

“Mission among the Chinese Diaspora - A case study of migration & mission”

Enoch Wan

*The dispersion of Chinese from the Mainland is a significant contemporary demographic phenomenon. Description and factual data regarding Chinese diaspora are presented to show two missiological trends: the emergence of both mission opportunities among them and the potentials in mission participation by them. These two trends are significant in global mission due to the sheer size of diaspora Chinese among the unreached and their potential forces adding to the resources of global mission in the two-thirds world. (Pre-publication version: *Missiology*, Jan. 2003)*

INTRODUCTION

This study is about “overseas Chinese” (*huaren*) – people of Chinese descent residing outside of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chinese people began emigrating from China prior to the 14th century and the outflow accelerated in the early 19th century due to a combination of push (population explosion, famines, political instability, etc.) and pull factors (better life and more opportunities abroad).

The pattern of population growth of overseas Chinese (“Chinese diaspora”) has been steady in the past 50 years, e.g. the statistics provided by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission of Taiwan: 1948 – 8.7 million, 1968 – 18⁺ million, beginning of 1988 – 30 million, at the end of 1998 – 34 million (not including Hong Kong). From a 2002 report entitled “Overseas Chinese,”¹ the distribution of the 34 million of overseas Chinese is as follows: 80% in Asia, 15% North & South Americas, 2.8% in Europe, 1.7% in Oceania, 0.4% in Africa). The following quotation is from “Commission Chinatown Series,”² providing a sketch of the updated demographics of overseas Chinese:

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“There were a total of 34,505,000 overseas Chinese scattered around the world as of the end of 1999, an increase of 2.3 percent over the previous year.” “There were a total of 34,505,000 overseas Chinese scattered around the world as of the end of 1999, an increase of 2.3 percent over the previous year.” “Residents of Asia topped the list, with 26,788,000 ethnic Chinese living in countries other than mainland China and Taiwan. Overseas Chinese residents of the Americas were second most populous. The total there came to 6,013,000, a 19.8 percent increase on the 1998 figure of 5,020,000.

Europe was third in terms of total population of overseas Chinese, with 968,000 residents. Oceania came in next, with 605,000 people, and Africa trailed the list, with only 132,000 ethnic Chinese residents.

The statistics show that the total number of overseas Chinese worldwide increased by 2.3 percent from 1998's figure of 33,726,000.”

From a missiological perspective, two mission trends will be identified in this case study of migration and mission among diaspora Chinese.

MISSION TREND NO. 1 - MISSION OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Since the People's Republic of China (PRC - Mainland) is a communist country and the people of the Republic of China (RC - Taiwan) are mostly Buddhist (or folk-religion)³, the outflow of emigration from these two countries provides an unprecedented “kairos moment” in terms of mission opportunities in contemporary mission history. PRC being the most populous country in the world and most Chinese are residing in countries within the 10/40 window, **evangelizing Chinese is one of the most challenging but imperative tasks of modern missions.** Here lies the missiological significance of this case study.

Due to the combination of multiple factors (e.g. the demise of communism, the disappointment of PRC members with communist ideology, the decrease of government control of religion, etc.), PRC people (also the largest mission field in the world) nowadays have been very receptive to the Gospel in the second half of the last century. The total number of Christians in PRC was about 700,000 in 1949 when foreign missionaries were forced to leave. Since then, the growth of the Christian church in PRC has been phenomenal; though the statistical data were not consistent. The official figure released by the Religious Bureau in January 2000 was 25,000,000; the most conservative estimate given by chairman Han W.J. of the Three-self Patriotic Movement of China was 13,000,000 and the higher estimate of *Mission Frontiers* in the June 2000 issue was 60,000,000.⁴

Of the five major ethnic groups, the Han Chinese is the majority (91.3%)⁵ and among the diaspora Han Chinese there are a cluster of 17 Han Chinese language groups. They form the largest ethnic group in the world, numbering about 1.2 billion. “Although the vast majority of them live in mainland China, many have immigrated to other countries, and today they reside in nearly every nation of the world...remain unreached with the Gospel.”⁶ The same web site provides the latest estimates from the World Evangelization Research Center, see Figure 1.

