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# ChinaSource Quarterly

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**Doing Missions  
with Chinese  
Characteristics:  
Developments in the  
Indigenous Missions  
Movement from China**

WU Xi, Guest Editor

華源協作  
CHINASOURCE



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## Editorial

### The Nuts and Bolts of IMM from China

By WU Xi

This issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly* features some significant breakthroughs in the development of the Indigenous Mission Movement (IMM) from China.

The lead article by Qing Quan, on the development of the “good neighbor” model of missions from Wenzhou, is the first of its kind that traces an indigenous missiology from theology to practice. Qing Quan integrates history, missiological insights, and practice into the article as indicated by Brent Fulton’s brief analysis immediately following the article.

Wang and Kam provide another perspective of the missions movement. Drawing from numerous case studies, they condense the insights into 15 key points. These provide a bird’s eye view of the overall movement as opposed to Qing Quan who focuses on the development of a particular branch. The Chinese unabridged originals of both of these articles are available by download. (See the individual articles.) We have presented shortened, English, synopses in this issue to make their work available to English readers.

Gudao’s presentation of missiology for the Chinese church is a cry from the watchman on the wall to wake up the church to her responsibility in God’s kingdom. He outlines how the Chinese church can participate in God’s plan for reaching the nations.

The article based on my interviews with frontline workers telling of their hard-learned lessons brings the mission movement much closer to home. This is probably the first time such a frank and open sharing of their struggles is documented.

These first four articles, which comprise over two-thirds of the issue, are all contributed by indigenous sources. This is a vivid illustration of the growing maturity of the Chinese church in the mission movement. For this, we celebrate and give thanks to the Lord. I certainly expect this trend to continue in the days ahead. Perhaps in a future issue all the writers will be indigenous leaders.

The remainder of the issue features two pieces by Peter Bryant from a Western point of view. However, he understands China very well, having lived his entire adult life there. He starts with how the Chinese can do missions both in (and across) China versus out of China. He then continues with an analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative, highlighting the opportunities and challenges.

Finally, the book review by Richard Cook looks at a recent publication that truly carries out-of-the-box thinking. Andrew Kaiser’s book on Timothy Richard challenges the conventional classification of putting Richard in the non-evangelical camp as one of the early missionaries to China.

May all the articles in this issue stretch the minds of readers, challenge each one to look at China from a fresh angle, and give everyone a renewed commitment towards enabling the church in her effort to reach the world.

*WU Xi (pseudonym) began serving China during the mid-70s, just before China’s Open Door policy was implemented. He served in many different capacities including working with Chinese scholars studying in the West, frontline evangelistic work, and church mobilization for China. He now focuses on developing China’s mission ecosystem.*



# Good Neighbor Model of Missions A New Path for Wenzhou Evangelism

By Qing Quan

This article is an English summary of an excerpt from the Chinese article, 好邻舍宣教模式 (“Good Neighbor Model of Missions”) by Qing Quan; the summary is by Brent Fulton. The churches and people in the article are referred to by pseudonyms. The original Chinese article is available [here](#).



Image courtesy of a friend of ChinaSource.

In 1959, the authorities declared Wenzhou to be “a Christianity-free city.”<sup>1</sup> Today Wenzhou is called “the Jerusalem of China.”<sup>2</sup> This change testifies to the practice of local missions, the result of outward environmental changes directly affecting the local model of missions in Wenzhou.

Following the missionary expulsion and government clampdown on churches in the 1950s, preachers in Wenzhou were no longer able to continue the missionary-inspired circuit-riding practice of going village to village but had to remain in the last village they had visited. Those local shepherds who “stayed behind” gained cultural recognition, their work deepened, and the gospel spread widely. Many believers rose up to lead. They suffered trials and preached courageously. Miracles and wonders accompanied the spread of the gospel.

Efforts to unify evangelistic ministries from 1942 to 1952,<sup>3</sup> as well as the government’s anti-Christian actions starting in 1958 served to dismantle the original denominational borders, causing the Wenzhou church to completely reorganize, creating its future framework built on local districts.

In 1969 the Wenzhou Christian Church was established. In 1970, regional Wenzhou churches were established.<sup>4</sup> From 1978 onwards, Wenzhou Christians began leaving Wenzhou.<sup>5</sup> During this time the term “Wenzhou model” was coined, and Wenzhou gained the beautiful title, “Jerusalem of China.”

## I. Application of the Wenzhou Model of Missions

This article uses four paradigms: going passively; coming passively; going actively; and coming actively; to review the Great Commission activities of Wenzhou Christian Churches.

### a. Going Passively

Some joke that, “there are places birds cannot fly, but there is nowhere Wenzhou people cannot go.”<sup>6</sup> The most recent statistics show that over a third of Wenzhou people live elsewhere in the world.<sup>7</sup> Between the 1980s and 2010, merchants and students were the two main groups of Wenzhou people leaving the area.

**Merchants:** Following the Cultural Revolution, a shortage of resources and opportunities brought about by economic reform prompted masses of Wenzhou people to go elsewhere in China and beyond. While there was no lack of Christians among them, most Christians did not move away for the sake of the gospel. These Wenzhou Christian merchants did, however, begin establishing churches wherever they went for the simple reason that Christians needed a place to worship. These churches, having the same basic DNA, formed the Wenzhou Christian Churches. Though lacking the foundation of a theory of missions, this paradigm of “going passively” put into practice the reality of tentmaking,

Dr. Howard Brant, of Serving in Mission International, points out that a wave of missions relies on seven important factors: 1.) Called individuals; 2.) Visionary leaders; 3.) Missional churches; 4.) Appropriate training; 5.) Flexible structures; 6.) Sustainable finances; and 7.) Powerful prayer movements.<sup>8</sup>

Among these, the two characteristics of flexible structures and sustainable finances are particularly evident among merchant groups. Because merchants leave home to earn money, they do not wait to raise funds but go forth boldly. When they arrive, they first think about how to earn money so that they can live, and live well. Once they have an income, if the church has needs, or gospel work has needs, they donate according to their ability and begin new ministries.

When Wenzhou merchants went out in the early days, they faced many challenges. There is a saying, “Unafraid of heaven, unafraid of earth, only afraid of a Wenzhou person speaking Mandarin.” Fortunately many churches began using Mandarin

in their gatherings, naturally attracting non-Wenzhou people to join the church and causing the church to feel a little less Wenzhou-centric.

**College students:** Wenzhou students likewise traveled throughout the nation for schooling, not for the sake of the gospel, but because the Wenzhou area lacked higher education resources. In 2003, Wenzhou Christian Churches established a college ministry team, and other church organizations in Wenzhou did the same. By 2010, the Wenzhou Christian Churches' college ministry group alone oversaw more than 30 fellowships.<sup>9</sup>

### **b. Coming Passively**

**Migrant workers:** The direct effect of the Reform and Opening policy was to bring population mobility to China. Since the dawn of the Reform period, 2,000,000 people have left Wenzhou while 3,000,000 have entered for work. The transformation from "outsider" to "migrant worker" to "new Wenzhou resident" is not only a change in name, but also reflects the process of Wenzhou city's acceptance of people from the outside. A similar process of acceptance was also reflected in the church. From the time Wenzhou Christian Churches began their migrant gospel ministries in 1992, there have always been migrant workers returning home, some who return to shepherd churches full time, and others who return because of work changes to serve part time

**White-collar workers:** "Migrant worker" usually refers to laborers from other regions who engage in lower class work. There is also another group—the white-collar workers, or marketplace professionals, commonly known as the "*baigujing* (white bone spirit)."<sup>10</sup> Wenzhou churches recognized the opportunity presented by these mobile white collar workers, shared the gospel with them, and created fellowships or churches that were focused on these "*baigujing*."

### **c. Going Actively**

**Circuit pastors:** The church's involvement with the "passive" gospel bridges discussed above has resulted in strategies of active ministry that are rooted in the missionary legacy of circuit pastors.<sup>11</sup> Circuit systems are manifest in almost all ministry teams among Wenzhou Christian Churches. Speakers from local Wenzhou revival meetings have been invited or sent to host revival meetings all over the nation. It is the same with marriage and family-building training, evangelistic training, Sunday school teacher training, and so on, as well as to support merchant churches, student fellowships, and migrant home churches elsewhere. This has become the missionary goal of Wenzhou Christian Churches—"to complete and not control."<sup>12</sup>

### **d. Coming Actively**

**Training for non-Wenzhou people:** Since 1993, Wenzhou churches have been holding training classes to help non-Wenzhou pastors begin theological training when they return to their own churches. The Wenzhou Bible Academy was formally established in 2007. Students include people from both Wenzhou and beyond.

## **II. The Characteristics and Weaknesses of the Wenzhou Model**

"The Wenzhou model" is a term that comes from economics. In 1985, *Liberation Daily* summarized the Wenzhou business model with the famous "four 'thousand' spirits"—crossing a thousand mountains and waters, going through a thousand difficulties and trials, thinking of a thousand different ways and methods, speaking a thousand different dialects and tongues.<sup>13</sup> The establishment of Wenzhou churches and the model of missions have been similarly called the "Wenzhou model" by other churches.

However, Wenzhou missions have been directed by God. Earlier we mentioned the models of "passive and active" as well as "going and coming," and we see that when people are not active, God still directs the development of missions. Wenzhou Christians have been incarnational and have utilized "gospel bridges" to live elsewhere for a long time and build their own social networks among locals. They prioritize church planting in keeping with Timothy Keller's observations about the primacy of church planting for evangelism, church growth, revival, reaching diverse populations, and sustaining urban ministries.<sup>14</sup>

Local Wenzhou churches have a circuit system. In the Wenzhou Christian Churches' expansion outward, they have continued this model. The overall strategy of missions in Wenzhou Christian Churches is primarily to supply what is lacking in the

local church by training theological students from elsewhere. Finally, during the process of developing mission fields elsewhere, most Wenzhou Christian Churches create a specific gospel fund that allows outreach to continue even if churches have inflated costs during building projects or in other areas.

### III. The Crisis of the Wenzhou Model

Today, various limitations are becoming apparent. Because the Wenzhou model was unintentionally formed, there is a wildness to it that cannot be handed down. Many churches and ministries are formally continuing, but their fruit is not like before. The people still live everywhere, but are unwilling to learn local languages. The mission funds are ready, but full-time missionaries are few. The prayer meetings increase in number, but the prayers of the members are becoming cooler. Those involved in visitation are busy, but their service of love has become hollow. The church has become a community of ministries, not a community of lives. Pastors are becoming more like CEOs and are no longer life mentors.

