



# The People's Republic of China and Christianity

## A Brief Introduction

By Elena Vishnevskaya

**T**he spellbinding surge of Christianity in China has baffled the Western scholarly community for several decades as Christianity has been growing by leaps and bounds despite the restrictive religious policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): as of this article's publication, Christian believers in China tally between 70 and 100 million.<sup>1</sup> To appreciate the runaway expansion of Christianity in China is to recognize the contextual factors which have shaped this unique phenomenon—spiritual, political, economic, and socio-cultural. The collapse of the Mao era totalitarianism, the Chinese state's ongoing antagonism toward religion, rapid urbanization, extraordinary economic development, and marked social inequality have provided a pivotal framework for Christianity's growth in China.

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China's dealings with the Western world became severely limited. Fearful of foreign infiltration via religion, the PRC sought to prevent outside interference in China's life by restricting all religious activity, including that of Christianity. The regime killed, imprisoned, shunned, and discriminated against Christians. In the early 1950's, all ties with foreign missionary societies were severed, and China's Protestants were organized into the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and later, in 1980, the China Christian

Council (CCC). Together, the TSPM and the CCC have functioned as a "semi-autonomous agency that regulates the affairs of China's Protestants in accordance with the principles of self-support, self-government and self-propagation."<sup>2</sup> The "Three-Self" principles were intended to safeguard Chinese churches from Western influence and ensure their loyalty to the freshly-minted PRC. With the founding of the TSPM, denominational distinctions were erased (the recent tenor of urban church life, however, has shown a stance toward denominational affiliation).<sup>3</sup> Many Christians, uncomfortable with the governmental control of the TSPM, refused to comply and started meeting in homes. The house-church movement—whose origins can be traced to the pre-1949 era—took off, but not without a price. Members of unregistered churches were persecuted and their leaders, like Wang Mingdao, Samuel Lamb, and Allen Yuan, were imprisoned from twenty to twenty-five years for their resistance to integrate their congregations into the TSPM.<sup>4</sup>

A Catholic counterpart to the TSPM and the CCC, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), was established in 1957 after the Party condemned the Catholic Church and the Pope. The following year the first Catholic bishops in China were consecrated without papal mandate.<sup>5</sup> Loyalty to the Vatican was seen as undermining the authority of the PRC, and Catholic clergy were to be approved and monitored by the government. Many Catholics in China opposed the creation of a national church and chose to remain underground, which led to their ruthless suppression. Dissenting clergy were brutally punished by the CCP: Archbishop Dominic Tang Yiming served twenty-two years in prison, and Cardinal Kung Pin-mei, thirty.<sup>6</sup>

In 1966, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution to cleanse society of its last feudal and bourgeois vestiges. During the ten-year upheaval, wholesale persecution of Christianity—and other religions—became systematic and deliberate. No forms of Christianity could operate in the open, as the PRC tried to weed out Christians irrespective of their church affiliation. Countless Christian believers were sent off to labor camps for their political re-education. House-church leaders endured arrests and torture. Catholic priests and nuns were coerced into marriage. Even those who supported the TSPM were not spared the wrath of the CCP; thus, in 1973, the CCP made an example of pastor Wang Zhiming by executing him in public.<sup>7</sup>



Wang Mingdao at the Christian Tabernacle in Beijing, circa 1950.  
Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8ktknv>.

The terror of the Cultural Revolution marred the credibility of state ideology, and to restore people's trust in the Party-State, the leadership of the PRC started offering them some degree of individual freedoms. The Chinese economy, badly hurt during the Cultural Revolution, became the prerogative of new Party functionaries, who pursued expansion of international trade and sought out foreign technologies and capital investments.<sup>8</sup> With the "open door" policy of 1979, "[t]he Party's aim . . . shifted from eradicating religion to marshaling all available forces (including religious) within society to participate in the modernization effort."<sup>9</sup> The 1982 Constitution of the PRC declared:

*Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.*<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Christians in China were assured of freedom of belief, provided their activities did not undermine the Party's line. The government's investment in economic development overshadowed its former preoccupation with "correct belief" of its citizens.<sup>11</sup>

The end of the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent economic boom created a spiritual vacuum that neither communist doctrines nor new material goods could fill. In search of a value system, the Chinese turned to religion, and many fell under the sway of Christianity. In a culture where scores of people found themselves devoid of meaning and disengaged from one another and the common good, Christianity with its offer of "fellowship, [a] comprehensive moral system, organized structure, and solidarity as part of an international movement," became an attractive option. "Additionally, harsh repression of more popular traditional Chinese religions—especially during the Cultural Revolution—reduced the influence of Buddhism and Daoism and opened the door for greater Christian expansion."<sup>12</sup> Christianity thus appeared not only as a less risky choice but also a simpler and more straightforward religion whose devotees had no need to placate multiple gods of traditional Chinese religions in order to be saved.