Displaced people are most receptive to the Gospel when in transition and diaspora Han Chinese is no exception. Figures 2 to 7 show both **the challenge and opportunities of mission efforts among diaspora Chinese worldwide.** The data of Figures 2-10 provided for this article by Dr. Cyrus Lam (“Go International”) are

updated information from his publication of 1997, 109-115. Of specific interest is the high % in the Netherlands (15% - Figure 2), Singapore (16.8 - Figure 4) and the low/no % elsewhere. The contrast of the high (5.62% - North America of Figure 5), low (0.52 - Latin America - Figure 7) and lowest % (0.27% - Africa & Indian Ocean - Figure 3) is very significant. Of interest is the Chinese workers in Israel.⁶

The unprecedented receptivity of the Gospel by the Chinese is not only found in the PRC as witnessed by researchers from abroad and Christians from within, it is also true among diaspora Chinese. The following are the author's personal experiences.

For three summers the author was involved in short-term mission work in a creative access country where there are approximately 20,000 Chinese employed in construction, agriculture, nursing, and services. Currently there are 4 Chinese churches in this small country of about 5 million, founded at the rate of 1 per year. The annual conversion rate is around 300 for the last few years. The Chinese New Year celebration/outreach meeting of 2002 was attended by 2,200, and 1,300 were refused admission due to limitation of facility and restriction of the fire department.

Conversion of Chinese, in PRC and recent emigrants from PRC in the past decade, is almost taken for granted due to the unusual moving of the Holy Spirit. New Chinese congregations are mushrooming all over the world as shown in Figures 8 to 10. The recent rapid church growth among Chinese resulted in an extreme shortage of pastors/shepherds. This shortage is one of the causes of the prevalence of cultic/heretical harassments of new Chinese Christians worldwide. "Making disciples" is the mandate of the Great Commission; not "converts" nor "church-members." Discipleship of new Chinese converts is commonly a "missing link" of mission outreach to the Chinese and **one of the most critical mission challenges to the Christian church globally.**

The author has been personally involved with two pastoral training programs in the last few years: in Europe, and in Central & South Americas. The one for Europe is a cooperative of The Alliance Bible Seminary (ABS-HK) in Hong Kong and COCM (Chinese Overseas Christian Missions, based in Milton Keynes, UK). It began in 1998 with 17 students for a 2-year program. Sixteen graduated in 1999 and are now serving in 10 countries all over Europe. A similar 2-year pastoral training program is an extension program of ABS-Canada. Being based in Panama, it was founded in 2000 with 15 new students from 6 countries. Eight graduated in December, 2001 and are now serving in 8 countries of Central and South Americas. Students in these two intensive but successful pastoral training programs are mostly professionals and successful entrepreneurs from neighboring countries where they returned to serve after graduation with effectiveness and fruitfulness.

The recent population growth of diaspora Chinese **provides unprecedented mission opportunities** and at the same time **posted a critical challenge in Christian mission** - "making disciples" as mandated in the Great Commission.

MISSION TREND NO. 2 - MISSION PARTICIPATION & PARTNERSHIP

A brief review will suffice to show the encouraging trend of increased mission participation of the diaspora Chinese globally. According to Edmund Mok's 1996 report,⁷ in 1978 at the first mission symposium of CCCOWE (Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelization), 110 (2.7%) of the 4,000 Chinese churches

worldwide had some form of mission involvement with about fifty Chinese missionaries. In 1993, the result of the survey conducted by CCCOWE showed that 10% of the 7,000 Chinese churches worldwide were involved in missions with 760 Chinese missionaries.⁸ In 2000, it was estimated there to be 1,000 Chinese missionaries worldwide by Rev. Mark Chang.⁹ The increase of Chinese missionaries from less than 100 to 1,000 in twenty years is **a positive sign of increased mission participation of Chinese Christians.**¹⁰

The case of “Go International” also **illustrated the growing trend of mission participation of Chinese Christian.** It is one of the newest and fastest growing Chinese mission organizations, launched in 1995 in California by 7 Chinese Christians who had “a vision to minister and to motivate Chinese Christians all over the world to participate in evangelism and mission works.” In less than two decades, it has grown to have a staff of over 40 dedicated workers with ministries in 14 different regions of the world. Its ministries include publishing a bi-monthly mission magazine, organizing missionary training/debriefing, etc. As of now, there are national boards of GO International in countries such as Singapore, Canada, Taiwan, Philippines and Hong Kong. Cooperating with the original US board, representatives from the other five national boards formed an international board for equal partnership in global mission.