The “Wenzhou model” needs to return to the roots of life—from caring for works to caring for people, from caring for one’s own people to caring for all nations, from being completely passive to being active as well as passive. The good neighbor model is a response to the crisis of the “Wenzhou model.”

### IV. A Renewal of the Missionary Model: The Good Neighbor Model

A good neighbor is a Great Commission Christian who actively loves others, most importantly the unreached communities in the city, in regions where Chinese have migrated, and in the rest of the world. The good neighbor model asks four basic questions:

- “Who is the neighbor?” reveals the attitude of missions.
- “Who do we love?” reveals the mission field.
- “How do we do so?” reveals the strategy.
- “Who does so?” reveals the workers.

***My neighbor, an active attitude:*** When Jesus explained “who is my neighbor,” he pointed out that when you actively love someone, you become that person’s neighbor. In his book, Bosch mentions that the roots of great changes in the past couple of decades of missiology come from knowing that God is the God of missions, from no longer seeing missions as a church activity but as God’s character.<sup>15</sup>

***Who we love, the mission field:*** Jesus answered this question through the example of the Samaritan and the Jew. He explained the truth of loving your neighbor as you love yourself. With the resources from the Wenzhou Christian Churches’ districts, and cooperation between them, new mission fields can be more easily entered. The establishment of sending organizations unites the power of different churches to cross cultures and national boundaries.<sup>16</sup> The good neighbor model reminds us to continually learn to enter into new unreached communities, including the neighbor of an enemy culture. Wenzhou churches are unique in that they have Christians all over the world. The concept of “neighbor” reminds Wenzhou Christian Churches to break through the existing Wenzhou cultural circles and enter into communities of other cultures.

***How it’s done, the strategy:*** The key to being a good neighbor is found in the word “good.” It is built on the foundation of a heart of kindness, and its actions are those of lasting love. Because of their willingness to love, the last generation of Wenzhou Christian Churches won a reputation among Wenzhou people. Today, whatever obstacles we face, we need to pass down this very real, ongoing love.

***Those doing it, the workers:*** A key question in the model of missions is: who is the missionary? In today’s mission movements, we expect elites to go into missions. But the emphasis of the good neighbor model is on “one who journeys”<sup>17</sup>—meaning everyone who journeys into a community, who goes to those in need, can become a missionary. Today, Wenzhou Christian Churches are maturing, yet the concept of the “priesthood of all believers” is slowly fading. The good neighbor model reminds us that, while developing church organization and dividing labor, we should also emphasize equipping everyone to be a disciple, to share the gospel and serve.

### Conclusion

The twenty-first century calls for team cooperation and asks how to leave behind the concepts of Western-centrism and

elitism to raise up disciples in missions. The future of Wenzhou Christian Churches as well as Wenzhou churches all over the world relies on responding to diverse cultures and to an age of globalization, which creates even more “neighbors.” The good neighbor model is suitable not only for Wenzhou Christians but also for Chinese believers as a whole who are going all over the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Qing Quan, ed., “Chronology of Wenzhou Church Events. Part II,” *Kernel of Wheat* 5 (2007.1), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, ed. Chen Huiwen, Twenty-first Century Chinese Edition (North America: Great Commission Center, 2003), p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by Ye Xingzhuan, Ji Yishan, Xia Tan, *The Christian Gospel in Wenzhou: The Growth of Understanding Church Youth Members in the Fifties in Wenzhou Urban Christian Churches*, (internally published, 2017), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Qing Quan, “Chronology of Wenzhou Church Events. Part II,” ed. by Mai Luru. *Kernel of Wheat* 8 (Hong Kong: The Ark Limited, 2007.4), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Jin Weigen, special report “Looking at Evangelism from the Spread of the Gospel out of Wenzhou,” 150th Anniversary of Wenzhou Gospel, September 14, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> “There are places birds cannot fly, but there is nowhere Wenzhou people cannot go,” [http://www.sohu.com/a/131824696\\_651109](http://www.sohu.com/a/131824696_651109) (last accessed 10 am, August 19, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ni Kaomeng, “Where did the Wenzhou people go?” Wenzhou Network: <http://news.66wz.com/system/2017/04/17/104984270.shtml> (last accessed 10 am, May 28, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Brant, Howard, “Seven Essentials of Majority World Emerging Mission Movements.” Presented at the Korean World Mission Association, November 3-5, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Tang DW, Wenzhou, September 6, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *Baiguojing*, meaning white-collared (*bai*), backbone (*gu*), elite (*jing*).

<sup>11</sup> Qing Quan, “Cross-Cultural Missions Begins with Churches Building Cross-Cultural Teams—Discussing the Organization of Cross-Cultural Teams with Wenzhou Christian Churches as an Example,” edited by Ezra Pan, *Gospel. Wenzhou. (1867-2017): Academic Papers on the 150th Anniversary of Protestant Christianity Entering Wenzhou*, (Hong Kong: The Ark Limited, 2017), p. 244.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Huang CP, Wenzhou, May 7, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Sang Jinwuan, “For Rural Industry Look to Southern Jiangsu, for Cottage Industry Look to Southern Zhejiang, 330,000 People Involved in Family Industry,” *Liberation Daily* (May 12, 1985), frontpage headline.

<sup>14</sup> Keller, Timothy, “Church Planting as a Movement Dynamic”, Chinese translation in *ChurchChina Magazine* (churchchina.org) 2011, November, Issue #32, Pg 8-11. Original in Keller’s *Center Church*, Zondervan 2012. Chapter 29.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Chinese edition translated by Bai Chen Yuhua (Taipei: China Evangelical Seminary, 1996), p. 525.

<sup>16</sup> Qing Quan, “Cross-Cultural Missions Begins with Churches Building Cross-Cultural Teams—Discussing the Organization of Cross-Cultural Teams with Wenzhou Christian Churches as an Example,” edited by Ezra Pan, *Gospel. Wenzhou. (1867-2017): Academic Papers on the 150th Anniversary of Protestant Christianity Entering Wenzhou*, (Hong Kong: The Ark Limited, 2017), p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 10:33.

*Qing Quan (pseudonym) is from China and has a DMin from Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary. He is involved in missions mobilization.*

## The “Wenzhou Model” and Missions from China

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is not between the local church and the field. Rather it is a journey of the heart, the voyage beyond the security of one’s own culture and into unknown, even hostile, territory. Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan is an invitation to follow him on this journey.

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## The “Wenzhou Model” and Missions from China

By Brent Fulton



The revival of China’s “Back to Jerusalem” vision in the 1990s and the development of the Belt and Road Initiative over the past decade have piqued the interest of global mission leaders regarding the prospect of a significant missions movement from China. Wenzhou Christians, who have been planting churches throughout China and abroad for decades, stand out as a possible example of what the Chinese missions movement could become, prompting the question of whether the “Wenzhou Model” might be key to the future of such a movement.

As Qing Quan points out in his analysis of the model, there is much to be appreciated. Business provides a natural means of financial support and a legitimate platform for entry into a culture, and it can open doors of influence. The circuit system used to supply speakers, teachers, and ministry trainers to churches around China has provided the infrastructure for programs and resources developed by Wenzhou churches to be shared widely. The sheer willingness to strike out into regions unknown, necessitated originally by their need to venture beyond the mountains surrounding Wenzhou in order to make a living, has given them resilience and courage, important qualities for anyone undertaking pioneering mission work.

On the other hand, some of the same strengths that have combined to create such a cohesive yet flexible mission force can also be problematic. The Wenzhou dialect is notoriously difficult. Although Wenzhou believers have sought to use Mandarin in outreach to migrants within Wenzhou and in their activities elsewhere, language remains a barrier. Successfully getting to the field and remaining there are important hurdles to effective missions activity, but overcoming these is just the beginning. While Wenzhou Christians may be able to go everywhere, once they get there they do not necessarily reach out beyond their tribe. Qing takes issue with Cao Nanlai’s sociological treatment of Wenzhou’s “boss Christians,” but he also acknowledges that this merchant mentality continues to pervade some Wenzhou churches, preventing effective sharing of leadership and succession to younger pastors.

Furthermore, while business provides support and opens doors, it can also be a liability. If the business were to be perceived as detrimental to the local economy, or as having poor working conditions or providing faulty products or services, the integrity of the Christian message could suffer. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) may offer pathways for Christians to engage in missional business abroad, but a backlash against Chinese influence—already materializing in some BRI target countries—might make the Christians unwelcome. Cross-cultural workers from China need to consider the possibility that tension between their national identity and their identity as Christians could undermine their mission efforts.

Qing’s observation that the feet of merchants follow the opportunities of business suggests another potential drawback of the “Wenzhou Model.” What if business opportunities in a given locale dry up due to changes in the local economy or government policy, even as the gospel ministry is yielding fruitful results? How will future mission efforts be sustained? This would be particularly problematic in the case of cross-cultural workers sent out by a local church that does not have abundant financial resources and is thus counting on the business to support their missionaries.

Finally, as Qing so lucidly explains, the success story of Wenzhou is the product of its unique geography, history, and culture. These have combined to create a particular entrepreneurial spirit that enables Wenzhou Christians to go anywhere and thrive anywhere, to find and exploit opportunities, to operate with political savvy, and to support one another through a global network of relationships. Christians elsewhere in China engaging in missions would do well to appreciate these attributes and learn from them; yet, they cannot necessarily emulate them. In other words, the “Wenzhou Model” may be admirable or even instructive, but it cannot be replicated.

The “Good Neighbor” missiology Qing proposes may be helpful in addressing some of the shortcomings not only of Wenzhou missions but of China’s mission movement as a whole. Seeing mission no longer as an activity but as an expression of God’s character requires rethinking the relationship between “us” and “them,” between “friend” and “enemy.” It redirects attention from doing mission to being the people of God. It is also a reminder that the Great Commission is for all of Christ’s followers, not just the professional missionaries. Finally, the idea of the good neighbor as “one who journeys” speaks to the need for missionaries not only to be willing to travel geographically, but, more importantly, to conquer the geography of their own hearts.

