

Christianity in China:

From the History and Operation of “Evergreen China Service” and Beyond

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Editor’s Note:

This paper originally was presented at the 2015 Northwest regional EMS Conference, George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon, April 11, 2015. This paper has not included the recent development inside China, i.e. aggressive campaign to remove crosses from hundreds of Protestant churches in the province of Zhejiang in northeast coast of China.¹

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Introduction

My goal for this paper is to research, explore and explain the different views concerning Christianity in China. I am writing this with the hope that together we in the West might understand the full picture of Christianity in China better. Instead of only posting a blog or presenting my opinion, I wish to present a well-researched representation of the situation in China. This paper will help us read stories from China in the wider context of the current situation. Furthermore it would benefit Christians who wish to work in China or those supporting Christians in China. In general, it might be an informative tool for the church at large.

¹ Readers may use the link <http://www.evergreenchina.net/home/> for information re: “Evergreen China Service”.

Let me tell you a bit of background that is informative of “why” this paper and “how” my perspective emerged. I grew up in China. For thirteen years of my life, I spent my time in the Chinese countryside where my parents have worked since 1997 for the purpose of reaching the lost for Christ. In the year 2000, they joined the Christian organization Evergreen. The fact that I am a MK is hard to hide, and when people discover my story, I am frequently bombarded with questions about the state of Christianity in China. In most cases, people have been shocked to hear about our status as “openly Christian in China” (Evergreen). They wonder: “How can that be possible?”

History of Evergreen China Service

Evergreen's history reaches back to the time of the Japanese War. In 1909, Peter Torjesen, at age seventeen, heard from the missions advocate Ludvig Hope about the millions of Chinese who were waiting to hear the Word of God. Subsequently, when the offering came by, Torjesen decided to give everything he had to the cause. He emptied not only his wallet into the offering, but he also wrote his name on a piece of paper including the words: “My life” and placed it in the offering. From that moment onwards, he was committed to serving the Chinese for God's glory. Soon, Torjesen left for China with his wife, where he would serve the Chinese literally for the rest of his life. During World War II, their ministry flourished as they touched the lives of many by offering shelter to over 1,000 refugees. However, one day as Torjesen was tending to those staying in the church, the Japanese flew overhead and bombed the church building, killing all those inside (Malcolm 2004).

Peter Torjesen's death in 1939 did not bring an end to the ministry, but instead opened a door for future generations. Years later, in 1988, the local government officials in Shanxi

province saw Peter Torjesen's name on a list of martyrs for China. Touched by his service for their country, they invited the remaining three generations of Torjesens to China in order to honor Peter's death by raising a monument. Finn Torjesen, Peter's grandson, also came to China for this occasion, and, at this time, the Chinese government asked if he would be willing to continue in the steps of his grandfather. In that moment, the basis for the organization Evergreen was laid (Malcolm 2004).

Coming to China on the government's invitation, Evergreen decided from the very beginning to respect their position and cherish the trust the government had given them. From the start, they did not hide the fact that they were Christians who loved to share their hope with everyone interested. However, at the same time, Evergreen did not lose focus and forget that they had been invited to serve the Chinese people as Peter had done, being willing to give their very lives if the situation called for that.

Thus, based out of this Christian organization that serves China with an open mentality and respect for the government, I have seen the doors God has opened into the Chinese people's heart. Moreover, I have noticed possibilities, not only amongst ourselves, but also in ministries across China, as many fellow workers confirm. Yet, it appears that the normative picture of China in the West is often that of severe persecution of Christians by a closed communist government strongly opposing the Chinese Church. This has caused me to wonder about the various narratives that exist about China's Christians. Working with Moody Bible Institute as an Intercultural Honors Student has opened up the door to investigate these tensions. Based on my experiences in the West these past years and my preliminary research, I have found that people frequently have this standard picture of a persecuted Chinese church. However, I wonder if we are accurate in viewing China in this light. Why do such disparate views on Christianity in China

exist today among Western Christians? From where have these popular images originated and how have they developed?

In this, however, I also want to recognize the enormity of this attempt. As others have pointed out, China is a vast country concerning numbers of people that are nearly impossible to comprehend. Furthermore, China is a paradox. People who know China will confirm that anything said about China is probably true somewhere in the country. In saying this, note though, how the saying cannot be reversed, for something that is true in one place in China does not have to be true across China. Furthermore, the situation there is fragile. At any point in time, the political winds are liable to change directions. In this, there are sometimes occurrences, which are difficult to explain, such as the recent cross-burning by the police in Wenzhou (McKenzie 2014). With such happenings, our Chinese brothers and sisters are also mystified by the apparent arbitrariness of the actions of the Chinese authorities. As a result, the topic of persecution is a difficult but not impossible one to address.

