

## IN THIS ISSUE...

4 Returning Chinese Scholars

6 Returnees Serving in China

9 Chinese Nationals and Western Agencies

14 One Million in 2007 Prayer Movement

PERSPECTIVES AND ANALYSIS FOR THOSE WHO SERVE CHINA

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Peter S. Anderson

Tom Mizera

## Staying in China: The Issues

**H**e was given twenty-four hours to leave the country. After a week of uncertainty, following an investigation by the police, it was finally made clear he was being expelled for “religious activities incompatible with his status as a foreign expert.” Meanwhile, in another city, another foreigner is hailed as a true friend of China and given, what was at the time, the rare honor of permanent residence. These experiences of two equally committed Christian professionals, both of whom felt called to serve in China, are drastically different. There are several issues here, but clearly “retention” or longevity of in-country service is one of them.

### China and Foreigners

Foreigners are flocking to China—not just tourists, but longer-term residents. There are hundreds of thousands of foreigners engaged in business and investment, education (both teaching and studying), technical and cultural exchange, sports and entertainment. Many of these foreigners are Christians. In the openness of China today, few realize that there are fairly strict policies in place regarding foreigners and their religious activities.<sup>1</sup>

### An Overview

Most Christian foreigners resident in China do *not* see themselves as called to China for the longer term. Many are there to fulfill business commitments. They seldom engage in serious language study and tend to find fellowship and service opportunities within the foreign community. However, there are other foreigners who do see their presence in China as a call from God to serve the Chinese people. These so called “long-term” work-

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ers normally spend an initial period in concentrated language study before moving into a teaching, consulting or business environment. There are scores of overseas organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are eager to recruit such people in a wide range of professions for the many openings they have throughout the country. While some do welcome those with only a year to offer, many need and prefer longer-term commitments. Longevity of service is of critical concern for it takes time for any foreign worker to become effective. Those whose work environment allows them to operate in English (such as language teachers) can be effective in their role from day one, but normally, becoming culturally sensitive and adapting to life in China takes much longer. In fact, it takes a lifetime for there is always more to learn. There is no question in my mind that we need to see a far greater commitment to the long term (and all that it involves in language acquisition and cultural understanding) if we as foreigners want to be truly effective.

### Factors that Affect Longevity of Service

**Political.** We live in a "political" world and politics in China are a sensitive issue. When foreigners overstep the boundaries, they may well be asked to leave or, at least, they may find their activities more closely monitored. While I believe China is more tolerant than many Western nations when it comes to what they allow in the classroom, the fact remains, however, that religion and politics are sensitive issues to be handled with great care. Unwise words or actions on the part of the foreign professional, or his or her supporters back home, can jeopardize that person's position. Certain overt activities are inappropriate (not heroic)—and they may be unnecessary. Why, for example, should a foreign believer feel he has to baptize a Chinese convert? I think it is far better for that person to be linked up with local believers who can do the baptizing. For one thing, the locals are better able to judge if the person is ready for such a step. Those foreigners who feel they have to produce visible results for their supporters may find themselves back home more quickly than they bargained for.

**Organizational.** Sadly, some excel-

lent workers give up and go home because the organization with which they are affiliated fails to retain their loyalty and trust. Kath Donovan and Ruth Myers write about the characteristics of workers from different generations. The Booster Generation (those born before 1946) "... were high in institutional loyalty. When the leaders said, 'jump,' they asked 'How high?'" The Baby Boomer Generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) on the other hand "... brought to mission a commitment focused on excellence in ministry.... When their leader said, 'Jump,' they asked, 'Why?'" Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1983) are said to have a "greater emphasis on the experiential and the relational.... When the leader says, 'Jump,' they say, 'We will, if you jump with us.'"<sup>2</sup>

In the China context, we are not thinking of traditional missionaries or mission agencies, but rather of those called into a tentmaker or professional role. However these generational characteristics outlined by Donovan and Myers still apply. When China workers perceive their leaders as not being sensitive enough to the realities on the ground in China, there can be a problem. Similarly, when there is a lack of guidance or affirmation from organizational or team leaders, workers can begin to lose heart. Some traditional organizations are not easily able to meet the needs of professionals serving in China. It is essential there be a trusting relationship between agency groups and the China-based NGOs or organizations to whom they second (or loan) workers. Some larger churches (or denominational organizations) select, train and send their own teams of workers. William Taylor asks, however, whether these churches have "truly counted the cost of providing the imperative field-based support systems to enable their teams to live and serve effectively and for longer term?"<sup>3</sup>

**Professional.** China is requiring increasingly higher professional qualifications. Even for those going to teach English it is no longer sufficient to simply be a mother-tongue speaker. One needs training in how to teach the language. It is important for those wishing to serve longer term to be adequately prepared and qualified in their chosen profession. There may well be need, from time

to time, to upgrade one's qualifications and to gain further relevant experience. Those who are committed to professional excellence and who do a good job are far more likely to be asked to remain by their Chinese employers. The foreigner I mentioned, who was given permanent residence, made a name for himself as an enthusiastic and competent teacher. He has written textbooks and helped his university and city win international awards. Being under-qualified or incompetent, on the other hand, sabotages longevity—however well-meaning and loving the foreign worker may be.

**Personal.** There are a host of personal reasons why good workers leave China, often just when they are becoming most effective. The educational needs of children are a major factor. Many major cities, and some smaller centers too, have international schools (some run on Christian principles) which provide a viable alternative to home schooling or local schooling. However, for some, the individual needs of their children demand relocation back home. Others face the challenge of balancing their calling to China with the legitimate needs of aging parents. Some workers face the disappointment of broken health or emotional burn-out. None of these personal circumstances should be regarded as failure. It is all too easy to forget God is sovereign in all the circumstances of our lives. Nothing comes as a surprise to Him. Although the benefits of long term service are obvious, in individual cases, God might have other plans for His servants. In some cases, workers may have overstayed their welcome, and others really should retire. They may be just as useful back home—or even more so—working with Chinese scholars or immigrants in their home country.

**Spiritual.** Undoubtedly one of the most crucial factors in staying the course is keeping one's eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The disciplines of daily prayer and feeding on God's Word are non-negotiable essentials. The Christian foreigner serving in China will have his or her calling tested. He or she will face spiritual warfare and temptation. All need fellowship and times of refreshment and rest in order to make it for the long haul. It is very sad when some sort of moral failure causes gifted people



**There are a host of personal reasons why good workers leave China, often just when they are becoming most effective. The educational needs of children are a major factor.**

to have to withdraw. "Those who fail because of a moral lapse due to lack of self-control leading to uncontrolled anger, factious behavior, illicit sex, or some other sin cause grave consequences."<sup>4</sup> China is awash with moral landmines, and the worker who wants to serve effectively in the midst of the battle needs to walk humbly and closely with his or her God. I have known several cases of moral failure that have knocked out (or severely wounded) individuals, marriages and even ministries.

The love of money can also become a snare for some—especially those in the business field. Christian workers can so easily lose sight of their original calling and can "lose their first love" when they allow the temptations surrounding them to gain a foothold. Each of the qualities listed in Galatians 5:22, 23 are needed big time in China—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." They are the fruit of the Spirit-filled life.

