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The Chinese are Coming



by Michael Tai



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Christianity in Europe has been in decline since the 18th century Enlightenment. Today many churches stand empty or are converted to restaurants, clubs and even mosques. The European Constitution makes no reference to Europe's Christian roots and secularism is so entrenched that religious symbols are banned from public places and even Christmas postage stamps are not allowed to show baby Jesus or the nativity scene. Faith has become a private matter and values like charity, honesty and faithfulness are being discarded with alarming consequences.

By contrast the church in China is experiencing phenomenal growth and there are an estimated 70 million to 100 million Chinese Christians today. Will the Chinese come to Europe's aid and how will Europeans respond to an Asian proclamation of the gospel?

China evokes scenes of temples, monks and martial arts, and Europeans think of Chinese as Buddhists, not Christians. For centuries Europeans thought of China as the exotic oriental kingdom recounted by Marco Polo or the home of the fearsome Mongol hordes that ravaged medieval Europe. In recent history Mao and the Cultural Revolution created the image of a nation hostile to God.

If Chinese Christians are unlikely, Chinese missionaries are even less probable. The history of Christian missions, after all, is the chronicle of Western missionaries and their exploits, and the notion of missionaries from the East preaching to a godless Europe is the stuff of creative

fiction. Unknown to most Europeans, Christianity in China dates back to the seventh century, and although its presence there was often tenuous, the nation today boasts one of the largest and most vibrant churches history has ever seen. Evangelists as young as sixteen criss-cross the rural countryside bringing the gospel to peasant villages. Churches are filled to the brim and teaching and preaching can last from morning till evening. Prayer starts at five in the morning and signs and wonders occur regularly.

Zealous as they are, however, the Chinese have little cross-cultural missionary experience and the cultural and linguistic gap between the Chinese and Europeans is considerable. How well will Chinese adapt and how should they contextualize their message to Europe's postmodern secularism? Despite determined American effort after the Second World War, Western Europeans have shunned American evangelicalism and its church planting projects. What kind of alternative approach should the Chinese adopt?

After two centuries of weakness and turmoil, China is reemerging as a world power with wide ranging influence. She has overtaken the US as the premier destination for investment capital becoming 'the factory of the world' supplying everything from shoes and toys to computers and aerospace components. Growing at 10 percent a year

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since 1978, China's GDP is set to overtake Germany to become the world's third largest economy by 2008. Overseas investments are increasing dramatically as China moves to secure supplies of energy and raw materials for her booming economy. Overseas Chinese represent the biggest ethnic diaspora and their ranks are boosted by growing numbers of students, businessmen and migrants seeking opportunities abroad. These developments have profound bearing on the missionary role of the Chinese, and China's greatest impact on the world may yet be spiritual rather than economic.

This essay will trace the story of Christianity in China, discuss the decline of the Church in Europe and why the Chinese may be poised to play an important role in reviving European Christianity. It will examine the Chinese view of missions and why they of all people may be called to Europe. It will also look at the mobilizing, training and support needed for such a movement to take shape.

History of the Chinese Church

China's first contact with Christianity came through the Nestorians in the seventh century. The Nestorians took their name from Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople sacked from office by the Council of Ephesus in 431 for maintaining that the human and divine natures of Christ were not united in one person. His followers migrated to Persia and there founded the Syriac-speaking Church of the East.

The first Nestorian mission arrived in the Chinese capital Changan in 635 AD during the first years of the Tang Dynasty and enjoyed 150 years of favor in the Tang court. According to an eighth century stele, the emperor issued a decree to 'proclaim the teachings everywhere for the salvation of the people'. The Nestorian teachings were translated into Chinese and Christian communities grew up around the country.

This good fortune came to an end when the Muslims defeated the Chinese armies in Central Asia in 741 and gained control of the Silk Road, the ancient trade artery that linked China to the Mediterranean. Meanwhile anti-foreign sentiments grew in the Tang court culminating in a decree in 845 ordering monks of the 'Religion of Light' to return to lay life 'so that they will not adulterate the customs of China.'

Curiously, neither Rome nor Constantinople, the two principal centers of Christianity, knew of the Nestorian accomplishments in China, and it was not until Mongol armies from central Asia threatened Europe that Rome sent emissaries to the Asia. In rapid succession, the Mongols crushed the Russians, Germans, Poles and Hun-

garians. In 1243 Pope Innocentius IV sent a 60-year old Franciscan friar Giovanni da Plano Carpini with a letter to Guyuk Khan threatening divine judgment if the Mongols resumed attacks on Europe. Guyuk spurned the Pope's message and prepared a renewed assault and Europe was spared only by Guyuk's death in 1248 and ensuing internal division among the Mongols.

Seven years later, in 1253, French King Louis IX sent

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another Franciscan, Willem de Rubruck, to propose an alliance with the Mongols against the Muslims in the Holy Land but the khan rejected the idea. The next Westerner to meet with Mongols was Marco Polo, the young Venetian adventurer, who met Kublai Khan in 1266. He returned to Europe with a remarkable request by the khan to send a hundred missionaries, 'wise men of learning in the Christian religion and doctrine' and if the pope sent the missionaries, the khan promised, 'he and all his potentates would become men of the church.'

Rome dithered and sent a single Franciscan, Giovanni of Monte Corvino who arrived in 1294 after Kublai's death. Kublai's grandson and successor, Timur Oljeitu, gave Monte Corvino support and the Catholics slowly built up a base in Peking. Monte Corvino built a church in 1299 and six years later reported six thousand baptized Chinese and Mongols. In 1307 Pope Clement V appointed him archbishop of Peking and with further reinforcements from Rome, the Catholics established a thriving community in the southern seaport of Quanzhou in Fujian Province. But the tide turned once again against the Christians as more and more Mongol leaders in Eurasia converted to Islam, and Christians gradually lost their patronage. The Mongols themselves were overthrown in 1372 by a peasant rebellion which established the Ming Dynasty whose leaders were Buddhists and in another wave of xenophobia both the Nestorians and the Catholics were persecuted until they disappeared at the end of the fourteenth century. It took another two hundred years before Christians set foot in China again. This time it was the Jesuits.

