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天國視野 Kingdom Perspective

Chinese Baptist Fellowship of the United States and Canada

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A Thriving English Ministry in the Chinese Church

Rev. Francis Chung

I had the privilege of speaking via Zoom to a group of pastors ministering in ethnic Chinese Churches in Southern California. The topic was the English ministry in the Chinese Church - commonly referred to as the Second Generation, the American-Born Chinese, English-speaking congregation, or some iteration of these word combinations - which evokes confusion within the Chinese church for both the Chinese and English congregations. This confusion is not solely on semantics but centers on identity and purpose and so these crucial questions must be addressed: What is a successful English ministry? What is the relationship between the Chinese and English congregations? What is the vision of the English ministry? Each question looks at the situation from different angles, but ultimately the goal is to establish, grow, and shepherd a thriving English Ministry in an ethnic Chinese church. I believe the central issue that inhibits this goal has less to do with culture or theology, but rather with interpersonal dynamics caused by personal issues of pride, impatience, and a lack of faith.

“...Can the East Asian church in America reverse the flight of its next generation?” (Helen Lee)

Unfortunately, not only is there confusion, there is also hostility. Terms like "old-fashioned" or "too Chinese" are spoken in derision from one side while phrases like "too American" or "not conservative enough" are the corresponding denigrating response. The divide is now referred to in more academic language with "honor and shame culture" or "pragmatic approach" compared with "inflexible" as the weaponized phrases of choice.

With confusion and hostility, the results are all too obvious, conflict that leads to division. The plight of the English Ministry in the Chinese Church is clearly stated by Helen Lee in her article published in Christianity Today on August 12, 1996 - "Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian church in America reverse the flight of its next generation?" Her words are still relevant more than thirty years later. She comments, "The surge in Asian immigration led to an explosion of new churches. But the flip side of this

success story has been a silent exodus of church-raised young people..." However, her diagnosis leads to the conclusion that the main culprit is cultural differences. She concludes that the young people leaving "find their immigrant churches irrelevant, culturally stifling, and ill equipped to develop them spiritually for life in the multicultural 1990's." Is culture the real issue? I believe focusing on culture is a red herring that distracts from the real problem and prevents real solutions. The problem again is one of interpersonal relationships.

My experiences in the Chinese Church forged my view on the importance of healthy relationships. My father just retired last year after more than forty years serving as senior pastor at Mandarin Baptist Church of Los Angeles (MBCLA). Over the years from college to adulthood to marriage, I have worshipped in the Chinese church from the Northeast to the Bible Belt before returning to my home church to serve. For a short time, I ventured in a different direction worshipping at an Asian-American church and also large American mega-churches, but I felt more at home and called to the Chinese church. However, in the Chinese church, I have experienced the fallout and devastation of church divisions and witnessed ugly conflicts. Was culture the real reason for these issues? If so, how is it that I

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the problem ... is ...*

have also seen an uncommon unity that transcends natural divisions in a Chinese Church? I believe that culture is a very real barrier and a major issue to overcome, but it is not the main problem. Lack of sound theology can also be an impediment, but that too is not the core issue. Many pastors and leaders in Chinese churches are sound theologians who graduated from sound theological institutions with renowned biblical scholars and seasoned pastors in their faculty. However, it is putting into practice the theology learned in seminary that is the root issue. The biblical values of faith, hope, and love are in short supply. Defining these terms are much easier than living them out, but when we blame culture or theology, then the problem persists and then even worse, take root.

The Chinese church has responded to the problem articulated by Lee by making culture the core issue. Therefore, different models for the English ministry were born with this issue in mind:

1. **Separate Church Culture Model**—Take the second generation and form their own church (Asian American Church). This takes many forms (a single Chinese church, churches within the same association, or groups of unrelated churches.) The idea is to remove cultural issues.
2. **Multicultural Model** - Since language is no longer a barrier, churches are formed with the intent to reach out to all ethnicities. The mantra is the more cultures the better since this reflects the Melting Pot that is America.
3. **One Building , Two Churches Model** - Share a building but have separate budgets and leadership. Again, this is to remove the cultural differences, but to share resources like the building.
4. **One Church, Multiple Languages** - This is the existing model, but with a pro-active emphasis to grow the English Ministry by developing leaders, increasing budgets, and building facilities to target the next generation.

