

## **Obligation to Evangelize under New China-Hong Kong Relationship**

© Otto Lui  
Associate General Secretary (Training)



Before Hong Kong's return to China, we talked about and participated in evangelical ministries in China with great fervor, as we saw the need for the Gospel of our fellow countrymen and wished that more and more of them would believe in the Lord. Within the first twenty years after the reunification, we noted that churches in China were developing unceasingly and felt that Hong Kong could play a significant role in contributing to our mother country. As Hong Kong is so closely connected with the mainland that commitment to China Church ministries seemed a must.

In recent years, due to the enactment of the newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs in mainland and other control measures targeting churches, plus later on the Anti Extradition Bill protests in HK, and the current novel coronavirus pandemic, all of which somehow seems related to the Chinese government (at least psychologically), negative sentiments towards China have arisen among Hong Kong people. It seems that we have entered into a new phase of unfavorable relationship with China – tentatively, I call it, the “New China-Hong Kong Relationship”.

I have discussed with some youths with the heightened anti-China mood about why there is a huge difference of feelings towards China between them and the older generation. The conclusion is that we are holding very different views of China. The generation who grew up before the return of Hong Kong is aware of the very hard times in the past hundred years of China, and also witnessed the June 4<sup>th</sup> tragedy. They are also impressed by how their parents backed the homeland – squeezing into crowded trains with packs of bulky sundries and appliances on their trips to their hometown. They knew China was in need. The new

generation born after the reunification sees an overbearing “strong nation” and bossy “rich second generation”, which are a source of all problems in recent years. What they have received from the media is mainly negative news, and due to their refusal to have direct contact with China, the wall of estrangement can only be thicker and higher.

## Being the Right Person

How is one to explain to this generation the importance of participation in China Church ministries? First, it should be shown that the focus of ministries of the Kingdom of God is people. A “right person” is capable of responding to the mission of the Kingdom of God, and he is duty-bound to do so within a specific time and location. Hong Kong believers participating in China Church ministries are the “right persons”. No matter how you feel, that we have the same culture as Chinese people is a fact. Apart from sharing the same language and culture, church connections are inseparable as well. Most of Hong Kong’s local churches were relocated from the mainland, and reciprocally Hong Kong churches have never stopped influencing their mainland counterparts. From intercession during the Cultural Revolution, to coordination of resources from overseas for provisioning mainland churches, to Hong Kong Christians’ getting into the mainland through various ways in order to serve, and to mainland pastors coming to Hong Kong for training, coupled with a unique Home Return Permit system at the time, all these have made Hong Kong the largest window to Chinese evangelism. Obviously, we, including those born after Hong Kong’s return to China, ought to be the “right persons”.

The China-Hong Kong relationship involves mutual dependence. Though Hong Kong’s influence is diminishing recently, the city is still one with the greatest influence on China. In the past few years, overseas organizations allowed to keep their services in China are fewer in number. While Hong Kong organizations are under similar limitations, it is still possible for their workers to travel to and fro to serve. For example, through decades of networking with mainland partners, CCL has established mutual trust with them and so far is still permitted to authorize mainland seminaries to publish Christian publications, which are valuable support to frontline pastors and their ministries.

Hong Kong churches maintain an irreplaceable role, in that we have learned the way to repackage Christian ministries embedded in western culture and understand what changes are necessary in order to adapt to the Chinese culture. For example, in evangelism programs, Hong Kong churches would place more emphasis on relationship building. On the issue of paying ancestors tribute, Chinese ethical values would be considered to achieve a proper balance. As the east and west have different ways of communication – not just in terms of language, but also cultural



[Gifting pastoral book packs \(which include Christian publications published by mainland seminaries authorized by CCL\) to mainland seminary graduates.](#)

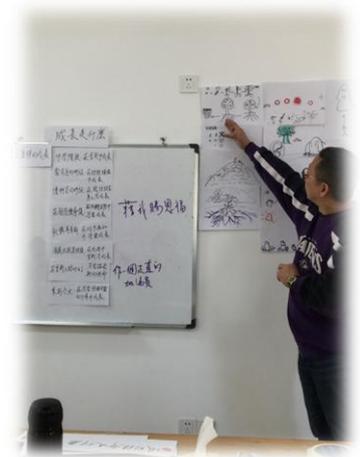
implications –we are irreplaceable. Hong Kong Christians today are a unique group and are living in a special historical moment. We inherit the Chinese culture and are tightly connected to mainland China. We, with the younger generation, have to act in response to this unusual identity – be the “right person”. We should not think that our specific influence will last for an indefinite period, but we should feel blessed and have no regret if we can play a part in the Lord’s plan.

## Doing the Right Thing

It is impossible to expect all Hong Kong churches to join China Church ministries. However, for many years, over 60% of local churches offer their services to mainland churches to various extents. This is according to the report of the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement, which surveyed local churches exchanging with mainland churches<sup>1</sup>. The primary form of the activities was visits and secondary was training or theological education exchanges. These two forms of activities have come to a halt over last two to three years. Yet the impact on mainland churches is in fact not too big.

