



[Chaoyang Park in the Fall by Bridget Colla via Flickr](#)

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The author shares how his worldview has changed over the decades and how his relationships with others have changed as a result of this. As China continues to develop and grow, its need for foreign interaction will change. The deepest benefit foreign believers can bring is the benefit of a life that flows from God through Jesus; however, those whom China invites to come and stay will change according to the country's felt needs.

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The changes in China are both positive and negative, and they require us to rethink the kinds of foreign Christians who are still needed in that country. Some kinds of foreigners are not needed while there is a great need for another kind—those who exemplify biblical values and priorities in all aspects of their lives. Not only can they help strengthen the testimony of Chinese believers and those who shepherd them, they can also act as evangelists.

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Chinese Christians have a unique place in global Christianity and are entering into deeper conversations with Christians worldwide. What do they offer each other? One of the greatest challenges to global Christianity is navigating fragmentation and diversity. Another significant challenge is interaction with people of other religions. How can Chinese Christians help in these and other challenges? What role do they play on the global scene? The author addresses these questions in his discussion of this topic.

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In China, the “post-eighties” denotes those who were generally born during the 1980s. They are the earliest generation of those who became known in the West as the “Little Emperors” of China. Typically, they were raised in a family environment where all adults focused their attention on their only heir. R and J review the family relationships, psychological characteristics, and spokespersons for this generation. They then give suggestions for Christian expatriates working with this group.

### **Book Reviews**

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Harrison recounts the story of Catholicism in a small village in Shanxi, from its initial arrival at the opening of the seventeenth century right up to the present. She uncovers insights regarding the cross-cultural process in China that diverge significantly from common perceptions about how Christianity and Chinese culture relate to one another. Well researched, her book challenges some of the prevailing scholarly understandings of Christianity's encounter with Chinese culture and should cause expatriates to ask how they can best contribute to the growth of the church in China in view of the influence of globalism upon it.

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Items that require your intercession.

## Editorial

### The More Things Change . . .

By Andrew Kaiser, Guest Editor

For most expatriates serving in China, change is the only constant, forcing each of us to struggle daily with the difficulties of living faithfully in the midst of seemingly unending transition. The sheer pace of change in China means that today's strategies might not work for tomorrow's China. At the same time, the size and vitality of China make identifying and understanding these shifts a very daunting task: if we do not understand the nature of these changes then it is unlikely we will be able to discern appropriate ways to respond.

In this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* we have collected a handful of experienced China workers and asked them to share some of their insights regarding expatriate ministry in a changing China. Hopefully, their reflections will help equip all of us to more ably respond to the rapid speed and complex nature of the shifts taking place in China today. The great variety of our authors' responses, however, should keep us mindful of just how complicated a phenomenon change can be.

Todd Johnson gives us an aerial view of how recent developments in the Chinese church compare and relate to trends in global Christianity, providing a welcome warning against Chinese exceptionalism. R and J zoom in on China more specifically, documenting one particular societal change that is affecting contemporary China in profound ways. The more we understand the complex social and historical forces at work in China today the better chance we have of discovering effective ways to live out the gospel in this country. Suzanne then takes us down even closer, leading us right into the trenches with her survey of Chinese people who work with expatriates. These comments collected from real Chinese people remind us that effective ministry takes place in the messy places where our lives are shared with Chinese people—there are no shortcuts. The perceived distance between expatriates and Chinese people is shrinking, and this provides both a challenge and an opportunity.

And yet, in the midst of all these changes, there are fundamental truths that will never cease to be relevant. *The Missionary's Curse* demonstrates that the need to develop appropriate Chinese expressions of Christianity has always been a central plot point in the story of China missions. As he recounts his lengthy pilgrimage in China ministry, Bill Job points out that beyond whatever words he said and the ideas that he knew to be true, his acts of obedience to the simple (yet not so simple!) gospel were the defining aspects of his witness. True transformation comes—irrespective of whatever changes China is experiencing—when God's people obey him in all aspects of life, no matter how mundane or dramatic. Certainly, many aspects of life and ministry in China are, in fact, in flux. However, as Wright Doyle reminds us, many of the requirements for effective faithful ministry remain unchanged: humility, cultural sensitivity, a long-term mentality, and true, godly love for other people.

May these articles help us all to think more carefully about the changes that are occurring and to commit ourselves anew to the timeless aspects of faithful Christian service.

*Andrew T. Kaiser lives in China with his family. He has been working in China's non-profit sector since 1997.*



Journal Entry (Joel Montes de Oca) by Chris Lott, on Flickr

## Resource Corner

### ChinaSource Conversations

#### Walking with Leaders Coaching in China: Navigating Culture

The first in a series of podcasts



Based on a consultation held in 2014, the theme of this first podcast, coaching, focuses on “drawing out.” The individuals interviewed each have experience and expertise in this area and present a diversity of viewpoints. Find this first conversation at:

ChinaSource Conversations <http://www.chinasource.org/about/publications/chinasource-conversations>

Future podcasts in this series will include the topics of mentoring, or “pouring in,” and spiritual formation, which is the big picture, the landscape of our journey with the Lord.

We hope these podcasts will be both informative and encouraging. From them, we are anticipating a rich dialogue and exchange of ideas resulting in a valuable resource that will enable those ministering in China to hear from others who have walked the same path.

We are pleased to present this first installment of the “Walking with Leaders” series as part of *ChinaSource Conversations*. Stay tuned for more to come!

## Some Things Change, Some Are Timeless

By Bill Job

Everything changes. We should be used to this by now, but we usually resist it. As a result, we are stressed when we encounter the reality that some things must change to be relevant. I can no longer buy pants in the size I wore in high school!

So, it should not be a surprise that the role of foreigners in China changes. It is expected, and we should be prepared to offer what is relevant in the new season. Unfortunately, my observation is that we believers are not usually among the early adopters. Instead of asking the Lord for what his ideas are for today, we tend to anchor ourselves to what he said years ago and forget to ask for fresh input from heaven.

When I arrived in 1987, China's needs were apparent. Foreigners knew how they could contribute. Many Chinese needed to speak English and could not. There you are; it was a clear need—and we came and truly helped. There were clear needs for medical upgrades in both skills and knowledge—and we came and truly helped. There were clear needs to interact commercially with other nations, and there were clear needs to help the disadvantaged—and we came and truly helped.

During the 90s, not much changed. English was still needed and we continued coming as teachers. International business was taking off, and some came to work in that area. Throughout the decade, manufacturing grew dramatically, and China took center stage as the world's supplier of anything anyone wanted to buy.

China became stronger. English played a major role and was still needed. But, other areas of education also became important. All the skills of business, accounting, management, logistics, and customer service were also needed.

The first decade of this century saw the collapse of the world's financial system in 2008.

With that downfall came the loss of confidence in depending on international business as a way of achieving economic strength. With that shift came a huge change in China's willingness to look to the West for its future. When that happened, China's perceived need for Westerners changed as well. It had become very capable in many areas and, therefore, did not need what foreigners had been bringing.

Throughout past decades, foreign Christians hoped to help Chinese Christians. I recall my first trip to China in 1986, when, as I stood on a street in Guangzhou, someone quietly came up to me, six inches from my face, and said, "I have heard of Jesus. Is it true?" That experience gave me the feeling that the needs were very basic and yet significant; I would certainly be able to help in this area.

