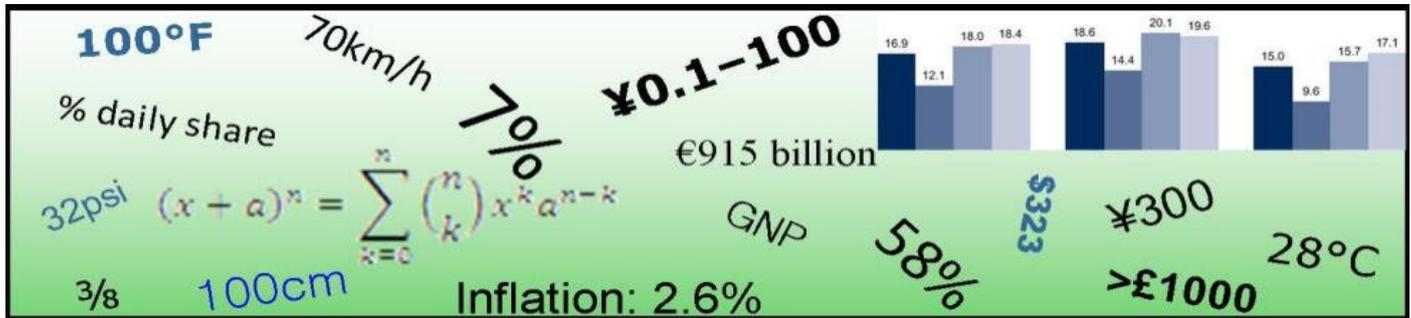


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## Editorial

### China by the Numbers

By Brent Fulton

Thumbing through an in-flight magazine recently, I came across a graph showing the rate of global population growth since 1960. The overall trend is downward, from more than two percent in the 1960s and early 1970s to about 1.1 percent today.

What immediately caught my eye, however, was the v-shaped dip occurring just after 1960, when the global growth rate plummeted to a low of 1.35 percent before bouncing back up over two percent. Taking a closer look at the color-coded regional data underneath the global trend line revealed the cause of the dip. China's population growth rate fell below zero in 1961, following the massive deaths that occurred as a result of the failed Great Leap Forward campaign in the late 1950s and the subsequent nationwide famine.

By 1963 China's growth rate had shot back up, contributing to a stabilizing of global population growth until the early 1970s. Then the global numbers began a slow decline as China's one-child policy took hold with dramatic effect into the early 1980s.

#### China Tips the Scales

This simple graph in an airline magazine was yet another example of how China, by virtue of its sheer size, changes the face of the world as the dynamics affecting life in China shape global trends. Similar examples could be found in China's impact upon global urbanization rates, numbers of people lifted out of poverty, consumption of energy resources worldwide and many other measures of global change as a result of China's rapid development during the past three decades.

The example above also suggests the global ripples caused by Chinese government policies. Whether economic measures, food policy or family planning, the results extend far beyond China's borders, leaving their mark on everything from the Dow Jones Industrial Average to the average age of the world's population.



Anna Frodesiak Wikimedia Commons

In this issue we seek to put a face on some of the many statistics that are commonly used to try and make sense of what is happening in China today. In most cases a line can be drawn between official policy and the resulting social phenomenon. The predicament of urban migrant children, for example, stems from an outdated household registration policy that has effectively kept city and countryside apart, both geographically and in the collective psyche of the people. China's "soft landing" can be attributed to the government's monetary policies. Its education policy is contributing to the lopsided development and increased alienation of youth—even within the church, where parents and pastors alike are reticent to intervene for fear of their children falling behind in China's ultra-competitive, test-based culture.

One statistic that appears to have defied government policy for decades, however, is the continued growth of the Chinese church. As Tony Lambert points out, accurate numbers are still hard to come by. Nonetheless, this church growth has already placed China squarely on the map when it comes to the global Christian population. As China moves steadily toward becoming the nation with the largest number of Christians, its church will increasingly be in a position to leave a lasting mark on Christianity worldwide.

*Brent Fulton is President of ChinaSource and the Editor of ChinaSource Quarterly.*

## Religious Statistics in China

By Tony Lambert

Counting adherents of religions in China is like entering a minefield. It is generally recognized that Chinese economic, population and birth-control statistics are massaged up or down depending on political requirements, and religious statistics are even more problematic. I entered this minefield some 40 years ago and have consistently advocated taking a cautious approach which I shall continue here!

There are two major problems for anyone attempting to make realistic estimates of religious believers in China today. The first is that the government has for a long time downplayed the role of religion in Chinese society, and with it, generally underestimated, in the view of most serious researchers, the numbers of religious believers, especially Christians. Political and ideological factors play a major role in this. The official ideology of China is still “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” although this is often forgotten. It is the Party’s “statement of faith,” codified in Document 19 of 1982 as the post-Mao, milder, religious policy, that religion will ultimately wither and die at some point in the future. This flies in the face of all the current evidence that religion is flourishing in China.



Gaylan Yeung

In the case of Protestant Christianity, both the government and the Three Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC)—known as the *lianghui*, or two officially-recognized bodies controlling Protestant churches—for more than two decades denied the very existence of unregistered house-churches. Protestant church statistics were strictly based on baptisms and attendance figures at state-registered churches and registered meeting-points (known in “shorthand” as *tangdian*). Similarly, the large “underground” Catholic Church, loyal to the Vatican, was ignored when issuing statistics for Catholics which were limited to those attending mass at “patriotic” Catholic churches and chapels. As we shall see, these attitudes have slowly changed among many government officials, and among academics and researchers working inside Mainland China. They have largely been jettisoned in favor of more unbiased and wide-ranging presuppositions which take into account the entire spectrum of Christian belief from the most separatist of unregistered house-churches to those registered churches and their leaders who faithfully follow the Party line.

The second problem is in some ways the opposite of the first. Researchers and believers overseas, in strong reaction to the very partial and biased statistics which have emanated from Mainland official sources, until recently (and still do so, in some cases) have seized on every scrap of information coming from other sources, especially Chinese religious believers themselves, and proceeded to extrapolate, build models and estimate numbers. The result has been, especially in the case of Protestant Christianity, wildly varying figures ranging from 23 million (the present TSPM/CCC figure) to over 100 or even 200 million. In the case of Islam, a similar situation pertains: whereas the official number for Islamic believers in China is just over 20 million, some Muslim observers overseas have talked of 70 or even over 100 million Muslims.

What are some of the practical problems that make statements of definitive statistics for religious believers in China hazardous—and perhaps even impossible? Using unregistered house-church Christians as an example, one may make a few general observations which rule out any definitive statement of detailed statistics. In most cases, house-churches are now to be found across China. (Tibet is the major exception and even there, there are a few). No one is able to visit all the house-churches or collate accurate statistics from all these heterogeneous meetings that range from groups of a handful of people meeting together to large networks which claim millions of adherents. Statements which appear regularly in the Christian press that “every day 25,000 (or 50,000 or 100,000 depending!) new believers are added to the church in China” are ruled out of count because of the simple inability of anyone at the present to make accurate surveys of all house-church believers at the national or even provincial level. Statements such as that in Henan province “in 2009 there were 8,856,228 house-church Protestant Christians,” as one overseas observer has claimed, are similarly ruled out of count. Such detailed statistics are impossible to draw up for the simple reason that no one has sufficient reliable informants. Reports that emanate are partial, may be exaggerated and, in most cases, almost certainly cannot give a fair or accurate estimate of the many other networks, let alone individual fellowships, which exist outside the informants’ own limited range of first-hand knowledge.

Having cleared the ground, so to speak, we can proceed cautiously to examine what evidence exists for each of the five, major, officially-recognized religious faiths in China.

