



May – August 2024

千亿 BILLIONS



People

Serving in East Asia: 10
tips from over 10 years
20 lessons from 20 years
of mission



Places

Missional business in
Southeast Asia
Answered prayers from
East Asia



Participate

Garden or jungle? A
posture of learning in
East Asia
Nothing more and
nothing less



中國與其人民

China and
Its People



Heart for Asia. Hope for Billions.

We are OMF International, founded by James Hudson Taylor in 1865 as the China Inland Mission. We serve the Church and share the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness with the people of East Asia.

Billions comes out three times a year and is free for supporters. It started life as *China's Millions* in 1875, the title highlighted the numbers of people without the hope of Christ. In 2000 we changed the name to reflect East Asia's growing population. Today we still want to help all Christians get involved in God's global plan and to pursue every avenue to reach East Asians for Jesus.

編者的話

From the Editor

Matthew 19:26 declares, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission (CIM), now OMF, once shared a similar and profound insight: "There are three stages to every great work of God; first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."

The faithfulness of China's church today prompts us to ponder: how can we navigate our own ministries or walks with Jesus amidst trials and adversity? We can find reassurance in Jesus' words in John 16:33, as He reminds His disciples that He has overcome the world.

This verse bolsters our faith, reminding us that God is faithful. The stories in this edition of *Billions* reflect only a small part of the work God is doing in His church in China, living examples of Jesus' ability to keep His promise in John 16:33.

Let us unite in prayer for the people of China and trust that God will continue to manifest His mighty works among and through them.

Scott Brown

OMF Australia Communications Lead
au.media@omfmail.com

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AU NATIONAL CENTRE

OMF International (AU)

18-20 Oxford St, Epping NSW 2121
PO Box 849, Epping NSW 1710

T (02) 9868 4777

F (02) 9868 5743

au.info@omfmail.com

omf.org/au

STATE CENTRES

NSW

18-20 Oxford St, Epping NSW 2121
PO Box 849, Epping NSW 1710

T (02) 9868 4777

F (02) 9868 5743

nsw@omfmail.com

VIC/TAS

525 Middleborough Road,
Box Hill North VIC 3129
PO Box 199, Box Hill VIC 3128

T (03) 9898 9922

vic@omfmail.com

tas@omfmail.com

QLD/NT

34 Trafalgar Street,
Woolloongabba QLD 4102
PO Box 8207,
Woolloongabba QLD 4102

T (07) 3391 6777

qld@omfmail.com

nt@omfmail.com

WA

Suite 12 & 13, Hulme House,
32 Hulme Court, Myaree WA 6154

T (08) 9240 8312

wa@omfmail.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Design:

Anton Triyanto & Sparks Studio

Editing:

Trix Wilkins & Reuben Grace

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

OMF International

2 Cluny Road, Singapore 259570

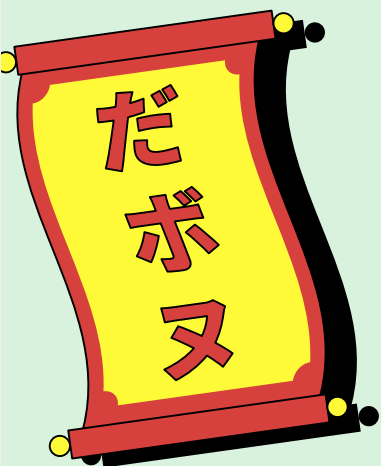
T +65 6319 4550

F +65 6472 2398

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INTRODUCING CHINA

Page 11



SERVING IN EAST ASIA

ten tips from over ten years of service

Page 7

THE Shining Lights OF TODAY'S CHURCH

Page 17



GARDEN OR JUNGLE? A POSTURE OF LEARNING IN EAST ASIA

Page 5



目錄

Contents

News Updates	3
Answered Prayers from East Asia	4
Garden or Jungle? A posture of learning in East Asia	5
Serving in East Asia: ten tips from over ten years of service	7
20 lessons from 20 years of mission	9
Introducing China	11
Trends in China today	13
God's Special Gifts	15
The Shining Lights of Today's Church in China	17
Stepping into the unknown	18
Nothing more and nothing less	21
Living a holy, whole life for Christ	22
Arrivals	25
Transfers	29
Pray for China	31





新消息

News Updates

Creatives Community Launch

The context of mission is always changing, and we're prepared to adopt new ways to effectively reach people for Jesus. Just as Hudson Taylor pioneered new cross-cultural mission practices, we continue to innovate. Inspired by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, we are exploring new and relevant ways to reach and mobilise people for the sake of the gospel.

Our vision is to see a collaborative creative community equipping and engaging current and emerging generations of gospel workers from Australia through compelling communication. It's a space where content creators can serve, belong and discover their place in cross-cultural mission.

We seek to nurture each community member's creative gifts to enable them to flourish. We serve and depend on God to grow each person in godly character, skill and vision. "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."¹ Corinthians 3:7.

To find out more and get involved contact Scott: au.creatives@omfmail.com.

To Glory

Russell Grigg (1927 - 2024)

Russell joined OMF in 1959 and served in Indonesia, where he led OMF's publishing program in Jakarta for 12 years. It was here that he met fellow Australian OMF missionary Merle, whom he married. In 1982, Russell joined OMF again, serving on the home staff for eight years, as well as leading in South Australia as State Director. Upon retirement, Russell became a staff writer and editor for Creation Ministries International (CMI), where he served for 29 years.

Ruth Weston (1957 - 2024)

For 32 years Ruth demonstrated the quiet passion and dogged determination needed to grow the church in Japan. Step by step, she valued each person God sent her and reached out with one-to-one Bible studies over and over again. She befriended, listened and invited people for meals. Back in Brisbane, Ruth spent hours handwriting her own Bible study questions in Japanese. Let's pray for the Lord to send more for His harvest like her!

Marian Moar (1941 - 2024)

Marian was a teacher and trained deaconess who particularly enjoyed children's ministry. With her love of coffee, she often found herself getting alongside OMF missionaries to encourage them. For a number of years, Marian led a prayer group for God's work in Korea, where her sister Cecily served. We're thankful for Marian and our many prayer partners who faithfully intercede for people to know Jesus.

ANSWERED PRAYERS FROM *East Asia*



Lappidoth and Deborah share how God taught them the importance of praying specifically.*

Part of God's work—prayer

When I (Lappidoth) was in primary school, my father read to me a biography of Hudson Taylor. I was struck by his few personal possessions and how he always seemed to be down to his last few coins and had to have total reliance on God for his next meal!

Later, when I was at university I attended an Overseas Christian Fellowship camp and an elective run by OMF workers. I began going to OMF events, where I learned about the need for the gospel across East Asia, and what OMF was doing to share the good news about Jesus.

It was particularly good to hear stories from workers serving in East Asia, and to be a part of what God was doing there by praying for them.

Role reversal and lessons in prayer

In 2023, God taught me more about the importance of prayer when I was able to briefly reverse roles—I experienced life as a cross-cultural worker when my wife and I went on a short-term trip to Taiwan to help with a summer camp.

We sent letters to faithful friends and family who prayed for us before and during our trip. This helped us to better understand how essential prayer is for missionaries! To give some examples of answered prayer:

A big fear of mine was that I wouldn't be able to cope with the heat in the middle of summer. I found that the heat wasn't as bad as I had feared, and on days where I had more things to do at the camp I also found that I had extra strength to get through—even in the heat!

My wife Deborah has cynophobia (fear of dogs)—and there are many stray dogs in Taiwan.

Children at the summer camp said that usually there were always dogs at the school. Family and friends prayed, and the whole time we were at the school we didn't see a single dog.

Experiences like this taught me the importance of seriously praying for the specific prayer points requested by missionaries.

A diverse prayer meeting

Back in Australia, I began attending the monthly East Asia prayer meeting, and after the previous facilitator retired, I agreed to begin leading it.

A highlight of this meeting is the diversity of the people who attend – we will usually have a 99-year-old praying alongside a university student! It's such a blessing to see how God brings people together people who might otherwise unlikely meet to pray for his mission in East Asia.

Another highlight is answered prayer. We had an opportunity to pray with some workers for finances to come through so that they could return to East Asia after home assignment. The situation didn't seem too hopeful—the financial shortfall was huge, and they wouldn't be able to leave as planned unless there was a miracle. We prayed anyway—and not long after, I received a newsletter with the good news that somehow the finances had come in on time!

