

## AN ANALYSIS INTO THE GROWTH FACTORS OF THE CHINESE CHURCHES IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD MALAYSIA

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### 1. Introduction

In the last decade there has been a phenomenal growth among the Chinese ministries in the Assemblies of God Malaysia. The growth statistics among the Chinese work seems to have surpassed the historically predominant English work. This is not to say that they have outnumbered the English work in term of churches or adherents. The growth pattern herein discussed has to do with the number of new souls saved, the growing numbers of Chinese works started and the growing spiritual expression and maturity.

So far, there has been no hard statistical data available to verify this phenomenon, but it is an acknowledged reality. What is intriguing is the fact that the Assemblies of God Malaysia started originally as a Chinese movement. Then growth of the Chinese work was overtaken by the English movement, and now in the last decade they are surpassing the English work. What happened to the Chinese work in the lean years of growth? What were the reasons that account for the Chinese resistance to the Gospel? What are the factors that contributed to the current growth pattern in the Chinese work?

### 2. Understanding the Context

Let us begin with a general backdrop that would introduce the social historical context which provides the background in understanding the Chinese work in Malaysia. Who were the Chinese in Malaysia? Chinese came to the shores of Malaysia as early as the Ming Dynasty as trade

envoy led by Zheng He.<sup>1</sup> Since then, there has been a constant flow of Chinese traders and laborers from China. Due to the long historical diplomatic relationship between China and Malaysia, the focus of this paper will concentrate on the period of British colonization at the end of the eighteen century onwards.

Many of these Chinese laborers, or coolies as they were called who came over from China, were men. Due to the harsh realities, many men left their families back in the homeland to seek for better life opportunities. Some were brought because labor recruiters back home promised them a better future in some distant land. Some landed in Malaysia by force because they were deceived by the labor recruiters. They came to find subsistence. Religious matters and other issues were not their concern.

They had to deal with many challenging social circumstances and struggles with various existing communities. Among the Chinese themselves there were issues like the differentiation between the "straits born" Chinese and the immigrant Chinese. The dialect and clan issues brought questions of relationships and industrial privileges. The "straits born" Chinese were those who had come earlier and had become British subjects. They were more educated and intelligent.<sup>2</sup> They were deemed to be a more permanent Chinese population in the Straits Settlement. The Chinese migrants were clannish. Spatial relationships among the Chinese migrants themselves were segmented along dialect lines in their own enclaves.<sup>3</sup> The immigrant Chinese lives were harder as the "straits born" had some favor with the British authority. During this period the British strategy was to divide and rule. At the same time, they were increasingly interfering into Chinese matters. This interference raised suspicion among the Chinese towards the British. The Chinese began to develop a way to protect themselves. They organized themselves in *kongsi*, *hui dang* and *secret societies*. This structure helped the "strait Chinese" who were generally in control in obtaining cheap laborers.<sup>4</sup> These organizations were vital links to job opportunities and social security in a foreign land for migrants.

In general the Chinese worked harder and were more proficient even in menial tasks.<sup>5</sup> For many Chinese migrants, their stay in Malaysia was

<sup>1</sup> Kong Yuanzhi, "Zheng He and the History of China-Malaysia Relations", *Journal of Malaysian Chinese Studies*. Vol. 5. (Kuala Lumpur, Center For Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2002) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Shinozaki Kaori, "Privileged Subjects? Unification of the Straits Chinese and Banishment Ordinance in 1890s, Singapore", *Journal of Malaysian Chinese Studies*. Vol. 5. (Kuala Lumpur, Center For Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2002) 60.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Bunnell, *Malaysia, Modernity and the Multimedia Super Corridor: A Critical Geography of Intelligence*(London: RoutledgeCruzon, 2004), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Kaori, 62.

transient in nature. Except for work, other things did not concern them. A phrase they often used to express their aspirations in the colloquial Malay language was, "sudah cari makan balik tionsan," which means "after having earned enough I will go back to China."

### 3. The Homeland Context

Why did the Chinese migrate? What were some of the homeland issues? China is a vast country with a very dense population. Historically, it was marked by political factions and feudalism. The difficult life situations back in the homeland due to political unrest, famine, oppressive living conditions and social systems are reasons for the migrations.

The feudalistic social system was notoriously oppressive. The general populace were peasants and most of the land owners were rich and oppressive feudal lords. They were forced to make unreasonable payments for the use of the land. Constant flooding, due to the overflow of the *Huang He* (Yellow River), aggravated the misery of the peasants. As a result, there was constant famine and living realities were harsh. Then came the Western intrusion and the perpetrators of the large opium trade into China. Opium made the living realities even worse.

