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## Editorial

### Changing China, Continuing Challenges

Guest Editorial by Andrew Kaiser



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Since the regulatory tightening that preceded the 2008 Beijing Olympics, simply finding a way to remain in China for any length of time has become increasingly difficult for most expatriate Christian workers. While many prognosticators predicted that things would return to “normal” once the tensions of the Olympic moment had passed, the pattern of increased bureaucratic scrutiny has instead increased. Despite assurances from the new Chinese leadership, current efforts to bolster local consumption and business activity have created an environment that is making it increasingly difficult for foreign businesses to thrive in China. With respect to taxation, long-term visas, labor permits, registrations, public security, property ownership or most any area within government remit, recent regulatory changes are requiring foreigners who wish to remain in China to make changes to the ways they operate.

At the same time, China’s new confidence in the wake of the successful 2008 Olympics has also brought well-earned attention to China’s growing strengths and resources. While China’s successes in education, technology, and business have garnered praise, the social sector has also seen development with a growing range of increasingly high quality services available in many parts of China. The church has been part of this trend; expanding wages and increased access to education have combined with the benefits of on-line communication and commerce to yield a church with more money, more social capital and more access to theological education and resources than at any time in recent memory.

This new context for China ministry raises a host of questions for anyone committed to long-term ministry in China. Ministry goals and strategies that were formed in the 1990s—and in some cases in the 1980s—may no longer be appropriate for the conditions and needs of the Chinese church today. Models of cooperation and partnership that were developed to aid a church with little money and few qualified ministers no longer fit the current realities. Even questions as fundamental as, “How do Christians relate to society?” need to be reconsidered in post-Olympic China. For those already deeply engaged in China service, there is a great need for reevaluation.

However, for the new China worker, the basic challenges will remain the same. First, any newly arrived or arriving expatriate must work hard to understand the basic context within which the local Christian community exists; Mark Strand’s article introduces some of the current trends and priorities shaping that context. Second, anyone hoping to serve the local Christian community must develop a broad understanding of the state of the larger church in China; Mark McLeister’s article highlights some of the more recent trends that are too often ignored by those already familiar with the Chinese church of the past. Third, regardless of ethnicity, the realities of cross-cultural living and working demand that any expatriate who hopes to minister in faithful and effective ways in China must make healthy cultural understanding and adjustment a top priority; Andrea Klopper points out some of the areas that will require concerted attention. Fourth, effective ministry requires learning how to work in healthy cooperation with Chinese people; Jenny introduces us to some of the common pitfalls that can disrupt working relationships. Mark Batluck then recommends one helpful guide through this entire process. Finally, a list of key resources is provided to guide further reading.

While far from complete, it is our hope that the information in this issue will provide a good introduction to *what every expat in China ministry needs to know*.

*Andrew T. Kaiser lives in China with his family. He has been working in China’s non-profit sector since 1997.*

## Intercessory Notes

*Please pray*

1. For expatriates to find innovative ways to serve the Chinese via the service sector, to help Chinese Christians discern reliable resources on the Internet and to give time to mentoring Chinese leaders.
2. That expatriate ministries will be able to help Chinese church leaders learn to occupy an appropriate position in the social space that is now more open to them.
3. That those new to China—and those already serving—will be discerning as they work with congregations of many different types that have a variety of cooperative activities.
4. That newcomers to China, as well as those currently serving, will be open to listening to their Chinese colleagues and considering their advice.
5. That those anticipating service in China will take time for thorough preparation before leaving their country of origin.



# Change, Stasis and Opportunity: Exploring China's Developmental Trajectory

By Mark A. Strand

I first moved to China 28 years ago and have lived there most of the intervening years. During that time external changes have been so substantial that photos from my early days bear no resemblance to the China of today, and as I speak with young Chinese people they find some of my categories odd. Having said that, while the pace of development has been frenetic and the economic growth historic, there have been few substantive changes in China. Basic inequalities, limited educational opportunities, rural-urban disparities and political sensitivities remain, and yet the Chinese people remain hopeful and industrious in the face of these challenges. It reminds one that China's developmental trajectory will not follow Western patterns. As a firm believer in the sovereign ways of God over the affairs of humans, it gives me pause to consider what opportunities this contradiction creates for the people of China and its church and for friends around the world committed to the Chinese church.



[rudenoon](#)

The purpose of this essay is to help long-term expatriate workers in China understand the social and spiritual context of China and ways to respond to it. The notion of rapid development in the context of limited change will be entertained, followed by analyses of present trends and future opportunities in several areas of social importance to the nation and concluding with comments on prospects for the Chinese church.

For expatriates working in China, it can appear to be getting more difficult to do ministry there. In fact, the overall context seems to remain rather the same year after year. However, the roles we play or the needs around us change so that we need to be alert, diligent and wise as we strive to maintain our spiritual vitality and relevance as we minister the gospel. For those currently in China, one must neither long for the "good old days" nor wait for some time when China is "wide open" for ministry. As long as I have been in the country, the present has always been sufficiently challenging to keep me vigilant, trusting fully in Christ and open to give me steady spiritual fruitfulness. With that in mind, attention will now be turned to addressing the current trends in China with reflection on what they mean for Chinese society and the Chinese church with implications for ministry by expatriate Christians living there.

## Health and Education

The World Health Organization has a road map describing health and education as the essential elements in economic development. Although an extreme market approach to health care in the 1990s nearly sank the country, the SARS epidemic in 2003 was the clarion call that led to righting the ship, leading in 2007 to health care reform designed to bring primary health care to all urban residents. Although there have been hiccups, a functional system has been created that provides preventive medicine and chronic disease management to many urban residents who previously had to pay out-of-pocket for expensive hospital-based health care. Developing the same system for rural residents is in process.

Health care reform has created the opportunity for expatriate ministries to become involved in helping China build this primary health care system through the introduction of Family Medicine and community health services.

Rapid urbanization is an opportunity for the church to develop health services to meet a social need and witness to society in tangible ways. China already has 185 million people over the age of 60 (13.7% of the population) and this will only increase in the next twenty years, creating the need for health care services and nursing home care. The call to care for widows in distress should be grounds for innovation in this arena.

