

MISSION: NINE HURDLES FOR ASIAN CHURCHES

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Introduction

Christianity in the twentieth century experienced many changes. One of the fundamental ones is the shift of gravity from the traditional West to the East, or in Andrew Walls' expression, "to the South."¹ In the serial move of God's history, Asia, among other continents, has experienced the phenomenal growth of Christianity. Much growth and energy is evident in the so-called Two-thirds World churches. This has been realized through two main factors: 1) the phenomenal growth of the church; and 2) the strengthening of the regional economy. In fact, "AP" (Asia-Pacific) has become a household word in political, economic and religious areas. Various factors indicate that the church in the Asia Pacific region is finally having "its day."

Equally phenomenal is the growth of the Asian missionary force. A growing number of cross-cultural missionaries are expected to come from Asia in the coming decades. According to Larry Pate, in 2000, non-western missionaries are expected to outnumber the western ones,² and most of them will be Asian. The Asian church has been lauded as the next

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¹ In his lectures during the Annual Lectureship of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, January 13-15, 1997.

² Larry D. Pate, *From Every People: A Handbook of Two-Thirds World Missions with Directory, Histories, and Analysis* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), pp. 11-57.

generation missionary force. In 2000, the Korean church claims to have around 8,000 cross-cultural missionaries spread all over the world. As expected, Asian missionaries have been effective in many senses, and have changed the missionary demography considerably. Many writings have been produced which have sought to provide analyses of the phenomenon. Some of the reasons for their effectiveness include: 1) a closer gap between missionary-sending and missionary-receiving cultures; 2) their traditionally people-oriented culture; and 3) the relatively lower expense involved in maintenance of Asian missionaries. The most important theological point is that the growth of the church is understood as the purpose of mission.³ Therefore, whether the Asian churches recognize it or not, church growth will be sustained only through the Asian churches' constant involvement in evangelism and mission.

In the midst of all the praiseworthy prospects, the short missionary history of the Asian church reveals that we have yet a long way to go, and much to learn. Some problems are common among all missionary movements, hence universal, but others are more uniquely "Asian." After "trying," missionaries and churches have begun to realize their problems and challenges.

In this short paper, nine common "hurdles" facing Asian churches and missionaries in their mission work are going to be discussed. They are hindrances and challenges; I call them hurdles which Asian churches and missionaries have to overcome to reach the goal. If we trip on even one of them, its consequences will be disastrous. On the other hand, as we carefully overcome them, we will become stronger.

These issues will be viewed from the perspective of an Asian missionary involved in local ministry as well as leadership training for about twenty years in an Asian setting. The goal is to alert the Asian missionary communities and their churches of these hurdles that others and I have tripped over, so that those who come after us do not have to repeat the same mistakes and frustration.

The observations and analysis are based on personal experiences of my own ministry and of fellow Asian missionaries in the past twenty years. Hence, references to them only indicate that someone else has raised similar concerns as well. It will be worthwhile to mention that probably the first cooperative expression of this concern was voiced during the Asia

³ Bong Rin Ro, "Historical Analysis of Missions in Asia," in *World Mission: The Asian Challenge: A Compendium of the Asian Missions Congress '90*, ed. Met Q. Castillo (n.p.: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1991), pp. 44-51.

Missions Congress '90 in Seoul, Korea and its ensuing Congress in 1998 in Thailand.⁴

Another note of caution: one should remember that Asia is not uniform. Its diverse political, cultural, social, economic and religious situations make it difficult to generalize anything.⁵ Even among the “missionary sending” Asian entities, the differences are enormous, e.g. Filipino and Korean churches. The following listing is a moderate attempt to generalize issues which the Asian church and its missionaries have faced or will face in the future.⁶

1. Missionary-Receiving Mentality

Traditionally, Asian nationals have been a great “mission field” for centuries. Like colonization, this long history sets certain values, assumptions and behaviors. Moreover, because of the frequent link between missionaries and colonizers, the image of missionaries in some parts of Asia is not always positive. As Asian nations begin to send out their own missionaries, churches and missionaries struggle from the psychological stereotypes in missions. Switching from a receiving to a giving mentality takes more than the input of new information. It will take a paradigm shift or the change of our worldview. The following are some expressions of our missionary-receiving mentality evident in our Christian life.

⁴ Its selected papers were subsequently published in *World Missions: The Asian Challenge: A Compendium of the Asia Missions Congress '90* (and this volume is hereafter indicated as *WMAC*). The Thailand meeting resulted in a book, *Into the 21st Century Asian Church in Mission: A Compendium of the Asian Missions Congress II*, eds. Met Castillo and Katie Sisco (n.p.: Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, n.d.).

⁵ The plurality of Asia is illustrated in Theodore Williams, “World Missions: The Asian Challenge,” in *WMAC*, pp. 39-41.