The Chinese were greatly affected by Western intrusion into China. Diplomatic relationships with the West were not pleasant. The many episodes of arrogance and disregard for the Chinese authorities are well documented. Wolfgang Franke and K. M. Pannikar in each of their books highlighted many of these inopportune episodes and they draw the reader's attention to the Chinese and Asian views on these matters.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Neill feels that Pannikar has not been too objective on the issues and somewhat "anti Christian animus." I would choose to defer from Neill's observation of Pannikar. He perceived history from Asian lenses. I would further disagree with Neill's assertion that Westerners were notorious for their excessive behaviors. "At no point have the foundations of Asian life been touched; the thoughtful and educated classes have considered the Gospel, and, for all their respect for the person of Jesus, have rejected it as a way life."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> William J McCord, *The Dawn of the Pacific Century: Implications for Three Worlds of Development* (New Jersey: Transaction Pub. 1996) 104.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West*, Trans. by R. A. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 1968. An Asian perspective on this matters can be read in the book by, K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973) 560-561.

For this paper, I would like to highlight several issues in China that are believed to have directly impacted the Chinese migrants to Malaysia and the effect this had on their response to Christianity. Starting with a brief introduction of the West into Asia, Kosuke Koyama described the Western diplomatic stance since its inception as a "Gun and Ointment" diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> This stance was seen in the historical episode of the "Opium War." The "Opium War", in 1840-42 was the Chinese retaliation to the British acts of aggression and covetousness to maintain their diminishing trade balance.<sup>9</sup> The British brought opium to the Chinese and when the Chinese government attempted to oppose the import of this dangerous commodity, it led to much animosity and confrontation which resulted in the "Opium War". It goes without saying that the military superiority and might of the British had given them the upper hand. After the Chinese were defeated, they were further humiliated by the British through a series of "Unequal Treaties." The first of the many unequal treaties the Chinese had to sign was the "Treaty of Nanking." The Chinese had to cede Hong Kong, Canton, Amoy, Fuchou and Ningpo and Shanghai to be open for trade. What the British started, other foreign powers followed suit which led to a series of unequal treaties with France, the United States, Russia, Belgium and other countries.<sup>10</sup> Then in 1858, the British and French forced the Chinese to sign the "Treaty of Tientsin" to make further concessions which led to the sacking and destruction of the Imperial Palace in Peking.<sup>11</sup>

What was more startling was that the Christian missions in China got entangled with the atrocities of the foreign powers. It was obvious the missions during the turbulent "Opium War" came under the protection of the foreign powers, though there was nothing in the Treaty of Nanking that mentioned any concession to the missions. The French in 1846 forced the concession of tolerance of Christian Religion and the missionaries. Later treaties forced the Chinese to make further concession to allow free movement of the missions throughout China.<sup>12</sup> Franke cited an example of the deadly association between the opium trade and Christian mission.

<sup>8</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (London: SCM. 1974) 46-61.

<sup>9</sup> *The Opium War*, by The Compilation Group for the "History of Modern China" series (Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Franke, 68.

<sup>11</sup> J Y Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2002) 414-415.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph R. Covell, "China", *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers, 2002) 178-179. Franke, 76-77.

In that year a ship belonging to Jardine, Matheson & Co. sailed into the region north of Amoy with the well-known missionary Dr. Karl Guzloff on board as interpreter. From one side of the ship, Dr. Guzloff distributed Christian tracts to the Chinese, while opium was unloaded from the other side.<sup>13</sup>

All these demands and unequal terms imposed on the Chinese led to resentment towards the foreign powers and suspicion of Christian missions. The later periods were marked by clashes of the Chinese with the foreign powers and with Christian missions which led to the Boxer Rebellion. The 1900 Boxer Rebellion was an anti-foreign movement.<sup>14</sup> It is no doubt that missionaries worked hard to bring the Gospel to China. All these social political turbulences unconsciously undermined the preaching of the Gospel.

Driven by these social political dysfunctions and confrontations with foreign powers and atrocities fueled the Chinese towards nationalism. The Boxer Rebellion was described as a last attempt of the Chinese to throw off the foreign yoke and return to Chinese culture.<sup>15</sup> Life had never been easy. Apart from facing the issues of foreign powers, they also had a hard time in their own cultural milieu facing their own oppressive feudalism.

