

IN THIS ISSUE...

4 The Shop Church:
The Second Mile

6 2006 China
Business Conditions

9 Between Riches
and Poverty

12 When East Meets West
in the Marketplace

PERSPECTIVES AND
ANALYSIS FOR THOSE
WHO SERVE CHINA

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Patrick Lee

Mel Sletch

Business as Ministry

This article will be different. You are used to reading about great nation-wide trends and global ideas. I feel a little silly sharing this story with you because it covers an area of about three kilometers and deals with only one small company. It is more about what we did wrong than about what we did right. However, in the process, we think we have seen a little of what Jesus has been up to and thought it might be encouraging.

In the Beginning, Poor Vision

I knew, over 30 years ago, that I was supposed to live in China. Just after arriving in the late 80s, I learned that foreigners could have their own businesses. I believed that I should try to use business in some way but was not sure how. I had owned a small business previously. If I had put my vision into words then, it would have looked like this: *I would serve Him, and the church, by teaching, using my company as a platform and my business as access to reach influential people to disciple.*

Now, that does not sound too bad, does it? But, as I look back, I see that Jesus disagreed with virtually all of it.

Our Business Was the Ministry

For instance, Jesus had been showing us that our business was not about access, it was about being the core of the ministry itself. I began to see this clearly when we had about two hundred employees. At that time, I looked carefully at the stories of the talents and the minas and realized that all Christians were business people by definition. We had been given resources belonging to our master and a command to "do business until I return." When He returns, He will look for increase or profit. Anyone who cannot offer Him any will be in great trouble. We cannot safely ignore this delegated responsibility.

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IFMA



People from the street often have no work experience and find it difficult to learn how to conduct themselves in a working culture.

So, I began to try to find out what the resources were that had been given to me. Money? Power? Wealth? I did not have much of those. Then I thought, "What is valuable to Him?" Immediately, I began to think about people. They are certainly valuable to Him! Yikes, I had two hundred people depending on me as my employees. What if I were responsible for them in some way? What if one day the Lord sat across from me at a table and said, "Tell me, what did you do to invest in Xiao Chen, the cleaning lady?" Or, what if I said to Him, "Here, Lord, you gave me three talents, and I have produced three more." Then he answered, "Three? What do you mean three? I gave you six!" I became more than a little concerned.

So, I thought of a plan—it was really more of a cop out. I decided that, on that day when I would talk with the Lord, if I could say that I had brought those people to Him through prayer, then, maybe it would go better for me.

While I had been told by the Lord not to actively share the gospel through

words (that is another story), two other local employees were sharing the gospel verbally, and by now twenty employees were relatively strong believers and could pray effectively. I called them together and explained my problem. I needed their help. Could they each take ten names and agree to pray every day for each of those individuals? I just wanted to get their names before God every day. They agreed. So, we made laminated pages each showing about ten people, pictures and basic information. On Saturday mornings we often got together for three to four hours of prayer. We would each switch our cards with someone else and then pray for the individuals on the new card the next week.

During the next six months, people started coming to Christ until approximately eighty percent of the company confessed they were believers. There was no plan or strategy. Things just flowed together in a very natural way. Each week, between two and ten people seemed to find Christ.

Then, I realized one day, that for three

weeks I had not heard about anyone coming to Christ. I was worried that we had done something to offend the Lord. I asked three people if they had heard of anyone receiving Christ lately. Those three had led twelve people to Christ that week, but none of them were in the company. It seemed we had saturated our market (our company), and the Lord was moving into other areas (neighborhoods and relatives). Jesus was showing us that the business was not access to ministry opportunities, but was, indeed, the ministry itself.

Transformation Begins

We began to teach the Scriptures, and our employees began to understand they had an obligation to their communities and families. Nightly prayer meetings developed in their community. Many groups of believers were formed. Many lives were changed.

Today, at the beginning of each work day, a handful of employees meets to sing praise songs. During lunch breaks, groups form to study the Scripture, pray and sing. At the end of the day, someone takes time to talk to the Lord about anything that came up during the day. We do not want to take home a burden that only He can handle. During times of trouble, you will find people praying in the workshops, hallways or on the roof.

Recently, I asked one of our ex-beggars if anything was happening in the community where many of our employees live. He immediately told me six stories. I will share three. In the meat market, a fight broke out and a meat seller, waving a cleaver, rushed someone. Out of the crowd jumped a man who stood between the two and stopped the fight. He spoke calmly and got the two to resolve their problem.

A girl was hit by a car. The driver fled and she was left lying on the road in pain and unable to move. A large crowd gathered to watch. Again, someone stepped out of the crowd, checked the victim, picked her up, put her in a cab and went to the hospital with her.

On a walkway, a bike rider came too close to a girl who was walking. A peddle hit her in the leg, cutting her and ripping off her skirt. A couple was approaching and saw the incident. The husband took off his jacket, wrapped it around her and

took her to a hospital to care for the cut.

My friend then said all those who acted were from our company. I began to believe Jesus when He indicated our business was the ministry for us.

Two- to Four-Second Windows of Opportunity

Another thing Jesus taught us was that to be ready to seize investment opportunities, we needed to be ready to act. Sometimes, these opportunities came in two- to four-second windows of opportunity.

One day, I parked my car at the company and noticed a dwarf-like gentle-

Person from the street often have no work experience and find it difficult to learn how to conduct themselves in a working culture. One individual in our factory, when he saw me walking down the aisle, got up from his position to come over and talk with me. I explained that he must stay in his position and continue working to add value, and if not, he could not stay. However, he wanted to do things differently. Sorry, I said.

