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**MINISTRY IN CHINA – OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES**

Dr. Linwood T. Geiger  
Distinguished Professor of Economics  
Eastern University, St. David's, PA 19087-3696, USA

The purpose of the paper is to emphasize the reasons it is important for Christianity to expand in China and to discuss the opportunities and obstacles when evangelizing is constrained by the Government. Only a small percentage of Chinese are Christians, either openly or secretly (worshiping in illegal house churches). Not only is China the largest country in the world, with almost one fourth of the world's population, but it also has the fastest growing economy that is likely to be the largest in the world by 2030. Few people doubt that this country will have immense power and influence in the future. However, ministry is constrained there, because many of the Chinese leaders are paranoid when foreigners are involved with religion, based on their history over the past two centuries, and therefore have forbidden religious proselytizing. How can Christians working in China submit to Chinese authorities (Phil. 2:8), present a credible Christian witness, develop the trust and respect of the leaders in this exotic country, and yet conduct an effective ministry? To best understand the problem in this large and complex nation, the paper will

- (1) first examine China's fantastic economic growth, then
- (2) briefly review the history of religion in the country, focusing on Christianity, and
- (3) finally look at the obstacles and opportunities for ministry.

China has experienced the most rapid growth in the world since 1980. During the 1960s and 1970s, it was considered one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita income of less than \$300. However, by 1990, the other countries in East Asia were very aware of this growing economic and military power; and, by 2000, all the industrial nations were sensitive to China's actions and reactions. The average 8% growth rate over the past twenty years has resulted in a Gross National Income of almost \$5 trillion in 2000 – greater than any other country in the world with the exception of the United States. If this trend continues, within 20 years China's economy will be larger than the economy of the US. Granted that the per capita income in China will be lower than that of many industrial nations, but the significance is that by 2025 she will have the capability to produce more goods and services than any country in the world.

Partially because the missionary expansion in China was supported by 80 humiliating port treaties whereby foreigners were subject to their own laws and immune from Chinese authority, Christianity and other religions were suppressed in China after the Communists took over in 1949. However, "life-style" evangelism has been effective in this country even when the time for the development of relationships has been brief.

## MINISTRY IN CHINA – OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES Spring 2003

By:

Dr. Linwood T. Geiger  
Distinguished Professor of Economics  
Eastern University, St. David's, PA 19087-3696, USA

Only a small percentage of Chinese are Christians, either openly or secretly (worshiping in illegal house churches). Not only is China the largest country in the world, with almost one fourth of the world's population, but also it is the fastest growing nation, with an economy that is likely to be the largest in the world by 2030. Few people doubt that this country will have immense power and immense influence around the world in the future, so it is important that there be an opportunity for the growth of Christianity. However, ministry is constrained there, because many of the Chinese leaders are paranoid about foreign involvement with religion, based on their history over the past two centuries, and therefore have forbidden religious proselytizing. **How can Christians working in China submit to Chinese authorities (Phil. 2:8), present a credible Christian witness, develop the trust and respect of the leaders in this exotic country, and yet conduct an effective ministry?** To best understand the problem in this large and complex nation, we'll

- (4) first examine China's fantastic economic growth, then
- (5) briefly review the history of religion in the country, focusing on Christianity, and
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### Economic Growth in China

China has experienced the most rapid growth in the world since 1980. During the 1960s and 1970s, it was considered one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita income of less than \$300. However, by 1990, the other countries in East Asia were very aware of this growing economic and military power; and, by 2000, all the industrial nations considered China's actions and reactions. The average 8% growth rate over the past twenty years has resulted in a Gross National Income of almost \$5 trillion in 2000<sup>i</sup> – greater than any other country in the world with the exception of the United States. If this trend continues, within 20 years China's economy will be larger than the economy of the US. Granted that the per capita income in China will be lower than that of many industrial nations, but the significance is that by 2025 she will have the capability to produce more goods and services than any country in the world.

A review of economic reform in China is often divided into three periods, 1978-1990, 1990-1996, and 1997-present. We'll focus on the first period because it was the most unexpected and dramatic and established the foundations for the strong growth of the last 13 years. Then we'll briefly cover the second and third periods. An interesting question is why was China willing to take the big risk of embarking on economic reform in 1978 since growth from 1950 through 1978 had been

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<sup>i</sup> PPP – World Development Report 2002, pp232.

satisfactory (about 4.5%) and any changes to open their economy would weaken control of the Communists over their people. The following factors seem to have motivated the change:

- The economic performance of the Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) during the 1960s and 1970s was over 10%, greater than that of China and the rest of the world. The one significant difference between these four countries and China was the presence of a market economy.
- China's economic growth from 1950 through 1978 was almost exclusively due to an increase in labor and capital – very little was caused by an increase in productivity. On the other hand her neighbors experienced large productivity gains.
- She wanted to remove the memory of the disastrous Cultural Revolution in the 1970s.
- There was a change in leadership – Deng Xiao Ping took over.

