



# Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners



## The New Missionary Force

### Mission from the Majority World

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## Cover Photo:

The cover photos illustrate just how international mission has become. The first photo shows OMF members at the Central Thailand Field Conference in 1958. Contrast this with the second photo taken at a recent OMF Field Conference held in Thailand and it becomes clear how global OMF has become. Five continents and more than seventeen countries were represented. Nations included Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Uruguay, UK, and USA. Also noticeable is an increasing number of ethnic Asians joining from non-Asian countries.

## Archive photo source:

*The Millions* (March 1958): 27.

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# Editorial

Walter McConnell

For more than ten years mission leaders have reminded us that the gospel message is not the responsibility of one part of the world that must take it to the rest, but a task for the whole church. Mission is from anywhere to everywhere. This past October, around 300 mission and church leaders from 80 countries discussed this reality under the title of “Polycentric Mission” while attending the WEA Mission Commission Global Consultation in Panama. Interaction with a world-wide body of Christians demonstrated that mission springs from multiple centers and highlighted the shift in mission from the north and west to the south and east. This is not so much a passing of the baton from one part of the world to another but of becoming co-laborers in the gospel who shoulder the load together.

The value the WEA Mission Commission places upon the world-wide church is seen in the composition of the leadership team which includes nine people from five continents. This value was highlighted at the conference when David Ruiz was formally appointed to serve as the Executive Director of the WEA MC. Rev. Ruiz is originally from Guatemala and has served as the General Director and International President of

COMIBAM (Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana) in addition to being part of the WEA MC leadership team. May the Lord bless him and his associates as they work together to encourage and train the whole church so that it can be involved in mission.

The WEA is not the only organization that unites Christians from different parts of the globe for world evangelism and discipleship. As the cover photos show, during the past fifty to sixty years OMF has seen its membership grow from being primarily Western to the point where it includes people from many ethnic groups and countries of origin.

In this issue of *Mission Round Table* we will take up some papers from OMF’s April 2016 Mission Research Consultation on “The Future of Mission” to examine several aspects of how the Majority World has impacted mission.

In the first article, Eldon Porter highlights some major issues that need to be addressed as mission agencies and churches interact on a global scale. A paradigm shift has taken place that has included majority world people in mission, local churches taking a more active role in mission sending, the global diaspora movement, and

the interconnectedness of the modern world. As these realities force us to rethink our mission structures and way of operating, we would be wise to listen to what he has to say.

While Porter gives us a broad overview of the scene, the following two articles zoom in on mission to and from China. In the first we learn about the challenges and opportunities of doing urban ministry in China. The change that has taken place in church and society in this country is so staggering that even those who do not work there have much to learn about the needs of the cities wherever they are. The second article highlights historical and recent attempts by Chinese Christians to engage in their own mission movements. Things they have experienced, both positively and negatively, will benefit the church in other countries as they move out in mission to their own people or cross-culturally.

An interview with Patrick Fung records his reflections on some of the ideas shared in these and other papers from the Mission Research Consultation. His main concern is how these ideas that shape the future of mission impact the church in and from the Global East.

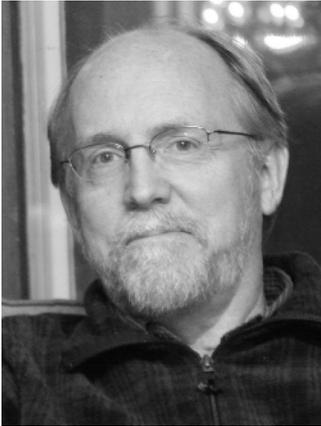
Our final article steps back in history to introduce one of the significant indigenous evangelistic movements that grew up in China in the first half of the twentieth century—the Bethel Bands. As mentioned in the article on mission movements from China, this group has encouraged many Chinese Christians today to consider their part in reaching out to others with the gospel of Christ. I hope that these articles will stimulate your thought and move you to action, no matter where you are from or where you are working, as mission is indeed from everywhere to everywhere.

Walter McConnell



Installation of David Ruiz as the Executive Director of the WEA

# Partnering with the Majority World in the Global Paradigm



## Eldon Porter

Eldon Porter has earned a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has served with SIM for 25 years, the last four as the Deputy International Director for the Americas. He currently serves as a Consultant for Global Engagement with Missio Nexus and COMIBAM.

**W**e live in an unprecedented period of mission history. Within the last twenty-five years we have witnessed a paradigm shift away from the old “from the West to the rest” model to what is now described as a mission movement “from anywhere to everywhere.” This change of paradigm poses unique challenges for mission structures that were formed in one context but now find themselves struggling to adapt to the vibrant but totally different reality of global missions today. The complexity of this paradigm shift is highlighted when a traditional western agency seeks to partner with a mission movement originating from what just decades before was a mission field.

As the paradigm shift began to unfold, many traditional agency leaders assumed that their primary challenge would simply be to discover how best to partner with the new mission structures. The assumption for some has been that if they can find a partner to serve as their sending office from the new region, address financial challenges on support levels, agree on a common language, etc. then they would be partnering with the majority world.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, it isn’t that simple.

In the context of this new paradigm, the challenge for the traditional agency is not so much in building partnerships but rather in transitioning to relevance in the new reality. It is only then that an agency, with roots in the former paradigm, will be seen as partnership or globally friendly by both the majority world missions movement as well as by those new mission stakeholders that span western and non-western contexts. Most challenges associated with partnering find their roots in an agency’s inability to make the adjustments.

## 1. Personal background

I grew up in Nigeria where my parents served for over forty years as missionaries with SIM, starting in the mid-1940s. My wife and I also served with SIM for twenty-one years in Bolivia and four years as SIM’s Deputy International Director for the Americas where I was responsible for SIM’s Canadian and US sending offices and the field work in Latin America. My many leadership roles, both on the field and at the International Office, give me first-hand experience with the struggles of a traditional agency trying to adapt to the new paradigm.

In 2009 we left SIM to focus on supporting regional and global mission networks that seek to facilitate effective ministry collaboration by the global church. My field of research has been on the theory, structures, and leadership models of networks. I manage a website called Linking Global Voices where I track over 500 networks globally.<sup>2</sup> The site serves as a resource for those seeking to identify various kinds of networks.

I also serve in an official capacity as a Consultant for Global Engagement with Missio Nexus, COMIBAM, AfMA, CRAF, and to a lesser degree the European Evangelical Missions Association, Central and Eastern European Mission Forum, and Central Asia Missions Network.<sup>3</sup>

My primary assignment with Missio Nexus has been to research the impact of the globalization of missions on traditional mission agencies. I lead workshops on this topic for both mission leadership teams as well as their boards. On a more personal basis, I serve as a sounding board for several agency CEOs as they navigate the transition.

## 2. Overview

I will begin by explaining what has caused the paradigm shift in missions and then look at four macro issues that are redefining how missions is done and the new formal and informal mission structures. I will then move on to look at the challenge of transitioning an agency into current relevance where partnerships can best flourish. There are some critical issues that all agencies are wrestling with and I will highlight what seem to be some trends taking place in this transition process. I will conclude with recommendations on how an agency may become globally friendly.

### 2.1. What caused the paradigm shift?

There are two primary factors that caused the paradigm shift in missions. The first is the growth of the majority world church and its mission force. This cannot be underestimated. Authentic, culturally appropriate expressions of believers from around the world responding to the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations are resulting in a beautiful mosaic of diverse expressions of missions. The traditional western model of an agency with both sending and field structures is no longer the norm.

Globalization is the second factor that caused the shift in paradigm. This is primarily driven by communications technology and the many services associated with it. In contrast to the past, when global communication was difficult at best, today one can hold a video chat with someone in virtually every country of the world. Technology allows the church from around the world to engage in mission both through traditional structures and (oftentimes) in new creative ways.

### 2.2. The four macro issues

Four macro issues influence the new global paradigm of missions. Note that all of these issues either need partnerships to be effective or enable partnerships to come together. This is in stark contrast to the past when mission agencies tended to function autonomously. These four macro issues call for a more open-handed partnership where equal parties come

together and decide to do something that neither could do on their own.

#### 2.2.1. The majority world church and mission movement

The first macro issue is the vibrant and rapidly growing majority world church and its mission movement. It is worth noting that those leading this movement are not wrestling with the transition issues that traditional mission agencies are wrestling with. Their structures tend to be simple, working in partnerships is the norm, and their systems tend to be more flexible. This non-western mission movement is now a reality and making its mark globally. To a great extent, they are leading the way in how missions should happen in the global paradigm.

#### 2.2.2 Direct local church involvement

The second macro issue is the desire and ability of a local body of believers to get directly involved in missions. In the past, a local church could not do missions without working through the agency. Today we see churches of all sizes from around the world involved directly in cross-cultural ministries. From the perspective of the local church, partnering with a mission agency is just one of many options. Increasingly, the leaders of the local church mission movement resist the assumption, implied at times by some agencies, that an agency/church partnership is simply for the church to “pay, pray, and stay away.” Denominational mission agencies are perhaps being most negatively affected by this direct local church involvement phenomenon.

#### 2.2.3. The global diaspora movement

The third macro issue is the global diaspora movement in which unprecedented numbers of people are moving from their culture of origin into other cultural contexts. This is impacting traditional agencies in three primary areas. First, agencies are developing a people-group strategy when in the past they were more geographically focused. Instead of targeting the geographic region where

the people group lived, they are developing outreach strategies that are fluid, tracking their target people group as they migrate. Second, traditional agencies almost always have had “sending offices” and “field or receiving offices.” Today we are seeing sending offices also serving as field or ministry supervision offices. And third, ministry in a global diaspora world is requiring that agencies collaborate with others for effective ministry outreach.

#### 2.2.4. The highly interconnected world

The fourth macro issue impacting how missions is done today is the technological resources that have resulted in a highly globalized and interconnected world. The technology driven “flattening of the world” is allowing people to communicate freely with virtually anyone, in almost any location, globally. This ability to connect leads in turn to the creation of ministry partnerships.

Here are two of many examples of how this is impacting missions. The technology-enhanced connection between the diaspora and homeland communities of a particular ethnic group argues for a partnership-dependent ministry strategy to reach both aspects of the people group. An example would be where churches in Finland and in Kenya partner with an international mission agency reaching the Somalis.

A second example highlights how this is affecting traditional mission agencies. For some missionaries, the sense of belonging within their mission agency is being replaced by the value of being connected. Riding on the back of global technology, networks are allowing individuals in one agency to connect with others in similar ministries from other organizations and from countries around the world. These informal but vibrant ministry connections between individuals who have so much in common are sometimes creating an alternate environment to which one can belong. Sometimes these networks can have greater influence on the ministry of an individual missionary than their agency leaders would like.

These four macro issues are major influencers in how missions is done

today. Rather than being annoyed by these factors, traditional agencies need to accept them and adjust to the new paradigm.

### **3. New mission structures**

It should not be surprising to find new kinds of mission structures in the global paradigm, given the vastly different contexts out of which and in which mission is taking place. The first three listed below are formal structures while the last one is a grouping of informal and less structured methods. Note that some of these represent potential partners that span both the western and the majority world.

#### **3.1 Sending and receiving**

Traditional western agencies typically had administrative structures supporting both the sending and receiving of missionaries. The sending office mobilized, recruited, typically granted membership, trained, provided member care, receipted and managed support and ministry fund donations, represented the agency before the sending church, etc. On the field the agency provided some kind of support for orientation of new missionaries, ministry supervision, accountability for use of finances, field member care, etc. An agency was considered to be “international” if it had sending offices in more than one country.

While agencies with these sending and receiving structures still exist, we see them undergoing significant changes. Many of these agencies are utilizing their sending capacity to send out their own missionaries who serve in areas where their agency does not serve, seconding those missionaries to serve with others. We are also seeing these agencies allow their field offices to receive missionaries who are sent directly from sending structures in locations where their agency does not have a sending office.

In the new paradigm, an agency’s capacity to send missionaries to serve anywhere in the world where their cause is relevant and receive missionaries from anywhere in the world into their supervised ministry context is being understood as the new definition of an international agency.

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#### **3.2. Just sending**

There are also mission structures that only send missionaries. These structures fulfill the responsibilities associated with the sending of missionaries but look for others able to serve in the receiving of their missionaries. While some of these existed in the old paradigm, primarily in Europe, today we see this model expanding across Latin America and into Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>4</sup>

There are two trends taking place with these sending only structures. The first is that rather than serving as the “sending office for their partner,” they now want to send out their own missionaries to serve in the context of an established partnership, with their missionaries maintaining dual membership. And the second trend is that these sending structures are increasingly sending their missionaries to work under national-led ministries and not just to serve with other mission structures.

#### **3.3. Just receiving**

The newest mission structures are those that only receive missionaries sent or seconded from others. These structures have no “sending offices.” They are exclusively field led and strive for excellence in their capacity to work closely with the national church in the receiving of missionaries. They talk of “creating pull” to attract partners that share their core values. They partner with different kinds of sending structures (churches or other agencies) in providing the services necessary for effective ministry on the field.<sup>5</sup>

#### **3.4. Informal structures**

I observe three different informal but very clearly defined ways that missions is being done, all of which are in some way related to the global diaspora movement. These are all potential ministry partners in the new paradigm. The first are situations where religious

persecution is driving Christians from their homes and into new areas. We see this happening with believers coming out of Central Asia (the “stan” countries) and from Iraq and Syria. In both situations we find pastors from the regions following their church members through WhatsApp and ministry visits, encouraging them to see themselves as missionaries. This is similar to the mission movement of the early church in Acts.

The second example is the situation where for economic reasons large numbers of people (including believers) move for employment, sometimes into closed countries. Examples of this are the Filipinos and Indians employed in oil rich countries. Pastors from the Philippines are sent to shepherd these young people, encouraging them to live for Christ in their work places. Some consider them to be the most significant mission force in those countries.

The third example is those involved in business as mission, the vast majority of whom are not members of any formal mission structure. There are many vibrant networks servicing these individuals.<sup>6</sup>

All of these new mission structures pose unique partnership opportunities for a traditional western agency. An understanding of the nature of each structure and the related mission force better enables an agency to explore new and dynamic partnership models.

### **4. The strategic role of networks**

Networks are perhaps the most strategic tool available to facilitate global engagement and collaboration. They are becoming recognized as the best platform from which to provide leadership and the best space or context that enables global engagement. These are not organizations but rather formal or informal groupings of totally autonomous entities that come together

around a common purpose. There is a wide variety of different kinds of networks, what some call associations or alliances.

From a historical perspective, globalization has altered the primary value of networks. In the past an individual or organization was generally motivated to associate with a particular network in order to establish his or her identity. Someone would say, “We are members of the WEA and not the WCC.” But today individuals, ministries, and organizations choose to associate with a network in a variety of ways to be more effective in ministry. Well-run networks seek to accomplish this by facilitating the sharing of information and by providing services that allow individual parties to meet and explore ways they might collaborate. The fact that huge sums of money are spent in an effort to attend network meetings illustrates their perceived value. Unfortunately, many network events are just that—a gathering—and don’t take full advantage of their potential leadership role.

There are two basic categories of networks within the evangelical world. The first are those that are defined by geography. This category of networks can be divided into three groups. The first is the evangelical alliances or the associations of evangelicals related to a specific geographic region. The second group are those networks representing the mission movements originating from the countries and regions that have an established church. The third category are networks of mission efforts focused on unreached or under-reached people in a specific geographic area such as those focused on Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and the many country-specific networks.

The second basic category of networks is those that are issue specific. These tend to be more organic by nature. These networks span any issue when it is felt that collaboration would be beneficial. The Linking Global Voices website provides an extensive list of some of the most active issue-specific networks.<sup>7</sup>

There seems to be growing intentionality on the part of traditional agencies as they engage with networks. Some assign key individuals to serve in a leadership role in a particular

network for the purpose of expanding the influence of an issue they consider strategic. Others encourage their members to get involved simply to build relationships, learn what others are doing, and to explore potential partnership opportunities.

## **5. Becoming global friendly**

We will now move from discussing the characteristics of the new paradigm to the challenge traditional agencies face in adapting to and becoming relevant in this new reality.

In the light of the vast diversity of expressions of missions, the intrinsic value of flexibility is essential if one is to become globally friendly. Traditional agencies that were developed in a paradigm in which almost all their missionaries came from fairly similar contexts (education, a common trade language, standard of living, etc.) are faced with a vastly diverse and constantly changing global context. A partnership-friendly agency is almost always one that is focused on the essentials and flexible with secondary issues.

### **5.1. Three critical issues**

As an agency navigates the process of change from one paradigm to another, it will find itself repeatedly coming back to discuss three core issues. The first is the agency’s identity. It is common for the members of an agency to think of their organization in terms of structure and policies. But as agency leaders wrestle with partnership challenges they almost always discover that difficulties in partnering are related mostly to systems and policies. For example, an agency might require a certain support level; a potential partner is from a lower economic level, lives on less, and is even willing to “live by faith.” Policies pertaining to an official language or insurance requirements often become a major stumbling block inhibiting a potential partnership. This invariably leads to the question, “What really is the agency?” Is it a set of policies, structures, and procedures that were relevant for a western context? Or is the identity of the agency tied more to its ethos, doctrinal beliefs, core values, and objectives? As long as the “we’ve always done it this way” trumps the

“this is who we are and where we are going,” building partnerships will be difficult at best.

The second core issue is the agency’s value added to potential partners. Any entity seeking to partner needs to highlight their value added for others who share the same cause. An agency’s value added is generally not their structure and policies but rather their experience, relationships, and ability to minister in the new diaspora-rich environment.

The third issue is that of membership. What is membership and to whom and under what conditions is membership granted? Every agency is different, but when membership is tied to structures, policies, and systems, it will be more difficult to truly partner with the majority world and treat their missionaries as equal. Those that stay focused on who they are and where they are going are more flexible in their concept of what is required to become a member. Discussions often center on questions such as: Can membership be tied to a commitment to a set of core values, vision statement, doctrinal statement, and a willingness to submit to agency leadership? Can a field leader grant membership? Can someone be a member of more than one organization at the same time?

## **6. Trends in becoming globally friendly**

Many traditional western agencies are trying to become partnership friendly in the new global paradigm. While each traditional mission agency is unique and approaches the transition differently, we are seeing some clear trends. All of these trends position an agency to be able to partner more freely with both the majority world and other global mission stakeholders, some of which are also coming from the West.

### **6.1. From sending to receiving**

Agencies are transitioning from being defined by their sending capacity to being led by their receiving capacity. They are consciously strengthening their capacity to manage partnerships at the field level. These include partnerships with local churches engaged from around the world, with

diaspora missionaries, as well as with various mission structures that send their missionaries to serve.

In the old paradigm an agency's sending office was central to the administrative structure and spent the vast majority of the administrative budget. Generally speaking, senior leaders were located in these offices. This made sense when most missionaries came from just a few countries. Since it is now impractical to consider establishing sending offices in each country from which the agency could conceivably receive missionaries, the strategic value of the receiving or field office has increased.

As more attention is being given to strengthen the role of the receiving offices, a growing trend is seen in sending offices intentionally downsizing and partnering more closely with the sending church. Some of the services offered by the sending office, such as receipting and financial management, training, and member care, are being outsourced.

Traditional sending offices are becoming "multi-directional." Due largely to global diaspora, traditional sending offices are finding it necessary to retool to be able also to offer services traditionally associated with the receiving offices. A growing number of these traditional sending offices are being urged to receive and supervise missionaries sent from the majority world church. These majority world missionaries are uniquely gifted to help western churches faced with immigrant communities forming in their neighborhoods.

## **6.2. From autonomy to partnerships**

Driven by the need to partner, agencies are redefining what they mean by the word "we." In the past, western agencies typically functioned as self-contained entities. Almost all functioned autonomously, working with just their own human, financial, and

leadership resources. Today, when we hear the word "we," it is increasingly associated with joint ventures where the resources of two or more parties come together to accomplish something that neither could do on their own. There is also an increasing awareness that excellence in ministry often results from effective collaboration. These partnerships are not just that which happens between two mission agency structures, one from the West and the other from the majority world. Partnerships are being developed with a wide spectrum of potential stakeholders. These include local churches, the various forms of the diaspora-related informal structures, as well as the more traditional and sometimes new mission-related structures.

We see this trend towards working in partnerships in how agencies define membership. In the past, a member was an individual who joined "the mission club." We are now seeing agencies grant membership to local churches and other structures with whom they strategically partner, making room for them at the table. Dual memberships are very common among the majority world mission movement and are growing steadily in the West.

## **6.3. From uniformity to flexibility**

One of the unique aspects of traditional western agencies was the tendency to maintain uniform standards for all members. As the majority world mission movement developed it became evident that they held different expectations on standard of living and other value-oriented issues. Most western agencies that welcome missionaries from the majority world initially try to maintain their uniformity. Before long these same agencies realize that this is not sustainable and find themselves embracing flexibility while holding fast to the core essentials and maintaining a clear focus on their overall objectives.

## **6.4. From a club to a cause**

In the past an agency tended to function as a self-contained unit which, for many, felt like a family. In this family or club, dual membership was almost unheard of and loyalty to the agency over many years was seen as a high value. But the sense of an agency's identity is changing with the collaboration around a cause redefining membership. While the sense of "family" can still be nurtured, most would say that it is different.