Then, he asked to be allowed to talk to each group leader, one day at a time. He noticed that they often had tasks they did not like to do. He wanted to be able to do those tasks for them—to serve

Mel Sletch



Planting a factory in a poor community not only provides jobs, but can lead employees to faith.

man who said, "Hi Boss." I explained I did not know him and I was not his boss. He answered, "You will be soon. I have been looking for this company for a long time" (apparently we have a reputation in the beggar community). The clock started ticking, and I had to decide on the spot if I was going to do anything. When he spoke, he revealed some sort of mental handicap. I decided it was an investment opportunity from the Lord. It took us three months to help him get his ID straightened out. Eventually, he landed a trial position. He quickly became a believer.

them. I agreed to try this for a while. Six months later he was elected the most valuable employee in the company. His language difficulty disappeared. I even overheard a mature Christian say she liked being in Bible studies with him because he had such great understanding of the Scripture. He has one big smile and is often heard singing hymns as he works.

His Company, Not Mine

Another of my vision misconceptions was that I would use my company to serve Christ. The stories of the talents

Continued on page 14



Ronald Yu

Mel Sletch

The Shop Church: The Second Mile

I have been experimenting with the strategy of shop-church multiplication since 2002. It is a tentmaking model, tailor-made for rural house church missionaries doing urban church planting, especially among migrants working in factory areas. In China's Pearl River Delta alone, there are over ten million migrants working. In one factory in Shenzhen, there are over 200,000 migrant workers. How can the church in China develop an effective strategy to reach such massive numbers of migrant workers in the factories? While placing Christians in factories is part of the answer, in addition, a critical issue is the positioning, both physically and socially, of a church planter in the industrial neighborhood in order to evangelize and nurture a church there. How can this best be done?

In response to this challenge, I have developed the concept of shop-church planting. It was described in my article, "An Urban Mandate for the Rural House Church," published in *China Ministry Report* (April-June, 2003) and briefly described in my article "Tentmaking and Indigenous Urban Mission in China" in the spring 2004 issue of this journal. What has happened since then? In this essay, I will describe what I have learned so far and how house church missionaries may be helped to walk the second mile in this project.

The problems with rural missionaries working in an urban context are manifold. First, they are despised by urban people because of their rural origin, being uneducated and unskilled. Second, religious proselytizers look suspicious to the materialistic urbanites. Are they religious sects or heretical groups like *Falungong* or Eastern Lightning? In addition, rural preachers tend to be too "preachy" for the urban audience and lack the sophistication of arguing rationally and apologetically. Third, it is hard for house church missionaries to survive by donations either from the ru-

ral sending churches or from the emergent churches which they try to plant near the factories. The sending churches, being rural based, have limited cash offerings to support expensive urban missions, and the emergent churches, being too small (usually under thirty people) with mainly seekers or new believers, are not ready to support an evangelist in a substantial way.

My logic to start shop-church plants was quite simple. If urban evangelists need money to survive and cannot sustain themselves through donations, one thing they can do is business, which has the ex-

PLICIT purpose of making money. If they are in need of a respectable social status, being a successful businessmen is admired by the urbanites. This idea of mine was inspired by the Holy Spirit as one day, being puzzled by the problems mentioned above, I did prayer walking with a house church missionary in a factory area. The Spirit opened my eyes to see the solution on both sides of the street—shops! If I could help the urban evangelists to acquire a shop, they could get a respectable professional status which adds credibility to their message, and they could then support themselves without receiving donations from either the sending church or the emerging church. How could I get them started? By providing a micro-loan. So, even though I had never done business in my life, I started to encourage urban evangelists to experiment with this idea.

How has it gone over the past five years? Numerically, there was one shop in 2002, eight shops in 2003, nine in 2004 and seven in 2005. The good news is that small shops are viable, and the bad news is that larger shops are not yet successful. Shops are “small” or “large” in a spatial or monetary sense. A shop is small if the loan is lower than RMB\$30,000 (US\$3,750) and the rear residential area can hold only a small group. It is a large shop if it has a rear residential area large enough to hold thirty people for a meeting, and because of that, the loan is much larger; it may range from RMB\$80,000 to \$160,000 (US\$10,000 to \$20,000). Small shops function only as a midway station in the church planting process; only large shops can hold a congregation and become the terminal station in the church planting process.

Most evangelists can pay back the loan for the small shops in a year or two. This is stage one shop planting, and it is proven to be viable and successful. However, when evangelists step into the second mile, they stumble and have not reached their destination yet. There were three couples who tried larger shops. All needed to be subsidized. Two were subsequently closed down because of a growing deficit. One is still struggling to do sustainable business but has not been able to repay the loan yet.

So, I discovered that there are two stages in shop-church planting: the small shop as an evangelistic station and the larger shop as a shop-church. The success of small shops is encouraging. The evan-



The margin of profit for small shops in industrial areas is dwindling. There are just too many shops along the streets to make businesses highly competitive.

gelists have paid back the loans and become shop-owners. What are the avenues they have attempted? They have tried a grocery store, a telephone shop, a book rental facility and a restaurant. There are two things in these shops which facilitate the spreading of the gospel: the telephone and the television. Workers need to make and receive calls at a shop near their factory. So, they will greet the shop owner if they need to receive a special call from home. The evangelists can show gospel movies on the TV which is turned on all day long to attract customers.

Although the evangelists cannot plant a church in the shop because it is too small, the shop has solved several critical problems for the church planters: social status as shop-owners, self-support through business and gospel contacts through the customers. They can still plant a church, though, not in the shops but in their homes or the homes of new believers. Indeed, the ideas of shop-church and tentmaking are both too radical for China's evangelists to swallow all at once. They seem to be more comfortable trying business tentmaking first with house churches established around their shops before try-

ing the shop-church idea.