⁶ A set of similar concerns was raised by David Pickard, International Director of OMF in his “Challenges Facing Asian Missions,” in *Into the 21st Century*, pp. 42-50. Readers will benefit much by reading the present article (from an Asian missionary working in Asia) and Pickard’s (a western missionary having worked in Asia for many years).

1.1 Taking Missionaries for Granted

Early missionaries often came not by an invitation from national churches but by their own initiative. For this reason, they became an easy target of institutional persecution. Even among Christians, their presence and labor are taken for granted. This is displayed in a number of ways.

The first is the lack of appreciation for their presence and work. Although missionaries were not perfect, they began the difficult work of preaching even under severe persecutions. A century ago Asia was a far more difficult place for westerners than it is today. Their contribution in educational, medical and social development is enormous, let alone in the religious area. No wonder some Asian churches have grown phenomenally. Now Christians are flocking to Asia to learn church growth secrets. Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea is a case in point. Many programs and principles are shared such as the cell group system and prayer. However, the critical role of early missionaries who shed much blood as martyrs is seldom mentioned. This oversight is obvious when one compares Korean church history presented by Korean scholars and non-Korean writers.⁷

The second is the lack of understanding, or the lack of willingness to understand, as to what it takes to be a missionary. One might say that missionaries did not share their personal struggles. The point is that we normally do not try to seek them out. Many western missionaries died in their first several years of service due to illness. Traditionally missionaries came from rich countries to poor. Hence, they were generally viewed as rich. From the missionary-receiving end, any help and assistance extended by missionaries was viewed as expected. When it stops, then it becomes unusual. Consequently, not many appreciate the sacrificial life of missionaries and the generous giving by western churches.

1.2 Mind of One-sided Criticism

By all means, fair evaluation and constructive criticism is a noble act of love. However, when we lack sympathy, we easily develop a fine ability to criticize. In the early days when a private vehicle was not known to us, we used to say, "They have to ride a bus just like us, if they are going to minister to us!" Already we developed a romantic view of missions such as,

⁷ For instance, Allen D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1971) and Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *Hankook Gidokkyo-eu Yuksa [A History of Korean Church]*, 2 vols. (Seoul: Christian Literature Press, 1989, 1990).

“The more hardship a missionary suffers, the better worker he or she is.” When we were on the receiving end, the idea of mission was often unrealistic since we did not care to consider what was involved in doing missions. Also missionaries were expected to adopt the lifestyle and culture of the field, often without due consideration given to differences between the cultures and difficulties involved in adjustment.

1.3 Pattern of Dependency

It is true that in the past, missionary-sending nations and missionary-receiving countries were clearly divided. That division also coincides with rich versus poor, developed versus underdeveloped, white versus non-white or even western versus non-western nations. The missionary culture and lifestyle that was often viewed as superior to their national counterparts was not entirely the missionaries’ fault. Realistically, as far as Christian practices were concerned, missionaries were expected to lead nationals, particularly in evangelistic and training situations. Moreover with the missionaries’ financial capability, it is common to see the “inherited pattern of dependency.”⁸

1.4 Suggested Solutions

The change of an attitude and mentality takes a long time, just as their formation does not happen overnight. Asian churches, as much as its societies, are in the midst of radical changes. At best, the memory of colonial experiences, war, poverty and oppressive rule is still fresh, or at worst, these are still the present reality. It may take the next generation to have a less biased orientation. But this also implies that the present generation has to provide a path for such change by beginning the process now.

One fundamental solution is a constant education of churches with sound biblical, theological and historical perspectives of mission. As many lay people are interested in mission, it may be a good idea to develop “mission study” lessons, much like Bible study material. Missionaries, missiologists and pastors can join their resources and produce several models of it.

⁸ Met Castillo, “Issues and Trends in Christian Missions in Asia,” *WMAC*, p. 97.

One practical way that is definitely helpful is to assume an “objectifying perspective,” even if it is for a moment. That is to put our own Asian missionaries in the place of the western missionaries whom we have certain expectations from and criticism against. Before voicing a complaint about Korean missionaries for their inadequacy in cultural adaptation or language ability, a Philippine church leader, for instance, may like to think one more time of his or her own missionaries in Cambodia or China who may well be the target of similar criticism and expectation of the national churches. It is a mental practice like that of WWJD (“What would Jesus do?”).

2. Historical “Baggage”

Asian countries, except for just a few, were colonized at one time or another. This history has strong implications for the colonized as well as to the colonizers in doing mission. Another pertinent past is frequent racial struggles among some Asian nations.