However, in interacting with China, the West needs to understand the full picture in order to make well-grounded decisions. Based on these insights, the Western church will be better equipped in order to support the efforts of organizations working in China, more informed in reading the various media stories in the Western world, and better prepared for actually going to work in China in today's context.

Understanding Today's Context

The question for Western Christians is: where is China today with regards to Christians or Christianity? From the first moment that Christianity entered China through the Nestorian missionary endeavors around the 600s, there have been times of peace and flourishing for the

Chinese church, but also times of persecution pulling the church apart (Bray 2012). For example, the 1800s were scattered with various instances of persecution. At the beginning, from 1724 to the 1840s, Christianity was illegal in China and Christians were constantly in fear of persecution (Bays 2012). Other difficult times often referred to are the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Yet, there have also been prosperous seasons. For example, the years following the Boxer Uprising were surprisingly positive for the Christians as the Christian blood that was spilled earned the respect of the Chinese who were watching (Bays 2012).

Christianity in China blossomed like never before as a passion for reaching the Chinese people was unleashed. Especially, the Chinese Christians stepped up to the plate and took ownership of developing Christianity (Bays 2012). Another encouraging manifestation was the conversion to Christianity of political leaders such as Sun Yat-sen (Bays 2012).

So what does it look like today? Might persecution have become the exception rather than the norm? If so, why is the most common narrative in the West one of persecution? In this following section, I wish to explore the persecution stories existing in the West. Where have they come from? How have they developed?

First, I hope to look at the imprint the past has had on China. Next, the cultural impact cannot be ignored. Frequently, various situations are misunderstood because foreigners misinterpret the various cultural values. The cultural aspect also has to do with taking a look at the government's role and perspective of the situation. Moreover, some of the statistics on persecution shed light upon the situation as well. Finally, I want to share a personal story as an illustration of misinterpretation.

History of China with the West

Evergreen's story as mentioned before is a beautiful example of how a testimony from the past reaches into the future. While this organization's story is small-scale, the same dynamics are at work in the bigger picture. When Westerners discuss China or work within the Chinese context, it is of vital importance that they realize how they have been perceived in the past. Sadly enough, much of China's interaction with the West has not been positive. Frequently missionaries have gotten themselves on the wrong side of the argument. They have often stood by the political concerns of their own countries, without always realizing how this witness communicates to the Chinese. For example, during the Opium Wars (1839–1842), the West's main moneymaking export into China was opium. This illegal trade occurred against China's wishes and when the Chinese decided to take a stand, the Western powers forced a treaty upon them. During this time, the Christians in the West believed that the Western agenda was God's will and thus they played a major role in forcing China's hand (Bays 2012). This however resulted in a destructive witness, as the Chinese saw the foreigners forcing their way into China instead of serving the Chinese.

Another negative witness from Western missionaries occurred in the 1800s. At this time, Westerners were not allowed across China's borders. However, many missionaries refused to let this keep them from entering the country. Thus, large numbers snuck into China illegally during these years. The Chinese government was aware of this activity, and it created a spirit of distrust towards these missionaries who would not respect China's law in this matter (Bays 2012).

Such stories as the above, once written down in history, are not easily forgotten. This calls upon Western Christians today to hold onto an even greater standard in order to overcome

the memories of the past. Another result, however, is that Western Christians must also realize that the Chinese will be more cautious towards them.

Not only have the Western missionaries left a bad impression at times, but within Chinese Christianity, there have also been moments of tension. For example, during 1850-1864, the Taiping Rebellion took place, which was also considered the first Chinese Christian movement. At first the missionaries were supportive and excited for a Christian government in China. Later on, suspicion arose among the foreigners, partly because this movement did not appear to have any positive plans for the Westerners on their agenda. In the end, criticisms turned out justified, as there did arise a valid concern whether or not this group was actually Christian. In the end, the rebellion did not succeed, but in the government's understanding these were Christians and, thus, they have had more reason to be apprehensive towards Christians (Bays 2012).

