

## Strategies of Mission Movements in Asia Today

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Asia continues to be the continent which has the most number of unreached people groups (UPGs) living in regions dominated by major religious faiths and political ideologies with almost negligible Christian influence. Can the Christian minorities of Asia really reach out to our Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Communist, animist and secular humanist neighbors effectively, so that the Great Commission can be fulfilled among them, even in our generation? If Asian Christians are faithful in effectively doing our evangelization of Asia, we would help the global church in finishing the Great Commission among more than 70% of the unchurched and unreached in the world today.<sup>1</sup> This paper seeks to show how the various churches in Asia are trying to do missions to reap Asia's harvest in partnership with the global Church in their respective neighborhoods and countries.

Why is the world, esp. Asia, not fully evangelized yet? The problem is not with God nor with the lost, but appears to be with the church: it is not doing enough to send enough workers into the harvest, which seems to be ripe for reaping most, if not all of the time (Mt.9:36-38; Jn.4:34-38).<sup>2</sup> We thank God that many major missional initiatives have emerged from Asian churches especially since the 1960s mainly through the maturation of student movements in India, the Philippines, Singapore, Hongkong and South Korea. God raised David Cho, Philip Teng and a few others to form the *Asia Missions Association (AMA)* in 1973. Since then various Asian indigenous mission movements and global mission agencies have recruited and sent out thousands of Asian missionaries to Asia and the world.

However, in spite the zeal, sincerity, dedication, prayers and even sacrifices in our missions, there seems to be hardly any significant outcomes and impact among the UPGs in Asia: is the Asian church taking the gospel *effectively* to Asia and the world? As Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." May I suggest that besides spiritual factors, finding and implementing

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of 2010, Joshua Project ([www.joshua-project.net](http://www.joshua-project.net)) reports that 6,847 of the 16,562 peoples groups on earth have no Gospel access; that is 41.3% of all people groups are still unreached. Todd Johnson, David Barrett, & Peter Crossing (eds.), "Christianity 2010: A View from the New *Atlas of Global Christianity*." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34.1 (January 2010) shows that global Christianity (including 60% Roman Catholics) has declined slightly from 34.8 percent in 1910 to 33.2% in 2010 (p. 29). They also uncovered the facts that 86% of religionists globally do not personally know a Christian, and non-Christians in Asia are more isolated from Christians than in any other continent in the world (p. 34). And if present trends continue, 1.95 billion (24.5%) will still be unreached by 2025. Perhaps worse is the statistical trend that Christianity will only be 33.8% of the world's population in 2025, and only 35% by 2050.

<sup>2</sup> The Bible clearly shows that our Triune God desires the salvation of the whole world: the Father does not want anyone to perish (1 Tim.2:3f; 2 Pet.3:8f), thus, he sent his only Son to provide salvation for the world (Jn.3:16). The Son died for the sins of the world (1 Jn.2:1f), sends the Holy Spirit to bear witness to this good news (Ac.1:8), and will return only when this witness reaches all the nations (Mt.24:14; 28:18-20; cf. Jn.12:32). And the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh (Ac.2:17f) and is convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn.16:8-11). So, the church can go forward confidently with our Lord's promise that the powers of hell cannot withstand the advance of his kingdom (Mt.16:18f).

the “right mission strategy” will be most significant in determining our success or failure to bring closure to the Great Commission in Asia and the world? Sending more missionaries is good, but not good enough. We must make sure that we are strategically sending the right quality of missionaries who will do effective mission work. Hence as I present the dozens of Asian mission movements in Asia today, I classify them according to the mission strategies and their intended and actual outcomes.

There are five (5) main mission strategies which have developed globally and have been used by various Asian mission movements in Asia, in the recent four decades since the first Lausanne Congress (1974). These are: (1) Church Growth through outreach programs; (2) Church Growth through cell multiplication; (3) Church Growth through intentional church planting; (4) Church Multiplication through church planting movements; and (5) Kingdom Expansion through disciple making movements.<sup>3</sup>

These five strategies are presented to show that there are some clear-cut options for consistent policy-making and strategizing in our mission programs. This does not preclude our freedom to “pick and mix” from what we consider to be useful and effective for our particular church(es) and mission(s). Yet the conclusion will also show that the consistent use of only two of these five strategies can realistically fulfill God’s desire to see Asia and the whole world fully evangelized soonest!

### **Strategy #1: Church Growth Through Outreach Programs**

Most *Asian churches and denominations* as well as *Asian and global mission organizations* that are concerned for evangelism, church-planting and missions follow the Church Growth strategies and practices which have evolved through the past two centuries since William Carey (1792). This traditional and mainstream mission strategy seeks to build congregations that will find ways to reach out to the community so as to attract the unchurched to become members of the congregation.