The Jesuits were trained in mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, cartography, and other advance sciences

of Renaissance Europe. One of them, Francis Xavier, a Spaniard trained at the University of Paris, spent most of his life traveling and evangelizing in India, the Malayan Peninsula, the Moluccas and Japan. He tried to enter China but died on an island off the southern coast of China. His desire to bring the Gospel to China inspired other Jesuits, including a gifted Italian named Matteo Ricci.

Ricci entered southern China and mastered the Chinese language before moving to Beijing in 1601. To contextualize he adopted the clothing of the scholar gentry and wrote in Chinese explaining Christian concepts to the literati. Ricci won the respect of scholars and succeeded in regaining access to the Ming court the Franciscans lost. The Jesuits were so politically skillful they retained influence even when the Manchus conquered Ming China in 1644.

One of Ricci's successors, the German Ferdinand Verbiest, enjoyed close ties with Kangxi (1654-1722), one of China's most talented emperors, and there is evidence suggesting that Kangxi accepted the Christian faith. But rivalry between the Jesuits and other monastic orders undermined the mission. Arriving later, the Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians preferred direct evangelization of the common folk to the Jesuit strategy of targeting the scholar gentry. They accused the Jesuits of theologically bending over backwards in their eagerness to win the scholar gentry, and the constant theological squabbles between the Catholic factions led to an imperial expulsion decree in 1724 and the Christian population once again dwindled.

The next missionary wave came almost a hundred years later when Anglo-Saxon Protestants arrived by sea with the European imperialists after 1807. Spearheaded by British missionaries such as Robert Morrison and Hudson Taylor, the missionaries preached the gospel and encouraged educational, social and political reform. But injustices perpetrated by the Europeans such as the devastating opium trade and territorial concessions forced upon China became an albatross for the missionaries and their Chinese converts who bore the brunt of xenophobic violence whenever it erupted. Tens of thousands of Chinese Christians along with some two hundred missionaries were killed during the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901).

In 1911 the weak Manchu government was overthrown in a republican revolution led by a Christian physician Sun Yat-sen but democratic institutions failed to take root and the country remained largely controlled by warlords. Civil war soon broke out between the Nationalists and the Communists who fought sporadic campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. The Japanese invaded China in 1937 leading to hostilities with America and all out war in the Pacific. After Japan's defeat in 1945, civil war resumed, the Com-

munists defeated the Nationalist armies in 1949, formed a new government, promptly expelled all missionaries and determined to crush the church which looked set to vanish once again from the landscape. But it did not.

In 1949 there were three to four million Christians in China; fifty years later China's Christians numbered between 50 million to 70 million with 50,000 house churches. The dramatic growth despite systematic state persecution

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is one of the miracles of modern history and it could set the stage for a major turning point in the history of Christian missions.

But before going on to discuss the emerging Asian missionary movement, it is necessary to first look at the biblical mandate for missions and what is it that God is really asking his people to do and be.

Biblical Basis of Missions

Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its *raison d'être*. Missions is not a new word but was used originally in the context of the Father sending the Son into the world. Theologians like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch have commented ably on the theology of missions. The Great Commission of Matt 28: 18-20 is often cited as proof text for missions but missions began early in the Old Testament when God called Abraham out of the land of Ur and sent him 'unto the land that I shall show thee' and promised to 'bless thee...and in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' (Gen 12:1 - 3).

The ultimate missionary, of course, was Jesus himself who was sent by his Father, took on human form to show God to humanity: 'I know him because I am from him and he sent me' (John 7:29). Later when Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, he said to them, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

Right from the beginning, however, Christian theology was heavily influenced by its Greek context. Responding to Greek philosophical questions, the Seven Ecumenical Councils focused on defining the nature of the Godhead, and for a long time the church approved of missions

but was not itself the mission. Liturgy and ecclesiology were central and missiology peripheral. Even much later Calvin's influential Institutes of the Christian Religion had surprisingly little to say about the mission of the church.

The 1964 encyclical *Lumen Gentium* or 'Light of Nations' reaffirmed, however, the missionary character of the Church. The council asserted that 'the church on earth is by its very nature missionary.' It declared 'Christ is the light of nations' and the Church a pilgrim people sent out with the task of bringing Christ to the nations.

There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. Mission belongs to the very being of the church. A church that is not in mission is no church at all. Indeed the entire Christian existence is to be characterized as missionary existence.

But *Missio Dei* is more than proclaiming the gospel. It is ushering in the kingdom of God by doing the things that Jesus did. It is healing the sick and casting out demons, identifying with the poor and oppressed, and standing against injustice. For the church to be missional, individual Christians must be missional.

So often mission is a fringe activity by a small group in the church while the rest sit back to have their 'felt needs' met. Faith has become a therapeutic faith not only in the West but in many other parts of the world too. The privatized Christianity from the West is often nothing but a veneer of Christian subculture on top of an atheistic lifestyle.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda brought this into stark relief. Rwanda was considered one of the great successes of Christian missions. Christian missions there began in 1900 and by 1940 ninety percent of the village headmen were Catholics and the king officially declared the country a Christian kingdom in 1946. Lutherans, Baptists and Anglicans all arrived by 1922. Today eighty to ninety percent of the population regard themselves as Christians, and much of the Christianity is of strong evangelical persuasion. But between April and June 1994, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in a space of 100 days.

Authentic Christianity must transform individual lives as well as entire communities and societies—for what good is a faith without transforming force? Jesus said, 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out...' (Matt 5:13).