However, looking back over 28 years, I see that many of my ideas, flowing from my worldview, were not healthy from a Kingdom point of view. Back then, I assumed, as I had been taught, that the entire Christian experience was founded on knowledge. By that I mean that I did not know some very important things. At first I did not know I was separated from God by sin and that Jesus came to save me from that problem and reconcile me to himself. I needed to learn that truth and I did. Then I moved on to realize my knowledge of the Bible was nonexistent, and so I began to add to that knowledge. Eventually, I completed seminary studies and tried to fill in all the knowledge gaps that I had. My ministry in the United States took the form of teaching because I believed that the basic problem was lack of knowledge. Certainly, there is much to support this worldview.

Then, in my early years in China, I began to meet people who did more believing in what they were learning than I did. I began to meet people who did not know as much as I did, but they believed much more in what they did know. It was unsettling.

The Lord was dismantling the basis of my worldview and changing my foundation from "knowledge" to the idea of "obedience." I began to realize that God did not seem to care so much about what I knew as he did what I obeyed. He highlighted the issue of obedience in scripture in a way I had not been willing to see. I began to realize that perhaps I should not be teaching what the Bible said unless I was also doing it. Statements like, "Do not worry," became troubling because I saw how little I obeyed. Likewise, "Bless those who curse you," took on new meaning when I learned that six women, identified as witches, were cursing me.\*

As I began to obey his word more, I began to experience what I think of as his life. My life changed dramatically, and I began to shift from a heavy yoke to the light yoke he promised.

At that point, I realized that my influence on the lives of my Christian friends might not have been as positive as I had hoped. If I was simply trying to fill in their gaps of knowledge with what I understood to be the truth, then they would only get the benefit of knowledge. If I was honest, I would admit the accumulation of knowledge had not helped me achieve what my heart actually desired. It was obeying what I knew that brought life. My observation of the impact of what we think of as higher education was clearly disappointing. After a couple of years of focused study on spiritual subjects, several of my local friends had obviously not matured in their spiritual lives as I had expected.

However, the foundation of my worldview shifted once again from "obedience" to the "life of God." This began to change how I thought about the gospel. I began to see it as the message of the very life of God being available to me and others. Of course, I had to understand my separation from God because of sin and his life given for me, but that was not the end point, it was only the beginning. The destination was experiencing the very life of God—he in me and I in him, just as he promised.

I mention this because it affects the role of the foreigner in China. Sometimes I meet someone who introduces him- or herself as a person sent to bring the gospel to China. I often think to myself, "Which gospel?" If you had asked me when I had first arrived, I probably would have described my understanding of the gospel as the gospel of sin management. I was fully prepared to give those lost people the knowledge they were lacking to deal with this universal problem. But, I was not bringing them the gospel of the "life of God." That was not what I had been



Gaylan Yeung

taught. It was not how I was thinking. There is a big difference between the gospel of sin management and the gospel of the “life of God.”

This whole shift in my thinking has taught me to seek intellectual humility. I have come to see that I still need to understand what the Kingdom is and how it works, but I have so much more to learn. Until my stories seem like they could have come from the Bible itself, I want to keep pursuing a better understanding of what I have been given—this life of God. I need to better understand how it works. In this regard, I feel I have learned more about the Kingdom in the past five years than the previous 43.

While countries like China will develop and grow, their need for foreign interaction will change. What they used to need, they may no longer feel they need. We might see the situation differently, but that does not really matter. We will be allowed and invited to interact only where they feel the need for our influence.

China has in many ways taken its deserved economic position in the world. Chinese companies now compete head-to-head with many of the best in the world. Sure, there is much to learn, but the invitation to help will go out to those who can bring specific and developed skills. That is the nature of this season in China. No country wants to feel dependent on others.

Still, the deepest benefit foreign believers can bring is the benefit of a life that flows from God through Jesus. The universal need for this does not seem to change as a society develops. Perhaps, it might even increase as a society achieves economic and technical greatness. Often, when that greatness comes, along with it comes the expectation that it has now achieved its purpose. Nevertheless, when you poke beneath the surface, you always find that what our hearts (and theirs) deeply long for is not found in that greatness. It is only found in a relationship with God through Jesus that is experienced as we practice dependence upon him. If we can provide a living example of how this life works in us, we can always bring a treasure to any country in any stage of development.

The problem will be who gets invited to come and stay. Those invitations will change according to the felt needs of China.

One day we were having a management meeting in one of my companies trying to deal with the economic collapse of 2008. Some felt that God had let us down because we lost half our orders that summer. But one leader made the statement that he would rather have one year in our company than 100 years in a large successful company because in our company he learned to walk with God. I was shocked, but delighted, to hear that was his assessment.

I believe that if we help people learn to walk with God as they watch us do our jobs, that will always bring a treasure to any country in which we live and serve.

\* My staff, who lived in the community, made me aware that six women and a man, described as *wupo* or witches (巫婆), were cursing me and the company because of the influence of the Kingdom of God that we were bringing into the community. For several months, my staff would go to their homes and pray God’s blessings before going to work. Hence, bless those who curse you.

*Bill Job has lived in China since 1987 starting and operating five companies in Hong Kong and China.*



# Changing China, Changing Roles, Unchanging Commission

## Foreigners in China Today

By G. Wright Doyle

As we consider the ways in which foreigners might make a contribution to the welfare of Chinese society and to the growth of Christianity in China, we must first remind ourselves of the rapidly changing situation there.

### “Positive” Changes

To begin with, there are far more urban churches than ten years ago, composed of both migrants from rural areas and educated people, many of them professionals. It would seem, too, that there are more Christians at all levels of society. More Christian literature, blogs, web sites, online training resources, and overseas training options make it possible for believers to grow in their knowledge of the Bible and in their ability to serve, and for nonbelievers to learn about the Christian faith. Likewise, there is more awareness of resources available from Taiwan, Hong Kong, overseas Chinese Christian publishers, radio and television broadcasting, and seminaries.

All these developments, as well as an increased maturity and confidence, especially among younger urban church leaders, have resulted in a growing sense that they do not need Westerners to engage in evangelism as before. “We can do it ourselves,” they are saying.

### “Negative” Changes

On the other hand, not all the news is good. From almost all directions we hear of disturbing weaknesses among Christians. Shallow faith, worldliness, materialism, and general busyness caused by the tremendous pressure to survive and to acquire “the good things of life,” limit the impact of the gospel upon professing believers. Evangelism with limited biblical content, poor teaching from the pulpit, and the influence of the “prosperity” message lead not only to a poor grasp of the core elements of the faith—not to mention the whole counsel of God—but also to a focus on earthly success and “happiness”—hardly the materials out of which sound, healthy Christians and churches can be built.

Meanwhile, small, intimate, house-church gatherings have been replaced, in many cases, by larger meetings, making deep fellowship, mutual encouragement, accountability, and spiritual “quality control” extremely difficult. The rapid expansion of the number of Christians has thrust immature people into positions of leadership for which they are not equipped. Most Chinese church leaders are overworked with little time for Bible study, meditation, and prayer. Following the traditional pattern of Chinese leadership, they rule over their flock in a hierarchical fashion, stunting the growth of new leaders and the exercise of spiritual gifts on the part of believers.

We repeatedly hear that the marriages of pastors are in trouble, sometimes because wife and children are neglected for “God’s work.” Nor do parents know how to bring up their children in a godly way. In fact, the greatest need in the church seems to be teaching and example of biblical family living. These and other weaknesses among Chinese Christians dull zeal for evangelism and make a credible testimony more difficult.

Within Chinese society, warp-speed urbanization and modernization have spawned fierce, dog-eat-dog competition. College graduates—the ones most likely to join urban churches—cannot easily find jobs. Housing prices, though ready to fall, are sky-high. Rising wealth has created a consumer culture exceeding even that of the West. Hedonism of all types, including pervasive sexual immorality, has produced a generation of “getters,” not givers.

