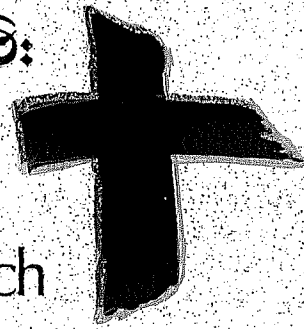


THE Empty CROSS:



The False Doctrine
Of China's Official Church

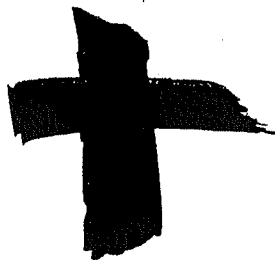
The Three Self Patriotic Movement
基督教三自愛國會

Compiled & Edited By
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2000

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THE EMPTY CROSS:

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF CHINA'S OFFICIAL RELIGION SPREAD THROUGH THE THREE SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The earliest known symbol of Christianity under persecution was the sign of the fish, drawn in the dirt of streetways and sidepaths when Christians would try to identify each other and find comfort in their Lord when it was not available to them physically. It was and remains a symbol of the fellowship of the body of Christ. It was an important symbol in that it referred to a physical nourishment of our bodies as well as the Spiritual nourishment of our souls through our belief in Jesus Christ. A more powerful symbol of our faith is the cross, symbolizing our Lord's sacrifice. This latter symbol is powerful in its representation that death has no power over believers. Jesus Christ's human body was tormented and killed on that symbol, but it did not kill Him. We know Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life."

Only through Him may we attain our true Spiritual life. Our belief in Christ as Lord gives us eternal Spiritual life after physical death. We accept that Christ is the head of the church, and we submit our souls to no one but Him. Without a personal relationship with Jesus, where we accept Him as our personal Savior, we cannot attain the promise of Eternal Life given on the cross at Calvary. A Christian's cross is full of faith, full of promise, and full of hope because of the promise of Jesus. This cross is steadfast and based on the teaching of our Lord found in the New Testament of the Holy Bible. But, it is not the cross that is found in the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church in China.

The Chinese Communist party has done everything in its power to

deny their people the opportunity to find and worship Jesus Christ. Through the TSPM they have instead given the Chinese people, who search and reach out for truth and life, a way of practicing the Christian religion, maintaining a form of godliness, while remaining loyal to the Chinese socialist agenda. They have substituted the truth of God's Word, and the Kingdom of God, for a "truth" that includes the welfare and destiny of the great proletariat revolution. They have substituted life in Christ that brings peace and victory now as well as eternal life with Him, for a life devoted to the good of China, and more specifically, the power of the elite within the Communist party. This leaves those seeking true life in Christ with the emptiness of false doctrines. These false doctrines empty the cross of Christ and all it represents to believers who follow the teachings of the Holy Bible. It empties the cross of its meaning, its vitality, and its saving grace.

When Communism became a force in China following World War II, party members realized their future political success would rest on their ability to manipulate and control the vast population of their huge country. They realized that only when Chinese citizens thought alike, acted alike, and feared retaliation for dissent that the Communist doctrine could become a way of life. An effective method for the communists was to banish "foreign influences" from the country, stifle dissent among the political ranks, and issue laws and administrative decrees to "legalize" enforcement of their repression. This allowed them the freedom necessary to mold the population into the communist ideal they craved.

The first action taken by the Communist Party was to evict foreign Christian groups, especially evangelicals, and attempt to follow the Russian model of not permitting religion of any kind within China. However, it became evident, even after ousting the mainline denominations which operated in China before World War II, that religion, and Christianity in particular, had a "calming" effect on the population. If properly controlled, religion might be of benefit to the Party. From this realization grew the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church, the officially recognized Protestant denomination in China, as an outlet for the country's desire for Spiritual involvement. However, the church as described and mandated by the Chinese Communist Party bears little resemblance to the church as described in New Testament Scripture.

The following document provides some background information necessary to understand how the Christian Church has evolved in China over the last half century. It describes some of the traditional belief systems present in the country and how those affect the growth of Christianity. There is a description of the leadership of the TSPM, and the rules and regulations passed by the government, which determine the course of the

legal Chinese church. Also presented is an assessment of the current church situation in China as analyzed by 20 Chinese Christian intellectuals and their impression of how the situation affects the growth of Christianity in China, as well as implications of that situation.

Much of the description of the restrictions placed on Christianity show how the Chinese communists have essentially separated from their Christian religion the most basic tenants of the faith as presented in the New Testament. The Chinese Communist Party has stripped the cross which held our Savior. It takes away the ability to have faith, the promise of the resurrection, and the hope of salvation. In the Communist Party's quest for control of the country, they have developed an empty cross of false doctrine with themselves as the head of the church, rather than our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE COUNTRY

With more than 1.2 billion residents, China is the most populous nation on earth and third largest in land area. Its borders span more than 2000 miles east to west, and almost that distance north to south. This land supports one-fifth of the world's total population. Two-thirds of China's land is desert or mountains, and only one-tenth is cultivated. The eastern half has three extensive river systems that provide ample water for farmlands. Two-thirds of the population reside in rural areas. The chief agricultural crops of grain, rice, cotton, potatoes, and tea employ more than 60% of the workforce. Only 25% of people are employed through industry and commerce, although in the 1990s migration to the city areas has created enormous building booms along the coastal region.¹

The government of China is administered through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from the capital in Beijing. Although nearly 40 million people belong to the CCP, that figure is only about 4 percent of the total population. After communism was abandoned in Europe and the former USSR, China became the oldest surviving Communist regime. Throughout the 1990s vast economic reforms and growth developed in the capitalist economic systems of the west. However, China's government policy remained rigid and repressive when relating to political, religious or ethnic dissenters. Despite an economic boom in the city centers, most people remain in poverty. As many as 1.5 million urban workers are jobless, which is equal to 7.5 percent of that workforce. In 1997 China

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, Washington: Brassey's, pg. 88-90.

regained control of Hong Kong after 156 years of British rule. The current President of China is Jiang Zemin.

Officially, China is an atheistic state. The goal of the Marxist rulers is to eliminate or repackage all religion. The Three Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant) and Catholic Patriotic Association (Catholic) were designed to control Christianity. Because the leaders believe religion helped overthrow communism in Europe, they desire to maintain strict control over the instruction of pastors and the nature of worship practices. Any Christian or church worker not certified by the government's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) is subject to beatings, fines, sexual molestation by police, and imprisonment. The unregistered church leaders are faced with the threat of "re-education through labor," a euphemism for prison camps.

The Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) is an official government controlled religious organization which Protestants are required to join under the Communists' interpretation of religious freedom. Christian activities outside the rules of the TSPM are illegal and prohibited. Increasingly, they are dealt with severely. Official activities sanctioned by the RAB are restrictive in nature and contrary to accepted Christian theology and practices.²

CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

The first Christian missionaries migrated into the western regions of China in the early 7th Century A.D. These first emissaries to carry the gospel eastward were Nestorian monks from Asia Minor and Persia. The monks founded monasteries which flourished and grew in number over the following two hundred years. Part of the reason for this success was the growth of prosperity and cultural accomplishment under the Tang Dynasty of rulers. The Tang emperors adapted a form of Buddhism into Zen as a cultural influence, which caused some clashes with the new Christian followers.

However, in the mid-9th Century the Chinese dynastic leaders, became weak and had little remaining military power. They became suspicious of the monks' Western influence and systematically closed or destroyed most of the established Christian religious centers in favor of a return to more traditional Confucianism. In the early 10th century, Confucianism was made the "official" state religion of China. During the

² Johnstone, Patrick. *Operation World*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pg. 163-165.

next three hundred years, there was little Christian activity allowed as Chinese leaders worked to consolidate power under the Song dynasty. It was during this time that a major political shift occurred, removing power from royal families and placing it in the hands of those who could pass civil service examinations.

In the late 13th century, Marco Polo visited the cultural and political centers of China from his home in Venice, Italy. His trading influence and economic success caused intense curiosity toward the "strange" religious beliefs followed by the Europeans. This curiosity and desire for cultural expansion led to another brief era of Christian expansion into China. In 1289 Franciscan monks began a 100-year missionary effort. Again, the late 14th century saw another collapse of Christianity in China as the mainland military and political structures were overthrown by invaders from Mongolia. Establishment of the Ming dynasty was marked by this second withdrawal of Christian religious practice from China.

The Ming dynasty was known for an intense dislike of anything foreign. This grew from rebellions against the Mongolian invader, Kubila Khan. He established the Yuan dynasty, which ruled China for 100 years. During this period, no foreign trade or influence, including Christian religious practice, was allowed in China. In the late 15th century, the Ming once again began to allow foreign trade. Their opinion of the foreigners was unfavorable, and the emissaries were always treated as inferiors. During 1582 Jesuit priests came to China as teachers to introduce Western style science, mathematics, and astronomy. For a third time, Christianity gained a foothold.

For over 200 years, Catholic priests were allowed to invite believers to their ceremonies, which seemed strange and methodic to the Chinese. The practices of the Christian religion were difficult to connect to Chinese tradition. Until this time, the major religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism practiced in China were based more on thought processes and improvement of self, rather than upon an omniscient, omnipotent Spiritual Being. The religions taught obedience to a hierarchy rather than a benevolent spirit. The rulers of the Qing dynasty closely monitored this cultural clash. In the early 1800s the first Protestant missionaries were allowed into the country, with the first recorded Chinese convert baptized in 1814.³

From 1839 through the 1860s, China and Europeans battled through the Opium Wars. Europeans smuggled opium, an illegal drug in China, into the country in an attempt to gain more favorable trading laws. After an

³ Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

intense military struggle over the disrupted economy and growing influence of opium, China lost the Opium Wars to Great Britain. The increased influence of the Westerners provided additional opportunity for the growth of Christian missions. However, the difficulty of providing a cultural context to tie the church to ordinary life caused some of the Christian beliefs to be corrupted into cults, especially in the rural areas.

One such cult grew into an influence that caused a series of uprising known as the Taiping rebellions. This was a group of semi-religious followers who combined Christian beliefs with ancient Chinese ideas for perfecting society. They challenged both the Qing dynasty and Confucianism with a program to divide the land equally among the people. It was nearly 30 years before the rebellions ceased and this corrupted form of religion was stopped. However, this series of conflicts laid the groundwork for a more serious uprising called the Boxer Rebellion. During this time, most of the Christian workers in China were killed or forced out of the country. It also was a time of political corruption that allowed the revolution of Sun Yat-Sen to succeed and end imperial rule in 1913.

In 1921 the Communist Party was established in China, followed by a serious break in relations between the Nationalists and Communists in 1927. As the influence of the Communists spread during the 20s and 30s in southern China, the environment became more and more difficult for the remaining Christian groups within the country. During the same time, the influence of Japan in the region increased and hostile activity against Christians began in earnest. Japan began an intense military campaign in China in 1937, which culminated with the 1941 bombing of Hong Kong.⁴ Known missionaries were interned under harsh conditions or forced to leave China.

By 1949 Mao Zedong had established the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party. His new government was the People's Republic of China. Religion, especially Christianity, became an activity condemned by the government. However, by the early 1950s, Mao realized that in order to eradicate the "foreign-influenced" Christianity, the CCP would have to have a mechanism to control it. Thus, the Three Self Patriotic Movement was established in 1954 as a way for Communists to monitor and control Christianity in China. The TSPM Church experienced steady growth during the 50s and early 60s.

By 1966 other factors were causing political pressure on the Communists, which resulted in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Using a systematic and cruel procedure, students in the semi-military Red

⁴ World Book Encyclopedia, Chicago: 1994, "China," vol. 3, pg. 480.

Guards targeted Christian churches, burned or otherwise destroyed them, and either killed or sent pastors to "re-education in labor camps." By 1976, all of the Three Self Patriotic Movement churches had been closed and most registered believers went underground or were imprisoned. Christian officials were replaced in political positions, and the Communist party adopted the hard line that party members were forbidden to adopt a religion. Christianity and other religious beliefs were branded as "opiates of the masses" and banned. For the fifth time, open Christianity was not allowed.

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, there was a reawakening in the political structure of the Communist party as leaders realized the damage caused by the Cultural Revolution. In 1977 Deng Xiaoping, a moderate politician, became chairman of the party. Under his influence, the TSPM churches were allowed to reopen in 1979. In 1980 the China Christian Council, and the Nanjing Theological Seminary were established to coordinate matters of religion and to train new pastors. Realizing the need to control the content of Christian resources and materials, the party established the Amity Press in 1985 in partnership with foreign-led denominations. This permission was one method the government would use to monitor and restrict the activities of foreign Christians working within the country.

During the early 1980s there was increased activity in the underground churches, which were receiving materials and finances from foreign Christian groups. In the late 1980s, the Communists once again began to tighten control on Christian influence, especially that involved with foreigners. In an ironic twist, following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, large numbers of Chinese intellectuals and students turned to Christ. The party noticed this increase in Christian activity. In the mid-1990s authorities began to target non-Three Self Patriotic Movement church leaders, as well as sects, under an anti-crime campaign. The Communists used this tactic in an attempt to avoid the appearance of religious persecution.