Although I do believe we won't discover the full impact of our prayers until our coming eternal life, I look forward to hearing more stories of prayers answered.

**Names changed for security purposes*

Join us in prayer for East Asia (online prayer groups)

- Second Saturdays, 10:30-11:30am AEST
 - Monthly varied Tuesdays or Wednesdays, 7pm AEST
- Contact au.info@omfmail.com.

GARDEN OR JUNGLE? A POSTURE OF LEARNING IN EAST ASIA

The church in East Asia is like a giant garden. There are lots of things growing (both good and bad!), there is much fertile soil, and it is all a bit crazy! In short, it sounds like a church we read about in the epistles. Weeds and wonders, growth and decay, joy and sorrow, enthusiasm and error. OMF has been working in East Asia for over 150 years now and one of the current questions we ask ourselves is: “Do we still need to be there?”

Before diving into that complex question, let’s pause for a moment of praise. God has done and continues to do amazing things in East Asia. Many have turned to the Lord, attend church, evangelize locally and increasingly are looking to take the gospel out globally. How wonderful! God is good. There is an established church in East Asia—after decades and centuries of sowing gospel seeds there is a garden! And the garden is growing and fertile.

Crossing cultures to be counter-cultural

So what then is still needed? In East Asia, many areas of the church look more like young, tender shoots rather than a large, solid oak tree. It is challenging for Christians to live out their faith in their families, workplaces, neighborhoods and communities. Just like everywhere else, Christians just starting out in faith need discipleship—from fellow Christians who live in and know their context, sharing their way of life and experiences.

Christians who are willing to serve with their professions and businesses are needed—who are willing to cross cultures yet be counter-cultural, identifying with local Christians who live and work in atheistic, hyper-competitive and materialistic environments. Sometimes God will call foreign Christians to serve in this way; sometimes Christians who share the same passport but are of a different culture will respond to this need.

A posture of learning from East Asia’s Christians

Another thing that is needed from cross-cultural workers is humility and the willingness to learn. Serving in East Asia today is more like pruning, fertilizing and installing trellises rather than sowing. We are to encourage and journey alongside local Christians who engage in frontline ministry.

We respect, support and work with our East Asian brothers and sisters. We should partner with and not compete with or replace local Christians or churches.

An extension of this is mission mentoring. We give thanks for how Christians in East Asia are going out in cross-cultural ministry.

They need mentors and coaches willing to journey with them as they step out of their comfort zones; they need support structures as they struggle with crossing cultures and often see very little fruit in the short run.

Many of us are blessed to have theological and ministry training our East Asian family could only dream of.

As members of the global church, we have a role to play in training and supporting East Asians who share our passion to take the gospel to those who have never heard. At the same time, we have a role to play in learning from our East Asian brothers and sisters who are led by the Holy Spirit to innovate, discover and experiment with the seeds that are growing, multiplying in ways many of us dream of.

With God, all things are possible

There remain very real challenges, and at times it feels like East Asia is less like a garden and more like an impenetrable jungle that cannot be entered. Still, in the midst of geopolitics, regulations and other things beyond our control, let's remember that "with man this is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26). Let's carefully watch, pray and follow what He is doing. There are many genuine possibilities and open doors to serve.

We are thankful to have workers teaching at universities, running businesses, training local pastors, on student visas and more. Even in the height of the pandemic, the Lord opened the door for some to re-enter East Asia. The Lord can do it! There are also opportunities for us to reach out to East Asian diaspora in our home countries—East Asians have been scattered all over the world for various reasons, and this opens up new doors for us to share Jesus.

Growing, learning and serving together

For some of us (like me!) gardening is intimidating. We may not know a lot about soil, plant varieties, seasons or weeds. And yet the Lord desires fruit.

This calls for us to be willing to cross cultures to learn, understand, and better journey with East Asians. This means we struggle and grapple together as to how our faith challenges our respective cultures.

That is the beauty of the global Body of Christ. We grow together, learn together, serve together.

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

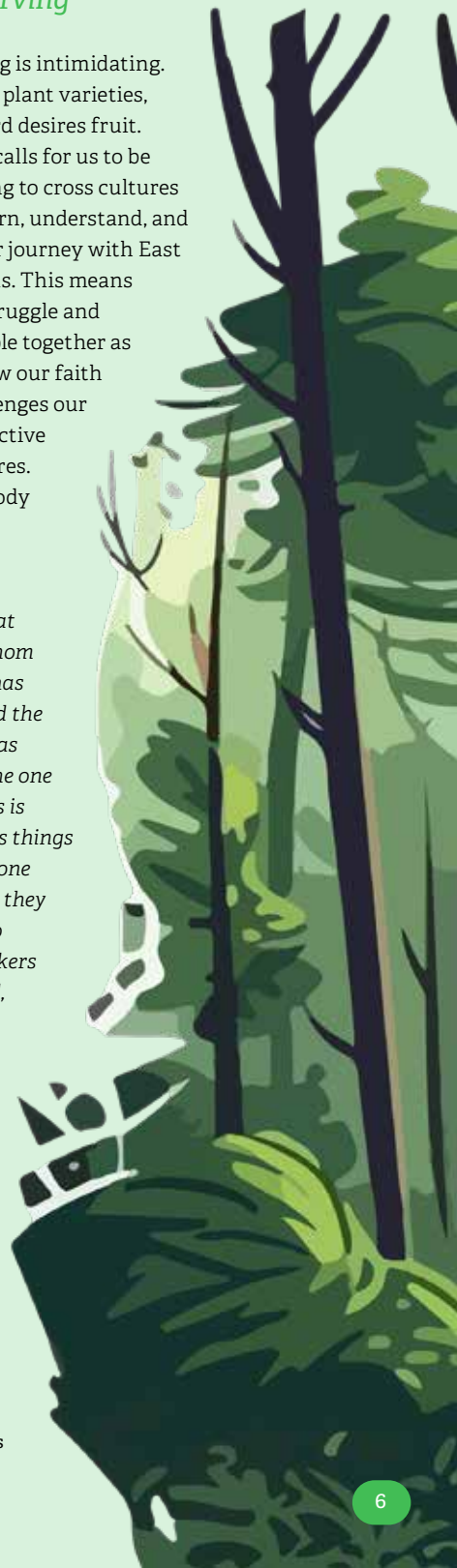
While God is the ultimate Gardener, we have a part to play. Let's not be intimidated by the challenges of ministry to East Asia and East Asians—let's see the possibilities.

Paul Jessop,

OMF Australia National Director
with Jo*, a ministry leader in East Asia

* Name changed for security purposes

**FOR SOME OF US (LIKE ME!)
GARDENING IS INTIMIDATING. WE
MAY NOT KNOW A LOT ABOUT SOIL,
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SERVING IN EAST ASIA

ten tips from over ten years of service

From sharing meals to delving into a biblical theology of suffering, Lydia shares her top ten tips for those exploring mission in East Asia.*

1. Go with a humble spirit and a teachable heart

Go with a servant mindset. Sometimes we go just wanting conversions, wanting to teach, wanting to correct others—but spiritual growth doesn't come in such a way.

Listen and learn from local Christians. When I worked with a house church, I learned about what young adults were thinking. Having good friendships with senior local Christians was also helpful.

Be teachable among your own co-workers and respond to suggestions and feedback. There is beauty in your team working together, despite all your differences.

2. Transition well, but not too long—and always come back to God's Word

Having a good mentor, as well as my Homeside Ministry Team (HMT) coordinator, was so helpful when I first arrived in East Asia. Such close friendships help you transition.

Be careful though not to give yourself too long a transition; mourn your loss, but don't keep mourning—work, and reflect on God's Word, for His thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).

3. Go with a scaffolding mindset and aim to leave

Hudson Taylor once said, "Missionaries are the scaffolding, not the edifice." How do you work with others so if you have to go, others can take on the ministry and bless their community?

I once planned to run a discipleship camp, and there was a short-term team coming to help. Initially, nobody was interested. So we ran a "pre-camp" event and in the end, 25 students signed up! We did devotions, workshops, English lessons, games, and modelled how to do Bible studies on topics such as relationships and boundaries.