**A. IN CHINA FROM 1978 THROUGH 1990**, with the economic reform, there were lots of winners and very few losers. With the exception of two periods of double-digit inflation that were quickly brought under control, the real growth rate was excellent. High quality produce and many consumer goods became available to most people, and the great inequality between the rich and the peasants narrowed dramatically. These early economic reforms in China consisted of the following elements:

1. Emphasis on rural sector development
  - \* Farming and free markets
  - \* Small scale industrial output
2. Decentralization of decision making
3. Creation of a private sector
4. Provision of incentives for workers
5. Use of the market to allocate goods in many areas
6. Increasing openness to the rest of the world
  - \* Encouragement of foreign investment
  - \* Liberalization of foreign trade

The initial reforms introduced in 1978 focused on the rural areas, increasing the size of private plots for farmers and encouraging the establishment and expansion of free markets for farm products. Changes were made gradually over the next ten to fifteen years, during which time government intervention continued (e.g. for many years there was a market price as well as a government price for most consumer goods). The reforms were not applied evenly to all sectors and regions of the economy. Reform of the economic system in rural areas not only preceded reforms in the urban areas but also was far more significant in the beginning. Also, the reforms were far more extensive in the southern and coastal areas of the country, particularly in Guangdong province.

The following elements of the early economic reforms in China were considered to be the most significant:

## 1. Rural Sector Development

**a. Farm Productivity and Free Markets** Rural sector development has been the cornerstone of the early reforms. Assuming that the quota for grain was realized, farmers were encouraged to use a portion of their land (7%) to produce anything they would like, to sell their output, and to enjoy the results of their activity in terms of an improved standard of living, more material goods, etc. With this incentive, free markets were established on many secondary streets in villages, towns, and all the major cities of the country. Produce and livestock were transported from rural areas during the night and were sold on the city streets in the early morning and throughout the day. The free markets unleashed a tremendous demand for fresh vegetables, fruits, meats, live chickens, and fish. While there were many markets in the countryside, there were no free markets in the cities in 1978. By 1980 there were almost 3,000 markets in the cities, and this number increased to over 13,000 by 1990. Productivity on the farmers' small plots increased dramatically, and eventually most of the vegetables consumed by the Chinese were produced on these private lots in the local countryside and sold in the city markets. Fish farms were established and, in time encircled the major cities. Initially, the local governments attempted to set prices for the products sold in the free markets, but over a period of ten to fifteen years became less involved (the level of local government involvement varied from city to city), with demand and supply conditions ultimately determining the prices. While the government continued to offer most of the same foods and other products in state-stores (often at lower prices), the private sector share of the market increased and became dominant because of the quality and the freshness of the food, particularly vegetables, fruits, meat, fish and fowl.

**b. Village and Township Enterprises (TVE)** Equally impressive was the establishment and expansion of Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs), which grew in the rural areas at a rate in excess of 15% per year since 1980. These businesses were rural collectives that were theoretically owned and operated by the workers at the village or township level. Although they were regulated by the State, their organizations and operations varied widely from location to location. Most of the TVEs functioned like privately owned enterprises in the sense that if the managers had good ideas and efficiently manufactured quality products needed by the people, they enjoyed substantial profits. However, if they were not sensitive to the consumer's needs and were not productive and efficient, they did not remain in business for long. In other words, a hard budget constraint<sup>ii</sup> was operative. In 1989 there were 18.7 million of these enterprises across the

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ii The **hard budget constraint** means that the owners and managers are responsible for the financial condition of the firm without access to transfer payments from the government to cover losses. The term implies that the manager will lose his job or the firm will go out of business if it is not profitable. Financial responsibility must be accompanied by managerial autonomy that permits the manager to set prices of goods, wages, employment, etc, in response to market signals. A **soft budget constraint** means that the firm's losses are covered by transfers from some source, e.g. state budget, other enterprises, the financial system.

country employing 93.7 million people and accounting for 24.3% of the nation's output.<sup>iii</sup> After two stagnant years, the number employed increased to 96 million at the end of 1991.

The success of these village and township enterprises was due to many factors, including competition, financial discipline, and a high level of rural savings. Linkages with state-owned firms also contributed to their success, as the state enterprises provided raw materials, technology and a demand for their products. While property rights were not clear, the profits did go to the managers and to the workers in the township and village enterprises.

