A VISION FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM

Growing English Ministries

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1. *What are some potential challenges of growing an English ministry within a Chinese church?*

2. *Does Scripture shed any light on the issue of cultural barriers or autonomy for the English speaking ministries?*

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A VISION FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM: Growing English Ministries

"To develop an English ministry that's most effective in reaching English speaking people."

Preamble: *For the purposes of this paper, I have sought to identify cultural patterns as neutrally as possible. There is no intention of judging the right-ness or wrong-ness of either, the Chinese cultural patterns or the English (Canadian) cultural patterns. Also, it shall be understood that in the vast majority of cases, there is a certain amount of "Chinese-ness" and "Canadian-ness" in all of us who come from a Chinese heritage. It is not my intention to judge and/or stereotyped others as being totally one or the other but to seek to identify the general differences so as to have a better understanding of each other. I believe this is absolutely necessary to minimize intercultural misunderstandings and to maximize biblical unity and effectiveness in our efforts to build up His Church and to win souls to Jesus Christ.*

1. What are some potential challenges of growing an English ministry within a Chinese church?

Cultural Differences & Challenges (Between 1st & 2nd Generation Chinese)

1st generation Chinese primarily refers to Overseas-born Chinese (OBC) and 2nd generation Chinese primarily refers to Canadian-born Chinese (CBC)

a.   Differences in Their Form of Activity

There are marked differences in the motives that drive each culture to their various forms of activity. The Chinese culture tends to be very *ascriptive* oriented in their culture. Ascription is marked by an emphasis on "*being*", where identity is more a function of being in a role than of performing certain actions (*American Cultural Patterns.* Stewart & Bennett, 1991, 77). Cultures driven by ascriptive motivations tend to have enmeshed families, where the extended family is also extremely close in their relationships with one another.. With this high emphasis on "*being*", the Chinese culture clearly values being in a constant state of harmony. Activities that aid to accomplish this end are highly valued. For this reason in Chinese culture, there is a very high emphasis on "togetherness" at activities such as meals, games, functions etc. That is why they are often found to be in large groups. Chinese people tend to eat in large clusters with family and friends rather than in small groups of two or three. Ascription is also the reason that children must welcome relatives and friends at the door and greet them by their formal names when told to do so by the head of the house. Being in a state of harmony extends to every area of life, including the workplace. For this reason, there tends to be a very deep loyalty and sacrifice to the employer over and above one's personal needs. Ascription extends to every part of life and any hindrances to harmony is extremely shunned and at times, a loss of face.

On the other hand, the Canadian culture tends to be more *achievement* oriented in life and are more in a state of "*doing"* rather than being. Canadians are more action oriented rather than relationally oriented where "*doing*" is the dominant form of activity. In the Canadian culture, there is great stress placed on maximizing visible accomplishments and living life to its fullest. The achievement oriented life is very time conscious, goal oriented and strives for efficiency in every area of life. That is one reason Canadians tend to be very direct, independent, solution oriented and consumer oriented. With such a great orientation to achievement and action, it is easy to see how everything in life can quickly become a means to an end. Also, it is not surprising to see tendencies towards self-sufficiency, self-centredness and self-fulfilment. Achievement oriented motivations greatly influence the amount of ones' self worth, competitiveness, and work ethics. It is not unusual for Canadians to be overly competitive in sports or to move from job to job when there is an increase in salary and position.

The potential for conflicts between ascriptive oriented people and achievement oriented people are very great. One wants to have a meal to develop relationship while the other brings out an agenda to discuss business before eating. One wants to avoid controversy to keep the peace while the other identifies obvious problems that need fixing. One wants to keep the children in the household until

marriage while the other cannot wait to move into an apartment. One plans to hand over the family grocery store while the other plans to pursue a career away from the family. Difficulties that eventually lead to misunderstandings never seem to stop when cultural differences go unnoticed.

b.   Differences in Their Form of Relationships

Relationships in the Chinese culture tend to be quite structured, stemming from the family and extending to the general society. Chinese families have been traditionally hierarchical in nature. The husband is the head of the home where most decisions are made by him. Positionally, he is like a monarch who rules the entire clan and whatever he decides is seldom changed. With ascription and harmony being highly valued, obedience becomes a predominant characteristic of the Chinese culture and obedience is thus, a demonstration of respect (where obedience is often equated with spirituality). No one dares to openly challenge the decision of the head in this authoritatively based system, including the wife. Challenge and objections disrupt this harmony and openly shows disrespect to the head. The same holds true in the workplace and in society. The older the person, the more respect and obedience is given. There is much pressure in this environment to conform to the way things have always been done and to maintain the status quo. Change and conflict are usually internalized, unspoken or overlooked. Any form of disagreement is usually very threatening to the head of the house, employer or elder. It is seldom dealt with in public but when surfaced, the head always has the last say.

