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About ChinaSource

For the past 20 years, ChinaSource has been a trusted platform facilitating the flow of critical knowledge and leading-edge research among the Christian communities inside China and around the world and engaging them in collaborating to serve the Chinese church and society.

As China continues to grow and change, the church in China is doing the same. With over 100 years of collective China-ministry experience, the ChinaSource team is strategically positioned to help bring knowledge, clarity, and insight to groups engaging with China.

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ChinaSource's content is aimed at providing reliable, balanced, and relevant information to those who serve China. All of ChinaSource's content resources can be found on the website: www.chinasource.org

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ChinaSource's partnerships are aimed at playing a catalytic role in bringing together the right people, asking the right questions, and influencing Christian thinking about China. We partner with individuals, organizations, churches, and interested groups who share our vision to see China's Christians engage the society inside and outside of China as they contribute to and influence the global church conversation for the advancement of God's Kingdom.

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ChinaSource is committed to actively engaging with China in order to better connect and amplify the voice of Christians in China. We hope to act as a conversational bridge between the church in China and the global church. Whenever and wherever the church in China is being talked about, ChinaSource aims to be part of the discussion. This is primarily done via our network of Chinese Christians, conferences, research, events, and through media.

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To access embedded links to resources and other related articles, please go to the online version of this *ChinaSource Quarterly* (<https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-quarterlies/digital-engagement/>).

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Editorial

Keeping Pace in Our Digital Age

Andrew Feng and Nick Wu

This year, 2023, over five billion people are using the internet and have access to mobile devices. In the last decade, internet users have more than doubled, with the most users located in eastern and southern Asia.¹ The rapid growth of users online and on mobile devices signifies an increasingly digital world which includes access for people groups who have not yet heard the gospel. As the reach of the internet expands among unreached people groups, the opportunity for digital evangelism and discipleship also grows. Where physical access may be limited, digital spaces open a door for the whole church to rethink how they might spend their time online to be part of global missions.



This autumn 2023 *ChinaSource Quarterly* invites leaders to share various digital strategies being used to engage the church body in action, reaching Chinese people online, and digital evangelism and discipleship. The authors of the lead article, both from Indigitous, share the need for innovation and digital transformation for the 99 percent not in professional ministry to find their place in the Great Commission. Through innovation and using their digital, creative, and marketplace skills, the whole church body can be activated and engaged in digital missions.

Sean Cheng writes about using new media for digital evangelism and reaching Chinese people online. His article details several digital strategies used in China over the last few decades and the state of current platforms and their challenges.

Luke Cheng, of Far East Broadcasting Company, shares how their radio ministry initiated a Bible college through the airwaves in China over 40 years ago. Through decades of growth and the development of new media, their radio Bible college has expanded online, including training courses and content through a mobile app.

Tsun-En Lu, from Ambassadors for Christ, provides accounts of scholars from China studying in the US and coming to know Christ. Leaders in the church from this new generation are finding the need to be mobile as they discern whether to stay in the US or return to China. As a result, digital strategies have allowed continued ministry despite physical barriers and distance.

Travis Todd takes us through his journey serving on Cru's digital strategies team. He recounts the growth of online discipleship and evangelism for the modern landscape of China including reaching over 30 million views through their free online content. Their approach is to fail often, even if it means getting into trouble, to get the gospel to more people.

The book review for this issue features *Sharing Jesus Online: Helping Everyday Believers Become Digital and Metaverse Missionaries* by John Harris and Jeff Reed. Harris and Reed focus on B.L.E.S.S. principles in digital and metaverse spaces, shedding light on the need for everyday missionaries in those environments.

This issue's Resource Corner features the GodTools app, a resource with many tools for evangelism and starting gospel conversations. The app features a parallel language function which allows users to share the four spiritual laws in Chinese and other languages.

As Christians, staying updated on effective digital strategies is crucial to keeping pace in this digital age and engaging the whole church in new pathways. Digital engagement is making the gospel available and accessible to anyone, anytime, anywhere. Christians now have the opportunity to contribute their digital skills to support and supplement the greatest needs of the Great Commission. I hope you find that this issue of CSQ helps to paint a better picture of various digital strategies as well as the online landscape for reaching the Chinese mission field.

¹ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report," *DataReportal*, January 26, 2023, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report>.

Prior to ministry, Andrew Feng graduated from USC, interned at Yahoo, and consulted for KPMG. Currently, he serves as the US Lead for [Indigitous](#) which engages young leaders to use their giftedness beyond the four church walls. He and his wife served abroad for five years where they adopted their special needs son. Andrew has a heart for the younger generation and continues to mentor them under Indigitous.

Over the past few years, God has opened Nick's heart for missions through dozens of opportunities including taking Perspectives, going on short term mission trips, and documenting and producing videos for missions. He is eager to see where God is leading him in his faith and missions, but he is even more excited to see other younger generation Christians step into serving God's global kingdom in new and innovative ways.

The Need for Innovation and Digital Transformation

Andrew Feng and Nick Wu

In every era of missions, technology has helped missionaries take the gospel to new people and places. From the network of Roman roads in 300 BC, the printing press in 1436, television evangelism in 1950, the internet in 1983, and now 5.4 billion mobile phone users, technology has provided tools and resources for evangelism. New technological advances continue to emerge rapidly, which can often feel like new hurdles to learn all over again. Society, on a global scale, is learning to adapt to these technologies, thus opening new strategies for connecting to unreached peoples.



The Internet and Technology for Missions

Despite a world with over half the population online, the gospel has still not reached about a third of the world, and the percentage of Christians compared to the global population is projected to see little growth by 2050.¹ Just as missions work was accelerated in the past with innovation and technology, the church needs to innovate and transform digitally to make disciples of all nations.

In the last 40 years, the internet has transformed how society learns, works, and connects. Today, the internet has reached 5.1 billion people, and 65 percent of global internet users are in North Africa, Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. In China alone, there are 1.05 billion internet users, including 1.03 billion social media users.² This means a majority of internet users are in regions that overlap with the 10/40 Window which the missions world has deemed the highest priority for mission work.³ With access to the internet, online strategies are popular for connecting to new people. Through global connection online, we can also see how digital natives may cross cultural boundaries with others online. Alongside the internet, recent technological tools like applications of artificial intelligence, new trends on social media, virtual reality spaces, and more can open new avenues for the gospel.

Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is the adoption of digital technology for innovation, invention, user experience, or efficiency. It includes both practice and mindset for Christians to engage in digital technology effectively for communication and evangelism. In practice, it can transform work and daily tasks to be more streamlined or automated, thus saving resources like time and money. It is also crucial for Christians to be thinking about the future where there will be a need for continual adaptation and innovation. Mission leaders need to be pioneers of innovation to be culturally relevant in reaching a wider audience undergoing digital globalization.

These can all be daunting for missionaries who have not grown up as digital natives. However, they are not called to be alone in the Great Commission effort. God has called the 99 percent of the church—those who are not in full-time ministry—along with the one percent of ministry workers to make disciples. The

whole church needs to innovate and adapt to digital transformation. To not change or do anything about it can be fatal for the spread of the gospel.