The margin of profit for small shops in industrial areas is dwindling. There are just too many shops along the streets to make businesses highly competitive. Superstores, like Wal-Mart, that can deliver a heavy blow to small businesses, are also appearing in these neighborhoods. Shop owners need to be sensitive to such changes and be creative in finding new products or services to meet the needs of the customers. However, because of their rural upbringing, these urban evangelists are not competitive and creative enough to improve their businesses in light of the declining margin of profit. Some of them earn just enough from their shops for survival. The factory workers, with a steady salary, may be better off. However, for evangelists, working in a factory would not be a good choice because long hours in the factory would not allow them the freedom of doing ministry.

The larger shop-churches did not perform well in terms of business, but ministry wise they have been very successful. For example, in a restaurant, there are several VIP rooms for small groups to meet

Continued on page 8



Dwight Nordstrom

Mel Sletch

2006 China Business Conditions

“State of Affairs”

China will soon have the world's second largest economy. Amazingly, China was not even among the top fifteen countries in economic ranking a quarter century ago. China has increased its relative ranking in total economic output faster than any other significant-sized country in the entire history of the modern world. For new investment, business people want to enter a fast growth market niche with reasonable predictability and stability. China has had both of these for most of the last quarter century.

A brief summary comparison of “Kingdom Businesses” in China versus other major unevangelized areas of the world (Africa, Central Asia, SE Asia, etc.) results in a startling fact—it appears that China has well over fifty percent (by total profits) of *all* Kingdom Businesses in the unevangelized world. Sadly, the vast majority of “known” Kingdom Businesses in oth-

er least reached areas of the world have failed to make a sustaining profit (using commonly accepted accounting practices) during the past twenty-five years. Additionally, these non-China areas have had precious few “significant-sized Kingdom Business model winners” which have been able to attract seven-figure (US\$), market-based financing (debt and equity)

on a continuing basis; instead China continues in first place for Kingdom-Business based capital investment.

The conclusion is that the past twenty-five years have been, overall, increasingly “good” years for Kingdom Businesses to be started and/or grown in China. However, while the future is quite bright, it will also become more competitive.

Comparisons between the Past and Now

THEN: This author worked in his first factory in China in 1983. Our business was then a “typical” central-government funded large (i.e. several hundred million dollar) project involving 5,000 workers in a state-owned enterprise where fees for a successful technology/license transfer were the basis of success—not profit at the actual China operation. I had no ability to directly hire or fire employees. Our

manufacturing process required a dust and temperature controlled environment to do friction welding for manufacturing extreme-environment oilfield equipment parts. When workers were discovered using company equipment to “roast” a pig in this clean welding environment, we were unable to effect the changes we wanted—immediately fire the workers and put in new safeguards to make sure it never happened again.

NOW: A large, Kingdom Business (KB) recently decided, from an economic basis only, that their two wholly foreign-owned enterprises (WFOEs) should be consolidated into one. They successfully, within a nine month time period, laid off over 400 employees in one location and hired over 300 employees in the new location. Without this ability to rationalize production, this KB would probably have had to close down in a few years.

THEN: The first five manufacturing businesses in the early 1990s that this author invested equity in were all joint-ventures with Chinese partners where we, as the “foreign party” were the minority partner. We made some profit in four of these; however, in all five we were not very successful in keeping Kingdom-minded management in the business. We have now exited from all of these (our average length of ownership was eight years).

NOW: Since 1997, only one of our equity investments (approximately ten) has been a joint-venture (JV) with a Chinese partner. [Note: this JV was not a classic “greenfield” manufacturing start-up (where we would probably only do a wholly-foreign owned enterprise if at all possible). Instead, it was an acquisition where the Chinese partner’s investment was the purchase price of the newly-created JV.] Conclusion: China has tremendously liberalized (both in regulation and in practice) the ability of the non-national business/entrepreneur to own his/her own operation in China. Given the values that KBs try to instill in their operations, KBs should normally not have a local, non-KB partner if that partner wants to play an active on-site role in the business.

THEN: When I worked in the 1986 - '89 time frame with General Electric (GE) in China, we only had our Beijing and Shanghai offices with a new equity



Mel Sletch

China is “open for business.” This was not true twenty-five years ago. In order to “win” in China’s marketplace, this author has found, inter alia, the following to be best practices.

1. **China is the most open and competitive marketplace in the world.** You must be “best in class” in what you want to do.
2. **Competition will come not just from other international companies** but also from Chinese-owned and managed operations.
3. **Focus on doing a few things very well** and outsource noncritical functions.
4. **Partner with those companies that are #1 or #2** in their particular niche.
5. **Have multicultural teams** at all your operations.
6. **China is not the world’s lowest-labor cost center** for unskilled labor; focus on hiring lower-cost, skilled workers (engineers, etc.) and strive for both a domestic as well as export market.
7. **Pay your taxes** after getting good financial and accounting support.
8. **Have a government relations person at all your operations** and make sure you have both national PRC government relations help as well as local support.
9. **Recruit and develop quality and long-term middle and senior leadership** (both national and non-national); ruthlessly focus on leadership competencies being both your biggest internal problem as well as the area that you can become “best-in-class” in if you successfully mentor, promote, rotate, etc.

Continued on page 8

—Dwight Nordstrom

investment based in Beijing in late 1989. We did some aircraft engine sourcing in Xian and other places, but outside of short-term sales and technical support business in “remote” areas, GE’s several hundred million dollars per year business in China did not have any non-nationals long-term in second-, third- and fourth-tier cities in China. The Great Commission reality of China is that historically over thirty of the top fifty least-reached cities in the world were in China. With a few notable exceptions, KBs were not significantly “incarnationalizing” themselves any place outside of the big three—Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

NOW: If an entrepreneurially-competent team is committed to start a “world-class” business in one of the 170+ cities in China with over one million in population, they now should be able to create, network, analyze, final select and implement a successful business plan. With the cost of shipping and telecommunications continuing their general tread of decreasing over the past twenty-five years (on both a nominal as well as inflation-adjusted basis) while the quality and quantity of these continues to increase, a team with the “right stuff” has a reasonably good chance of finding its competitive advantage and “staying alive” with the business.