Hong Kong was turned over to Chinese rule once again by Great Britain at the end of the treaty from the Opium Wars. In 1998 underground church leaders issued a public appeal to end persecution of unregistered Christians. However, this attempt was followed by a crackdown in 1999 on unregistered house church leaders, and the forced resignation of three graduates from the TSPM seminary in Nanjing.⁵

⁵ Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

HISTORIC CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

To understand the complexity of religion in China requires knowledge of the various philosophies that have influenced the culture. Official religion in China has been discouraged under the Communists, but it has played an important part in traditional Chinese life. There have been three schools of thought which have traditionally influenced Chinese culture throughout most of its history: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Even in modern China elements of these have been combined with aspects of Christianity to form cults.⁶

Confucianism is based on the ideas of the philosopher Confucius, who was born about 550 B.C. This belief system stresses the importance of moral standards and of a well-ordered society in which parents rule their children, men rule women, and the educated rule the common people. In addition, Confucianism strongly emphasizes deep respect for one's ancestors and for the glory of the past. This emphasis developed into a form of "ancestor worship" that is intricately wound through the society today. Respect for and obedience to the authority of "wise elders" is the strength of this belief system. It is a religion for which the Communists are thankful, as it gives credibility to the communist leadership because they are the "ancestors" of the Party and therefore entitled to rule lives and citizens' consciousness.

Taoism is the second influential school of thought. It teaches that a person should withdraw from everyday life and live in harmony with nature. Taoism began during the 300s B.C. and is based on a book called the Tao Te Ching, or The Classic of the Way and the Virtue. Taoism came to include many elements of Chinese folk beliefs and became a religion with many protective gods. Again, the Communists appreciated this form of worship as it uses many deities to "protect" the believers from harm. There is no focus on a single entity, so loyalty to a specific source can not develop. As needs change, so does the authority. The party uses this concept to promote the protective nature of the government in guarding the population from the evil influences of foreign interests. Whatever a citizen's need, there is someone in the government who can meet it.

Buddhism, the third influential school of thought, reached China from India before 100 A.D. As a religion, it became well-established throughout the country during the 300s A.D. Under the influence of Confucianism and Taoism, several different sects of Buddhism developed. They taught strict

⁶ Johnstone, Patrick. *Operation World*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pg. 163-165.

moral standards and the ideas of rebirth and life after death. The Chinese Buddhists worshipped many gods and appealed to them for help in times of trouble. The communists appreciated this line of worship because it also reinforced the idea that citizens could be "reborn" into the ideals of society as promoted by the party. There was another, and better, life under communism.

None of these traditional Chinese ways of thought developed an understanding of one Supreme Being that creates or guides life on earth for the purpose of attaining Eternal Life with the deity. The gods of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are not living entities. None of them offer a personal relationship with the believer. None of these gods offered themselves to redeem the souls of their followers. None of them portrayed the concept of divine "Grace."

Under the Communists, the government has regarded religion as "superstition." Instead, the government actively encourages the people through intensive propaganda campaigns to study science and political writings to solve their problems. The government discourages any mention that life will improve outside guidance from the Communist party. Over the past 12 years, there has been a shift in the approach used by the party. The Communists now oppose Confucianism because it emphasizes the past and justifies inequality in society.

The Communists have also turned Taoist and Buddhist temples into museums, schools, and meeting halls. Communist leaders particularly dislike Christianity because it promotes the belief that God is superior to the state, and that Christ is our Savior rather than the state. Since the late 1970s, government attitudes towards religion have alternately softened and hardened according to how well they believed it could be manipulated for the benefit of the state.

Christianity has exploded in China over the last 100 years. The Communist influence has been unable to control its spread, and reliable estimates, from sources operating inside the country, are that the unofficial church is more than four times the size of the official Three Self Patriotic Movement. According to reliable figures provided through Compass Direct, the unofficial and official church combined are twice the size of the Chinese Communist Party. From 1900 to 2000 the church has grown ninety times its original size. During the last half of the 20th century, most Christian missionaries and foreign workers were expelled from China, and churches, seminaries, and schools were closed.

7 VOM Sources inside China for over 30 years, anonymous here to protect their safety.

However, because the Christian influence helped maintain social order and provided essential social services, the government once again permitted official Three Self Patriotic Movement churches to open in 1979. There are severe restrictions within the philosophy of the TSPM churches that contradict essential elements of the faith, and for that reason many Christians have refused to become part of the official registered church. The Communists list Christianity as less than one percent of the population. House church leaders estimate that nine percent of China's people are Christians.

HISTORY OF THE THREE SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

According to EWTN⁸, The Three Self Reform Movement began in 1949 and grew steadily until 1957. The origin of the movement was from Communist Party officials who realized that Christianity was experiencing astonishing growth in China. Because the majority of church leadership at that time was through foreign Christian agencies, the Communists believed that they needed to get rid of this "socially destabilizing" force. Under the guise of a reform movement, the government stressed the importance of "self" in determining China's future. Their goal was to strive for Self-government, Self-reliance, and Self-evangelism.

The primary goal was to liberate the Chinese Christian churches from foreign control in the belief that the church would then disappear.⁹ High ranking Communist officials strongly believed the only reason Christianity flourished was because the foreign evangelists and leadership were too charismatic in their presentations. They could see no connection with the "magical" nature of Christianity and the traditions of Chinese culture. Without that foreign influence, Communists leaders firmly believed that the interest in Christianity would fade away.¹⁰ The government aimed to control communications, travel, publication, and assembly. During this time, the Christian church continued to grow in spite of the contradictory instruction of state-sponsored religion. However, interference continued from authorities who were attempting to regiment Christianity into a more state-oriented rather than religious experience.

In 1966 a part of the Chinese leadership began the devastating

⁸ EWTN, August 12, 1996, CWN.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Buchan, Alex. *Understanding the Current Breakdown on China's Churches*, Compass Direct, July 26, 1992.

Cultural Revolution, which eventually created many Christian martyrs. Militant students recruited by the Communists would terrorize local congregations of both registered Three Self Patriotic Movement Churches and unregistered churches. Hundreds of thousands of Christians were banished to labor "re-education" camps, and most church buildings were destroyed. The Communists were amazed by the refusal of Christians to deny their faith that Christ was the head and only leader of the church. Party leaders had no basis of understanding for this line of belief. The suppression continued until 1976 at the death of Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong.

OFFICIAL CHURCH HIERARCHY

By 1980, according to Compass Direct,¹¹ China had developed policies that included five legally recognized religions:

- Three Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant)
- Patriotic Catholic Association (Catholic, but not *Roman Catholic*)
- Buddhism
- Daoism (a form of Taoism)
- Islam

These five religious groups were answerable to the Religious Affairs Bureau, which in turn was regulated by the Communist Party. The official hierarchy for religion in China¹² that is recognized by the government remains:

- The Communist Party
- The Religious Affairs Bureau
- The Three Self Patriotic Movement/Patriotic Catholic Association/
Other Religions
- Official Seminaries
- Official House Churches (only in areas not large enough for a church building for the Three Self Patriotic Movement congregation)

All rules and regulations for the practice of religion in China were and continue to be developed to support the Communist party. The Religious Affairs Bureau interprets the rules and regulations and all presumed legal religious groups must follow them. The RAB, staffed by Communist Party

11 Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

12 China News & Church Report, December 3, 1993.

members, screens and places pastoral candidates into the official seminaries. This screening insures that only the candidates with the "proper patriotic mindset" are allowed to study for the TSPM pastorate.