A clearly defined cause or even multiple causes allow(s) for flexibility in the building of the missionary team. A focus on the cause has given freedom to the makeup of the missionary team. No longer does someone involved in BAM need to do his business as part of the agency to be a member of the agency. And no longer is agency membership an option only for individuals. Today we see businesses and local churches that share the same cause, becoming part of the team.

## **7. Recommendations**

The challenge of effectively partnering with the majority world is fundamentally linked to an agency's ability to adjust to the new realities of the global paradigm. As an agency becomes more relevant in the new paradigm, they are considered to be globally friendly. Listed below are practical steps that an agency can take to position itself to partner more effectively in the new reality.

- The single most important and essential factor for transitioning a traditional western agency is a clear and uncompromising commitment by top leadership to see the transition take place. Change never comes easily and is almost always the result of focused leadership.
- Because of the nature of organizational change, it is best to empower a task force to wrestle with the challenges of transitioning the agency. The group would process the critical issues of identity, value added, and membership, in addition to other issues unique to the agency.
- It is important to come to terms with the macro issues at play within

*Agencies are transitioning from being defined by their sending capacity to being led by their receiving capacity. They are consciously strengthening their capacity to manage partnerships at the field level.*

the new paradigm. For some, the past seems almost a utopia in contrast to the challenges of the new reality.

- An agency must clarify and then intentionally promote their cause or causes for which they exist and their value added to potential partners. Agencies no longer grow just through mobilization but now also by partnering around a common cause.
- The sign of an agency having successfully adapted to the new reality is that they are seen as partnership friendly. Some refer to this as “creating pull” or attracting partners. It requires a clear understanding of one’s identity, value added, and a proactive strategy to partner with others to achieve what one could not do alone.
- The new mission structures, both formal and informal, must be understood and seen as valid expressions with which strategic partnerships can be developed.
- Agencies must understand the strategic significance of agency/church partnerships. Local churches from around the world want to and can be directly involved in missions. Exciting partnerships can result when the cause of the agency and the church align. Agencies will be granting membership to local churches in addition to individuals. Local churches typically make a longer term commitment than do individuals; they bring to the partnership a breadth and depth of commitment and resources that are unparalleled. But this only happens when the church has a seat at the table.

*The single most important and essential factor for transitioning a traditional western agency is a clear and uncompromising commitment by top leadership to see the transition take place. Change never comes easily and is almost always the result of focused leadership.*

- Thought should be given to how an agency’s structural assets should be adapted to fit the new reality. Both sending and receiving offices are becoming multi-directional.
- An agency must develop a strategy for their engagement with networks. There are two parts to this strategy, one relational and the other strategic. Every agency needs to be building and maintaining relationships globally so as to position itself to nurture partnerships. Networks provide the environment in which an agency can strategically develop and even promote their cause on a broader scale than just within their agency.
- The challenge of leading in a partnership-dependent environment has motivated some secular businesses to create the senior leadership role of Chief Collaboration Officer (CCO). Mission agencies will appoint CCOs and include in their leadership training program a significant component on leadership in a partnership environment. Building and managing multi-stakeholder partnerships is one of the most important leadership skills in today’s highly interconnected and globalized reality.

## 8. Conclusion

Over the last decades we have witnessed unprecedented change in the global factors that impact how missions is done. For the new stakeholders of missions, this is exciting. But for the leaders of traditional western agencies, these same changes are often perceived as a threat. Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, is quoted as saying: “If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near.”<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, many agencies are not keeping up with the changes that have and continue to take place in global missions. Those that manage to transition well will discover the richness of partnering in ministry with the global church. **MRT**

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<sup>1</sup> For two reasons I’ve decided to use the term “majority world” instead of “global south” to describe the non-western part of missions. First of all there are countries like Korea that are geographically located in the North but which are definitely part of the non-western mission movement. And secondly, the term majority world also emphasizes the size of the new movement in contrast to that of the West.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.LinkingGlobalVoices.com](http://www.LinkingGlobalVoices.com).

<sup>3</sup> These are various networks of the mission movements. Missio Nexus–North America [www.missionexus.org](http://www.missionexus.org); COMIBAM, the Ibero-American mission network [www.comibam.org/](http://www.comibam.org/); the African Mission Association (AfMA); CRAF–Francophone Africa; EEMA–Europe; Eastern and Central European Mission Forum (EEMF); and Central Asia Network originating from the “stan countries.”

<sup>4</sup> Examples of these are DMG, [www.dmgint.de](http://www.dmgint.de); FEDEMEC Costa Rica, <http://fedemec.net/>; PAAM Panama, <https://misionespaam.wordpress.com/>; SAMM Paraguay, <http://misionsamm.blogspot.com/>; and ProVision Chile, <http://provision.cl/>.

<sup>5</sup> PMI, or Pueblos Musulmanes Internacional, is an excellent example of this model. [www.pminternacional.org/](http://www.pminternacional.org/).

<sup>6</sup> Some of the networks serving this group are BAM Global, <http://bamglobal.org/>; OPEN Network, <https://opennetworkers.net/>; and ICWM, [www.marketplaceleaders.org/icwm/](http://www.marketplaceleaders.org/icwm/).

<sup>7</sup> Linking Global Voices lists issue-specific networks: <http://www.linkingglobalvoices.com/issue-specific-networks>.

<sup>8</sup> Ben McMan, “The Business Case for Collaboration,” 10 December 2013; <https://benmcmann.wordpress.com/2013/12/10/the-business-case-for-collaboration/>.



Digital image from <http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/170000/velka/friends-quietly-communicate.jpg>

# The Challenge and Opportunity of Urban Ministry in China

H. P.

## 1. Our urban world

We live in an urban world. During the twentieth century the world's urban population increased more than tenfold (from 220 million to 2.8 billion). Then in 2008 an historical milestone occurred when for the first time in history over 50% of the total population of the world lived in cities.<sup>1</sup> To put this in perspective, world urban population was only 2% in 1700,<sup>2</sup> and had only increased to 13.5% in 1900.<sup>3</sup> This recent rapid and steady rise in percentage of the world urban population is illustrated in figure 1.<sup>4</sup> If we look at China alone, the pace of urbanization is staggering. As one analyst has said, "The 21st century will not be dominated by America or China, Brazil or India, but by the city."<sup>5</sup>

As we seek to obey Christ's command to make disciples among all the nations, our priorities and strategies must incorporate the fact that the majority of the world is now urban. This fact need not necessarily frighten us, however. As Rodney Stark has pointed out, "Early Christianity was primarily an urban movement." While the emphasis of this paper will be on the impact of urbanization in China and the way these changing demographics must

impact our ministry strategies there, the principles could apply in any urban area in Asia. We will also explore how the impact of urbanization in China will necessitate changes in strategy even for those focused on minority peoples. The urgency and importance of making disciples in urban settings is thus true not just in China, but wherever we serve and whatever people group we focus on.

When we only look at numbers, the urbanization of China certainly presents a daunting challenge. What might be less obvious, though, is that in

terms of world missions it also provides an opportunity. The recent growth of China's urban church has naturally led to much discussion about the potential impact of missionaries from China.<sup>7</sup> When we consider that the world is now majority urban, a case can be made that the urbanization within China provides a training ground for Chinese indigenous missions. As the church in China engages with the rapid urbanization of China, the Lord is preparing it for its role in world missions. Having learned to minister in the context of extensive urbanization, China's missionaries will be better equipped to face the urban world they will encounter in mission. We too can learn from their experience to tackle the impact of urbanization in other parts of Asia.

## 2. The special context of urban China

### 2.1. The pace of urbanization

When I first went to China in the early eighties, only 20% of the population lived in cities. Yet by 2011, in just over thirty years, China's urban population surpassed 50%! By the year 2030, projections are that it will reach

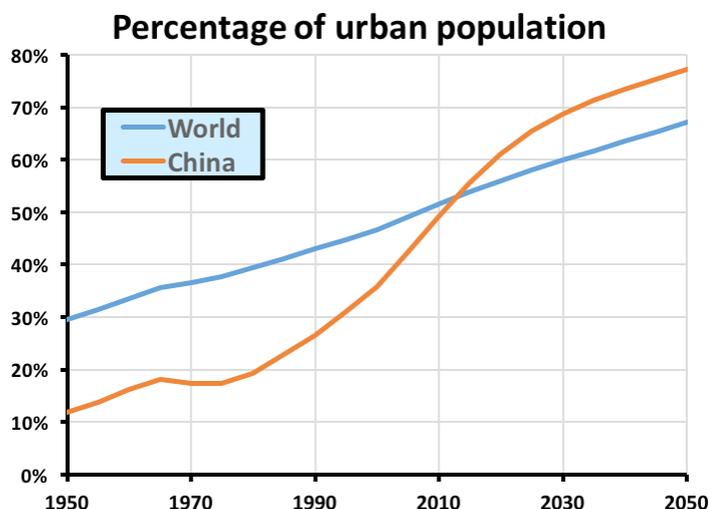


Fig. 1 Percentage of urban population. Data taken from the UN, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.<sup>4</sup>

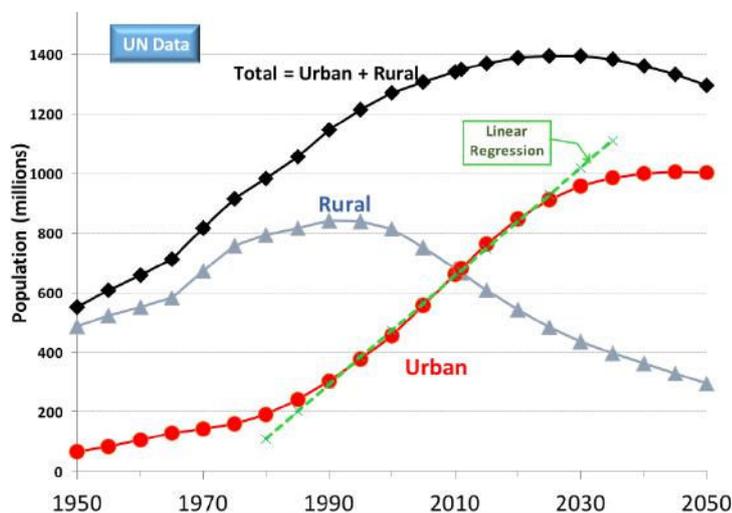


Fig. 2. Comparison of the rural and urban population in China. Data taken from the UN, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.<sup>4</sup>

approximately 70%. This corresponds to one billion people! The urban economy will likely represent 90% of China's total GDP.<sup>8</sup>

A more detailed view of the UN Data for China is given in figure 2. The data show that within the past twenty to thirty years there has been a sea change in the makeup of China's growing population. In the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, roughly corresponding to the time of the Cultural Revolution, population growth was mainly due to a rapid rise of the rural population. That was a time when over 16 million urban youth either volunteered or were sent to the countryside.<sup>9</sup>

Once China "opened up" after the fall of the Gang of Four, however, urban population growth began to outpace rural growth. This shift is most evident after 1990 when China's rural population peaked and the urban population began a rapid rise. A linear regression of data shows that the urban population has grown at essentially a linear rate of 18.2 million per year since 1990. This corresponds to an average net increase of close to 50,000 people per day—more than 2.5 times the average growth rate of the total population. Projections indicate this rate will continue until around 2025. Since these projections were made before the recent retraction of the one-child policy, however, their accuracy is slightly suspect. Some experts, though, suggest this policy change will have little overall impact.<sup>10</sup>

Another distinctive factor in China's urbanization is that it is not focused within one or two cities. Of course there are the "Alpha" cities like Shanghai and Beijing, but there is a substantial number of other cities with large populations. Finding consistent data on the size of various cities in China is difficult, but UN data say that in 2015 there were 106 Chinese cities with populations exceeding one million, and this will increase to 137 by 2025. By comparison, the UK has five and the USA has 45 such cities.<sup>11</sup> Some pundits predict an even greater number of large cities in China, saying that by 2025 there will be 221 cities with populations exceeding one million.<sup>12</sup> From a ministry perspective, we should realize that the ministry challenges of urban areas are not limited to the "Alpha" cities. As we will explore below, each

of these cities will face many common issues, such as migrant workers or extreme work-related stress, but each will also have its unique challenges.

## 2.2. The drivers of urbanization

When one looks at this data and thinks about the startling implications of this rapid and extensive urbanization, the question "Why?" naturally surfaces. All of this change has happened while China has enforced the one-child policy, so obviously the reason is not because the birthrate in cities has dramatically increased. Detailed reasons for this phenomenon are varied and complex, but four major factors stand out: (1) economic growth, (2) government policy, (3) the Chinese cultural view of cities, and (4) the presence of prestigious universities.<sup>13</sup>

Since the Open Door policy was implemented under Deng Xiaoping, the desire for economic growth has been a major driver for urbanization. One needs to look no further than Shenzhen to understand this. When established as a Special Economic Zone in 1979, it was nothing more than a small fishing village with a population of 30,000. It now has a population well over 10 million.<sup>14</sup> Cities are where the jobs are.

Urbanization is also a matter of government policy. Much of this is pure pragmatism—providing schools, hospitals, and other social services is just easier when the people are in cities. During various trips in western Sichuan, I have even observed that the government was willing to offer free houses to rural or nomadic peoples in their push to get them to settle in towns or cities. This policy became even stronger in 2012 with the implementation of the "城镇化" (Chengzhenhua, "city-town-transformation") policy. The goal is actually to minimize the rural-urban distinction. The focus will be on the over 20,000 "towns" throughout China and on accelerating their urbanization. This will impact many issues related to land use and involve granting of more urban registrations for the migrant populations.<sup>15</sup> If this old "hukou" system (registration for right of residence) is changed to allow migrants to purchase property and allow their children to attend urban schools

without exorbitant costs, the pace of urbanization will definitely increase.

An extreme example of how the Chinese government wants to push urbanization is the recent formalization of plans for "京津冀" (Jing-Jin-Ji), a city that will be the size of the US State of Kansas and have a population of 130 million. This super city will comprise Beijing, Tianjin, and parts of Hebei Province.<sup>16</sup> (Note: Ji is the ancient character for Hebei.)

A third reason for this rapid urbanization is the general view Chinese have of cities. In one meeting attended by about 150 Chinese pastors and lay leaders, my wife and I asked how many of them liked cities. With almost complete unanimity they responded with an enthusiastic and resounding "yes, we like cities." Chinese flock to cities because they see cities as places that are full of opportunities, better developed, and "热闹" (renao)—lively, bustling. In addition, Chinese people traditionally consider a city to be a place of prestige and security. This preference for cities is easy to understand for anyone who has visited a rural town or village in China. Rural China can be a hard and difficult place. It is small wonder, then, that so many move to the city with hopes of finding a new and better future. The challenge from a ministry perspective is to understand and address the despair and hopelessness so many face when they soon find their hopes dashed.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the prestige of the city is the presence of leading universities. Within a Confucian world view, education is an essential investment for the future of one's children. The best education options at all levels—primary, secondary, and tertiary—are in major cities, and the disparity between urban and rural education is often huge. Thus, education is a fourth major factor driving urbanization. An illustration of the sometimes unbridled drive by Chinese parents to get good education for their children can be seen in a photo recently posted on China's social media. It showed a new-born baby with a sign that says "There are still 6933 days until the 'Gao Kao' (China's college entrance exam)." Even some Chinese netizens were appalled by this.<sup>18</sup>

Government policy further intensifies this dynamic. Regulations dictate that children must take the “Gao Kao” in the location of their “hukou” (household registration). A student taking the “Gao Kao” in a rural area has a much lower chance of getting a spot in a prestigious university. For example, the acceptance rate for Beijing University for students with a Beijing “hukou” is more than 25 times greater than a student with a Henan “hukou”. Another inequality can be seen in the chance to get into a “Project 211” university, a list of the (approximately) top 100 universities in China.<sup>19</sup> Beijing has twenty-six “211” universities, corresponding to one “211” school for every 3,000 “Gao-Kao” test-takers. Henan has only one “211” university in the whole province, so there are over 716,000 test-takers per “211” university.<sup>20</sup> Thirteen other provinces also have only one “211” university.

Since the vast majority of universities are in cities, college students from the countryside will naturally become acclimated to urban life. There is little chance that they would want to return to the countryside. During a visit to Ganzi Prefecture in western Sichuan, the director of education told me that while very few students from the prefecture ever made it out of Ganzi to go to university, less than 10% of those who do make it ever return. Another manifestation of this trend is the emergence of the “Ant Tribe” in Beijing.<sup>21</sup> The “Ant Tribe” refers to those who have graduated from premier universities but can’t find adequate work and so must take menial jobs and live in substandard housing. They can’t return to their home towns because this would be a great loss of face. The pursuit of higher education has dictated that they become urbanites, no matter the cost.

### 3. Remarks on an appropriate theology for urban ministry

Numerous books and articles have been written about urban ministry, so it is beyond the scope of this short article to address all aspects of a theology of urban ministry. A few remarks to elucidate some of my own perspectives and to set the stage for applying such a theology to China, though, will hopefully prove instructive.

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#### 3.1. Understanding God’s desire for a city

From a missional and theological perspective, the importance of cities is in many ways obvious. As Tim Keller has said, “In cities, you have more image of God per square inch than anywhere else in the world.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, a wide range of theological perspectives on cities exists. David W. Smith summarizes the two opposite ends of this spectrum: “the city is the concrete expression of the human fall from grace” and “(the city) is the instrument of human liberation, opening up previously unknown possibilities of freedom and creativity and promising the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth, or of utopia.”<sup>23</sup>

This spectrum exists because within Scripture and throughout history there have been competing desires for the city. Robert C. Linthicum says, “Every city has both Babylon and Jerusalem in it, for every city is the battleground between the god of Babylon (Baal, Satan) and the God of Jerusalem (Yahweh, the Lord) for domination and control.”<sup>24</sup>

If we look at Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, we can find some rationale for the thought that the city is an expression for man’s fall from grace:

- *The city indicated a desire for self-security from enemies* (The Hebrew word does not always imply a walled city, but often does.<sup>25</sup>)
- *The city represented a desire for self-importance* (Gen 4:17; 10:8–12)
- *The city marked the pinnacle of success: the center of culture, prosperity, and power* (Gen 11:4)
- *The city has always been a center for the expression of religion* (Dan 3; 1 Sam 5)

Yet, in contrast to this, we can also see some of God’s views of and desires for a city:

- *A place for worship and praise, a source of joy* (Ps 48:1–2)

- *A place of blessing, safety, and refreshing* (Pss 107:4–9; 46:4–7; 127)
- *A place for justice and righteousness* (Zech 8:16; Deut 21:19; 22:15) [Note also the concept of the city of refuge (Num 35:9–34)]
- *A place where the righteous make an impact* (Prov 11:11) [Note also the forty-eight cities for the Levites and their role for teaching (Lev 10:11; Josh 21:1–42)]
- *A place that is to display God’s glory and be a witness to the nations* (Jer 33:9)
- *A place that is our ultimate hope and future* (Heb 13:14; Rev 21:2)

This vision of a city is certainly not a description of cities in China nor of cities in any other place in the world. Yet, if our future is to be a “city,” then we must affirm that a city cannot be inherently bad. As Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz say, “Despite sin’s radical distortion of God’s urban purposes, the city remains a mark of grace as well as rebellion, a mark of preserving, conserving grace shared with all under the shadow of the common curse. Urban life, though fallen, is still more than merely livable.”<sup>26</sup>

#### 3.2. Understanding God’s mission for his church in a city

The Great Commission involves “making disciples” (Matt 28:19) as its focus, and has the “end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV) as its scope. God’s concern is obviously for people, not geography. The church then is to take the gospel to wherever there are people. Fulfilling the Great Commission must equally involve taking the gospel into the city as well as the most remote village.

On one level, God’s mission for his church in the city is no different than his mission for his church in any other part of the world. In Jeremiah 29, though, we are given a special insight into God’s plan for impacting the city. While the theological implications of this passage are numerous, a few

pertinent observations and applications will hopefully shed some light on God's missional plan for his people in cities today.

In his grace, even though they had rebelled against him, God's plan was to use the Jews to bless the Babylonians! In Jeremiah 29:7 he commanded the Jews in exile to do two things and gave them one promise. Many English translations do not make it clear, but the verse actually reads like this: "But seek the *shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its *shalom* you will find your *shalom*" (emphasis added).

The first command then is that they were to seek the *shalom* of the city. The word for seek includes the idea of caring. The problems of the city where they lived were their problems. Interestingly, when Jeremiah described the people in exile, he included officials and craftsmen as well as the elders. They likely had the skills to help deal with many of the problems the cities faced. God had placed the Israelites there to be a blessing to the community (cf. Gen 12:2–3).

In some amazing way, they could only truly experience *shalom* when their city experienced *shalom*. God not only planned to give *shalom* to the Israelites in Babylon, he also wanted to give the Babylonians *shalom*. His *shalom* for his people is also *shalom* for their neighbors. Why? He is God of grace. The reason God so strongly repudiated the message of the false prophets in vv 8–9 is that their message painted a false image of God and his plan. Their message implied that God was only concerned about Israel. Their message was almost like those today who preach a "me-centered" gospel or a prosperity gospel. Our God is not a selfish God. He wants to show both his own people as well as all the nations that he is a God of blessing and a God who saves. Our vision for ministry in the city must demonstrate that our God is a God of grace.

