



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



APRIL 2020

## Who is Xia Baolong?

A year's gone by since the attempted introduction of the Fugitive Offenders Amendment Bill by the Hong Kong government. It is commonly called the "Extradition Bill" because it would allow wanted fugitives from Mainland China to be expatriated for trial on the mainland.

The slow response to retract the bill gave room for the protests to grow more determined, and for a pro-democracy movement to strengthen. Use of tear gas and some excessive use of force to break up protests has all cultivated further distrust in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Hong Kong people were also angry and concerned at the lax government handling of the coronavirus outbreak. Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, closed borders only after medical worker strikes and community pressure. Hong Kong international airport, the Shenzhen Bay border and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge remained



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open and still provided a pathway for the virus to enter Hong Kong from the mainland. Since the 8th Feb, all travellers arriving from China have been imposed with a 14-day quarantine.

Leaving some borders open caused friction between mainlanders and Hong Kong citizens, especially after a second coronavirus death on the 19th February and growing numbers in quarantine. In the city several restaurants have refused to serve Mandarin speakers (Hong Kong citizens speak mainly Cantonese).

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated places in the world but right now, the streets are largely deserted as people work from home, schools are closed, and social activities have ceased. An exodus of expats fleeing the virus could further harm Hong Kong's limping economy. HK is suffering an unprecedented back-to-back recession, but for those invested in toilet paper, bleach and bulk rice the returns are likely to be good as people stock up for self-imposed quarantine.

This is the picture that now faces Xia Baolong(夏宝龙), the newly appointed director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, who assumed the position on February 13, 2020. The shuffle has the 67-year-old Xia Baolong replace Zhang Xiaoming who has moved into the deputy director position in charge of daily operations. The office is

directly under the Chinese government's State Council.

Xia has a reputation as a hard worker - but also as hardline enforcer of Xi Jinping's rule-of-law and anti-religious policies. He knows Xi Jinping well, having worked as his deputy when Xi was party secretary of the affluent Zhejiang Province. Xia later stepped into this role himself in 2014 after completing a doctorate in political economics.

It was in Zhejiang that Xia's 2014 campaign against churches hit headlines. The Province had a flourishing Christian population. In fact, Zhejiang's Wenzhou city was dubbed "New Jerusalem" because it boasted 1500 churches and numerous crosses dotted the horizon. Xia ordered 1000's of crosses to be torn down on the grounds they were illegal structures or unregistered churches. But it was the destruction of Sanjiang Church in Wenzhou that particularly shocked believers. This was a newly built state-registered TSPM church. Believers had raised over 20 million yuan to construct the impressive, landmark church with a dramatic 180-foot spire. It was large enough to seat 2000 worshipers.

Unfortunately, they exceeded the size approved for the building. It was permitted for 20,000 square feet but covered 100,000 square feet. Although the church negotiated to deconstruct part of the building, it did not sway the decision to demolish it. Petitions and protests were ignored.

In 2018 Xia was made the vice-chairman and secretary general of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). This advisory

body works closely with the United Front Work Department, the segment of the government that now oversees religion in China.

## Blockchain Boosts Charity

The important role that charities play in society was highlighted after the devastating 2008 Sichuan Earthquake. Entire towns and villages were destroyed, and charities stepped in to work alongside the State with medical care, food, shelter and care of orphans.

However, when help is desperately needed, being able to offer aid is not always straightforward in China. Recently, Chinese churches attempting to donate face masks to clinics working with CoVid-19 patients struggled to determine which suppliers were genuine and which would sell them substandard products. And then, arranging safe delivery was another headache. Gifts

have been known to disappear on route to their destination, turning up later at a roadside market.

In some Provinces all Covid-19 donations had to go through the State-run Chinese Red Cross. But outrage arose nationwide against the organisation after footage went public showing what appeared to be an official taking boxes of masks. These were supposed to be for frontline medical staff.

Increasingly, greater accountability and transparency are being demanded by Chinese citizens. China has already taken



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steps to tighten up the charity sector. In 2016 a Charity Law was introduced which permitted a charity to spend no more than 10% of donations received on administration. The law also clarified the registration process for charities, set information disclosure requirements and allowed for tax deductible donations. It also gave more organisations the right to raise funds directly from the public.