### Buddhism

Buddhism has long been acknowledged as the major religious faith in China by both Mainland sources and overseas scholars. The Chinese government and the Buddhist Association have long stuck to a figure of 100 million Buddhist believers which has not changed. This is clearly a highly dubious estimate. Officials and researchers in China have had to wrestle with the vexing problem of what consists of “feudal superstition” (which is to be suppressed) and what consists of true Buddhist belief (which can be tolerated). Over the decades no real answer has been



Glenn Herr

found to this conundrum. Although arguably Buddhism is tolerated more than Protestantism or Catholicism (I recently came across a manual of Buddhist teaching on sale in Beijing's largest book shop with a recommendation by former President Jiang Zemin!), on occasion Buddhist monks and nuns have been persecuted for performing rites which the local officials have regarded as superstitious.

One of the major problems in assessing the number of Buddhists in China is that of definition. In practice, there seems no clear distinction between Buddhism and what we may call "folk religion" and Daoism. A survey conducted by East China Normal University in 2006 found that some thirty percent of the adult population or 300 million people followed some religion, the majority of these being followers of Buddhism or folk religion. This is about three times the official estimate mentioned previously (BBC News, 7 February 2007).

We are on firmer ground when it comes to estimating numbers of Buddhists among China's national minorities. According to official sources there are 7.6 million followers of Tibetan Buddhism among the Tibetans, Mongols, Yugur, Monba and Tu peoples. There are also about 1.5 million followers of "Pali Buddhists" better known as Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism, among the Dai, Bulang, Deang and Wa peoples.

It is interesting that some researchers within China claim that there are more Christians than Daoists or Buddhists in certain areas. For instance, a recent survey of Chongqing states there may be 800,000 Protestants but only 600,000 Buddhists and 70,000 Daoists. (See section below on Protestantism.) This seems to be based on fairly narrow criteria limiting Buddhists to those who declare themselves to be so and are registered in some way as taking part in institutional religious practices.

Strict followers of Buddhism are not numerous, that is those who practice vegetarianism and as monks, nuns or lay people practice Buddhist rules seriously. However, those who are influenced by popular Buddhism and "folk religion" probably number several hundred million.

### Daoism

China's only indigenous religion (if we except Confucianism) has generally avoided the limelight. Daoist priests and hermits usually avoid cities and live in remote mountainous areas. According to the Chairman of the official China Daoist Association, Min Zhiting, there are now over 1,100 temples and shrines in China and over 26,000 Daoist initiates. [This compares to a claimed five million initiates in 1950 ([www.kenyon.edu](http://www.kenyon.edu), N/D).] Daoism suffered severe repression in the 1950s because of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of distinguishing state-approved Daoism from "feudal superstition" and such secret societies as *Yiguandao*. Mr Min, no doubt following the example of the Buddhists, claimed vaguely that there are "over 100 million" Daoists in China. As with Buddhism, the number of practicing Daoist monks, nuns and hermits is probably not great, but the influence of Daoism at a popular level, which is often hardly distinguishable from magic, is vast. Virtually any night, Chinese TV is awash with "sword and sorcery" thrillers in which the heroes and villains seek elixirs and perform impossible gymnastic feats and magic, all of which have their roots in popular Daoism and folk-religion. Daoist temples are crowded at festivals and some are even being renovated or rebuilt in city areas. Nevertheless, the distinct Ming dynasty garb of a Daoist priest is still unusual on the street as opposed to the dark red of Tibetan lamas or the grey of Han Chinese Buddhist monks.



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### Islam

As mentioned in the introduction, statistics for numbers of Muslims in China vary as much as for Christians. The present official figure is 28 million, based on the total number of Uygurs, Kazaks and other smaller Muslim minority people, but especially including the numerous Hui (Chinese-speaking Muslims). However, this figure is vigorously disputed by Muslim researchers overseas. They point out that a census taken in China in 1936 gave a figure of 48,104,240 Muslims in China ([teachislam.com](http://teachislam.com)). In 1982 the official figure was only 15 million. Even the BBC on its "Religion and Ethics" website claims the real figure could be anything between 20 million and 100 million. Another Islamic source claims, mysteriously, that the CIA recently estimated the number of Muslims in China to be 37,108,000. The American Pew Research Center, after conducting a survey in 2009, came up with the figure of 1.9% of the total population of China as Muslim, or 21,667,000 people, which reflects the then official figure.

Uygurs speculated the real figure was perhaps 12-15 million—they were not claiming a huge discrepancy. On balance, it seems likely that the total number of Muslims in China is probably higher than the official figures but unlikely to be the very high figures of 50 or even over 100 million claimed by some Muslim observers overseas.

### Catholicism

Roman Catholic scholars in the Vatican and at the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong have compiled detailed statistics of the numbers of Catholics, churches, priests, bishops and dioceses and so on, on the Mainland. So we are on much surer



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ground when it comes to estimating numbers of Catholics in China than any other religion. The official government and Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) figure is now five million—only a modest increase from three million in 1950 (*New China News Agency*, 23 November 1950). About 50,000 new Catholics are baptized every year in these state-recognized churches.

The Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life estimated the number of Catholics (both “patriotic” and “underground”) to be nine million in 2011 (*Global Christianity*, December 2011). The Holy Spirit Study Centre who have, perhaps, the best access and expertise, estimate a total of 12 million, five million of whom attend “patriotic” Catholic churches (that is, those approved by the government and technically loyal to Beijing and not to the Vatican) and some seven million attending “underground” churches which are fiercely loyal to the Pope. In practice, there is a good deal of overlap, with many bishops and priests in the “patriotic” church loyal to the Vatican. At the time of writing this article, relations between the Vatican and Beijing have hit a new low. The new Bishop of Shanghai, publicly, from the pulpit, announced his withdrawal from the CPA and was applauded by the congregation. The CPA, as with the TSPM in Protestant circles, is much despised by the majority of Catholic believers.



China Partners

### Protestantism

Officially according to the TSPM/CCC and the government there were only 700,000 Protestants in the whole of China in 1950. Overseas researchers generally computed the figure a little higher at about one million to include the wider Protestant community. However, whichever figure is taken, it is truly remarkable that after decades of outright persecution the official figure today is 23 million! At least one million new converts are added to the state-registered church annually. [See *Dangdai Zhongguo Minzu Zongjiao Wenti Yanjiu (Studies of Religious and Minority Questions in Modern China)*, China Social Sciences Publishing House, Beijing, 2010.]

Virtually every one now accepts the existence of a very large number of unregistered house-church Christians. This is no longer a taboo subject within China. Academics have written articles and books dealing with the house-churches, and pastors in the TSPM/CCC churches will often admit their existence and even hazard an estimate of the number of unregistered believers in particular cities or provinces.

The problem, as I mentioned in the introduction, is that over the last 30 years there has been a welter of conflicting statistics emanating from government, TSPM/CCC spokespersons, house-church leaders and believers, researchers and pundits overseas. Many, perhaps the majority, of the statistics relating to the house-churches have a very shaky foundation. The Western mind-set for preferring precise figures means that often the most speculative estimate has been published, repub-

lished and then further extrapolated to produce further inflated figures which cannot be verified.

The following evidence is submitted as reasonably reliable. In 2000 evidence was “leaked” from the government Public Security Bureau that there were 35 million Protestants in China—a significantly higher number than the then official figure (*Compass Direct*, 1 April, 2000). In 2010 the official English language *China Daily* surprisingly published an article which reported there were more than 50 million unregistered house-church Protestants in China, according to reliable academic sources. It is highly unlikely this report slipped past the censors unawares. We therefore now have a reasonable basis for stating a conservative total of some 73 million Protestants in China, according to official sources.

