

An Understanding of Past and Present Outreach to the Chinese in North America for a More
Effective Outreach in the Future: A case study of the Minneapolis / St. Paul area

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MARCH 2014

Abstract

This paper is a study of past and present outreach efforts to the Chinese in North America for the purpose of developing strategies for more effective outreach in the future. The sole focus of this study is reaching the Chinese people living in North America and does not speak to any aspects of activity in East Asia. This research was conducted through a series of interviews of WELS ministries reaching the Chinese people as well as interviews and research of similar outreach efforts by other denominations in North America. The WELS can benefit from a study of additional church bodies' methodology and philosophy in reaching the Chinese in North America, specifically in the areas of appointing leadership, evangelism strategies, and overall understanding of the North American Chinese culture. If a WELS church analyzes the surrounding community and the subsequent research reveals that Chinese people are living within their area, it is my prayer that this paper can serve as a gathering of examples, strategies, and encouragement to aid the members of the church in sharing their faith with the Chinese people.

Part I: Introduction

Personal Connection

Walking away from our overseas home was a bittersweet moment in the summer of 2009. My wife Becky and I had spent the last two years together sharing our faith and teaching English in East Asia. Since our departure we have kept an interest in sharing God's Word with the Chinese on our home soil while staying connected to the work overseas. God has blessed us with opportunities to still work among his beloved Chinese people. We have also stayed in contact with Chinese friends and American teachers who continue to work overseas. During our first year back to the United States, we lived in New Ulm, Minnesota where we had the privilege to encourage and study God's Word with a group of Martin Luther College students that would eventually serve overseas in East Asia.

The following years in Milwaukee brought additional opportunities to stay connected. During our first year we visited our overseas home for two weeks in 2011 with the intention to

reunite with and encourage Chinese friends. We returned encouraged, as we had once again seen the power of the gospel working in the hearts of friends, old and new. As we prepared for year number two in Milwaukee another opportunity was presented to us. A growing number of Chinese students were attending Wisconsin Lutheran High School and host parents were needed. This was a “job” for our young family to provide a welcoming home to the Chinese students as well as a demonstration of Christian living. The ultimate goal was to create an atmosphere in which we could share our faith with the students. That school year we had the privilege of hosting three Chinese boys, all of whom quickly became a part of our family, stood in family photos, and rejoiced with us on the day of our son’s baptism. While our Chinese boys returned home at the end of the school year, some Chinese friends from our days teaching overseas made the journey to stay with us over the summer, both that year in Milwaukee and the following year while vicaring in Georgia.

Currently, during our final year in Milwaukee, we are again hosting Chinese students, two girls, whose social crew of two other Chinese girls gathers regularly at our house after school. This is a welcome reality for our family as we often reminisce about East Asia, discuss cultural differences, and share laughs over our miscues in our feeble attempts to learn one another’s language. As our relationships grow with one another, we give thanks for the girls’ interest to attend a worship service every Saturday night at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa and for the work of Pastor Joshua Yu in reaching out to them. God has placed a witnessing opportunity at our doorstep and we thank him for it. These experiences further my interest in a study of Chinese culture, the Mandarin language, and other opportunities for our family in the future to share our Savior’s love with the Chinese.

Purpose

Romans 10:14-16 is a section of Scripture shared with teachers who are preparing to go teach English overseas to East Asia: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!* Upon our return to North America the realization came that our feet do not have to travel far to reach the Chinese people

with the gospel, but instead the Chinese are living in our neighborhoods, they are a part of our communities, and they have become one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States (Nationwide, census respondents who identify as Chinese represent the largest Asian group¹).

It is with this background of experiences in working with the Chinese people that I have been eager to better understand the outreach efforts made by the WELS and other church bodies to meet the spiritual needs of the Chinese living in North America. My investigation started with an attempt to understand the recent history of Chinese outreach by the WELS in the Minneapolis / St. Paul area while observing the opportunities that still exist today. This paper will give an overview of the past and present outreach efforts by the WELS to the Chinese in the Twin Cities and compare with the present efforts of other churches in the greater Minneapolis / St. Paul area. This comparison will be followed by a collection of cultural characteristics that have challenged Christian ministries around North America to evangelize the Chinese. This paper will also note several other WELS outreach efforts to the Chinese in North America along with possible locations for the future. Finally, it is the intention of this paper to conclude with proposals and strategies for more effective outreach to the Chinese in North America.

Part II: Outreach in Minneapolis / St. Paul

Making Contact

I was never given the privilege of meeting Loren Steele, but having served with both of his daughters and their husbands overseas a wonderful picture has been painted of a man who truly grasped the gospel's desire to reach all nations. Pastor Allen Schleusener did a great service by writing his Senior Church History paper about the life of his father-in-law, Loren Steele. In that paper Pastor Al (as many of his East Asian students called him while we served alongside each other overseas) recounted the fascinating path God led Loren to come in contact with the Chinese. Loren had originally been interested in reaching out to the Hmong upon his assignment to serve at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN. Years before God blessed Loren with opportunities to share the love of Jesus with the Hmong in Manitowoc, WI over his Vicar year

¹ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/03/23/149244806/u-s-census-show-asians-are-fastest-growing-racial-group>

and Loren was eager to see what doors God might open for him in St. Paul, Minnesota. God blessed Loren's efforts, eventually leading him to help educate and encourage several Hmong seminary students.

Once the Seminary students were fully trained, Loren took a backseat in working with the Hmong outreach. He decided to target another Asian group and attempted to reach out to the Japanese, but was met with some resistance. Still, Loren's heart and eyes were geared toward reaching out to Asians with the Good News of Jesus Christ.² Loren eventually came into contact with three Chinese women who were initially interested in studying the Bible. Loren was unable to communicate with the three women in their native language, but he was introduced to another woman, Lai Ping, who was willing to translate for the Bible class though she herself was not a Christian (she would translate for over two years before she herself believed that Jesus was the Savior she always needed and wanted).³

The classes began, but the three women who had been interested could no longer make the time commitment to study with Pastor Steele. Lai Ping, however, asked that the Bible study continue between her and Pastor Steele – reminiscent of Jesus' words that where two or three gather in Jesus' name, there he is with them (Mt. 18:20). Loren eventually met another Chinese contact named Becky Yin, who hosted Bible studies at her home even though her husband wanted nothing to do with Christianity. The desire of this small group to reach more Chinese people resulted in a flyer distribution throughout the Asian markets in the Twin Cities. Only one person answered the flyer, but that one respondent happened to be a student from the University of Minnesota. This particular student encouraged the group to reach out to other students on the university campus, which proved to be a very fruitful avenue to explore. The group was able to secure lists of new arrivals from East Asia that would be attending the university, complete with their names and flight times. This allowed them to make an initial contact with the students that got off the plane, becoming the first friendly faces the students saw in a new country. These students were given a ride from the airport, connected with host families, and invited to

² Allen Schleusener, *Pastor Loren E. Steele: A Man of God Working Boldly in the Lord among the Chinese* (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Church History 331, 2002) pg. 12.

³ Mark A. Cordes, *Come and See: A Sermon delivered in January following Loren Steele's passing*, pg. 2.

gatherings hosted by Lai Ping and Becky Yin. The young group also sought to connect with students by putting up an information table in one of the student campus centers.

Eventually, in 1998 the group that started with Pastor Steele, Becky Yin, and Lai Ping started meeting in the Dinky Dome – an unofficial student center off the University of Minnesota campus and the same place where the WELS campus ministry had been meeting. These Bible studies for the Chinese were led by Pastor Steele and saw anywhere from three to twenty-three additional people in attendance and always concluded with a Chinese meal. But this wasn't the only successful outreach effort made at the university campus:

In 1998 Pastor Loren Steele teamed up with Joel Lintner, campus pastor at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis/ St. Paul, and planned a rally for Asian students from Oct. 16-18. The goal of Asian Call '98, held at Saint Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn., was to take people friendly to Christianity and enroll them in Bible study. Of the 121 Asians who attended, 80 to 90 were non-Christian. They attended workshops describing the basics of Christianity. The results were impressive. Many people committed to learn more about Christianity. Pastor Steele's Asian Bible classes have more than doubled ... Joe Dietrich, campus pastor at Michigan State University, brought four Asians. Two of them attended worship the following week for the first time. About 30 Asian students stayed with American families. Many exchanged addresses. One Chinese woman, expecting her only child, told her host family she would name her baby after one of their children. Jesus says in Revelation 3:8, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." Christ has placed an open door before us. Many Asian students who come to America are open to new ideas, and even to old ones. They are willing to hear about a faith that is neither American nor Chinese nor Japanese, but is for all people of all time.⁴

Experiences like these fueled the group's desire to reach more Chinese people in the Twin Cities and brought a greater awareness and interest in the Bible studies that were being offered. Once the attendance steadied in the teens the group asked Pastor Steele if they could meet for a regular Sunday service. God blessed the group's worship services, eventually growing to a point where another location beyond the Dinky Dome had to be found. The group settled on Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, where the Chinese services are still taking place at this time. From their start in 1998 to 2002 the attendance for worship went from 20 souls to over 80 souls on

⁴ Joel Lintner, "Opening the Gospel for Asians," WELS Forward in Christ: Volume 86, number 1 (January 1999).

average, not including special services.⁵ Due to the size of the group they were formally incorporated as part of the church in 2002, officially as Mt. Olive Chinese Church.

Though God in his infinite wisdom took Pastor Loren Steele home to heaven on January 8th, 2005, there have been others who have served the saints at Mt. Olive Chinese Church. Following Pastor Steele, pastors Joel Lintner, John Baumann, and Leon Piepenbrink served the congregation in various capacities until Li Xiao Qing was brought to lead. Li Xiao Qing served the congregation briefly after his graduation from the PSI program, but eventually returned back to East Asia.

Mt. Olive Chinese Church at Present

Today there is a Chinese fellowship gathering and worship service held each week on the property of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN. Pastor David Zhao and his wife are Chinese natives who immigrated to Canada until Pastor Zhao's wife took a job in the Twin Cities. Pastor Zhao participated in our WELS fellowship through the campus ministry at the University of Minnesota and then was trained as a pastor through our WELS Pastoral Studies Institute. Pastor Zhao was brought to the fellowship at Mt. Olive Chinese Church in 2005 and served as a vicar at Mt. Olive from 2010-2011. Following his graduation from the PSI program David Zhao was appointed to lead the people at Mt. Olive Chinese Church in 2011. In the summer of 2012 Pastor Zhao accepted the call for a two-year extension for his service as translator and online instructor in St. Paul, MN.⁶ Pastor Zhao is now an online instructor to more than 100 students in East Asia through QQ, an equivalent to Facebook.⁷ Pastor Zhao served as the theological editor for the religious works being translated into the Chinese language by the Translation Working Group in Hong Kong, but his work in that area has been discontinued. In addition to this, Pastor

⁵ Schleusener, pg. 30

⁶ <http://www.wels.net/news-events/assignments-mission-fields>

⁷ <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCUQFjAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fconnect.wels.net%2FAOM%2FBWM%2Fmissionpromo%2FMissions%2520Promotions%2520Power%2520Points%2FBWM%2520Overview%25202012%2520SCRIPT.docx&ei=whQAU5LrHMKiyAGHm4DoAQ&usg=AFQjCNHXx26UzpG59P7tbsc2vrViWNQB9Q&sig2=PPEC8cHq35h1ddT4DbuJIw&bvm=bv.61535280,d.aWc>

Zhao also leads a gathering at Mt. Olive Chinese Church in worship regularly on Sunday mornings.

This past October I had the opportunity to attend a worship service at Mt. Olive Chinese Church. Upon walking into the church I noticed nothing displayed that would cause a visitor to know that a group of Chinese gather every Sunday afternoon for worship. The only advertisement that I noticed was a small sign on an exterior door as I headed from the main level down to the basement that stated that the Chinese fellowship took place downstairs. That afternoon Pastor Zhao led the worship service as a dozen or so Chinese people gathered around circular tables in the basement. The tunes of familiar Lutheran hymns had been recorded and were sung in Mandarin. Pastor Zhao led the service using a familiar WELS liturgy and delivered a sermon in Mandarin as well. In many ways it was very easy for a non-Mandarin speaking WELS member to follow along and understand the service.

Following the service the women organized the food for the weekly meal, during which Pastor Zhao took the time to introduce me to the group and explained my interest in observing outreach to the Chinese in the St. Paul area. The meal provided an excellent opportunity for me to speak with most of the individuals from the gathering. Everyone in attendance had some connection to a relative or good friend who was linked to this particular Chinese fellowship at Mt. Olive and because of this relationship many accepted an invitation to come take part in the worship service and fellowship time. The worship service and fellowship gathering afterward were enjoyable and I am thankful for the effort put forward by the group who met that Sunday. The Chinese people shared with me that this regular Sunday afternoon gathering is something they looked forward to because it was a chance to not only hear God's Word but also to interact in Mandarin while indulging in some authentic Chinese cooking.

My initial concerns stemming from this experience have very little to do with what took place on Sunday morning, but rather what does not take place on the other six days of the week. Part of the approach that Pastor Zhao has taken with the congregation is in response to the experiences of the past. When Pastor Steele and Li Xiao Qing were serving this church there was a strong push to engage new people both in the community and at the universities. Based on Pastor Zhao's assessment, the members of the church became very reliant on these individual men and were without direction and leadership once these leaders were no longer a part of the

church. Some of the church members also expressed feelings of being “burned out” from the work of engaging the university students and other Chinese contacts. As Pastor Zhao heard these feelings expressed, he saw the need to educate and concentrate on the spiritual growth of the current members. The intention is to provide a more solid education for the members instead of having an overwhelming focus on outreach. While in theory this approach can be seen as admirable, the method by which this is to take place should be called into question. There are no other opportunities for the Chinese people to study God’s Word in Mandarin outside of Sunday worship. The Chinese members are invited to attend the English Bible study during the week, but this Bible study is not led by Pastor Zhao.