The increased agricultural productivity, the growth of the farmer's markets in the cities, and the rise of village and township enterprises enabled many peasants to increase their income dramatically and reduced the gap between rural and urban per capita income. In 1978, the ratio between rural and urban per capita consumption was only 32.9% (169 yuan/yr in the countryside vs 514 yuan/yr in the city), but it increased to over 43% by 1985 (324 yuan versus 754 yuan).<sup>iv</sup> Unfortunately, this trend reversed in the 1990s, and the inequality between the country and the city started to widen again because of the more recent tremendous growth in the cities and coastal areas.

**2 Decentralized Decision Making** Much of the decision-making power was decentralized to the province, county, city, and in some cases to the local and individual levels e.g.

- The provinces and local governments became responsible for collection of many major taxes. This decision made it more difficult for the central government to control the nations' economy as it had in the past. In the 1990s the central government tried to gain back some of this control
- The number of products allocated by the central government fell dramatically, so that industrial production and retail sales subject to the State plan fell to about 30% of the total
- The provinces started to compete to attract foreign investment. This competition included the establishment of trade zones and industrial centers and the promotion of joint ventures.

**3 Creation of a Private Sector** A private sector was permitted and encouraged in certain areas by the government. Individuals had the opportunity to own a business, earn a profit, invest, and

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iii. China Daily, Sunday, July 8, 1990, pp. 1.

iv. The data for the period from 1978 to 1985 were reported by Dwight Perkins in his article "Reforming China's Economic System" in the *Journal of Economic Literature* Vol. XXVI, (June 1988), page 638.

accumulate goods. The free markets described above provided earnings opportunities for farmers and spawned millions of entrepreneurs who were needed to transport and sell the goods in urban areas. They sold not only vegetables, meats, fish and fruits, but also clothing, pastry and rolls, furniture, live chickens, crickets, toys, restaurant services, etc. on many of the secondary streets of the villages, towns, and cities throughout China.

In addition to providing entrepreneurs in the free market, during this first period, private enterprises tended to concentrate in service-oriented businesses e.g. taxi drivers, bicycle repairmen, ferry boat operators, barbers, hairdressers, doctors, individuals providing transportation of all kinds, particularly on bicycles, small bus and truck repair operations.<sup>v</sup> The financial rewards for people working in the private sector proved to be substantial, in many cases their income was five to ten times more than that of workers in state enterprises. The number of people listed in the private sector was relatively small, 7.6 million, at the end of 1991.<sup>vi</sup> This amounted to only about 1.5% of the total working population; however, this figure was misleading in that it did not include millions and millions of farmers selling produce from their private plots and the part-time private sector activities by people working for state enterprises, education institutions, etc. During my year in China as a Fulbright lecturer in the early 1990s, the vast majority of the Chinese professors and State Enterprise employees whom I got to know worked part-time in the private sector.

**4. Incentives for Workers** Incentives were used to encourage increased productivity in all areas: government operations, village and township enterprises, joint ventures, etc. In addition to the obvious incentives for people in the private sector, reforms included material rewards related to effort and output in the state enterprises. Table 1 illustrates the change in the pay structure for state enterprises from 1978 through 1989 and reflects the establishment of more incentives. For example, base pay fell from 85% to 47%, while bonuses increased from 2% to over 17%.

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v. An interesting example of how the private sector functioned occurred when I was in Beijing during the summer of 1990 and realized that I needed additional calling cards for a subsequent trip to Hong Kong and Singapore. The larger State printing shops would not consider printing cards in less than a week. However, a private businessman with a small one-room operation was delighted to print 100 cards within a day and actually ended up printing 200 when a 2nd member of our group realized that his calling card inventory also was low. The printer earned 120 yuan (\$25.00 in 1990) within a short period of time by taking care of the needs of two consumers - a windfall by his standards.

vi May 2, 1992 edition of the *China Daily*, page 1

**TABLE 1 STRUCTURE OF PAY IN STATE ENTERPRISES (Method of Compensation - % of total)**

Method of Compensation	1978	1980	1985	1989
BASE PAY	85.0	69.8	57.2	47.4
PIECE WAGES	0.8	3.2	9.5	9.2
BONUS	2.3	9.1	12.4	17.6
ALLOWANCE	6.5	14.1	18.5	23.1
OVERTIME WAGE	2.0	1.6	1.6	1.7
OTHER	3.4	2.2	0.8	1.0

**SOURCE: 1990 Statistical survey of China, page 44**

**5. Increased use of the Market to Allocate Goods** In a number of sectors and industries, market prices started to perform the function of allocating goods and services. This had been particularly true for the agricultural sector for some time, and the number of agricultural products whose prices are not determined by central authority was increasing each year. However, the price and output for a number of industrial products were still determined by central authority.