Since early 2014, political pressures on the church have increased in some places as part of a general tightening campaign by the government. Strong anti-American propaganda and stricter ideological oversight in universities have made foreigners, especially Americans, more “radioactive” than ever. Increased restrictions on the Internet have rendered some forms of activity by foreigners, and even local believers, difficult.

In the West, the financial crises in Europe, very mixed signals about the American economy, and a growing emphasis upon social work rather than verbal evangelism are beginning to dampen the zeal of Christians to serve overseas along with the ability of the church to support them. In particular, various trends in the past few decades have gutted the heart of long-term missionary commitment and made lifetime dedication very rare. The result: few Westerners stay in China very long, and most do not learn the language well enough to communicate effectively.

### Character Constants amidst Changing Conditions

All these changes, plus more that have not been mentioned, require us to rethink the kinds of foreign Christians who are still needed in China. Clearly, some kinds of people are not needed, if, indeed, they ever were:

- Impatient, unprepared evangelists who do not take time to learn the language or culture and seek quick “decisions” for Christ.
- Self-willed, independent agents who are not willing to work with Chinese believers or other Westerners.
- Donor-driven “missionaries” who seek statistics for supporters back home more than long-term growth built on a solid foundation.
- Well-meaning, but ignorant zealots who are not aware of either China’s long history and rich culture or previous and present attempts to reach them for Christ. Thinking they have to “invent the wheel,” they are often not aware of the thousands of books and other materials already translated into Chinese, especially in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and North America.
- “Students” who do not really spend time learning Chinese but who focus on “ministry” to Chinese.
- “Business people” who use their work visa as a cover for Christian ministry.



[Joann Pittman](#)

- Short-term visitors who imagine that they can make converts in one quick trip.
- Advocates for democracy and Western-style government in the name of Christ. These may be good things, but they are not essential to the gospel, and promotion of them only confirms the suspicions of the Chinese government.
- Foreign money!

On the other hand, despite—and because of—the changing scene in China, there is still a great need for certain types of foreigners. Still needed:

- Dedicated Christians who will take seriously the Great Commission and do all they can to become effective Christian witnesses in China. This includes solid grounding in the Bible, deep piety, and learning as much as possible about Chinese history, culture, and contemporary society. *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*, by Peter Yu and this writer, was written to be an aid in this area.
- Young people who will dedicate their lives to work among the Chinese and take the time to learn the language well.
- Teachers, especially of English, but also other of subjects, who are committed to excellence in their work and to a lifestyle that is visibly God-centered and grace-filled.
- Skilled workers in the medical field and other mercy-related areas.
- People whose marriages and family life can be a model to Chinese.
- Mature Christians who will spend several weeks, months, or even years in China contributing their expertise but also becoming real friends to their colleagues.
- Business people who exhibit integrity, honesty, fairness, and love in all they do.
- Friends and mentors for Chinese Christians, including pastors and church leaders.
- Tourists and participants in short-term vision (not “mission!”) trips who come to look, listen, learn, and love those whom they meet, and to pray.
- Well-trained theologians who know enough Chinese language and culture to work alongside Chinese Christians who are seeking to bring the light of the Scriptures to bear upon their cultural heritage.
- In short, if what we have said about the state of Chinese Christians and churches reflects reality, then godly foreign believers who exemplify biblical values and priorities at home, school, and work can make a major contribution towards strengthening the testimony of Chinese believers and those who try to shepherd them.

### **Changing China, Unchanging Commission**

These same foreigners can also serve as much-needed evangelists. Despite what many are telling us, no matter how many Chinese have heard the biblical gospel, there are still hundreds of millions who have not.

Let us suppose that there are 100 million Chinese Christians (though this estimate is high); that each one understands the basic core of the Christian message, as summarized, for example, in the Apostles’ Creed (though this seems not to be the case); that each one can articulate the good news clearly (though not all can) and each has told at least one person enough about God to make informed repentance and true faith possible (again, this is unlikely); and that the daily lives of Christians are so different that others are drawn to ask, “Why? Where do your love, joy, peace, and righteous living come from?”

Let us further suppose that the efforts of pastors and evangelists, along with the countless Christian web sites and blogs, have brought a coherent biblical presentation to another two hundred million people. That would give us a total of 400 million (including existing believers) who have heard the gospel within the past few years. Now let us double that figure, just in case we have severely underestimated the combined witness of millions of believers. That still leaves us with at least 700 million Chinese—double the population of the United States—who have not had a chance to learn about God, Christ, salvation through faith in Jesus, and the new life that is mandated by Scripture and made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

Can anyone still say that there is no need for more Christian witnesses, even foreigners, who live as true followers of Christ and, when appropriate, communicate the essentials of the Christian faith to interested Chinese friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and fellow passengers? But evangelism, like edification of Christians, must be done slowly, quietly, patiently, prayerfully, personally, and mostly through friendship and godly living. China needs people who will listen, pray, be friends, and model godly living.

In particular, Chinese Christians will greatly benefit from watching Christian couples relate to each other in love. As husbands care tenderly for their wives, honoring them and exercising servant leadership, the traditional Chinese view of men’s role will be challenged. As wives demonstrate respect, meekness, and submission to their husbands, the common practice of wifely nagging, henpecking, criticizing, and openly rebelling against husbands likewise will be confronted with a different paradigm.

In the same manner, as Christian parents exercise both firm discipline and unconditional love, coupled with consistent teaching of God’s Word and mutual respect in the home, a huge gap in current Chinese society will be filled by this powerful counterexample to extremes of neglect, indulgence, and pressure to succeed that inflict serious harm on children.

Since Chinese tend to be both very practical and highly observant, what we will speak more loudly than what we say, and will contribute immeasurably to the growth of the Christian church in China. If they observe Christians who are secure in the love of God, walking the way of the cross, and filled with joy and hope, they will not fail to notice and ask questions.

There will always be a need for foreigners like this!

*G. Wright Doyle is Director, Global China Center, editor of Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity ([www.bdconline.net](http://www.bdconline.net)), and co-editor of Studies in Chinese Christianity, published by Wipf & Stock. For more on effective ministry among Chinese, see Reaching Chinese Worldwide, by G. Wright Doyle.*

# Christianity in China in the Context of Global Christianity

By Todd M. Johnson

Both Christianity in China and global Christianity have undergone profound demographic changes since the year 1900. The two have interacted in significant ways with one another, both positive and negative, especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This contact leads to two questions: (1) What is the significance of global Christianity for Chinese Christianity? and (2) What is the significance of Chinese Christianity for global Christianity?

These questions are important because Christians around the world are increasingly connected with one another. As Nigerian theologian Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo and African-American ethicist Reggie L. Williams state, “Christianity is not truly global by its mere presence in many countries of the world. It is truly global when two criteria are met. First, the local communities of the world’s nations are given the freedom to rethink and re-express Christianity’s teaching about God’s relationship with the world through Jesus Christ. And second, the local communities see themselves as equals, conversing and critiquing each other and contributing theologically to Christianity’s long tradition.”<sup>1</sup> Chinese Christians have a unique place in global Christianity, and they are entering into a deeper conversation with Christians in both the global South and the global North.

## Global Christianity<sup>2</sup>

The most significant trend within global Christianity is its dramatic demographic shift to the South. This shift has been documented by many scholars as a groundbreaking process affecting not only all religions worldwide, but how Christianity itself is practiced as a global phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Yet, over the course of the twentieth century and already into the twenty-first, Christians have continued to make up approximately one-third of the world’s population. This sustained percentage masks dramatic changes in the geographical makeup of global Christianity—a process of both North-South and East-West movement stretching back to the earliest days of Christianity—that is far from inconsequential.

