

Christians in China:
How can Christians in the United States best support
their persecuted brothers and sisters in China?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Religion
Of Gustavus Adolphus College
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
Of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by

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May 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
PART 1: The History of China in Religion and Politics	7
PART 2: Current Atmosphere in China for Christians	23
PART 3: Options for Christians in China	
Option 1: Work Through the Three Self Patriotic Church.....	34
Option 2: Prayer and Intercession	37
Option 3: Support Native Missions Monetarily & The Changing Face of Mission.....	39
Option 4: Bible Smuggling and the Laws of this World.....	45
CONCLUSION	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51

INTRODUCTION

A middle class Lutheran farmer in Iowa. An Italian college student involved in Catholic World Missions in Colombia. A widowed mother of three children in Sudan who just confessed the name Jesus yesterday. There is a single underlying concept that reaches far beyond the confines of any specific Christian denomination. This common thread links together believers all over the world. It does not bother to address the matter of denomination or of race or of social class. It is the belief in the fact that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of all. With that central belief, Christians can be described as belonging to one universal church.¹ Paul says in Ephesians 4:25 "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, *for we are all members of one body.*" (Italics mine.) He also writes in Romans 12:5 "so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Indeed Christians are all members of one body, one church. However, not all Christians have the same experiences, nor do they live under the same circumstances. In some countries today, Christian men, women, and children suffer pain, misery, and death. They do not suffer only from the myriad ills that afflict all of humankind. They suffer because they are persecuted for what they believe.

But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.²

How do Christians in one place respond to their persecuted brothers and sisters in

¹ The term *universal* is used in its most basic meaning—including, relating to, or affecting all members of the class or group under consideration—and should not be confused with the system of liberal or unitarian beliefs that are referred to as "Universalist."

² 1 Corinthians 12:24-26.

the body in a completely different location? Being a Christian in the United States of America, one encounters far different forms of persecution than believers in different places around the world. Here in this highly secular country, we are granted religious freedoms by our Constitution. The solution seems to be as simple as getting the correct legislation passed and in place in countries around the world.

However, it is not as cut and dried as passing some bills and writing things down on paper. Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution of 1982, states that "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization, or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion."³ This is in direct opposition to what Christians in China would say, as well as other mission organizations such as The Voice of the Martyrs and Open Doors, and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. Because there are two opposing viewpoints that seem to be irreconcilable, this paper will claim that there is persecution of Christians in China happening at a high intensity. The persecution includes, but is in no way limited to, spending time in prison for "breaking laws," suffering daily for one's beliefs, torture, and death.

The apostle Paul would say to remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.⁴ At the time Paul wrote his letters to the different churches, Christians were suffering at the hands of the government. They too were imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs. This took place around two thousand years ago, and time has not changed circumstances that greatly. One

³ English translation of the Chinese Constitution **Find a better source than the internet*

⁴ Hebrews 13:3.

may think the Christians would just stop putting themselves in such a place to be persecuted and physically harmed.

Why do Christians continually try to teach others about Jesus? The difference lies in the words the Jesus Christ told his disciples before he was taken up into heaven, and is recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

These words have intense meaning for Christians; they are not taken lightly. "All nations" means exactly what it says—everyone despite their current belief system, creed, race, or station in society. This is a direct command from Jesus, and it cannot be ignored.

As K.P. Yohannan writes in his book *Revolution in World Missions*,

What is the basic purpose of your living in this world, as you claim to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it to accumulate wealth? Fame? Popularity? To fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind? And to somehow survive and, in the end, to die and hopefully go to heaven? No. The purpose of your life as a believer must be to obey Jesus when He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel..."⁵

The Great Commission should be an integral part of any Christian's life. The New Testament addresses the Great Commission and persecution, which can and many times does lead to death. The spilling of the blood of God's beloved children is not only a theme in the New Testament, but it seems to be on God's heart from the beginning—in the Old Testament as well. In Genesis chapter 4, it is written:

⁵ Yohannan, K. P. *Revolution in World Missions*. Gospel for Asia, Carrollton, Texas. 2001. p. 158.

And the LORD said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, what hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.⁶

The suffering of Christians, like the pain of any human being, cries out for our attention, our sympathy, and our action.

Why has there been no overwhelming response to these Christians overseas? If what was written above is true, that we are all members of one body, should not the church in America be lending a hand? The same America the God has blessed immensely with wealth and power and resources? As Dr. Paul Marshall, regarded as one of the world's leading authorities on religious persecution, writes in *Their Blood Cries Out*:

A refusal to take religion seriously, a disdain for those for whom faith is the central fact of human existence, a blank incomprehension of those who will die rather than forsake the peaceful expression of their beliefs—all these contribute to indifference which turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to the pain and cries of suffering believers. In a world awash with attention to ethnic and racial conflict, it produces a generation that can say "I don't know" or, more chillingly, "I don't care," to one of the most pervasive problems in contemporary human existence.⁷

Unfortunately, this is the overarching attitude of Christians in the United States. Marshall also states that ignorance is an underlying reason for the complete lack of action in America; ignorance "fostered by preconceptions and conventional wisdoms that lead many in the West to dismiss the fact of anti-Christian persecution as improbably untrue, impossible" and that "truth can become a victim of expectation, reality a casualty of prior

⁶ Genesis 4:9-10. King James Version.

⁷ Marshall, Paul and Lela Gilbert. *Their Blood Cries Out*. Word Publishing: Dallas, Texas. 1997 p. 7.

beliefs.”⁸ This argument of ignorance as stated by Marshall is referring specifically to people who are not aware that this is a problem in the world and one that needs to be addressed.

The issue is still at hand. Christians are persecuted in different parts of the world to different extents. A correct Christian response would be, firstly, to respond. Different tactics are going to help different situations—some will work in particular circumstances, while others would be detrimental to the work that has been done by the indigenous Christians.

So how should Christians in America respond to the persecuted church in China?

The first thing one needs to understand is that certain approaches are going to work better in China, while others will not work as well. The main factor in determining which techniques are going to be more suitable to China involves understanding the complexity of the current atmosphere within the country: social, political, and religious. China has a deep and long history, which some claim dates back before 5,000 BC.⁹ Because of this long history, the Chinese have been through many upheavals in their politics, changes in the dynamics of their every day lives, and some amendments to their deeply rooted canon of beliefs. However, China has remained relatively cut-off at times, which seems to have served to enrich and strengthen its own national identity. As Pastor Kang writes in his introduction to *The Discovery of Genesis* (with his proposed date of the origin of Chinese settlement being 2500 B.C.), “because of the geographical isolation of China by mountain ranges, deserts, and oceans, this race of people was

⁸ Horowitz, Michael. Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C. 1997. As written in the introduction to the Marshall book. p. xxii.

⁹ *Journey Into China*. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C., 1982 p. 17.

sealed off to itself, free from outside influences, as it developed its own characteristic culture, nor was it disturbed for over 2,000 years.”¹⁰

In comparison, consider the United States of America. The United States has only officially been a country for a little over 200 years and our culture seems quite unique and established. However, unlike China, we have never been closed off to anything as far as other cultures and traditions go. After all, the United States is known as the great melting pot. The point to draw from this is how difficult it is for certain things to change in the United States—rights for minorities, women in politics, our changeable Democratic constitution to be changed—and then to think about how much more deeply engrained the culture is in China—a government oppressive to its citizens, a much longer history, and an identity linked to the culture.

In the following section, I will write about the earliest known religious practices in China, as well as describe Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the three major religions that dominate Chinese history. I will also introduce the major events of the twentieth century that have defined the Chinese culture of late, which include the Boxer Rebellion, the establishment of communism and the People’s Republic of China, and Chairman Mao’s Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. All the while, I will be noting how the culture has adapted to pressures laid upon it from outside and inside sources.

¹⁰ Kang, C.H. and Ethel R. Nelson. *The Discovery of Genesis: How the truths of Genesis were found hidden in the Chinese Language*. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1979 p. 2-3. The contents of this book may or may not be factual, however the preface contains an extensive and thorough account of the religious history of China, which is the reason for using this book.

Part I: The History of China in Religion and Politics

The best place to start is at the beginning. The earliest people who lived in China are referred to as the Shang people. In 1899 it was discovered on “dragon bones” (actually tortoise shells and cattle bones) that these people “centered their belief in Di or Shang Di, the Lord or the Lord on High, who presided over the world and administered spiritual and human matters.”¹¹ This authority was also known to be high above, universal, all-knowing, infinite, and overwhelming. In short, the ancient Chinese were very much monotheists; a stark contrast to a then chiefly polytheistic worship world.¹² This being, Di, was assisted by royal ancestors who were concerned with their descendents on earth. Therefore, worship of the royal ancestors (sacrifices and invoking their names in divination) was critical for the stability of the royal household, as they would bless the descendents only if they provided the proper sacrifices. Xinzhong Yao writes in the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions* that the support between the living and the dead remains the central thread of religious beliefs in China.¹³ This idea is deeply embedded in Chinese thought and sentiment, and becomes a factor when Buddhism and Christianity are introduced, which will be discussed later.