THEN: In January of 1981, this author attended the winter semester at Harvard Law School’s “China Law” class. We had less than 100 pages of Chinese laws to read; the class focused on Joint-Venture Contracts and other types of actual, individual business contracts.

NOW: China has entered the World Trade Organization as a full member. Contrary to the popular perception in the West which belittles China’s patent and copyright protection, China’s intellectual property rights (IPR) laws are basically up to the level of “international best practice.” Although the effective enforcement of IPR needs improvement, the legal and administrative IPR protection exists. Books in China with Christian-based values can be legally published and distributed.

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The Shop Church Continued from page 5

and an upper story where over thirty people can gather for a training seminar or Bible study. It is safer to run training seminars in the workplace than in a secluded home. In fact, seminars were held in this restaurant twice a month and attracted all the house church Christians in the neighborhood to gather. We all agree that the restaurant-church has great potential to multiply if only it is also viable as a business.

The reason that larger shop-churches are not yet successful (I do not consider them failures yet!) is rather obvious: rural individuals are not professionally qualified to run competitive urban businesses. They need to receive extended and substantial professional training before they can succeed in being bivocational shop-church planters. Before then, they should stay at the low risk level of stage one shop planting. Should I then give up the idea of the larger shop-church and be content with helping urban evangelists to multiply home meetings around small shops?

As I meditated on Matthew 5:41 where Jesus said, “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles,” I felt compelled to see shop-church planting developed into a mission movement because the need is great and the potential for multiplication is tremendous. Now, I am asking how the shop-church planting movement can reach its destination in its second stage.

In this second stage experimentation, I am searching out successful small businesses in China run by committed urban Christians. This is a top-down approach (working with knowledgeable professional businessmen) in contrast to my previous bottom-up approach (working with unskilled labor). Once connected, we would work out a partnering relationship that would allow a ministry team to enter the business workplace and develop a mission within the business, and in turn, the Christian entrepreneur would use his professional expertise to help church planters do business planting. Rural people would need to go through extended training in the business before they would be qualified to do business planting.

An example of this is the musical

teams that are in great demand to offer weekend concerts for migrant factory workers. Such concerts prepare hearts for the gospel. I have just located a Christian who operates a profit-making music center and is willing to partner in such an effort. A ministry team is invited to the center to gradually spread the gospel among the instructors who serve over five hundred children in the community. In turn, the center will gather, train and send musical teams out to factories to offer concerts. If the business is reproducible, we hope to multiply similar music centers in other cities in China.

Nurturing churches and discipleship training in the workplace effectively integrate faith with work and hold promise for rapid spiritual multiplication in urban settings. The biblical theology and mission strategy for this idea are described in my essay “Vocational Mission and Spiritual Multiplication in the Workplace” published in China 20/20 (March, 2006).

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A Few Good Photographers Needed

ChinaSource is looking for photographers who would be willing to take photos in China, or share photos of China they already have, with the ChinaSource journal. If photography is an interest of yours, and you are willing to let the journal use your photos, email us at info@chsource.org.



Between Riches and Poverty: Chinese Christian Business People

Huo Shui

In China, the number of Christians is growing constantly—even the official figure is increasing. The latest estimate from the TSPM/CCC is sixteen million Christians. Among these Christians are a group of people who are busy with their business on weekdays but worship God on weekends; they are the Chinese Christian business people.

Background

Christians in business are quite common. In Western countries, any Christian may work in any industry or field, and what he or she believes is considered private; it has nothing to do with what that person does for a living. In China, however, being a Christian and doing business at the same time have different connotations. This is because, over several thousand years of feudal society, China has always despised business people. In the ranking of social positions—gentry, farmers, workers, people of business—the highest rank belongs to scholars while people of business are at the bottom. Since Mao successfully led the revolution in 1949, tremendous changes have taken place in the social fabric of society. Workers and farmers have now become “leaders” of society; intellectuals have lost their superiority. Nevertheless, business people are still at the bottom of the new list: workers, farmers, soldiers, intellectuals, and business people. For several thousand years, the Chinese have made negative comments about business people. “Every business person is deceitful; a person who is not deceitful cannot operate a business.” A business person can be very rich, but he or she has no social standing. It does not matter whether the business is large or small—“crafty business person” is the label given by the society to all engaged in business.

However, over the past twenty years, China has, for the first time in her history, developed a “campaign to emphasize business”—that is, the so-called “econom-



Mel Sletch

The popular saying: **“With every nine out of ten people being business people, the remaining one is a solo trader,”** vividly reflects the thinking of the **Chinese people today—they want to become rich and wealthy doing business.**

ic reforms” and “market economy.” China began an unprecedented large scale “every citizen a business person” campaign. Commercial activity has become one of the most popular jobs, and the number of business people continues to increase as the campaign of “openness and activism” is thoroughly developed. The popular saying: “With every nine out of ten people being business people, the remaining one

is a solo trader,” vividly reflects the thinking of the Chinese people today—they want to become rich and wealthy by doing business.

The rapid development of the economy and the emergence of private enterprise and individually-owned businesses have also impacted the fast-growing community of Christians in China. Among these Chinese Christians, there are a large

number of “Christian business people.” The most famous area among them is Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province. In Wenzhou, individually-owned business and private enterprise first started in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For more than twenty years, the economy in this area has maintained a robust vitality. This is also the fastest growing area for Christianity in China. Many Wenzhou Christians are very famous and successful in the Chinese business world. Products from small businesses in Wenzhou are well-known nationally. Footprints of Wenzhou Christian business people are throughout China.

In addition, during the last twenty plus years of reform, many Chinese Christian entrepreneurs and business people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States and Europe have returned to China to invest, to conduct business and other trading activities. Under their influence, some people, who in the past did not know about Christianity, have become Christians. There are also Chinese who, while studying or working abroad, have become Christians. When they return to China, they become part of the Chinese Christian people of business community.