Emerging Asian Missionary Movement

Since the beginning of the modern Protestant missionary movement in the nineteenth century, missions have predominantly been the work of North Ameri-

cans and Europeans. But that pattern is changing. In the third millennium Christianity shifted from the West and North to the South and East. The term 'majority world' has recently come to describe the rest of the world over and against North America and Western Europe. In 1900 majority world Christians made up only 16.7 percent of all Christians but 59.4 percent in 2000. By 2001 there were over 86 million Christians in Africa which is more numer-

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ous than the whole of Europe.

Andrew Walls, the church historiographer, notes the most striking feature of Christianity at the beginning of the third millennium is that it is 'predominantly a non-Western religion.' Scott Moreau, chair of intercultural studies at Wheaton College, declares, "The day of Western missionary dominance is over not because Western missionaries have died off but because the rest of the world has caught the vision and is engaged and energized." In 1973 Christianity Today reported 3,411 non-Western, cross-cultural missionaries in the world. That number has now exploded to 103,000, nearly equal to the total number of U.S. and Canadian Protestant missionaries of about 112,000.

South Korea stands at the vanguard of the majority world missionary movement and sends more than 1,100 new missionaries each year which is as many new missionaries as all the countries of the West combined. The number of South Korean missionaries skyrocketed from 80 missionaries in 1980 to 1,200 in 1991. South Korea sends one missionary for every 4.2 congregations, and by 2007 there were almost 13,000 South Koreans serving as long-term missionaries around the world, ranking the country second only to the US.

Korean missions to the Muslim world caught headlines in 2007 with the kidnapping of a group of Korean missionaries by the Taliban in Afghanistan; two men including the team leader were executed. Korean missionaries are active in virtually every country and the Korean World Mission Association plans to send 100,000 full-time Korean missionaries by 2030. It wants to mobilize 50 percent of Korean churches into missions, recruit one of every 300 Korean Christians to become missionaries, adopt 200

unreached people groups every five years, and send one million tentmakers into difficult-access countries by 2020. James Engel and William Dyrness observe that:

Power, leadership and influence in world mission circles have been shifting for several decades away from North America and Europe to the point that the most exciting initiatives in missions have a profoundly different geographical focus. In the very best sense, this is cause for celebration because the baby has now become a vigorous, maturing and responsible adult in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Jerusalem is no longer only in the West. There are now many Jerusalems from which God's word is spreading.

Other Asians are active in cross-cultural missions too. Naga missionaries are actively planting churches throughout India. Many churches in Malaysia are engaged in missions in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and China and reach out to migrant workers from Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam. Malaysia is a major Southeast Asian crossroad inhabited by Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians speaking Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. This makes Malaysians culturally adaptable, and some go as missionaries as far as Africa and Latin America.

In fact, with the exception of Koreans and Japanese, most Asians live in multi-ethnic societies and speak two or three languages. They are used to living with few creature comforts and some even have stronger immune systems than people from industrialized countries. They blend easily with the locals in the majority world because of similar skin tone.

More importantly, they carry none of the colonial baggage associated with white people and are received as equals. Because they come from group oriented cultures, they are often perceived as being more friendly and people-oriented and need less private time and space. They tend to be good team members who follow the leader without the critical questioning of their Western colleagues.

The question, however, is how they will be received in Europe. White supremacist sentiments exist subtly or overtly and racial violence against colored people are punished with little more than a slap on the wrist in parts of Europe. But the missionary potential of the Chinese deserves attention for a number of reasons.

Firstly, China has a zealous growing church that has withstood severe persecution. Chinese Christians often pay a heavy price for following Jesus and it is not uncommon for them to be jailed, tortured or killed and yet the church is undoubtedly the fastest growing today. China's

house churches have a vision called 'Back to Jerusalem' to send 100,000 missionaries to the vast Islamic belt stretching from China's western Xinjiang Province through central Asia and the Gulf states all the way back to Israel. It is perhaps the greatest missionary vision in history targeting the most difficult mission field and it will probably not stop at Jerusalem.

Secondly, China's breathtaking rise as an economic

The Chinese settle in more countries than anyone else.

superpower has important implications for global missions. As the country becomes more affluent, her churches' resources for sending missionaries will grow. Already increasing numbers of Chinese pastors and missionaries are being trained overseas. As income levels rise, more Chinese pursue education overseas and the thousands of Chinese students studying abroad acquire foreign language skills and valuable cross-cultural experience. Many find Christ overseas and some will become missionaries.

Thirdly, Chinese immigrants already live in many countries in large numbers and the Christians among them form a natural missionary fifth column in their adoptive land. The Chinese have often been compared to the Jews because of their influence, business acumen and diaspora tradition. Will God use the Chinese as he promised to use the Jews to be a blessing to the nations?

Chinese Diaspora

The Chinese settle in more countries than anyone else. The Jews scattered because of war, persecution and national defeat; the Chinese leave home for economic reasons. Chinese migration overseas first started in the 15th century when the Ming admiral, Cheng Ho, led huge trading fleets to the Indian Ocean. But it was not until the era of European mercantile imperialism that the Chinese diaspora began in earnest. Many colonies lacked laborers and there was a large labor surplus in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The weak Qing government was forced by the colonial powers to allow its subjects to work overseas, and many Fujianese and Cantonese moved to Southeast Asia while the Taishans moved to North Amer-

ica and Australia to work as laborers in gold mining and railroad construction.

After the nineteenth century, large numbers of Chinese migrated to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Western Europe as well as Peru, Panama and Mexico. When China closed itself to the outside world from the 1950s to the 1980s, Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan continued to settle overseas. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the relaxation of travel restrictions, significant numbers from China migrated to Europe.

Experts believe that the Chinese living in Russia will reach 10 million by 2010 and become the dominant ethnic group in the Russian Far East in 20 to 30 years' time. There are Chinese settled in virtually every country in Europe, from the affluent Scandinavian countries in the north to the poverty stricken Balkan states in the south.