For local evangelism, several approaches are used. Among the main ones are: (1) house-to-house visitation, with the hope that an evangelistic Bible study may be started; (2) street (or commando) evangelism; (3) church fellowships, like Men’s, Women’s, Youth, Singles, Couples, Young Adults, etc.; (4) interest clubs, such as sports (basketball, football, tennis, bowling, golf, chess, etc.), creative arts (painting, photography, etc.), camping, etc.; (5) use of mass media, like radio, television, newspapers, tracts, films (esp. the “Jesus” film), and recently, websites and chat-rooms, often combined with correspondence courses.

The use of the above methods usually becomes more intense during special occasions, like: (1) special Sundays, esp. worship services, of religious festivals, like Easter, Christmas and Pentecost, “All Saints,” Thanksgiving, etc.; and public holidays like Mothers’, Fathers’, Independence, New Year, etc. (2) special seminars, like on parenting,

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<sup>3</sup> A list of references for those interested to learn more about any or all of these mission strategies is found at the end of this work.

marriage enrichment, cooking, etc.; (3) special meals, usually with some special features, like invited speakers or featured films; and (4) community events, like concerts, rallies, cultural shows, and healing services.

Those who are more community-oriented would add “good works” or wholistic ministries, like (1) social services, such as feeding programs, tutorials, medical clinics, often for free; and (2) counseling services, through coffeehouses, ministry centers, even half-way houses. Those who have more resources have sought to build Christian (read: church-owned) orphanages, schools and hospitals. Most of these need external funding support, often from *Christian development and mission organizations* from the West<sup>4</sup> and Asia’s developed countries. In the past ten years, special focus has been on “child-focused development” to reach the 4/14 Window, promoted by the *Mission as Transformation* and *Transform World Connections*.<sup>5</sup>

And for their foreign missions, they focus on raising global and cross-cultural awareness that will result in motivating their members to pray, go or fund their evangelism and mission programs. Besides recruiting members, esp. the young ones, to go as missionaries, the emphasis is usually on raising a Mission Fund, which is usually budgeted for evangelistic and church-related ministries.<sup>6</sup>

In order to maximize their mobilization potential, mission-minded churches have some features scheduled into their church life, too, such as (1) monthly Missions Sundays, usually with testimonies of missionaries and special speakers; (2) regular prayer updates on missionaries, unreached peoples and nations featured in worship services, prayer meetings and other church activities; and (3) an Annual Mission Conference, as the highlight of a Mission Week or Mission Month, when mission data, opportunities and organizations are put on table and/or booth displays.

Special mention must be given to the *Diaspora ministries, esp. to international workers and students* in their midst. Some churches and para-churches in major cities in Asia (esp. in Singapore, Korea, Japan, Philippines, Australia and New Zealand) sponsor ministries to expatriates by forming fellowships among them. Very few have incorporated these fellowships into the mainstream of the congregation to constitute a multi-ethnic church. Rather the majority has kept them as fellowships or has “hived them off” to form autonomous ethnic churches to reach their own compatriots. Most

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<sup>4</sup> Quite a number of “indigenous church-planters and workers” are supported by funds from the West (esp. the U.S.A.) through mission agencies that focus on this. Most significant are Partners, Christian Aid Mission and Gospel for Asia.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Budijanto 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Among them are: (1) church-planting, among tribals, rural, urban poor, UPGs (like Muslims and/or Hindus), or Christian minority nations; (2) Bible translation, development, and other forms of mission agencies; (3) Christian schools; (4) children’s ministries; (5) campus ministries, incl. international students; (6) theological schools; (7) scholarships for seminarians; (8) media, like tracts, radio, etc.; (9) short-term mission trips; and (10) special local outreaches, as enumerated above. Also included are the expenses incurred for (11) the Mission Week or Month, as well as for (12) the church delegation to some Mission Conference(s).

significant may be a mission agency in Malaysia that ministered among Vietnamese workers there, and have their converts return to their homeland to start churches among UPGs there.<sup>7</sup> Many ministries to international students have also seen great results as their converts returned to their homelands after graduation to start ministries there.

The best denominational example I know is that of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church (MPC) in northeast India. Politically following twenty years of rebellion spearheaded by the Mizo Liberation Front, church leaders approved of Mizoram becoming India's twenty-third state in February 1987. They interpreted their political subservience to a predominantly Hindu nation as God's way of bringing the gospel to India, since they would no longer need visas to freely evangelize in the subcontinent.<sup>8</sup> In 2004-2005, the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod Mission Board (SMB) had some 1,355 fully-supported missionaries, financially supported by the 445,500 member-strong MPC, which consists of almost the entire Mizo population. Given the state's annual per capita income of approximately 6,000 Rupees (\$132 dollars), how did such a small, relatively poor church provide for so many missionaries? The answer is that the entire church is "missional:" they considered the task of proclaiming the Gospel as their responsibility to their nation. In 2003, they gave Rs. 154,120,823 (= US\$3.4 million) to mission work.