Models are helpful, and some are better than others, but models cannot properly address the silent exodus that Lee observes and that still exists in the Chinese church today. Models assume the main issue is culture, and so many of the above models try to minimize the potential cultural conflicts by creating a distance between the Chinese and English congregations. In my opinion, finding the right model is not the solution because culture, although an impediment, is not the main problem.

So, what is holding the Chinese church back?

So, what is holding the Chinese church back? I believe the issues are with individuals. Culture cannot be easily changed, but individuals can work better together. Yet, most of our conversations deal with culture. There is much unhelpful language as mentioned in the introduction like "Chinese way" or "American way." These caricatures force the conversation away from individual issues like pride, selfishness, impatience, bitterness, and many others that are in the heart of sinful men and women. These are hard conversations that might take years to solve. There will be honest disagreement, differences on how to lead, conflicts in styles, and just simply personality dissonance. However, when these are explained away as cultural differences, the issues persist and the Chinese church suffers. Culture is not the culprit. The issue is centered on sinful men - their insecurities, their desires, and their arrogance. The fault lies not in one group over the other. Both are at fault.

Even as I write this, I recognize my own failures in this area. If truth be told, I need to humble myself, admit faults, and be quick to forgive. But unless we recognize this problem, another generation will go by and Helen Lee's article will still ring true.



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Editor's Note:

The future of the Chinese Baptist church in North America rests in part to a vibrant English ministry that seeks to disciple the next generation of young believers who grow up in their Christian homes, and community kids, youths and adults reached by the church so that the cause of Christ could be passed on to succeeding generations. If the church is complacent in this, in a worst case scenario, there might not be a next generation of believers to pass the baton to. We, at the Chinese Baptist Fellowship, are quite concerned about this. We have a committed team in our English/NextGen Ministry who is willing to come alongside churches to advice and seek answers to how a vibrant English ministry could be initiated and/or enhanced in your church. Tell us how we might be of help. Contact Rev. William Eng, Team Leader, at: wmeng92633@aol.com .



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華人教會英語事工的興旺發展

鍾惠賢牧師

我非常榮幸有機會通過 Zoom 向一群在南加州華人教會中服侍的牧師分享，主題是華人教會中的英語事工。這常被稱為第二代，美國出生的華人，英語會眾，或這些詞語的組合，它們常為在華人教會中的華語及英語會眾帶來困惑。這些困惑不僅是在語義上的，而且還關乎他們的身份和目的。因此我們必須處理以下的關鍵問題：何謂成功的英語事工？中文會眾和英語會眾有什麼關係？英語事工的願景是什麼？這每個問題都由不同的角度來探索處境，但最終的目的是在華人教會中建立，培育和發展蓬勃的英語事工。我認為攔阻實現這目的的核心不是在文化或神學上，而是在於個人的驕傲，欠缺忍耐，和缺乏信心所引起的人際關係問題。

「美國的東亞裔教會能否扭轉其下一代出走？」 李海倫

不幸的是，在當中不僅存在混亂，且存有敵意。其中一方常用到如“古老”或“太中國化”等語帶嘲笑用語，而另一方則用到“太美國化”或“不夠保守”等語帶貶意的用語。現在，在更學術化的語言中，這種分歧被稱為“榮譽和恥辱文化”或“務實的態度”，這與“不夠保守”或“沒有彈性”等，同用來作為刺人的語言。

在混亂和敵意當中，其結果是明顯的。衝突帶來分裂。李海倫（Helen Lee）在於 1996 年 8 月 12 日的《今日基督教》上所發表的文章，靜默的出走（Silent Exodus）：美國的東亞裔教會能否扭轉其下一代出走？清楚地說明了華人教會中的英語事工的困境。三十多年後，她的話仍然適用。她評論說：“亞洲移民的激增導致新教會爆炸式增長。但是，這個成功故事的背面卻是教會所培養的年輕人默默地外逃……”然而，她的診斷所得出來的結論是：文化差異是主要的問題。她的結論是：離開的年輕人“發現他們的移民教會變得對他們無關重要，她的文化令人

感到窒息，並且沒有能力在靈性上幫助他們在 90 年代的多元文化中生活。”但文化是真正的問題嗎？我認為，專注在文化上誤導了我們，使我們在尋找真正的問題上分心，並攔阻了真正的解決方案。再而言之，問題是在於人際關係。