2.1 Colonial History

Nacpil characterized Asia using four critical principles: the first being the colonial past.⁹ The fact that early western missionaries were considered as part of the colonial force is a clear reminder that history can play a critical role in mission. This unfortunate past still lingers today in a different form in Tibet and other former republics in China. The colonizers for many Asian nations were westerners such as Spain in the Philippines, the Netherlands in Indonesia, Britain in India and China, Portugal in Malaysia, Timor and Macao, France in Vietnam, and America in the Philippines, Samoa, Guam and others. In other cases, colonization was by Japan in Korea, China and many Southeast Asian nations even if the duration was relatively short. These were colonized either by western nations or by Japan.¹⁰

⁹ Emilio P. Nacpil, “The Critical Principle,” in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book*, ed. Douglas J. Elwood (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day, 1976), pp. 3-6.

¹⁰ Winburn T. Thomas, “The Christian Mission since 1938: In Southeast Asia,” in *Frontiers of the Christian World Mission since 1938: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Scott Latourette*, ed. Wilber C. Harr (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 23-61 (24) considers the Japanese occupation and the communization of mainland China

There is no doubt that some historical events have contributed to the present church growth in some Asian countries. But in most cases, the bitter past hinders our future mission. Worse is the rise of nationalism that practically nurtures past wounds. Koreans and Filipinos, for instance, grow up learning how cruel the Japanese were during their occupation. This is learned not just from history books, but from many eyewitnesses who are still alive. This continues to nurture anger and hatred in many hearts today.

Situations such as these make it difficult for both missionaries and missionary-receiving entities. It took much working of God's grace for Rev. Leonardo Caput in the northern Philippines, whose father was killed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the World War II, to live and work with a Japanese missionary in the same building for many years. In the same way, Korean Christians have had to work hard to accept Japanese whose army persecuted, tortured, and killed many Christians, burned churches with Christians in them, let alone the hardships which the entire nation underwent including the recent issue of "comfort women" who were forced to be sex slaves for the Japanese soldiers. This issue involves more than 200,000 women from Korea, China, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.¹¹ Missionaries from these nations to Japan have to overcome this particular "historical baggage" in their psychology and emotion. Equally difficult is how the Japanese can accept missionaries from Korea whose people were traditionally looked down upon because of the colonial past. This will apply to British missionaries to India and Indian missionaries to Britain, for example.

Another side of the problem is an "attitude of the victimized." Whenever a high ranking Japanese official visits Korea, Koreans expect an offer of apology for the historical past. The level of his or her apology becomes a big issue. This is not an exception among Christians. Japanese Christian leaders visiting Korea are expected to "repent" of their past sins to the nation and Christians of Korea. Representing the victimized side, I wonder how long we are going to "lick our wounds."

as two events which "have stamped their imprint upon the whole Christian movement throughout Southeast Asia..."

¹¹ Nelia Sancho, "State Legal Compensation for 'Comfort Women' Sought," *The Philippine Star*, March 5, 1997, p. 17.

2.2 Present Day Problem

Historical “baggage” is not just a thing of the past. After the end of the Cold War era, racial conflicts have become a major issue that often has escalated to wars. East Timor is only one case, and the Cambodian genocide is still fresh in our memory. How East Timor Christian missionaries can one day bring a message of forgiveness and reconciliation to Indonesian Muslims will depend primarily upon how they can overcome their historical “baggage.” A challenge continues as former Communist nations open their door to the gospel. For instance, North Korea, when it finally opens, will have great difficulties in reorienting itself from the Stalinist indoctrination that has lasted for half a century. As South Korea and America have been taught to be “enemies” of, and imperialists against, the nation, missionaries need to consider the past psychological orientation of these people. In the present day, this takes a different form. In countries where foreign laborers are commonly employed, the image of missionary from these countries will face difficulties due to the public image.

2.3 Solution?

Are there any solutions to this challenge? My own encounter suggests three steps toward a resolution: 1) it will not help to pretend that nothing has happened. Although it is painful, we must let it stand; 2) both victims and victimizers must learn from history, so that we will not commit the same mistakes. The Bible uses Israel’s history for this reason (Act 7; 1 Cor 10; Isa 63:7-14); 3) Christians must demonstrate a kingdom perspective. Our identity with God and with fellow Christians should precede that of our earthly nation; and 4) ultimately, it is the Lord who will enable us to forgive and be free from the past. Unfortunate events of history may open a surprising door, especially for the suffering party, to initiate God’s offer of forgiveness and reconciliation to the victimizers. Christians need to develop a proactive attitude toward such a situation.

3. “We Don’t Have the Stuff!”

Probably several factors contribute to the low self-image of Asia and Asian churches. This mindset, which may be called “barrio mentality,” has been especially apparent among less developed nations or some traditions such as Pentecostals. This mentality has to be broken before Asian

churches emerge as a true missionary force. There are at least two factors that contribute to this.

3.1 Poverty

One is the long history of poverty. All the Asian nations except a few have had to struggle through wars, dictatorships and social oppressions. In the midst of this struggle, poverty has been the most pressing issue in Asia, even in the midst of the recent economic development. This reality is especially felt as Asians look at the western missionary model that is based on economic strength. Nowadays, the west approaches missionary work in a more institutional way, with a budgeted system, gadgets and equipment, insurance, and so forth. Then Asian churches can easily say, "We cannot afford to have a missionary." A creative compromise is that Asia supplies personnel and the west money. One may say this is a model for missions partnership.