Pastor Zhao explained that he is not called as a second pastor to the congregation but instead works under the Board for World Missions and has a primary focus to conduct internet Bible classes with people overseas. Pastor Zhao concentrates a majority of his effort and time in working with the Chinese people that are not living in North America and sees his position as an opportunity to further the work of reaching souls in East Asia. When I asked about the efforts that could be made in the St. Paul area Pastor Zhao responded that there are not enough Chinese people in Mt. Olive’s surrounding neighborhoods because most of the people were living in the suburbs away from their church’s location. Pastor Zhao did acknowledge that there are large numbers of Chinese students who attend the universities in the area, but he responded to those figures by saying that there were already various campus ministries taking place at those universities and that reaching out to Chinese students is not an effective way for building up a congregation as students graduate and move on to other cities. I was given the impression as a one-time visitor that this arrangement at Mt. Olive Chinese Church had become a preaching station on Sunday mornings for Pastor Zhao and that very little church-related activity directed toward the Chinese living in the Twin Cities takes place outside of Sunday morning. Even a search for Mt. Olive Chinese Church on the internet brings up very few results and lacks any attachment to the Mt. Olive Lutheran Church website.

This causes a dilemma as the story of Loren Steele is told alongside the present day stories of outreach efforts to the Chinese. Pastor Schleusener and Pastor Zhao have their respective responsibilities to serve in the capacities that they have been called to at this time. But the question has to be raised regarding what more can be done in the area of reaching out to the

Chinese living in St. Paul, where over 40,000 people are Asian.⁸ The answer, of course, is that more can always be done – any full-time minister of the gospel can attest that if there were more hours in a day more could be done – but alas let there be rejoicing and thanksgiving in the hours God does provide. When Pastor Zhao arrived at Mt. Olive Chinese Church in 2005 there were roughly forty people in regular attendance. During my visit in October the church welcomed a dozen people in attendance, though I have been in contact with a few people who were off traveling that weekend who regularly attend. My impression is that the current arrangement of Pastor Zhao’s position and analysis of the surrounding neighborhoods has played a part in the dwindling attendance and church related activity at Mt. Olive Chinese Church.

To better understand the setting I ventured out to meet with other Chinese congregations in the Twin Cities area to learn more of their outreach efforts and to observe their congregations. Pastors and church members from several denominations shared their insights, opinions, and experiences in reaching out to the Chinese in Minneapolis / St. Paul. Several interviews proved to be fruitful in seeking to better understand what can be done to reach the Chinese more effectively in the Twin Cities. In the following interviews I asked the participants to give a brief overview of their ministerial work with the Chinese and to share stories of how they were able to make contact with the people that they now serve at their church. I also asked each participant to speak on the differences in their experiences of reaching out to Chinese versus reaching out to members of another racial group. Conversations eventually arrived at theorizing over what aspects of the Chinese culture caused difficulty in their willingness to hear and study God’s Word. The ultimate goal was to glean ideas and strategies to help God people’s better understand the opportunities in our own communities and to make us aware of cultural sensitivities when seeking to reach the lost among the Chinese.

Twin City Chinese Christian Church

Twin City Chinese Christian Church (T4C) is located three miles away from Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Lauderdale, MN. I met with Pastor Mike Gin, one of three pastors on staff. Pastor Mike (as he prefers to be called) handles the English worship services and Bible studies

⁸ http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_DP_DPDP1

while his two associates handle the Cantonese and Mandarin spoken services and events. The church views itself as three congregations separated by the language spoken in their services and yet one united church. Pastor Mike is a second generation Chinese American and has lived in the United States for the majority of his life. His parents spoke some Mandarin at home, but for the most part he grew up speaking English and presently he knows very little Mandarin. Mike Gin worked as an engineer for four years in Washington D.C. and during that time became heavily involved in his church. After he was let go from his engineering position, the church took Mike on to their staff full-time as a mission coordinator where he led outreach efforts and taught Bible classes. Eventually Mike enrolled himself at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. Following his graduation in 2003 Pastor Mike was given the opportunity to serve at T4C.

T4C was established by ministers who were forced to leave East Asia following political changes in 1949. Pastor Mike commends the pastors and members of this church in the 1960's for their vision in establishing English services and Bible classes to go along with the already established Mandarin events. The variety of services and opportunities for the Chinese in attendance were very appealing as it allowed the people to worship both in their native tongue and English, the spoken language of their new home. When Pastor Mike was given the opportunity to serve in 2003 the church had already expanded to the present day three congregations of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. These three options fulfill the church's goal to build up three interdependent congregations as one church to become the center of discipleship and outreach to the Chinese in the Twin Cities. After a series of interviews that consisted of monitoring and rating his sermons, Bible classes, outreach strategies, and interaction with the members of the church Pastor Mike was hired to serve as the full-time pastor of the English congregation where he still serves today.

Understanding his background, I asked Pastor Mike what he and his congregation were doing as far as outreach to the community along with strategies they had implemented in bringing more people to their church. Pastor Mike spoke that for his particular congregation there was a strong focus on relationships. A majority of the people that he presently comes into contact with are friends, relatives, and associates of people that are already members or have attended T4C. In his first years with T4C Pastor Mike did a good deal of work with canvassing and reaching out to the neighborhoods with moderate success and interest. He personally feels

that this kind of work can still be done, but with the amount of prospects from friendship and family outreach his schedule is full. One difficulty that Pastor Mike addressed with cold canvassing to Chinese people is their tendency to remain private and act as cordial as possible without allowing the canvasser to know what they really think (though Pastor Mike has found that the courtesy of an invitation and an opportunity to interact with other Chinese people is often appreciated even if there is no initial reaction to the proposal of attending T4C).

Pastor Mike has spent a majority of his time working with second generation Chinese people who are both interested in maintaining their Chinese roots while embracing the culture and language of the world around them in the Twin Cities. Prospects have come through the outreach efforts at a number of universities while at the same time T4C has teamed up with Campus Crusaders for Christ and InterVarsity for additional contacts. Over the last ten years strategies to connect at the universities have been altered due to the different make-up of the students upon their arrival to the Twin Cities. A decade ago T4C was able to create relationships with new Chinese students by providing basic furniture, transportation, and a hot meal on the weekends. Nowadays, Chinese students arriving at the universities tend to be very well supported financially by their families back home and don't require the same support from outside sources.

When I asked about some of the other challenges T4C faces in reaching out to the Chinese in his community Pastor Mike spoke of the variety of options that are available in English, especially in settings with nicer buildings that don't have the dynamic of three different groups (Mandarin, Cantonese, and English) trying to coexist in one church. Pastor Mike also acknowledged that today when he presents Christianity to a new Chinese contact he's not necessarily dealing with a "blank slate" on the subject of Jesus and the Bible. Many of the new contacts absorb an impression of Christianity through media and culture studies. While Pastor Mike still meets plenty of Chinese people who know nothing of Jesus, a rising percentage have developed opinions of Christianity and have labeled it with a reputation as a Western belief system. This reality requires Pastor Mike to be ready to either share the very basics of God's Word or to debunk myths and misguided notions about Christianity.

Pastor Mike has learned to never be afraid of stating the obvious, both with new contacts and still with his members. Clarity is essential for ensuring that important teachings are not lost

in translation. It is also necessary to learn in what ways a person is considered “Chinese.” Are the Chinese people first or second generation Chinese? Are they considered Chinese by ethnicity and language? Are they labeled Chinese because they grew up in a Chinese home or even simply have the complexion of a Chinese person? Answers to these questions will dictate an approach when continuing a conversation.

In organizing additional programs and bible classes for his members, Pastor Mike has become extremely flexible in working around the school schedule of the children. After years of trying to have a youth group or a teen class during the week, Pastor Mike eventually found success on the weekend. It became clear that a secular education is held at such a high premium by his Chinese members that any proposals to have children participate in anything else besides schoolwork on a school night is not welcomed by the parents. There is room for growth in the understanding of a Christian education being far more important than a secular education, but Pastor Mike also concedes that respect must be given to the wishes of his people. In turn, many of the parents have arranged their children’s schedules in such a way that if the students are faithful in their studies they can be rewarded by attending the Friday evening Bible study at T4C. Church events don’t always resonate with people as an ideal way to spend a Friday night, and yet for these kids it is a treat. This limited window prompts the congregations to provide the kids with quality entertainment alongside studying God’s love and relevance in their lives. This is an important step in understanding the mission field around this particular area of the church: the Chinese people have high expectations of what will take place Sunday through Thursday evenings with their children and any proposals to interfere with this schedule will fall on deaf ears. But to encourage a reward system and invite the children on the nights where they are not responsible the next day for schoolwork is welcomed with smiles by the parents.

Speaking on biblical comprehension, a concept like *We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19)* is exceptionally difficult for the Chinese members at T4C to grasp. As believers read this passage with the eyes of faith and hear again of God’s love for his people there is bound to be a certain sense of astonishment and almost disbelief. Why would God love people before they did anything to please him? All human beings can admit that it makes more sense to earn love by what a person does and the Chinese are no exception. Pastor Mike has observed that those who

were raised in a traditional Chinese household have the concept of earning respect and love through sacrifice and hard-work. For Pastor Mike to simply tell them otherwise would cause confusion and most likely would not compute in their minds. Pastor Mike stresses the need for a solid foundation and explanation as to why God reveals his eternal love for people even before they loved God. Once again it is important to know the background of the Chinese person before approaching certain teachings and subjects.

A unique challenge with the Chinese at T4C has been the use of public and private forgiveness. While Pastor Mike acknowledges this practice as very beneficial, he is now sensitive to the reality that this is vastly different from a Chinese person's upbringing. To publicly admit guilt and failure as is often performed in WELS church services in the Confession and Absolution may come off as very strange to many Chinese people. The idea of admitting wrongdoing in the presence of others, even when done in unison pulls at their mindset to always keep face and remain upstanding and honorable in the presence of others around them. As Pastor Mike spoke of this example he sought to emphasize and encourage the importance of understanding cultural norms and assumptions (Communism, Atheism, Buddhism, "saving face", shame discipline, etc.) but to realize that these impressions will not be universally true. It is a good strategy to read and study, but nothing will ever be better than investing the time to get to know a person and where they are coming from in life.

EFCTC

A second interview was conducted with Pastor Daniel Wu who serves at Evangelical Formosan (Taiwan) Church of the Twin Cities, also known as EFCTC. Pastor Wu also spends time working with students at various campuses throughout the Twin Cities. He too recognizes the difficulty raising membership numbers with students because of their inevitable graduations and relocations to places outside the Twin Cities. Pastor Wu, however, sees the benefit in studying and worshipping with the students because he can prepare them to take the gospel elsewhere in the world. These students want to be a part of a Christian mentor program and many want discipleship training. Having spent time with Pastor Wu in Bible study the students recognize the importance of sharing their faith. They look to Pastor Wu to prepare them for witnessing opportunities while they are enrolled at school and in their lives after graduation. This

particular church has seen the benefit of incorporating these highly motivated students into their fellowship. The energy and focus of the students helps the other church members to move past the idea of gathering on Sunday for cultural fellowship and instead encourages an emphasis on God's Word. Ultimately, any church that seeks to serve the Chinese people in America will need to participate in and promote cultural festivals and observe the importance of retaining and reflecting on this particular culture. The danger is that the actual worship service can be jeopardized or belittled on account of people just wanting to enjoy time being with other Chinese people. Pastor Wu has seen the benefit of eager university students who want to worship and learn more of God as they bring a focused approach to the church and influence the other members.

One area that Pastor Wu has explored in making new Chinese contacts is in participating with various associations and groups around the Minneapolis area. Pastor Wu makes a point of joining and participating in cultural groups that gather, such as the Taiwanese Association of America – Minnesota Chapter. Here he is able to mingle with others and frequently Pastor Wu brings members with him so they can also make new contacts. Having chances to relate about similar backgrounds and share experiences with others allows the pastor and members of EFCTC to establish credibility and the all-important start of a relationship with new people. Other Chinese cultural and language groups exist all over the Minneapolis / St. Paul area, such as the Minneapolis Chinese Culture and Language Club. The time spent participating in these cultural events will lead to invitations to worship and Bible study that come from a person who is known and trusted instead of a cold-call request to join a group that is perceived to be heavily Westernized.

In connection with this Pastor Wu and his members make a point of having cultural festivals and recognition of Chinese holidays during the year and invite others from the community. They are honest and upfront about being a church and inviting new people to worship with them, but there is also the recognition that in order to be perceived as authentic a relationship needs to be established. Pastor Wu is quick to follow up that concept by sharing stories of students and community members who are thrilled by a simple invitation, whether specific to worship and Bible study or for a cultural event. A kind greeting and simple invite can go a long way in making contacts and finding prospects.

When visitors do come to learn more and show interest in becoming members, both Pastor Mike and Pastor Wu have systems in place to connect the new family with at least two families that are already a part of the church. This allows the new people to get acquainted with others while forming a small group for Bible studies during the week. Both congregations use a small-group Bible study program based on the pastor's sermon each week. This program is understood as a common practice of what members at these churches do each week. These newly formed small-groups also are responsible for caring for one another by encouraging participation and inviting to take part in other events, both church-related and secular.