In post-Mao China, unregistered Protestant churches proliferated in the countryside and continued their growth in China's burgeoning industrial areas. These congregations represent a plethora of Christian beliefs and practices: "some are clearly Pentecostal, others are on the margin, while many are simply of the conservative evangelical type. Some are exclusivist to the extreme and reject the validity of any other group, while others are more conciliatory and willing to work together, including working with Three-Self churches."<sup>13</sup> The tension between "the two Protestantisms,"—registered and unregistered—is often palpable as the TSPM and the CCC view themselves as beacons of orthodoxy, keeping an eye on the so-called heterodox tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

Charismatic churches, always wary of religious establishments trying to fit them into an ideological straitjacket, seem to have been especially inviting to the economically disadvantaged, for whom the divine promise of justice and prosperity looms large. The teachings of these churches, usually unregistered, resonate with ordinary people whose every-day concerns extend to the whole person, mind and body: "in their practices of healing and deliverance from evil spirits, independent and Pentecostal churches . . . demonstrate that Christianity has power, and they appeal to people oppressed by sickness, misfortune and affliction."<sup>15</sup> In addition to churches of charismatic fervor, sectarian Christian movements have also been active in China, and their "alternative" beliefs—often seen as pregnant with anti-social potential due to their millenarian nature—have caused anxiety both for the state and mainstream Christian communities.<sup>16</sup> Cults, as an expression of indigenous Christianity, continue being hugely popular in rural areas where they function as "a natural product of the interface between the more exuberant form of Protestantism and Chinese popular religious traditions."<sup>17</sup> The historical memory of homegrown revolts, including the Taiping



Reverend Samuel Lamb (1924–2013) preaching in a house church in Guangzhou. Source: Screen capture from the YouTube video *Rev Samuel Lamb China & The Church in China* at <https://tinyurl.com/fveuem32>.



Government workers remove a cross from a church in Zhejiang city of Lishui. Source: *Christianity Today* at <https://tinyurl.com/s36ye266>. (ChinaAid photo)

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The Golden Lampstand Church, built in 2009. Source: *OpenDoorsUSA* at <https://tinyurl.com/dvve2aej>.



The Golden Lampstand Church, as it is demolished by Chinese police officers in 2018. Source: Screen capture from “Officials demolish Golden Lampstand Church in Shanxi, China” by *The Guardian* on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/5eb599f8>.

Rebellion of the nineteenth century with its roots in charismatic Christianity, has made the government pay closer attention to these religious circles.

Even though the PRC opened to the world at the threshold of the 1980's, the Chinese Catholic Church, which began functioning as a dual community of the official and the unofficial church in 1957, did not get any respite. To prevent potential foreign interference in internal matters, the Chinese government ordained Catholic bishops without papal approval. The Vatican responded to the unsanctioned consecrations of bishops in China by appointing their own.<sup>18</sup> Tensions between the unofficial Catholic Church and the Chinese state have been particularly acute in Hebei province, where “authorities have been known to force many underground priests and believers to make a choice of either joining the ‘patriotic’ church or facing punishments, such as fines, job loss, and, in some cases, having their children barred from school.”<sup>19</sup> Hebei province, a home to a significant portion of China's Catholics, also gained notoriety in the 1990's for arrests and detentions of prominent Catholic bishops and priests. One of those leaders, Bishop Zeng Jingmu, was imprisoned in 1995 and transferred to house arrest in 1998 owing to international pressure on the Chinese regime. In 1999, another hierarch of the underground Catholic Church, auxiliary Bishop Yan Weiping, died under suspicious circumstances upon his release from police custody.<sup>20</sup>