The most recent Chinese migrants to Europe come from China's southern Zhejiang Province, particularly from Qingtian and Wenzhou counties, who do a thriving business in garment and footwear. The Zhejiang Chinese are notoriously frugal and hardworking but also extremely good at pooling financial resources. Some attribute the skyrocketing real estate prices in Shanghai to aggressive speculation by Wenzhou businessmen. So powerful is Wenzhou financial muscle that the county has been dubbed the financial capital of China.

Table 1: Top 20 Overseas Chinese Populations

Country	2005 Population	Rank
Indonesia	7,566,200	1
Thailand	7,053,240	2
Malaysia	6,187,400	3
United States	3,376,031	4
Singapore	2,684,900	5
Canada	1,612,173	6
Peru	1,300,000	7
Vietnam	1,263,570	8
Philippines	1,146,250	9
Myanmar	1,101,314	10
Russia	998,000	11
Australia	614,694	12
Japan	519,561	13
Cambodia	343,855	14
United Kingdom	296,623	15
France	230,515	16
India	189,470	17
Laos	185,765	18
Brazil	151,649	19
Netherlands	144,928	20

Source: *Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission, ROC, 2005.*

In recent years Chinese have begun flocking to Africa too. The official Chinese Xinhua news agency estimates 750,000 Chinese working for extended periods in Africa, reflecting rapidly growing trade between Africa and China totaling \$55 billion in 2006 compared to a mere \$10 million a generation ago.

The degree of assimilation by the immigrants varies from country to country. The first-generation immigrants

Migration is not new:

Christianity spread by migration

in the early centuries.

tend to stay among themselves but the local born children are highly acculturated, often speak no Chinese and identify far less with Chinese culture than their parents.

The Chinese are probably better integrated in Thailand than in any other country. They speak Thai, bear Thai names and take on Thai culture so completely that they are indistinguishable from the Thais. Unlike Chinese in other parts of the world, the Chinese in Thailand no longer think of themselves as Chinese. As in most of Southeast Asia they form the most dynamic sector of the economy and control a disproportionate share of the wealth.

In Indonesia the Chinese represent less than two percent of the population but control over seventy percent of the market capitalization on the Jakarta stock exchange. In North America they happily embrace the American way of life and many build successful careers in the technology sector. Born in Taiwan and raised in California, Jerry Yang, co-founder of Yahoo, is a classic Chinese American success story. In schools and colleges Chinese are regular top achievers and well represented in elite universities like Harvard and Stanford particularly in science, engineering and business studies.

In Europe, however, their success is more muted and this could be due to the fact that the brightest eventually make their way to greener pastures across the Atlantic. Europe's tax regime and restrictive business laws dampen entrepreneurship and the migrants' children often choose to study in America and build their careers there. But wherever they settle, there is always a Christian witness among them. The Chinese from mainland China are especially open to the gospel and quick to accept the Christian faith. Many become devout believers eager to serve and

witness, and constitute one of the fastest growing churches in North America.

Migrant churches are radically changing the shape of Christianity and missions, and we shall now turn to look at them.

Migrant Churches

Because of globalization and the explosion in travel today, international migration has skyrocketed. According to the 'International Migration Report 2002' published by the United Nations Population Division, over 175 million migrants live in countries other than those of their birth. International migration has doubled since 1975 and in the more developed countries nearly one in ten persons is a migrant.

International migration helps to shore up the sagging population growth in developed countries and maintain a healthy ratio between the aging and the working population. Birth rates in Europe, Japan and North America have dropped below the level needed to maintain their population, and to maintain the critical population balance, Europe needs 20.3 million migrants and the United States 14.3 million.

Economic migrants make up 91 percent of global migration, and the largest diaspora is of the Chinese, with an estimated 55 million living outside China, followed by 22 million Indians. Migrants bring along many resources to their new countries, not the least of which is their religious beliefs.

This phenomenon is not new—Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Joshua were all migrants and Christianity spread by migration in the early centuries. During the Thirty Years War, Catholic, Reformed and Anabaptist communities fleeing persecution formed migrant churches across Europe. Anabaptist groups such as the Mennonites and the Amish migrated to North America from Germany and the Ukraine and set themselves apart by confession and race.

Migrant churches offer cultural familiarity, practical help and friendship, and have become a familiar sight in almost all countries where migrants settle. Today Filipino workers congregating in Catholic churches on Sundays are a common sight in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. Migrant churches have sprung up among Bangladeshi, Nepali, Indonesian, Burmese and Vietnamese workers in Southeast Asia too. Many Iranian Shiite asylum seekers become Christians while waiting in transit in Turkey and there are many thriving Iranian churches in Vancouver and the San Francisco Bay Area. Latino migrants in southern and western United States have given rise to many large Spanish-speaking congregations.

Global migration has presented the church with an unprecedented opportunity to reach people from difficult access countries. The migrants need help and are grateful when someone comes to their aid. Reaching out to the migrants who often face corruption, exploitation, crime and injustice is an act of worship. 'I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Matt 25:36) Christians

It is a church of, by, and for the Chinese, with no interaction with other communities.

serve Christ and fulfill his mission by loving their neighbors. For what good is pious preaching and Bible study if we have no compassion? 'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.' (1 Cor 13:1)

Chinese Churches in Europe

There are Chinese churches in virtually every country in Europe. London alone has 28 Chinese churches with another 78 throughout the rest of the UK, 16 in Belgium, 24 in France (mostly in Paris), 25 in Germany, 21 in Holland, 33 in Italy, 28 in Spain, 5 in Sweden, 7 in Switzerland. The earliest were started in the 1950s in the UK by Pastor Stephen Wang, the founder of the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM). He saw the need to reach out to Chinese restaurant workers from Hong Kong. Up until the 1980s Chinese students to the UK came mainly from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong and so Cantonese and English were spoken in those congregations. A large part of the congregation consisted of students which meant a constant turnover as the students left after their studies. The ministry to the restaurant workers proved very demanding because they worked long hours and were available only during a break in the late afternoon or late evening after the restaurant closes. Today the congregations still consist mostly of students, and because many do not speak Chinese, a separate English language service is necessary while the main service is conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese.

