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# God is Moving in the Cities of China

*Jim Nickel*

**A**s the greatest rural to urban migration in history continues in China, God is at work. He is opening doors for Christians to impact the cities of China, and He is stirring up His people to go through those doors. God's people, both inside and outside of China, are beginning to respond to the challenge of the cities.

Urban Christians in China are finding creative new ways to show the love of Christ to their neighbors, coworkers and employees. A Christian business owner in one city hires both Christian and non-Christian migrants from the same villages and encourages the Christians to share their faith with their coworkers. Many of the

Christian migrants are children of poor rural pastors, so the income they earn helps advance the kingdom of God in the countryside as well.

Another group of urban Christians have formed a family life ministry which brings non-Christian couples together to learn relational and parenting skills. As these couples learn God's plan for the family, many of them come to faith in Christ. The training sessions are conducted in homes with small groups of couples meeting weekly for several months. As these couples become Christians and bond with one another, the leaders encourage them to continue meeting—not just as a marriage and parenting support group but as a church!

A growing group of Christian factory owners in

Graham Cousens



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Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China  
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southern China have committed themselves to raise the quality of life of their employees. This is good for business as Western buyers are anxious to buy from factories that have good quality of life standards for their workers. It is also a powerful way to encourage the growth of the church. Christian teachers, drama troupes, musical groups and so on are brought in to provide educational and cultural activities and, as they share the gospel, factory workers come to know Christ through their witness. Christians working in the factories as bivocational pastors gather them together and form churches, right inside the factories.

Other urban Christians are establishing “shop churches,” taking the church to the marketplace. Since many shops in China include a residence over or behind the shop, these small businesses provide not only a meeting place but housing and a source of income for bivocational church planters.

Rural Christians are catching a vision to take the decades-long revival they have experienced in the countryside to the cities. Large rural church networks have assigned key leaders to evangelize and plant churches in the cities. While cultural barriers have hindered their effectiveness, they are not about to give up.

Recently a group of rural and urban Christian leaders met to consider how they could work together to evangelize and plant churches in a particular city. “We rural Christians are like an army surrounding the city, but we can’t penetrate it,” said one of the rural leaders.

An urban pastor responded, “We’re like spiritual guerilla fighters in the city. We are already in the city, and we

understand how to reach out and do ministry in the city, but we are too few to really make an impact.”

It was clear to both groups that they needed each other—the urban pastors needed more laborers to expand their ministry, and the rural leaders needed help in understanding how to adjust their ministry approach to suit the urban setting. The biggest barrier to cooperation, they both acknowledged, was pride on both sides.

“Urban Christian leaders need to humble themselves and accept us,” said one rural leader. “And we must also humble ourselves,” he hastened to add.

Christian leaders who had been involved in effective city-reaching efforts in other parts of the world were present at this meeting. They encouraged those gathered to see their city not as an adversary to be conquered but as a needy friend to be served. As the church serves the city, they pointed out, it is demonstrating the love of Christ in very tangible ways, preparing the soil for the seed of the Word to take root and grow.

This prompted those gathered to share some of the ways the church in China is already serving the city. One shared how a sister from his fellowship started an orphanage in another city, which resulted in the development of a very positive attitude towards the church in that city. Another shared how the church in a small, poor city provided labor for a road that needed to be built. This was so appreciated by the local authorities that a sign was erected by the road acknowledging the church’s contribution.

As these Christian leaders from rural and urban churches came to know

and appreciate one another, the cultural barriers that separated them began to disappear. They ended the meeting by praying together and agreeing to meet again to explore how they could partner to reach their city for Jesus Christ.

### Overseas Chinese

Many overseas Chinese Christians are returning to lend their considerable skills to the task of discipling the cities of their mother country. Christian Chinese business people, doctors, educators and other professionals are showing the love of Christ and sharing the gospel with their colleagues, clients, students and patients. They are also making an impact on the spiritual climate in their cities as they carry out their work with integrity, often in sharp contrast to those around them. Some are directly challenging systemic injustices in the cities, promoting the rule of law, teaching business ethics and exposing corruption.

### Other Expatriates

Non-Chinese Christians from around the world are also making an impact in the cities of China. Christian English teachers continue to reach intellectuals on college campuses. An increasing number of these teachers are focusing on connecting those they win to Christ with existing churches or church planting movements. This important development is facilitated by the fact that local Christians are getting involved in campus ministries alongside expatriates.

Christian professionals and business people from around the world are pro-

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# The Gospel, Evangelism and Social Action in China: Some Considerations

Michael W. Metzger

Graham Cousens

**C**hristians in China with whom I've talked over the past couple of years describe the gospel's great influence in the countryside but find fewer pathways to engage emerging Chinese urban professionals. Some of this is due to the effect of Western assumptions and approaches in evangelism and missions. Much of American Protestantism is chastised because of its emphasis on conversions apart from social action and cultural change. Is it possible that these Western assumptions (i.e., Enlightenment, modernism, science etc.) that have given shape to the American Protestant church are being replicated in China?

In this article, I would like to moderate a series of conversations through questions as a means of looking for better ways to engage Chinese urban professionals. Here are some of the assumptions we are making that raise the questions we are tackling.

**D**oes Genesis one give us "the human job description?"

Many agencies and churches cite the Great Commission as being the church's mandate. However, some hold that Genesis 1:26-28 is the primary "human job description." This passage calls for humanity to "cultivate the earth," or "have dominion," and is known as the Cultural Mandate. Its scope is broader than redeeming peo-

lated? Is there a relationship?

Some hold that the Great Commission is a continuation and reiteration of the Cultural Mandate. Christ was present at the creation. He spoke and commanded us to "have dominion." In the Great Commission, Christ reminds his followers to teach "all that I have commanded you." This line of thinking holds that the Great Commission is encompassed in the Cultural Mandate.

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**"Too many Christians,"** writes Dallas Willard, "believe that Christianity will get them into heaven but has **little impact on the way we live here and now.**"

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ple—it includes humankind. This question is important: if we are to cultivate all of creation, then the scope of our responsibilities is significantly wider than simply redeeming people. Is Genesis 1:26-28 "the human job description?"