While Pastor Wu does have some interest in possibly returning to East Asia in the future, both Pastor Mike and Pastor Wu recognize the opportunity to reach the many Chinese people currently residing in the greater Minneapolis / St. Paul area. Both congregations have considered expanding beyond a specific focus on the Chinese people and to reach additional Asian groups in the Twin Cities. For now, these men are thankful for their opportunities and are eager to reach more Chinese people with the Good News of our Savior Jesus.

A WELS Pastor's perspective on Asian Outreach in North America

A third interview with Pastor Pheng Moua from Immanuel Hmong Lutheran Church proved to be very beneficial on the subject of reaching out to a specific Asian group in North America. The unique experience of Pastor Moua going through the WELS Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) program and serving as a full-time minister to the Hmong in a congregation connected with St. Paul Lutheran Church has given him a perspective on outreach efforts by churches specifically targeting a group of people, like the Chinese.

In reflection of his own experience and envisioning the possibilities of the future, Pastor Moua recognizes that for a church to reach out to a targeted group of people it is crucial to have support from an already established congregation. He acknowledges that support both financially to fund the workers and support in the form of willingness to maintain a mission mindset are critical for congregational outreach and growth. In speaking of target groups, Pastor Moua encourages a good mixture of students and established families in the area. Core families are needed to start up a congregation because of the heavy turn-over in membership by students, but

at the same time student ministries should not be neglected. Pastor Moua encourages a focus on the Chinese by campus ministries as the numbers of first generation Chinese students are increasing throughout North American universities. This outreach has to take place with the realization that the students and others will most likely have other agendas in spending time with a church rather than simply looking for spiritual guidance. Pastor Moua says that everyone working within this outreach effort has to be mindful that the contacts and prospects will be looking to gain something from the church. It could be that the Chinese who do participate are looking to increase in their English skills from ESL courses that are offered or in simple conversation with a North American. Though many Chinese students and members of the community are living comfortably, it is still likely that those who make themselves available to the church are looking for some kind of handout or opportunity to connect with other Chinese people.

Pastor Moua stresses that a majority of Asians who move to North America are in pursuit of a better life. Often times that improved life does not focus on the religious freedom to learn more of Christianity. While the freedom is certainly enjoyed in North America, there will continue to be a strong desire for reconnecting back to the cultural roots of the motherland. As a result Christian churches are often viewed as settings to reconnect with the Asian culture instead of a church being a place to learn of God. None of these reasons should deter outreach from taking place in the community, as the gospel overcomes any improper motivation as God works through various means to bring his people to know of his love.

As Pastor Moua considers the success and fortune that many Chinese are experiencing today, especially ones who are able to come abroad to North America, he stresses the emptiness that many of them must be feeling even in moments of prosperity. The majority of the Chinese arrive with the hope of freedoms unavailable to them back home. While many Chinese people arrive with money and aspirations to thrive in North America, they also come ashore with an empty void spiritually. In the case of individuals who have come on their own, they have operated with a group mentality up to this moment, and so to act and survive as an individual is foreign to them. The reality is that these people not only need a social life and to be incorporated into groups, but they also are seeking to satisfy the questions of their souls regarding the reason for their existence. There is a thirst for something more, to find a purpose and a meaning – one

that can be offered by those in North America who are willing to share the truths of Scripture. A “family focus” approach and a style of friendship evangelism that is competent and sensitive to the needs of the Chinese people living away from their homeland will open doors to share the freedom Christians have in Christ.

Pastor Moua also spoke of the kind of person needed to serve as a pastor or leader in a Chinese church in North America. One scenario is to use the Seminary students who are Chinese and currently studying overseas. Could one of these men come to North America and partner with another church to reach out to the Chinese community? Just as others have advised, Pastor Moua sees the potential of such an arrangement in theory looking nice on paper, but fears that this may not be the answer. A first generation seminary student would likely not be considered fit to serve by the second generation Chinese people who already call North America their home. While the native pastor would take some time to adjust to the culture, the issue would remain that many second generation Chinese are not necessarily looking for a full-time Mandarin-speaking pastor because they have embraced the English-speaking culture around them. Pastor Moua also cautions that bringing a graduate from another country to North America would be unwise due to the desire by many to live the American Dream, fearing that any candidate might lose focus. Such a scenario would cause many church members to question whether or not the called worker has come to serve or to be served by the opportunities of this free nation.

Going by the example of Pastor Moua, if there could be some formal training done in North America that scenario would in theory be more successful. Pastor Moua supports the possibility of North American students learning the Mandarin language to start such an outreach. English speakers attempting to learn Mandarin have a challenge in front of them, and yet it can be done. Pastor Moua stands on the ground that regardless of nationality or background God’s Word accomplishes what it is set out to do (Isaiah 55:10, 11). Taking the time to build relationships with the Chinese people will translate into opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Minnesota Faith Chinese Lutheran Church

Glenn E. Berg-Moberg and his ELCA congregation at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church in St. Paul often discussed how to best welcome immigrant Christians and welcome the non-

Christian seekers who hail from other lands.⁹ Eventually the opportunity to support came to their doorstep: Minnesota Faith Chinese Lutheran Church. This church began as a Bible study in the 1990s at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. This group of professors, college students and community members who made up Faith Chinese Fellowship (FCF) held their first service at St Anthony Park Lutheran Church on September 8th, 1996. For over ten years St. Anthony made their building available to be used by the “Faith Chinese” congregation, which has its own pastor, council, worship life, and budget. Faith Chinese has used the established church building of St. Anthony Park on Sunday afternoons for worship, Christian education, and fellowship. Pastor Berg-Moberg writes that this relationship was not a matter of a coincidence:

Our church is located a scant few blocks from the Saint Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. The U. of M. consistently has a big population of students from East Asia. The call to house an immigrant church grew organically from our setting, nurtured by members with special skills and caring hearts. At the outset, former East Asia workers with ties to our congregation began a welcoming ministry helping Chinese students settle into U.S. life. For the Chinese student, finding housing, doing the shopping, and any ordinary daily task is complicated by a daunting language barrier. Having Chinese-speaking mentors to guide and answer questions makes the culture shock more manageable. Social gatherings and meals shared with groups of Chinese students makes up for some homesickness. As that fellowship grew, many came to faith in Jesus and received baptism. The group recognized the need for regular Chinese language worship. As a mission-minded congregation, St. Anthony Park Lutheran opened its doors to a second congregation and an open-ended arrangement began. The fledgling Faith Chinese had few resources, so the building was offered for free. The use of an established building means the immigrant church can focus its resources on ministry, not mortgages. This arrangement has continued through the years, and our congregation considers it a mission support commitment . . . we have had a few joint activities over the years. Potlucks, an anniversary concert, and a few joint meetings for calendar coordination have all been helpful and well received. Joint worship has been attempted, but the utter lack of similarity between the languages makes the language barrier unyielding. Switching from one language to another curtails how much will fit into the worship time allotted, since everything is spoken twice. Simultaneous translation makes for a very distracted feeling that intrudes on the need for prayerful focus. For these reasons, the two congregations mostly function on their own. We have not actively sought to integrate the two communities. This may seem counter to Jesus’ vision “that they may all be one” (John 17:11), yet there is another way to see this ministry. The best ministry our congregation can offer immigrant Chinese is to support a ministry of immigrant to immigrant. The members of Faith Chinese are themselves Chinese nationals, most of them here to study.

⁹ Glenn E Berg-Moberg, “Ministry with Immigrants: Sharing the Mission” *The New Immigrants* Volume 29, number 3 (Summer 2009): 289

Who better to welcome and to evangelize the newcomers than those who really understand?¹⁰

As recently as 2012 the two churches looked into finding separate locations for worship because of greater needs of space for each congregation. St. Anthony Park Lutheran had an opportunity to open their doors to a Chinese gathering in need of a place for worship and as a result both congregations have been blessed.

Comparison of Outreach Efforts

Following the interviews, stories, and experiences of Chinese outreach taking place in the Minneapolis / St. Paul area, I thank my God for the work that is being accomplished. The work of these Christian men and women is produced by the faith that God has given them; their labor is prompted by love, and their endurance is inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:3). God allows us to create, propose, and initiate different strategies for getting his Word out to the nations. This results in outreach efforts to the Chinese in Minneapolis / St. Paul looking very different from church to church. There are different ways to engage the people, different programs that can be put together to attract interest, and even different ways to help facilitate a Chinese gathering. The most significant differences between our WELS Chinese church and the other Chinese churches in the surrounding area are the roles in which the workers are called to serve. The men who serve in the role as pastor of the non-WELS churches have the abilities to communicate with their Chinese people and so are commissioned to do just that: to preach to them, to teach Bible studies, to support their members' spiritual needs, and to reach out to new people in the community. The one unanimous focus of all the pastors in non-WELS Chinese churches was a focus on the Chinese people in the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. Many of these churches had programs for mission efforts to East Asia, but this was not the primary focus of the North American Chinese Church's pastor and his role within the church.

The effort being made at Mt. Olive Chinese Church is different in nature because Pastor Zhao's assigned tasks are to be focused on the work in East Asia. Pastor Zhao possesses a very willing and eager spirit to conduct Bible studies online with those looking for spiritual guidance.

¹⁰ Berg-Moberg, 289-290

His vocation is one that requires him to reach out and work with people outside of his community. The Chinese church at Mt. Olive stays intact by the networking of the members and a desire on the part of the people to have a worship service and gathering on Sundays. Pastor Zhao remains faithful in organizing worship and preaching on Sunday mornings to the group that gathers each week. Recently the group opened their doors to others within the community who share an interest in Chinese culture by hosting a Chinese New Year celebration. Nearly forty people from the congregation and the community as well as the Mandarin students from Martin Luther College gathered to celebrate the culture and the blessings of a new year in the Lord. But beyond the Sunday morning worship and festival gatherings the role of Pastor Zhao is not to nurture the flock at Mt. Olive Chinese Church or reach out to the lost souls of the St. Paul community.

Loren Steele was a man whose heart was on fire for reaching the Asian community both in North America and overseas in East Asia. Now that these opportunities have become more of a reality, the WELS has found ways to effectively reach the souls overseas in East Asia, but the personnel is not in place to reach the Chinese people living in North America. Pastor Zhao's schedule is full with his responsibilities in leading Bible studies over the internet and preaching on Sunday mornings. His arranged schedule, personal observations of the community around him, and talents best suit him for teaching over the internet versus engaging people face to face in the community. Pastor Zhao's gifts make him the right man for his position, but not the right man to lead an outreach effort to the Chinese in the greater Minneapolis / St. Paul area. The other Chinese churches that have been focused on in this paper have leaders in the church whose sole focus is to reach the souls of the Chinese in the greater St. Paul / Minneapolis area. This leadership vision is crucial and ultimately necessary for a church to meet people in this setting.

Many of the differences between the WELS effort and other efforts boil down to specific job description and personality traits of the leaders. The other churches that are working with growing Chinese ministries have men who can and want to do street evangelism. These pastors are also of the same opinion that their members must be actively involved in an every week small group Bible study. As new people join their churches they are automatically plugged into a new "family" through which they can connect quickly to the church and to the teaching of God's Word. At this time the WELS does not have a called leader with the willingness or personality to

lead Mt. Olive Chinese Church to engage the community. For now, as the arrangement stands, those who gather faithfully on Sunday mornings will continue to attend and will invite others in the community to join them. God's Word will be faithfully proclaimed on Sunday mornings at Mt. Olive Chinese Church. But because of the absence of involvement within the community, limited Bible classes, and the lack full-time leadership called to serve the Chinese people of St. Paul the Chinese Church at Mt. Olive will struggle to grow and expand.

Part III: Understanding the Chinese of North America

Understanding the Characteristics

Outreach to the Chinese in North America is hardly a new topic for many church bodies working in North America. This has resulted in other church bodies documenting and analyzing their outreach efforts to better prepare for the future. One objective of this paper is to better understand what others around North America have written concerning North American Chinese Churches. Specifically, there was a pursuit to learn more about certain aspects of outreach to the Chinese that makes this effort unique. Many of the topics that follow will help raise awareness regarding the cultural norms while highlighting certain characteristics of the Chinese people that have distinctively shaped evangelism efforts to reach them. The following are considerations and generalizations of the Asian culture that have been researched and discussed in connection with evangelizing Asians who reside in North America. This list of characteristics is by no means exhaustive when recognizing the cultural nuances of the Chinese. The hope is that a basic mindfulness of these different characteristics will aid the efforts of God's people in seeking to bring the gospel to their Chinese friends and contacts.

To be clear, this list is not an accurate portrayal of each and every Chinese immigrant or Chinese American citizen living in North America. These proposed characteristics cannot be taken as sweeping generalizations for an entire race of people; however, those who have experience reaching out to the Chinese have noted certain tendencies and patterns that can be found in the following list. There has been a movement in the last decade to discuss these issues in response to some alarming statistics facing the North American Asian community: First, a

study shows that nearly 63% of Asian Americans are unchurched.¹¹ (Although the accuracy of the Barna study appears to be more precise, some have even put that number as high as 97%, such as a report by Stanley Inoye in the newsletter of an Asian American ministry consultant group called Iwa).¹² Additional studies show the lack of Christianity among the Chinese, such as 77% of American Chinese claim to not be Christian.¹³ A study by Joseph Wong states that well over 75% percent of American-born Chinese in Chinese immigrant churches end up leaving their church.¹⁴ Statistics like these have led many to research and compose a list of targeted issues that may affect a Chinese person living in American regarding the message of Christianity.

