained relatively separate. The inaccessibility of their remote region preserved the Shixing culture and their distinct Qiangic language, which is also called 'Shixing'.

Traditional Shixing marriages may be monogamous, polyandrous (brothers sharing a wife), or polygamous (sisters sharing a husband). These arrangements would prevent estates from being divided, provided better protection or assistance in raising children.

The Shixing converted to Tibetan Buddhism long ago. Amongst their religious rituals they revere certain mountains, water deities and ancestors. Rice plays an important part in their offerings. Outside houses, one will find mani piles (pyramids of white stones) which are engraved with Buddhist prayers. The homes themselves are three storied and generally dark and cool inside. The lower story is for livestock, the second for the people and the flat roof has storage for corn.

Since the arrival of Chinese with the logging and gold industries, most Shixing have learned Mandarin Chinese. Development, modernisation and increasing contact with Chinese language, education, media and internet is bringing opportunity, but could sadly also bring the extinction of this small group's mother tongue.

Nowadays, Chinese administrative structures, legal systems and culture are influencing Shixing cultural practices, such as polyandry.



*Photo taken by Swiss aid workers  
(Michael Woodhead - Flickr.com)*

# PRAYER POINTERS

## The Race Toward A Cashless Society

Pray that the Lord will give his people wisdom in how to engage with technology including social media, financial applications and social credit systems.

Thank God that China welcomed over 30.5 million tourists in 2018. Pray that there will be many who leave behind them seeds of hope, love and truth.

Praise God that He is in control of all things and that He is working out His glorious plan.

## Chinese In A Jewish Homeland

Thank God that he provided a second Jewish homeland and that this region stands as a testimony to Him and His people.

Pray for good relationships between Russian and Chinese in the Russian far eastern regions.

Pray that Russian Christians will not be afraid to reach out to Chinese migrants. (A 2012 survey of JAO showed 23% adhere to Russian Orthodoxy, 6% are Orthodox Christians of other church jurisdictions or Orthodox believers who are not members of any church, and 9% are unaffiliated or generic Christians.)

## Shixing 史兴 (Xumi 旭米 / Sumu 粟母)

Pray that Christians will come to this remote region to work among the Shixing people. Praise God that now, by learning Chinese, the Shixing have greater opportunity to hear the gospel.

Pray for solid friendships to develop between Christians and Shixing people.

Pray that God will show Shixing people that there is a great need to have a saviour.

Thank God for the kind and hard-working Shixing people. Pray they will come to find rest in Him.

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Dreams And Visions

Thank God for reaching out to those that we cannot.

Pray that Chinese believers will seek out ways to reach the Tibetan people and that they will follow through faithfully with language learning. Pray that the Father will provide all their needs and open doors for them.

Pray that God will introduce himself to the Tibetans through dreams and visions. Pray that he will provide believers to support and nurture their faith.

## African Students Denied Place To Worship

Pray that African students who are Christians will not be discouraged from studying in China.

Pray that God will uphold and strengthen their faith and make a way for them to fellowship with other believers.

Pray that these students will become leaders and influencers in their respective lands.

## Intercession is Crucial

Pray that more people will join intercession teams to China in the year ahead.

Pray that prayer and intercession will be increased around the world for the Chinese people, many of whom still remain unable to hear the gospel message of hope and freedom.

Praise God that our battles are not against flesh and blood.

Remember the workers who faithfully remain in China. Pray that their work will be fruitful and that it will be multiplied.



**Chinese Church Support Ministries**

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



# Dreams And Visions

For centuries the people of Tibet lived in a hermit kingdom, isolated and guarded against the outside world.

Buddhism entered Tibet in the 7th century and has blended with ancient Bön practices. It remains the predominant belief among the many groups that make up the Tibetan Minority in China today.

Many Tibetan areas in China are designated restricted zones and access in and out is limited. In addition, rural Tibetans that wish to move to larger cities for work find it difficult to transfer their hukou (household registration). Even if more believers were willing to live and work among rural Tibetans and were willing to learn their language to bring them the gospel, the reality is that beyond the cities, very few could even find a way.

The Buddhist concept of offsetting 'bad karma' with 'good karma' leads followers to recite mantras, spin prayer wheels, burn incense and make pilgrimages to holy sites. They meditate and give donations in the hope they can pay off their karmic debts and attain a better life next time round. As they reach old age the need to attain enough merit becomes even more urgent.

Sadly, most Tibetan people have never had an opportunity to hear of the God who made the way to atone for sin -once and for all. Even though they know well the power of demons to cause sickness and harm, they do not understand the



A Tibetan Buddhist pilgrim prostrates herself in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa

work Jesus achieved at the cross to defeat the powers and principalities of darkness.

One observer among the Amdo Tibetans said, "Buddhism is about achieving peace with yourself, but Tibetans have no concept of forgiveness and murder and feuds are common."

In recent decades foreign Christians have attended regional universities and English corners with the aim of reaching out to Tibetan students. But the current clampdown on religions with intense monitoring of students and teachers has virtually closed this door. Possibly, the only way to reach Tibetans now is through friendship evangelism – "being salt and light."

Understanding Tibetan language is also a key part of building friendships yet very few Chinese students follow through with Tibetan language learning to become fluent.

Among those Tibetans that have heard and believed the message of Christ,

many have fallen away. It is said that “to be Tibetan is to be Buddhist”. Those that become believers can be ostracised from their friends and family and employers. Others fall away after moving away from their Christian fellowship and support. This happened for one student who continued his study abroad in a Western nation. The camaraderie of other Tibetans in the new country and the familiarity of their Tibetan Buddhist festivals and traditions drew him back.