This "minority and its poverty complex"¹² is more of a psychological problem than an economic one. Asian missionaries do not have to "equip" themselves with all these provisions. India is a strong missionary-sending church, which has already proven that missionaries do not have to be wealthy.

3.2 Traditional Concept of Mission

Traditionally missionary-sending nations were found among the developed or industrialized countries in the West. Most of them were also colonial forces in the past. This inevitably contributed to the formation of a link between mission and wealth. As a result, the missionary-sending party has been traditionally conceived as benefactor; religiously, culturally as well as economically. Naturally, the missionary-receiving party has been viewed as beneficiary.

Consequently a notion has developed that only "rich" nations or churches can send missionaries. This has further formed a perception that missionaries come with "goodies" including material and financial benefits to the people of less resourceful thus less evangelized nations. This entirely non-biblical image can discourage those who have a missionary call from less resourceful places, or cause them to believe their only resort is to a "field" that is poorer than his or her own. At this point, most of Asian

¹² Williams, "World Missions: The Asian Challenge," p. 42.

missionaries serve only in such places. Korean missionaries serve in Asia, Africa and former Soviet republics. One exception may be Japan. Singaporean missionaries are serving in Asian nations such as China, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, India, Bangladesh, etc. When it comes to missionaries from even less developed nations, naturally this boundary is slowly broken. For instance, Filipino missionaries are serving not only in places poorer than their own, such as Cambodia, China, Vietnam, but also in richer countries than the Philippines, such as Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Middle Eastern nations, Europe and North America. In a sense, Asian mission will fully mature when their missionaries are sent to any “mission field” where the gospel is needed, regardless of its economic level. However, as history tells, this has its own challenges.

Asian missionaries often come with the idea that missionary work is intimately linked to finances. For instance, establishing physical buildings becomes a priority among many Korean missionaries. In many cases, this often-called “money mission” has brought rather negative consequences. These include the “spoiling” of dedicated workers, “stealing” of national workers by offering a better monetary support, promoting reliance, misguided and less healthy theology such as the “church is a building,” and a host of other problems.

3.3 High-tech Mission

Lately, extensive research and modern technology have equipped missionary endeavor. With the advent of a new academic discipline, “missiology,” there has been extensive research in culture, history and missionary strategy. Also various programs, projects, and seminars have awakened and probably “democratized” the missionary work to the pew level. At the same time, there is a tendency that the true spiritual aspect of the entire missionary work is gradually hidden behind the display of complex statistics and strategies. This can “scare” Asian churches and their missionaries. Whether some Asian churches can afford this or not, we need to remind ourselves that the ultimate tools for missions are humans whose lives have been transformed by the message of Christ.

3.4 Solution

The obvious solution to this challenge is a proper orientation of missions. More specifically the central role of people in missionary endeavors: not money, technology or anything else. Also, important is the clear goal of mission, which has been misunderstood or at least wrongly

presumed by “mission fields” for so long. If the goal of mission is the salvation of men and women, then what an individual, a church or a nation has or does not have does not matter at all. (Obviously this suggestion applies to the next discussion as well.) The true resource is men and women saved by the blood of Jesus, called by him and empowered by his Holy Spirit. Asian as well as western missionaries need to be reminded of the brilliant editorial message of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, “Missiology, meet Jesus”!¹³

4. “Can-Do” Spirit

This is an exact opposite attitude to the previous discussion of “barrio mentality.” With the rapid change of Asian societies, suddenly there is confidence in the air. There is no doubt that this is a blessing from the Lord. However, some churches and missionaries become overly confident and even arrogant in their approaches. This positive, but often destructive attitude, is the result of the following.

4.1 Over-emphasis on the Decline of the Western Churches

There has been overemphasis on the decline of the western church and its missionary role. The highlighting of failures such as cultural insensitivity among some western missionaries have been widely shared through publications. This attitude is particularly true, as the world has marveled at the church growth phenomenon here in Asia. This is not to deny that in the providence of God, in this juncture of Christian history, God is using Asian churches. However, this should not be a cause for overconfidence or even arrogance. We need to remember that the biggest portion of today’s missionary force still comes from the west. Its academic institutions, research, funding, experience, and continuing commitment to missions must not only be appreciated but also fully utilized by Asian churches.

