



CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

CHINA PRAYER LETTER



MARCH 2020

CoVid-19 Outbreak in China

The coronavirus outbreak that exploded in Wuhan and infected tens of thousands of people and left hundreds of millions of others throughout China fearing for their lives is overwhelming China and frightening the entire world. The crisis became a test of the regime's ability to govern.

Many companies delayed reopening after the Lunar New Year break. The service, entertainment and retail businesses suffered losses due to reduced number of people leaving the house. It is a heavy blow to China's hope of totally eradicating poverty by 2020.

The COVID-19 sequence was 96.2% similar to a bat virus and had 79.5% similarity to the coronavirus that causes SARS. Scientists suspect that there is one or several "intermediary" host species between bats and COVID-19. How it was introduced into humans and then the spread from human



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

to human remains unclear.

As early as December last year, eight people were reprimanded by the police for alerting other doctors in Wuhan to the spread of the coronavirus on social media. According to media reports, these eight "rumour-mongers" are doctors, Dr. Li Wenliang is one of them. Tragically, he contracted the virus himself, and died eventually. His death unleashed public fury over the Communist Party's lack of transparency and accountability.

China imposed lockdowns on Wuhan and several cities across the mainland, effectively curbing all movement of affected people between cities and countries. Restrictions have also been placed on people movement within cities. Hospitals are facing shortages of supplies as the number of patients rise. Wuhan has struggled to handle the influx of patients, even with the help of several purpose-built hospitals dedicated to treating Covid-19. Healthcare workers face the constant danger of being infected because of long hours, stress and exposure to the highly contagious coronavirus.

The Covid-19 breakout brings out China's worst and best. The following are some examples of the "best": healthcare workers working round the clock, medical professionals from all over China going to Wuhan voluntarily to help, factory workers resuming work to produce masks and protective suits, hotels offering free accommodation in Wuhan for medical workers from other cities, free meals and meal deliveries for medical workers and those under quarantine, free rides to hospital and even mass sing-alongs from apartment windows.

Pastors in Wuhan sent out urgent appeal to Chinese Christians to fast and pray in this time of distress. There were testimonies of people coming to the Lord as a result of the sickness. Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches in Beijing have suspended all gatherings since January 24 at the usual venues but church services still go on by live webcasts or recorded audio and videos. A union of Christian musicians recorded the song "Stay with You 武汉你不孤单", involving hundreds of singers in different regions, to bless Wuhan and China.



The Hani People (哈尼族; Hānízú)

Along China's borders with Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam a traveller is likely to meet people of the Hani Minority. Nearly all 1.6 million Hani are located in Yunnan province primarily in the mountains between the Red River (红河; Honghe) and the Lancang (Mekong) River.

Hani custom has it they are descended from the Yi people and that around the time of the fall of the Nanzhao Empire and the rise of the Kingdom of Dali (937–1253), they become a separate tribe that migrated from Tibet to Yunnan.

Each of the many Hani sub-groups has its own distinctive headdress and clothing, distinguishing them among the multitude of ethnic groups that converge at local markets. Men wear a black or white head wrap and a coat opening down the front.



Photo: Françoise Gaujour, Flickr.com, (CC BY-NC-ND)

Women's jackets button to the right. The headpieces of some sub-groups are quite beautiful, being decorated with silver coins, beads, shells, feathers and tassels.

In Hani mythology humans and spirits used be together in the world. The spirits slept during the day and the humans slept at night but, because they stole from each and quarrelled, the creator Apoemiyeh

International Short-Term Teams

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made the earth and the sky and let them choose in which they wanted to live. Men got to choose first, selecting earth with its game, trees and fruits. The spirits felt cheated and every wet season they visit earth hidden in the rain to bring floods and sickness. To this day Hani villages build special gates to keep the spirits out.

Their religion is a blend of animism and ancestor worship. They have three classes of shaman priests with specific roles covering leadership, religious activities, exorcisms, predictions, healing and medicinal herbs. Customary beliefs deem that the ghosts of those who die naturally will return to their ancestral homeland and become guardians of their offspring. But the ghosts of people who die unmarried under 35, or from an unnatural cause, will be left to wander and become harmful.

During the Hani's Spring Festival which they call "Ang Ma Tu" a grand street banquet is held where each family in the village prepares a table of delicious food and invite all to come and share.