We may have heard it before: we are losing our next generation! Whether it is children growing up and leaving the church, fewer missionaries being sent, or government regulations tightening in restricted countries, it is evident that many challenges impede the spread of the gospel. In Pew Research's projected 2050 growth rate of religions, Islam is climbing faster and will likely surpass Christianity after 2050. In corporate settings, when a project fails, it goes through a post-mortem evaluation. However, the attrition of Christianity and global missions leads to a more dire and bleak outcome. Rather, we can consider performing a "pre-mortem," which means looking ahead and avoiding the mistakes that will hinder the spread of the gospel. This mental model is crucial for ministry leaders because they are not enough to reach the 3.2 billion people who are yet to be reached. Rather than only relying on the one percent, evangelism and discipleship need to be the work of the 99 percent of the church. This 99 percent of those not in professional ministry have the opportunity to reach their spheres of society beyond the one percent.

As the whole church is living in an increasingly digital world, the 99 percent of Christians have also needed to adopt digital transformation in their workplaces. More recently, with the impact of COVID-19, churches and ministries have begun to adopt digitally with online worship services, despite this being a challenge for many. We might look at using new and digital technology as a "blizzard" which Andy Crouch, a partner of Praxis, shares:

As leaders, we must react swiftly to the blizzard that is already upon us...pivot to survive...and reimagine our organizations to outlast the rigors of a possible little ice age.... We are, for reasons only God knows, on the front line, on the starting team. Let us act boldly, today, to build as best we can, for the love of our neighbor and the glory of God.⁴

With rapid changes and new trends, missions and ministry leaders must stay ahead of the curve on all things relevant to engage the next generation, mobilize new goers, and creatively reach the lost. According to the National Skills Coalition, 92 percent of jobs in the US require digital skills. As innovators or early adopters, mission and ministry leaders can discern and guide Christians against the misuse of technology. In the Bible, Paul shares about his missionary life and the need to adapt for the sake of evangelism: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Likewise, Christians can redeem technology and digital spaces for good. Rather than be a consumer of technology and online content, there is an opportunity to give their time and skills for digital missions which is providing and creating digital tools, resources, and strategies for global missions.

In Ted Esler's book, *The Innovation Crisis*, he writes about the need for creativity and imagination in the church and beyond. He suggests using five simple concepts called the Shoemaker Rules, named after William Carey. The five rules are:

1. See a problem worth solving.
2. Ride the wave of existing innovation.
3. Be biased to action.
4. Empathize, then strategize.
5. Think big.⁵

Esler points out that innovation needs to exist in missions because it enables Christians to regain their voice for the church in culture and society. Using the Shoemaker Rules will help the church recognize the urgency of missions, adapt to new trends with innovation, and move into action for real change. He encourages us that to truly empathize with others, whether it be to mobilize Christians in the church or to understand unreached people groups, there is a need for new solutions and the posture of innovation.

Innovation and digital transformation can help redefine the missions journey for Christians among the 99 percent. Many churchgoers do not know what the Great Commission means for their life and do not know their place in global missions. However, the missions world needs them, including their marketplace and tech expertise beyond the four church walls. Innovation in missions means activating people beyond awareness and into action. The hope is to see the church take on a new posture and behavior toward digital transformation.

In addition, with the need for creative access to countries like China, Christians outside the country may find avenues to support cross-cultural workers and churches within the country through digital spaces. The young adults of the next generation of China's digital natives are often pressured to pursue only their career paths. Their missions journey exists only for a few Sundays of the year or at a conference like [Chinese Mission Convention](#) (CMC). However, digital missions can provide an avenue for them to offer their digital skills to supplement the needs of missions in China and other hard-to-reach spaces. Where physical boundaries prevent access to China, young adults with a heart for China can re-engage with digital transformation, innovation, and collaboration to help share the gospel in new creative ways.

Opportunities for Innovation and Collaboration

Hackathons are events usually held for programmers on college campuses or within tech companies. It is typically a weekend-long event where technologists are challenged to prototype a tech solution to a problem. Indigitous (indigenous + digital) hosts the largest Christian hackathon, #HACK, and has gathered technologists and creatives alike to come together and "hack" for missions. Between challenges in using data to locate Christian activity, Scripture innovation, engaging the next generation in church-planting, and many more challenges, the hackathon has been a space for Christians to bring their faith, work, and heart for missions together with others. Ministries join hackathons as well to be part of the community, learn from each other, and collaborate with the church body to innovate and brainstorm solutions that help solve their mission's needs. Hackathons hosted in China have become beneficial in gathering technologists, media specialists, and creatives to then go on to continue serving in creating digital content strategies to reach the Chinese community online.

Similar to hackathons, design sprints are great practices for innovation. Design sprints are a time-constrained, five-phase process that utilizes design thinking to develop a new product, tool, or strategy. In corporate settings, design sprints aim to reduce risk when bringing a new product, service, or feature to market. They also help to better understand the needs of their audience or users. While design sprints often take place within hackathons as well, the process itself can be implemented in any ministry environment. It involves a team dedicated to collaborating within a set amount of time to brainstorm and prototype a new solution. The five phases can be split into five separate days, such as:

- Day 1: Understand: Observe and empathize with the challenges users face.
- Day 2: Sketch: Do brainstorming and ideation.
- Day 3: Decide: Define the problem statement to be solved and any added features.

- Day 4: Prototype: Build and implement.
- Day 5: Test: Gather feedback from potential users.

Design sprints can be implemented by ministries to innovate new solutions with their outreach or discipleship strategies. They can also gather new insights at a low cost before ministries spend too many resources on an idea that may fail.

Virtual cohorts open another pathway to engage young adults in global missions. Virtual cohorts often come together in learning environments which became a necessity when many educational institutions went online during COVID-19. Indigitous has taken the virtual cohort model and created digital missions cohorts where young adults can use their marketplace skills and work together with mission organizations. Indigitous has set up virtual cohorts as an internship that is like a short-term missions trip done digitally. For eight to ten weeks, these young adults will meet together online, learn about missions and unreached people groups, and use their tech and creative skills to help solve the needs of missions. Mission organizations will partner with Indigitous and present a challenge that these young adults will work on. For clearer scopes of work, this can appear like providing extra resources to complete tasks. For more open-ended challenges, this can appear more like a design sprint where the cohort will prototype a new solution. In both cases, there is an opportunity to reimagine digital discipleship with mentors that engage young people to combine their heads, hearts, and hands for the advancement of the gospel.

Another advantage of a virtual cohort program is to get international students involved in digital missions. Indigitous's digital missions cohorts have offered flexibility in bringing in international students from China and other countries to work together. They offer their cultural perspective and experiences to the projects which help to expand the views of the cohort as a whole. To learn more about Indigitous cohorts, visit the [Indigitous website](#).

