

MISSION PARTNERSHIPS FOR EFFECTING INSIDER MOVEMENTS: The Case of China Ministries International-Philippines

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China Ministries International-Philippines (CMIP) has specialized in forming mission partnerships with seven organizations in order to attain its major goal to effect “Insider (or Kingdom) Movements” (IM) through the use of the non-extractive “disciple multiplication movement” (DMM) strategy¹ in China and beyond. As CMIP’s founder and president since 1994, I believed that cooperation with other mission organization is the best way to do missions. I hope this article can inspire readers to learn from our practice of using mission partnerships to maximize the potential for bigger impact in mobilizing more reapers into the harvest.

CMIP was founded as a mission agency to recruit, train and deploy Filipino missionaries to do IM through DMM across the universities in the People’s Republic of China. It is one of the six regional offices of China Ministries International (CMI), which was founded in 1978 in Hong Kong by Rev. Dr. Jonathan Chao. Each regional office is autonomous, and their top executive and Board leaders met annually as the International Council, and presently meets every two years since 2006 upon its restructuring after the untimely demise of the founder in 2004.

FOUNDING: PARTNERSHIP WITH AN ESTABLISHED MISSION

When I started to go into mission mobilization in 1994, I had already a clear vision of how the best approach to effective ministry among the unreached must be done: through lay missionaries who can enter restricted areas to make disciples and form house church networks through them. Hence I searched for an established mission agency that shared my convictions to learn from their experiences as well as build on their strengths, resources and connections.

Actually it was not a search, since I already knew Dr. Chao since 1978 as I had been receiving the China Prayer Letter and other materials from the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong. These helped confirm my views about the revival of the church in China through the “underground” house church networks. My conviction for house church multiplication based on the “gospel explosion” in China in the ‘80s was also nurtured by Asian Outreach and my readings of Dr. John Sung (as a child, 1966-70) and Watchman Nee (in seminary, 1974-77).

1. David S. Lim, “Contextualizing Kingdom Movements in a Religious Pluralistic World,” in David S. Lim, Eiko Takamizawa and Daniel J. Kim (eds). *Christian Mission in Religious Pluralistic Society* (Seoul: East-West Center for Missions Research and Development, 2019), 95-119; and “Kingdomization through Oikos Church Networks of Insider Movements: A Biblical Missiology.” *Asia Missions Advance* 67 (April 2020).

My calling to use my life to reaching China for Christ was made at a Youth Summer Conference in 1969. My missionary journey started in 1971 with Inter-Varsity-Philippines as a freshman in college, with our triple emphasis on “Evangelism, Discipleship and Missions,” where I learned the practical skills on leading and multiplying cell groups. It took a while to be fulfilled since I felt called to theological education in 1973, to be able to train ministers for God’s mission, thus I earned my post-graduate degrees (ending with Ph.D. in Theology in 1987) and served as Academic Dean of Asian Theological Seminary (1988-91) and Oxford Centre of Mission Studies (1992-94). This long preparatory period helped me to mature spiritually and master the skills professionally for the convictions and qualifications to be a mission leader.

PIONEERING STAGE (1994-1999): PARTNERSHIP WITH A MISSIONS ASSOCIATION

I was ending my two-year stint at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in 1994, when I applied to be a missionary with China Ministries International (CMI) through the U.K. office (which has since closed down). At that time, I had already known and respected Dr. Chao as one of the top creative Asian theologians and historians of missions for China, since we were both members of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT), and physically met when both of us presented papers on “Church and State” issues at Osijek, Yugoslavia (now Croatia) in 1988. I shared his holistic missiology that formed CMI’s slogan “Evangelization of China’s peoples, Kingdomization of China’s church, Christianization of China’s culture.”

By September 1994, I was welcomed as Philippine representative and regional director of CMIP, and my family joined me in the CMI conference in Hong Kong then. I began to organize our mission agency and our office as we got officially registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission, with Bishop Fred Magbanua as the first chair of our Board of Trustees. We adopted for our promotional slogan: “To impact the 21st Century, let’s evangelize the next superpower.”

For the first six years, I took twice-a-year ministry trips into China (1995-2000). I went around the country learning how to operate underground as I taught in several discipleship training centers. I was able to learn a lot about the situation of the house church networks in China through the local contacts and missionaries serving with CMI. Meanwhile, I was mobilizing for China missions through organizing

the Board, raising funds, publishing newsletters, preaching in churches, speaking in mission conferences and lecturing in seminaries.