**Financial.** For some, finances become a reason for withdrawal. Foreigners working for international companies are very well off with good salaries and up-market accommodations. Foreign teachers or students, however, may find their budgets severely stretched, especially if they have dependent children. Those working in NGOs may or may not have a salary provided. Professionals serving longer term in China generally need considerably less than the traditional missionary who joins a traditional mission agency. Despite this, they still need solid support from home if they are to remain longer term.

### **What is Being Done to Encourage Longevity?**

We have considered some of the factors affecting longevity of service. Since not everyone who wants to serve in China is suitable, careful selection of workers can help reduce early drop out. People need to be adequately qualified spiritu-

**Continued on page 8**



Jeff Mennen

Tom Mizera

# The Challenge of **Returning Chinese Scholars**

**Z**hang Hua's\* year at the University of Iowa's Physics Department was wonderful. His experience there was enjoyable and was influential in his getting promoted when he went back to China last year. However, more importantly, he will tell you, it was during that year that he came to know Jesus. Through the witness of a relative in the U.S. and the prayers and efforts of the Chinese fellowship that befriended him, he was a "success story" of the international student ministry.

However, when Zhang Hua returned to China, he struggled in his faith. It was hard for him to find a good fellowship in his area, and he went without for months. Finally, he contacted the Chinese brother I introduced him to, and he found a fellowship at which he has become a leader and has grown in his walk with God. Still, he told me last week that if it were not for the brother I had introduced him to, he probably would not be in a fellowship right now.

Why is it so hard for Christian returnees to continue in their faith once they have arrived back home? Is there anything we can do about it to help? First, let's look at some of the problems returnees face.

## **Four Problems for Returnees**

**1. Busyness:** When I talked with Zhang Hua about his difficulties finding a fellowship back in China, he said that he was quite busy, and that the fellowship he heard about at first was quite far away. We concluded that if it is not a priority for the returnee to make time for a fellowship and take the initiative to find and become active in a fellowship, it just will not happen. Another friend involved with returnee work wrote me about the "killer hours" that many businesses require of their workers—roughly twelve hours a day. He wrote, "In North America we might think of this kind of schedule as an emergency overtime situation; for Asians it's a nor-

mal work week." Clearly, these hours make it hard to find time for fellowship or personal Bible study and prayer. At the same time, foreign and Chinese Christians who are involved with fellowships back in China are also overwhelmed themselves, and even if they hear about some returning believers, they may not make the time to follow them up.

**2. Faith/Life Conflict:** Living out the Christian life in China is tough! At work, for example, supervisors may not only demand extra hours from the returnee, they may also expect that they would be willing to do immoral or illegal things for the sake of the company. This may mean dishonesty in negotiations or taxes, or perhaps

encouragement towards sexual immorality or greed. In the face of this pressure, it is easy to compartmentalize one's faith as being separate from the "real world," and this erodes one's walk with God. Similarly, these stresses and temptations can destroy marriage and family relationships. One Chinese returnee wrote, "I underestimated the situation when someone told me in general terms about this when I was in the U.S. The returnees need specific admonitions on what to avoid and how to live a victorious life."

**3. Fitting in:** This is especially true for those who have lived overseas for a number of years. In one sense, they have always felt that in their hearts they are Chinese, and this is largely still true. However, after learning a new culture and becoming more Westernized, they may not like the Chinese ways of worship, of leadership, of decision making and so on. Imagine a Chinese Ph.D. candidate who, after a period of searching, comes to Christ in the U.S. and becomes a part of a mainland scholars' fellowship at a local Chinese church. This individual may be used to a level of sophistication and education of believers that will be hard to reproduce back in China. So, a returnee may go to a nearby fellowship and conclude that it is not really an appropriate one for him or her.

**4. Security:** Although this area seems to be improving in general, it is still an important factor. Though the Three-Self Churches are legal, they are often crowded and may have other problems. Many house churches are officially illegal gatherings, especially if they have an outward ministry focus. Returnees may hear in the West a somewhat exaggerated version of the level of persecution in China and stay away from fellowships out of fear of this persecution.

The bottom line for returnees facing these difficulties is that too many of them gradually fall away from the Lord after returning to China. Following are some current efforts and suggested areas for improvement to help more returnees find fellowships and continue to walk with the Lord.

## Current Efforts

• **Resources and literature:** There are many good workbooks and resources for returnees such as Lisa Espineli-

Chinn's *Think Home* or ISI's DVD *Welcome Home*. These are excellent heart preparation resources for returning to China. My informal survey of some international student workers indicates that the three keys to someone having a successful return to his country are: A close walk with the Lord; experiences in service/leadership; and good heart preparation for what is ahead. Churches and international student ministries need to provide environments for the development of these keys as they launch their returnees back to China.

• **Networking:** Frequently, I receive emails from international student ministry workers or Chinese church pastors asking me to help a Chinese believer find a fellowship as he/she moves back to China. Multiply this by many other China-focused ministries and churches, and clearly there is a lot of networking going on. Even so, this is admittedly touching only a minority of the crop of believers returning to China. Also, the better the relationships are between the sending groups and the receiving groups, the more likely it is that the returnee will be brought into the local fellowship. International agencies have the potential to broaden the scope of this work, but it all comes down to trust and relationships.

## Suggested Areas for Assisting Returnees

• Paul exhorted the Thessalonian church to, "excel still more." We need to continue to provide training and resources for our Chinese friends who return home and to connect people to fellowships in China, just as we are doing. However, we also need a shift in our emphasis. Our goal is not just to send believers back and help them get plugged in; rather, can we instill in these returnees a conviction that God is sending them back to China for a purpose? Can we help them to see that they are an important part of God's plan to turn China to Christ?

• We need to gather to pray and discuss how God may want to use us to be a blessing to the Chinese church and the returnees God sends back to China. By "us," I mean the senders (Chinese churches, international student agencies) and the receivers (international agencies in China, Chinese church represen-

tatives) and even returnees themselves. Several agencies involved in Chinese student ministries are teaming up to discuss the issues involved with Chinese students returning to their country. I strongly believe that God has already raised up the resources and structures to allow for good communication of information about returnees to get back to fellowships in China. He has blessed many of our agencies with resources to set up safe communication channels. So, we should be able to increase greatly the percentage of successful handoffs of returnees to fellowships in China.

• We should develop some structure to coordinate the efforts of our various ministries. If we do this, more senders would know how to connect their Chinese believers with fellowships in China through safe and trusted channels. Even if we do this, however, we need some kind of "filter" so that we send only the information of the most solid believers through this method, at least at first. As the receiving fellowships/ministries in China have time allocation and security concerns, we need to send the information of those who are the most likely to become leaders in the ministry, not just members. We need to establish that referrals they receive from senders are worth their attention and can influence their entire ministry.

• We need to pray for wisdom. There are so many unknowns involved with this, and we do not want to jeopardize any indigenous fellowships. We need God's direction and wisdom.

• There must be commitment levels for each group involved.

**Senders:** Many are called to cities or universities, and the priority is to reach out to the Chinese intellectuals in these places. We need to be committed to provide the best encouragement and exhortation for returnees before they get on the plane and then to follow through with them after they return to China.