Hani people have their own language and dialects but no written language. Instead they have strong oral traditions. Men learn to recite their patrilineal genealogy back 60 generations to the first Hani ancestor. A Latin writing system was developed in 1957 but was not widely adopted. Today, Hani children attend school and learn Chinese language and characters. There is no Hani Bible

and most have never heard the gospel.

It was Hani agriculturalists who engineered China's famous Honghe Rice Terraces. In 2013, these 1200-year-old terraces were declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. It has taken hard work over centuries to maintain the irrigation systems and terrace walls to keep the precious topsoil from washing down the hillsides into the rivers. The farming system integrates rice with fish, eels, buffalos, cattle and ducks. Hani farmers also cultivate banana and rubber trees.



Tourism to the rice terraces is very popular, however the local villagers have obtained minimal economic benefits and young people mostly leave to work in factories. Poverty alleviation efforts include branding the local organic red rice for its health benefits to add value and relocating poor villages to urban housing estates where job opportunities are greater.

Bolstering the Pension Fund

A 2019 report looking into China's Pension Fund has indicated that pension reserves will dwindle to zero by 2035 as the nation's workforce declines and the population ages.

The Pension Fund Actuarial Report 2019-2050 was prepared by the Center for International Social Security Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It has Chinese workers concerned that they will not be able to collect their pensions on their retirement day.

China's increasingly elderly population is a consequence of the One-Child Policy which was in action for four decades (1979 to 2016). The oldest children from this period are now around 40 and their parents are reaching the age of retirement. Their father can legally collect a pension at age 60 and their mother at age 50 if she's a blue colour worker, 55 if she is a white-collar worker. They are naturally hoping to enjoy a lengthy retirement on their well-earned pensions. The average life span for men is 75 years and for woman is 77.9 years.

During the One-Child Era a 4-2-1 pattern occurred. Four grandparents produced two parents who produce just one grandchild. It is these grandchildren, who



must now shoulder the burden of paying into the pension funds to support the older generations.

China's main pension fund, the Urban Worker Pension fund was established just twenty-three years ago in 1997. At the end of 2018 this fund looked healthy with a reserve of 4.8 trillion yuan. The report predicts this will rise in the next few years to peak at 7 trillion yuan in 2027, but then will drop steadily to zero by 2035.

An individual's contributions to the scheme are made up from two parts: a payment of 8% of monthly wages from the employee to an individual account which he or she can claim upon



To gain an understanding of how rapidly the population is aging consider the total population over sixty – it was predicted to grow by 100 million in just 15 years (from 200 million in 2015 to over 300 million by 2030).

Too look at another way – back in 2018, 11.9 percent of the population were older than sixty-five. By 2050 expect to see close to 35 percent over sixty-five!

The government is doing all it can to bolster the pension scheme. It's encouraging local governments to invest more of the fund and has moved equity from state owned enterprises into the fund. To entice more contributors, they've dropped employer payments from 20% to 16% and increased the allocation of funds in the pension system to individual accounts. But, although these strategies will grow the scheme, experts say they will also bring forward the year (2027) in which the fund was predicted begin declining to the current year, 2020. The hope is the fund will regain its surplus in the longer term.

They are working to improve workforce quality, healthcare and retirement services and innovative technology.

Other suggestions have been income tax incentives for two children, support for mothers in the workplace, allowing births out of wedlock and raising the women's retirement age.

retirement, and a payment of 20% of the employees' wages made by their employer into a social pool account. This part goes to paying the body of people that have already retired. Many small businesses, especially private ones, opt out of the scheme as they simply cannot afford it. More than 130 million urban workers remain uncovered.

In 2018 the working-age population started to decline. Making matters worse, China is also up against reduced fertility and falling crude birth rates. This seems to also be a global phenomenon.

PRAYER POINTERS

CoVid-19 Outbreak in China

Pray for the people infected with the virus and for family members of the deceased. Pray for those in lockdown to be able to find food, daily necessities, that they will stay calm and sane.

Pray for the Chinese leaders and people to acknowledge that there is an Almighty God and for Christians in China to reach out in love and be good witnesses.

Pray for Healthcare workers and their family members and ask for sufficient masks, protective suits, medical supplies and facilities.

Pray for Christians to draw close to God in humility and prayer and that the peace and comfort of God will be upon them.

Pray against racism and xenophobia around the world.