The monotheistic ideology began to change around 800 BCE when natural disasters and state cruelty hit China that were not to be satiated by the prayers of the people to Di and the ancestors. A new group of thinkers, who sought to find a deeper

¹¹ John Bowker, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 p. 112.

¹² Kang and Nelson, p. 14.

¹³ Bowker, p. 114.

meaning of life, emerged and was led by K'ung Fu Tzu (pronounced *Confucius* in English). Confucius was born in 551 to a lower ranking family. The best information we have concerning Confucius is his biography titled *Records of the Historian*, and his own writings compiled by his students, which is referred to as *The Analects*. Confucius regarded himself as a person who "set his mind upon learning at 15 years old," and who "had established himself by 30."¹⁴ It is clear from the records that Confucius retained the traditional belief in the power of Di, and that he also believed it was "his mission to transmit ancient culture."¹⁵ Confucius wrote about the fact that humans should both gain experience from their beliefs and also carry out what they believe. This translates directly into serving the dead, which is illustrated in *Analects* 1:9 "When proper respect towards the dead is shown at the end of their life and continued after they are far away, the virtues of the people will have reached their highest point."¹⁶

Confucius gained a small band of students that followed him and took note of his sayings and teachings. The writings of Confucius deal primarily with individual morality and ethics, along with the proper exercise of political power by rulers. He believed the only legitimate person to rule would be one who exemplified the most important virtue of ren, translated as "gentleman" or "authoritative person," and thus they would have a heart of love. If this took place, Confucius hoped and believed that the world would return to the balanced, peaceful state of ancient times.¹⁷ Other Confucian virtues that are still practiced today include ritual, propriety, love for one another within the family,

¹⁴ Confucius. *The Analects*. Trans. Arthur Waley. New York: Knopf, 2001.

¹⁵ Bowker, p. 114.

¹⁶ Confucius.

¹⁷ Bowker, p. 114.

righteousness, honesty, trustworthiness, and loyalty to the state.

One point about Confucianism is that it is androcentric—women are given no dignity and no human rights. Within Confucianism, women have to absolutely obey their fathers if they are not married, their husbands if they are married, and their sons if they are widowed. This mindset can still be seen today in China, as will be illustrated later.

Confucius had a huge impact on China and the Chinese society. After he died, his students spread around the country, and eight separate schools surfaced; each claiming they were truly Confucian. The interpretation that was most widely accepted said that humans were born with an evil nature, but through discipline through the teachings of Confucius, one could “overcome their selfish desires and eventually reach the highest ideal.”¹⁸

Confucianism eventually spread throughout the entire countryside and became so popular that it was instituted as a state religion during the Han dynasty around 100 BCE. Alongside his ideology, Confucius himself began to be an object of worship. Because Confucius had a revelation of the things he did, he began to be known as the savior of mankind and by studying his texts one could obtain the same revelation.¹⁹ In fact, up until 1912 offering up sacrifices to the Ancient Teacher and Supreme Sage (Confucius) was required in all levels of Chinese society.

Confucianism was not the only new ideology surfacing during this time in China’s history. Taoism was another new way of thinking about life, and also evolved into a religion over time. Searching for a way to avoid the constant feudal warfare and conflicts disrupting society at his time, Lao-Tse, believed to be the founder of Taoism and known

¹⁸ Bowker, p. 117.

¹⁹ Bowker, p. 122.

as the Supreme Lord, wrote a book which “refers to a power which envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites.”²⁰

Not only did Taoism embody the harmony of opposites, but it also stated that the development of virtue was one’s chief task, specifically the virtues of compassion, moderation and humility. In general, the Tao was a force that flowed through all life, and each believer’s goal was to become one with it. Taoists “believe that spirits pervaded nature...The gods in heaven acted like and were treated like the officials in the world of men; worshipping the gods was a kind of rehearsal of attitudes toward secular authorities. On the other hand, the demons and ghosts of hell acted like and were treated like the bullies, outlaws, and threatening strangers in the real world.”²¹ Time was cyclical and not linear, and they followed the art of *wu wei* which means to let nature take its course.

Taoism can be looked at as a cauldron: useful elements of various practices, both religious and non-religious, were combined into one system. “Ingredients” included Confucian moral codes, early teachings of men that came to be known as Taoist masters, Mystical Learning from scholars, “prescription practitioners” (medical doctors and spiritual masters), and many other ideologies of the time. This mixture gradually evolved into the Taoism we study.²²

The Han dynasty felt threatened by the Taoists, however, because a lineage materialized that claimed the Mandate of Heaven (authority given to the rulers) was taken

²⁰ “Our Beliefs,” Western Reform Taoism at: <http://wrt.org/beliefs.html#tao> (May be off-line).

²¹ Wolf, Arthur P., “*Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*,” Pages 131-182; as quoted in Judith A. Berling, “*Taoism, or the Way*,” at <http://www.askasia.org/frclasrm/readings/r000005.htm>

²² Bowker, p. 123.

from the emperor and given to Zhang Daoling and his descendants. However threatened the dynasty was, it prevailed as did Taoism. Taoist moral elements integrated with prevailing Confucian virtues, namely filial piety (ancestor worship), and became the chief and predominant belief system of China—in politics and in every day life. Rulers summoned priests to serve as personal masters, and mandated worship for all Chinese.

Taoism and Confucianism meshed relatively well due to the fact that ancestor worship could be the center of each, after which the moral codes fell into place. The Chinese had engrained filial piety into their everyday routine. For example, Confucius wrote in the *Classic on Filial Piety*,

Filial piety is the basis of virtue and the source of the teachings. We receive our body, our hair, and skin from our parents, and we dare not destroy them. This is the beginning of filial piety. To establish ourselves and to practice the way, so that we will perpetuate our name in later generations, thus glorifying our parents, this is the end of filial piety. For filial piety starts with serving our parents, continues with serving the ruling prince, and ends with establishing ourselves.²³

The focus was not on the individual, but rather the family and generation to generation. This was direct contrast to the Buddhism that was introduced into China

Buddhism was founded in northern India by the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in 563 BCE. In 535 BCE, he left his family and everything he knew to seek the truth. He declared he found it, attained enlightenment, and claimed the title of Buddha (one who has awakened). When Buddhism arrived in China, in the latter part of the ever-changing Han dynasty, it found a culture that already possessed sophisticated religious and philosophical systems.²⁴ There was quite rift between the beliefs and

²³ Ch'en, Kenneth. "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. 28 (1968), 81-97.

²⁴ Bowker, p. 95.

practices held by Buddhists and the culture of the Chinese. In Buddhism, one leaves his home to go to a monastery where the individual will study under a Buddhist Master and attempt to accomplish individual salvation in nirvana—also known as reaching Enlightenment.

The problem lay in the fact that one would leave the family, cutting all familial ties. Wives would become widows and children would become orphans. Celibacy was also recommended, which, when an individual's worth is based on ancestral and familial ties, gave Buddhism a relatively anti-patriotic aura. Confucian interaction with Buddhism was confused not only on the family system, but also concerning the Buddhist teaching of rebirth. It became "unclear as to who or what was being worshiped in the ancestor rites."²⁵ Ethically, however, Buddhist and Confucian concepts were very similar specifically the Buddhist teachings of the Three Trainings which describe the pleasant treatment of others and conducting yourself in an upright and just way. Confucianism and Buddhism meshed well on the subject of unwanted daughters—they could conveniently be disposed of as nuns. "Confucian principles of family etiquette were gradually adapted to fit the 'family' of the monastery."²⁶

Buddhism and Taoism had a more interesting interaction. Chinese Taoists thought it was possible that Lao Tse could have met the Buddha and let him become his disciple, while Indian Buddhists believed the opposite—Lao Tse may have been the Buddha's disciple. They drew these conclusions because both religions were concerned with immortality.

In time, Buddhism appealed to the Chinese because they pointed out sutras that

²⁵ Bowker, p. 95.

²⁶ Bowker, p. 95.

stress the virtue of filial piety. They also said that when a monk left his household, he was actually “transforming himself into a vehicle for the conversion and salvation of his parents. By so doing, he was expressing his filial piety to his parents, though in a different way from that of the Confucians.”²⁷ According to Kenneth Ch’en in *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, he is convinced

...that one of the primary reasons why Buddhism alone was able to gain a wide following among the Chinese was that it was able to adjust itself to Chinese ethical practices and beliefs. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Buddhist attempts to demonstrate its adherence to the cardinal Confucian virtue of filial piety and ancestral worship. By presenting an image of itself as conforming to Chinese social and ethical values it was able to convince that Chinese that it was no longer a foreign and Indian religion but had become Chinese.²⁸

And so the three major religions were integrated into Chinese life. The social ethics and moral teachings of Confucius were blended with the Taoist communion with nature and Buddhist concepts of afterlife.²⁹

After the Han dynasty (which lasted from 206 BCE-220 CE) came a period in China of great expansion and growth. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism blossomed. In 618 CE the Tang dynasty begins. This dynasty was known for its focus on wealth, promoting intercultural exchanges, having an openness to new customs, technologies, ideas, rituals, faiths, and ways of life. Simply because the new Dynasty was open to these new options does not mean they were integrated into the Chinese culture. Mostly the upper classes and the educated were concerned with the new focuses, while the majority of China still practiced their mix of Confucianism and Taoism.