4.2 Myth of a “Closer Cultural Gap”

Another false assumption is the “closer cultural gap” which commonly prevails among Asians. It is true that Asian missionaries have more cultural

¹³ Jim Reapsome, Missiology, Meet Jesus,” *EMQ* 23:1 (Jan 1996), pp. 6-7.

advantages due to common or similar features among Asian cultures. The cultural gap, for example, which a Korean missionary must cross in China is much smaller than that which an American missionary has to cross. However, this seeming advantage is not always fully realized. One problem is the less one expects the difference, the more one tends to violate cultural expectations. The “short gap” does not mean, “no-gap.” In fact, some times one Asian culture can be vastly different from another. On the other hand, the same allowance normally given to western missionaries, because of the obvious disparity of background and culture, is not accorded to Asian missionaries.¹⁴

One reality to consider is that Asia in its lifestyle and culture has rapidly changed. Most economic tigers in Asia have adopted western education, management and values. These countries, some of which happen to be missionary-sending nations, have changed their orientation and their missionaries are extremely competitive, individualistic, and goal-oriented.

4.3 Triumphalism

Probably this upbeat mentality is due to the impressive economic achievement among Asian nations and the phenomenal church growth in Asia. Because of the success at home, missionaries feel that they finally have the “know-how” to evangelize a nation or to make churches grow. Many Korean missionaries in the Philippines implemented programs which work well back home, such as the cell group system, dawn prayer meetings, overnight prayers, visitations, etc. They are mostly good, but missionaries often impose these programs without carefully considering the new cultural and social setting. At this point, I would like to argue that church growth comes as God’s gift, although human efforts play a great role. When the Korean church stopped growing in the early 90s, we found that most of the church growth ingredients were still there. Unlike early sociology-based church growth theories, church growth is primarily a spiritual phenomenon and must come from the Lord. If that is the case, then it is for a divine mission in a specific time of history. Then humility is a virtue every missionary agency and missionary should acquire.

¹⁴ James H. Taylor, III, “Missions Strategy for World Evangelization,” in *WMAC*, p. 67.

4.4 “We Know the Trick”

For various reasons, Asian churches are trying to invent or reinvent something creative to carry on the old task of doing missions. For instance, the idea of “national or native missionaries” is becoming popular and appealing, partly because it is less expensive. This is a wonderful idea especially in restricted areas. However, if one advocates and practices this to replace the costly operation of cross-cultural missionary work, there is a basic problem in the understanding of mission. I thank the Lord that no western churches tried this in Korea to save money.

Another disturbing expression being used, at least in some Asian countries, is the term, “missions enterprise.” We have already discussed that the rapid economic growth in Asia has a great influence on missions, in positive as well negative senses. One great negative effect is that missionary work is viewed more from a business analogy.¹⁵ The idea of “native missionaries” is part of this approach. Ministry is never an enterprise, the rule of which is to invest the least and gain the most. It is investing endlessly. No one calls pastors as doing “pastoral enterprise.”

A growing trend in Asia is an explosive growth of international travel. Christians, especially the youth, are involved in short-term mission trips. This opens a vast new possibility in orientation, exposure, training and recruitment. Also the idea of “tent-making” further democratized missions. However, this excellent trend is not without a negative side effect: an amateurish approach to missions. Sometimes the task is not taken seriously, but “like a hobby or a pastime.”¹⁶

4.5 Suggested Solutions

The first thing Asian missionaries and churches need to have is humility. Church growth, economic growth and subsequent missionary movement should not be understood as a trophy of hard and brilliant work, but as God-given grace and opportunity. As Ro argues, church growth is maintained by missionary and evangelism work, since this is the very purpose of the church’s growth. However, church growth begins as God’s sovereign gift, but not as a result of missionary involvement in missionary

¹⁵ Met Castillo, “Issues and Trends in Christian Missions in Asia,” in *WMAC*, p. 95.

¹⁶ Williams, “World Missions: The Asian Challenge,” p. 42.

works.¹⁷ Once this perspective is in place, then even the economic growth of a nation should be perceived as God-provided resources for the church to carry out missionary calling. This perception will also keep Asian churches from the mentality, “The sun is rising in Asia while it has set in the West.” The bottom line is God’s sovereignty: if he is the God who used Persian king Cyrus to rescue Jews from captivity, who are we to boss around others as if we have earned the right?

Some good practical advice, well applied to the next discussion as well, is to read the history of the church, ancient and modern. This has two immediate benefits: 1) Asian churches will realize that they are used by God in his much larger plan throughout history; and 2) various aspects of missionary works, historically proven sound methodologies and equally proven mistakes. The former will locate the missionary role and opportunity of Asian churches in a much larger context and will help to reduce any undue prideful attitude. Asian churches can certainly wake up from an illusion that Christian mission has happened for the first time by Asian churches since the time of the early church. This will further lead to a more searching and learning attitude from both churches and missionaries ahead of them. Many methods and approaches have been tried and (dis)proved in various times and settings. Asian churches do not have to invent every wheel, including those proven unuseful.