Since the 1980s there have been increasing numbers of students from China. But the churches are wholly Chinese

and sport exclusive names like the 'Aberdeen Chinese Christian Church' or the 'Manchester Chinese Christian Church' and so on. Rarely do they invite Europeans; they assume Europeans prefer to attend European churches. It is a church of the Chinese, by the Chinese, for the Chinese with no apparent mandate to interact with other communities.

It does not occur to the pastor that some Europeans may like his preaching or enjoy Asian-style Christian fellowship. The Asian attitude toward Europeans is ambivalent. On the one hand, they admire European culture and civilization but on the other hand, they do not always feel comfortable around Europeans. Reaching across culture always takes extra effort but like other ethnic churches the challenge is see themselves not as an ethnic enclave but as a missionary church to the Europeans. They need to realize that God brought them to Europe not for the sake of comfort but for 'the saving of many lives' (Gen 50:20).

Secular Europe

One of the clearest signs of Europe's secularism is the fact that the European Constitution makes no reference to Europe's Christian roots. Christianity in Europe has been in decline since the Enlightenment when thinkers such as Descartes, Hume and Locke put reason above faith and undermined the authority of God and Church.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment were optimists who believed in the inherent goodness of man and in the doctrine of inevitable progress which was boosted by Darwin's theory of evolution. Although the Enlightenment brought many benefits to mankind, it introduced the idea that this world is all that matters and that as religion cannot be empirically proven, it can safely be ignored. The ensuing scientific and industrial revolution led to urbanization which broke down family ties, uprooted traditional values and alienated people from the rhythm of country life which made belief in God natural.

The Church's frequent indifference to the cause of freedom and justice further undermined her credibility. During the Second World War the Church in Germany seemed to be on the side of the Nazis and consistently allied itself with the ruthless oligarchies in Latin America where millions live in poverty and despair. David Barrett calculated an average of 53,000 people leave the church permanently each week in North America and Europe.

In 1943 Godin and Daniel shocked the Catholic world with their book *France: pays de mission* which argued France had once again become a pagan country and a mission field. Samuel Escobar declares 'Spain has moved from

secularism to paganism.' The Czech Republic, home of the 15th century martyr Jan Hus, is today one of Europe's most secular states.

There are, of course, parts of Europe where the Church is still influential. In Poland the Catholic Church which stood as symbol of resistance against the communist regime during the Soviet era enjoys wide support. Over ninety percent of Poles profess the Catholic faith and

Chinese churches have so far done little in cross-cultural missions, but that is beginning to change.

church attendance is high judging from the crowds streaming into churches on Sundays. With the acute shortage of clergymen in parishes around the world, priests have become one of Poland's leading exports.

The Eastern Orthodox Church too is reasserting itself after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russian President Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer, openly professes the Orthodox faith and even made a pilgrimage to the monastic community on Mount Athos, one of Orthodox Christianity's holiest sites. Although his motives may be more political than religious, Putin's stance represents an important official endorsement of Christianity after decades of communist repression.

But this raises the crucial question of how Asian missionaries should relate to Catholic and Orthodox Christians.

Chinese Missionary Posture

Chinese churches have so far done little in cross-cultural missions. Chinese missions by and large consist of missions to Chinese. Missionaries from Taiwan go to Thailand not to reach the Thais but the Chinese minorities there. For the Chinese missions means reaching the Chinese in other parts of the world. Chinese pastors rarely urge their congregation to reach out to other nationalities although that is beginning to change.

For centuries the Chinese have held to an ethnocentric worldview. China's very name *zhongguo* or 'Central Kingdom' spells ethnocentrism and throughout her long history she showed no interest in the lands beyond her borders. Whereas the Greeks and Romans pursued impe-

rialist expansion (Alexander's armies marched as far as India), the Chinese stayed at home. Chinese civilization was the most advanced and prosperous and the sheer size of the kingdom meant her rulers had no compelling reason to conquer or colonize. Vassal states paid tribute to China in return for prestige and protection but they were never ruled by China. Western dominance in the last two centuries dented China's self-confidence but did not cure her of ethnocentrism.

The Chinese are also notoriously materialistic with a natural propensity toward wealth creation. Prosperity is the ultimate measure of success and during the Lunar New Year festival they wish each other prosperity. One of their favorite gods is the Prosperity God (Mammon) dressed in the robes of a Tang dynasty mandarin.

They display a utilitarian bias and, unlike Europeans, see no value in conquering Mount Everest or the South Pole. Utilitarianism, materialism and ethnocentrism combine to produce a weak sense of charity and the philanthropic ideals of a Bill Gates or Warren Buffet are unheard of. Preferring to pass their estate to their children, the Chinese give far less to international causes than Americans or British. They value education and give generously to schools but with few exceptions they donate mostly to Chinese schools or schools where there are significant numbers of Chinese students (such as the Chan Center for Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia or the Lee Seng Tee Library at Cambridge University). Charity begins at home and stops there. Caritas or 'love' compels us to show compassion to our neighbor but unless the Chinese understand love in a wider context, Chinese cross-cultural missions will remain anemic.

The gospel, however, is beginning to make a difference and the house churches have a vision to send 100,000 missionaries to the Islamic countries of Central Asia and the Middle East. This is a risky enterprise but the Chinese are prepared to lay down their lives.

Meanwhile the global balance of power is shifting rapidly and a new world order is emerging with profound implications for missions. China is a densely populated country and many parts extremely poor. The World Bank puts the number of poor (those living on less than \$1 dollar a day) in China at 300 million. But her economy is booming and the country's foreign reserves grew from a mere \$2.3 billion in 1977 to a whopping \$1.4 trillion in 2007. China's foreign reserves now rank number one overtaking mighty Japan's \$973 billion at the end of 2007.