²⁷ Ch’en, Kenneth. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973 p. 50.

²⁸ Ch’en. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, p. 60.

²⁹ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/confucius>.

During this time of religious tolerance the first known Christian missionary came to China, a Nestorian Monk named Olopen (also called Olopun³⁰ and Alopen³¹). He arrived at Changan, and was received at the royal court. The Nestorian Church, based in Syria and Persia, had been looking to China to expand, so it sent missionaries to walk via the silk trade route, or the "Silk Road," to northwest China. The Nestorians were theological castoffs because they believed Jesus' nature consisted of two persons, rather than one person with two natures, and, being condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), they moved east.

It was by personal invitation that Olopen entered the Emperor's own library to translate scripture and became a regular guest inside the palace. The Emperor at the time, Tai Zong, ordered a church be built for Olopen, which became known as the Persian or DaiQin Temple, and allowed him to preach freely. He was also awarded the title of the National Priest. Jinjiao (the Chinese name for the Christian faith) churches were built in many places all over China. However, Christianity was not taken seriously as a new faith due to the policy of tolerance during the Tang dynasty.

Other missionaries attempted to evangelize China as well, but only a few made any progress, and none made any sort of impact until two Jesuits, Matteo Ricci and Michael Ruggieri, arrived in 1583. Their arrival, according to Xinzhong Yao in the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions*, "would lead to one of the most important events in interfaith dialogue in the religious history of China."³²

These two highly educated Italians, along with the other missionaries that soon

³⁰ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/eastasia/781nestorian.html>

³¹ <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1996/52/52h024.html>

³² Bowker, p. 131.

followed them, took it upon themselves to learn as much about the Chinese culture as possible. They studied the language, local customs, and ancient classics. They branded Buddhism and Taoism as utterly superstitious. However, their approach at evangelizing was highly accepted and welcomed by the Chinese people. They adapted their preaching to accommodate the culture of China, all the while concentrating on the highly educated Confucians. Once similarities were found and made known between Christian and Confucian thought, Ricci was known as the “Scholar from the West” and was highly respected.³³ Taking advantage of this, the Christian missionaries spread the Good News, the commandments, and their message about God. They specifically targeted the Chinese misunderstandings of the Christian faith, and taught in a manner that was adapted to Chinese thinking. This appealed to the Confucians who felt that foreign Buddhism had tainted the Chinese culture.

Beyond these superficial similarities in morals and ethics, such as respect for others, not murdering, and honesty, a realization of greater contradictions between Christian theism and the “secular-based moral tradition” surfaced.³⁴ A number of questions arose, such as the question of ancestor worship, how the Christian God could truly be represented, and whether the Confucians should be allowed to pay homage to ancient sages. Ricci died in the middle of trying to reconcile these questions, so an immediate response was never made. Because of the acts of the Christian missionaries and the Confucian scholars at this stage, there is definite evidence of genuine dialogue and communication between the two even though they did not necessarily agree on every detail.

³³ Bowker, p. 131.

³⁴ Bowker, p. 131, insert.

However, not everyone was so accepting to the Christian faith. The conflicts between Chinese customs and the Catholic doctrine led to a confrontation between the Chinese government and the Catholic movement. During the sixteenth century, a high-ranking official in Nanjing named Shen Huai advised the Emperor repeatedly that Christianity should be banned for the following reasons:

1. Western missionaries were spies.
2. Catholicism taught Chinese not to respect parents and worship ancestors.
3. Western missionaries stole proprietary Chinese knowledge.
4. Catholicism practiced weird customs like Chrismation (applying consecrated oil), baptism and allowed male and female followers to study in the same room (forbidden by the conservative Chinese society).

Anti-Catholic officials seconded the motion, while Catholic officials opposed. Official Shen Huai arrested dozens of missionaries in Nanjing, and the Emperor passed a law deporting all foreign missionaries back to their homelands.

Another example of the clash between Christianity and the Chinese culture is demonstrated in what is referred to as the Case of Calendar. Initiated by Yang Guangxian as an attack on Catholicism, he argued that the phrase “according to the new Western calendar,” in Johann Adam Schall von Bell's book *History of China*, tended to imply that the Chinese lunar calendar was inferior to that of the West.³⁵ This was considered an insult to the Chinese. Yang advised the Emperor that von Bell was a conspirator with other missionaries, conspiring to overthrow the government, misleading the public with religious lies, and lying about the calendar. In 1664, von

³⁵ See Huang Yi-long, “Court Divination and Christianity in the K’ang-Hsi Era,” *Chinese Science*, vol. 10 (1991), pp.1 –20.

Bell and a number of Catholic Chinese officials were arrested. Von Bell was sentenced to be executed along with five of the officers. Across the nation, about 30 missionaries were arrested and sent to the capital for questioning. Churches were closed down and scriptures burned. The majority of Christian missionaries were again deported. Eventually, the Emperor did acquit von Bell and another man, though they were both already dead.

The next emperor had the same problems accepting Christianity as his predecessor had. He banned Catholicism and once again deported all missionaries. He ordered any Christians hiding in the country be collected and sent home. The ban on Catholicism showed a continued conflict between the old Chinese customs of Confucianism and ancestor worship and the new Christian movement.

The following point illustrates the attitude of these emperors and some of the fears they may have had: when asked to be nice to the Catholics, Emperor Yong Zheng once replied, "You [Catholics] wish that all the Chinese would become Catholics. I do understand this is your dogma. But let's consider what will happen to us. Do we not all become the subjects of your Pope? My people will listen to you instead, if we are under attack (by the West)."³⁶ Traditionally, Chinese were taught to respect their parents, elders and ancestors, and be loyal to the king. The concept of asking the Chinese to be loyal to the Pope did not sit well with the Emperor.

To reinforce the fact that Christianity was not welcome in China, the new emperor passed the Closed Door Policy to limit the spread of Christianity in China in 1757. The city of Guangzhou became the only trading port in China; merchants were not allowed to

³⁶ <http://www.yutopian.com/religion/history/Israelite.html>

land on China soil. Other than the ten missionaries who stayed in the palace with positions as historians or astronomers, there were very few others who took care of the 300,000 believers in China. This situation persisted for the remainder of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, right up to the Opium Wars in 1832.

The Opium Wars took China by storm with humiliating military defeats inflicted by Britain (1839-1842, 1856-1895), which, along with the economic and political exploitation of China by various Western powers and Japan, only increased Chinese resentment of the West. In 1899, a secret society of Chinese called the *Yihetuan* ("Society of Righteousness and Harmony"), known by Westerners as the Boxers, began a campaign of terror against Christian missionaries. Although the Boxers were officially denounced, they were secretly supported by many of the royal court, including the Dowager Empress Cixi.³⁷ Their terrorist activities increased and the ensuing crisis climaxed on June 18, 1900, in a general uprising in Beijing with Cixi ordering that all foreigners be killed. A large relief expedition comprised of American, French, Japanese, British, Russian, and German troops entered the city, and a peace treaty was signed on September 7, 1901. The effects of the treaty included a large indemnity to be paid over forty years, and the right to station troops to guard a clear route to the coast. With the Boxer Rebellion and other events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, imperialism ended and thus did Taoism, which drew its support from imperialism.

China was in a very uncertain and unsettled state. Faced with such adversity, most Chinese wished that the country could be united to resist these external invasions. Despite the arguments by some religious leaders that Christianity was what the Chinese needed to

³⁷ "Boxer Uprising," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2004. © 1997-2004 Microsoft Corporation. <http://encarta.msn.com>

help, the value of Christianity was derogated because it was a foreign religion and, thus linked to foreign imperialism. Since it was not part of the Chinese tradition, Christianity was disregarded as a means that could help rebuild the new China.

This resulted in an emergence of a strong Nationalist Movement, which eventually sparked the Anti-Christian Movement of the 1920s. Christianity was criticized as being the "Slave of the Western Capitalist Countries." At that time, Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto was very popular among the Chinese youth and the Anti-Christian Movement was often used as a tool in the power struggle of political parties. Christianity was perceived as unscientific and that it retarded the growth and productivity of the country.