**H**ow are the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission re-

Believing (or disbelieving) that the Great Commission is a continuation and reiteration of the Cultural Mandate does not alter the strict meaning of the Great Commission passage. The command contains one verb: "make disciples." The process is described in four participles: going, baptizing, teaching and doing. If one holds that the Great Commission is a continua-

tion and reiteration of the Cultural Mandate, the scope of teaching, doing, and what constitutes evangelism becomes much broader. As John Stott states: “It is not just that the commission includes a duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded, and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.”

**In what way(s) do you see the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission related? What is the Gospel?**

“Too many Christians,” writes Dallas Willard, “believe that Christianity will get them into heaven but has little

impact on the way we live here and now. The gospel, as understood by many in America, lacks any essential bearing upon the individual’s life as a whole, especially upon occupations or work time, and upon the fine texture of personal relationships in the home and neighborhood.” Willard is one, among many, who believes that our current proclamations of the gospel promote privatized piety and compartmentalized living. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, he suggests that when the good news is primarily about God’s love, sin and Jesus’ offer of redemption, we are offering a “gospel of sin management.” In other words, you solve the “sin problem,” but moment-to-moment human reality in its depth is not easily addressed.

Willard describes the gospel as “the presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through reliance on Jesus.” He says the prophet John understood the Gospel as the availability of the kingdom.

**What is evangelism?**

Evangelism simply means “to share the good news” in many ways, shapes and forms so as to reach the most people for Christ. Throughout the ages, evangelism has been understood to include preaching, witnessing, good works, teaching, charity, activism, social improvements and many other activities. Francis of Assisi wrote: “Preach at all times, if necessary, use words.” Do you agree with this broad definition of evangelism?

There is another way to think about evangelism—from inside the creation, fall and redemption worldview. John Piper, senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, has stated that “evangelism exists because worship does not.” Before creation the angelic realm worshipped God. Into eternity,

his chosen ones will worship him. Worship is the “big idea” in Scripture, not evangelism. If human beings had never fallen (Genesis 3), there would be no need for evangelism! In eternity, there will be no evangelism.

Evangelism can be viewed as a necessary and compassionate detour from God’s original plan. He never intended that we would sin, but we did. Hence, we evangelize.

The creation, fall, redemption worldview situates evangelism within worship—and cultural reform. “The idea that the gospel is addressed only to the individual and that it is only indirectly addressed to societies, nations and cultures is simply an illusion of our individualistic post-Enlightenment Western culture,” according to Lesslie Newbigin in *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*.

**What is the relationship between evangelism (revival) and social action (reform)?**

John Stott suggests that, at its very core, the Great Commission is about service: “It is in our service role that we can find the right synthesis of evangelism and social action.” Stott proposes three current approaches for thinking about evangelism and social action. “First, some regard social action as a means to evangelism.” Cultural reform only has extrinsic or instrumental value if it serves as a preliminary for evangelism. Stott feels this approach is problematic. The second approach is to regard “social action not as a means to evangelism but as a manifestation of evangelism.” This holds that our social responsibilities grow naturally out of evangelism. Stott sees this as an improvement over the first approach, but it still “makes service a subdivision of evangelism.” The third approach, advocated by Stott, is to see “social action as a partner of evangelism. Neither is a means to the other or even a manifestation of the other; each is an end in itself and an expression of unfeigned love.”

**How do you see the relationship between evangelism (revival)**

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Graham Cousens





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## Conversation Launchers

### **1 Do we need to think more critically about who we are reaching rather than how many we are reaching?**

Again, Keller and Berry's book advocates for influencing just ten percent of any population—the rest will follow. In the 1930s, a committed Marxist named Antonio Gramsci forecast the eventual fall of communism. He felt that while communist thinking played well with the masses, it had not proven to be persuasive among leaders in politics, commerce, the arts, education, and the media. Gramsci predicted the communist movement would eventually falter if it would not engage those who sit at the key crossroads of cultural leadership. In 1989, we witnessed the fulfillment of his prophecy.

### **2 Do we need to recalibrate how long it takes to "change the world" or a society?**

In the postmodern world, it seems to take longer for someone to come to faith. In the 1950s and 60s, many parachurch organizations saw one in two individuals become believers when they first heard the gospel. Today, estimates vary between one in ten and one in twenty. Furthermore, it takes six to nine months longer for someone to come to faith than it did in modern times. Do we need to recalibrate our view of evangelism as more of a process and less a point-in-time event?

### **3 Do we need to change our perception of our role in the evangelistic process?**

I have recently begun to suggest that evangelists in our culture need to see themselves more as "center fielders" rather than as "pitchers" as we do in our current approach. We make a presentation—a "pitch," if you will—and the listener responds. However, I suggest that we need more emphasis on becoming "center fielders." Center fielders do not control the game as much as they cover a great deal of ground. Center fielders think on their feet. They anticipate well. They gain recognition by performing well, responding to questions and having a grasp of a wide range of topics (i.e., worldview). We will have to become experts on the cultural milieu around us. As Brian McLaren points out, Paul quoted the Athenian poets—not his prophets—on Mars Hill (Acts 17).

### **4 Do we need to better appreciate—and employ—those who have come before us?**

I believe we can develop "worldview evangelism" in the postmodern world. Postmodern people think more broadly in terms of a process rather than a decision (or a point-in-time conversion). Outreach that can think broadly is called "worldview evangelism." Socrates suggested that it is often better to ask a few probing questions, interacting and exploring with people, than to present a package of propositions. In effect, he advocated for the art of conversation. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ, but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view" (1 Corinthians 9,

*The Message*). Paul urged believers to enter the world of their friends, see life from their perspective and appreciate that there are true and good elements in their beliefs. Francis Schaeffer took one of two directions in conversations with seekers and skeptics. One way was to walk with the skeptic and follow their belief system to its logical conclusion—exposing its bankruptcy. This requires that Christians understand what skeptics truly believe and appreciate whatever parts of the truth reside in their belief system. The second direction advocated by Schaeffer was to describe the surpassing beauty and coherency of a comprehensive and cogent Christian worldview. For a believer, this means weaving an attractive narrative that leads the skeptic towards the surpassing beauty of the Christian worldview.

