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848 Stewart Drive, Suite 200, Sunnyvale, CA 94085

Email: [info@gcciusa.org](mailto:info@gcciusa.org) Website: <http://www.gcciusa.org>

Tel: (408) 636-0030

Fax: (408) 636-0033



# Chinese Second Generation Ministry in North America

-- An interview with Pastor Anthony So --

Written by Wai-Suet Chan, translated by Marian Leung



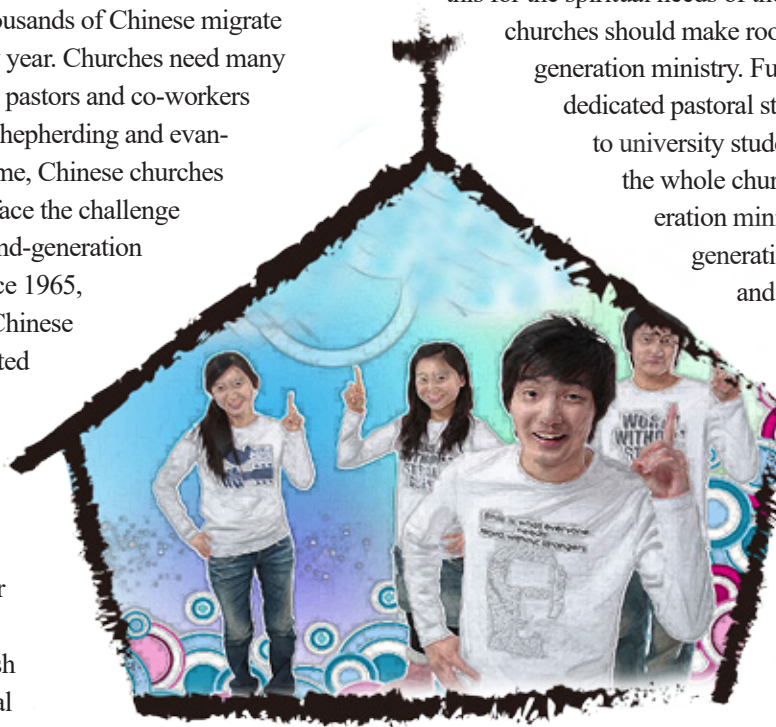
*During the interview with Pastor Anthony So, Associate Professor of Practical Theology and D. Min. Program Director at Logos Evangelical Seminary in El Monte, California, Pastor Anthony pointed out that Chinese immigrants in North America can be divided roughly into three groups: first generation, 1.5 generation (no definite age range), second generation, and third generation. Due to time and space constraints, the following article will only focus on the second generation in Chinese churches.*

Since the 19th century—prompted by livelihood, economic and political factors—a substantial number of Chinese people have dispersed and migrated to North America in search of their “Dream of Gold” (this phenomenon of migration is known as being the result of “push and pull factors”). After 1965, the relaxation of the U.S. immigration policy led to a marked surge in the number of people entering the country as students or immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as Southeast Asia. Many of them came to Christ in Bible study groups at universities and have been attending church ever since, with their children and grandchildren being second- and third-generation Christians. However, the truth is that a vast majority of these second-generation Chinese Americans are actually non-believers waiting to be saved.

The following is what Pastor Anthony has shared on how to minister to these second-generation Chinese Americans:

## Workers Development

First of all, senior pastors must be certain of their call to ministry in North America: not only serving first-generation immigrants but ministering to the second generation as well. For Chinese churches in North America, we thank the Lord that tens of thousands of Chinese migrate to North America every year. Churches need many more Chinese-speaking pastors and co-workers to shoulder the task of shepherding and evangelizing. At the same time, Chinese churches in North America also face the challenge and mission to the second-generation Chinese American. Since 1965, there have been many Chinese educated in U.S., accepted Christ, and then moved on to attend seminary. Today, most of them are pastoring churches, and have become senior pastors. These pastors, who are fluent in English and have a cross-cultural background, are in position to develop new immigrant and second generation ministries as well as to nurture second-generation pastors. Hence, to help the growth of second generation in the church, pastors must heed the call to not minister only to first-generation Chinese but to also train these first-generation Christians to minister to the second generation, so that the faith can be passed down from generation to generation.



## Mentality Transformation

### 1. Determination to Evangelize the Second Generation

First, we have to understand that second generation ministry is in effect mission. The second-generation Chinese, grown up in America, are people of a different culture. Thus, the church must try intentionally to understand them, to sow seeds, and to water before reaping any harvest. The spiritual growth of the second generation is by no means an “Evolutionary Product” but rather the “Revolutionary Product” of second generation ministry. The church should view second generation ministry as the responsibility of the whole church, requiring involvement of the pastors, elders, deacons, and even the congregation; this task should

even be included in the church constitution to make it the theology of ministry of the church. Generally speaking, Chinese churches often plan financially for church building or missions, just like Chinese parents doing for their children’s education. However, not many Chinese churches do this for the spiritual needs of the second generation. Perhaps churches should make room in their budget for second generation ministry. Funds can be used to recruit dedicated pastoral staff specifically ministering to university students and young adults. As the whole church support second generation ministry, recognize the second generation as “unreached people,” and assign seasoned pastors to minister to them, the second generation ministry will certainly develop smoothly. This ministry can then help nurture, shape, and build up second-generation Chinese immigrants, enabling to serve in the church as well as becoming the salt and light in society.