Flush with cash, the Chinese government is buying into major Western banks and gaining strategic influence in the global financial system. Chinese prestige and self-confidence is growing. On his first visit to China,

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown appealed to boost Anglo-Chinese trade by 50% by 2010 and for Britain to become the number one destination for Chinese investments. Trade between the two countries totaled \$40 billion in 2007, and Britain no longer sees herself as the bridge between Europe and the US but is positioning to become a global hub linking Europe with India and China.

In Eastern Europe, the Chinese, still seen as suppliers

A dedicated mission will be needed to promote and support missionary endeavor in Europe.

of cheap merchandise in open air markets, are starting to open shops and hiring local European employees. These momentous changes will benefit Chinese missions but who will mobilize workers for Europe and what form will the mission take?

Promoting and Preparing

First of all there is widespread ignorance in Asia about the condition of the Church and society in Europe. Many know nothing of the empty churches, rampant divorce, broken families, orphans, domestic violence, substance abuse, prostitution and slavery there.

Europeans brought Christianity to the rest of the world and to most Asians Europe is the heartland of Christianity. When they think of Europe, magnificent cities and beautiful landscape dotted with churches and cathedrals come to mind. The notion of sending missionaries there is absurd and a mission trip to Europe sounds like a pretext for a holiday. With desperate needs all over the majority world a proposal for European missions is usually greeted with deep skepticism. Most Asian churches find it hard to justify funds for Europe when they consider what those funds can do in Cambodia, the Philippines or the Sudan preferring instead to 'leave Europe to the Americans.'

But that kind of arithmetic is not from the Spirit. To counter that sort of thinking and dispel the myths about European Christianity, a dedicated mission will be needed to promote and support missionary endeavor in Europe. Already some Asian churches, seeing they can no longer ignore Europe, are beginning to make forays into Russia, the Ukraine and parts of Eastern Europe.

But the call is to go to the Europeans and the Chinese must resist spending all their time with other Chinese when they arrive. They should encourage Chinese churches in Europe to shed their ethnic exclusivity and adopt a cross-cultural posture. The movement will see Asians from the Orient and the diaspora doing YWAM-style street evangelism, soup kitchens, outreach to prostitutes and drug addicts, and coffee house ministries to students. It will be an ecumenical movement crossing traditional European confessional lines with the missionaries cultivating ties to the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox.

Untainted by the crusades, persecution of Jews, European Wars of Religion, Spanish Inquisition or colonialism, the Chinese have a historic opportunity to present the gospel with a fresh face. The mission will organize in mixed teams of Asians, Europeans and others and steer away from the imperialist model where Westerners lead and others follow. Typically Westerners hold the key positions and pay lip service to the ideal of learning from one another. The mission must reflect the racial and social equality of God's kingdom. Partnership means a sharing of power and there must be healthy checks and balances against subtle nationalist and racist tendencies.

Language learning is imperative and long-term workers will spend a considerable part of their time in language school. In the first year or two it is the top priority; everything else including ministry takes a back seat. The missionary's goal is to integrate himself into local community and this means reading current affairs and popular culture too. Admittedly European grammar and phonetics pose a stiff challenge to Chinese speakers, and what takes an Indian learner six months to master, may take a Chinese up to two years. But if European missionaries study Chinese, surely Chinese missionaries can make the same commitment to mastering Europe's languages. Even Koreans who face greater difficulty with European languages do not shrink from the challenge. Language is the doorway to a deeper understanding of a nation's culture, history and worldview, and ultimately the Chinese must engage Europeans the way Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits engaged the Chinese.

The missionary curriculum must include personal development, interpersonal skills and organizational behavior. Team members should practice an ethos of looking out for one another and guard against self-reliance, competition and jealousy. Hierarchy has deep roots in Chinese culture and Chinese can be fiercely competitive, title conscious and humble in a wrong way. Missionaries must know the difference between humility of form and humility of spirit. Discord and discouragement are the enemy's weapons of choice, and spiritual warfare on the field can

be intense.

Training must address realities such as sexual temptation and team conflict, and how to help team members recover. Chinese culture is shame-based, and whereas a Westerner can look at failure as a positive learning experience, the Chinese is expected to feel shame and loss of self-worth.

Furthermore, the Chinese performance bias can eas-

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ily lead to exhaustion. The Chinese need to learn to resist busy-ness and leaders especially should be careful not to become so active they have no time for team members who may feel neglected or left to sort out problems on their own. Most attrition takes place within the first year as the newcomers struggle to cope with culture shock, homesickness, team conflict, expectation gap and disenchantment but those who make it through the first year will usually stay on for the long haul. Team leaders with a pastoral heart make a huge difference in helping newcomers adjust. Vigilant prayer is important but member care through trained counselors must be available to members and their families too.

To avert misunderstanding, the Chinese will need to learn European norms from the earliest stages of training and acculturation. Europeans value personal grooming more than Chinese. Russians wear shoes when they go out but the Chinese are quite happy going around in flip-flops. Chinese have a sophisticated culinary culture but surprisingly few table rules. Europeans are taught not to speak with a full mouth or to shut their mouth when chewing, but not the Chinese. For Europeans it is rude to slurp and burp or to rest the elbows on the table, but not the Chinese. Europeans look someone in the eye when talking but many Asians avoid eye contact especially when speaking to a senior person. Europeans are comfortable with differences of opinion but the Chinese behave deferentially toward those of superior rank and avoid making someone lose face through open contradiction.

The way the Chinese are perceived varies from country to country. Many still believe white people are biologically and culturally superior and have proven so throughout

history. In Russia and the Ukraine, blacks and Asians suffer spontaneous violence while the police turn a blind eye. In the UK colonial hubris lingers on despite growing multiculturalism. Tribalism is a universal problem but it is worth remembering that the early Christians took the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the world despite prejudices and persecution. The church in China has been baptized by fire too and will probably not be deterred by racism.