### **5 How much of the postmodern experience is going to influence China?**

Recently, I watched a PBS special that tracked a Chinese family through five years. It seemed to me that the twenty-something son came to reject the family's traditional (pre-modern) way of thinking and became postmodern. I believe that, in the West, the postmodern world now characterizes seventy-five percent of the population including the urban core, media, cultural elites and intellectuals. Is this true for China? Most of the missionary efforts of the last two hundred years in China assumed modernist approaches. If there are emerging, postmodern Chinese, then this "modern" evangelism will appear backward and intolerant. To use James Collins' words, we must "confront the brutal reality" that most of our evangelistic methods are grounded in modern assumptions and techniques and are primarily effective in pre-modern societies. The higher one goes in the strata of society throughout the world, the more postmodern thought prevails (and the less effective our modern methods become). Is China moving more and more toward postmodernism or are these assumptions too great?

—Michael W. Metzger

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**and social action (reform)? If John Stott is close to the truth, what are the practical implications?**

Based on his preference for “social action as a partner of evangelism,” John Stott sees three spheres of responsibilities. The first sphere of responsibility is in our vocations. He advocates a view that sees our lifework as the central setting for revival and renewal. Second, he urges that the local church understand that “its mission of service is wider than evangelism.” Third, he urges that believers develop networks, small groups and organizations that take up our responsibilities on the “national scene.”

**What do you think of Stott’s practical implications? How might this relate to China?**

It seems to me as though the Western experience of privatized faith is being replicated in China. Theodore Roszak says that faith in America has become “privately engaging...but publicly irrelevant.” Is this happening in China—where the higher you go in society the less effective the evangelism?

A new book by Ed Keller and Jon Berry titled *The Influentials: One American in ten tells the other nine how to vote, where to eat, and what to buy* might offer some insights into influencing culture. The authors assert that ten percent of any population basically influences the other ninety percent. In America, this ten percent is a diverse group that focuses on “learning, experimenting and creating in every aspect of life.” These “influentials” can be grouped by three themes: strong relationships (family, friends, and broader connections), integrity (honesty and authenticity) and exploration (ideas, creativity, learning, and knowledge). Is it possible to think about developing communities of Chinese “influentials” who will influence other leadership? How would this begin?

Keller and Berry suggest that anyone can be an “influential” simply by engaging in civic life. In other words, the “influentials” are not a closed society. It should be noted that “influentials”

do not spend much time in front of a TV and do not respond well to technological approaches to ideas (such as film presentations of the gospel). They want conversations, art and community. We should also remember that the authors believe only “influentials” can influence the “influentials.” It places responsibility on believers—who have been mandated to “have dominion and exercise influence” (Genesis 1:26-28)—to be the “influentials” in this generation. Does this research shed any light on evangelism in China?

Second, we might think about the relationship between “solicitation and starvation.” Decades ago, Harvey Conn’s missionary efforts brought him into contact with women who had migrated to Seoul, Korea. Most could only find work as prostitutes. The good news is that many of these women came to faith in Christ. However, Conn saw that much of our traditional evangelism inadvertently puts people in moral dilemmas.

Korean culture, at the time of Conn’s work, offered few work options for women other than prostitution. Told to “walk in a new manner,” these new converts really had only two options—starvation or solicitation. They were stuck in a moral dilemma—in part due to the traditional approach to evangelism. Traditional evangelism teaches that our primary responsibility is to redeem people, not society. This demotes social reform to secondary status, using it only as a means to evangelism. In other words, “doing good” and “doing justice” only have instrumental value—if they lead someone to faith. By themselves, they have no intrinsic value.

In *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, Harvey Conn argued for a seamless approach to evangelism—that “doing good” and “redeeming society” are all part of evangelism. The point of the gospel is not simply to reproduce souls who can reproduce other souls. It also must take responsibility for those social, political and cultural settings that enhance what it means to be fully human. This is why John Stott says social action and evan-

gelism “...belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love.”

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# Tentmaking and Indigenous Urban Mission in China

Ronald Yu

The only occurrence of tentmaking in the Bible is found in Acts 18:1-4. It took place during Paul's missionary journeys and notably in the urban context of Corinth. When the concept was revitalized in the 1960s in the context of global world missions, the emphasis was on the professional status which a missionary needs for creative access to Islamic and communist countries where the doors are closed to missionaries. However, the intent of this article is to understand the significance of tentmaking for China's indigenous missionaries and how it can help them overcome urban obstacles in their mission work. Although the rural church in China has undergone revival and developed dynamic models in leadership training and mission sending, it is now facing an impasse in urban missions.

## Tentmaking in China's Rural Context

Tentmaking has never been a concept emphasized by China's rural house churches. It is the last thing they would like their evangelists to do. In their revival meetings, they have called thousands of young people, not a few teenagers, to dedicate their lives full-time for the Lord's ministries. Many have been sent off after one to three months of intensive training. The harvest field in China is so great, and the need is so urgent, that pastors and missionaries should serve full-time for their entire lives. Tentmaking does not seem to be a good choice.

However, I would like to argue that house church evangelists and missionaries have been tentmakers. This is probably the most neglected ingredient of the house church revival. Back in 1985, I visited Henan many times and heard wonderful reports of revival

and missionaries being sent both there and elsewhere in China. From what I heard, I listed the ingredients of revival: fervent prayer, hunger for God's word, Scripture memorization, miraculous healings, itinerant preaching, persecution, house church models (deinstitutionalized), intensive training and mission sending. Tentmaking never crossed their minds or mine as a possible component of the house church revival.

However, in retrospect, I would

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**Few rural evangelists and pastors** have really given up their farms or relied on the churches for their living.