5. Micro Vision

Probably the most destructive effect in a real setting is the narrow vision or short-sightedness in mission. Unfortunately, Asian missionaries have been victims of this approach. Causes can be identified from a mono-cultural orientation to a lack of serious thinking. History also reveals that the problem is universal. Some of the specific areas are as follows:

5.1 Understanding of Mission

In some Asian churches, mission works are viewed as an expansion of the local church. This branch church concept entails a tight control of the mission field by the sending church. This is just one expression of a bigger

¹⁷ Ro, “Historical Analysis of Missions in Asia,” p. 45. However, whether the church growth comes *out of* the church’s involvement in mission as Ro argues is questionable. Instead, it comes either out of other Christian’s missionary activities or *in order for the church to* do missions.

problem: the definition of mission is not established. This is further traced to the lack of proper mission theology. At one time, a missionary teacher was introduced as one "doing mission while teaching." At present, the urgent issue is to understand mission as a wider spectrum of ministry whereby one intentionally engages in a work to share the gospel of salvation with unbelievers and establish a local congregation.

A related issue is a romantic view of missions. Generally, a primitive environment is favored as a mission field. This is traced to an assumption that the harder a missionary's living environment, the better the missionary. For this reason, even though Asia is being rapidly urbanized, rural mission is still viewed more favorably.

5.2 Short-sighted Vision

What missionaries' work today will continue tomorrow? Every missionary begins a ministry in good faith. However, when the missionary does not reflect on the long-term implications and effect of the present ministry, this can result in critical mistakes. A good example is the work of an Italian missionary group under the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. First generation Italian immigrants formed their own group under the U.S. General Council. They carried on their own missions program. In the Philippines, Italian missionaries concentrated their work in the Dagupan area of Luzon Island. They had dedicated missionaries and national workers. They pioneered many churches and started a Bible school. Unfortunately, however, this group did not work with the Philippine General Council, nor with missionaries from the U.S. Assemblies of God. Recently, the Italian district was disbanded as the second and third generation Italians have integrated into the mainstream of society. What is left is another body, for all practical purposes another denomination, in the Philippines even after the sending body no longer exists. Had early pioneers carefully judged implications of their decisions at that time, this would not have happened. Today, the Northern Luzon District of the Philippine General Council considers the Dagupan area one of the least established, even if there are many churches, workers and a Bible school begun by a district of a sister general council. Unfortunately, Asian missionaries and sending bodies are making similar mistakes.

5.3 Individualism: Lack of Cooperation

In Asia, individual churches carry out most of the missionary works. Denominations often function as a body providing administrative assistance

such as processing new missionaries and transmitting funds. This is because of the wide-spread “competitive individualism” which tops Kim’s list of problems among Korean missionaries.¹⁸ It is a clear reminder that churches and their missionaries are as individualistic as their western counterparts. As a result, Asian missionaries are often unwilling to work with fellow missionaries. This excessive individualism, a direct contradiction to Asian cultural orientation, is now characteristic of Asian missionaries which greatly hinders the missionary work.¹⁹

6. “Short-Term” Approach²⁰

This discussion (as is its suggested solution) is related to the previous one, yet further to be distinguished from the short-term missions endeavor. Today, most missionary-sending Asian countries are the so-called “Tiger” economies such as Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Philippines and even Taiwan. In past decades, these nations worked hard and achieved impressive economic and social progress. High-rise buildings in the middle of Chinese rice fields symbolize how far Asia has come. For instance, many Asian nations have jumped from the hand-writing stage to a computer age, bypassing the typewriter step. A similar situation is observed in telecommunication: a remote mountain community that never had the traditional telephone system now has a cellular wireless phone system available. This rapid change has impacted the society and church immensely. In urban centers, there has been a change in lifestyle reflecting an increase in competitive individualism against the traditional group-orientation, and achievement/goal orientation rather than relationship consciousness. This has created an expectation of quick results, short attention span and lack of patience. In missionary work, this attitude is apparent in several areas.

¹⁸ Myung-Hyuk Kim, “Korean Missions in the World Today and Its Problems,” in *Korean Church Growth Explosion*, pp. 212-22 (214), and also Kim Myung Hyuk, “Cooperation and Partnership in Missions,” in *WMAC*, p. 103.

¹⁹ Williams, “World Missions: The Asian Challenge,” p. 42.

²⁰ Readers should not be confused this discussion with the short-term missionary endeavor (contrary to longer-term career missionaries).

6.1 Lack of Proper Training

Among Asian missionaries as well as sending bodies, pre-field training or even in-field training was long viewed at best as unnecessary or at worst a waste of time and money.²¹ Missionary candidates are so eager to hit the field as quickly as possible and begin their ministry. The early years of their ministry, therefore, tend to be characterized by many mistakes, conflicts, discouragement, and even irrecoverable harm to the host church. Cultural insensitivity and aggressive approaches have done much damage to national partners as well as to the fields. For the existing Asian missionaries, even in-field training is urgent.