**6. The International Sector** In the late seventies, China started to open up its economy to the rest of the world. Exports and imports expanded rapidly although the country maintained a high level of bureaucratic control over exchange rates and quotas. China returned to her seat at the World Bank and the IMF and began to borrow from these institutions, and started seeking admission to World Trade Organization (WTO – then known as GATT) in the late 1980s. Foreign investment was encouraged, which meant joint ventures and, in subsequent years, some direct foreign investment. Special economic zones (SEZ) were created where special freedoms and tax breaks were provided to encourage foreign trade and investment. By the early 1990s, there were thousands of special economic zones throughout the country. Foreigners had an opportunity to invest, and stock markets were established in Shanghai and Shenzhen in December 1990. CITIC, China's International Trust and Investment Corporation, actively invested in enterprises in Hong Kong and other areas outside the country, and the government worked hard to increase tourism.

**The results of these economic reforms were truly remarkable.** During the 1980s, real GNP growth exceeded 8%, probably the highest in the world for the ten-year period even though the growth rate declined to 4% and 5% in 1989 and 1990 respectively. In the southern and coastal provinces, real GNP growth frequently exceeded 15%/year. The improved productivity in the

agricultural sector permitted a significant share of the labor force to transfer to the manufacturing sector that had even higher productivity. The growth of township and village enterprises averaged more than 15%/year and, by 1990, employed almost 100 million people and contributed 25% of the nation's industrial output. The growth in Guangdong Province also exceeded 15%/year and accounted for one third of the country's total exports. Remarkably, while the Chinese continued to be effective at mobilizing resources, one third of the economy's real growth during this period resulted from productivity improvement. The reforms were apparently effective in motivating people to work harder and to think of new and better ways of producing goods.

There was a great increase in the standard of living of the average citizen and a very large increase in consumer products, particularly food and clothing. The quality and availability of vegetables and meats improved significantly as the result of the free market sensitivity to the needs of the consumer. Food production increased dramatically, and China shifted from being a large importer of food in 1978 to being a net exporter by 1985. A report in *The Economist* indicated that by the early 1990s nearly 70% of Chinese urban households had color television and 81% had washing machines.

One negative factor resulting from this dramatic growth was increased air pollution. The economic expansion required significant increases in energy production and consumption. Fortunately, China is the world's largest producer of coal, but unfortunately, the coal is of very poor quality, and large quantities of cleaner oil resources were not yet developed. By 1990, nine of the ten largest cities in the country had air quality levels below the acceptable minimum standards.

**B. DURING PERIOD 2, FROM 1990 THROUGH 1996**, while economic growth continued to be strong, the country began to experience difficulties in a number of areas. The increase in efficiencies in the agriculture sector resulted in a surplus of tens of millions of peasants roaming the countryside. While the previous system provided the “iron rice bowl”<sup>vii</sup> for workers in government operations and state-owned enterprises, there were few provisions for care of people in the private sector. Thus the much higher rate of growth of the non-state sector exposed inadequate housing infrastructure and the lack of safety nets or inadequate safety nets for the retired, the unemployed, and for medical and educational needs of the people. Tension grew among the peasants because of the rapid increase in income inequality since the late 1980s, which reflects differences in growth between regions. The southeastern coastal areas grew at a rate in excess of 13%, while central China grew at approximately 6%. Bureaucratic corruption created a strong public reaction against government officials' engaging in bribery, nepotism and gambling with public funds. In addition, crime was growing as increasing wealth attracted drugs and enterprising criminal gangs. The rapid economic and military growth became threatening to other nations. The limited energy and transportation infrastructure caused concern about continued growth in the future.

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vii With the “**iron rice bowl**” concept the government guaranteed that citizens would receive the food, shelter, clothing and health care required to meet their basic needs from birth to death.

**International tensions** increased as China grew. East Asian countries, primarily Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, became alarmed about China's claim on most of the islands in the South China Sea, particularly the Paracel and Spratly Islands where there appear to be substantial oil reserves. Also, Japan and China argued over the ownership of the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between Okinawa and Taiwan. The East Asian nations also became concerned about what they perceived to be China's rapid military build-up and its nuclear capabilities. The official military budget was \$8.7 billion in the mid-1990s, but this does not include nuclear-weapons procurement, defense-related R&D, and the 600,000 People's Armed Police. A number of international analysts estimated the actual defense spending at \$85 billion which is slightly higher than Japan's and about one-third of the United States. As the military strength of the country increased, it was natural for other nations to perceive this increasingly powerful country as a threat and for China to want to play a more important role on the world scene. viii The United States was concerned about the growing trade deficit with China, and what they perceived to be breaking of agreements on the protection of international property, and continuous violations of human rights. On the other hand, China was unhappy with the United States for blocking its membership in the World Trade Organization for many years, the United States' ambiguous and confusing position regarding Taiwan, and because of the criticism about human rights which China believes is her own affair and not a matter of concern for other countries.