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like to add tentmaking to the list of revival ingredients. First, I would like to point out that few rural evangelists and pastors have really given up their farms or relied on the churches for their living. Their homes and fields are their workplaces. They evangelize people of their own profession (farming being the only rural profession!). They establish the church right in their workplaces (their homes) where they can take care of both church and farm activities at the same time. The way they schedule their services and training programs fits their work rhythm and agricultural calendar. For example, they have worship services and prayer meetings at noon when they come back from the field to take a break from the scorching sun. They hold training sessions up to three months long in be-

tween busy sowing and harvesting seasons. Even full-time evangelists need to help with fieldwork back home during busy seasons because their families and churches provide them with the strongest support.

Rural missionaries are also tentmak-

Graham Cousens



ers without realizing it. They do evangelism and church planting in the rural context, reproducing their home models in the mission field. In busy farm seasons, they either help the host family in the mission field or return home to help their own families. Although they are serving the Lord full-time, they have never really given up their former farming profession. They still use it from time to time to enhance their mission work. House church mission work has been expanding rapidly precisely because of the

perfection of the art of tentmaking in the rural context.

To confirm my observations, I have begun an oral survey with house-church leaders. I ask any leaders I meet whether or not they agree with my observations and analysis presented above. Last week, I met fifteen leaders from three major church networks, and I was surprised to get a unanimous confirmation of my thesis: tentmaking has been a key ingredient—and a much neglected one—in rural house church revival and missionary expansion. This is a wonderful discovery both for me and for the house church. It follows that if churches in China want a revival in urban mission, their missionaries need to do tentmaking also, just as they have done during rural revival in the past.

### Tentmaking in China's Urban Context

In China, there are only two kinds of churches and both are weak in urban missions. While the official TSPM-affiliated churches, under the control of the Religious Bureau, may be large, the numbers of chapels in a given city are limited. There is no church planting or mission mandate in the TSPM churches because of their liberal theology. Urban house churches are small (at most up to thirty people), and few can support a full-time pastor. They are struggling for survival and few can develop systematic training and persistent mission sending like the rural churches. Besides the existing urban church polarity, there is the new migrant wave into the cities with urban missionaries sent from rural churches trying to establish a new brand of urban churches. Will they develop into another house church, TSPM church or something else? How will this new influx of rural missionaries maintain their existence and establish their identities in the urban setting?

For the churches in China to engage in active urban mission, they must overcome three basic problems: an acceptable social status for the pastor-evangelist; a stable financial source to sustain the pastor's family and church expenses; and a church model

that will transcend the limitations inherent in the traditional TSPM chapel or house church meeting in a home. Tentmaking seems to provide feasible solutions to all these problems.

First, China's urban pastors need an acceptable social status. Only registered church pastors are licensed by the state. House church pastors are considered illegal because they do not have a license granted by the TSPM and Religious Bureau and therefore are respected only within the church. They are either despised or ignored by the urban community. In greeting new friends, a pastor looks suspicious because he finds it hard to explain

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**How can urban pastors be supported? Few urban house churches are able to afford a full-time pastor.**

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what he does for a living. This damages the credibility of the message he shares. Tentmaking will provide him with a respectable professional status that will facilitate his relational networking and enhance the credibility of his message.

Second, how can urban pastors be supported? This is not a problem for TSPM-affiliated churches because they have enough members to provide sufficient donations. However, it is a severe problem for the house churches because their size is limited by religious policy. Any gathering bigger than thirty people is likely to be pressured or persecuted by the police. If there are seekers or new believers in the group, they will be less likely to contribute much in terms of regular donations. Few urban house churches are able to afford a full-time pastor. I know an urban pastor who serves three house meetings but still cannot get enough donations for his basic living costs. He has to pray

hard each day just for his daily bread. Some house churches have pastors only because they receive external aid. Tentmaking serves to alleviate the financial pressure on the urban pastor. It is a means of self-support.

Third, how can an urban church be built without being controlled by the state like the TSPM-affiliated church or harassed by the police from time to time like the house church? The wilderness "tent" model is an option worth considering. It was a place of worship designed for a mobile people traveling through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Urbanization in Chi-

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na has brought much mobility among people that could require a similar church model. A church could be set up in the Christian workplace instead of having a chapel exclusively for worship. Jesus himself liberated the concept of worship by allowing worship in any place at any time as long as worshipers worship in spirit and in truth (John 4: 20-24). In the past, communist workplaces were owned and controlled by the state, but economic liberalization has brought about privatization in many economic and social spheres with Party surveillance disappearing from the workplace. As a result, active Christian witnessing is increasing in these spheres. The only stumbling block is that urban missionaries are not radical enough to plant churches in the workplace. Amidst urban diversities, can we not have a vari-

ety of church models such as office churches, factory churches and shop churches? Are chapels and homes the only alternatives? The tentmaker's "tent" church model provides an innovative alternative to the traditional models and can meet the challenge of urban mobility and diversity.

Tentmaking is an urban strategy that can help the native missionary face the urban challenges in China's unique context. I started to apply this tentmaking strategy two years ago. I helped a team of urban missionaries, originally from house churches, to do microloan "shop-church" planting in factory areas. In 2002, an urban missionary received the first micro loan of RMB\$10,000 and opened a shop. In the first month, he was able to sustain the living expenses of a family of four. In the meantime, he was able to evangelize and train up Christians in the shop. In seven months, he returned the loan and became the shop owner. In 2003, four other couples received one week of business-tentmaking training and learned to do the same thing. By June, there were five other "shop-churches" planted. By year's end, three additional "shop-churches" were planted in neighboring cities with one being self-financed and another operated by a Christian from a minority group. Over Christmas, one "shop-church" had three worship services on Sunday and one of the services had an attendance of 50 believers!

In this particular application of tentmaking, the shop business provides the missionary with a socially recognizable status as shop owner, a sizeable income to sustain his family without relying on the mother church or external aid, and a "tent" church model which I call "shop-church." These "shop-churches" are actually more secure than home churches, because it is quite legitimate for business people to have an occasional religious meeting in the shop because there is not enough time to go to church. It is quite respectable for the shop owner to sacrifice a little of his work time to share spiritual truths. It would be another story if the police found a missionary

planting a church in a Christian home and spending all his time in religious proselytization. Increasingly, house meetings in the cities are reported to the police by neighbors, not for political or religious reasons but for security reasons. There is concern about unemployed migrants causing trouble in the neighborhood.