The Canadian culture is radically different. It is much more egalitarian and democratic. People are treated on a more equal basis in almost every sector of society. Respect is shown in this culture by seeking each person's view or opinion before making a decision. In cases of disagreement, every persons' opinion is sought out and valued in order to find the best solution to the situation. It is not unusual for groups' to take a vote whenever difficult decisions need to be made. Democracy is the way. With the emphasis on time and achievement, it is not surprising that in conflicts, Canadians tend to be direct and confrontational. They generally like to get to the root when faced with a problem and to solve it in order to maximize efficiency and time usage. Relationships in this culture also tend to be very informal where most are on a first name basis, including the parent-child relationship. Friendliness, openness and honesty are common elements in this culture. Social relationships are built upon quality time spent together where equality, openness and honesty bonds people together.

Tensions can readily be seen when hierarchical oriented people encounter egalitarian oriented people. One feels very threatened and loses face when the decision is challenged while the one who vocalizes disagreement is only trying to be open and honest. One is frustrated when he makes a decision and no one supports or follows that decision while the other is offended because no opinions were sought whether the outcome was a good or bad result. One is accustomed to always giving orders while the other is accustomed to rebelling against such disregard for peoples' rights and opinions. One feels the beginnings of a mutiny when the other gives a slick presentation that seems to be in opposition to the head. One is accustomed to receiving respect because of age or position while the other only gives respect to those who earn it. Conflicts are bound to surface when these cultural differences go unnoticed.

c.   Differences in Their Perception of the Self

The Chinese culture is highly characterized by the *"we-ism"* mentality. The *"we-ism"* mentality places high priority on the family as a source of identity and support. It highly values the cohesiveness of the family and its relationship to the extended family. It can be seen in most metropolitan cities that many Chinese people can be found in large clusters, especially near a Chinatown. There are fewer things more highly valued than the family in the Chinese culture. When a Chinese person thinks in terms of the self, that perception of the self is always seen in light of the entire family or clan. That self-concept is deeply rooted and formed around the lineal family. It implies that any action of the self is really an action of the entire family. It is a life that is lived in constant representation of the family and the continuity of the Chinese self spans many generations. Thus, any major decision that needs to be made is always made in consultation of the family since all actions are seen as actions of the family. The Chinese self, being

rooted in the family, places tremendous reliance internally for love and support. That is why most Chinese families seldom turn to government social agencies for financial support such as welfare or social security when unemployed. They always turn to the family in times of such need for there is great shame and a tremendous loss of face to the family when the family is unable to take care of its own. Chinese families typically live in a closed system that neither desires nor seeks any outside help whatsoever.

In the Canadian culture, the perception of the self is more of a "*me-ism*" mentality rather that a "*we-ism*" mentality. Canadians associate the self with words such as *me* and *my*, manifesting a concept of the self that is singular and individualistic in nature. Most Canadians in the workforce are highly motivated by the self and can show relatively little loyalty to their organisations when advancement opportunities in salary and position arise from other companies. Hand in hand with individualism is independence in this culture. It is normal for children to desire to move out of the home and into an apartment once they enter the workforce. It is seen as a positive and healthy event since the parents have been successful at fostering independence in their children. In a culture where individualism and independence are virtues to be esteemed, decisions can be quickly made, challenges are welcomed, and constant change is accepted as normal.

The potential for misunderstanding is great in these contrasting sets of perceptions of the self. One always wants to check every decision with the family while the other is becoming impatient with the inability to make a decision. One expects total sacrifice for the family while the other is extremely motivated for the self. One expects a total embracing of traditions and customs while the other is out distancing oneself from those traditions. One refuses to seek any form of outside help while the other greatly appreciates welfare programs to help the poor. One looks down on family members for not keeping the Chinese language while the other sees no benefit in trying to maintain a language that is of little practical use in the society. One wants to take full care of the elderly while the other sees it as being more convenient to place them in a home for the elderly. Simply stated, one seeks high dependence while the other seeks high independence. Given these varied cultural differences, the potential for conflicts and misunderstandings are great.