**Returnees:** These must be the most committed of all to their spiritual health upon their return to China. They must be committed to finding a fellowship—even though they are busy and even if the first few fellowships they encounter are not what they are looking for. Hebrews 10:24-25 needs to be etched upon their hearts.

Continued on page 13



# The Road Home: Returnees Serving in China

**I**n the past few years, returning Chinese scholars have played an increasingly important role in China's economic construction. At the same time, more and more of them are returning with the goal of spreading the gospel. Is this an easy or difficult path to take? What obstacles does one encounter, and how can these be solved? What should one do to prepare to return?

The following interview with **Chen Guo-guang** addresses these questions. Originally from Beijing, Chen worked in the U.S. as an electrical engineer and also spent three years in seminary. In 1993, he returned to work in China with the goal of spreading the gospel. Looking back on these years, he has much in his heart to share with those who also have this goal.

## Why Overseas Scholars Need to Return

**E**d: Why do you believe that China at this time needs large numbers of Christian overseas scholars to return and spread the gospel? (As if China needs more evangelists?)

**Chen:** In reality, China lacks evange-

lists who can preach the gospel to China's intellectuals. According to my experience these past few years in the Chinese church, most evangelists have not received a high level of education. Thus, when the gospel is preached, it is mostly among the grassroots population; there is no way for it, generally speaking, to penetrate the intellectual class. The few institutions in China capable of cultivating Master's level seminary students have a relatively small number of students, compared with the more than 10 million intellectuals in China. Under these conditions, it is not only necessary for well qualified students from abroad to return as evangelists or pastors; it is a desperate need.

**E**d: Besides their advanced studies overseas, do you feel the returning scholars' experiences of having lived abroad can help them in sharing the gospel when they return?

**Chen:** Yes, this is a huge help. According to my own experience, my greatest learning took place while I was overseas systematically studying theology and laying a solid foundation for a lifetime of service. This enabled me to cope with all kinds of challenges. I gained experience serving in both Western and Chinese churches, including experience in church management and administration. The Chinese church, because its membership has increased so rapidly, is very weak in this area and unable to meet the need.

I also learned how to use literature in sharing the gospel. Literature work overseas has been very successful, and there are many outstanding literature resources which have had a significant impact on the spread of the gospel, such as *Overseas Campus* magazine. I could fully utilize these resources according to the need. The situation in China simply would not have allowed me to learn these things.

## Preparing to Return

**E**d: You just referred to the need for returnees to have proper preparation. What specific areas of preparation are needed?

**Chen:** First of all, one needs to have a clear vision and sense of mission. This is most important. Without a particularly clear calling and the knowledge that God has called one to return and serve the souls of the masses, one will not last very long but will easily be defeated by various forms of attack.

Secondly, it is preferable to have had systematic study of theological knowledge, for example, hermeneutics, systematic theology, homiletics, church history, comparative religions and so on. If this is not possible, one should at least study the Bible and Chinese church history.

**E**d: *Why do you emphasize these two types of knowledge?*

**Chen:** Because people's doubts and suspicions toward Christianity are often in these two areas. For example, "Why did God not allow man to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge?" Or, "Christianity was forcibly brought into China on gunboats by the Western powers ...." These are all sharp reactions to Christianity. If the evangelist has not prepared adequately in advance, he or she will definitely not be able to stand firm. In addition, the church in China desperately needs training in biblical knowledge. If returnees have studied systematically, in this way they will be able to be a great help.

**E**d: *Are other types of preparation needed?*

**Chen:** Of course. The third type is experience in serving. While overseas it is important to participate as much as possible in evangelism, discipleship and pastoral work. Furthermore, the broader the scope and the greater the experience, the better. I have a friend who after returning to China led a house church. This house church at the beginning only had three to five persons. My friend could handle this group easily, but then it quickly grew to 40-50 people. He did not know what to do because while overseas he had never had this kind of experience.

Fourthly, it is necessary to have more personal experience with the Chinese church. Before going back, get to know the church through visiting relatives or taking short-term trips. After returning, take the time to visit many different churches.

**E**d: *In other words you must gain firsthand knowledge of the church through personal experience?*

**Chen:** Yes, the goal is to gain firsthand information, not secondhand knowledge or hearsay. After I returned, I was not in a hurry to lead a church, but rather spent a year purposefully visiting different churches to understand their situations. I called this a year of acclimation. If one does not understand the situation of the Chinese church, how can one serve there?

**E**d: *I heard one returnee brother say that once he returned and was dropped into the huge ocean of unbelievers, he felt extraordinarily lonely. Is this situation common?*

**Chen:** Yes, and therefore the fifth area of preparation is to build a network of spiritual relationships. A network of spiritual relationships overseas serves as a means of support, both financially and through prayer. In country, a spiritual relationship network can help one understand the Chinese church and smoothly enter the field of service in China.

The sixth point is that those who have a heart to return to China for the gospel's sake should preferably have a recognized status in society, a career, or an affiliation with a particular company. In other words, do not have as your primary public role that of an evangelist. Because the Chinese still are not used to—and moreover do not understand—the role of an evangelist, they will ask a lot of questions. For example, they might pay special attention to the source of the evangelist's income. If one has a regular status in society, such as an engineer in a particular company, this can prevent unnecessary difficulties. At the same time, one can keep from arousing people's feelings of mistrust, thus making it easier to share the gospel.

I believe the above mentioned means of preparation are quite essential. Yet when all is said and done, even with all this preparation, those who return to China to share the gospel will likely still find themselves exhausted and worn out by various problems and difficulties.

### **Difficulties Encountered After Returning**

**E**d: *After having been back for these several years, you have no doubt encountered many of these problems and*

*difficulties. Can you expound on those that are most critical?*

**Chen:** I believe there are at least these five aspects. First of all, there is political pressure. The house church in China is a target of control and operates against the law. Nonetheless, the situation does not match the exaggerated stories about China we often hear about in the West—as if as soon as one turns around one ends up in jail. However, those engaged in cross-regional evangelism are liable to be detained, and one is not always free to speak as one pleases. So, there is still a degree of psychological pressure.

**E**d: *So, how do you deal with this difficulty?*

**Chen:** Have a renewed understanding of your own role. Do not see yourself as the target of government surveillance but rather as a normal citizen. In that way one's mind and heart will not feel pressure.

The second difficulty is in one's standard of living. For example, the air conditioning in China is still below standard. Busses are crowded. When shopping, one needs to know how to bargain. All these require a period of time in order to become accustomed to them. The biggest difficulty is with one's family, the children in particular. There was a brother who returned to China with his family to take a position in a technical firm. Before long, he went away on business leaving his wife and child behind. The day after he left their new shower broke. The wife and child had no experience with this and did not know who to call to fix it, so there was nothing they could do. For exactly 20 days they did not take a shower, so the child every day complained, "I want to go back to America! China is detestable!"

Children's education is also a problem. Christians are unwilling to allow their own children to receive atheistic education from an early age.

**E**d: *So how does one solve this problem?*

**Chen:** Both parents need to agree that, whatever the problem, they will face it and solve it together. Regarding the children's education, the only solution is to supplement what they receive in school with teaching at home.