There is a lot of room for the development of the service sector in China, but few Chinese consumers recognize the value of services, so the service market is not very robust. For ministries hoping to use the service sector to create financially sustainable ministry models, the lack of strong demand will be a headwind for the indefinite future.

Although the number of spots for college students has grown remarkably, those students are not receiving a good education and are not finding jobs upon graduation, except for those coming out of the premier universities. One would hope that increased demand would create the opportunity to develop genuinely Christian schools for Chinese citizens, but a chokehold on education in China has largely prevented such a development.

## Civil Society

While political reforms have lagged, there is no denying that the social space within which Chinese people are free to live and express themselves has grown steadily over the years, contributing to improved quality of life for most people.

The most significant growing space in China is the virtual space of the Internet. China is experiencing information mobility like never before. Internet users, banking, movie watching and music have all gone mobile. While *Weibo*, *Youku* and *Baidu* are exploiting this increasing social space, it is unclear whether it is enhancing civil society or not. While the space increases, the topics acceptable in that space are rather limited to benign ones such as environmental safety, changing family dynamics, sexual freedom and others. The world of the mind and all it creates has not been given free play, particularly on political, ethnic and religious topics.

However, Chinese people have learned how to exploit even the smallest opportunity. The church has been as innovative as any social entity and is currently equipped with a diversity of people able to provide the resources they need to grow and meet the needs around them. The Internet provides sermon feeds, biblical resources, books and all manner of resources free or nearly so. The quality is uneven, making it difficult for young Christians to discern what to listen to. This is an opportunity for expatriate Christians to provide guidance and technical support to access such resources and determine which ones are reliable.

There is now general recognition that mentoring Christian leaders is the most important contribution expatriate Christians can make to the global church. This is the call to do ministry by supporting others rather than focusing on doing it all oneself. This will increase as the Chinese church grows in strength and maturity, and the expatriate's role is less central. Nevertheless, less central does not mean less important, and expatriate Christians would do well to prepare themselves to fill this role well.

### **Government Attitude toward Expatriates**

There appears to be no intention to begin political reform in China, so I will repeat what I have been saying since I went to China in 1985—adapt to the current reality and take advantage of each available opportunity to develop locally appropriate ministries. It is unlikely that China will become politically inhospitable to foreign Christians, but neither will they officially sanction the activities of expatriate Christians in China. Thus, Christians should settle in, learn the language and begin to make contributions to the church and to Chinese society in-line with their vision. Although fear of being kicked out remains for some, the fears of air pollution or inflation are more likely to drive out expatriate Christian workers than the Chinese government.

### **Global Position**

The Red River of the north is notorious for spring flooding. Unlike flooding in other regions, with flash floods, hurricanes and a terrain that worsens the outcome, the northern plains are flat. China's rise has been like the Red River floodwaters—forceful, sure and silent.

China's recent decades of success coupled with rising nationalism have created a younger generation of rather self-assured people. On a recent trip to the U.S., I sought out the daughter of a Chinese medical colleague from China to check up on her. While having lunch together, she began to complain about the American university she was attending, arguing, "This school can't compare to my university in China. It is too easy, and the teachers are not good. I'm just here to saunter through classes and basically buy a masters degree." Her pomposity and lack of curiosity were extremely off-putting to me, but her attitude can be found among an increasing number of young Chinese people. This attitude is also reflected in decreasing interest in the gospel among young people compared to ten years ago.

This beaming confidence they have picked up from the certainty heard back home and for good reason. Whether it is the economy, athletics, technological innovation or lavish personal spending, China is on a roll. However, the Chinese government's confident appearances bluff deeper ambivalence about their true global role. They are desperate for acceptance on the global stage, but their inability to consistently occupy an appropriate position makes that acceptance elusive. It will take time, and it is our job to pray for and support the process in ways appropriate to our guest status in China and with a view to the kingdom of God.

### **The Church**

As mentioned earlier, the government will not change its religious policy in the short term. At the same time, the government can no longer deny the existence of the Chinese house church and is beginning to understand the function of the church. This is good for the church and for society. Therefore, one of the opportunities for ministries in China is to help Chinese church leaders learn to occupy an appropriate position in the social space being afforded them. For example, when sharing the public square, the church needs to demonstrate obedience to the gospel first through conveying values such as faith, humility and hope, and then to proclaim the gospel in ways that are appropriate to the setting and the opportunity.

In a recent issue of *ChinaSource*, there was an interview with several Chinese church leaders entitled "The Future of Christianity in China: A Panel Discussion" (Spring 2012). Each of the participants spoke of the need for the Chinese church to "impact society," reflecting the current weakness of this manifestation of the gospel. This is precisely the point of the book *Dual Impact* published by Evergreen.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity will exist in China—that much is clear. The question is, "What kind of Christianity?" Over the last ten years, the Chinese church has matured significantly from the fundamentalist ways of the house church movement of the 1980s and 90s. However, the church remains rather reductionist, focusing on saving souls more than full gospel obedience as outlined above. Therefore, the church in China is stable but vulnerable.

The church is externally vulnerable. The government is fickle and intimidating, so the church is unable to feel clarity and certainty in their status. This is a reminder to expatriate Christians to use their unique status in China to publicly vouch for the validity and quality of the Chinese church. We should bring the gospel to officials and people of influence through our obedience to the gospel in their very presence.

Despite this vulnerability, the Chinese church has adapted to its political environment and grown both numerically and spiritually in that context. Other than those churches that depend upon it, the Chinese church in general would rather leave the "persecuted church" label behind. This stigmatizes it and devalues the ingenuity along with the spiritual and theological resources it has developed in response to its sociopolitical reality. Rather than calling it the *persecuted church*, we should look to it as a teacher of how to grow a healthy church in a politically repressive context.