### 2. Determination to Change Church Culture

In order to preserve Chinese culture and pass it on to the next generation, Chinese immigrants in North America are often more conservative than those living in other Chinese communities. Some parents, worried about their children influenced by white American culture or marrying people from other cultures, adopt a “Chinese culture protection” approach in family education. Ken Fong, Senior Pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles, called this the “Fish Pond” style of sub-culture protection. (Fong, 1999). Pastor Ken reckoned that young second-generation Chinese are more receptive to American culture, the so-called “Salty Ocean Water culture.” Born and raised on American soil, educated in American schools, with English as their first language, these young people naturally identify more with American culture. Unlike those of the first generation, they consider themselves Americans. Though with limited understanding of Chinese culture yet growing up in Chinese families, they also think of themselves as Chinese.

Thus, they are torn often between the American mainstream culture and the Confucian immigrant culture. This could lead to identity crisis and feeling of not being accept-

ed even being discriminated by society. In church, first-generation leaders may not be capable to fully understand their aspirations and thinking in areas such as the style of worship, content of outreach programs, financial management, tendency of independent administrative framework, etc. So they feel that they are being treated as children, unimportant and not respected. One young man from a Korean church complained that he and his peers were assigned to worship in a small classroom next to the kitchen, their singing mixed with the smell of *kimchi*. Once, he brought along a non-believer white friend; the friend could not cope with the worship environment and never returned. Most of the second-generation youths have attended church from childhood per parental instructions. After grown up, they would search for their own God. Many young Chinese, upon turning 18, leave home for college and may walk quietly out of the church, a phenomenon described as the “Silent Exodus” by Helen Lee (*Christianity Today*, 1996). While some may find their way back to God, the majority lose their way. In order for them to be built up, they must be allowed to find God in a world of their own culture, language, and style of worship. This is the essence of mission.

## Mission Participation

### 1. Multi-cultural mission

In the perspective of mission, the church must bring blessing to the local people or it fails to fulfill the Great Commission. It would be best if the word “American” is added to the name of Chinese churches as it would show that the church, in fulfilling the Great Commission in the U.S., not only blesses the Chinese but also the local people including second-generation Chinese. Failure to carry out the mandate of making “disciples of all nations” is failure to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The church must build up the second generation to engage in mission. Well-versed in the culture and language, they can accomplish what the first-generation Chinese may not be able to. John Lo is a second-generation Chinese and Lead Pastor of Epicentre Church in Los Angeles. He mobilizes his congregation to spread the gospel among different ethnic groups in the U.S., as well as developing ministry in inland cities, as far away as places in Africa, planting indigenous churches.

### 2. Tent-making/Bi-vocational Mission

Post-modern age missions often take the form of either tent-making or bi-vocational ministry. Second-generation Chinese are people of a different culture, who can share the

gospel in their workplace or in the business world as tent-making missionaries. They are better suited than the first generation for missions. How can we not nurture the second generation? A proprietor of a noodle factory in L.A., in his 60s and a second-generation Chinese, has been devoted to sharing the gospel in China for almost 15 years. With his business background and a MBA degree, he teaches business English and English as a foreign language at universities in China, getting in touch with young people and setting up Bible study groups. He said he would do his best to teach his students and would go wherever his services are needed. This is an example of second-generation Chinese engaging in missions and their great potential.

### 3. Internet Evangelism

There are immense popularity and requirement of the internet, and English is generally used, even on networks in China. While Chinese churches in the U.S. have embarked on online evangelism, most of websites are in Chinese. Since second-generation Chinese not only are familiar with Western culture also proficient in using the internet, why not train them to involve in online evangelism; failing to do so, we lose a great opportunity to serve God’s purpose in our own generation (Acts 13:36). The church must equip second-generation followers of Christ to become an elite Christian army of soldiers, heeding Paul’s teaching to the Ephesian church: “*to equip God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*” (Ephesians 4:12) The church is not for retaining the second generation but to build them up to seek lost souls.

## Mentoring Partnership

### 1. First generation as mentors

Young people of the post-modern age like seeing with their own eyes, touching with their own hands, participating personally, and experiencing “reality” before believing and accepting “the truth.” The role of the mentor is not only the leader but also navigator molding life with life, with more inspiration and less instruction. To retain the second generation, Chinese churches must seek out some suitable uncles and aunts from the first generation to serve as model navigators for the second generation, a la godfathers/ godmothers at infant baptism in Catholic Church. Some Christian churches also assign mature believers to walk with new believers. Young second-generation Chinese choose to return to their mother church after leaving for or graduated from college mainly because there are people they respect. In view of this, certain spiritually mature Christians should



act as guides for young people. With this practice in place, the chance of second-generation youth staying in the church would increase. By having a mentor, the second generation would get to know more about the culture of the first generation and consequently learn about their own roots as well. This is the best antidote for identity crisis.