The third difficulty is the social and interpersonal environment. One often

encounters this kind of situation: something unfortunate happens, and it is clearly the other person's fault, but this person scolds you for whatever happened. Moreover, people in the Mainland often have unreasonable expectations of those who have returned and seek to benefit from these relationships. They may believe you have made a fortune overseas and are therefore very wealthy, or they might hope that you can help them develop relationships overseas. After a while, when they discover that you are unable to satisfy these expectations, they begin to speak badly about you. Just thinking about having to serve these kinds of people, one cannot help but feel tired and regretful.

**E**d: So, what to do?

**Chen:** The only solution is found in Hebrews 12: "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such hardship from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

The fourth difficulty is the spiritual environment. There is a great difference between the church environments inside and outside China, including worship traditions. The house churches of China often do not have sermons, only devotional sharing. For example, there might be a brother who stands up and says, "I have something from the Lord to share with everyone." Also, there is not the liberty to sing loudly. This often causes returnees to feel uneasy, as if they have not really participated in worship, and their soul is unsatisfied. Given this kind of spiritual loneliness, it is easy to fall into a spiritual depression.

Some house church evangelists discriminate against evangelists from overseas. One reason is that they fear new things coming into the church, and another is that returnees have a higher educational level and may carry an air of superiority, thus creating aversion. It is easy for them to have an extreme response toward those who have different opinions. For example, if someone does something inappropriate in a training session, some house churches will immediately excommunicate the person. From

that point on they will not greet the person or communicate with him or her but rather cut off all relations.

**E**d: How do you solve this problem?

**Chen:** Fully recognize the contrast between evangelistic work inside and outside China and consider returning to China to do the work of the gospel as cross-cultural ("near culture") missions. Do not think that this is the same motherland where you were born and grew up, and therefore you are very familiar with and knowledgeable about everything. Actually, we still need to spend a lot of time to understand and to become accustomed to current conditions in China. Moreover, do not assume the posture of a teacher, but rather that of a student—

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#### **Staying in China: The Issues** Continued from page 3

ally, professionally and psychologically. Despite the need for high academic and professional standards, it is, however, sobering to discover that some individuals who might not have made it through an agency's screening hoops have nonetheless gone to China and been incredibly effective. I can think of a single lady from Europe who is impacting the lives of disabled children and another from New Zealand who has for many years worked among orphans. Exceptions to the rule perhaps!

Another need is for adequate orientation. Basic orientation is being provided by agencies with work in China. Most agencies provide extra support for new workers, especially those involved in language study. Agencies hold annual conferences (for fellowship, teaching and training) and some also arrange in-service training opportunities. I believe it is important to be associated with an agency—for the sake of accountability and also for the kind of orientation and support such agencies provide.

One area of need is helping China workers better evaluate how they are doing in terms of job satisfaction and effectiveness and how they might plan for the future. Senior lecturer in Marketplace Christianity and Tent-making at Carey Baptist College in New Zealand, Derek Christensen, is developing tools to help workers, in a context such as China, to better evaluate their prog-

or the heart of a servant—to understand and serve the church in China.

#### **An Easy Road?**

**E**d: Is returning to China to do the work of the gospel easy or difficult?

**Chen:** It's not that difficult. Some people see it as very much being a road fraught with hardships, but if the Lord calls you to take this road He will give you sufficient grace and strength. He said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." If you really take this road, you will discover it is not that difficult. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." (Deut. 33:25)

*Used by permission from Overseas Campus magazine. Translation is by Brent and Jasmine Fulton. ■*

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ress "towards the goals that they set, their direction towards fulfillment of their expected work role and their fit with the agency responsible for their placement or management."<sup>5</sup> Derek refers to this as PDF—progress, direction and fit. I am sure such efforts will assist workers in practical ways who otherwise might have been tempted to give up and go home.

#### **Endnotes**

1. State Council regulations on the management of religious activities of foreigners in the PRC, 31 January 1994. NB: these regulations were not superseded by the 2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs.

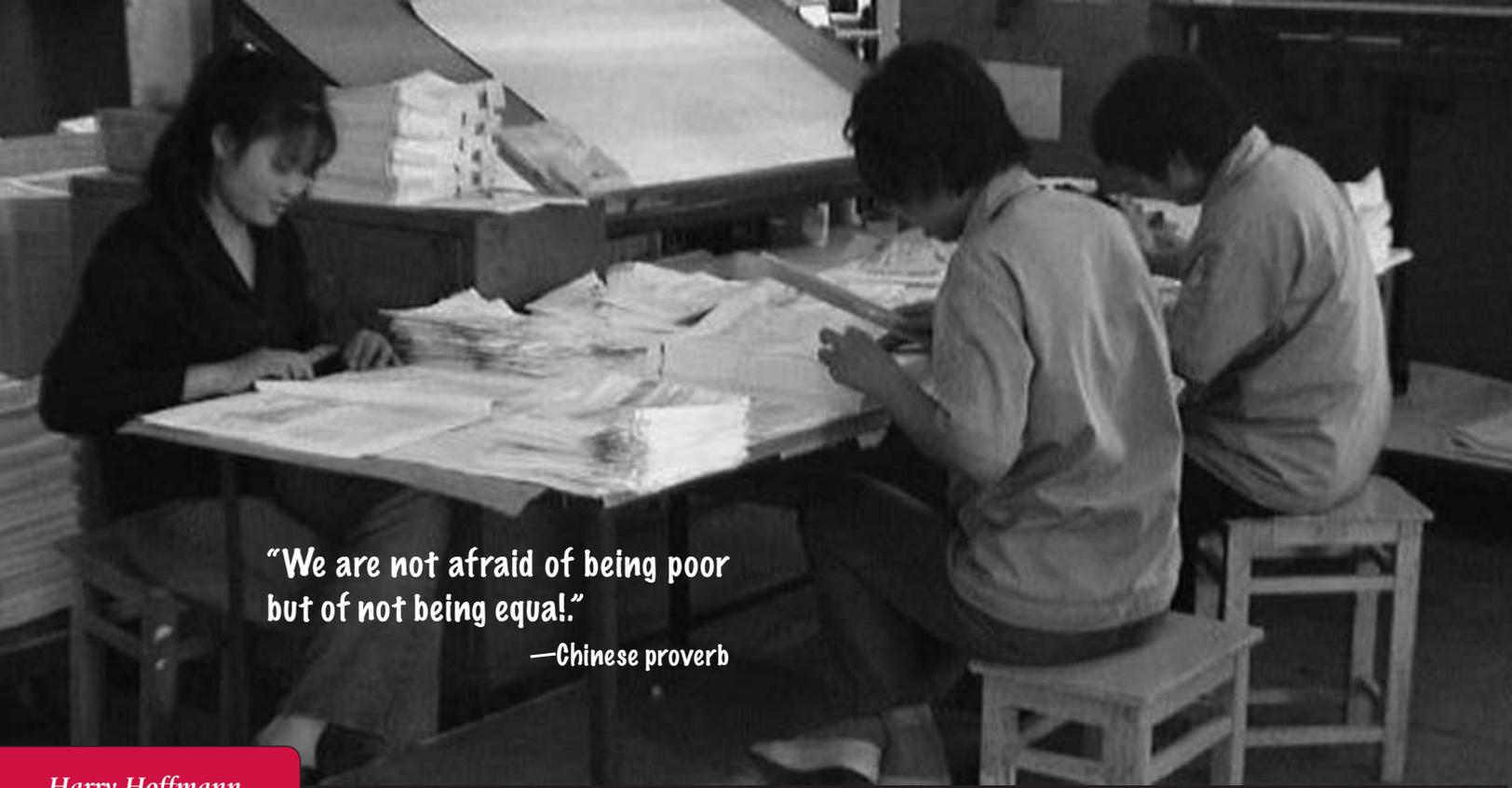
2. Donovan, Kath & Ruth Myors, "Re-inventing Missionary Commitment," from *Doing Member Care Well* edited by Kelly O'Donnell, William Carey Library, Pasadena, 2002, pp. 297, 298.