Since 1953, in a practice known as *buhfai tham*, women set aside a handful of rice when they prepare morning and evening meals. This rice is regularly collected from each household and sold at an auction, with proceeds going to the SMB. In 2003, the "handful of rice" offerings raised almost US\$1 million for missions. Similarly, sticks of firewood are set aside from each load that is delivered to a home, and children are encouraged to forage for firewood. The wood is then contributed to the "mission firewood pile" on Sunday mornings. Churches in rural areas dedicate entire gardens, farms, and teak plantations to missions, while their urban counterparts open small shops and tea stalls. The time and effort necessary to run such enterprises is provided by volunteers, with all profits going to support missions. Some churches construct buildings, with rental revenues going entirely to the mission fund. Several women practice imaginary field visits, praying and collecting the amount of money that it would take to actually travel to the selected mission field, with resulting monies going to SMB funds. Many churches have sacrificed their lavish Christmas feasts, celebrating the joy of diverting the money towards missions. Many church members, especially women, miss one meal a week, donating the value of that meal to the mission fund. And, finally, most members practice tithing, giving a minimum of 10 percent of their monthly income to the church; tithers designate their offerings for one of four options, two of which are mission-related. May we do missions creatively and sacrificially like them, if not better than them.

## **Strategy #2: Church Growth Through Cell Multiplication**

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<sup>7</sup> Details cannot be given here due to security reasons, as in many latter parts of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> May we see more of such missionary spirit that can cast out the demons of nationalism to which ethnocentric humans (including pastors and missionaries) have been so susceptible!

A new phenomenon since the 1980s is the rise of “cell churches,” esp. *mega-churches* in the cities of Asia and the world. They started as “churches *with* cells,” mainly with the strategy of Yoido Full Gospel Church founded in 1958 by David Yonggi Cho in Seoul, Korea.

Then in the 1990s, “seeker-friendly churches” (popularized by Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Church and Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in U.S.A.) combined with the “cell-church” (two-winged: celebration on Sundays and small groups on weekdays only) aimed to grow “churches *of* cells,” popularized by Lawrence Khong in Singapore then. A more recent strategy has focused on multiplying leaders for these cells, called “Groups of 12” (G-12) developed by Cesar Castellanos in Bogota, Colombia (now adopted by some churches and denominations in Asia), “Discipleship-group of 12” (D-12) by Christ’s Commission Fellowship (Manila), “Wiki-church” by Victory Christian Fellowship (Manila),<sup>9</sup> and most recently “Disciplemaking church” of Edmund Chan’s Covenant Evangelical Free Church (Singapore).

These “churches *of* cells” try to focus on cell ministry as their main evangelistic strategy, and this has proven to be quite effective and successful. Unlike the “churches *with* cells,” they aim to require each church member to be a member of a cell; hence church membership is calculated by counting cell members, which is a more valid way than counting attendance in Sunday worship services. But in actuality, with their *centralized* structure to meet more needs from their increasing membership, most of them have slowly developed another category called “congregation,” and added many other evangelistic projects and fellowship activities. Because of their size, they have the financial capacity to develop any program that the central leadership decides to be necessary or feasible, even if these new projects would later become huge budget outlays! In the end, they are no longer “churches *of* cells,” but look more and more similar to the “churches *with* cells.”

The benchmark of this explosive growth strategy is “cell multiplication.” Through a carefully planned lay leadership training program, the church is able to mobilize a good number of their church members to lead cell groups (called care groups, discipleship groups, prayer groups, etc.) in their places of residence, work, study and even recreation. Since most of these churches are theologically Pentecostal-charismatic, they also emphasize “power evangelism” or “signs and wonders” as they pray for miraculous healing and other spiritual manifestations, like tongues, “resting in (or slain by) the Spirit,” etc.). In association with other independent (and mostly also with the same theological bent) ministers and churches, they wage “spiritual warfare” as they jointly seek to evangelize and make disciples in their locality.

In most cases, their other major evangelistic activity is “seeker-friendly” Sunday services. Since Sunday mornings are the best available time for the unchurched to “go to church,” the program is arranged in such a way that they will be feel appreciated and loved throughout their “church experience.” This normally means that the church will have made a careful survey or research of the surrounding community, including coming up

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Murrell 2012.

with a profile of the average person they will try to evangelize. The Sunday service is therefore a “celebration” mainly for the non-members rather than for the members, who actually do the hosting and other chores to help make newcomers feel as comfortable and welcomed as possible. The more traditionally inclined would have “altar calls” almost each Sunday, while the charismatically inclined would have “altar calls for healing,” to give people a chance to indicate their conversion and/or be listed for a follow-up visit within the next few days. Those members who would like more worship and teaching can attend a couple of other “evening services” scheduled during the week, usually Wednesday and/or Thursday.

As to their world mission program, they have four main thrusts: (1) the founding pastor gradually becomes well-known, and is then invited (or can afford to invite himself) to speak at major Church Growth conferences and teach other pastors on how his strategy and experience works; (2) the church sponsors Church Growth seminar-workshops and/or “leadership conferences,” for pastors and church leaders to “come and see” the church, usually on-site but can also be held elsewhere; (3) the pastor, and later a mission pastor or a church elder, leads short-term mission trips mostly for their young people; and (4) the church tries to give financial support to some pastors who feel called to plant churches (usually as a branch, satellite, daughter or sister church) elsewhere; such a subsidy is usually for a limited period of time, since the church expects an indigenous (read: self-supporting) church to be planted within a few years.