## **2. Navigators out of the Ranks of Second Generation**

Ministering to the second generation should not be solely the responsibility of senior pastors. The role of senior pastor should be flexible. He can be guide pastor like a point guard of a basketball team, sometimes making shots and sometimes dealing off assists. Senior pastor sometimes walks ahead of the youths leading the way but trails behind at other times to learn from them; acknowledging his unfamiliarity with the culture of the second generation; and at times assists other able co-workers to take the lead. Through it all, senior pastors should aim to nurture the second generation towards assuming pastoral role, and pass the baton at the appropriate time, allowing them to guide the first generation into new territory. During a guided tour of China, the local guide takes over from the tour leader at each city. Likewise, when it comes to outreach ministry in the local community, even though first-generation pastors are proficient in English, they may not be as knowledgeable about the culture as second-generation pastors.

The second generation will stay on if they have a sense of belonging and feel they can contribute to the ministry. With a congregation embracing first and second generations, the church can bear witness to their multiple cultures to the Chinese community and the local community at large, attracting more newcomers. It is hoped that the first and second generations in the church can learn from one other and follow the example of Christ together. (1 Corinthians 11:1).

## **Management**

### **1. Language ability**

If the church switches to using English or be bi-lingual in meetings, it will attract more second-generation believers. In organizing church activities, attention should be paid to the interests and needs of the second generation, and pastoral staff and elders should have basic English communication skills. When Pastor Anthony first started working in second generation ministry in 1979, he was told that his English was inadequate. He humbly accepted their comments, and his English has improved steadily since.

## **2. Personnel Change**

Whenever there is a change of pastors, elders, or deacons in the church, it might affect decisions concerning certain aspects of English ministry. Efforts must be made to pass along to everyone involved in the change the aims, programs, plans, understandings, analyses, etc of the English ministry that have been developed over time, lest this important vision and mission could be gradually forgotten.

## **3. Church planting plan**

The church planting ministry requires long periods of prayers and preparation. Usually the church will send a few families to undertake this ministry, and the children of these families would, of course, follow. Once there, they have to adapt to a new environment and continue their walk in faith with often limited support/resources. Such changes often have a negative impact on the spiritual life of the young second generation. If second-generation ministry is included in church planting plans, this negative impact can be avoided.

## **4. Family ministry**

Where family ministry is concerned, efforts have to be made to teach parents to set godly examples in their speech and behavior. Parents should not just worry about their children's education but should see the home as a place for nurturing and firming the faith of their children, equipping them while they are still young and building up their faith step by step. In order to pass on the Christian faith, discipleship is of prime importance, with the first generation training the second generation. Senior pastors should help parents to become disciple-makers disciplining their children while they are young not waiting until their preteen year. Just like how Chinese families involve their children from birth with extended family member gatherings at festivals, the churches should maintain vibrant and strong children ministry and youth ministry.

## **Conclusion**

Pastor Anthony pointed out that many North American Chinese churches have already begun to intentionally nurture the faith of the second generation. This is a good beginning. However, Chinese churches in North America must undergo certain degree of changes in order to truly evolve into North American Chinese churches—ones that intentionally shepherd the Lord's flock with one heart, including first-generation and second-generation Christians as well as their nonbeliever family members and friends.

*(The original Chinese article was published in June, 2016 GCB)*

# Lost Youth is Lost Opportunity

Joe Chan

The current trend in North America is that youths who grew up in ethnic churches are deciding to call it quits. Some have left ethnic Chinese churches to attend multicultural churches. Others have sadly left the faith all together. There are many reasons for these departures. A recent study titled “To Whom Shall We Go?” led by Dr. Enoch Wong and his team, is an effort to collect the reasons why Canadian-born Chinese are leaving the ethnic Chinese churches in Canada. While the study is not yet complete, some common trends cited in the preliminary results were the lack of leadership in reaching the second generation, a disjointed sense of community and belonging that builds identities, and cultural taboos like sexual identities.<sup>1</sup> This loss of youth is not a problem exclusive to Canadian churches.

For instance, in some Anglican churches in the U.K., the attendance of youth has steadily declined as youths embrace the postmodern culture. Many of the great edifices once filled with vibrant and youthful worship have become shadows of their former glory. Sunday worship services in these church buildings are often half-filled with aging congregations who wonder what the future holds beyond themselves. Many dwell on the past and reminisce about former glory instead of preparing for succession. Sadly, this is what happens to churches that lack a focus when it comes to discipling youths. Churches often recognize this need for discipleship but may not carry it out in a timely manner, leading to an aging leadership without succession. By grace, some churches have observed these trends with better planning, and there has been some renewal in the U.K. However, it is a difficult rebuild and reboot when practically a whole generation has gone astray. The absence of youths in churches has a much wider effect than just church attendance. One of those effects is a slowdown of God’s mission to reach the lost of the world.