6.2 Expectation of Immediate Results

This short-term expectation may have been influenced by the rapid social and economic development of many sending nations of Asia. However, a deeper cause may be found in the misunderstanding or narrow perception of mission among the sending agencies as well as missionaries. This is a direct consequence of the poor or non pre-field missionary training. One needs to remember that for missionaries from a monocultural setting, the very phenomenon of multiculturalism is a shock.²²

When the sending church expects an immediate report of result, especially when the missionary is still struggling in adjusting with culture, language, food and new relationships, this will further reduce the possibility of in-field study. This often results in “sheep-stealing” (or even “shepherd-stealing”), duplication, “money-mission”²³ and others. An initial dissatisfaction can lead missionaries to transfer to another field. If the same approach is repeated, the consequence to the churches as well as to the missionary will be disastrous.

²¹ For a recent discussion of the issue, see Andrew Byung-yoon Kim, “Rethinking of Korean Missions,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 1:1 (1999), pp. 101-19, esp. pp. 110, 114-17; for more comprehensive suggestions, Sung-sam Kang, “Developing Missionary Training Program,” in *Intro the 21st Century*, pp. 137-144; Miguel Alvarez, “Missionary Training: A Discipline,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 2:1 (2000), pp. 91-102.

²² Williams, “World Missions: The Asian Challenge,” p. 41.

²³ This expression is used by Ho-Jin Chun, *Sunkyo-hak [Missiology]*, rev. ed. Reformed Theology Series (Seoul: Reformed Faith and Life Association, 1996), p. 242 in describing a widespread practice among Korean missionaries.

6.3 Short Attention Span

This does not necessarily mean that a missionary changes his or her mission field often. Among Asian churches, missions attention shifts rather quickly. For Korean churches, the favorite field moved from the Philippines in the early 80s to Africa, then to China, former Soviet republics, and finally to North Korea. Responding to new opportunities is not only proper but also desirable. However, the point is that the new field has replaced the old. A similar problem is shown in a missionary support pattern. An average supporter in Korea lasts about two or three years. Then they support new missionaries.

7. Neo-Colonial Psychology

Generally in Asia, ownership of property or leadership of a group means much. Particularly since most Asian nations, except Japan and China, have not “conquered” anything or anyone, unwittingly, this background may have been expressed in two areas: the desire to own and to control.

7.1 Desire to Own

As a reaction to their past, there is almost an obsession of ownership. Missionary works often involve acquiring properties and constructing buildings. Interest in maintaining ownership is expressed in two ways. First is a direct ownership. Rather than titling a parcel of land to a national entity such as his or her sister denomination, a non-profit organization is often created to own it. Surprisingly, many churches, sending agencies and missionaries do not question this practice. For them, owning what they spend money for is natural. To enlighten the case, a simple question is asked: “How would you like it if a missionary from another country did the same thing in your own place?” A second way to control ownership is in naming a newly built church, the building as well as its congregation, with enigmatic foreign words. Once, a church in the mountain area of the Philippines was named *Sekwang* church, which is the name of the supporting church in Korea. Even today, members ask the meaning of the word. It could have been easily named “The Light of the World” church, the translation of the Korean name. Again, the same rule applies to illustrate the issue: What if a foreign missionary purchased a lot, built a church building in a Korean countryside, and name it “Sacramento”

church? Would it be something acceptable and appreciated? This ownership issue is especially common when big churches act as mission organizations as they tend to view mission field work as an extension of their church.

7.2 Desire to Control

The desire to control frequently is indicative of the relationship between a missionary and national worker(s). There are a number of factors which make this very likely: 1) Missionaries come from relatively rich countries to poorer Asian countries; 2) Often, the national workers receive financial assistance; and 3) Asians easily apply a hierarchical rather than partnership-like relationship. This is obvious by the fact that most of Asian missionaries work among those who are controllable, that is, among their own (such as Filipino missionaries working among Filipino workers in Europe) or to a poorer group than the missionaries themselves. Asian missionaries are seldom found ministering among, let us say, white Europeans. In other words, missionaries are normally found where they can feel superior to the national partners. By all means, we should avoid this pitfall. Here is a warning from a westerner,

... we should avoid the superior attitude of the conqueror which characterized missions in the colonial period. Paternalism in missions is not just a western pitfall. Asian missionaries can also fall in this, particularly if they come from a background of affluence and strength. Financial power and political power have nothing to do with missions in the spirit of Christ. It is only a mission that is characterized by servanthood, sacrifice and suffering that will cause Asia to listen.²⁴

7.3 Missionary Appointment

Some large Asian churches, especially from Korea and Singapore, consider their “mission fields” as an extension of their churches. Hence, missionary appointment is not based on one’s calling, but based on their internal staff appointment policy. In one large Korean church, missionary appointment has been considered as a necessary step to advance in their promotion ladder. This obviously reflects the churches’ missionary philosophy as an expansion of the church’s territory. This is clearly a reflection of new colonial mentality. This has rather grave implications for

²⁴ Williams, “World Missions: The Asian Challenge,” p. 42.

the goal and for the direction of missionary work. The agenda is not set by the needs of the field nor by the missionary's vision, but by the mother church's policy. As a consequence, mission is done not for the national churches, but for the sending church.

