

Former CHP Leader's China Report **By Ron Gray**

In November, Janet and I were honored to be included in a small group of Canadians among the 99 people over age 65 invited by the Chinese government to participate in China's first annual Chongyang Festival in Beijing October 23-29. The name Chongyang ("Double 9") reflects the fact that the Festival is held on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. The Canadian organizers said they had chosen us because, as recently-retired participants in Canadian politics (as Leader of the CHP for 13 years, with Janet as my Executive Assistant), we would have insight into government policies impacting care for the elderly.

In 1982, the United Nations urged member nations to give special attention to the needs of the elderly; 15 years later, China declared "*Chongyang Day*" a day for recognition of the elderly. This year, the government of China staged the first festival of what is intended to be an annual event devoted to recognizing the needs of the elderly.

China is the first nation in the UN to respond so fully to the 27-year-old resolution—probably because, next to Japan, China has the most rapidly-aging population in the world. Demographers predict that by 2020, the average age in China will be older than in North America.

One reason for this demographic trend is China's "one-child-per-family" policy. But China is unique only in having a government policy that enforces the trend of population decline; all the rest of the industrialized world is voluntarily on the same demographic treadmill to oblivion, with fertility rates that have plunged to between 1.2 and 1.9 children per woman. (A fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman is needed to maintain existing population levels.) Canada's fertility rate is now 1.66, up only slightly from 1.5 five years ago (Quebec is still only at 1.2); America and France are at 1.9, but much of their fertility is attributable to recent immigration (in the USA from Latin America; in France from Muslim nations); Italy, Spain and most of the Baltic states are around 1.2.

Demographers predict that within a generation or two, there will be almost no native French left in France, almost no native Italians remaining in Italy, almost no Spanish Spaniards in Spain. Russia is losing population at the rate of 700,000 a year.

This global population trend produces an inverted age pyramid: in China, for example, one young worker typically helps to support two parents, and those three people support four grandparents. This makes government policies on care for the aged, and their role in society, critical for their future.

The UN Population Fund has warned the threat of depopulation could plunge the world into a global depression by 2040 or 2050. By 2020, population growth will have peaked at a global total of nine billion, and we will enter a depopulation trend steeper and deeper than the population growth in the last half of the 20th century. This depopulation trend confirms the urgent need for the CHP's pro-natalist policies. Economist Adam Smith noted 250 years ago that expanding populations are always associated with economic growth, contracting populations with depressions.

Our five-day visit to Beijing was illuminating: because I have long held views sharply opposed to many policies of the Chinese communist government, I have been inclined to consider China another example of the failed policies of Marxism, like the Soviet Union. But what I saw in China was not what I had anticipated.

For one thing, I quickly realized that the monolithic centralized power of China is not the same as the culture and the people of China. John Naisbitt, the author of *Megatrends 2010*, says that since the days of Deng Xiaoping, Beijing's goal has been "to liberate the people [from a history of feudalism and foreign exploitation] before democratizing the government." One of the "old guard" of the Chinese Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping became Secretary General in 1954, but was purged by Mao Tsedong in 1966 for his strong objections to the excesses of the Great Leap Forward. By 1974, however, Deng had been "rehabilitated" and returned to power. After Mao's death in 1976, Deng became *de facto* leader of China, until his own death in 1997. It was Deng who inaugurated the move to a free-market economy within a communist political state.

As China has leapt into the ranks of the world's leading economies—next year it is predicted to become the Number Two economy in the world—the draconian policies of Chairman Mao have been relaxed. Our young

translator told us the “one child” policy has already been modified: if he, an only child, marries a girl who is also an only child, they will be allowed *two* children.

Beijing is an astonishing city for anyone whose previous comparisons for North American cities have been with the old cities of Europe. The population of the Chinese capital is equal to half the total population of Canada, and most of Beijing’s buildings and highways are under 20 years old. The city is modern and clean—its airport is surely among the finest in the world, spacious and modern.

The model seniors’ village to which we were taken was a beautiful facility, with bright, modern, well-furnished rooms; full medical services; extensive recreational facilities; a state-subsidized store with some goods at half the regular prices; and offering residents independent or assisted living. The cost to stay in this modern centre would be under \$3,000 (Cdn) per month. (China is looking for investors to fund many more such facilities.)