Pray that Jehovah Rapha—the Lord our Healer—will stop this sickness in its tracks.

The Hani People

Praise God that many Hani in other Asian countries have come to know Christ. Pray that their faith will be refined and strengthened and that they will have opportunity to reach out to Chinese Hani.

Pray that Hani who have been relocated will find good jobs and will be able to adjust to their new urban lifestyles.

Pray that the gospel message will not be withheld from the Hani and that God will prepare their hearts to receive it.



Honghe Hani Rice Terraces
by inkelv1122, Flickr.com

PRAYER POINTERS

Bolstering the Pension Fund

Praise God that he cares about the elderly.

Pray that China's senior citizens will not want for care in their old age.

Pray that those in charge will be wise in the management of the pension funds.

Suffocating Laws

Praise God that nothing can separate us from His love.

Pray for churches under pressure from the myriad of new laws and regulations.

Pray that Chinese Christians will find ways to safely fellowship together.

News from CCSM UK

Pray for peace across China that will help families and society to feel they can move forward.

Pray for the Christians to spread that peace and be a source of blessing to neighbours, friends and colleagues.

Pray that teams and work in China can continue to bless and equip the church, those who serve the church and reach out to those on the margins of society.



Chinese Church Support Ministries

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

Suffocating Laws

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recently produced yet another weapon for its war against religion. Just two years after the infamous Revised Religious Affairs Regulations, the National Administration for Religious Affairs (NRAA, previously known as SARA) has now dished out further Administrative Measures for Religious Groups.

These measures became effective on February 1, 2020 and ram home the message that the CCP intends to be over and above the church in every aspect of church life. The Administrative Measures state that “Without the review and consent of the Religious Affairs Department of the People’s Government or registration with the Civil Affairs Department of the People’s Government, no activities can be carried out in the name of religious

groups.”

A good portion of the document’s 41 articles lay out the required organisational structures, hierarchies, numerous reporting requirements, financial accounting and staff training obligations now expected of all religious groups. In addition, TSPM churches will need to submit annual work plans and annual reports and any long-term and short-term projects and goals to the Religious Affairs Department. This onerous bureaucracy is beyond the means of small congregations.

Not only are churches answerable to the CCP, they must also work for them for free. Article 17 says “Religious organizations shall publicize the principles and policies of the Communist Party of China, national laws, regulations, and rules to religious staff and religious citizens, and educate and guide religious staff and religious citizens to support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, support the socialist system, and adhere to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics...”

Rules regulating application for religious venues to gain



'legal person status' came into effect in April 2019. In order to collect donations, pay staff, apply for loans etc. a church must apply for 'legal person status'. This process requires registration as a TSPM church, consent of a local recognized religious group and no less than a 100,000 RMB (around US\$14,300) in registered capital. The application is reviewed by the local Religious Affairs Department who may reject the application if it believes the church is not aligned with the Communist Party's ideologies.

A pastor from Jingzhou city in the central province of Hubei told the human rights watchdog Bitter Winter, "So much registered capital, this is difficult for us. And, after the registration is done, the church money will be controlled by the government." He added, "The government also restricts the content of the church's sermons, only allowing the content about core socialist values and the belief in the Communist Party. With one policy after another issued, the state just wants to eliminate the churches that fall out of its control."

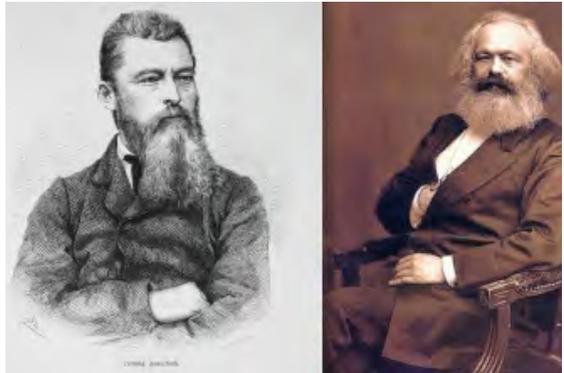
Tragically, the relentless red tape and constant administrative roadblocks proved too much for a Pastor in Henan Province. Exhausted, he took his life, jumping from the fifth floor of his church building. According to Bitter Winter, the first Sunday after Song Yongsheng's death, the sermon held by a church that he was once in charge of was about "viewing the kindness of

the core socialist values from Biblical knowledge." More than 30 government personnel and plainclothes officers surveilled the service.

