

One Belt, One Road: A New Phase in Chinese Mission?

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(Editor's Note: With regards to the contents and Gospel opportunities presented by "One Belt, One Road", please refer to Pray for China Issue 269.)

Ever since discussions of "Back to Jerusalem" (referred as BTJ below) began more than ten years ago, spreading the Gospel from China has become a new topic of mission. At that time, some churches and mission organizations put forward that the idea espoused in BTJ in the 1930s was an excellent opportunity for Chinese churches to take part in cross-cultural mission. Some even theorized that, before the coming of the Messiah at the end of the age, the responsibility of saving the whole house of Israel falls to the Chinese churches.

However, in the past decade, such a nationalistically tinged missiology has not borne out success in the realm of practical experience. In the early days, mainland churches that participated in overseas missions went into Muslim countries driven solely by passion, and without sufficient preparation. Working in the field with little knowledge of the environment, religious culture and language, many workers could not even last a month before returning home. Some even came under suspicion as they did not handle large donations with sufficient transparency.

Nevertheless, Chinese churches began cross-cultural missions in the 21st century through BTJ. Much training of cross-cultural missions continue to this day, and there are examples of successful church-planting in Muslim regions. In recent years, building on the momentum of the "One Belt, One Road" economic scheme put forward by the Chinese government

involving the whole of Asia, mission organizations have announced that 20,000 Chinese missionaries will be sent overseas by 2030. Is “One Belt, One Road” an extension of the BTJ dream, or is it an entirely new phase in the cross-cultural mission of Chinese churches?

I have had many opportunities in the past year to attend different occasions, researching, discussing, and learning about the relationship between “One Belt, One Road” and Chinese missions. Much of the printed discussion focused on the political and economic bubbles of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative. Some of them made one-sided exclamations regarding its unlimited potential for business opportunities. This article will discuss what mainland churches need to consider—whether they should use “One Belt, One Road” as a means for cross-cultural mission without repeating the same mistakes as BTJ.

Character Formation

Many workers in mission organizations reflect that when Chinese businessmen from the mainland come for investments, their ways of doing business often causes negative feelings for locals. These mission workers worry that these businessmen (including Christian businessmen) might use business



strategies that are incompatible with the Bible’s teachings, leading to a negative impact on local ministries. The truth is, the last 30 years have seen a rapid growth of Christian churches. However, the teaching of the Bible and Christian ethical values have yet to be established on a solid foundation. The synthesis of Christianity and Chinese culture has been a discussion on a philosophical level for the most part, and not sufficiently practiced in real life. Many Christians are affected by social trends, and follow trends without sufficient self-reflection.

Take, for example, the official one-child policy. The government demands that further pregnancies are to be aborted. As the official policy is set, schools teach and advocate it. Unfortunately, even church workers make this demand of brothers and sisters who are pregnant with their second child. Another example is the popular use of “guanxi” to settle problems in society. Things are not done through legal channels, but Christian businessmen follow suit, seeing this as normal business culture, using “guanxi”, or even outright bribery, for the sake of convenience and opportunities.

In today's mission fields, especially when faced with Muslim communities, "Talking Jesus" is not a viable model of spreading the Gospel. Displaying moral and ethical standards above and beyond what is in society is a more effective form of witnessing. Perhaps for frontline workers, building up personal character, behavior and culture according to Scripture is more important than training in different mission strategies.

Establishing Partners

At the mention of mission, we naturally recall contributions made by western mission organizations. It is true that they established a firm foundation for the churches in China. However, the greatest difference between our situations today and back then is the advancement of



information technology. Back in those days, those who did pioneering work did not have many examples of previous workers to consult and refer to, and there was little information about the field. There was difficulty in even knowing if there were other Christians in the same city, as if the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing. However, the apostle Paul went looking for believers whenever he first arrived in a new city. In the 1930s, mission workers in the "Chinese Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band" set this as their principle, "Establishing churches where there are none. Helping churches from regions with churches."

In today's Chinese ministries, it can be said that each organization does its work independently of others. There are organizations that work very closely and this generates a huge effect. Others seldom communicate with outsiders, doing their work by themselves. Many outside churches and mission organizations do not notice the maturity and development of the local church, and deploy their own methods in the field. However, given the complex factors of the current international climate and social environment, mission work today have a greater need for partnerships compared to the past. With different talents scattered in different churches and organizations, each will have different experiences and expertise. No single team will have success when sent overseas.