God's second command is to pray for the city. The officials and craftsmen could help on one level, but ultimately *shalom* can only come from God. By asking the Jews to pray for the city, God affirmed that he was willing to hear their prayers and bless the city.

So, what is God's mission for his church in the cities? God has placed his people in cities for his redemptive purposes. He wants our cities to experience his *shalom*. The challenge to us is that this can only happen when God's people are repentant and wholeheartedly seeking the Lord (Jer 29:12–14). There is no *shalom*, either for God's people or for their cities, apart from a relationship with God.

We must be careful not to equate *shalom* with material prosperity. In Old Testament poetry, *shalom* is often placed in parallel with righteousness, justice, and truth. It impacts every relationship: our relationship with God, our relationship with our neighbor, and even our relationship with our environment.

Ultimately, *shalom* can only be found in a relationship with Jesus (cf. Eph 2:14). When we consider all these aspects of *shalom*, we could actually say that *shalom* is the outcome of discipleship, namely, the transformation of our worldview, our behavior, and our relationships that come as the result of knowing Jesus. This transformation brings *shalom*. Thinking in this way will help us define the full scope of what it means to take the gospel into the city.

### 3.3. Understanding the forces that impact a city

Jeremiah's directive to seek and to pray for the *shalom* of a city is an implicit reminder that citizens in the cities of his day or those of our day do not yet experience *shalom*. On many levels there have been some wonderful changes in China's cities. The huge rise in the standard of living for many urban Chinese over the past thirty years is hard to imagine, even for those of us who have witnessed the changes first hand. Housing and educational standards have improved. Owning a car is no longer an impossible dream. Tourism—travelling to popular places within China and even overseas—is a booming industry.

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These gains have had their costs, however. Work pressures take an incredible toll. Stresses on family life are immense. Pollution and other environmental problems are well documented. These struggles are similar to urban issues faced in cities around the world. As mentioned above, material gain is not equivalent to *shalom*.

Simply attributing all these problems to the aftermath of Genesis 3, while obviously true, is not particularly instructive in addressing the issues confronting both believers and non-believers in cities. There are various spiritual forces and/or systems that bind people and prevent them from coming to faith or from growing in their faith. These could be summarized as:

- Political power/systems
- Economic power/systems
- Social power/systems
- Religious power/systems<sup>27</sup>

We must first realize that any of these various systems can place people under bondage. For example, economic and social systems can place people under as much bondage as an autocratic and oppressive government. It is hard to find another way to explain the emergence in China's cities of the previously mentioned "Ant Tribe" or another phenomenon called the "Rat Tribe."<sup>28</sup> The "Rat Tribe" consists of about one million Beijing people, mainly young, who live in makeshift rooms in basements or former underground air-raid bunkers.

Another example is the whole migrant worker phenomenon in China, which is also driven by economics. The havoc it has wrecked on families is easy to observe. A Chinese pastor once told me that the whole family structure within China is being distorted because of young people migrating to the cities. Traditional Chinese family structure is hierarchical and power within the family was always with the elderly. Now, however, the elderly must submit to their own children who are working as migrants because they are

the ones bringing home the money. Further, there are an estimated 61 million “left-behind children” (about 20% nationally) who must grow up without one or both of their parents. In addition to their trauma of separation from their parents, there are issues of dwindling educational opportunities in the villages and also cases of abuse.<sup>29</sup> Understanding dynamics such as these is essential for a holistic ministry within the cities of China.

In addition, we must recognize that each city is different. The more relaxed nature of Chengdu is vastly different than the frantic pace of Shanghai. The “idols” of each city are also different. In admittedly overly simplistic caricature, we could speak of Beijing worshiping the idols of politics and academics, and Shanghai and Hong Kong worshiping money. If the goal of our evangelism and discipleship includes worldview transformation, these idols must be understood and confronted. As Tim Keller has pointed out, “In ancient times, the deities were bloodthirsty and hard to appease. They still are.”<sup>30</sup>

#### **4. Critical issues of urban ministry in China**

As we have seen, the impact of urbanization in China is pervasive. In the coming decades it will be one of the major influences, if not the major influence, on Chinese society. For us, however, a key concern must be how the church in China will respond to this massive demographic shift. Will she be a quiet observer of the changes or an active participant seeking to impact life in China’s cities? Actually, these questions could be asked of the church in any metropolitan area in the world. Lessons learned by the church in China could be applied in other settings. As mentioned above, these lessons could also be instructive as China’s church moves out in mission.

By God’s grace, China’s church, both urban and rural, is a rapidly growing and maturing church. I strongly believe that the Lord would have the church become a major force in shaping modern China. Yet the church is at a very critical juncture. With all the changes within China coupled with the stress of its own rapid growth, China’s urban church faces some daunting challenges. The

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church is relatively young with a large percentage of first generation believers. Pastors need encouragement. Mentors are needed to help young believers know how to live out the gospel each day in the marketplace and to know how to raise a family in an urban pluralistic world. Disciple makers are needed to help the church discern how best to bring the gospel to the marginalized within their city.

While a multitude of challenges and issues could be discussed, a few seem to have special significance and applicability in other settings in Asia. The first is to recognize that we cannot look at China’s cities as a simple monolith. Rather than making church planting strategies by looking at a 2D map and asking which street corners do not have churches, we should begin to think three dimensionally. A church on a given street will impact certain segments of society, but other segments of society on that same street will not be impacted by the church in any way.<sup>31</sup> In much the same way that missiologists have understood that unreached people groups will not be reached with the gospel unless the church makes a concerted effort to cross the various language and cultural barriers that separate them from the “reached” people groups, so reaching the numerous people segments within the cities will also require a concerted effort by the church to cross the various boundaries that isolate them. Although these barriers are not necessarily defined by ethnicity or language, they can still form an equally mammoth divide.

While it is common to think in terms of groups like students, young professionals, the elderly, or migrants, the reality of the “three-dimensionality” of China’s megacities is much more complex. The appendix contains a list of some unreached people segments within urban China.<sup>32</sup> This list is

merely indicative and is in no way meant to be exhaustive. Most of the groups mentioned in the appendix are in some way marginalized from society as well as from the church. There are other groups, though, that would not be considered marginalized from a social or economic point of view; nevertheless, they often have little or no contact with the church. Examples include university professors and the scientific community, government workers, shop keepers, and construction workers. Although the specific people segments will differ, identifying such unreached people segments would be a constructive exercise for developing a ministry strategy for any city in the world.

A second dynamic is the number of ethnic minorities in the cities. Most are ethnic minorities from within China who have moved to the cities along with other migrant workers. Detailed and verifiable data are difficult to obtain. Some figures that apparently come from government sources indicate that at some point before July 2009 there were over 200,000 minority people in Guangzhou, representing 1.7% of the population.<sup>33</sup> A slightly more detailed breakdown for five ethnic groups with long-term residents exceeding 10,000 is given in the table in figure 3. Since these figures are at least seven or eight years old, the current number of ethnic minority residents in the Pearl River Delta is certainly much higher.<sup>34</sup> The data clearly indicate that ministries among China’s ethnic minorities must also consider working in urban areas. Thinking in these terms would likewise be applicable in any city in the world. Although migration within China is extreme in its scale, migration of people is a worldwide phenomenon. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, an estimated 120,000 people migrate to cities every day.<sup>35</sup>

Minority Group	Registered residents (have "Hu Kou")	Migrants	Total
Zhuang	8,763	74,552	83,315
Tu Jia	3,807	20,525	24,332
Miao	2,347	19,663	22,010
Yao	2,437	16,743	19,180
Hui	7,316	6,716	14,032
Totals for these five people groups	24,670	138,199	162,869

Fig. 3. Chinese ethnic minorities in Guangzhou with over 10,000 long-term residents. Precise date for this data is unknown, but it is before 2009. The data cited the total number of minorities living in Guangzhou as 212,874.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, as China's economy booms, it becomes more attractive to other nationalities. For example, government figures indicate that the number of Africans living in Guangzhou is around 16,000.<sup>36</sup> There are also large communities of foreign students in China, especially from India and Pakistan. God's mission for the church in China certainly includes all of these peoples.

## 5. Critical issues facing China's urban church

The critical issues facing China's urban church go beyond identifying the type of people who need to be evangelized. Several major challenges exist within the church itself. Not the least of these challenges would be the lack of unity within the church. The most obvious division is between the government-approved church (TSPM, "Three Self Patriotic Movement") and the unregistered "house" churches (HCs). Unregistered churches, however, are also fragmented. This disunity comes from many factors including fear of persecution, theological and ecclesiological differences, and distrust caused by fear of infiltration by cults. Unless the church in China, whether rural or urban, can overcome this disunity, the church's impact on society will be severely limited.<sup>37</sup>

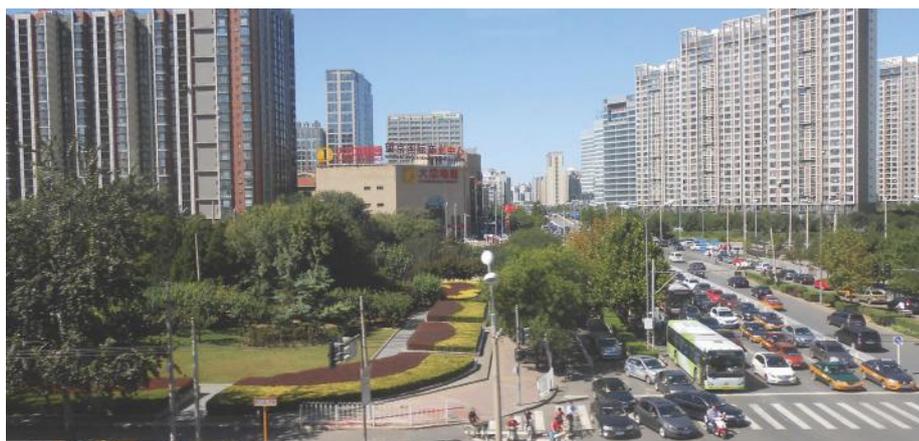
As mentioned above, China's urban church contains a large percentage of first generation believers. Two great needs surface as a result of this fact. First, as with all churches around the world, there is a need for discipleship of these young converts. Because of the relative lack of mentors with experience in the urban Chinese world, however, addressing this pressing need is difficult. Further, the rapid change in urban China means that it is harder

for the few older believers to journey with these young believers to bring about transformation of life, worldview, values, and ethics. Yet only those "who live a transformed life can transform those around them and have an impact on the society."<sup>38</sup>

A second impact of the large percentage of first generation believers is that leadership development must be given a high priority. Indigenous seminaries are being formed, but the quality and content of the training varies greatly. Attempts have been made to establish some accrediting associations to provide guidance and supervision for the seminaries. The variance in the academic backgrounds of the students means that obtaining consistency in seminary training is difficult. While some urban colleagues are going overseas for advanced studies and some schools are pushing to develop full-fledged Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, and even doctoral studies, other seminaries have students who have at most a middle school education. Given the rapid growth of the church and the desperate need for pastors, leadership development will have to remain very flexible in terms of academic standards. Some Chinese leaders involved in

seminary education have emphasized that, regardless of the academic standards, the focus of seminaries should be on training pastors and missionaries. They must be equipped to help the church confront the various threats to the continued growth of the church. These threats include not only cults, but also materialism and the prosperity gospel. Yet the leadership needs of the urban church cannot be met by seminaries alone. Informal training of lay leaders training must be maintained and strengthened.

In addition to leadership training, there is a great need to see indigenous theological reflection at China's seminaries. What God has done in the past thirty-plus years in China is a great display of his power and wisdom. We need to encourage our Chinese brothers and sisters to reflect on this so that we can learn from their experience. China's church has much to give the worldwide church in terms of things like ecclesiology, a theology of suffering, and even parts of theology proper (cf. Eph 3:10). With the growth of China's urban church, more believers now come from China's intellectual elite. Though they tend to be comparatively young in their faith, they have the academic background and capacity to handle complex theological issues. The danger, however, may be that they could treat this task as just another academic task without it flowing from a deep spiritual transformation. It will be important, therefore, that there be adequate interaction and conversation between these urban believers and their spiritual elders from the countryside. Such conversations will be important not only to preserve and to transmit the strong spiritual heritage of these elders, but also to comprehend the full impact of what God has done in China. Those





who could mentor and encourage these young theologians will be doing a great service to the church worldwide.

As was highlighted above, the fact that the world is now majority urban means that China's urban church is in a position to play a special role in cross-cultural missions. Much effort has been given to encourage the development of indigenous mission movements within China. In addition to mission strategies and structures to reach UPGs, there must also be holistic missions "into" the city, embracing a city's "three-dimensionality". The point here is certainly not to downplay the need for mission efforts to UPGs, but to emphasize that China's church could make a tremendous contribution to urban missions around the world. Those who journey with the church must endeavor to ensure that missions does not become a program or an activity, but rather an integral part of the church's vision, mission, and values. Further, discipleship and leadership training must emphasize that the whole church should be involved in missions.<sup>39</sup> China's church is a praying church, so as church members are educated about the needs, challenges, and opportunities of cross-cultural missions, a tremendous prayer force will be unleashed.

A final critical issue for the continued growth of China's urban church is how to handle the post-house-church era. Already there is a move from the house church model to form urban congregations as the political climate

in China has become more relaxed.<sup>40</sup> A congregation's stability and its ability to provide more ministries, such as children and youth ministries, is obviously attractive. There will also be greater potential to have a visible impact on society, such as that seen in the churches' response to the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. Yet there is a danger that as China's church makes moves to be more "stable," she could lose the fervency of faith and the willingness to sacrifice that have so characterized her these past few decades. Lessons from the changes in the early church after Constantine became emperor in 312 AD and from the explosive growth yet eventual decline of the Korean church might be helpful. Much wisdom from the Spirit and dependence on his power will be needed during this transition.

## 6. Strategies for urban ministry

The needs that have been expressed in this paper are only the tip of an iceberg in terms of the needs that must be addressed if the church is to penetrate and impact China's cities. The massive scale of these cities could lead one to wonder if anything that we do would make any real difference. Similar comments could actually be made of many other cities in Asia. Yet obedience to the Great Commission demands that we and our local brothers and sisters embrace these cities and trust that God will move to transform them (Zech 4:6). Detailed

strategies will of course vary, but below are a few illustrative strategies that are at the same time both fundamental and universal.

If we are to have an impact on the cities, we must perhaps first and foremost value and practice partnership. Partnership must become a fundamental theological conviction, not just a matter of convenience or efficiency.<sup>41</sup> Partnership is hard work, and often takes more effort than doing things on one's own. Yet the Lord is glorified when we work together in unity. In China's cities, a community working together in unity and caring for one another will be extremely attractive. Studies have shown that conversion has a distinct social component and is not just a matter of doctrine.<sup>42</sup>

As we engage in ministry in cities, we must seek to see the city as God sees the city. We must learn to look beyond the glitz and glamor of the city and see those who are isolated and hidden by economic, social, educational, or ethnic barriers. Discipleship of the young urban Christians must also engender a compassion for the poor and marginalized. As is true in almost every culture, it will be very counter-cultural for young professionals to care for the marginalized since many of them have had to work very hard to climb the "ladder of success." Yet my experience is that almost every Chinese person has an idea that helping the poor is a good thing, even if they personally would never get involved. If the church can be seen as actively helping the poor, she could gain much credibility in the eyes of the average Chinese person.

At the same time we must realize that the gospel must also transform those with power and influence in society.<sup>43</sup> Otherwise some of the systemic issues that entrap the marginalized will not be addressed. The biblical view of a righteous king is that he will care for the poor (Ps 72:4). Only with this two-pronged approach can cities become the place of justice, righteousness, joy, and worship that God desires of them

*What God has done in the past thirty-plus years in China is a great display of his power and wisdom. We need to encourage our Chinese brothers and sisters to reflect on this so that we can learn from their experience. China's church has much to give the worldwide church in terms of things like ecclesiology, a theology of suffering, and even parts of theology proper.*

*Cities are complex. Urban ministries will therefore be equally complex and varied. There will never be one single strategy, or even a simple set of strategies, that will be adequate to see the gospel penetrate a city. Yet to attempt to do everything will likely be equivalent to doing nothing; the issues are simply too multifaceted for cursory efforts.*

(Zech 8:16; Ps 48:1–2; Jer 33:9–11).

The urban church in China consists of many students and young professionals who move, or someday will move, in the circles of power and influence. The church must seek to implant in these students and young professionals a vision that God has placed them in the city to be his instruments of blessing to their city. These young urban professionals may also be key in helping to negotiate a better working relationship between the Chinese Government and unregistered churches.<sup>44</sup>

Ministries relating to the family can also be one way to impact both ends of the social spectrum. Any issue relating to the family is a strongly felt need by both believers and non-believers, by both the rich and the poor. Addressing these needs can impact all levels of society within a city and also influence basic core values.

In the early days after China's "Open-Door Policy" began, ministry by foreigners often centered on student work at universities. While this remains an extremely vital ministry, the need for missional business has become increasingly important. Actually we can learn some things from our brothers and sisters from Wenzhou in this regard. They have used business platforms to help plant churches all over the world.<sup>45</sup> But the need for missional business goes far beyond being a platform for church planting. To see the gospel penetrate the cities, the church must be able to influence the business community and see the gospel transform it. The economic growth experienced within China in the past few decades has been perhaps the biggest cultural change agent during this period. When I first went to China, people were poor, but it didn't matter—everyone was poor. Now China has one of the largest income gaps in the world, where the top 1% own 33% of the wealth and the poorest 25% combined have only 1% of China's wealth.<sup>46</sup> (It should be

noted that this disparity is still less than that in the USA.) Recent government crackdowns indicate that corruption, tax evasion, and many other unethical business practices are commonplace. Unless the church develops a theology for the marketplace and helps members understand and apply Christian ethics in the marketplace, Christianity will not be able to speak into this major aspect of modern Chinese culture. The church would then likely remain on the fringes of Chinese society. The complexity of missional business is well known and beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, we must continue to pursue it as a fundamental strategy for reaching cities.

Cities are complex. Urban ministries will therefore be equally complex and varied. There will never be one single strategy, or even a simple set of strategies, that will be adequate to see the gospel penetrate a city. Yet to attempt to do everything will likely be equivalent to doing nothing; the issues are simply too multifaceted for cursory efforts. The challenge for practitioners will be to maintain focus in the face of overwhelming needs and opportunities. This demands much prayer, humility, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

## **7. Conclusion: The privilege and opportunity of a journey**

China's urban church is facing a crucial period as it deals with all the issues and needs for strategic

development that have been mentioned in this paper. What happens in the next ten to fifteen years may well determine whether the church will be a transforming influence to society or if society will transform the church. I believe the Lord has given us a unique privilege and opportunity to journey shoulder to shoulder in partnership with China's urban church during this critical juncture. We can write up all kinds of ministry plans and strategies, but perhaps the most effective strategy of all is simply to be willing to walk humbly side by side, day after day with Chinese brothers and sisters. Without this incarnational approach, without developing deep partnerships, mutual discipleship, and close fellowship, the deep changes in values and worldview that are needed to impact China's cities will be harder to achieve. It is hard to imagine a greater privilege than investing our lives in this way.

Let me conclude with some thoughts on the type of people who will be needed for this journey with the urban church of China in dealing with the many challenges it faces. I often say that we need "entrepreneurial servants." New workers need to be "entrepreneurial" in the sense that they need to be people of vision who are unsatisfied with the status-quo. They should be able to identify new areas of ministry and to cast a vision for how God wants to change things. But unlike typical entrepreneurs, they must also be servants. They must be humble, teachable, and able to resist the temptation to just do the ministry themselves. They must be willing to invest in local brothers and sisters and equip them to do the work. These "entrepreneurial servants" are the people who can best journey with today's urban church in China. I assume that this would actually describe the kind of new workers needed in many parts of Asia.

*New workers need to be "entrepreneurial" in the sense that they need to be people of vision who are unsatisfied with the status-quo. They should be able to identify new areas of ministry and to cast a vision for how God wants to change things. But unlike typical entrepreneurs, they must also be servants.*

God is doing amazing things. Those of us who have had the privilege of witnessing the manifestation of his power through the church in China can never doubt we have a big God. The most amazing thing, though, is that he continues to invite us to join him in this work. Let us pray that the Lord of the Harvest will raise up many more to join him in this incredible harvest field in the cities of China. **MRT**

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential for Urban Growth," George Martine, lead author (New York: UNFPA, 2007), [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/695\\_filename\\_sowp2007\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/695_filename_sowp2007_eng.pdf) (accessed 7 March 2016).

<sup>2</sup> David W. Smith, *Seeking a City with Foundations: Theology for an Urban World* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated by comparing data from Michael Kremer, "Population Growth and Technological Change: One Million B.C. to 1900," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 108:3 (August 1993): 681–716, <http://faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/210a/readings/kremer1993.pdf> (accessed 21 March 2016) and UNFPA, "State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential for Urban Growth."

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2012). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Parag Khanna, "Beyond City Limits," *Foreign Policy* (16 August 2010), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/beyond\\_city\\_limits](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/beyond_city_limits) (accessed 27 December 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (HarperCollins e-books, Reprint edition, 17 March 2009), Kindle, 2, Loc. 124–126.