The church is also internally vulnerable. Materialism, thirst for power and factionalism threaten the integrity of its witness among Christians themselves. Compromise and corruption from within could threaten its unity. Such problems would frustrate the government, resulting in a return to repressive ways. Unhealthy church leadership would also disillusion the Christians themselves, resulting in a drift away from the church. This is a very real concern today and a reminder to pick up the pace on disciple-

## **“House Church” versus “Three-Self”?** **Cooperation across the Christian Community** **in China**

*By Mark McLeister*

The narrative which suggests that Protestantism in contemporary China is clearly divided into the binary opposites of “house church” and “Three-Self” is so ingrained in the thinking of many scholars, observers, journalists and missionaries (among others) that it is arguably one of the dominant paradigms shaping perceptions of the church in China today. I do not think that those new to China should just accept this paradigm as a given. It goes without saying that this paradigm is at the core of much mission strategy both at the institutional as well as the individual level. While I understand that the idea that (Protestant) Christians belong to either a “house church” or a “Three-Self Church” is still championed by some, if not many church leaders and lay believers in China itself,<sup>1</sup> I do not think it is reflective of much of the complex reality of Protestantism in China in 2013.<sup>2</sup> I hope to demonstrate here that there is a wide range of congregation types in China and that simply thinking in terms of “house church” versus “Three-Self” is a gross oversimplification of what things are like on the ground. I will also highlight some specific examples from my own research in China of how different congregations work together.



[ChinaHopeLive.net](http://ChinaHopeLive.net)

Every expatriate who engages with Christianity in China needs to consider the wealth of different types of congregations and the range of different characteristics which help define them. Some congregations are registered with the state and are affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). These congregations may have close ties with the TSPM or may be affiliated in name only, and they may be categorized by the state as either a “meeting point” or a “church.” It should also be noted that some of these congregations meet all of the state-defined criteria for registration while others meet none of these criteria at all. An increasing number of registered congregations are also setting up their own small groups which meet in homes, factories or other businesses. These groups of believers are not large enough to register as meeting points. Some congregations are registered with the state independently of the TSPM; these tend to be distinct denominations such as the True Jesus Church. Other congregations may at one time have been registered but for any number of reasons no longer are; yet they have maintained ties with the state and operate quite openly.

There are also a huge number of congregations across China which are not registered. There are many reasons why congregations do not register or cannot register, and it would be an over-simplification to say that the main reason is theological. Some congregations are not registered but have informal ties with the TSPM while some function freely without being officially registered because they have close ties to key officials. There are congregations that are not registered with the state nor do they have ties with local officials; however, some of these operate openly while others are much more secretive. Some of these congregations are sizable while others are made up of a handful of people.

While the registration status of a particular congregation is not always entirely clear, there are many other characteristics which help define congregations. Some are rural, some urban and others are located in the rapidly-changing suburbs. Some congregations are exclusively ethnic Han Chinese, while others are made up of a range of ethnic groups. Still others are exclusively so-called “minority” churches, for example: Chinese Korean or Miao. There are congregations that are almost exclusively composed of migrants (either all from one specific part of China or from different locations). Congregations may be mono-lingual (Korean, English) or bi- or multi-lingual. Some congregations are predominantly or exclusively so-called “overseas Chinese.” There are those that are made up exclusively of non-Chinese nationals such as international fellowships or South Korean congregations; others are a mixture of both Chinese and non-Chinese nationals. Some congregations are marked by their distinct, traditional denominational label (Little Flock or Seventh Day Adventist) while others are newer denominations (for example, Wenzhou). Congregations may be extremely conservative or clearly Pentecostal to the extreme.

There are congregations that are part of a vast and highly-organized network while others operate entirely (and sometimes defiantly!) alone. Some are made up exclusively of elderly people while others are exclusively young people. There are those that are solely for students, young professionals or intellectuals. Congregations may be made up entirely of employees from a single company or enterprise while others are made up of people from a particular trade (such as sea fishing or business). There are congregations made up predominantly of people with a hearing impairment. Some congregations are active in spreading their message while others focus on their own holiness to the extent that they do not let “outsiders” in—let alone attempt to take their message into the community. I even know of a congregation developing within a group of young people who all have an interest in online gaming!

These are just a few of the characteristics by which congregations can be defined or by which congregations define themselves, but these alone should suggest that viewing the Chinese church as being divided into “house churches” and “Three-Self” churches is highly inaccurate. While it is fairly obvious that some congregations may be a combination of multiple categories, it is also important to bear in mind that the defining characteristics of congregations change over time; this will affect approaches and opportunities for partnering.

I would suggest that there are three significant ongoing processes in many parts of China which help to blur the boundaries between congregations. First, many Chinese Christians attend or belong to more than one congregation at any one time. I have met many “lay” believers and leaders who are involved in more than one congregation on a regular basis. In reality, this means that the boundaries of any given congregation can be very porous. This is extremely important to bear in mind for those new to working in or with the Protestant community in China.

In addition, networking is apparently becoming increasingly important for congregations of all types and is facilitated by the relaxing of regulations on residence, private transport and new Internet-based technology. Some networking is done in formal and concrete ways but most is done in very informal ways. This is significant because it allows for the flow of ideas between congregations and also reminds them that they are part of a wider Christian community, both nationally and globally.

A third major factor which results in the breaking down of distinct boundaries between congregations is resource sharing. In one city in which I conducted extensive fieldwork, the sharing of resources was conducted between congregations locally as well as interregionally and internationally.<sup>3</sup>

Local resource sharing includes such things as joint training programs where personnel and/or materials are shared between congregations as well as regular preaching/teaching. There can be a range of training programs going on at any one time involving different types of congregations. The most common programs I came across were leadership training and training for children's workers. Several congregations worked together to organize and run a short summer program for high-school aged young people, focusing on Bible teaching and evangelism. Part of this involved taking the young people into a downtown area to put into practice what they had been learning in their classes. The classes themselves took place in a church registered with the state and affiliated with the TSPM. Church leaders regularly preached or taught in congregations beyond the firm boundaries suggested by the traditional "house church—Three-Self" paradigm. Many of the so-called Three-Self churches had leaders who had not received their training in Three-Self seminaries. Some of them were even part of the preaching teams in the churches.