History of Religious Influence

Pieces of shell and bone known as “Oracle Bones” from 6,000 years ago testify to the practice of religion in Asia. These contain written questions from the Chinese asking deities about the future weather, crop planting, family fortunes, military endeavors, and other similar topics.¹⁵ 500 years before Jesus walked this earth the teachings of Confucius established an ethical-philosophical approach to social relationships, which remains today as the main way of approaching relationships. The ideas of cosmic unity remain a part of the Chinese community, expressed in the terms *tai chi* and *yin-yang*, ideas first brought to prominence by Lao Tzu who lived around the same time as Confucius. Lao Tzu brought the people to see a world that is holistic, balanced, and harmonious. Mixed with these beliefs and ideas are traits of Buddhism which has influenced many Chinese people regardless if they adhere to the religion. Taoism has also held a prominent role throughout Chinese religious history.¹⁶

¹¹ Audrey Barrick. “Study: U.S. Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million.”
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/study-u-s-unchurched-population-nears-100-million-26418/>

¹² Peter Cha, *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, 154

¹³ Jerry Park. “Assessing the Sociological Study of Asian American Christianity.”
http://www.academia.edu/401340/Assessing_the_Sociological_Study_of_Asian_American_Christianity

¹⁴ Cha, 146

¹⁵ Victor H. Mair, "The Case of the Wayward Oracle Bone", *Expedition* 43/2 (2001), pg. 42.
www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/pdfs/43-2/the%20case.pdf

¹⁶ David Ng, *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community*, 27

Presently, many Chinese have been influenced by a governing system that claims supreme authority over any other power or deity. Chinese are often exposed to a hostile attitude toward religion which was seen as emblematic of feudalism and foreign colonialism. Religious belief or practice was often discouraged because it was regarded by the government as backwards and superstitious.¹⁷ Religious freedom can be foreign to many Chinese people, as religious practice is heavily restricted and regulated by the government. Even with modern influences, many Chinese are still affected by Buddhist teachings that life involves suffering which must be overcome by denying material cravings and becoming wholly spiritual. Chinese tend to be pluralistic in religion, philosophy, and social ethics to a point that they actively accept a variety of spiritual ideas, religious teachings, and moral practices that “make sense”. They look for something useful to add to their gathered cluster of wisdom. As a result, being religious does not necessarily mean that a Chinese person is a member of one such religious institution.¹⁸

The Confucian Influence

Chinese Confucianism has a few central emphases which include: a focus on this world in spite of a concept of Heaven; a consuming drive for moral improvement, even perfection; confidence that people can change themselves to become better people; and a strong sense that the main purpose of any belief system is to make human beings into better citizens and thus benefit society. Though the vast majority of Chinese Christians believe some form of the gospel, the emphasis in North American Chinese churches falls upon human efforts to improve themselves and their society. G. Wright Doyle, author of The Perfect Man: A Comparison of Confucius and Jesus and Hope Deferred: Studies of Christianity and American Culture, shares his observations on the influence that Confucianism still has in the Christian church:

I have heard hundreds of sermons over the past thirty years; almost never has the preacher focused on the grace of God in Christ, except in purely evangelistic messages, where some elements of it do appear. Almost always, it’s all about what we must do to please God. The Confucian “Heaven” has been replaced by a “Christian” God who exacts total obedience and enforces moral standards, rather like a stern father. Does the text

¹⁷ Religion Facts, “History of Chinese Religion.”
http://www.religionfacts.com/chinese_religion/history.htm

¹⁸ Ng, 27.

come from the Gospels? Then Jesus is our perfect example. The Epistles are rarely preached, but when they are, you hear how we must behave, not how faith joins us to the Fountain of transforming Life. The Old Testament provides stories that are used as good and bad examples for personal conduct. And so on. I have even heard sermons on the Passover and the Day of Atonement that did not even mention Christ and his saving work for us! The preachers were all “evangelicals” who say that they believe in Jesus as Savior, but who preach what can only be called “Christianized” Confucianism. In a word, moralism; legalism, if you will. What we must do, not what God has done, is doing, will do, for us, in us, through us.¹⁹

The teachings of Confucius continue to be handed down to the next generations, both with negative results as cited by G. Wright Doyle and seemingly positive outcomes as cited by the observations of Greg Jao:

Many Chinese American Christians come from faith communities that are modeled after the Confucian values of duty, community, and altruistic self-sacrifice. As a result, the churches often reveal great faithfulness, deep sacrifice, committed prayer, obedience to Scripture, meaningful community, concern for family, and strong mission awareness. These actions can be powered by a keen sense of the holiness of God, the cost of Christ’s death on the cross, and an awareness of our dependence on the Holy Spirit.²⁰

Although Greg Jao seems to be advocating that the Confucian influence can and does benefit the church, G. Wright Doyle’s observation still stands true: too often the motivation for Chinese Christians is reliant on their own effort and not the effort of Jesus on their behalf. Sadly, too many Chinese attending a church in North America are not coming to know what the Apostle Paul knew and shared with the Galatian Christians: *(We) know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified (Gal. 2:16)*. The results of this Confucian belief system reveal themselves in both obvious and subtle ways in the lives of Chinese Christians in North America as many try to make sense of the moralistic focus of their training from their culture in connection with the words of Scripture.

Ultimately, the Apostle Paul’s words must be allowed to put the legalistic nature of Confucianism to rest and become the proper motivation for any Christian: *Therefore, there is*

¹⁹ G. Wright Doyle, “The Greatest Threat to the Chinese Church.”
<http://www.chinainst.org/en/articles/christianity-in-china/the-greatest-threat-to-the-chinese-church.php>

²⁰ Greg Jao, *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, 129

now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Ro. 8:1-4).

The Language Obstacle

When Pastor Loren Steele began his work with the Hmong and eventually with other Asian groups he recognized the difficulty of not speaking the language of his audience. For a native English speaker, learning the Mandarin language is considered to be extremely difficult. According to the Foreign Science Institute (FSI) Mandarin ranks as a level five on a five part scale for difficulty, suggesting that 88 weeks or 2200 hours of study is required for an average English speaker to learn the language.²¹ This difficulty is compounded by the fact that a high percentage of Chinese who immigrate to North America are content to reside in setting where they can function and survive by only speaking Mandarin. Students of linguistic patterns around North America, like Steve Kaufmann of www.thelinguist.com, have surveyed and claim that Chinese rank on the negative end of immigrant groups who choose either to not learn English or fail to improve their English upon their arrival. Instead many Chinese choose to speak Mandarin as they spend a majority of their time within their Chinese circles.²²

While many Christians hear the Apostle Paul's words and strive to become all things to all people (1 Co. 9:22), the reality of learning an Eastern language for a native English speaker is a daunting task. Pastor Steele wrote of his experiences in combating this challenge, often taking to his artistic abilities to draw his message or bringing a bilingual acquaintance with him to translate. But these events took place only after Pastor Steele had established a relationship for a follow-up visit or if an introduction was made by a mutual friend. Unless tongues of fire appear

²¹ Effective Language Learning. "Language Difficulty Ranking."
<http://www.effectivelanguagelearning.com/language-guide/language-difficulty>

²² Steve Kaufmann, "Most Chinese Immigrants Don't Improve their English after 7 years. Why?"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW-WeO82OaI>

on the heads of those looking to reach out with the gospel (Ac. 2:3ff), to make any kind of first-time evangelism call by knocking on doors or strike up a conversation in a marketplace is a tough hurdle to vault over when the two people involved cannot understand each other.²³

The other difficulty that comes from attempting to communicate to a Chinese person about religion when language abilities on either side are lacking is the danger of syncretism. Pastor Steele wrote about how his message was received by one of his Bible class students, Yoeun, who also happened to be a Buddhist:

One day Yoeun literally exploded with questions ... and I was thrilled to receive some feedback to what I had been teaching. But my delight turned to consternation when he said, "I consider you a god, Pastor." I suddenly felt as Paul must have in Lystra (Acts 14:8-20). What had been happening suddenly became apparent. Yoeun, along with some others, had been listening intently and nodding in agreement, so I thought they were taking what I had been saying as the one and only truth. What they were really doing was taking my words and fitting them neatly into Buddhist thinking. Yoeun's statement that he considered me as a "god" finally exposed his mental syncretism. Mahayana Buddhism is a sect which raises Buddha, and various other wise teachers, to the position of "gods" because they teach the way to nirvana. One of the hardest things to ascertain when teaching Asians is how your words are being understood on the other side of those almond eyes. Nirvana equates easily with heaven. Jesus, like Buddha, is a great teacher of the "way." If you want to call him a Savior, they'll go with that. A Buddhist uses the word salvation as the escape from suffering by the suppression of desire. Buddhists use the word "sin", but it means anything which hinders man's progress toward his self-made salvation. They will even fit our Christian definition of death as the separation of body and soul into their Buddhist understanding. There are five component parts of man that separate at death: the physical body, the sensations and feelings, perception, volition, and consciousness. The Christian says, "Soul and body come together at the resurrection." "Of course," says the Buddhist, "we believe in re-incarnation too."²⁴

The importance of having a Christian leader or interpreter who has a solid understanding of the languages being communicated can never be overstated. Common Christian terminology and speech can be troublesome if tossed out in a conversation without a thorough explanation. When the teacher and the student meet, as Pastor Steele and Yoeun did, they bring with them their religious and philosophical heritages that may differ greatly from one another. Without a mastering of the student's language, both the teacher and the student are prone to assumptions of what is being communicated, leaving the truth or meaning to be defined as the individuals see fit

²³ Loren E. Steele, *Our World Mission at Home*, pg. 8

²⁴ Steele, 13-14

according to their own understanding. Even translations like the Chinese Union Version, the predominant translation among Protestants, adds difficulty in properly conveying the meaning of God's Word clearly to the minds of the Chinese. The language obstacle continues to add difficulty to those who seek to communicate the truths of Scripture.

Transparency and Honesty

Following a survey of pastors, evangelists, and teachers who work directly with the Chinese in North America, one aspect of the Chinese culture was frequently cited as an issue for Christians to share God's Word with their Chinese friends and neighbors: a transparency and honesty in their reactions to the message of God's Word. Pastor Steele referred to this tendency as the "Hidden Heart", noting that oriental stoicism basically prohibits the showing of emotions, other than joy, to outsiders. It was only through time and multiple experiences that Pastor Steele would eventually have an idea of what his contacts and prospects might be thinking in relation to his friendship proposal and the message of his God from the Bible.²⁵ One pastor who currently works with the Chinese in North America notes that often times his Chinese prospects will tell him what they think he wants to hear instead of their true feelings. The same pastor has seen that over time an honest relationship with authentic, straight-forward communication can exist. The important guideline to follow is to not simply lecture the truths of God's Word to a Chinese student. Out of respect for the person speaking, they will naturally nod their heads in agreement and more than likely will give you their full attention, even if they are in complete disagreement with the message that is being shared. It is far better to ask questions and gauge comprehension through continuous interaction.

Securing Identity

Many Chinese understand their own personal identity to be bound to their families and to others in their communities so that each is an interdependent "person in community". This is in contrast to many Western people whose life goal is self-fulfillment as a free individual

²⁵ Steele, 9

independent of others.²⁶ For example, throughout much of Chinese history, the fundamental glue that has held society together is the concept of *guanxi*, relationships between people. Today this means that who an individual knows and what these other people believe are obligations to the individual. With a good network of contacts in East Asia, almost anything can be accomplished. *Guanxi* is how things get done.²⁷

Chinese North Americans often will still define individual personal identity in relation to other persons, notably to those sharing family ties. Personal attitudes are formed and decisions are made with the community in mind. One does not live for self alone and one's actions are always evaluated by their effect on the community. To be a person is to be in community.²⁸ The benefits of this cultural norm and common practice are obvious, but there can be drawbacks as well, especially when this mentality is adopted and implemented within a church setting.

While the family cohesiveness undoubtedly makes for clan solidarity and mutual help, its expectations on individual members sometimes can become too demanding or even oppressive. The ideal of harmony in the home, regulated by social pressures, is all too often won at the expense of personal choice and freedom of movement. In the life of Christians such expectations are carried over to church behavior. This is seen as an asset, as it certainly boosts church attendance and brings many younger people into the church. On the other hand, if the same hierarchal arrangements are simply mirrored in the life of the church as a family, it does not bring Good News to those on the lower end of the scale. Their movements would continue to be restricted and their contributions not sought or valued. In the case of new converts whose family members remain non-Christian, there is the psychological burden of acting differently or even of deserting the family.²⁹

There can be disadvantages from this mentality in regards to forming a congregation, but such a tradition can also bring benefits. Chinese North American Christians identify with the image of the church as the "household of God". Just as being in a community is like being in a family or "house", being in a community for the church is like being "in the household of God". The church is the family of God. Chinese North Americans can see themselves in such a practical church. In their own lives they know what a community is (even without a specific word as we have in English) because they have practiced being in a community, particularly and

²⁶ Ng, xix

²⁷ Joyce Millet, "Culture Savvy: Chinese Culture, Etiquette, and Protocol."
http://www.culturalsavvy.com/chinese_culture.htm

²⁸ Ng, 25

²⁹ Ng, 80

practically, in families. They can appreciate what a church is when they can observe a church that practices community like a family does.³⁰

Relationship between Generations

The Fourth Commandment's instructions on familial relationships are often met with little resistance when studying with a Chinese person. Their culture embraces the idea of honoring parents, elders, and those who have gone before them. In fact, this is a trait many Chinese seek to possess and demonstrate throughout their lives. For some, the essence of Confucianism is filial piety. It is important to consider how within the Asian culture, where the parent-child relationship is undoubtedly hierarchical and stoical, can the call from the 4th commandment to honor one's parents be embraced?³¹ Filial piety is definitely not contradictory to Scripture, but the motivations can be quite different. In the Confucian system filial piety stems more from a conviction that parents give one life and therefore deserve all the gratitude, respect, and honor one can render them.³² Generally speaking, Asians are taught to have a high regard for their elder and to maintain a proper public demeanor, but these values can often deter them from creating safe and authentic places to honestly confess their brokenness and failures.³³

While the teaching, tradition, and almost universal acceptance of this practice is understood by the Chinese, today often presents the reality of one or both Chinese parents not being active in the lives of their children because of work commitments and social obligations. Regardless of the culture or location, when the interaction does not occur between parents and children, a necessary trust for bonding and growing in these roles isn't earned. In this reality, the concept of respect for elders is one that can only be entrenched in the minds of children through discipline and lecture instead of a feeling that naturally arises in an active relationship.