Before 1949, the pre-communist history of Modern China had been essentially one of weakness, humiliation, and failure. Traditional China was held in tension with the progress of the rest of the world, namely the West, the emergence of the Kuomintang³⁸ and the Chinese Communist Party. They exemplified China's complete failure to come into the world economy. Despite all the hardships the country was facing, a deep nationalist sentiment emerged and solidified at this time.

Mao Tse-tung sprung up as a leader of the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He envisioned a mixed economy under Communist control, with the necessary capital coming mainly from the accumulated wealth of the Chinese people. Maoism, the thought of Mao Tse-tung, as summarized in Jerome Chen's book *Mao and the Chinese*

³⁸ Under the leadership of first Sun Yat-sen then Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang was a political party of China organized after the Revolution of 1911, by which the Qing (Manchu) dynasty was overthrown and a republican government was established in China; Worked firstly with the Communists party, but when communist power within the Kuomintang grew too strong, Chiang Kai-shek expelled them. Retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after a bloody defeat by the Communists with the aid of the US. Taken from: <http://msn.encyclopedia.com/kuomintang>.

Revolution, had three major characteristics. Maoism was representative of the people, it recognized the meaning of history in one's own class-consciousness, and it stressed contradictions and struggle, or what could be referred to as the power of negative thinking, to the point where it invented enemies of all types and called them "paper tigers" as Mao did in a speech in 1950.³⁹

As the CCP gained momentum, so did Mao. In 1945, a civil war broke out between the Communists and the Nationalists (Kuomintang). The Communists, under the direction of Chairman Mao, defeated the Kuomintang Nationalists. On October 1, 1949, Mao declared China the People's Republic of China. Mao assumed role as leader and China became communist.

Mao instituted drastic changes to the economy of China. He launched the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, which initially had good intentions. It was going to overcome the backwardness of China's economy, industry, and technology through mass mobilization of the Chinese people who would work for the good of the country through steel production in small-scale backyard furnaces, and the collective farms and communes.⁴⁰ However, it had devastating effects. Natural disasters and neglect of agricultural work led to three years of poor harvest, famine, and industrial decline. However, Mao was unwavering.

He regrouped and in 1966 launched the Cultural Revolution, a radical movement that closed schools, slowed production, and virtually severed China's relations with the outside world. Mao appealed to students of universities and high schools who were ready

³⁹ Chen, Jerome. *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1965 as quoted in Jonathan Chao. "Crucial Issues in Leadership Training: A Chinese Perspective." *Mission Focus*. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980.

⁴⁰ Schram, Stuart R. *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Viking Press, 1967. Chapter 3.

for change and desired to smash the four "olds": old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.⁴¹ Chaos ensued as the Red Guards, former college- and high school-aged students who supported Mao, destroyed temples, artwork, books, and anything associated with traditional or foreign cultures. Artists, writers, and those with foreign connections were persecuted. Any new plays that were written glorified Chairman Mao. Support propaganda went up all over the country and was concentrated in the cities.

What was happening to religion at this time? Since Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism were linked to China's past, they were no longer tolerated. All books were burned, including Bibles. The only book of a teaching nature that was allowed to remain was the little red book of Chairman Mao's sayings. Christianity was seen as a link to the West, so that too was banned. Many Christian leaders like Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao were arrested and imprisoned. As written in the Encarta Encyclopedia in an article about the Cultural Revolution,

Most of the radical excesses of the Cultural Revolution had diminished by the mid-1970's, some of its rhetoric and policies continued even after Mao's death in 1976. Jiang Qing [Mao's wife] and the rest of the Gang of Four [Mao's personal supporters] were arrested that year. Their arrest was declared the official end of the movement, but it was not until 1981 that the Gang of Four were convicted for their crimes and the Communist Party leadership under Deng Xiaoping officially condemned the Cultural Revolution.⁴²

The dire consequences of the Cultural Revolution included the elimination of economic cooperation with the West, economic isolation, and an increase of xenophobia. Also, the education of an entire generation suffered because protestors were supporting Mao, and then sent to labor camps. Now that we see the social history of China up until the

⁴¹ Joseph, William A. China 1972 Image Database Department of Political Science. Wellesley College. <http://www.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/China1972/intro.html>.

⁴² "Cultural Revolution," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2004.

early 1980s, we can take a look at the current government and see how the seeds planted by Chairman Mao have really taken root.

The political structure of China has remained largely unchanged since 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established. The Chinese Communist Party follows the Leninist model of one-party rule and for the most part controls the republic, although a few government-approved "opposition" parties do exist. Together, the CCP and the Chinese government control national politics, which isn't too difficult since most government officials are also members of the CCP, and leaders of the former tend to be leaders of the latter. The two institutions are *formally* separate, however. The government's main legislative body is the National People's Congress (governed by the Politburo and the Secretariat), and the chief executive body is the State Council. Local governments follow a similar pattern, with power formally in the hands of government bodies and effectively in the hands of local Communist Party leaders. Deng Xiaoping took control of the Chinese government after the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, followed by Jiang Zemin (1989-2003) and Hu Jintao (2003-).

The first constitution of the People's Republic of China went into effect in 1954. It established the government structure and contained a long chapter on citizens' rights and duties. The government adopted new constitutions in 1975 and 1978, and adopted the present constitution in 1982.⁴³ Each constitution reflected the ideological concerns and policy priorities of the time, although none fundamentally altered the government structure. Each of the constitutions nominally centralized power in the National People's Congress, giving the Congress power to appoint and supervise the top officials of both

⁴³ Joseph, <http://www.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/China1972/intro.html>

the executive and the judicial branches. The present constitution is similar to the formality and detail of the first.

As is evidenced, China has been through a long history, resistant to change, yet changed nonetheless. The atmosphere is complex due to the long history. Different religions are woven so tightly together that it is often impossible to distinguish between the beliefs of each of them, the commonplace cultural norms, and the actions of the government. I tried to separate and define the religions as they came into existence in China, as well as the basic frame of today's governing body.

Part II: Current Atmosphere in China for Christians

As an outsider looking into China, and even as an average Chinese citizen looking about, the Chinese Communist Government is extremely oppressive. The constitution may guarantee particular rights, but after all is said and done, what freedoms are the people actually allowed? More particularly, what religious freedoms are they actually given? The constitution quite clearly states that the Chinese can believe whatsoever they desire and no one's personal ideology may be pressed upon them; they are not forced to believe anything the government—or otherwise—tells them. This encompasses all belief systems including Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Chinese folk religions, and Christianity as well as the other religions present in China. On the surface it may even be safe to say that anyone can believe whatever he so desires.

However, as we look at the practicality of these “freedoms,” the situation for Christians becomes much more problematic. The Chinese Government has implemented a state-run Christian Church, called the Three Self Patriotic Movement (or Church,

referred to as TSPM or TSPC). Within this church, there are 1,300 ordained pastors for roughly 13.3 million members and 18 seminaries capable of training 300 men at a time.⁴⁴ If a Christian attends one of these churches, their name is on a member register and they can attend worship.

The Chinese government, through state-sanctioned religious bodies, has increased its control over religious doctrine, seminary curricula, and the training and selection of leaders and clergy. Bishop Ding Guangxun, the concurrent honorary president of the official TSPM for the Protestant churches in China and the Christian Council of China, reportedly has introduced a "new theology" that seeks to de-emphasize the differences between believers and non-believers and to ensure that doctrines of the official Chinese Protestant Churches are compatible with socialist ideology.⁴⁵ One important feature of this theology is the denial of the fundamental Christian doctrine of salvation by faith. This new theological construct was introduced into seminary curricula, which resulted in the departure (both voluntary and involuntary) of many faculty members and students.⁴⁶ In addition to the government's attempt to exert control over theology, the TSPM churches face other government restrictions.

During the 1950s and 1960s, evangelism and the teaching of religion to children under the age of eighteen was strictly forbidden, and pastors were not allowed to preach on topics such as tithing (which might affect the economy), healing, Sunday as a day of rest (the Chinese work seven days a week), and the second coming of Christ (which

⁴⁴ <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/dec27/34.0.html>

⁴⁵ Davenport, Paul. "Testimony of a Teacher Expelled from Nanjing Seminary," Compass Direct, January 2001.

⁴⁶ "A Closer Look at the Church in China," Ethics and Public Policy Center meeting, January 31, 2001. (USCIRF staff notes.)

might undermine the people's commitment to the current regime). Even though there was such a crackdown on Christianity during this time, the underground church grew at an incredible rate⁴⁷, so it would seem that the government's attempts to retard the growth backfired.

Today members of the TSPM cannot preach outside their own village and province. Moreover, pastors that do not follow official guidelines may be relocated, removed from current positions, and stripped of salaries and accommodations.⁴⁸ It seems that pastors are allowed to continue preaching the Word of God if they follow the rules the Chinese government has placed and they are allowed to teach within the confines of what the Chinese Government deems worthy to know. However, this aspect about what is and is not allowed to be preached and taught is subject to interpretation, and facts on the true situation pertaining to the Christian faith in China are muddled.