There were also several notable examples of interregional resource sharing. One senior leader of a particular network of congregations was invited to work long-term with a newly-planted Three-Self church.<sup>4</sup> He was involved with Bible teaching for the church leaders and regularly preached in the youth meeting. Besides this work, the same man also organized short-term Bible school programs in another part of China. The same congregation also employed a "preacher" to run the children's work. She had been trained in an "underground seminary" (her words) and had extensive experience in working with children. She also ran parenting classes for single mothers from the local community.

One congregation which engaged in extensive international resource-sharing was made up almost entirely of those with hearing impairments. They met in the basement of a Three-Self church and some of the leaders had completed seminary training sponsored by South Korean churches. Several additional young, hearing-impaired Christians were undertaking Bible study correspondence courses with a view to becoming full-time evangelists to those with hearing impairments. A Three-Self congregation in the city also partnered with South Korean missionaries who helped with training in discipleship and music.

These are just some brief examples of the many ways in which different congregations share resources in one small city in China. People who work long-term with the church in China will be aware of many more ways in which congregations network and share resources. The expatriate needs to bear in mind that a great deal of the networking and resource-sharing is done quietly or in the background and is not immediately obvious to newcomers. I would suggest that those new to engaging with the Protestant community in China be wary of jumping to conclusions about particular congregations or dividing churches into one of two camps. There is a multiplicity of congregation types in China which do not fit neatly into the traditional "house church—Three-Self" paradigm, and this should be reflected in mission approaches. There will usually be much going on behind the scenes which expatriates may not find out about for some time since many leaders tend to "play down" their contacts and the activities in which they or their congregations are involved.

While I think more needs to be done to develop a useful typology of congregations which would be in line with the reality of the contemporary Chinese church, I wonder if it may be more useful to consider specific congregations in terms of whether or not they are missional<sup>5</sup> since the categories Three-Self and house church are becoming increasingly outdated. Expatriates need to be sensitive and careful as to how they judge people and congregations.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I think it is worth mentioning here that this distinction is also emphasized by the Chinese state for a range of reasons which we cannot go into here.

<sup>2</sup> Without wanting to make overgeneralizations, it would seem to me that this distinction is less important for many young believers.

<sup>3</sup> I have also noted similar processes in other cities in different parts of China.

<sup>4</sup> The congregation began with seven people but grew to about three hundred in just two years.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of "missional" will need to be appropriate to the localized context.

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## China—Here We Are!

By Andrea Klopfer

Any journey begins long before you arrive at your destination. Inevitably, there is preparation with most attention given to the practicalities of travel arrangements, paperwork, packing and farewells. Some things are “packed” without a thought—and these can often lead to the biggest problems.

### Explore Expectations

We all have them—expectations of ourselves and others. Often we are unaware of them as they are buried in our subconscious. Consider what expectations you have in your baggage: what living conditions may be like, how long it will take to get set up, how you will make friends, what you will do for leisure, how you will learn the language and what that will demand of you, as well as what you will do and how quickly.

We easily become victims of our own expectations. For example, on first moving to North China after almost five years in Taiwan where I had studied Mandarin, I expected to be able to complete numerous tasks in any one day (even with small children). What an optimist! I was soon getting frustrated at how little I achieved and was beginning to feel twinges of negativity. Everything just took longer: queues were somewhat token, systems were different, paying utility bills was a run around, the children drew comments resulting in conversations that took time, office lunch hours were long.... Then, I made a simple readjustment of my expectations and decided I would feel good if I managed to get one thing done properly per day out of my list of several tasks. It helped to celebrate fewer successes rather than bemoan a failure to achieve as much as I had expected!

I also soon realized I had less energy and/or became tired more quickly. Having been forewarned that this was a natural part of culture stress when coping with so much that was new, unfamiliar, different and incomprehensible, I was able to accept it more easily. Expect to get tired and make sure you take times of rest—daily, weekly (the Sabbath principle) and annually.

### Evaluate Earnestly



Another way to prepare for going abroad is to deal *beforehand* with any major personal or relational issues of which you are aware. Do not pack them in with your other baggage or expect they will remain behind. Living in another culture tends to bring things to the surface making life harder both for yourself and any team of which you are a part. So, for example, if anger management is a challenge for you in your current location, try to address this and get the help you may need while it is more readily available rather than having a major blow up on the other side of the world where the fallout may be more disastrous.

### Ensure Your Identity

It is also immensely helpful, after taking a long hard look at yourself, to be honest about what gives you your identity. Is it your role? Your skills? Your qualifications? Your job? Your nationality? What makes you who you are? When moving to another country and culture, much of what we may have built our identity upon is removed. You may be taking up a new job or not have any clear job at all if you are becoming a student again. You may have been looked up to for your ability with words and intellectual skills, but now you are like a toddler hardly able to string a sentence together, let alone be erudite. A useful item to have in your “identikit” is the attitude of being a learner. This will help you face a new culture with a degree of enthusiasm and humility. Furthermore, it is valuable to be able to recognize how much of your culture is imprinted on you and may cause a “rub” with the new culture/s. You may be as unaware of various cultural elements of your make-up, worldview and behavior as of your expectations (which are probably in part culturally conditioned!). Noticing what you think and do, and then considering why, may help to defuse potentially flammable situations or evaluate what are referred to as “critical incidents.” These are encounters with people of a different culture that go wrong, with negative judgments made that can greatly damage a foreigner’s effectiveness. Sometimes our identity as “foreigners” can work to our advantage as more grace is extended to us. When first learning Mandarin, as students we would go around greeting people practicing certain new phrases; no Chinese would do this but with the “crazy foreigners” it was acceptable. Doing something like this may be easier for us to do in a foreign context than back in our home countries.

Over time, I have found that I have grown into a new identity which is linked to my Chinese name. Choosing a name in Chinese culture is a significant and carefully considered exercise. Its meaning expresses much. Do give it due consideration and see it as opening a new dimension to who you are, but at the same time, hold onto the identity you have in Christ.