As the concept of respecting those in authority plays out and is applied both to the church and home, issues within the Chinese community arise for several reasons. One growing problem

³⁰ Ng, 39

³¹ M. Sydney Park, *Honoring the Generations: Learning with Asian North American Congregations*, 15

³² Ng, 153

³³ Peter Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights from Groundbreaking Congregations*, 24

is children growing up in homes with distant or absent parental figures, due to work or emotional withdrawal. Distant fathers and a heritage of emotional restraint have often robbed Asian families of ways to express familial affection as well as personal hurt or fear.³⁴ Greg Jao addresses this difficulty in how it affects a Chinese American to approach God as a Father:

The cultural backgrounds mold Chinese American attitudes toward approaching God as a Father, an invitation that God gives by revealing himself in Scripture as our Father. Many Chinese Americans ache with desire to be cherished by God, but our heavenly Father seems like just one more authority figure we are doomed to disappoint. A common feeling in our spirituality then is a deep and often unverballed sense of defeat, exhaustion, fear, and despair ... the Chinese family dynamic places fathers in a hierarchy system atop the rest, making it difficult for many Chinese Americans to imagine significant intimacy between ourselves and a parental figure. Hierarchy precludes egalitarian relationships, a key criterion of intimacy in a Western context. Not surprisingly, we don't feel intimate with God as He seems too holy to approach or to know.³⁵

Another issue that can arise is the motivation and attitude behind obeying elders and others in authority. Peter Cha echoes a sentiment felt by many Chinese as they hear the teachings of the church on this issue:

As Asian American Christians how are we to practice God's commandment for us to honor our parents? Are we to blindly obey our parents, as our Confucian based culture seems to teach? Or are we to learn to "hate" our parents for Christ's sake, as our non-Asian Christian friends frequently remind us regarding Luke 14:26³⁶ to emphasize discipleship and the decisive actions that may be called for to stay faithful to God?³⁷

The difficulty of unbelieving parents is an issue for any Christian, as they seek to find the proper balance of love and respect with the understanding that they are to follow God before men (Acts 5:29). For Chinese Americans, to make such a drastic decision by faith can bring great shame both to the family and to themselves in the eyes of the family. Accusations of adopting Western culture and deserting the family by believing in Jesus can fill a Chinese person's heart with guilt. Studies confirm that Asian Americans experience disproportionately strong feelings

³⁴ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 23

³⁵ Jao, 130-131

³⁶ *If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple* (NIV2011).

³⁷ Cha, *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, 154

of shame when compared with others, primarily in terms of feeling deficient and exposed.³⁸ This shame often arises when Chinese Americans fail to meet the expectations of their parents.³⁹

Finally, the difference in focusing on a target group for evangelism between the generations often times becomes an issue within North American Chinese churches. Should the focus of the church be to serve the Mandarin focused first generation Chinese, who are often referred to as OBCs (overseas-born Chinese)? Or should the focus shift to reaching out to the English speaking ABCs (American born Chinese)?⁴⁰ The tension can be great as the second and third generation Chinese seek to give respect to the leaders of their hierarchal church system while at the same creating an environment where their peers and future generations will want to come and hear the Word of God in English. The dilemma of how to serve people from different backgrounds is an issue that can plague the Chinese church, especially if cultural rules and practices supersede a willingness to work together with fellow Christians in reaching people of all ages and backgrounds.

Retaining Chinese Culture within Christianity

Ministers, evangelists, and writers throughout North America who are concerned with the make-up of a Chinese church often wrestle with the proposition of whether or not a Chinese Christian Church can be distinctive from other Christian churches by elements and influences from their Chinese culture. Beyond the physical appearance of the people in worship, can it be obviously viewed and understood that a church is a Chinese Christian Church over just another Christian Church? This question pains many who seek to reach out to the Chinese.

To what extent is it permissible or faithful for Christians of a Chinese Confucian background living in North America to retain some form of veneration of ancestors and of family members who have died? How do they properly venerate ancestors without being made to feel they are somehow not being true to their Christian faith and practice? Specifically, is it permissible for Christians to honor and remember their ancestors and other deceased family members by marking the anniversary of their deaths with some

³⁸ Jon Ido Warden, "Shame, Culture, and Grace."
<http://resistinggrace.com/2013/05/02/shame-culture-and-grace/>

³⁹ Jao, 133

⁴⁰ Don M. Tow, "Dynamics of Chinese-American Churches in the U.S."
<http://www.dontow.com/2008/10/dynamics-of-chinese-american-churches-in-the-u-s/>

kind of ritual? ... or keeping in some shape or form traditional commemorations of the dead set a specific times of the year, such as Qing Ming (April 5th; also known as “Tomb Sweeping Day”), a day in the Confucian tradition to visit ancestors’ grave sites? ... Should Chinese Christians in North America celebrate festivals from their heritage culture, especially those that still seem to have religious connotations attached to them? Such questions become even more acute in families where some of the members have not converted to Christianity and are still carrying on traditional rituals. Do the Christian members participate, either voluntarily or when requested or urged? If they do, might they not feel guilty about taking part in something that they think is pagan or non-Christian and therefore contaminating the purity of their Christian faith and practice? Or do they refrain from having anything to do with non-Christian rituals for fear of being accused of practicing “syncretism”? If they do refrain, do they then feel guilty about severing themselves from the rest of the family and disturbing family harmony on top of failing to honor their ancestors of the dead?⁴¹

David Ng’s questions are legitimate and practical in any attempt to reach out to a Chinese person with the love of God and the message of salvation. The Apostle Paul’s words remind us that God’s Word is to be held high above any cultural tradition or practice: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2)*. The challenge of evaluating cultural truths and norms in light of God’s absolute truth in the Bible is extremely difficult for many to grasp regardless of their heritage culture. Chinese are no different, especially those who have lived decades with an understanding and identification of being “Chinese” and know very little about being “Christian”. Why is it so hard for Asian-Americans to believe that Christianity is for them? It is because they fail to understand that the gospel both speaks to and transcends culture, but it does not obliterate it.⁴²

In speaking of integrating culture with Christianity, several characteristics of the Chinese mentality influence and affect the actions that take place. A strong sense of tradition, respect for ancestors and those who have lived longer, a strong desire to receive acceptance and respect within the family, and an overall desire to keep harmony when at all possible are often preconceived truths by the Chinese before analyzing Christianity. The debate over what is permissible to retain of the Chinese culture for Chinese Christians has been taking place since missionaries went overseas in the 19th century. Missionaries from the Vatican in the 19th and 20th centuries are often remembered as one who stood their ground on a “Christ against culture” and

⁴¹ Ng, 151-152

⁴² Tom Lin. *Losing Face & Finding Grace*, 17

required Chinese converts to dissociate themselves from their cult practice at home or in a temple. This mentality was reversed in 1936 when papal instruction stated that both ancestor worship and the Confucian cult are acknowledged to have evolved over the years into more of a social, familial, and civil nature and have become merely “cultural and secular” rather than remaining religious.⁴³

A blending of the Confucian traditions and practices with Christianity is accurately labeled as syncretism, but many view the modern practice as more of a dual religious system, a separation of the two beliefs as the person chooses to essentially lead a double life. This kind of religious pluralism and the ease of accepting such an approach by Chinese people is traced back to the culture in Asia in which religious patterns are so deeply woven into a culture that it is no longer possible to discern easily what is religion and what is culture, as it is almost impossible for many Chinese people not to be somehow inextricably Confucian, Taoist, and possibly Buddhist in some way.⁴⁴

One struggle in creating and sustaining a church that reaches the Chinese people is the organization and possible separation of groups at services. Many Chinese churches opt for having separate services: one service for those who prefer English and another service for those who prefer Mandarin. Churches that have their chosen leaders who can speak the necessary language for the service often choose to separate the groups, but a majority of these groups, both English and Mandarin speaking, tend to use Western forms of worship and liturgical materials. While there is a natural desire for worship to reflect the theology and tradition of a denomination, it is remarkable that Asian North American worship services seldom utilize the cultural patterns and rhythms of the native culture.

This commonality in many Chinese North American churches is attributed to new-born Chinese Christians being taught to forsake their pagan ways that they had come to know in their culture. There was and still is today good reason in leaving behind cultural tendencies and practices that do not agree or abide by Scripture. In the past many Chinese congregants decided upon their arrival into Christianity that it was better to make a sincere attempt to assimilate to the

⁴³ Ng, 154

⁴⁴ Ng, 154

typical Christian culture of North America and to avoid ideas of incorporating pictures, symbols, gestures, or other expressions that would be considered to be Asian in form and practice. But now the question is being asked if there can be validity in what is often referred to as indigenous worship.⁴⁵ Although almost all material made available to Chinese Christian groups are translations of previous compositions and writings, there is a strong desire in the Chinese Christian community for creating worship and liturgy to be meaningfully Chinese in character.

Difficulty in accepting God's generosity in grace

The Apostle Paul wrote clearly in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that believers in Christ are saved by grace alone. This is such a comfort to a believer, and yet, is there a more controversial concept in the Bible when compared to what secular society deems as the way to prosper and eventually win in life? The ultimate victory is given to people simply by love from God to his people, love that they don't deserve. This proposal is contentious to the American dream and the established system that rewards the best and the brightest. When this concept is compared to the psyche of the Chinese, the result is once again that pure grace is oppositional to their principles and way of life. What are the implications of "saved by grace" for a culture driven by strong work ethics where confidence and identity of the individual are anchored on achievement and success? And if we are to account for Paul's reasoning why we are saved by grace and not by works, "*so that no one should boast*", can confidence and identities continue to be founded on works?⁴⁶

Luke chapter 15 contains a powerful lesson of grace that is well known by many Christians. The story known as the Prodigal Son (also termed the Generous Father) is one that many Chinese struggle to understand. Not only do many Chinese have difficulty identifying with the father's compulsion to celebrate, but many also have difficulty identifying with the younger son. This is especially true for anyone who is successful or in a position of leadership in the church. The path to success in an Eastern mindset is one that relates well to the older son in the parable, a life of being responsible and careful, keeping family honor, and not wasting the family's resources. The high standards for keeping face in the Chinese culture and the norm of

⁴⁵ Ng, xxiv

⁴⁶ M. Sydney Park, 5

rewarding only the successful takes issue with the father in the parable and his compulsion to celebrate over a son who was so reckless and irresponsible. Honor, righteousness, and living according to standards and expectations are all of high value in Eastern cultures.⁴⁷ Those who have been successful by faithfully working hard often struggle to understand how the father can be just and holy while extending outrageous generosity to the younger son. The older son's inability to understand the father causes him to miss out on even a small party for himself. The older son's relationship to his father is ruled by fear, rather than infused with joy. Like his younger brother he is surprised and confused at his father's generosity, but instead of responding in joy he cries out with bitterness. The confusion of the older brother is the confusion of many Chinese as they seek to juggle the message of grace with the ideals of their cultural upbringing.⁴⁸

While any human being is born with a natural rejection and skepticism toward pure grace from God, it is worth noting that the nurturing of a certain individual can affect a person's willingness to listen to such a proposal. The confusion of the older brother in the parable over celebrating the return of the previously rebellious son resonates with many in the Asian culture. There exists a natural insistence on an individual becoming successful, almost perfect, before the person is given acceptance and reward. The message of free and full forgiveness, grace, and never-ending love by God completely defies the accepted cultural standards. To go and preach the gospel, to keep the grace of Christ and his work as the focus, leads toward a ministry that is often times messy and in disarray. The gospel we bring is so far removed from anything in their experience, so foreign to their culture that it comes under immediate suspicion.⁴⁹ This is not because of the quality or effectiveness of the message, for we take confidence that God's Word is powerful (Romans 1:16) and that it accomplishes what it is set out to do (Isaiah 55:10, 11).

Culturally speaking, Asians can struggle with this concept, for according to God's grace they are to value everyone as a person loved by Christ, for whom Christ gave his life. The Asian community is often taught to emphasize and reward hard work and external disciplines above mercy and internal transformation.⁵⁰ They are to ignore previous distinctions that had been the

⁴⁷ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 22

⁴⁸ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 22-23

⁴⁹ Steele, 6

⁵⁰ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, pg. 24

basis for social hierarchy, instead serving one another and looking out for each other's needs.⁵¹ This is a difficult task for any human being, and Asians are no exception when trying to turn their focus from being culturally acceptable to learning of their acceptance in God's eyes.