In some rural areas, there are not enough official church buildings to house the official registered churches. In those cases, the government allows registered pastors to hold church meetings in their homes. However, there are limitations on the number of participants who can attend and the ages of those who can attend.

SEVEN RULES OF THE THREE SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

According to China News and Church Report¹³, the Communists wanted to set the government up as the supreme authority over Chinese citizens' lives. In order to accomplish this, the Communists instituted seven rules that the established church must strictly follow. These rules are designed to place more importance on the government than any instruction provided to Christians through the Holy Bible.

First, (Christian believers) must fervently love the People's Republic of China, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Peoples' Government, uphold the unification of the motherland and the harmony among ethnic groups, and work steadfastly on the road of socialism.

Second, (Christian believers) must strictly abide by all the laws, regulations, and policies of the Communist Party and the State, and strive to be patriotic and law abiding citizens.

Third, (Christian believers) must actively work to increase the material wealth and cultivate the spiritual morals of the socialist civilization. They must comply with the government's labor codes and strive to contribute to the development of the "Four Modernizations" established by the Communist Party. When scheduled religious activities are in conflict with production and work schedules; the economic activities must take priority.

Fourth, a permit must be obtained from the county Religious Affairs Bureau [who are Communist Party members] in order to establish religious meeting points. No unauthorized meeting points are allowed.

¹³ China News and Church Report, December 3, 1993.

Fifth, (Christian believers) must actively cooperate with the government to carry out thoroughly, the party's religious policies to the letter. (They) shall not persuade and force others to believe in Christianity. (They) shall not brainwash teenagers under 18 with religious beliefs. (They) shall not bring children [under 18] to religious activities.

Sixth, one should see a doctor for medication when sick. (Christian believers) must not resort to prayer alone for healing so as not to endanger people's health and lives.

Seventh, (Christian believers) shall not preach their religion outside the church building and specific places which have been designated for religious activities. They shall not preach itinerantly. They shall not receive self-proclaimed evangelists into their homes, churches, or meeting points.

Carl Lawrence, author of *The Coming Influence of China*, explained specifically that these rules mean that TSPM Christians must value socialism above their faith.¹⁴ They must place the laws of society above the law of God. They must sacrifice religious observances in order to promote the economic well-being of the country. New churches are not permitted unless they are authorized by the State. There is to be no evangelization, and participation by teenagers and children is forbidden. Miracles and spiritual healings do not exist. Preaching outside official church buildings is not allowed, and only the pastors appointed by the Communist state are allowed to preach inside the buildings to which they are assigned. Pastors may not be visiting speakers inside another TSPM church building or site. Further, pastors are required to submit copies of their weekly sermons to the authorities for censoring, and then must only preach what the censors permit.

CURRENT LEADERSHIP OF THE THREE SELF PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT

According to the China News and Church Report,¹⁵ the head of the Religious Affairs Bureau is Ye Xiaowen. Under his administration the following appointments have been made or continued:

Luo Guanzong, Chairman
Den Fucun, Secretary General
Xu Minghan Associate Secretary

¹⁴ Lawrence, Carl. *Coming Influence of China*, Sisters OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1996.

¹⁵ *New Heads for TSPM and CCC*, Online, February 13, 1997, America Online.

Jin Wei, Associate Secretary
 Bishop Ding Guangxun, Honorary Chairman, Retired
 Xu Rushang, Associate
 Yin Jizeng, Associate

With the exception of the now retired Bishop Ding Guangxun, none of the leadership is ordained clergy. They are members of the Communist party, an atheistic organization, which forbids them to belong to any religious group or to follow their practices.

THE CHINA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

In 1980, the China Christian Council was formed as a sister organization to the Three Self Patriotic Movement, with special responsibility for reopening churches, rebuilding seminaries, and printing Bibles¹⁶. The government was interested in providing approval for expansion of Christian churches in order to better control the leadership as well as the content of the material provided for instruction. This step was to counteract grassroots level Christians who were not interested in the teachings of the political body of the Communist Party. In many rural areas most of the Christians remain outside the officially recognized Three Self Patriotic Movement and have no desire to register, due to what they see as a conflict of church leadership. The Communists see the Party as the head of the church. The dissenting Christians see Christ as the head of the church. Through the CCC, the State protects "normal" religious activity as defined by itself – TSPM religious activities in registered buildings only.

Between 1982 and 1998, the CCP made progress toward modest liberalization under the leadership of Bishop Ding, as reported by Compass Direct.¹⁷ Cases of persecution were in decline. There was serious talk of abolishing the repressive mechanism of CCP control of religion, including the TSPM. However, forces within the CCP, alarmed by "bourgeois liberalization," began a political campaign targeted against religion, which mirrored frustrations with development of the democracy movement within the political structure.

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union created a reaction in the Beijing regime, as described by Compass Direct.¹⁸ In 1989-90 liberal intellectuals and students were arrested or fled the

16 Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, Online, <http://pda.pcu.a.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

17 Compass Direct, Online, October 22, 1999, email version.

18 Ibid.

country. The Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 and failure of the democracy movement has had major repercussions for the political direction of China as a whole over the 1990s. This has seriously affected any open development of the growing Chinese church.

The China Christian Council was instructed by the government to coordinate church affairs in accordance with the Communist Party regulations. It's mandate is to train leaders using the appropriate patriotic philosophies, to train these leaders to use Chinese government printed Bibles, without preaching from forbidden texts, and to deal with pastoral matters such as selection and placement of seminary graduates who are worthy to be ordained.

Seminary graduates who are pastors with an evangelical style to their sermon presentations, are routinely removed from prominent or visible positions and placed out in the countryside. This "relocation" is for the "protection" of the official TSPM church so that "radical elements" will not corrupt the official religion into a sect or cult. Any deviation from officially approved doctrine is basis for relocation.¹⁹

COMMUNIST PARTY POLICIES

One interesting effect following Tiananmen, and reported by Paul Davenport,²⁰ was that large numbers of intellectuals and students turned to Christ in the months and years following the massacre of students at Tiananmen. The gospel message meant more to these new Christians who were disillusioned with the practices and philosophies of the CCP. The reaction of the government was to further restrict religious practice through measures allowed in "Document 6,"²¹ issued in 1990, by warning of the danger of "hostile foreign forces using religion to undertake 'peaceful revolution.'" This document also called for a crackdown of unregistered house church preachers. Also used as a guideline during the repression was "Document 19,"²² issued in 1982, which formally outlined the limits of tolerance as well as the punishments for disobedience to the state. Neither of these documents consider the instructions of the Holy Bible or the penalties for disobedience to God.