In 1982, the PRC adopted Document 19, “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period,” which articulated the CCP's policy on religion. While Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism were permitted, the Party unequivocally expected that religion would eventually fade away and disappear altogether.<sup>21</sup> Christianity has not died out but instead proven to be an indelible presence in Chinese society. In light of Christianity's high visibility, China's president Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) departed from the position of previous leadership when he announced in 2001 that “religion could act as a stabilizing force in society and, as such, could be mobilized as a positive force for

national development.”<sup>22</sup> The beginning of the twenty-first century, however, spelled further decline in the relations between the Vatican and the PRC. When Pope John Paul II canonized 87 Chinese martyrs on October 1, 2000, the indignant CCP blasted the Vatican for purposefully choosing October 1, the National Day of the PRC, to undermine the power of the Chinese state. When two Chinese bishops, who lacked the Vatican's endorsement, were ordained in 2011, the Vatican excommunicated them. The Chinese government sternly demanded that the Holy See refrain from meddling in the religious life of the PRC.<sup>23</sup>

When Xi Jinping took over in 2012, dogmatic purity became, once again, of utmost priority to the PRC. Hostile to religion, Xi Jinping inadvertently helped create conditions conducive to Christian growth. The Belt and Road Initiative, announced in 2013, aimed to restore the ancient Silk Road, which brought together Asia and Europe for commerce and attendant exchange of ideas. By connecting countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe, the economic development initiative generated cost-effective land- and sea-based routes for Chinese goods. China's commanding assertiveness in the global marketplace translated into fresh opportunities for Christians in China, who are now connected with one another and Christians around the world. One's access to Christian publications, Christian education courses, virtual Bible studies, live-broadcast church services and a multitude of discussion forums and blog posts on every aspect of Christian life, has erased obstacles to community building—a goal fraught with tension in the past.<sup>24</sup>

The larger societal changes benefitting Christian churches, like the Belt and Road Initiative, have been overshadowed, however, by relentless crackdowns on Christian communities. In 2013,

## Key Religious Controls (November 2012–November 2016)

#	Control	Chinese Buddhism/ Taoism	Christianity (Protestants + Catholics) <sup>a</sup>	Tibetan Buddhism	Islam (Uighurs) <sup>b</sup>	Falun Gong <sup>c</sup>
<b>Total</b>		8/24 (33%)	18/24 (75%)	22/24 (92%)	21/22 (95%)	18/18 (100%)
1	Oversight by "patriotic association"	●	●	●	●	n/a
2	Control over religious leader recruitment/training	●	●	●	●	n/a
3	Numerical limits on ordination/training	●	●	●	●	n/a
4	Closure/destruction of place of worship	●	●	●	●	n/a
5	Imprisonment of state-approved religious leader/monastic	●	●	●	●	n/a
6	Imprisonment of unofficial religious leader/monastic		●			n/a
7	Doctrinal interference/manipulation		●	●	●	●
8	Ban on core religious tenet		●	●	●	●
9	Study of religious scriptures punished		●	●	●	●
10	Religious celebration restricted or punished		●	●	●	●
11	Imprisonment of lay believer	●	●	●	●	●
12	Imprisonment of 50+ believers		●	●	n/a	●
13	Imprisonment of 500+ believers				n/a	●
14	Detention for religious engagement online		●	●	●	●
15	Restrictions on children's participation	●	●	●	●	●
16	Political "reeducation" campaigns		●	●	●	●
17	Widespread torture			●	●	●
18	Extrajudicial killing		●	●	●	●
19	10+ extrajudicial deaths			●	●	●
20	New restrictive legal change			●	●	●
21	Restrictions on movement/passport allocation			●	●	●
22	Vilification in state media		●	●	●	●
23	Economic exploitation	●	●	●	●	●
24	Online censorship of religious communication			●	●	●

**Notes:**

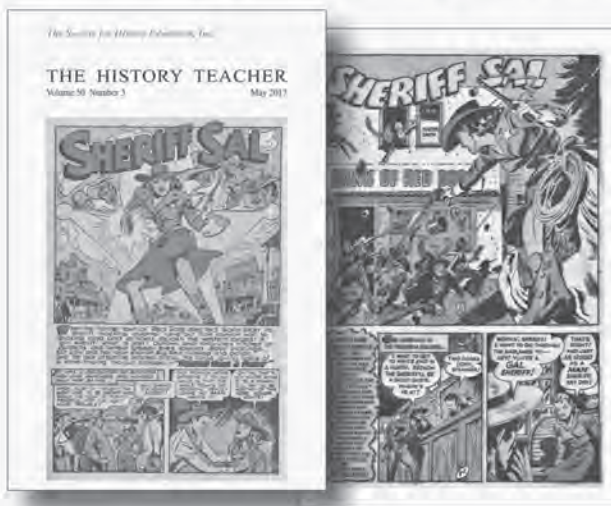
a. Imprisonment figures for Christians also include individuals held for belonging to banned quasi-Christian sects.

b. Due to insufficiently clear data, treatment of Hui Muslims is not included here, and no assessment is made on whether 50+ or 500+ Uighurs were detained.

c. Several forms of control are not applicable to Falun Gong because it is neither a formally organized religion nor officially recognized and therefore lacks ordained clergy, places of worship, and state-sanctioned leaders.