To correct a previous Pietistic imbalance, some Chinese Christians have recovered the biblical emphasis upon the social implications of Christian faith, and have sought to encourage each other to make an impact on society. G. Wright Doyle wrote on the danger that can come from such an emphasis:

Christianity becomes a tool for improving the nation – just the function that both traditional Confucianism and East Asian rulers believe religion should perform. As you would expect, the result is legalism in the Christian community. Preachers and leaders don't admit that they have faults (or at least not very often). Others follow suit, and hide their true condition from each other, struggling to present a spiritual façade and joining the common crusade to become better people. Success stories form the highlight of personal testimony; failure is quietly ignored. Christians are constantly exhorted to attend Sunday worship and various meetings; to give generously; to serve sacrificially; to share the gospel with their neighbors. In some churches, they are even occasionally reminded of biblical teachings on the family and work – though this is also rare. Mostly, children are told to obey their parents; rarely are parents taught how to bring up their offspring. In most Chinese churches, at least the core people are very, very busy, very, very tired, and very, very lonely. But they soldier on, believing that they will in this way please the God whom they love and desperately want to please. Leadership tends to be concentrated in one person, or an oligarchy, and everyone else is expected to do what they are told by those in authority. In the traditional Chinese home, the father was a distant perfectionist who expected obedience and superior performance in school. That has changed in today's East Asia, with a limiting of children producing “little emperors” doted on by parents and grandparents. In either case, the combination of love and discipline, grace and truth is absent. This man-centered focus can be traced back to a universal reliance on works to establish our righteousness, the sort of trust in the “flesh” that so upset Paul and which inevitably produces the legalism and self-righteousness that provoked Jesus' strongest condemnations. The problem for Chinese is that this natural human concentration upon pleasing others - including God – and making ourselves look good by doing good works is backed up by centuries of Confucian teaching. When they become Christians, it's hard for them to escape this works-centered mindset. The sad consequence is a Christianity that looks at lot like “baptized” Confucianism.⁵²

The absence of grace changes everything. The word “grace” may even be discussed, but when grace has to rely on moralism and good works, it is no longer grace. The blending of a

⁵¹ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, pg. 27

⁵² Doyle, 1

cultural mentality on how to succeed with the concept of God's grace is just another way to empty the power of God's grace. Further aspects of the Asian culture often hinder an interest in learning more of free grace on top of this Confucian restraint in accepted philosophy: an internalized shame within the individual and the common arrangement of distant fathers from the family.⁵³ The barriers for all people, Chinese included, upon hearing of God's grace can be endless. For the Chinese, grace can seem too good to be true, as they hurt inside with their shame knowing that they do not deserve to be loved in such a way. The idea of grace from a loving Father can be hard to comprehend as some Chinese struggle to know the concept of a Father's love being possible based on their experience with their earthly fathers. The message of God's grace is so simple and yet profound, too good to be true and too impossible to comprehend, setting up obstacles for anyone who brings their own ideas into salvation.

Leadership

One struggle that Evangelical churches throughout the country are finding as they seek to reach out to the Chinese in North America is the inability of Chinese church leaders and pastors to sufficiently lead the congregation and secure the necessary support to continue their work. As the percentage of Chinese living in American increased throughout the 1990's and early 2000's the number of Chinese in attendance at Evangelical seminaries increased. Congregations were launched during these time periods to meet the needs of the ever-growing Chinese population, largely led by young pastors who did not have sufficient role models or support to help them with the overwhelming task of starting a church. Many of these congregations that have survived until today continue to experience growing pains from their difficult beginnings. These churches struggle with leadership issues, with identifying their mission and vision, with staffing problems, and with organizational issues. As these churches struggle with issues of leadership, spiritual maturity, and a lack of resources or role models, they find themselves wrestling with the questions of: Who are we? What are we becoming? And what does the future hold for us?⁵⁴

⁵³ Jao, 129

⁵⁴ Cha, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 11

Leaders in Chinese churches, both overseas in East Asia and in North America, are often faced with the difficult decision of what they can afford to do with ministry while still maintaining an occupation and responsibility that provides for the family. The social system calls on a man to not only provide for his family, but also his parents and other relatives for financial support. Children many times are the retirement plan of parents, and so the pressure looms over the child to find a profession that will make the child's immediate family as well as parents and relatives comfortable. Support throughout the training of leaders is critical for development, but sadly many students who have pursued full-time Christian work have not received the support needed to develop into leaders; instead, they are faced with much persecution and disappointment from their parents.⁵⁵

Leaders in Chinese North American Churches have also struggled with care and sensitivity in counseling one another. Just like other churches that gather to praise God, the Chinese North American churches are not immune to the struggles and strife that come to everyone living in this sinful world. Chinese pastors in North American congregations often struggle in the area of pastoral counseling. These struggles to properly and effectively counsel members are well-documented and a smoldering issue for many congregations. Like any congregation there exists "people problems" between the leaders and the congregants, but analyzing and striving to solve the issue may be different in many ways when dealing with people who have a Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist background along with ways of relating and talking that are distinctly Asian.⁵⁶

The concept of "keeping face" and "saving face" are critical, to the point that one instance of "losing face" even in the eyes of the pastor can cause embarrassment to the extent that a person may never return or speak with the pastor again. "*Mianzi*" means face: losing face, saving face and giving face is very important and should be taken into consideration at all times.⁵⁷ If a pastor or a leader in the church were to lose their temper, confront someone openly, put someone on the spot, demonstrate arrogant behavior, or fail to accord proper respect they could cause a Chinese member or prospect to lose face. To cause a Chinese person to lose face

⁵⁵ Jao, 58

⁵⁶ Ng, xxv

⁵⁷ Millet, 1

can seriously jeopardize opportunities in the future to be respected and heard when pronouncing the truth of God's Word. Because of this, some leaders have also failed to lead their people away from doing something wrong because of their desire to "keep face" and not offend anyone. The art of being polite and courteous is referred to as *li*, which originally meant to sacrifice. Proper etiquette preserves harmony and face, and as a result a person's true emotions do not always matter as long as surface harmony is maintained. For example, a public argument, or a boss reprimanding a staff member in front of others would disturb surface harmony and cause someone to lose face. This is why the Chinese often use an intermediary to deliver bad news or unpleasant messages.⁵⁸ In a church setting, if this approach is taken or even a failure to approach a problem at all is also a failure to properly serve as a leader.

The pain and guilt of losing face will likely remain with a Chinese person for many years to come. Because of this some Chinese Christian leaders forgo the opportunity to do counseling altogether simply for fear of causing a person in counseling to lose face. As David Ng and his team researched the tendencies of pastors in Asian North American churches, they found that most pastors successfully used their knowledge and intuition, and yet still struggled. The need is great for pastoral care techniques that are safe and therapeutic, ways that are respectful and healing.⁵⁹

Part IV: Additional WELS outreach efforts to the Chinese in North America

Ottawa, Canada

In 2004 Pastor Wayne Halldorson and Divine Word Lutheran Church in Ottawa, Canada came into contact with some Chinese prospects. Professor Sorum from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary along with several Seminary students surveyed the neighborhoods around the church and noted a higher than expected percentage of people from East Asia that had moved into the community. While surveying they also came across an advertisement at a Chinese cultural center that offered presentations to anyone who desired to know more about the Chinese culture and to

⁵⁸ Millet, 1

⁵⁹ Ng, xxv

hear the experiences of native Chinese people living in North America. Two Chinese women presented their stories to the men from WLS and members of Divine Word. The gathered WELS audience followed up the presentation with a simple question to their speakers: How could the church support their new Chinese friends?

In asking that very question with sincerity the congregation met their Chinese contacts at a spot where they were missing something: they needed friendships; they needed others who cared about them, not just their Chinese friends and relatives. The group had already cared enough to listen to these women and now they were looking to build on this new found relationship. The WELS group gave credibility to their sincerity by taking their new Chinese friends out for lunch following the presentation, which presented an opportunity for Professor Sorum to share God's love with these Chinese women. While neither of the ladies who attended that lunch immediately took BIC or became members, it became apparent that the Chinese who were living in this area were open to relationships and lacking the Good News of Jesus as their Savior. From that moment on special consideration has been given to making contact with the Chinese people in Ottawa, building relationships, and inviting them to church.

Eventually, one lady came in as a walk-in to church and took the Bible Information Class. As Pastor Halldorson puts it, "Once we had one person that came, other Chinese people were interested and they began to network." The church decided to host a Chinese Open House – an opportunity for their Chinese friends to share their culture with the congregation and introduce their friends to the church. Pastor Halldorson and the members at Divine Word believe that many of the Chinese people living in North America want to meet Canadians and Americans. The Chinese are interested in the freedoms, the experiences, and the languages of North America. Having an open house to welcome more Chinese into the church not only allows the Chinese to share their cultural heritage but also satisfies their desire to learn more of the North American culture. The Chinese understand that being a part of a church is a cultural norm for many North Americans and on that basis alone they are willing to listen and even visit. Divine Word also offers ESL programs that naturally morph into BIC courses, and as usual the Chinese are very willing to invite their friends to join them.

Pastor Halldorson is quick to note that it has not always been easy in the last ten years to reach out to the Chinese. While many are willing to learn and experience the church culture of

North America, there has been reluctance by some to join the church as members. This seems to be a result from the pressure that comes from a Communist mentality of not being loyal to a church or anyone above the government. In Pastor Halldorson's experience in Ottawa most non-Chinese prospects upon completion of the course are ready to commit to membership (if issues arise that would keep them from membership that would likely come out during the course) whereas the Chinese students have often inquired of Pastor Halldorson's thoughts for direction on how they should proceed at the end of the course. A "new world" of Christianity mixed with new cultures and languages can cause people from anywhere in this world to hesitate in becoming members, and many Chinese are no exception to this. Pastor Halldorson is quick to speak of the many positive blessings through these opportunities to study with the Chinese people. He spoke of one student in particular, Joanna, who nearly completed BIC with him in Ottawa before she moved to Vancouver. By the grace of God, she was connected with Pastor Geoff Cortright and today is constantly networking and inviting friends to come visit their fellowship.

Those who have the opportunity to introduce and present Christianity really have to explain that when someone becomes a Christian that person is not going to be free from sin, doubts, struggles, and hardships. This is a very real perception that can come from other Christian influences and as a result some Chinese are hesitant to join because they don't see themselves as good enough or perfect enough to be in the ranks of a Christian. Pastor Halldorson acknowledges that creating a Christian culture is a very slow task. In working with the Chinese, the members of Divine Word are approaching people from a completely different background and therefore have to expect that they will not simply fall in line with a Christian's way of acting and interacting.

Ten years after Professor Sorum led a group to make contact with some Chinese in Ottawa, a Chinese potluck takes place at Divine Word on the first Saturday of every month. Everyone from the congregation is invited and activities are kept very informal and low key. They start with an opening prayer and a brief message. The meal comes together by everyone bringing a dish to pass, something that Chinese will do without question. During the potluck an announcement is made that if anyone is interested in further instruction or has questions about the church they are welcome to ask any of the members or they can speak with the pastor. This

has become a casual event that many Chinese contacts feel comfortable attending and inviting their friends to join.

Following the potluck and fellowship time, Pastor Halldorson invites anyone interested to take part in a Saturday sermon review. The group reads through Pastor's sermon for the next day and then free discussion happens, ranging from English vocabulary questions to personal applications in everyday life. Whoever wants to stick around for the sermon review, Chinese or non-Chinese, can benefit from hearing the same message twice (a second time the next morning at worship). This practice also helps Pastor Halldorson to be sensitive to idioms and other difficulties for non-native English speakers. The Saturday sermon reviews are available every Saturday evening at 7:00pm.

Another Bible study approach that has created interest among the Chinese is a Bible class where everyone gathered simply reads the Bible – there is no handout, no preparation – the people simply read and discuss what comes to mind. This style of class helps the Chinese to be open and to ask their questions. Those in attendance are free from the pressure of having to know the right answer to a certain question and can instead speak their minds and ask the questions that are on their hearts.

Going forward in reaching out to the Chinese, Pastor Halldorson emphasizes patience, suggesting that a timeline of five to seven years of continually working with the Chinese in an area will eventually produce tangible fruit. But the opportunities to share the Good News and discuss Christ's work are always available. In Pastor Halldorson's experience, first generation Chinese will keep their distance and remain somewhat skeptical and reserved. The second generation tends to bring the curiosity and the interest, though this is not always true. Pastor Halldorson sees the second generation as being the leaders in a Chinese fellowship after they grow up in the church. For now, the role that he sees for himself, his people, and others interested in reaching out to the Chinese is to patiently teach as much as possible. He suggests that there doesn't need to be a great deal of resources poured into advertising; simply make connections and friendships which will lead to them networking and inviting their friends. One Chinese member has an email list for all of the Chinese members and prospects and she sends the invites while offering Pastor Halldorson as a resource for any questions. Pastor Halldorson concluded by saying that the real open door in the Chinese community is their willingness to

learn. The opportunities are abounding and we need to be there teaching them. Simple fellowship gatherings with food really do work. After that, let the people invite their friends and network.

Vancouver, Canada

Pastor Geoff Cortright and his people are reaching out to the Chinese people in a different part of Canada. Vancouver, British Columbia is a city where you can find every culture and language under the sun coming to this one metropolitan area. On the second Sunday of every month, Pastor Geoff Cortright leaves his church in Red Deer, Alberta, drives to the airport in Calgary, flies to Vancouver, and then drives to meet with the group using the name Saviour of the Nations Lutheran Church. After a meal, a Communion service, and Scripture study, the group discusses its mission plan. Unlike previous mission efforts in Vancouver, this effort has been laity-led with assistance from Canadian pastors in Alberta. Because supporting a pastor in Vancouver is expensive (starter homes cost more than \$500,000), the members realized at the beginning that they need to take ownership and be missionaries themselves.

