

China's House Churches Continue Growing in Face of Persecution

When Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang officially take over as the president and the premier of China in March next year, will anything change for that country's millions of Christians who are part of the **house church movement**? This question, which many are asking, must not overlook China's political system.

While the names of the new leaders were officially announced this month, the succession actually began five years ago when Xi and Li were anointed as Hu Jintao's and Wen Jiabao's successors respectively. They were groomed all these years to become the top leaders of the world's second-most-powerful country.

There is little room for anything significant to happen suddenly in China's politics. What is expected most from a new leadership is to maintain the continuity, while all major policy changes—with long-term planning—are made by consensus. Therefore, no individual has the power to take a major decision.

As far as **religious freedom** is concerned, Chinese government's attitude toward an "unchecked" growth of the house church movement is likely to remain unchanged in the coming years. The movement comprises "unofficial" churches that operate outside of the government-controlled confederations like the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council.

This explains why the Shouwang Church—which began as a home Bible study in 1993 and rose to become one of the largest house churches in 2007—is being persecuted by authorities. The church owns a floor in the Daheng Science and Technology Tower in northwest Beijing's Zhongguancun area, but authorities have

prevented the church from using the property. The church has been meeting in a park for more than a year, despite sporadic arrest and detention of its members during services.

Earlier this month, seven Christians from a house church in Henan Province were charged with engaging in activities of “Shouters,” a **cult** group that was founded in the 1960s in the United States and was banned by the Chinese government in the 1980s, according to the China Aid.

Catholics who leave the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA)—the body created by the communist authorities—also face persecution. For example, Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin has been under house arrest in his seminary on the outskirts of Shanghai since July 7, according to *Vatican Insider*.

Authorities oppose even official churches if they seek to resist moves of the government. For instance, Chengjiao Street Three-Self Church in the northeastern city of Yushu in Jilin Province was recently denied permission to stage a public protest against the planned and allegedly illegal eviction and demolition of their church property by real estate developers, China Aid reported on Nov. 26.

Ryan Morgan, International Christian Concern’s regional manager for Southeast Asia, said, “The only choice has been to worship illegally and face the threat of harassment, arrest, torture and imprisonment. Tens of millions of Christians in China are still forced to do this today.”

However, China’s churches appear to be strong enough to continue to grow both in numbers and spiritual depth in the face of persecution.

[Click here](#) for the original article by International Christian Concern.