The shop is a tent both for the missionary's family to live in and for God's family to worship in. It is an evangelistic station, a meeting point and a training site for Kingdom business and ministry. A missionary can do nothing better than tentmaking in the urban context!

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claiming the gospel by word and deed in many different spheres of influence. As a result, Christian communities are being multiplied among many different affinity groups such as lawyers and medical workers—even government officials!

In addition, Christians are moving aggressively to minister to the urban poor, orphans and other disenfranchised groups of city dwellers. They are building schools for the children of migrant workers, providing vocational training to give the urban poor a hand up and meeting social needs in the city in many other ways.

Over the past two and a half years, one young lady has developed a ministry of compassion to street children in one of China's largest cities. These street children have been sold by impoverished rural parents to unscrupulous "businessmen" who house them in shacks in the back alleys of the city and force them to beg, sell flowers and in other ways make money for them. The children are given a daily quota and are often beaten if they fail to meet it.

As she became aware of this situation, this young lady went to the home villages of these children and offered

to pay their parents the same amount their bosses had promised to pay if they would either bring their children home and put them in school or give her permission to take care of them. She is currently caring for 20-25 of these children and hopes to expand her capacity to care for 50 or more and to expand to other cities.

The growing emphasis on urban mission in China is a welcome trend. However, the needs and opportunities in China's cities are overwhelming to those involved. "Please come help us!" was the plea this author heard over and over on a recent trip to China.

In addition, there are hundreds of cities in China where very few, if any, of the kinds of ministries described in this article are taking place for one simple reason: there are very few Christians in those cities. Most Christian work seems to be concentrated in a handful of China's cities. Who will take the gospel in word and deed to the vast majority of China's cities that have yet to experience anything like what we have described here?

The opportunities are there. China is desperately seeking foreign experts to bring expertise and capital, create jobs and in many other ways assist in the development and modernization of China's cities. Traditional missionaries are not welcome, but Christian professionals, business people and educators are. In addition, as the fledgling third sector continues to develop, Christians skilled in the development and management of non-governmental organizations are also urgently needed and welcomed.

God is moving in the cities of China, but it is clear that there is much more He could and would do if more of His people were to make themselves available to serve in these cities. We invite you to contact us at [info@chsource.org](mailto:info@chsource.org) for more information on how you can be involved.

*Jim Nickel is vice president of ChinaSource and has been involved in promoting work among the unreached Chinese peoples for more than 20 years.*

The Chinese government's release of its latest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figure of \$1,000 per person at the end of 2003 signifies that China is on the verge of becoming a world economic power. It also signifies that full-fledged urbanization has taken off. The traditional Chinese society, rooted in agriculture, is gradually diminishing and yielding to rapid industrialization.

To understand what is going on, one need only look at the new skyscrapers and traffic jams. The speed of urbanization is nothing less than amazing. A million acres of farm land disappears each year. A hundred million rural farmers have already flocked to the cities to seek better jobs. New factories and office buildings, new residential developments and road expansion are constantly stretching city limits. A new city map of Beijing becomes outdated about a month after its publication. Many who hold the latest city map are perplexed and overwhelmed by the constant rapid changes.

All this can be viewed as a China that is advancing rapidly, or it can be seen as the disappearance of the old and traditional China.

To those who for generations have lived in rural China, cities are no longer distant as they once were. Now, anyone has an opportunity to seek new dreams in the cities. However, behind the veil of impressive urban development, there are countless stories woven together by blood and sweat.

### **Migrant Workers: China's Second Class Citizens?**

On March 17th, 2003, Sun Zhigang arrived in Guangzhou from Jiangxi province to look for a new job. One day after dinner, while he was walking the streets of Guangzhou, he was detained by a government official for not having an identification card with him. Three days later he was found beaten to death. It seems the only reason for this was that he was a migrant worker without an identification card. Sun Zhi-

gang was innocent. His death shocked society. As news spread, many ordinary Chinese citizens expressed their outrage. The government was forced to punish the perpetrator and changed some laws regarding migrant workers. His parents received government compensation for his wrongful death. Because it forced the government to change some laws, his death was not completely wasted. Nevertheless, justice might not have been served if not

had no choice but to provide 1.2 billion RMB emergency funds to temporarily alleviate the crisis. Furthermore, children of migrant workers are not eligible to enroll in the public schools. The government does not recognize schools started by migrant workers for their own children.

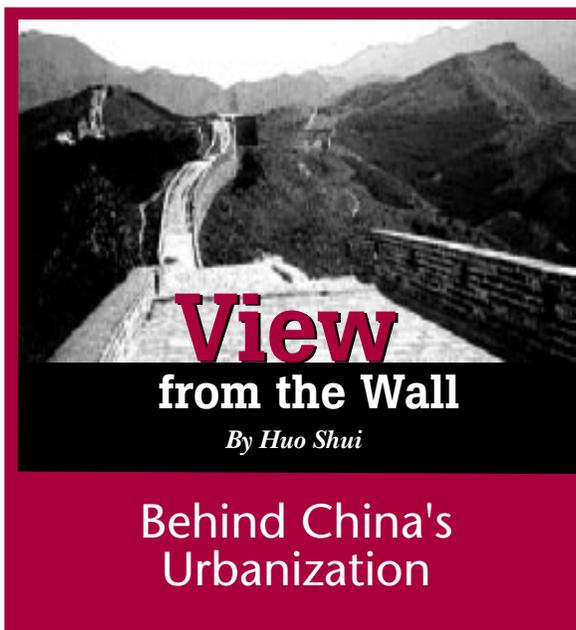
Nevertheless, migrant workers play a critical role in supplying cheap labor for a city to function—from garbage collection, selling vegetables and milk delivery to construction.

They give their lives to ensure that the modernization of the cities continues, but often their rights and very existence are not even acknowledged. They are a group that is forgotten or ignored by society. They are China's second class citizens. Urbanization and modernization have brought them nothing more than hardship and trials. When you are astounded by the rapid pace of urban modernization, do not forget the millions of migrant workers who make all these things possible with their hard labor.