Lastly, a new ministry partner, Switchboard, is creating a global platform connecting everyday believers to the mission field. Missionaries all over the world are often in need of help but do not know whom to ask for assistance. Many are also tackling multiple roles, wearing many hats when it comes to ministry, and living as pioneers. However, missionaries can receive remote support, and Switchboard's platform enables experts across all sectors to bring their best to serve in the Great Commission. Virtual volunteers or kingdom consultants can sign up for the platform and get connected with Great Commission organizations.⁶

Conclusion

Innovation and digital transformation are necessary for the advancement of the gospel in this technologically driven world. Through innovation and digital transformation, we may see the whole church rise together to take on its missional calling. In this way, digital transformation can enable the 99 percent of Christians to collaborate and truly meet the needs of the missions world with their time, skills, and resources together. It can then become the ministry of the whole church to take the gospel beyond the four walls of the church and their spheres of influence. By redeeming technology, Christians can redefine their engagement in the Great Commission and empower the discipleship of the next generation to carry global missions forward.

¹ “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050,” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015, Accessed August 15, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

² Simon Kemp, “Digital 2023: China,” DataReportal, February 9, 2023, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-china>.

³ The 10/40 Window refers to the countries located between 10- and 40-degrees north latitude, including much of Africa and Asia, and some of Europe. The area is considered to have the least interaction with the gospel. See “10/40 Window,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified June 3, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10/40_window.

⁴ Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, Dave Blanchard, "Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization is Now a Startup," *Praxis Journal*, March 23, 2020, accessed August 15, 2023. <https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff>.

⁵ Ted Esler, *The Innovation Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Publishers. 2021), 36.

⁶ To get connected, go to: <https://www.globalswitchboard.io/blog/make-yourself-available-to-the-global-body-of-christ>.

Prior to ministry, Andrew Feng graduated from USC, interned at Yahoo, and consulted for KPMG. Currently, he serves as the US Lead for [Indigitous](#) which engages young leaders to use their giftedness beyond the four church walls. He and his wife served abroad for five years where they adopted their special needs son. Andrew has a heart for the younger generation and continues to mentor them under Indigitous.

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Using New Media for Digital Evangelism on Chinese Cyberspace

Sean Cheng

A veteran internet missionary reflects on both the past and present spreading of the gospel among Chinese internet users.



Image credit: [Buffik](#) via [Pixabay](#).

I have been active in digital evangelism on the Chinese internet since 1995. Because of this long history, some Chinese friends call me an internet writer “on the *gu hui* level.” *Gu hui* is Chinese for ashes, but in this context, it means that I am a “dinosaur fossil” on Chinese cyberspace. In 2010, in an official Chinese Communist Youth League journal article, the author listed me as one of the most dangerous internet missionaries to whom Chinese youth should be alerted.¹ For me, however, my personal experience of Chinese Christian internet mission has always made me marvel at the leading of God behind it.

The history of Chinese digital evangelism dates back to the mid-1990s when the Chinese internet began. Some of us may still remember the sound of a phone line dial-up and blinking letters on a 386 PC. Around that time, the Chinese language world started to have its first generation of BBSes (bulletin-board sites) which were primitive online forums. Even in that dinosaur age, there were already Christians doing apologetics and sharing the gospel on China’s internet.² I was one of the earliest ones.

Then came the World Wide Web, and at the end of the 1990s we saw many WWW-style Chinese online forums. Christians, including myself, were active on those platforms dialoging with intellectuals in China about the Christian faith. Many influential intellectuals in China, who later became Christians (e.g., Wang Yi),³ were involved in such dialogs.

In the 2000s, blogs, Douban, and Weibo became popular in China, and Chinese Christians again quickly took them up for evangelistic purposes. Next, WeChat (*Wei Xin*) became the big deal and top app. I personally believe that there was a golden window of 10 or 15 years using WeChat for evangelism in the 2000s and 2010s. The majority of significant Chinese Christian media, for example, had WeChat *gong gong hao* or public accounts. One Christian article from those public accounts could get thousands of reads, even reaching *10 wan jia*—more than one hundred thousand reads—thus “breaking the meter.”

I joined Overseas Campus Ministries ([oc.org](#)), a Chinese Christian media ministry, in 2011 to lead their internet ministry. A WeChat public account was our number one platform, and we established Christian blogger “circles” in China. Our evangelistic WeChat account reached more than seventy thousand subscribers before it was totally deleted, and everything evaporated overnight before the COVID-19 pandemic. For personal evangelism, I also joined Zhihu, the Chinese equivalent of Quora, and answered nearly three hundred Christian faith-related questions. Many of my answers got high numbers of reads, and some got a lot of likes by non-Christians.

For Chinese online evangelism, 2018 was the important dividing line. In that year, the Chinese government announced a new set of regulations on “religious content on the internet.” A number of influential Christian websites and WeChat public accounts were blocked. My own Zhihu account was blocked and all my answers on that platform were completely deleted overnight. (I regret not having saved all the answers

on my computer.) Later that year, many house churches in Chinese cities were banned from gathering for worship.

Many Christian netizens feared that the implementation of the new regulations would make evangelism impossible on the Chinese internet, especially on WeChat. On March 1, 2022, the new regulations officially went into effect. Would it stop evangelism on China’s internet?

When *Christianity Today* asked a group of Chinese internet mission leaders if the new regulations would do that, they actually said “no.”⁴ Basically, it just gave the Chinese government and platforms like WeChat and Zhihu more legal reasons to censor Christian content—but they had been doing that since before the new regulations.

Today, many Chinese Christians are still using WeChat to share biblical content and evangelistic articles—at least links if not full texts. Some use coded words and *pinyin* initial abbreviations in text to get around the censorship (e.g., “JH” for church and “JDT” for Christians). Chinese Christians organize and share information about Christian webinars, online sermons, recordings, and videos. Many overseas Chinese churches and fellowships still have active WeChat groups for Bible study, daily Bible reading, devotionals, and so on.

However, we do need to be careful to avoid the *min gan ci*, or “sensitive words.” Of course, we know better than to use WeChat to share confidential information such as financial data about our churches or Christian organizations. There truly is a backdoor leading directly to the public security authorities.

At the same time, it is also true that after 2018 many additional Chinese ministries’ public accounts on WeChat were deleted or seriously restricted. Many felt they were forced to have a reluctant exodus from WeChat. Many ministries based outside China decided to give up WeChat and move their content to platforms outside the Great Firewall. I personally use many of these tools (such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, and so on.) for evangelistic purposes (but I would avoid using TikTok). In 2021, I hosted a Clubhouse “room” that I called “Venting about Christianity” and intentionally invited several Chinese pastors and church leaders to join me in the room to listen to what others were complaining about Christians and Christianity and to respond with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Today, for my Chinese language work at *Christianity Today*, I use Zoom and Twitter Space for evangelistic talks and devotionals.⁵

WeChat is almost the only social media that people in China can use “inside the Wall,” that is, without a VPN (virtual private network). However, it has its own problems when it comes to evangelistic uses. In 2017, when WeChat evangelism was at its peak, the Chinese team of ReFrame ministries studied thousands of WeChat public accounts.⁶ They found that less than seven percent of the accounts containing Christian words were actually run by Christians. Four of the top five such accounts were commercial accounts operated by a single, secular marketing company in Jinan, Shandong. In addition, plagiarism was a problem that was widespread—even among Christian public accounts.