As 'outsiders' the Chinese will enjoy one advantage: Europeans do not expect Chinese to be Christians and are surprised when they meet one. Having themselves rejected the faith they wonder why Chinese take it up. This gives the Chinese opportunity to explain the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15) and prompt Europeans to reconsider their choices. While they may reject the witness of another European, they will often listen to the testimony of an outsider.

Travel and living expenses are high in Europe. A return air ticket from Singapore to London in 2008 costs €1,000 and the cost of living in Western Europe is five to six times higher than Malaysia. European tax and social security charges usually add an extra 100 percent on top of actual cost of living. If it costs €1,000 a month to live in France, the missionary must raise €2,000. Chinese churches balk at spending up to ten times more to send a missionary to Europe compared to what they pay their senior pastor. They often equate poverty with spirituality. Low wages, they believe, are the best test of motives; they reason that a pastor who works for a minimal salary proves he is not there for the money. Such thinking must change before the Chinese are ready to send missionaries to Europe. Eastern Europe, however, is less expensive and probably the best place to start an Asian mission. It costs less to live in Eastern Europe than in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea or Japan, and prices in Poland are about the same as Malaysia and even lower in southeastern Europe and most parts of Russia.

Another hurdle for Asians concerns their children's schooling. The Chinese place a premium on education and anxiety about the children's schooling must be addressed before they are willing to go. Except in the UK, many Chinese pastors hesitate to put their children in European schools. They fear their children may not fit back in Asia—a child schooled in Italian, Hungarian or Polish will have no school to attend when he returns home. Many European countries offer excellent education that are at the same time less stressful than schools in many parts of East Asia. Sending the children to local schools has clear advantages but is possible only if the child starts early, preferably no later than kindergarten or first grade as older children will

find it hard to catch up.

Even if the missionary wants to put his child in a local school, his wife may not agree. Home schooling is one solution but it is not yet popular among Asians, many of whom do not understand how it works. Western missions build MK ('missionary kid') schools to provide Western-style education to missionary children, such as the *Dalat International Academy* in Malaysia and the *Black Forest Acad-*

...bring them to a personal relationship with God without insisting they leave their church...

emy in Germany, both of which offer an American style school curriculum.

But fees in these schools which receive no government aid and are staffed by Western teachers can be as high as those in private schools in America, and many Asian missionaries can simply not afford to send their children to those schools. Furthermore, MK schools are boarding schools with their pros and cons. They school the children and free the missionaries to do their work but it also means the children are separated for long periods from their parents often leading to depression and other issues, and some have argued that sending children away is a denial of a creational mandate.

MK schools are not the perfect solution but they are a helpful option, and a school that fits the Asian budget will go a long way to helping Asians come to Europe. But where would be a good place for a school? Poland is a beautiful country where Asians are well received. It was one of the most tolerant countries in medieval Europe, and while other countries persecuted the Jews, Poland welcomed them and became home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant Jewish communities. Jews lived in Poland since the 10th century and before the Holocaust, Poland was the center of European Jewry with a thriving community of 3.5 million. Like Asians, Poles are more relational and a Sunday lunch with a Polish family can carry on till dinner time. Living costs in Poland are cheaper than Singapore, Hong Kong or Taiwan, and a school in Poland staffed by Asians and Poles would cost only a fraction of American MK schools. Poland's central location makes it an ideal choice for a missionary hub, and therefore for an MK school too. Poland joined the European Union in 2004

and in December 2007 became part of the Schengen Zone which allows passport-free travel within the zone.

How Shall We Reach Them

There is perhaps no better time to reach Europe. The Enlightenment ideas that have dominated Western thinking for two centuries have been fully discredited and people are beginning to realize that materialism just does not work. Catastrophic climate change, the current crisis sweeping the global financial system and the widening rift between the rich and the poor are causing many to rethink their presuppositions. Economic growth and prosperity have not brought happiness and there is now a spiritual hunger in Europe where people are looking for answers.

Europe stands at the threshold of a historic paradigm shift and missionaries must be ready to present the truth of the gospel. Michael Green and Alistair McGrath stress the importance of starting where people are. Missionaries must understand why people are not Christians and learn to build bridges. The average European today is a post-modernist who picks and chooses ideas from sources as diverse as Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age and capitalism to build his own customized worldview.

But even more important than understanding contemporary culture is to do what Jesus did. The biggest church in Europe today is one in the Ukraine started by a young Nigerian pastor called Sunday Adelaja. Pastor Sunday started his ministry with seven alcoholics and drug addicts in an apartment in Kiev in 1994. It now boasts 25,000 members in Kiev alone including the mayor, Leonid Chernovetsky. The church reaches out to the homeless, drug addicts and prostitutes and operates a soup kitchen feeding one to two thousand people a day. It runs homes for abandoned children and over 2,000 have been restored to their families. It claims over one million conversions in the first eight years, and planted over 600 churches in 45 countries. Pastor Sunday who grew up in poverty in Africa now plays an influential role in the social and political life of the Ukraine. His achievement is remarkable because he is black but over ninety percent of his congregation is white in a country where colored people are despised. In 2007 he was invited to open the US Senate in prayer and to speak at the United Nations. Chinese missionaries must identify right from the start with the poor and the oppressed, the sick and the marginalized and build churches that exist for the sake of missions.

But evangelism in post-Christendom Europe requires a different approach. The conventional church planting model is neither effective nor appropriate for Europe.

David Bjork, longtime missionary to France, notes that the history of American missions to Catholic France has been marked more by struggle than success. He attributes the slow progress to the position the missionaries take toward the Roman Catholic Church. The French assume all non-Catholic groups to be cults and to try to 'convert' them and make them join the Protestant church is counterproductive.

China's most important impact on the world could be spiritual.

The better approach is to bring them to a personal relationship with God without insisting they leave their church. David Bjork not only allows his French disciples to attend mass but he actively models and promotes participation. One should not forget that hopeful changes are taking place in the Catholic Church and while objectionable doctrines remain, one need not assume that all Catholics subscribe to every Catholic doctrine. Coming as servants, the missionaries must be willing to 'wash feet' and if necessary serve the state churches rather than plant new churches.