The shift of Christianity to the global South is most clearly illustrated by the drastic changes in Christian percentages by continent between 1910 and 2010. In 1910 the majority of Christians worldwide resided in the global North, with only small representations in Oceania, Africa, and Asia; 66 percent of all Christians lived in Europe. By 2010 Europe’s proportion of all Christians had dropped to only 26 percent. Conversely, less than two percent of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910, which skyrocketed to almost 22 percent by 2010. The global North contained over 80 percent of all Christians in 1910, falling to less than 40 percent by 2010. It is clear that Christianity in 1910 was largely a Western phenomenon, including a strong European Roman Catholic presence in Latin America, where few church leaders were actually Latin Americans. The most dramatic difference between these two dates is in Africa—less than 10 percent Christian in 1910 but nearly 50 percent Christian in 2010, with sub-Saharan Africa well over 70 percent Christian.

## Divisions between Christians

Another trend is the increasing number of Christian denominations in the world. There are now more than 45,000 Christian denominations, ranging in size from millions to less than one hundred members.<sup>4</sup> Korean theologian Moonjang Lee writes, “Christianity has become too fragmented. Existing in a fragmented world, churches fail to show a united front. There are so many divisions within Christianity that it is an intriguing task to clarify a Christian identity.”<sup>5</sup> Today, the vast majority of denominations are located in the Independent (more than 27,000) and Protestant (nearly 11,000) traditions. If current trends continue, by 2025 there could be 55,000 denominations.

## Christian Renewal Worldwide

A further trend inside global Christianity is the appearance of unprecedented renewal movements occurring globally within all traditions. Renewal within global Christianity takes many forms, including evangelical movements, liturgical renewal, Bible study fellowships, and house church movements. The numbers of Christians involved in various kinds of renewal movements include 300 to 545 million Evangelicals<sup>6</sup> and 600 million Pentecostals/Charismatics. The locus of Christian renewal is clearly in the global South, where the majority of its practitioners live and where it is growing most rapidly.

## Comparing Chinese and Global Christianity

Table 1 compares Christians in China with Christians around the globe in 1900, 2000, and 2010. In 1900, Christians made up less than 0.5 percent of the population of what is today China,<sup>7</sup> whereas Christians were 34.5 percent of the global population. But throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, Christianity in China saw tremendous growth, while the percentage of Christians around the world declined slightly. At the same time that Christianity in the global North has been declining, Christianity in the global South has been on the rise. Chinese Christianity is part of that story.



[Yellow China by John Keogh via Flickr.](#)

**Table 1. Christianity in China and the World, 1900–2010**

	1900	%	2000	%	2010	%	1900–2000 % p.a.*	2000–2010 % p.a.
<b>World</b>								
Christians	558,131,000	34.5%	1,988,414,000	32.4%	2,272,774,000	32.9%	1.11%	1.35%
Independents	8,859,000	0.5%	301,804,000	4.9%	378,958,000	5.5%	3.12%	2.30%
Orthodox	115,855,000	7.2%	256,653,000	4.2%	276,605,000	4.0%	0.69%	0.75%
Protestants	133,606,000	8.2%	426,950,000	7.0%	507,239,000	7.3%	1.02%	1.74%
Catholics	266,566,000	16.5%	1,047,224,000	17.1%	1,172,804,000	17.0%	1.20%	1.14%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	80,912,000	5.0%	239,563,000	3.9%	300,426,000	4.3%	0.95%	2.29%
<i>Pentecostals</i>	981,000	0.1%	460,526,000	7.5%	587,579,000	8.5%	5.49%	2.47%
<b>China</b>								
Christians	1,651,000	0.3%	76,691,000	6.0%	107,956,000	7.9%	3.39%	3.48%
Independents	1,000	0.0%	50,043,000	3.9%	75,342,000	5.5%	9.87%	4.18%
Orthodox	5,000	0.0%	10,000	0.0%	10,000	0.0%	0.60%	0.00%
Protestants	385,000	0.1%	16,421,000	1.3%	24,721,000	1.8%	3.32%	4.18%
Catholics	1,100,000	0.2%	12,000,000	0.9%	15,000,000	1.1%	2.10%	2.26%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	270,000	0.1%	10,172,000	0.8%	15,246,000 <sup>#</sup>	1.1%	3.21%	4.13%
<i>Pentecostals</i>	2,000	0.0%	35,152,000	2.7%	52,091,000	3.8%	8.87%	4.01%

\*% p.a. stands for “percent per annum,” the average annual growth rate over the period listed.

<sup>#</sup>Strict self-identification. *Operation World*, using a broader definition, estimates 75.4 million or about 70% of all Christians.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2015).

Note: Christian traditions do not add up the Christian total because the table is missing doubly-affiliated (members of more than one denomination), unaffiliated, and disaffiliated Christians. House churches are found in the “Independent” tradition. In addition, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are found within the four traditions above and should not be added to the others.

### *Christian traditions*

While Roman Catholics make up more than half of all Christians globally in 2010, they make up only one-third of all Christians in China. Protestants (e.g. Three-Self Patriotic Movement) and Independents (e.g. house churches) make up two-thirds of all Chinese Christians (note, however, that there are very large numbers of doubly affiliated in China). The fastest growing Christian tradition in the world and in China (from 2000 - 2010) is Independents (globally including African Initiated Churches and nontraditional Christian churches; in China, mainly the house church movement). Note that Christians in China grew 2.5 times faster (from 2000 - 2010) than global Christianity (3.48% p.a. vs. 1.35% p.a.).

### *Evangelicals and Pentecostals*

Globally, Evangelicals are 13 percent of all Christians, and Pentecostals are 25 percent of all Christians. In China, Evangelicals (strict self-identification) are 14 percent of all Christians while Pentecostals are much higher at 48 percent of all Christians. (Evangelicals, on the broader *Operation World* definition, are 70% of all Christians in China). Chinese Christians who interact with Western Christians (in particular) on the global stage often find themselves more conservative theologically and more dynamic in worship and practice. At the same time, they can often clash with other Christians in Asia over the strongly “Chinese” culture expressed in their Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

### **Chinese in Global Christianity**

Chinese Christianity has at least three characteristics that are significant in the context of global Christianity: (1) nondenominationalism, (2) growth under pressure, and (3) mission after colonialism. Each of these characteristics can be set in opposition to key features of Western Christianity: (1) proliferation of denominations, (2) decline under favor, and (3) colonial mission. Finally, a fourth area is the global diaspora of Chinese around the world.

#### *Nondenominationalism*

While there is clearly a Catholic/Protestant divide both in Chinese Christian history and in the present situation of the church, Chinese Christians have, for the most part, avoided the denominationalism present in the rest of the world. This means that Chinese Christians might have a special role in bringing together Christians from different backgrounds. Until recently Chinese Christians have not had a significant presence at international gatherings, but that is beginning to change. A potential disadvantage of this increased contact, however, might be the introduction of denominationalism into China.

#### *Growth under pressure*

The modern history of persecution of the Chinese church includes diverse interactions between the Chinese government and Christians—in some places severe, and, in others, merely restrictive. At present, there seems to be a very uneven treatment of Christians across China. Internationally, Christians are under great pressure. The Pew Research Center reports on the limits to religious freedom in most countries in the world, with Christians as the most widely persecuted religious group (139 countries).<sup>9</sup> Persecution is one important area that Chinese Christians share with other Christians around the world. At the same time, Western Christians have been declining as a percentage in virtually every country where Christianity once was aligned with the state.<sup>10</sup>

## Mission after colonialism

Despite persecution and limited contact with the world, Chinese Christians have expressed a vision to reach the whole world with the gospel. One such initiative is the Back to Jerusalem movement, with its roots in the 1920s. It was revived in the early 2000s, and Chinese Christians set their sights on sending 100,000 missionaries to the Middle East (back along the Silk Roads on which Christianity initially made its way to China).<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Christians around the world have focused the vast majority of its mission efforts on places that are already Christian.<sup>12</sup> An unanswered question is how Chinese mission strategy might impact global mission strategy, especially in light of the fact that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western mission was often aligned with the colonial enterprise.