Mission ministry of The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) to the Chinese is **a case illustrative of mission partnership in modern missions.**¹¹ It began by Western missionaries in 1889 in interior China and was forced in 1949 to relocate to the British colony of Hong Kong, including dozens of missionaries, the Alliance Bible Seminary (ABS) and the Alliance Press. The joint efforts of C&MA missionaries planted 5 churches during the first 10 years in HK. In the 1960s, the indigenous C&MA-HK association was formed which flourished in the 1970s. In the 1980s, partnership between Western mission efforts and C&MA-HK witnessed rapid growth with the total receipt of USD\$1,901,815 in 1999, see Figure 11.

Of the total 180 Protestant missionaries sent from HK in 1998, 70 (33.4%) were from C&MA-HK. In 1995 the service-oriented Cornerstone Association Ltd. was formed by C&MA-HK specifically for China-ministry. It flourished with the spiritual encouragement of C&MA of the West (US and Canada) and their token personnel/financial support and in the year 2000 alone, USD\$736,033.11 was distributed for construction of church building and services of various kinds in PRC: e.g. educational, medical, relief and community development.

This case aptly illustrates **mission partnership of diaspora Chinese Christian with Western mission efforts in the largest modern mission field, PRC.**

CONCLUSION:

In this study, description of illustrative cases and factual data regarding Chinese diaspora are presented to show two missiological trends: the emergence of both mission opportunities among them and the potentials in mission participation by them.

Notes

¹ “Overseas Chinese,” Online. 13 May 2002, <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/info/book2000/ch0904t.htm>>

² “Commission Chinatown Series.” Online. 13 May 2002, <http://www.huayinet.org/culture%5Cculture_chinatown.htm>

³ The number of global Chinese folk-religionist in 1990 is 380,006,038 - Barrett & Johnson.

⁴ See Wan 2001

⁵Johnstone & Mandryk, *Operation World 2001*, 159

⁶See website: www.kavlaoved.org.il, and <http://www.ipost.com/Editions/2002/01/02/News/News.40992.html>



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Chinese Workers in Israel: 1995 – 2001

The workers

"Israel hosts today approximately 20,000 Chinese workers. Most of them are employed in construction; the rest in agriculture, nursing, and services. The Chinese Government exports workers as a source of foreign currency. This is not unusual. It is unusual, however, that Chinese governmental agents apply pressure on Chinese workers to accept deplorable working conditions..."

(This only an excerpt. Full document is available upon request – ewan@westernseminary.edu)

⁷The Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles, Online, May 13, 2000, <<http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8072a.htm>>

⁸Mok 1996, 200-209

⁹Chan 1993:6:2

¹⁰Mark Chang, 2000:2. A significant event recently occurred in the PRC providing a glimpse of the momentous drive of Chinese Christians towards participation in global mission (see press release entitled "Our World Inquiry Report--The 21st Century Chinese Church" by Luis Bush dated Tue, 12 Feb 2002 18:54:19 EST, from RickWood@XC.Org and for subscription: "News & views from The Inquiry" the-inquiry@XC.Org)

¹¹Data taken from Johnny Wan 2002

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APPENDICIES

Figure 1 – STATISTICS OF THE DIASPORA HAN CHINESE

Demography								
Group Name	Country	Language	1995 Population	% Christian	Scripture Availability	Jesus Film	Christian Broadcasts	Mission Agencies
Han: Cantonese	Cambodia	yueh	200,500	1%	N.T.	Available	Available	4
Han: Hakka	Cambodia	kejia	20,000	1%	N.T.	Available	Available	4
Han: Hokkien	Cambodia	fukienese	50,100	1%	N.T.	None	Available	4
Han: Mandarin	Cambodia	kuoyu	112,100	1%	N.T.	Available	Available	None
Han: Teochow	Cambodia	chaozhou	250,600	1%	N.T.	None	Available	4
Han: Cantonese	India	yueh	19,200	5%	N.T.	Available	Available	3
Han: Hakka	India	kejia	102,700	5%	N.T.	Available	Available	3
Han: Cantonese	Laos	yueh	48,800	0.8%	Bible	Available	Available	None
Han: Mandarin	Laos	kuoyu	34,700	0.7%	Bible	Available	Available	1
Han	Nepal	kuoyu	15,300	0.3%	Bible	Available	Available	None
Han	Saudi Arabia	kuoyu	73,000	6%	N.T.	Available	Available	None
Han	Tanzania	kuoyu	44,800	0.05%	Bible	Available	Available	1
Han:Fuchow	Thailand	fuzhou	11,758	10%			Available	
Han:Hokkien	Thailand	hokkien	1,257,000	8.1%			Available	
Han	Thailand	thai	4,844,300	0.72%	Bible	Available	Available	2
Han	Turkey	kuoyu	41,400	2%	N.T.	Available	Available	None
Han:Mandarin	Vietnam	kuoyu	664,100	2%	N.T.	Available	Available	1