What really encouraged me was the spiritual impact of that camp. On the last day, each person shared something about their experience—they were repentant, challenged, in tears, impacted by their deepened understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

Being scaffolders, one of the local leaders and I selected five people from the house church to lead this ministry—today, the ministry remains vibrant, and to this day this house church sends short-term teams to do children's ministry and do outreach projects in other places!

4. Bring "Jesus culture" into your ministry

How do you bring Jesus' culture into your ministry? Take care of your personal walk with God. Read books and reflect thoughtfully on what you read, such as *Jesus Driven Ministry* by Ajith Fernando, *Spiritual Healthy Emotionally* by Peter Scazzerro and *Knowing God* by Edmund Chan.

Have prayer partners where you are serving. When I was in East Asia, I would meet with 2-3 people once a week to eat and pray together. We kept going even if others could not come. Accountability and honesty are very important. I've also found that the more prayerful I am, the more I learn from God—and when I'm less prayerful, I may have lots of ideas, but nothing comes of them!

5. Be patient with your colleagues—they come from their own cultures too

All of us have our own mind and can be very gung-ho about things. Sometimes we feel it's easier to work by



ourselves—especially in teams of various cultures where the stress can be great. If you're an ideas person, give people time to process your ideas. Extend kindness, grace and generosity.

Sometimes we have past hurts, and any baggage we have not been dealt with will be 100 times worse overseas! As Christians, we all go through ongoing refining fire to become more like Jesus. Be honest and be willing to have an accountability partner to journey with you.

6. Start where you are—with making friends

Make friends from East Asia where you are and try to understand culture and mindset. Learn the language—having even a little helps and over the long-term, you'll be better able to settle in a new environment quickly.

7. Gain a biblical foundation, particularly on the theology of suffering

A good biblical foundation for missionaries almost goes without saying, but a good understanding of the theology of suffering is especially important. This will help you know how to journey with people, especially in areas where the rural poor or minority peoples live.

Learn how to disciple East Asians. Upon accepting Jesus, they might be the only Christian in their context, family, college or workplace. Sometimes, they may accept out of convenience or politeness at first. Learn how to journey with people for long-haul discipleship.

8. Build your resilience and flexibility—and don't hold your profession too tightly

We all have rose-colored glasses about things that are new—including mission—and the reality is often different. How do we prepare for situations where expectations don't meet reality?

In East Asia, things keep changing and flexibility is important. Hold things loosely and allow God to lead. Ask Him to direct you and seek wise counsel—don't depend on your own understanding. God knows the big picture and when and where He asks you to go, He will enable.

9. Take joy in the unexpected and see God work

Every term of service for me was in a different location. Eventually I said, "God, I am tired of moving." One term, after a year of language study, I received a government scholarship to do a masters in teaching language. I got to attend a convention, made a lot of direct connections, shared a lot of meals with students—and we became good friends despite our age differences.

This scholarship gave me the opportunity to reach out to university students and do ministry with young adults and a house church. The church had a vision to see their children grow up, serve as young adults and continue the ministry of sharing the gospel. I was so encouraged by a couple of amazing local Christians at this church. They would invite 20-30 of their friends over and I just had to "run the program." Even though I was only there three years or so, we saw 10-15 people baptized!

10. Surrender to God

We know about surrendering to God in theory, but how does this come alive in our context? During my first year, it was very hard for me to be based in East Asia. Honestly, I was a reluctant missionary.

In hindsight, it was such a privilege. I learned so much. I got to work in all sorts of roles, visited most places where OMF serves as well as most of our colleagues—which gave me understanding and joy about how God was working. In surrendering, I saw that God doesn't waste anything.

BONUS Tip! Have meals with people

In a region of delicious cuisines, meals are God-given opportunities to love and serve others. Not just with people you're reaching out to, but your colleagues—and not just your team, but people from different departments! Go out for lunch and befriend people. We love because He first loved us, and it is by our love that others will know we are Christ's disciples (1 John 4:19; John 13:35).

Lydia*

with Trix Wilkins, Content Writer & Editor

**Name changed for security purposes*



Over the last 20 years I have served as a single, as a married woman and as a mother. I have served in five different countries with OMF and I have attempted to learn three languages—none of which I have mastered! God has taught me a lot during this time...

1. Things don't always go to plan

There are so many things that can force change: sickness, team issues, visa issues, closed and open doors...It is wonderful to have a clear plan and focus, but it is vital to be redirected and guided by the Holy Spirit, for it is the Lord who established our steps (Prov 16:9). I have learnt that mission is unpredictable, but through it all we have a faithful and constant travel companion in Jesus.

2. Be a learner

Of all the roles I have had over the years, that of a learner is the one that covers it all. From language and cultural learning, to new skills needed to unforeseen circumstances, flexibility and teachability are key. We pray that our resolve to be faithful will be a powerful testimony of His faithfulness.

3. Health and safety are not guaranteed

Over the last 20 years I have personally experienced loss and trauma, and I have also witnessed coworkers go through terrible suffering. There have been robberies, miscarriages and stillbirths, child loss, cancer, illness, near fatal car crashes, accidents, mental health issues...Constantly, I am reminded of 1 Peter 5:9 and 2 Cor 4:7-9—of the treasure we have in jars of clay and the surpassing power of God.

4. Missionaries are not perfect people

We all struggle with brokenness and sin. I have seen a whole range of issues over the years: pride, narcissism, depression, anxiety, extramarital affairs, addictions, marital breakdown, neglectful parents, anger...I have also seen God bring redemption and healing in many situations. I remember the joy on hearing that one missionary couple had reconciled after a time of separation and serious marital issues.

5. Working in a multicultural team is really hard

When I first set out, I was told that the most common

cause of missionaries leaving is team conflict, and that most of the cultural shock I would experience would be more to do with serving on a cross-cultural team. I didn't believe it then, but oh yes do I believe it now! It is especially hard for co-workers who are not native English speakers. We continually need the Holy Spirit to work in us and to bring unity, grace and love.

6. Living by faith can be a joy

Initially, OMF's finance policy was daunting, but over 20 years have shown me that God is indeed able to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19). Yes, there have been some very stressful times, but time and again we've seen the Lord provide in miraculous and often unexpected ways.

7. God never wastes a thing

He can use anyone! Disciple-making should always be our first calling, but missions today requires all sorts of professions that might not have previously been thought of as relevant: app builders, digital content creators, IT specialists, audio engineers, web designers, business people...

8. Saying goodbye to family never gets easier

Even after 20 years.

9. "Home" will take on new meaning

You will most likely never fully feel at home anywhere and seen as an outsider or an anomaly no matter where you are. This is so difficult to come to terms with, but we find our belonging and identity in Christ and look forward to heaven as our home (Heb 11:14-16).

10. The first year is the best and the worst

The season of firsts is so humbling but also so exciting! Learning a new language, where to shop, how to pay bills, how to eat...More than just gaining knowledge, you are brought to a point where you are pulled out of your comfort zone and made totally reliant and dependent on Christ. This is a vulnerable but wonderful place to be.





11. Communication in the local language is key

Language learning can be difficult and frustrating but definitely worth investing in. Not only will you be more effective in discipling locals to be authentic Christians in their own context, but you will also feel more at home and settled.

12. What you eat and how you eat it matters

Enjoying local food can help to build bridges (though this is not always possible, or can be very difficult such as super spicy foods, innards or alcohol). The same goes for the way you eat foods (such as using correct chopstick technique or eating curry with your hands). I'm always amused by how much praise my husband gets for holding his chopsticks correctly!

13. Stopping to rest will keep you going

Sabbath-keeping is vital for longevity. Going on holidays can seem like an indulgence when you're on a missionary budget and when so many things seem urgent. Taking time to rest can seem like a waste of time, but it will save you from burnout and exhaustion.

14. Don't give up on regular meetings

It is essential to meet with others in your local context for mutual accountability and encouragement; in-person fellowship should always be a priority, a safe place where you stir each other up towards love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25).

15. Prayer is the backbone of all we do

This would require a whole other article!

16. The spiritual harvest can be unpredictable

Sometimes the most unexpected people accept Jesus

with little input, while others who have been prayed for and have heard the gospel many times over many years remain unrepentant.

17. Single life and family life each have their pros and cons

We each have our own gifts from God (1 Cor 7:7). Singles have a wonderful opportunity to get deep into language, culture and local relationships with locals. Families and couples might be less lonely but have significant time and energy constraints.