19 Woehr, Chris. *Report from China's Church*, Online: http://klpertec.com/forerunner/forerunner/X0070_Church_growth.html.

20 Davenport, Paul. *Ten Years after the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Chinese Church - 1989-1999*.

21 Compass Direct, Online, October 22, 1999, email version.

22 Ibid.

In 1995 President Jiang Zemin stated at a top Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) conference that the CCP is still engaged in a "secret struggle" with the Christian church, and even the Three Self Patriotic Movement should be monitored much more closely for adherence to the law.²³ In 1996, Carl Lawrence reported that the director of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaowen, admitted, "Our aim is...to use registration as a means to tighten lawful control over places for religious activities as well as on all religious activities themselves." When confronted with accusations of persecution, the RAB blames crackdowns on local cadres who "do not properly understand the national laws" respecting freedom of religion.²⁴

Since 1998 there have been increased police sweeps, fines and arrests for both TSPM leaders who chose to follow biblical teachings of Christ in their official buildings, as well as non-TSPM unregistered church leaders. The purpose of these raids is to instill fear of reprisal and severe punishments in all who do not put the state's interests above God's interests.

In November 1998, Bishop Ding of Nanjing Seminary, the primary provider of pastors for the TSPM churches, advocated that (Christian) theology must be liberalized away from actual teachings of Christ in the Holy Bible toward more of the official Communist Party doctrine²⁵ in order to:

1. Exclude thought incompatible with socialism.
2. Eradicate stubborn conservative faith.
3. Dispute that Jesus rose from the dead.
4. Dislike fundamentalism.

TSPM seminary students, who are taught these principles in the context of being more important than the actual teachings of the Bible, must work for a few years after graduation in order to demonstrate their abilities before they can be ordained. Under this rule, pastoral candidates are carefully screened for their obedience to the state above their obedience to God. TSPM churches baptize believers rather than infants, since people under 18 are not allowed into the churches.²⁶ New converts in the TSPM churches may choose to be baptized either by sprinkling or by immersion.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Davenport, Paul. *Ten Years after the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Chinese Church – 1989-1999.*

²⁵ Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

²⁶ VOM China contact, anonymous here to protect safety.

Proselytizing by foreigners inside the TSPM churches is not allowed, and many times visiting pastors from foreign countries cannot address congregations, even in the form of introductions or greetings from their home congregations abroad.

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLISHER

As an addition to the responsibilities of the CCC, the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing was formed. This group produces Bibles, Bible commentaries, and other materials for distribution to the TSPM churches. Founded in 1987, the company is a joint venture with the United Bible Societies. Bibles cannot legally be sold in secular bookstores, and only the Amity Press has government authorization to print them.²⁷ Unfortunately, over half of the items printed by Amity are in the English language and other languages, rather than the Chinese dialects needed by members of the Three Self Patriotic Movement churches in the countryside. Many of the Bibles printed at Amity are for the export market rather than for inside China. Because of this fact, according to VOM sources inside China, the annual figures provided by the Communist government reporting the numbers of Bibles published in China are deceptive. They do not report accurately on the exported items.²⁸

The Amity Press Foundation was allowed by the CCP to be formed for the purposes of providing social service ministries in health care, education, relief, and rural development that are compatible with the teachings and philosophies of the Chinese Communist Party. They are allowed to print Bibles and other publications "which do not conflict with Party doctrine."²⁹ This is an important phrase because the CCP doctrine places the state as the head of the church. Amity is also able to provide teaching programs using visiting foreigners as long as they abide by established laws and regulations. The primary directive of these laws and regulations point to the forbidden activities of mentioning their faith and explaining their faith to native Chinese TSPM believers. If caught or suspected of violating these provisions, foreign Christian teachers are deported immediately.

27 Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, Online, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

28 Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

29 Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, Online, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

ADDITIONAL OFFICIAL POLICIES

The Chinese Communist Party maintains several important philosophies and reinforces these through the TSPM churches. According to China News and Church Report³⁰, these are that the government is the head of the Church; control of thought and belief can be maintained through registration of church buildings and pastors; and the authorities must approve religious leaders, and only those who demonstrate "right thinking" are allowed to be approved.

The China News Agency, Xinhua, listed in a news article about the work of the Religious Affairs Bureau,³¹ that there were three immediate tasks to clean up religious problems within the country:

1. Order that all Protestant Christian places of worship be required to register with the TSPM.
2. Deal with difficult religious problems of public concern, including elimination of dangerous sects [such as unregistered house churches].
3. Cultivate contingents of young patriotic religious preachers, who will observe the CCC dictates of the TSPM church.

The meaning of these tasks is that the TSPM official church is more concerned with its position of authority than with preaching the absolute truth of Jesus Christ. There is irony in that the world's leading atheistic power places restrictions on Christianity that in turn only helps the student of the Holy Bible. According to Compass Direct, the government's greatest fear is that the same struggle in Europe, Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union will erupt in China.³¹ They fear a *Spiritual* battle more than a *Political* battle.

Eva Stimson reported that in order for a church to register under the TSPM rules, it must have a name, a place to meet, a recognized leader, a democratic system of governance, a legal means of financial support, and a minimum number of members (which varies by province).³² The Communist government's main concern with Christianity is maintaining public order and it seeks through the establishment of the TSPM churches to eliminate the "radical" influence of Christ's teachings, and instead presents Christ-like confessions as a placebo, presenting Him simply as a

30 China News and Church Report, December 3, 1993.

31 Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

32 Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, Online, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

philosopher of morals, not as the Son of the Living God.

The CCP's official containment policy proposes to use the TSPM to smash any link between religion and nationalism, to cut support for unofficial churches from Western organizations, and to force underground religious activity to the surface where it can be controlled or eliminated. These limits of tolerance were spelled out in 1982 under "Document 19."³³ According to Carl Lawrence, communism in general views religion as a pathology, and feels it has a duty to hasten its demise.³⁴ Under Chairman Mao Zedong, religion was rarely mentioned. It was beneath the notice of the more important socialist agenda and unworthy of mention in an administration establishing itself as the supreme authority over the lives of its people. Under Li Peng and Jiang Zemin, there has been more personal involvement with religious matters.

Also, according to Alex Buchan, Chinese "spirituality" under the Communist TSPM churches is defined humanistically as an "all-round man, at once artistic and selfless, virtuous and giving." Document 6, enacted in 1990, encouraged citizens to work toward materialistic, scientific, and atheistic society. A TSPM pastor in Shanghai told officials he was making people more honest by fighting graft with the gospel. However, he was in turn told by government officials that honest people who believe in God are superstitious, and they will not make China better.³⁵

Foreign Christians, who see the spreading of Christianity as something the state has no jurisdiction or influence over, threaten the Chinese leadership. Smuggling Bibles and holding underground teaching seminars are very threatening to a Communist party leadership. Their focus on loyalty to the state cannot comprehend the Spiritual motivation of Christians seeking to worship their living Lord. Because of this lack of understanding, the Communists can not motivate people in the same way that the Christian religion can.