I recall years ago listening to an overseas Chinese mission leader as he addressed a group of mission-minded pastors from China, along with a handful of recruiters and trainers from international sending agencies. Much had already been said during their two days together about building sending structures, creating sustainable platforms, mobilizing financial support, and training workers. In his closing remarks this mission leader reminded his audience that the longest journey to be made

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# Reflections on Chinese Missions: Influencing Factors and Lessons Learned

By Wang and Kam

*Wang and Kam have had significant experience with Chinese missions. Wang is a mission statesman in China with almost two decades of experience. He is also a trainer of missionaries in various schools. His sending organization has sent out dozens of missionaries cross-culturally. Kam has served the mission movement in China extensively. He established many sending structures alongside Chinese leaders and served as a mobilizer, advisor, and board member.*



*This article is based on an earlier work in Chinese by Wang and has been rewritten with extensive input by Kam. Wang's original (and much longer) Chinese article is available [here](#).*

## Introduction and Influencing Factors

There has been a revival in the Chinese church. The exponential church growth in China and her venture into missions are vivid proof. There are obvious advantages to China's engagement in world evangelization.

1. The enormous size of the Chinese church;
2. The global spread of the Chinese diaspora;
3. The hard-working, long-suffering character of the Chinese people;
4. The overflowing indwelling of the Holy Spirit;
5. The warm historical relationship with Muslims;
6. The presence of various religious systems in China to allow cross-cultural ministry within the country.

Furthermore, two significant geopolitical factors have emerged.

1. Linguistic consideration: the global wave of learning Chinese. The expansion of the Confucius Institute worldwide and the influx of international students to Chinese universities point this out. This paves the way for missionaries from China to serve in these countries.
2. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): there are many aspects of BRI that affect Chinese Mission.
  - BRI has two routes: one land-based and a sea route to the south.
  - BRI is based on common interests: in business, in development, and in benefit.
  - BRI is based on mutuality: in connectivity, in strategic interaction, in natural resource sharing, and in development of other markets outside the vested countries.
  - BRI is entrepreneur driven, market-governed, government approved, and based on international standards.
  - BRI includes five spheres: policy, trade, investment, systems, and people.
  - BRI connects six trade corridors: Euro-Asia, Sino-Russian, Central Asia, Indochina peninsula, Sino-Pakistan, and the Sea Silk Route.

Through BRI, Chinese mission can also reach 68 strategic countries.

- 13 Eastern Orthodox countries
- 10 Buddhist countries
- 29 Islamic countries
- 10 Catholic countries
- 2 Hindu countries
- 2 post-Christian countries
- 1 Apostolic Armenian country
- 1 Jewish country

## Lessons learned from Chinese Mission

Although China has just ventured into mission, there are already valuable lessons learned. Since the church is quite young and experience is very limited, the uncharted waters of cross-cultural mission have posed significant challenges to the Chinese. Thus, the first batches of practitioners are the "spies" (cf. Numbers 13). We thank God that there are such experi-

mental soldiers who are preparing the way for the elite troops that will come later (2 Corinthians 6:4).

The following lessons are based on years of observation and actual front-line incidences. We can summarize them into the following fifteen lessons.

1. **Missionaries do not understand their personal call**; they merely follow their leader's direction and go out. This came out of student interviews in training institutes. The obvious solution is to strengthen mission education and only train candidates with a clear calling.

2. **Missionaries are not properly screened**; there is no objective standard for screening. Many missionaries do not know cross-cultural, incarnational living and do not understand the principle of "become all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Inappropriate behavior, such as using alcohol and playing cards, is not a good testimony in the Muslim context. Incarnational living is a nonnegotiable prerequisite for frontline workers. Missionaries should learn to be like their cell phones—with world-wide roaming capability. It is also important for missionaries to not just transplant their sending church to the field. We were shocked to hear that some missionaries serving in an Islamic context planned to establish a large church building after leading locals to Christ. An in-depth understanding of serving in creative access nations must be ingrained into the mindset of such missionaries.

3. **Missionary training has become like quick turnaround, fast-food outlets**. Missionary training takes time, just like Abraham's 318 elite servant-soldiers (Genesis 14:14). A shared set of missionary training curriculum must be established to guarantee a minimum standard for frontline workers.

4. **Mission should not be dependent on foreign finances**. Some Chinese sending structures are wholly supported by overseas contributions. We must develop totally indigenous structures. We should support and send workers according to the measures entrusted to us by the Lord. We need to connect with and learn from our international partners, but the financial support should be totally indigenous.

5. **Member care for missionaries must be part of the system**. Missionaries cannot be sent and forgotten; they must be followed up in the field and supervised. Member care is essential to the survival of missionaries. Sending without caring is irresponsible and will cause major problems when these workers fail. This raises the question of how to set up sending structures. Can a local church serve as a sending structure and provide all the care and supervision needed? Can a network provide these functions? Should this be entrusted to sending structures or even to the local Christian body in the field?

6. **It is most important for missionaries to learn one-on-one discipleship, small group pastoral care, and house church ministry in today's mission context**. Almost all of the easy fields have been taken up by older mission agencies. What is left for Chinese missionaries are the creative access fields where open ministry is unlikely.

7. **The Chinese church has been prepared by God for such a time as this—to serve him in persecuted countries**. The people of China's church have been prepared by meeting in caves and by learning to memorize entire passages of scripture. They learned without computers and PowerPoint presentations. They met in homes and offices. These models are more suited for countries like those in the Middle East, for example. The Chinese church is intended for the countries where believers are persecuted. It is Esther 4:14a being fulfilled. "For if you (the Chinese Church) remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews (the people) will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish."

8. **Mission should be frontline driven**, not controlled by armchair strategists sitting in the sending office. Some Chinese agencies still have their chain of command starting at the sending office, following an extension of the traditional Chinese church leadership model. Frontline partnership with other missionaries cannot take place because the sending church or agency has never partnered with anyone else. The ultimate solution to this is to have mission executives in the sending structure come up through frontline assignment experience. However, this will take time as those workers need to accumulate enough experience in the field.

9. **Short-term mission has its limitations**. Some groups organize short-term mission trips but only give the participants minimal orientation. An example is young participants who distributed gospel tracks in an Islamic state. This caused tremendous difficulty for the long-term workers in that country after the short-termers left. Ultimately, the root cause of this is lack of frontline sensitivity by the leaders of the sending structures. Had they listened to the input of their own long-term workers, this situation could have been avoided. More importantly, short-term mission work must be under the leadership of long-term workers.

10. **Hosting short-term teams can be a major distraction** for long-term workers. Some churches are good at sending short-term "care" teams to visit long-term workers. Nevertheless, managing the livelihood of a ten-member team is

not an easy task. These teams often desire to stay with the missionary who has to wake up early to prepare the meals and arrange activities all day. A much better way is for the “care” team to stay in local hotels as tourists and visit the missionary without putting pressure on him/her. Better still, such teams should only be three to four people at most, so as not to draw attention to the missionary.

**11. Language and cultural learning are best done in immersion settings.** Some groups started preparing their Muslim workers with the Arabic language while in China. However, there is no context to practice the new language. We strongly suggest missionaries start their foreign language with a minimum level of English as the universal language of interaction with international colleagues. Picking up the local language *in situ* through immersion is the best way to learn.

**12. While some churches are good at sending, they are not good at sustaining support.** The local church cannot just jump on the mission bandwagon. Each church is better off partnering with like-minded networks and doing some careful planning in long-term sustainability. The average pastor in China is too busy to be a good pastor and a good mission executive at the same time. Mission should best be handled by a dedicated group of people, be part of an independent sending structure, or a mission board of a network of churches.

**13. Groups have different definitions for mission.** Most accept mission as only cross-cultural ministry towards an unreached people group. However, some still consider benevolent ministry and caring for the poor as their only involvement in mission. Rather, we see unreached people groups ministry as the major mission ministry and social service as a supplemental service that will ultimately lead to the former. The investment between these two “legs” of ministry should be appropriately distributed instead of distributed evenly.

**14. Martyrdom is a reality in mission.** The highly publicized first martyrdom case of two Chinese citizens serving in Pakistan have caused a significant ripple effect.\* The sending leaders were incarcerated and the structure was closed. Although the ultimate responsibility lies with the Korean sending structure that trained, commissioned, and managed the team, the particular, high-profile approach of the sending structure is a significant factor. However, planning on the part of the Chinese senders to manage such a crisis was evidently not in place. This incident points to an obvious lack of contingency planning, insurance coverage, and instruction for frontline workers if they are incapacitated.

**15. Children’s education is a looming issue on the horizon.** After serving on the frontline for over ten years, some workers have children who are now school age. Third Culture Kid (TCK) education is fast becoming an important issue. Not all Chinese workers can handle home schooling. Local schools often are not an acceptable option—particularly in light of tertiary education; TCK’s cannot fit into the Chinese system, and a Western education option is financially prohibitive. Something new needs to be developed that will include provision to keep the Chinese language or have strategically located Chinese TCK boarding schools. The alternative is to limit missionary assignments to specific countries that have good local schools or leave the children in China in the care of extended family or the church body.

In conclusion, we can see that the Chinese church has benefited from some early trailblazers who dared to follow Christ’s call to declare his glory among the nations. There have been many challenges, but there is a pathway for others to follow. We can continue to enrich our experience through several directions.

First, we can learn through history. We can learn through the history of our international colleagues who have had much longer involvement than we have. We can learn from their mature structures. We can also learn through our own involvement of “crossing the river by touching the stones on the riverbed.” Second, we should learn to partner with others instead of forging ahead into battle as lone rangers. Third, we have never done this before, and there are not many recent precedents from other countries that we can follow. A certain spirit of exploration is necessary. Lastly, there are things that we can now see, but they are beyond our ability to change. This is an inevitable part of the growth process and birth pain.

By God’s grace, we learn through these precious experiences, but ultimately, we trust the word that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in his epistle to the Romans: “All things work together for the good of those who love God” (Romans. 8:28).

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\* For information about this incident, see: *ChinaSource*, “Mourning Two Chinese Christians Killed in Pakistan,” June 20, 2017, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/mourning-two-chinese-christians-killed-in-pakistan/> and Drazen Jorgic, “Pakistan says Chinese killed by Islamic State were preachers,” June 14, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/pakistan-china/pakistan-says-chinese-killed-by-islamic-state-were-preachers-idUKKBN1931DE>.

## Missions and the Chinese Church: Advantages and Difficulties

By Gudao

Praise the Lord that throughout recent years the 100 million believers found in Chinese churches have become more and more burdened with missions. Today, Chinese people are found everywhere in the world, so we can say the era of Chinese missions has come. This is the work of Almighty God. However, it means that Chinese churches need to prepare for a new era. The following is a reflection on both the advantages and difficulties facing the Chinese church in its mission endeavors.