All of these “churches *with* cells” and *attempted* “churches *of* cells” therefore differ much in their strategy from Strategy #1. They are simpler by emphasizing only two major activities: cell multiplication and “seeker-friendly celebration” for local evangelism, and “modeling” and “church-planting” for foreign mission. As seen above, such simplicity is often just an ideal at the start, but often quickly gets complicated (and expensive!) to maintain, since the varied demands of the increasing number of members require really gifted leadership and management skills that require huge budgets.

Perhaps the best model of this type that approximates a movement may be that of Victory Christian Fellowship (Philippines) that has aimed to plant a “wiki-church” in every major city among the 55 countries in Asia. Through its Every Nation Leadership Institute, it has trained church-planters who can start and nurture their cell-church approach, as short-termers, tentmakers or career missionaries. They have already formed branches in about 40 nations, including Muslim- and Communist-dominated ones.

### **Strategy #3: Church Growth Through Intentional Church-Planting**

The third mission strategy in Asia is that of intentional (or saturation) church-planting, which has been nurtured by the national movements in the *Global Church Planting Network*. A local church (or denomination) can envision and plan to start new churches in other areas through sending individual church-planters or church-planting teams, some even as big as an entire section of a congregation. The goal is to expand the presence, influence and ministry of the church to other communities, regions and nations.

Oftentimes, the resultant church-plants become satellite churches or daughter churches which will eventually become sister-churches of the mother (or sending) churches.

Though some churches are planted by independent church-planters, the majority are started by “sending churches,” who provide prayer, encouragement, finance and counsel to those whom they send. Most denominations and mega-churches in Asia have developed manuals to instruct church-planters (usually clergy-types) on how to launch a church-plant. Sometimes several churches of the same denomination combine their resources to blend their mission strategy for a city, region, or nation.

The usual practice of church-planters is to do house-to-house visits, usually after some evangelistic event (like an evangelistic rally, healing crusade, etc.) to gain some contacts. The objective is to work towards the conversion and baptism of about twenty-five adults through evangelistic Bible studies and discipleship classes. A new church is considered “planted” or established when a consistent number of baptized believers can choose their own leaders (self-governing) to raise their own budget (self-supporting) to fund their expenses for a pastor, property/facilities and activities to keep Sunday worship services and evangelistic programs going (self-propagating).

Many denominations have been using this strategy for some time, and this is how they have become global organizations, often with centers in the West, from where the original “mother church” was established. In the two decades after World War II, when most colonies became independent, most of these global church structures encouraged their national counterparts in Asia and the Third World to also become autonomous. In most Asian denominations, centralized structures remain within national boundaries: church policies and properties usually belong to a centralized legal church entity.

The recent rise of independent (oftentimes of Pentecostal or charismatic bent) churches has popularized the concept of autonomous indigenous churches, which set their own policies and own their own properties. Many denominations which have not transitioned to a more decentralized “association of churches” structure in the past have to learn to classify many of their strong churches (most of them are mega-churches), which have become autonomous, as “affiliate churches.” The trend seems to be for more church-planting initiatives to come from the local church rather than the denominational level.

Another recent trend is the use of a more wholistic approach to church-planting, esp. among the urban poor. The initiative usually comes from *Christian development organizations* (CDOs) or *mission agencies with wholistic orientation*. They work towards planting churches among the poor through incarnational workers (usually lay, with some community development training) who will eventually pass on the leadership of the new church to a local church or a pastor.

With the rise and spread of “saturation evangelism” strategy of *Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) movement* developed by Jim Montgomery in the Philippines in the mid-1970s, the saturation church-planting (SCP) strategy has been introduced in many Asian countries. “Church multiplication” or “church planting movements” (CPM) are being

encouraged, to purposively escalate the number of churches being established within a period of time. Many *evangelical denominations and national council of churches* have adopted this vision and strategy. The outstanding ones in Asia (e.g., South Korea, Philippines, India, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Nepal, and most recently Thailand) have aimed to organize churches which can reproduce or “give birth” to another church within 3-5 years. The goal is to work with other churches to saturate a region with churches in each municipality. From my research, the Assemblies of God has been the main denomination that has most successfully used this strategy in Asia in the last two decades.

The more successful ones have discovered that the key to rapid church multiplication is to plant churches where the presentation of the gospel and the requirements for church membership are kept to the most basic and simplest minimum. However since most church-plants adopt a lot of what the “sending church” requires, such envisioned multiplication programs are often delayed or even stymied.