<sup>7</sup> See for example articles on "China's Indigenous Mission Movement," *China Source Quarterly* 15:1 (Spring 2013), <http://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-quarterlies/chinas-indigenous-mission-movement> (accessed 11 April 2016).

<sup>8</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, "Preparing for China's Urban Billion," March 2009, <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/urbanization/preparing-for-chinas-urban-billion> (accessed 19 June 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 604.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie T. Chang, "Why the One-Child Policy Has Become Irrelevant," *The Atlantic* (March 20, 2013), <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/why-the-one-child-policy-has-become-irrelevant/274178/> (accessed 3 March 2016).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition

<sup>12</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, "Preparing for China's Urban Billion."

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Calvin Ma for the insight regarding universities and the role that education plays in a Confucian worldview. He provided extremely helpful feedback as the reviewer of an earlier form of this paper presented at the OMF Missions Research Consultation held April 2016

in Singapore.

<sup>14</sup> Winsome Tam, "The History of a 'City without History,'" *Asia Society Hong Kong Center*, 4 May 2010, <http://asiasociety.org/history-city-without-history> (accessed 4 March 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Mi Shih, "Making Rural China Urban," *The China Story*, Australian Centre on China in the World, 18 June 2013, <https://www.thechinastory.org/2013/06/making-rural-china-urban/> (accessed 4 March 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Ian Johnson, "As Beijing Becomes a Supercity, the Rapid Growth Brings Pains," *The New York Times* (19 July 2015), <http://nyti.ms/1Ja2Aey> (accessed 7 March 2016).

<sup>17</sup> The OMF prayer guide "China's Cities" gives several stories of this type of situation.

<sup>18</sup> See for example <http://ycq0801.home.news.cn/blog/a/0101001504410D0D644A51F6.html> (accessed 28 July 2016).

<sup>19</sup> The name "Project 211" comes from the Central Government's efforts to strengthen approximately 100 universities for the twenty-first century, <http://www.chinaeducenter.com/en/cedu/ceduproject211.php> (accessed 8 August 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Ross, "How China's Cities Bar the Door to a Better Education for Migrant Students," *China Economic Review* (13 July 2015), <http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/how-chinas-cities-bar-door-better-education-migrant-students> (accessed 29 July 2016). Ross references a detailed compilation of data by Yiqin Fu at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XgT5uoO31m5gPnPXrPAQfc26LlJHDCrsl6asgm-WM/edit?pref=2&pli=1#gid=0> (accessed 29 July 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Zhao Yanrong and Qian Yanfeng, *China Daily* (8 December 2009), [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beijing/2009-12/08/content\\_9137424.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/beijing/2009-12/08/content_9137424.htm) (accessed 9 Jan 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Keller (27 February 2015), <https://www.facebook.com/TimKellerNYC/posts/910599558979931> (accessed 7 March 2016).

<sup>23</sup> David W. Smith, *Seeking a City with Foundations: Theology for an Urban World* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle, loc. 281–82.

<sup>25</sup> "The significance of the city lay, rather, in the protection that it could offer in times of distress not only to the inhabitants but also to those who dwelt in the immediate vicinity. Only in the course of time did the cities also become the economic, intellectual, and cultural center for the Israelites. Urbanization progressed as the former seminomadic structures of life became more remote." E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 882.

<sup>26</sup> Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 87.

<sup>27</sup> Adapted from several chapters in Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan*.

<sup>28</sup> Ian Johnson, "The Rat Tribe of Beijing," *Al Jazeera America* (24 January 2015), <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2015/01/underground-beijing/> (accessed 29 September 2015).

<sup>29</sup> April Ma, "China raises a generation of 'left-behind' children," *CNN* (4 February 2014), <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/04/world/asia/china-children-left-behind/> (accessed 5 February 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), Kindle,

loc. 85.

<sup>31</sup> D.C., a colleague in China, private conversation with the author.

<sup>32</sup> S.D., a colleague in China, researched and provided this list to the author.

<sup>33</sup> The data was on a fax dated July 2009, but the actual date and source of the data is not known.

<sup>34</sup> The Chinese National Bureau of Statistics 2000 census indicated that "only" 42.4 million migrants left their home province, with 35% of these going to Guangdong province. Since the total number of migrant workers crossing provincial boundaries in 2014 exceeded 168 million, the number of ethnic minorities in the Pearl River Delta (Guangzhou/Shenzhen) has certainly increased significantly in the last six or seven years. (See [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-04/29/content\\_2854930.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-04/29/content_2854930.htm) for the 2014 data).

<sup>35</sup> International Organization for Migration, "World Migration Report 2015 – Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility," (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2015), 17, <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2015> (accessed 11 April 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Roberto Castillo, "How many Africans are in Guangzhou?," October 2014, <http://africansinchina.net/how-many-africans-are-there-in-guangzhou/> (accessed 9 March 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Brent Fulton, *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2015), 109–25.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Calvin Ma, feedback received as the reviewer of an earlier form of this paper presented at the OMF Missions Research Consultation held April 2016 in Singapore.

<sup>39</sup> The ideas expressed in OMF's "Six Ways" easily come to mind here, but these would need to be indigenized for China's urban church.

<sup>40</sup> At the time of the writing of this article, the situation in China has become more tense, especially in Zhejiang province with the removal of crosses from churches. (See for example: <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2016/February/China-Sentences-Pastor-to-14-Years-In-Prison-For-Resisting-Cross-Removal>.) It remains to be seen if this will become a more general trend throughout China. Diligent and fervent prayer is needed.

<sup>41</sup> See several helpful papers in *Mission Round Table 10:1* (January 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Stark, *Cities of God*, Kindle, 11, Loc. 255

<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to a brief conversation with Prof. Viv Grigg of Azusa Pacific Seminary for this insight.

<sup>44</sup> Fulton, *China's Urban Christians*, 126–34.

<sup>45</sup> See for example: Nanlai Cao, "Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in the 'Wenzhou Model' of Christian Revival," *The China Journal* 59 (January 2008): 63–87; or Huo Shui, "Between Riches and Poverty: Chinese Christian Business People," *China Source* (19 December 2006), <http://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/between-riches-and-poverty-chinese-christian-business-people> (accessed 4 April 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel Wildau and Tom Mitchell, "China Income Inequality Among World's Worst," *Financial Times* (14 January 2016), <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3c521faa-baa6-11e5-a7cc-280dfe875e28.html#axzz42OM4stJn> (accessed 10 March 2016).

<sup>47</sup> An extensive reading list and other resources concerning missional business can be found on the Business 4 Blessing website, <https://b4blessing.com/reading/businessmission.php>

## Appendix

### Unreached peoples in urban and semi-urban centers classified according to their social needs and social status in a mainland China context

S. D., August 2015

Group	Official statistics k=thousand, m=million	Balanced estimate (not radical)	Notes
Orphaned and abandoned children	Orphaned and abandoned children 712k (2010). Only 100k are living in orphanages. <u>Abandoned children</u> 100k / year	At least 1m orphaned children	<a href="http://www.topnews9.com/article_20140416_35988.html">http://www.topnews9.com/article_20140416_35988.html</a> <a href="http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/201406/05/c_1110990894.htm">http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/201406/05/c_1110990894.htm</a> <a href="http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_496cab690102emsi.html">http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_496cab690102emsi.html</a>
Migrant workers	273.95m		Some of them can be rich but they are still the marginalized in the cities even though they have contributed a lot towards China's urbanization. <a href="http://finance.chinanews.com/cj/2015/04-29/7242204.shtml">http://finance.chinanews.com/cj/2015/04-29/7242204.shtml</a> <a href="http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2014-05/12/c_1110648933.htm">http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2014-05/12/c_1110648933.htm</a> <a href="http://www.askci.com/news/2015/05/28/105738pg6a.shtml">http://www.askci.com/news/2015/05/28/105738pg6a.shtml</a>
Beggars, especially begging children	2.35m cases of individuals helped by the government in 2013, of which 159k were adolescents.	Difficult to estimate	1. It is said that over 99% of beggars in the streets are career beggars and their monthly income can easily be over RMB10,000, sometimes even RMB 20,000–30,000. 2. Some children were sold to a strange place and controlled by people. They are forced to beg in the streets, no matter the weather. Their living conditions are very poor and they are often physically abused or even become disabled because of physical harm. Many of them have to bring a certain amount of money each day, otherwise they will be beaten or physically harmed. <a href="http://www.huaxia.com/20031218/00158580.html">http://www.huaxia.com/20031218/00158580.html</a> <a href="http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/02-28/5896784.shtml">http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/02-28/5896784.shtml</a> <a href="http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20141016/13189819_0.shtml">http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20141016/13189819_0.shtml</a> <a href="http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20140917/13119648_0.shtml">http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20140917/13119648_0.shtml</a>
Disabled people	Disabled people 85.02m (2010).	Difficult to estimate	Consists of: Visually impaired 12.63m, Hearing impaired 20.54m, Speech impaired 1.3m, Physically disabled 24.72m, Intellectually disabled 5.68m, Mentally retarded 6.29m, People with multiple disabilities 13.86m <a href="http://wuxizazhi.cnki.net/Search/CJRZ201204008.html">http://wuxizazhi.cnki.net/Search/CJRZ201204008.html</a>
Children and women who are abducted	<u>Abducted children</u> 10k every year <u>Abducted women</u> About 30k are rescued by police each year.	Abducted children: 70k (some say up to 200k) each year	<a href="http://www.whatsonweibo.com/chinas-stolen-children-why-babies-are-booming-business/">http://www.whatsonweibo.com/chinas-stolen-children-why-babies-are-booming-business/</a> <a href="http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2015/0727/Dark-corner-of-China-s-rise-A-surge-in-trafficking-of-children">http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2015/0727/Dark-corner-of-China-s-rise-A-surge-in-trafficking-of-children</a>
People who have lost their jobs	200m (from quote of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao on 22 Mar 2010)	Difficult to estimate	<a href="http://www.360doc.com/content/10/0324/12/235253_20047416.shtml">http://www.360doc.com/content/10/0324/12/235253_20047416.shtml</a>
People, families, and community that are living with and affected by HIV/AIDS	49k living with HIV and AIDS (Oct 2014), 80k AIDS orphans (Dec 2006), 138–210k children affected by HIV/AIDS (2010)	At least 1.2m (2010)	<a href="http://news.xinhuanet.com/2014-11/30/c_1113462415.htm">http://news.xinhuanet.com/2014-11/30/c_1113462415.htm</a> <a href="http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-09/29/content_579877.htm">http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-09/29/content_579877.htm</a> <a href="http://china.caixin.com/2015-08-12/100838559.html">http://china.caixin.com/2015-08-12/100838559.html</a> <a href="http://datanews.caixin.com/2015-08-24/100842812.html">http://datanews.caixin.com/2015-08-24/100842812.html</a> <a href="http://www.unaids.org.cn/cn/index/page.asp?id=197&amp;class=2&amp;classname=China%E2%80%99s+Epidemic+%26+Response">http://www.unaids.org.cn/cn/index/page.asp?id=197&amp;class=2&amp;classname=China%E2%80%99s+Epidemic+%26+Response</a>
Young mothers (少女母亲)		China has 1% of the world's young/single mothers.	<a href="http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_7f2e49c20101kvvi.html">http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_7f2e49c20101kvvi.html</a> <a href="http://daxue.163.com/14/1217/19/ADMJ0D3E00913J5O.html">http://daxue.163.com/14/1217/19/ADMJ0D3E00913J5O.html</a> <a href="http://lady.gscn.com.cn/system/2014/12/17/010876652.shtml">http://lady.gscn.com.cn/system/2014/12/17/010876652.shtml</a>
Children with divorced parents	No figures found	1.91m couples got divorced in 2006	<a href="http://hunjia.55bbs.com/wenda/1519471.html">http://hunjia.55bbs.com/wenda/1519471.html</a>
Sex workers	No available statistics	6m No figures found on male sex workers and transgender sex workers	Includes both female and male sex workers, and both "straight" and gay sex workers (also called MBs or Money Boys) <a href="http://club.kdnet.net/dispbbs.asp?id=9209575&amp;boardid=1">http://club.kdnet.net/dispbbs.asp?id=9209575&amp;boardid=1</a>
Empty-nest elderly 空巢老人	Over 100m (by the end of 2013)	Over 10m	In the media this term normally refers to the old people whose children are working in another place/city but, personally, I would extend this concept to all elderly people who are living on their own. They might be single, widowed, or not living with any other family members. <a href="http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2013/10-14/5373711.shtml">http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2013/10-14/5373711.shtml</a>

Group	Official statistics k=thousand, m=million	Balanced estimate (not radical)	Notes
Parents who lost their only child 失独父母	76k families each year lose their only child. Overall there are over one million families in China who have lost their only child.		This issue arises from Mainland China's one-child policy. Most of these parents are fifty years old or older and can't have any more children. Compared to other people who have lost their family members and loved ones, this group of people are even more vulnerable. <a href="http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=eoPB9-xY8wuZ4ZoYV-yN3hDFfrAagcP8yES5mrbCuN6HqVjxjBp26voSyS9u_dEc-VtLik2mgzU69qRTVulZ_">http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=eoPB9-xY8wuZ4ZoYV-yN3hDFfrAagcP8yES5mrbCuN6HqVjxjBp26voSyS9u_dEc-VtLik2mgzU69qRTVulZ_</a> <a href="http://education.news.cn/2012-07/30/c_123490569.htm">http://education.news.cn/2012-07/30/c_123490569.htm</a> <a href="http://www.china.com.cn/news/2012-07/30/content_2606072.htm">http://www.china.com.cn/news/2012-07/30/content_2606072.htm</a> <a href="http://bbs.nantaihu.com/simple/?t90853124.html">http://bbs.nantaihu.com/simple/?t90853124.html</a> <a href="http://www.yaolan.com/news/201208271215200.shtml">http://www.yaolan.com/news/201208271215200.shtml</a> <a href="http://news.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2013-09/13/c_132718020.htm">http://news.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2013-09/13/c_132718020.htm</a>
Left-behind children 留守儿童	61.0255m		These are children that are left behind at home by their parents who have gone to cities to work. These children often live in the countryside but are partly the consequences of the urbanization. <a href="http://www.chinanews.com/edu/2014/05-16/618058.shtml">http://www.chinanews.com/edu/2014/05-16/618058.shtml</a> <a href="http://data.163.com/13/0726/02/94M664OS0004MTN.html">http://data.163.com/13/0726/02/94M664OS0004MTN.html</a> <a href="http://news.sohu.com/20150613/n414949356.shtml">http://news.sohu.com/20150613/n414949356.shtml</a>
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, and Transgendered (女同性恋, 男同性恋, 双性恋和跨性别者)		20m gays (2010)	<a href="http://www.08kan.com/gwk/MzA3MzA2MDUxOQ/205483832/1/1ad55608f392af0841766a5f8aab0fdb.html">http://www.08kan.com/gwk/MzA3MzA2MDUxOQ/205483832/1/1ad55608f392af0841766a5f8aab0fdb.html</a> <a href="http://www.adquan.com/post-13-30975.html">http://www.adquan.com/post-13-30975.html</a> <a href="http://china.caixin.com/2015-08-12/100838559.html">http://china.caixin.com/2015-08-12/100838559.html</a> <a href="http://datanews.caixin.com/2015-08-24/100842812.html">http://datanews.caixin.com/2015-08-24/100842812.html</a>
Wives of gay men (Tong Qi, 同妻)		12m (2010) 16m (2015)	Women who are married to gays may or may not know that their spouses are only interested in men. Some gay men choose to get married so that they can make their family happy and don't have to face all the pressure from their family and society. However, these women have become the victims of this. <a href="http://www.08kan.com/gwk/MzA3MzA2MDUxOQ/20548383/1/1a_d55608f392af0841766a5f8aab0fdb.html">http://www.08kan.com/gwk/MzA3MzA2MDUxOQ/20548383/1/1a_d55608f392af0841766a5f8aab0fdb.html</a> <a href="http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2015/04-16/7212693.shtml">http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2015/04-16/7212693.shtml</a> <a href="http://sc.sina.com.cn/news/z/2015-04-16/detail-ichmi_fpy8444912.shtml">http://sc.sina.com.cn/news/z/2015-04-16/detail-ichmi_fpy8444912.shtml</a> <a href="http://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-04/16/content_20450928.htm">http://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-04/16/content_20450928.htm</a>
Working class that lives in basements (“Rat Tribe”) (“地老鼠”)		2m (in Beijing alone)	Today everybody is paying attention to the skyscrapers in the big cities and the modernization but very few people have paid attention to another group—a huge population who work very hard during the day in the big cities but hide in the basements during the nights where it is dark, humid, cold, and small. People easily forget the existence of these people in the cities. They work very hard. They have dreams. They are doing something good for society. But they are still at the bottom of the ladder in the cities. Some say in Beijing alone there are 2 million people living in basements. <a href="http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1872196862">http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1872196862</a> <a href="http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=Vk0XL2Q1AFceVQpSQTreGavYJJKcFKNZn8wW_nI5VptqHv0Zz-Kr2LMrF2Ur4skNBwgeRn5cNIFBVvDSuEexVsa">http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=Vk0XL2Q1AFceVQpSQTreGavYJJKcFKNZn8wW_nI5VptqHv0Zz-Kr2LMrF2Ur4skNBwgeRn5cNIFBVvDSuEexVsa</a>
Young women who are pregnant (少女未婚先孕)	5m unwed women have an abortion in public hospitals each year (excluding the illegal clinics), of whom 50% are adolescents.	For every 100 unwed girls between 15 and 24 years old, four get pregnant and 90% of these will have an abortion.	Ten adolescent girls undergo an unsafe abortion every minute. <a href="http://health.sina.com.cn/hc/s/2013-07-11/103892723.shtml">http://health.sina.com.cn/hc/s/2013-07-11/103892723.shtml</a> <a href="http://epaper.qlwb.com.cn/qlwb/content/20140917ArticleA06003F_M.htm">http://epaper.qlwb.com.cn/qlwb/content/20140917ArticleA06003F_M.htm</a> <a href="http://baobao.baidu.com/questionb9f5ce89afee5363927c2a97b4d66272.html">http://baobao.baidu.com/questionb9f5ce89afee5363927c2a97b4d66272.html</a> <a href="http://fashion.xinmin.cn/gd/2014/09/17/25410912.html">http://fashion.xinmin.cn/gd/2014/09/17/25410912.html</a> <a href="http://lady.gscn.com.cn/system/2014/12/17/010876652.shtml">http://lady.gscn.com.cn/system/2014/12/17/010876652.shtml</a>
Students (especially undergraduate and postgraduate students)	42.29m		<a href="http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201502/t20150226_685799.html">http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201502/t20150226_685799.html</a>
Businessmen	No available statistics	Difficult to estimate	The following article shows how vulnerable this group is: <a href="http://business.sohu.com/20140603/n400363778.shtml">http://business.sohu.com/20140603/n400363778.shtml</a>

# Indigenous Mission Movements in China

Steve Z.

**B**eginning in the 1990s and especially after the year 2000, the Korean church mission movement has motivated the evangelistic thinking of traditional Chinese house churches. More and more churches from different house church movements have begun to recognize, accept, and promote “indigenous mission.”<sup>1</sup>

Two enthusiastic slogans have become popular during this time. The first is: “The gospel entered China, the gospel is in China, the gospel sets forth from China” (福音进中国、福音在中国、福音出中国).<sup>2</sup> For the contemporary Chinese church, this slogan is grounded in the present, emphasizes opportunities, and challenges the church to its worldwide responsibilities. The fact that the Western church had already relinquished its role as the prime leader and sending base of missions by the beginning of the twenty-first century has given the growing Chinese church more reason to view this slogan as a source of pride and a motivation to carry out their gospel duties.

The second slogan, which has become quite widely known in the Western church, is “bring the gospel back to Jerusalem” (让福音回归耶路撒冷). According to Brother Yun, who has become well known in foreign circles after emigrating from China some years ago, “When we speak about ‘Back To Jerusalem’ we are speaking about evangelizing thousands of unreached people groups in places between China and Jerusalem. It is the destiny of the house-churches of China to pull down the world’s last remaining spiritual strongholds—and to proclaim the glorious Gospel to all nations before the Second Coming of our Lord.”<sup>3</sup> Since this movement

shares much in common with the 10/40 mission strategy of the Western church, the “Back to Jerusalem” slogan has become very popular in the West.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it has become the main channel through which the Western church has been introduced to Chinese indigenous missions. Even so, many western Christians find this goal to be quite different from their expectations of a missionary movement. So, while they are delighted to learn of the goals of its leaders, many have expressed doubts and concerns about it. How can we more accurately understand this “indigenous missionary movement” that originated in China and may significantly influence global mission? This topic will undoubtedly require a lot of attention from mission-focused research teams, especially from agencies that focus on China.

## 1. The Origin of Chinese Indigenous Mission Movements

If we consider the historical development of the gospel “entering China”, being “in China”, and “setting forth from China,” it is easy to see that from the perspective of the Chinese church “setting forth” is a relatively new phenomenon. Existing records suggest that Christianity “entered” the central plains of China no later than the Tang Dynasty in the sixth century. However, Christianity didn’t begin to “set forth” from China for more than a millennium, after China had passed through several thousand years of imperial rule and entered the republican era in the twentieth century.

