

A Gospel Audience of a Million

■ Putonghua Speaking Communities in Hong Kong

◎ Interview & Editing: Yin Qing

What do Local Churches in Hong Kong Need to Pay Attention to?

According to the 2016 Hong Kong SAR government by-census reports, more than 940,000 mainlanders had immigrated to Hong Kong in the last 20 years. Of these, a majority of them immigrate for the purpose of uniting with their families.¹ Apart from these newcomers, Hong Kong receives annually an estimated 40 million tourists, businesspeople, merchants and students who form the Putonghua speaking community in Hong Kong. Have churches in Hong Kong directed efforts to evangelize this community?



On the 9th of May, I attended the 45th China Ministry seminar organized by CCL. The seminar featured the announcement of the survey results of the “Local Putonghua Ministry of Hong Kong Churches Survey” and related reflections and suggestions. This article will attempt to summarize those results, and explore how local churches can address the fact of increasing numbers in the Putonghua-speaking community in Hong Kong.

How do Putonghua-speaking Communities Come to Church?

From the 595 valid samples from the survey, 339 (57%) of the churches had Putonghua speaking visitors attend their church service in previous year. Of these churches with contact with Putonghua speaking visitors to their services, 89% indicated that the vast majority of Putonghua speaking community members are new immigrants to Hong Kong, whereas parents or relatives of students, travellers, businesspeople and mainland students make up a small minority.

How do Putonghua-speaking community members come to visit churches? Friends and relatives of church members, and self-motivated visitors made up 51.6% and 44.3% respectively. Only 16.7% of visitors came from successful initiatives by churches to reach out. Churches from all over Hong Kong received visits from Putonghua-speaking communities, and the effect of location on Putonghua ministries was found to be unclear.

How do Churches Come to Contact Putonghua Speaking Communities?

In the survey, there were 30 churches (5%) that had an existing Putonghua service. Another 60 had Putonghua translation for services (10.1%). 164 churches (27.6%) indicated that Putonghua speaking visitors came to services conducted in Cantonese with no simultaneous interpretation. Apart from services, visitors also went to small-group introduction to Christianity classes, Cantonese classes, new immigrant classes and elderly fellowships, etc. There were no more than 3000 people in these churches in total.



Moreover, 180 churches (30.1%) had existing Putonghua outreach activities or ministries. Of these, 20% with outreach activities did not have members of Putonghua-speaking communities join service. Conversely, of those churches without outreach, half indicated that they had members from Putonghua-speaking communities come to their services. Most church outreach activities encompassed traditional Gospel presentations, but the effect on attracting Putonghua speakers to join church activities is not apparent.

Of the 415 churches in the survey with no Putonghua outreach ministries, only 13 have future plans to begin outreach to Putonghua-speaking communities. Of those which responded that no plans yet exist, a quarter cite lack of manpower and resources as the reason for this, over half also responded that they believed no such efforts were necessary. A portion of those churches responding that no such efforts were necessary had existing Putonghua-speaking fellowships. Many other churches also indicated that their members could all understand Cantonese.

Are Churches Willing to Put in Resources?

Only 8 churches of those surveyed had specific staff in charge of ministries to Putonghua speakers. They also had a specific budget set aside to empower Putonghua ministries. Of the 339 churches with Putonghua ministries, only 82 were proponents, with church pastoral workers being the first proponents making up 90%. Budget-wise, 17 churches indicated that they budgeted for Putonghua ministries, ranging from US\$128 to US\$25,640.

There was a positive correlation between church size and the appearance of Putonghua speaking members. Putonghua speaking members only appeared in 48% of churches with under 100 people. The probability of Putonghua speaking members appearing increases to 80% when the church has over 500 attendees. Students and businesspeople most frequently appeared in large churches.

Can Churches Engage in Evangelistic Ministries to Putonghua Speaking Communities?

“Local Putonghua Ministry of Hong Kong Churches Survey” has brought some thoughts and reflections on ministries, and has occasioned the church leaders to take the initiative in examining the issue of evangelistic efforts to Putonghua-speaking communities in Hong Kong.

1. **Community Needs:** Most members of the Putonghua-speaking community who go to church are people who are reuniting with family in Hong Kong, or new immigrants. There are not many current ministries that focus on these groups. Most church Putonghua ministry focus on traditional methods of evangelising: visitation, street evangelism, church Gospel rallies, etc. The effectiveness of these methods is unclear. At the same time, whichever the church ministry, most Putonghua speakers come to church at the prompting of friends and family members, and are motivated by activities in the community, or the pursuit of religious belief. A minority of them join because of targeted activities, such as Cantonese classes, or Induction Programme for Newly Arrived Children. The churches in Hong Kong need to consider what the Putonghua-speaking community is really like, and what their actual needs are.
2. **Language Considerations:** If Putonghua speakers attend churches with no Putonghua worship or related ministries, does that mean they have a strong desire to know and become a part of local communities? If they wish to assimilate to local life, then it is no wonder that traditional evangelistic outreach efforts have had an unclear effect. Under

these conditions, launching a Putonghua worship service is not necessary. Because language learning is a major motivation, it would seem that simultaneous interpretation offered in Putonghua would be enough to meet their needs. However, if churches were to devise a worship service or sermon content that targets Putonghua speakers specifically to address those Putonghua speakers who are not motivated to assimilate into local language communities, it may prove to be very feasible as well.