### **Mission: an absolute necessity for the church**

The essence of mission is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in different or similar cultures. God wants all people on earth, regardless of race or color to worship him. Revelation chapter seven shows us the future worship scene in heaven: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10)

In Matthew 28:16 Jesus tells his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. This command, given to the church, by the head of the church, is a mandatory, absolute, and non-negotiable order. All nations and nationalities of the world are our goal. Our mission is to reach them. Some may think that mission is exclusively the business of foreign missionaries; Chinese churches only have to evangelize Chinese. However, Christians should have a universal perspective and heart because our Lord Jesus is king of the universe.

### **Difficulties facing mission among Chinese churches**

While the Chinese church has many participants, how many missionaries has it sent? Many countries have received missionaries but very few of these are from mainland China or overseas Chinese. The numbers are out of proportion to the tens of millions of Christians in China. Why has the Chinese church not sent more missionaries? The following are some reasons for this failure.

**Reluctant parents:** The lack of desire for mission in Chinese churches is closely related to the national character. Chinese are very attached to their families. While the parents are alive, a son or daughter may not go very far abroad. Parents are reluctant to let go of their children—especially nowadays when many families have only one child. Many children have been spoiled from childhood, are unable to bear hardships or responsibilities, and are selfish. In addition, parents are not willing to let their child go into Muslim areas or other dangerous places. How will they become missionaries, soldiers for God's kingdom?

**No spirit of adventure:** Chinese are not used to international living. They are unwilling to face danger and lack the will and spirit of giving, in both money and life. Being self-centered, the church has no burden for missions.

**Need for revival:** Chinese house churches have a tradition of prayer—and prayer can move mountains. The new generation of Chinese churches can follow this wonderful tradition by uniting in prayer and launching national, missionary prayer meetings. Prayer can revive Chinese churches.

**Bias between domestic and foreign ministries/missions:** The Chinese mindset is closed and selfish. Chinese people often believe that one should not interfere with another's business before solving one's own problems. This is a manifestation of Chinese cultural isolation. This exclusivity is seen in Chinese proverbs such as these:

- To resist foreign aggression, we must first get rid of the enemy within;
- Put your affairs in order before you help others;
- Each one sweeps the snow from his own doorstep and doesn't heed the frost on his neighbor's roof.

In addition, Chinese think there are so many people in China who have not heard the gospel, why should they spend effort and money preaching to foreigners? The bias that differentiates between domestic and foreign ministries/missions has divided the church. This blocks the advance of missions by the Chinese church to the extent that the church becomes the "Chinese" church rather than part of the universal church.

**"Life" without mission:** Some churches put a special emphasis on spiritual life, which is good, but life without mission is dead. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:34) Jesus knew full

well that his mission on earth was to fulfill God the Father's plan and finish his work. On the cross he said, "It is finished." The Father's will was done and his mission was accomplished. Is there a mission in our lives?

**Immaturity in the church or individual lives:** Sometimes we use the pretext that our life is not mature enough to be involved with mission. Yet, how does a believer's life grow without involvement in mission? In addition, mission should not be postponed until a church is "capable" or "mature." Some may think that because a church is not mature enough, it should lay aside missionary ministry.

**Lack of mission agencies:** The history of missions makes it clear that no single church can fulfill God's mission; there must be cooperation among churches. I believe the mission agency is the best mode of cooperation among churches.

Churches in China are largely congregational and operate independently. However, mission requires cooperation, including training of missionaries, provision of finances, dispatching, fellowship on the field, and so on. Chinese churches need mission societies, but at the moment, the number of local mission societies is very few. Those that have had some success in China are the large, house church networks. While they are not mission societies, they are large groups and have mechanisms similar to those of a mission society.

To establish a mission society, cooperation is essential, but this is very difficult for Chinese churches. What is the basis for cooperation? Scripture says, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God..." (Ephesus 4:13a) Unity in truth is true unity, and only such unity has mission power. In other words, unity of fellowship is the foundation of a mission society. A church that sends missionaries should be a church with a healthy fellowship that is united with several churches in truth.

The selection of missionaries should be carried out by both the church and the mission society. In this respect, Chinese churches can learn from Western and South Korean churches. At times, I hear brothers or sisters say that the model of Western missions is wrong; we should have our own mission procedures with Chinese characteristics. While I believe God has a special leading for the churches in China, there are similarities in some basic mission principles that apply to many countries. We have no basis or right to judge the Western church's mission that has at least 200 years of history behind it. A humble start for the Chinese church is necessary. Learning from pioneers can help it avoid many stumbling stones.

**Difficulty in conquering the language barrier:** Language is of great importance for missionaries. Learning a language costs money, effort and time—often a long time, even years. Many churches are capable of sending missionaries but unable to support and wait for them to learn the language. In mainland China, few missionaries have received higher education meaning that very few have had experience in mastering a foreign language. Thus, some Chinese missionaries may not be prepared to pay the price. On the other hand, during this time, while missionaries are spending money for their family's livelihood without any concrete "fruit," some churches want to give up and put pressure on the missionary to see results or learn faster. Nevertheless, language learning is a necessary part of missions. The most effective way to understand a culture is through learning its language so that one can communicate with the local people in their heart language.

### **Advantages: the Chinese church's inheritance**

In spite of the difficulties, God has given the Chinese church an inheritance that can help in mission work. Many people state that the 21st century is China's century. Others state that China is about to take up the last leg of missions. However, we should not say this for it implies there will be only Chinese churches doing mission work in this century—and that idea is not biblical. Rather, the Chinese church should take this as an encouragement for a church that is young in its mission endeavors. Foreign churches will continue their mission work—it is an essential feature of all churches. Statements suggesting that only Chinese churches are doing mission work are arrogant. Rather, we should say that in the 21st century Chinese churches will participate in and become members of the great ministry of the universal church and its mission. Nevertheless, God has given a special inheritance to Chinese churches.

**The house church example:** Preaching the gospel to Muslims is very difficult. Most Islamic countries do not issue a missionary visa, so missionaries cannot minister publicly; they have to establish underground churches. That is exactly the feature of Chinese house churches—it is what we Chinese do best. Western and South Korean missionaries are more comfortable with a church model that has fixed meeting places and licensing qualifications for clergy, but these are not necessary to establish underground churches in Muslim countries. Because of their strong hostility against Christianity, it is very rare that a church is built in an Islamic country. Generally, these countries will not allow their people to convert to another religion. If individuals do so, they are at risk of being imprisoned or even beheaded. A missionary may only see several people believe in Jesus in his lifetime, and all of the believers will remain in underground fellowships. This is the same fellowship mode of the Chinese house church.

**The Chinese language:** The worldwide popularity of the Chinese language is beyond imagination, especially in central Asia and Pakistan where Chinese teachers are very popular. Because of this, Chinese people do not need any special skills or

business to survive outside their country; they can survive with just the Chinese language. In Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, the Chinese language department at one university has more than a thousand students. Pakistan has a large number of schools that need Chinese language teachers, and they will provide accommodations and salaries. The need to learn Chinese is everywhere in the five central Asian countries and Pakistan. Chinese Christians can get a Chinese Language Teacher Certificate in China and then go out on a mission. Some ministries offer help in training and tests for Chinese language teaching qualifications. What a great grace the Chinese language is for us when it comes to missions!

**Rapid development of the Chinese economy:** The rapid economic development in China over the past 30 years is a miracle which provides opportunities for missions in Chinese churches. Financial support and investment in missions become possibilities. With growing economic power and a large population, Chinese are now beginning to fill the world. We see the grace of God with more and more Chinese being converted. I am convinced that God has given the Chinese church these many Christians so that missions can move forward.

**Friendly relationships for many years:** One country that has been extremely friendly to China is Pakistan. Pakistan's relations with the United States and the West have declined greatly in recent years, but relations with China have been consistently friendly. Its people like the Chinese quite a lot. In northern Pakistan, there is a road called China-Pakistan Friendship Road which historically was the road for silk trading. Starting from the Khunjerab Pass in China, it goes all the way to Islamabad. Taking nearly 20 years to build, the Chinese government sent tens of thousands of workers to build this road, and hundreds of them died during the construction process. Now in Gilgit a northern city of Pakistan, 88 Chinese workers who laid down their lives for this project are buried in a martyrs' cemetery. The people there welcome the Chinese. Is this not similar to the voice of the Macedonian calling for someone to come help them?

## The Chinese church's participation in missions

How then should the Chinese church participate in missions? Following are four important aspects.

- a. *Pray for missions.* God listens to prayer. Prayer is not speaking in vain, but speaking to the living God. Pray for all nations, missionaries, and China. We now have a prayer ministry for all nations that is held every two weeks. We look forward to seeing more churches participating in prayer for missions.
- b. *Contribute to missions.* Set aside a proportion of the tithe, say 10%, for missions. Some Korean churches take 51% or even 70% of tithes for mission work. The church should not spend all its money on domestic ministry; rather, there should be monies for mission work as well as the training and support of missionaries.
- c. *Promote missions through education and training.* In this regard, there are courses to create mission awareness in the church such as "Kairos," "Perspectives,"<sup>1</sup> and "Global Gates" which include the concept of the "95/25 Gate."<sup>2</sup>
- d. *Make short-term mission trips.* These can be either abroad or in national minority areas. If you have a missions' spirit, encourage other brothers and sisters to become missionaries.

## Conclusion

Even as God spoke to Joshua, his words are an encouragement for China's church today:

*Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them...being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:2b, 6-9)*

Chinese churches should take on greater mission responsibility in this new century and spread the gospel to every corner of the world. I am truly grateful that God has blessed us in China with such a great population and with many Christians in our churches! May the gospel be spread over the whole earth through Chinese missionaries, just as the waters fill the seas! Hallelujah!

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<sup>1</sup> For information about these courses, see the following links: *Kairos* website, Course Descriptions at <https://www.kairoscourse.org/course-descriptions>; *Perspectives* website with course information at <https://www.perspectives.org/#>.

<sup>2</sup> "95/25 Gate" is a refinement of the 10/40 window that is becoming popular. It identifies a square block defined by longitude east 95 to east 25 and latitude 10 north to 40 north. This gate represents an area from north-west China in the east to Egypt in the west; and from sub-Saharan Africa in the north to Indochina Peninsula in the south. It represents most of the unreached blocks in the world, covering the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist world. This concept is often presented in seminars and talks.