### **Urbanites: Pain in Their Hearts**

During China's October National Day, several events occurred in Tiananmen Square. Some people jumped into the river in front of the Square; others wanted to burn themselves. Still others wanted to blow themselves up. The police were able to stop and arrest these individuals before their acts were carried out. However, these attempts demonstrate the cry that comes from the heart of many. Some are local Beijing residents; others come from outside the city. Why do they seek death? It is because they hope that their death will serve as a wake-up call for society to pay attention to their plight. They have lost hope that justice will be done for them.

For some of these people, their life long residences were torn down against their wishes. Shanghai lawyer, Zheng Enlong, was arrested by the authorities. He represented many citizens of Shanghai who were forced to relocate as the



## **Behind China's Urbanization**

for Sun being a college graduate and for netizens expressing their outrage in internet chat rooms and bulletin boards. There were many migrant workers before Sun who experienced utter abuse or even death in the cities without any headlines.

Millions of migrant workers accept low paying jobs that most urban people do not want. These jobs tend to be very hard with long hours. Workers do not have holidays or benefits and are not even guaranteed to receive their wages. Not getting paid on time is becoming a normal phenomenon for many migrant workers. Some have not received wages for years. Nationwide, wages owed to migrant workers has reached 100 billion RMB. Some workers resort to suicide in order to express their deep despair and dissatisfaction. In November, 2003, the city of Beijing

city bowed to the pressure of wealthy developers. In Xian, Fuzhou, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Baotou and Beijing, real estate developers and corrupt government officials have forced residents to accept very low payment for their properties. Then they turn around and build high-rises for instant lucrative profits. Things like this occur throughout China on a daily basis. Historic buildings and cultural relics will soon become ashes and their sites will house modern high-rises. Many of the developer's victims have no choice but to relocate to remote areas since they simply cannot afford the cost of the newer housing in the cities.

Numerous corrupt officials strike it rich as they grant favors to developers. Ordinary citizens have no way to fight this battle. Local courts refuse to accept lawsuits against government officials and developers—after all, it is the government who gives the orders to tear down the old buildings. The companies that do this work are government appointed. Compensation is determined by the government. Can anyone win a lawsuit against such a government?

Rampant destruction of old housing and its unfairness has become a major source of social unrest. The central government was forced to ask local officials to stop “unreasonable” tear downs. The government is now required to clearly and openly state how compensations work so that all citizens know what they are entitled to. CCTV, a government run station, even broadcast a few corruption cases. Nevertheless, all these efforts cannot erase the hurt and the pain in the hearts of many ordinary people whose lives have been turned upside down.

### Homeowners' Councils: The Birth of New Communities

An unexpected product of rapid urbanization is homeowners' councils. Homeowners' councils have broken the age-old control of the Party at the most basic level of government—the communities. These new communities are self-governing, unlike the past where the Party had virtual control over every-



**Rampant destruction of old housing and its unfairness has become a major source of social unrest.**

thing. Of course, the Communist government does not like to see this new development. However, it cannot stop the birth or legalization of these self-governing communities that actually are allowed to exercise their legal rights, a first since the 1949 revolution.

This latest development is a big shock to the Communist government. Traditionally, the Party has set up a neighborhood council, the lowest level of government. These neighborhood councils would watch over every citizen. However, privately owned properties broke the limits of the neighborhood council. Now, properties can be bought by whoever can afford them. New property owners, wanting to protect their investments, have formed homeowners' councils. The government initially refused to recognize these as official entities. However, the force of the market has pushed the government to recognize their legality, albeit reluctantly. For the first time, people in a community can discuss issues, make

decisions, elect a representative and exercise their rights without the interference of a Party neighborhood representative.

The meaning and significance of homeowners' councils are far reaching and may not be fully recognized until much later. If rural villages are also able to democratically elect their own community leaders, how much power does the Party have left at the most basic level of Chinese society? Perhaps the government can no longer worry about things such as this as they try to focus on economic development and making money. But, who knows? Once ordinary Chinese citizens have learned to exercise their basic rights at the most fundamental level, might they not want the same ability to protect their rights at a higher level?

*Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Tian Hui.*

## Peoples of China

# Peoples of the Cities

*Jim Nickel*

**S**he was a rich woman driving a silver BMW. They were a peasant and his wife atop a rickety tractor loaded with market-bound spring onions. Their lives were a universe apart until a sack of scallions got tangled with the side-view mirror of the luxury car.

*The outraged BMW driver, witnesses say, leaped out, punching and kicking the farm couple and screaming, “How can you afford to scratch my car?” A crowd gathered to watch.*

*The woman got back into her BMW and ploughed into the bystanders, killing the farmer’s wife and injuring 12 others.*

*China’s most famous traffic accident happened last October in the city of Harbin, in the country’s remote north-eastern industrial rust belt. Few people outside the immediate area would have heard about it if it were not for the court judgment issued last month against the driver, Su Xiuwen—a two-year sentence with a three-year suspension, suggesting that she may not spend a day in jail.*

*In a country where the smallest legal infringement can merit harsh punishment, many Chinese saw the ruling as a slap in the face. The country’s increasingly vocal court of public opinion, incensed that a well-off defendant appeared to be above the law, exploded on the internet.*

*A week or so ago local officials finally bowed to the pressure and vowed to reinvestigate the case for judicial improprieties.*

*To the people at the scene, it looked as if Su, in a fit of rage, deliberately mowed down the onion peddler. She said she had meant to reverse.*

*The only thing the public found credible was the rumor that Su, 45, the wife of a wealthy businessman, was also related to a high-ranking provincial leader. No one seemed to believe official denials of any connection.<sup>1</sup>*

This incident, perhaps as no other in recent history, underscores the diversity of people within the cities of China. Between the extremes represented by the wealthy woman in the BMW and the poor onion farmer lie dozens of other kinds of people, every one of them precious in God’s sight.

Take a walk with me through the streets of Beijing. Just past the sharply-dressed young businessman talking on his cell phone, we see workmen mixing cement by hand as they lay the foundation for yet another new building. Just

around the corner from the internet café, where students are surfing the internet, is a noodle stand manned by a cook who looks as if he just stepped off the bus from the countryside.