18. Living an authentic faith-filled life can be the strongest witness

The people you live amongst are watching everything you do: the way you live, how you decorate your home, how you interact with your spouse and your children, the care you show for your parents and family back home, how you prioritize your time...As you live your life, people will see the difference that the gospel has made.

19. Character is more important than giftedness

Some new workers might come with glowing resumes and lots of experience but lack the maturity and character to last.

20. Be prepared to leave (see #1!)

Sometimes it is harder to be called to leave than it is to be called to stay. Not long after I arrived, I met a family who were leaving to care for their elderly parents. I'll never forget when they said that whether they were called to stay or go, they felt challenged to always respond to the Lord in obedience. This was great advice to hear on arrival.

The Lord isn't just after our sacrifices, but He is after our heart of obedience (1 Sam 15:22). It is ultimately a matter of faith, trusting that as the Lord calls, sends, leads and guides, He is sovereign and holds all things in His hands.

Ruth*

Music and social media ministry in East Asia

*Name changed for security purposes

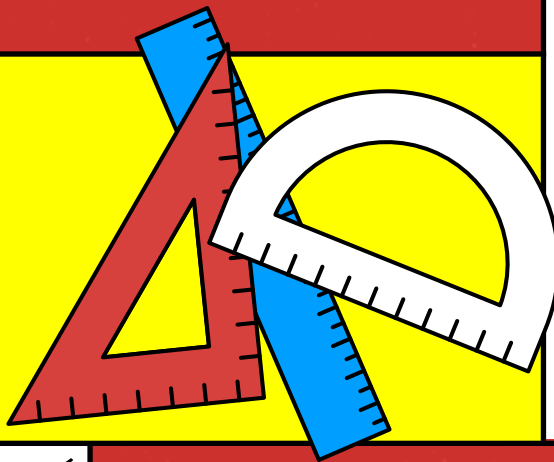
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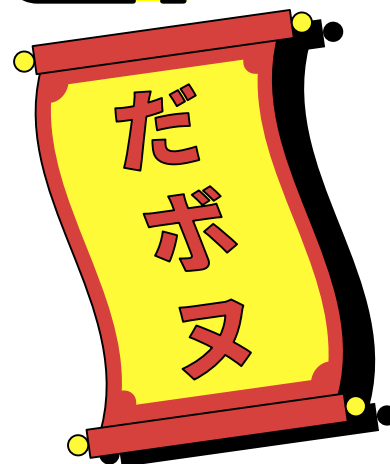
Education

170,000

Chinese students were studying in the UK last year



Language



Officially there are

302

living languages in China

Food

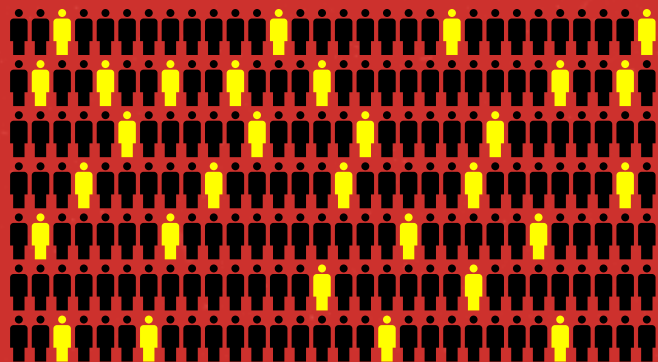
142,700

metric tons of rice is eaten a year

Population

OVER 1 IN 7

of the world's population live in China



Provinces

The Gobi Desert is

5 TIMES

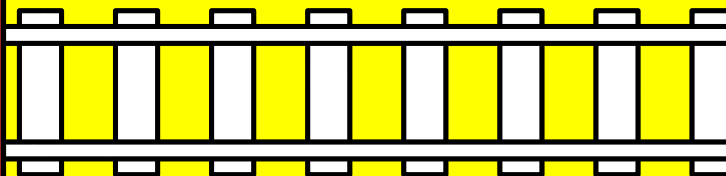
the area of the UK



Travel

China has enough railway track to go around the world

TWICE



Distance between cities

Guangzhou to Harbin or Urumqi to Shanghai – over 2000 miles that's roughly the distance from London to Beirut



There are domestic flights within China that last over 5 hours! (HRB to SYX)

At 632m the Shanghai Tower is the world's third tallest building.

Trends IN CHINA TODAY

China is a vast nation of diverse people and places and so the saying 'everything you've ever heard about China is true' is apt. However, here are four major trends that should inform how we think about and pray for China and its people:

Population pressures

China is home to over 1.4 billion people, but for the first time in 60 years its population has begun to fall. The population fell by 850,000 in 2022 and 2.08 million in 2023. This means that, like many countries, China is now facing an ageing population. Already 14% of the population is over 65 years old and by 2040 this is expected to reach 28% or 402 million people.

Recent policies to encourage people to have more children have had little impact. The pressures of life and especially finances have made younger people more reluctant to have any children, let alone more than one.

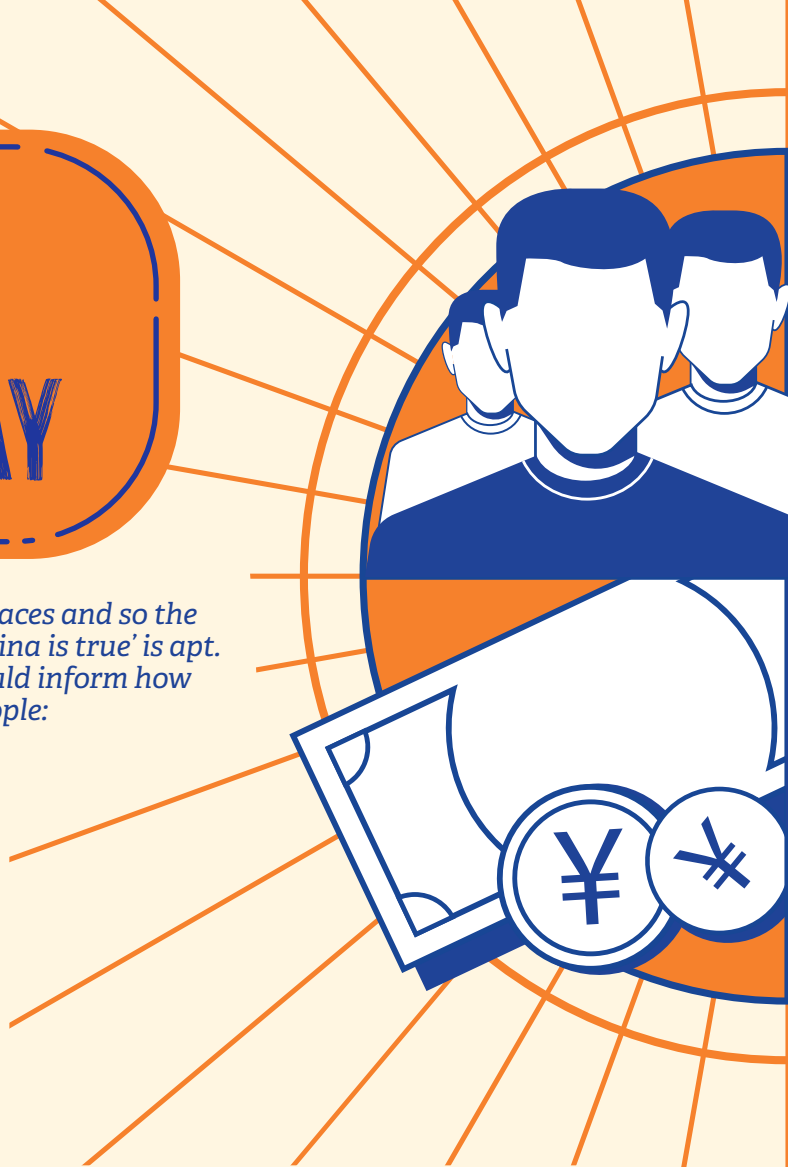
An added factor in China is that children from single-child parents face what is known as the 4-2-1 phenomenon: when the child reaches working age, he or she could have to care for two parents and four grandparents in retirement.

China's ageing population is both a challenge and an opportunity for churches. The Bible commands Christians to be the first to care for their own families (1 Timothy 5:8). One church has seized the opportunity to serve the elderly in their community. Beimen Church, a megachurch in Fujian province, opened a nursing home in 2021. The home has 156 beds and works together with the local hospital. The church also provides other elderly care services and could provide a model for other churches to follow to serve their congregations, communities and the nation as a whole.