In this strategy, cross-cultural missions consist of sending effective church-planters (often clergy-types) to plant churches (often transplanting the sending church’s pattern) in other places. Unless combined with great cultural sensitivity and ecclesiastical flexibility, this strategy will have slow and insignificant results. The DAWN approach only requires leaders of effective SCP movements to “go and share” with other leaders the insights that they have learned from their experiences.

#### **Strategy #4: Church Multiplication Through Church Planting Movements**

Yet these three Church Growth strategies (including the mega-church kind) has not made any significant impact on the Muslim *Ummah* (community), Communist lands, Buddhist areas and Hindu castes yet. As our Lord’s Great Commission includes discipling these major blocs of people groups, which strategy will be effective in reaching these UPGs today that will bear fruit and even much fruit among them?

Thankfully there are Asian movements that are using two other mission strategies that have developed in recent years. Though the concept of “total church mobilization” predates Lausanne 1974, mainly in the “Theological Education by Extension” (TEE) movement in Central America the 1960s (cf. Strachan), it is only in the last two decades that this has become a concrete reality seen in various “*church planting movements*” (CPM) in Asia and the world. They view that the above three strategies, though used of God in the past and will continue to be used in the future, will not be able to reach the world for Christ, since they fail to use the full potential of the whole church to evangelize and multiply churches among the nations, esp. the UPGs.

This fourth strategy called “Church Multiplication through CPMs” aims to have every Christian equipped to be a disciple-maker (in any place) and tentmaker (in cross-cultural contexts). Theologically, this is based on the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Practically, besides the few who are called to be church-supported leaders, every believer can be a local “lay pastor” and/or a cross-cultural “lay missionary.” They



can lead churches not just in their places of residence, but also in their places of work or study.

For this to be doable and duplicable, the key is to intentionally limit the size of churches, about 20 adults as maximum number per church; hence they have often been called “house churches” (in fact, this is the only type of church in the New Testament!)<sup>10</sup> or any designation according to the context of their regular meetings, such as “office churches,” “campus churches,” etc. FEBA and EHC called them “Christ groups” in India, and TWR used “radio churches” in China. The small size makes it simple for ordinary people to participate and lead, as well as makes it flexible and humanly manageable. In many situations, this makes the church persecution-proof and poverty-proof. After all, the full presence of Christ is among them, even if only two or three are gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20)!

Yet most important, the small size allows a simple body-life that develops transparency and mutual ministry in informal face-to-face relationships (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26). Believers are automatically trained “on the job” to become leaders as they learn to discover and use their spiritual gifts, participate in discussions and ministries, as well as take turns in leading group activities. Only disciplined believers can reproduce and multiply (evangelize and disciple others); and disciples are made only in small groups with “high touch” relationships!

“Cell groups” in mega-churches are somewhat similar, but the big difference is that their agenda or curriculum is set by the central church, whereas in “house churches,” each sets their own agenda in relation to their own contextual needs and aspirations. The disciple-makers (read: house-church elders or servant-leaders) are released within a few weeks (definitely not more than three years) and entrusted with the responsibility and the corresponding authority (in short, *empowered*) to lead their own ministry and “house church network(s).”

Thus, evangelism happens naturally through friendships that are formed. The fastest CPM today is “*Training for Trainers*” (*T4T*), where a tentmaker equipped his disciples to share their testimonies with their friends and kin, and once any of their contacts becomes a convert, they are incorporated into a “house church” and trained to also share their testimonies with their friends and kin... and so forth! Those who have learned to do such “friendship evangelism” and lead “house churches” become export-quality servant-leaders: they can be sent by God to any place in the world (with some cross-cultural training by their disciplers) and make disciple-makers there also.

Cross-cultural mission happens naturally also as believers relocate for work as business people, managers, teachers, medical personnel, care-givers, seamen, even domestic helpers. Each just needs to find a partner to evangelize and disciple a few of their converted contacts who will be able to disciple others also (cf. 2 Tim.2:2). Even as tourists, they can combine their sight-seeing with a disciple-making objective: develop

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<sup>10</sup> Globally, the phrases “simple church” and “organic church” are also being used.

friendship with one or two “persons of peace” (cf. Lk.10:4-7), and share their “life in Christ” with them, sensitively in a servant or learning mode (cf. 1 Pet.3:15).

Moreover, these “lay missionaries” or tentmakers will be more effective witnesses than clergy-types, because they will have greater credibility (not paid to witness for Jesus), better role modeling (2 Th.3:6-10), and more contextualized witness in society. Those trained in the community organizing methodology will have the added advantage of having learned to do networking and partnership with other groups, including religious groups, so as to gain friendships with community leaders (including religious leaders) for possible strategic evangelism that effects saturation evangelization and societal transformation! Gladly, many of the *global and Asian Christian development organizations and their partner networks* are working with this mission approach already.