What is the Christian community doing to reach the world for Christ? How close are we to fulfilling the Great Commission? According to the Joshua Project, there are 16,319 people groups in the world representing



approximately 7.3 billion people.<sup>2</sup> These people groups are the “nations” that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:14 when He said, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” As stated on the Joshua Project website (as of January 2016), approximately 42.7% of the total population is considered “reached”—meaning self-supporting indigenous churches have been established there—leaving 6,571 people groups “unreached,” they represent 40.3% of the total population, or over 3 billion people! Most of the unreached falls within the 10/40 window, an area of the eastern hemisphere that is between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. This window lies predominantly over North Africa, the Middle East, and most of Asia. There is clearly a tremendous amount of mission work yet to be done.

There are serious repercussions that will affect the fulfilling the Great Commission if the church fails to reach, disciple, and develop our youths today. The local churches’ lack of effort to help youths build a future will hurt the efforts of making Christ known in the world. The hurts and problems of local churches will hinder the spread of the Gospel because the advance of missions and churches are codependent. Let me suggest five positive effects that a greater body of youths in the church will have on the mission field.



## 1. An increase in the number of youths represents an increase in the number of workers

Without youths, there is no future for local churches or the mission field because there will simply be less workers. When youths are discipled well, they are the greatest assets to local churches. If they are followers of Jesus Christ, they will become senders, goers, or both with regards to God's mission. Jesus says in Matthew 9:37, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*" There is a tremendous need to send workers into the mission field to share the Good News. As previously discussed, some of the U.K. Anglican churches experienced a decline because of their lack of youth. A decreasing church population means the number of future workers—the "goers" who are willing to risk it all to "harvest" for God—will decrease. The amount of senders will also naturally decrease when the seeds of God's mission and His vision for the lost are not imparted to congregants at an early age.

Generally speaking, youths do not possess great resources as most have no means of earning a living while in school. But they will not always remain at that life stage; they will grow and, in time, become productive adults capable of earning a living. If youths are not discipled well, they will grow up spending hard-earned resources predominantly on themselves or on things unrelated to God's mission work. Sending goers requires incredible amounts of financial resources and prayer. Without future senders, there will be less goers. Local

churches must invest resources today—be it money, time, or manpower—to disciple the next generation in order to have a future. An increase in the body of youths in local churches will represent an increase in goers and senders to the mission field.

## 2. An increase in the number of youths represents the possibility of healthy succession

Aging and death are as inevitable as their timing is unpredictable. However, God's mission must continue beyond the certainty of death in each generation. Without youths, who will take on the mantle of leadership and continue His ministry? It might take missionaries willing to dedicate their whole lives to building relationships with unreached people groups in order to open up opportunities to speak about Christ. How many generations of missionaries will it take to break the soil of hardened hearts, plant gospel seeds, and disciple new believers that will build self-supporting indigenous churches? This kind of field work can take decades, even centuries, and one lifetime is not enough!

At times, many of our youth appear rebellious, immature, and downright selfish. We say, "How can they amount to anything?" Some of them may continue that way for a very long time. However, what if we focused on who they could potentially be in the future rather than just on who they are today? I am so thankful for the pastor and counselors that never gave up on me; I was a rebellious child with lots of issues while growing up. I cannot believe how much God has changed me over the years to become a pastor today. Invest in those youths, even if they do not look like future workers today. Perhaps one of your most rebellious youths will become a great missionary and pastor. God can change hearts, like how He changed Saul who became the apostle Paul. While we still have the energy and strength, let us devote time to play the roles of mentors, coaches, and counselors, so that these youths can grow in maturity and continue the Lord's work.

## 3. An increase in the number of youths represents a greater number of short-term mission opportunities

Short-term mission trips serve several purposes beyond reaching a target group for a short period of time. The efforts put into short-term missions stimulate the vision for greater global missions and provide hands-on, direct contact within cross-cultural settings. This process helps create partnerships between the senders and goers, as senders better understand how to support goers and the nature of the work being performed in the field.



Also, short-term mission trips provide opportunities for goers to experience God in their personal life. It can open doors for the Holy Spirit to create deeper spiritual roots within them and renew their spiritual walk. Young people may come back after short-term mission trips with a renewed desire to serve in their home churches. Those valuable experiences can catalyze them into becoming senders and advocates for missions themselves.

As such, churches that emphasize the importance of youth ministry will often incorporate missions as part of the discipleship curriculum. Short-term missions are an opportunity to nurture youths as well as share God's vision for the lost. Local churches and missionaries enter into vibrant partnerships as senders and goers that share the gospel with the unreached. Without a focus on nurturing youths through the experience of short-term missions, there will be a loss of opportunities for partnerships which will lead to a diminished pace in spreading the Gospel.

#### **4. An increase in the number of youths represents an increase of passion for God's mission in local churches**

Young people are full of energy, vigor, and passion. Being around them is exciting, and it makes my heart glad. I was on a short-term mission trip with a twelve-year-old boy who was on fire for God. We had a time of sharing to unpack our experiences on that trip. The young boy teared up as he described his sadness at seeing other people walk by the poor and needy without giving any thought or showing care. Those tears were genuine tears of compassion for the lost and hurting. As a pastor, I was embarrassed to have not noticed and not felt what he took note of. Ever since his sharing, I have made an effort to pay closer attention to those around me who are in need.