What I would like to remind mission-minded Christians who use the internet is this: While all these new media tools can be useful for internet evangelism, they also have their challenges and pitfalls. Some challenges are China-specific, such as the Great Firewall, the censorship by the Chinese government, and WeChat’s commercialism and plagiarism. Others include apologetical challenges which often also have unique Chinese contextual characteristics, such as nationalism and scientism.

Then there are those typical, universal pitfalls of social media, such as polarization, disinformation, distraction, and addiction. Internet evangelism is an extremely difficult endeavor. One has to have a true calling to become involved, and not every Christian is called to do internet evangelism and apologetics. In this digital age, practicing self-control is an important spiritual discipline for Christians. Therefore, to be able to do internet evangelism, Christians must grow in spiritual discipline and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit if they desire to contribute in this way.

As many Chinese church leaders like to say, the Chinese word for crisis is *wei ji*. *Wei* means danger or challenge, and *ji* means time or opportunity. Using new media for the glory of God on the Chinese internet has never been easy, and it will not get any easier in the future. It has both challenges and opportunities. Even in the post-2018-new-regulations present, there are still plenty of platforms, new media, and websites, both outside and inside the Great Firewall, that Chinese Christians can use to spread the gospel among Chinese internet users. In North America, a number of Chinese ministries have joined forces to organize the Internet Mission Forum, even providing training courses on using new media for internet mission.⁷ It is notable that at the end of the newest revision of the Chinese *Returnee Handbook*,⁸ URLs of useful online websites are listed.⁹

As a veteran “internet missionary,” I am thankful to have participated in history and witnessed the miraculous growth of Chinese internet mission. There were only a handful of Chinese Christians on the internet when I started writing about Christianity 28 years ago, but today millions of us are using the internet. While only a small percentage of these are intentionally involved in internet evangelism, that is still a lot of Christians. I pray that more will be called to participate, and that by God’s grace we will continue to carry out the Great Commission on the Chinese internet.

¹ Zuo Peng, China Youth Research, “High vigilance against the online spread of Christianity,” June 2012, <http://www.hongqi.tv/hyzd/2012-06-01/729.html>. Note that this link may not work in some places in the world.

² Jidian (Sean Cheng), “The Chinese Internet and the Gospel of Christ,” accessed September 12, 2023, <http://www.godoor.net/jidianlinks/net.html>.

³ Ian Johnson, “Wang Yi: The Faithfully Disobedient Chinese Pastor,” *Christianity Today*, February 2023, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/january-web-only/china-church-wang-yi-persecution-faithful-disobedience.html>.

⁴ Sean Cheng, “Can China’s New Regulations Really Stop Evangelism on the Internet?” *Christianity Today*, March 3, 2022, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/march-web-only/internet-regulations-china-evangelism.html>.

⁵ Audios, Videos, and Writings of Jidian (Sean Cheng), accessed September 12, 2023, <http://godoor.net/whjdt/>.

⁶ Jerry An, “Here’s What Thousands of Christian WeChat Accounts Reveal About Chinese Internet Evangelism,” May 13, 2022, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-web-only/wechat-public-accounts-chinese-evangelism-censorship.html>.

⁷ See the [Chinese Internet Mission Forum](http://www.chineseinternetmissionforum.com) website.

⁸ *Returnee Handbook*, 3rd ed, Overseas Campus Ministries, Chinese e-book, <https://wdbook.com/dp/35486931288065>.

⁹ See Internet Christian Resources in Chinese, accessed September 12, 2023, <http://godoor.net/whjdt/ziyuan.htm>.

Sean Cheng is Asia Editor of Christianity Today. He has been active in internet evangelism for 28 years employing a variety of media and platforms using the pen name of Jidian (基甸). He is the host of a YouTube channel, podcasts, and Twitter Space, and the author of three books in Chinese. He has served the Chinese church as a Christian media worker and diaspora missionary for over ten years.

Online Theological Training Forty Years of Growth of Liangyou Theological Seminary

Luke Cheng

Liangyou Theological Seminary (hereafter referred to as Liangyou Seminary) is a training program developed by the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) in 1982. Starting as a broadcasting program, Liangyou Seminary is now an educational institute with over twenty thousand students registered and four thousand graduates. Its forty years of development have witnessed God's guidance and work.



Image credit: [Dylan Ferreira](#) via [Unsplash](#).

The Beginning

In the 1980s, China opened its doors to the outside world. Churches began to meet again, and the gospel could be spread more freely. However, the spiritual condition of the church at that time could be summarized in one phrase: "A yard wide but an inch deep." On the one hand, the gospel ministry of the church flourished, the church grew, and the number of believers increased. On the other hand, many believers were not deeply rooted in the truth, and their spiritual condition was worrisome. It was easy for heretics to harass the church and steal away believers. Many house churches lacked pastors, and most of the pastors lacked basic theological training, making it difficult for them to effectively pastor churches and shepherd believers.

FEBC's workers felt the great need for Chinese Christians to be pastored, and pastors to be trained, especially in rural areas. In 1982, they founded the Rural Bible Institute, an on-air training ministry to help Chinese churches train volunteers, workers, and pastors through broadcasting and media. In the absence of Chinese theological reference books at the founding of the ministry, the institute's teachers labored writing down lectures on each subject, line by line. These courses were then delivered by fluent Mandarin speakers as they were broadcast to China through the medium wave radio station of FEBC. They pastored tens of thousands of hungry believers and helped many preachers and workers in the church.

Renewed Academic Structure

From 1982 to 1991, the Rural Bible Institute was only broadcasting training courses via radio. There was no formal academic structure for admitting students, nor was there any examination provided for the courses. The academy mainly taught through broadcasting and nurtured believers through the use of letters. In response to the needs of urban believers, the Rural Bible Institute was renamed Liangyou Theological Seminary in 1991, and in 1992, Liangyou Seminary began its undergraduate diploma program with students enrolling and taking exams.

In 1995, the program was changed to a two-year program with the goal of training lay pastors and evangelists as good shepherds. Later on, Liangyou Seminary added the Volunteer Training Program, and in 2003, the Advanced Program was added to strengthen the training of the undergraduate program and to meet the needs of church volunteers and graduates. In 2011, these two programs were optimized into the Foundation Program and Advanced Diploma Program. In October 2017, the Foundation Program was

expanded into the Navigation Program to equip more young believers and nurture a new generation of successors for the church.

From Broadcasting to Webcasting

In the early days, Liangyou Seminary relied mainly on medium wave and short wave radio to broadcast theological training courses to the audience, and the students listened to the programs over the radio. The advantages of broadcasting are obvious as it is hard to entirely block out programs and requires only simple receiving equipment. However, the effectiveness of broadcasting depends on the area, time, and interference. There were many places in China, especially in big cities, where there was radio interference and noise, and the programs could not be heard clearly by listeners. Meanwhile, when a listener missed a program, he would not be able to listen to it later. It was also difficult for listeners to listen to programs repeatedly if they did not understand them.