To facilitate this online, the government gave around a dozen organisations permission to operate online charity platforms. These included Tencent Charity, Taobao Charity, Weibo Charity, Jingdong Charity, Baidu Charity, Xinhua Charity, Gongyibao, United for Charity, Qingsongchou, China Foundation Center, and Ant Financial (formerly known as Alipay, an Alibaba Group affiliate). Today there are more than twenty online donation platforms.

Of these, Ant Financial was the first in China to incorporate blockchain technology. Their pilot scheme was named “Ant Love” and it enabled users of Alipay to donate to a cause and then watch the fundraising progress, including the number of donors and amount of donations as they occurred. All causes must be supported by a charity organisation. Each donation is linked directly to a specific recipient, and the donation is time stamped when they receive the money. Donors trust Alipay’s identification verification systems to ensure the beneficiary is not a phoney.

However, the pilot’s blockchain ledgers were kept private to Ant Financial. Then in September 2019, Alibaba and Ant Financial launched Charities on the Chain (CoC), a new platform with an open ledger. Now connected donors, charities and beneficiaries can track donations right through to their implementation, making the process completely transparent. The service is offered free of charge to charitable organizations. Tencent’s popular Gongyi Charity also uses the security of blockchain and is readily available through the WeChat app. Although it does not have an open ledger it promises to regularly audit and monitor its transactions.

China is actively embracing blockchain technology in many other areas, including to trace food from farm-to-table, to verify car odometers and in the supply chain of medicine. In addition, the People’s Bank of China is well advanced in preparation to launch its own digital currency (along the lines of Bitcoin and Ethereum) based on blockchain technology.

The strong advantage of blockchain technology is the irrefutable integrity of data, its ledgers cannot be modified and are virtually tamper-proof. Multiple independent parties use a process known as “consensus,” to verify each transaction before adding it to the chain.

Blockchain is boosting the confidence of Chinese citizens to open their wallets and give.

# The Kazakh Minority

The first Turkic empire, the mighty Göktürk Khaganate (552AD) stretched, at its zenith, from the Black Sea, across Central Asia and China's western and northern reaches, through Mongolia into Manchuria.

Its conquests originated north of the Altai Mountains, a region that lies at the convergence of modern-day China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. Here a Turkic tribe of skilled ironsmiths and horse breeders dominated by the Rouran Khaganate rebelled against their overlords and then proceeded to subjugate all other tribes along the Eurasian Steppes. Many of these tribes were also Turkic peoples, mostly nomadic herdsmen and travelling merchants.

Under Göktürk rule trade flowed freely and the Turkic identity was established.

In 744AD the Göktürk Empire collapsed, and its eastern regions gave way to the Uyghur Khaganate. It wasn't until the great Mongol expansion in the 13th century that another empire would extend the length of these regions.

Today, the DNA of the Kazakh people, like the other nationalities in central Asia, is an amalgamation of Turkic, Mongol, the original inhabitants, and neighbouring nations. Compared to other central Asian countries, the Kazakhs population has a slightly higher



percentage of Slavic and European DNA.

Most of China's Kazakhs immigrated from Russia, moving in to take up the void left by the Dzungar genocide in 1755, others fled Tsarist conscription into the army between 1916 and 1920. Still others came after losing pastureland to Russian settlers. During the Soviet era collectivisation and famines drove many more across the border.

This migration changed direction in the 1950s and 60s as tens of thousands returned to the Soviet Union shortly after the Republic of China was formed and later in 1991 when Kazakhstan gained independence and offered repatriation to Kazakhs abroad. They were drawn by Kazakhstan's prospering cities and greater religious freedom for Muslims. Others moved for the opportunity to have more children than permitted

in China and to be able to educate their children in their Kazakh mother tongue.

Nowadays, there are about 1.8 million Chinese Kazakhs, and they are one of the 56 recognised minority groups. The majority live in the north of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and in the Tianshan Mountains with smaller populations in Gansu and Qinghai.



In Xinjiang they live alongside the Uyghurs, but while Uyghurs tend to be agriculturalists, Kazakhs are generally pastoralists living in yurts over summer to take their livestock to the mountain meadows. Some still live this way in China and Mongolia, although in Kazakhstan they are more urban and settled.