I don't know what happened to that young boy since we lost touch after that trip. Perhaps he became a pastor, a missionary, or a faithful supporter of his church. From time to time, I still pray for him to continue growing in his passion for God. He was so excited and passionate during that trip. God used the young boy's passion to spark passion in me. Many times I believe adults miss learning opportunities by not interacting with the youth just because they are younger and seem less mature. As we grow older, we sometimes face and must accept losses and defeats; as such, our hearts can grow smaller, harder, and colder. We lose the drive to dream big dreams for God. Perhaps we need a dose of youthful energy and passion to kick-start the inner passion that is buried within us again.

#### **5. An increase in the number of youths can spark creative strategies to fulfill God's mission**

Young people are more likely to think outside-the-box than their older counterparts who may be set in their ways. Remember, there are 6,571 unreached people groups representing slightly over 3 billion unreached people in the world. What makes this especially challenging is that people groups move and change all the time. Therefore, strategies also need to evolve as traditional methods and mindsets may no longer be viable.

Young people possesses greater creativity without the hindrance of past baggage. We have a saying in English: "It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks." It is more difficult to learn new things as we settle into routines. Routines can lead to being comfortable with the present and an aversion against trying something different. Many people will only try something new when they realize that the situation or matter is completely broken and there is nothing else to lose. Often at this stage, the situation or matter cannot be salvaged, and it is too late. Our youths possesses the potential and creativity necessary to reach the lost in an ever-evolving world. We need their creativity to develop strategies to reach those 3 billion people efficiently and effectively. Including youths in the discussion of mission strategies may spark new ideas.

We need to invest in our youth. Losing them equates to losing opportunities to impact God's Kingdom. We need to start adopting the principles gleaned from the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. God expects us to multiply what He entrusted to us and not maintain the status quo like the wicked and lazy servant who buried his talent. Invest wisely into God's Kingdom by investing our resources into our young people. Train them up and send them out for they will multiply the initial investment and expand God's Kingdom.

Youth and missions are not mutually exclusive. They are co-dependent. If we lose our youth, there will be ripple effects in God's mission. May God grant us wisdom to invest wisely in the next generation!

1. *Based on Dr. Enoch Wong's Presentation at the North American Chinese Co-ordination Centre of World Evangelization Consultation on Oct. 6, 2015 at the Toronto Chinese Community Church.*
2. [http://joshuaproject.net/global\\_statistics](http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics)

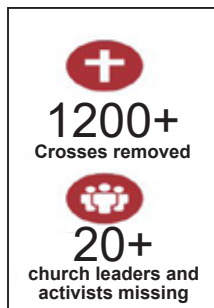
*(The author is the English Ministry Pastor at Cornerstone Chinese Alliance Church.)*

# China's Conflicting Signals

David Ro

Even the experts are baffled—legally registered Three-Self Patriotic churches are under attack while illegal house churches are being invited into official dialogue. Is China heading for another Mao-era level of persecution or opening up to an age of religious freedom? With conflicting signals seen across a range of other social, economic, and political issues, times are confusing, and nothing is certain. However, there is reason for optimism. The gospel is alive, and something is about to happen.

## Attacks and talks



Starting with the demolition of San Jiang Church in April 2014, Communist party Secretary Xia Baolong of Zhejiang province began attacking primarily Three-Self Protestant and Catholic Patriotic churches. Over 1,200-1,500 crosses have been removed and dozens of churches demolished in Wenzhou city, called the “Jerusalem of the East.”<sup>1</sup> Church

attacks intensified in July 2015 with the burning of crosses on top of church buildings. Christian lawyer Zhang Kai has been arrested and is missing along with 20 church leaders and activists. (Editor: Zhang was released on bail on March 6, 2016.)

As dark clouds surrounded Wenzhou in June 2015, President Xi Jinping’s National Security Commission met with a group of nationally recognized House church leaders in Beijing—the first such event in Communist China’s history. Officials asked for information regarding the size of the House church, differences with the Three-Self church, indigenous theology, House church revivals, the gospel heading westward, minority groups, cults, social responsibility, and urbanization—as well as suggestions for house church legalization, bringing a glimmer of hope for the legal recognition of the House church.<sup>2</sup>

## Why would Beijing allow attacks on the Three-Self churches?

One conjecture is that someone in the central government is testing the strength of the Three-Self church in the populous Christian Wenzhou region in preparation for a nationwide campaign to “indigenize” Christianity with Chinese characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Three-Self churches with their huge buildings and highly visible red crosses appear to resemble Western cathedrals, contrasting strongly with the less visible “indigenous” House church Christianity which some officials may feel is more appropriate for China.

Another plausible explanation is *internal politics*. Xi is reforming the government to purge it of corruption and inefficiencies. Allowing the attacks to continue provides the central government opportunities for the reorganization of the United Front, State Administration of Religious Affairs, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

The simplest explanation is that China overall is moving toward *conservative Neo-Maoist ideology*. An emerging leftist movement with nostalgia for Mao and a renewed nationalism is resisting liberals who are perceived as holding anti-China views of democracy, pluralism, and a free society associated with a Western-dominated world order. Christians have appeared to align themselves with the liberals.<sup>4</sup> With the popularity of Christianity growing, leftist forces in the central government are supporting a conservative provincial official in limiting the growth of Christianity.