When internet access became common, Liangyou Seminary also began to utilize the internet and digital media, recording training courses and establishing an online training platform to increase interaction with students. In 2005, Liangyou Seminary launched its webcasting service which allowed listeners to listen to courses, download lectures, and communicate with the seminary. In 2011, Liangyou Seminary's website was launched, and has been continually improved. It allows students to register, listen to courses, and hand in assignments online. Through these digital media and online platforms, students' listening has become far more effective. All of the courses are free of charge on the internet, so students can not only see the course syllabus conveniently, but they can also listen to courses over and over again when it is most convenient for them. They can also receive timely feedback on their homework from seminary teachers.

Online Self-Learning and Global Access

With the rise in popularity of smartphones, in 2018, Liangyou Seminary developed its own app, called Liangyou College, which allows students to listen to lessons anytime, anywhere. The app has added multiple-choice questions to the Navigation Program so that new believers and young believers can listen to these customized courses and measure the effectiveness of their learning.

In response to the changes and challenges of the times, in 2022, the seminary launched the Universal Undergraduate Program and the Universal Advanced Program. Liangyou Seminary is gradually transforming into an online self-learning platform. It provides multiple-choice questions for each course so that students can freely organize their study plan according to their own time and use these questions to measure their learning effectiveness. It also opened courses for public use so that any church can use their courses to train their own church workers and preachers.

Impact on Global Christian Leadership

After forty years, there are nearly twenty thousand students who have enrolled in Liangyou Seminary's programs, and countless believers have listened to its courses without registering as students. The theological education and pastoral training provided by the seminary have contributed greatly to the establishment and development of churches in China and have nurtured generations of Christian leaders and pastoral workers for Chinese churches around the world. The students of Liangyou Seminary come from all over the world, from those who never had the opportunity to go to school to university professors

and professionals who are well-educated. With such students, the teachers have taught without discrimination, tailoring the teaching to each student's needs, and nourishing them with care. We have heard testimonies of preachers listening to sermons preached at Liangyou Seminary, recording them, and then preaching them to believers. At a time when there was a severe lack of resources and theological training, the courses of Liangyou Seminary have, to a certain extent, served as a theological standard due to the trust of the audience in Liangyou Radio.

Shaping Tomorrow's Ministries: The Future of Online Theological Training

Now that the number of Christians in China has grown to tens of millions, the focus of gospel work in China has shifted from evangelism to equipping and training. The need for theological training in China is not decreasing but increasing. In many third- and fourth-tier cities or rural areas, pastors are often tentmakers, and they cannot afford to leave their ministries to attend training. In times of relaxed policies, many overseas theological training ministries subsidized the training needs of pastors to a certain extent. Now, with a tightening policy, it is difficult for overseas organizations to freely conduct training. Because of the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the church's acceptance of training through the internet, as well as familiarity in using various soft- and hardware, has risen dramatically. Training resources have also become more and more abundant on the internet. For these reasons, online training is becoming increasingly important to pastoral training in Chinese churches.

Certainly, online training needs to be adjusted according to the changing times and the needs of the church. Pastoral training needs to be extended from the simple teaching of biblical-theological knowledge to the edification of spiritual life and the transmission of ministry experience. Therefore, online training needs to be integrated with fellowship and discipleship. Furthermore, the curriculum, coursework, and methods of measuring teaching effectiveness need to be adjusted according to the trainee's level of education. Finally, online training should be coordinated with local churches so that the content of the training is close to the needs of the churches.

Luke Cheng was born and raised in east China. After he graduated from college, he went to Canada to pursue graduate studies in engineering. He heard the gospel in a Bible study group on campus and became a follower of Jesus Christ. After finishing his PhD in computer engineering, he worked as a software engineer for ten years. In 2017, he resigned from his work and started full-time seminary studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He graduated with a ThM and joined Far East Broadcasting Company as the Executive Director of Chinese Ministries. Luke's passion is to share Christ with China through media and technology and help churches make disciples.

Engaging the Highly Mobile Generation of Chinese Intellectuals

Tsun-En Lu

James is a bright young Chinese man raised in a communist family. He decides to study abroad to see the world. Landing in the US, he is invited to attend a campus Bible study group. Like other young Chinese atheists, he asks many difficult questions and challenges the Christian faith. The questions are not always adequately answered, but he is impressed by the genuine love shown to him by those Christians. At an evangelistic rally, the Holy Spirit opens up his mind to see the beauty of the gospel, and he prays to receive Christ as his personal savior.



Image credit: [Surface](#) via [UnSplash](#).

James quickly becomes a lay leader in the church and meets his future spouse who was raised in an anti-communist family hurt by the Party's past. They both graduate from the university and get married the same year. Unsure of their next step, they strive to build a Christ-centered family. James finds a research assistant position at another university, and the couple moves to a new state. The funding is not secure, so they must relocate once more. They join a new church there and are recruited to start a new student ministry.

The couple are disciplined, mentored, and learn varied Christian disciplines from many teachers with different spiritual backgrounds at multiple locations. They often consider returning to China, as they desire to share the gospel with their families, but they believe their children have better opportunities in the US. A few years later, James joins another university and serves as an adjunct professor. They move again, knowing it will not be their last relocation.

James and his family are an example of the highly mobile generation of Chinese intellectuals we are encountering. They undertake various life stages across multiple locales and manage a complex blend of worldviews derived from diverse perspectives. They experience personal growth through adaptation to new roles and environments and make significant impacts on communities beyond their immediate circle.

This phenomenon became more significant during the pandemic when everyone retreated from in-person gatherings and increased engagement online. The direct impact on the lives of local churches was tremendous. However, the thriving virtual communities of varied interests were impressive. It has become imperative for Christian leaders to rethink the role of the local church, parachurch, and the use of digital platforms and media.

Ambassadors for Christ (AFC), Inc. is a missionary organization established in 1963 and headquartered in Paradise, Pennsylvania. Its vision is to equip and mobilize Chinese American churches to reach out to Chinese-speaking young intellectuals for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership transformation. During the pandemic, the organization adopted an innovative ministry model that focuses on supporting micro-communities, which reflect the highly mobile character of overseas Chinese intellectuals. These groups differ from traditional small groups because they do not have inherent "DNA" since they do not necessarily have reproducible training models. Each micro-community exists to serve actual needs.

Collectively, these micro-communities embody the ecosystem of the gospel—the variety of Christian life and the diversity of people groups.

AFC also established the [United Student Outreach](#) (USO). The USO is a platform of micro-communities that brings together churches and parachurch ministries through a membership management system to collaborate and reach the highly mobile generation of Chinese international students, young professionals, young families, and returnees. AFC assigns full-time staff to form a team that is involved in creating and developing the micro-communities on the platform.

This ministry model leads to a different method of digital engagement. First, it does not emphasize promoting organizational resources to an unknown audience. Instead, it works with micro-communities first and then uses digital engagement to promote the sharing of resources that reflect the diversity of the ecosystem. Second, it does not rely on the user's loyalty to a particular program. As long as the user maintains a connection with the platform, it integrates a variety of resources to suit the user's needs, adapting to the user's constantly changing location and life stage.

This method also has better potential for building in-depth relationships. The membership system allows us to see many aspects of a person who may have different interests and experiences during different life stages while staying abroad. One-on-one mentoring can occur simultaneously as the person participates in various short-term programs. Opportunities for personal growth can arise from both online and on-site activities.