A number of academic surveys of religious belief, including Christianity, have been undertaken in recent years, some with aid from American academics. East China Normal University reported 40 million Christians in 2006 (*The Guardian*, 7 February 2007). The Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life issued a figure of 58,040,000 Protestants after doing a proper survey with the break-down as follows:

Total Protestants	58,040,000	4.3% of China’s total population
Independent (house-church)	35,040,000	2.6% of China’s total population
TSPM (“state” church)	23,000,000	1.7% of China’s total population

*Global Christianity* Dec 2011

In November 2011, the most detailed and significant statistical survey of Christianity in China was published in Beijing: *Collated Reports of a Survey on Chinese Christianity (Zhongguo Jidujiao: Diaoyen Baogaoji)*. This was conducted in select cities, towns and villages all over the country in May 2009 by researchers from the Institute for World Religions of the China Academy of Social Sciences. It includes much useful and unbiased information on the house-churches as well as the TSPM/CCC churches.

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## A Generation Saved; A Future Found

By Yuenadan

From 1979 to the early 2000s, God brought great growth to the Chinese church. During this period of revival and growth, the Spirit provided a bountiful harvest of tens of thousands who came to Christ. However, throughout this time, our primary focus was on adults, not children and teenagers. The church, believing that Christ's return was imminent, focused its attention on evangelizing adults. As both the church and as parents, we lacked an understanding of the importance of reaching the next generation. We have also been hindered by placing the academic development of our children and teenagers above their spiritual growth. As the years passed, the Spirit began to speak to many of us that we needed to begin ministering to the next generation, to preserve the harvest of our children, lest they fall away.

Let us look at the situation of children and teenagers in our churches today. I believe this will greatly influence the future of the church in China. This paper draws on the experiences of those serving as children and youth workers in the Chinese church as well as those who support them on the ground.

### Three Statements on Emerging Realities and Models

First, *over the last five years, ministry to children and youth has begun* although in some locations, it has existed even longer. Many churches now provide some type of learning environment for children apart from the adult congregation on Sundays.



Some churches have more established children and youth ministry programs that have matured over recent years. They offer age-appropriate Sunday school classes from as early as kindergarten to middle school and youth classes for high school. A few churches even have separate youth fellowships that meet outside of Sunday services for middle and high school students with experienced and dedicated (specialized) youth leaders. Many other churches, restricted by space and resources, are only able to provide one class for all age levels (elementary to high school). Some churches are yet unable to provide the resources to start a separate ministry for their children and youth. While the situation and needs vary from church to church and region to region, the growth of children and youth ministry demonstrates the tremendous change and development of the church in China over just a short period of time.

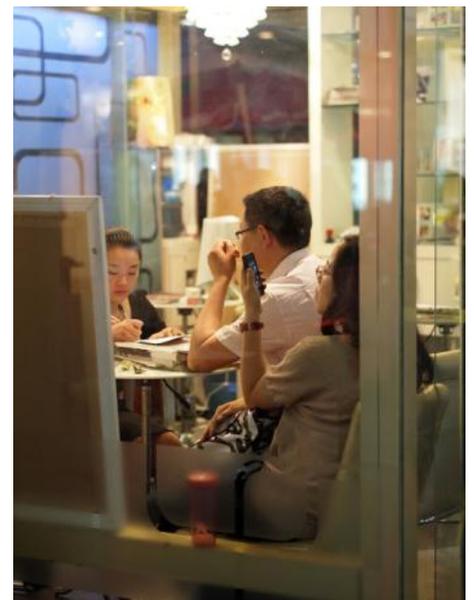
Second, *we have not developed a mature philosophy of ministry to the next generation.* We lack consensus on how we should minister to children and teenagers, and our philosophy and practice are not integrated. Rather than seeing the next generation as a stewardship responsibility or evangelism and discipleship opportunity, we see them as a risk and a burden. This philosophy is also hindered by the emphasis our families place on their children's academic success. We acknowledge the external pressures exerted on a child: to study hard every day, to enter a prestigious university, to get a high paying and respectable job, to "succeed." The demands placed on this child (who is most likely the family's only child) are very high. We acknowledge that the entire family's future is often dependent on the future of this one child, but if we neglect the spiritual nurture of our children, we risk helping them gain the whole world while losing their souls.

We have forgotten the Spirit's teaching in Deuteronomy that one of the primary responsibilities of the people of God is to nurture the next generation and to continue the line of faith unbroken.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

The command to disciple the next generation was given with the greatest command, to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength as a logical obligation of the greatest command.

What is children and youth ministry? What does it mean to teach them God's Word? When we teach our children and youth to discover, engage and live out God's Word, not only are their lives won for Christ but the entire body of Christ is strengthened and blessed. Conversely, when we do not, we risk losing them as followers of Christ, and we risk the future of our churches.



Third, as churches have begun to see a need for children and youth ministry programs, *there has been growth in new and innovative strategies, programs, and curriculum.* In the past few years we have seen more children's curriculum made available for churches and summer camps along with discipleship material. While we see evangelism materials for children and youth being

developed, most of this increase is restricted to children's materials. Availability of quality youth materials is growing much more slowly. The rapid growth of Internet access and mobile phone capability in China has, however, provided an explosion of available digital ministry materials. We are also seeing God raise up Chinese leaders to take ownership and create materials and programs native to the Chinese church.

#### Four Challenges

First, this new emerging ministry *needs stability*. Youth workers should develop deep trusting relationships with parents and children to insure healthy discipleship. These types of relationships take time and commitment to develop. While they are important in any pastoral relationship, regardless of age or maturity, they are especially foundational for children and youth. Unlike other ministry responsibilities, we should be slow to rotate youth or children's workers from one responsibility to another. Rather, these workers need time to develop emerging models and practices, to build trust with youth and parents and to gain an understanding of how to disciple the next generation.

According to a recent research study, released by the non-profit organization OneHope, titled "The Spiritual State of the World's Children," teens are influenced by many sources outside the home. In this study, teens (Christian and non-Christian) cited the following as having *a lot* or *some* influence over their thoughts and actions: 52% responded information from the Internet, 54% indigenous faith, 54% movies, 55% textbooks. In addition, 48% responded that they do not consider their faith important to them. By providing healthy relationships between youth workers, parents and children, we can better ensure our children and teens are learning from positive role models and influences.



Second, this new emerging ministry *needs support from church leaders, members and parents*. In research, children and youth workers describe feeling separated and unsupported by the church. Some church leaders may not view children and youth ministry as a high priority. Others may see the need and make the effort, but because of their lack of familiarity with this type of ministry, they lack awareness about how to support it. Because the concept of children and youth ministry is still very new to the church, the workers often remain detached from the church. The physical and visible separation of "Sunday school" from adult fellowship can contribute to the misperception that discipling the next generation is separate from the normal work of the church. This simply is not true. Research tells us that workers often feel ignored by church leaders; many lack any spiritual guidance or financial support. They describe feeling demoralized at the lack of recognition and support from the church body. As 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us, there should be no schism in the body of Christ; all members should grow together in respect and love. As God has called us to teach our faith to the next generation, we must support the calling of these workers in the same way we would support other ministries of the church. To neglect these laborers is to neglect a great harvest and the future of our churches.

Third, *our models remain underdeveloped, traditional, and naïve*. Most churches are still unequipped with proper ministries for their children and youth that not only teach them biblical knowledge and literacy, but also provide answers and practical models on how to live as Christians and deal with the issues facing them today. Our models remain this way because we have not involved our children and youth in the body of the church. We need to train them to be disciple makers, making them responsible actors and participants in the church. We must also provide them opportunities that train and equip them for this active participation in the church.

Because teenagers are not involved in the church and are unequipped to be disciple makers, they are losing hope for their future. According to the same recent study, 63% of teens in China (Christian and non-Christian) do not express a desire for a clear purpose in life. Fifty-three percent disagree that they will be happy in their marriages, and 47% responded that they have had suicidal thoughts. The church teaches sound biblical knowledge and principles, but it must be better equipped to demonstrate how to practically live out these principles. The church must ask itself how it can not only *teach* God's Word, but how to engage with, model and live out God's Word in a way that results in life transformation. Most would agree that children and youth have been

present in church for a long time, but few can demonstrate how these children and youth have experienced life transformation. Without this life change, we cannot change other people and we cannot positively influence society.