Despite the attacks, the Three-Self church has in fact been strengthened by them. Stories of heroism among Three-Self believers strapping themselves to crosses as hundreds of police descend to attack have even moved House church believers. Several urban House church leaders signed a petition in support of the Three-Self church in Zhejiang. For the first time, House church leaders have crossed the divide to stand beside their former adversaries.

## Why would Xi open a dialogue with House church Christians?

A convincing argument could be pragmatism: Xi needs to find a way to provide recognition for millions of Chinese citizens. Pessimists, on the other hand, would see Beijing as luring in House church leaders in order to bring them under government control. However, a key House church leader at the center of events views this recent dialogue in Beijing as representing a true change of heart within Xi’s administration:

*“From the receiving, communication, content, and signals given, the upper levels [of government] want to solve the problem . . . for the House church to truly have a legal status within Chinese society. This is our hope and*



prayer.” This House church leader continues: “*They have high hopes for the House church . . . they want the House church to be established based upon the Bible and eventually want to move toward a separation of church and state.*”

## Significance

If these statements truly reflect the views of the top leadership in the central government, then this recent dialogue can only be described as a spiritual breakthrough answering decades of faithful prayers for China.

The benefit is that, for the first time, House church Christians, who have endured more than 60 years of persevering faith under extremely difficult conditions, would be legally recognized. This would fulfill the vision of a Beijing pastor for the church in China to one day surface from being an underground movement to becoming a “City on a Hill, Light unto the World” with a global mission force for the world.<sup>5</sup>

## Outlook

### Four Possible Scenarios



Persecution



Status quo



Legal status



Separation of church and state

There are four possible scenarios:

1. *Persecution*: Three-self and House churches all come under attack in a national campaign.
2. *Status quo*: House church remains illegal and operates as usual under pressure.
3. *Legal status*: House church becomes legal within limits and with pressures.
4. *Separation of church and state*: Least likely and potential to be most dangerous for the church.

Even under the worst-case scenario (no.1), persecution would serve to strengthen and deepen the church, preparing for the church to surface another day.

A free scenario (no.4) would be wonderful but could also be detrimental due to the challenges of materialism and consumerism.

Scenario (no.3) is the most likely as well as the most favorable for the church since freedom within limits provides enough operating space to expand, along with some remaining pressure that would serve to keep the church sharp.

House church legalization would be hotly debated. While many urban churches and large rural networks would welcome this new openness, a good number of traditional House churches, having experienced persecution in the past, would probably opt to remain hidden. Any involvement with the government is still seen as compromising. Differences between the registered and unregistered House

churches could divide the church for another generation.

## Benefits of legalization

Many would caution against advocating for this movement toward a freer society. The global church often idolizes the church in China as a model of Christianity flourishing under difficult circumstances, attributing the decline of the Western Christianity to too much freedom.

However, China would more likely follow another model, similar to that of South Korea in the 1970s to 1990s. Former persecution and sufferings produced a deep spirituality, preparing Korea for fast-paced church growth in a growing economy and a missions movement that sent 26,766 missionaries abroad in 2014.

Legal status would have many benefits:

House churches could rent or purchase facilities with legal protection.

Underground seminaries could surface to train up future leaders.

Sunday schools, youth groups, student and young adult ministries, family, marriage and counseling ministries, and church publications could mature.

Christians could engage more openly in neighborhood community outreach and in social concerns for the poor and elderly.

Local NGOs and orphanages as well as groups dedicated to poverty and disaster relief with Christian witness would have more legal space to develop.

One of the most significant benefits is China’s future involvement in global missions.<sup>6</sup> At the Mission China 2030 conference in Hong Kong in September 2015, 850 House church leaders and young people gathered around a visionary goal “to send 20,000 missionaries by the year 2030.”<sup>7</sup> A legal environment would increase the scope to develop effective sending structures for sending missionaries abroad.

The Three-Self and House church divide would also slowly diminish, and true reconciliation could begin. Another likely outcome could be the transformation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches, making them more like their House church counterparts and truly “Three-Self” in terms of being self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. A freer religious market would shut down Three-Self churches that have relied on government support and directives, while healthy Three-Self churches would continue to grow.

## Uncertainties

Many factors on the horizon could militate against Christianity in China. Xi’s battle with government corruption and the recent nerves over China’s slowdown to a new lower economic growth rate of 6.5% could cause domestic unrest or uneasiness for the foreseeable future. National-

ism and a desire for a stronger military continue to grow. Anti-American sentiment is also on the rise with the recent military frictions in the South China Sea. If Taiwan's elections continue to lead the country down a more independent path (as polls would suggest) and Republicans win the White House in 2016, the United States and China could be heading toward a collision that could have a negative effect on the church.