In short, digital engagement is not just another way of using media in a more interactive manner. Digital engagement is also an integral part of the life of the multifaceted Christian life in communities.

Tsun-En Lu is the director of Discipleship Resource Center at [Ambassadors for Christ](#), Inc. The organization equips and mobilizes Chinese immigrant churches to reach Chinese-speaking young intellectuals in North America. Tsun-En and his team are responsible for providing comprehensive, strategic, integrated, and accessible resources. They adopt a membership management strategy for micro-communities of the same target audience to connect and collaborate online and onsite.

Breaking through the Great Wall

Travis Todd

One of the things I love talking about is taking steps of faith to bring Jesus to as many people as possible. I serve with Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), and our vision is to make Jesus and his mission accessible to anyone, anywhere, anytime they want to be a part of it. I lived in China with my wife and four children for 22 years until COVID-19 came along and, like many others, we got stuck outside of the country. Nevertheless, I praise the Lord for digital means to continue to connect with people in China.



Image credit: [Priscilla Du Preez](#) via [Unsplash](#).

My digital ministry story began in 2006 when I returned to China after being in the United States for a few months. I was excited to tell people about Jesus but was overwhelmed. There were two hundred million people in the part of China where I was leading workers and ministry teams. Although I love talking with people, I knew I would never be able to speak with that many people, and I would never be able to get ten thousand friends to come and join me either! Then, as I looked around, I noticed that more and more people were on the internet, so I started some websites to connect with others online.

By 2010, the small group I was working with (at that time it would have been a stretch to call us a team) was seeing around three thousand people a month indicating a decision for Christ online. We were blown away by this. However, since then, things have become more complicated—although the principles are still the same. Put Jesus in front of as many people as possible, let them hear the gospel so they have an opportunity to respond to it, then help them grow in their walk with Christ. I constantly ask my teammates: “Are we helping people move a little closer to Jesus every day? Can those who do not know Jesus come to know him? Will those who know him know him a little bit better?”

You might be wondering how we do online evangelism and discipleship in today’s China. As you might imagine, it is crazy!

The first thing we needed to decide was that we did not care about creating a brand or promoting an organization. I do not want anything we create or do to be famous. I want Jesus to be famous. Thinking this way makes it a lot easier to do what works. For instance, we open a website and call it *XinShengMing*. When it gets shut down, we rename it *XSM*. When that gets shut down, we call it *GoChina*. We just keep giving it a new name. We opened a WeChat account and called it “JesusFilm.” WeChat asked us to change the name, so we called it “NewLife Films.” Then that was shut down, so once again we opened a new website. In 2021, we had three websites and nine social media accounts shut down.

Every day we had posts blocked, and our four social media teams were getting discouraged. I pulled them all together and reminded them that we had connected with over thirty million people. We had shared the gospel over three million times and linked over a thousand people with local churches. If we had waited for a perfect or easy way to communicate, those people would not have had an opportunity to know Jesus a little more. It is incredible what God is doing. We cannot wait for safe or ideal situations; rather, we must keep taking the gospel to people.

You might ask about security concerns since everything on the internet is monitored. In 2022, 13 of our 25 local Chinese team members were questioned by the police. After each occurrence, I asked the team member if he or she wanted to quit. I did not want anyone to be involved with this work just because we were friends. Most of them told me they wanted to keep working on this. They knew they were helping people learn about Jesus. One young woman, who had worked with us for three months, said that every time the police told her she was doing wrong, the Holy Spirit reminded her of a previous conversation that was the opposite of what the police said. She knew she was doing what the Lord wanted and helping others to experience Jesus a little bit better.

A few team members decided to stop working with us, and that was okay. As you build teams, you need to look for people who, first and foremost, are called to the mission; they cannot be hired just for a task. I was reminded of this as I read John 10:12–13 one morning. In that passage, Jesus talks about being a shepherd: “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” We need team members who view themselves as being used by the Lord as shepherds and not those who run when the wolf comes along.

Our process is like a funnel. We try to connect with people on matters of the heart or spirit, including feel-good content like movies, music, or difficult things people face in their lives. Once we make a connection, we invite these people into groups and then offer them deeper relationships. We had over thirty million people view our content on many different platforms around China. Of those around forty thousand have joined our groups where we can talk with them and get them involved in topical discussions about leadership, parenting, gardening, or anything else they might be interested in talking about. After we gather people around their interests and build trust with them, we then share Christ with them. As appropriate, we ask them if they want to study the Bible or learn how to share their faith. If they respond positively, we have a team that makes phone calls to connect them to local fellowships.

We do not have enough workers to help all forty thousand who are in our groups. If you or your organization are interested in being involved, we can help you promote your online events in our groups. Just let us know. Our heart’s desire is to enable people to experience Jesus more. If you can be part of that—praise the Lord!

As I mentioned at the beginning, we do not want to be famous. We know that when you become too well known in China, the authorities will knock you down. They are using artificial intelligence which makes it harder to keep anything—websites, videos, articles—online. Sites and content get pulled down very quickly. However, since our goal is to get as much of our content, and the content of others we have worked with over the years, shared as widely as possible, we do not want just a few platforms with hundreds of thousands of followers; rather, we want our content spread across many channels.

With that in mind, we give away our content for free—no strings attached. We want people to use it in whatever way their audiences want to engage with it. For example, if we have a thirty-minute video and someone cuts it down to thirty seconds because they can engage their audience better in that format, then we say—go for it! If something needs to be reworked, then do it. Our goal is to get content out there to be used because there are many people who want to share Jesus with the people around them, but they do not know what to share once they run out of their own ideas. If we can help hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people share our content with their networks, that is much better than creating a few big accounts that quickly get shut down. It is harder to shut down thousands of individuals who are mobilized!

At present, we are collecting shareable content on a Google drive and learning the kinds of content people can use. Then, we will have a group of developers create an app or website that will allow people to both upload and share their content as well as download the content that they want to share with their people. In phase one, the content will be available for free in both Chinese and English. Once we figure out the best way to do this, we plan to add other languages and also work with creators who will have some requirements for sharing their content. There are many around the world who want content that is easy to share, and together we can help them. If you would like to work on this project with us, please let me know.¹

Remember—do not wait for the best (read “safest”) opportunity. Get shut down and get shut down often. If you are not getting in trouble, you are not getting the gospel to people. Think about how many friends have been questioned by the police—and how many are still behind bars. I know just two or three who are being held, but I know thousands who have been questioned. So, be bold and work to get the gospel out there.

I will end with a story. One of the women on my team in China is a 65-year-old mother who cares for her autistic son at home. Last year, from July to December she had 41 Zoom events with over nine hundred people who attended her events. Thirteen people accepted Christ through her ministry online. She told me that when I encouraged her to try holding Zoom events in 2020, she was not sure if she could learn how to use Zoom let alone hold events. Nevertheless, after three months she became comfortable using it and is amazed by what God is doing. Are there people in your life who could be mobilized like this mom?

¹ Travis may be contacted by emailing travis.todd@cru.org.