3. **How to Attract them:** Reaching Putonghua-speaking communities through social services is effective, but attracting them to attend church services is a different issue entirely. The effective use of services offered by organizations still has a lot of potential. Churches seldom collaborate with different organizations. Would using these existing organizations to gain access to opportunities and resources increase the effectiveness of ministry efforts?
4. **Resource Commitment:** When divided into manpower and financial resources, the former is more important than the latter. From the perspective of churches with existing Putonghua ministries, it is fairly important that church workers act as drivers. From a holistic Gospel mandate perspective, whole-person care, multi-ethnic and cross-cultural ministries are equally important. Through integrating resources, churches of different scales can each put their different strengths to service.
5. **Extended Effect:** Traditionally, Chinese families form very tight-knit relationships. Families that reunite in Hong Kong naturally bring with them opportunities for evangelism. When those who come to the faith connect with family and friends from the mainland, along with the support of churches, perhaps this will be more beneficial in the long term than the current support work being done for churches in Guangdong Province.

Conclusion

Researcher Dr. Otto Lui (CCL Associate General Secretary (Training)) pointed out that this survey research provided foundational information for future related research and for formulating future ministry strategies. Though the research effort shows many unexamined questions which demand more research, we are grateful that, with no budget and only 15 staff and volunteers to conduct phone interviews, CCL was



able to get in touch with 1119 churches ², successfully conducting interviews with 600 of those churches. Of those, 595 Cantonese churches (53.2%) provided actionable research data. It is hoped that in the future, with access to more resources, further investigations can be conducted.

To quote Dr. Lui's conclusions of his report, "Under the trend of 'globalization', the cities of the world have become fields for Gospel work, where many ethnic groups can be reached through cross-cultural evangelism. Can local churches in Hong Kong engage in Putonghua evangelistic work to local Putonghua-speaking communities? Can local churches equip new immigrants, expats, mainland businesspeople and students to be disciples and followers of Christ in hopes that, when they return to the mainland, they will become effective ambassadors for the Gospel? Chinese evangelistic ministries have experienced a lot over the many years, it stands to reason that it should have more diversity in methods and approaches--heading North is not the only option." I hope that, even as ministry work that goes to the north becomes more limited and restrained over time, churches in Hong Kong will realize the precious Gospel opportunity to reach out to an audience that has come right before our eyes!

¹ For detailed information, please consult the government by-census reports on their website at: <https://www.bycensus2016.gov.hk/tc/bc-articles.html>

² According to information from the "2014 Hong Kong Churches Survey Briefing" (Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement, 2014), there are presently 1287 Chinese-speaking churches in Hong Kong. Hence this current survey reached 86.9% of the churches.

2018 marks the 45th anniversary for CCL's China Ministry. The training team engaged in a "Local Putonghua Ministry of Hong Kong Churches Survey". The reason for this is that over the many years, our predecessors prayed fervently that the doors of China would be open for the Gospel. Now that an enormous Putonghua Speaking community has appeared right before our eyes, what are the responses of the local churches?

The survey was analyzed by Dr. Otto Lui and Dr. Lau Chung Ming, with David Shen managing the data. If you wish to receive a complete version of the "Local Putonghua Ministry of Hong Kong Churches Survey", please contact the China Church Ministry Department.

Pastoral Resources

The Last 400 Metres

■ The Living Word Curriculum Series



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Associate General Secretary (Publishing)

In difficulties? Learn from hardship

In 594 B.C., Jeremiah wrote to the 3,000 people who were exiled together with King Jehoiachin to Babylon. The letter was addressed to people including priests, prophets, all other people and surviving elders (Jeremiah 29:1). What do you think was written in the letter? “Within two years I will bring back to Jerusalem all the articles of the Lord’s house that were removed” (Jeremiah 28:3)? Or “build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:5-7)?

The former was a promise made through the prophet Hananiah to encourage people. Unfortunately, it was not realized, and Hananiah was consequently deemed a false prophet. The latter remarks were made by Jeremiah, and though discouraging, they were indeed words from Jehovah¹. In unexpectedly difficult circumstances, the Lord still reigned. He asked the Israelites to settle down for seven years, learn to pray to the Lord (29:7), persist in times of hardship (29:5), stay away from lies (28:3) and obey the Lord.

Facing constraints? Learn to stay focused

After the revised religious policies were implemented on the mainland, the vetting process for publishing and re-publishing has been affected. Not only have there been delays, but titles which used to be approved have now been rejected. We are not prophets who can prophesize, but like the Israelites ages ago, we should count on the Lord in times of difficulties.

Moreover, a church which used to use the Living Word to nurture group leaders was thrown into an unexpected situation when it was about to start a new Living Word programme. The training nearly came to a halt. The leaders did not complain, but kept praying and communicating with each other. They were even more determined to study the Word and focused on how to foster spiritual growth. Finally, the several hundred participants were divided into many small groups to continue their learning. The problems persisted, but the participants' confidence had instead been boosted.