Actually, many of the literature in Strategy #2 contain theological and practical benchmarks of Strategy #4, particularly that “a cell is a (complete) church.” However, due to the former’s inherited vision of church (centralized structure) and mission (wholistic, yet non-transformational and non-contextual), each mega-church has developed into “a denomination in one building.” In contrast, their logic should flow into a decentralized system of “*house-church networks*” (HCN) that empowers the so-called laity to become “lay pastors” (disciple-makers) locally and “lay missionaries” (tentmakers) cross-culturally. Gladly, many missionaries from the West, the Philippines, Indonesia and India have begun to shift to using this strategy in many areas of Asia today.

### **Strategy #5: Kingdom Expansion Through Disciple Multiplication Movements**

Yet many CPMs (Strategy #4) are struggling to multiply as much as they should. There has been another mission strategy called the “disciple multiplication movement” (DMM), which aims to produce “*people movements*,” especially using the best practices of community organizing and high contextualization strategies, which is also labeled “insider movements” (IM) nowadays.<sup>11</sup> (Please refer to the “Appendix” for my biblical theology for DMM).

In my estimation, this fifth strategy is advocated and practiced by 60% of the *house church movements* (HCM) in Asia, and perhaps about 25% of HCMs in China. The leaders in the HCMs in Asia have been organized and meeting informally since 2006,<sup>12</sup> and found like-minded partners in the various lay-focused movements, like *campus ministries* (esp. *Navigators*), *marketplace or workplace ministry*, *business-as-mission* and *tentmaker movements* globally, as well as mission agencies (mainly Western, mostly in the *International Orality Network*) that do CPMs that intentionally avoid “church

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<sup>11</sup> For those familiar with the C1-C6 spectrum discussion in Western missiology, CPMs are generally C4, while DMMs and IMs are C5 and C6. Cf. Travis 1998 & 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Lim 2013.

planting.”<sup>13</sup> The leaders of all these movements have started to meet annually in conferences held by *Asian Frontier Missions Initiative/Asian Society of Frontier Missions* since 2007. Perhaps the most intentional movement of this type is the *Philippine Missions Mobilization Movement* that seeks to “bless the nations” by training and commissioning a million diaspora Filipinos to be tentmaker (and about 5,000 career) missionaries to catalyze DMMs where they live and work.

Believing that God desires His people to effectively bring all peoples to inherit eternal life and enjoy abundant life (= shalom/peace in Old Testament, and Kingdom of God in New Testament) as they obey Him as their Creator and Master through their faith in His Son Jesus Christ, it seems most reasonable to believe that He thus made a *simple* plan for world redemption by which all peoples and nations will be made into followers of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit – without extracting them from their community.

This strategy works for “kingdom expansion” or “societal transformation,” by which the individuals, families, communities and institutions in our nations will be disciplined to repent of their sins and build Christ-following communities that are growing in righteousness and justice marked by self-giving love (Greek: *agape*).<sup>14</sup> These Christ-centered individuals and families will be “incarnated” in the structures of their communities, naturally rising to servant leadership roles as they love and serve their neighbors in practical ways. As they facilitate the holistic development of their neighborhood, they transform their proximate communities “from the inside out” as they share their blessings as servant-partners with other communities in establishing *shalom* where they live and work.

As individuals are disciplined within their socio-religious contexts, new Christ-worshippers will gradually mature towards living as “little Christs” (Rom.8:28f; Col.1:28f; 3:1-17), whose faith will have begun with adopting (often elaborate) indigenous forms, but ultimately develop into simple religiosity, each living for God’s glory in obedience to His word, esp. using their home (and perhaps also their smartphone, website, Weibo/Twitter/Facebook pages) as base for their involvement in global DMM. They will be active in community services, with less and less need for religious services (Matt.25:31-46; cf. Isa.58:1-12; Mic.6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24; Js.2:14-26; 1 Jn.3:16-18). With confidence of having everything good in Christ (for God is always near and *grace*-fully loves them constantly forever), they will walk with Jesus humbly with a disciple-making lifestyle without having to act religious or do much religious rituals (1 Tim.4:4f, cf. Matt.6:1-18)!

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<sup>13</sup> They are linked globally as ETHNE, and in Southeast Asia as SEALINK. DMM is also promoted globally in Vision 5:9, SEANET and Rethinking Forum, which seek to bless the peoples in the Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu worlds, respectively.

<sup>14</sup> “Righteousness” refers to right/moral relationships (usually using one word: “love”) between persons which promote goodness and discourage evil. And “justice” (which is “love in the public sphere”) denotes moral relationships where every person and community is empowered (given the authority, democratic space and skills) to participate actively in determining their destiny for the common good to the glory of God.

To achieve this objective, DMMs seek to simply follow the missionary method of Christ and the apostles called “disciple-making,” as they model servant leadership, which persuades and equips people to live according to God’s will voluntarily, whether the church constitutes the majority or the “overwhelming minority” (Mk.10:42-45; 1 Pet.5:1-3). Every Christ-follower is disciplined to make their own disciples, through wholistic and transformational ministries, which include both friendship evangelism and socio-political action, with signs and wonders (Mt.28:18-20; Lk.4:18f; Rom.15:18f; 1 Pet.2:9f) that will result in family and community conversions to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

To “make disciples” means to equip others with just three relational skills, so they will learn how to live Christ-centered and Christ-like lifestyles: (a) hearing God through prayerful meditation to turn His word (*logos*) into a word (*rhema*) to be obeyed; (b) making disciples through leading a house church in Bible reflection and sharing, thereby each one learns how to do personal devotions (or “Quiet Time” = *lectio divina*) together with fellow believers; and (c) doing friendship evangelism to share what they learn of God and His will with their networks of non-believing kin and friends.