Through the reading of many sources and piecing together facts, one is able to conclude that there are opposing sides to this story, and only a personal experience in China witnessing the TSPM Church would be able to persuade a reader, or this writer, as to what is truth. Some sources, mainly Christian organizations and mission-related institutions such as the Voice of the Martyrs⁴⁹ and Open Doors International⁵⁰ claim that any Bible verses referring to an anti-government sentiment are extracted, and that the state-run churches are not allowed to teach about the second coming nor about the

⁴⁷ Brother Andrew and Verne Becker. *The Calling: The Challenge to walk the Narrow Road*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2002. p. 88.

⁴⁸ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Protestant Christianity and Religious Freedom in China .

⁴⁹ White, Tom. "From the Doughnut Shop to the Underground," *The Voice of the Martyrs*. February 2004.

⁵⁰ <http://www.opendoors.org/>

resurrection of Jesus—one of the principle underpinning elements of the Christian faith. However other sources, such as published works by the Chinese Government, do not directly address this situation and still uphold the fact that Christianity is a legal faith and moreover, is supported by the government as one, having provided church buildings and pastors and resources.

Bibles are a difficult topic of conversation. In my research, I found basically two different viewpoints of what was happening in China. Open Doors International states at its official website:

Twenty-five million Bibles have been legally printed and sold since 1987. These Bibles are sold cheaply (a result of a subsidy from the United Bible Societies) through the official Protestant churches, and have pretty much met Bible demand in the cities. Even house church Christians have been able to buy these Bibles. In addition, many provincial church councils are able to print Christian literature. There are also many religious books produced and sold in government bookstores by academic publishing houses. This is a great improvement and is to be applauded.

In the rural areas, where 80% of house church Christians live, there are still considerable shortages of scriptures.⁵¹

The Bibles that are printed in China have a government stamp inside the front cover which makes them identifiable as legal. Another Christian source, The Voice of the Martyrs, agree and say that Bibles are available to the Chinese Christians. However, these sources each individually say that the government printed Bibles have large portions of text removed at the request of the government; the portions pertaining to what is not allowed to be taught or preached in the churches.⁵²

One of the most controversial issues is the extent of the Chinese government's persecution of Chinese Christians. From reading statements and rights such as have been

⁵¹ <http://www.opendoors.org>

⁵² White, p. 1.

previously mentioned, it can be concluded that the State government does not intentionally persecute Christians that attend the state-endorsed TSPM Church. It is more probable that the average believer faces “harassment and discrimination rather than jailings and beatings.”⁵³

In my research and discussions with faculty members, I came across the argument that the Christians that are being targeted are often seen as law-breakers and political dangers.⁵⁴ This is an understandable argument because in many respects, Christians who are not members of a legal church break the written laws in China. However, because China is such a large country with a majority of Christians living in the countryside many citizens do not have access to a legal church. The solution that has arisen over the past few decades is that of house churches—which in short are Christian gatherings to worship by singing spiritual songs, reading from a Bible which is often times one that has been acquired from outside of China, and teaching the Word of God.

These gatherings are by definition illegal. They are not registered with the government, as all Christian gatherings must be, many times they meet at night and at odd hours, which can be considered suspect, and also in remote locations. Attendance at one of these house church gatherings ranges on average from seven to one hundred and fifty people.⁵⁵ They are connected by a network of believers and have leaders among them who are versed in the knowledge of the Bible. The leaders travel from province to province around the country teaching at various gatherings. Most of the leaders across China have spent time in prison. They are usually arrested on charges of gathering

⁵³ <http://www.opendoors.org>

⁵⁴ Discussion with Steve Haggmark, advisor. March 7, 2004.

⁵⁵ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway. *The Heavenly Man*. Mill Hill, London: Monarch Books, 2001. p. 68.

illegally, teaching children under the age of 18, plotting/conspiring against the government, “disturbing the social order and normal religious life,” and “influencing the stability and unity of village life.”⁵⁶

That is a very dry, very superficial definition of house churches, a definition one who is looking at China in an academic way might view them. But these members of the house churches, the illegal gatherings, have taken hold of the truths told them in the Bible and by the Holy Spirit. Unofficial estimates declare that the house churches encompass 60 million Christians.⁵⁷ Brother Yun is one member of the Christian house church movement. In his autobiography/testimony called *The Heavenly Man*, he writes about the house churches and the network of believers.

Unfortunately, the house churches were also considered illegal by the government because of our refusal to register with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, so we became targets in the campaign. Unregistered Christians were labeled “spiritual pollutants” by the authorities and the TSPM. Hundreds of house church leaders were rounded up and sent to prison labour camps. In Henan many believers were executed for their faith in Jesus. During this wave of persecution, Brother Xu shared with me some important thoughts. He said, “The future of our Chinese house churches needs careful consideration. We should be faithful in small things while believing for big things from God. We have to learn whatever the Lord wants to teach us from his Word, from life, from our experiences, and from our sufferings. Therefore we should initiate a prayer effort and look to God’s mercy and revelation. Let’s set up training centres and take the gospel to all parts of our nation. We need to be better prepared to equip the troops in order to establish God’s Church.”⁵⁸

Throughout the book *The Heavenly Man*, it is apparent that the Christians in the house churches are following the Spirit and seeking God and His vision for China, and that they

⁵⁶ These were the various grounds on which Brother Yun, Brother Xu, and Brother Fong (among others) were arrested and spent time in prison. All recorded in *The Heavenly Man*.

⁵⁷ Brother Andrew, p. 88.

⁵⁸ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway. *The Heavenly Man*. Mill Hill, London: Monarch Books, 2001 p. 59-60.

have a plan laid out for the redemption of more lost souls. Even as the leaders are imprisoned for what they believe to be is the right way to follow Jesus, they have been thriving. Brother Yun and his contemporaries have said that their times in prison have proved to be some of their most privileged times because while in prison, and in such close proximity to so many men, they have the opportunity to minister to the other prisoners, the guards, and their torturers. The extent of persecution and torture, however, is quite extreme. Brother Yun recounts one of many experiences he's had in prison.

The officers rushed at me, held me down and viciously kicked and beat me. They stamped on my legs and chest with their heavy boots, and pulled my hair back and pistol-whipped me. My bones crunched and snapped under their savage blows and kicks. They then produced a dreaded electric baton and tortured me with electric shocks. I was thrashed so severely that all I could do was curl up and focus on Jesus, trying not to pay attention to the blows. Finally, I lost consciousness.⁵⁹

Another example of the tortures suffered by the Christians at the hands of the authorities is written in a book called *Jesus Freaks*, which is published by The Voice of the Martyrs.

John Jue Han Ding could feel the mighty power of God within him, strengthening him to endure the unbearable. They had tied his hands behind his back and then emptied a bucket of human waste on his head. They had left him like that for days, never giving him a chance to clean himself. He was given food, but with his hands tied behind his back, he had to lie on the floor and lick it up like an animal. The food had to pass through soiled lips. He still did not deny his faith and refused to admit to crimes he had not committed. Then his torturers filled a cell with human waste and put him in it with a multitude of common criminals. Now they all waded and suffocated in it. The common criminals were told they would all be kept like this indefinitely unless they forced him to comply with the demands of the interrogators. To survive, these criminals now competed in torturing him day and night...[Because he could not be shaken] the authorities eventually gave up and stopped torturing him.⁶⁰

One illustration used by Watchman Nee to describe the church in China is written

⁵⁹ Brother Yun and Hattaway, p. 242.

⁶⁰ dc Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs. *Jesus Freaks*. Albury Publishing: Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1999 p. 271.

about in Randy Alcorn's book, *Safely Home*.

Many years ago Ni Tuosheng—Watchman Nee—was asked to speak at a gathering. He knew in the crowd there were many authorities wanting to arrest him as soon as he spoke about Yesu or church. When he stood, there was a glass of water by him. Suddenly he threw it down, then crushed it with his heel. But the more violently he crushed it, the more the glass spread. Everywhere he put his foot down, glass spread farther. Then he sat down. The unbelievers thought he had gone mad. But the believers understood. It was a sermon without words. They did not arrest him—how can you arrest a man for preaching when he has said nothing?⁶¹

In attempting to destroy the church, the government has inadvertently spread it. The more they imprison believers, the more they have an opportunity to bring others to Christ. The more they send people to correction farms for “re-education,” the more the gospel is spoken to those who have never heard it. Christians take their beliefs with them everywhere they go—they cannot be separated. I will even say that the same state that persecutes the Christian church is being used as an instrument in God's hands to make the church grow. This does not mean that we should stop fighting for human rights for Christians in China.

Amnesty International's Report 2003 details what was happening in China to its residents without specifically mentioning Christians by name. Technically, this report could be for any religious groups.

