

## RECONCILIATION REPORT

# Riding the Silk Road



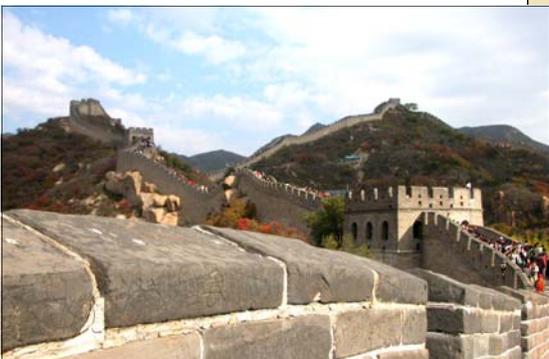
Through the kindness of friends, in October I sat in on meetings with five groups of house church leaders. They represented between twenty and twenty-five million Chinese Christians of independent charismatic leaning, originating only from the 1970s and 80s! In 2005 there were approximately 110 million Christians in China (World Christian Database). I asked about their mission activities and plans. Since the 1980s, God has used visions,

overseas Chinese and American preacher Dennis Balcomb, together with the heritage of a missions vision dating back to the 1920s in the form of the "Back to Jerusalem" movement, to convict these fellowships of the need to evangelize inside and outside China (see [backtojerusalem.com](http://backtojerusalem.com)). They intend to take the Gospel west through Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic nations—on the Silk Road all the way back to Jerusalem, on the feet of tens of thousands of missionaries.

One group has forty-five single missionaries serving in Cambodia, Pakistan, Burma, Yemen and Cambodia. Another has trained 300 cross-cultural workers, serving primarily in minority tribes. Yet another has three workers in Pakistan and a couple in Africa. I had the privilege of teaching 35 missionary students for an hour, but could not take pictures of any faces, nor could church leaders be photographed. Chinese are so ubiquitous globally and secularized that they are not expected to be missionaries. About 41% of Chinese are classified as "non-religious" (World Christian Database). Missionaries from one set of house churches receive about \$150 per month, plus rent for two years. It's hoped that churches they plant will then support them. I asked the leader of about 7 million believers, if his people were resistant to serving cross-culturally. At first he didn't understand the question. He replied that they will go to the hardest places—even to Afghanis and Japanese—the latter widely despised by Chinese.

Missionary training is secret and is generally two-three years in duration. There are at least four known larger missionary training facilities. One group has three campuses, rotating them as security requires. A leader told us that persecution has been around so long, that they simply don't care about it. Imprisonment has been common. Annually police come and question family members about the whereabouts of leaders.

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Chinese noticing rural immigrants to Beijing, just arrived on the sidewalk, across from Tiananmen Square.



The fellowships with which we had contact were rural in origin but all five are targeting immigrant workers, factory workers and urban ministry within China. City-dwellers now comprise almost half of the Chinese population. Since the cost of living in cities is extremely high compared to that of village life, this is a tremendous financial challenge. One sub-group has sent missionaries to 200 of the 600 primary Chinese cities. Creative strategies are used. One fellowship bought adhesive bandages and freely dispensed them to construction workers who needed them, while sharing the Gospel.

All five fellowships are primarily engaged in church planting and in consequent leadership training. A brother heading churches in Shanghai described how he and five others came to Shanghai in 1992. Each set a goal to win a specific number of people to the Lord in the coming year. Sixteen years later there are 4,000 believers and 120 house churches from those efforts. Another group of house churches has grown in 32 years to about 850,000, in 3400 house churches, with 300 fulltime church overseers. For comparison, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA reported about 850,000 members in 2002. They were founded in 1870 (Statistical Abstract of the US: 2007, Table 74; www.c-m-e.org).

I read the book *China, Inc.*, by Ted Fishman while on the trip. Their economy on afterburner is illustrated by the sock industry in Zhejiang Province. Schoolteacher Hong Dongyang began the first sock factory there in 1970. By 2003 that province produced 8 billion pair of socks, a third of global output (p. 70, 2006 ed.). China's economic power can be frightening, but I came home thrilled that a significant percentage of Chinese Christians are as aggressively extending the Kingdom of God as their compatriots are in producing Chinese goods. I can't help



thinking that if the American church, and the African American church, with its own history of persecution (yet having a unique entré among people of color), will not obey the command to go into all the world, the Chinese are preparing. Jim



### Prayers Requested by Chinese Christian Leaders:

1. God to raise up faithful leaders and high-quality missionaries
2. Wisdom to reach university students
3. Funds for Bibles (at least 270,000/year), funds to support and visit their missionaries, to print training materials and to support and transport leaders.
4. For children's ministry resources
5. For unity in the house church movement, particularly among older members
6. For excellent theological training of leaders
7. To stop bondage to ancestors

