

Missionaries: Made in China

First-time visitors to China are staggered by the sheer numbers of people crowding the streets and public transport.

With a population spilling over the 1.3 billion mark, this nation is home to one-fifth of the planet. Beijing claims 19 million residents, Shanghai 20 million, and cities with only one or two million are considered small.

It's also hard to ignore the in-your-face wealth of the cities. Cartier, Rolls Royce showrooms and luxury hotels seem to advertise capitalism rather than Communism. These are clearly China's glory days—small wonder the West is looking to the East to bail them out of their economic woes. China is rapidly expanding its holdings all over the world. The International Monetary Fund is predicting that by 2016, it will surpass the U.S. as the world biggest economic superpower.

What does this burgeoning prosperity and nationalistic pride mean for missions and the Chinese Church? The first Protestant missionary made it to China in 1807, a full 500 years behind Roman Catholic missionaries. On the voyage out, the cynical ship's captain asked Robert Morrison if he really expected to make any impression on the idolatry of this vast empire.

"No, sir," Morrison humbly replied, "but I expect God will."

And God has. By the 1920s over 10,000 missionaries were working all over China. When the establishment of the People's Republic forced a mass exodus of foreign workers, the church not only held firm, it flourished. Chinese believers took over the leadership and the vision to reach their country and beyond.

Today China's 100 million-plus Christians actually outnumber its 80 million Communist party members. Mission activity

thrives, although it looks a lot different in 21st Century China than it did in Morrison's or Hudson Taylor's era. Today a typical missionary may live on the 24th floor of an apartment block surrounded by skyscrapers. He or she may be leading a business team that is influencing hundreds—perhaps thousands—of others, through the marketplace. And this team could be completely composed of Chinese men and women.

Operation Mobilization has had a presence in China for a number of years and has always worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Chinese believers. Post-disaster relief and development efforts, income-generating projects, healthcare and language and business training are not just a “front” for missions, they have proved in themselves to be powerful conduits for the **gospel**.

The *People's Daily* has reported that more than 300 million Chinese people, or nearly a quarter of the country's population, have studied English either as a major course or as an elective subject. Many young people are like Stephen*, a farmer's son who was determined to leave the countryside for an education in the city. In spite of the competition he won a scholarship to a university with over 50,000 students. Separated from his family and under severe pressure to succeed, Stephen became stressed and depressed, unable to sleep.

Then he met some Christian students, one of whom loaned him a Bible. He began attending a small group Bible study with other students. Since a foreigner led in English, he thought this a good way to improve his language skills. But as Stephen observed the way the lives of his fellow students changed as they came to faith, he began to crave the same assurance. After three years of searching he knew he'd found what he was looking for and was quietly baptised in the portable “bathtub” of a foreign teacher's apartment. Stephen graduated at the top of his class, found himself head-hunted by a major corporation, and today continues passionately committed to his

Lord, looking for ways to reach his family and colleagues.

With 428 of over 500 people groups within the country still unreached and millions of Chinese now living in other countries, missions “made in China” is the logical way to go. China has one of the world’s fastest-growing churches, with the potential of becoming the biggest mission-sending country within the next 20 years. OM believes that providing key services like Scripture translation and mobilising and training young people will enable the Church in China to fulfil its God-given role in world missions.

*name changed