Money matters

China's dramatic economic success since the 1990s has improved standards of living and brought impressive development to the country. For example, since 2008 China has developed what is now the world's largest high-speed rail network and is helping other countries update their rail systems.

In the last few years, however, the local and global response to the Covid-19 pandemic have had a significant impact on the Chinese economy with rising youth unemployment and falling property prices in major cities. The people of China are working hard to restore growth to the economy. Pray for Christian employers and business owners to have wisdom as they seek to promote growth and build workplaces shaped by gospel attitudes.





City centred

In 2011, over 50% of China's population lived in cities and by 2023 this had increased to 66% and people continue to move to the cities, often in search of work and a better life. China's urbanisation is happening at an unprecedented speed and scale. China's cities are some of the most densely populated and influential places in East Asia, both for those living in the cities and rural areas. What if that influence could be used for Christ and the spread of his good news? Pray for parents who have left their children behind in rural areas as they seek work in cities.

As we consider the crowds found in urban areas across China, may we reflect the response of our Lord, who 'when he saw the crowds...', 'had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' (Matthew 9:36).

Gospel opportunities

Estimates as to the number of Christians in China vary significantly. One estimate suggests Christianity has grown faster in China than any other place in the world over the last forty years from 1 million to as many as 100 million Christians.

Despite this, there remain vast numbers of people across China still to hear the good news of Jesus in a meaningful way. This includes not only many people in the majority Han population, but also 55 officially recognised ethnic groups, each with their own unique traditions foods and cultures. The Joshua Project Christian data website still considers 10 per cent of China's people – over 140 million people – to be unreached with the gospel. That's about same size as the combined populations of the UK, Australia and Canada.

Almost 160 years after the first China Inland Mission workers landed in the country in 1865, there remains an unfinished task to share the good news of Jesus in all its fullness across China.

Pray for China and its people:

- For wisdom for government and churches in dealing with China's ageing population and caring for the elderly
- For God's blessing on China and its people
- For Christians as they seek to be a blessing to their communities
- For families split between urban and rural areas
- For the Chinese Church and those still to hear the good news of Jesus

GOD'S SPECIAL GIFTS

How does God sustain people in ministry for over 30 years? David and Tina Cannon share special memories of their time in Thailand and the hope that keeps them going, day in, day out.

Way back in 1994, we were designated to our first place of ministry in Thailand. The name of the little town was Wiset, which in Thai means "special."

This town remains a special place for us. It's the place where we began the journey of learning Thai language and culture, where our son was born and our two children grew up. It's the place where we learned from a senior missionary about church planting, and where we had the opportunity to work alongside a Thai evangelist. We believe that Wiset is a place that is very special in God's eyes.

We had a number of special relationships in Wiset. There were the lovely Christians we served with, some severely disfigured by leprosy but beautiful in soul. There were the students and teachers to whom we taught English and shared the gospel. We wonder, "Has this seed sprouted and grown? All those children we taught are now adults in their thirties or forties!" We live in prayerful hope that they have or will come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

"Ah-ha" moments

One Christmas, we held a pizza party in our home for our friends and neighbours. We saved quite a lot to be able to afford the then rare, precious and expensive mozzarella cheese to sprinkle sparingly on top of our homemade pizza base and sauce. Our neighbours were excited as this was perhaps the first time they had ever eaten such exotic fare.

We shared the Christmas story and our need for a Saviour, and a team of short-term workers helped with games and excitement. There was indeed much excitement—we all went to bed exhausted.

The next morning as I (Tina) was outside our home and a neighbour summoned me over. She had been to the market and proudly showed me her necklace of Buddhist amulets, to which she had added a crucifix.

"Look," she said, "I have Jesus as my saviour too!"

She, like many Thai people, was looking for a source of power to solve problems and happy to add Jesus to other amulets. We saw how understanding the exclusiveness of the gospel and Jesus' claim, "I am the way, the truth and the life" takes a work of the Spirit (John 14:6).

I still remember how, after a few years of friendship and sharing Jesus with neighbours in Wiset, there was a sudden, palpable change in the atmosphere and the demeanour of the two who were listening. This older couple sat up more attentively as we shared.

That day, they turned their attention and hearts to Jesus. From then on, we shared Bible studies and prayed regularly with them until they both passed on.

These times, the "aha" moments as someone, by the Spirit, grasps a biblical truth you



have taught again and again, make life and ministry all the more worthwhile and have kept us going.

A certain hope for a special town

Today, there is a small church in Wiset with its own Thai pastor. They have recently seen God's provision of a block of land to build a church and they press on to see what God will do in this special place. Wiset remains, 30 years later, quite resistant to the gospel—yet we look forward to the day when God pours his Spirit on this place and opens many hearts. This kind of hope keeps us praying year in and year out.

This is one reason that we have remained in Thailand for so long. There is still much more work to do as we serve alongside Thai Christians sharing the gospel, discipling new Christians and training new church leaders. As we have come through highs and lows we have sought to be faithful, useful and loving. We believe this work is a privilege—though admittedly, sometimes, we have stayed out of a sense of duty and obedience and think, “It’s been so long now we have to keep going no matter what.”

In our first four-year term, we dreamed of Australia and home and a sense of belonging nearly every day. Now, as we care for the next generation of missionaries who also work hard in expectant hope, Thailand seems more like home to us. We feel honored to be able to encourage these new workers in love and good deeds, and it is wonderfully special to see how much the Thai church has grown over the past 30 years.

It has been in God’s strength and with faithful prayer and financial supporters as part of our team that we have lasted this long. We thank God for His enabling in every season, and our supporters for their



faithful care and provision that has kept us here. We invite you to continue to pray with us for the town of Wiset—and all Thailand—to come to Christ.



Serving Third Culture Kids—a special family

A special ministry that has added value to our lives was working with Third Culture Kids. After 16 years of church planting in Central Thailand, we were asked to take on the role of dorm parents: caring for 27 missionary kids over a nine-year period as they attended school in Chiang Mai. It was a joyful time of investing in the children and their parents serving all over East Asia. These children are now young adults and beginning to build families of their own.

The culmination of our nine years in the dorm was a reunion we held in 2018. Dorm kids and their parents past and present met together to enjoy the special bond that was formed over the years. Those who had already graduated and returned to their home countries expressed the joy of being truly understood by the other dorm kids who had lived the same experiences. There was laughter and tears as we thanked God for the family He created.

THE *Shining Lights* OF TODAY'S CHURCH IN CHINA

*Our perception of China's Church has often been that of struggle and persecution, yet despite its challenging history, over the past 40 years it has continued to grow in breadth and depth. Even official Chinese scholars such as Mu Zhongjian accept that 'Christianity has grown in urban and rural areas at an unprecedented rapid rate in history (an annual increase of about 1 million believers) and has become the religion with the most formal believers.'*¹

This growth is remarkable; at the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's Church seemed to have all but disappeared. Then in the 1990s, official reports suggested there were perhaps 10 million Christians in the country. By 2018, similar reports suggested this had nearly quadrupled.² Survey data from Christian organisations suggest there may be as many as 100 million Christians in China today.

In the past few years Churches have noticed further surveillance of their activities, and new laws have restricted the use of online spaces to share resources. Despite these challenges, a new generation of Christians is emerging and seeking to grow as disciples.³

In a recent national event, Christians gathered from all over the country in a virtual conference, joining together online to learn, pray, and praise God.

One poignant moment involved challenging all participating to consider if they would commit to following Jesus and taking his message out to others, perhaps even beyond China. Those wishing to make such a commitment were asked to switch on the torch/light on their smartphones and shine them at the screen. Each screen was awash with little shining lights as hundreds if not thousands responded to the call to follow Jesus and share the gospel.

The adage "everything you hear about China is true, somewhere", continues to hold water. So while there are challenges and obstacles to the Church and individuals following Jesus in China today, the Lord is still clearly building his Church. People continue to be saved and disciples continue to grow in boldness and love.

Chris Watts

OMF (UK) Communications Manager

Mu Zhongjian: "The Theory of Religious Ecology" published in World Religious Culture, No.1, 2012.
1. chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/four-decades-of-church-growth-in-china/
2. bueu.edu/articles/2023/why-is-christianity-growing-in-china/
3.