Even with these uncertainties over the likelihood of a welcoming environment becoming a reality, a Beijing pastor is hopeful: "*Whether persecution comes or not, the church will continue to fulfill its missions. The time is ripe for the vision of Mission China 2030 . . . to send 20,000 missionaries by the year 2030.*"



## How should we respond?

In preparation for the eventual legal status of the House church, we must remember some key points:

1. *The evangelization of China should be the primary responsibility of the Chinese.* Missions strategies should focus on seeking supporting roles in partnerships with indigenous churches. As House church leaders become legal, security concerns will be a lesser issue but any foreign involvement could be seen as meddling in domestic affairs.
2. Legal recognition of the House church opens the door for more *specialized and professional ministries* to flourish. Local churches will be developing their own specialized ministries along with para-church organizations.
3. China must adopt a *learning posture in world missions* and learn from the lessons and mistakes of the Western and Korean missions movements. The size of China's influence alone could either greatly enhance or cause great damage to the gospel. In the area of overseas cross-cultural missions, the Chinese church needs the global church.
4. *We must be willing to sacrifice and go ourselves.* Chinese church leaders are watching to see who are sending missionaries. Chinese leaders have asked why mega-churches and "missional" churches in the West<sup>8</sup> are not sending any missionaries and wondered what could be learned from such shallow faith.

## Conclusion

China's complexities continue to confuse the global church. As the country apparently moves in a Neo-Maoist

nationalistic direction, we can expect more bad news to come. Only time will tell, but hope is on the way. This is not because of pragmatism or signs of more favorable political conditions regarding the legal status of the House church.

God is answering the prayers of the global church for China and its leaders. Good news is on the horizon because a God-timed spiritual working appears to be taking place in the hearts of some of China's top leaders. It does not make sense in this current political environment, but is God preparing China's role in global missions?

## Endnotes

1. *Editor's Note:* See 'China's Churches: Growing influence and official wariness present twin challenges' by Thomas Harvey, Paul Huoshui, and David Ro in the July 2014 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*.
2. The closed-door meetings between officials and House church leaders were held on 16-18 June 2015 at a Beijing hotel. Officials gave House church leaders permission to release this news publicly during President Xi's visit to the US in September 2015.
3. The Three-self church nationwide is being pressured to become more Chinese pears to belt' government become more Chinese, holding conferences on 'The Sinicization of Christianity' (Zhongnan Seminary in Wuhan, 28-29 September 2015), 'Christianity and The Chinese Way' (CASS in Beijing 20 November 2015). become more Chinese pears to belt' government
4. China's ideological rivals Neo-Maoist, Neo-Confucius, Liberals, and Christian academics came together to produce the 'Oxford Consensus' in August 2013. See 'Christian Faith and Current Ideological Trends in China: The implications of the "Oxford Consensus"' in the November 2013 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*.
5. Rev Tianming Jin, 'City on a Hill'.
6. David Ro, 'The Rising Missions Movement in China (the World's New Number 1 Economy) and How to Support It', *Lausanne Global Analysis*, May 2015, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-05/the-rising-missions-movement-in-china-the-worlds-new-number-1-economy-and-how-to-support-it>.
7. 'Nine Hundred from Mainland China Participate in Inaugural Mission China 2030 Conference', Lausanne Movement, 26 October 2015, <http://www.lausanne.org/news-releases/inaugural-mission-china-2030-conference>.
8. Ed Stetzer, 'Five Reasons Missional Churches Don't Do Global Missions', *Christianity Today*, 24 September 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/september/five-reasons-missional-churches-dont-do-global-missions.html>.

*David Ro serves as the Director of the Christy Wilson Center for World Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and as Regional Director for the Lausanne Movement in East Asia.*

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# World Mission News

Compiled by Samuel C.Y. Ling

**China:** Last fall, some 850 Chinese Christian leaders from mainland China held a mission conference in Hong Kong. They announced a goal of sending 20,000 missionaries from China by the year 2030. The number was based on their estimate that 20,000 missionaries have served in China since the days of Robert Morrison. In a sense, this was the repayment of a gospel debt. Top sending countries in 2010 were: USA (127,000); Brazil (34,000); France and Spain (21,000); South Korea and Italy (20,000); United Kingdom (14,000); and India (10,000). In 1990, South Koreans wanted to send 10,000 missionaries in 10 years, which they did by 2000. Now the aim is to send 100,000 by 2030.

*Christianity Today, christianitytoday.com, Jan/Feb 2016>*

**Audio Bible:** As of the end of 2015, 954 Bible recordings have been released in languages (including sign languages) spoken by over 6 billion people in the world (or 85% of the world's population). With advancements in technology, the agency of this ministry expects to hit the 1,000 mark by May of this year, with further goals of at least 2,000 in this generation to reach 97% of the world's population.

*<Faith Comes by Hearing, faithcomesbyhearing.com, 2/4/16>*

**Middle East:** According to the UN, one in every 122 people is either internally displaced or seeking asylum. Among them, children are the most vulnerable. Some studies showed that 85% of children in refugee camps suffer from post-traumatic stress with 25% even having thoughts of suicide. With the cooperation of local Christian groups, an agency is setting up tent schools in the camps to restore the educational process and provide hope for the future through the gospel.