However, in general, Christian business people are still a tiny portion of the total Chinese Christian population. Although the number of people currently doing business is the highest in the history of China, only a small number of business people are Christian. (By contrast, the most popular religion among business people in China is Buddhism, especially in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian.) The majority of Christians in China are farmers, intellectuals, employees of international corporations, housewives, retired people, and those who have connections overseas.

Positive Social Impact

Although the number of Christian business people in China is not so great, business people still have a degree of influence in society. Their impact can be seen from several aspects.

First of all, in business and commercial activities, open proclamation of Christian beliefs and messages can be done legally and publicly. For instance, some companies have names that are ob-



Only a small number of business people in China are Christian. **The most popular religion among business people in China is Buddhism.**

viously Christian—Amazing Grace Restaurant, Holy Mana School and Living Water Culture Company are some examples. Some companies use art and works based primarily on Christian culture to decorate their office. Other enterprises have openly declared that their company’s values are based on Christian principles. Some companies use Christian symbols on their websites. All these are grass-root efforts to legitimize Christianity in China.

Second, many Christian entrepreneurs actively sponsor the publication of Christian stationary, magazines and books (such as picture books of churches). They also support Christian performances and shows such as Christmas celebration performances and Christian concerts.

Third, they are involved in major charitable donations and social events. Whenever there are floods, earthquakes, epidemics or other natural disasters, Christian business people from all over China make donations and contributions. At the same time, many Christian business people have helped local governments in education and medical facil-

ities within the confines of government regulations. The government omits the religious background of the donor and publishes only the donor’s name or the corporate identity. This does not hinder people from understanding the donor’s belief. This is the area where Christian business people in China can make an important contribution to society under current regulations. It is also the most “lenient” area of current government policy towards Christianity. No consideration is given to the donor’s belief. All donations to society are good

Currently, China is not open towards NGOs (non-governmental organizations). There is not a culture of citizen-societal participation as mature as in Western countries. The country does not have the support of a sufficient benevolent practice. In light of these factors, Christian business people do make a very positive contribution in their community and the business world when they can donate toward charity. It not only shows that “some rich people have consciences and are kind-hearted,” but also

reflects the moral values and social responsibility of Christianity among Chinese business people. It links faith and love together, creating a far-reaching impact in the society.

The Dynamics

Although many Christian business people and entrepreneurs strive to create a positive image of Christianity in China by making donations and contributions to the communities, believers who are in business face an extremely challenging situation. In China, doing business is hard; living a Christian life is even harder; doing business while maintaining Christian faith is the hardest of all.

Why is this? To understand the reason, we need to go back to the history of the development of Chinese society. Chinese culture has been based on Confucian ethics for the past millennium. Although lately three religions, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, have been merging together, Confucianism, labeled by Lu Xun as “feudal ethics,” has never been forgotten and still has a profound ideological and cultural influence on the Chinese people’s behavior. After 1949, Mao Zedong replaced Confucianism with Marxism, Communism and socialism as the official religion. All religious ideology was eliminated as he was an idealist. After Mao, Deng Xiaoping reformed the economic system and opened the door of China to the world. With the development of a market economy, Mao Zedong and Marxism are gradually fading from Chinese society. People will not pursue communism fanatically and believe blindly in Marxism anymore. However, a society cannot exist without an ideological belief system. The spiritual belief system of the Chinese community has become void and has not been replenished for a long time. As the government tries to maintain an ideological facade of communism and socialism, the Chinese are plunged into an unprecedented crisis of no ideological belief system.

At the same time, the economy in China is developing very rapidly and people’s desires for material things and wealth is approaching madness. The fundamental moral standards in society are changing. People are in the pursuit of wealth—and of showing it off. “Shame on pov-

erty but not on prostitution” is widely accepted. Counterfeiting is everywhere, in every industry and business. “Producing counterfeits” and “tracing down the counterfeits” have become daily topics in the news and on TV. As society is being transformed, people are getting used to all kinds of societal evils and malpractice, especially corruption of all levels of government officials. Chinese society has now seen unprecedented growth and prosperity in material things on the outside but also unprecedented emptiness and darkness in spirituality. Serious literary works and the arts have disappeared. They have been replaced by thoughtless “farce,” a tasteless “fast-food culture” geared towards the populace. (This is directly related to the government not allowing freedom of speech, a strict media censorship and news control system.)

Challenges and Temptations

This moral situation in the society is very critical. In such a situation, a person of business, in order to survive, to attain success or to win in a competitive environment will inevitably face many enormously difficult decisions that challenge traditional moral values: morality or money? Between corrupt government

The community recognizes Christian business people by their donations and contributions based on their “love” to society. People can rarely hear how Christian faith helps these business people.

officials and administrative agencies (especially those dealing with business people directly in areas such as commerce, taxation and banking) and businesses, it is very difficult to find a piece of “unspoiled ground.” For an ordinary person with a moral conscience, it is not easy to maintain integrity in the current corrupted social and moral environment. How difficult it is for a Christian business person who wants to do business in accord with biblical principles! The reality is that all Christian business people have to face struggles and take risks because of their beliefs. As the sinfulness of humanity is fully exposed, Christian business people with true faith are like professional box-

ers in the ring, fighting the front line battle against the devil.

At present, China does not allow people freedom to establish their own civic organizations. It is impossible for Christian business people to have their own organizations similar to the associations for Christian business people in the United States. People from other professions or walks of life judge them not by their ethics but by their wealth, and eye them as successful individuals with envy. However, this is a total “misunderstanding.”

To avoid such misunderstanding and embarrassment, some Christian business people have begun to set up their “own” churches. (In Beijing there are house churches organized by Wenzhou business people.) In these churches, all the members can share personal experiences with each other, understand one another and encourage each other because they have similar experiences and backgrounds.