MOBILIZATION STAGE (1999-2015): LEADERSHIP IN TWO MISSION MOVEMENTS

By 1997, I've started to take leadership roles in the Philippine missions movement, after being elected to be on the Board of Directors of Philippine Missions Association (PMA). In 1999-2000, I served as the officer-in-charge of PMA when its National Director took a study leave. I was then introduced to Tentmakers International (TI) as I served as the conference director of its Asian Congress in 2000. This led me to co-found two mission movements. Locally, I helped revived PMA's Tentmakers Task Force, which eventually was called the Philippine Mission Mobilization Movement (PM3) that sought to recruit, train and deploy 200,000 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as tentmaker-missionaries among the unreached; the goal was increased in 2009 to one million OFWs catalyzing disciple multiplication movements among the unreached by 2020. Globally, I became a member of the core team of the Lausanne's Tentmakers Issue Group led by Berit Kloster, which worked closely with TI to promote missions by bi-vocational and Business as Mission.

At the same time, we were actually starting to send missionaries to China. We were able to commission and deploy our first missionary to reach the Buddhists in Inner Mongolia in 1999, and our second to reach the Tibetans in Nepal in 2000. Then two more were sent in 2001, and four in 2002, just as we incorporated the Asian Center for English Studies (ACES) to provide TESOL training classes for our recruits. In 2003 we formed a partnership with the Take the Nations for Jesus Church (TNJ) to send nine more into China.

In 2004, our Southern Luzon regional coordinator Eman Abrea visited three cities in China with only \$50 on his departure, and returned in great joy. By 2006, our field missionaries & mobilizers have reached 66 in number, and increased by 17 more in 2007 and 8 more for a total of 91 coming in and out of China by end of 2008. With the death of our best recruiter Visayas regional coordinator Chona Jomilla in 2009, we gradually increased to 120 by 2013. By this time, I had taken on other important mission mobilization roles, and just as the new President Xi Jinping started to repress religious freedoms again in China, so CMIP transitioned to another form of mission agency.

EMPOWERMENT STAGE (2015-PRESENT): PARTNERSHIPS WITH MISSION ORGANIZATIONS

After twenty years of ministry as a government-registered mission agency, CMIP has operated since June 2015 as a Mission Fellowship, which continues to mobilize for missions to China through partnerships

with mission organizations. New missionary recruits are trained to go simply as OFWs into China. With all staff serving as volunteers and working from home, there is no more need for an office. Since then, the few donations to CMIP are given official receipts through our partner ASDECS (see below).

Our main ministries are now: (a) providing Tentmakers' Training Seminars (4-8 hours), (b) mentoring and counseling different Filipino (and other nationalities) tentmaking missionaries to China and elsewhere, (c) fundraising to meet emergency needs of missionaries and provide official receipts for donors who want them, (d) represent CMI and participate in CMI family activities, and (e) promoting the vision, mission and strategy of CMIP to all our partners & networks.

Besides continuing to be a member of a global partnership for missions to China (that's CMI) and a national partnership for missions mobilization (that's PMA), CMIP also maintains five other mission partnerships:

Above all is Asian School for Development and Cross-cultural Studies (ASDECS) which trains "elders of the nation" (Christian nation-builders) to lead the realization of the kingdom of God in their nation. I took a part-time paid position as its President since February 2008, confident that if we can produce graduates from our post-graduate and certificate programs in Transformational Spirituality (MATS), Transformational Leadership (MTL), Community Development (MACD & Ph.D), Development Management (MDM) and Asian Studies (Ph.D) in each Asian nation (incl. China!), we shall have equipped enough servant-leaders to transform (or Kingdomize/Christianize) those nations.

ASDECS also partners with Bible Schools in providing the curriculum and faculty of their Bachelor in Transformational Leadership (BTL) major in Community Development. We graduated our first 4 Ph.D. and 6 Ed.D. in Korea last November 27, 2019. Our degrees have accreditation from the International Council for Higher Education (ICHE).

Secondly, we have partnered with Lausanne Philippines Partnership (LPP), where I have served as Board Chairman since its founding in 2007 as it sought to propagate the best practices of para-church and mission groups. I'm a mentor of the Lausanne Younger Leaders Group, and serve as a member of the Executive Committee of Asia Lausanne. Recently, I led the local committee for the Lausanne Global Workplace Forum held in Manila in June 2019, which focused on workplace ministry & business as mission (BAM), which I consider to be the most important church conference since Pentecost - as it restored the focus of the global church's mission mobilization to the "priesthood of all believers."