In the 80s to 90s, as Chinese churches boomed, only some Hong Kong churches and organizations were on the frontline, providing pastoral training and aid. Following Hong Kong’s return and China’s opening-up, Hong Kong churches’ involvement multiplied. However, increased involvement did not necessarily represent more influence. The point is how it was conducted - whether resources or ministries targeted ministries lacking in Chinese churches – were we doing the “right thing”?

What are the “right things”? In the missionary field, the touchstone is the field’s needs, not the outsiders’ own interests. What is actually required by the served party? Is there anything they cannot perform and need the help of an outsider? This seems to be a very basic question, but in the last 20 years it has been neglected by Hong Kong churches. Often when there was nobody to preach, to lead the youth fellowship, or to teach the Sunday School, Hong Kong churches regularly dispatched someone to help. After 10 or 20 years, such gatherings were closed down, and nobody in the mainland was capable of taking up the work. Doing the “right thing” means that in those situations, the appropriate solution was training up their own leaders, enabling churches to be run within locally available capabilities and be led in their own direction and means. Therefore, external organizations or churches should use small groups and mentor-mentee relationships to foster local leaders, and let them take up their congregations’ education now and in the future.



A teacher leading mainland leaders to think about “What is growth?”

## Call of the Age

How is one to change the younger generation's unfavorable impression towards China? The first task is to help them understand that to change the world, the first and foremost work is to change China. Notwithstanding whether you like it, China is impacting the world, as fully proved by this occasion of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The economy, politics, culture, and even medical and health matters are all interconnected in the global village, leaving none on their own. Even though not many people have the will to change the world, just for self-benefit, changing the faith of the Chinese is still essential. It is questionable as to whether it is right to persuade the young people to join the great mission from this viewpoint, but we need to share our thoughts from their perspective. It should be made clear to them that God places us in this age to fulfill a particular and magnificent role.

Besides, it is necessary to point out to them that to alter a system, people's hearts have to be changed. Many youths feel frustrated about the future, thinking that there is no future if the system cannot be reformed. Nevertheless, they also understand that if hearts are not changed, the society will not improve even if the system is reformed. Mind that this is an opportunity to emphasize the power of the Gospel in changing human hearts. Through genuine repentance on hearing the Gospel, one's values will be changed by God. What is said here is not the social gospel. The Gospel can transform a society, but this is not the purpose of the Gospel. The Gospel represents God's power to save and it carries the hope of eternal life together with regeneration in this life. In view of this, we earnestly wish that everybody be saved, and hope at the same time to help mainland Christians build their faith on the foundation of Biblical truths and be changed by God's words and regenerated with a new heart.

In summary, under the new China-Hong Kong relationship, we should again go back to the age-old mission. In spite of the way of participation in China Church ministries differing according to changes of the age, the reason for participation is single, namely for the honor awarded by God for joining His redemption plan. Whether or not the young generation thinks so, the role of Hong Kong people is unique in China Church ministries. Our obligation given by God is to serve right now. As Mordecai said to Esther, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

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<sup>1</sup>Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement – "Report of 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey". The survey was conducted via self-filled questionnaires and telephone surveys on churches in HK, and information from 1,082 churches (84.1% of all churches in HK) was collected. At the same time, 40% of all churches were selected by random for a detailed survey. In the report, exchanges with mainland churches are tabulated: 60.1% of all churches in HK had exchanges with mainland churches in 2012 to 2014, lower than the 63% in 2009. The exchange activities were mainly visits (40.4%), and there were also training/theological education (28.3%) and other ministry co-operations.

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## **Safeguarding children's mind and spirit**

### **-- Online tutorial on Christian Education**

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China Church Ministry Frontline Worker



In the past few months, the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in massive numbers of confirmed infection cases and deaths. Even mature adults who have had relatively ample life experience find themselves increasingly unable to cope. What about the sensitive and vulnerable adolescents and children? If they need to face the reality of their parents having been diagnosed with the virus or even died from the disease, how would they react emotionally? There might not be any apparent outward expression of strong distress, but deep down, they could be suffering from complicated agony. Moreover, a depressed mood could arise spontaneously from boredom experienced by children who have been staying home due to the prolonged lockdown. How could the emotional disturbances be managed?

Children of believers are not exempted. In the past, they might seek help from their pastors or their children's Sunday school teachers. But now that children Sunday school has stopped, even the church itself has suspended all gatherings, the responsibility of resolving the emotional struggles of children falls directly on the shoulders of parents alone. Without relevant training, do all parents know how to comfort their children? If most mainland pastors do not have training on counseling adolescents and children, can they teach the parents?