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Johan and Debbie Linder reflect on over 30 years of service with OMF—from church planting, leadership and training roles in Thailand to leadership of home offices in Australia and New Zealand, their journey has been one of flourishing churches, cultural clashes and serving in multicultural teams. Here's the story of their journey so far—and top tips for those exploring a life of mission.

We are Johan and Debbie, and we've been serving with OMF for over 30 years. We worked in church planting, leadership and training roles in Thailand between 1993 and 2007. Then God took us back to Australia in where we worked with Thai people in Sydney, and later took on leadership of OMF Australia. For the last two years, we have been leading the OMF New Zealand team.

We've had our ups and downs—from the joy of seeing new churches flourish to the challenges of cultural clashes and

misunderstandings. God has been faithful to us, caring for us and our family over all these years.

How it all began...

So, how did our journey in missions begin? I (Johan) am from a non-Christian



migrant background. I moved from Sweden to Australia at the age of nine. I faced a tough time in school and university, and had to move out of home to care for my siblings for a while.

It was during this hardship that I found deeper meaning in life as I turned to Christ in faith. As part of that, I was challenged to join a Scripture Union beach mission team. Debbie, too, faced challenges in her early twenties—and we ended up on the same beach mission team.

Together, Debbie and I learnt about sharing Jesus' love with others, and it encouraged us to pursue missions overseas. Debbie had a short-term mission experience with Operation Mobilisation in a small Austrian village; mine was among the high rise buildings of Hong Kong and jungles of Papua New Guinea. These trips taught us a lot about ourselves and helped us to make decisions about where we didn't want to work!

The search for a right fit

Fast forward to Bible college and marriage, Debbie and I found ourselves searching for the right mission organization. OMF's values, particularly those relating to prayer and dependence on God, resonated with us deeply. As we explored options, we felt called to serve in Thailand, a country where many millions have not yet heard the Gospel. Neither of us were experts in Asian culture, so OMF wisely had us spend a year serving as an English pastor in a Chinese church. It was an eye-opener! We learned valuable—sometimes painful—lessons about cultural differences and Asian cultural values that would prove crucial in our journey.

Learning language and culture

In October 1993, we left for Thailand. It was overwhelming—the language, the heat and humidity, spicy food and an active rodent population around our first house. We muddled on under the care of our language and training

supervisors trying to learn to speak Thai and navigate a new culture. It wasn't easy making friends, but over time we settled. We enjoyed learning with fellow students from the UK, Sweden, Germany, the US, Australia and New Zealand.

After intensive language study, we were ready to help start a new church in a central Thailand city.

Church planting in Thailand: Surprises and God's grace

We began working with other missionaries and the pastor of an existing church. It wasn't smooth sailing. There were conflicts and things got messy, but amidst the challenges we saw God's faithfulness and lives were transformed by God's grace. Just a few months ago, I visited the church and was encouraged to see that it's still thriving under the same pastor and his wife who we worked with a couple of decades ago!

Then, to our surprise, we were asked to move to Bangkok to manage OMF Thailand's finances and oversee the office. We committed to this role for 2 years until we left for home assignment, then returned to lead the church planting team in Bangkok—of about

12 different nationalities as well as with Thai Christians and pastors.

We saw the beauty of unity in diversity of the many different cultural backgrounds as we collaborated to plant churches across Bangkok. During one team meeting, we realized that every member was reading the Bible passage in a different language!

It was a time of learning and some difficult challenges that took a toll on us personally, but also prepared us for the ministry that lay ahead.

Mobilizing the church for mission

After 14 years in Thailand, health concerns called us back to Australia, where thankfully, we could continue ministering to the Thai community in Sydney. After four years, I was asked to lead the

God has been faithful **TO US, CARING FOR US AND OUR FAMILY OVER ALL THESE YEARS.**

OMF team in Australia, and now we are doing the same role with OMF in New Zealand!

Our current roles involve speaking in churches, networking with pastors and mission leaders, giving direction to our team and mobilizing and training others to share Christ's love across cultures. Debbie's passion lies in encouraging young adults to think about missions and mentoring those who are preparing to serve. We have been able to draw on our own cross-cultural experiences and help others prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

God's enduring faithfulness

Looking back, we are thankful that God has provided for us in miraculous ways—from unexpected blessings in our children's lives to the strength we needed during challenging times. We've seen lives transformed by the gospel and experienced the joy of witnessing new communities built around faith in Jesus. We've faced difficulties, disappointments and moments of doubt.

Through it all, God has remained faithful, reminding us that He is always present, guiding our steps and providing for our needs.



Pray for Johan, Debbie and New Zealand

- As Johan and Debbie continue to lead the OMF team in New Zealand, connecting people with opportunities to serve in East Asia, pray for:
- Johan and Debbie's lives to reflect Christ's love and that they can effectively guide the team in this new chapter
- Continued sensitivity and unity as they work together as a team
- God's sustaining as they live away from family and close friends

3 LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED *the hard way*

1. We are fallible so we need to have faithful friends praying for us. Sometimes our own plans, expectations or limitations can cloud God's voice. We have had to learn to surrender our thoughts over and over and have valued the insight of prayerful friends and leaders who have helped keep us accountable.

2. Embrace the culture: Learning language and understanding cultural nuances is crucial for effective ministry. Building genuine relationships requires respect, sensitivity and understanding of what others value.

3. Be patient: Change takes time, especially when dealing with different cultural contexts. We need to trust in God's timing and learn to wait patiently for His work to unfold.

NOTHING MORE AND NOTHING LESS

“How can we support OMF?” This is the sort of question I get asked as I serve in the OMF finance team. It is such a privilege to meet people wanting to partner with OMF and our missionaries. I am deeply touched by this beautiful relationship—one they share in Jesus. Such partnership is godly, missional and biblical; we see an example in God’s Word between Paul and the Philippian church (Phil 4:10-20).

The secret of joy and contentment

From the beginning of his letter (Philippians 1:3-6), Paul expresses how much joy he has whenever he thinks about this church and prays for them. He was joyful for their hearts and their partnership; his was the joy of a pastor who sees his church working hard and in unity to take part in the work of the gospel.

When Paul wrote this letter, one of his objectives was to inform the church about his situation and express his appreciation for their support. He also used this opportunity to nurture them pastorally, teaching them the secret of being content in any and every situation: his trust and faith in God (4:11-13).

We cannot neglect the fact that while there was a strong partnership between Paul and the Philippians, he clearly urged the church to remember that it was God who kept his heart content. It was God who always provided for him and gave him the strength to continue with his ministry.

A fragrant offering

Being part of the OMF finance team, I get to witness a lot of mission partnerships. It gives me great joy in the Lord to see donations regularly

come in to meet the needs of our missionaries.

It is not the money that matters. It is the miracle that different churches and Christians from all walks of life partner in the work of the kingdom through OMF; that the Holy Spirit has called them to take part in mission in this way.

So, this truly is the work of God. This is the reason why Paul says it was good for the Philippian church to share in his troubles—because the support they provided was a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, and pleasing to God.

Full provision

As we entered 2024, I cannot remember how many times throughout the previous year I had looked at our financial situation, wondering whether our missionaries would receive enough support to meet their needs. I am very thankful to say that God provided what we needed to get through the year!

Day by day, month by month, God has shown me how gracious and loving He is. Through the partnership with our supporters, He has provided us enough to continue the work for His kingdom; enough to sustain our workers.

I am thankful for each person’s willingness to partner with OMF. It is very encouraging to see the work of the Holy Spirit in people’s hearts. Most importantly, it makes our ministry meaningful. Let’s pray that the work that we do is for His glory forever and ever—nothing more and nothing less.

Edwin Lee

OMF Australia Finance Manager

為主活出聖潔、完全的生活

LIVING A HOLY, WHOLE LIFE FOR CHRIST



Dr Joseph Chang took over from Patrick Fung as OMF International's 11th General Director at a special ceremony in Thailand in November 2023. We find out more about his story and vision for the future of OMF heading into its 160th anniversary in 2025.

Joseph grew up in a Christian family in Taiwan, where he trained as a medical doctor, but I was keen to find out about his personal faith journey.

'I could see the dark side of the church a lot' growing up, Joseph tells me. He felt that their failure to live up to what Christians preached invalidated their message. As a teenager, he sat on the front row in Sunday services seeking errors in the preaching and questioning the speaker afterwards.