This facility was established primarily to accommodate seniors whose children don’t live close enough to care for them; but our young translator told us that filial piety remains a very strong cultural value in China, and most would rather take their elderly parents into their own homes.

In the poorer city neighbourhoods, and in the countryside, a large segment of the population still struggles to join China’s burgeoning economy: from our bus we saw an entrepreneur cutting scrap metal at curb-side with an acetylene torch—without goggles or gloves; we also saw older women whose job it is to sweep the sidewalks with home-made brooms. In the countryside, subsistence farming is still the lot of many families.

R.J. Rummel, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Hawaii, in his book *Death by Government*, lists the toll of Chinese killed by their own government since the 1949 Revolution (almost 38 million, not including forced abortions and infanticides), second only to the number of citizens murdered by the Leninist-Stalinist communist government of the Soviet Union (almost 47 million). Although we may rightly deplore such excesses of Chairman Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, we can also see that, since the free market reforms of Deng Xiaoping, life is now getting better for those who survived. For many others, alas, life is still as Thomas Hobbes described life of natural man: “Nasty, brutish, and short.”

The remarkable resilience of the culture and people of China, who have had to endure and overcome oppression often in more than 5,000 years of history, deserves more credit for the progress seen in China today than does Marxism.

Chinese television news and public affairs broadcasting shows a high level of excellence and expertise. (You can see examples for yourself via the Internet on CCTV-9, in English, at <http://english.cctv.com/01/index.shtml>)

Two news stories on CCTV, while we were there, marked the new policy of openness to the world: one involved exchanges of high-level military leaders between the People’s Liberation Army and the United States military; and a relaxation (on both sides) of rules for exchanging journalists between China and Taiwan. The Chinese government says its growing military might is primarily defensive, and their increasing openness and transparency in exchanges with Western military leaders supports the idea that their motives are peaceful.

One of the remarkable features we found in talking with both educators and ordinary people in China was that many younger Chinese, in addition to striving to get onto the materialist bandwagon, are also reaching back to rediscover their cultural roots.

Before our trip, Richmond Pastor Joy Guo gave a presentation (which we will attach) that prepared us to better understand the cultural and linguistic roots of the Chinese. She says there is a deep root connecting China to Israel, seen in ancient pictographs as well as in conversational phrases such as “Heaven knows.” She links the scripture that predicted Abraham’s seed would become “as the stars of heaven” with the fact that China now has the largest population in the world. Such connections to the children of Israel remained hidden after Confucianism and Buddhism came to China 2,500 and 2,000 years ago, respectively.

We met Christians in China who assured us that government policy now officially incorporates religious freedom—although it still maintains China’s “three self” standards: self-financed, self-led, and self-propagating (i.e., no foreign funds, leaders or missionaries). Ironically, they told us that the plight of Christians in China has

often been made worse by aggressive and outspokenly critical foreign Christians, trying to bring their cultural values into China.

During the official Chongyang Festival welcoming ceremonies, 14 of the Christians among the 99 delegates sang *Amazing Grace*—and it was broadcast all across China on state television! Some of the same group gave brief addresses on the theme of nine words assigned by Pastor Joy: *shi li* (joy); *ping ahn* (peace); *jan kang* (health); *neng li* (strength); *zhu hei* (wisdom); *zuen guei* (honor); *shi shi* (faith); *pahn wang* (hope) and *i shi* (love).

Our translator and guide was a wonderfully patient business student who wants to perfect his English. We had been told we could give Bibles as gifts, so we prepared one for him, which we presented the last time we saw him. In the fly-leaf we wrote: “*This book (the Bible), more than any other, has shaped the culture and language of the English-speaking world. We hope it will aid you in your studies. Love, Ron and Janet Gray.*”

Chinese Christians we met expressed confidence in the future growth of the Gospel in China, as prosperity brings a more relaxed political environment.

Would we go back to China? Yes! It was a wonderful experience and we were truly blessed to have been there.



FORMER CHP LEADER Ron Gray (centre, waving) and his wife, Janet (red jacket), photographed at the Summer Palace in Beijing, were among 99 delegates from all around the world invited to China’s First Annual *Chongyang* Festival honoring senior citizens.