This leads to the fourth, growing challenge facing children and youth ministry in the Chinese church. The *church must recognize that children and youth ministry plays a vital role in developing a healthy society with proper moral direction*. The same study shows that 75% of teens in China (Christian and non-Christian) cannot recall a time when religious beliefs have changed their behavior; 58% of teens do not believe spiritual development is necessary for leading a satisfying life; 60% believe that lying is sometimes necessary and 59% believe that bending the rules is okay; 44% believe that breaking the law is okay if it does not hurt anyone. Clearly our children and youth are facing questions on what it

means to live a loving and moral life through faith. These same children and teenagers will decide the future moral direction of China. The church remains the greatest hope for providing moral direction in a society that is crying out from confusion and pain. If the church can position itself to address the causes of these attitudes and behaviors, it will demonstrate how it can be a part of future social transformation. However, to do so, it must not only be aware of what issues our children and youth are facing but also listen to them and provide relevant, contemporary solutions suitable for them. The challenge for the church is to show how it provides moral direction for society and how hope and faith in God alone can deliver us from brokenness.



### **Consequences If We Fail**

First, if we fail to minister to our children and youth *we will fail to establish churches in the emerging urban centers*. China is experiencing the largest migration and fastest development growth in the history of the world. Urbanization is drawing families, their children and youth to growing cities in search of jobs, education and a future—and these urban centers are the future of the Chinese church. However, this urbanization—along with globalization—is putting churches and families under considerable strain. As cities are growing rapidly, urban churches are also experiencing growth, but most of this growth is among the adult population. We saw the Spirit move in the church starting over thirty years ago, but during those years, what have we done to preserve the harvest? Rural churches that experienced massive growth in adult believers twenty, thirty or more years ago are beginning to see their church attendance decrease and age. Our children and youth are the future of our churches, and we must minister to them because this is the most likely time in their lives that they will accept Christ. If we miss this window, what will the future of our churches look like? We risk becoming a “one generation church”; we risk our chance to turn this nation into a nation for God. We are becoming an ageing church (老龄化教会).

Second, *Christian families will suffer as the next generation leaves the faith*. Children and youth will be shaped, not by their families and church communities, but by growing, empty, secular dreams of materialism, universalism and self-servitude. Children and youth who grew up in proximity to faith, but who were never taught how to practice and live it will gradually turn away from faith. We will lose them to other influences. Families will remain divided between believer and unbeliever. We must ask ourselves, if we are not raising our children and youth for the church of Christ, what then are we raising them for?

### **Three Actions You Can Take to Preserve the Harvest**

First, *invest in a dedicated children and youth worker*, pledging them full-time support for at least three to four years. A three to four year window allows the worker to focus solely on pursuing and discerning his/her calling from God. Only then can workers develop and hone skills necessary to work in the ministry, build strong relationships with the children and youth and develop healthy working relationships with other church workers and church leaders. We must allow and empower workers who are blessed with the gift to minister and mentor children and youth to stay in these roles long-term.

Second, *make children and youth an essential part of the church family* in the preaching, by developing a biblical theology of multi-generational faith and by allowing youth to serve in youth service or by leading worship (Deut. 6). Members of the church leadership should acknowledge the role of children and youth ministries as equal parts of the body of Christ and support and acknowledge the work of children and youth workers as vital to the church. Actively involve the youth ministry in church decisions, seek out opportunities to provide further training to youth workers and create opportunities for the whole church body to regularly witness what the children and youth ministries are doing.

Third, *adopt innovative, relevant, and contextualized (本地化) ministry programs* for your children and youth that make them a partner in the gospel, not an outsider that is sent away to a separate class. Acknowledge the spiritual capacity of children and youth and their ability to be disciples and disciple makers by creating opportunities for them, based on their needs and interests, to practice their faith with their parents, friends, church community and the community outside of the church (1 Tim. 4:12). Include ministry opportunities that directly ask about and answer the contemporary concerns they are living with. Allow children and youth workers a visible role in church administration and leadership. Provide regular opportunities for children and youth to participate in, and even lead, portions of worship and services. As a congregation and church leadership, make it an essential mission of the church to minister not just to this adult generation, but also to generations to come.

*Yuenadan lives and works in Mainland China with an extensive range of local church fellowships and specialized organizations to develop their children and youth ministries. This paper has drawn on interviews conducted by the writer with local people working in these ministries in today's China as well as experience from working closely with partners to develop this ministry.*

## China's Online Christian Community

By Joann Pittman

China's Internet numbers are impressive. According to the [biannual report](#) on Internet use released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CINIC) at the end of June 2012, China has 538 million Internet users (that number is most likely above 600 million now). Three hundred eighty-eight million users (72%) access the Internet using their mobile phones. Social media has taken China by storm over the past few years with one social media platform, *Sina Weibo*, claiming to have more than 300 million users. Think about that for a moment—the number of users of one social media platform is roughly the same as the entire population of the United States. (The original report in Chinese can be found [here](#).)



Glenn Herr

The Chinese government has developed a very sophisticated censorship/management regime that relies on a combination of keyword monitoring, content blocking and even employment of “internet cops” who monitor websites, forums and social media. In an article titled [“China’s Internet: The Invisible Birdcage.”](#) Bill Bishop, a Beijing based writer explains it this way: “Chen Yun, a Party elder who spent much of his career overseeing the economy, advocated the idea of a ‘birdcage economy’ for China. The cage was the state economic plan, within which free markets—the birds—could move freely. China’s approach to managing the Internet is similar: the government has built a gilded cage around the Internet that will prove far more robust than its critics expect.”

Within this birdcage there is a parallel universe where most Chinese netizens exist. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are blocked. Never mind—China has *RenRen*, *Weibo* and *Youku*, all of which are more appealing to local Chinese because they have been developed and built with the Chinese user in mind.

For outsiders, the story of the Internet in China seems to be the cage itself. Most of what is written is about the limits, controls and what Chinese netizens cannot access and cannot say.

What is far more interesting, however, is how the Internet is being used in China—what is going on inside the birdcage, as it were. Especially with the advent of social media, the Internet in China has become the closest thing that China has to a public square—a place where ordinary people can express their ideas and opinions.

A common assumption is that religious content in general, and Christian content in particular, is something that is not allowed within the birdcage; however, there is no evidence to support this notion. In fact, given the existence of thousands of Christian websites, blogs and micro-blogs, it is safe to say that there is no evidence that Christian content per se is considered sensitive.

The reality is that there is a thriving Christian community online where believers are participating in conversations about what is going on in China and the world, discussing issues and engaging in debates, accessing theological training, offering encouragement and doing evangelism.

In January 2012, *World* magazine published an article titled [“Web of Grace.”](#) highlighting some of the overseas ministries that have launched online initiatives in China. These include Jesus Central ([Yesu Zhongxin](#)), [Gordon Seminary](#) and [Desiring God](#). When I last checked, all of these were accessible within China.

But, what about locally run sites? With thousands of them out there, how do we know where to begin? I recently asked a young, internet-savvy seminary student in Beijing what Christian websites he would recommend paying attention to. These are the four he mentioned:

### [The Christian Times](#)

This site is popular with those participating in and promoting the “open” church movement. There are articles about international and domestic stories related to Christianity as well as commentary on current events. There are also articles related to urban churches and pastoral issues. It is a platform for Christians to discuss faith issues, as well as introduce Christianity to non-believers.

### [Gospel Times](#)

This is more of a straight news site. It is a good site for news and information from churches (mostly registered) and Christian organizations all over China, but there are very few in depth articles.

### [Voice in the Wilderness](#)

This is a general site containing sections on spirituality, literature and the arts, news, TV programs and essays. There are also forums where believers can share their comments on the various issues raised in the articles and blogs.

[Jona Home](#) This website provides a platform for Christians to explore issues of faith, discipleship and spiritual life, using blogs and discussion forums.

All of these sites have their IP registration numbers displayed on their home page, which means they are in compliance with government regulations and have registered their sites with the agency that oversees the Internet.