Historically, when the Nestorians (涅斯多留, also known as “jingjiao,” 景教, “the luminous religion”) arrived in the central plain of China, they were well received by the people. According

to the inscription on a memorial stele, Emperor Tang Gaozong (唐高宗) “founded brilliant monasteries in every one of the departments (chou). He further promoted A-lo-pen [阿罗本] to be Great Spiritual Lord, Protector of the Empire. The religion was spread over the ten provinces and the kingdoms were enriched with vast prosperity; monasteries occupied every city and the families enjoyed great happiness.”<sup>5</sup> Nestorians had particularly won the favor of Emperor Tang Taizong (唐太宗) who even invited the missionary Alopen to the palace with the result that “the books had been translated in the [royal] library and the doctrine examined in his private apartment [of the emperor].”<sup>6</sup> Although the Nestorians established churches and worshipped in China for several hundred years, the gospel never transitioned from “entering” to “setting forth” during the Tang Dynasty. The Nestorian church was completely wiped out during the anti-Buddhism political movement during the reign of Emperor Tang Wuzong (唐武宗).<sup>7</sup>

To be fair, one cannot criticize the Nestorian church for lacking missionary vision as the stele explicitly stated that “the true Way was preached and illumined . . . the Way is broad; its influence universal.”<sup>8</sup> Neither can one arbitrarily conclude that the Nestorian church did not adapt to the Chinese environment. From the arrival of Alopen in China, it took the Nestorian missionaries only 150 years before it could be said that “monasteries occupied every city.” Planting churches at this speed is astonishing even when judged by today’s standard.

Some may argue that the progression from “entering” to “being in” and to “setting forth” is a modern mission theory that does not apply to the

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Nestorian church. Even so, the theory was shown to work in the Tang Dynasty, though not by the Nestorians but by Buddhists who came to China around the same time.

The Tang Dynasty was one of the most culturally flourishing eras of Chinese history. It was part of the “golden days” when the major world religions freely spread their doctrines across the vast empire. They all, of course, faced the challenge of survival. Even so, Buddhism not only survived the storms of that era, but also gradually became a fundamental part of Chinese culture, especially as it impacted language and popular religious thinking. Buddhism thus made the transition from “entering China” to being “in China.” Moreover, Buddhism “set forth” from the central plains of China to reach the remote island nation of Japan.

From the perspective of mission history, we cannot evade the question of why Buddhism not only survived but also revived after the devastating *meifo* (anti-Buddhism) movement. How did Buddhism manage to profoundly influence the thought and culture of the Chinese nation and achieve the goal of being “in” China? Why did Buddhism attract monks from Japan so that they crossed sea and land to China’s central plains to “seek the Scriptures”? And at the same time, why was Syriac Nestorian Christianity, along with its claim that “the true Way was preached and illumined,” rooted out in an anti-Buddhism movement even though it was an innocent bystander? Not only

did it fail to “set forth” from China, it could not even consolidate its presence “in” China.

The failure of Nestorianism does not mean Christianity failed in China. Several hundred years later, rule over the central plains passed from the Tang to the Yuan Dynasty. At the invitation of the Yuan Imperial Court, and after many failed attempts, the Vatican finally sent Giovanni da Montecorvino (孟德高维, 1246–1328), a Franciscan, to China. Montecorvino successfully set up the first Catholic Church in Khanbaliq (now Beijing) in 1299. When Montecorvino died some thirty years later, thirty thousand of the Khan’s subjects had believed in Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Sadly, this situation did not last. In 1368, the resurgence of Han Chinese and establishment of the Ming Dynasty resulted in the disappearance of Christianity for a second time in China’s history due to a lack of Han converts.

With hindsight, it is clear that the church established by Montecorvino and his Franciscan associates was mainly made up of Mongols and Semu, but not Han Chinese.<sup>10</sup> This is the likely reason why the Han Chinese, after the establishment of the Ming Dynasty, saw the Christian church as a foreign religion and drove it out. Six hundred years after the Nestorians of the Tang Dynasty, the Franciscans, despite their realization of the dream of “entering” China and setting up churches with a large community of believers in the capital city and across

the central plains, failed to attain the goal of staying “in China” after the change in political regimes.

Even so, the Han of the Ming Dynasty were not innately opposed to Christianity. In 1600, three hundred years after Montecorvino built the Khanbaliq church, the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (利玛窦) arrived in the same city after overcoming many difficulties and hardships. By then, Khanbaliq had been renamed Beijing and served as the capital of the Ming Dynasty. Ricci had only ten years in which to spread Christianity in Beijing as he died in 1610. During that time he succeeded in unlocking the mainstream culture of the central plains. In an era when *lixue* (理学)<sup>11</sup> prevailed in the Chinese intellectual world, he led the outstanding Confucian Xu Guangqi (徐光启, 1562–1633) to be baptized as a Christian. This marked the first time a Confucian believed in Jesus. Moreover, Ricci not only used the Chinese language as a communication medium to publish “*Tianzhu Shilu*” (“天主实录,” “The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven”), he also enlisted the aid of Xu Guangqi and others to translate Euclid’s *Elements* and other Western classics. He further promoted the positive changes that the Christian worldview had brought to the human race. These endeavors not only produced a flourishing church with a large number of converts in the central plain of China—a scene reminiscent of Montecorvino’s work—but also succeeded in establishing a good social foundation for the church in a cultural environment that mingled the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Christianity, for the first time in history, was strong enough to prevent its disappearance in the wake of a dynastic change.

Not long afterwards the Ming Dynasty faded into history and missionaries such as Johann Adam Schall von Bell (汤若望) and Giuseppe Castiglione (郎世宁) won the favor and respect of the royal court of the Qing Dynasty. Even during the long period following the Rites Controversy (礼仪之争) when Christianity was prohibited by the Emperors and anti-Christian movements arose, the Christian faith was not erased from the central plain of China.<sup>12</sup> The Jesuit form of Christianity successfully “entered” China and achieved the goal of staying “in”



Xu Guangqi and Matteo Ricci

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China, despite many harsh trials. They set up dioceses in the country and its surrounding regions but, due to the limitations of their theology, they did not follow the Great Commission's call to motivate the churches they founded to participate more deeply in global mission.<sup>13</sup> It is thus fair to conclude that although the third "entry" of Christianity into China realized the goal of staying "in" the country, the need for the gospel to "set forth" from China never entered the minds of the Catholic missionaries. Neither did they encourage the Chinese church to set out and fulfil Jesus' Great Commission to preach the gospel "to the ends of the earth."

The true roots of the Chinese indigenous missionary movement in which mission is taken as a commission (以宣教为使命) and evangelism and saving souls are taken as the responsibility of the Chinese church can only be traced back to the beginning of the Protestant missionary movement when Robert Morrison (马礼逊) arrived in 1807.

When Robert Morrison and other early Protestant missionaries arrived in China, the kind of challenges and difficulties they had to face in this land which had closed itself off from the world and where Christianity was prohibited were no less than those faced by the Catholic priests who had preceded them. Even so, Morrison completed the most important task since the days of Ricci, that is, to translate the Bible into Chinese. The Catholic Church, by comparison, did not see the need for a Chinese Bible until the 1920s and it was not until 1968 that the *Sigao* version (思高圣经) was published.

Apart from Morrison, Samuel Dyer (台约尔) and his associates preached continuously to the Chinese through the medium of written words. In May 1877, seventy years after Morrison arrived in China, the first China Protestant missionary conference was held in Shanghai. By then, the

number of Protestant missionaries in China had reached 473, of whom 126 were in attendance. In this meeting the value and importance of a quality native Christian literature ministry was raised. It was apparently the first time western missionaries raised the possibility of and advocated the mission theory that "indigenoussness" (本土) and "preaching" (布道) should be taken together as related concepts.<sup>14</sup>

Just as in the days of Morrison, western missionaries needed Chinese helpers for Bible translation. They similarly discovered the need to allow Chinese to take responsibility in using their own written language to evangelize their countrymen. For more than two thousand years the written language was the one and only means for people from the central plains to be educated for government office and bring honor to their parents and ancestors. At this point, under the encouragement of the missionaries, Chinese believers started to use the written language as a tool to evangelize their own people.

This change in the use of the written language led to a profound change in the cultural history of the central plains. The rise of written vernacular Chinese eventually led to the beginning of the influential New Cultural Movement. The development of Christianity in China over the past two hundred years shows that, in addition to the education and medicine that Chinese society desperately needed and that served as keen instruments for missionary work, written vernacular Chinese literature played a key role. Among the three, western missionaries dominated in the area of education and medicine while the Chinese workers had the major share in writing vernacular Christian literature. Apart from a few big projects—such as the translation of the Chinese Union Version Bible—that were still directed by westerners, more and more well-known and not so well-known Chinese Christians began to produce and distribute evangelistic literature. While the literary work of Ricci and Xu Guangqi targeted

the intellectuals of the central plains, the vernacular literature movement initiated by Protestants brought the written language to the common people for the first time.

The Chinese Christian indigenous missionary movement had its roots in an indigenous evangelistic movement. Moreover, the indigenous missionary movement was neither founded upon preexistent theories, nor instigated or planned by anyone. Rather, it began when a group of Chinese converts acquainted with the benefits of the gospel to humanity rose up and committed themselves to use indigenous methods to preach the gospel. Beyond preaching the word, their use of easy-to-understand vernacular written language was the most effective evangelical tool at hand. In addition to using literature, the rise of the Chinese indigenous evangelistic and mission movement is actually based on something deeper: the theological factors that moved Chinese Christians to reflect on the development of social trends of the early twentieth century.

## **2. The birth and development of Chinese Indigenous Mission Movements**

From the perspective of practical theology, evangelism (布道) and mission (宣教) are not the same, as the latter refers to crossing geographical and racial boundaries. Chinese indigenous mission follows this same line of development, gradually evolving from indigenous evangelism. This development is inseparable from the changing contexts in China and the world in the twentieth century.

The most renowned of the early Chinese Christians to go abroad was Huang Nai-Tang (黄乃棠, 1849–1924). Huang was a Methodist from Fujian who successfully passed the imperial provincial examination and had taken part in the *Gongche Shangshu* movement (公车上书).<sup>15</sup> His chief achievement

*The first truly influential indigenous evangelistic movement started only after Mary Stone established the Bethel Mission and its associated school and hospital in Shanghai. Her influence was solidified because not only did she plant a church and establish a school, she also devoted herself to itinerant preaching in many places. She also guided Andrew Gih, who became a very important leader in Chinese mission history.*

overseas was to secure a colony (垦殖地) in Sibul, Sarawak where, in 1901, he established a Fujian Christian community by leading three groups totaling more than one thousand poor Christian peasants from Fujian Province to work this land.<sup>16</sup> Although this community formed the seedbed of the largest local Chinese church in the area today, Huang should not be seen as pioneering an indigenous mission movement since he crossed the South China Sea (南洋) not purely to preach the gospel, but as a result of changes in the political and social situation at home. While other ethnic groups live in the South China Sea region, the sizable migrant Chinese Christian community was a key factor for Chinese Christians to leave their homeland and go overseas for evangelism and mission.

The first Chinese evangelist who went overseas for evangelistic purpose was the C&MA pastor Rev. Choe Sing Huen (朱醒魂, 1888–1963).<sup>17</sup> By the early 1920s he had established a church in Saigon, Vietnam. He then moved to Indonesia to explore opportunities

for planting more churches. However, strictly speaking, Choe Sing Huen's mission work cannot be classified as "indigenous" because it was still part of the Chinese diaspora gospel work promoted and developed by the chairman of the South China region of the C&MA, Robert A. Jaffray (翟辅民, 1873–1945). In order to enable Chinese evangelists to shoulder the burden of saving the souls of overseas Chinese, Jaffray also promoted and launched the Chinese Foreign Missionary Union (中华海外布道团).<sup>18</sup> It is fair to conclude that although this missionary band was not indigenously Chinese, it played an important role by introducing what was possible and it inspired the later rise of the Chinese indigenous missionary movement.

Mary Stone (石美玉, 1873–1954) was arguably the pioneer who ignited the Chinese indigenous evangelism and mission movements.<sup>19</sup> Born in a Wesleyan Christian family in Jiujiang, Jiangxi, Mary was amongst the first Chinese women to be educated abroad. When she completed her medical training in America, she returned home with a vision to heal both the physical and spiritual illnesses of her compatriots. With the cooperation of some western missionaries, she opened a hospital in Jiujiang in 1900—the very year of the Boxer Rebellion. At the same time she started a Bible study and nursing class. Sometime later, in response to the negative impact of the Boxer Rebellion on Christianity, the road of "self-propagation" was gradually adopted as the common view of Chinese Christians.

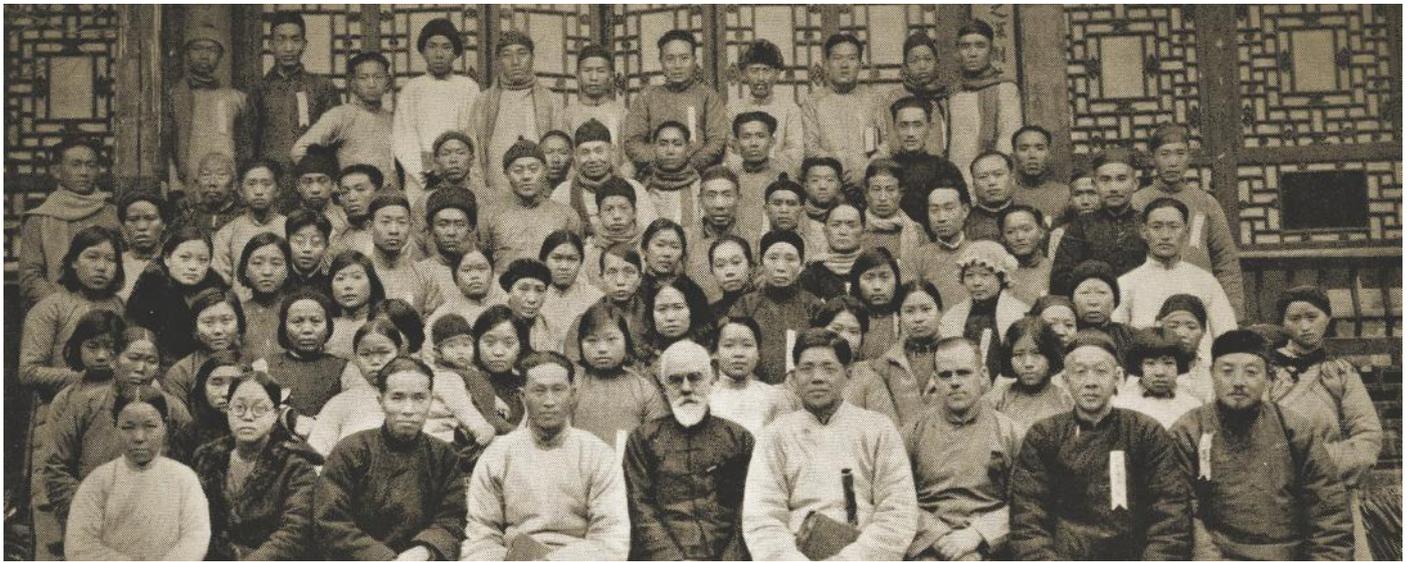
In the summer of 1918, after the establishment of the Republic of China, Mary and six others—Yu Rizhang (余日章), Chen Weiping (陈维屏), Cheng Jingyi (诚静怡), Hu Suzhen (胡素贞), Cai Sujuan (蔡素娟), and Ding Limei (丁立美)—launched the

"Chinese Inland Missionary Union" (中华国内布道会) during a retreat in Kuling. This was the very first time in history when Chinese Christians working on their own launched a united mission program aimed to reach all the peoples and regions of China. Ten years later, in 1928, Robert A. Jaffray of the C&MA correspondingly launched the Chinese Foreign Missionary Union (中华国外布道团), which had Chinese evangelists such as Wang Zai (王载) and Wang Zhi (王峙) as key leaders. This group traveled wherever Chinese could be found in the South China Sea region to preach and set up churches. Even so, the first truly influential indigenous evangelistic movement started only after Mary Stone established the Bethel Mission (伯特利教会) and its associated school and hospital in Shanghai. Her influence was solidified because not only did she plant a church and establish a school, she also devoted herself to itinerant preaching in many places. She also guided Andrew Gih (许志文, 1901–1985), who became a very important leader in Chinese mission history.

Apart from the external factor of the Boxer Rebellion, there was also a more important internal factor behind the rise of "self-propagation" within the Chinese church in the first half of the twentieth century—the emergence of the so-called "modernist" theology within the main Western denominations. Finding it impossible to accept the position of the "unbelieving faction" (不信派), Mary Stone left the Wesleyan church with her like-minded American missionary friend, Jennie V. Hughes (胡遵理, 1874–1951). Together they went to Shanghai, and in the name of "Bethel" founded a church, seminary, hospital, and a number of schools—including a nursing school, middle school, primary school, and orphanage. After the birth of the Republic, China was in perpetual turmoil. Both Chinese Christians and some western missionaries in China realized that it was not possible to merely copy the western missionaries' method of establishing schools and hospitals in order to solve the basic problem of saving souls. Consequently, a series of regional "revival movements"—such as the Shandong Revival (山东大复兴) of the early 1930s—arose.



Mary Stone



The Kweichow Provincial Short Term Bible School, 1936. Front row (from the left): Ruth Cheng, Hannah Cheng, Pastor Lin (leader of the Bethel Band visiting Kweichow), Elder Koh (Bethel Band), Rev. G. Cecil-Smith, Mr. Tien (Bethel Band), Rev. Ieuan Jones, Elder Shen of Tsunyi, Elder Yeh of Kweiyang. *China's Millions* (April 1936): 74.

It was in this spiritual atmosphere that the Asbury College World Evangelistic Team came to China in 1930 to take part in the Summer Bible retreat hosted by the Bethel Mission. Bethel Mission members were deeply moved by the Holy Spirit through the input of the Americans and determined to follow their example. The following February, Andrew Gih founded the “Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band.” When Dr. John Sung (宋尚节) later became a member, the Evangelistic Band was greatly reinforced. These enthusiastic Chinese Christians traversed all the cities in China, from North to South, and then traveled overseas. This was the beginning of the Chinese indigenous mission.

In the first four years of the Bethel Band, members travelled fifty thousand kilometers, visited 133 cities, and held 3,389 meetings where they preached to hundreds of thousands of people and led tens of thousands to the Lord. They accomplished this in spite of having to rely on outdated modes of transportation and facing the chaos of war and armed separatists. They subsequently established auxiliary bands all over China and influenced

many local churches to set up their own evangelistic bands. In addition to evangelizing Han-occupied regions, they also expanded the work to areas where Han didn't live. Their gospel-motivated footprints could be traced to Mongolia, Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. After 1938 Andrew Gih and his associates crossed the frontier to visit Vietnam. That trip marked the first step in moving from evangelism within China to overseas mission. And though John Song left the Bethel Mission in 1933—only two years after its inception—he continued to be involved in itinerant evangelism for the next fifteen years, exerting a great influence on China, Taiwan, and many other parts of Southeast Asia.

It should be appreciated that the work of Mary Stone, Andrew Gih, and John Song, and the Bethel Band's vision of widespread evangelization and teaching people to confess their sins and believe in Jesus—even after they moved from going across regions to cross borders—generally focused on Han Chinese communities. In spite of their positive work, they lacked a clear aspiration to engage in cross-cultural ministry. Even so, the Chinese indigenous

evangelistic and missionary movement of the twentieth century was not limited to Han Chinese. In addition to the Chinese co-workers who accompanied CIM missionaries to areas where minority people lived—like Yunnan, Guizhou, and Qinghai—to start gospel outreach and educational work, an indigenous force dedicated to cross-cultural mission had emerged. One of the most important trends from the time that still influences the missional direction of today's Chinese Church was the “gospel migration movement” (福音移民运动) that focused on the western borderlands. The forerunner of this movement was Pastor Ding Limei (丁立美, 1871–1936) of Weixian, Shandong. In 1910 Ding brought together student representatives from Hebei, Shandong, and Anhui to set up the “Righteous and Courageous Evangelistic Band” (义勇布道团), which was the predecessor of the Chinese Christian Student Volunteer Movement Evangelistic Band (中华基督教学生立志布道团). In 1918 he, along with David Z. T. Yui (余日章), Cheng Jingyi (诚静怡), and others, set up the “Preparatory Committee for the Yunnan Evangelistic Band” (云南布道筹备委员会) under the auspices of the

*In the first four years of the Bethel Band, members travelled fifty thousand kilometers, visited 133 cities, and held 3,389 meetings where they preached to hundreds of thousands of people and led tens of thousands to the Lord. They accomplished this in spite of having to rely on outdated modes of transportation and facing the chaos of war and armed separatists. They subsequently established auxiliary bands all over China and influenced many local churches to set up their own evangelistic bands.*

“China Inland Evangelistic Society” (中华国内布道团). The next spring, seven people—including Ding and his wife—were sent to Yunnan. From 1920 on they preached and established churches in the border areas of Yunnan and in northwest and northeast China.