Rapid growth among believers has also frequently resulted in suspicion with the Chinese leaders. A prime example was the situation for Christians in Sichuan in 1746 and 1755. In the 1700s, Christianity blossomed in this area like no other area. The government's first response was to clamp down on the situation to bring it under control. In this way, they hoped to prevent any sudden uprising, which might otherwise have occurred. After all, a large group unexpectedly appearing from among the people has the potential to become politically dangerous. After interrogations, however, they realized the Christians were nothing to worry about and these were left to continue their lives and worship (Bays 2012).

In understanding these occurrences from Christianity's entrance into China till the 1900s, the West can have a better understanding of some of the actions of the Chinese government in the 21st century. Much of what is happening today does not stand isolated in history, but is

influenced by the past. Though the leaders of China today are not those of 40 years ago and the methods of addressing the situations in their country have changed over time, what the Chinese people— especially the government— know about their history and many of their presuppositions have stayed the same or have only developed slowly in time.

Culture Impact on China

History and culture have much overlap and both play a major role in communication. Whether people are aware of it or not, each country has its own cultural expectations and values. Each country has their own style of leadership and expectations for followers. As a result, how the government manages a country is going to differ in each scenario. The West, for example, strongly believes that everyone deserves a voice. Democracy is seen as superior to any other system. This is not going to be the case in some other parts of the world. People who are not aware of these differences might work themselves into unwanted trouble or misinterpret various situations. Having worked in China for a number of years, the members of Evergreen have become familiar with some of these cultural dynamics.

Throughout China's history, foreigners have taken advantage of China. The missionaries as well have tended to be at the center of some major disturbances. Furthermore, China is very aware that if they do not keep tabs on everything, a small underground movement might develop that could overthrow the government. The officials are mindful that in other countries, such as in Romania and Poland, it was an uprising from within the Catholic Church that overthrew communism (Porter n.d., Stan and Turcescu n.d.). Thus the Chinese government views Christianity as a threat because it operates through an extensive network connecting many people across vast geographical stretches. They see Christianity as having the potential of upsetting the

power balance. They try to monitor the growth and movement of Christianity closely; as a result, there are sometimes occurrences of arrests. These might be presented as cases of persecution and sometimes they are, but more often the government is just protecting and governing the country as they deem fit. It is then the Christian's responsibility to understand this mindset and thus respond accordingly in the spirit of Romans 13 (Wiley-Blackwell, 11).

In working with the government, Evergreen has also found that there is an unwritten rule that says that the local officials must be notified when a religious meeting of 20 people or more is scheduled. In this way, the officials can oversee the various activities in their area to ensure that no social unrest happens. Only one time in the past 20 years in China did Evergreen make the mistake of forgetting to notify the government when they were having a large training. In that situation, the police came in, banned the meeting and took some people to the police station for questioning. Once the situation had been fully investigated, the officials understood the activities and let everyone go. Realize however, that if the media had reported on this event, it would have been viewed as a case of persecution.

Having seen some examples of the cultural impact, let us take a look at another “persecution” story. In 2008, a huge conference was organized for about one hundred pastors in China. Teachers from America and Korea came to share. However, the government was not notified. The local government discovered the meetings, and did not appreciate the surprise. Not wanting to deal with any trouble (as such meetings have the potential to turn into a powerful political movement), the officials responded by stopping the proceedings and detaining the foreigners (M. de Ruiter 2015). To the West, this story was presented as an example of persecution of Christians. However, was Christianity really the issue? What was the main concern? I might suggest that safety and social stability, not Christianity, was on the minds of

these officials. Moreover, these officials probably also had another cultural concern: losing face. The local officials are expected to know everything that happens in their district. However, this conference surprised them and they lost face, so they needed to act in order also to redeem themselves.

Persecution: Rampant in China or Not? (The Numbers)

Bob Fu, president of ChinaAid, is one of the leading voices in the USA concerning Christian persecution in China. Originally from China, Fu resettled in America in 1996 from where he has intervened for the Chinese Christians. For this purpose, he built ChinaAid in 2002, an organization focused on responding and helping persecuted Chinese Christians. Organizations such as his share the stories of the difficulties Chinese Christians face in China.

In 2012, ChinaAid released a report on the numbers of persecuted Christians in China. And yes, there were quite a few instances of persecution noted. However, the numbers themselves are quite positive. The highest numbers of persecution were from Beijing. In 2012, the organization counted 934 instances of persecution (China Aid Association 2013). The reason this might be viewed in a positive light is that considering the numbers of Christians in the area, this number is an extremely small percentage of the Christians. Other organizations concur: in 2013, statistics show that only 0.01% of the Christians in China faced persecution (The Economist). This means that the majority of Christians are able to live life proclaiming Christ openly.