However, Christian business people have little spiritual influence within the social fabric of China. Christian principles have not been officially recognized for stimulating and developing entrepreneurial thinking in business. The community recognizes Christian business

people by their donations and contributions based on their “love” to society. People can rarely hear how Christian faith helps these business people personally or to achieve business success. Christian business people face challenges in their personal and spiritual lives—more so than government restrictions on expression of their religious belief.

God’s entry into China is a painful process. Chinese business people accepting God is an important part of this process. Their long struggle and suffering is impossible for others to comprehend. The root of the suffering is that although they know the truth, the ethical

Continued on page 13

Book Review

When East Meets West in the Market Place

One Billion Customers: Lessons from the Front Lines of Doing Business in China by James McGregor. New York: Free Press, 2005, 312 pp., ISBN: 0743258398, US\$27.00.

Reviewed by Brent Fulton

With the aplomb of a *Wall Street Journal* reporter (which he was) and the hardnosed realism of a corporate executive (which he still is), James McGregor relates the colorful and enlightening story—past and present—of foreign business in China.

Beginning with Lord Macartney's failed mission to China in 1793, McGregor traces the development of commercial relations through the lopsided opium trade and resulting wars in the mid 1800s, the cozy (and corrupt) rela-

Most helpful is the "Little Red Book of Business" that concludes each chapter. These nuggets alone make the book a worthwhile investment.

tionship between business and the KMT rule in the early 1900s, China's retreat from the world scene under Mao, and its emergence and eventual entry into the World Trade Organization. Subsequent chapters consist of case studies of contemporary efforts by various foreign companies or individuals to do business in China, including the failed attempt by Morgan Stanley to create China's first joint-venture investment bank, the race between McDonnell Douglas and Boeing to secure a foothold in China's nascent aircraft market, Xinhua's drive to corner the market on financial news in China, and the political intrigue behind

the emergence of competition among China's domestic mobile phone carriers.

Each chapter begins with an overview of the players and their goals, then goes into a detailed account of how the deals actually played out, concluding with a "What This Means for You" section that distills down the relevant lessons for business in China today. In the process McGregor skillfully deals with the political realities, both domestic and international, and cultural nuances that often blindside well-meaning foreigners attempting to navigate the maze of relationships that constitute the Chinese business environment.

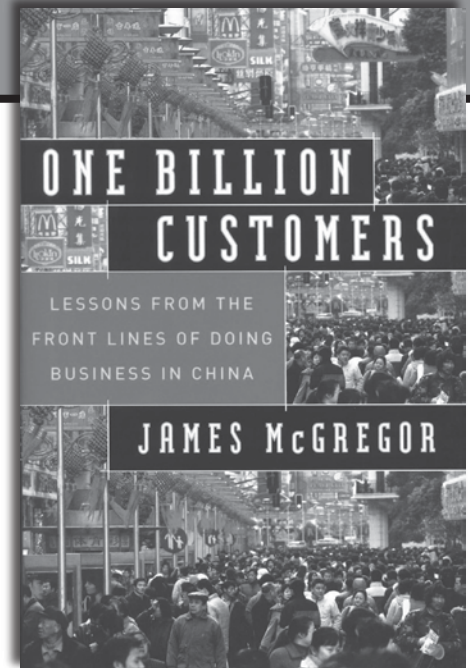
Most helpful is the "Little Red Book of Business" that concludes each chapter—two pages of pithy sayings that encapsulate the insights revealed in the

case study. These nuggets alone make the book a worthwhile investment. Some examples of McGregor's wit and wisdom:

- You can't do too much due diligence on prospective partners. Understanding your partner's political and family connections is essential. Forget "face," get the facts.

- China's modernization is aiming at "rule by law" not "rule of law," so relationships and personal power reign supreme.

- *Guanxi*, the oft-cited Chinese word for relationships or connections, is overrated, temporary, nontransferable, and



resides in the hands of the individual who has it. Never, ever put your business in the position where you are dependent on one individual for access to government officials.

- Avert crises by spending the money necessary for a comprehensive and proactive government relations program in China. You might even help shape your industry's regulatory environment.

- Frame your arguments to show how your business is good for China, not what is wrong with the Chinese government. You can't make the system look bad.

- Politics no longer drive everything in China. To understand where China is headed, focus on analyzing the country's business and commerce more than deciphering *People's Daily* headlines.

- If your boss wants to do a quick deal in China, lose his or her visa.

- The most talented businesspeople in China are great human observers who can analyze the people elements of a business situation.

- When Chinese see something that works, you don't have to talk them into expanding it. You need to get out of the way or get run over.

- * It is often best to start your business at a provincial level where officials are more entrepreneurial and often resist control by Beijing. They can be very loyal and protect you.

McGregor winds up his book with a look at the Beijing University International MBA (BiMBA) program, a cooperative venture between China's premier university and a consortium of Catholic business schools in the United States. Here he delves beneath the strategies and protocols of business in China to examine the cultural, social and psychological factors impacting the development of China's future business leaders. These ingrained patterns of behavior, according to McGregor, are what are currently holding the Chinese back from competing on a global scale.

Chief among these is the "curse of the three monks," taken from the Chinese parable where one monk fetches water with two buckets suspended on a shoulder pole, two monks fetch less water by carrying a bucket between them, and three monks come back empty-handed because they could not agree who should carry the water and who should supervise the work. Although China on the surface appears to be a collective society, an intense streak of individualism runs through the culture, breeding competition, undermining trust, and rendering cooperation extremely difficult. Add to the mix a tradition of hierarchical leadership, the scars of the Cultural Revolution and other political campaigns, and an educational system that still stresses rote learning and imitation, and one begins to understand the underlying weaknesses that could undermine China's current economic miracle. For McGregor, it is the creative combination of Western and Chinese business practices (explored through programs like BiMBA and achieved through "layering" Western and Chinese leadership in the corporate management team) that will ultimately enable the next generation of business and political leaders to overcome these obstacles and move ahead.