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the Chinese government launched a campaign to take down crosses from the roofs of both Catholic and Protestant churches. As of this writing, thousands of churches, including those affiliated with the TSPM, have lost their crosses. In addition to cross removal, Chinese authorities set their sights on church buildings themselves—hundreds of places of worship have been destroyed.<sup>25</sup> One of the most troubling examples of church decimation has been the Golden Lampstand Church in Shanxi province, a house church boasting 50,000 in attendance. The US \$2.6 million church built in 2009 was destroyed with dynamite in 2018.<sup>26</sup>

In 2017, China's State Council published a revised version of the 2005 Religious Affairs Regulations, which came into effect in February 2018; however, "this reworking simply expanded the scope and intensity of administrative control."<sup>27</sup> Xi Jinping's policies have shown an increasingly tighter grip on activities of religious practitioners, be it Falun Gong adherents, Muslim ethnic Uighurs, or Tibetan Buddhists.<sup>28</sup> Christians too, as followers of a "non-Chinese" religious tradition, have borne the brunt of escalating attacks on their communities. One of the earliest implementations of the newly revised Religious Affairs Regulations occurred in October 2018: having terrorized the congregation of the Bible Reformed Church in Guangdong province for nearly a decade, the authorities finally closed the church. The church, founded by Samuel Lamb, an esteemed figure in the house-church movement, was shut down following his imprisonment in 1955 and reopened shortly after his return in 1978. This most recent closure bespeaks an unabating effort by the government to restrain Lamb—and his congregation—who continued his ministry despite having suffered a great deal at the hands of the CCP in the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

In September of the same year, political winds of change appeared to have shifted in favor of China's Catholics. The Vatican and the Chinese state reached a rapprochement as they compromised over the nomination of bishops: under the provisional agreement, which is to be renewed every two years, the Chinese government recommends Catholic bishops and the Pope approves or vetoes the selected candidates. Thus, when this historic deal on the nomination of bishops in China was signed, it seemed to have signaled an improvement in the relations between the Vatican and the PRC, which almost immediately resulted in two Chinese bishops taking part in a synod in Rome. Still, the enforcement of the Religious Affairs Regulations, adopted earlier in the year, served as a sobering reminder that the PRC's treatment of Christianity, including Catholicism, remains volatile.<sup>30</sup>

While the provisional deal between the Vatican and the PRC was renewed for the second time October 22, 2022,<sup>31</sup> many Chinese Catholics are questioning the cachet of the agreement in light of the ongoing arbitrary arrests and detention of clergy and laity. For example, Bishop Augustine Cui Tai of the Xuanhua diocese in Hebei province, a staunch opponent of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), has been imprisoned off and on since 2007. In June 2020, he disappeared after his arrest. One of Bishop Cui Tai's allies, Bishop Joseph Zhang Weishu of the Xinxiang diocese in Henan province, is also still missing since his arrest in May 2021.<sup>32</sup> Another widely-known case of the CCP's ill-treatment of Catholic clergy involves Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin. During his consecration as auxiliary bishop of Shanghai on July 7, 2012, the forty-four-year-old priest renounced the CCPA during his ordination ceremony at St. Ignatius Cathedral in Shanghai. Consequently, he was placed under house arrest, where he has remained ever since.<sup>33</sup>

Persecution of Christians in China is often carried out under the auspices of the policy of "sinicization," first publicized by Xi Jinping in 2015 and commenced in 2019. The policy purports to ensure that religion is cognizant of its place within the Party-State and adjusts its practices to socialist society.<sup>34</sup> Hence, sinicization's five-year plan (2019–2024) has systematically attempted to "sinicize religion" by changing religious doctrines and practices so they are in line with and loyally promote CCP ideology.<sup>35</sup> Many

## Religious Persecution by Province

Many religious controls in China are imposed nationwide, and instances of persecution have been recorded in every one of China's 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and province-level municipalities since November 2012. Still, the degree of persecution and the primary groups targeted vary from region to region.