*<Tent Schools International, tentschoolsint.org, 2/2/16>*

**Syria:** The war has caused 250,000 deaths, created millions of refugees, and resulted in severe damage all over the nation. Since the war started, many families have been scattered, relying on Christian groups for aid. They come in their need, tears, and sadness, and find release and peace as people pray for them. Their hearts have become softened towards the gospel, whereas in the past, they were not approachable or interested, especially the women. Now, there are ladies' meetings of 50-70 women who often bring their children, and the refugees themselves minister to others.

*<Operation Mobilization, www.omusa.org, 2/2/16>*

**Mexico:** Last January, in the village of Tuxpan de Bolaos, Jalisco, some 50 people (including children), all Baptists and members of the Huichol indigenous group, were expelled from their homes under the threat of lynching due to their faith, after the government failed to stop their displacement. In December 6, 2015, the village assembly adopted a resolution to expel the people if they did not convert to "traditional"

Roman Catholicism. The state and federal officials were informed of the threat promptly. However, similar governmental inactions have occurred repeatedly in freedom of religion cases throughout the country.

*<Voice of the Martyrs, www.persecution.com, 2/1/16>*

**USA:** An Iranian couple visited a church, where a member who knew Arabic talked to them. He asked if they had understood what they had heard. The answer of "very little" prompted him to set up a Bible study with them twice a week. They only knew some stories like those of Abraham, Isaac, and Moses, so the two families went from creation to Christ using the Discovery Bible study program. With the biblical foundation laid, God spoke to this Iranian couple through Isaiah 53. The husband said, "This is the story of Jesus!" The wife replied, "Yes, but it was written 700 years before Jesus." That day they decided to follow Jesus, and both were soon baptized. One of the confronting questions of the Discover Bible study program is, "Who are you going to tell?" In some 6-8 months, about a dozen people came to Christ and 10 Bible studies were started. This program is being used effectively all over the world and throughout Middle East refugee camps.

*<Pioneers, www.pioneers.org, 1/28/16>*

**Zimbabwe:** Bulawayo is the second largest city in the nation with some 700,000 people and a rising water shortage due to decreasing rainfall and defective dams. The government and other agencies have tried and failed to find water in the region. A Christian agency also spent months without success but chose not to quit. Their persistence sparked the interest of the locals, giving them greater opportunities to share the gospel, their hope in Christ, and how it has affected them and their work. After months of work and prayer, God blessed them with success, and now they have a rare water source in the area benefiting about 2,000 people.

*<Global Aid Network, www.gain.org, 1/29/16>*

**Myanmar:** In spite of severe official restrictions and a steep terrain, a local ministry leader reported that God is moving fast in the nation. Besides the Karen people, they are reaching other minority groups such as the Kayan, Asho Chin, and even some mainly Buddhist Burmese-speaking villages in the central parts of the nation. A dozen house churches have also been planted, one with 87 members of different nationalities.

*<Christian Aid Mission, www.christianaid.org 1/27/16>*

**Thailand:** An agency has been very successful in reaching children in this primarily Buddhist nation and, through them, sharing the gospel with their parents through audio recordings in their native tongue.

*<WorldServe Ministries, www.worldserveusa.org, 1/19/16>*



# Roma Vision Sharing Night in Toronto, March 6, 2016



*Rev. Sam Chan interviewed Dr. Sharon Chan*



*Dr. Kok-Swang Tan, chairman of GCC-Canada welcomed the participants*

About 150 people from 10 churches gathered at the Richmond Hill Christian Community Church (RHCCC) in the Greater Toronto area to attend a vision-sharing event on Roma missions.

Dr. Sharon Chan, President of GCCI, used the story of Cornelius to remind the participants that “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:37, 38). The Roma are one of the people groups that God loves and cares about.

Rev. Samuel Chan, the senior pastor, and Rev. Grover Crosby, the mission consultant of RHCCC, also shared what they had learned from visitations to several Roma villages in Romania as well as from their participation in a consultation with Roma leaders in Budapest. They agreed that it is the power of the gospel that has changed the mentality of Roma Christians and encouraged them to be more hard-working and to care about the destiny of their own people.

Several sisters and a brother who participated in last year’s short-term mission trips also shared how their experience of serving the Roma gave them a new understanding of this unreached people group. Being among the people showed them how the Holy Spirit has truly changed the Roma Christian communities by helping them find their identity and value in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Thomas Wang, the founder of GCCI, was not able to attend the meeting due to a health problem, but he addressed those in attendance through a video message, challenging Chinese churches to step out of their comfort zone and take up the challenge that God has prepared for them. He himself is so passionate about the Roma people that even in his nineties, he has been visiting different Roma communities in eastern Europe for the past three years.

It is no secret that because of the inward mentality of Chinese culture, Chinese-speaking churches are often more concerned with their own people. Even when they send missionaries overseas, most of them end up working only among ethnic Chinese. However, we can see some changes already happening among Chinese churches in Toronto. May the Spirit continue to move among the Chinese churches to bring more labourers to reach the Roma!



*About 150 people attended the event*