**C. ECONOMIC REFORM BETWEEN 1996 AND THE PRESENT** focused on improving the efficiency of the State Owned Enterprises. Most of the industrial growth in China since the beginning of reform in 1978 has been Township & Village Enterprises (TVEs) which, although they are collectives, function like private firms in a competitive environment. The output growth rate and labor productivity improvements have been much greater in the Township and Village Enterprises, which now account for over 25% of all industrial output in the country. Also, there has been a substantial increase in private sector firms and foreign investment; however, the state enterprises have not "withered away." The workers employed by SOE's were 18% in 1978 and are still 18%, which means that an additional 35 million Chinese are now working in the enterprises. There is a total of over 100,000 state-owned enterprises employing over 100 million people. The State's share of industrial investment has only fallen from 86% in 1982 to 75% now; however, during the same period its share of output has fallen from 74% to 34% in 1999 to 28% in 2001. Figure 2 illustrates the relative decline in importance of the state enterprises and the increased contribution by other business activities.

The facts reflect the difficulty. By 1995, the overall profitability of the state enterprises was declining, with about two-thirds of the firms recording losses - approximately \$5.7 billion was lost by state-owned firms. The problem was complicated by the debts the SOE's owed each other, which were estimated to exceed \$30 billion. One in four SOE's have debts that exceed their assets. A significant portion of the state production is of poor quality which goes into large

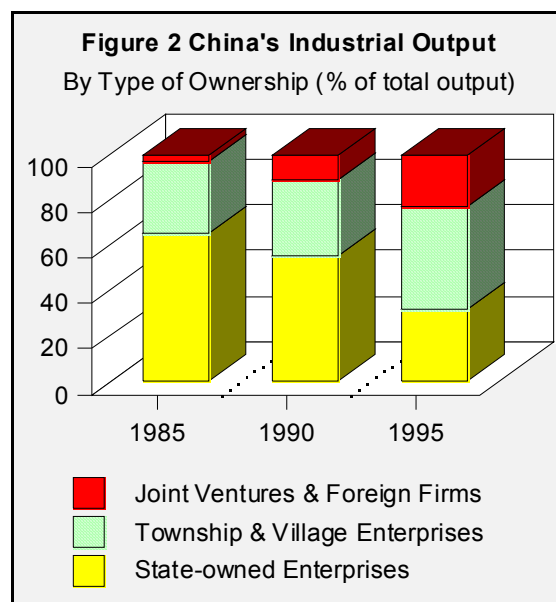
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viii . However, most of China's equipment is obsolete and the majority of the spending is for salaries and infrastructure, not for weapons systems. While they may be intimidating to many of the smaller East Asian countries, it is unlikely that they could be a threat to United States and the other industrial nations in the foreseeable future.

stockpiles. All heavy industry is in the hands of SOEs. One of the reasons for the continued losses is excessive wage increases. There is no hard budget constraint; the managers have no incentive to resist wage demands. The problem is particularly evident in North China's Industrial Sector (in Liaoning Province) where

- Many factories are obsolete
- Many employees are no longer paid
- SOEs are still overstaffed
- Virtually all SOEs are making losses

Numerous efforts have been made to increase the efficiency of the state-enterprises. The government understands the deep-rooted contradictions that exist in these enterprises under the traditional planned economy, and realizes that there needs to be clear definition of property rights, power, and responsibilities that separates the state enterprises from the government. *While subsidized, many state enterprises in the transitional economies have higher costs for very legitimate reasons; they assume responsibilities for important social costs: pensions, medical coverage, apartments, and, occasionally schools and cultural centers. These social costs are normally the responsibility of government, the individual, and/or insurance in most market economies.*



**Another problem – the banking sector** An essential step in the transition to a market economy is the development of an efficient financial industry. The task of mobilizing domestic savings and then allocating capital to the right businesses rests with financial institutions, primarily with banks. The banking sector in China is in poor shape because it has been forced to loan money to the State-owned Enterprises to keep them afloat and the SOE have defaulted on many of these loans.

**Yet the economic growth is still great.** In spite of these problems the country is growing rapidly (8% in 2002), expanding many vital industries like computers, cell phones, chips, automobiles, roads, air travel; receiving more foreign investment in some years than all of the developing countries combined; increasing graduate and undergraduate education; increasing the quality of life of their people, and providing work for most of its growing population.

