What is God doing in China today?
A marvelous patchwork of paradox!

Revival ~ Unreached
Arguably, the greatest revival since Christ came to earth is happening in China today! Every day, an estimated 20,000 or more Chinese are becoming Christians. When Communism took over China in 1949, after a century of missionary work, there were less than 1 million born-again believers; now there is an est. 70 million or more!

For the first time in China's 5000-year history, university students, scholars, and intellectuals are truly open to the gospel, and coming to Christ in significant numbers. Healings and other miracles are frequently reported. Many Chinese evangelists, often brave young peasant girls in their teens, are going to unreached parts of their country planting churches.

There are many left unreached. Operation World estimates that at least 500 million Mainland Chinese have never even heard the name of Jesus even one time. Most believers have no trained pastor, and millions lack a Bible. Cults and heresies are rampant. Many large/small minority groups remain almost completely unreached. For example, the 8.6 million Hui have about 50 believers, the 7.2 million Uyghurs have about 100, the 4.6 million Tibetans have about 400, and the 30,000 Pumi have none known.

Closed ~ Open
The "front door" is mostly closed. China does not allow "missionaries" or "missionary" activity. Neither Chinese nor foreigners are allowed to evangelize or disciple openly, outside government-designated buildings, areas and leadership. A number of Chinese pastors of unregistered churches are in prison, and more than a few expatriate Christians have been expelled for overzealous activity. Bibles and Christian literature, while not specifically proscribed, in practice are not allowed to be imported.

However, the "back door" is wide open. It is not illegal to be a Christian, except for Communist Party members and the military. Simply being a Christian does not usually result in serious persecution for the average Chinese. There are many open churches and meeting points sanctioned by the TSPM. Amity Press prints Chinese Bibles for official distribution, but these are not accessible to most rural believers.

Hundreds and even thousands of positions are open for expatriate Christians to live in China as teachers of English (China has "English fever"), foreign experts, language students, businessmen, etc. Many discreet opportunities for personal ministry result in influential Chinese coming to Christ. Humanitarian work likewise opens many doors.

Tourist visas are readily available to visit China for 30 or even 60 days. Prayer, Bible delivery, personal ministry (many Chinese are eager to practice English/meet foreigners) are fruitful. Radio broadcasts from outside China are very fruitful for evangelism and discipleship.
Spiritual Hunger ~ Materialism

Chinese often describe their hearts as "empty" and "dark." Much of the hold of traditional Chinese religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—was weakened by the anti-supernatural propaganda of Communist education... *(read more)*

Despite the widespread pervasiveness of "Communism," however, hardly anyone in Mainland China believes in it nowadays. The "Hundred Flowers" experience in 1957, the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958-61, the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, and the current corruption, have all thoroughly disillusioned the population.

The net result has been a deep spiritual vacuum. Without a moral foundation, the resulting rise in divorce, crime, dishonesty, prostitution, corruption, etc., is alarming to many Chinese. At the same time, the expulsion of foreign missionaries soon after 1949 and the current fascination with all things Western have together greatly diminished resistance to Christianity as a "foreign" religion. God has sovereignty sent a great move of His Spirit at this time of great hunger and openness!

Many forces are competing to fill the vacuum. The tremendous growth of the Chinese economy since Deng Xiao Ping’s policies ("it is glorious to get rich!") were implemented beginning in 1979 has resulted in relative prosperity; many Chinese are intoxicated with this sudden availability of wealth. Materialism is perhaps the greatest threat to the current revival.

At the same time, Buddhism and neo-Confucianism are making a comeback, also vying for the hearts of China. Many non-Han minorities remain very resistant to any spiritual change.

Registered ~ Unregistered Churches

To register or not to register, that is the question and it divides Chinese and expatriate ministries alike.

Registering with the government offers the advantages of working openly, being "legal," and relative safety from persecution. The spiritual quality of registered churches and pastors varies widely. Some are strongly Biblical, some are more political shams; some are restricted and monitored heavily, some left more alone. Change can occur suddenly and unpredictably. Unquestionably, there are in fact many godly people in registered churches and the 17 registered seminaries and Bible schools, yet they have serious limitations.

Some areas find registration virtually impossible, due to regulatory obstacles such as having a full-time building or a TSPM/CCC seminary trained pastor, arbitrary disapproval, etc. Worse, registered churches face a variety of restrictions, including: not teaching people under age 18; severely limited evangelism; no activity outside designated buildings, areas and leadership; prohibition against promulgating healing, the Second Coming, and some other topics; baptisms only once/year; no non-TSPM materials. Many Chinese consider submitting to political control (esp. the officially atheistic Communist Party) over the church to be
spiritual compromise; others refuse out of fear of future changes in policy with possible persecution.

Unregistered churches have more spiritual freedom-if less political freedom. They have generally more spiritual vitality, and are more evangelistic. They also have more heresy. Failing or refusing to register leaves these "house" or "family" churches open to the accusation of being unpatriotic, criminal, or subversive.

The vast majority of Chinese believers choose to remain unregistered. Many thousands of those who have registered later become disillusioned and leave TSPM/CCC churches for unregistered ones. However, under the pressure of an intense government campaign, many unregistered churches are now registering, as well. Generally, minority groups with Christian congregations are less restricted than the Han majority, and registration presents far less of a problem. Examples are Lisu, Korean and some Miao.

Partnership with expatriate believers is especially difficult for unregistered churches, and very risky. Such partnership exacerbates the government's misconception that Christians are related to foreign powers and thereby disloyal to China. Yet spiritual partnership is needed to provide Bibles, training and vision. Chinese believers are asking for assistance!