## Diaspora

Finally, there is the Chinese diaspora, one of the world's largest, with major global impact across business and education. Chinese are living all over the world; more than 50 million are estimated to now live outside of China with large concentrations in Thailand, Malaysia, the United States, Canada, and dozens of other countries.<sup>13</sup> While Chinese have the tendency to minister only to their fellow Chinese abroad, missiologist Enoch Wan offers suggestions for forming strategic partnerships with other diaspora communities (such as the Koreans).<sup>14</sup> Generally, Chinese are more Christian in diaspora than they are in China (e.g., Chinese are 30 percent Christian in Australia, but only eight percent at home).<sup>15</sup> For these and other reasons, Chinese in diaspora are strategically placed throughout the world, both to interact with other Christians and to reach non-Christians.

## Conclusion

Today, Christians in China are increasingly interacting with Christians worldwide. What do they offer to each other? As stated above, one of the single greatest challenges to global Christianity is navigating fragmentation and diversity. Another significant challenge for global Christians is interaction with people in other religions. Here, Chinese Christians might have something special to offer. They live in one of the most religiously diverse countries on earth and are also found in many other countries. They can take their own experience, missiologically and theologically, and speak to the global Church about good practices and lessons learned from living without denominations in religiously diverse settings. The global Church, on the other hand, has become increasingly connected, something that the Chinese church would greatly benefit from. It is this kind of interaction and dialogue that will continue to define the relationship between local forms of Christianity around the world and the global Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo and Reggie L. Williams, "Converting a Colonialist Christ: Toward an African Postcolonial Christology," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), pp. 88–101.

<sup>2</sup> This section is derived from a longer essay by Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Bellofatto [Zurlo], "Upon Closer Examination: Status of World Christianity," in *River of God: An Introduction to World Mission*, ed. Doug Priest and Steve Burris (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), pp. 108–124.

<sup>3</sup> See Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> See Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007) for a complete listing of Christian denominations in every country of the world.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, "Future of Global Christianity," in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> The structural definition of "Evangelicals" consists of all affiliated church members self-identifying as Evangelicals (300 million in 2010, *World Christian Database*). The theological definition includes church members who affirm or practice belief in the crucified Christ, an experience of personal conversion, adherence to the Bible as a theological foundation, and active engagement in missionary evangelism (545 million in 2010, *Operation World*). See Gina A. Zurlo, "Demographics of Global Evangelicalism," in Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, and Mark Hutchinson, eds., *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Thomas Nelson, 2015), pages 34–47.

<sup>7</sup> Not including Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan, all examined as separate countries in the *World Christian Database*.

<sup>8</sup> This is particularly true in countries in Southeast Asia where Chinese are a minority but economically stronger. See "South-East Asia's Chinese," BBC News, August 29, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1514916.stm>.

<sup>9</sup> "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," Pew Research Center (September 2012): 23, accessed May 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/09/RisingTideofRestrictions-fullreport.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, pp. 154–173, 190–193.

<sup>11</sup> David Ro, "The Rising Missions Movement in China and How to Support it" in *Lausanne Global Analysis*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, May 2015, pp. 4–10.

<sup>12</sup> "About 82% of Christian expenditure is dedicated to the pastoral ministries of the churches in the home countries of the givers, mostly in the heartlands of the Christian faith." Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, p. 296.

<sup>13</sup> Huiyao Wang, "China's Competition for Global Talents: Strategy, Policy, and Recommendations," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada: Research Reports*, May 24, 2012, pp. 1–19.

<sup>14</sup> Enoch Wan, "Korean Diaspora: From Hermit Kingdom to Kingdom Ministry," in *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, ed. S. Hun Kim and Wonsuk Ma (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 101–116.

<sup>15</sup> Vegard Skirbekk, Stuart Basten, Eric Caron Malenfant, and Marcin Stonawski, "The Religious Composition of the Chinese Diaspora, Focusing on Canada," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 51, No. 1, January 2012, pp. 173–183.

## View from the Wall

### Encouragement and Advice from our Chinese Colleagues

By Suzanne

How are we doing? What could we do better? What would our Chinese colleagues like those of us who have come from other parts of the world to know?

As a network of people from all over the world who live and work in China, we are a mix of languages, music, special foods, and other customs that enrich our community no end. We also face challenges, one of which concerns the relationships between local coworkers and those who come from the Americas, Europe, other parts of the Asia-Pacific region, and Africa. We often fall into an “us and them” way of relating, with foreigners being treated with respect, kindness, and patience even though at times we can be frustrating to our Chinese colleagues.



[China, Great Wall Of by Jason E. via Flickr](#)

Wanting honest answers to questions of what our Chinese colleagues would like us, who are foreigners, to know without consideration for anyone “keeping face” or concern for causing offence, we conducted an anonymous small-scale study among our Chinese coworkers. Bilingual questionnaires were distributed through our networks, and all responses were collected and collated by a local colleague. It should be noted that most of those involved in this study were more concerned about what we contribute to communities than about personal gain. The responses we received from 14 local coworkers reflect the nature of our various organizations.

It was encouraging to be reassured that, by and large, we *do* add significant value to the communities in which we live and work. However, we need to keep actively learning more about Chinese culture. Interestingly, the importance of language learning did not rate a mention, but the need to keep focused on cultural learning was stressed over and over. Finally, our colleagues would like us to drop any pretence of “I have it all together,” and just be *real* and present in the communities in which we live and work. It is tempting to withdraw to our cultural bubbles where we can relax and be ourselves, but this study highlights how much it is appreciated when we make the extra effort to “be ourselves” in our host cultures.

#### **Three Questions**

##### ***Question One: What benefits do foreign colleagues bring to your workplace and/or team?***

Half of all those who responded specifically mentioned the role foreigners have in our *teams*. Our teams look very different to those of the secular Chinese world, and this is appreciated. Feedback included concepts such as respect, encouragement, boundaries, planning, honesty, problem-solving and integrating faith and work as being seen in our teams.

What foreigners have done in terms of building up our colleagues in the area of *faith* is valued. Six out of the 14 respondents commented on this. However, while this is very important and to be celebrated, a caution comes in section two with the advice that we should work hand-in-hand with local believers rather than start our own programs. Perhaps the most important thing we can offer is not so much what we *do* as who we *are* in our faith.

Respondents commented that foreign coworkers were “examples in matters of faith,” adding that, “They really care about us and pray for us when life isn’t going well.” In addition, they indicated that, “Their stable and solid spiritual lives are a great help to us,” and “They integrate faith into their everyday lives.”

We are valued as a conduit of *resources*. This includes *professional skills*, *funding* and *personnel*. Four of the respondents commented on the professional skills we bring and often pass on through training. Three respondents mentioned the value of foreign workers as sourcing funds. One respondent who works with the disabled is appreciative of the role of foreigners in visiting the disabled and teaching them English, thus boosting their self-confidence.

Other comments which did not fall into distinctive categories include the role we have in public relations, teaching English, and appreciation of our willingness to learn about Chinese culture.