Taking developmental possibilities of "One Belt, One Road" in South East Asian countries as an example, many mission organizations have established preliminary work in Myanmar,

Vietnam, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and others. Nevertheless, there have long been local churches and mission organizations that are already operating there. They know the local culture and government policies, but perhaps their limited development is due to a lack of resources. If Christian business teams in the mainland are preparing to start work, they could first consider understanding social problems in the target society through local workers, direct their efforts at local needs and use local relational networks to begin their work. At the same time, they can request training for practical needs, targeting specific areas in different fields. This way, these five distinct groups, the local churches or organizations, those mission organizations that have been serving in the field for many years, the churches that newly enter the field, businessmen and theological training units form a complementary alliance. This is what is needed in today's mission field.

Establishing Models



Since these are all new opportunities, even as we reflect on past experience, we have to establish new experiences at the same time for those who follow after to take reference from. If the “One Belt, One Road” initiative were to achieve its planned scale, it would be the greatest economic and political network of the century. Simultaneously, it would also be the

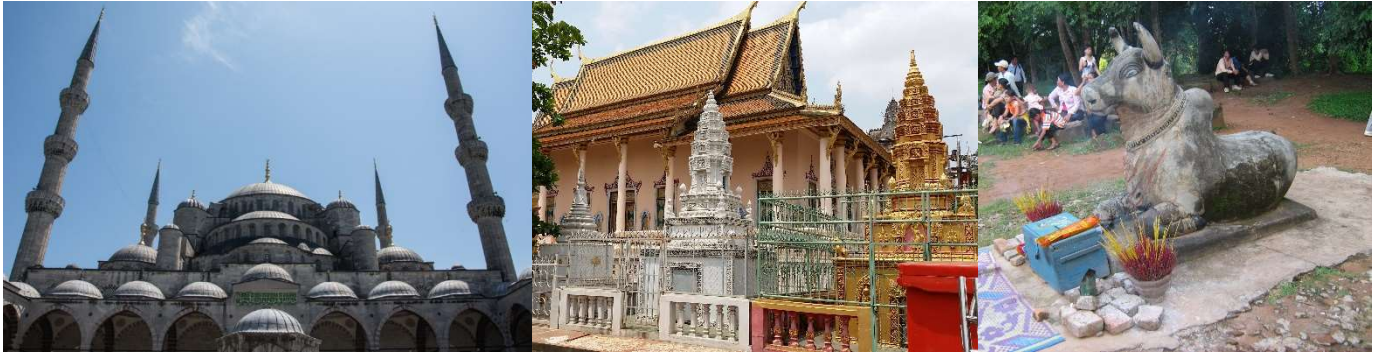
biggest, most complex mission network. We should not anticipate on achieving a mission plan on a scale that matches that of “One Belt, One Road”. Even if we had such a plan, the chances for success would be very low as there would be countermeasures in countries which are closed and hostile to the Gospel. But at the very least, those who have a heart to live and work in those areas and countries can discuss with each other and establish a new model for cooperation to share the resources of God's family.

Last year, Rev. Chan Kim Kwong put forward the concept of Gospel immigration as a means of advancing mission work in Asia. It means for many families to form mission teams so as to share resources in the field. I think this should include the following:



- Entrepreneurs: they provide work opportunities. They are directed at the market and commercial opportunities in the local market so as to open the door to spread the Gospel.

- Poverty alleviation or social services units: They are directed to help in the areas in which local governments have fewer or a lack of resources.
- Mission/ church workers: Focusing on Gospel work, they are directed to help local churches where needed, and to plant churches where there are none.
- Support services: If the above three reach a certain scale, a fourth category—educators, medical workers and trainers will need to provide support services from behind the scenes.



In many different ways, at different times, God raises up teams to put together piece after piece of a picture that glorifies God. I do not believe that the Chinese churches are the final batter before the coming of the Lord, but surely it is an important player. The Chinese churches are a part of the great picture of God's plan for salvation, essential and integral to the whole. How should we seize opportunities to partner with different groups to help paint this picture? How should we prepare for this new phase of the Chinese church joining in world evangelism?

Please Support the Training of Business and Marketplace Leaders

With the "One Belt, One Road" initiative presenting opportunities for cross-cultural mission, we will need battle-hardened veteran mission workers to take up the task of teaching the Bible, advocating business as mission, pasturing to leaders in the marketplace and teaching Bible. Faced with huge needs in the mainland, workers must travel between different cities to act as life mentors and companions. It is planned that 14 leaders in business field and marketplace are to be equipped in South Central China and East China.

The fundraising goal of 2016 is US\$64,000, inclusive of expenses to support workers and training.

US\$22,000 have been raised between March and the end of June. If you are moved and would like to make an offering, please contact us for details, thank you.