None of this should come as a surprise in a nation ruled by a communist socialist government based on the atheist beliefs and theories of Marx and Engels. A document called "*The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period*" authored by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1982 clearly outlined the Party's ideology. It says:

"This is [also] what Comrade Mao Zedong meant when he said that the people, relying on themselves alone, will create a new age both for themselves and for the world.

*Only when we enter this new age will **all that shows a religious face in the present world finally disappear.** Therefore, each of us Party members from generation to generation, must put forth all our best efforts in the struggle to bring about this brilliant future."*



News from CCSM UK



As I write this it is very unclear what the impact of the coronavirus will be in China and the rest of the world.

Even as life is disrupted in China one Chinese pastor has asked for believers around the world to pray, and the first prayer request is for peace. He asks that we seek the peace of Christ to reign in their hearts. With this in mind, we should pray for peace if people are still fearful of the virus, we should pray for peace for those whose businesses have been closed and who have lost income, we should pray for peace for those who have suffered lack of food, we should pray for peace for those whose schooling has been disrupted, we should pray for peace

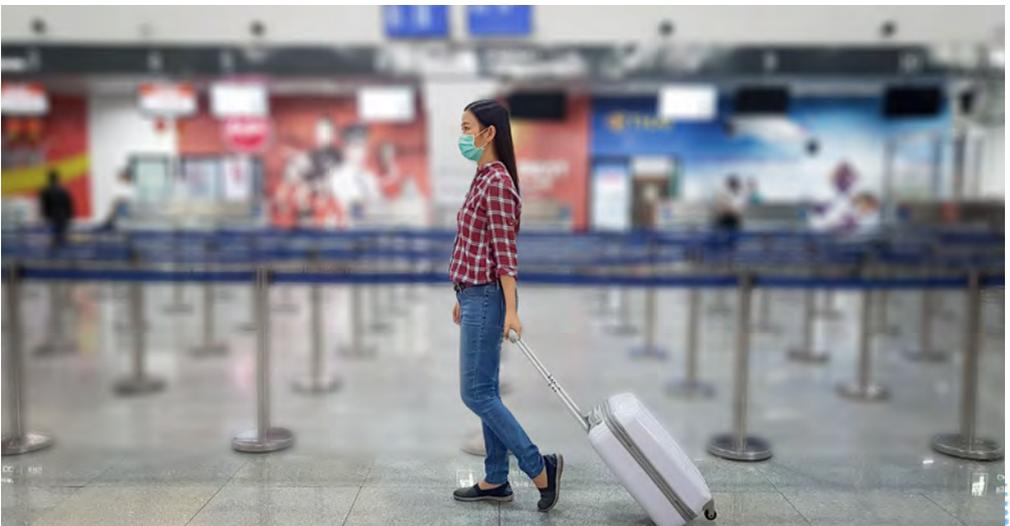
for those churches that have been unable to meet. As fear has risen we should pray for peace to fill Christians' hearts so that they can share that peace, and that this peace will be a way of sharing Jesus across China.

Jesus wanted us to receive his peace – John 14:27 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

And in John 16:33 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

We should receive the peace Jesus has given us and live our lives in that peace.

As this virus outbreak reminds us, we





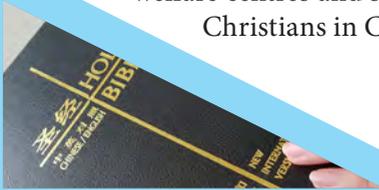
Guangzhou Train Station by Tom Booth, Flickr.com

don't know what will happen tomorrow, but we walk in His peace and we pray that many more will come to know Jesus this year across China. If God wills, we will take teams into China, distribute SD cards with hundreds of resources on them, help those who need medical aid, serve those in orphanages and welfare centres and support Christians in China.

Where you can please pray, please join us on teams and please support all of this financially. We serve while we can and while there are opportunities. Also please take every opportunity to share with friends, at church, with family the opportunities to serve God in China, which can start right now in prayer.

Richest blessings,

Martyn Wells
CCSM UK Director



CCSM UK

PO Box 5857
Sheffield, S10 9GG
T: 0114 229 5796
National Director: Martyn Wells
uk@amccsm.org
www.amccsm.org