Joseph was keen to study and looked deeply into Christianity and into science. It was a long process, but one that led Joseph to give Christianity a go 'to see whether it's true'. He became more and more convinced by the claims of Jesus, not just as his saviour, but the Lord of his whole life.

By now, Joseph was at medical school, so an unusual way to express that commitment came to mind. He had just been studying anatomy, so named as many body parts as he could and prayed: 'If all these things are created by you, let me commit it to you, or return it to you, and for the purpose that you made it for.'





Called together

Joseph began to explore how the Lord might use him in the future.

It was around this time that Joseph met Lori through church and found they shared a calling to mission. Both had been deeply influenced by OMF (UK) workers serving in Taiwan: Mary Thurlow and Martin & Angela Symonds. 'We saw the life they lived and also the values they hold so dearly', Joseph says. 'On the one side, we want to know the secret of that kind of joy and life. And on the other side, it also gives us the window to see the needs of other places.'

Joseph and Lori's relationship grew into marriage, and they wondered, "How can we also be a blessing to bring the good news of Jesus to those yet to hear it?"

In all its fullness

Joseph's medical background meant they were keen to serve the whole person in Jesus' name. As OMF International's vision statement is to 'share the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness with East Asia's people', I ask Joseph about why he is passionate about this.

'As a doctor it's very natural for us to try to heal people's bodies physically, but is that all? Or is it just a tool for us to reach the deeper needs of a person? Or is it something we cannot separate, which means it's not which one comes first or which one is more important than others? But actually, the whole salvation and the whole gospel is about the whole person.'

'The gospel in all its fullness means that when you do the good work, you need to be always prepared and ready to share the reason behind it. When we share the message, we also need to demonstrate it ... You live out the life you preach, and you also preach the life you live. If you are lacking either one that's not complete, that's not a whole gospel either.'

FIVE KEY PRIORITIES

An emphasis on the Christian life is the first of Joseph's five priorities for OMF moving forward:

1. Go deeper: Strengthening the spiritual foundation

Joseph is grateful for the foundations laid by previous leaders of the China Inland Mission and OMF, but highlights the need to continue building 'a firm and strong spiritual foundation by living personal lives of holiness.'

'This should be the foundation for all the missionaries in OMF', Joseph affirms. It also forms the basis for putting disciple-making at the core of all levels of OMF ministry.

2. Go further: Filling strategic needs

We need to 'be able to listen to God, to carefully discern his will and listen to people attentively.' This will lead OMF into new opportunities in a fast changing world, though 'we also need to consider whether there are some ministries we need to stop doing' so OMF can respond and proactively lead in God's mission. At the same time, we should integrate the resources to support our people who are in strategic places with scarce resources.

3. Go faster: Catalysing gospel movements

OMF has done a lot in catalysing the mission movement to East Asia in the past, Joseph notes, but now has the privilege of participating in 'the mission movement from East Asian people too.' Traditional distinctions between 'home' centres that

send workers and 'field' centres that receive workers are disappearing. OMF centres around the world need to work together more closely to serve East Asian people in transition, and especially, Joseph notes, the second generation of people in transition who need 'special attention' and support.

4. Go smarter: Developing innovative partnerships

Joseph shares about the need to develop genuine partnerships that help extend God's kingdom, for example in areas such as missional business, marketplace ministry and online evangelism.

5. Go together: As the Body of Christ

God is raising up a mission movement from East Asia, among the people OMF has traditionally served. 'Are we ready to embrace them?' is Joseph's question.

Joseph remarks that some say OMF is a Westernized organisation, while others have asked him if he would like OMF to become more Asian.

'I would say "no", that's equally wrong', Joseph says, 'this should not be Asian or Western.' Difference is meant to 'bring us together, to be united together to form one body of Christ.' Welcoming churches from across the globe, OMF should not become 'an Asian mission organisation.' But Joseph aims to 'make it an interculturally friendly organisation.' 'Cross-cultural communication is not a tool.' As an organisation 'we are the testimony of the body of Christ for people to see... for us to speak, but also for us to listen, for us to give and also for us to receive.'

Opportunities and challenges

When I ask Joseph what he is excited about and what challenges he expects in the next few years, I get a surprising answer: 'I am scared by the uncertain future, but I am also excited about the uncertain future.' He explains this is for two reasons. First, he is not alone: the new International Leadership Team and the International Council are standing together with him. Second, because he cannot rely on his past experience or plans, but must truly 'come before the Lord to seek him and discern his will because I have nothing else to rely on. And that is beautiful.' Amen.

Reuben Grace

OMF (UK) Content & Books Coordinator



Please join us in prayer for Joseph, Lori and OMF for:

- Joseph & Lori and all OMF workers to live out a holy life before the Lord
- The ability to listen carefully to the Lord and respond obediently
- The ability to listen carefully to people
- For boldness to make necessary changes

Beth

Professional service in Southeast Asia

For the past two years, I've been serving in a concrete city surrounded by palm oil plantations. I studied the national language, learnt about local culture and customs, and helped my team arrange regular prayer events for people around the globe. Our latest project has been recording some of our prayer materials in video slideshows for use in small groups.

Learning to abide in and depend on God

Throughout my time overseas, God has been teaching me to abide in and depend on Him. Which is the exact same message my pastor gave during my commissioning service from John 15:4-5! "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

I had decided to complete a two-year term to move beyond the "honeymoon period" I had experienced on previous trips. My time overseas definitely delivered—from a delayed departure to culture shock, loneliness, constant transitions and travel, growing awareness of my sin and the sin of others, exposure to overt poverty, poor mental health, spiritual warfare and unmet expectations...The honeymoon period didn't last too long.

However, God has been using these experiences to teach me to abide in and depend on Him.

Left to my own devices, I probably would have forgotten the farewell message of my

pastor and spiralled into a chaotic frenzy, but by God's grace He has been reminding me of the words from John 15:4-5 throughout the last two years. From spiritual retreat material, to books, sermons and reminders from trusted advisors—this message has appeared again and again throughout my term, teaching me not to depend on my own efforts but to rely on God and see how he uses us even in our weakness.



Pray Beth

- Pray that Beth will finish well and prepare for her transition back to Australia, identifying and implementing any supports she will need to help with this transition.
- Pray that Beth will continue to learn to abide and depend on God and focus on His Kingdom.
- Pray that Beth will prepare and present material that will help people understand the vision and mission of OMF teams in Southeast Asia



Frank & Rose*

Missional business and social media ministry in Southeast Asia

Frank and Rose with their three children are part of a church planting team in Southeast Asia. Frank's role is to lead a business selling locally-made products. Rose manages their household and children, and mobilizes prayer for the people group they aim to reach with the gospel.

Social media outreach

Our team began an exciting media outreach initiative in 2021. We target online ads specifically to our people group that talk about spiritual things, such as, "If you could erase something in your past, what would it be?"

Through online chats, our colleagues prayerfully discern if enquirers are open to discussing the Bible. If they are genuinely interested, follow-up is done in person. We are celebrating that now two people have come to faith through the media outreach. We pray for thousands more!

A new school and belonging

In May 2022, we had just returned to Southeast Asia and were asking God what schooling option we should choose for our two older

kids. Through prayer, we felt God leading us to enroll them in a national private school.

The first six months were really tough, as there were no other children of similar cultural background to ours at the school. Now, almost two years in, we praise God for His wisdom in sending our kids there. Despite the challenges, being in this school has really helped our children to feel like they belong. Pray for our youngest child, who will start school in July.

Realities of missional business

Setting up a missional business has been a huge learning curve. Two years in, we are still working toward our first sale. We are thankful for our first employee, who began in November 2023. Pray that God will shape the business into a sustainable and profitable company that is a blessing to our local community.

A short home assignment

Due to our business and children's schooling, our home assignment is very short! We will only be in Australia for three months. Pray that amidst the connecting with mission partners, we will enjoy times of rest and refreshment from the Lord.

*Names changed for security purposes



Hannah*

Professional service in Southeast Asia

I am part of a church-planting team in Southeast Asia. I had planned to use my professional physiotherapy qualifications to obtain a long-term visa—join an NGO or charity and assist with a health outreach project.

My first year involved full-time language learning. Initially, I enrolled in a language school. After a few months, I opted to learn language one-on-one with a local person. This enabled me to train in healthcare jargon and read the Bible with my language teacher.