Note: Several sources informed the provincial ratings for this map, including data on incidents of persecution and detention available from Chinese court documents, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China's Political Prisoner Database, and reports by Human Rights Watch and China Aid.

Page twenty-five of the Freedom House Special Report of February 2017, *The Battle for China's Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping*. By Sarah Cook. You can download the report PDF here: <https://tinyurl.com/39ka8rhu>.

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Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin before he resigned from the Catholic Patriotic Association and was placed under house arrest in a seminary by the Chinese government. Source: Screen capture from the YouTube video, *Persecuted Chinese Bishop's Reversal Sends Shockwaves* at <https://tinyurl.com/38wfpdmf>. ©Currents News



Pastor Wang Yi holds a sign asking for people to pray for China on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests. Source: The CHVn95.1 FM website at <https://tinyurl.com/yc78r9du>. (ChinaAid photo)

**Despite the official Chinese rhetoric, in the last several years Christians in China have faced renewed attacks by the CCP. The Administrative Measures for Religious Groups, enforced February 1, 2020, reminds Christians of the CCP's ascendancy at every turn of their work: the list of activities for which they need official permission is unprecedentedly exhaustive.**

Christians in China consider this a coy move to root out “non-Chinese” religions like Christianity. Xi Jinping appears to have “re-ignited ideological nationalism, intensifying a cultural campaign against ‘Western infiltration,’ and elevated Confucianism as the sole representative of Chinese thought.”<sup>36</sup> Once seen as stalling China’s modernization, Confucianism is experiencing an unprecedented rejuvenation due to the recent strategy of the Chinese government, which pits Confucianism and other traditional religious practices against Christianity. Confucianism, as a venerable indigenous tradition, is to help China chart its own unique course in the global arena, while Christianity, as a nonnative religion, is to recede into the past.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the resurgence of Confucianism, Christianity in China is not retreating and remains a viable presence, adapting its mission to the urban milieu. Concomitant with the country’s economic success, China’s urbanization has provided both a challenge and an opportunity to Christian churches. With an offer of an enormous industrial army of migrant workers from the countryside, urbanization has propelled the Chinese economy to dizzying heights. Drawn to the cities’ economic prospects, the relocated rural population has found itself disenfranchised from access to housing, medical care, public education, and other essential services. China’s *hukou* system, or household registration, which was set up by the government in the 1950’s to restrict migration to the urban centers, engendered a social chasm between native urbanites and migrants from the countryside. In 2021, President Xi Jinping launched a “common prosperity” campaign to tackle China’s social inequalities. Thus far, the campaign’s “piecemeal efforts [have done] little to improve the experience of rural hukou-holders who live in China’s most attractive ‘tier one’ megacities and make up a sizeable proportion of the country’s 375 million strong ‘floating population’ of internal migrants.”<sup>38</sup> New city-dwellers, however, are benefitting from the work of urban churches, who stepped up to the plate to meet the spiritual and practical needs of migrant workers. A substantial number of these urban Christians belong to unregistered Protestant churches, which are renting public spaces and establishing themselves as an authoritative presence in the community, “part of a larger effort to reposition the church in society. Whereas the traditional house church was hidden from society, and the registered church was prevented from playing a significant role in

mainstream social or cultural life, a [current] generation of urban Christians desires to make the church visible.”<sup>39</sup>

Despite the official Chinese rhetoric, in the last several years Christians in China have faced renewed attacks by the CCP. The Administrative Measures for Religious Groups, enforced February 1, 2020, reminds Christians of the CCP’s ascendancy at every turn of their work: the list of activities for which they need official permission is unprecedentedly exhaustive. For example, religious organizations are required to notify the Religious Affairs Department of “personnel change[s],” as well as “important meetings, activities, trainings, and international communications.” The state also expects reports of “donations of religious books or audio/visual products, or donations over 100,000 yuan (about 1,493 USD) from overseas organizations or individuals.” Secular authorities reserve the right to examine and approve religious “work projects, annual work plans, and annual summary reports,” as well as “large financial expenditures, major asset disposal, and major construction projects.”<sup>40</sup> The 2022 legislation, Administrative Measures for the Internet Religious Information Services, addresses another governmental concern that the internet and social media have inappropriately become means of Christian evangelism. According to the Measures, religious organizations need to hold an Internet Religious Information Service License to post religious material online, and only five state-sanctioned religious traditions can obtain the license. Even though Protestant and Catholic churches are among the five recipients of the license, the state still monitors their online activities to ensure a “sinicized” version of Christianity, compliant with socialist ideals.<sup>41</sup>