It was in these circumstances and hardships that the people looked for hope outside of China. During this period, many peasants hardly had a decent meal. To have a bowl of “*bai mi fan*” or white rice was a luxury. China suffered internally and people despaired. One option was to migrate. The migrants who came over to Malaysia carried and possibly internalized within them all the social and historical baggage.

#### 4. Pentecostal Missions and the Chinese Community

As Pentecostals, we recognize the role of God in any Church growth movement. In every episode of Church growth in history, God acted in a particular context. God in His great wisdom masterfully utilizes the best of

<sup>13</sup> Franke, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Pannikar, 147-150, Covell, 76-77, Leung Ka-Lun with contributions from Xu Ru Lei, “China”, Trans. Tung Lun-Hsien, and The China Group, trans. by Dufresse Chang, *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 141-145. Edmond Tang, “East Asia”, *Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Paratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 78.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Harrington, *Peking 1900: The Boxer Rebellion* (Oxford: Osprey Pub., 2001) 7-10.

the historical, political and social circumstances and resources to accomplish His sovereign purposes. The thrust of the paper will be to look for the fingerprints of God through the historical, political and social context in the growth of the Chinese work in the Assemblies of God Malaysia. In this paper, the terms Chinese, Tamil or English works are used in reference to the works of the Assemblies of God Malaysia.

The missionary efforts in Malaysia commenced among the Chinese in 1934.<sup>16</sup> This was the official date adopted as the first Chinese work was successfully established under Carrie P. Anderson.<sup>17</sup> As such, many consider her to be the first missionary to Malaya. In a report written by Lula Ashmore Baird in July 1951, she mentioned Katherine Claus and Esther Johnson as the first missionaries to Malaya. She even mentioned that a work was started in Ipoh where Katherine Claus resided. The work was given away due to lack of workers to continue the work.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that Jin Huat overlays the readiness of the Chinese people to the missions effort of the Assemblies of God against the backdrop of the John Sung revival meetings is suspect. He was right that the Malaysian Chinese work were the centers (Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur) where other English works and Chinese works spread throughout the country.<sup>19</sup> Derek Tan asserts that most of the mission efforts were confined to Kuala Lumpur for a period of nineteen years. There were some extended efforts of outreach in surrounding nearby villages. He also details that these pioneering efforts were limited to the Chinese populace.<sup>20</sup> The first period of Assemblies of God missionaries who came was pre-World War II. When the war broke out the missionaries were instructed to repatriate.<sup>21</sup> Then there was only the Chinese work in Kuala Lumpur. During this period, a group faithfully met in various borrowed locations. Some were scattered due to the circumstances of the war.<sup>22</sup> After the war when the missionaries

<sup>16</sup> Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 129. The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Souvenir Publication of the Kuala Assembly of God Church, an archival resource of the National Archive Center of the Assemblies of God Malaysia.

<sup>17</sup> Lula Ashmore Baird wrote a report in July 1951. The date Carrie P. Anderson started the work in 1933. This report is found in the Asia Pacific Resource Center located in Baguio, Philippines.

<sup>18</sup> Lula Ashmore Baird report July 1951.

<sup>19</sup> Tan Jin Huat, “Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore”,

*Asian and Pentecostals: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, Anderson and Tang eds. (Baguio City: Regnum & APTS Press, 2005) 286-287.

<sup>20</sup> Derek Tan, “The Assemblies of God”, *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History*, Hunt, Lee and Roxborough, eds. (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications,

came back, they sought out the former members and began reconstruction work. More missionaries came over after the war. During this period, more works were started. The influx of missionaries to Malaysia was a result of the closed door in China. The Penang work was started in 1953 by Evelyn Iris Hatchett. She had English Sunday schools and a Cantonese Service.<sup>23</sup> The work among the Chinese was hard and slow. In 1959 Lula Baird moved to Ipoh and started a Cantonese work.<sup>24</sup> Then Raub was started in 1960, again with a Chinese congregation.<sup>25</sup> During this period many children attended Sunday schools and youth were exposed to the Gospel message. The English work in no time overran the Chinese work. What were the factors that made the Chinese work difficult and the lack of growth? Why were the Chinese so resistant to the Gospel?