Christians are active participants on Chinese micro-blogging (*weibo*) platforms as well. While many *weibo* users are ordinary believers sharing their faith or offering encouragement to others, there are also those who are more famous and influential. These include Yuan Zhiming (@远牧师), a U.S. based pastor who has close to 150,000 “followers,” Zhao Xiao (@zhaoxiaolovedgod), a China-based economist who has more than four million “followers,” as well as famous actors and actresses.

Perhaps most surprising is the availability of the Bible online. A popular one is O-Bible (<http://www.o-bible.com/gb/index.html>). With choices of English, simplified characters or traditional characters, this site provides the text of the entire Bible as well as Bible study tools.

What are the implications of this burgeoning online Christian community, especially for individuals and organizations engaged in ministry in China? I think there are at least two. First of all, planning should increasingly include thinking about and developing internet strategies. Secondly, it is probably time to rethink the assumptions that underlie security and communications policies. Things that may have been considered “sensitive” twenty, or even ten, years ago, may not necessarily be sensitive today.

Certainly not every organization engaged in China will be able to establish an online presence in China, but there are probably a few things that most individuals and organizations can do to either “listen in” on what is happening in the community (and thereby become better informed) or to actually take part in the conversation.

ChinaSource recently launched a new website to help give outsiders access to this online Christian community and thereby provide a platform to “listen in on the conversation.” The site, called [Chinese Church Voices](#), posts translations of articles from various Chinese sites, including those mentioned above.



#### **Websites:**

[Gospel Times](#) (news)  
[Christian Times](#) (news)  
[China Christian Council/Three-self Patriotic Movement](#)  
[Jidujiao114](#) (portal)  
[God 611](#) (testimonies)  
[JiduNet](#) (news)  
[Jidu Jiao](#) (news forum)  
[Kuanye](#) (forum)  
[ZDL Books](#) (Christian publishing)  
[Christian music](#)  
[Today's Chinese Family](#)

#### **Micro-blogs:**

[Baojiayin](#)  
[CCDM](#) (Chinese Christian Digital Media)  
[China Church](#)  
[Christian Chinese Site](#)  
[Christian Sharing Site](#)  
[Desiring God](#) (John Piper)  
[Jiao Mu Magazine](#)  
[Lu Li Ping](#) (actress)  
[Morning Light Bookstore](#)

#### **For Further Reading:**

[China's Internet: The Invisible Birdcage](#), by Bill Bishop  
[Web of Grace](#) (World Magazine)  
[China Media Project](#) (Hong Kong)  
[How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression](#) (Harvard)

*Joann Pittman has lived and worked in China for over 20 years. She currently works in the field of cross-cultural training and consulting and is a Senior Associate with ChinaSource.*

## View from the Wall

# Steady Growth, Comprehensive Restructuring and National Transformation Prospects after the 18th Party Congress

By Zhao Xiao

Over the past 30 plus years, China's economy has been on a high growth trajectory. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) statistics, from 1980 to 2011 the actual U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) grew 2.28 times larger, Germany's increased 4.39 times, Japan's 5.47 while China's grew by 34.52 times! Although the growth of these developed countries just about quadrupled during the period from 1990 to 2011, the per capita GDP in China grew 25 times larger. During this rapid growth, China's economic structure underwent a drastic change as well.

In 2011, the total population in Mainland China was 1.347 billion of which the urban population was 690 million while rural areas were 656 million. For the first time, the urban population exceeded that of the rural areas implying that the country has changed from the several thousand years old rural China to an urban China. Over three decades of reform and opening-up, China's urban population increased from 172 million to 690 million of which 150 million once lived in the countryside. That is the largest population migration in human history; it is three times the European migration to America during the era of American industrialization.



<http://english.people.com.cn/90785/8018361.html>

“Within one generation, China has achieved what has taken centuries for other countries to do” (World Bank, 1999). “In human history, never before have so many people in such a short time experienced such rapid improvement in living conditions” (Krugman, 19990). There are no greater words of admiration than these.

However, even at the time of China's 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, the country's transformation was not yet completed. Multiple challenges still lie ahead, and the overall risks are rapidly growing. If China does not persist on the path of reform, it may regress and even crash!

In 2011, I pointed out that 2012 would be more than just a new year for China; it would be the beginning of a new era. China would inevitably experience turbulence and risks: an economic downturn, social upheavals and risks for the government. As 2012 now comes to an end, we have seen all of the above. First, China's economy staged a high dive. From a peak GDP growth of 15%, to 2011's highest increase of 11% and an average growth of nearly 10% in the past three decades, to a dip in growth of 7%, China is at risk of a hard landing.

Second, this year, from east to the west and from north to south, there were frequent outbreaks of violent, mass incidents. These occurrences in Shifang, Qidong, Shenyang, Yinggehai and other places reflect the fact that the old way of doing things can no longer be sustained.

Third, the government faced many risks. This has been seen not only in various civil incidents and criticisms but also in the breaking news of Wang Lijun, and Bo Xilai's world-shocking political crisis. These situations indicate that the governance that was effective in the past can no longer be maintained.

To those outsiders who only watch the Chinese news, China is “a blessed country.” However, those who access online public opinions about the nation will see that social antagonism and discontent have reached a serious level. China is definitely a broken country—and in pain.

All of the above, particularly the events of 2012, point to the core issue that China must speed up its transformation. Only then can the nation deal with its crisis and continue to advance. Over the past three decades, China has put on the “red dancing shoes” of change, and economic transformation has brought about huge changes. However, a transformed economy is bound to promote political and social change. At the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress, there was major consensus on this point, but unfortunately there was not any implementation. Thus, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress in 2012, this issue was a focus of attention. I believe it will have a greater global impact than that of the United States' election. The entire world is watching to see the direction the world's second-largest economy will take following this recent Congress.

Now, after careful observation, we should be able to sketch a rough outline of the path that China's development will take in the

future. At the economic level, following the aftershocks of rapid decline in economic growth, the latest trends show optimistic signs for China's economy in 2013 and beyond. Beginning in the third quarter of 2012, China's economy halted its fall and began showing a successful soft landing as well as signs of economic recovery. GDP and other indexes have shown signs of stabilization and even accelerated growth. The Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) has returned to within the range of economic recovery, indicating that in 2013 China's economy will improve.

Internally, three factors will continue to drive China's economy upward. First, the government's investment in infrastructure will continue to be a strong stimulus. The Chinese government has sufficient financial strength and will not loosen its grip until the economy is in full recovery. Second, China's real estate has begun a modest recovery in the third quarter and is expected to continue this momentum into 2013. This, together with market-driven strength and the strength from the Chinese government, will boost the economic recovery. Third, the selling off of inventory as a result of the economic downturn will bottom out in 2013; then an impetus to add inventory will emerge. In the external economy, considering the steady rise in global leading economic indicators and the prediction by a number of international institutions of a better economy in 2013 than in 2012, Chinese imports and exports are expected to maintain steady upward momentum. Taken together, China's economy is expected to return to an 8% growth rate with annual economic growth expected to reach 8.2%.

However, it must be noted that this current recovery is still very vulnerable, and growth must not be too rapid since China's economy is still subject to drag from the international economy. At the same time, China's real estate and automobile industries can no longer help boost China's economy by maintaining a tenfold increase as during the past decade. The macroeconomic policy of the Chinese government to provide stimulus has only limited, diminishing effects. As a result, the Chinese economy's improvement in 2013 will be weak and mild. However, one should still be thankful that it will obviously have averted a hard landing and a rapid decline as in 2012. The risks of China's economy have been mitigated to a large extent; one can look forward to medium- to long-term stable growth.

The Chinese economy is still in the stage of rapid, structural, transformation and fast economic growth like that of a growing child. Compared with developed countries with urbanization of 80% or above, China still has a long road to travel. The ineffectiveness of the "globalization/external demand growth mode" led to the crises in the West; China's "urbanization/internal demand growth mode" still affords a tremendous capacity for growth.