## Religion in China

Throughout her history, China has never known a great deal of religious freedom. In the first 1800 years after the birth of Christ there was some evidence of a Christian presence in China, but activity was limited and had little impact in the country. There is information about a Syrian sect called the Nestorians that were present as early as the seventh century. In 1625 a ten foot stone monument was uncovered in the vicinity of Xian which contained the history, theology and names of the Nestorian Syrians who called themselves Jiangjio (meaning Religion of Light) and were active during the Tang Dynasty (A.D, 635-845.) They were persecuted but appeared again among the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries during Genghis Khan's time. Also there was evidence of Christianity between the fifth and the eleventh century when ancient Taoist scrolls were discovered in 1907 in a long-sealed cave in remote regions of Northern China. The first scroll revealed that a delegation of Christians traveling from Persia in the West arrived in China in 635 A.D.<sup>ix</sup> At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Jesuit missionaries, following Portuguese explorers, were active primarily in South China and Sichuan Province.<sup>x</sup> During this early period, however, Buddhism arrived from India and Islam from the Arab countries – these religions grew more rapidly and became known as the Chinese religions. Christianity was not a significant factor.

The West approached China in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in an effort to increase trade – first the Portuguese and then the Dutch and the British. **In 1807 the modern missionary movement in China** began. The missionaries often arrived with Western governments one of whose main purposes was to colonize ports to encourage trade, particularly in opium. For the Western countries the growth of opium sales in China was necessary to provide the money to purchase Chinese teas, porcelain, silks, and decorative goods. The consumption of opium spread from the leisure classes, to coolie laborers, and finally, by the end of the nineteenth century, many peasants also became addicts. The Chinese government was unable to stop this growth.

Under the **protection of port treaties** established with the Chinese, and the Western military with its technical superiority, missionaries penetrated into the interior of the country. By the end of the 1800s, the Roman Catholics had 750 missionaries and 400 native priests. The Protestants, consisting of Baptists, Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Wesleyans, supported 1300 missionaries who maintained 500 stations with churches and sometimes schools and hospitals in about 350 different cities and towns.<sup>xi</sup> Mission schools were opened in each new treaty port. It was the period of the great missionaries and medical missionaries, like Hudson Taylor and Hyla Doc.

But it was **a turbulent time** for the Chinese and the missionaries: e.g.

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<sup>ix</sup> Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras, Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, (New York, The Ballantine Publishing Group, 2001), pp39-60.

<sup>x</sup> Britt Towery's *Christianity in Today's China*, (The Tao Foundation, 2000), pp 9-11.

<sup>xi</sup> John King Fairbank's *The United States and China*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976), pp 202. Jonathan D. Spence *The Search for Modern China*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp 204-210.

- the Taiping Revolution (1851-1864), which began as a semi-Christian movement originating in South China, eventually turned against foreigners and was smashed by the Manchus and Western armies;
- missionaries and their converts were harassed, beaten and occasionally killed in the 1860's in Guangdong and Sichuan Provinces;
- the Tianjin "massacre" occurred in the 1870's;
- beginning at the turn of the century (1900) the Boxer Rebellion, which resulted in the death of thousands of Chinese Christians and over 200 foreign missionaries, was also crushed by Western troops.

However, the missionary movement was not just hostility, exploitation and misunderstanding. Wonderful relationships were often established. Mission schools prepared young Chinese to speak English and provided knowledge about the rest of the world, and the principles of Western medicine spread throughout the country. Converts were won, but they were relatively few considering the size of China. During the first half of the twentieth century, missionaries continued to be active, although this activity became more difficult during the war with Japan and the undeclared civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists which raged for over twenty years and ended when the Nationalists were defeated and the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949.

#### **China's Paranoia About Foreign Religions**

Ever since the entry of missionaries in China two hundred years ago, the country has had experiences with foreigners that have created a lack of trust in the intentions of religious people from other countries. The paranoia is based partly on the relationship between the missionary movement and colonialism in China. The powerful Western nations, as they had done in Africa, India and other parts of Asia, were able to establish unequal treaties because of their much superior technical and military power. (There were five treaty ports initially in China, but eventually there was a total of eighty humiliating treaties [Fairbanks *The United States and China*]) whereby foreigners were subject to their own laws and immune from Chinese authority - they could flaunt the rules of the Chinese emperor, e.g. the spread of opium and Christianity became legal, westerners were permitted to travel into the interior of the country. My two missionary uncles talked about signs in the foreign sections of cities in the 1920s that said "Dogs and Chinese not allowed beyond this point!" The Communists also remember that some of the important families of their enemies were Christians, and many of the missionaries were anti-Communist. All of these factors have caused the Chinese Communist Government to view with suspicion the churches and Christianity connected with foreigners.

Christianity and other religions were suppressed in China after the Communists took over in 1949. Proselytizing by foreigners was prohibited. Nevertheless, there was substantial growth in Christianity during the past 50 years, not only in the legal churches but also in the illegal churches.