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## Missions with Chinese Characteristics

By Peter Bryant

### Introduction

The growth of the Chinese church since the founding of the People's Republic of China has created new models of "church" that have not only survived periods of intense opposition and persecution but have grown in ways that were totally unanticipated or unforeseen. Likewise, the unique combination of China's history and culture, political environment, and church situation has created approaches to cross-cultural mission that deserve greater study and reflection.



Image credit: [Sergey Norkov](#) on [Unsplash](#).

When talking about global missions we are often familiar with approaches based on sending from an open-access nation to other open-access or creative access areas. This is our common paradigm for understanding cross-cultural missions. China provides an alternative model where we see sending from a creative-access nation to other open-access or creative-access areas. This short paper discusses the characteristics of this alternative model of missions with Chinese characteristics.

### Impact of Government Policy Changes

Since 2012 there has been an ongoing series of changes in government policy, law, regulation, organization, and implementation that have resulted in a more restrictive environment for Chinese churches and Christians. These have been covered previously in a number of posts and papers:

- Revised Religious Regulations (implemented since 2/1/2018),<sup>1</sup>
- Charity Law<sup>2</sup> (governing Chinese domestic charities and NGOs),
- Foreign NGO Law<sup>3</sup> (governing international NGOs in China),
- merger of SARA into the UFWD,<sup>4</sup>
- sinicization movement.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the key features and intentions of these policy changes have been to:

- restrict the scope and scale of Christian churches and organizations,
- restrict the interaction of Chinese churches and organizations with overseas churches and organizations,
- restrict the access to Christian training both within China and outside China's borders,
- restrict any activity that could potentially destabilize China's ethnic minorities or China's international activities such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

ChinaSource has previously highlighted that many of these policies are component pieces of the overall re-establishment of China Communist Party control over all aspects of life and society.

These changes since 2012 have affected Chinese Christians from their local church meeting places to their activities in outreach both locally, in other parts of China, and beyond China's borders. Looking at this situation with Western eyes, we often wonder how church and mission can be done.

In addition to these overall policy changes, there are long-standing challenges for churches and individuals involved in cross-cultural outreach that include:

- House churches are not allowed to have a legal registration; local mission agencies cannot register as a religious charity or nonprofit
- Financial matters cannot be easily handled—if you cannot register your church or organization, you cannot open a bank account to handle funds. Funds transfers become a challenge and are often handled through individual bank accounts
- China's currency (*Renminbi*, *RMB*, *yuan*) is not an internationally convertible currency. China also has restrictions on the ability of individuals and organizations to convert RMB into USD or other convertible currencies and to remit or take this money out of China

### Unique Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Mission in China

There is also a tendency among Western Christians to think that because of the rapid growth of the Chinese church since 1949, China no longer needs missionaries. One of China's best known house church pastors commented several years ago:

During the next 30 years, China will still contain the largest number of nonbelievers and unreached people. We must give attention both to the extreme level of difficulty as well as to the extreme strategic significance of the evangelization of China. In the past, I was very encouraged by reports of the number of Christians in China, for it increased my faith and gave glory to God. However, more and more, I do not pay as much attention to these numbers. For no matter how many believers there are today, China is still less than five percent Christian. China has 2300 county-level cities. According to one study, only one third of these cities possibly have a church. The further west one goes, the fewer Christians one finds. The evangelization of China demands the concern not only of Chinese Christians, but of the church worldwide.<sup>6</sup>

Those who research unreached and unengaged peoples identify over 100 groups in China.<sup>7</sup> These are all groups that require some type of cross-cultural outreach. Many of these groups have their own language and culture that workers need to learn. Chinese churches that gain a vision to reach out to unreached groups have a number of unreached or unengaged groups to choose from within their own country. Many of these groups have a geographic concentration, but people from these groups are also found in major cities because of migrant labor movements, health care, or education needs.

Once a church has identified a particular group or sub-group of people, there are multiple ways to send their workers to reach out. Probably the biggest challenge is to determine if this also means learning one of the minority languages and culture.

All cross-cultural workers struggle with ethnocentrism (the attitude that one's own group, ethnicity, or nationality is superior to others<sup>8</sup>). Workers from Europe or the USA have some opportunity to recognize and work on this attitude since minority populations in their country will exceed 10% for a larger minority group. In China, Han Chinese account for 92% of the total population with the remaining 8% split among the 55 recognized minority groups. A common Han Chinese attitude toward minority cultures is that they should simply become Chinese. As we look to Jesus' incarnation we see the model for how cross-cultural mission should work, however difficult that may be for us.

It is hard to gain accurate figures for the work among China's minorities. However, an increasing number of churches are sending short-term teams and workers along with longer-term workers, finding unreached populations nearby in their own city and working together with both Chinese and international workers to find ways to reach across the cultural and language barriers that have hindered the spread of the gospel.

## **Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Mission beyond China**

As China has become increasingly global in its interactions, the opportunities for churches and individual Christians have also increased. At the same time, mission awareness and teaching in churches has also increased to the point where there is an increasing emphasis on reaching across borders and cultures.

The translation of the *Perspectives* course and *Kairos* course into Chinese, and the training of Chinese trainers have greatly helped build awareness of what cross-cultural ministry entails. These also provide practical training for individuals and churches interested in cross-cultural ministry. Those interested in missions can now find training in Chinese in their local context to help prepare them.

During the past decade, various house church networks have established their own mission-sending organizations. Often these have grown out of an individual church or local group of churches. The finances of the mission are often part of a church budget. The leadership, management, and operation are directly under the church's senior leadership.

As Chinese Christians have moved beyond their own borders they have run into all the common issues faced by mission-sending organizations around the world such as work visas, living arrangements, children's education, health care, and so on. Without many of the legal structures and services that are familiar to Western workers, Chinese workers have been creative in finding new solutions to common issues. For example, many international workers may have some type of medical insurance or evacuation insurance as part of their overall support and planning. There are examples where Chinese workers, while not having access to these insurance and service offerings, were able to use Chinese social media platforms to inform friends and supporters of emergency medical needs and to use the same social media platforms to accept donations to help cover the costs of the medical treatment and even evacuation back to China.

Most of the countries where Chinese workers go to work fall into the Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)<sup>9</sup> framework. As such, the government strongly encourages all types of business, education, and cultural exchanges. However, if any activities of cross-cultural workers are seen to hinder or interfere with bilateral relations with China or the overall progress on the BRI, the Chinese government can focus its attention on the links all the way to the sending churches. An example of this would be the reaction when two Chinese workers were martyred in Pakistan in 2017.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, many individuals and organizations associated with these two workers were investigated and interviewed.

At a recent meeting of several Chinese mission agencies, one of the workers shared a devotional from Acts 8. She pointed out that in the earlier chapters in the book of Acts there were instances of persecution and opposition, but these were all directed against individuals. In Acts 8, you have the first recorded persecution of the entire church in Jerusalem to the ex-

tent that all but the apostles had to leave the city. Her encouragement was that God was sovereign in this situation and caused the persecution of the church to result in the church moving into its Judea and Samaria mission. Although Jesus had sent his disciples to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, the early church got stuck at the first step until there was this intense round of persecution. She related this historical incident to China's current situation where churches are under increasing pressure and opposition but are increasingly moving out in mission.

## Conclusion

The history of the Chinese church and the political environment in China has required new and creative approaches to mission. Despite the increasing legal, regulatory, and operational controls in the past few years, Chinese churches have demonstrated an increased awareness and interest in mission and have moved forward with creative approaches to outreach both within China's borders as well as outward to many needy areas of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See "China Revises Regulation on Religious Affairs," The State Council, The People's Republic of China, September 7, 2017, [http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest\\_releases/2017/09/07/content\\_281475842719170.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2017/09/07/content_281475842719170.htm); for additional information also see: Eleanor Albert, "Religion in China," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/religion-china> and ChinaSource Team, "Why Christians in China Must Prepare Themselves for the New Regulations on Religious Affairs," *ChinaSource*, January 30, 2018, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/why-christians-in-china-must-prepare-themselves-for-the-new-regulations-on-religious-affairs/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Ashwin Kaja and Timothy P. Stratford, "China Implements New Charity Law," *Global Policy Watch*, November 1, 2016, <https://www.globalpolicywatch.com/2016/11/china-implements-new-charity-law/>.

<sup>3</sup> See "Fact Sheet on China's Foreign NGO Law," *The China NGO Project*, November 1, 2017, <http://www.chinafile.com/ngo/latest/fact-sheet-chinas-foreign-ngo-law>; for further information see "The China NGO Project" which is a community-driven platform from *ChinaFile* focused on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in China since the implementation of 2017's *Foreign NGO Law*.

<sup>4</sup> See "SARA Abolished," *Chinese Church Support Ministries*, April 29, 2018, <http://ccsm.amccsm.org/en/news/prayer/%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87%E7%B9%81%E9%AB%94-sara-abolished/> and Joann Pittman, "Goodbye SARA," *ChinaSource*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/goodbye-sara/>.

<sup>5</sup> See Jackson Wu, "7 Reasons Why Sinicization Is Not Rhetoric This Time," *ChinaSource*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-blog-posts/7-reasons-why-sinicization-is-not-rhetoric-this-time>.

<sup>6</sup> See Ezra Jin, "The Chinese Church and the Global Body of Christ," *ChinaSource*, June 7, 2012, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/the-chinese-church-and-the-global-body-of-christ>.

<sup>7</sup> An International Mission Board prayer guide lists 134 groups for China (see Steve Ellis, Affinity Group Leader, "UUPG The Top Unengaged Unreached People Groups of East Asia," Vol. 4, <https://www.imb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/East-Asia-UUPG-Prayer-Guide.pdf>); the current list (from the International Mission Board, SBC, dated April 30, 2020), for China has 338 unreached people groups and 156 unengaged unreached people groups. It can be found at <https://www.peoplegroups.org/explore/CountryDetails.aspx?genc0=CHN>.

<sup>8</sup> "ethnocentrism," *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnocentrism>

<sup>9</sup> See accompanying article in this issue on the "Chinese Missions along the Belt and Road."

<sup>10</sup> See Yang Sheng, "Pakistan Says Chinese Hostages Killed by IS Were Preachers" *Global Times*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1051346.shtml>.