I took trips to the surrounding villages for health promotion and followed up with patients for rehabilitation. During the week, we would gauge if anyone was open to reading God's Word, whether one-on-one or with a small group.

A highlight of my last four years in Southeast Asia was a spiritual ladies' retreat with local colleagues. I am excited to see how the Lord will synergize the strengths of local and foreign workers for His kingdom work.

One thing I have learned

We need to be flexible and rely on God's provision. Most of my team are working in businesses where we need to trust the Lord to equip us with new skills as required. We're so thankful for God's provision of local and national Christians who have a heart for the unreached.

Some resources you might check out:

- **Growing Participator Approach**
<https://www.growingparticipation.com>
- **Honour and Shame**
<https://honorshame.com/honorshame-101>

3 tips – professional service in Southeast Asia

1. Take time to understand honor-shame cultures+ and be prepared to share how the Lord has taken our disgrace and shame through the work of Jesus.
2. You'll need to be adaptable. We can formulate many plans and strategies but the Lord has the final say.
3. Let the Lord shape your definition of success. We may be prone to using worldly measures of performance. Our faithful and prayerful efforts are precious to our God.

*Name changed for security purposes



Pray for Hannah and for Christian professionals in Southeast Asia

- Pray that Hannah will rest well in the Lord during her home assignment.
- Pray as Hannah arranges for a different visa to return to Southeast Asia; her current visa is no longer viable. Pray for applications to be processed in a timely manner.
- Pray for Hannah and her team as she aims to return as a business owner to Southeast Asia, and plans to equip local people to run and manage it. Pray for the Lord to provide the capital needed for the business.



Sharon Law

Field Candidate Coordinator, Japan

Based at the OMF Japan headquarters in Ichikawa, my main role this term was Field Candidate Coordinator. This meant working with leaders in various OMF centers to screen and walk with people moving towards serving in Japan long-term. My role is to help ensure that potential workers gain an understanding of the field and how they can be preparing before they come, and that they have the suitable training and equipping to serve in Japan.

I was also involved with the Returnee Focus ministry team to reach out to Japanese people who have lived overseas for a significant period and returned to Japan. I had the privilege of reading the Bible with returnees and also mentoring an Aussie returnee who is currently doing ministry apprenticeship in Tokyo.

One of the biggest highlights was seeing how God used the six year period I served in the OMF Australia office and with the Sydney Japanese Evangelical Church (2016-2021) to prepare me for these ministries. When I first found out I had developed a chronic illness and wouldn't be able to return to Japan as planned, I had a hard time understanding why—I now look back and give thanks to God for the way He used that time to grow and equip me. We don't always understand why things happen, but we can trust in God and his plans!



Pray for Sharon

- **Reflection and renewal:** There is some apprehension as this will be Sharon's first "real" home assignment, and she's not sure what to expect. Along with rest, missionaries need to recuperate physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Pray that Sharon can reflect well on the past term and be renewed as she prepares for her next term.
- **Rest and recharging:** Missionaries can often feel like they are "on" all the time. Being involved in two ministry roles along with church on Sundays meant Sharon's weeks were pretty full. Pray for intentional and deep rest so she can recharge well.
- **Reporting and reconnection:** Home assignment is a time for missionaries to share with mission partners about God's work and further ways to be praying. It's also a special time for reconnecting in a more personal way. Pray for Sharon's preparations, sharing times, reconnections with old friends and for new friends to meet.

Dave & Andrea Sutherland

State Ministry Leader (SML),
Victoria

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.
- Philippians 4:12-13

Andrea and I (Dave) feel like we have broken the 'usual' SML mold. Due to our family circumstances and location, we are largely fulfilling the role of State Ministry Leader for Victoria remotely for two days per week.

Our God-given team

We don't go this road alone as the Lord has given us a great team in the Melbourne office.

Jane is our fantastic Serve Asia Coordinator, and in these early days is also our go-to person whenever we have to ask, "What happens now, Jane?" Gentle, patient and willing to serve, we are very thankful to God for Jane.

Vera is our dynamic Personal Assistant. She's like that dependable team player who says, "Pass the ball to me, I'm open!" Vera, full of enthusiasm is eager to get the job done



and desires to see the OMF family in Victoria served well.

We also have Scott (technically part of the national communications team, but with whom we often liaise), helping us successfully get our event advertising off the ground and out to those who are wanting to receive it.

We want to especially mention the group of invaluable volunteers who faithfully serve the work of OMF VIC/TAS in many varying ways. Without their faithful help, we would not be able to cover the work that we do each year.

A day in the life of an SML

A typical week for Andrea and I starts with an online team meeting on Mondays praying specifically for missionaries sent from Victoria. This is a special time as we

get to think and pray about what our workers in East Asia are doing and to bring them before the throne of grace.

Week by week, we pray our way through the prayer needs of these precious people serving in cross-cultural ministry and often conclude our time together by developing action points for the purpose of caring more effectively for those we are praying for.

On Wednesdays, our team meets again to look forward to what is coming up. This could be anything from preparing a Mission Steps event for people exploring mission, an alumni prayer meeting, connecting with missionaries on home assignment and interviewing people applying to serve with OMF.

Once each month, Andrea and I head to the OMF office for a few days. During these times, we meet face-to-face with missionaries on home assignment, pray with our team, grow connections with churches, represent OMF at mission events and host events in the office.

We love our role, and see that it could easily take up more than a working week...

Other hats we're wearing

However, there are other hats that Andrea and I wear.

Since returning to Australia, much of Andrea's time has been spent looking after the care needs for her aging parents in north east Victoria. Since the loss of Andrea's mother last October, she continues to care for her father—a huge role that often demands

immediate attention.

As for me, I am also the associate pastor at our sending church—a role that is for three days per week. Again, like all the hats we wear, this too is precious work because people matter.

If we are honest, both Andrea and I walked into the VIC/TAS SML role with knees shaking. We could see how big the task was that lay ahead, we could see the enormity of the tasks we were already engaged in, and we could also see our frailty and our human limitations—and we humbly ask for prayer.



Pray for Dave and Andrea, and OMF Victoria

- Pray for Dave and Andrea, and OMF Victoria
- Pray for the missionaries that have been sent from OMF VIC/TAS as they serve God in reaching the lost with the eternal news of the gospel
- Pray for Jane and Vera, two precious volunteers as they faithfully journey with Dave and Andrea on the VIC/TAS team
- Pray that the team would be effective in meeting the needs of missionaries who are serving, and have eyes open to see and meet those who are looking to serve the Lord and His kingdom through cross-cultural mission
- Pray for continued enabling from the Lord as Dave and Andrea engage in their leadership role along with others they steward each week

梅花香自苦寒來

PRAY FOR CHINA

Day 1- The Marginalised

Many people in urban China have issues that result in them being marginalised by mainstream society. Society often shuns them, yet the Lord who made them loves them. Pray that those who are struggling and feel unloved will know that they are treasured by God and that they may know him.

Day 3 – Tibetan Skylands People

In most areas of the Skylands (the high plateaus of China, Mongolia, and Bhutan), there are very few Christians. The vast majority of Skylands peoples live in areas that are extremely difficult for outsiders to reach and adapt to linguistically and culturally. Pray for ingenuity and boldness among believers to overcome these challenges.

Day 5 – People with Disabilities

People with mental and physical disabilities are often ignored. Many live in poverty and without hope. However, in 2012 the government encouraged religious organisations to find ways to help people with disabilities. Pray for Christians to lead the way in serving these people and for society to see Christian love in action.

Join us in praying for China and its people for five-minutes-a-day, for five days.

Day 2 – The Hui

Over 10 million Hui live across China. The largest of the Silk Road People's they are traditionally followers of Islam and renowned for their delicious hand-pulled noodles. Pray for Christians to have opportunities to bless the Hui and for them to discover more about the love of Jesus.

Day 4 – The Zhuang

Hidden among the mountains of south-west China are countless villages of Zhuang people who have never heard of Jesus. Many worship spirits believed to live in nature and their ancestors. Less than 0.25% of the 20 million Zhuang believe in Christ. Pray for Christians willing to proclaim the good news of Jesus among the Zhuang.

Continue praying...

Learn more and continue praying for China with our free prayer guides.

Our 5x5x5 guides are designed to guide through 5 days of praying for 5 minutes about 5 different topics.

omf.org/au/resource/china-555-prayer-guide

