

Asian Mission Movements

Report on a consultation held at Redcliffe College, UK,
10-11 June 2009



Author: Revd Canon Mark Oxbrow, International Coordinator of the Faith2Share network.

Asia is a big place!

Asia is changing very fast

Asia is experiencing real growth in Christian discipleship

Asia is economically, socially, culturally and missionally, the place to watch in God's world today.

These were just some of the challenges which confronted, stretched and excited the 60 people from 25 different mission groups who met in Redcliffe College for two days in June, 2009. Church and mission leaders, Asians and Europeans, diaspora Christians and missionaries, worked together to discern more clearly the hand of God in Asia and how each of us is called to serve in His Asian mission.

Through all the ages to come, the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body.

You have given your goods to feed the poor.

You have given your bodies to be burned.

We ask for love.

Give us friends.

These are words spoken a century ago by one of the very few Asian Christians invited to attend the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah worked as an evangelist with the YMCA in India, helped to found the Indian Missionary Society and the National Missionary Society and was the first Indian to become an Anglican Bishop (of Dornakal). I use this quotation at the start of this report because it reminds us of the centrality of love and friendship in Christian mission. One hundred years later the mission movements of Asia (including the IMA and NMA to which Bishop Azariah's vision gave birth) are some of the strongest in the world and lead the way in innovative mission. In a sense those of us meeting in Redcliffe College could only stand 'at a distance' from the heartlands of Asian mission but nevertheless our 'friendship' is still valued and we, in this post-Christendom continent of Europe, certainly need evangelising friends from Asia to be with us.

Koreans everywhere!

At the start of our consultation we were privileged to hear from a seasoned Korean missionary, representing the third largest mission sending nation after the USA and India. Dr. Julie Ma is President of the Asian Pentecostal Society and tutor in missiology at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Speaking out of her own experience (planting 130 churches in the Philippines), current research and her wide networking within Korean mission movements Dr. Ma gave us not only a powerful description of one of the more significant missionary movements of our time, but also an honest appraisal of some of the challenges, weaknesses, strengths and missiological implications of this powerful movement.

Two important characteristics of Korean mission are the background that most Koreans have in a shamanistic world view with the immanence of the spirit world, and their strong mono-culturism. The former gives them a distinct advantage over rational secularists from the West as they encounter the spirit worlds of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the jinns of Islam. During discussion a questioner described Korean mission as often appearing to be very 'modern' – rational, focused on objectives, and perhaps not well placed to address the growing number of post-modern mission contexts of the 21st. century. This, and Korean mono-culturism, can make cross-cultural mission more of a challenge, a challenge which is often overcome by their commitment to hard work, the focus on relationships and hospitality as well as strategic goals and unique heritage in prayer and fasting. Other issues raised in discussion were the place of Korean power structures, leadership patterns and identity consciousness within the church, and the effects on Korean missiology of the recent taking hostage of Korean missionaries in Afghanistan.

Dr. Ma ended her presentation by looking at the challenges for Korean and Western (and by implication African, other Asian, and Latin American) missionaries working together. Time given to fellowship, prayer together and an attempt to learn from each other's traditions are all essential if God's mission is to move forward through the participation of all God's people.

Big Pictures and History

Mark Laing has taught mission at Union Biblical Seminary in Pune, India, but has a broad experience of mission in Asia. Taking a historical perspective Mark helped us look at the role of finance in mission, the significance of socio-political context, the rise in 'mission in reverse', and the shame of disunity in mission.

Looking carefully at socio-political contexts helped several of us present to solve a mystery! Why, with equal mission efforts have been applied over many years, had the church in South Korea grown so amazingly and yet the church in Japan remains so frail? We can understand this dynamic, Mark suggested, if we see how Christianity came as a 'friend in adversity' to Korea, it came to strengthen the culture of opposition to Japanese imperialism. In Japan, on the other hand, Christianity has always been identified with foreign powers if not enemies.

In looking closely at 'mission in reverse' (a term disliked by many because of its derivative nature) Mark encouraged us to reflect more on 'involuntary mission' than 'official mission'. We were reminded of Kirsteen and Sebastian Kim's assertion that "Christianity spreads from below" and Walter Hollenweger's injunction "invest in local evangelists" – refugees, migrants, students, business travelers and the like. The issue of the day is how we train and resource involuntary missionaries.

The discussion after Mark spoke led us into questions of conversion (is it to the church or to Jesus?) and ecclesiology (do we need new forms of church and have some Korean and other Asian missionaries simply adopted, or adapted, an inappropriate Western model of church?).

South Asia, Korea, Leadership and Partnership

Elective seminar groups allowed participants to reflect further on the missional role of South Asians in Europe (through a case study from Bradford, UK), trends in Korean Mission, leadership patterns and development within Asian mission movements and how meaningful partnerships can be developed between Global South and Global North movements (using as a case study the Faith2Share network).

Partnership was also very much on the agenda as two mission leaders, Warren Beattie of OMF and Phil Simpson of CMS reflected on how their more traditional mission agencies are changing in response to many of the issues outlined earlier. Warren spoke of partnering with

Asian mission movements whilst Phil focused on catalytic leadership and the development of communities of mission praxis. Both agreed that the key is to focus on the development of people who share a common core ideology and agreed mission objectives. Networks increase capacity as has been so well illustrated in Clay Shirky's "Here comes everybody"

Don't forget Mongolia

Half way through our consultation we were privileged to hear from, and be led in prayer by, Mr. Mojic Baldandorj, leader of the Evangelical Alliance in Mongolia. Here is an Asian church which doesn't know how to be church without being missional. How did the rest of us forget?

Please Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.

If you would like to respond to this article, please use the 'Voice your comments' form on the [Encounters](http://www.redcliffe.org/encounters) website (www.redcliffe.org/encounters). You may prefer to email your response to mission@redcliffe.org, in which case please remember to include your full name, your organisation/role and whether you would like your comments posted on the [Encounters](http://www.redcliffe.org/encounters) discussion board.