Thirdly, we also work with SEANET, the global partnership to reach the Buddhist world. Since 1999, I've been a member of the global Steering Group that hosts an annual conference on reaching the Buddhist

peoples in the second week of January each year in Chiang Mai. The Philippine chapter has been loosely affiliated with PMA's flagship program, aiming to train and send 250,000 tentmakers (that's 25% of PMA's 1 million) to reach Buddhist peoples & countries (incl. China).

Partnering with SEANET has the added advantage that I'm somewhat forced to write a scholarly paper each year for publication to be read by seminarians, missionaries and missiologists for their professional enrichment. My latest published paper is "Christianization Lessons from the Mission History in China," in Paul de Neui (ed.), *Emerging Faiths: Lessons from Mission History in Asia* (Pasadena: William Carey Library), 159-173.

Fourthly, CMIP is part of the Star Grass Coalition, the House Church Movement in the Philippines, which seeks to multiply disciple-makers and house churches across the nations, a few households at a time. Since 2005, I've served as chief coordinator of the leadership teams of the Philippines, Southeast Asia and Asia. I led a group of 6 Filipinos to participate in the 3rd Global House-Church Leaders' Summit in June 2018 in Bali.

And finally, we also partner with Asia Society of Frontier Missions (ASFM). We are one of the founding members of this association (led mainly by Koreans and Korean Americans) since 2009. Since October 2010, I helped direct its Asia Mission Leaders Forum (AMLF) that seeks to advance cooperation among frontier missionaries and organizations, and co-host its Annual Missiological Forum that hopes to collect journal papers on the best practices of "Insider Movements" among the unreached. We held our latest conference in Bali in September 2019.

CONCLUSION

With 120 missionaries who have been mobilized for China, CMIP has been the largest Philippine-based mission in China. We have remained in touch with half of them, mainly through emails and Facebook Messenger. Most have already returned home; some help churches in the Philippines to minister to new migrants from China and continue to help mobilize for tentmaking missions. A few continue to serve in China, but others have gone on to the Middle East, India, Nepal, Vietnam and the West.

We have followed the mission paradigm of "Insider Movements" of the Global House Church Movement. We believe that the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth are house church networks where every Christ-follower is disciplined to be a priest/minister of the gospel, who can each practice 1 Cor. 14:26 in their home and workplace to make and multiply disciples, like in 2 Tim. 2:2.2

God has been and is at work in China, and His Church has been growing rapidly without much outside help,

2. See Rad Zdero, *The Global House Church Movement*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2004.

except for radio broadcasting and Bibles smuggled in. The best people to evangelize China are the local believers themselves, so we should partner with them primarily. Thus the role of expatriates is of supportive servants and partners: (a) to follow the lead of God-appointed Chinese church leaders, while also (b) sharing our spiritual gifts and expertise humbly and generously, and (c) serving as bridges between China's house churches and local churches abroad.

Our goal is to help equip and empower the Chinese church (and not create dependency) for her to do her share in world evangelization, esp. in the various "Back to Jerusalem" mission movements. Thus we must just focus in equipping her leaders to become truly theologically mature in Christ and spiritually alive to send competent missionaries to the unreached in China, Asia and the world.

Hence CMIP's policy has been to avoid bringing in Christian literature from the outside, but rather encourage and help finance the printing of the best used materials developed by the house church leaders themselves. Thus, in spite the difficulties and risks of contacting and supporting the house church networks, we believe that we must channel most, if not all, our disciples and support to our brethren in these fellowships.

Therefore, through our partnerships, CMIP continues to work cooperatively with all who share our convictions and strategies to serve the house church networks in China and beyond. As an African proverb says, "If you want to go fast - go alone; if you want to go far -go together." Indeed through partnerships we can accomplish more and exponentially for expanding God's kingdom by working with others towards a common goal than by doing it alone. As we apply this fundamental value to our life in areas of family, ministry, church, business, sports, government, and among the nations, God will multiply our efforts and increase our impact!



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He earned his Th.M. (New Testament) from Asian Center for Theological Studies in Seoul, Korea, and his Ph.D. Theology (New Testament) from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has recently co-edited the compendium of Asian Society of Missiology's conference: Christian Mission in Religious Pluralistic Society