Figure 2 - EUROPE : ETHNIC CHINESE & CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	FELLOWSHIP/ BIBLE STUDY RP	CHRISTIANS	%
Swiss	5,000	1	1	220	4.40%
UK	250,000	62	-	7,500	3.00%
Israel	20,000	4	-	500	2.50%
Portugal	5,000	1	-	100	2.00%
Netherlands	5,000	14	-	750	15.00%
Switzerland	5,000	3	6	40	0.80%
Finland	4,000	1	1	30	0.75%
Spain	35,000	9	1	700	2.00%
France	250,000	14	-	1,500	0.60%
Norway	5,000	1	-	30	0.60%
Denmark	5,000	-	1	30	0.60%
Ireland	8,000	1	-	30	0.38%
Austria	30,000	1	1	100	0.33%
Germany	100,000	4	16	700	0.70%
Italy	50,000	19	1	120	0.24%
Romania	10,000	-	1	20	0.20%
Belgium	14,000	3	-	25	0.18%
Hungary	30,000	2	-	50	0.17%

Czechoslovakia	14,000	-	1	-	0.00%
Russia	-	2		-	0%
Luxembourg	-	1		-	0%
Iceland	-	-	1	-	0%
Poland	1,000	1	1	20	2.00%
Bulgaria	3,000	-	-	-	0.00%
TOTAL	849,000	144	32	12,465	1.47%

Figure 3 - AFRICA & INDIAN OCEAN: ETHNIC CHINESE & CHINESE CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	CHRISTIANS	%
Mauritius	30,000	2	200	0.67%
South Africa	100,000	8	300	0.30%
Reunion	21,000	1	70	0.30%
Mauritius	35,000	-	-	0.00%
Madagascar	10,000	-	-	0.00%
Tanzania	1,000	-	-	0.00%
Kenya	2,000	-	-	0.00%
Ghana	1,000	-	-	0.00%
Mozambique	1,000	-	-	0.00%
Seychelles	1,000	-	-	0.00%
Lesotho	2,000	1	?	?
Namibia	2,000	-	-	0.00%
Zambia	2,000	-	-	0.00%
TOTAL	208,000.00	12.00	570.00	0.27%

Figure 4 - ASIA: ETHNIC CHINESE & CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	CHRISTIANS	%
<i>China</i>	<i>1,295,330,000</i>	<i>447,761 (134 per unit)</i>	<i>60,000,000</i>	<i>4.63</i>
Singapore	3,072,000	387	516,000	16.80%
Hong Kong	6,860,000	1,200	500,000	7.29%
Malaysia	5,417,500	1,000	136,460	2.52%
Philippines	1,000,000	58	18,371	1.84%
South Korea	20,000	9	350	1.75%
India	12,000	3	200	1.67%
Macao	500,000	54	7,122	1.42%
Indonesia	8,000,000	296	100,000	1.25%
Taiwan	22,000,000	3,609	248,122	1.13%
North Korea	10,000	-	110	1.10%
Brunei	49,300	7	443	0.90%
Japan	238,000	20	1,200	0.50%
Myanmar	3,000,000	62	10,000	0.33%
Lao	170,000	-	300	0.18%
Thailand	6,000,000	69	9,150	0.15%
Vietnam	1,200,000	8	1,000	0.08%
Common. .Indept. States	130,000	5	100	0.08%
Cambodia	340,000	4	150	0.04%
Mongolia	35,000	-	10	0.03%
Saudi Arabia	27,000	-	-	0.00%
Kuwait	6,000	-	-	0.00%
Pakistan	4,000	-	-	0.00%
Sri Lanka	4,000	-	-	0.00%
New Guinea	10,000	-	-	0.00%
TOTAL	50,980,000	6,784	1,548,954	3.03%

Figure 5 - NORTH AMERICA: ETHNIC CHINESE AND CHINESE CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	CHRISTIANS	%
Canada	1,000,000	350	58,000	5.80%
U.S.A.	2,700,000	1,000	150,000	5.56%
TOTAL	3,700,000	1,350	208,000	5.62%