### Engage with Others and the World around You

It may be tempting to respond to a new culture with fright, fight and flight reflexes. In the first instance, everything becomes overwhelming and very threatening. You may feel horrified, afraid you will never manage and become somewhat paralyzed. This will pass. In the second case, you will often express your feelings in anger, consider the way things are done as “stupid,” “inefficient,” “crazy” and even “downright wrong.” This can make you unpleasant to be around. In the third instance, one wants to retreat, whether by getting on the next flight home or by withdrawing into the local expatriate “ghetto” where things feel familiar, comprehensible and safe. While these may be natural responses, one should not get stuck in them or allow them to set the tone for living in a new place as they will, in the long-term, alienate the very people with whom you have come to make friends.



[xiaming](http://xiaming.com)

Investing in developing relationships with local people is a good way to ensure a healthy adjustment. These friends will provide invaluable help in understanding the culture better and giving an insider's view to life. They are also more likely to be around long after many of one's expatriate friends have moved on. If you intend to stay in one place for some time, the constant cycle of "hellos" and "goodbyes" with expatriates can be draining. Sign up for activities that will enlarge your circle of acquaintances—join the dancing in the park on summer nights, try out calligraphy in the community center, find out where the nearest badminton court is. If you are more of an introvert, team up with an extrovert. I have made some of my best Chinese friends thanks to my husband chatting to all sorts of people and then introducing them to me.

Guard against spending too much time on the computer to stay connected with friends on the other side of the world through e-mails, Skype and Facebook. Technology is a blessing for keeping in touch, but it can seriously erode time that would be better used in building up friendships where you are. Similarly, despite the increasingly widespread use of cars, going via public transportation or bicycle are good ways of being less isolated and provide opportunities to talk to people.

## Enquire

A good way to start building relationships is through asking questions. This keeps one from coming across as expert in any way and shows that one is keen to learn and interested in the other person. People love talking about themselves, their families, country and culture. One may meet especially knowledgeable people who will patiently explain aspects of the new culture within the confines of one's language ability. Such cultural interpreters are a blessing. See the adjacent box for some suggested starter questions to help "break the ice." A questionnaire depersonalizes the questions somewhat which can help put the other person at ease. Hopefully it can also facilitate a two-way discussion where you are able to share from your life and culture as well.



In today's increasingly globalized world, and with China's expanding relations with so many countries, it is important to remember that culture is in flux. Asking how things today are different from several years ago, how this generation differs from that of the previous one, how experiences in the city and countryside, or north and south, east or west of the country differ, will be revealing. It will also perhaps provide a corrective to any sweeping generalizations.

Often a prelude to asking questions is observation. Spend time looking at what is going on around you, noting similarities and differences, seeing how people act in various situations and what they say. In addition, it is good to ask

for help and advice. This puts one in the often uncomfortable position of acknowledging one's helplessness. Self-sufficiency (real or projected) can create a distance whereas being on the receiving end of someone else's assistance can be a good way of making contact and building bridges. This is true for relating to both expatriates and local people who will tend to leave you alone if they sense you are able to manage without them.

## Equip Yourself

Although asking questions is a way to acquire a greater understanding, this can be difficult with limited language ability. I recommend that you make an effort to learn to speak some Mandarin and at least recognize some key Chinese characters. This not only enables communication but also earns one a certain degree of respect (and I am not talking about the praise given at how well you speak on your merely uttering *nǐ hǎo* in greeting). When Chinese people hear you making an effort, they feel that you value them and their culture; you communicate that you care enough to try. It is certainly not easy for Westerners to tackle such a different language with its tones and written characters, but persistence and an ongoing learning attitude with humility is of great value. It makes engaging at a heart level more natural, and Christian faith takes on a Chinese hue.

Sometimes, the best way to become equipped is by being stretched—by saying "Yes" to things beyond one's felt level of competence. Early on, I agreed to tell a Bible story to the youngest Sunday school class in Taiwan. I spent time preparing with my language teacher, ensuring I knew all the names and key terms. Using a flannel board helped, and I felt the level, although demanding, was linguistically age appropriate for me! Similarly, after two years and with a bit more language but still feeling inadequate, I accepted a friend's invitation to do some Bible studies in the book of Luke. It certainly pushed me but provided an invaluable basis on which I could build. A certain amount of daring is needed.

Another form of equipping is through reading. There are so many excellent books available on different aspects of life in China—histories, novels, travel, culture and business. A beginner's booklist is included in this issue to whet your appetite. (See the bibliography.) It is worthwhile to subscribe to a journal such as *TIME*, *The Economist* or a reputable on-line newspaper which may contain insightful information or comment on current events in China. These can provide another angle to English media in

### Starter Questions to Develop Cultural Understanding and Build Relationships

- ◆ Within the household, what are the responsibilities of family and extended family members?
- ◆ When is it appropriate for people to get married? How does an individual find a partner?
- ◆ How does the person perceive his or her own social standing or status? (*Be careful how you ask this!*)
- ◆ What are considered to be status symbols?
- ◆ What are the main religious practices/routines?
- ◆ Who are the significant spiritual leaders?
- ◆ Are there any superstitions in the culture?
- ◆ What is the attitude towards suffering?
- ◆ Are there any special practices associated with death and grieving?
- ◆ What is considered bad behavior in the household?
- ◆ What are the main forms of discipline?
- ◆ What seems to make the people happy? Angry? Sad?
- ◆ How are emotions expressed?
- ◆ What are appropriate relationships with people of the opposite sex?
- ◆ What is the attitude towards children? The elderly?
- ◆ How do people relax or pass time?
- ◆ How is time viewed? What about privacy?

## Foreigners and Chinese Working Together: A Local Perspective

By Jenny

Now you really are on the way to serve overseas! You have probably had a lot of training and study, and you have read a lot of books about China. Most likely, you feel you are ready. You have a passion to serve, you have a warm heart and you cannot wait to come to China to do God's work. Everything looks right, but...

