

The Chinese Have Rounded Up Another Christian Pastor

Is Chinese President Xi Jinping launching a new Cultural Revolution in his country? Judging from the near-constant deluge of reports of Christians being arrested, it's certainly possible.

From 1966 to 1976, Mao Zedong instituted the Cultural Revolution to purge remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Chinese Communist Party. It eventually was declared to be responsible for "the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic."

That doesn't mean Xi wouldn't be willing to try his own version.

Christianity in China predates the People's Republic by more than 12 centuries. In 1949, there were just 4 million Christians in the country. But, since the "easing" of restrictions—Chinese Christians are still among the most persecuted in the world—that number has grown to more than 31 million.

And they're bucking against government controls over their religious practices.

Chinese over the age of 18 are permitted to join a Christian church if it is registered with the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church, China Christian Council or the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Church. But underground house churches are popping up everywhere, prompting harsh crackdowns by the government.

Open Door USA, which monitors the persecution of Christians around the world, has this to say about the situation for Chinese Christians:

The campaign of breaking down crosses in the Zhejiang province has ended, but church meetings continued to be disrupted in several provinces. The new NGO law and the new draft regulations on religion are signs for tightening control on Christians in particular. As Christians are the largest social force in China not controlled by the Communist Party, there are increasing efforts to bring them under state control. Historical Christian communities (including government-controlled churches) and non-traditional Protestant Christian communities are monitored and limited in their freedom of religion, the communities of converts to Christianity—very small groups of Christian converts from Muslim or Tibetan background—are particularly targeted.

Now ChinaAid is reporting the most high-profile arrest of a Christian pastor since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Gu “Joseph” Yuese, the former pastor of China’s largest state-run megachurch, was formally arrested last weekend by a local public security bureau in China’s Zhejiang province.

Gu, the former chairman of the Hangzhou Municipal China Christian Council, a local branch of the China Christian Council, has been charged with embezzlement of nearly \$1.6 million. It is more likely, however, his arrest is related to his opposition to the forced demolition of church crosses in the province.

In January of last year, he was ousted from his position as senior pastor of Chongyi Church, China’s largest Three-Self Church. At the time, government officials said it was done to facilitate better management of official churches, improvement of their relationship with the provincial government and better circulation of prominent Christians who are in charge

of churches.

A few days later, Gu was arrested for the first time and placed in one of the nation's notorious "black jails." He was released on bond two months later and remained under house arrest until he was re-apprehended last weekend. {eoa}