The goal is to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded (Mat 28:19). The church is the visible expression of God's kingdom but it should be understood first of all as the wider community of faith rather than competing denominational clubs. Perhaps the best thing the Chinese can give to Europe is their zeal for Christ. They bear witness to the miracles they experience in Asia and confront Europeans with a worldview that contrasts against Europe's humanistic rationalism. They can demonstrate God's power and help Europeans to marvel once again at God's glory. With their house church model, they could transform European Christianity into a deeper, wider and less institutional spirituality.

'Back to Jerusalem' missionaries with experience from the Middle East could reach out to the Islamic communities in Europe too. Many Moslems flee the poverty in their homeland and harbor deep resentment against the West. Islam is becoming increasingly radical but an Asian face with a servant heart may stand a better chance of showing

Moslems the Father they have never known.

Meanwhile growing interest in the Chinese language will open many doors. Because of China's ascendance, the ability to speak Chinese is increasingly seen as a plus by corporate recruiters, and teaching Chinese may soon become a multi-billion dollar global industry. According to the China Scholarship Council, the number of foreign students studying in China went from 11,000 in 1991 to 160,000 in 2006. To meet the needs of students learning Chinese, China has set up over a hundred Confucius Institutes (the Chinese equivalent of the British Council, the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institute) around the world.

In the US up to 50,000 students are learning Chinese in elementary and secondary schools, and in May 2005 two US senators introduced a bill to spend \$1.3 billion over five years in Chinese language programs in schools and cultural exchange with China. In 2006 the British Council estimated 100 schools in the UK teaching Chinese and the UK government wants every school, college and university to be twinned with a Chinese partner by 2010. In France Chinese is offered in 110 universities and in 50 universities and 150 schools in Germany. Chinese language camps may soon become a popular means to tell school children about Jesus and Chinese missionaries should equip themselves with Chinese language teaching qualification.

Lastly, one of the great delights of the Chinese is their cuisine. As in other oriental cultures, meals play an important role in Chinese social life. The Chinese are very casual about eating and this is reflected in the round shape of the dinner table. If a guest shows up unexpectedly, he is easily accommodated with an extra bowl and pair of chopsticks. The bowl is held in one hand and the chopsticks in the other, and if the table gets overcrowded, some guests simply eat standing. Eating is a popular pastime and many Chinese congregations eat together after Sunday worship. Many Europeans love Chinese food and come gladly when invited. The Trinitarian God is relational and there are few better ways to cultivate friendship than over a bowl of rice. In the missionary quiver, dining is an arrow not to be despised.

Conclusion

China stands at a historic crossroads poised to become an economic superpower rivaling the United States. But while all eyes are fixed on her growing economic and political influence, China's most important impact on the world could be spiritual. Christianity first came to China in the seventh century but the Church in China has grown at a phenomenal rate in the past fifty

years and there are an estimated 70 million to 100 million Christians in China today.

Even more impressive than the speed and scale of church growth is the spirituality and commitment in the face of harsh state persecution. The openness to the gospel among the Chinese is unprecedented, and every day large numbers of Chinese turn to Christ not only in China but in every part of the diaspora. Till now Chinese missions consist largely of Chinese reaching Chinese but that could change very quickly. The ubiquitous Chinese form a natural fifth column for global missions and students and migrants are a huge potential missionary pool.

Since the Enlightenment, the Church in Europe has suffered serious decline and European society today is largely secular. Can Chinese turn Europeans back to Christ? The answer is a hopeful 'yes'. God raised a young, black Nigerian to lead thousands of Ukrainians and Russians to Christ; surely He can use the Chinese too.

Evangelism in post-Christendom Europe requires a different approach for which the Chinese are providentially suited. Firstly, China's Christians bear no denominational stripes. They are free of historical baggage and can embrace Catholic and Orthodox Christians as brothers. They should serve the churches of Europe rather than plant denominational churches. Secondly, the Chinese bring faith and practice honed in the crucible of persecution coupled with personal experience and respect for God's transforming love and power. Raised on a diet of rationalism, Europeans are deeply skeptical about religion but while they resist attempts by their countrymen to introduce the gospel, they may be ready to hear it from Chinese lips. Thirdly, the Chinese must identify with the poor and oppressed and serve the destitute and marginalized. Bible teaching and caring for widows and orphans must go hand in hand. Finally, they must work with the locals in teams where no single culture dominates.

For all this to happen there must be concerted prayer and mobilization. Europe (including Russia) is a culturally diverse continent of 48 countries with a population of 710 million (compared to US population of 303 million), and to create a movement rallying large numbers of Asian men and women to serve Europe in street evangelism, Bible study, soup kitchen, orphanage and campus outreach is a monumental task.

But the good news is the Chinese are already in Europe. The challenge is to mobilize, train and support the missionaries. This is a task too great for any single organization but a pioneer mission to spark interest and start the ball rolling will be necessary. Like a mustard seed, it can become a tree, so that birds of the air can come and perch in its branches.

The movement will require extensive networking, partnering and training and because of her central location, Poland is the ideal place for a strategic mission hub. Living costs there are much lower than Western Europe and the Poles are a tolerant people. Having suffered centuries of abuse by powerful neighbors, they display a refreshing humility and compassion for the weak, and their relationship oriented culture makes them ideal partners for Asians.

Asians already engage in cross-cultural missions in the majority world but the time has come to reach out to Europe too. Looking at what God is doing in China and among the Chinese around the world, one sees a plan unfolding. By God's providence Christianity in China has come of age and the Chinese may be ready to play a role in Europe one would scarcely have expected even a decade ago. God works in wondrous ways destroying the wisdom of the wise and frustrating the intelligence of the intelligent (1 Cor 1:19). What is about to unfold could radically transform Europe. These are exciting times and the Church can expect great things from a great God.

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