

## Paper Proposal for IAMS 2020 Sydney for the Study Group on Religious Freedom

Title: “Repression, Regulation, and Respite: The People’s Republic of China’s Cyclical Interaction with Religion and Chinese Christianity”

Before 2014, some scholars, missiologists, and Chinese Christians felt that the People’s Republic of China was opening to greater religious freedom. There were signs, after years of continual improvements of waning tensions. This understanding can be cap-stoned by the late Daniel Bays’ concluding comment on the lessening of pressures fully resolving in a “. . . another decade” (see Bays 2014, 203). As Bays, and many other China scholars, show in other works, this article will discuss a more comprehensive outlook.

This paper will utilize Chinese culture, civilization, and mission history to temper both extremes of unbalanced optimism and pessimism. This paper will tackle the historical nature of Chinese civilizations traditionally governed religion through several examples. The first example is how regime legitimacy in China, often expressed as the “mandate of heaven” (*tianming* 天命), can be seen in the PRC’s concerns and actions. Second, is how the PRC reacts to one religious group has direct ramifications on other religious groups. Finally, this paper will show how religious repression can turn to respite based on the felt needs of those officials governing any one area.

The fact that the PRC, and many past Chinese governments, often oscillated between repression and respite gives a tempered understanding in which to move forward in the current climate. After 2014, ex-pats in China and mission organizations have found an “unprecedented” amount of scrutiny and repression. However, this does not necessitate pessimism or hopelessness concerning Chinese Christians and the continued growth and diffusion of their Christianity.