Travis Todd is the East Asia Field Strategies Leader for [Cru](#). He served in China from 1998 to 2020. Over the last year he has led the Cru staff to connect with over thirty million people in-country as they “win, build, and send.” His heart is in evangelism.

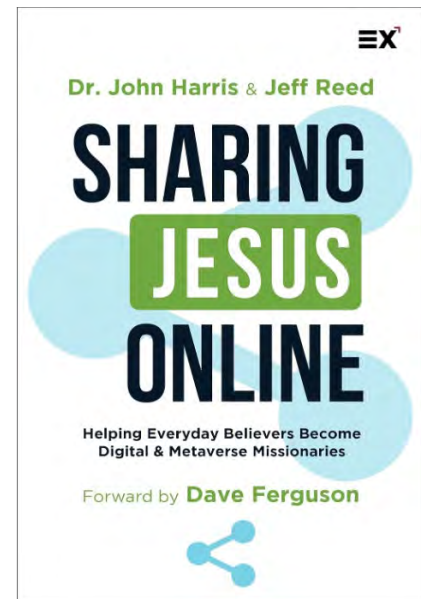
Book Review

A Framework for Digital Evangelism

Andrew Feng and Nick Wu

Sharing Jesus Online: Helping Everyday Believers Become Digital and Metaverse Missionaries by John Harris and Jeff Reed. Coppel, TX: Exponential, 2023, 161 pages. ISBN 978-1624241123, paperback. ISBN 978-1624241130, epub. Available from [Amazon](#).

Digital spaces are expanding with the onset of new technologies and online platforms. From social media to the metaverse, new people turn to online communities daily. Christians may have many questions about how to navigate these digital spaces and how to practically share Jesus. Dr. John Harris and Jeff Reed's book, *Sharing Jesus Online: Helping Everyday Believers Become Digital and Metaverse Missionaries*, provides practical steps to understanding people in digital spaces with a relational approach. Dr. Harris and Reed share about advances in technology and how increased access is opening doors to many people who might not be reached otherwise. While digital spaces can feel expansive and daunting, Dr. Harris and Reed stress that building relationships online is an effective strategy for the proclamation of the gospel.



“It has been said that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This common quote rings true for Dr. Harris and Reed’s approach to treating people online as we might build relationships traditionally. People who may be receptive to the gospel are those who see you as interested in getting to know who they are. They advocate that any Christian with digital access has the potential to be a digital missionary. While the online landscape may differ from offline interactions, it doesn’t have to be intimidating.

Dr. Harris and Reed’s foundational framework for initiating gospel conversations is B.L.E.S.S.:

B—Begin with Prayer

- We lean on the Spirit to guide us in approaching new people with whom to share Jesus.

L—Listen

- Listening to others is key to developing trusting relationships in which the gospel can be shared.

E—Enjoy Sharing Experiences

- Shared experiences online will look different from in-person, which means connecting with people where they are, like on social media, gaming, or the metaverse. These platforms lend for relationships to be built such as over content, play, or VR.

S—Serve

- Serving someone digitally has creative possibilities, including sharing knowledge or resources and meeting basic, relational needs.

S—Share Your Jesus Story

- One of the best ways to build relationships towards sharing the gospel message is through your personal testimony of how Jesus changed your life.

The B.L.E.S.S. framework is a flexible set of principles with the goal of helping everyday believers begin sharing about Jesus online. Dr. Harris and Reed hope that this framework will serve as a valuable starting point for Christians who may be unsure of how to start. They provide practical steps to build relationships in digital spaces and how to share about Jesus.

Dr. Harris and Reed begin with their first chapter, “Reimagining the Great Commission,” discussing how digital spaces have opened new opportunities for evangelism. Digital missionaries are using messaging apps like WhatsApp to engage in gospel conversations with thousands of people. People with online access around the world may have their first exposure to the gospel with a digital missionary. Another example is to look at the users of Facebook as the largest “nation” to which Jesus has commanded us to go in the Great Commission. With many active users, there is a large potential for digital evangelism and pioneering work to begin through a large social media platform. Digital evangelism is connecting users across multiple devices, whether they are mobile, desktop, or VR goggle users.

Metaverse technology is on the rise and while relatively new, has much potential to be explored for digital evangelism. It differs from other digital mission fields as users tend to be early adopters. Unlike social networks, users in the metaverse are less likely to already know each other, which opens new opportunities for connection with someone to hear the gospel for the first time. Metaverse churches are also being initiated as new experiences and inviting a new demographic of online users who may be hesitant to join a church in person. New digital communities also represent a shift in culture, which redefines the possibilities of gathering and connection.

While these various online spaces and technologies are exciting, the goal of sharing the gospel still rests on the individual Christian. Dr. Harris and Reed express the desire for any Christian online to take up the ministry of evangelism and discipleship for themselves. Going online to do so is becoming increasingly accessible and necessary!

Through several chapters of the book, Dr. Harris and Reed proceed with basic applications and fears to overcome to take the step to share Jesus online. They address several misconceptions about reaching people, where online platforms have different social dynamics and cultures. They also debunk religious apprehensions about entering digital spaces, so that Christians may be informed in how to navigate it without compromise.

They apply the B.L.E.S.S. framework as a basic example for any Christian to start relationships online. Dr. Harris and Reed express the importance of prayer for all approaches to ministry, even if it is a simple conversation with a new person online.

Active listening online may look different from texting, chat rooms, audio spaces, and other platforms. Social listening, the process of identifying and accessing what is being said about an individual is also key for helping digital missionaries connect with others online. This can be a shared interest or experience, which increases the possibility for direct engagement.

Shared experiences have been some of the most effective methods for Christians to connect with new people. Video and online gaming have invited people to connect globally and have even produced communities and friendships through playing together. Dr. Harris and Reed write, “The anonymity of digital allows for incredibly authentic conversations. Some of the most honest conversations I’ve had with strangers took place while playing video games. Gamers can easily strengthen relationships with other gamers” (p. 93). Likewise, VR spaces, online learning, online content, and other apps also offer a similar opportunity for forming new friendships through shared experiences.

People can be served online with a creative and open mindset. Dr. Harris and Reed suggest a few examples. One is praying for people through text or recorded audio, so the receiver of prayer can go back to the prayer at a later time. Digital resources can also be shared to connect people in need with the right people or services. While there is much potential for online evangelism, Dr. Harris and Reed also note that this does not exclude the need for offline and physical experiences of worship and discipleship. Rather, they express that both are necessary. Digital missionaries have the chance to serve all kinds of people whether online, offline, or both. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to change lives at any time and in any place.

Dr. Harris and Reed’s final point of the B.L.E.S.S. framework reminds us that sharing our personal story of Jesus matters. They provide practical steps to take on the challenge individually as our ministry work. Evangelism is not only for ministers, pastors, or missionaries. The authors also provide various ways to tell your story to different audiences, including whether to use more or fewer Christian terms.

Lastly, Dr. Harris and Reed encourage readers that becoming a digital missionary does not mean needing to impact a billion people. Rather than create a generic Christian post being broadcasted to a wide audience, they underscore the significance of starting with individual relationships. Their message is clear: becoming a digital missionary is achievable for every Christian, and the key is to build authentic and trusting relationships.