Short Summary & Conclusion of Cultural Differences & Challenges

Values, Behavior	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation
Basis for decision	Direction from authority	Discussion, agreement	Directions from within
Forms of control	Compliance to rules/laws, with rewards/punishment	Interpersonal consensus, group commitments	Self-actualization with actions in-line with self
Position to others	Hierarchical	Peer	Individual
Relationally	Structured, formal	Group-oriented	Individually-oriented
To be avoided	Deviation from authority	Failure to reach consensus	Untrue to self

There are infinite opportunities for miscommunication and conflict between 1st & 2nd generation people (and 3rd and 4th and so on). The differences in their form of activity, relationships and perception of the self seem to tremendously outweigh any similarities that might exist. This may help to partially explain why 2nd generation CBC's and perhaps, future generations, will not only face a great potential for an identity crisis, but also why so many have dropped out of the church when they reach an age where they can no longer be forced by their parents to attend. Preserving and nurturing a healthy and functional Chinese family is crucial to the health of a church. It is possible that some segments of the

Chinese community in North America are building their roots on a crumbling foundation, for when the family is crumbling at the core, the community becomes very unstable.

Without placing value judgments on either culture since it really is not an issue of which culture is the right one and which culture is the wrong one (there are beautiful expressions rooted in Christian principles in both), the truth is, these differences can really hinder the work of God. That being the case, there are benefits for being culturally sensitive and empowering enough to minimize the potential hindrances. We need to develop better ways and means to overcome the potential dangers so that the Great Commission of our Lord may continue to go forward.

2.   **Does Scripture shed any light on the issue of cultural barriers or autonomy for the English speaking ministries?**

Gal. 3:28 *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*
Let's notice that all Christians are equal in the sight of God, and as such, should be treated equally. Regardless of a person's ethnicity, position in society or sex, all should be treated in the same loving manner. Whether ethnic groups are situated together in one place or different places, they are equal.

Eph 2:14-16 *"For he (Christ) himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."*
Let's notice that Christ, through His death and resurrection, has destroyed any and all barriers between Jews and Gentiles. It has always been Christ's intention to have the Jews be as accepting of the Gentiles as they were with their own kind. Race, culture and language should never hinder to work of the Kingdom nor in how other ethnicities are treated.

Acts 6:1-4 *"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Greek-speaking Jews among them complained against those of the Hebrew-speaking Jews because their widows were being over-looked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."*
Let's notice that the a smaller section of the church (the Greek-speaking Jews) began to expand under the leadership of the Hebrew-speaking Jews (Hebrew is the mother tongue of the Jewish people). The apostles recognized their God-given limitations and realized their calling was to fulfil and to ensure the proper development of what God had called them to do. It would be wrong for them to neglect this responsibility. Thus, out of unity, love, trust and good stewardship, they turned over and entrusted the ministry into the hands of the Greek-speaking Jews who were full of Spirit and wisdom to serve their own kind. In this church, unity meant the relinquishing of control by the larger group to the smaller group for the purposes of God. Thus, the word of God spread and the number of disciples grew (v. 7).

Luke 15:11-12 *"Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them."*
Let's notice that although the father loved his younger son very much and wanted what was best for him, although the father knew what the younger son was like and could imagine how he might spend his inheritance, although the father was infinitely wise, loving and had the authority to command obedience, the father did not stop his younger son from going out on his own. We must assume that the younger son waited until he had come of age to make his request known and when he did, the father obliged because he knew that there were lessons which could only be learned from being independent and autonomous. Seeking independence and autonomy was not discouraged in this father.

John 16:7 *"But I (Jesus) tell you the truth; It is for your good that I am going away."*

Let's notice that Jesus spent three and a half years training His disciples and He was now preparing them for his imminent departure. He spent a lot of time comforting them, reassuring them, encouraging them. Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit and prayed for them. It probably was not easy for Jesus to leave His disciples on their own but He did so because He had their best interests in mind. How could the disciples be better off without Jesus' physical presence? The disciples would become stronger spiritually by having to stand on their own two feet and relying on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 11:22-23 *"News of this (the new church at Antioch) reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem (headquarters), and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts."*
Let's notice that the believers in Jerusalem were suspicious of the new ministry going on in Antioch so they sent an elder to investigate. Barnabas saw some things within that new church/ministry which convinced him that they were genuine. Then he encouraged the church. He then went and brought Saul to Antioch and team-taught with Saul for one year (v. 26). When God is clearly working mightily in other people groups, we should be full of joy and filled with a willingness to help, to support and to bless that work of God.