Saviour of the Nations, Vancouver, BC started a "Chinese Bible Class" about 2 1/2 years ago when a WELS Chinese member invited friends over to have "English tea" with them. Pastor Cortright joined the group and brought a BIC lesson. The lesson caught people off guard but they wanted to practice English and were intrigued by the concept of the gospel. Since that time Pastor Cortright has been meeting with the group on a semi-regular basis (once per month, but sometimes twice) except during holidays when people return to East Asia. The class is taught in English using the English and Mandarin parallel "4 Key Concepts" Faith Builders curriculum. The group takes two to three sessions per lesson and has made steady progress. There are also fellowship events about four times per year where all the members of the church and the Chinese Bible study participants attend concerts together or go out for dinner. The Chinese fellowship group is an English / Mandarin monthly two hour Bible class in private homes with materials in both languages to accommodate for recent immigrants to Vancouver and for others who are not yet comfortable in communicating solely with the English language.

The members of the church remind anyone working with the Chinese to be slow, kind, and patient with them while taking the time to ask them if they have a religious background and

if they are currently attached to their system of belief. Friendship evangelism is vital, but at some point in the growing relationship there should be an invitation to a Bible class or church service. Through various interactions with different Chinese contacts, Pastor Cortright has learned that initial responses and feelings by Chinese toward Christianity can be very hard to gage. The cultural reality is that it takes a very long time for many Chinese people to build the necessary trust to openly divulge personal opinions and feelings on a matter. Additionally, many Chinese contacts would not be able to verbalize this answer in English or are hesitant to make an attempt for fear of sounding foolish in English.

How exactly have the people of Saviour of the Nations come into contact with the Chinese people? In one word, networking. Friends invite friends to join them. It is not unusual for a new person to show up at the class, or even on occasion to Sunday morning worship. Many want to come and take advantage of a chance to practice English. Others are intrigued by their friends telling them that they are Christians and want to learn more of what this label means. One recent example of this is a woman whose English name is Cindy. Cindy has been coming since almost the beginning and has certainly become a Christian, though she describes herself as taking baby steps in her knowledge of the Bible. She brought her husband Ray to a recent lesson for the first time. He has just finished getting a degree in accounting and is a very well-educated man who describes himself as neutral, or a soft agnostic. He came to the class to see what his wife had been learning and it was quickly apparent that she had not actually shared her faith with him beyond saying she is a Christian. She had brought her husband to see "the expert", Pastor Cortright, which is not uncommon in other Chinese ministries. Pastor Cortright had not yet reached a lesson on the universal priesthood, or the Great Commission belonging to all Christians, so Cindy seemed to think only Pastor Cortright could tell her husband about Christianity. Though she herself did not understand her opportunity to share her faith, she felt comfortable in bring her husband along with her because the trust had been built up between Cindy and this group of Christians.

In all situations, God's people are reminded to pray for opportunities to be a positive witness of Christianity, keeping in mind Jesus' words to let our lights shine before others, so that the Chinese and others may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16). The members of Saviour of the Nations continue to ask if their Chinese friends have any more friends

or associates that they would like to invite to a Bible study, recognizing the cultural tendencies to network with other Chinese. They encourage anyone working with outreach to the Chinese to know a few phrases in Mandarin, having experienced in their setting that a little language comprehension can be a successful bridge to an open conversation with a Chinese person.

Looking at the racial makeup of Vancouver, 163,230 out of 590,205 of the visible minority population are Chinese with an estimated 170,265 Chinese in total. While a majority of the population claims functionality in English, the reality is that over 7,000 of these Chinese speak primarily Mandarin for their work and many of the 170,265 enjoy communicating in their native tongue.⁶⁰ To this point, Pastor Cortright has experienced his struggles in trying to reach more Chinese in the city because there isn't always a need for the large Chinese population to know how to communicate in English. Pastor Cortright has found it difficult to be accepted or invited into various Chinese social groups because he doesn't speak Mandarin, which he sites as his biggest challenge in furthering the outreach in the city of Vancouver. And yet Pastor Cortright and the members see the potential of so many Chinese people in their midst combined with the reality that Vancouver is one of the least churching cities in North America (some statistics showing only 3% of the population being regular church attendees in the last decade⁶¹). Members of Saviour of the Nations have their eyes open as they look at this field, seeing that Vancouver is ripe for the harvest (Jn. 4:35).

Because the city's population is so dispersed and land prices are so high, "there is no goal to choose a 'target area' where we hope to eventually get land or build," says Pastor Cortright. Instead, the leaders of Saviour of the Nations are hoping to build a congregation of small groups who can meet anywhere and expand indefinitely by their needs. If the Lord blesses it, a few small groups will be scattered over the city who can come together periodically to worship, pray, and grow as a body of Christ. Members of the mission are teaching adult instruction classes, inviting others to services, and doing follow-up visits. Pastor Cortright and other pastors in Alberta equip and assist them in this work. This work has continued to blossom under God's blessing and is now offering weekly worship services and Bible classes which began on January

⁶⁰ Statistics Canada, "NHS Focus on Geography Series: Greater Vancouver." <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Pages/FOG.cfm?lang=E&level=4&GeoCode=5915020>

⁶¹ Jim Tune, "Open Doors in Vancouver." http://christianstandard.com/2005/08/cs_article-79/

20th, 2013. A generous donation allowed the congregation to call David Sigrist, a 2012 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, to serve the congregation in a limited capacity while he studies ancient manuscripts at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia.⁶² The obstacles and challenges in reaching the Chinese in Vancouver are evident, and yet God continues to show that his Word is living and active (Heb. 4:12), working in the hearts of the people in Vancouver.

Following my interview with Pastor Cortright and members of Saviour of the Nations, a formal request and proposal has been put together to further the outreach efforts in Vancouver. The proposal requests a full-time pastor to serve the existing core group and to continue reaching out the Chinese. Included with this proposal is the request to keep David Sigrist on staff half-time while he continues his additional course work. Finally, the proposal requests a staff minister to serve half-time as well, specifically functioning as the coordinator of Chinese and other international outreach. God continues to open new doors and bless the efforts of his people as they take the gospel message to the lost souls of Vancouver.

Part 5: Strategies and Ideas Going Forward

Networking

Much has been said about the usefulness in Chinese outreach to have the Chinese people invite and network with their friends and family in order to bring them to church. To borrow from this model, it would be beneficial for those in the WELS who are reaching out to the Chinese community to network with each other. In searching for additional resources and people working with the Chinese, it became apparent that in our WELS circles we are aware of Chinese outreach efforts taking place, but the actual details, stories, and experiences at certain locations have not been thoroughly shared for the benefit of others. This paper has provided some detail of the work taking place in St. Paul, MN at Mt. Olive Chinese Church, Divine Word Lutheran Church in Ottawa, Canada, and Saviour of the Nations Lutheran Church in Vancouver, Canada. Further stories could be shared, such as the work of True North Ministries, a group serving the

⁶² Wayne Rouse, "District News"
<http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/april-2013/district-news%E2%80%9494april-2013>

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (with over 3,000 Asian students on campus⁶³) and other colleges in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota. The University of Wisconsin – Madison campus has had a full-time international outreach coordinator since 1996 and a great deal could be learned from the work of Pastor Tom Trapp and Cari Larsen. The members of Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel have put together an international Vacation Bible School each year and make church programs and facilities available to the international students. The arrangement in Wauwatosa, WI at St. John’s Lutheran Church would also be beneficial for further study concerning Chinese outreach, as Pastor Joshua Yu could share his insights as he engages both the community around Wauwatosa and the Chinese students that attend our Lutheran high schools in the greater Milwaukee area.

Networking can lead to new ideas and encouragements as we estimate in the future where we might reach more Chinese. At Cross of Life Lutheran Church in Mississauga, Ontario there have been over a hundred Chinese students and parents involved in church related programs, such as the week long March Break Camp and their annual Easter egg hunt. Opportunities like these are available in some of the neighborhoods that surround our WELS churches. If a WELS church takes the time to understand the community profile they may come to see the opportunity to reach out to different ethnic groups, including the Chinese. Networking can allow us to let iron sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17) – to use one another for future outreach ideas and learning from past examples as people share insights and suggestions.

Training Workers

Paul speaks of the dynamite that God equips his people with to break down the barriers of people’s hearts: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16)*. Members of our church body and graduates from our schools know the real reason that hearts are changed to follow Christ: the power of God’s Word. With that truth held in the forefront of our minds, we do have the responsibility to enable ourselves and one another to effectively communicate the truth of God’s Word. We do not simply rely on the supernatural work of God’s Word being spoken in English to change the

⁶³ Rachele Hernandez, “University of MN – Admissions: Fall 2012 Undergraduate Students at a Glance.” <http://admissions.tc.umn.edu/opportunities/diversity.html>

heart of someone who only knows Mandarin. To take nothing away from the power of God's Word, Christians are tasked with learning how to communicate with the lost souls of this world, even to the extent of learning another language.

There has been admirable progress in training and providing opportunities for students to learn the Mandarin language. Martin Luther College now offers courses for those interested in taking Mandarin, with a professor on staff who has personal experience with our overseas efforts in East Asia and possesses a passion for using Mandarin for gospel outreach. Martin Luther College will now allow pastor track students to take Mandarin as their required additional language course to go with their Greek and Hebrew courses. This program is also seeking to offer immersion trips to further assist students in developing their ability to communicate in Mandarin. This is a wonderful addition as our church seeks to train workers with a mindset to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The WELS has also benefited from a splendid relationship between Wisconsin Lutheran College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. WLC now provides two scholarships a year to Seminary students for attending Mandarin courses on the WLC campus. The generosity of the arrangement eliminates any need for a Seminary student to have a secondary job, which allows the student to simply focus on learning Mandarin.

This is a great start, but more opportunities need to be discussed and explored. To learn a new language is best done at a young age and even by the time a child enters high school they have missed out on some of their most favorable chances to learn a new language. However, most high school students are in a far better position to take on a new language as compared to a typical college or seminary student. As a synod, we need to strongly consider providing an opportunity for our future leaders in the church to learn Mandarin by providing Mandarin courses at the high school level. These courses can be headed up by a native Chinese speaker, as in the case of MLC, but finances may not allow every institution this luxury. Instead, exploring options of online course training or even allowing students to study at a local college or university that offers a Mandarin course could be a solution (Wisconsin Lutheran College's Mandarin program has opened up their classroom to include both high school and grade school students who have a background with the language).

The WELS worker training system seeks to produce "generalists" in the sense that each student has a thorough, firm foundation based on God's Word and the truth of God's Word

proclaimed in the Lutheran Confessions. This approach to the education of our called workers should not be compromised, but in addition to this we are capable of recognizing certain individuals with talents for languages that could specialize in Mandarin. With proper encouragement from leaders in our schools and reasonable opportunities (such as the WLC – WLS arrangement for Seminary students) we can raise up leaders for the next generations to engage the almost two billion people that speak Mandarin.⁶⁴

Professor Kuske once wrote that as a synod training workers there is a need to train students so they are able to adapt to cultures other than their own. This is especially true as the racial make-up of our communities continues to change and the people whom we serve as a church and school come from various backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.⁶⁵ Until this dream of Mandarin courses being taught in WELS grade schools and high schools becomes a reality, there are other ways to raise the awareness and interest of reaching the Chinese in the minds of our young people.

A mastering of the Mandarin language is not necessary in all circumstances to reach the Chinese people. Christian love demonstrated by a genuine interest and concern for the Chinese people and their culture will create relationships. While the need is urgent for more WELS Mandarin speakers, it has become evident that possessing knowledge of the language is limited in its usefulness if it is not combined with a love for souls and a readiness to interact with people.

A little interest in the Chinese culture, a willingness to interact and befriend a Chinese stranger, and an open heart to share the love of Christ can go a long way in creating opportunities to share God’s love within the Chinese community. A growing awareness and interest in Chinese culture is best fostered through cultural studies and experiences in an educational system. For future called workers to pursue reaching out to the Chinese there needs to be more opportunities to learn of the history and culture of the Chinese. Many WELS students have very little education on East Asian history, including modern developments in Asia. Asia continues to encompass the fastest growing population figures in the world as well as rising in global power

⁶⁴ Pearson Education, “Most Widely Spoken Languages in the World.”
<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0775272.html>

⁶⁵ David, Kuske, *Curricular Implications for Preparing Future Ministers to Become All things to All People*, 4-5

and influence. Yet very little time is dedicated to this study in our school system. By the time a student arrives at Martin Luther College and finally has the option to take an elective focused on Asian history many of the students are pursuing different paths. This is not to presume that all students should only focus on Asian cultural studies, but more opportunities must be available to create and further student interest.

Opportunities to educate future leaders to reach out to the Chinese are not limited to traditional students from North America. Currently, our WELS high schools, both synodical and area-Lutheran, have over 100 Chinese students enrolled among them. More than 100 Chinese students are being fed God's Word on a daily basis as it is faithfully taught and proclaimed by WELS teachers and pastors. Beyond the financial and multi-cultural benefits that these arrangements bring to our schools, there are excellent opportunities to witness to the Chinese students while also encouraging them to become witnesses themselves. Some of the students attend our schools with a Christian background, but many come with little to no knowledge of God's truth found in Scripture. Our WELS schools have chances to train up these children in the ways that God would have them live their lives. Prayers should follow, asking God to work faith in the hearts of these students to hold to the truth and not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). As we faithfully proclaim and teach God's saving truth to these Chinese students, God may choose to raise up a leader among them to serve our church. Many of the students come to our schools in pursuit of language acquisition and to prepare for an American university. Yet God may have different plans – he may turn the hearts of students to be willing and eager to serve God's flock (1 Pt 5:2). God will train up leaders for his church and will gather his elect – we can be certain of this truth. And yet God works through our efforts and ideas to accomplish his work. Our church body has been blessed with established programs that can provide training for spiritual leadership to the Chinese. The PSI program (Pastoral Studies Institute), Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong, and now our schools in the United States can prepare potential leaders and helpers for reaching the Chinese people with God's Word. God is doing amazing wonders in the hearts of people in all of these programs. It is the prayer of God's people that he continues to bless such programs and continue to provide leaders for his church.