Serious human rights violations continued and in some respects the situation deteriorated. Tens of thousands of people continued to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or belief. Some were sentenced to prison terms; many others were administratively detained without charge or trial. The “strike hard” campaign against crime launched in April 2001 was renewed for a further year. According to interim figures available, the crack-down led to at least 1,921 death sentences, many imposed after unfair trials, and 1,060

⁶¹ Alcorn, Randy. *Safely Home*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001. p. 292

executions. Torture and ill-treatment remained widespread and appeared to increase as a result of the campaign.⁶²

In the previous section I have given to show that there is definite persecution going on in China, aimed specifically at Christians. Even if they are seen as breaking laws, the extent of their prison sentences and torture because of it seems undue. Now the question remains. What should Christians in the United States do in response to the persecuted Christians in China? A few thoughts may come to mind.

- We could do nothing. After all, we have our own lives to live here. And life is hard enough thinking of ourselves and our families, let alone an unknown someone on the other side of the world.
- We could send in our military and demand reforms with force. We do have, arguably, the strongest military in the world.

Neither of the above are options. As was stated at the beginning of the paper there is a privileged obligation to help other members of the Christian family. Using military force has not worked in the past, would not be good for our country's relations with the rest of the world right now, and would be devastating to the Chinese economy once again.

- Organizations having good relations with the Chinese Government could start demanding reforms.

This is possibly an option, however, once the organization started demanding the reforms, who is to say that another round of severe persecution against Christians would not break out, or that the organization would be kicked out of the country. There has to be a better and more productive way. The route that must be taken asks a new question. How

⁶² <http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/china>

3. Support them by giving monetarily to help with missions from within the country where native workers are doing the bulk of the evangelizing, a shift from the old idea of sending foreigners to a strange area with little or no knowledge of beliefs and customs.
4. Support the Christians by giving them what they desire: Bibles. This would obviously mean smuggling Bibles in to the country.

The next section of this paper will discuss these options by making a case for them both positively and negatively, and then I will conclude which is the best one for the People's Republic of China and its current religious, social, and political climate today. The arguments and options will be presented within a particular viewpoint. This viewpoint presupposes a literal interpretation of the Bible, a belief in intercessory prayer, an active seeking of the will of God. It has the characteristics of a evangelical Christian viewpoint in the way it functions. This viewpoint could also be considered conservative because it has one goal: to seek the establishment of God's kingdom on earth through the saving of souls by confessing Jesus.

There are other viewpoints about mission and about supporting indigenous Christians. I am in no way saying they are completely wrong, nor that they are harmful. I am simply choosing my particular viewpoint for this paper.

Part III: The Options for Christians in America

Option 1: Work through the Three Self Patriotic Church

Working through an already established entity would seem to make the most sense. The Three Self Patriotic Church has been in effect for about fifty years, and in its current form for about fifteen years. It is now possible to work legally within China and partner with local Christians, albeit primarily with the official church as yet.⁶³ The TSPC does distribute Bibles, the legal production of scriptures in China is capped at 2.3 million per year, though occasional agreements have raised this quota to 3.5 million.⁶⁴ As was stated previously, the TSPC also trains its priests at seminaries. The priests, in the eyes of the government, work for the government. However, there is no doubt in my mind that there are definitely Christians working within those confines of the Religious Affairs Bureau, and in turn the Chinese Communist control, and that they are leading people to Christ everyday.

But one must look at the fruit of their endeavors. Is the TSPC showing itself to be an effective and viable option? I would say no. Without repeating myself, everything written previously about the TSPC pertains here. Seminary students are examined on political conformity as well as theological knowledge. The government regulates the publication and distribution of religious material. Churches are forbidden to be under the

⁶³ <http://www.opendoors.org>

⁶⁴ <http://www.opendoors.org>

authority of any overseas body which means that, because of its worldwide association with the Vatican, Roman Catholicism is officially outlawed.⁶⁵

One must also ask, would it be effective to work through a government the so oppresses its citizens? Glossed over facts that the Chinese government gives the world on the whole do not portray the atrocities it displays to its citizens, not only Christians, though that is the focus here. The government has a population program where newly married couples must be sterilized or take long-lasting contraceptives if one or both are diagnosed as having a hereditary disease making them “unsuitable for reproduction.” It also forces women to have abortions even in the later stages of pregnancy.⁶⁶ These actions would be difficult for anyone to have to face, and both are in direct contradiction with the Christian faith.

The government has also set up detention camps called *laogai*, “reform through labor,” and *laojiao*, or “reeducation through labor.” These allow for detention, and the most brutal form of detention, without a trial or a hearing. Harry Wu, a human rights activist who has been to a *laogai* camp says in the *Freedom Review*, “The Chinese *laogai* camp is fundamentally no different from a concentration camp, from the Gulag.”⁶⁷ Needless to say, the government is hostile towards its citizens and it seems they must keep them in constant control.

Christianity Today, a magazine that publishes all of its articles online, wrote one such article on the Three Self Church blooming entitled “Visitors See Signs of Strong

⁶⁵ Marshall, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Marshall, p. 77 & Amnesty International Reports 2003 at <http://www.amnestyusa.org>

⁶⁷ “Out of the Chinese Gulag: In Conversation with Harry Wu,” *Freedom Review*, November/December 1995. p. 47.

Evangelical Faith in China."⁶⁸ The article describes the TSPC as "a growing church [has had] ... the freedom to worship, propagate its faith, educate its youth, live in Christian homes, [and] publish journals, books, and Bibles."⁶⁹ K. H. Ting, with whom the author had an interview for the article, talked about the freedom of religion the Chinese enjoy, and that the TSPC is not under government control. The article goes on to discuss how the religious situation for Christians in China is really looking up, and that Christians leading the TSPC are evangelical, spirit-filled people.

Jonathon Chao, director of the Chinese Church Research Center wrote, in a response to this article:

[Church leaders were quoted without editorial comment saying] "a growing church [has had] ... the freedom to worship, propagate its faith, educate its youth, live in Christian homes, [and] publish journals, books, and Bibles."

This statement gives the impression that a growing church in China in general is enjoying the above mentioned freedoms. An interpretative paraphrase of Ting's quotation would read like this: "Churches under the TSPM/CCC have freedom to worship in officially designated places of worship, propagate their faith by officially designated TSPM pastors within the designated places of worship, and educate their youth in the TSPM-operated seminaries and short-term training sessions run by regional TSPM leaders. The national TSPM/CCC publish a journal called *Tianfeng*, a theological quarterly, a series of booklets, and Bibles."⁷⁰

Chao, obviously adamant about the depiction of the TSPC goes on to say:

I am not opposed to American evangelicals making some contacts with the leaders in the TSPM, because they are part of the realities of the Church situation in socialist China. But if American evangelicals desire to develop a meaningful dialogue with official leaders of churches in a socialist country, they would do well to understand first the system under which these leaders work and the functions of their communications with the

⁶⁸ "Visitors See Signs of Strong Evangelical Faith in China." *Christianity Today*, Sept. 6, 1985. p. 46-48.

⁶⁹ "Visitors See..."

⁷⁰ Chao, Jonathan. "Digging in the Walls" section of *O Timothy* magazine. Vol. 5, Issue 5. 1988. David W. Cloud, Editor. p. 1.

outside world. In such contacts American evangelicals should speak as evangelicals with evangelical concerns, such as evangelism among the unreached.⁷¹

Taking both of these arguments, one must try to decipher the present situation with the TSPC. It is difficult to do. Working through the TSPC is possible, but presently, within the research I have been able to do pertaining to this option, it seems that the TSPC is not readily available to the majority of Christians in China. Therefore I do not foresee it as being the most effective option, though the strides it has taken are to be commended and more are to be hoped for.

Option 2: Prayer and Intercession

Prayer is one of the strongest weapons we have been given by God, and intercession is an even mightier weapon. They are both highly important Biblical concepts. Intercessory prayer differs from other prayers in that it is a concept to “stand in the gap” between one thing and another. 2 Kings 19:4 says, “It may be that the Lord your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. *Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives.*” (Italics mine.) Ezekiel 22:29-30 says, “The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. [The Lord said] I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and *stand*

⁷¹ Chao, Jonathan. “Digging in the Walls.” p. 1.

before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”

An example of the action of intercession and its results is recorded in Numbers 16. The Lord was sending a plague to wipe out the grumbling Israelites. Aaron was told to put incense in his censer and make atonement for the people. “So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped.”⁷² Another example of praying and mighty things happening is in 1 Kings 18. By Elijah’s prayer to God, he was the only one to bring rain or to call down the Lord’s fire on the wet wood, the stones, and even the water.

It is apparent from the above examples that intercession and prayer are God-ordained. There are a myriad of other examples throughout the Bible, and in people’s lives, including in China. In Brother Yun’s book, *The Heavenly Man*, he recounts story after story of his experiences in China, most of which involved prayer. As persecuted as Brother Yun was and is, he is still living, which is a testimony to his relationship with God—a relationship only built by prayer.