Two main factors moved Chinese Christians to evangelize ethnic minorities in western China. The first was that western missionaries, including those of the China Inland Mission, had led whole tribes of Lisu and Big Flowerly Miao to the Lord. At the same time, stories of the evangelization of Mongolians and Tibetans living on the Tibetan Plateau stirred the hearts of Han Christians to evangelize ethnic minority groups. In fact, their westward evangelistic trips received the full support and partnership of missionaries from various societies, including the CIM.

The second factor emerged from the beginnings of the Sino-Japan war when large numbers of people from the coastal provinces began to move west. Many Christians from eastern and southern China—mainly comprising urbanites, intellectuals, and young students—due to their contact with the people living in the western borderlands began to recognize that sharing the gospel is a blessed privilege. The most representative attempt to reach out was the “borderland service department” (边疆服务部) of the national headquarters of the Church of Christ in China (中华基督教会全国总会) that was established in 1939. The initial plan was to start educational and medical programs in western Sichuan and the Tibetan region to open doors for evangelism. At that time, some Christian students and intellectuals who remained in the frontlines during the Sino-Japan War also responded to the call of the ethnic minorities and took the initiative to set up schools and hospitals in the borderlands.

In reality, the indigenous mission organizations that were established to evangelize the peoples of the borderlands were started by a number of local seminaries after the Sino-Japan War. The most well-known was the *Bianchuan fuyin tuan* (遍传福音团, “The Band that Spreads the Gospel All Over the Place”), launched by the students and teachers of Northwest Bible Institute (西北圣经学院) in

*The situation in China in the late forties caused great anxiety. The victory that followed eight years of war with Japan brought no real peace. Nevertheless, the spiritual needs of China’s far west that were identified by the Chinese church during the war continued to stir the hearts of young intellectuals.*

Fengxiang (凤翔), Shaanxi. By and large, they traveled westward from Shaanxi along the Hexi Corridor (the western region of the Yellow River) and arrived in Xinjiang via Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai.<sup>20</sup> One can still find churches planted by this group to the north and south of Tianshan (天山). Later, graduates from North China Theological Seminary (华北神学院) and Baptist Seminary along the coast also joined the evangelistic work in Xinjiang. In addition, the Chinese Christian Evangelistic Band (中华基督徒布道会), established in Qingdao in 1947, issued the call for people to go and evangelize ethnic minorities.

The situation in China in the late forties caused great anxiety. The victory that followed eight years of war with Japan brought no real peace. Nevertheless, the spiritual needs of China’s far west that were identified by the Chinese church during the war continued to stir the hearts of young intellectuals. In this social setting, Pastor Zhang Guquan (张谷泉, 1920–1956) of Shandong launched the “Northwest Spiritual Work Band” (西北灵工团). He gradually emerged at the frontline of Chinese indigenous mission and deeply influenced the contemporary Chinese church as they entered the ranks of world mission thinking.

In his early years, Zhang Guquan was influenced by the Jesus Family (耶稣家庭) and the Little Flock (聚会处). He then went to study at North China Theological Seminary at Tenxian (滕县). During 1945–1946, due to the chaos of civil war that caused increasing numbers of Christian refugees to flee, Zhang set up “Spiritual Cultivation Seminary” (灵修院) at Weixian, Shandong. In 1947, two female students from Cheeloo University (齐鲁大学)—Zhang Meiyang (张美英) and Liu Shuyuan (刘淑媛)—were sent by the Spiritual Cultivation Seminary to pioneer work in Xinjiang. In the following year, after the whole seminary fasted and prayed, Zhang Guquan and others decided to relocate

the teachers, students, and their families from Shandong to Xinjiang. They departed in several groups, travelled thousands of miles westward to Hami (哈密), Xinjiang, and encountered many difficulties along the way. Often, they could only travel on foot or by horse and cart. Remarkably, not only did they receive hospitality from churches along their westward journey, but others also expressed their desire to join them on the way. The most well-known was the theologian Zhao Ximen (赵西门, 1918–2001) and his wife Wen Muling (文沐灵, 1916–1960) who travelled from Nanjing to meet up with them at Hami. In 1949, just before Mainland China changed leadership, Zhang and over one hundred associates formally established the “Northwest Spiritual Work Band” (西北灵工团), modeled after the Spiritual Cultivation Commune at Weixian that “shared everything in common.” In his hymn, “Northwest Spiritual Work,” Zhang wrote:

The spiritual work of the Northwest has been revived in the last days,  
May the brothers and sisters earnestly  
do the Lord’s work,  
do the Lord’s work,  
do the Lord’s work.  
Take the gospel back to Jerusalem,  
leaping over mountains and jumping  
over ridges, by foot and by boat,  
carving out paths in the wilderness  
and deserts.<sup>21</sup>

The opening paragraph of Volume 1, Issue 2 of the periodical, Northwest Spiritual Work (西北灵工), that Zhao Ximen published on occasion, more clearly explained the ideas behind “Back to Jerusalem.”

Our way is along the borders of the motherland—Xinjiang and Xizang. Our way is also in the West of the motherland—India, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Arabia, and Palestine. These are the places God has entrusted to us that we might walk this way, the boundaries that

*In the last ten years of the twentieth century after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, Chinese Christians caught the vision of “mission” once again. This is most noticeable in the re-launch of the “Back to Jerusalem” slogan by Chinese Christians and the call of the 2030 movement for 20,000 missionaries from China to join the global mission force by 2030.*

he determined for our lifework.

This is a clear vision statement for Chinese indigenous missions. It is also the manifesto of a group of Chinese Christians who dedicated themselves to world mission. However, due to the dramatic changes in China’s political situation, the “Northwest Spiritual Work Band” never crossed national borders and never reached its goal of crossing ethnic divides.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the necessity for the Chinese church to develop a vision so that the gospel can “depart from China” and cross cultural boundaries had become widely recognized and after thirty years of stagnation was reignited in the nineties.

### **3. Current Practice and Prospects of Chinese Indigenous Mission Movements**

At the end of the seventies after China’s thirty-year revolutionary storm, Chinese Christians seemed to emerge from nowhere as they re-started a limited range of normal Christian activities such as Sunday gatherings. At that time, people from other parts of the world discovered with delight that the Chinese church was not only alive, but had also greatly grown in size. From that time on, Chinese Christians, particularly the number of believers attending house churches, continued to expand and became one shining example of church growth in modern history. In the last ten years of the twentieth century after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, Chinese Christians caught the vision of “mission” once again. This is most noticeable in the re-launch of the “Back to Jerusalem” slogan by Chinese Christians and the call of the 2030 movement for 20,000 missionaries from China to join the global mission.

As it was only revived in the nineties, the present Chinese indigenous mission

movement remains in its embryonic stage. It is thus too early to make any objective historical analysis regarding its potential. Nevertheless, it is possible for sober observations to be made regarding some specific characteristics of current Chinese indigenous missions. It is also possible for us to gain a clearer understanding of the special features and potential development of this movement.

#### **3.1. Who is promoting mission in China?**

The Three-Self Church, in theory and practice, endeavors to promote “Sinification” through Christianity’s adaption to the Socialist system. When the Communist party came to power every effort was made to eliminate Christianity. Though this failed, the party hasn’t given up trying to reestablish the phase of “Christianity in China” seen earlier in history. The need for “Christianity to set forth from China” has never appeared on the official agenda of the Three-Self Church.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, the phrases “the gospel sets forth from China” and “doing mission beyond China” are only heard in Chinese house churches which are far greater in number than the Three-Self Church. Chinese house churches do not exhibit the kind of overarching framework found in the Three-Self Church. After Christianity regained a place in society during the 1980s and continued to grow over a further thirty years, house churches in China emerged in three different forms.

The first form is exemplified by the churches directly led by the older generation of evangelists such as Wang

Ming-Dao (王明道) of Shanghai, Yuan Xiang-Chen (袁相忱) of Beijing, Lin Xian-Gao (林献羔) of Guangzhou, and Yang Xin-Fei (杨心斐) of Xiamen. Although each group has its own characteristics and emphases, all are staunchly fundamentalist theologically and firmly resist the “modernist theology” (新派神学) promoted by the Three-Self Church. They similarly prefer a familial structure over an organizational structure when it comes to church governance. Missiologically, although they all recognize the church’s duty to fulfil the Great Commission, they emphasize the importance of each believer’s spiritual life. To Chinese Christians who grew up after the Cultural Revolution, these older leaders are honored as servants who were faithful even to the point of death and spiritual models who walked the way of the Cross. They are also seen as spiritual mentors who led the church revival that started in the eighties. Even so, they are not initiators or leaders of the modern Chinese mission movement.

The second form of house churches takes the shape of associations of churches, modeled after large “dioceses” (片区) for churches in rural areas and small to medium-size cities such as the Fangcheng church, the Chinese Evangelical Fellowship, and the Wenzhou churches.<sup>24</sup> The leaders of most of these churches are Christian workers who were directed and trained for many years under the older generation of fundamentalist mentors. Their social standing is generally not very high. Theologically, they embrace fundamentalism and reject Three-Self ideology. With China’s policy of opening up to the world, they have also been influenced to varying degrees by churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries. They have been further influenced by the personal understandings of certain leaders. Their ideas are therefore a mixture of fundamentalism and different shades of “indigenous theology”. Their church governance reflects a traditional Confucian clan (家族/宗族) structure. While the first type of churches led by

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*Putting all the data together, it seems that the Chinese church has made a good beginning in mission. However, the majority still remain in the visionary and exploratory stage. The concept of a “missional China” is not yet a movement in the present tense, but it is a goal that could be achieved step by step if the church receives proper guidance.*

the older spiritual leaders could be said to be paternalistic (家长制), the style of the second form of house churches could be identified as patriarchal (族长制). Since the social context has improved, generally speaking, the leaders of this second form of churches are more likely to focus on evangelism and lead people to the Lord than the older spiritual leaders. It is therefore fair to call them the initiators of “missional China” as well as the main force behind the “Back to Jerusalem” slogan.

The third form includes newly established urban churches in big Chinese cities such as Shouwang in Beijing, Wanbang in Shanghai, and Qiu-yu-zhi-fu in Chengdu. Although the number of believers in these churches is much smaller than those in the second group, the majority of their leaders have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher and have received training from recognized seminaries overseas. For this reason, their horizons stretch far beyond that of their predecessors. Having identified what they believe to be deficiencies in the theology and governance of traditional house churches, they have become more inclined to accept Calvinist teaching. As they have developed a stronger sense of responsibility toward society and a more critical mindset, they believe that cross-cultural mission is the duty of the church, the very reason for its existence. The purpose and mobilization of the 2030 movement originated from such Chinese intellectual Christians who are full of passion and have a strong sense of responsibility for the times. In comparison to the second form of churches, these intellectual Christians are more rational in their mission mobilization and are better equipped in theological and sociological analysis. Even so, they tend to be less resilient when facing difficulties and less patient in their desire for success.

In addition to the above three major forms of house churches, there are a

number of other types of churches in China. For example, the Jiaxing church of Zhejiang Province and Shihua church of Shanghai lie in between the first and the second forms of churches. An important characteristic of these churches is that upon the death of older spiritual leaders who directly or indirectly influenced the church, leadership is passed on to the next generation. These churches value continuity highly and do not consider missions to be an urgent matter. Another type lies in between the second and third forms of churches. Examples are churches for migrant workers that can be found in and around many large cities. Representative examples include the church for people from Guizhou in Shaoxing, Zhejiang and the Lisu church in Kunming. Practical questions of making a living, interacting with fellow countrymen, and a longing for normal church life have meant that missions hasn’t become a priority for these churches.

The above analysis provides a rough sketch of the huge Christian community comprising some 100,000,000 believers. Who from among these will join the ranks of those called to global mission? From the above picture, we can gather an impression of the missional characteristics of Chinese Christians, their strengths and weaknesses, and the problems and challenges that they are facing.

### **3.2. The current state of mission mobilization in the Chinese Church**

Overseas research institutions and Christians who pay close attention to the development of the Chinese church and issues in world mission have spent much time following and studying the Chinese house church to understand the current state and future direction of mobilization and participation in mission. Among these are Chinese organizations such as “CCOWE” (华福) and “GOI/Gospel Operation

International” (华传), and western organizations like Open Doors and ChinaSource. Added to this list are some purely academic organizations and theological seminaries. Each organization has its own purposes for studying the topic. This paper does not intend to evaluate the work and opinions of these groups. It presents observations based on the historical background of Chinese church growth and accounts of CIM and other mission organizations which have guided and partnered with the Chinese church.

Let’s first look at two sets of data. The first set considers the actual number of people who have participated in the “Back to Jerusalem” movement up to this day. Although Brother Yun and his associates have frequently announced publicly that they would send out 100,000 missionaries to take the gospel to fifty-one countries, they had only sent out about 1,500 people by 2004.<sup>25</sup> Further, both the results derived from field studies of various researchers and my own interviews with people who have taken part in this movement point to the conclusion that the published figures present a human-devised ideal that does not correspond to reality. Not only are the actual numbers of those sent far below what was announced, but even those who were sent to evangelize in a cross-cultural environment are, without exception, living and ministering among their own people—the Han Chinese—and using their native language. Although this movement has been going on for more than ten years, it has never actually “crossed” any cultural barriers. This is exactly the same problem faced in earlier times by the “Northwest Spiritual Work Fellowship” when they first arrived in Xinjiang.

The next set of data was collected in November 2015 through a survey designed to measure “the current state and outlook of Chinese church ministry.” The 856 questionnaires collected indicated that 80.1% of the respondents were in full or part time Christian ministry, 42.6% had tertiary

(bachelor and above) qualifications, and 61% had received theological training. The data clearly show that in comparison with thirty years ago dramatic changes have taken place in the composition of the Chinese house church, particularly with regard to leadership. Although rural Christians may still hold a numerical advantage, the urbanization and intellectualization of the Chinese church cannot be reversed.

However, alongside these encouraging statistics, answers given to questions concerning “mission” present a different picture. Positively, the majority of respondents gave the right definition for “mission,” which shows that the Chinese church has a clear and mature understanding of what it is.<sup>26</sup> However, when they were asked whether their church currently promotes and participates in mission, only 29.6% indicated they were involved while 52.6% indicated that they either had never thought about it, or had thought about it but didn’t know how to get involved, or simply failed to answer the question. The remaining 17% stated that they had tried to get involved but failed.

Putting all the data together, it seems that the Chinese church has made a good beginning in mission. However, the majority still remain in the visionary and exploratory stage. The concept of a “missional China” is not yet a movement in the present tense, but it is a goal that could be achieved step by step if the church receives proper guidance.

### **3.3. Issues the Chinese Church must consider as it promotes mission**

If we count off from the days of Mary Stone and Ding Limei, Chinese Christians have journeyed on the road of indigenous evangelism and

overseas mission for nearly 100 years. This covers nearly half of the history of Protestant missions in China.

Although the history has been filled with hardship and tears, the missionary movement in China was built upon a solid biblical and theological base and has progressed like a relay race in which the baton has been passed on across several generations. Though the church and the world are undergoing change, God’s love for the world and the salvation that comes from the cross remain unchanged. When the Chinese church marches toward the front of the stage, becoming conscious of its own responsibility towards world mission, we must truly recognize that this is a very different world from the one that was known by our forefathers. We also need to discover whether we have the ability to converse with this world and lead modern men and women of other cultures to Jesus as Savior. The following issues are unavoidable as the church matures in mission.

#### **A. Issues concerning economics**

Today, whether in China or abroad, when people talk about Chinese churches promoting indigenous mission, they often mention that China’s economic development over the past thirty years has increased the church’s ability to engage in mission and that human resources in China are incomparably large.<sup>27</sup> However, the success of mission is neither measured by piles of gold and silver, nor can it succeed by the tactical deployment of waves of humanity. It also remains true that the per capita economic power of the Chinese people lags behind the traditional missionary-sending countries. Similarly, financial support made by Chinese Christians to mission is far from on a par with their counterparts in traditional missionary-sending countries.

#### **B. Issues concerning motivation**

In addition to the positive expectations that economic power and human resources bring, the Chinese church holds to a popular missiological myth: since Christianity, from its beginnings, has always expanded westward and the faith has now circled the globe it is the job of the Chinese church to carry the “last baton” of global mission and return to Jerusalem. This mission myth is not based on biblical revelation. Rather, it seems to pander to national pride as well as adding a “super-spiritual label” to what is actually Chinese national arrogance. This myth is in reality a “spiritual” trap from which the Chinese church will not be able to extricate themselves. Our motivation for participation in world mission should be entirely based on our Savior’s Great Commission. This is the only true starting point of missional activity. It’s not because we are stronger, have more people, possess better cultural values, or anything like that. We need to reflect on our motivations and mentality when we promote mission. Is it based on an “I can” or “my nation can” mentality? Do we really think that other nations have lost their appetite for mission?

If we think that the above two points permit Chinese people to develop misconceptions about mission, then we need to pay close attention to a few basic issues that we may not have considered before.

#### **C. Issues concerning theology**

Urban churches in China are predominantly reformed and maintain a reformed approach to mission. Nevertheless, we must be aware that even though reformed ideas are popular in China they are not regarded so highly in every corner of the world.

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*Reflecting on the way China was evangelized after the arrival of Robert Morrison, we discover that the Chinese accepted western missionaries not only because of their devotion, but largely because of the tools they brought, such as medicine and education. They also helped the Chinese rediscover the importance and use of literature. Apart from listening to them preach the “way,” Chinese people experienced the answers to life’s biggest questions—such as the existence of “love,” “dignity,” and “truth”—through the “tools” that the missionaries brought.*

If someone lets Chinese missionaries know that they don’t really appreciate Calvinism, should we continue recommending it to them? The purpose of mission is to lead people to accept Jesus as their personal savior, not to accept any particular theological theory.

#### **D. Issues concerning cultural backgrounds**

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the essence of Chinese thought is largely Confucian and therefore fundamentally atheistic. When sixty years of atheistic education is added to this, we must conclude that the majority of missionaries sent from China received their formative education from an atheistic perspective. Most Chinese Christians have therefore journeyed from atheism to monotheism to embrace Jesus as the only true God. However, once we leave China we discover that in most areas of the world polytheism, pantheism, and various forms of monotheism, rather than atheism, are prevalent. How then can people who turned from atheism to theism help people from polytheistic or pantheistic backgrounds accept Jesus as their only Savior? Before Chinese Christians set out, they must learn many lessons in comparative religion.

#### **E. Issues concerning tools for propagation**

Reflecting on the way China was evangelized after the arrival of Robert Morrison, we discover that the Chinese accepted western missionaries not only because of their devotion, but largely

because of the tools they brought, such as medicine and education. They also helped the Chinese rediscover the importance and use of literature. Apart from listening to them preach the “way,” Chinese people experienced the answers to life’s biggest questions—such as the existence of “love,” “dignity,” and “truth”—through the “tools” that the missionaries brought. For example, though the Qing Court at times prohibited Christianity, their eventual abolition of the imperial exam system proved the effectiveness of the educational tools brought in by the missionaries.

Similarly, when we reach out in mission, we should also consider what tools we have that can help people accept the Lord. Is it Chinese language or the Confucian Institute or Chinese food or Kung Fu? It seems that Chinese people do not possess any missional tools that are superior to the ones used by the western church. What then do we have? While Africa has opened a wide door to the Chinese, the vast majority of the Chinese they have contact with have ventured there for trade. These Chinese visitors regularly flaunt their wealth and demonstrate a lack of fear of God by their greed and refusal to bear responsibility for their actions.

When Chinese Christians go to Africa, what can we bring that will be a blessing to Africans? What evidence can we provide so that they won’t think we are simply activists who are there to promote imperialist China? Africans still have a lot of “backward customs.” Western missionaries once

helped Chinese Christians put away customs like foot binding and opium smoking. When we send missionaries to Africa, shouldn’t we consider how we can improve on the western Christians’ methods to help Africans correct their bad customs?

#### **F. Issues concerning political backgrounds**

Whether or not Chinese missionaries acknowledge it, whenever they cross borders and encounter other cultures, the first and foremost thing that people notice is their “Chinese” background. Apart from traditional culture, people of the receiving nation will look at the particular Chinese person in front of them against the backdrop of China’s current performance on the global stage. For this reason, no matter where they go the deeds and motivations of the Chinese missionaries will always be evaluated or judged by the political context of China. For example, the Chinese government is currently promoting the “one belt, one road” initiative which overlaps geographically with the “Back to Jerusalem” program advocated by the church. Can the westward movement of the gospel extricate itself from the political shadow of the mercantilism proposed in the “one belt, one road” campaign? Or should Chinese missionaries take the opportunity to use the “one belt, one road” initiative as a missionary platform, just as Robert Morrison used the East India Company in an earlier age?

#### **Conclusion**

In the two hundred years since Robert Morrison arrived in China in 1807, the Chinese Christian population has risen to something close to 100 million so that China is one of the countries with the highest number of Christians. Historically speaking, this is nothing short of miraculous. Throughout this growth process, the Chinese

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church has experienced several “great revivals” which have not only built a church of the greatest scale, but have also established several missionary movements that, while they are of global influence, have mainly impacted Asia. China in the twenty-first century is already witnessing Christianity moving from “the gospel is in China” stage to “the gospel sets forth from China” stage, as it begins to flow with the tide of world mission.