While written for and about business leaders dealing with China, McGregor's book has application to foreigners who are trying to work in other sectors of Chinese society as well, including leaders of faith-based organizations. They too encounter resistant government officials who use "fatigue, food, and drink" as negotiating tools, and they are likewise susceptible to the "slobbering CEO syndrome," whereby political pageant-

ry is used to awe foreigners into accepting unfavorable terms for operating in China. Eager to do *something* in China, these leaders can be too quick to believe that they need China more than China needs them, and thus ready to do almost *anything* rather than leave China empty-handed. Like many foreign businessmen, they can come to China with too much goodwill, too much trust, and too little patience, hoping to accomplish something significant in China without taking the requisite time to understand the culture and build relationships.

Finally, McGregor's advice that foreign business leaders frame their China strategy as a roadmap is good advice to leaders in other types of organizations in China as well. Such a roadmap helps to get individuals within an organization (especially one that is fairly large or diversified) on the same page when it comes to China and ensures a consistent response when the organization encounters the inevitable roadblocks that working in China entails. It also provides one's counterparts in China a picture of what benefits lay ahead provided they are committed to a long-term partnership.

The suggestion in the cover notes that *One Billion Customers* is destined to become the bible for business people in China may be a bit overstated. McGregor's purpose is not to immerse the reader in the details of the legal or financial arrangements necessary to doing business in China or to provide a dance-by-number guide to the cultural customs one will encounter. McGregor sheds more than enough light on these areas to inform the teachable leader about how much he or she has to learn, and there is a myriad of other business books and volumes on differences between Westerners and Chinese to fill in the details. However, his real talent is as a consummate storyteller with a gift for drawing valuable lessons out of the real-life experiences of his characters, resulting in a very readable book that is both rich in practical insights and extremely entertaining.

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

Between Riches and Poverty

Continued from page 11

and moral standards, they are powerless to follow such standards. For example, a "law abiding" business that does not bow to government commerce and taxation departments, that does not engage in "public relations" activities, that does not engage in unfair competition, cannot possibly survive in China, a society with no rule of law. Perhaps a business person may occasionally be forced to sacrifice his ethical principle in certain special circumstances. If this compromise, however, becomes a regular practice in business, or even becomes a necessity for survival, then it is inevitable that integrity will be lost. Corruption and hypocrisy will spread together with profit. Profit-making with no regard to the means will take first place and will become the goal of the business person's life.

Of course, no matter how difficult the situation, there are still many devout Christian business people doing business not only for money. Some business people have changed the way they do business after becoming Christians. However, the problem is that business people who can maintain the principles of their belief are few and far between. In a society without a tradition of Christian culture and a weak rule of law, "business ethics" that are popular in Western societies and based on Christian moral standards but without a foundation of a personal faith can hardly become the norm of the society. What Christian business people need to change is not just their individual activities but the culture and morality of the whole society.

Purification of society depends on the process of each individual; the purity of soul of an ordinary business person depends on the freedom of his personal beliefs and the legal protection of religious freedom. Until he has such freedom and protection, the Chinese Christian business person will continue to struggle between conscience and temptation. From this perspective, Chinese Christian business people may be wealthy materially, but they are thirsting for spiritual wealth; they need much spiritual support and a very strong faith to face the challenges.

Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Iris Song. ■

Business as Ministry
continued from page 3

and minas helped me see that the resources never belonged to the servants. They were stewards. I began to see that I too was only a steward. The company was, indeed, His.

When I started believing this, it brought many, many changes. For example, when I viewed it as my company, and my accountant left, I prayed: "Lord, please help me. I need a good accountant, and You know good accountants are very hard to find. Please help me!" As a steward, I began to pray, "Lord, Your accountant got

in the mountains where he had been doing his relief work. Our thought was to take some of our factory work to that area. He has managed it very well and the community is being transformed through the financial input of our employees. Now, there is a thriving church there.

True Religion Cares for Orphans and Widows

My partner also had a passion for helping orphans. In his past work, he had started a foster care program that brought handicapped orphans out of institutions and into homes in the community. It has

Once I understood the company was His, He began to assemble a team to run His company. One of the team members He brought was a man who had spent many years doing poverty relief work.

married and is leaving town. You need a new accountant." It is much easier when we take our correct position and let him handle the rest. He did promise an easy yoke, right?

Once I understood the company was His, He began to assemble a team to run His company. One of the wonderful team members He brought was a man who had spent many years in a city several hours away doing poverty relief work. He joined us, and we planted a daughter factory out

been entirely managed by local believers. We had been praying for our local orphanage, perhaps because it is a good place to see kingdom activity happening. However, for years, we could do nothing. Then, one day, the local orphanage director just happened to meet our folks at the hospital because we were sponsoring operations for orphans from another city. Intrigued, he visited our company and is now allowing us to help the local orphanage. There are many children with

cerebral palsy. We have started a special needs program in which we locate and train people to care for these children. It has been so successful that we have taken it to one other city and are now preparing to take it to another one.

So, Jesus has shown us that while we may be a small company, if we are willing, through us He can:

- plant a factory and a church hundreds of miles away in a very poor community
 - lead a majority of our employees to faith in himself
 - transform the lives of beggars through work and a viable identity in the body of Christ
 - raise up a trained force of Christians to help orphanages care for children with cerebral palsy and other handicaps and provide foster care for many handicapped orphans who can then live in a normal home
 - raise up a large group of faithful people who will invest hundreds of hours in prayer for the Kingdom of God in their neighborhoods
 - cause many people to live out the characteristics of Christ
- So, what has Jesus been showing you?