If one were to pray and intercede for China, what would one pray for? The first instinct for many would be to say, “Pray that the government would stop persecuting the Christians!” This attitude, surprisingly enough, is not the attitude Brother Yun would have Westerners take. He writes:

God has used China’s government for his own purposes, moulding and shaping his

⁷² *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*. Hoerber, Robert G., ed. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1984. Numbers 16:47-48.

children as he sees fit. Instead of focusing our prayers against any political system, we pray that regardless of what happens to us, we will be pleasing to God. Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power.⁷³

Once that is said, one can see a little more how the native Chinese Christians think.

Praying for leaders in China is definitely an option though, as 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." It is God's desire that all be saved, and that includes the ruling powers of China. The Voice of the Martyrs urges its readers to "keep on praying for all the saints" as well as "pray for those in authority in China, that they might come to know the good news of the Gospel of Christ."⁷⁴

Praying and interceding are important aspects of supporting the Christians in China. It is not the sole option, however. Jesus' command in Matthew 28 is very clear. It says "Go." An action of mission that has not been bathed in prayer is foolish. China can be a very dangerous place for Christians of any nationality. If God has not ordained an event to take place, be it any of the options, he has been disobeyed. Of course he will not leave his children high and dry. However, it is much easier to work for God when you work with God.

Option 2 is not an option on its own. Because the Great Commission requires us to go, I believe Christians in the US need to be doing everything possible to support the Chinese Christians. Prayer and intercession are necessary and should not be forgotten at

⁷³ Brother Yun, p. 287.

⁷⁴ *The Voice of the Martyrs*. October 2003. Bartlesville, Oklahoma: The Voice of the Martyrs, Inc., 2000.

any cost. They should be paired with both Option 3 and Option 4.

Option 3: Support Native Missions Monetarily & the Changing face of Missions

Since the end of World War II the Western Church's moral mandate and vision for global outreach has faded. Today the average North American believer can hardly pronounce the word "missionary" without having cartoon caricatures of ridiculous little men in pith helmets pop into mind—images of cannibals with spears and huge black pots of boiling water.⁷⁵ The face of missions has changed. The debate among Western leaders about the future of missions has in the meantime raged on, producing whole libraries of books and some valuable research. Regrettably, however, the overall result on the average Christian has been extremely negative. Many believers today are not aware that a new day in missions has dawned. According to K.P. Yohannan's book *Revolution in World Missions* "the frontline work of missions in Asia has been taken over almost completely by indigenous missionaries."⁷⁶

It is true that for many reasons, most of them political in nature, it is difficult for many Westerners to go overseas on extended mission work. Many of the countries that need resources brought to the people have extremely restricted guidelines for entering the country, and the majority of Christian literature would be considered contraband.

Instead of physically traveling to a foreign land to deliver supplies and much-needed help, Option 3 surfaces: support the missions that already exist in countries and regions by sending money and supplies to them through organizations that have ties in both places. K.P. Yohannan is one supporter of this strategy.

⁷⁵ Yohannan, p. 74.

⁷⁶ Yohannan, p. 75.

Yohannan started the mission organization *Gospel for Asia*. In one section of his book *Revolution in World Mission* he discusses the fact that the funds of the North American missions that exist today are being ill-placed. They are being primarily used for humanitarian aid, which is many times referred to as the “social gospel”: feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, housing the homeless, and other relief work. This poses a problem for Yohannan because he most strongly holds to the fact that without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the social gospel merely makes a little more comfortable the time of those suffering on earth before their spending an eternity in hell. Yohannan goes on to say that “history has already taught us that this gospel—without the blood of Christ, conversion and the cross—is a total failure.” He gives hospitals in India as an example. They were planted in India as mission hospitals, yet have had no noticeable effect on either the churches or the society in the area. Would all humanitarian organizations have this same end?

The difficulty I have with this viewpoint is that Jesus clearly states in Matthew 5,6, and 7 and Luke 6 as well as throughout each of the gospels that one should care for the sick, the needy, the hungry, the orphans, the widows. Jesus was akin to taking care of the needy, however, he always took the opportunity to teach the person he was with. I can see the concern of Yohannan, and also that of Paul Marshall. It is not the goal of this paper to condemn mission work in nations, but rather to call to attention the danger in a social gospel without Jesus’ gospel.

Dr. Paul Marshall writes in his book *Their Blood Cries Out* that money should not be sent to humanitarian/human rights organizations. Marshall says that such organizations “do not deal much with questions related to freedom of worship and to

religious speech,” that they “restrict questions of freedom of religion only to freedom of worship,” and that they “pass over the religious identity of the people who are suffering.”⁷⁷ For example, Amnesty International has excellent reports on many countries in the world, however it tends to give a distorted picture of conflicts; in one instance in Sudan involving Christian resistance to a fervently Islamicizing government, Amnesty International writes: “Bigots on all sides, Muslims and Christians alike, have exploited religion, making it a significant factor in the continued fighting.”⁷⁸—thus overlooking reasons behind such “bigotry.” Though this example is regarding Sudan in its specifics, Amnesty International is only one of many human rights organizations active in most countries in the world, and therefore is representative of a commonplace issue evidenced in countries such as Bhutan, Nigeria, Nepal, the Southern Phillippines, and also China.

Neither of these two men is blind to the pain and suffering around them. K.P Yohannan was born and grew up in India, and Paul Marshall has studied the persecuted church for a decade. Yohannan also writes

As Christians we must follow the example of Jesus. I do believe we must do all we can to relieve the pain and suffering around us. We must love our neighbors as ourselves in all areas of life. But we must keep supreme the priority of sharing the message of salvation with them—and we must never minister to the physical needs at the expense of preaching Christ. This is biblical balance, the true Gospel of Jesus.⁷⁹

Both Yohannan and Marshall stress the importance of native evangelists. There are three major advantages of utilizing Christians already in a place. First is that they already understand the culture, customs and lifestyle as well as the language. These

⁷⁷ Marshall, p. 203.

⁷⁸ Marshall, p. 203.

⁷⁹ Yohannan, p. 124.

“missionaries” would not need to spend valuable time in preparation for a trip. The second advantage is that the most effective communication occurs between peers. It is much easier to hear correction, facts, the Gospel, anything from someone who comes from where you are and where you have been. While there may still be social barriers to overcome, they are much smaller than culture barriers and more easily identified. The third advantage is what Yohannan writes. “It is a wise investment of our resources because the native missionary works more economically than foreigners can.”⁸⁰ This last point argues not only for native missionaries but also for the supporting them monetarily.

Now I will turn to China and effectively with the Christian church there. Specifically, this option deals with evangelism as well as funding. With the money from Christian believers in the West, the house churches could afford to purchase supplies such as Christian pamphlets⁸¹, Bibles, some new technology such as VCR’s and DVD players,⁸² bicycles, banners, flags, cassettes, and loudspeaker systems. They might also be able to aid people in their travels to help educate the thousands of new Christians that are born every day. Using native missionaries is also key. Westerners stick out in China and therefore draw attention—not only from the citizens, but also from the Government officials and authorities. If their attention is focused on Westerners, there is a greater chance that there will be a raid on the house church or the Christians that are being helped will suffer more pronounced persecution.

⁸⁰ Yohannan, p. 137.

⁸¹ The Voice of the Martyrs has made pamphlets that look similar to comic books. These pamphlets illustrate the Gospel story and are used in remote locations around the globe where technology and electricity are not available.

⁸² The Voice of the Martyrs has produced and distributed thousands of copies of what they refer to as the “Jesus movie” which portrays the Gospel message and is used as an aid in Christian mission work world-wide. It is shown in many languages and is being translated into many more.

Using native missionaries also helps create unity among believers in China. Brother Yun writes in his book *The Heavenly Man* that mission organizations of specific denominations started to put other books at the top of bags containing Bibles. These books were about their particular denomination's theology, or teaching that focused on certain aspects of God's word and not only about the Gospel of Christ. This posed a huge problem because soon there was arguing among house church groups about what was Truth and what was not. Much like the situation today in America and the rest of the West with denominations.

A foreseen problem with supporting monetarily in the United States is that so many people are wary of where their money actually goes. Possible contributors have seen commercials on television that do not look credible in the least, and many have also heard of stories where the money is sent to a particular organization and kept in the United States, never to go overseas where it is intended to go. This is a valid argument but is easily solved by supporting trusted mission organizations dedicated to winning souls. Another way to identify valid organizations is to take a look at their theology. If the Bible is seen as authority and a liberal stance has not been taken—thereby sliding over to a “social gospel”—it probably has more credence.