*Over the last 30 years Peter Bryant (pseudonym) has had the chance to visit, live for extended periods of time, and travel to almost all of China's provinces. As a Christian businessperson he has met Chinese from all walks of life. He has a particular interest in marketplace ministries and business as mission and enjoys working with emerging Chinese leaders.*

## Chinese Missions along the Belt and Road

By Peter Bryant

### Introduction

China has launched a major geopolitical/economic initiative at the same time that mission outreach awareness has been growing among the house churches of China. The confluence of these two developments in the last five years has created new opportunities and challenges for Chinese churches and Christians in reaching out globally in mission. This article provides a general background and overview of these developments.

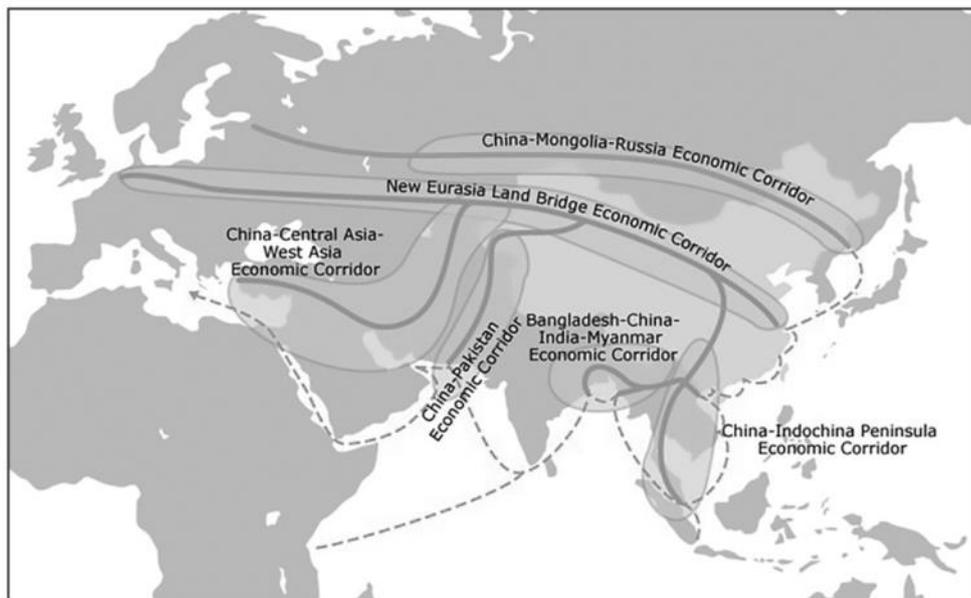


### The Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013 Chinese president Xi Jinping, in state visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, first started talking about the New Silk Road and the maritime Silk Road which quickly became One Belt and One Road (OBOR) and later the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Since that time the BRI has become a major part of China's external relations. It was written into the Chinese Communist Party constitution in 2017 and government work plans afterwards. BRI has become a major part of China's foreign relations, international development, as well as domestic economic programs.

From the perspective of outside countries, China's BRI program has been characterized as a geo-strategic plan for building a new type of international order with China at the center. BRI has been characterized as debt diplomacy with some Western countries blaming China for creating "debt traps" for other developing countries. Others have referred to BRI as a form of neocolonialism.

What cannot be disputed is that BRI covers a significant part of the world:



Source: Hong Kong Trade Development Council, "The Belt and Road Initiative," May 3, 2018.

Statistics provided<sup>1</sup> early in its development indicate that BRI encompasses:

- more than 60 countries,
- one third of global economic activity (GDP),
- 65% of global population.

At the 2019 Belt and Road Forum, China stated that 125 countries and 29 international organizations have signed BRI cooperation documents with China.<sup>2</sup>

Within China, BRI is discussed in terms of achieving shared growth and win-win outcomes through dialogue and collaboration, building a new platform for international trade and investment, raising up new practices in global economic govern-

ance, and contributing China's wisdom for building a global community with a shared future for humanity.

These two perspectives and ways of describing BRI are far apart. However, for anyone interested in the unreached and unengaged areas and peoples of the world, the overlap with BRI countries is unmistakable and intriguing.

### **Chinese Christians and BRI**

Regardless of how you see BRI and which voices you choose to listen to, it is also important to hear what Chinese Christians say about BRI. As early as 2015, I have heard Chinese Christians refer to BRI as God's plan for the Chinese church. Just as the Roman Empire provided and enforced a peaceful and secure environment for commerce and travel, and the Roman roads and ports were used by the early church and the Apostle Paul in the spread of the gospel, Chinese believers see the Chinese government's BRI plan as part of God's plan to use the Chinese church in mission. Many see and talk about BRI as God's road and opportunity for them to move out in mission.

The timing of BRI is also significant for mission from China.

During the past 40 years of China's development there has been a consistent external focus on countries outside of China. If you read a Chinese newspaper and compare it to any North American newspaper for the same time period, you will find the Chinese newspaper has a much higher percentage of articles, news, and information about foreign countries. Learning foreign languages has been part of school curriculum from elementary school onwards for the past four decades. As the standard of living has risen in China, Chinese have begun to move out as students, business people, and tourists. In 2019, China had over 160 million outbound tourists.<sup>3</sup> No matter where you go in the world today as a tourist, student, or business person, you are highly likely to run into Chinese citizens. Mainland Chinese churches that can afford to arrange tours to the Holy Land for its members also have the financial capability to join the global mission movement in sending out their own cross-cultural workers.

During this same four-decade time period, the church in China has also begun to look more globally. About 10-20 years ago the Back to Jerusalem (BTJ) movement<sup>4</sup> was popular among the rural house church networks. This movement has historical links to mission movements to China's western provinces that started before 1949. While exact numbers are hard to confirm, thousands of workers were sent to western China and beyond. In more recent years, the Mission China 2030 (MC2030) movement<sup>5</sup> among the urban churches set a goal of sending 20,000 cross-cultural missionaries from China by 2030. Thousands of churches and individual Christians were exposed to cross-cultural missions for the first time.

Both the BTJ and MC2030 have had their detractors for various reasons. Despite these criticisms both movements have played an important part in raising awareness of cross-cultural mission and helping to mobilize churches and individuals.

### **Opportunities for Mission along the BRI**

With China maintaining a continued long-term focus and engagement with these areas of the world and increasing all forms of trade and interaction, it is only natural that Chinese Christians will have a multiplicity of opportunities to work and serve in cross-cultural settings.

As part of its BRI emphasis, the Chinese government has also increased its support for international students from BRI countries studying in China. China previously announced providing 10,000 government scholarships annually to students from BRI countries.<sup>6</sup> China now has the third largest group of international students globally.<sup>7</sup> Chinese churches have opportunities in China's major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Chengdu, Xian, and others to reach out to a growing number of international students from a variety of countries that are part of the BRI. This new type of international student ministry (ISM) is an important ministry opportunity and training opportunity as churches begin to engage and think about ministry beyond their borders.<sup>8</sup> As these BRI international students complete their degrees, graduate, and return to their home countries this also creates new opportunities for outreach and ministry along the BRI roads.

There are also opportunities in education. As China has increased its involvement in countries around the world, the number of people learning Chinese internationally has increased greatly. In early decades of China's opening to the outside world, those who could teach English as a second language (ESL) were in high demand to teach in Chinese universities. Today, we are seeing a similar need and demand for teaching Chinese as a second language (CSL) in countries around the world. Teaching Chinese is a means for many Chinese to find work in other countries. For Chinese Christians this is an op-

portunity to have a clear identity, provide a needed service, support themselves and their families, and be engaged with local people in countries across the BRI world. China is also investing in the study, teaching, and research in the languages, cultures, and background of the BRI countries. There are opportunities for those in education in China and beyond.

There are opportunities in traditional church and mission work. Chinese churches and agencies are finding opportunities to do traditional ministry and church planting. Sometimes these are independent efforts done by Chinese churches and agencies alone. In other cases there are partnerships and collaboration with other international mission agencies. Two years ago I was visiting a church in Chicago and heard one of their short-term teams share about their summer mission trip. I understood they were focused on working with refugees in Jordan. As they shared about their experiences, I realized these American church members had been assisting and supporting cross-cultural workers sent from China reaching out to refugees in Jordan.

A large sphere of opportunity is business as mission along the BRI. As part of its economic program, the Chinese government has been encouraging companies at all levels to go out (走出去) and seek new markets and new business opportunities outside of China. This emphasis and effort has been enhanced with the emphasis on BRI. Christian entrepreneurs with a missional purpose will find many opportunities to seek new business opportunities along the BRI that can also serve a missional purpose.

Any vision the size of BRI will bring a wide range of opportunities for individuals and churches that have a missional heart and vision to see the gospel taken to every people and every country. China has reached a stage in its economic development and the church has a growing awareness of its responsibility for following God in mission. This combination will result in multiple new approaches and opportunities among the BRI countries.

### **Challenges for Mission along the BRI**

One of the lessons of church history is that challenges and opposition often go hand-in-hand with outreach and the expansion of the church. We should not be surprised that these new mission movements are also encountering challenges. Some challenges are common to cross-cultural workers from other countries and some are unique to China's situation.

One of the challenges is finding appropriate ways to partner with international mission agencies, other Chinese agencies, and local churches. For example, there are areas where some of the early BTJ movement workers from China's rural church networks have continued to work for more than a decade. Now new workers from the urban churches are arriving and could benefit from the lessons, experience, and wisdom of these seasoned Chinese workers. However, because of the differences between the rural and urban churches back in China, these two kinds of workers seem to rarely be working together.

Another challenge would be the lack of mission infrastructure to support Chinese workers. This would include team organization and leadership, opportunities for language and culture learning, appropriate children's education, member care, and so on. The author is not aware of any Chinese international school across the BRI areas available to Chinese workers that can educate their children to the level that they can return to China to take the university entrance exams (高考) and do their university studies in China. There are examples of small teams who have spent a decade in a foreign country without learning the local language and culture. This greatly impacts their ability to be effective in a new culture and reach local people. A small percentage of workers will be like the Apostle Paul with multiple gifts, great faith, tremendous intellect, and single-minded focus. The majority of workers will find the lack of support in these areas becomes a series of confusing and confounding challenges to their life and ministry.

The history of Western mission outreach to China has long been tainted by missionaries who came to China on the back of their government's might and economic power. Chinese school children learn about this period as a "century of humiliation" that continues to impact Chinese society. Now that China's global importance, economic size, and impact has increased, Chinese workers along the Belt and Road countries also face a similar challenge of association with a powerful government and charges of neocolonialism. Fortunately, Chinese mission leaders are more aware of these negative possibilities and are learning from the lessons of the past.