Patrick Lee has been in business for 26 years. While in the collectible market, his company was recognized as the best in the world in their particular market segment which they innovated into existence. ■

Intercessory Notes

Please pray

1. **For owners of businesses** who employ others and are striving to both evangelize and disciple them.
2. **That God would continue to bless and give success to small shop-churches**, and that God would give wisdom and direction to their owners.
3. **For God's direction, new ideas and clear thinking** for those involved with larger shop-churches. Pray that God would enable these to become successful.
4. **That the witness Christian business people have** through their companies, contributions and testimonies will impact Chinese society.
5. **That Christian business people will have the courage to implement biblical principles** as they face many moral decisions and issues of integrity.
6. **For strong faith and abiding commitment to Christ** for all people of business in China.

Resource Corner

Introduction to Serving China

A sixty-nine page guide compiled to provide a broad perspective on what God is doing in China. This primer will prepare both individuals and organizations for service in China and is a great introductory tool for those new to China service. It also makes a good reference for those encouraging China teams.

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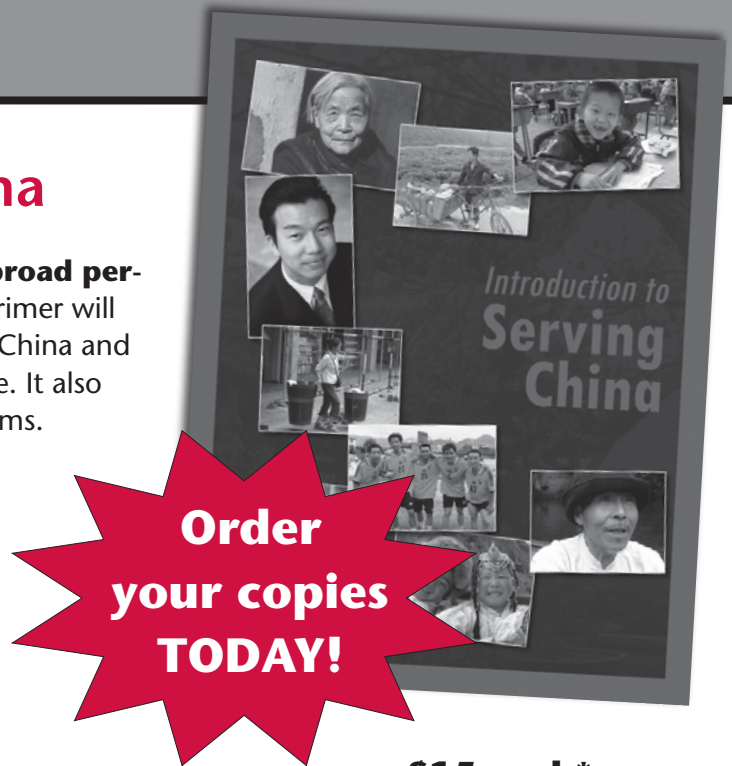
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Tips and practical suggestions for language learning can be found at: www.chinesemadeeasier.com
Check it out!



China Perspective

Lambs Among Wolves

Brent Fullton, Editor

At a recent gathering of Christian business leaders in China, a seasoned pastor made this observation: "Christians are the final conscience of the nation. If we fail, this country has no hope. For 50 years Chinese have learned how to be political beings, but no one has taught them how to really live as people (*zuo ren*). Only if groups of Christians are willing to stand up in various walks of life will China have hope. Thus we need to help Christian entrepreneurs to have a sense of mission."

Man De, a philosopher and writer who became a believer earlier this decade after studying Christianity for several years, came to a similar conclusion. Analyzing the emergence of Chinese Christian entrepreneurs, he wrote a book on the biblical concept of calling, emphasizing the unique role that those in the business world play in extending the church's witness into society. In an article published in a major southern Chinese business magazine he contrasted the ethic of the lamb, characterized by Christ and his followers, with the ethic of the wolf—a popular image in the highly competitive (and extremely corrupt) contemporary business culture.

The Chinese church *has* turned a corner in its transition from a predominately rural, largely marginalized segment of society to an increasingly influential and well-connected community of believers found throughout China's urban centers. At the forefront of this transition is a growing number of entrepreneurs, ranging in age from late 20s to early 40s, many of whom have come to Christ within the past decade. Some grew up in Christian families in "Bible belt" cities like Wenzhou or Hangzhou. Others came to know Christ while on a university campus, either in China or abroad, or through the witness of a believer in the workplace.

Unlike Christian leaders of previous generations whose message emphasized suffering and separation from the world, these entrepreneurs are perfectly comfortable with their dual identities as business and church leaders. In some cases the church is literally in the workplace, which doubles as office during the day and worship center in the evening and on weekends. Not a few companies hold daily or weekly prayer meetings, providing spiritual encouragement to believing coworkers and an opportunity for those who have

not yet believed to hear the gospel.

According to Man, the impact in the workplace and beyond is significant. Companies run by Christians are more likely to have a strong sense of mission, resulting in less infighting among co-workers. Communication improves and, even in China's high-stress business climate, Man says leaders are more relaxed. Looking beyond the company itself, these leaders bless the community by investing in areas such as education or helping the poor. They also serve as a resource to the larger body of Christ, bringing not only finances but also expertise, relationships and influence that can help the church navigate China's unpredictable political and social waters.

Living as lambs in the wolves' domain is not without peril. Christian entrepreneurs are not immune to the temptations, financial pressures and crowded schedules that have contributed to troubled marriages and rising divorce rates in China. Becoming a Christian gives a business leader a new moral framework and source of spiritual strength to deal with corruption, but going against the tide is not easy.

These struggles notwithstanding, if the church is in fact the final conscience of the nation, then the Christian business leader is uniquely positioned at this juncture in history to give voice to this conscience in a critically important way.

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

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