

Do you care to know & know to care: Challenges of urban evangelism to the Chinese

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Facts & Figures: Cities and Province of China (Last Update: April 26, 2001)

The total number of Chinese cities is 666.
11 cities with population over 2 million
23 cities with population between 1 and 2 million;
44 cities with population between 500,000 and 1 million;
159 cities with population between 200,000 and 500,000;
393 cities with population less than 200,000.

The number of Mayoress in China is 375;
The total urban population in China is 515.11 million (1996).

(The data are based on the statement issued by the Second Session of Chinese Mayor's Association in May 22, 1996 and the Report of China National Statistic Bureau in 1997. Some data were updated on October 17, 1997)

All of China's 4 municipalities with population over 10 million (2001)
Example: Beijing 13.82 million within the area of 16,800 square km; Hong Kong (special administrative region) 6.86 million within 1,092 square km

(From www.chinatoday.com)

Trends & Challenges:

Besides the cities inside China as listed above, most of the Chinese globally live in major cities, e.g. Singapore, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Sydney, Hong Kong, Toronto, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, London, Paris, etc.

"Positive trends" that provide opportunities for evangelism in China's urban centers:

Accessibility:

For instance, massive number of Chinese population in Mainland China is accessible by urban evangelism due to demographic shift towards the cities with high concentration. Many poor peasants from the countryside are flooding into cities in hope of employment and better living. Thus the explosive population growth of urban centers in China and the demographic concentration constitute a key positive factor in terms of accessibility to great evangelistic opportunities. Even hard-to-reach ethnic minority group members are found in major cities in China, e.g. Muslim, Manchurian, etc.

"Diaspora Chinese" (overseas-Chinese, or *hua-qiao*) are found in major cities outside of China, Toronto, Vancouver...in Canada; New York, LA, San Francisco, Chicago...in the U.S.A; London, Paris, Berlin...in Europe; Sydney, Melbourne...in Australia; etc. Regardless of dialectal variation, geographical origin, they can be relatively easier be reached by the Gospel in metropolitan centers worldwide than in their respective places of origin.

Receptivity:

Massive humanity in the cities of China can be easily touched and reached by a dynamic type of Christianity. Many a displaced person in new urban environment is receptive to change and the Gospel due to the deterioration of traditional values (e.g. folk religion including ancestor worship and superstition). When he feels acutely a sense of social alienation and displacement in urban centers all over the world, Chinese city dwellers can easily be reached by “friendship evangelism” and be attracted to a congregation characterized by Christian charity and love. Whereas in their places of origin, they are bounded by time-honored tradition, peer pressure, family network, etc.

Strategic Multiplication:

Since urban centers are where many of the rich, well-educated, powerful individuals (social, political and religious leaders) are found; thus strong local congregations in the key cities are strategic for the financing and multiplication in evangelistic efforts through out the entire country. Systematic and active recruiting and equipping members for evangelistic outreach can easily be done in major urban centers to provide a strategic home base for the whole country or even the entire region. A case in point is Singapore - a strategic base to reach out to neighboring Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

“**Negative trends**” that constitute **challenges** for evangelism in China’s urban centers:

False substitute:

People in urban centers may harden their heart and become resistant to Christianity when they are engulfed in capitalism, hedonism, materialism, consumerism, etc. The false sense of security brought by wealth; medical and technical aid for health; the pleasure from gluttony, luxury and lust, etc.; may all mistaken by urban Chinese residents as the substitute for the “living water” (John 4) that can really satisfy. However, Christians themselves are to have their spirituality renewed and revitalized so that they are prepared to reach out and serve others the “living water” (Christ and the eternal life from HIM).

Stumbling block:

The urban poor and new arrivers from agricultural rural areas may be apathetic and resistant to the Gospel when they arrive and stay in the city where they find social inequality, economic disparity, legal injustice, especially when they encounter un-Christ-like Christians who are counterfeits. There is nothing more damaging to the cause of Christ than those Christians whose life speaks against the Gospel (MT 18:1-6) .