##### ***Question Two: What advice do you have for foreign colleagues?***

To continue working on a *better understanding of Chinese culture* was the most common piece of advice. Six respondents mentioned this. Some responses included practical tips such as continually filling up a guest’s tea cup with hot water, being tactful rather than direct in communication, and not splitting the check at meals. Some of our colleagues would like us to grasp deeper concepts such as the Confucian principle of “the golden mean” (compromise, avoidance of excess etc), the way society is structured around people being kind and generous to one another thus creating a sense of obligation and gratitude, the importance of building relationships with key people, understanding and practicing the concept of “face” and more.

Two of our colleagues would like to say to us, “*Please interact with us more.*” (This was repeated more strongly in the final section of the survey.) Another colleague added that interaction should not be just to practice language but rather to build genuine relationships. One respondent pointed out that foreigners are often busy with “foreign things,” but it would be good if we could work together more and complement one another. Another respondent noted the importance of foreigners attending team meetings leading to

better mutual understanding.

*Lighten up!* We can sometimes come across as very serious and focused, but two of our colleagues encourage us to “lighten up” and even crack a few jokes.

*Ask for help.* Why is it that we foreigners like to be so independent? It is not easy for us to live in a culture so different from our own, and our colleagues recognize that. Two of our colleagues particularly plead with us to just ask for help when we need it and not be embarrassed to do so.

Two respondents commented on the need for *flexibility* in Chinese culture. “*Listen to us and respect us*” was the advice from one respondent who felt that we too often think we know best, yet the reality is we do not always know what is culturally relevant and legal in a Chinese context. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, *encouraging local people to participate in local churches* rather than setting up something outside the local structure was the heartfelt plea of one respondent who wants to see new believers thrive not only when their foreign friends are present but also after they leave.

Other pieces of advice included *realistic expectations*, *appropriate clothing* for local climates, *seeing people as individuals* rather than clumping all “Chinese people” into one category, and the being aware of the *changing role of foreigners* in China.

### **Question Three: Is there anything else you would like to add?**

There were two clear categories of advice offered here. First was the desire for *more frequent interactions* between foreign and local coworkers. Eight respondents commented on this, five of whom mentioned the significant role played by food! One also mentioned the richness that comes from our different backgrounds as we study the Bible together; another finds discussions with his/her foreign colleague helpful but is frustrated by the language gap, and one other particularly appreciates learning about how foreign friends view families and child rearing.

The second category was about foreigners “*being real.*” We need to actively love one another and knock down the walls of pride that can easily arise with our cultural differences. As one respondent so beautifully put it, we all need to “work openly together under the sun—in this way we can all relax.” If we can just “be real” with one another in a context of love, with every little thing, good or bad, being brought into the clear light of the sun rather than being hidden in shame, then our cultural differences will fall into perspective.

### **Conclusion**

There are two strong themes that emerged from this small study. The first is the importance of “*being real and present.*” This includes being transparent in areas of faith, work, and even our neediness. We foreigners are appreciated for who we are and what we bring both personally and professionally. However, we sometimes withdraw to our own “comfort zones,” creating a sense of “us” and “them.”

The second theme which emerged is that of *culture*. What we bring from our own cultural and faith backgrounds is appreciated, but we need to keep asking questions, noticing things, and actively learning about local culture in order to enjoy richer interactions with local people.

Thank you, Chinese colleagues, for your patience with and care of us, your foreign friends who come from very different backgrounds. We appreciate you very much.

Foreign colleagues, let us keep on just being ourselves, professionally and personally, in this part of the world which is home to us for a season. May we do our best to knock down the walls of insecurity which we can easily erect. May we persevere and even intensify efforts to learn about the culture, being constantly humble and curious. We have local colleagues who are ready and willing to help us thrive here. We are blessed.

*Suzanne is an Australian who has lived in China for 13 of the past 20 years. Originally a teacher of English as a foreign language, she now serves in member care.*

## **Intercessory Notes**

*Please pray*

1. That foreigners serving in China will increasingly experience the very life of God—he in me and I in him—within themselves.
2. For Chinese Christians as they participate on the global scene in a variety of ways. Pray that their impact on Christianity outside their country would be with discernment and wisdom.
3. For cultural understanding and wisdom for those working with the “post-eighties” generation whose worldview is so distinct from that of other generations.
4. That foreign workers in China would have a humble attitude as they persevere in a different culture, accept advice from their Chinese coworkers, and maintain openness as they continually learn more about the culture.
5. That foreign workers would understand the increasing relationship between global Christianity and the church in China, and adjust as necessary as they serve in China.



## Peoples of China

### Understanding and Engaging with the Post-Eighties Generation

By R and J

The role of Christian expatriates engaged in China ministry is changing, in part, because the worldview of the people with whom they work has shifted. Accordingly, one must adapt to this emerging worldview as suggested in the modern political slogan: “与时俱进” (“Move with the times”).

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of distinct, generational groups in China. Some say that since the 1970s, about every five years a different generation emerges holding divergent views on core values and beliefs. Specific titles have entered common parlance to refer to those born in each period. This article will discuss key features of one of these generational groups, the “post-eighties” (80后). Then, briefly, it will suggest how expatriates can effectively recalibrate and better engage with this group.

As the term suggests, people who are post-eighties were generally born during the 1980s, although those born at the end of the 70s are sometimes also included. The post-eighties are the earliest generation of those who became known in the West as the “Little Emperors” of China. Broadly speaking, they were typically raised in a close family environment where all adults—parents and grandparents—concentrated their attention on their only heir. Accordingly, the perceptions of family relationships are a key feature of this group.

#### Key Family Relationships

##### *Grandparents*

In terms of emotional attachments, post-eighties adults are closest to their grandparents. From infancy, a majority of these babies were raised exclusively by their paternal grandparents until they reached the age at which they could attend primary school, typically seven or eight years old. Later, returning to live with their parents, post-eighties children were often accompanied by their grandparents who would relocate in order to continue living with them until they finished high school.

A number of factors combined to produce this situation. To begin with, it was a very pragmatic arrangement. As retirees, grandparents usually had sufficient time to provide care in contrast to the child’s parents who were typically employed in fulltime jobs, six days per week. Such arrangements also satisfied traditional and cultural expectations that assumed grandparents would assist with the care of their grandchildren, especially the progeny of their own son(s). In most cases, there were also important financial incentives as well. By leaving their children in the care of their grandparents, young parents could avoid paying professional childcare fees; grandparents often considered these savings to represent a concrete, financial contribution from them to the young family. Lastly, following the introduction of the strict one-child family planning policy—the post-eighties babies being the first generation born under these rules—insecurities which normally surround childbirth were further intensified. As a result, grandparents often became emotionally entangled even during the early stages of pregnancy and found it difficult to detach themselves following the birth of their grandchild.

The post-eighties children had little influence over their situation until they were well into early adulthood. By that time, they found their emotional attachment to their grandparents stronger than that to their own parents. Crucially now, the post-eighties generation is attempting to juggle personal career ambitions alongside satisfying filial responsibilities to aging grandparents. When these priorities inevitably clash, these adults face intense emotional turmoil, although personal career ambitions tend to finally dominate.

##### *Parents and children*

In contrast to the strong emotional bond with their grandparents, the post-eighties generation often struggles to feel a significant attachment to their parents. It could be said that this situation is the unfortunate result of their parents’ absence during the crucial years of their childhood. As already mentioned, it was their live-in grandparents who cooked, bathed, and accompanied them daily. Parents, on the other hand, could not be counted on for meaningful interaction on a daily basis (with the exception of enforcing discipline) as their “work units” (单位) all too often expected them to fulfil long working hours. Although parents of the post-eighties generation may have slept under the same roof as their children, in practice, their circumstances often resulted with them living as DINKs—“double-income-no-kids”—parents.