### 5. The Chinese Work and Their Early Setbacks

In response to this inquiry, I would like to present the factors that account for the seemingly lethargic Chinese work. As mentioned previously, Chinese migrants brought with them the emotional and historical baggage. The struggles of the Chinese did not end after emigrating from China. Many Chinese landed in Malaysia. Others landed in Indonesia and many other places as far as America during the large Chinese Diaspora of 1910-1911. Many of them also landed in Malaysia, others landed in Indonesia and many other places as far as America. In Malaysia, most of them worked in the tin mines and on plantations.<sup>26</sup> Not long after their arrival, the Great Depression of 1930s hit Malaysia, and thousands of Chinese were unemployed. Khoo Kay Khim, a Malaysian historian, estimated during the depression about half a million Chinese were unemployed. Many turned to begging and sleeping days and nights on five foot ways and verandahs.<sup>27</sup> Many actually struggled for a living by being hawkers for their livelihood. Not long after the depression, Malaysia suffered the Japanese invasion of World War II. It was not until in the last 20 years that the general Chinese populace in Malaysia achieved better economic viability.

1992) 229.

<sup>21</sup> Baird, 81-85.

<sup>22</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir Publication.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Tan, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Baird, 124-131.

<sup>25</sup> Barid, 133-137

<sup>26</sup> Kaori, 62

<sup>27</sup> Khoo Kay Khim, "The Great Depression: The Malaysian Context," *The History*

The Chinese in their struggle had very little energy or interest in religion. The obvious exigencies were bread and butter issues. Many of those cheated by the labor recruiters were bitter with the circumstances they were in. Many had families back home in China. Religious talk and commitment was a luxury many could not afford. This accounts for the Chinese pragmatic attitudes toward their gods.

The historical baggage from their homeland and the entanglement of Christian missions with foreign powers were viewed with suspicion. They were frustrated, angry and confused over the relationships with the Christian missions. How did the message the Christians preached correspond with the realities they observed? How does one respond to a message of love when the messengers are involved with the people who humiliate your country and exploit your people? They were demeaned and humiliated by the foreign powers. Any collaboration with them would be a betrayal. Chinese felt that to embrace Christianity was tantamount to an act of treason toward their people and their nation. Betrayal is a very shameful and contemptible act in Chinese culture. People caught in an act of treason are called "Zhou Kou" or "running dog" in the community. They will be ostracized and denied communal protection.

There is also the implication that when a Chinese person accepts Christianity, the Chinese community loses a person. Converts are forbidden to participate in many communal and cultural activities and duties like the wedding and funeral rites by the missionaries. They follow foreign ways and disregard many Chinese traditions. During this era, whether it was a conscious or unconscious, missions' effort were often conducted with the "noble savage" theological undergirding.<sup>28</sup> Contextualization was a word not known during this time. The missionaries did and thought what they knew and understood; their intent was to be faithful to the Lord. Not faulting the missionaries then, many of their instructions on cultural matters were potentially explosive, and in hindsight rather naïve or insensitive.

This sense of feeling was further intensified by the clannish structure of the migrant community. The spatial relationships between migrants of different dialects were reasonably distinct. "As migrants they were sensitive to economic opportunities. . . to compete in the new environment, they organized their clan, dialect or occupational associations as the central

*of South-East, South and East Asia: Essays and Documents*, ed. Khoo Kay Khim (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977) 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1992, 288-289). Jane Samson, "Ethnology and Theology: Nineteenth-Century Missions Dilemmas in the South Pacific", *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 99-122.

component of social organizations.<sup>29</sup> They even fought against one another over the matter of economics and survival.<sup>30</sup> Accepting Christianity would disjoin one's fraternity with the communal clan. Under such a harsh environment, clan fraternity was very vital for survival and subsistence. It is not easy for one to risk the possibility of losing one's livelihood for the sake of a "suspect" foreign religion.

Confucian family structure also deepens the sense of reluctance of the Chinese to respond to the Gospel. The acceptance of the Gospel would be equal to rejection of parents and forefathers. Any affront that undermines the teaching of filial piety are met with dire consequence. One can recall the Matteo Ricci "Rite controversy" which led to the ousting of missions from China and persecution of the Christians in China. Filial piety is a very sensitive issue in a Chinese community.<sup>31</sup> Any breach of filial piety is a dishonor to the person as well as to the family. The act will disgrace the family and cause them "loss of face" which is very important to a Chinese. The family will be shamed in the community.<sup>32</sup> If a person has been found to have accepted Christianity, heavy persecution will follow.

The multiple dialects of the Chinese did not make the missionaries' efforts an easy one. Entering a cross-cultural context was already challenging. To deal with multiple dialects was even more difficult. Even with their best foot forward, communication of the Gospel to the Chinese was a mammoth effort on the part of the missionaries. The result may not have been exponential, but it was sure and steady. There were communication challenges. There were Bible women who came over from Hong Kong who were only effective among the Cantonese community. Even the missionaries who learned Chinese were largely Cantonese speaking. Thus, much of the effort and Chinese works were confined to the Cantonese community.