The Western church has often understood mission to focus on foreign cultures. In contrast, the Chinese indigenous missionary movement was not originally “cross-cultural.” It was, rather, a direct response to God’s call during the Great Revival era. It was an evangelistic movement that was not limited by the boundaries of culture. The resultant theological reflection is that mission is a commission that the church must take part in. According to the narratives of the four Gospels, Jesus’ proclamation of the Great Commission indicates that true mission must eventually reach the cross-cultural stage. This is not to say that unless mission is cross-cultural from the start it cannot be called mission. The church of the apostolic age started its work within the same family and nation and then went on to reach Gentiles and barbarians. For this reason, we should not give the Chinese church the wrong impression that mission must be cross-cultural from the start.

History teaches us that “setting forth from China” first and foremost means to resist the anti-Christian propaganda promulgated by the secular world that prefers that Christianity remains “in China.” To achieve this requires that indigeneity begins to arise and develop in a way that brings the gospel and the daily life of ordinary people into close relationship. As a result, when Chinese Christians set forth they need to clearly understand the key material, psychological, and spiritual characteristics of both the twenty-first century Chinese church and the “Macedonia” to which we are called. We need to consider whether the Chinese church currently has the material, psychological, and spiritual qualifications that are necessary to start out and assume the task of taking the gospel to the whole world. We also need to analyze how our personal resources correspond to the needs of

the field. What are our advantages and disadvantages? Do we have the means and will to overcome the disadvantages? How can we become integrated into the world missionary movement? How much effort is needed to study the essential aspects of culture found on the mission field? What things should be discarded? What can be transformed into missional tools?

If the Chinese church regularly discusses the relationship between Christianity and Confucianism, then, when we begin to set out toward Jerusalem, shouldn’t we start reflecting on the relationship between Christianity and pantheism and other forms of monotheism? And when we set out toward Africa, shouldn’t we discuss the correspondence between traditional Chinese worship practices and those found in African culture?

The purpose of cross-cultural mission is not to give one a feeling of “crossing”. Rather, it is to build an awareness of the spiritual and material needs of people from foreign cultures. For instance, Chinese mission agencies in Africa cannot avoid spending time and energy studying the “backward customs” of the society or community where they live, how common they are, and the evil consequences they bring. Another example comes in the light of the United Nations’ policies on eliminating poverty, promoting gender equality, alleviating disasters, facing climate change, etc. Will we question the practical significance of what we do in relation to Africa’s development? Though the official position for Chinese diplomacy is “no intervention in internal affairs,” the actual result is that greed is encouraged and Chinese are only interested in African resources. Even the colonists in history did not perform so poorly. This

is how the name “Chinese Empire” came about. How can we help African people realize that Chinese missionaries are not agents of the “Chinese Empire” but ambassadors of God? How can we convince the African church to be willing to work with us so that we can together promote local evangelism and service? How can we, from the outset, become aware that we are not the ultimate savior of Africa, but simply the next possible stimulus of an indigenous missionary movement?

When western missionaries held the first Missionary Conference in Shanghai, they already realized that “there is no hope at all within China.” They also expressed that “Each year many millions of Chinese have passed into eternal death! How heart-breaking it is!” Similarly, when Chinese Christians think of going to Africa for mission, shouldn’t they also ask: “What is it in Africa that breaks the heart of the Chinese church?”

The Chinese church must understand that mission is the Lord Jesus’ commandment to the church. It is the church’s Great Commission. Mission does not exist merely to demonstrate its own strength or to be an additional burden on the church. Rather, it is a blessing in and of itself. At the same time that mission builds up missionaries it can become a blessing to the Chinese church.

It is an exciting era for Chinese Christians. It is no exaggeration to say that the mission work of the Chinese church in the next few decades has a great potential to influence the whole world and to make an important contribution to the completion of the Great Commission. However, frankly speaking, if the tens of thousands of workers who are sent out carry with

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*It doesn't matter if we are part of the Chinese church or if we pray for the Chinese church with great expectations that they will set forth into all parts of the world; we should never forget the lesson laid down more than one hundred years ago when the "Northeast revival movement" selected its slogan. Success comes "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech 4:6).*

them the wrong theology, unhealthy missionary methods, and misguided passion, they are also capable of creating the greatest chaos in the whole of church history.

The Chinese church should not forget that just as "the three-self formula" was not a Chinese innovation, the possibility that modern China could become the next missionary-sending base is not a creation of their own reasoning power. Rather, it is the result of the teaching and example of many overseas Christians who came to serve in China since the 1990s.

Finally, it doesn't matter if we are part of the Chinese church or if we pray for the Chinese church with great expectations that they will set forth into all parts of the world; we should never forget the lesson laid down more than one hundred years ago when the "Northeast revival movement" selected its slogan. Success comes "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech 4:6). **MRT**

<sup>1</sup> Rob Moll, "Missions Incredible—South Korea sends more missionaries than any country but the U.S. And it won't be long before it's number one," *Christianity Today* (1 March 2006). This article may have been a bit too optimistic with regard to the Korean church. According to *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020 Society, Religion, and Mission*, published by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (2013), 76, South Korea was the number six sending country in 2010, behind the US, Brazil, France, Spain, and Italy. Even though most of the missionaries from several of these countries are Roman Catholic, South Korea (with 20,000 sent) remains far behind the US (127,000) and Brazil (34,000).

<sup>2</sup> 张路加, "福音与中国-明白神的心意与蓝图 刊于," *今日宣教*, 二零一五年十月 (创刊号)。

<sup>3</sup> "China's Mission: Back to Jerusalem," <http://chinasmissionbtj.org/wordpress/> (accessed 22 August 2016).

<sup>4</sup> "China's Mission: Back to Jerusalem."

<sup>5</sup> From the "Memorial Stele of the Propagation in China of the Luminous Religion from Daqin" (大秦景教流行中国碑; pinyin: Dàqīn Jǐngjiào liúxíng Zhōngguó bēi, abbreviated 大秦景教碑). Translation by Arthur Christopher Moule (慕阿德), Christians in China before the year 1550 (London: SPCK, 1930), 40. Many members of the Moule family served in China as

missionaries.

<sup>6</sup> Moule, "Memorial Stele," 38.

<sup>7</sup> This movement is known as *Wuzong Miefu* (武宗灭佛). During his six-year reign, Wuzong suppressed all foreign religions. Though his main target was Buddhism, Christianity was also severely affected.

<sup>8</sup> Moule, "Memorial Stele," 46–7.

<sup>9</sup> Christianity was known to the Mongols as *Yelikaven* (也里可温) in Chinese transliteration.

The Mongol form of the word is uncertain. Many Chinese intellectuals wrongly thought the Catholic mission marked a return of *Jingjiao*.

<sup>10</sup> *Semu* refers to the second caste in the Yuan Dynasty. Meaning "assorted categories," the word captures the ethnic diversity within this social class.

<sup>11</sup> *Lixue* is a more rationalist form of Confucianism, or Neo-Confucianism, that came to prominence in the Song and Ming dynasties.

Digital image of illustration of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi from Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* published in 1667, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xu\\_Guangqi#/media/File:Kircher\\_-\\_Toonneel\\_van\\_China\\_-\\_Ricci\\_and\\_Guangqi.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xu_Guangqi#/media/File:Kircher_-_Toonneel_van_China_-_Ricci_and_Guangqi.jpg). (accessed 31 October 2016).

<sup>12</sup> The Chinese Rites controversy was a dispute among Roman Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries over the question of whether Chinese rituals honoring Confucius and ancestors were compatible with the Christian faith.

<sup>13</sup> See the valuable article "Province of Si-chuen," extracted from Thomas Thornville Cooper's, "Travels of a Pioneer of Commerce," in *China's Millions* (August 1877): 94–5. According to his article, the Société des Missions Etrangères founded a Catholic mission (Si-chuen Mission) in 1704. Despite various civil wars, prohibition, and persecution, this mission persevered in its service. By the time CIM missionaries arrived in Sichuan in the late 1870s, there were tens of thousands of Chinese believers and dozens of Chinese Catholic priests in addition to foreign missionaries.

<sup>14</sup> *China's Millions* (September 1877): 114–15.

<sup>15</sup> *Gongche Shangshu*'s literal meaning is "Public Vehicle Petition." It was a political movement seeking reforms and expressing opposition to the Treaty of Shimonoseki in which Taiwan was ceded to Japan.

<sup>16</sup> 李恩涵, 《东南亚华人史·第九章·第二节》(五南图书, 2002): 241–5.

<sup>17</sup> 陳潤棠, 《华人教会新突破: 中华海外布道团——华人宣教先锋南洋拓荒史·朱醒魂: 中国第一位海外宣教士》(华富中心, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Robert A. Jaffray, "Report of the South China Conference of C&MA, 1929," *South China Alliance Tidings* 24:1 (February 1930): 8–9.

<sup>19</sup> Digital image of Dr. Mary Stone (Shi Meiyu) by Margaret E. Burton from [https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dr.\\_Shi\\_Meiyu.jpg](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dr._Shi_Meiyu.jpg). (accessed 31 October 2016).

<sup>20</sup> According to some materials, the vision of the *Bianchuan fuyin tuan*, from its inception in 1943, was to "evangelize the Northwest seven provinces and the Northwest seven countries" of China. This vision was never actually achieved.

<sup>21</sup> 西北之灵工末世大振兴,

愿兄弟努力作主工, 作主工, 作主工。

把福音传回耶路撒冷,  
蹄山复越岭, 徒步又航行,  
旷野和沙漠路开通。

<sup>22</sup> According to Huang Jianbo (黄建波), "Whether it was the early pioneers of the Northwest Spiritual Work Band, or the churches that survived as the fruits of their labor, both focused on the Han Chinese as their main target group and rarely reached out to the Muslim community. This is more or less a deviation from the original mission of the "Back to Jerusalem" movement. Even so, the peculiarities of the Xinjiang borderlands, the socio-political pressure of the 1950s, and the clan-based traditions of the Muslim faith should all be taken into account." 黄建波, "自东而西-西北灵工团史述及思考," 基督时报 (1 June 2012).

<sup>23</sup> 高峰, 促进基督教中国化——在2015年5月全国基督教中青年代表人士培训班上的讲话。2016-01-27发表, <http://www.ccctspm.org/sanzishiliao/2016/127/16127907.html>. See also 中国基督教第九次代表会议: 中国基督教第九次代表会议发挥正能量 共圆“中国梦”倡议书, <http://www.ccctspm.org/tianfengzh/2013/911/13911607.html>.

<sup>24</sup> This Chinese form of diocese rose from the rural church of the 1980s when the gospel spread from village to village and county to county. As the church grew across a province, it came under one governing body that may lead 10,000, 500,000, or even more people.

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.gospelherald.com.hk/news/mis-64/> 一个震撼的异象。

<sup>26</sup> Survey questions: What do think of "mission"? Answers:

- 617 ticked cross-cultural mission
- 266 ticked cross-border mission
- 419 ticked cross-racial/ethnic mission
- 422 ticked cross-region mission
- 233 ticked short-term mission
- 132 ticked family migration
- 139 ticked membership in a mission board
- 172 ticked setting up a mission board/sending agency

问卷问题: 您认为宣教的意义是什么? 答案如下:

- 跨文化宣教617次  跨国境宣教266次
- 跨种族宣教419次  跨地区宣教422次
- 短宣形式233次  全家移民宣教132次
- 加入差会139次  建立差会172次

<sup>27</sup> See 麥裕沛, "全球化與「福音進中國, 福音出中國」," 刊于《今日華人教會》總第二六七期, 二〇〇八年八月號。

# Partnership with the Global Church: Implications for the Global East

## *An Interview with Patrick Fung*

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### Patrick Fung

Dr. Patrick Fung is the General Director of OMF International. He was one of the plenary speakers at the Cape Town 2010 Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. More recently in October 2016, he spoke at the WEA Mission Commission Global Consultation in Panama on the subject of “Cooperation in a Polycentric World.”

***A*s the church in the Global East matures and interacts with the church in the rest of the world, are there signs that it is redefining itself vis-à-vis other parts of the global church?**

In an insightful paper delivered at the OMF Mission Research Consultation this past April, Eddie Arthur made this point: “There is a danger that the increasingly Christian South will *define itself* against what they see as the secular and overly liberal North and this could lead to a fracture in the church.”<sup>1</sup>

We are already seeing that happen. In February 2016 the leaders of conservative Anglican churches from Africa said they will “stand for the truth” at a critical global summit which revealed deep divisions within the worldwide Anglican Communion over homosexuality. Archbishops of the Church of England from six African countries—Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—walked out in protest during the week-long talks.

The church from the Global East, similar to that from the Global South, will redefine itself, its faith, and its mission according to the good news of

Jesus and will not be ashamed of the gospel. The church in the Global East will be defined theologically and not politically, socially, and/or culturally. How that will look exactly, we do not know yet. However, increasingly, the church in the Global East will not be just looking towards the West for support, resources, ideas, or even mission or church models. More importantly—perhaps sadly—the church in the Global East may not continue to look to the West for leadership unless there is a demonstrable humility and a sincere desire for authentic equal partnership.

Part of the “redefining” process is that the church in the Global East deeply desires to connect with the global church and to find her role in global mission. The church in China, for example, after being disconnected from the rest of the world for nearly fifty years, is ready to reengage. As mission organizations, we have a tremendous privilege and opportunity to be the bridge to connect the church from the Global East to the global church, and vice versa. Thus the mission organization also needs to redefine itself. Our role will not be to lead, but to connect and be the bridge. I believe that the critical step in redefining itself is in theological/missiological areas which the church in the Global East continues to grapple with.

*Part of the “redefining” process is that the church in the Global East deeply desires to connect with the global church and to find her role in global mission.*

**Your comments about the need for the Eastern church to connect with the global church and for mission organizations to act as a bridge through which this can be accomplished highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining world-wide networks through which churches can interact. A section of Eldon Porter’s article found earlier in this issue of MRT champions “the strategic role of networks.” How do you see that worked out in mission agencies today?**

When I read Eldon Porter’s article, I was struck by his emphasis on the importance of networking that goes beyond partnering or just partnership. Porter has tracked 500 networks globally. Riding on the back of global technology, networks are allowing individuals in one agency to connect with others in similar ministries from other organizations and from countries around the world. These informal but vibrant ministry connections between individuals who have so much in common are sometimes creating an alternate environment to which one can belong. In OMF, we have recently adopted the term “bandwidth” to refer to our ability to send and receive information. We often talk about the need to increase and widen our bandwidth so that we can better connect with others to pursue a common purpose.

For that to happen, mission organizations need to be, as Porter puts it, “partnership friendly.” This means the agency must always focus on the essentials and remain flexible with secondary issues. Porter is correct that, by and large, most of the traditional Western agencies are defined by systems, policies, and structures. It is essential that we ask ourselves how we derive our identity. Does it come from these things or is it tied more to ethos, doctrines, core values, and shared objectives? As we face the new global world, churches from the Global East, similar to the Global

South, have a different way of working. Their structures tend to be simple and less well-defined. Systems tend to be flexible and sometimes appear chaotic. Strategies are often fluid. Apparently conflicting values are regularly accepted and ambiguity abounds.

The need for networks in such a world is powerfully stated by Porter: “Networks are perhaps the most strategic tool available to facilitate global engagement and collaboration. They are becoming recognized as the best platform and the best space or context that enables global engagement.” Earlier in the paper he provided a brilliant example of how this works in an interconnected world when he spoke of churches in Finland and Kenya partnering with an international mission agency to reach out to Somalis. In our OMF context, we partner with churches in Kenya to reach the Chinese diaspora in their country. In another situation, a group of key church leaders from China meet in Korea where we link them with an African leader from an international mission agency.

Networking can happen everywhere in an interconnected world. For this reason, Porter’s comment that “The single most important factor is to see a clear and uncompromising commitment by top leadership to see the transition take place,” is of supreme importance. Top leadership must have the mindset to accept change and to encourage and initiate strategic partnership and networking. One example of how that is played out in our circles is the increase in opportunities for “internship” arrangements whereby churches in the Global East can increase their mission exposure. The networking can be between OMF and other mission agencies so that young people can be placed, through OMF’s contacts, as mission interns in places where OMF does not serve so they can learn to minister in different cultures.

**For partnerships to be effective, we will need to expand our dialogue with churches globally. Can you speak to the importance of inter-church and inter-agency dialogue?**

As we consider this question, the first

point to note is that we should not be concerned with dialogue for the sake of dialogue or talk for the sake of talk. Our dialogue should center on the key issues of evangelism and discipleship. There is a growing concern that many churches and mission agencies are losing their focus on evangelistic mission. Martin Lee of Global Connection wrote that “The evangelical church has lost its desire to help people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, happy with just social action and doing good.”<sup>2</sup> This is alarming if it is true. Similarly, according to the research documented in Steve Z’s article in this issue of *MRT*, of 856 pastors from China interviewed, though 29% have been exposed to mission, a significant 51% said they have never thought about mission. Our dialogue must address this reality.

Second, the impact of globalization means that there is now no such thing as a purely local context. Every situation in the world is informed by the larger global context. Thus the long-held distinction between home and foreign missions or the notion of mission fields versus home office is becoming increasingly blurred or even redundant in a globalized world. Andrew Walls’ frequently quoted phrase is true: “mission today is from everywhere to everywhere.” But what does “from everywhere to everywhere” mean to the mission agencies and what does it mean to the church both in the West and the East? This has yet to be clarified. Examples need to be studied, tested, and learned from.

These two realities support my belief that dialogue is very important. However, we should not think that dialogue only needs to take place between mission agencies. Dialogue between the churches—from both the sending and receiving contexts (though this distinction may be a bit arbitrary)—and the mission agencies will become increasingly important. Agencies need to hear and respond to the views of the church from the Global East.

Let me quote some comments made by a key leader from China on mission involvement by mission agencies.

We should mobilize the Chinese church to be involved in reaching the neglected frontiers among the

*When, in true partnership, each of us brings what he or she has, not what we don't have, we will bless the global church in its mission. This kind of partnership will demonstrate that we respect and rejoice in diversity, rather than hold that there is only one way of doing missions that must be foisted on everyone else.*

minorities. OMF can provide training behind the scenes, but the actual line of work needs to be borne by the Chinese believers. There are situations in which expatriate missionaries are a hindrance rather than a help to mission in China. The minority churches in the Northeast region will be closely monitored; the issues with Tibetans, Mongolians, and Muslims are extremely sensitive. It is thus strongly recommended that mission agencies make strategic adjustments and try not to do the actual work but instead mobilize the Chinese churches to do the work.

Two evangelical groups or movements are trying to create a global table for mission agencies and churches from the Global South, the Global East, and the West to come together. One is the Lausanne Movement and the other is the WEA Mission Commission. The WEA consultation in Panama in October 2016 provided a wonderful opportunity for dialogue around the global table. However, simply providing a global table is not adequate. We need, to push the analogy further, to consider how we will share our dinner together and what we will eat. Creating a culture that welcomes different voices is essential.

A recent consultation on global leadership held in Malaysia was attended by three brothers from Latin America who required translation. When there was adequate translation, the Latin American colleagues made some excellent contributions. Without translation, their input would have been negligible at best. The same is true for colleagues from the Global East, though their input into the dialogue would probably be quite different, reflecting a more non-linear approach with a loose agenda.

At the 1900 Edinburgh Mission Conference, V.S. Azariah, an Indian church leader, pointed out:

Through all the ages to come the Indian church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and

self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have fed the poor. You have given yourself to us. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!"

There is still a long way to go to build that friendship—not only among mission agencies, but also with churches. As I reflected on this, I have come to believe that mission agencies have a strategic role to play in facilitating or providing such roundtables to bring people together, to listen, and to learn together.

### **What else can be done to help the church in the Global East as it matures?**

One of the most important contributions we can make comes through training. This need is seen in the very helpful observation Steve Z made in his paper about training in the context of the Chinese Church. Chinese Christians grew up in an atheistic context. As they came to faith they began to grow in their understanding of monotheism. However, most Chinese Christians lack an understanding of the religious world in which they live where polytheism is prominent. Of course, Chinese are influenced by traditional beliefs that recognize all kinds of gods and spirits. Steve Z's point, however, is that for the Chinese church to be involved effectively in missions, cross-cultural mission training is essential but is still missing or severely lacking. This is an area where mission agencies need to think carefully about how to equip brothers and sisters for missions and encourage indigenous biblical church movements.

As the article made clear, the Chinese church often thinks of mission only in the sense of overseas cross-cultural missions. However, the Chinese church also needs to understand the whole mission of God according to the grand biblical narratives. If Jesus is not the Lord of all—all societies, cultures, and peoples—he is not Lord at all. In the past 100 years, the church in China,

by and large, has held a dichotomized view of Christian discipleship that separates the sacred from the secular. The Chinese church needs help to regain the understanding that the mission of God's people flows from the whole mission of God. They similarly need to learn that training is needed not only for skills and knowledge, but also to develop a Christ-honoring attitude of learning from the global church, including those from the West, the South, and other parts of the East.

In our global family, some will bring gifts that are quite different. Some will model faithfulness in the face of suffering and persecution and show us a vital element of authentic gospel living. Some will bring years of experience of commending the Lord Jesus Christ in the context of another world faith. Some will demonstrate how to live with shining trust in God despite poverty or injustice. Others will bring deep traditions of believing prayer. The body of Christ needs all of these and many more. When, in true partnership, each of us brings what he or she has, not what we don't have, we will bless the global church in its mission. This kind of partnership will demonstrate that we respect and rejoice in diversity, rather than hold that there is only one way of doing missions that must be foisted on everyone else.