The latest onslaught on Christian churches, both official and unofficial, includes all kinds of aggressive governmental actions: church raids, confiscation of church property and personal assets of Christians, demolition of churches, political vetting of seminary students, and torture of clergy and laity.<sup>42</sup> House churches still reel from the devastation inflicted several years ago on the Early Rain Covenant Church and its leader. In December 2019, the Early Rain Covenant Church

in Sichuan province was closed by local authorities and dozens of its parishioners were arrested. Pastor Wang Yi, a human rights activist and one of the most outspoken Chinese critics of the CCP, was sentenced to nine years in prison after police forced from his congregants sham testimonies, accusing Wang Yi of sedition. Many within and without the house-church movement recognized in this bellicose move a reprisal for Wang Yi's role in the creation of the 2018 document, "A Joint Statement by Pastors: A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith." The statement, signed by hundreds of church leaders, rebuked the Religious Affairs Regulations adopted earlier in the year and demanded cessation of house-church repressions. While Christians around the country and the world, as well as the US State Department, have been unsuccessfully calling for Wang Yi's release, the CCP continues imprisoning dissent.<sup>43</sup> Geng Zejun, another house-church pastor, was arrested in January 2022 and given a prison sentence of one year and three months.<sup>44</sup> The list of names of imprisoned Christian leaders and laity is growing.

Facial recognition software, telephone tracking, and surveillance cameras, all of which have been employed by the Chinese state to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic, are now utilized to keep tabs on members of unregistered churches. The authorities do not stop short of physical and psychological harassment to intimidate Christians into recanting their beliefs. Christians run the risk of forfeiting social welfare benefits if they are unwilling to substitute portraits of Xi Jinping for Christian iconography.<sup>45</sup> Christian leaders are ordered to swear loyalty to the CCP and conform the content of their homilies to the Party line, and a recently launched "clergy database" allows the government to check on how closely the clergy follow the Party's directives. Churches and religious organizations are required to report the conduct of their religious leaders to local authorities, who in turn would administer the clergy's "rewards and punishments" and register them in the database. A concerted effort between religious and secular parties would ensure that only politically sound individuals serve their congregations.<sup>46</sup> All of these draconian tactics notwithstanding, the Christian faith appears tenacious and resilient. As the twenty-first century marches on, Christianity in China shows no signs of slowing down: the numbers of Christian adherents are expected to reach 160 million by 2025 and 247 million by 2030.<sup>47</sup> As long as the Party-State finds Christianity congruent with its goals of modernization and social stability—and thus refrains from reverting to the pre-1976 violent persecution of Christians—the growth of Christianity in China will most likely be sustained. ♦

### Timeline of Developments Affecting Christianity in China after the Founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949

- 1951–54 All foreign missionaries expelled from China
- 1954 The Three-Self Patriotic Movement established
- 1955–58 Leaders of House-Church Movement (Wang Mingdao, Samuel Lamb, and Allen Yuan) and pro-Rome Catholic clergy (Archbishop Dominic Tang Yiming and Cardinal Kung Pin-mei) arrested and imprisoned for twenty to thirty years
- 1957 The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association established
- 1966–76 The Cultural Revolution: severe religious suppression
- 1973 Pastor Wang Zhiming publicly executed
- 1979 "Open-door" policy, aimed at improving relations with the West, adopted
- 1980 The China Christian Council established
- 1982 Document 19, "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period," adopted
- 2000 John Paul II canonized Chinese martyrs
- 2005 Religious Affairs Regulations adopted
- 2012 Thaddeus Ma Daqin renounced the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association during his consecration as auxiliary bishop of Shanghai  
Xi Jinping elected general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party
- 2013 Xi Jinping elected president of China  
Campaign to remove crosses from churches launched
- 2018 Golden Lampstand Church demolished  
A revised version of the 2005 Religious Affairs Regulations enforced  
A Joint Statement by Pastors: A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith issued by Chinese house-church pastors  
Provisional agreement on the appointment of Chinese bishops reached between the Vatican and the PRC  
Samuel Lamb's Bible Reformed Church shut down
- 2019 The policy of "sinicization" launched  
Wang Yi, pastor of the Early Rain Covenant Church and a human rights activist, sentenced to nine years in prison
- 2020 The Administrative Measures for Religious Groups enforced
- 2022 The Administrative Measures for the Internet Religious Information Services adopted

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