China has a sedentarisation scheme in action and has also closed off much of the pasturelands from grazing. The Kazakh's rich culture and hospitality, along with the area's beautiful mountains

and grasslands are being developed for tourism. The next generation is unlikely to experience the nomad lifestyle they have lived for thousands of years. Increasingly, the younger generations in China are gaining a high-level education, becoming fluent in Chinese, living in the cities and earning a relatively high income.

China's Kazakhs have been called cultural, or "folk", Muslims. They identify as Sunni Muslim but are not particularly observant. Alcohol and cigarettes are a problem among the population. They like to keep totems from their shamanistic past, such as the dried foot of a wolf or teeth from a wild animal, as lucky charms. Some still practice shamanistic healing.

Those that do practice their Sunni Muslim faith have faced growing restrictions. Since 2018 many have been placed in re-education camps along with over a million Uyghurs. Asia Harvest estimate only 30 Christians among the Chinese Kazakhs and report that now, almost all Uyghur and Kazakh church leaders have been detained. Other sources have said that those that are not in camps have stopped gathering together.

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Who is Xia Baolong?

Thank God that he has not chosen to live in buildings of brick and mortar but in His people.

Praise God that he has promised to build His church.

Thank God that he has given us a wonderful promise of hope. *“I saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God -the All Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God lights it up, and its lamp is the Lord”* [Rev 21:22-23(NET)]

Pray for Hong Kong’s leadership that there will be continued freedom to worship the Lord and share the gospel.

## Blockchain Boosts Charity

Thank God that blockchain technology is allowing the Chinese people to regain trust in charities and to be confident in their giving.

Praise God that many in desperate need will now have a greater chance of receiving help.

Pray that God’s name will be glorified through those that work in His service and that He will provide for all their needs.



Kalajun Grasslands 喀拉峻草原, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture 伊犁哈萨克自治州, Xinjiang 新疆

# PRAYER POINTERS

## The Kazakh Minority

Pray that God will prepare the hearts of Kazakhs to hear the gospel message and that He will bring opportunities for them to hear it.

Pray that Kazakh Christians interned in camps or factories will be strengthened, comforted and encouraged. Pray that their children will grow up to know the Lord.

Pray that God will show the Chinese Church specific ways to reach the Kazakh people in China.

## Xenophobia Rising

Pray that China will recognise the ugly nature of the rising racism, xenophobia and hatred in the nation. Pray that hatred will not develop into violence.

Pray that Chinese will stand up against xenophobia in their country.

Pray that those that are stirring up dissent will be stopped in their tracks.

## The Wenzhou Flame

Thank God that His timing and plans are always good. Thank Him that he has prepared a church that can reach the Chinese diaspora in Europe and back along the One Road One Belt.

Pray that the Wenzhou church in Europe will continue to be blessed spiritually and financially so they may be a blessing to the diaspora.

Pray that these Chinese Churches in Europe will grow and find favour among their adopted countryfolk.



**Chinese Church Support Ministries**

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



# Xenophobia

## Rising

Xenophobia is a fear, prejudice or dislike of foreigners. Unfortunately, this ugly and dangerous emotion is ramping up in China.

Quite how deep the sentiments are running was demonstrated recently when the government, in a bid to attract foreign talent, published a draft law on relaxing permanent residency requirements, in effect providing a green card to qualifying applicants. It would also allow foreigners' dependants to apply simultaneously for permanent residency. This unleashed huge backlash on social media, with rants like, "foreigners get treated better, have more perks and earn higher salaries." Sadly, streams of racist profanities have been littering the internet. The angry posts are frequently aimed at international

students, and particularly target Africans.

One widely circulated post from Weibo declared: "China is not an immigrant country." The reality is that less than one per cent of foreigners have permanent residency in China, according to state media.

During the Coronavirus pandemic the government has had the difficult job of holding together a nation of anxious, frustrated and financially stretched citizens and many are disgruntled at how things have been handled.

One foreign worker observed, "The state-machine seeks to deflect blame away from China: moral outrage about so-called racist incidents in other countries is big news, all designed to stoke the fuel of xenophobic hatred. Any incident that portrays the West in a poor light is seized upon and twisted to expose an anti-China bias. It's really worrying considering that the





majority of the population is fed this diet from womb to tomb - outside news is heavily censored.