Despite the lack of intimacy between them, post-eighties adults will often continue to live with their parents, if they can. This extended parental dependence is an arrangement of convenience rather than an emotional attachment. Consistent with the upbringing they had under their grandparents, the post-eighties are largely accustomed to being looked after in their daily living.

Childcare arrangements for the children of post-eighties do not appear to have changed in any significant way. Much like their own parents, post-eighties parents also tend to deposit their infant children with the child’s grandparents. In many cases, these parents will take the initiative to request this arrangement. Alternatively, the parents of the post-eighties may also ask that their grandchildren be given to them. In any case, many post-eighties seem to presume that their parents will continue to support and care for them into retirement on a frequent, if not daily, basis. The recently coined term “generation leech” (啃老族) denotes this living arrangement in which post-eighties adults continue to depend upon the financial and practical care of their parents.

##### *Spouse or partner*

Perhaps the greatest personal challenge among post-eighties young adults is their relationship with a spouse or partner. Popular media in China is frequently awash with reports on the widespread phenomenon of “flash marriages” (闪婚) and “flash divorces” (闪离). These are self-evident terms coined by this generation to denote marital relationships that form and/or disintegrate with breath-taking speed. There are also



Forlorn by sherrah sherrah via Flickr.

the modern derogatory terms “male/female leftovers” (剩男, 剩女) which refer to the increasing number of post-eighties individuals who remain single into their thirties with very little prospects of marriage.

Why do close personal relationships seem to be a particular challenge for this generation? It is worth noting that many post-eighties themselves lacked a healthy role model in their parents’ marriages for which divorce was preferred but ultimately impossible due to previously insurmountable social and legal constraints. As a result, they have often borne witness to their parents’ dysfunctional marriage—or worse, their extramarital affairs—in excruciating detail. On the other hand, the emotional intimacy with which they are most familiar is between them and their grandparents. However, when this relationship model becomes the ideal upon which the post-eighties base their search for a partner, it creates unrealistic expectations in relationships and results in insecurity, querulousness, and an unwillingness to undertake long-term commitment.

### Key Spokespersons

The post-eighties have produced a number of important celebrity spokespersons who articulate the unique challenges they face. Indeed, the term “post-eighties” was first coined within literary circles referring to a new generation of young authors who became highly popular bloggers in the early days of the Internet. Among them, three are particularly worth mentioning.

*Han Han* (韩寒) and *Guo Jingming* (郭敬明) are two male authors who, despite their similar ages, hold opposing social values. On the one hand, Han Han critically parodies the disjunction between the daily reality that people experience and its official representation in the state media. In contrast, Guo Jingming is a talented and flamboyant writer who utilizes the dazzling and sensational image of a more confident modernized China and glories in its superficiality. Both command a huge following of avid readers through their blogs and published works as well as many fans closely imitating their fashion and personal hobbies.

*Li Yuchun* (李宇春) is a female singer whose rise to fame began on one of China’s earliest talent shows. Since then, she is best known for her androgynous style whereby she presents herself on stage and in public as a spirited young man who uses make-up and feminine accessories. Li Yuchun’s contribution has been to affirm to China’s youth that being an masculine female or an effeminate male is quite fashionable and desirable. Indeed, much of the recent attitudinal shift among China’s youth toward tolerating and welcoming homosexuality and LGBT culture can be traced to the rise of Li Yuchun’s public profile.



Li Yuchun via [js.people.cn](http://js.people.cn)

### Key Psychological Characteristics

#### *Loneliness*

In light of their somewhat cloistered family circumstances, it is unsurprising that post-eighties were well acquainted with loneliness during their childhoods. Moreover, with the exception of occasional visits with cousins, classmates, or other children their own age, post-eighties children typically had few options but to play alone indoors under the supervision of their grandparents. Of course, such a situation is hardly unique to China. Nevertheless, the sense of social isolation they felt has been further exacerbated by the national context wherein community organized events have been typically discouraged, restricted, or banned outright. Those living in the cities probably fared even worse due to the widespread practice by families to remain self-confined in their apartments without regular interaction with either neighbours or the family network.

#### *Self-centeredness*

The self-centeredness of the post-eighties generation is a characteristic that is best understood silhouetted against previous older traditions. Up until relatively recently, children occupied the outer periphery of the family circle and possessed a personal value considerably lower than that of an adult. Their individual needs and demands were deemed subordinate to those of the family and secondary to elderly members or the family head.

A sudden reversal of this situation followed the introduction, in the late seventies, of the one-child policy to restrict population growth. Post-eighties children quickly became a “rarity” within family networks and their status dramatically increased from a very young age. This was particularly evident among male progeny who are especially valued for their unique role in bearing the family name—a point of considerable concern to those grandparents who maintain traditional beliefs about the importance of ancestral lineage.

Faced with the prospect of only a single heir, family elders and parents alike sought to satisfy the demands of the post-eighties child and concentrated their attention and limited family finances on fostering the child’s potential for future success. To this extent, the widespread sense of self-centeredness among this generation is not so much personal as it is a social characteristic fostered from early childhood. Subsequent difficulties frequently have arisen as the “one-child” becomes an adult. They quickly find out that their needs and demands will not be unconditionally met by those outside their immediate family. Their disillusionment is further magnified as they are surrounded by their own peers, many of whom share the same self-centered expectations.

### Suggestions for Christian Expatriates

Mixed, “all-age” congregations are relatively uncommon in China. Instead, unofficial house churches are typically organized along generational lines. As members of the post-eighties generation increasingly undertake leadership roles, Christian expatriates can help them face their unique challenges. Following are suggestions for doing this.

- As outlined above, post-eighties are often less mature than their age suggests due to their continued dependence upon family members or their seniors. They require a great deal of mentoring and could also benefit from opportunities to initiate or organize meetings under the supervision of a facilitator. They need to become independent, responsible and encouraged to personally own their leadership roles—not least in order to counter a lack of commitment.

## Book Review

### A New Understanding of the Relationship between Christianity and Chinese Culture

Reviewed by Andrew Kaiser

*The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*, Henrietta Harrison, University of California, 2013, 279 pages. ISBN-10: 0520273125; ISBN-13: 978-0520273122. At Amazon: paperback \$24.33; Kindle \$14.55 with free reading app.

Henrietta Harrison's recent book, *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales*, recounts the story of Catholicism in a small village located near Taiyuan, Shanxi from its initial arrival at the opening of the seventeenth century on through the dynamic events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and right up to the present. To support her narrative, Harrison makes use of an impressive wealth of material unearthed from a host of archival collections in several languages from around the world as well as local Shanxi resources and oral histories she gathered on several research trips. The result is a scholarly tour de force of resource integration and analysis. This is historical research of the highest order, and anyone with an interest in history would benefit from interaction with Harrison's work.

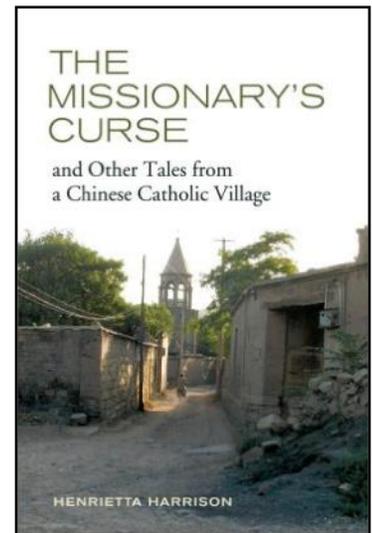
For most readers of ChinaSource, however, the real value of this work lies elsewhere. The burgeoning academic field of Global Christianity has brought fresh attention to issues of acculturation, a term used to describe the changes experienced by Christianity (or any other religion) as it is absorbed into the host culture during the process of cross-cultural transmission. This way of looking at contextualization from, as it were, the other side of the coin, highlights the many different "Christianities" that have developed around the world, drawing welcome attention to some of the unintended consequences of successful Christian mission. In the course of her exploration of the encounter between Catholicism and this particular community in rural north China, Harrison uncovers a handful of insights regarding the cross-cultural process in China that diverge significantly from common perceptions about how Christianity and Chinese culture relate to one another.