May the churches from the Global East bring energy, freshness, and vibrancy to the proclamation of the good news of Christ in word, deed, and character. May the church in the Global East have a teachable spirit, reflecting a willingness to receive from other members of God's global family. May we all come to the global table for the spiritual mission banquet that God has laid for us. **MRT**

<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added. Eddie Arthur's paper will be published in the next issue of *Mission Round Table*.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lee, "Integral Mission: an Analysis," paper presented at the Global Connections Council, London, 2015.

# With Bethel in Manchuria, 1931<sup>1</sup>



## Leslie T. Lyall<sup>2</sup>

Son of an itinerant evangelist, Lyall joined the CIM in response to D. E. Hoste's call in 1929 for 200 new workers. He arrived in a China that was riven by civil war and worked in the increasingly unstable environment for more than twenty years, most notably training students who later became pastors and elders. Lyall left a lasting contribution to the history of CIM/OMF and the Chinese church through writing ten books, including *Come Wind, Come Weather* (1960), *Urgent Harvest* (1963), and *A Passion for the Impossible* (1965).

This article, abridged from a chapter in Lyall's biography of John Sung, tells how the great Chinese church leader worked together with the Bethel Band to take evangelistic trips to different parts of China where they ministered to Chinese and foreigner alike.

In the autumn of 1931, the political tension was almost at breaking point. Japan's designs were already clear and Manchuria was under the threat of aggression. Andrew Gih, the leader of the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band, had intended to visit Manchuria and Mongolia in the spring but open doors in other provinces had kept the Band fully busy right up to the time of the Conference. It now seemed even more urgent for the Band to go to the "Three North-eastern Provinces", the name by which all Chinese know Manchuria.

The other original members of the Band were Frank Ling from Foochow, Lincoln Nieh and Philip Lee. The two latter were in their late teens and all three were musical, especially Philip who had a trained tenor voice and could play almost any wind or stringed instrument. After the Summer Conference, Andrew Gih invited John Sung to join them formally, even though he well knew that he himself, the leader of the Band, would henceforth be less prominent than the now famed Dr. Sung.

As a result of the Summer Conference, the Bethel Bands had agreed to emphasize in all their campaigns four important features of a healthy church life: the Watch-tower or prayer meeting; Evangelistic Bands, composed of new converts and others; Bible classes for effective follow-up work; and the institution of family worship in the home. The influence of Dr. Sung's experience in Fukien and Central China is plain. A "Watch-Tower" was set up in the room at Bethel where every day from early morning until late at night someone was always at prayer for the work of the Evangelistic Bands.

The triennial conference of one of the Lutheran missions was in progress [at Fengfangchen in Dairen], with 200 delegates from all over Manchuria present. The invitation to the Band to speak was somewhat reluctant. Lincoln Nieh led the singing and introduced the people to some of the Bethel choruses, while Philip Lee sang. Then John Sung gave his testimony, speaking with great power. When an appeal was made, twenty-five Chinese and two missionaries went to the front. There they poured their hearts in prayer before God, confessing their sins with many tears. But some of the missionaries objected to the "excitement" and the loud praying. The next day, they sent a Chinese deputation to say that no further invitations to preach would be given to the Band unless they lowered their voices, used no gestures and prayed quietly. How could men whose hearts were aflame accept such limiting restrictions? When it was announced that business meetings would take the place of all other planned meetings on the Monday, the Band packed up their belongings and, thanking God that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name, left on the night train.

From Fengfangchen, the Band went to Mukden, arriving a week ahead of schedule. As things turned out, their visit proved to be just on the eve of the "Mukden incident", when the Japanese Imperial Army seized the city as a prelude to occupying the whole of Manchuria. This was the event which enraged China, shocked the world and eventually led to war with China after the League of Nations had failed to act to stop aggression. At this crisis in the city's history and in contrast to what had happened at Fengfangchen, the Band was to be

God's instrument in bringing about the greatest revival the Church in Mukden had ever experienced. And this is not overlooking the revivals that had attended the ministry of Jonathan Goforth in Manchuria. At first, attendance at the meetings was small, but ten responded to the appeal the first evening. The next morning at 5:30 a.m. the church was full. Twenty-seven meetings were held in all and over 1,000 people confessed their sins and made profession of faith in Christ. There was increasing joy as the days went on at the great things God was doing for that city. Dr. Sung wrote to Dr. Mary Stone, Jr., and Miss Hughes:

The first trial is to change stones into bread. We thought that the Conference to which we have been invited to speak would give us an open door to Manchuria because in that Conference all the preachers and workers of that Mission throughout Manchuria can be reached... But this is not the way of our Lord. He did not allow us to change the stones into bread. The missionaries had fixed ideas and those preachers with traditional opinions are in the eyes of the Lord merely stones. The Lord can change them into bread, but they would not let Him do it. We are glad we were driven out of that place because this experience has helped the young evangelists to be humble, not to be too ambitious and try to turn the world upside down in one minute's time . . . . Of course, after leaving there we prayed more for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Thank God, the name of the next place we came to means "Listen to the Will of Heaven"! Several great evangelists have been there. They helped create a spiritual appetite. On our part our previous experience taught us to trust more in prayer and living upon the Word of the Lord, for one day we prayed together eight or ten times, something we had never done before. Here we found the key for revival. After the shame of the Cross there was the glory of the Resurrection and for this reason we have had about 1,000 sound conversions and 279 beautiful testimonies.

The campaign over, the train carrying the Band to their destination in Heilungkiang province pulled out of

Mukden on the morning of September 18th. It was the last train to leave the capital before the Japanese took over control of the city! Chaos and confusion reigned there, but in the hearts of hundreds of new believers there was nothing but the peace and joy of sin forgiven.

Everywhere the fear of widespread hostilities caused the Christians to advise the Band to go back home, but as doors opened in city after city they felt that God was leading them on. "This may be our last opportunity—and Manchuria's!" It was—before Manchuria became a puppet Japanese State. Right up to Hailar, the last big city on the railway before it crosses the Russian frontier at Manchuli to join the Trans-Siberian line, the Band went. Fear of bombing was keeping people from travelling and the trains were almost empty. Officials were suspicious of the five young men so near the frontier and interrogations gave opportunities for many a personal testimony. At Hailar, the church was in a sad condition under an unconverted pastor and two worldly "elders", one of whom was engaged in smuggling. At the first meeting thirty people professed faith in Christ, and there might have been many more had the Band not been forced to leave the city by news of heavy bombing of the railways and the possibility of being cut off. Harbin was therefore reached two weeks ahead of schedule.

Prior to the arrival of the Band in Harbin, the Chinese National Council and the Synod of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Mukden had raised a sum of money for a special retreat for all the Harbin Chinese churches which were in danger of isolating themselves from fellowship with the other churches of Harbin and China. They were sadly divided among themselves and torn by bitter rivalry. Three of them had driven out the missionaries in an endeavour to prove that the Church was not the "running dog of the foreigner". The difficulties were so great that the proposed retreat seemed doomed to failure. Pastors of the larger churches where the meetings would have to be held refused to agree to the speakers suggested, and the missionaries who were behind the plan were almost in despair.

Dr. and Mrs. Deming were stationed

in Harbin at the time. Just as Mrs. Deming was at her wits' end, the pastor of the Chinese Methodist Church led in the five young men, who had arrived so unexpectedly following the curtailed Hailar campaign. Dr. Deming was away, but Mrs. Deming soon recognised in Dr. Sung the same young man whom she and her husband had befriended in New York at Union Theological Seminary and of whom they had read such glowing reports in the *Bible Union for China* magazine.

Would the local Christians receive these young men after rejecting other "big speakers"? They did, and all the churches except one decided to unite for meetings to be held in the large Union Church. It was Saturday when the Band arrived. The same evening, the first hastily arranged meeting was held. A Japanese plane had been circling over the city during the day and during the meeting there were two loud explosions. But no one took any notice. The cheerful singing and the happy team work of the Band held the attention of everyone. Dr. Sung preached, and at once gripped his audience with his graphic style and burning zeal. As he finished, wet with perspiration in spite of the winter temperature outside, Andrew Gih gave the appeal and conducted the after-meeting. Meetings were arranged from seven to nine every morning and from five to seven every evening, Pastor Gih preaching in the mornings and Dr. Sung in the evenings. During the hours between, the individual members of the Band were free to visit the many churches of the city—Chinese, Korean, Russian, and even German. Only one of the churches frowned on their indecorous evangelism and refused their cooperation. The campaign brought to Harbin the first real revival the Chinese churches of the city had ever experienced. Among those who found Christ personally for the first time were several leading laymen and lay preachers and a Y.M.C.A. secretary who had been creating serious trouble among the churches. Missionaries, pastors, and church workers, some of whom had not spoken to one another for months, met at the communion rail and asked forgiveness of one another. There was a great putting right of wrongs, an unreserved consecration of many young lives, hundreds of conversions and hundreds more seeking the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The

people crowded to the front of the church after every appeal to pray and to receive personal help. The last meetings in the great church were packed and the people would hardly let the young evangelists go.

The main meetings over, Dr. and Mrs. Deming urged the Band to stay on for a few days, partly for a rest and partly to lead meetings in the newly erected Korean Methodist Church at which Dr. Deming interpreted from English into Korean. Twenty Koreans decided for Christ . . . Mrs. Deming was delighted to attend to the personal needs of the Band: laundry sewing, mending and the like. A young out-of-work tailor was employed to help the men and he was surprised and deeply impressed to observe that the Band rose at 4:30 every morning for prayer and Bible study.

Describing the Mukden campaign, Dr. Sung continued in his letter to the Bethel headquarters:

Then we came to Harbin. God just prepared workers and preachers for us to work with. He wanted us to learn how to work step by step and build the revival upon the rock . . . We helped them realize the wonder and stability of the Bible. When this battle was won invitations came not only from the Chinese but also from the Russian, Korean and German Churches...Now we are beginning to meet our third temptation, "Kneel down and you can have everything." We could stay in Harbin and work with the Russian and German churches, thus opening the way for world-wide evangelism, but God wanted us to go forward and we have come to a small, cold place



The Bethel Band in Harbin, 1931. Back (from the left): John Sung, Philip Lee, Frank Ling. Front: Lincoln Nieh, Andrew Gih

called Hulan. There is a hard battle ahead of us. Pray that we may be humble enough to meet this third and hardest trial.

Yours in soul-saving service,  
John Sung

After Harbin the Band divided into two: Dr. Sung, Frank Ling and Philip Lee went to Hulan and Suihwa, while Andrew Gih and Lincoln Nieh went to Asahur. At Hulan, the Principal of a large school run by the Y.M.C.A. and four of his teachers were converted together with most of the boys. Dr. Sung also preached on the Five Loaves and Two Fishes in a Russian church. As the Russian pastor interpreted, many were in tears and, at the invitation, fifty Russian Christians dedicated their lives for the evangelization of the Russians of Manchuria.

The two sections of the Band met again in Harbin for a few devotional meetings. Time was getting short, and it was evident that they would have to divide forces again if they were to respond to the invitations which were reaching them. But there seems to have been some disagreement about their plans and to settle the matter they drew lots. As a result, Andrew Gih went to Chaoyangchen while John Sung remained in Harbin for a day or two and then was to go to Changchun and Kirin. It is clear that the Enemy of souls was doing his best to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit by introducing differences of opinion among the five members of the Band. But they were aware of these attacks and no serious dissension was permitted to arise.

Dr. Sung gave his last message to the church leaders in Harbin on the Book of Acts, teaching them the truths about the Holy Spirit. When the time came to leave by the night train, the Christians escorted them to the station to see them off. Right to the last moment Dr. Sung, leaning out of the carriage window, was giving texts with their references to all who asked for them, while Philip Lee, lying in the upper berth of the sleeper, shone an electric torch on the open Bible. The chorus singing was so lusty that the station guards came rushing up to see what was going on!

At Changchun, where Andrew Gih had already held meetings, Dr. Sung was

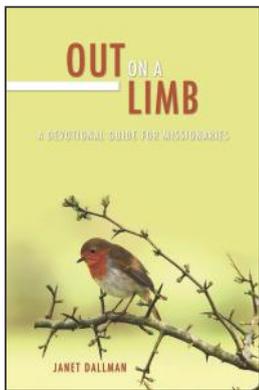
invited to speak in the leading Chinese church, although the pastor said, "I do not believe in appeals and do not want anything emotional! But as the Holy Spirit worked during the meetings the whole congregation rushed to the front to confess sin. Among them was their pastor who confessed especially the sin of dictating to the Holy Spirit.

At Kirin, Japanese troops were already in occupation. The Korean Christians had all been scattered or arrested and the churches were full of apprehension. But one of the pastors, himself a well-known preacher, gave Dr. Sung a welcome. His was a flourishing church which had already been behind Dr. Sung in prayer and sympathy. From this pastor, Dr. Sung learned the Chinese phrase for "laying hold" of God and His promises and he began to expect God to "lay hold" of sinners. He prayed with new faith in the promises of God. And there was manifestly a working of the Spirit of God in this city too. One pastor of another church had forbidden his congregation to attend Dr. Sung's meetings. But on the last night he came. God "laid hold" of him and he publicly confessed that for six years he had neither read his Bible nor had a morning "quiet time". There was a Christian doctor in the city, too, but he was too proud to kneel when he prayed. One day, while operating in the theatre, his arm refused to respond to his brain. He fell immediately on his knees and cried to God to restore his arm and save the life of the patient. God heard his prayer.

"First the Cross, then the glory!" seemed to summarize the campaign in the "Three North-eastern Provinces", which were henceforth to be known as Manchukuo so long as the Japanese remained in control. Over 3,000 people altogether had professed conversion in those few autumn months of 1931 and at a time when the whole area was in a state of warfare and turmoil. The Manchurian churches had begun to think in terms of an annual Bethel Conference in Manchuria, seeing that it was so difficult for Manchurian Christians to travel to Shanghai. **MRT**

<sup>1</sup> Condensed from a chapter in L. T. Lyall, *Flame for God: John Sung and Revival in the Far East* (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1954), 73-89.

<sup>2</sup> Photo of Leslie Lyall from <http://www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/1/lyall-leslie-theodore.php> (accessed 29 November 2016).



## Out on a Limb: A Devotional Guide for Missionaries

By Janet Dallman. Xulon, 2016. ISBN: 9781498470919. 147 pp.

Reviewed by Claire McConnell

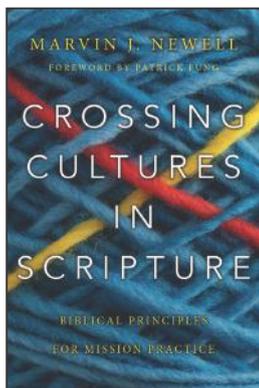
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As Christian workers, missionaries encounter many of the same difficulties faced by those who minister in their home countries. However, as cross-cultural workers, they also confront additional stresses which arise from living in an environment that can be hostile to both the gospel message and those who bring it. More difficult still is the fact that they face these stresses without the friendships and support structures that would be readily available at home. For this reason they often feel isolated and vulnerable, and, well, as the title of this book puts it, like they are going *Out on a Limb*.

In thirty-one readings, Dallman leads us through a number of issues common to missionaries in a way that is gentle yet challenging. From language and cultural learning, to the challenges and joys of team life, to the inevitable difficulties that leaving a family in one's home country can bring, each devotional draws from a wide personal experience as she grew up in Africa where her parents worked as missionaries, served as a single missionary in Africa, and is currently serving as a married missionary in Japan where she has raised her family. Both Scripture and real-life stories vividly illustrate the issues addressed and challenge us to react rightly to them. Each chapter ends with thought-provoking activities and a prayer.

I would recommend this book to any cross-cultural worker—whether one who is setting out for the first time or a seasoned veteran. Both would benefit from the challenging insights that Dallman brings to many areas. Those who wish to better understand and pray for missionaries will also gain from these chapters while finding themselves helped and encouraged in their own walk with the Lord.

This is not a book to be read once and then put down. As the years pass, many will be encouraged to reread it from cover to cover, while progress in life and ministry will cause others to return to certain chapters to help them as they face new challenges.



## Crossing Cultures in Scripture: Biblical Principles for Mission Practice

By Marvin J. Newell. Downers Grove: IVP, 2016. ISBN: 9780830844739. 298 pp.

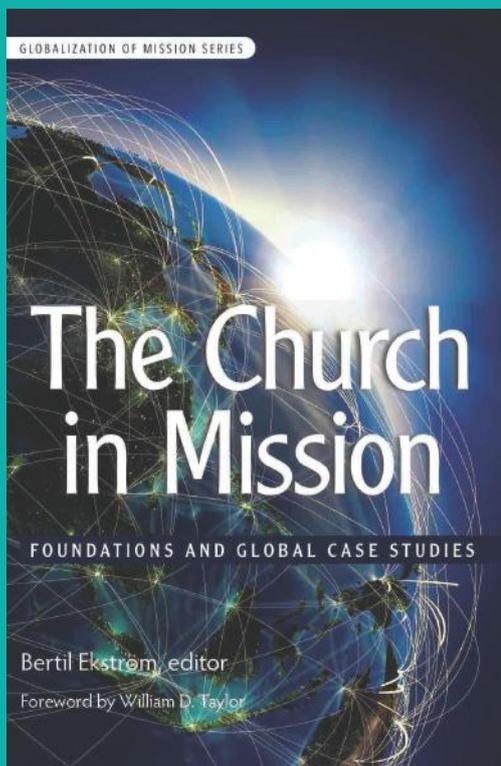
Reviewed by Walter McConnell

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Since missions is essentially a cross-cultural enterprise, Christ's command to make disciples of all nations obliges us to acquire a deep understanding of how cultures work and how to communicate the gospel effectively to every culture. *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* leads missionaries along this path by showing that followers of God have always interacted with people from other cultures and that principles for cross-cultural interaction can be traced from Genesis to Revelation.

Written in an engaging manner, the book begins with a chapter defining culture in missiological and anthropological terms, and then examines cultural interplay in the Old Testament in nineteen chapters and the New Testament in sixteen. Readers will appreciate the frequent use of modern stories that anchor the biblical lessons in contemporary practice. They will also welcome the fact that it often fleshes out the lives of biblical characters by firmly placing them in real cross-cultural situations. A major weakness in a book that is otherwise quite useful is that many chapters read as though the modern and biblical stories were chosen for their power to illustrate popular missiological concepts that cannot easily be derived from Scripture. While not negating the validity or value of the ideas, it lessens the book's use as a biblical theology of culture.

While most missionaries would benefit from this book, those who have read little on cultural issues have the most to gain as it provides a good introduction to an indispensable field for those who want to communicate the gospel well. Those working in home centers or preparing for home assignment may find an appendix that suggests sermon topics for preaching on culture extremely useful.



## The Church in Mission: Foundations and Global Case Studies

Bertil Ekström, ed. Pasadena: William Carey, 2016. ISBN: 9780878080533. 383pp.

The theme “the church in mission” remains one of the most critical subjects for today’s global mission. This book weaves together solid biblical theological reflections, contemporary missiological issues and real-life case studies from scholars and practitioners of different continents on the subject of church in mission. Similar to other books published by WEA, this book once again carries deep level scholarly reflection as well as relevant contemporary applications for anyone committed to global mission. I highly recommend this book to you.

*Dr. Patrick Fung, OMF International*

In the introduction to *The Church in Mission*, Bertil Ekström asks the following important questions and assures us that they will be addressed by the articles that follow.

What does it mean today to be a church totally committed to the gospel and fully engaged in God’s mission? What major religious and sociological trends in our world are affecting the role of the global church and local churches? How must we understand and be prepared to face these trends? How do we define “church” in the twenty-first century, being faithful to the Scriptures and at the same time relevant to a generation that does not believe in the institutional church anymore? What are some good models of missional churches in different regions of the world that will encourage and inspire those who long to see a church making a difference in society and in the world?

These are some of the issues that the book . . . addresses. There are certainly no final answers and magical forms; rather, we present a broad and deep discussion on how the gospel should be lived out by Jesus’ followers in our time and through our communities. Questions are raised and analyzed both from the perspective of a local church as well as from a global and general understanding of the Christian church. Some of our examples will focus more on local realities, others more on global challenges.

*The Church in Mission* examines this crucial theme in three parts.

- Part One: Biblical and Theological Foundations: Gospel, Church, and Mission
- Part Two: Contemporary Missiological Issues
- Part Three: Church in Mission: Case Studies

These parts are further divided into thirty-three chapters written by an international team of scholars (representing twenty-one nations) who examine the breadth and depth of the subject to lay the solid foundations that are essential for sustained and fruitful missional work. Authors of individual chapters who will be familiar to readers of *Mission Round Table* include Warren Beattie, Rose Dowsett, Peter Rowan, and Eileen Poh.

This book is the work of the WEA Mission Commission, an international and inter-generational community of global mission leaders that works to strengthen the sending of missionaries from both traditional and new sending countries so that the gospel can be preached from every nation to every nation. For more information about the WEA Mission Commission and how you can get involved, go to <http://mc.worlddea.org/>.