Asian DMMs and HCMs aim to catalyze “people movements” that equip disciples to multiply simple “biblical Christianity” -- contextualized, holistic and transformational “indigenous churches” that are truly replicable: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating and *self-theologizing*. They will be planting “churches” that will be copied by future generations of Christians, so they should avoid transplanting denominational churches (= complex Christianity = Christendom) which are often non-contextual (= foreign-looking), hence have almost always produced marginalized Christians who are separated from their communities -- despised and rejected by their family and friends, not only because of the Gospel but also because of their extra-biblical forms/traditions, often unknowingly, resulting from “extraction evangelism.” This is to follow Apostle Paul’s instructions to expatriate missionaries to consider their hosts as masters, and to “become all things to all people” (1 Cor.9:19-23), and to local Christ-followers to retain and then develop wholistically from their professional and socio-religious identities (1 Cor.7:17-24). Many *Christian development agencies* have been doing this community-based non-extractive approach for some time already – often unintentionally due to the requirements of government and other secular fund sources.

Sociologically, the assumption is that vast numbers of peoples can be converted *en masse* as we allow new converts to remain as vital members of their families and communities. “Fighting the religion-changing battle is the wrong battle.”<sup>15</sup> The strategy is that of infiltration (or “incarnation”!), to transform the people with the gospel *from within* their social structures, preferably without setting an alternative religious structure among them. And to be consistent with this mission approach, even in societies where religious freedom prevail, the HCMs will remain as informal networks and thus refuse to become legally registered as religious groups of “house churches” individually or corporately, for they seek to represent the Kingdom of God (= Lordship of Christ) as nameless, faceless

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<sup>15</sup> Travis 2005:13. Cf. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17.1 (2000) and 21.1-4 (2004), and their website <http://www.ijfm.org>.

and powerless servant-leaders of God by simply discipling people to pray to God in Jesus' name and obedience to God's Word (cf. 1 Tim.4:4f) wherever they live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit. Spirit-gifted leaders will organically arise and be recognized and consulted by Christ-followers in a flat structure.

Thus, DMMs and HCMs do not encourage their disciples to attend international fellowships or denominational churches, if there are any, perhaps except in special occasions to show solidarity with the whole body of Christ. They just focus on making disciples and multiplying "simple churches," for where two or three believers are gathered prayerfully, there is the church (Matt.18:19f). They mentor their disciples to expand God's kingdom by just "gossiping Jesus" and forming temporary small "disciple-making groups" among their friends and kin without extracting them from their communities and networks. They are to just do this spiritual "network marketing" of the Gospel from city to city – till Asia and the whole world knows and obeys Jesus.

This raises the challenge for us: Are we ready to recognize Christ-worshippers who trust and obey Him as Lord within their socio-religious (read: non-Christendom) contexts? Can we welcome Christ-followers whose socio-religious identities remain Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Communist? I really hope so, even if many of us will be very hesitant. Let us be reminded that most of our Christendom forms and practices have developed from those of European tribes which were converted to Christ through "people movements" without being extracted from their socio-religious identities, as these also happened in the evangelization of the Christianized populations in South India, the Philippines, Northeast India, Myanmar, Indonesia and most Pacific islands.

## **Conclusion**

Our missional efforts and movements have not been and will not be wanting in zeal, holiness, dedication, prayers and even sacrifices. Yet in order to attain fruitful outcomes, our challenge seems obviously to be with the mission strategy that we will be using! Are we ready for a *major paradigm shift* for the sake of putting closure to the Great Commission, even if it may mean breaking with some of our treasured traditions in doing missions?

As shown above, most Asian churches and missions have been using mission strategies that have systematically hindered our obedience to reach the nations for Jesus. The past four decades since Lausanne 1974 have seen improvements in the outreach programs of many local churches (Strategy #1) and the development of new strategies, like cell multiplication (Strategy #2) and intentional church-planting (Strategy #3). Yet we have also seen the (re)discovery of two strategies that have the potential of truly mobilizing the whole church for global missions – through house church multiplication by mobilizing all believers to be disciple-makers or tentmakers for CPMs (Strategy #4), and most effectively through contextualized community-based CPMs, called DMMs (Strategy #5).<sup>16</sup> Let's turn Christian-led houses and offices into "church buildings," and

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<sup>16</sup> I estimate that if the HCMs in Asia produced by the CPMs and DMMs were to form one denomination (which they will never do), they would already constitute the largest one in Asia today!

church buildings into community ministry centers, managed by the local network of house churches, each with their own unique ministry contributions in their contexts.