We are confronted with various difficulties and challenges in our publishing work. Just like the Israelites who lived 70 hard years, we learned to pray and rely on God's provisions. We neither have shortcuts, but nor have we slackened in our efforts. Given the hard work and devotion of the authors, editorial committee and production team, the progress of writing up the Living Word has been faster than usual. Amidst the uncertain external environment, we have clung onto God's guidance and quickened our pace in this "last 400 metres" of the track.

Confronted by obstacles? Need for encouragement

This seemingly impossible 400 metres is like the 70 years in which the Israelites experienced much anguish in the Gentiles' territory. However, no matter whether you are running for training or taking part in a race, there are always reasons to give up in the midst of this last 400-metre stretch. Training strengthens us and competing in a race teaches us submission and patience. With cheers and encouragement from within and outside the track, we have completed the last 400 metres in the publication of the "Living Word". What is more important is that leaders have grown spiritually through learning the "Living Word" every month, every quarter and every year. Despite the adversities and limitations, they have learned through the truth a sense of focus and how to live a valuable life.

Please walk this last 400 metres with us in our "Living Word" ministry through your prayers and offering. In 2018, we plan to publish two sets of new publications, with 2,000 volumes for teachers and 8,000 volumes for students. The remaining 9 sets will also be

revised. A funding of US\$96,000 is required. We hope you can respond immediately. The offering can be marked for “The Living Word Curriculum Series”. Thank you!

¹ Refer to *Teachers’ Guide of Jeremiah, The Living Word Curriculum Series, p. 94-95.*

Since the start of the publication of The Living Word Curriculum Series in 2000, the publications have taken on the mission of teaching the truth and leadership training. There is a total of 28 titles, and we aim to publish 19 titles cumulatively within this year, with 110,000 volumes distributed all over China. We do not focus only on learning, i.e. accurate interpretation of the Bible and effective teaching, we also place emphasis on living out the Word. Over the years, numerous church leaders and believers have reinvigorated the culture in their workplace, family and church. Hopefully, the remaining publications can be completed in a few years, and a full set of publications covering books in both the New Testament and Old Testament can be dedicated to the Lord and become a blessing to many churches.

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# Prayers

## 1. A great chance for evangelism

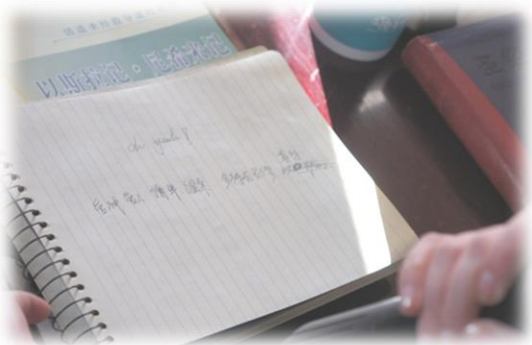
Information from the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department shows that more than 940,000 single entry permit holders arrived in Hong Kong from the mainland between 1997 and 2016. The 2016 population by-census shows that the population aged 5 and above who could speak Putonghua rose from 40% in 2006 to 49 % in 2016.



How can Cantonese-speaking churches in Hong Kong evangelise to the Putonghua-speaking population?

May the Lord send churches to evangelise to the group through community services, whole person care and gatherings. May He help churches see that the conversion of new arrivals from China could in the long run lead to more people believing in Christ on the mainland due to the family and social ties of the converts in Hong Kong.

## 2. The Living Word



The Christian publishing ministry is under threat following the amendment of the Religious Affairs Regulation early this year and the official decision to put the General Administration of Press and Publications under direct control of the Central Propaganda Department in late March.

The development poses challenges to the publication of The Living Word Curriculum Series which play a key role in equipping church leaders to 'live out the truth' in daily lives.

May the Lord bless the author, editorial committee and editing team of the series, help them follow the Lord's guidance and strive to produce relevant materials despite the worsened environment.

### 3. Countering distorted marriage value

Matchmaking TV shows are very popular in China; one participant shot to fame after claiming : “I’d rather cry in a Porsche than on a bicycle.” The participant rose to be a host of this kind of show. On the mainland many people seeking marriage are lured by wealth. Pre-marital sex and co-habitation have also become common, putting young believers under great temptation and test.



May the Lord show mercy, help churches proclaim the Christian values of chastity and respect for one’s spouse; help believers seek God’s will and wait with a pure heart for the most suitable partner He has prepared for them.

### 4. The first free emergency service



Recently 120 emergency centres in Liaoyang city, Liaoning province started offering free medical emergency services, sparing villager patients an average upfront payment of 500 yuan. The policy for the sake of public interest helps ease patients’ burden. Also, ambulance teams have offered more consultation services at people’s homes.

May the Lord guide efforts to improve medical emergency services in China, and let hospitals in other regions adopt the same policy to ensure patients are not denied treatment because of exorbitant costs.

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