3. Taylor, William, "Examining the Iceberg Called Attrition," from *Too Valuable to Lose*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, 1997, p. 11.

4. McKaughan, Paul, "Missionary Attrition: Defining the Problem," from *Too Valuable to Lose*, edited by William Taylor, William Carey Library, Pasadena, 1997, p. 20.

5. Christensen, Derek, "PDF—A Fresh Approach to Retention in Mission and Professional Placements," privately circulated paper, May 2006.

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"We are not afraid of being poor  
but of not being equal."

—Chinese proverb

Harry Hoffmann

China Partner

# Chinese Nationals and Western Agencies

**C**hina is diverse, as are foreign-Chinese relationships. First, there is a culturally, very diverse group of foreigners, from all over the world, working in China. Second, there are rural and urban Chinese, Han and minority Chinese, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, educated and non-educated, young and old and so on. With such great diversity, there is often a tendency to generalize the complexity of China, which in turn, can create disagreement on various issues.

Having completed Chinese studies, and with ten years of life and work in Asia and the Chinese context, I find that time and again I come to the point of questioning Western paradigms about the Chinese as well as established cultural categories for the them such as collectivism and authoritarian leadership styles.<sup>1</sup> Ask the Chinese how they view foreigners, and they will usually ask back: "Which ones?" Every nationality is perceived differently. "Are you talking about Americans, English, Germans, Dutch, Norwegians, Africans, Australians or Japanese?" Ask those working for Western agencies how they view the Chinese and the answers will also vary depend-

ing greatly on where in China the question is asked. Those working with the Han Chinese in the north, south, east or west or with any of the 55 official minority nationalities will all give different answers.

## **Fremdsicht or How Chinese View Foreigners**

*Selbtsicht* and *fremdsicht* are two words used in German social science to describe how individuals or groups see themselves (*selbtsicht*) and how others see them (*fremdsicht*). To translate these words more literarily, *selbtsicht* describes the "self-view" and "*fremdsicht*" is the "foreign-view." This article deals mainly with

the "*fremdsicht*."

When I interviewed some Chinese about their view of foreigners, I received many answers, partly dependent on the nationality of the foreigners and partly dependent on the age of the Chinese. The following is a brief summary of my interviews.

**Older Chinese *fremdsicht* on foreigners:** About sixty-five percent of the older Chinese, (fifty or older), think positively about foreigners in general. They give three reasons for this. First, Western nations have developed very rapidly over the past 150 years, and the Chinese respect the people of these nations for their economical and social achievements. Second, foreigners

wear good clothing, earn, spend and invest a lot of money, and travel. The Chinese appreciate rich foreigners who are able to travel. Third, China was a victim in World War II, as it was invaded by the Japanese. The Western allies, together with the Chinese, fought the Japanese, and after victory, some Western nations helped to rebuild China.

About thirty-five percent of the older Chinese have a more negative image of foreigners. They look at Chinese history, where again and again foreign nations tried to invade and control China. For example, during the Opium Wars of the 1860s, the British forced the Chinese to accept the import of opium in return for Chinese goods. In the following years, trading centers were established where French, German, British and US merchants demanded large areas of land in which they asserted "extra-territorial" rights. Today, the older Chinese still grieve the loss of traditional cultural goods like vases and paintings from

## Foreigners often come to China as achievers saying, "I can do this and that." This kind of attitude and behavior seem strange and proud to the Chinese.

those days. "Some of them are on display in Western museums, and they should be given back to China," one Chinese man said. "We just want to be left alone!"

**Younger Chinese *fremdsicht* on foreigners:** The opinion of the younger Chinese about foreigners changes quickly. It is mostly open and inviting, mainly because of foreign business and investments but also because of movies from all over the world, especially Hollywood (USA) and Bollywood (India). "China still needs time to develop," my friend Li Ke says. "Western countries have had the last 200 years to develop. We just started 20 years ago. But even if our forefathers hated each other, we can work together with foreigners today, although we won't forget the past."

### Working with Foreigners

The measure of effectiveness of a work relationship between Chinese and for-

eigners nowadays includes several different factors. An important one, of course, is money and benefits. Others are as mentioned above, but most important seems to be the foreigner's attitude as perceived by the Chinese (*fremdsicht*). Negative examples include:

—"if I get the impression that they don't love China..."

—"if they put their right for freedom on the table and tell me I am not free."

—"if they only drink coffee but no tea."

—"if they talk aggressively."

Chinese in general do not like the "show-off" mentality some foreigners appear to have, presenting how good they are. Foreigners often come to China as achievers saying, "I can do this and that." This kind of attitude and behavior seem strange and proud to the Chinese. The Chinese might think the same, but they would never say it.

**How Chinese relate to Western agencies:** "Foreign companies in China are suffering from heavy brain drain with

an average dropout rate of 16.7 percent this year, according to a survey by the Shanghai Association of Foreign-Invested Companies."<sup>2</sup>

Jie Lin was working in a foreign owned gift shop selling minority-made handicrafts. When she learned enough about the business, she left and started her own gift shop, almost next door.

Tan Qian says, "My Western leader told me I should choose whatever I wanted. But from a Chinese point of view, I should do what my leader wants me to do. I don't want to make my own decisions, because perhaps my leader doesn't need this aspect of work. It seems to me that his way of work is that you choose what you are interested in. But I feel embarrassed to ask and tend to be passive in choosing. So I don't know what he really thinks."

Zheng Weihao, a restaurant manager in a foreign owned five-star hotel in Shanghai, has changed his job three times

over the past four years. His monthly salary has increased from US\$250 to US\$750.

**Retaining local employees:** How can Western agencies better retain Chinese employees and co-workers and, to use economical language, "protect their investments" in acquisition, training and developing people? A Western individualistic approach to leadership, like "Leadership as Coaching,"<sup>3</sup> or the "What are the desires of your heart"<sup>4</sup> personnel development approach do not get very far. This emotionally perceived individual "Me" who was put into this world for a specific purpose that is manifested in the "desires of the heart" is not a dominant part of Chinese thinking. It is hard to describe what their thinking actually is, but when foreigners ask Chinese about their life purpose, it usually ends in frustration.

### How to Motivate the Chinese

In practical terms, the following describes six aspects of how agencies can improve their retention of Chinese employees.