There are already mission organizations working to send funding and support to China. Gospel for Asia, The Voice of the Martyrs, Open Doors, and Cornerstone Ministries are just a few. These groups are effectively working in China as is evidenced through their publications such as newsletters, books, websites, and testimonies of workers and native Chinese citizens who have been saved. Supporting monetarily the native evangelists and missionaries is an effective option. They exist even though they

would be illegal as far as the Chinese government is concerned, which could be seen as a huge problem and something to be avoided at all costs. But how far does one go to follow the laws implemented by the governments of this world? I will peruse this question in the next section.

Option 4: Bible Smuggling & the Laws of this World

⁸³When the mother of Moses was lovingly hiding her baby in the basket (Exodus 2), one of her church officials knocked on her door and convinced her that her act was “illegal.” Realizing her sin, she surrendered Moses to the authorities. He was killed and the Jews remained in slavery.

The first few centuries of Christians were very embarrassed that they were called atheists for not worshipping Caesar. They listened to some theological experts who unrestrictedly embraced a few Bible passages about government authority. They turned in their lists of members, gave up their secret (scroll copying) print ships, revealed the addresses of their catacomb meetings and stopped smuggling Bible texts out of respect to the emperor who claimed to be God. In a few months, Christianity ceased to exist.

When Paul was being lowered in the basket over the wall (Acts 9), one of the men above had second thoughts and grabbing the rope said, “Wait a minute, fellas, are you sure this is legal? Didn’t Paul want us to give the authorities our spiritual rights, too?” Paul didn’t get a chance to answer. When the basket jerked to a stop, he had fallen out and broken his neck.⁸⁴

The above illustrations may sound ridiculous or even blasphemous. They are not meant to be. They are based on prevalent attitudes among some Christian circles today about work that some Christians do secretly. In China today, it is against the law to print, sell, import, or distribute the Bible or other Christian literature outside of the Government-allowed Bibles. How should Christians react to this? The words “against the

⁸³ These illustrations are meant to be taken on the premise that the people were breaking the laws that were implemented for their day. It is in no way meant to be taken in regards to the will of God, nor how His will comes about in relation to actions of man.

⁸⁴ White, Tom. *What about Bible Smuggling?* Bartlesville, Oklahoma: The Voice of the Martyrs, Inc., 2000.

law” disturb us. Some Christians claim that Bible “smuggling” is wrong because it dishonors scriptures concerning obedience to the government. How far and into what areas does that obedience extend?

Romans 13 reads

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

By reading these first verses of the chapter, one could make a relatively convincing argument that those who smuggle Bibles are obviously and blatantly undermining the government and the implemented laws. This is perfectly clear. However, Paul is not finished with this section.

For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword of nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

What needs to be addressed is the last line that reads “not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.” Submitting to authority is what needs to be done, however, when that is in direct contradiction with what God tells us to do, God has a trump card. Jesus says in Matthew 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Romans 10:17 reads “Consequently faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” The Bible is the word of Christ, and if

we are serious about doing the will of God, we must get Bibles to both believers and unbelievers in China.

Bible smuggling can be accomplished in many different ways. There are detailed accounts of people bringing suitcases full of Bibles into the country, of walking them in by foot through mountainous terrain, there was even one group who filled a boat with one million Bibles and covertly delivered them to a beach in China with a boat the sunk to just under the water level.⁸⁵ People drive them into the country in cars whenever possible as well, though that is a challenge because most of the time cars will be searched and the Bibles could easily be discovered. There is no tried and true method. God has been using many different and creative ways to get the Bibles into the hands of believers.

But it is those Bibles in those hands that concerns some people. Can this action of smuggling Bibles illegally prolong and even fuel the persecution of Christians in China? After all, this is tangible evidence that the Christians are breaking the laws. Whereas some local authorities persecute Christians for meeting together and saying the “wrong” things, this is something they can confiscate and use as evidence. One question that surfaces is this: Does it really matter? Would the authorities really quit the persecution if the Bibles stopped coming in from outside sources? I would say no. According to Hong Kong-based Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy, An official at the provincial-level religious affairs bureau said a crackdown on unauthorized religious groups was on-going. He indicated that the campaign was part of a nation-wide effort to wipe out illegal religious groups.⁸⁶ I do not foresee the persecution coming to a halt if

⁸⁵ Brother Andrew and Verne Becker. *The Calling: The Challenge to walk the Narrow Road*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2002. Chapter 7.

⁸⁶ Cornerstone Ministries Bi-monthly newsletter, March/April 2004. © CSM 2004.

Bible smuggling ceased, and as I have noted previously, prison time for Christians in China is seen quite differently than us as Americans see it.

A different problem is proposed by Paul Marshall. He criticizes mission organizations for their tactics of raising money to do the work that they deem necessary. He writes that the fund-raising letters sent out “exaggerate conditions in order to shock donors into making large contributions. This desensitizes westerners to an apparently endless series of emergencies.”⁸⁷ Marshall argues that one organization becomes offended with another, and subtle (or not-so-subtle) criticism ensues. Disagreements regarding all sorts of issues including theology, tactics, personalities, or political viewpoints form the basis of these attacks. Marshall describes a conflict that took place when Nelson Graham’s East Gates Ministries International claimed, “The days of smuggling Bibles into China are over...” He says this was in an appeal for funds for Bibles that would, with the permission of the Chinese government, be printed and distributed inside China. It was attacked by others whose focus was long included Bible smuggling.⁸⁸

This argument is interesting, however it is hard to decipher its intents. If it is just making the point that organizations argue with one another, I see no problem with it. If it is trying to make a statement that Bibles should be printed within China, I would agree. However, more Bibles would need to be printed than are now because the number of believers and unbelievers out numbers the amount of bibles available, and they would, of course, need to be complete. I would have absolutely no qualms about abandoning this option as unnecessary if these actions took place. Christians in China continue to cry out

⁸⁷ Marshall, p. 161.

⁸⁸ Marshall, p. 162.

for more Bibles that they are not as of right now receiving from the government.

If Westerners are willing to respond to the Church in China by fulfilling their requests for more Bibles, which is what I have found to be the case in my research, then bringing Bibles into China is in the hands of God. Those who are willing to risk possible prison time, to risk not being granted visas again, and sometimes (through extreme circumstances) even their lives to help the church in China are typically those who feel called to do this. Oddly enough, there has been great success with getting Bibles into the hands of Christians in China, even if they are considered contraband materials by the Chinese government.

Conclusion

China is a very complex place. The centuries of history that have gone into making China the place it is today are multi-faceted. Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism still have a heavy impact on society today. From the time Christianity was introduced in China it has been seen as an outside force, a tool of the Imperialism of the West. Christianity was not welcomed by many because of this reason. However, Christianity has grown in China—it has not been stagnant. In fact, the church in China has grown to an approximately 50 million believers. Because of the Communist control of the government, it is repressed. Even though the 1982 Constitution gives Chinese citizens the right to practice any religion they choose, it is obvious that there are government specified parameters that the Chinese must abide by, many of which are in contradiction to the Christian faith, such as teaching what the Bible says, teaching

children, and gathering together to worship. The Christians are then persecuted for their beliefs, they suffer at the hands of the authorities, and many die.

As a Christian in the United States my heart goes out to them. We are all members of the body of Christ. When one part of the body suffers, the other parts feel its suffering. The question arises of how can we support the church there? There are four options that arise. The first option would be to work through the Three Self Patriotic Church. It is already established and legal. This is not the most effective option because it is not readily available to the majority of the Chinese Christians, and because of the information I have read pertaining to the harassment of Christians by the very same government.

The second option is prayer and intercession. They are both ordained by God as is evidenced in the Bible. However, when put side by side with the Great Commission in Matthew 28, it becomes clear that the place for prayer and intercession is not alone, but paired with either option three or option four.

Working through and supporting native missionaries is the third option. There can be a danger when working through mission organizations that are affiliated with particular denominations because it can and does cause division and strife among believers when they receive information about a particular denomination's belief system as opposed to the Bible as it is. Native missions have no language barrier, they understand the social system, and they are peers to the people who need to be evangelized—all of which are more effective when telling people about Christ.

The last option is Bible smuggling. Through my research, I have found bible smuggling to be not only an effective option, but a necessary one as well. If we as

Christians want to support the church in China, we need to listen to what they need. They need Bibles. I have read story after story about how Bibles are desperately needed due to the astounding rate people are being won to Christ in China.⁸⁹ Acquiring Bibles within the country is not a viable option because there simply are not enough. Smuggling Bibles is illegal according to the Chinese Government, but something that must be done regardless.

I have tried to prove in my thesis that Option 1 is not an option, Option 2 is when paired with another, and that Option 3 and 4 are the best and most effective ways that Christians in the United States can support the persecuted Christian Church in China. The church in China is growing rapidly, but the spiritual depth of the church is shallow. Only by taking advantage of every avenue to assist the whole church in China through Bible deliveries, leadership training, prayer support and encouragement will we see the continued, solid growth of the world's largest revival.

⁸⁹ They are included in these stories as well as numbers 15, 17, 36, and 37 in the included bibliography.

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