Another area of challenge is the expansive role of the Chinese government along the BRI. From the Chinese government's point of view, the activities of Chinese missionaries may not be aligned with the goals and objectives of their government. In

2018 two Chinese workers were martyred in Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> Every country's government is shocked and concerned when their citizens are harmed for any reason while visiting or living in a foreign country. As the Chinese government understood what these two workers were doing, they became concerned that cross-cultural workers of this kind would have a negative impact to their BRI hopes and objectives. Following this incident there were investigations both outside and inside China to determine who was related to these workers and what kind of work they were doing.

A final area of challenge is the pressure that sending churches are currently receiving in China. There are Chinese workers, already overseas, who have seen their supporting churches closed, reorganized, or suppressed. Suddenly their source of support has been cut off or greatly diminished as the church has refocused on its own survival.

Looking at the situation with Western eyes, we often focus on what cannot be done. From discussions with Chinese Christians about the same situations, more often there is a focus on what can be done and what should be done somehow. The challenges are not ignored but faced in attitudes of trust and faith that God has appointed them to go and make disciples. The focus is on the open doors and Jesus' promise to be with them always.

## Conclusions

As China and the Chinese church have developed over the past four decades, the opportunities and motivation for mission among Chinese Christians have increased greatly. In the past seven years as China has developed its Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese Christians have gained a vision for the opportunities (and even responsibilities) that God has put before them. We are seeing multiple streams and efforts from the church all across China. Encompassing more than half of the countries and populations of the world, the BRI world is already an important area for mission. The emergence of Chinese missions and Chinese missionaries will add a new facet to the work that the Holy Spirit is doing among Chinese churches and in the BRI countries.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see, "Full text: Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative," The State Council, The People's Republic of China, March 30, 2015, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content\\_281475080249035.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm); Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, January 28, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>, and "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," European Bank, <https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/belt-and-road/overview.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See Zhou Jin, "China Says Belt, Road Will Not Get Involved in Territorial Disputes," *China Daily*, April 16, 2019, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/85859.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> See "2019 China Tourism Facts & Figures," *Travel China Guide*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/tourism/2019statistics/>.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about BTJ see "What Is Back to Jerusalem?" Back to Jerusalem, <https://backtojerusalem.com/about/> and Wen Mu, "The Present and the Future of the Back to Jerusalem Movement," *ChinaSource*, April 25, 2006, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/the-present-and-future-of-the-btj-movement-a-view-from-the-church-in-china>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about MC2030 see Karin Butler Primuth, "Launching China's Biggest Missionary Sending Initiative," *ChinaSource*, November 13, 2015, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/launching-chinas-biggest-missionary-sending-initiative/> and ChinaSource Team, "'Mission China in 2030' in Korea," *ChinaSource*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/mission-china-2030-in-korea/>.

<sup>6</sup> See "Full text: Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative," The State Council, The People's Republic of China, March 30, 2015, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content\\_281475080249035.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm).

<sup>7</sup> For more information see Phil Jones, "International Students in China an Unreached Diaspora," *ChinaSource*, October 6, 2017, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/international-students-in-china-an-unreached-diaspora/>.

<sup>8</sup> For more information see Phil Jones, "The Birth of ISM in China," *ChinaSource*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-blog-posts/the-birth-of-ism-in-china> and Phil Jones, "International Student Ministry in China," October 22, 2018, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/ebooks/international-student-ministry-in-china>.

<sup>9</sup> See Yang Sheng, "Pakistan Says Chinese Hostages Killed by IS Were Preachers," *Global Times*, June 13, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1051346.shtml>.

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## The Heart Cries of Frontline Workers in Muslim Contexts Interviews by the Guest Editor

By WU Xi

*For this issue of the ChinaSource Quarterly, the guest editor conducted interviews with front-line workers. They were asked to reflect upon the struggles they faced when they first went out as missionaries sent from China and to share the challenges they met with. Most serve in a Muslim context. The following summaries are based on their input.*

The issues Chinese missionaries face can be summarized along the following:

- orientation and cultural adaption,
- challenges faced by men, women, and families,
- financial considerations, especially related to ministry platform and member-care.

### Orientation and Cultural Adaption

There are pressures from the external cultural context which result in internal conflict with adaptation. The religion of Islam is an all-encompassing way of life that permeates every aspect of the host cultural. This is much stronger than that of the Buddhist worldview. Traditional Chinese Confucian culture has done a good job of integrating the imported Buddhist religion into the Chinese context and worldview, effectively transforming the foreign religion into an indigenous Chinese religion. However, when it comes to the interaction between Islam and the Chinese worldview, Islam is able to hold its own ground firmly. Upon arrival on the field, missionaries found themselves struggling to adjust to the Muslim worldview. This has tremendous implications for how they conduct their life and ministry. A point of contention that some frontline workers feel particularly is how ministry by a single woman is accepted (or rather rejected) in the Islamic context. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Islam controls all aspects of the life of its followers and demands that everyone observe the Islamic way of living. This covers their expectations, their work, their lives, their interpersonal relationships, their marriages, and their families. In other words, it covers everything; nothing is excluded.

This all-encompassing worldview creates a drastic change of role for the missionary's life and ministry on the frontlines from what it had been in China. The result is a very strong tension in cultural adjustment. Very few missionaries are taught about such tension in their training and almost none have learned how to deal with it. The training they get, if any, is at most a theoretical treatment about cross-cultural tension, not any real experience at the level of intensity they are being thrown into. It is like learning how to swim on dry land in a classroom and then being dumped into a deep pool upon arrival on the field.

One side effect of such external cultural tension is a manifestation of hidden personal issues not observed under normal circumstances. Many newly arrived missionaries from China find themselves behaving differently in their new environment. Problems such as interpersonal conflict, temper flare-ups, and other things that they can usually suppress begin to show up unexpectedly. Often, they show up about a year after arrival, just past the "honeymoon" period. This is a classic application of the Holmes-Rahe Stress Inventory. The typical missionary transition results in a stress level of about 150 out of a maximum of 300 on the scale. This is already approaching a dangerous level—a 50% chance of developing a physical ailment within two years. Additional stress such as an Islamic culture demands could be disastrous. Issues such as these need to be dealt with before arriving on the mission field.

Another challenge in cultural adaptation is language learning, particularly in the Middle East. Most urban dwellers can speak some English; however, in the countryside, almost everyone speaks only Arabic. For Chinese missionaries, both languages are difficult to learn. Intensifying the issue is that most Arabic language instruction is only available using English. Thus, currently the path to learning Arabic demands a certain fluency in English. This is a disadvantage for Chinese missionaries and there is no ready solution in sight.

The only practical long-term solution is to develop Chinese missionaries' fluency in Arabic so that they can use it as a lingua franca with international team members and in ministry. This will solve two problems: it diminishes the need for fluency in English and at the same time makes it possible to develop an Arabic primer using Chinese as the teaching medium by Chinese workers gifted in language learning (similar resources already exist for Biblical Greek, Hebrew, and some modern languages).



Image credit: [Flo P on Unsplash](#).

## Gender and Family Issues

In the Muslim culture, a single woman is not expected to work outside the home, much less be alone, by herself. Women, especially foreign women, who do not respect such cultural norms, will be perceived as promiscuous. A woman walking on the street by herself (in that culture, an act done only by prostitutes) is seen as inviting sexual advances by a man. However, the clear exception is a woman accompanied by children. This clearly signals a mother, not a sexually promiscuous woman.

Often children become gate openers for ministry opportunities, both for children's ministry and in particular, for women's ministry. Children will often provide a good cover for a ministry platform and draw less attention from the authorities.

However, children are not immune from discrimination from the locals in their schools. They also are exposed to harassment. Their own safety and security is a concern of theirs and, in particular, of their parents. Sending structures must address this issue from a member care angle and relieve such anxiety.

Additionally, the ministry experience most women in China have had will not have much application in a Muslim context. Most women, whether married or especially singles, will have to function in totally new roles and need to be prepared accordingly. Examples include women preaching or leading worship which they had done in China but would not be open to them in the Muslim world.

One surprising issue raised by one man was that of local Muslim women flirting with expatriate men walking alone on the street. This can easily draw a man into a compromising situation and moral temptation.

## Financial Issues

Many missionaries face financial difficulty. They are being paid an allowance according to the cost of living in China. On the mission field, an allowance of US \$300 a month per family will not sustain a family locally. Furthermore, support commitments need to be for the entire term of service, and preferably, mutually expected to be multi-term.

Very few missionaries receive a support level that takes into consideration their ministry platform. Indeed, living in a Muslim context requires a suitable platform. Without financial support to establish such a platform, whether a small business or a cultural center, the missionary is forced to use personal resources for such an investment. Furthermore, with inadequate financial support, the platform must generate income for the missionary's livelihood.

Member care is an urgent felt need expressed by all missionaries. With so much stress facing the typical missionaries, both individually and with the family, it is important for them to attend member-care events. Yet, almost no sending structure allows these to be included in its fund-raising goal. An immediate solution is to use Chinese, member-care personnel from international agencies to serve at member-care events. There have been several such events organized, and they have been received very positively. Similar events are planned that will take place in the immediate future to address this need.

During the coronavirus epidemic, member care for Chinese missionaries has been virtually non-existent. There have been only a few cases of emergency air ticket provision for missionaries to return to China as a contingency. With tickets estimated at US\$4,000 or more per person, this can only be provided by emergency funds maintained by sending structures. What is even more alarming is that quite a few missionaries received no member-care phone calls (zero to two phone calls in most cases). This points out a much larger issue: How do China's sending structures understand member care? There is still much more that needs to be done.

## Conclusion

These interviews were conducted with only a small sample of missionaries. However, the issues brought out here are the heart cries of frontline workers—and desperately need to be addressed.

*WU Xi (pseudonym) began serving China during the mid-70s, just before China's Open Door policy was implemented. He served in many different capacities including working with Chinese scholars studying in the West, frontline evangelistic work, and church mobilization for China. He now focuses on developing China's mission ecosystem.*

## Book Review

### *Encountering China: A Book Review*

By Richard Cook

Kaiser, Andrew T. *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2019. Kindle, \$9.99; paperback, 281 pages, \$34, at Amazon.

### Thesis of the Book

In *Encountering China*, Andrew Kaiser provides an alternative interpretation to the development of the missionary thought of Timothy Richard in China. Timothy Richard was well acquainted with James Hudson Taylor, and he is sometimes known in missions' history as the modernist counterpart to the evangelical Hudson Taylor. Richard's missionary strategy has also been compared to Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits, with their priority placed on evangelism to the political and cultural elite.