Even if most of our churches would hesitate to make this paradigm shift themselves, they should at least start to encourage and support Strategy #4 and Strategy #5 ministries which aim at replicating “people movements” to Christ. As far as simple mathematics go, it is the only hope we have to finish the Great Commission as soon as possible. Let’s aim not only for more missional programs and activities, but also for quality missional results and effectiveness. Just compare the potential for evangelistic and transformational impact in a nation or a people group and their missionary outreach to the unchurched locally and the UPGs cross-culturally: one church of 200,000 members (Strategy #2), or 100 churches of 2,000 members each (Strategy #1), or 1,000 churches of 200 members each (Strategy #3), or 10,000 churches of 20 members each (Strategy #4), or 40,000 churches of 5 members each (Strategy #5). In my estimation, the *average annual growth rate* for each strategy differs: 10% for Strategy #1, 20% for Strategy #2, 30% for Strategy #3, 60% for Strategy #4, and 100% or more for Strategy #5.

May Asian Christ-followers develop mission movements that focus on church multiplication through CPMs (Strategy #4) and most especially on kingdom expansion through DMMs (Strategy #5) to effectively reach Asia and the world in our generation. May the whole Asian church be mobilized to share the whole gospel *effectively* and *strategically* with the whole world “...and then the end will come” (Mt.24:14). *Maranatha!*

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### **Appendix: Biblical Basis for Disciple Multiplication Movements**

Jesus actually initiated a spiritual movement for the global expansion of the Kingdom of God through "Disciple Multiplication Movements" (DMM). His movement was radically contextualized – Jews multiplying disciples among Jews without creating another organized religious system parallel or counter to the synagogue (of early Judaism). He did not intend to found a new religion, though his simple spiritual transformation movement became a complex religious institution later on. He even had converts in Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and perhaps through them, Gamaliel, who were entrenched in the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish socio-political structure of his time).

The early Christians followed his strategy by becoming a sect within Early Judaism. They reached out to their compatriots as Jews to Jews within the Temple and synagogue structures of Jewish society, and just met informally "from house to house," evangelizing and discipling a few households at a time. Within a few years of such DMM, they had literally turned the Roman Empire upside down (Ac.17:6 KJV). They did not create a clergy class, nor construct (or even rent) a religious building nor hold regular religious services, except to break bread weekly in their homes. It was the teaching and practice of the apostle Paul (perhaps the best model of a cross-cultural missionary) not to plant a "local church," but an indigenous DMM in house churches that are formed by converts who did not have to be dislocated from their homes and communities (1 Cor. 7:17-24). With just seven years of three missionary journeys of consistent contextualization ("becoming all things to all men," 1 Cor. 9:19-23), he claimed that he had no more regions to evangelize "from Jerusalem to Illyricum" (Rom.15:18-20, cf. Acts 19:1-10)!

This New Testament practice is not different from that of Old Testament (OT) Israel, which shows God's design and structure for a disciplined or transformed people:

- 1) There were no local shrines or temples in each village or town.

(2) There were no weekly Sabbath worship services; “synagogues” as multi-purpose community centers came later in 200 B.C. for teaching Diaspora Jews.

(3) There were no weekly nor monthly collection of tithes and offerings; these were collected only during the 3 annual festivals. 1 Cor.16:1-4 shows weekly collections in the early church were mainly for immediate local needs, esp. of widows and orphans (cf. Ac.6:1; Js.1:27).

(4) There were no “full-time” clergy. The levitical priests were provided not just with cities, but also with pasturelands (Josh. 21). They were not exempt from being stewards of God’s resources, thus they were shepherds and cowboys to provide livestock products for their neighbors and nation (cf. 2 Thess.3:6-10). This was how the priests learned to be expert butchers for animal sacrifices in the Temple.

(5) The OT Jews were required to celebrate communally as a people in the national Temple (note: God’s original design was a portable and transportable Tabernacle) only three times a year: Passover (= Holy Week), Pentecost (= anniversary of each Christ-centered community) and Tabernacles (= Christmas or Harvest festival) (Dt.16:16).

(6) The actual teaching and obedience of the “way of God’s righteousness” were in the homes (Dt.6:1-11)!

Biblical Christianity is therefore structured as an informal (even underground) network of *simple churches* (usually called “house churches”). It is not “*churchless* Christianity” nor “*religionless* Christianity,” but “*simple* Christianity.” Its mission is to organically reproduce simple groups of Christ-worshippers without elaborate religiosity, based mainly in the homes and workplaces of each of them. They simply obey the Great Commandment to love God with all they have and love their neighbors by serving the needy in their community (Matt. 5:13-16; 25:31-46; etc.). They seek to fulfill and live out God’s covenants with Abraham that through him every family on earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3, cf. Gal. 3:14, 29), and with Israel that she will be a kingdom of royal priests (Ex. 19:6, cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10).