The TSPM seeks to lessen the influence of foreigners through enforcement of the Communist policies. Some of these include that a church minister is assigned to a certain church for pulpit ministry only. The minister is allowed to speak only in his own TSPM church and is forbidden to speak in any other church. Assigned ministers are not allowed to speak in other cities or villages. There are no provisions for some of the traditional pastoral duties within the community, such as visitation for the ill or dying, or

33 Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

34 Lawrence, Carl. *Coming Influence of China*, Sisters OR: Multnomah Publications, Inc., 1996.

35 Buchan, Alex. *Understanding the Current Breakdown on China's Churches*, Compass Direct, July 26, 1996.

for performing the marriage or baptismal services out of doors. Pastors are also forbidden to maintain allegiances with foreign denominations. They are allowed to be ordained only by the state.³⁶

In 1994 Premier Li Peng signed decrees #144 and #145 to control religious activities of foreigners in China, even those associated with the TSPM churches, as well as those of Chinese religious believers.³⁷ Since then, the government has sought to implement strict registration of all churches, and to suppress unregistered house church activities. In general, government documents on religious policy have become more detailed and restrictive at every level since 1994.

A Three Self Patriotic Movement pastor explained that one of the lesser known avenues that the government uses to collect information about house churches is through the sale of Bibles at TSPM outlets. Purchasers of Bibles must give their names and addresses, which are then entered into a database. This information is then used to help monitor and control the spread of Christianity. Many purchasers are followed and watched to see whether their religious worship is done "legally" which is only within the approved TSPM church nearest their residence.³⁸

Another vehicle for information gathering is through the use of the guest quarters of the Amity Foundation in Nanjing.³⁹ The guest quarters are provided free of charge to TSPM house church leaders who go to Nanjing. Information about specific house church groups, both registered and unregistered, is collected through the "friendly conversations" that take place in this "Christian" setting. Deng Zhaoming, editor of Hong Kong's *Bridge* magazine, warned Western denominational leaders to use caution in sending money to TSPM leaders. He contends that the majority of funds sent to these Chinese churches are used instead to purchase cars and home furnishings for the leaders. He also charged that the widespread corruption no longer allows the TSPM to be self-supporting.⁴⁰

The TSPM church downplays the Second Coming doctrine, because the government fears it will distract citizens from the developing economic modernization program of the Communist Party. Periodically, the TSPM will

³⁶ En, Hong. *Select Soldiers Raised Up by God*, China Harvest 2, Christian Comm., Inc., July 1996.

³⁷ Davenport, Paul. *Ten Years after the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Chinese Church-1989-1999*.

³⁸ China News and Church Report, *Report from China*, September 15, 1997.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Buchan, Alex. *Western Denominations Corrupting Chinese Church Leaders*, Asia News in Brief, February 17, 1997.

disavow house church leaders as being not Christian, but cult, leaders because their teachings are counter to the official stance. The Chinese Communist Party also views the Second Coming of Christ as a dangerous idea that could have a destabilizing influence on the country as a whole.

Dr. Jonathan Chao, evangelical China watcher, warned Western Christians to question Dr. Han Wenzao, Chair of the China Christian Council. Dr. Chao pointed out that Han could speak authoritatively for the Communist Party, but he is not qualified to speak on either church affairs or theology on behalf of the Christian church of China. Han is a layman, unordained, and not in a position, at the top of the official religious establishment, to know much about Biblical Christianity.⁴¹

Additional Three Self Patriotic Movement policies include that miracles are heretical and that healing the sick is heretical. Because only the TSPM is a legal religious activity, the government confiscates unofficial believers' belongings and possessions. They also confiscate materials they find in the meeting, including stools, chairs, and utensils. Beatings, often with serious injuries, are also common for those found practicing Christianity outside the rules and regulations of the official TSPM churches.

Because many of the TSPM members attend both official and unofficial services, this puts many believers at risk.⁴²

In 1992 the CCP initiated a policy called "Synthetic Control," which applied to all religious groups, including the TSPM churches. An emergency mobilization of all government departments, party organizations, civilian associations, and industrial units was called to strive for national unity, and to reject foreign allegiances. At that time, all of the religious laws were codified. Under the United Front Department Decree,⁴³ which followed the CCP's "Four Basic Principles", the following restrictions became strictly enforced:

1. No believers could engage in itinerant evangelism or preach the gospel. Only TSPM pastors could preach, and then only in their assigned TSPM churches.
2. Believers are forbidden to hold house church meetings in the villages and farms. This rule became a hardship in those areas since most of the TSPM churches were inaccessible to them.

⁴¹ Buchan, Alex. *Senior Official Church Leader Lambastes Xu Yongze*, Compass Direct, July 25, 1997.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lawrence, Carl. *The Coming Influence of China*, Sisters OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 1996.

3. God must not be mentioned outside the doors of the TSPM churches.
4. Young people and middle-aged people were forbidden to believe in God. Only old women were allowed to believe. No one under 18 is allowed believe, especially students.

Article 99 of the criminal code, enacted in 1996 calls for the execution of members of secret societies who carry out counter-revolutionary activities. Attending a non-TSPM church is a counter-revolutionary activity. This decree also banned use of Christian names, and restricted foreign TV programming to 15% of total broadcast time. Most biblical based programming, both radio and TV, are to some degree produced or sponsored by foreign denominations. Article 99 severely limits the content and availability of quality biblically-based Christian programming.⁴⁴

In general, government documents on religious policy have become more detailed and restrictive at every level. Various government documents theoretically guarantee implementation of the rights of Christians. In 1997, Bishop Ding resigned from active leadership in the TSPM, and accepted an honorary position with the TSPM Seminary in Nanjing. Since then, Christians, both within the TSPM churches and within unregistered house churches, have reported that the Chinese Communist Party leadership has become increasingly restrictive.

In August 1998, evangelistic representatives from unregistered house churches met together and issued a public appeal to the government for an end to persecution, with a willingness to open a dialogue with both the authorities and the TSPM. The government declined the offer, refusing to deal with any "illegal" representatives of "illegal" churches who do not follow the official religious policies.

Since July 1999, Chinese President Jiang Zemin has called for renewed education in "scientific atheism," which the government believes is highly appropriate for the TSPM churches.⁴⁵ This is relevant for the government, as there have been many top Party officials who have become converted to a more Bible-based form of Christianity. Accusations from registered TSPM congregations toward their leadership have focused on an unbiblical form of liberal theology, which is supported by the TSPM leadership. Specifically, the charges include criticisms of retired Bishop

⁴⁴ Buchan, Alex. *Understanding the Current Breakdown on China's Churches*, Compass Direct, July 26, 1996.

⁴⁵ Compass Direct, October 22, 1999, email version.