The Chinese communities are very industrious and forward-looking. They had their private agendas. Many parents were willing to send their children to Sunday Schools with the underlying motive that their children

<sup>29</sup> Voon, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Kaori, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? A Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997) 124-128. Wolfgang Kubin, "Only the Chinese Understand China: The Problem of East West Understanding", *Chinese Thought in a Global Context: A Dialogue Between Chinese and Western Philosophical Approaches*, Karl-Heniz Pohl (Lieden: Brill Academic Pub, 1999) 37-39.

<sup>32</sup> William K. Gabrenya, Jr. and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, "Chinese Social Interaction: Harmony and Hierarchy on the Good Earth", *The Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, ed. By Michael Harris Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 318-219.

will pick up the English language. Other children were forewarned about conversion issues, especially, with the instruction that they must never be baptized. To the Chinese, when a person takes water baptism there is a spiritual symbolic reference point of no return. Thus, many came to Church but were not ready to make commitments to Christ.

During the war era, the work was left to run on its own. Like sheep without a shepherd they began to wander away. When the missionaries returned after the war to restart the work, they managed to find some scattered sheep and their works were restarted again. The break in the momentum had a definite setback on the momentum of the Chinese works. Needless to say, the amount of energy needed to reinitiate the inertia to start the works again was great.

In 1960, the Bible Institute of Malaya (BIM) was started;<sup>33</sup> the irony was that the medium of instruction was English. Chinese workers who needed training still had to go to Hong Kong for their training. Limited as it was, that was almost the only place where Chinese Christian workers could get their training. The training in Hong Kong was in Cantonese; this would mean that the outreach could only be effectively carried to a particular dialect group, which again was another limitation. Those trained (in BIM) were more proficient in English. So the starting of BIM became the catalyst for the proliferation of the English work. Due to cheaper cost to be trained locally and in English, and also the fact that the missionaries were more efficient in English work, the natural outcome was that the English work grew faster than the Chinese work.

There were attempts by BIM to try to start a Chinese training program. Due to poor response, the effort was abandoned. The Chinese work was already struggling to reach the Chinese people. Those in the Chinese work were still struggling to make a living. Church efforts to send workers to be trained in Hong Kong were costly. Many were still sent to BIM and with the missionaries' help many also started English works and Chinese works were then relegated to be a department in the Church.

## 6. The Chinese Movement Recovery

The Chinese work did have some setbacks, but the picture was not totally gloomy. There were pockets of growth in her history; the most significant, yet controversial one, was the ministry of Kong Duen Yee, a Hong Kong actress. Her evangelistic itinerary across the Malay Peninsula did result in many conversions as well as controversies. The most celebrated

<sup>33</sup> The minutes of the Field Fellowship Conference of the Malayan Assemblies of God, dated October 16, 1959 (National Archive Center of the Assemblies of God Malaysia).



controversy was centered on the conversion of a Taoist priest in Kuala Lumpur in 1963. She had also doctrinal excess issues. Because of the controversy, the Assemblies of God Malaysia withdrew their association with her.<sup>34</sup> This is a classic case of “power encounter” borrowing from John Wimber’s terminology.

The phenomenal growth of the Chinese work, in the author’s opinion, was a gradual one, reaching to a “critical mass” which led to an unprecedented growth pattern in the last decade which attracted the attention of the people. Throughout this period, up until the last decade, there was a steady stream of growth. There were growing, maturing and outstanding ministerial workers who provided good leadership for the Chinese work.

The growing pool of Chinese ministerial workers was largely due to the restarting of the Chinese Department in Bible College of Malaysia (BCM, formerly was called Bible Institute of Malaya) in 1980. However, between 1968 and 1972, several students were able to do their studies in Chinese under the direction of Rev David and Alice Nyien.<sup>35</sup> Since the inception of the Chinese Department in BCM a steady stream of ministerial workers were graduated annually. Through the years, growing leadership and widening participation of the Chinese programs which helped to propel the Chinese works forward. Young enthusiastic graduates began pioneering works and affected a momentum of growth within the Chinese movement. At the same time, the Chinese work as departments in English churches grew in tandem with the rest of the Chinese movement.

As BCM progressed in the training curriculum, it further strengthened the local leadership of the Chinese work. Extending her training programs through extension centers also helped to further develop a new level of lay leadership. BCM also helped the Chinese ministers to upgrade themselves academically.