As a Chinese citizen, I have been working with a Christian service organization in China for over ten years, serving as an assistant, a project manager, a regional director and assistant to the China Director. I have worked with many great foreign sisters and brothers; I have been managed by them and later, as a leader, worked alongside them. It has been such a blessing that God has sent so many great servants to work with us!

However, even with such amazing people, there were still hard situations and misunderstandings. I hope that by learning more from us, the locals, expatriates will be able to cooperate better with local brothers and sisters. In this article, I would like to use some stories to share some basic principles. These observations are the result of my own experiences, not the conclusions of a survey. I hope they will serve as an encouragement or a reminder to you before you really work with Chinese coworkers. Let's start.

Working in China, you really cannot separate work, ministry and personal life. This is a lesson from some long-term, foreign members of my organization. Originally from the United States, before they came to China they felt that they had several different lives. They had work life, family life, ministry life, personal life and so on. In each life, they had different friends; this was quite common in their country. When they moved to a small city in China, there were a lot of changes. Their work colleagues were also their sisters and brothers in the church and their friends. In China, especially in such a small city, their family issues were practically wide-open to the local people.

At first these foreign coworkers did not feel comfortable; they thought that this was a matter of cultural conflict. However, as God taught them, they began to realize that there should be only one life as Christians. In all places, at all times, we should all live as Christians—and our entire families should join us in living as members of God's kingdom.

This realization dramatically changed the view about life and belief for these foreign coworkers. Later, when they had their home assignment back in the U.S., they found this way of living useful there, too. Now there is only one life—their Christian life. We are called to live out Jesus' life, and this life will then influence other lives. Personally, my life was changed as well, not only from studying and being mentored, but most importantly from being influenced by their new way of living! In China, it is hard to separate work, ministry, family and personal life, especially if you want to live a holistic, transformational life.

We need to work hard. Sometimes, some foreign colleagues' lives are too relaxed. First, I want to say that this is not common among foreign members, but I remember one couple who came to China to serve. From my point of view, their life was too relaxed. They took long personal vacations, and they did not work at all on the weekends. They rested on both Chinese and Western holidays, and during the work day, they only worked part time. Maybe they worked very hard at home. Perhaps that is the right work rhythm for foreigners. However, the typical Chinese worker has to work so hard—six to seven days a week and ten hours a day—just to make a living. I agree there are also many Chinese workers who are very relaxed, especially those who work for the government, but as workers for the Lord, we should be putting more into our work than those who work for the world. Working hard does not mean not relying on God; rather, it shows our attitude—that we value God's work.

Please listen to our advice! One day, one of our local contacts called to invite us to attend their unit's annual party. This contact had helped us find several work partners. She said some leaders that we wanted to get to know might be at the party as well. I sensed that this was an opportunity to meet these leaders that we had been struggling to get in touch with. In addition, this contact was still important to us, and so I felt that we should go. However, the contact only told us about the party the night before it was scheduled, and the party itself was of no interest or value to us. I talked to my leader, and I persuaded him to go to it even though I could tell he really did not want to. First, it was not on the schedule—and who knew if he would meet that certain leader or not? Then too, if we did go, we could easily end up wasting a whole day's time. Finally, though my leader was not willing, and though our van suddenly would not start, we headed off to the party. At the event, we did manage to meet the leader we were trying to get to know, and because we "gave face" to our contact by showing up at this party, she helped us later on with a different matter. On the way back home, my leader shared that I had been right, and he confessed that sometimes, as a foreigner, he had difficulty reading Chinese relationship (renqing 人情) issues. I want to encourage you to please listen more to your Chinese colleagues, especially when dealing with issues related to Chinese culture, personal relationships, hospitality and so on. Even though at times we might not be able to explain why we make certain suggestions, we still know what should be done. We are locals, and we just naturally, instinctively know.

We want to do ministry work, but we have to raise our families as well. I have worked for this Christian service organization for almost twelve years. Over the last three to five years, many Chinese staff have had to leave us. A lot of them are Christians, they like our organization and they truly want to serve, but they had to leave to secure a higher salaried job to enable them to raise their families. This situation is especially acute for Christian brothers because they are usually the main source of income for their families. To tell the truth, as China's economy has developed, the pressure for organizations like ours to continue to offer reasonable salaries has become greater and greater. While foreign colleagues are often receiving very low pay compared to people in their home countries, they still receive enough for a reasonable lifestyle in China—they are able to pay for children's education and other basic life expenses. However, for those of us who are typical Chinese employees, our main income is our salary, and if we cannot get a reasonable one, then even though we want to serve, we simply cannot. There are, of course, some Chinese sisters and brothers who have a better situation, and they are willing to work as volunteers or would be more likely to accept a



[Official GDC](#)

low salary. Yet, in these situations the organization has much less control over how and when these volunteers work. My point is to remind you that, for us, money is an issue.

Not having attended Bible school does not prevent us from knowing God. Once, while serving as a regional director, at one of our leaders' meetings we talked about issues related to spiritual principles. I shared my point of view, but another leader felt that since I had not gone to Bible school, I should not give advice. Although he was quite polite, I was still shocked by his comment. I did not say anything else at that meeting, but after I went home I prayed: "God, I know I did not go to Bible school, and I have less knowledge than most of our foreign sisters and brothers who have attended Bible school or have some kind of training. Nevertheless, I am eager to know you, and you have been teaching me a lot through prayer and devotional study. Does going to Bible school or not really determine whether or not I can know you and know your will?" The answer was obviously no. When we met at the next leaders' meeting, I talked to the foreign brother. I cried as I said that although I did not have the opportunity to go to Bible school, it would not prevent me from knowing God's truth. Then this brother nodded, and together we all sang "Sisters and Brothers Love Each Other." After this I felt that before God, we are all the same.

Sisters and brothers, I agree that most of you who have come to my country have a passion to serve and have a rich spiritual life. That is why you have come! However, for many of us Chinese coworkers, we start by looking at our ministry as a job. We are grateful that you are willing to use all sorts of different ways to pass on your vision for service to us, like mentoring, disciplining, training and coaching. As time passes, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will grow in spiritual maturity.