Watch your step as we cross the street, or our walk may be cut short by one of those aggressive taxi drivers. Ah yes, the taxi drivers—a group all their own. Step back—here comes a military van, filled with soldiers. Let’s get off this busy street. I know God loves all these people, but they’re getting on my nerves!



Yes, this is better. A quiet, broad, tree-lined street with a more reasonable number of cars and bicycles. Grandmothers pushing strollers...old men playing *mah-jong* on the sidewalk...look at all the high-rise apartment buildings—there must be thousands of families living on this street. Where are they all?

We don't have to wait long to find out. As night descends upon the city, the streets fill with busses, more taxis and bicycles, and the sidewalks fill with pedestrians as students and teachers

us out of the alley demanding our passports. "What are you doing here?" he wants to know.

"We're just tourists, out seeing the sights."

"Well, move on, and don't take any pictures around here."

Who will reach these people with the gospel, we wonder? And what about all the other groups we saw today? Everyone we saw represented a different people group, some distinguished from others by ethnicity but most by socio-economic differences.

Graham Cousens



make their way home from school while business and professional men and women return from their offices and government workers escape from their bureaucratic routines for a few hours.

Here's an interesting alley; let's check it out. Interesting—these people aren't Chinese; they look more like mid-easterners—and they're living right on the street! There's a bed, a kitchen table, a cookstove—all right outside. What is this? These are Hui Muslims, a friend explains. They're migrant workers, living here temporarily while they provide cheap labor for a building project nearby.

A policeman comes by and hustles

There are 13 million plus people in Beijing. Most have never heard the name of Jesus. There are perhaps half a million Christians here (many, many more than in most cities of China), but they tend to be concentrated in certain strata of society. How can all these different groups we have been exposed to today—and hundreds more like them—be reached with the gospel? How many different kinds of churches will be needed to enable people from all these different groups to worship God without having to cross cultural barriers to do so?

These are important questions, focusing our attention on issues that are

often overlooked—perhaps not even considered—as Christians halfway around the world develop plans for their China ministry. A great deal of effort has been expended over the past twenty years to identify the unreached peoples of China. However, most of this effort has been focused upon identifying different ethno-linguistic peoples. Very little has been done to identify the sociological barriers to the spread of the gospel in the huge cities of China.

If we take seriously the command of Christ to make disciples of all peoples, we must give careful attention to this task. The church in China today exists primarily within certain strata of society. Church planting movements have been and are springing up within those strata, but it will take intentional effort to see church planting movements begin in strata which the church has not yet penetrated.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recognized this need for some time now. In 1991, a *People's Daily* article, summarizing a speech by Jiang Zemin, stated, "Party members coming from workers, farmers, intellectuals, servicemen and cadres are the most fundamental components and backbone force of the Party ranks, at the same time, it is necessary to draw into the Party the outstanding elements from other social sectors..."<sup>2</sup>

While it is highly unlikely that the CCP is going to succeed in achieving the goal Jiang enunciated in this speech, it is certain that someone or something IS going to capture the hearts and minds of the peoples of China's cities. Will it be the message of Christ or some false "ism" or god?

#### Endnotes

1. Excerpted from an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 2004. ([www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/01/18/1074360636509.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/01/18/1074360636509.html))
2. [http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200108/28/eng20010828\\_78614.html](http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200108/28/eng20010828_78614.html)

*Jim Nickel is vice president of ChinaSource and has been involved in promoting work among the unreached Chinese peoples for more than 20 years.*

## Book Review

# Carving Out a New Life

A review by John Peace

*Chinese Awakenings* by James and Ann Tyson. Westview Press, 1995, 325 pp. ISBN, 0813324734, paperback. Cost: \$28 at [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com).

The plaudits on the back cover lured me into this book, and they served to express my reaction when I finished the last of its 325 pages:

*"A superb inside view of China to the grass roots level... These Chinese lives as told by the Tysons are touching, but they ring true..."* — Ezra Vogel, Harvard University.

*"One of the most illuminating books on the profound changes affecting 1.2 billion Chinese as a result of the Deng Xiaoping reforms. This is the most penetrating analysis of how the reforms have affected various sectors of Chinese society that I have read. An eye-opening, and often chilling, account."* — David Shambaugh, Editor of *The China Quarterly*.

In contrast to the equally impressive *China Wakes* by another husband and wife team, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, this book takes a vertical slice out of different subgroups of China's population by following the lives of nine different people and their families. By tracing their careers over several decades, the authors expose us to the vicissitudes of China's tumultuous history since the Communist victory in 1949.

For insight into the rapidly changing China of the early 1990s, *Chinese Awakenings* provides an excellent companion volume to *China Wakes*. The Ty-

sons have also filled out the portrait of the Communist years that we find in such accounts as *Wild Swans*, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, and *China: Alive in the Bitter Sea*.

First, they look at the liberation from the drudgery of farm life of a woman who migrated to a city to find work. Then, they describe the amazing rise of Zhang Guoxi to become one of China's richest men presiding over an empire built totally from his own entrepreneurial skills. Next, they turn to the torturous experiences of a man whom they call "the Shanghai cosmopolite."

They go to the far west to see how Tibetan nomads have fared under the rule of Han Chinese Communists, then to the southeast to report on the resurgence of clans. Both these sketches show the tenacity of traditional customs, including religion, despite communist propaganda and pressure.

Part Three paints the dark side of the recent reforms: at "the bold feast," people like the women left behind on the farms and the countless industrial workers "starve." While their husbands have found new prosperity in the cit-

ies, the wives of millions of farmers are left to do all the work in the fields. Meanwhile, workers languish under harsh conditions in a new system of raw and unrestrained robber-baron capitalism. Exploitation of women and workers, which communism was supposed to eradicate, lives on with even greater intensity than before.