我在華人教會的經歷打造了我對建立健康關係的重要的看法。家父剛於去年在洛杉磯國語浸信會（MBCLA）擔任四十多年的主任牧師後退休。在我從大學，到成年，再到結婚，在我回到我的母會服事之前，那些年來，我在美國東北以至南部「聖經帶」的華人教會中崇拜。在一段短時間中，我也曾在一所美國亞裔教會和一所美國大型教會中崇拜，但我在華人教會中更感到有家的感覺，也被呼召服侍華人教會。但是，在華人教會中，我經歷了教會的分裂所帶來的後果和破壞，也目睹了衝突的醜陋。文化是造成這些問題的真正原因嗎？若是這樣，我又怎麼能看

專注在文化上誤導了我們，使我們在尋找真正的問題上分心，並攔阻了真正的解決方案。

到一個超越一般華人教會自然而有的分別所有的不一樣的團結？我認為文化是一個非常現實的障礙，也是需要克服的一個大問題，但它不是主要的問題。缺乏健全的神學可能是一個障礙，但也不是核心問題所在。華人教會中的許多牧師和領袖都是有良好裝備的神學家，他們畢業於著名的聖經學者和經驗豐富的牧師的神學院。然而，如何把在神學院學到的神學付諸實踐才是根本的問題。所欠缺的是信心，盼望和愛心等聖經價值。界定這些詞語比將它們實行出來要容易得多，但是當我們指責文化或神學時，問題仍然存在，甚至變得更糟，其影響更深遠。

華人教會在回應李海倫提出的問題時，常以文化作為核心問題來處理。因此，在這個考慮底下，產生了不同的英語事工模式：

1. **分開的教會模式** - 帶領 第二代去建立他們自己的教會（美籍華裔教會）。這有多種形式（一個單一的華人教會，在同一區聯會內的教會，或一群互不相關的教會。）其目的是消除文化問題。
2. **多元文化模式** - 由於語言不再是障礙，因此成立教會以接觸所有種族。其目標是越多不同的文化越好，因為這反映了美國的大熔爐。
3. **一棟建築物，兩個教會的模式** - 共享一棟建築物，但各有獨立的預算和領導團隊。同樣，這是為了消除文化差異，但卻共享建築物等資源。
4. **一個教會，多種語言** - 這是現有的模式，但是通過積極地栽培領袖，增加預算和建設針對下一代的設施，來發展英語事工。

那麼，是什麼阻礙了華人教會呢？我相信問題在於個人身上。文化不能輕易改變，但個人可以更好地一起工作。但是，我們的大多數對話都在處理文化。在引言中我提到了許多沒有幫助的語言，例如“中國式”或“美國式”。這些帶諷刺的語言使我們沒有談及驕傲，自私，缺乏忍耐，苦毒等常存在罪人心中的個人問題。這些艱辛的對話可能要花費數年才能解決。我們會有誠實的分歧，領導方式上的差異，風格上的衝突，甚或個性不合。但是，當我們以文化差異來解釋它們時，問題依然存在，華人教會仍然受苦。文化不是罪魁禍首。問題在於有罪的人身上：他們的不安全感，慾望，和傲慢。罪責不是單單在於某一方，雙方者都有過錯。

那麼，是什麼阻礙了華人教會呢？

即使在撰寫本文時，我也認識到自己在這方面的失敗。說實話，我需要謙卑自己，承認錯誤，並要快快地原諒。但我們若不認識到這個問題，一代人過去，而李海倫（Helen Lee）的文章仍然顯得實在。



鐘惠賢牧師是美國加州洛杉磯國語浸信會英語堂事工主任。他亦是美加華人浸信會聯會「英語／下一代事工」團隊成員。

編者註：

北美華人浸信教會的將來，取決於一個興盛的英語事工，能夠培育下一代在基督徒家庭長大的年輕信徒及教會在社區所接觸到的兒童，青年和成人，讓他們能夠成為門徒。這樣，基督的事工就可以傳給後代。但假若教會對此不思進取，在最壞的情況下，就會沒有可以接棒的下一代。美加華人浸信會聯會非常關心這個需要，我們的「英語/下一代」事工中有一支盡心盡力的團隊，非常樂意為您的教會就如何開始或促進充滿活力的英語事工提供建議並尋求答案。請讓我們知道如何效勞。請聯繫「英語/下一代」事工團隊負責人伍威廉牧師（Rev. William Eng），電子郵件：wmeng92633@aol.com。