Dear sisters and brothers, after I have shared these thoughts with you, you may think that our differences are too great. Nevertheless, we all know that it is God's will for each of us to develop our own gifts to serve in God's kingdom. My conclusion is Galatians 4:26-28: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Please pray with me for wisdom and patience for all, and may we all glorify God together as one body.

*Jenny has been serving alongside her Chinese and expatriate colleagues in China ministry for nearly twelve years.*

## Resource Corner

### ZG Briefs

*Scanning the internet for China news so you don't have to*  
edited by Joann Pittman, published by ChinaSource

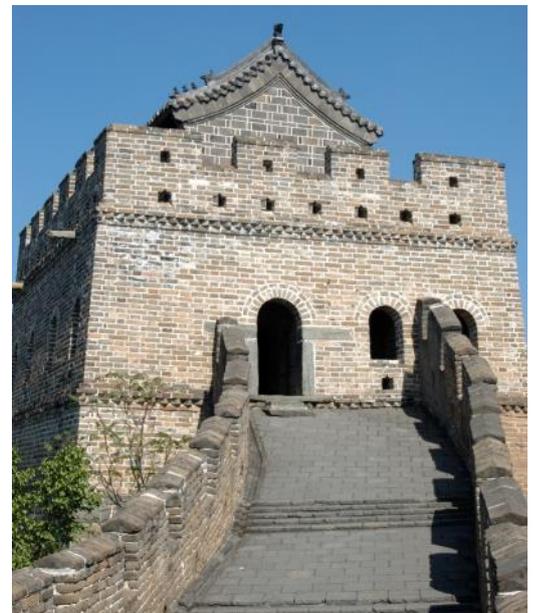
Started in 2001, ZG Briefs is a weekly compilation of the news in China, condensed from published sources and emailed to readers in China and abroad.

In addition to the important news stories of the week, ZGBriefs also provides links to blogs, commentaries, articles, and resources to increase understanding of what is happening in China today. Coverage includes domestic and international politics, economics, culture, and social trends, among other areas. Seeking to explore all facets of life in China, ZGBriefs also includes coverage of spiritual movements and the role of religious believers and faith-based groups in China.

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## Book Review: Preparing for Chinese Culture

by Linell Davis

Reviewed by MDB

Davis, Linell. *Doing Culture: Cross-Cultural Communication in Action*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1999. Vii + 345 pages. ISBN-13: 9787560017679; ISBN-10: 7560017673.

Linell Davis's *Doing Culture* has been an indispensable resource as our family plans on moving to China next summer. Having already spent a year teaching in China, reading *Doing Culture* was full of "Aha!" moments in which Davis describes cultural dynamics I had experienced but not understood.

Davis' insights come from both two decades of teaching in China and her professional training in sociology and cultural anthropology. Perhaps the most unique characteristic of *Doing Culture* is that the book is written for Western and Chinese audiences. Davis seeks to offer insights on how Americans and Chinese think, act, talk and relate—an approach that enables the Western reader to be more others- and self-conscious.

*Doing Culture* covers four areas: (1) fundamental ways we can think about culture, (2) first encounters between Americans and Chinese, (3) non-verbal communication and (4) communication in the workplace. The rest of this review will highlight insights from *Doing Culture* that we have found most helpful as we prepare to move.

Davis opens her book comparing one's culture to the "operating system" that runs on a computer. People, like computers, are fundamentally the same (i.e., the hardware). However, operating systems cause computers to function very differently! Americans and Chinese often interface like PCs and Macs—sometimes they are compatible and other times not. Being aware of differences can make all the difference.

Davis describes four stages of awareness through which we all progress in our understanding of these cultural differences. At first, cultural differences seem exotic. When I began preparing to teach in China, I remember imagining a school up in the mountains surrounded by clouds and having colleagues who taught wearing traditional Chinese dress! China and all its differences were thoroughly exotic to me.

In the next stage of cultural awareness, differences move from being exotic to frustrating. In my first month of life in China, Chinese attitudes toward schedules and planning were challenging to understand. Teaching schedules could be changed at (literally) a moment's notice. I found myself continually thinking: "This would be unacceptable in the States!" However, in China, it was 没问题—or "No problem!" In this stage, my awareness of differences was truly frustrating.

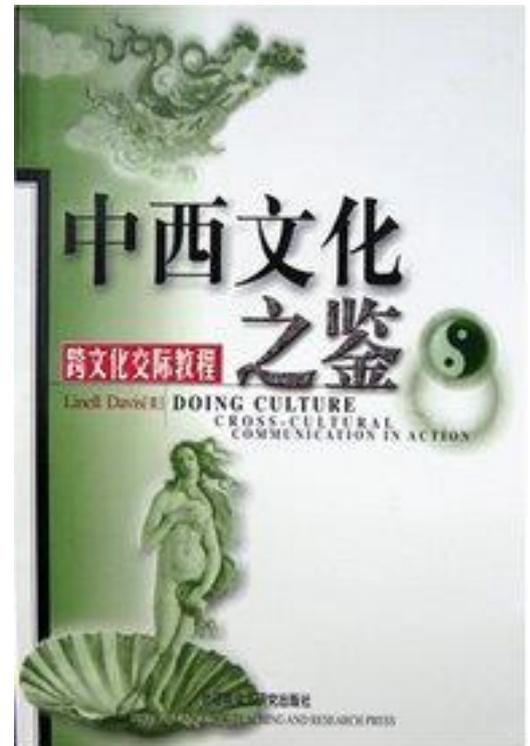
The third and fourth stages of cultural awareness take place at the *thinking* and *feeling* levels. Early on in China, a friend and I got chewed-out on a crowded bus for laughing very loudly throughout our private conversation. After the initial shock of the encounter, I began to understand how boisterous our behavior must have seemed to a crowd full of quiet Chinese. Then I began to empathize with the man's anger and felt embarrassed at the way we had acted. As Davis explains, understanding the above stages of cultural awareness can limit the distance between us and Chinese culture as we pursue understanding and empathy.