Walking Hand in Hand with Believers in the Marketplace

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Editor's Note

Apart from offering leadership training to mainland believers in the marketplace, we attach a lot of importance to building relationships with them. We serve as their life mentors, walking hand in hand with them. The following is a sharing by our co-worker, Dr. Boaz Yeung, on how he guided a sister to use her gifts in her marketplace and respond to God's calling.

In a young workers' training camp last year, a young female entrepreneur Sister Zhou approached me before the classes started and wanted to chat with me about her situation. She was only in her 20s, but had taken over the business of a garment factory from her father, who had just passed away from a serious illness. While she was still mourning over the death of a beloved one, she had to take care of the factory's business, handling new orders, running the factory, managing financial matters, etc. She got extremely nervous as a result. When she approached me, it was time for classes start. Furthermore, as the training camp aimed to help participants find their life goals, I asked her to discuss her problems with me when the camp was over.



Exploring One's Mission in the Marketplace

Afterwards, Sister Zhou shared that according to the analysis by the S.H.A.P.E. model, her spiritual gifts are in management, hospitality and helping others. Her heart is in reading, running a business, and media. Her abilities lay in interpersonal skills, language skills and self-reflection skills. She has an outgoing personality with good intuition and is a rational and decisive person. Her experiences included working for over a year in a radio station, helping with broadcasting and programme production, and she had a lot of experience in travelling by herself. She was born to a happy family and worked for three years in a garment factory covering a number of duties. Her painful experience and frustrations were related to the death of a beloved family member as well as the financial difficulties

confronting her company at that moment. She shared that during the course, she was asked to make one choice after another. In the end, she discovered that she wanted to be someone who could please God and achieve the Great Commission for the Lord, but she would prefer not to serve full-time. Therefore, when I mentioned the notions of “mission in the marketplace” and “business as mission”, she was most attracted to them. She got excited about the ideas (she had been downcast emotionally for quite some time, and was almost moved to tears during the course). Meanwhile, she believed that she was not yet adequately equipped and had problems in time management owing to her busy work schedule.

Serving Based on One's Gifts

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)

“God blessed them and said to them. ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it....’” (Genesis 1:28)



Sister Zhou busily working outside her factory

Sister Zhou expressed that the word “steward” made a great impression upon her. Indeed, she had read the above two verses. While she wanted to memorize them, she forgot about them all the time. She forgot that she was only the steward of God and it was God who should be the master. After the camp, I visited her factory and provided some further advice. In the past several months, I have followed up on the situation of her, her family and business through visiting, studying the Bible, praying and chatting with her.

Today, the business of Sister Zhou has become more stable, the conflicts of her family members have resolved and their relationship with God renewed. She was no longer sad and worried, but has grown more joyful and smiley. Since March, she has been helping me with the work of a platform about marketplace, using her gifts of broadcasting and management.

“Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:15)

In this age of information, mainland believers, especially those in the marketplace and business field, have abundant resources to help them understand the Bible. There are

many good articles and teachings on the Internet as well as excellent teachers from outside who travel to the mainland to teach. May the Lord provide more companions who can be their mentors to walk hand in hand with them, and set a good example of how a Christian should lead a life modelled after Christ.

Prayers

1. Christian Ethics and Struggles in the Marketplace

Christian businessmen in the mainland often struggle with ethics issues, eg. the prevailing culture of gift-giving in the society that is popular even among Christians; Christians are also baffled by questions such as “Is investment the same as speculation? Is money the root of all evil?” May the Lord help Christian businessmen put their Christian values into practice, and help pastors communicate more with them, understand their needs and care for them.



2. Pastors Facing Church Crisis Alone



When faced with church crises, mainland pastors often feel helpless in circumstances where they are comforting brothers and sisters. For example, in churches in East China whose crosses have been forcibly removed, pastoral staff there had to tackle conflicting views among the government, co-workers, and believers. May the Lord help mainland pastors handle church crises with wisdom and unite brothers and sisters together in helping their churches grow.

3. The Issue of Integrity

On May 7, a man from the mainland, Lei Yang, was arrested for soliciting prostitutes. He died after a brawl with police. His death triggered widespread concern. The media suspected the police of abusing their power, causing his “abnormal death”. The incident undermined public faith in law enforcement authorities. May the Lord help mainland authorities develop a system of rule of law, so that law enforcement can be done with integrity, without the abuse of power.



May there be mutual trust between the people and the authorities.

4. Graduates Getting Ready to Serve

This year's graduates of mainland seminaries are getting ready to serve in churches in their hometowns or elsewhere. Aside from the needs of pastoral books, they need to learn to work in teams. May the Lord provide them with adequate resources, and teams in which they can develop life on life relationships.



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