Figure 6 - OCEANA: ETHNIC CHINESE AND CHINESE CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	CHRISTIANS	%
Paula Islands	1,300	1	100	7.69%
Saipan	20,000	5	1,000	5.00%
Guam	6,000	2	300	5.00%
Australia	250,000	181	12,000	4.80%
New Zealand	36,600	26	1,000	2.73%
Fuji Islands	7,000	3	100	1.43%
Solomon Islands	2,000	-	-	0.00%
TOTAL	322,900	218	14,500	4.49%

Figure 7 - LATIN AMERICA: ETHNIC CHINESE AND CHINESE CHURCH

COUNTRY	CHINESE	CHURCH	CHRISTIANS	%
Paraguay	6,000	8	180	3.00%
Argentina	40,000	7	800	2.00%
Chile	2,000	1	40	2.00%
El Salvador	1,300	1	25	1.92%
Belize	7,000	6	200	2.86%
Suriname	12,000	2	150	1.25%
Puerto Rico	7,000	2	50	0.71%
Brazil	200,000	19	1,200	0.60%
Honduras	2,000	-	10	0.50%
Mexico	31,000	1	75	0.24%
Costa Rica	30,000	3	140	0.47%
Trinidad	12,000	1	50	0.42%
Bolivia	5,000	1	20	0.40%
Panama	120,000	4	450	0.38%
French Guyana	5,500	1	20	0.36%
Ecuador	6,500	1	20	0.31%
Dominican Republic	2,500	2	50	2.00%
Venezuela	40,000	4	70	0.18%
Guatemala	15,000	1	20	0.13%
Jamaica	31,000	1	50	0.16%
Peru	100,000	1	40	0.04%
Bahamas	500	-	-	0.00%
Columbia	1,000	-	-	0.00%
Nicaragua	7,000	-	-	0.00%
Cuba	15,000	-	-	0.00%
Guyana	1,500	-	-	0.00%
TOTAL	700,800	67	3,660	0.52%

Figure 8 - GLOBAL CHINESE CHURCH: CHINA & ABROAD

CHINA	447,761
OVERSEAS	8,779
TOTAL	456,540

Figure 9 - GLOBAL CHINESE CHURCH BY REGION

REGION	NO. CHURCH
CHINA	447,761
ASIA	6,993
NORTH AMERICA	1,350
OCEANA	218
EUROPE	144
LATIN AMERICA	63
AFRICA	12
TOTAL	456,541

Figure 10 - DISTRIBUTION OF CHINESE CHURCHES GLOBALLY

COUNTRY	CHURCH NO.	COUNTRY	CHURCH NO.
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China *	447,761	Spain	9
Taiwan	3,609	Paraguay	8
Hong Kong	1,200	Vietnam	8
USA	1,000	Brunei	7
Malaysia	1,000	Argentina	7
Singapore #	381	Belize	6
Canada	350	Siapan	5
Indonesia	296	Cambodia	4
Australia	181	Venezuela	4
Thailand	69	Germany	4
UK	62	Panama	4
Myanmar	62	Israel	4
Philippines	73	India	3
Macao	54	Costa Rica	3
New Zealand	26	Fuji Islands.	3
Italy	19	Belgium	3
Brazil	19	Russia	2
Netherlands	14	Austria	2
France	14	Surinam, Dominica, Puerto Rico, Mauritius, Switzerland, Finland, Hungary	2 each
Japan	13		Total - 14
South Africa	8	Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Trinidad, Uruguay, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Reunion, Portugal, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Romania, Chile, Palau Is.	1 each
South Korea	9		Total - 17
Total			456,540

* According to the conservative estimate, there are 60,000,000 Christians in Mainland China.

Assuming the average church size to be 200, there are 300,000. Take the global average size of Christian church of 134, then there are 440,000 churches in China.

In 1994, there were 413 churches in Singapore, the break down of Chinese churches are:

Chinese 73, English 18, bi-lingual 120, total 387; the rest were non-Chinese churches.

Figure 11 – C&MA-HK via-s-via Protestant Churches in HK (1990)

ASPECTS		C&MA-HK	TOTAL-HK	%
total churches		112	1,129	9.92%
Membership		24,889	172,237	14.45%
Pastoral staff		320	2,325	13.76%
New churches planted during	1980-89	26	238	10.92%
	1990-99	36	267	13.48%