Three Wall Street journalists were expelled from China in January when their newspaper refused to retract or apologise for an article critical of the CCP's handling of the disease. (It should be noted that these journalists did not write the article, but because of their affiliation with the newspaper were deported). When the USA retaliated by reviewing the credentials of Chinese journalists in the US, the Chinese foreign minister was almost apoplectic, firing off accusations of discrimination, and stifling the freedom of the press! Of course, this made national headlines, again firing up the locals because no mention was made of the earlier expulsions of the accredited foreign journalists."

point blame, there are always fingers pointing back.

One foreign family decided to pray about whether to stay or go at the onset of the CoVid-19 outbreak. They felt God was leading them to stay. A friend commented, "the huge benefit has been that by remaining in country, locals and others took notice. This is a God thing. A number of people were surprised they didn't leave when they had the opportunity. Let's be honest, fleeing is our innate natural response to danger. It's not necessarily wrong and we all have to weigh the pros and cons.

The result? A number of locals asked them why they stayed. After sharing, locals who viewed them as mere foreigners, now began viewing them as one of them. That's an amazing hurdle to overcome for any foreigner living abroad."

From whichever side the fingers

# The Wenzhou Flame



Wenzhou, in Zhejiang Province, is one of the wealthiest cities in China.

Food, tea, wine, jute, timber, paper, Alunite and manufactured electric appliances are shipped from its ports. The city boasts over 500 lighter factories. Its people are known as the 'Jews of the Orient' because of their business acumen, especially in real estate.

In the past the region experienced harsh Christian persecution. But in 2006 it was estimated that 20% of the City were Christ followers. State figures estimated over a million Christians by 2012, actual figures were likely much higher.

As China opened up, some Wenzhouese looked abroad for opportunity, migrating to America and Europe, predominantly to Italy, Spain and France. In the 1990's and early 2000's migrants would pay large sums of money to 'Snake-Head' gangs to smuggle them into Europe. The 'service' would provide them with jobs and accommodation to start their new life. Amnesties in Spain and Italy have since allowed them to legalise their status.

Many of the migrants were Christian, and they possessed a dual advantage to succeed. Firstly, they practiced the Chinese tradition of nurturing family into their expanding business networks.

Secondly, they could rely on the support of Chinese church connections already established in their adopted countries.

In Italy you are likely to find a Wenzhou family business that started as a clothing factory but expanded to cover the entire supply chain. Fabric is sourced in China, manufactured in Italy and marketed back to China as "Made in Italy". The Wenzhouese opened restaurants, retail and businesses in their adopted countries. Their ability to gain wealth has been a great blessing in building and growing the Chinese church in Europe.

The church model they developed in Europe is strongly Sinocentric and has not integrated with their host country churches. Rather they have national networks similar to the Chinese Family Church network back in Wenzhou and have even upheld some links back to leaders there. Churches are non-denominational, run by lay leaders along with a centralised preacher rotation system. The preachers all work as volunteers and are unpaid and pay their own travel costs.

The networks are well connected between other European countries, particularly in the Schengen Zone.

This means that those who move about to follow opportunities elsewhere in the region can always find a church.

According to a 2019 article by Nanlai Cao of Renmin University, Italy is now home to around 70 Chinese Churches and nearly 30,000 believers. France has around 40 churches, centred mainly in Paris, with one that grew to over a thousand members before dividing. In recent years migrant churches have also been planted in Greece and Malta. Unlike the USA, where many found faith in America, these European Christians brought their faith with them directly from China.

Church buildings are often a multifunction community centre.

The network is actively evangelising with events, camps, youth activities and all forms of outreach.

If anything, the Chinese government's crackdown in China has spurred their vision reach the diaspora. In the past they have sent short term teams into China but now they are using other methods to reach Mainlanders. A Christian owned company offers tours following the footsteps of the disciples. It is designed to attract Mainland Chinese Christians with the intent to strengthen and deepen their faith, and with the additional hope they will bring potential converts.

This Chinese grassroots movement in Europe, wish to bless their host nations, but so far, their strong evangelistic outreach has been to other Chinese. Whether the next generations will be 'lighters' igniting their secular European neighbours, time will tell.



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