**Payment and reward:** I recently heard a Chinese proverb which says: "We are not afraid of being poor but of not being equal!" An employee should be paid a fair wage for what he or she does. Many times Western agencies are looking for a bargain and then wonder about the lack of motivation among their employees. Salaries should be adjusted annually, a reward system for good, fair and faithful work should be in place and addressed through clear explanations and direct communications. Often in NGOs<sup>5</sup> and agencies with low budgets, locals stay only as long as they can learn and grow. Once that plateaus, they are looking for new opportunities. Another very important part of rewards is the annual *hongbao* (red envelope) for the Chinese New Year which is the 13th month salary given at the end of the traditional Chinese year. Money communicates. It is not the only way of communication, but it is quite an important way in present day China. Pay a fair and competitive salary and your staff will feel appreciated and motivated.

**Benefits:** Benefits in terms of pensions, accident and health insurance and annual leave are other important factors for employee retention in China.

For smaller organizations or NGOs, this might be more of a challenge. However, think back to the Europeans' industrialization history, when the working class was fighting for workers' rights—pension plans, health insurance and so on—in the mid-nineteenth century. Today, in the West, there is no question about these benefits. When thinking of the long-term retention of Chinese staff, and taking into account the values based on 200 years of industrialization expertise, the consideration of benefits should not be an issue for foreign agencies in China but a "must." I always address this topic in employment discussions with my Chinese staff. It might cost me in the short term, but I will reap the fruit in the long term.

**Development:** "I didn't learn anything new, so I left." Besides a fair salary, career perspective and personal development opportunities are reasons for retention. However, let's not confuse development opportunities with Western management thinking of "How can I help you to grow?"/Career Coaching Questions. A practical and clear option for possible career development needs to be laid out by the agency. Again, this might be easier for the larger companies than for smaller NGOs. If a Chinese employee is regularly given opportunities to grow, through new challenges, responsibilities, courses, trust with new projects and positive feedback about performance and potential, one is on a good path to effective staff motivation and retention. The message here is: "Never take your staff for granted!"

**Status:** Status and prestige are difficult topics for foreign NGOs in China. Working for BMW in Shanghai and driving a company car enhances status. Working for a relief and development agency in rural China will not add much to the status of a person, although just working for foreigners is a boon. Topping this with a good salary and other benefits, a gain of status might be perceived. However, in general, people working for NGOs are not really working for the sake of status. Doing orphanage work in China is not really prestigious; it is more value based.

**Team:** Almost every foreign company I know in China facilitates cooperative outings and activities for their employees: a

weekend away in a hotel or resort, a trip to Disney World in Hong Kong, a night out bowling and lots of dinners together with plenty of meat and fish. These kinds of team-oriented activities help build a network of personal relationships. The Chinese like to eat and have fun together. Every hotel has a bowling alley, and it is not about winning but about group cohesion. Western team thinking differs in some ways. Western team development is much more skill-based and focuses very much on "interpersonal skills" or "conflict prevention skills" and similar items. The Chinese just want to have fun!

**Culturally competent leadership:** Cultural competency is a big topic because most Westerners are not really intrinsically familiar with many aspects of it—for example, the "face saving" realities of Asians. "When the housekeeper brushed her teeth after lunch with one of the foreign family member's toothbrush, she was confronted and asked not to do this again. She left the house and was never seen again." Appropriate cultural awareness is a tricky area, and I want to encourage everyone in a leadership position, who is new in China, to not only do pre-assignment trainings, but to also find a local on-site cultural agent. On-site intercultural coaching is a must for foreigners in China in order to stay away from major mistakes leading to attrition, rather than retention.

Western leaders will always make some cultural mistakes. However, they will gain prestige in the eyes of the Chinese through, a) flexibility and demonstrated care for employees and b) a humble approach to implementing strategy and reaching goals. The "I can do it all" proclamations do not get managers far, but if they work hard (not talk hard), their attitude and the fruit of their labors will speak for themselves and will contribute to retaining employees. The art of balancing between people and goals in a foreign-Chinese work context is not learned overnight. It requires social competence, intercultural competence and business competence.

## Summary

Being involved in intercultural coaching and training in China for the past years, I am often faced with paradigms and standardized views (*fremdsicht*) of

how the Chinese are: collective, family oriented and believing in Confucius, Mao and money. Hollywood movies like *Rush Hour* with Jackie Chan support these paradigms to a certain extent. The reality is much more diverse. Grasping the diversity of China is a huge, lifelong task. In reality, the Chinese are collectivists (Confucianism) and individualists (Daoism). On one hand, they like order and stability; on the other, they appreciate change and flexibility. On one hand, there is active intervention; on the other the "wait and see" approach. There are rituals; and there is strategic behavior. Business can be done as a gentlemen; it can be done as a strategist.

I believe a good balance between a culturally competent foreign leader with a humble, flexible, people-approach on one side, and a hard-working, goal-focused work ethic on the other, creates the foundation towards retaining Chinese co-workers. Leadership with both social and intercultural competence is the key. Mixing this with the five other aspects of how to motivate Chinese personnel can contribute towards a positive relationship between Chinese nationals and Western agencies. Keep in mind, however, the Chinese proverb that says: "Teachers (or this article) can only open the door, but you must enter by yourself."

## Endnotes

1. See: Hofstede, G. *Culture's Consequences—International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Abridged Edition, (Sage Publications: Newbury Park) 1984; and Trompenaars, F. *Riding the Waves of Culture—Understanding Diversity in Global Business*, Chicago, 1994.

2. "Foreign companies upset by serious brain drain"; at *XinHua* online, Nov. 15, 2005, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-11/15/content\\_3782064.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-11/15/content_3782064.htm).

3. For example, Gary Collins' "Leadership through Coaching" approach. See <http://www.garycollins.com/institute.html>

4. Sometimes used in reference to what David said in Psalm 21:2, that God will give us the desires of our heart.

5. NGO stands for "non-governmental organization." It includes any non-profit, voluntary group which is organized on a local, national or international level.

**Harry Hoffmann**, a German national, has a Masters in Chinese Studies and has worked in an Asia or Chinese context for over ten years. He is married with three daughters. ■

# Book Review

## Flourishing in Demanding Environments

***Stress and Trauma Handbook: Strategies for Flourishing in Demanding Environments*** edited by John Fawcett. World Vision International, Monrovia, CA, 2003. 277 pages, paperback; ISBN 1-887983-52-X; \$29.95 at Amazon.com.

Reviewed by Steve Spinella

World Vision's *Stress and Trauma Handbook* describes the impact of stress and trauma on aid workers, reviews relevant professional literature, and recommends proactive strategies for addressing stress and trauma within World Vision. It is an outcome of a five-year project to study stress and trauma organizationally by World Vision using internal and external resources. It aims to provide strategies for flourishing in demanding environments. (Note: While published in the US, this book largely uses British English.)

### Facing Stress and Trauma

The first half of this book defines the challenge and summarizes the research that formed the basis for World Vision's approach to sharpening their strategies for flourishing in demanding environments. The second half elaborates six recommendations:

- Strengthen relationships
- Deepen your faith journey
- Rest and refresh yourself
- Enhance organizational care
- Respect and care for local staff
- Plan for traumatic stress as a certainty, not just a possibility

### Quick Take

If we view stress and trauma as a normal, predictable aspect of our work, we can look more deliberately at strategies that will help us to flourish in demand-

ing environments.