There was also a growing availability and access to Christian Chinese literature. This made it easy to obtain literature for evangelism purposes. Literature is a unintrusive way of presenting the Gospel to non-Christians. It is interesting that the Chinese movement is seemingly more advanced in using digital, multimedia and electronic methods to present the Gospel.

As the Chinese migrants were industrious and enterprising, their economic viability grew progressively in the passage of time. Malaysia as

<sup>34</sup> Tan Jin Huat, 289.

<sup>35</sup> The official Bible College Website, <http://bcm.org.my/> (access 10 Jan 2006), *The Newzette* which is an official communiqué of the school had also its first Chinese translated copy for distribution also in 1968. Which affirm the effort of the school starting the Chinese program (Source found in the National Archive of the Assemblies of God Malaysia).

a nation has been experiencing a rather consistent economic growth, except for a short setback in 1975, 1985 and the present struggle since 1997. Overall, the Chinese community came out of these situations reasonably well. These economic blessings helped the Chinese community to take a more relaxed and settled lifestyle. Education which used to be a luxury became accessible and education led them to a new sense of openness to the Gospel.

The communal and dialect groupings began to disintegrate and this freed them to socialize and the burden of clan identity was no longer as daunting. Filial piety still is the underlying social foundation of the Chinese community; its importance has not waned. However, the broadened mindset and perspective through education, media influence and the changing social outlook has given the Chinese a new perspective and a more tolerant outlook on life and religion. This made the people more open and ready to accept the Gospel.

In the past, one of the contributing factors to the resistance of the Gospel was the parents. Connected with the filial piety tension, many have deferred their decision for the Gospel and water baptism out of respect for the parents or grandparents. As the older generations slowly passed off the scene there is a diminishing sense of obligation. More and more of the new generation who are open are beginning to put less of these obligations on their children.

Connected to this was the readiness of the Chinese works to contextualize. In the last decade, the many efforts to contextualize the Gospel to and through Chinese cultural nuances are amazing. We have Christian “ang pow” which is used for auspicious occasions and Chinese New Year, “moon cakes” for mid-autumn festival, Chinese wedding gowns and many others. These contextualization efforts help the Chinese to have a closer affinity to Christianity.

As time and ministry progressed, the many children who came to the Sunday Schools have made a commitment to the Lord in spite of persecution. Many of them have good testimonies which speak well to their immediate family and community. Many also have grown to take up leadership in their churches. As the Gospel touches lives, these people touched by the Lord move upward in social mobility. The upward social mobility of the member also helps the Chinese work to be able to take on more creative and progressive efforts to share the Gospel and become more financially stable. These social achievements help them to be more influential in their work place and community. These good testimonies become a wonderful and powerful bridging opportunity for the communication of the Gospel.

In the last five years, many Chinese members have become involved in the “Happy Men” ministry. This is really the Chinese arm of the Full Gospel Business Men’s ministry. Those who got involved in this ministry

are very committed and enthusiastic. They have been very active in evangelism. They are well organized and they readily accept invitations from Chinese churches to share their testimonies and the Gospel. These men have impacted the Chinese work with their enthusiasm and commitment. Through their ministries many Chinese have accepted the Gospel.

The opening of diplomatic relationships with China and the exposure of the Church in China was an eye opener to both the Chinese churches and the Chinese community in Malaysia. It was a very powerful message to the Chinese Christian community that they are not alone. It really inspired and motivated the Malaysian work to move forward. It also opened the Chinese work to a whole new arena of missions. The Chinese work began to flex her spiritual muscles. It provided a whole new dimension of faith expression for the Chinese. These dynamic intersections of events locally and in China have indirectly brought excitement to the local Chinese work.

## 7. Conclusion

The growth potential of the Chinese work is best described by the term "the sky is the limit." Seeing the fingerprints of God in the Chinese work has been very inspiring.

Learning and observing how God uses history and circumstances to shape the outcome of a movement is very comforting and enlightening. While as a Pentecostal movement we essentially recognize the divine part in the history of a movement, we must also anticipate how God uses social circumstances to drive a movement. If we are due diligent in reading the "kairos" time that God has brought to us as a movement, partnering with God in these "kairos" moments will bring to the movement a limitless possibility and potentiality. History often serves as a reminder that along the passage of time there are snares and pitfalls which can so easily beset us. Therefore, it is important for leadership to be constantly vigilant and reflective on trends and issues that confront the movement.