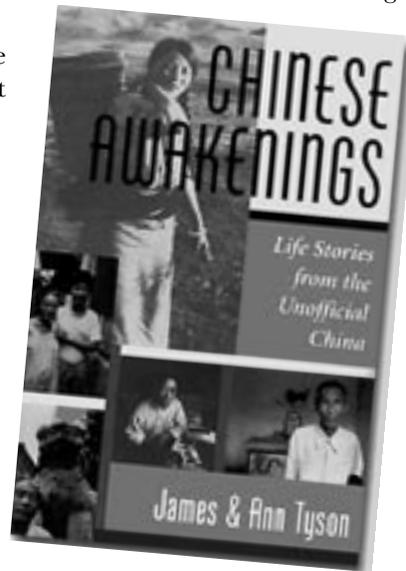
Part Four looks at two Chinese who have challenged the state: a journalist

turned dissident and a student turned collaborator. Each one started out with high, almost idolatrous, expectations—even worship—towards Mao and his radical revolution. Each one was horribly disillusioned. One continues to speak and write, albeit from the safety of the United States. The other keeps quiet, nursing hopes for eventual reform and biding his time.

The major thesis of the Tysons seems persuasive: millions of Chinese are carving out a new life for themselves either in total neglect of the policies, propaganda and programs of the Communist Party, or in some sort of manipulative relationship with it. Each chapter shows how the Party has lost credibility among the masses it was supposed to represent. Hardly anyone believes the rhetoric emanating from official organs anymore.

Instead, the Party is seen as a self-perpetuating organization of power-hungry, corrupt and utterly ruthless bureaucrats.

The Tysons fill their carefully researched book with dozens of examples of Communist Party corruption and oppression. They explain why countless Chinese have replaced their



**This book takes a vertical slice out of different subgroups of China's population by following the lives of nine different people and their families.**

earlier enthusiasm for the Communists with bitter disillusionment, even outrage and hatred. No wonder the authorities in Beijing feel they must impose rigid, even ruthless controls, on all dissent! With so much simmering anger against them, the Party bosses must find ways to distract, divide and discourage anyone seeking political reform lest a popular movement sweep them from power.

Indeed, the Tysons seem to think that the tide of history is with those who desire a more open and free society. They do not predict an immediate change of regime, however, since the Party has total control and the will to use it. Nor, do they think that students and other reform-minded activists have the mental framework yet or the personal maturity to replace the current government with anything better. It will take years for the Chinese to build a basis of political theory and social sophistication in order to bring into being a truly representative and free governmental system.

Nevertheless, the authors do see change coming from the grass roots, a change that will ultimately weaken and perhaps even destroy the stranglehold that the Party now has on real political power. Too many people are now making choices and building lives independently of Party control. There are so many nongovernmental organizations and enterprises that the government cannot keep a lid on the forces of transformation that will work themselves up from below.

One final observation: for those living in America, who have never experienced the kind of suffering and repression that hundreds of millions of Chinese have endured for many decades, just reading the stories of the nine people featured in this volume will inject a much needed sobriety into our thoughts about life. We have had it easy! Our hearts and our admiration go out to those who have survived "life in the bitter sea."

*John Peace, Ph.D., is a scholar who has worked among Chinese in Asia and America for 27 years.*

## Resource Corner

### The Cross—Jesus in China

*Written and directed by Yuan Zhiming.*

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- "The Bitter Cup" provides testimonies by missionaries after the Cultural Revolution.
- "The Canaan Hymns" tells the story of hymn writer Xiao Min.

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## “Unto the Least of These”

For Xue Yunhao, a farmer and father of two in Shaanxi Province, repaying a government loan of 20,000 RMB was proving to be an insurmountable obstacle. Faced with medical expenses for his mother's extended illness plus injuries he had sustained in an automobile accident, Xue fell hopelessly behind in his payments and ended up spending 15 days in jail. Upon his release he had little motivation to keep going.

Enter Wang Jinrong, a local church pastor, who arranged for Xue to participate in a new experimental sheep raising program. With the help of the county Christian Council, Xue was given three sheep to start with. Three out of every ten lambs born to those sheep were to be given to the church so that other poor farmers could participate in the program. At the end of three years Xue would pay the church for the original three sheep.

A year and a half after receiving the three sheep, Xue was converting his once unsuccessful farm into a sheep raising facility that would eventually accommodate 30 to 40 animals. He estimated that within little more than a year he would be completely out of debt.<sup>1</sup>

In China's southwest Yunnan prov-

ince, the provincial Christian Council took on another pressing social issue when it sponsored a symposium on AIDS for more than 60 church leaders, most of them from ethnic minority groups. Yunnan's proximity to the infamous “Golden Triangle” has contributed to the rapid spread of AIDS in the province.



Brent Fulton

During the symposium a government official noted that lower incidents of AIDS were found in communities containing more Christians. “Why don't we build more churches in areas infected with AIDS?” he asked.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with shrinking budgets for social services and a growing list of social dilemmas posed by China's rapid urbanization and globalization, the Chinese government is finding an unlikely ally in the church. Traditionally marginalized and viewed as a possible threat to society, Christians are now being recognized as having a unique role in easing the inevitable pain brought about by unprecedented social change. The solutions that the church offers do not simply provide temporary relief through programs or financial subsidies. Rather, they get to the core issue of how individuals deal with change by confronting the need for a heart change within the individual.

Evangelical Christians often come in for criticism because of the perception

that their actions do not measure up to their words. Quick to point out social ills, they are sometimes seen as less than willing to get involved in addressing them.

Christians in China are challenging this perception as they apply the truth of the gospel to the harsh realities of life around them. As China's non-profit sector continues to expand, these opportunities will likely increase. Confronting the wrenching pain of social change may provide the church with its best avenue for a credible witness in China's increasingly post-modern culture. In the words of Charles Colson, “To much of the watching world, our determined concern for the ‘least of these’ in every land may be our most powerful witness.”<sup>3</sup>

### Endnotes

1. Ting Yanren, “From Jail Inmate to Sheep Farmer,” *Amity Newsletter*, April-June 2003. Reprinted in *China News Update*, January 2004, pp. 3-5.

2. “Yunnan Church Sponsored AIDS Education,” *China News Update*, January 2004, p. 6.

3. Charles Colson with Anne Morse, “Confronting Moral Horror,” *Christianity Today*, February 2004, p. 128.

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