Acts 15:19-21 *"It is my judgment (Apostle James, chairman of the Jerusalem Council), therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and form blood. For Moses preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."*
Let's notice that some Jews claimed that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. When this matter came before their Supreme Court, the Jerusalem Council, the conclusion was that the Jewish Christians would not and should not, impose their cultural practice of circumcision upon the Gentile Christians for this had the potential of hindering their entrance into the Kingdom of God, and thus, hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord. Rather than developing new policies or regulations for control, they sent some soft suggestions to the Gentile leaders asking them to be sensitive to their Jewish taboos and blessed their ongoing ministry for the Kingdom of God. In this case, unity was not uniformity. Rather, it was an empowerment of the Gentiles to grow within the guidelines of God without hindrance from the Jew's own cultural practices and/or expectations.

Conclusion
We can conclude that it is biblically acceptable, and even beneficial for a church to target reaching people rooted in the same language/culture without hindrance or interference from other languages/cultures.

3.   Is it even possible for the English ministry to be financially self-supporting?

In most Chinese churches, the amount of independence and autonomy given to an English ministry often depends on their financial situation. It is often implied and sometimes explicitly stated that if an English ministry wants to be more involved in decision-making, they must first contribute equally as much as the Chinese ministry in the church. Whether this is a right or wrong perspective, having the ability to be financially self-supporting is indeed a crucial consideration. In the case of our English ministry at T3C, it has been very encouraging to see tremendous growth in the area of financial giving:

English Offerings	*General*	*Building*	*Missions*	*Total*
1995	$128,735	$18,318	$52,842	$199,895
1996	$132,602	$22,102	$60,994	$215,698
1997	$135,044	$48,256	$50,677	$233,977
1998	$153,148	$93,050	$55,389	$301,587
1999	$161,923	$91,310	$72,710	$325,943

From this record, it seems clear that English ministry has the financial ability to be self-supporting.

4. **What conclusion & options exist for us to become more effective in growing English Ministries, especially when the existing building becomes overcrowded?**

Does the English ministry of T3C need to be more culturally free and autonomous to be more effective in reaching English speaking people? The answer is simply a resounding YES, if we want to be more fruitful in what God has called us to do. And that is to do our utmost best to fulfil our part in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Does the English ministry need the Chinese ministry? Absolutely, especially if we want to win the parents of CBC's to Christ. Does the Chinese ministry need the English ministry? Absolutely, especially if they want to win the children of OBC's and the surrounding English speaking community to Christ. We can't live without each other but that does not necessarily mean we have to minister out of the same building under the same roof.

We are extremely grateful and indebted to our Senior Pastor Harding Ng who introduced the ideas of church planting and/or the Dual Church model of the Scarborough Chinese Alliance Church during our own restructuring at the beginning of 1999. Both seem to be viable options. Church planting simply means a group of people who carry the same vision will be sent out to fulfil their vision. This group may plant a church wherever they decide while the Dual Church model is simply 2 buildings, side by side, in which the Chinese speaking occupy one building while the English speaking occupies the other. This model enables each to have the fullest amount of freedom to fulfil what God is calling them to do. Each can minister in their own culturally relevant ways without hindering the other. Each can benefit and complement the other without the many conflicts and misunderstandings that are inherent in a large, one roof, one board, multi-congregational, multi-cultural system. Common problems that may severely hinder quantitative and qualitative growth are: lack of space, outdated policies, irrelevant traditions, cultural misunderstandings, leadership discouragement leading to casualties, discipleship frustrations, non-changeable worship times, divergent philosophies of running a church, pastoral friction, unspoken expectations, lack of a common vision, exclusion from the decision making process, and the like.

Of course, a third option is to simply keep the status quo but this option may not be helpful in the fulfillment of the stated vision. Realistically speaking, church planting or planning for a Dual church seem to be the best two options for the development of a more effective English speaking ministry. The Dual Church model is especially appealing since it is beneficial for both ministries to flourish and to support each other. In any case, each option has its own benefits and difficulties and as we discuss and plan for the future, may God empower all of us at T3C to continue being a church that lives and thrives on doing His will with all of our hearts.

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