In considering this report, realize as well that for many of these instances of persecution, the stories might not be quite as innocent as expected. I am not ruling out that in some situations Christians are persecuted. As said before, anything said about China is true somewhere at some

time. However, frequently there is more to the story. For example, in September 2009, some news came out in the West concerning the persecution of Christians in China. According to the article, the Chinese government had destroyed a Christian shoe factory in China. The police had forced their way into the factory, beaten up the occupants, thrown everyone out, and then burned down the building (400 Attack House Church Members in Shanxi Province 2009). Thus, the story was presented to the West as persecution of Christians in China.

Some members of Evergreen also heard the story, but were not content with what was shared in the media, as rumors floated around about the situation which had not been reported in the articles. Realizing that the area was not too far away from where they were stationed, they chose to speak to some eyewitnesses from the area. They wondered what the actual story was. In doing so, they discovered that the factory had been built illegally without permission from the government. In time, the Chinese government developed plans to build a road that crossed over the ground where that factory was. They approached the Christians, explained the plans, and asked the Christians to evacuate the property with compensation of a new piece of land on which they might rebuild. As China is a rapidly developing country, this type of request is fairly common. However, the Christians refused the offer and using their numbers created a stand-off with the authorities. In the end, the local government entered with force.

From our Western Christian perspective, it seems that this is persecution. However, the shoe factory was not the only place that was taken by the government due to the road-building project and these Christians were the only ones that chose to challenge the authorities. This leads to the question: was this an actual case of persecution?

I share this story because I hope that people might realize that stories, including persecution stories, are more complex than often portrayed in the media. Often only half of the

story is presented. Too often the stories are shared in order to convey the message the media wants to give. The narratives present the Christians, always innocent, trying to stand bravely against the “anti-Christian Communist Government”. In reality, though, the situations are not so black and white. In viewing the small percentage of Christians persecuted in China, it is important to realize that as much as the numbers look neat, the stories they represent have a lot of factors to consider. Some of these stories might not be about persecution of Christians per se. At times, these events take place because Christians did not respect or follow the government (laws). Some of these stories are about Christians who stepped into messy political situations or human rights debates, and thus ended in a predicament. Westerners who only see the problem from a distance need to be careful when saying that something happened simply because of the persecution.

Interpreting Motives

On a personal scale, being culturally aware is vital as well. Often times, short-termers share their experiences in China through a lens which sees persecution around every corner. Yet, are they even well enough informed about the situation to evaluate their experiences accordingly? For example, one girl shared a story of her short-term mission trip, which had been filled with excitement and danger. She flew to Beijing from the States, and then took the train to the place of her internship. Her friends had warned her not to buy anything to eat on her travels for fear of becoming sick with foreign foods. However, by the time she had reached Beijing, she had finished her last energy bar and was starving. She found her train and, once seated, realized that a female police officer was watching her. Aware that she was “being followed,” she became extremely cautious. Before long the police officer came over to her and invited her to lunch.

Since she was starving, she accepted. They moved over to the dining car, and over lunch, she felt that the police officer seemed to interrogate her. She asked inquisitive questions such as, “Where are you from?” and “Why are you here?” The girl realized the precarious situation she was in, and so she refrained from giving away too much information. When she arrived on site, she told her missionary friends about this “follower”.

As my new friend shared her story, some various points stood out. I have grown up in China. The “danger” in this story only resulted because my new friend was viewing the situation through a “persecution” lens. However, with just a couple of cultural explanations, one might see that this is the most friendly, innocent story imaginable. Any Caucasian will always stand out as a foreigner amidst the masses of the Chinese. It is extremely hard to go unnoticed. It is impossible not to be watched by the police or by the little kid on the street. Furthermore, the Chinese mindset is focused on development and “the next step”. Every Chinese wants to improve their English as it is the key to the future. If they can speak English, many doors will open. Thus, foreigners will frequently be approached by Chinese whose only wish is to practice their English. This Chinese officer was probably a friendly lady with the best intentions who just wanted to talk to the foreigner and practice her Chinese. Furthermore, take a second look at the questions that were asked. Does not any human being ask such questions when trying to get to know a stranger? In America, the girl would not have been surprised or intimidated by the questions.