If, after the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Chinese government can stimulate the vitality of its economy, then it can be expected to enter a new growth cycle with a growth range of approximately 7 to 8%. Furthermore, it can be expected to leave behind its high volatility and enter a period of low fluctuations and steady growth; the Chinese economy will welcome a new, rare, very good season.

The major characteristics of this new season will be the small fluctuations and stability. The target for China's economic growth, set at the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, is for the economy, by 2020, to have quadrupled over the preceding ten years. (Both urban and rural per capita income should also have quadrupled). Assuming that GDP growth in 2013 will be stable at 8%, and if from 2014 over the next 20 years it will drop gradually from 7.5% to 6% achieving the goal of an average annual growth of 7%, then the Chinese economy will have "L-shaped" growth. The advantage of "L-shaped" growth is stability. Therefore, China's economy will no longer be subject to great fluctuations and can enter a decade of moderate growth.

This growth pattern will greatly enhance China's national strength. In 2000, the size of China's economy was two trillion U.S. dollars, equivalent to 1/6 of the United State's economy. From 2000 to 2010, China's economy tripled, reaching six trillion U.S. dollars, equivalent to 40% of the U.S. economy. If the Chinese economy in the next decade comes close to a growth of 8%, by 2016 the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of China's total economy will be expected to exceed that of the United States. According to the official Chinese estimate, by 2018 the total Chinese economy, with currency conversion, is expected to exceed that of the United States and will become the world's largest economy. If China's economy is growing at an annual low of 7%, by 2020 the Chinese economy will have doubled and reached the 12 trillion dollar mark exceeding the U.S. economy at that time by 60%. At the same time, it will be equivalent to one and a half times the Japanese economy, and four times that of Germany, India, France or Brazil, six times that of Canada as well as 12 times that of Mexico.

China, as such, will increasingly exert an enormous influence on the global economy and be attractive to the world. Undoubtedly, such a time is worth looking forward to. On the other hand, such growth does not happen naturally. It requires breakthroughs in reforms to drive changes that, in turn, will ensure steady growth. In short, for China to achieve long-term steady growth, it must have political and social stability as well as economic success. It also requires full, internal, political transformation. Thus, it needs the implementation of political and social reforms as well as revived public confidence in both the reforms and the future of China.

At present, there is a serious gap between the rich and poor in China; issues such as corruption, injustice and confrontation among different social economic classes have reached their most serious levels since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. These are the stumbling blocks to the country's steady development and prosperity. It is anticipated that the pendulum of China's policies, which have swung to the left in the past decade with the increasing loss of the country's vitality, will swing back to the right. To deal with the country's problems, diffuse the simmering crisis and continue down the path to revival, reforms will be attempted once again. The path China is taking is becoming increasingly apparent since the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress; it includes an economy that assumes steady growth and a society and politics that become more open. There is no choice; this is the only way forward.

[Continued on page 17](#)

## Peoples of China

### China's Migrant Children

Laura Peng

In contemporary China, the compulsory schooling of rural migrant children has emerged as one of the most pressing problems facing the Chinese educational system.<sup>1</sup> Since the economic reform policies in 1978, the population of internal migrants moving to the cities in search of employment has increased at an unprecedented rate. In 2010, the migrant population was estimated to be 250 million.<sup>2</sup> Since the late 1990s, family migration and the desire for permanent urban residency have fueled the burgeoning urban population of school-aged rural youth who are born in the city or migrate there at a young age. Recent numbers from the China Children and Teenagers' Fund estimate there are 20 million rural migrant children 14 years old or under in China, comprising 13% of the total student population for compulsory education.<sup>3</sup> In other words, one out of every ten school-aged children is a rural migrant child.



In response to the concern that this generation of migrant children will develop into China's first urban underclass, the Chinese government has identified rural migrant children's compulsory education as a key issue in the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020). Since the emergence of the family migration phenomenon, restrictions under the *hukou* system<sup>4</sup> have excluded migrant children from accessing public schools and other critical social services in the cities. Privately-run migrant schools thus emerged as a low-cost option for migrant children to obtain an education. However, these for-profit institutions lacked good infrastructure and hired inexperienced teachers, thus providing their students with a low quality education.<sup>5</sup> Policymakers became concerned that this educational inequity would lead these youth to develop into an urban underclass and contribute to a rise in juvenile delin-

quency. Thus, beginning with the 1998 "Provisional Regulations on Schooling for Migrant Children," the 2001 "Decisions on Reform and Development of Basic Education" and the 2003 "Instructions on Further Improving Compulsory Education Provision to Migrant Children in Urban Areas" policies, the Chinese government issued a series of reforms declaring the host cities' responsibility to educate migrant children and migrant children's right to compulsory schooling, particularly in public schools.<sup>6</sup> The legislation of these policies encountered the resistance of host cities against spending local taxpayer finances on migrant children as well as the prejudice of local parents against schooling migrant youth with their children in public schools.

While national policy has explicitly declared migrant children's access to compulsory schooling, many challenges face this disadvantaged population. First, migrant children in different cities continue to face difficulty in accessing schooling policies. Under China's decentralized administration, city governments are responsible for implementing and funding national level policies. While national level policies dictate migrant children's right to schooling, policy implementation depends upon political will at the local municipal level. Consequently, implementation varies greatly from city to city. In cities where implementation is strict, public schools require parents to submit formal documents—including ID cards, temporary living certificates and employment certificates. Rural migrant parents, however, are undocumented laborers who often have trouble providing these documents. Moreover, students in unlicensed migrant schools face an uncertain future as local governments can easily shutdown the schools without notice. For example, in 2011 and 2012, Beijing closed down migrant schools only weeks before the new academic term began, forcing parents to scramble in finding alternative schooling options for their children, some even sending their children—without parental supervision—back to their hometowns to continue schooling.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, migrant children in Shanghai face a relatively rosier situation. In 2010, Shanghai invested half a billion U.S. dollars into expanding public schools to provide for the enrollment of migrant children, integrating migrant schools into the government educational system and making compulsory schooling free.<sup>8</sup>



Another significant challenge is migrant children's difficulty in obtaining a *quality* education. Currently, migrant children can access compulsory schooling in migrant schools or public schools. However, the education received in migrant schools is inferior compared to that in public schools. Research consistently concludes that public schools raise migrant children's achievement compared to migrant schools.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, gaining entry to public schools can still be challenging, sometimes requiring special connections (*guanxi*). For example, according to 2007 statistics released by the Beijing Municipal Education Commission, among the 400,000 school-age migrant children in Beijing, 63% are enrolled in public schools, 4.6% at private schools and 26% at unregistered migrant schools. The remaining 6.4% do not attend school.<sup>10</sup> A poor academic foundation not only robs rural migrant children of a realistic chance of scoring high on the college entrance examination but also of socio-economic opportunities in the future.

Another challenge is migrant children's inability to take the college exam. Recent national policy lifts the *hukou* restriction on migrant children's right to take the college entrance examination. Children of migrant workers in Anhui, Heilongjiang and Jiangsu will be able to take the college exam in 2013 while those in Shandong, Fujian and Jiangxi are eligible in 2014. However, migrant youth in the cities where the largest population of migrant children reside—Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou—lag behind the smaller cities in implementing this policy.<sup>11</sup> Parents of local youth—particularly in the large cities where the best national colleges are located—strongly protest the “opening” up of their cities for migrant children, fearing increased college enrollment competition. The inability of migrant children to take the college entrance exam not only negatively impacts migrant children but also urban teachers and principals. For students, the exclusion diminishes their motivation to study during their precollege years. For teachers and principals, migrant children's exclusion from the school accountability system gives less incentive for school practitioners to invest in migrant youth to the same degree as local youth.<sup>12</sup>

While many challenges still face China in schooling rural migrant children, the road ahead is paved with opportunity to transform this disadvantaged population into agents for positive, creative change. Prayer for municipal and national policymakers seeking to resolve this sensitive issue is essential. Policymakers in big cities face particular difficulties in implementing national policy and require divine wisdom to act on behalf of the nation's children, not simply to local allegiances.