In this study, focusing on the first half of Richard's career, from 1870-1891, Kaiser finds that Richard was thoroughly evangelical in his upbringing and his early years in China. Richard gradually broadened his missionary methods because of both his encounter with China and because of his fervent evangelical desire for more conversions. Further, Richard's missionary innovation was not an effort to reach the elite in society, like the Jesuits; rather, he was drawn to reach the people he believed most open to the gospel message. In his context in China, he believed these were the religious seekers in sectarian religions.

### Sources

Andrew Kaiser has a PhD in world Christianity from the University of Edinburgh, and he draws on several archives, including from Edinburgh, Oxford, Yale, and Wheaton. His extensive bibliography runs for twenty pages, with both English and Chinese sources, and he includes informative footnotes on almost every page. The introduction includes a valuable "Historiography of Richard," providing several perceptive insights about the relevant literature. Kaiser does incorporate Chinese perspectives, but he notes that the Chinese literature has somewhat limited value as some of these scholars do not use many English language primary source materials and they lack theological sophistication, thus leading to some misreadings of Timothy Richard (pp. 10-11).

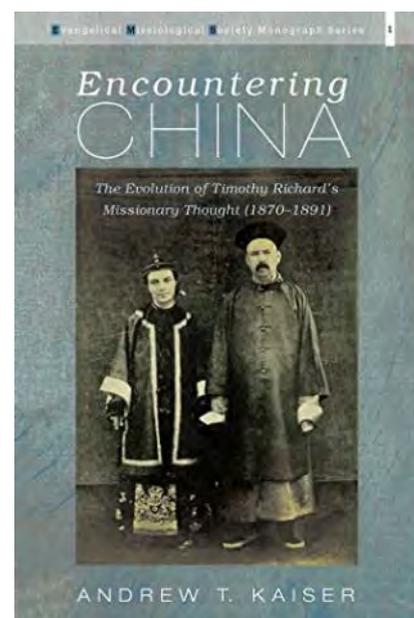
### Development of the Thesis

The book is well organized, divided into three parts and nine chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction, and chapter 9 is the conclusion. Chapter 2, the first chapter of part 1, starts by locating Timothy Richard's birth in 1845 among nonconformists in Wales. He was born into a pious Baptist family, and he applied to join the CIM in 1868. Hudson Taylor, however, encouraged him to join the Baptist Mission Society (BMS).

Arriving in China in 1870, Richard quickly became disheartened by the mission work, and he began his quest to develop more effective missionary methods. Kaiser provides a delightful description of one of Richard's early formative experiences. Richard made an itinerant preaching trip with an indigenous Chinese colleague to a temple fair. Skillfully weaving in information from pertinent modern literature on temple celebrations and festivals in China, Kaiser describes how Richard spent time living in the local village and then, when the weeklong festival approached, he requested permission to address the crowd. To his surprise his request was granted, and the resident Buddhist priests supplied the ladder for him to climb onto the bell tower where he preached to the crowds. The experience convinced Richard that the Christian missionary task in China must be carried out on Chinese terms, and that the relationship between missionaries and the local Chinese leaders and priests did not need to be adversarial (pp. 43-45).

This story points to an additional virtue of this book. Kaiser draws on scholarship from numerous disciplines, and he applies the insights to his study of Timothy Richard. At the same time, he contributes fresh ideas into those disciplines. For instance, in this case, scholars receive a rare eyewitness account of a temple festival in rural China in the 1870s.

Based on his early impressions in China, chapter 3 explores Richard's missiological development. He appealed to Matthew



10 as a source for his emphasis on “seeking the worthy” in evangelism. The “worthy” for Richard were not the political or even the religious elites in society, but rather they were the people most likely to be open to the gospel. Richard believed, in his context, these were the pious followers of the sectarian religions.

In chapter 4, Kaiser begins to examine Richard’s interaction with China’s religions, focusing on their sectarian forms. Having identified the “worthy,” Richard now realized he needed to be able to answer their questions. This propelled him further along “his empathetic trajectory of acculturation, resulting in both the intentional borrowing of techniques from Chinese religious sectarians and an increasing emphasis on indigenous participation in mission” (p. 68).

Part 2 moves the focus to the North China Famine. Chapter 5 describes his tireless famine relief work, including his passion for evangelism. Chapter 6 shows how his growing identification with the local people after the famine broadened his conception of Christian mission. After the famine, Richard began his political advocacy for reform attempting to assure that no similar disaster would strike North China again. Richard was exploring new theological formulations, trying to identify the social implications of the kingdom of God.

Kaiser clarifies Timothy Richard’s attitude towards Chinese officials: “If changing the minds of Chinese officials and scholars could result in the material advance for the people living in China, then as a Christian he was obliged to do so” (p. 148). Nonetheless, he was not like the Jesuits. Whereas the Jesuits advocated a top-down approach to the conversion of China, Richard’s motive to address the elite was to assist China. He was still committed to reaching the “worthy,” the religiously inclined devout seekers from the sectarian religions.

In part 3, Kaiser shows that after fifteen years in China Richard faced blistering criticism. Chapter 7 discusses the criticism Timothy Richard received from James Hudson Taylor and the CIM. Taylor believed Richard was “not orthodox” and had “Romish” tendencies. Chapter 8 turns to the intense attack Richard faced from his colleagues within the Baptist Mission Society in the second half of the 1880s. The four categories of attack are, “Another Gospel,” “Ineffective Methods,” “Leaning Romewards,” and “Personal Feelings.” Kaiser outlines the charges under each category, and he then delineates Richard’s careful defense. For instance, he was accused of not preaching the gospel, but he responded by asking the critics to come and observe how much time he spent in gospel teaching, “probably more time than any of my accusers” (pp. 218-219).

In Chapter 9, the conclusion, Kaiser suggests that Richard’s decision to leave North China and accept an invitation to work with the publishing ministry of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese (SDCK) in Shanghai was a strategic move designed to assure more direct forms of evangelistic work in order to bring about the conditions in China necessary for “conversion by the million” (p. 21).

## Evaluation

1. Andrew Kaiser has produced an innovative and meaningful study, touching on several significant themes. However, since the project started as a PhD dissertation, the approach and flow of the book is more academic and less artistic. The selected topics that are covered receive exhaustive attention, with numerous footnotes, but there are many other areas of interest that are overlooked. For instance, there is very little on Timothy Richard’s wife, Mary Martin (pp. 121-122), and there is no consideration of her impact on his thinking.

2. Timothy Richard contributed several powerful insights into missions. One I found most thought provoking was his insight on reaching the “worthy.” That idea comes from Jesus, who, in Matthew 10, sends his disciples into the towns and villages to preach, and he instructs them to search “for some worthy person.” Richard believed these “worthy” were the leaders and pious faithful of the “Secret Sects” (p. 72). Kaiser notes this reflected Richard’s respect for the intelligence and good intentions of devout Chinese religious leaders (p. 226).

Historians such as Dan Bays and Ryan Dunch, as well as some Roman Catholics, have also identified the conversion potential in Chinese sectarian groups (p. 76). A noteworthy question for missions in China, even now, is the potential role of sectarian religions and sectarian adherents today, especially with the dramatic change of the religious landscape in China since 1949.

3. Kaiser defends Timothy Richard from Hudson Taylor’s criticism in the early 1880s. Although Richard’s missionary methods were expanding, Kaiser believes Taylor was incorrect for breaking fellowship with Richard and accusing him of being “not orthodox.” In a letter, Taylor wrote “Richard is driving a good theory to death. He refuses to preach to the masses, is

for circulating moral and theistic tracts not containing the name or work of Christ, to prepare the way as he thinks for the gospel, and in some respects is dangerously near Rome” (p. 166).

Kaiser also defends Timothy Richard from the BMS criticisms of the late 1880s. To his detractors in the BMS, “Richard’s failure was complete: his work was wasting limited resources, had not improved official attitudes towards foreigners, had produced few converts (and those of questionable quality), and his reliance on local evangelists was less effective than having the missionaries themselves preach in the streets” (p. 195). One detractor wrote about a Christian service led by Richard, saying, Richard “had the end of the chapel covered with crimson cloth, and in the center of it a large white satin cross, and at either side two yellow streamers exactly like those used in Buddhist Temples; that with all the people kneeling toward the cross he led them in a chanted litany” (p. 201).

Kaiser acknowledges that there is conflicting evidence concerning Richard’s evangelical orthodoxy, yet he is convinced that Richard remained evangelical at least until 1891 (the year Kaiser chose to cut off his study). I find Kaiser’s arguments persuasive, but not necessarily helpful. If in fact Richard later became a proponent of modernist theology and missions, it would seem to be fair to say that in the 1880s Taylor and the BMS rightly suspected that Richard was moving gradually in the wrong direction.

4. As a historian, I appreciate the meticulous work of Andrew Kaiser in this study. With impeccable scholarship he shows both the progression of Richard’s missionary practices as well as Richard’s ongoing commitment to evangelical theology and conversion. However, I find the cutoff date of this study in 1891 is problematic. I understand that covering the second half of Richard’s career would have made the book significantly longer, and I appreciate the value of the book as it is.

In the book, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*, Lian Xi charts the transition of several missionaries into liberalism. Kaiser contrasts those missionaries to Timothy Richard: “Unlike Lian Xi’s missionaries whose growing empathy and respect for all things Chinese led them to abandon their commitment to Christian conversion, Richard during the first half of his life and ministry in China continued to pursue conversion, remaining firmly within the boundaries of Victorian evangelicalism” (p. 225).

I find it curious that Kaiser makes such a bold defense of Richard based on a somewhat artificial cutoff point. Kaiser does not address the question of whether Richard abandoned his evangelical faith after 1891. In hindsight, it seems plausible to suspect that Timothy Richard was in the process of abandoning his evangelical faith in the 1880s and 1890s. Kaiser’s thesis could be strengthened if he made more explicit the reason he believes it is significant that Timothy Richard was still evangelical and committed to conversion in 1891.

From my reading of *Encountering China*, I am inspired by Timothy Richard. He correctly pressed missions to contextualize the message and to proactively develop indigenous leaders. However, pursuing those positive objectives did not require compromising evangelical orthodoxy. For truly effective and eternal missions, the gospel must be defended and conversion must be pursued. As Paul writes in Romans 1:16, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*”

Our thanks to *Wipf and Stock Publishers* for supplying a copy of *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)* by Andrew T. Kaiser for this review.

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