First of all, most scholars and missionaries have approached the China mission task with the understanding that one of the fundamental barriers to effective evangelism has always been a presumed disconnect between Christianity and Chinese culture. As she recounts the initial adoption of Christianity by early seventeenth century Shanxi merchants (*jinshangren*), and then traces the growth of the Catholic community on through the religious cases (*jiao'an*) and violent conflicts of the nineteenth century, Harrison demonstrates that—at least initially—there was in fact "significant overlap between Christianity and Chinese religious culture, and that in this area the differences between Catholic practice and local folk religion have actually increased over the centuries" (5). This is an important corrective to our more common tendency to see Christian mission in China as a process moving towards a more fully acculturated Chinese Christianity.

Second of all, Harrison's narrative—particularly in its elucidation of the expanding foreign missionary communities of the nineteenth century—makes quite clear the reason for the increasing dissonance between Christianity and Chinese religious culture: "Differences between Catholic Christianity and Chinese local religion have been created over the centuries as local Catholicism has gradually been bound into global networks and institutions" (6). In other words, in the case of this particular rural community in Shanxi, increased connections with the Christian community outside of their village—and outside of their country—have fostered the kinds of changes in their own faith and religious practice that resulted in their gradual divergence from local culture. The more they knew about, interacted with and had access to the larger global church, the more they as a church became culturally separated from their local community.

As one would expect, the Boxer violence of 1900 plays an important part in Harrison's narrative. Without denying the role this increased, cultural distance between local Christians and non-Christians played in the events of that summer, Harrison highlights yet another often overlooked factor: much of this cultural divergence did not occur until after the foreign missionaries had independent access to large quantities of funds. Prior to the Opium Wars, Catholic missionaries working in Shanxi were financially dependent upon the largesse of the local Catholic community resulting in a de facto retention of at least some church authority by the local Christian elites. With financial independence, the missionaries experienced a relative increase in authority; they were gradually less inclined to cater to local opinion and were better able to exert their authority (expressed through orphanages, marriages and land-rights) over their congregations. The point, as Harrison summarizes, is that "Imperialism matters in this story, but it is not inherent in the missionary enterprise, nor did Chinese Catholics necessarily benefit from the growth of missionary power" (7). Increased missionary power was not welcomed by the Catholics in Harrison's study, nor was it perceived as a good thing for the church.

Fourth, Harrison's statistical analysis of available records for the Shanxi church provides still further support for the popular claim that Christianity in China has grown most rapidly in the absence of foreign missionaries. However, in this case she points not so much to the remarkable growth experienced particularly by the Protestant community in the 1970s and 1980s, but rather to the initial growth of Catholicism in the mid- to late-eighteenth century. Following the Yongzheng Emperor's 1724 ban against Christianity, foreign missionaries became increasingly rare on the ground, leaving local Catholics free to evolve their religious practices and identity in ways that best suited their local contexts. Free to work out its own acculturation, the church developed a capacity to grow on its own, expanding through the family networks that were—and to a lesser degree today still are—the foundation of Chinese society. This pattern continues today, for even after the return of the expatriate missionaries "the majority of Catholics have always inherited their faith rather than converting as adults." (202).



Finally, Harrison's interviews with present day Catholics in this small Shanxi village reveal a shift in the ways Chinese Christian identity is defined. During a personal conversation a few years ago, Harrison mentioned to me that while working in the archives at the Vatican in Rome, she was pleasantly surprised to have encountered a young priest from Shanxi. These global connections highlight the decreased distance between local Christian communities and the larger global church. Rather than seeing a local church that has become increasingly localized or "acculturated," Harrison has found that:

*Catholic practice in [this village] has moved ever closer to global norms. People tend to adopt local practices over time, but as members of a world religion Catholics also wish to share in the practices of the worldwide church, so that the processes of localization and globalization are in constant tension. However, it is the forces of globalization that have come to dominate, as inland Chinese villages... have become more closely linked to the outside world over the centuries (9).*

Practically speaking, this means that the very same church that appears to be developing its own distinctive local identity is in fact shaping itself to fit global notions of what it means to be Christian. As Harrison points out, these global connections are rapidly relativizing the political disputes that have monopolized questions of Christian identity in China since the 1980s, and the result is a church that while not necessarily "less Chinese" is certainly more global.

*Cheap air travel, labor migration, tourism, study abroad, and the Internet bind the villagers to the popular culture of global Catholicism even though their church remains formally separated from Rome. Thus what might look like the gradual development of a local Catholic church is far more commonly experienced today as progress towards authenticity defined in terms of global Catholicism. As the world has become increasingly globalized, Catholic practice in the village has become more like the practices of Catholics in other parts of the world (10).*

These are some of the key ways in which Harrison's book challenges our prevailing scholarly understandings of Christianity's encounter with Chinese culture. Although the nature of distinctly Catholic, as opposed to Protestant, religious practice as well as the distinctly Catholic centrality of Rome may make Harrison's narrative appear more true for Catholicism than for Protestantism, the marked influence of global Pentecostalism and post-Lausanne III financial mobilization within the Chinese Protestant church suggests that the patterns she uncovers may not be quite so uniquely Catholic. It is also true that for each of Harrison's points summarized above, arguments could—and no doubt will—be mustered by other academics in support of a counternarrative. This debate will be important, and scholars will continue to advance new understandings of this complicated story for many years to come.

However, for those of us more intimately involved in China mission—to those personally striving to contribute positively to the growth of God's kingdom in China, the lessons from Harrison's research are more immediate. According to this study, there was historically a lot of overlap between Christianity and Chinese religious practice, such that Christianity grew most rapidly in the absence of the foreign missionaries. However, over time as more foreigners got involved—and especially as those foreigners became powerful and financially independent of the local churches—Christianity in China became increasingly distinct from Chinese culture, ultimately moving towards conformity to a more general "global" Christianity. In light of these historical patterns, what ought we as expatriates to be doing? How can we best contribute to the growth of the church in China? How global or Chinese do we imagine the "church in China" is or will become? The revised understanding of the acculturation of Christianity in China proposed by The Missionary's Curse should give all expatriate Christians workers in China cause to reflect humbly on our identity and our work in the Middle Kingdom.

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- Those working with post-eighties should be aware that the problem of self-centeredness counters the Christian notion of self-sacrifice and the cost of discipleship.
- Post-eighties are particularly adept at compartmentalizing their lives in situationally specific ways. Knowing their families and peers and becoming a family friend provides a more complete view of their lives and allows one to become a "holistic friend."
- Given their lack of exposure to healthy marriages during childhood, post-eighties Christians struggle to build meaningful relationships in adulthood. It would be very valuable to offer guided assistance to understand biblical manhood and womanhood.
- Post-eighties Christians need assistance to critically evaluate culture—especially popular Western culture—from a biblical perspective. More than any previous generation, they are familiar with Western culture and materialism. However, for many of them, there is no clear distinction between the West and the Christian faith.

### Summary

The role of Christian expatriates engaged in China ministry is changing. Because the worldview of the people with whom they work has shifted, understanding and adaptation are needed. Two pressing needs for post-eighties Christians include:

- The urgent need for in-depth discipleship and clear expository teaching for Christian leaders.
- The need for role models who can demonstrate genuine holiness, true spirituality, and willingness to personally mentor them.

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