Secondly, organizational partnerships are vital. Currently, vocational schools in the cities increasingly are a pathway that rural migrant youth are choosing. However, upon graduating with a vocational certificate, they face difficulty in finding employment. Businesses that are willing to partner with vocational schools who educate rural migrant youth are a strategic way to ensure the future socioeconomic mobility of this generation. Collaboration between businesses, government and NGOs is essential in providing rural migrant youth with schooling that gives them practical training for employment.

Moreover, for churches, Christian groups and individuals who seek to alleviate this social problem, partnering with quality NGOs (local and foreign) that already have existing projects with migrant schools and students is an option. As NGOs become more familiar with the needs of migrant youth in the community, their staff will be able to suggest strategic ways to invest a partner's time, energy and material donations (including finances) to mutually benefit the children and their families, as well as the organization. However, given the politically sensitive climate on religion and migrant issues in China, it is advised that churches, Christian groups and individuals work directly with migrant families. Lastly, churches can also prayerfully consider moving their location to migrant communities. Churches located in migrant communities can serve as “salt and light” in an incarnational ministry that removes barriers of socioeconomic class and culture between church members and migrants.

<sup>1</sup> In China, compulsory schooling consists of nine years of primary education and junior secondary education. This article primarily focuses on compulsory schooling.

<sup>2</sup> Beibei, Ji and Song Shengxia. “Half a billion farmers seen going urban,” *Global Times*, Feb 25, 2010. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/china/society/2010-02/507860.html>

<sup>3</sup> If “left behind” children of migrant workers, who remain in the villages without parental care, are included in these statistics, the number rises to 30 million total migrant children in China, comprising 20% of the compulsory school-aged student population. “Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States,” *OECD*, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> In 1958, the Chinese Communist party established the *hukou* system to control rural-to-city migration by localizing resources to an individual's urban or rural *hukou* residence. Since educational funds in host cities are based on the local *hukou* student population, non-local *hukou* students are excluded from urban schooling funds. Chan, Kam Wing and Li Zhang. “The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes.” *The China Quarterly* 160:818-855, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Kwong, Julia. “The Integration of Migrant Children in Beijing Schools.” in *Education and Social Change in China: Inequality in a Market Economy* edited by G. A. Postiglione. Armonk, N.Y., 2006, pp. 163-178. M.E. Sharpe, Lu, Shaoqing and Shouli

<sup>6</sup> Zhang. “Urban/Rural Disparity and Migrant Children's Education,” *Chinese Education & Society* 37:56-83, 2004.

Standing Committee of the Tenth National People's Congress. “Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China,” 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Jinsong, Liu. “Migrant schools closed in Chinese capital,” *BBC News*, Beijing, 2011. “Beijing Migrant Schools Closed,” *Economic Observer*, Beijing, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Hewitt, Duncan; Mazumdar, Sudip; Margolis, Mac; and Overdorf, Jason. “Winning the Hard Ones: Success Stories from Tough Places,” *Newsweek*, Sept 20, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Song, Yingquan; Prashant Loyalak, Jianguo Wei. “Does Going to Public Schools Matter for Migrant Children's Academic Achievement in China?” China Institute for Educational Finance Research (CIEFR), 2010 and Peking University. Presentation at the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy workshop on Education for Migrant Children, Beijing, April 8, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> “Free classrooms scheduled for poor children,” *Xinhua*, Beijing, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> “Limits eased on migrants' college exams,” *Xinhua*, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Yiu, Lisa. *Social organization of Chinese public schools*, Forthcoming.

*Laura Peng, who currently lives in Greater China, has visited a number of public and private migrant schools in China.*

## Book Review: Listening to the Heart

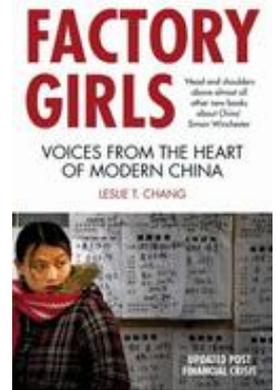
*Factory Girls : Voices from the Heart of Modern China*

by Leslie T. Chang

Reviewed by Andrea Klopper

Chang, Leslie T. *Factory Girls: Voices from the Heart of Modern China*. Picador, 2008, ISBN-10: 033044736X, ISBN-13: 978-0330447362; 320 pages; paper \$10.88; Kindle edition \$11.99 at Amazon.

Over a period of three years, from 2004 to 2006, Ms. Chang dipped in and out of the manufacturing hub of Dongguan in the far south of China (arguably not the “heart” of the country, as the title may claim, but one of many such regions). Low-tech factories from Hong Kong and Taiwan congregated here needing cheap land and labor which were abundant in the 1990s. Dongguan is described as “a city built for machines, not people” (19), “a city where everything is in the process of becoming something else” (20). Anyone who has lived in a Chinese city over the past ten years or so would be likely to say this is true of many places. It is also true for factory workers who are determined to become someone else, to improve themselves, even as mayors are trying to improve their cities.



Most migrants associate their places of origin or homes with poverty and backwardness. Their stories usually begin with “going out” (出去 chū qù). While it is initially hard to do, frequently requiring people who have gone before and returned with some success, it is also an adventure and means of changing one’s fate. All too often there was simply “nothing to do” back in the countryside. The cities offered prospects—of wealth and betterment. Yet, there was inevitably the contradiction of “missing their mothers” while “having the time of their lives,” and experiencing a freedom previously uncommon for young women. This is but one of the contradictions which riddle modern China.

Another contradiction that Chang identifies is the high profile rejection of the foreign presence in the Pearl River Delta. In the past, this revolved around trade, particularly the opium trade; now it is the “stealthy embrace” (30) of the recent foreign presence as bags and toys are manufactured for foreign consumption. In the midst of a mass movement of overwhelming proportions, as China’s urban migration undoubtedly is, Chang presents it on a more human-scale by looking at the lives of several young women with whom she develops a relationship.

A variety of features of migrant life are helpfully portrayed over the course of the book as the factory girls speak. There is the confusion and blurring of initial events, people and places when starting factory work. There is the risk-taking in standing up and standing out, such as when bosses are challenged. There are the precarious advantages of women who matter less than sons and so are somewhat freed to do what they want as well as showing an ability to rapidly adapt to city life in terms of clothes, hair-styles and accents. Life becomes defined by the seasons of the factory rather than the fields. There was a notable absence of discussion about, or interest in, political matters, though possibly this would be less the case among the growing web of netizens and the better working conditions of companies such as Foxconn.<sup>1</sup>

Underlying these aspects is invariably the search for a better life and hope for a brighter future. Work is a means to an end, and there is seldom interest shown in what the factories produce, for whom or why. Whereas Marx would perhaps ascribe this to alienation, the greater alienation of which the factory girls are aware is expressed in terms of loneliness and the lack of stable, lasting relationships—so they can rely only on themselves. Hence, “to be a migrant was to be constantly abandoned by the people closest to you” (104), to become a veteran of departures and returns. Transience inevitably breeds loneliness, a theme noted more recently by Gerard Lemos of the BBC who writes of “loneliness spreading like pollution.”<sup>2</sup> Whether it is due to changing jobs and changing factories or changing mobile phones and changing numbers, the result is the same.

Survival became a matter of focusing on the kindnesses that were shown to one, acquiring new skills that gave one an edge on others (such as sales techniques, speaking English and networking), standing one’s ground in the face of truculent bosses and demanding parents and lying about one’s actual work experience and abilities in order to advance. Often it was pride that made the workers stay on despite hardship; to return home would be face-losing defeat.