Competing alternatives:

Not only Christian groups see the opportunities in the cities and seize them for active evangelism; so do the other religious organizations and cult groups. They do so with greater efforts and bigger budget for they realize the strategic values of the city to their cause. Therefore, many non-Christian groups or anti-Christian organizations are aggressively recruiting adherents; even from Christian churches. Christians without foundation in faith knowing the fundamental could be easily misguided to joint these groups (including New Age organizations disguised as environmentalist, holistic health, etc)

Complexity:

Group diversity (e.g. ethnic and social dimensions) and sheer variety (e.g. religious background, economic variability, etc.) are challenging urban scenario to active Christian evangelism. Urban ethos (where heterogeneity is the norm, diversity is prevalent, religious tolerance is valued) can be very challenging to anyone who is simplistic in mindset and methodology in urban evangelism.

QUESTIONS to you today:

Do you remember that Jesus mourned for the city (Luke 13:31-35); Jesus, Stephen, James...died for the Gospel in the hands of city dwellers; Peter, Paul, Silus...were persecuted while evangelizing in urban centers; what about you?

Do you care to know our kinsmen in the cities and do you know to care their current plight and eternal destiny?

ACTIONS you can take PERSONALLY beginning today:

- (1) Pray for a passion for the massive humanity in cities inside and outside China, especially your relatives, friends, and business associates. Merchants who are **passionate** to capitalize the cities for **profit** see “dollar signs” all over the places because the volume of **potential customers**. Similarly, as a “world-Christian,” you should cultivate a **passion** for the volume of **possible converts/disciples** for the Kingdom in urban centers. The prayer for “thine kingdom come” cannot exclude the city.
- (2) If you currently live in a city, learn the facts about major cities in your countries; then actively cultivate an understanding of the plight and problem of urbanites; pray for fruit of your faithful ministry among city dwellers wherever you find yourself. You should bloom wherever you are planted, flourish wherever you have landed (John 15:1-17),
- (3) If you currently are not a city resident, plan to visit the cities again, not as a tourist or a shopper as you did many times before. Henceforth, go as an ambassador for the Gospel to the cities (2Cor 5:12), a light to the dark corners and a salt to city dwellers (Mt 5:13-16).

ACTIONS your CHURCH can take CORPERATIVELY beginning today:

Whether at the local congregational level or regional/national denominational level, the Church is God’s way of reaching the cities:

- (1) From the Book of Acts, we witnessed the spread of the Gospel, by the apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from Jerusalem to Samaria, Antioch...Ephesus...Athens... Corinth...Rome...etc. From the Epistle to the Romans, we discern the strategy of the Apostle Paul who repeatedly wanted to visit Rome (Rom 1, 15) and planned to have the church in Rome partnering with him to go beyond to Spain for Gospel outreach.

Therefore, church planting and growth planning should strategically include urban centers. Beginning today, you should **pray** that your local congregation and denominational leadership would have **a vision** for urban mission and **a passion** for the lost Chinese in the cities. There are books and magazine (even internet access to data) with specific information regarding your city of residence/employment. These data will help you pray intelligently.

- (2) Within the local church where Christian fellowship and true Christian brotherhood are found, **powerful public testimony** will be a witness to the world. Jesus said that is the mark of our discipleship (John 13:35) and Apostle Peter mentioned that to be the pre-evangelistic witness (1Peter 2:12; 3:13-15).

Following fervent prayers and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you should **plan** that specific steps can be taken in urban evangelism to reach the unevangelized and unchurched Chinese. For example, invite your close friends or spiritual teammates to pray with you regularly for a target group within the city, e.g. urban poor, new immigrants, etc. Plan to take field trips to these urban centers to gain first-hand knowledge. The more you know and experience, the easier to cultivate the passion for them.

- (3) There is power in the jointing of local congregations within the same city to accomplish things that individual congregations can never do by herself. For example, city-wide evangelistic rally could not be as powerful as **partnership of several congregations**.

The focus in the program of the 6th CCCOWE is on urban evangelism and the target group is Chinese globally. The following important question is raised for your serious consideration regarding evangelizing urban Chinese:

Do you care to know our kinsmen in the cities and do you know to care their current plight and eternal destiny?