A worker to the Tibetan people in China made an unusual request. He said, “Above all, pray for dreams and visions for the Tibetan people”. In his experience those that had come to faith as the result of a divine revelation had not been swayed.

Through the imagery of dreams God is able to reveal himself directly to the heart. He brings to light the things conscious minds refuse to acknowledge. He can cross cultures and reach over all barriers.

## African Students Denied Place To Worship

Africa’s best and brightest are being wooed to study in China with offers of full-featured scholarship programs. In 2018, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), President Xi Jinping announced a plan to train 1,000 high-calibre Africans, provide 50,000 government scholarships, sponsor 50,000 workshops and seminars for Africans and invite 2,000 African youths for exchanges. Typical of China’s forward-thinking diplomacy, this generous gesture will furnish better understanding of China and secure goodwill and ‘guanxi’ among the next generation of African leaders.

Furthermore, President Xi Jinping promised that China will continue to support Chinese language teaching in African countries by sending more Chinese teachers and volunteers, donating textbooks and teaching materials in Chinese, providing Confucius Institutes

scholarships and training more local Chinese language teachers.

The scholarships are targeted at students from ‘Belt Road’ nations. China’s heavy investment in the African Continent looks to be a long-term phenomenon and African students are showing their willingness to accept this partnership as the way of the future.

Also enticing African students to China, are the reasonably priced university fees (American university fees have skyrocketed in recent years) and the opportunity to learn Chinese among native speakers.

In 2016 around 61,000 students left African soil to study in China. In fact, China is becoming so popular with African students that more are heading there for higher education than at UK or American universities. China is now their second

most preferred country for study abroad, behind France.

But a group of over 80 African Christian students studying in a city in Liaoning Province found their time in China had its challenges. They told Chinese persecution watchdog Bitter Winter that, in September, the person in charge of the Three-Self church that they attended received a government order prohibiting foreigners from participating in gatherings at the church. A second Three-Self church also refused to allow them attendance. It seems that the churches' actions came on the heels of an "anti-religious infiltration" symposium held by the local government the previous month where officials questioned the person in charge of the church if they were carrying out any foreign-related activities.

Over 40 African students at a university

in Hubei Province reported the same experience. According to Bitter Winter, since October last year, the government-controlled meeting venue where the group attended gatherings received repeated threats from government officials who demanded the church's director drive out the international students.

African students are getting a taste of what the 'new normal' is for Chinese believers. Universities are charged with closely monitoring all students for religious beliefs, including foreigners. If an African student is found to attend a house church or share the Gospel with other students, he will be expelled and deported.

Students are having to come up with creative ways to conceal their fellowship and worship meetings, such as under the guise of birthday celebrations.

## Intercession is Crucial



*A CCSM annual Intercession Team has recently returned from China. This is what they have to report...*

It has become apparent with every new Intercession Team that security is tightening in China, which is why we believe the Intercession Teams are so important.

China, its local Church and mission workers serving in China need God's help! 1 John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his

will, he hears us."

Because it is God's will for Chinese to be saved, we know that as our Intercession Team prays through China, God hears our prayers and is powerfully shaping China and saving its people.

The Intercession Team prayed through ten separate locations in North West China over two weeks, making it a very busy team! Not only were the Han

Chinese prayed for (the people group that make up 92% of the population of China), but intercession was also made for eight minorities in the locations where they live. Furthermore, every major spiritual stronghold of Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism and Islam were prayed through in two different provinces in North West China.

As we travelled through China, we had opportunities to share the gospel with many people, including Tibetan Buddhist monks and Muslims. Praise the Lord, we also had people accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

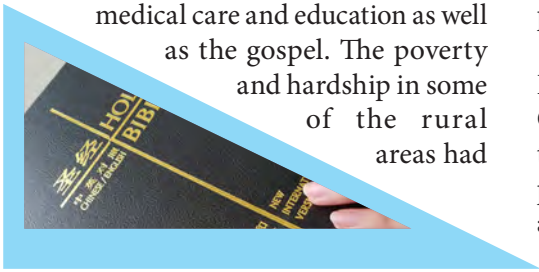
One NZ team member wrote “I already believed in mission to China, but this was reinforced. We have so many opportunities in NZ - not just physical and material advantages but also ready access to the gospel and to Christian fellowship and worship. I think we have an obligation to share resources such as medical care and education as well as the gospel. The poverty and hardship in some of the rural areas had

quite an impact on me.”

We were able to meet with local Chinese Church members. It was heart-breaking to hear about the persecution and increase of security since our last trip. The local church is now breaking into smaller units to avoid security pressures. However, we know that historically when persecution is at its highest, the church has always grown the fastest. Like pouring gasoline on fire to douse the flames, we know that the flames will increasingly get stronger! We are confident that although the pressure is high, the growth is going to be higher.

The missionaries are also facing pressure. Several have been sent home, given only 48 hours’ notice to pack their possessions and leave China. We prayed with many of those who remain for protection and wisdom. We can all support these individuals that have given up their lives to bring Jesus to China, they are very precious and very much needed!

Looking forward, we are confident that God will not forget China, its people, and the people serving there. Our continuing prayer is that ‘His will be done’ in this amazing harvest field, and that many more shall be brought into His Kingdom.



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