The legal churches are the “Three-Self”<sup>xii</sup> churches initiated at the First National Conference in China in 1954. They were truly Chinese because there were no connections to foreign mission groups. In the 1950s and the 1960s, however, all churches in China were suppressed by the Communists; many churches were merged, and church property was used by the government for schools, factories and warehouses. Initially, most Communist leaders had a basic mistrust of Christianity<sup>xiii</sup>, legal or illegal. In the 1970s, during the infamous Cultural Revolution, almost all the churches were closed or defaced<sup>xiv</sup>, religious books were burned, and Christians were often ridiculed and found guilty of crimes against the country. With churches closed, house churches came into existence and became the only place where believers could worship – many of them continued even when churches were reopened. By the end of the decade of the 1970s, after Mao died and the Gang of Four<sup>xv</sup> was arrested, sanity was restored to the country, churches were opened and ways were sought to quickly train religious leaders,

During the past two decades there has been a gradual improvement in the views of the Communist leaders about Christianity and the views of Western Christian organizations about the Three-Self Church. Some leaders are beginning to appreciate that Christians can be good citizens, and foreign missionary groups are starting to realize that the Chinese Church is not necessarily a tool of the Communist party. A friend of mine, Pastor William Wan, wrote an article in *Chinese Around the World* in 1985 critical of the Three-Self Church for never disagreeing with the Communists’ party line.<sup>xvi</sup> It’s true their message has not been anti-Communist but Jesus’ message was not anti-Roman. In these churches there is usually no political statement, either pro or con, about the government. My wife and I enjoyed a year, in 1992, attending a Three-Self Church in the center of Beijing (Chongwenmen District); the services were held in a large old wooden church built by the Baptists about 100 years ago, and the 700 to 800 in attendance included, on a regular basis, over 30 Westerners. We have never felt such a strong presence of the Holy Spirit wherever we worshiped, before or after that experience. We normally left the building about fifteen minutes after the service was over, and when we left there were usually 30 or so Chinese fervently praying at the rail in the front of the Church.

By the year 2000 the Chinese Christian Church was reasonably well established. There were well over 20 million Chinese Christians throughout the country. (There is no accurate count of the number of Christians in China. The numbers vary widely, from 20 million up to 70 million with the larger estimates made by Evangelical mission organizations.); 17 seminaries as well as a number of Bible Colleges were thriving; more than 20 million Bibles<sup>xvii</sup> were published and distributed in

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xii Three-Self means self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating – i.e. there are no ties with religious organizations in other countries.

xiii This mistrust was even greater with Catholicism because of the role of the Pope in the Church.

xiv As were temples and monasteries and cathedrals.

xv The Gang of Four which included Mao’s wife, used young people to terrorize and turn the country upside down during the Cultural Revolution.

xvi When I was Dean of the Graduate Program at Eastern College, Dr. Wan, the pastor of a large Chinese/Methodist Church in Washington D.C., would drive up once a week to counsel our Asian graduate students.

xvii In 1998 the 20 millionth Bible came off the press – the Amity Foundation Printing Press.

at least five different dialects; hymnals, devotional articles, and sermons were published and made available to the church members. The Bible that is printed in China is the 1919 Union Version, identical to the Bible in Singapore, Taiwan and in Chinese churches around the world. However, there are nowhere near enough pastors and church leaders to take care of the enormous potential in this country. Whether the number of Christians is 20 million or 70 million it is still a small number when one considers that the population of the country is 1.2 billion people – less than 6% taking the more optimistic projection. More seminaries and better seminaries, degree-granting seminaries, are needed. House churches and open churches need to work together because of the need for more knowledgeable leadership in the house churches.

### **Opportunities for Ministry in China**

In China, foreigners are not permitted to evangelize, to preach the gospel on street corners, on the radio or on TV or to hand out leaflets about Christianity. Neither are they permitted to bring Bibles into the country for distribution. However when Christians are questioned about why they are different, they can share their faith. It is called “Life Style Evangelism” and most people find that this is a much more effective way of influencing others rather than evangelizing the old fashioned way. Glenna, my wife, and I certainly found this to be true when we were on the faculty at the Foreign Affairs College in Beijing. Chinese faculty and students often asked us questions about why we would pray before meals or they would be curious about the meaning of the cross hanging in our flat or pictures we displayed during Christmas, Easter and other times during the Church year.