Chang entered into the world of the migrants at least monthly. She went on bus rides, read migrant magazines with stories of anguish and survival, attended fly-by-night “schools” and dating agencies, made fleeting friendships, went on the annual pilgrimage back home for Chinese New Year and discovered her own migrant story as she faced the past of her family. She observes that “then as now, all paths to success led away from the village” (131)—just as her grandfather left his 老家 (lǎo jiā) and a strand of the family ended up in the United States.

The book throws up a number of questions. To what extent does the loosening of roots that seems to inevitably occur in migration lead to an initial denial of the pain of that past which deprives people of a deeper understanding of their history and a richer sense of identity? Perhaps this is something to which these factory girls will return in a more reflective vein in later years, as has the author herself done. How will these work experiences look as these factory girls are now entering their thirties, perhaps married and with children who grow up in a very different world? How has the even greater access to, and influence of, computers, mobile phone technology and the Internet impacted the life of factory girls today? How similar are the experiences of factory girls and workers in other industries, such as construction, which has been largely the preserve of migrating males?

As with most books about “modern China,” they become outdated. The author is aware of this danger, but in looking at individuals rather than issues she feels that time and place are transcended (426), and that the transformations in individual lives may ultimately prove more significant. That said, this book describes quite a different China in as much as the optimism fueled by an economy growing at a staggering pace of ten percent per annum (and faster in the south) has undoubtedly slowed.<sup>3</sup> The world economic crisis post-2008 is dragging on and rippling outwards. There is more skepticism and doubts about the accessibility of earlier dreams. However, the book serves as a reminder that individuals and their stories matter. People deserve to be given a voice and listened to. They add color and life to the dry statistics. We discover that there are things shared by all those who “go out”—be it from a village, city or nation—and go through the process of “recreating” or “reinventing” themselves. They are “strivers” (404).

There is the pathos inherent in much of China’s past that people all too often have to rely on themselves. This highlights the need for avenues of hope and underscores the need for them to be pointed to a God who is totally reliable, ever present, stable and has their best interests at heart; a God who works in the lives of people “on the move.”

Among her conclusions, Chang observes that the lives and struggles of the factory girls “...were emblematic of their country today—and of the China of my family too, who strived to make up for everything they had lost or left behind. In the end, across time and class, this is the story of China: leaving home, enduring hardship, and making new life” (404).

Chang has an easy-going, engaging style and gradually draws the reader into the lives of Min and Chun Ming, as well as her own. She observes them, offering some comment, but withholds judgment. With time, she is able to revise some of her earlier views as possibly too simplistic. For example, she initially suggests that a place like Dongguan has no past and the past plays no part, but four years later she has come to see that the past had been there all along (383). This suggests that not only are the factory girls “in process,” but so is she as the author. Her growing awareness of both herself and her personal history, about which she knows little and in which she had previously shown no interest, begins to appeal to her. This gives the book a greater depth and breadth that would otherwise be absent. It also contributes an autobiographical element and an ability to empathize with those seeking to “shift the burden of being born Chinese,” casting aside the weight of family, history and nation (382-3).

While Chang’s book will definitely provide readers with insights into the lives of many in this vast nation, the most valuable reminder may well be that there is an inherent need—and value—in taking time to listen to people’s hearts as revealed through their stories, and to engage in ways that will truly change their “fate.” Reading this book is one way to get a glimpse and hear.

<sup>1</sup> See assorted articles in [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news).

<sup>2</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-19827537](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-19827537), 16 October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> China growth slows to 7.5% as the demand for the country’s exports drop, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19975112>, 18 October 2012.

*Andrea Klopper has taught in South Africa, the UK and China; she has mentored Mandarin language students and developed a cultural orientation and acquisition programme which she has run in two organizations. She enjoys reading, cycling in her city as well as making local friends.*

## Resource Corner

Good news! [Baojiayin.com](http://Baojiayin.com), established in 2008, now has an international website especially for English speakers and international Chinese customers! [Goodnewsinchina.com](http://Goodnewsinchina.com) has over 1000 simplified Chinese book titles, plus audiovisual resources and giftware-with-a-message!

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The perils of the researcher so far as statistics are concerned may be illustrated by their fact-finding in Chongqing. They state that the official number of Protestants in this vast megacity has now surpassed 500,000 although another official estimate puts it lower at 380,000. However, in a footnote we are told that “the statistic current in [TSPM/CCC] church circles is 800,000.” (!) This is typical of most cities and provinces throughout China and shows that even the official statistics emanating from the government and TSPM/CCC sources may vary widely.

Another important Mainland source was the book *Studies of Religious and Minority Questions in Modern China* published in Beijing in June 2010 by the Academy of Social Sciences Press. This contains some startling information of the rapid growth of Protestant Christianity. In his introduction to an article entitled “An Analysis for the Reasons for the Rapid Growth of [Protestant] Christianity in China Today,” researcher Ma Hucheng states that “some people estimate there are 50-70 million Christians in Mainland China.” However, he accepts the “moderate” estimate of 40 million as more likely while predicting that the rapid growth of the church will continue. He states:

If we estimate that Christianity will continue to grow at the rate of one million per year as has happened over the past 30 years, then after 20 years there will be 60 million believers and after 50 years a conservative estimate is over 100 million Christians.... As Christianity believes “everyone should spread the faith,” the more believers, then, the more preachers. So a moderate estimate is that after 50 years there will actually be 150 million to 200 million Christians. Mr Lu Daji [another academic researcher on religion] estimates that after only 20 years there could be 200 or even 300 million Christians.

It is no wonder that more conservative (that is neo-Maoist) elements in the government are concerned about the growth of Christianity. Ma believes that China is very similar to South Korea in its Confucian and Buddhist cultural and religious background. He states that already 35% of the South Korean population is Protestant and worries that China is well on the way to following in their footsteps on a more massive scale. So we have here confirmation from Marxist academic advisers to the government that both the number of Christians is considerably higher than the official statistics and that in the near future the church will continue to grow exponentially.

*Tony Lambert is the director for research, Chinese ministries, for OMF International and the author of several publications including China's Christian Millions.*

China, after the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, has its economy on track for steady growth; its society is becoming more open and its government more transparent. Not only does China's comprehensive transformation promote the country's advance, it is also the most advantageous opportunity for China to change as a nation. According to Asia Harvest statistics, the number of Chinese Christians reached 105 million at the end of 2010; however, their influence on Chinese society is still limited. Now, after the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, the number of Chinese Christians is expected to continue to climb while the relatively more relaxed environment should raise the quality and degree of their impact on Chinese society. When that happens, it will be the first time in history that China's comprehensive change of its systems and development model converges perfectly with the morality based on the life of Christ and inward transformation of the individual. Perhaps China, as a result, will move towards the well-awaited season of the “Change of the Cross.” Chinese Christians will usher in the most important, and best, season for China's national transformation as well as for Kingdom ministries.

In 2011, I issued a warning: “Landing, please fasten your seat belts.” Now, however, the aircraft is beginning to enjoy a smooth flight; with clarity I hear a voice from above saying, “Come, my darling, my beautiful one. Rise and go with me” (Song of Songs 2:10).

*Zhao Xiao, Ph.D., is the founder and chairman of Cypress Leadership Institute, a former Macro Strategy Department Chief of SASAC Economic Research Center, a professor at the University of Science and Technology in Beijing and has done research for various entities including Harvard University and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.*

## Intercessory Notes

*Please pray:*

1. For China's many people to hear the gospel, especially for those hearing of Christ via the Internet and for wisdom for Christians maintaining web sites.
2. For churches and believers to have a vision for reaching and discipling China's children and youth for Christ; for the workers currently carrying out this ministry.
3. For the nation's businessmen and women as they make choices and steer the courses of their enterprises in the economy of today's China.
4. For municipal and national policymakers seeking to make public schooling more easily available for migrant children. Those in large cities face particular difficulties and require divine wisdom to act on behalf of the nation's children.
5. For women working in factories throughout China.