- We keep ourselves and those we care for safe whenever possible.
- We prepare for trauma by strengthening resiliency in our personal and organizational lives. This includes healing old wounds, putting aside optional stressors and building positive mental and physical capacity.
- We address the impact of trauma throughout our personal and work processes. This includes taking time to rest and replenish, making room for our own and each other's arousal under stress and caring for one another in difficult conditions.
- We accept traumatic stress and its consequences as part of our family and organizational lives.

### The Challenge

"Stress is a state of psychological and physical arousal [resulting from] a threat, challenge or change in one's environment (p.15.)" Distress is "a psychological and physical arousal for which routine stress management is inadequate over time (p.16.)" Stress management refers to all efforts to reduce daily, chronic, cumulative, traumatic and caregiver ("secondary") stress.

Physiological reactions to stressful incidents and environments are normal and automatic (not moderated consciously.) Crisis physiology provides short term benefits at long term costs. Cortisone speeds up healing but depletes the immune system. Adrenaline enhances immediate performance but promotes heart disease. Endorphin relieves pain but is arousing and addictive. Sex hormones are depleted.

The increased sensual acuity of crisis physiology helps explain persistent arousal, heightened functioning and vivid dreams, flashbacks and memories, as



well as memory lapses, lack of peripheral awareness and ineffective activity. Burn-out, flameout, acute stress reactions and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reactions are common sequels to overwhelming stress.

### Recommendations

The research section includes three fairly independent chapters with listed authors. Graham Fawcett (John's brother) presents a behavioral model, Cynthia Eriksson et al present a research model, and Graham Fawcett presents the research project design with some summarized conclusions.

The second half of the *Handbook* elaborates six strategies in response to the realities of stress and trauma impacting international aid workers.

**Strengthen relationships:** Strengthen relationships because social support is even more strategic than individual healthy behaviors for ameliorating stress. Build, maintain, and use caring friends, family and coworkers for support. Strengthen team cohesion; develop consultative leadership styles; set clear and limited objectives.

**Deepen faith:** Deepen your faith journey because spiritual faith is a central element in coping with situations that challenge our previously held assumptions and beliefs. Increasing frequency, fervency and rigidity of religious

behaviors may indicate that faith is under stress. Unresolved, this may lead to withdrawal to a safer environment, formation of a reactive affinity group, and/or emotional and physical distress symptoms. Effectively processed, faith in crisis may lead to more integrative, nuanced affirmations and resilient spirituality.

**Rest and refresh:** Rest and refresh yourself. Take restful vacations and other breaks, especially when stress is high. In actual practice, workers, teams and supervisors all undervalue rest when under stress. This is congruent with the physiology of stress discussed earlier. Monitor and modify exercise, diet, sleep and relaxation. Use meditation and other relaxation techniques. Monitor and limit use of psychoactive chemicals, including caffeine.

**Enhance the organization:** Enhance organizational care. In recruitment and staff placement, recognize that poor fit or selection will be more disastrous, not less, in high stress conditions. In personnel development, recognize that increased training, coaching, consulting, and team building can lower arousal levels both through behavioral conditioning and through increased social support. In assessment and management, recognize that rest, relief from frustrating requirements or structures and access to care will preserve and enhance your organization's most valuable resource—your experienced and deployed front line personnel.

**Respect and care for locals:** Respect and care for local staff. Historically, perceived differences in meeting needs of local and international staff have been a besetting problem of international aid efforts. Practices cannot be universally coherent when cultures and nations intersect, though principles should be universally applied. Furthermore, when facing stress and trauma, cultures and communities differ in their assessments, histories, structures and resources, just as individuals within them also differ.

**Plan for traumatic stress:** Anticipate traumatic stress as a certainty, not just a possibility. World Vision's Trauma and Emergency Support Service (TESS) seeks to (1) reduce the likelihood of exposure to traumatic events; (2) maximize the likelihood of survival when trauma comes; (3) provide immediate and follow-up services to minimize damage and reduce longer-term consequences.

## Commentary

This is not a handbook in the sense of being a practical "how to" manual. Instead, it is the summary of the outcomes from a major effort by World Vision to better handle the impact of trauma on their international aid organization. If your organization wanted to do a comprehensive study on stress and trauma on your staff, you would probably get something much like what World Vision has already done. Your action plan would probably look a lot like that of World Vision. So, why not start with what they have done and then go on from there?

Because this book presents methodology, studies and applications, it also allows those of us with field experience to question their conclusions. For me, perhaps the weakest link was that of causality—for instance, is poor social support for front line workers a corollary of intense traumatic stress, or is it an independently contributing factor? Is it contradictory to assert that both collaborative leadership styles and clear direction for a team ameliorate stress, or does intense stress expose the flaws in every leadership style?

## Final Note

As one who deals with stress and trauma both personally and in my work with others, I cannot even write a review like this without being personally aroused by this material. For me, the automatic arousal that stress brings is an ongoing and recurring reality. Fawcett suggests, though, that there are two other groups of people among stress responders who are reportedly unaffected (p.25.) The first is those who have little awareness of their own stress responses. He suggests these will greatly benefit from stress management education. The second group is those who were once aware of their own stress responses, but now "feel nothing" over the longer term. This he suggests is more serious, because the links between our physical awareness and our body function may be compromised. This group, he suggests, will benefit from professional mental health care. I share this to suggest that an awareness that we are deeply impacted when we face stress and trauma is not such a bad thing compared to the alternatives. Intentionally asking ourselves, each other, and

our Father what we can do about our stress is a very practical next step.

**Steven P Spinella**, D. Min., is director of the Center for Counseling and Growth in Taichung, Taiwan, and an AAMFT approved supervisor for marriage and family therapists. He has spent the last ten years based in Taiwan. His personal list of traumatic events includes the loss of twin babies in 1986 and the "921" earthquake in 1999. Contact him at [Spinella@alumni.rice.edu](mailto:Spinella@alumni.rice.edu). ■

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## The Challenge of Returning Chinese Scholars Continued from page 5

**Receivers:** The laborers in-country need to be committed to following-up the returnees in a timely manner. Yes, these individuals are busy. However, returning Christians can be effective witnesses and communicators, they can be donors who have a vision for the ministry, and they can be cross-cultural bridges that can help make the whole ministry more effective. We need to let the in-country laborers see different returnees who have become coworkers at some level so that they can understand that they are mobilizing potential ministry leaders—not just bringing another person into their lives that they will have to care for.

Around the time of the American Revolution, there was a flag with several disconnected pieces of a rattlesnake on it. Each piece had the name of a state of the nascent U.S. The motto on the flag read, "Unite or die." The obvious point was that if the states could unite, they could be powerful—but if they could not, they would all die. We can make a difference in the spiritual lives of many China returnees if we can find a way to integrate our networks in a safe, timely fashion.

**Note:** If you are interested in networking for the purpose of following up on returnees, please email: [projectwefun@gmail.com](mailto:projectwefun@gmail.com).

\*Names and places have been changed to protect the people and ministries involved.