Considering that submission to authority is basic to our understanding of the role of a servant, an interesting question is why are some Christian organizations involved in covert activities, particularly when there is freedom of religion with certain restrictions within the country – why do they hold secret meetings, baptize converts in hotel bathrooms, hand out leaflets on the sly? Some of these organizations use the cover of teaching English when their primary purpose is to proselytize. Why do they smuggle bibles into the country when they have been printed in China by Amity Foundation Printing Press since 1987? I can still recall the amazement I felt when back in 1992 I visited the apartment of a new Christian friend in the Friendship Hotel complex in Beijing. I met him at the International Church and he wanted me to come over to his apartment to show me something “special.” After preliminary discussions he unlocked the bedroom door, unlocked the closet door within the bedroom and finally unlocked the metal container within the closet. Inside the metal container were a number of Bibles that he brought into the country. Why do this when one could purchase a Bible in the bookstore of the large Three-self church that Glenna and I attended Southeast of Tiananmen Square? These underground activities do not seem to be necessary, because life-style evangelism is so much more effective. Unfortunately, they serve to fuel the paranoia of the Chinese government about Western governments who use religion to influence China as they did over the past 200 years.

Life-style evangelism is sharing one's faith through the way one lives, through the job, through relationships with all people. It is easy to do, particularly if one's relationships with others extend over a period of time. You make friends, real friendships, with students, faculty, staff, any acquaintances. You share your life, your interests, and your passions, and you pay attention to the activities and passions of your new friends. Respect the customs, history, food differences and language of your host country. As your friendship grows it is natural for you to share your faith, why you are different, why you are a Christian. However, moderation as you read Scripture or share your spiritual life is important. The effectiveness of your witness depends on your integrity and credibility, which depends to a large degree upon your being whom you claim to be.

Glenna and I had many experiences during the year we taught at the Foreign Affairs College in Beijing, where brilliant young Chinese were studying to join the Foreign Ministry<sup>xviii</sup> and employees in the foreign ministry would return from a posting overseas to study to improve their skill in a particular language or to take other courses. We both love to tell the story about Panda, a freshman in Glenna's English class, who adopted us – to befriend us, to learn more about our lives and our family in the States, to teach me the Chinese game of Go, etc. He was an incomparable tour guide. Once he convinced us to go with him on a tour (e.g. The Temple of Heaven, Taoist Temple) he would read all that was written about the place and then would provide more information than we needed or could absorb. As soon as he learned that we were Christians, he asked to go with us to the Three-Self Church in downtown Beijing on Sunday morning to act as our interpreter. We were delighted. While we could follow the scripture reading because of the Chinese/English Bibles and we loved the music because the hymns were familiar (even though 700 were singing them in Chinese and 50 in other languages), and we could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit whenever we worshiped there, we were frustrated because we couldn't understand the sermon. This plan didn't work very well. Panda sat between the two of us and interpreted beautifully for perhaps five minutes, but then he stopped talking in spite of my elbow jamming his ribs because he got so involved in the sermon. Well, to compress a wonderfully long story, Panda became a Christian; a year after we returned to the States, he transferred to Stanford, and a year later, courtesy of some frequent flyer miles, he flew to Philadelphia for a weekend where he was baptized and received in our Church, St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. He continues to worship actively in the San Francisco area. We can provide other examples as can many organizations who believe in the efficacy of life-style evangelism. We even feel at peace about the many friends who, while not yet making a faith commitment, communicate or visit when they pass through Philadelphia – the seed has been sown.

While life-style evangelism works really well in this long-term environment, the challenge is to make a difference when you're teaching in China for just two weeks. For the past eight years I have been involved with PIBMA (Pacific Institute of Business Management) which provides management seminars for executives in state-owned enterprises, private sector companies, government organizations and Chinese business professors. Many of these people are key players in the economy. With economic reform creating great growth since 1978, the Chinese government is concerned about the need to increase the quantity and quality of business education. While many new MBA programs have been established in recent years, they are not adequate to meet

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<sup>xviii</sup> The entrance criteria was the top 10% in the key middle-schools around the country.

requirements in the country for competent managers. Ten courses in this seminar program are similar to courses required in a typical MBA program but they are offered in an intensive, short-term format. The PIBMA professors are senior faculty from Christian colleges and universities in the United States who are committed to improving the quality of business education in China. The Chinese government is even willing to subsidize these seminars in West China because of great need for more rapid growth in that section of the country. The question is does life-style evangelism work in this setting where the contact period is just two weeks a year? The answer seems to be “Yes” partly because email provides a means to keep in touch. Almost all of the faculty maintain communication with at least four or five Chinese managers throughout the year. Some of the faculty have hosted these Chinese friends in the States. As the same professors return to China year after year, the relationships have become stronger not only with the students but also with the interpreters, the hosts at the Chinese Universities and Institutes who organize the seminars and with members of the Chinese Central Government (SAFEA – State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs) who appreciate the valuable services provided by the American professors even though they are aware that these professors come from Christian Colleges and Universities in the United States.