Ding's published writings. According to Compass Direct⁴⁶, these texts downplay the importance of faith in Christ, deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, omit references to His second coming, blur the distinction between grace for believers and damnation for unbelievers. Additionally, they encourage a theology that conforms to the leadership of the Communist Party, not to the teachings of Christ in the Bible.

RECENT GOVERNMENT RULINGS

On May 26, 2000, the Religious Affairs Committee of the Ninth People's Representative Congress in Canton Province passed Declaration #83.⁴⁷ These 69 new laws and regulations contain much more restrictive language than previously passed national religious regulations. One primary focus is in the area of training for new pastors. The declaration restates that the official Three Self Patriotic Movement church is the only one authorized for the training of religious leadership. In Chapter 6, rule #37, it clearly states that religious academies must be run by a religious organization according to the laws and regulations of the State. It continues in rule #38 to say that all short training courses should first be reported to the related department in the province. In Chapter 5, rule 29 it states that any of the following circumstances would disqualify religious teachers and staffs to carry out religious activities: teacher was not officially appointed; teacher previously resigned from another religious teaching staff; teacher was de-certified by the provincial religious body.

Another area of the document addresses the "competition" between the official TSPM churches and unofficial house churches, making movement of smuggled materials more difficult, and enacting stern punishments for violations. In Chapter 8, rule #52 organizations and individuals are banned from carrying, selling, copying, or distributing self-printed or illegally imported religious publications. Rule #55 requires invitations for foreign religious organizations to visit a church to be authorized by the State, and are prohibited under rule #57 from establishing new religious organizations or to develop their religion. This is a direct reference to evangelizing. Rule #59 restricts foreign news media from reporting religious information that has not previously been approved by the religious bureau. This rule will make established foreign networks unable to provide uncensored materials in their broadcasts if they want continued access to information from official Communist sources and entry into China.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ As published in the Guangdong Province Newspaper, translated by VOM sources inside China.

Penalties listed under Chapter 10, rule #63 allow for fines up to 20,000 RMB (about 14 years wages) for each of the following violations:

- i.) Violation of rule #29: unauthorized, resigned, or dismissed religious teachers, if they practice activity as a religious teacher or staff.
- ii.) Violation of #37: running a religious academy without authorization.
- iii.) Violation of #38: running a training activity without approval from the government.

These rules and regulations will have serious consequences for the TSPM members and leadership who are sincerely trying to follow a moral path as outlined in the Bible. Many of the pastors in the TSPM church who also attend services or conduct services in underground churches will now face additional penalties. It will also become more difficult for these TSPM leaders to acquire materials and training provided through underground sources.

Rule #68 underscores the importance of Document 38 for the authorities who will administer it. If government departments are believed to have neglected their responsibilities in carrying out the laws and regulations, they will be warned, and if the offense is deemed serious, they will be punished. This is a clear mandate from the province government. Local authorities need to be vigilant and intolerant of Christian activities which occur outside the umbrella of the Three Self Patriotic Movement. The government appears to be slowly tightening a noose around the "freedom of beliefs" protected by the Chinese constitution. These additional new rules on top of existing Communist bureaucratic limitations make it more and more difficult for Christianity to be practiced legally, even inside the TSPM churches. The increased defection of believers from the official church is causing authorities to address what is their worst fear: not being able to control Christian believers' beliefs.

On July 11, (2000) The Australian reported that millions of Chinese bureaucrats were ordered to formal classes to study the thoughts of President Jiang Zemin.⁴⁸ He is using a Maoist-style campaign to extend his base of power. These studies involve a focus on "The Three Representations," which hold that the Communist Party represents China's highest economic, political, and cultural aspirations. A booklet is used in the study session detailing the important instructions of Comrade Jiang. All officials must read and reproduce the information in long essays to prove they have absorbed it in detail. Xinhua, China's official information agency,

48 O'Donnell, Lynne. *Jiang's own little red book*, The Australian, July 11, 2000.

reported that the Three Representations view is an important part of China's future at the turn of the century. They praised Jiang's work because it refines and summarizes the spirit of experience provided by the communist party.

This latest campaign is an attempt by the Communist Party to restore its ideology to the importance it had during the days of the Cultural Revolution. Combined with the latest round of restrictions placed on religious worship, this situation could mean serious consequences for the TSPM as well as the underground Chinese church.

CONSEQUENCES FOR CHINESE CHRISTIANS

True faith has always been exacted with a price in our earthly lives. When a Chinese wants to become a Christian, even through the TSPM church, there are definite penalties to be expected. According to Compass Direct,⁴⁹ they will automatically lose certain rights:

- It will become more difficult to obtain a job.
- It will be more difficult to get a good education.
- Followers will be prohibited from traveling abroad.
- Under the restrictions of the government, they will be unable to publically practice their faith.
- They will be forbidden to worship anywhere except within the authorized buildings where the worship can be supervised and guided by the state.
- Christianity is forbidden to be a way of life.
- Persecution will be expected for non-registered Christians, even those who were baptized through the TSPM church.

Christians, especially those in the TSPM, must take care to not attract unwanted government attention. Finally, they are not allowed to express political opinions, as the government has no room for advice from "superstitious" and therefore unpatriotic citizens.

STATISTICS ON CHINESE CHRISTIANITY

Under the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church, only pastors from

⁴⁹ Compass Direct. *Persecution in China: a Party Member's View*, October 24, 1997.

approved seminaries who have demonstrated their worth may be ordained.⁵⁰ Based on information provided through government channels, the official TSPM church claimed a membership of 13 million in 1998. There are only 18 TSPM seminaries in China, and these only enroll a maximum of 1,300 clergy per year.⁵¹ This is less than 1 new TSPM trainee for every 1,000 registered churches in China.

Considering the TSPM general secretary in a February 1999 report⁵² listed an additional 35,000 registered meeting points within the country, the limitations for growth are clearly evident. Chinese authorities enjoy pointing out that there is little restriction on the growth of Christianity in China. To support this claim, they compare membership and available meeting places over periods of time. In 1989, the government listed 4.5 million registered Christians meeting in 6,375 churches and 20,600 meeting points, and 13 seminaries. Compared to the 1998 official figures listed above, this is a growth rate of over 300% in the number of baptized TSPM Christians (4.5 million in 1989 to 13 million in 1999). About six churches are reopened or newly built somewhere in China every day. However, the same reporting agency also details that every year more than 500,000 new converts are baptized in TSPM churches. At this rate, the number of TSPM Christians would double before the end of the next decade. Using the Chinese government's own official figures of permitted building expansions, this would mean only about 50 new meeting places over the same time period for the additional 13 million TSPM believers. This would be 260,000 worshipers for each of the 50 new facilities, which is not a realistic expectation.