Ultimately, let us continue to instill in our young people the love that God has for all human beings; let us recognize the need for workers in the plentiful harvest among the Chinese and call out to the Lord to send workers in his harvest field (Matthew 9:37, 38); let us keep in mind the reality of how heaven will look as described by St. John: *There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."* (Revelation 7:9, 10)

Utilizing Resources

For over a decade, WELS members have been serving overseas in East Asia to teach English while sharing their Christian and American heritage with the people they meet. Over 250 WELS members have served overseas as English teachers in East Asia. The reality is that a majority of these teachers return to North America to further pursue their careers and raise families. In a recent poll of these teachers, every single respondent stated that they would like to be more involved in outreach to the Chinese in North America. A majority of the respondents were not involved in a focused outreach to the Chinese, but they were very willing to participate and get involved. Many of the respondents said that they would even be willing to help initiate some outreach efforts given their experience with the culture. This willingness is essential in creating opportunities for future church leaders to reach out to the Chinese.

These teachers can be used in several ways to bring the gospel to the Chinese. Many former East Asia teachers have done presentations of their experiences for churches, often being slotted in during the Bible study hour on Sunday mornings. While the joys of God's work being done half a world away are enjoyed by everyone in the church, often times the children miss out on the presentations. To go along with presentations to the church, there is great benefit in making presentations at WELS elementary and high schools. When our WELS young people hear these presentations combined with exposure to Chinese culture (and maybe even authentic Chinese food with some Chinese vocabulary and characters) the seeds of interest in reaching the Chinese people with God's Word are planted.

The WELS members who return from teaching in East Asia can also become a resource for reaching the Chinese in their specific North American community. The simple fact that a particular individual has spent time in East Asia, can speak a few phrases in Mandarin, and is aware that Chinese food in North America is not real Chinese food earns that individual an invitation for friendship and potentially honest, open communication with a Chinese immigrant. This open door cannot be undermined, but instead we must find ways to use these individuals: to get them speaking of their experiences, to be on our canvassing teams in our neighborhoods, to have them introduce the speakers at a Chinese culture awareness gathering at our churches, and in any other way that can be dreamed up and proposed by those looking to reach lost Chinese souls.

We must also consider how we will utilize called workers who presently in their vocations study Mandarin and use the language overseas in East Asia. Realistically some of these workers will return to North America one day to serve here. How will we use them and their unique skill of speaking Mandarin? Where can we best place them in North America to use their abilities and love for the Chinese people? The growing reality is that the WELS has available men and women who could be termed as specialists with the Chinese culture after immersion and teaching positions overseas in East Asia. This is not to suggest that every single person who participated in such a group should be directly working with reaching the Chinese in North America upon their return home. Experiences of living among the Chinese overseas and working with the Mandarin language does not translate into a perfect knowledge of how to interact and reach Chinese in North America – the mindset of a Chinese person residing in North America can be very different. Instead, consideration should be given to what can be gleaned from their experiences, their interest and energy in interacting with the Chinese, and any ideas that they may have in meeting the Chinese people in their community.

Two recent examples of WELS trained workers who are experienced with the Chinese culture and Mandarin are Pastor Nathaniel Timmermann and Mr. Micah Ricke. Following two years of studying Mandarin in East Asia, Pastor Timmermann was brought back to North America. In 2012 he was assigned to serve the saints at Salem Lutheran Church in Stillwater, MN. The Chinese population in Stillwater is quite small, limiting what Pastor Timmermann could do with his Mandarin language skills. But Pastor Timmermann has found other ways to

use his gifts by encouraging the work of Pastor Zhao at Mt. Olive Chinese Church, which is twenty miles away from Pastor Timmermann's congregation. Though Pastor Timmermann has no official role within the church at Mt. Olive, he uses what free time he has to work with and support Pastor Zhao in his role as well as encouraging other members of the congregation. Pastor Timmermann is also working with Mt. Olive Chinese Church to get a website up and running so that more people in the community can know of the church's existence.

The other recent example is Micah Ricke who will return to North America after four years of teaching English in East Asia. Starting in the summer of 2014, Micah will serve at Wisconsin Lutheran High School to work with the international student program as well as host several Chinese students in his home. He will have direct connection with over twenty Chinese students, opportunities to witness and encourage them, and to participate with them in the Chinese ministry led by Pastor Joshua Yu at St. John's in Wauwatosa. More WELS trained called workers will acquire gifts and abilities to serve the Chinese, but how will our leadership utilize the abilities of these men and women when they are available to serve God's people in North America? It is my prayer that we faithfully pursue how to employ these workers in ways that will give glory to God and make best use of the talents God has given to them.

Translated materials can also serve to bring God's truth to the Chinese. There is a great deal of work being done today in Hong Kong by the Translation Working Group and WELS Multi-Language Publications. The purpose of the Translation Working Group is to promote written and other media in the Chinese language for the sharing of the historic Christian faith as it is publicly confessed by the worldwide fellowship of WELS. The Translation Working Group also works with interpreters, translators, and editors to produce new materials in Chinese for people at all different levels in their Christian faith. This ranges from basic pamphlets on Christian beliefs to course notes and textbooks for national church leaders and students attending Asia Lutheran Seminary.⁶⁶ In situations like Vancouver, translated materials have been put to use with good results, as Pastor Cortright is able to work through different Bible lessons without himself knowing a great deal of Mandarin. In a situation like Mississauga, materials in Chinese

⁶⁶ "Communicating the Good News through Translation." *Forward in Christ*, Volume 100, Number 2, February, 2013.

<http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/february-2013/communicating-good-news-through-translation?page=0.0>

could be distributed to the families that visit the different activities at Cross of Life. While personal communication and creating relationships with the Chinese people will open more doors for witnessing, the fact that the WELS can give Christ-centered publications translated into Chinese is a reason to praise God and pray that work continues in the future.

Sharing Treasures

It has become apparent that many Chinese in North America possess a great deal of secular knowledge and material blessings. The rise of the Chinese economy and the premium put on education by the Chinese people has fostered this success. While it remains true that many Chinese contacts in North America, especially university students, can benefit from help in obtaining anything from a hot meal to furniture in a dorm room, the reality is that Christians have far greater treasures to share. The Chinese hearts are often times void of friendships, void of a meaningful purpose in this life, void of instruction on how to love one another, and ultimately void of knowing God's love for them. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Cor. 4:7)*. Many Chinese are searching for friendships and connections to Americans and the American dream, but ultimately they are looking for the treasure that all people desire to have and know: purpose and meaning in life. Christians have treasures to share with the Chinese, treasures that change our perspective on life and give us reason to live each day with a sense of purpose and joy. God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, to know the treasure he so freely gives in his grace (1 Tm 2:4). The Good News of Jesus saving the world from sin is this world's great treasure and one that can be adored by all.

In surveying both WELS members and Christians from other church bodies who actively share the gospel with the Chinese in North America, there was a unanimous appeal for befriending the Chinese people. Some spoke of the interest that many Chinese have of Western culture, particularly our Christian heritage and willingness to show love. In connection, the Chinese are well aware of the "American Dream" and the ideal American family. This is a treasure that many Chinese wish to obtain by relocating to North America. The Chinese are seeking to learn of love, of family, and of the meaning of life from us. What an opportunity! The answers of secular America will not bring their hearts peace, but the love of God, the formation

and function of a Christian family, and a meaning of life defined by God will bring peace to their searching hearts.

Befriending the Chinese also means that we can share the treasures that we enjoy as Christians living in a country full of freedoms. This does not mean that we impose our American culture as the only right way to live. Multi-cultural ministry or service means becoming all things to all people. Becoming all things to all people means that a person is willing to adapt himself in every way in every situation to every kind of people in order to avoid anything which might get in the way of sharing the gospel – as long as this adapting does not require any compromise of the truths of God’s Word – which then means learning another culture.⁶⁷ Ethnocentrism must be avoided – the attitude and tendency to evaluate and measure other cultures in light of what one’s own culture has taught as “right and proper and desirable and natural,” and this is accompanied by a feeling of contempt and seeks to change the other culture. Becoming means changing, not making all men like us, but it is a learning process on the part of the minister and those serving the people.⁶⁸ Instead, befriending our Chinese neighbors and sharing our American culture can include invitations for a cookout and a chance to step inside an American home, which can be very appealing to a Chinese person. We can open the door for spiritual nourishment by providing physical nourishment via cookouts, potlucks, or dining out.

This kind of pre-evangelism effort is effective in reaching the Chinese people. In a survey of non-called workers who actively work with Chinese outreach, respondents said that even inviting Chinese friends to do relatively ordinary things like going to a zoo, taking a walk in the park, visiting a museum, playing sports, and camping trips can provide an opportunity for relationships to grow and chances for witnessing to arise. Once relationships have been established, these new found friends will be far more willing to accept an invitation to go to church.

Our Lord Jesus commissions believers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Believers are then to teach

⁶⁷ Kuske, 2

⁶⁸ Snowden G Sims, *Changing Faces: Multi-Cultural Ministry*, 2.

the new disciples to obey everything God has commanded to his people. Jesus reassures his followers that he is with them always as they go about this work, even to the very end of the age (Mt. 28:19, 20). As WELS Christians our job is to live each day with the urgency and desire of the Great Commission while resting each night in the truth that God will gather his elect (Eph. 1). The need to reach the lost souls of the Chinese in North America is an urgent matter, one that God desires to be addressed by us, his workers; and yet this remains a matter in which the will of God will be the final outcome. Let us take confidence in the work that God will do through us as we seek to share the treasured gospel with those lost in this world who do not know of God's love for them.

As the WELS recognizes the need to reach the Chinese both in North America and on other continents, let us be ever mindful that human beings have been created in such a way that we benefit from being in the physical presence of other people, interacting, and socializing with other human beings face to face. While countless opportunities are available to reach people in East Asia via internet based communications, these connections should not completely replace our efforts to reach the people that live among us in our communities. As I sat with one retired WELS pastor discussing outreach to the Chinese I was amazed at the number of Bible studies he conducted online with eager students in East Asia. The energy needed to fulfill such a schedule seemed beyond a man of his age, and yet that same retired pastor was gathered with a group of Cambodians that weekend in a wonderful Bible study of Paul's letter to the Galatians. This pastor was an example of one who demonstrated a desire to do God's work while there is daylight (Jn. 9:4).

Modern technology allows us to connect with many whom we cannot reach face to face. In our enthusiasm and desire to reach the elect in East Asia, let us also recognize the reality that many lost souls of East Asia have relocated to areas that don't require a plane flight or internet connection – hearts from Asia searching for God are here, in North America, relocating to the cities around us and living in our communities.

Nothing New Under the Sun

More effective WELS outreach starts with the leadership that will be in place to bring the gospel to the Chinese in North America. As can best be analyzed, the leaders of a church who choose to engage the Chinese people in their community and reach out to their Chinese neighbors are privileged to have more opportunities to witness and to invite someone to church. Our relatively young history of WELS outreach to the Chinese in North America points to these needs in a leader and congregation for effective outreach:

- A desire to communicate and interact with the Chinese people.
- Some understanding of the Chinese culture and language.
- Willingness to learn and care about the lives of the Chinese people.
- Quality message and biblical instruction.
- Ability to incorporate newcomers into an active church family.

This list at its very basic principles is no different from what many people of any race and culture desire to find in a church. If there has been any significant discovery in researching gospel outreach to the Chinese in North America it is that there is no monumental difference that exists in reaching out to the Chinese when compared to reaching out to anyone else living on this continent. The simple exercise of loving people and proclaiming God's truth and love is the best formula for more effective outreach to the Chinese presently and will remain true in the future.

Conclusion

Throughout our young history of outreach to the Chinese in North America, WELS workers have displayed a love for souls and a passion to work faithfully out of love for our Savior. Presently in our church body there is a rallying cry for more efforts to be made to reach the Chinese overseas in East Asia. WELS efforts to share the Scriptures in East Asia continue to be blessed as God has truly opened a window for his Word to reach the lost hearts of the Chinese. The time is now! By God's grace let us continue to support our workers as they salt the lands of East Asia with their faith, traveling to the other side of the world to bear the light of God's saving truth to those lost in darkness (Mt. 5:13-16).

In that same enthusiasm may God's people also recognize the opportunities provided here in North America. Effective ministry to the Chinese will occur from recognizing the Chinese people in the community, engaging those Chinese in conversations, demonstrating a willingness to share American culture while learning of the Chinese culture, and ultimately the sharing of God's Word and invitation to learn more of Christianity. A love for souls, which fights to get past cultural barriers and language obstacles, will work.

Further research should be conducted on how to best use former teachers and workers returning from East Asia. Studies of potential outreach locations such as Mississauga and enhancing the efforts in Vancouver should also be researched. For the time being let us all be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks of us to give the reason for the hope that we have on account of what Jesus our Savior has done (1 Pt. 3:15).

The Chinese have a saying, "One more Christian, one less Chinese."⁶⁹ The foolishness of such a saying is obvious to God's people, and yet this underscores the belief of millions of souls that do not rest in the peace of God's love. As Christians we are in possession of God's gospel message that knows no cultural barriers. Let us seek out chances to share our gospel message so that God may use his Word to change the hearts of the Chinese people that he brings into our lives. Each time God brings another Chinese friend to faith, let us remark with joy and confidence, "One more Christian, one more friend for eternity."

⁶⁹ Fenggang Yang, "Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation and Adhesive Identities", 53

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