In putting the “persecution” lens to the side, the situation is not only seen as very innocent, but also very friendly. Ultimately, the circumstances portray the picture of a friendly police woman reaching out to the foreign girl. Frequently, in my travels, I have seen the same friendliness. Just this past Christmas, I flew back to China. Once I landed in Taiyuan, I realized

that I had to go up to the second floor in order to be picked up. As I stood in the airport looking lost and bewildered, a middle-aged cleaning lady walked up to me. She asked if I needed help and I explained my predicament. Not only did the lady point me to the stairs, but she took my suitcases (which were quite heavy) and helped me drag them up the stairs. When people reach beyond their personal suspicions, a whole new China opens up.

Another area, which needs to be addressed, concerns the fear that many foreigners in China have about being followed or watched or listened to. After the Cultural Revolution, this was definitely the case, for the Cultural Revolution had brainwashed people to be wary of the foreigners (Chang 2003). This attitude took time to change and initially the Chinese were wary of the foreigners entering their borders, watching them carefully. However, now the Chinese government is not concerned primarily with the foreigners within their borders, but the potential dissidents that might disrupt their society like the Uyghurs in Western China. As those who have kept up the China's news understand, this people group has become disruptive to the Chinese society in order to attempt to gain independence.

However, even if the government decided to keep close tabs on all of the Christians within China's borders, is there any thing that foreigners can do about this? One look at the developments in technology worldwide and people might realize that it is impossible to hide anything anymore! One can be sure that China is up to date and has probably even surpassed some of the Western developments. With the current sophistication of technology, it is impossible to keep anything secret from the government. Missionaries will often bend over backwards to keep things hidden, but it is useless. The Chinese government is going to know!

For instance, some of our missionary friends will use code-language in order to share messages. Instead of writing "God," they choose to write "Boss". A friend from the Dutch secret

intelligence service pointed out how any government would be able to decipher the code with access to a mere handful of emails. In the past, those methods might have worked. Today, they are not going to pass the test. Moreover, if any government wants someone out of the country, they do not need “proof” of anything in order to kick someone out. They can just deny someone a visa. As a result, the small safety precautions are not going to make much of a difference.

What is Possible Today?

If much of the Western narrative does not do justice to China's situation, what is happening today? Since the last major persecution during the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong, China has been opening their doors slowly. Deng Xiaoping, leader after Mao, was primarily concerned with bringing China up from the ashes. As he sought to remedy the disasters of the Cultural Revolution, his concern was not religion, and he was not wasting any time in trying to control or suppress various religions. Thus, there was new “freedom” for the Christians (Bays 2012).

Soon churches were opening, and Christians were able to once again worship God in front of all. Today, people are not needing to be restrained by fear so much. The young Christians are freely able to discuss their faith by phone or e-mail and share bible studies online. There are multiple webshops selling Christian books online and some churches even run their own websites. All over China millions of Christians of both registered churches and the so-called house churches meet in freedom together each Sunday of the week. There are many cases in which land that was confiscated by the government in the high days of communism is being returned to the church. Church buildings have been restored and given back or compensation was received to build new ones.

Another major change is the availability of Christian literature and Bibles all over China. There are a few hundred legally operating Christian bookstores all over China and Bibles are even available in the some of the government bookstores. Moreover, the Chinese people do not have to walk to the bookstore to obtain a Bible, but they could just choose to download the Bible app onto their phones. In addition to Scripture, there are many other apps with Christian content and music. Also, there are websites in Chinese, run by Chinese that sell over 2000 Christian book titles. People can order on-line and receive the books anywhere in China. An example of this is baojiain.com (报佳晋).

In the last few years Christians have been able to open over twenty theological seminaries and foreign teachers have been allowed to teach at those schools. Apart from these positive changes for the churches, maybe the biggest positive change is how more and more Christians are being found amongst the political leaders from the local to national level. Numerous intellectuals and even Party members are Christians and openly profess their faith. A good example is Mr. Liu who is in the China Social Science department in Beijing.

Many of these changes were made possible due to Deng Xiaoping's reform. He set into motion a new set of guidelines concerning religions in China. On one side, this new ruling, Document 19, allowed for more freedoms for the Chinese. At the same time, though, Document 19 was a bit vague, and liable to various interpretations. As a result, while moving the situation forward for Christians, the circumstances have become very unpredictable. Since the publishing of this document, nothing else has been written, which leaves Christians in a somewhat precarious position (Bays 2012). Though the winds are positive at this time, this ruling does leave Christians vulnerable to persecution returning.