### **Online live Christian Education training provides timely support**

Upon noticing the imminent needs, our team of Christian Education instructors decided to coach mainland church leaders and facilitate them to become capable of training parents. In early March, Christian Education instructors conducted online tutorials for 11 graduates

of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Professional Diploma in Christian Education Course. The training was tailored to be as practical as possible. The instructors selected materials written by foreign psychology experts that focused on helping adolescents and children deal with the psychological impact of the pandemic. Utilizing materials from these handbooks (which lack religious elements) and integrating them with appropriate biblical passages, the participants were provided with comprehensive instructions. It is hoped that mainland church leaders can become equipped to train parents whom in turn can help and guide their own children at home. By unveiling the inner feeling, parents can start untangling their children's complicated emotions and the whole family can be built up with Christian values and virtues.

The first phase of the online tutorial started in early March. The instructors prepared teaching materials for the students. Besides teaching the students how to use the materials, the instructors also made them understand the rationale behind. Many parents tend to think that their children will not have emotional disturbance. This myth has to be dispelled and replaced by understanding the importance of parents' roles in safeguarding the psychological well-being of their children.

The online tutorial was followed by a two-week practicum. Students needed to make use of the psychology handbook and bible passages to guide and uncover the underlying emotion of their own children or the children of other believers. Evaluation discussion was arranged after the practicum to allow students to share their findings and difficulties, the instructors then provided them with targeted teaching and guidance.

### **Taking daughter's hand, breaking free from anxiety**

Zhao is one of the students of the online course. She has two daughters, one in junior high school, the other in primary school. During the pandemic when schools were suspended, the two girls exhibited drastically different moods. The younger sister was exceedingly joyous, but the older sister was somewhat dispirited. As days went by, the older sister became increasingly anxious. Every time the parents went out for grocery shopping, she almost always nervously asked where the parents were going, for how long they would be gone, whether or not it be safe outside. Zhao tried asking her older daughter several times if she was having uncomfortable feelings, she kept replying, "Nothing."

After Zhao received training on the prescribed set of counselling materials, she selected the appropriate contents such as "my worries and sadness", "isolation", etc. to guide her daughter into opening herself up and sharing her feelings. She also encouraged her daughter to put into words her reflection on "My personal experience: From what sources did I learn about the pandemic? What do I know about the impact of the coronavirus? For disease prevention, what are the things I can do? Who is with me during the pandemic? etc." When Zhao and her daughter went through all these questions together, they were able to identify the core issues and overcome the psychological impacts. Zhao also used the bible passage prepared by her instructor, "For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,

my confidence since my youth.” (Psalms 71:5), to strengthen her daughter’s faith and release her from her worries.

### **Just a beginning, striving harder to serve**

The first phase of online “Christian Education” is just a beginning. We plan to organize second and third phases. Aside from inviting graduates from the Professional Diploma in Christian Education Course to enroll, we are also preparing to invite children Sunday school teachers and parents to participate. We wish to enhance support to a larger number of believer parents and collaboration to safeguard our children’s emotional and spiritual well-being. Looking into the future, we hope to capitalize on this experience and expand the scope to organize marital courses for husbands and wives, counselling courses, etc. to support Christian families in a more comprehensive way.



# Prayers

## 1. Show love in action

In areas where the pandemic is less serious, churches have both nurtured believers online and bore witnesses in the community through action. A mainland church partner said: “Though believers can’t go to places at this difficult time, they have still tried their utmost to serve, showing their love by sharing supplies such as masks and disinfectants with friends and neighbours!”



May the Lord use believers to share the gospel with non-believers through serving them.

## 2. Protect children’s soul



Professional coaches from outside the mainland have offered ministries for children whose parents were infected with COVID-19 or have died as a result, e.g. providing tailor-made counselling materials, teaching online etc. They are also hoping to support mainland workers, equip Christian parents to help them care for their children’s spiritual needs.

May the Lord give wisdom to mainland workers, help them understand the coaches’ teaching; may the Lord bless parents with confidence so they can help their children cope with their emotions, understand their inner feelings patiently, and deal with their children’s complex feelings with Christian values.

## 3. Merchants and workers under the pandemic

Mainland businesspeople and employees were affected by the pandemic to varying degrees. A coach responsible for a marketplace ministry shared: “There are few visitors at the major shopping streets, and shops have few customers. Some enterprises running at a loss are planning to cut wages or even lay off staff.”

May the Lord help operators cope with the tough circumstances and adjust their sales strategies creatively. Please pray for God’s mercy in minimizing livelihoods



issues caused by the pandemic, and that enterprises are willing to exercise their social responsibilities by weathering the storm together with their staff.

#### 4. Pray for candidates in the College Entrance Exam



The Ministry of Education has announced that the national college entrance examination will be delayed by a month to July 7 and 8. Hubei province and Beijing can, depending on the situation of the pandemic, propose an exam schedule suitable for their region and announce it to the public following approval from the ministry. The high-stake examination is crucial for the future of numerous high school graduates.

May the Lord keep the 10.71 million candidates so that they won't be disrupted by the delay in examination schedule, that they will stay calm and concentrate on preparing for the examination.

~ THE END ~

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#### Pray for China

Published since 1974

~ Pray for China publications can be served as a platform to express the latest situations and needs of churches and leaders in the mainland.

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