For the context of China, digital strategies and connecting with people online are more specifically discussed in the other articles of this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly*. Dr. Harris and Reed’s relational approach applies for individuals to begin relationships with Chinese people in various online spaces and understand their needs. The content of the book needs to be further contextualized for a local Chinese audience, where relationship building will have more nuances in both cultural and digital landscapes. The hope is through various avenues of digital technology, people will be connecting with authenticity and trust for the gospel to thrive.

ChinaSource Perspective Learning about Global Digital Culture

Joann Pittman

In preparing to write this article, I looked back at some of the other articles we've published on the topic of missions and technology, specifically internet technology. How has technology changed? Is how we think and talk about technology and missions changed? Are the answers to our questions the same, or have they changed as well?



Image credit: [Kisistvan77](#) via [Pixabay](#).

The first time we looked at this topic was in the December 2000 *ChinaSource Quarterly* (our only publication at the time) in an issue titled [“Telecommunications and Technology.”](#) To get a bit of perspective, let's consider the state of technology at the time. Internet connectivity was not yet universal and was still slow. Do you remember dial-up? Laptops were considered a luxury and the World Wide Web was in its infancy. Mobile phones were just phones. There were no smart phones.

Using technology in missions often meant shortwave radio broadcasts, copying and distributing cassette recordings, and engaging in spiritual conversations in online chat rooms. There were conversations about security and making sure that technological platforms were used in culturally appropriate ways. There were hopes that the internet would take off and become a powerful platform for evangelism and missions, but there was also caution against being overly optimistic about the reach and speed that internet technology would develop. In the end, I think the reach and speed actually outpaced what even the most optimistic observers at that time imagined.

This issue is an important update to the issue we published 23 years ago. It offers a historical overview of the role of technology in the spread of the gospel as well as an overview of current practices and platforms that are being used specifically in the Chinese speaking world.

Here are some key observations I had in reading this issue:

There is such a thing as a global digital culture. Just as we seek to learn the language and customs of any culture and for ways to share the gospel in culturally relevant ways, we need to be willing to do the same with this global digital culture. This will require a commitment to innovation.

Every age of human society has had its breakthrough technological advancements that provided new platforms for gospel proclamation. The printing press, the transistor radio, television, the internet, and now artificial intelligence come to mind. In each case, the new technology was met with skepticism. Unhealthy, or even criminal, things can be printed, transmitted, or shared with the world at large. That's true, but in every case, there were, and continue to be, innovative Christians who looked for ways to use these new platforms for evangelism and discipleship.

There are some very creative people doing very creative things in the digital space. These range from online discussion groups to the growth of online seminaries and other theological training platforms, to the establishment of “micro-communities” that are formed to reach out to the highly mobile generation of Chinese students and young people.

Digital evangelism is challenging. Sean Cheng, who was at one time labeled by a Party journal article as “the most dangerous internet evangelist” reminds us that “one has to have a true calling to become involved, and not every Christian is called to do internet evangelism and apologetics.”

The challenges of digital engagement with people inside China are real. Sensitive words may trigger blocking. The so-called Great Firewall is formidable, and many can’t access material posted online outside China without a virtual private network (VPN). Many involved in evangelism are involved in a constant cat-and-mouse game with China’s censorship regime. Their site is blocked; they open another one. That one is blocked, and they move yet again. On and on it goes.

Despite all the regulations and restrictions that the Chinese government puts in place to limit religious content on the internet, digital evangelism is alive and well and bearing fruit. The articles in this issue focus on what God is doing through digital engagement, not on what the Chinese government tries to prevent.

I also learned what a “hackathon” is, and you will too. Hint: it’s NOT gathering together a group of Christian young people to figure out how to break into someone’s computer. It is an event that brings digital professionals together to use their skills to come up with solutions and new innovations.

Finally, even though technologies change, the opportunities and concerns do not. Christians are, and should be, continuing to grapple with how to appropriately harness new technologies for the spread of the gospel.

I hope you will be as blessed, encouraged, and challenged by reading this issue as I was.

Joann Pittman is Vice President of Partnerships and China Engagement at ChinaSource.

Resource Corner

A Digital Resource for the Global Body

Justin Sooter

What does it take to have a conversation about faith nowadays? Many Christians today don't know how to attempt evangelism for fear of being unprepared or being labeled as pushy and judgmental. Many others find it difficult to even bring up their Christian identity in casual conversation. What can be done?



Image credit: [Terimakasih0](#) via [Pixabay](#).

Let me introduce you to the [GodTools app](#). GodTools is a platform dedicated to providing training and effective solutions for evangelism. The app is designed to help every Christian have access to realistic, contextualized, and gospel-centered evangelism resources. That means that whether you are talking with your sister in Singapore or asking deeper questions with your co-worker in California, GodTools can help you take the next step in sharing your faith.

GodTools is used around the world by Christians everywhere to learn **how** to share their faith and then **actually share** it. In 2023 alone, GodTools has seen more than 1,200 Chinese-speaking users from a wide variety of regions and countries access and share the gospel in the GodTools app.

Not only is GodTools available in over a hundred languages, the app also offers tools and lessons to help users learn and share their faith. Tools are contextualized resources designed to communicate the gospel clearly. As an example, the tool "Honor Restored" is specially designed to be shared with people from an honor-shame background like that of eastern Asia. Lessons like "How to Move Your Conversations to a Deeper Level" help users prepare and learn practical tips. Users can also share content with their friends and family right from the app.

Regardless of the next step you're trying to take, GodTools is a tried and tested resource for Christians everywhere to engage with their friends, family, and neighbors about Jesus.

Go to [GodToolsApp.com](#) to learn more and find links to download both Android and Apple versions.

Justin Sooter is the product leader of GodTools, a UX designer, and avid-fly fisherman based in Orlando, FL where he lives with his wife, daughter, and dog Jasper. With a background in advertising and web design, he applies these skills to help millions of believers and partners around the globe, both in and outside of Cru, share Jesus with their friends and neighbors via the GodTools app.

ChinaSource Publications

ChinaSource Blog

A platform where China ministry practitioners and experienced China-watchers offer timely analysis and insight on current issues relating to the church in China. Posts feature voices from those inside and outside China.

ZGBriefs

For those who want and need to keep up on what is happening in China, we monitor more than 50 different news sources and curate the most relevant and interesting stories out of China each week.

ChinaSource Quarterly

Providing strategic analysis of the issues affecting the church and Christian ministry in China, the Quarterly encourages proactive thinking and the development of effective approaches to Christian service.

Newsletter: The Lantern

Our monthly newsletter keeps you abreast of how ChinaSource is responding to opportunities to serve with the church in China and of related items for prayer. To subscribe to any or all of our publications, visit www.chinasource.org.

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- ***Serving Well in China*** - Are you preparing to serve in China, or maybe you're already there? Are you working with Chinese students in your home country? This course will help you serve well where you are.
- ***The Church in China Today*** - The religious climate in China, especially for Christians, may be messy but it's not beyond understanding. This course offers a comprehensive overview, ranging from a historical understanding, to the struggles it endures in present day, to common misconceptions about the state of the church.

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