Understanding the Narrative Present in the West: Stating my Hypothesis

So with so many positive changes in China, how come our Western narrative does not include these parts of the story? How has our perspective of China formed itself? How has the common narrative of China become the one of a persecuted church? In the rest of this paper, I hope to give four venues for consideration. Having lived in the West for the past five years, I have noticed a pattern in sources from where people appear to get their information.

First, I hope to point to the past. In China's past, as mentioned previously, there has been much persecution. There have been numerous difficult times. Many missionaries and Chinese, such as Brother Yun (*The Heavenly Man*), have written biographies on all that has happened to them. Randy Alcorn's *Homecoming* is another such example. These have become quite popular in the West. However, people do not always seem to realize the context of these books is not today's China. For example, Brother Yun, born in 1974, was arrested a total of 3 times. The last time he walked out of prison was in 1997. I have frequently noted this in discussing China with people. The stories on their minds have been those such as Brother Yun and are the ones they quote freely. Even as I was preparing for this presentation, I noticed this pattern. After sharing my topic, numerous people would often point to those stories as good sources for my paper. However, the stories of the past are not the stories of today. Many of my friends read and quote those stories and, thus, form an outdated picture of China in their mind.

Not only these past experiences, but even current missionaries tend to add to this picture of China. As much as it does not sound spiritual, the stories missionaries tend to share with their supporters back home are going to be the extreme cases. We all do this in our daily lives. We tend to share the exciting parts of life, even more so when we are trying to raise support. Thus, missionaries keep the secrecy and the excitement in their stories, maybe overemphasizing some

minor details. (Many of my missionary friends would concur.) So in missionary presentations, I know from experience that it is easy to exaggerate just a little bit or to give the most extreme picture. However, this does not always create the most accurate picture.

My former teacher who ran the small school in China also pointed this out one time after returning from furlough. During her time back in the United States, she had given the presentation of her work in China at one of her supporting churches. On this particular Sunday, the church had arranged for a large number of missionaries to come up one after the other to give their presentation. However, right before my teacher got up to give her presentation, a missionary pilot walked up and shared his exciting stories in aviation with Bibles being translated for whole tribes. Once my teacher heard that story, she was ready to give up on her presentation. She understood reality. She knew that after that exciting story, the competition was just too great for her story of teaching a handful of Sunday school teachers and missionary kids in China.

In this way, our stories represent the highlights and lowlights of being a missionary. Even if nothing exciting has happened in the past weeks or months on the field, missionaries will find the one exception to share. They know what their audience is hoping to hear, and the listeners interpret the exciting accounts as the standard; thus, the picture is formed in the West.

Finally, the Internet has had a large impact on the Western persecution narrative. Which websites are frequently quoted when discussing Christians in other countries? Voiceofthemartyrs.com, China Aid, etc. What do the names of these websites tell? They are going to be focused on the persecution stories. Their mission is to tell the story of the persecuted Church. People go to these websites to be informed about the persecution situation in other countries. They approach these stories as if they are the norm. However, if thinking one step

further, people might realize that these websites and organizations have an agenda. They are focused on the persecution. So they are going to present the story whether it is the norm or the exception. There is no room on these websites for stories of Christianity flourishing in freedom.

The media is placed in quite a predicament because bad news sells and good news does not. My father, Marc de Ruiten, spoke with one of the Dutch reporters for NOS (Dutch News TV) in Beijing concerning this topic, challenging them to present a positive story. NOS took him up on his challenge and proceeded to present my father's successes with business as missions (BAM) in China. This then led to the beginning of a website of positive news stories (Zwart). As mentioned before though, good news does not sell, and hardly anyone visits this website of good news.

Conclusion: So What Now?

Most of what the West seems to have associated with China in the past years is the persecution narrative. However, I hope that through these past pages, the Western community might be challenged in their thinking. I am not claiming that there is no persecution; however, might there be a chance that persecution is not the norm anymore for China? Might there be lots of joy and hope as well? Is there actually relative freedom, maybe even more so than in some Western countries?

From what I have experienced and heard, the doors to China are wide open right now! However, might the West not be seeing the possibilities by living in the past or being misinformed? One of the hardest aspects of the China's mission field is that it is not consistent. The needs change. The contexts change. Our challenge is to take note and change with the circumstances.

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