8. Nationalism

Considering the diverse and unique culture within Asia, nationalism is an expected move. This is strengthened by two other motives: 1) a historical experience which threatened the existence of the nation; and 2) the rise of the economy which makes governments possible to promote nationalism. This trend will continue in the future. There are several implications in missions.

8.1 Unique Link between Christianity and Nationalism

Nationalism, according to Han, has never been viewed as a positive phenomenon in the West. In fact, it is only in modern Asia where the gospel and nationalism are associated with each other.²⁵ Many countries in Asia, as Two-Thirds nations in other continents, have viewed patriotism as one of their highest virtues. It is well understood in the context of their colonial history. In some countries, as in Korea, Christianity and missionaries were part of the resistance and independent movement. This unique link is well established in Asia.

8.2 Ethnocentrism

In the mission fields of Asia, ethnocentrism can be motivated either by pride or insecurity. It is commonly expressed in an insistence on their way "back home" or a value judgment against the native culture over his or her own. It is especially true among missionaries sent by successful churches in well-to-do nations. This comes not only from their superior attitude, but also from their lack of exposure. Insecurity is displayed by a missionary's unwillingness to work with people from other cultures and language orientations. It is, therefore, interesting to note that Korean missionaries work among other Koreans even if theological orientations are radically

²⁵ Chul-Ha Han, "Involvement of the Korean Church in the Evangelization of Asia," in *Korean Church Growth Explosion*, pp. 74-95 (84).

different from each other. Consequently, international cooperation even among sister denominations seldom takes place. For instance, in Cambodia, Assemblies of God missionaries from six different countries formed a single missionary fellowship so that only one national Assemblies of God would be established. However, an Assemblies of God missionary from one Asian nation chose not to participate in this corporate effort. In such a situation, we cannot expect a healthy missionary-national relationship.

9. Not Learning from History

Although I have already discussed this, a final note: If “there is nothing new under the sun,” it truly applies to mission. Had missionaries and mission agencies studied Christian history, old mistakes would not have been repeated. Many new “strategies” are not necessarily new, rather they are old ones already tried and discarded. Certainly, an attitude such as, “we are doing missions for the first time in history” shows that we have not studied history. For instance, even a casual study of Korean church history will easily present a long list of pitfalls which missionaries actually fell into.²⁶ In every national church history, I am sure that one can find plenty of real illustrations of successful and failed missionary approaches and principles. For this and other reasons, there must be a committed effort to gather historical material and write a history of national churches.

Conclusion

One has to recognize that hurdles are not to be avoided but surmounted. If we recognize our unique historical, social, and spiritual make-up, they will work not as weaknesses, but as our greatest strengths. Most of these “hurdles” can work for us.

Another note is the need for a concerted effort. The future of mission is dependent upon how we learn to work together. Mission will no longer be constructed around a national versus missionary dialectic, but with more multicultural cooperation, as aggressively implemented by multinational corporations.

²⁶ See, for example, Martin L. Nelson, “A Foreigner’s View of the Korean Church,” in *Korean Church Growth Explosion*, pp. 237-55.

This brings us to a critical point: internationalization of missionary work.²⁷ Considering the unique historical and cultural make-up of each Asian nation or church, it is important to appreciate their uniqueness in the context of the wider move of God. For missionary candidates, especially from a mono or closed cultural setting, the “internationalization” of missionary training is critical. It is not difficult to form or simulate an international environment in missionary training. It will be ideal to include a group of non-national candidates to participate in the program. Speaking English rather than the national language for lectures as well as for living with, eating an international food, acting as guests to another culture will help to create a non-native environment. This is particularly important for mono-cultural settings. Had, for example, Korean missionary candidates received their very first missionary orientation in an international setting, even if within Korea, their adaptability and cultural understanding in the field would have been very much different today. If this is coupled with a proper theological orientation on mission, historical studies on approaches and strategies, the missionaries will set their feet in the right place when they begin.

Such internationalization should continue in the area of fellowship, orientation and research. There is no doubt that western churches and mission organizations can play a distinct role in these areas to help Asian churches and missionaries grow into maturity.

Just like all the challenges in human life, these nine hurdles for mission it not to discourage Asian churches from moving in mission but rather to strength the churches to be a more effective missionary agent. While the enemy certainly wishes us to trip on the hurdles, the Lord of harvest calls and empowers us not just to be able to overcome them, but to be more than victors.

²⁷ William D. Taylor, ed., *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1991) has collected extremely useful reflections from various missiologists all over the world.