According to the TSPM, Wenzhou has the highest concentration of Christians in China, with 600,000 Christians in a population of 7 million, which is about 8.5%.⁵³ Compass Direct also reported that most TSPM churches, which used to be full of elderly people, now also have a healthy proportion of young people. These "growth" statistics which elicit pride among the Chinese communists, pale when compared to the numbers of the overall population. China contains one-fifth of the world's population at 1.2 billion. The 500,000 converts a year to be baptized in the TSPM church is only .0417 percent of the overall population. (Unregistered churches report four to eight million baptisms per year.)⁵⁴

50 Stimson, Eva. *The Church in China*, Online, <http://pda.pcusa.org/pcusa/today/features/feat9711a.htm>

51 Buchan, Alex. *U.S. State Department Persecution Report*, Compass Direct, August 22, 1997.

52 Davenport, Paul. *Ten Years after the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Chinese Church 1989-1999*.

53 Compass Direct, *House Churches Closed in Wenzhou, China*, July 26, 1997.

54 VOM Contacts inside China, anonymous here for safety.

CHINESE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS ANALYSIS

Paul Davenport⁵⁵ commented on a 1999 report by 20 Chinese Christian intellectuals, who were not all connected to the TSPM church, which analyzed the current state of the Chinese church. Their main findings included:

1. The top leadership of both the TSPM and the CCC have lost their authority in terms of the faith, the Bible, and the church because of their search for worldly prestige and profit. The spirituality of the church has been diluted and its spiritual strength weakened.
2. Deceptive theologies, both within and outside the TSPM, have sprung up on all sides and are shaking the theological foundation of the church. The church is lacking an authoritative voice and God's Word is being drowned out by "raucous voices."
3. In organizational terms, 'gangster pastors' and those without any faith are being given leading positions, while pastors and workers who truly love the Lord, the church, and preaching the gospel are rejected. The TSPM has lost its distinctive nature and it is unlike secular organizations, but also is unlike the true church. It has reached the stage where it is unacceptable to both society and the true church.
4. In church management, the TSPM is incapable of taking up the challenge posed by secularism and the corruption endemic in Chinese society.
5. The caliber of TSPM leadership is in question. With the retirement of Bishop Ding, there is no one coming from the ranks of the old TSPM leadership to provide direction. Actually, because of the appointment of unordained lay CCP members to leadership positions, the leadership can only move in the direction of unbelief, and the unraveling of true theology and ecclesiology.
6. The most immediate result of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre was

⁵⁵ Davenport, Paul. *Ten Years after the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Chinese Church 1989-1999*.

the large number of intellectuals and students who turned to Christ in the months and years following. Many thinking people in China recognize the Christian roots to all that is best in Western society in terms of democracy, legal systems, education, health and social concern. This openness of thinking under Mao was not possible, but presents the Christian church with unprecedented evangelistic opportunities.

Using this as a baseline for the situation of the church in China, the Communists recognized that external pressures on their policies are posing a problem. The Three Self Patriotic Movement Church reputation suffers as leaders sacrifice church interest for economic gain and personal advantage. He Qinglian, a prominent Chinese social scientist and journalist, described China's elite as plundering state resources to create a perverse market economy. Under this system, "power determines the allocation of resources, but has no need to see to their efficient use." She further described, using official government statistics, how only 1 percent of China's population controls 60 percent of the wealth. "I am not afraid," she said, "to face the consequences of saying that China now has the most depraved group of governing elites in the last thousand years of Chinese history."⁵⁶

This situation will have serious consequences for the TSPM Church as the leadership looks to improve relations with their membership. VOM contacts inside China report that many Christians are leaving the TSPM for the refuge of the house churches. Even many of those who remain are attending both official and unofficial church meetings. There is increased pressure on the TSPM leadership from Chinese society as well as criticism of churches and individuals overseas, in addition to pressures from cults.

Within China today, the official literacy rate is 73%, which is representative of only the most basic skills in reading and writing.⁵⁷ However, an entire generation lost an opportunity for higher education during the Cultural Revolution. Economic boom times in the 1990s have further eroded opportunity for education to this group as they are needed for the rapid industrialization of coastal areas, as well as the production of food in rural areas, in order to sustain the population increase. According to Operation World, there are about 7.1 million students enrolled at the

56 Crampton, Thomas. *Beijing's "Black-Box Crackdown"*, International Herald Tribune, July 14, 2000.

57 Johnstone, Patrick. *Operation World*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pg. 163-165.

major universities in any year since 1989.⁵⁸ This is only 0.71% of the total population. The less educated the population, the more likely they are to believe political propaganda distortions, lies, and untruths. Through this, the political leadership is able to manage the thoughts of and control the actions of the people. Contrary to the propaganda distributed by the Communists, it is not the Christian faith that preys on the weak or uneducated. It is the party itself.

The Chinese "Christian intellectuals" provide a convincing analysis of the TSPM churches in the face of political and social pressures. They wrote as committed Christians, expressing a deep concern for Christ's church, a respectful view of Scripture and a Biblical spirituality. They should be distinguished from "culture Christians" who are intellectuals interested in Christianity from a cultural and philosophical perspective, but have not made a personal commitment to Christian faith.

THE REALITY OF THE CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

George Patterson⁵⁹ and Alex Buchan⁶⁰ both view Deng Ziaoping as an unwitting instrument of God who helped bring revival to China through his leniency with the TSPM during his administration. According to house church leaders, he created a society with just enough freedom to evangelize, but retained the apparatus of repression to punish when evangelism was done. These are the ideal conditions for church growth. "Too much repression," claims Buchan, "and the gospel never gets spread – too much freedom and the gospel never gets tested."

Patterson maintains the reality for the church in China is that the fastest growing segment has indeed adopted part of the philosophy of the TSPM: self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The irony is that it is not the registered TSPM church, but the underground church, which has displayed a remarkable proliferation using those techniques.

After the death of Mao in 1976, a vibrant Christianity patterned on the New Testament practice of home meetings emerged in spite of the encouragement of the government toward the Three Self Patriotic Movement churches. The reopening of church buildings and restoration of the TSPM in 1979 was part of Deng's "United Front" policy to bring all

58 Ibid.

59 Patterson, George. *Christianity in Communist China*, 1999.

60 Buchan, Alex. *Religious Policy Expected to Remain Repressive*, Compass Direct, February 20, 1997.

sections of the population behind a more liberal economic policy. It was a political act, part of the open door policy of building better relationships with the West. Buchan points out that in retrospect it was also the open door that allowed Christ into the hearts of Chinese believers.

The consequences of the Three Self Patriotic Movement in China and the repressive rules and regulations instituted by the Communist Party is this: Under the Communists, the point is not that there is freedom to *go* to the place of worship, but there is no freedom under the TSPM to *believe*. Philippians 1:14 states, "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Christians in China today risk their lives to reach beyond the empty cross offered by the Chinese Communist Party through the Three Self Patriotic Movement. Instead, they choose to embrace the love of God through his risen Son, Jesus Christ, as taught in the New Testament.

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