**Jeff Mennen** served in China for nine years and continues to work with Chinese international students who are in the US. His favorite activity is helping returnees successfully connect with other brothers and sisters back in China upon their return. ■



# One Million in 2007 Prayer Movement

With the approach of the 200th anniversary of the arrival in China of Robert Morrison, China's first Protestant missionary, God has given the vision of mobilizing one million Christians outside China to regularly partner in prayer with Christians inside China.

Morrison, who arrived in Guangzhou September 7, 1807 spent his entire life in China. He waited seven years before baptizing his first convert and over his next 27 years of ministry he baptized only ten new believers. During his lifetime he translated the Bible into Chinese and created a Chinese-English dictionary. Daily, he consistently demonstrated a Christ-like character.

**In China, anniversaries of major events are important—very important!** It is interesting to note that this upcoming 200th anniversary of Morrison's arrival in China kicks off the final eleven-month countdown to the Beijing Olympics. Is this coincidence, or does God have something in mind? Another breakthrough?

In February 2005, a number of China ministries and Christian churches met to seek God about this. The result was the formation of the partnership China Prayer Partners. As an international alliance, we believe that the opening years of the twenty-first century represent a pivotal time in God's plan for China. God brought unprecedented revival to China in the closing years of the 20th century; now China has the potential to be a great blessing to the world. China Prayer Partners invites God's people to join them in praying for God's blessing upon China during this watershed time.

## Our Purpose

To glorify God by mobilizing prayer for China and the worldwide Chinese church.

## Our Vision

For Christians to become involved in sustained intercessory prayer for China in three stages:

**1. Marathon Prayer Warrior.** Pray on a sustained basis with a long-term focus for a China where God is honored and for the worldwide Chinese Church in its part in completing the Great Commission. Starting date: now.

**2. Middle Distance.** Pray for one year prior to the start of the Beijing Olympics with a focus on the church in China.

Starting date: September 7, 2007.

**3. Sprinters.** Pray for 40 days with a focus on the 2008 Olympics and Paralympics. Starting date: August 8, 2008

## Our Strategy

To mobilize intercessory prayer and fasting for China.

As we consider China's population, 1.3 billion people—one-fifth of the world's total population—one million intercessors does not seem to be that large a number. It would mean one person would be praying for:

- 1,300 Mainland Chinese
- 1,200 Chinese who do not yet know Christ (using the most optimistic estimates)

**We invite you to join the "One Million in 2007 Movement" and in so doing to bring great glory, joy and pleasure to our awesome God.**

To register your commitment to pray regularly for China as part of the "One Million in 2007 Movement," or for further information, email [info@chinaprayerpartners.org](mailto:info@chinaprayerpartners.org) or visit

**[www.Chinaprayerpartners.org](http://www.Chinaprayerpartners.org)**

中國代禱夥伴  
〈北京2008與其前鋒〉

介紹

【中國代禱夥伴】是一個國際基督教教會和機構的事工聯盟。在二十世紀末，神給中國帶來了史無前例的復興。我們相信廿一世紀的開始，正是神在中國展開祂的計劃的重要時刻。今日在中國教會極具潛力成為全世界的祝福，關鍵系於健康成熟的教會——就是神所用的器皿與渠道。我們誠摯邀請所有屬神的子民，在這歷史性的時刻，加入為中國禱告的行列。

我們的目的

是以禱告來榮耀我們的 神，推動每一位基督信徒與 神同工，為中國和全球華人教會禱告。

# Resource Corner

## Intercessors for China Prayer Calendar (11th Edition)

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## Intercessory Notes

### Please pray...

1. **That agencies sending workers to China will be given God's wisdom** to carefully select workers who are adequately qualified spiritually, professionally and psychologically.
2. **That leaders of foreign agencies working in China with Chinese workers will maintain a humble attitude** and exhibit both social and intercultural competence.
3. **For organizational or team leaders to be sensitive to the realities** on the ground in China so that they can provide guidance and affirmation that will encourage workers in-country.
4. **That Christian Chinese returnees will make a commitment to search out and become part of a fellowship in their area.** Pray that God will give them wisdom as they determine how their time should be used and spiritual strength to not compromise their commitment to Christ.
5. **For the agencies working together to create networks** that will help and encourage Christian Chinese returnees to overcome the difficulties they face as they return to their country.
6. **That God would raise up one million individuals to pray for China during 2007.**



# China Perspective

## Going the Distance

Brent Fullton, Editor

Four fighter jets scream across the sky in a "V" formation, one leg of the "V" longer than the other. Suddenly the plane to the right of the lead jet streaks upward, leaving a hole in the formation as the other three continue overhead. Soon all four have vanished beyond the horizon.

The "missing man" formation, as it is known in military aviation circles, is a striking tribute to a fallen comrade. Commonly used to honor pilots who have lost their lives in combat, it is also seen in funerals for heads of state or other dignitaries.

In China the imagery may not be nearly as stark, but the signs are nonetheless evident when, for various reasons, a fellow servant in Christ is prematurely taken out of action: the missing chair at a committee meeting, the foreign family that hurriedly returns to their home country unannounced, the half-finished project whose owner is nowhere to be found, the promising student who found Christ overseas and returns to China only to "fall through the cracks," lacking fellowship and the encouragement to grow in his or her newfound faith.

For these servants the cause of their being sidelined is not as final as, for example, the tragedy that spells a premature end to the career of a fallen pilot or soldier. It may be burnout, frustration with the language, interpersonal conflicts with colleagues, or succumbing to temptation in a moment of weakness. Perhaps it is just the everyday demands of life in China that crowd out opportunities for spiritual growth and effective ministry. Often it is a combination of these and other factors. Yet the results are nonetheless devastating, both for them personally and for those with whom they serve.

A three-year, 22-nation study of organizations that send Christian personnel overseas<sup>1</sup> suggests that there are measures such organizations can take to ensure that their personnel will be more likely to stay on the field long term. The lessons from this study are valuable not only for similar organizations but also for other entities, such as churches or business enterprises that recognize the importance of long-term effectiveness in China.

Organizations with higher retention rates, the study found, were organizations that placed a significant emphasis

on prayer, both throughout the agency and in the lives of individual workers and those supporting them. They carefully screened applicants and required a higher degree of prefield training. Recognizing the importance of ongoing development, they also provided more opportunities for language and culture learning, as well as growth in particular skill areas. This factor alone is extremely relevant to China, as other research has shown that short-term foreign workers who do not have Chinese language ability eventually either take the time to learn the language, and end up serving longer term, or else leave China altogether.

Organizations with a higher retention rate effectively communicated plans and job descriptions. They encouraged open communication to and from leadership. They ensured that their workers' personal needs were met through adequate financial support, consistent spiritual growth, regular annual vacations and help with cultural adjustment. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these agencies evidenced healthy leadership practices, including annual reviews of personnel and effective supervision on the field.

### Endnote

1. Jim VanMeter, "The 7 Best Practices of U.S. Agencies with Good Retention of Long Term Missionaries," *Paraclete Perspective*. Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 1, 4, 6.

**Brent Fullton, Ph.D.**, is the president of *ChinaSource* and the editor of the *ChinaSource* journal. ■

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