Davis' description of "first encounters" between Americans and Chinese peels back the layers of interpersonal communication to show the reader communication actually works. She talks about cultural "codes" we all use to designate the ways we use language that may not be immediately intelligible for those outside of our culture. For example, American businessmen use sports metaphors as codes: "Keep your eye on the ball"; "He dropped the ball"; "She's on the ball"; "They threw me a curve ball" and "Playing hard ball." Davis also discusses "behavioral codes" like gestures and different facial expressions (53–54).

Most often, cultural *contexts* determine the codes we use to communicate. Some cultures are "low context" (like American culture) and other cultures are "high context" (like Chinese culture). With low context communication, most of the meaning is embedded in the actual message spoken. Someone can listen to the sports metaphors above, and if the listener knows the sporting reference, they can understand the code. In high context communication, however, the meaning relies more heavily on the setting, background, or circumstance surrounding the communication (much more difficult to figure out!). Davis repeatedly refers to Chinese politicians who give speeches that sound similar to the Western listener. However, in China's "high context" communication, the *context* determines the meaning of the speech, not simply the message of the speech itself.

I heard a story recently about a Western couple in China who was speaking quite openly about some topics that are sensitive in China. Not too long afterward, local officials came to their apartment for a "routine" check of their passports, visas, etc. The officials were kind and departed without any specific words or rebuke. The couple concluded that nothing was wrong and their careless communication was not linked to the visit. The Chinese officials no doubt concluded that the couple "got the message" and would be more careful in further communications. For the Chinese in this situation, the context contained the message, not the communication itself.

Davis' section on non-verbal communication picks up on the high/low theme when it describes low *contact* and high *contact* cultures. She says, "In high contact cultures, what people sense when they are close to a person or object is most important" (119). By contrast, low contact cultures maintain distance in interpersonal communication because their *visual* perception of the other person is most important. American culture is low contact—people maintain their distance when talking, great value is given to personal space, there is relatively low tolerance for smells, people say "excuse me" when someone bumps another in a public setting and so on. China is a high contact culture in which visual contact is only one of the ways people per-



ceive others. A lack of personal space, unfamiliar smells, inadvertent touching in crowded areas and so on are all in the realm of what is familiar for a Chinese person.

One of my dearest Chinese friends was what I called a “close talker.” When we spoke to each other, his face would get uncomfortably close to mine. I had the hardest time trying to figure out how best to maintain a comfortable distance when conversing with him. I decided that having conversations while walking was the most comfortable for me until he grabbed my hand, and we walked holding hands. Davis’ description of high/low contact cultures puts words to some of these most awkward cultural differences.

*Doing Culture* could be improved in several areas. As Davis admits in the Introduction, the book is written for the classroom and therefore feels more like a textbook with its shorter sections, case studies, exercises and chapter-ending discussion questions. It is also due for an updated edition (published in 1999, reprinted 2007), not on trade paper and copublished in the West for a wider distribution.

It should be noted that Davis does not write from a Christian perspective, and as an anthropologist her discussion of morality and God is relativistic. Nevertheless, her exposition of culture is extremely valuable and will be a reference of mine for years to come.

*Mark D Batluck, PhD, will move to China with his family in September to study. He has been working in education in Scotland since 2008.*

#### **Change, Stasis and Opportunity: Exploring China’s Developmental Trajectory** [Continued from page 4](#)

ship and sound theological training for Chinese Christians. Expatriate Christian workers should also serve church leaders to the end of increasing their capacity and depth of service.

Finally, the church is socially vulnerable. The wider society around them is saturated with materialism, intense secularism, relativistic philosophy and indifference to convictions. These factors are creating a spiritually dull populace who will have decreasing interest in the proclaimed gospel. The church is now numerically large (5-10% in most areas) and well resourced. This is the time to proclaim the gospel in word and deed with integrity and boldness. It is also time to serve society so that the gospel continues to come with breadth and power in unexpected ways.

Over the years, thousands of Christians from around the world have entered China short- or long-term for the purpose of ministering the gospel to its people. God has used this movement to bless both the Chinese church and those who have had the privilege of serving there. It is hoped that this essay will encourage people newer to the China scene to take time to learn the Chinese language and culture, to be steady in the face of constant flux, to remain focused when real change seems slow to come and to grasp firmly the opportunity of serving the Chinese church today.

I just finished reading the book *Factory Girls* which describes life for rural women in China who have migrated to southern cities to work in factories. What struck me most was the pace of change in these girls’ lives. For example, one young girl was able to finagle a job as a Human Resources person in one of the factories. She did it for a mere 24 days, but that was enough for her to move to another factory as a self-proclaimed “HR Expert” getting better pay and a better working environment. Twenty-four days!

We in China feel this pace of life and occasionally find it vertiginous. Nevertheless, God is our strength. He will give us wisdom to understand the times and to be wise so as to take full advantage of every opportunity. Each one has a talent and a calling, and it should be utilized to the fullest (Romans 12:3-8). The jocular Yogi Berra once said, “If you come to a fork in the road, take it.” There are many opportunities in China today, as many as the gifts and callings of people choosing to seize them.

<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Strand, editor. *Dual Impact*, Shanxi Evergreen Services, 2012, p. 163. This book is available by contacting Denise Haeffner at Evergreen at [na.office@evergreenchina.net](mailto:na.office@evergreenchina.net)

*Mark A. Strand, PhD, has worked in China for twenty years utilizing his training in public health and leadership development.*

## China—Here We Are [Continued from page 8](#)

China such as *The China Daily*. There are also bite-size offerings such as *ChinaSource* and *ZG Briefs*. You may also want to pack some of your favorite Christian books that will provide nourishment for your soul and perhaps ask some friends to keep you supplied with new books that will build up and encourage you in your faith. This is a valuable part of our ongoing equipping to serve.

### Exercise Acceptance

There is the old adage in cross-cultural circles that “It’s not right or wrong—it’s just different.” For the most part, this is true and a good starting point. If one begins with a superior attitude, little will be gained. It is always a good idea to start by observing, withholding judgment and noting what is going on. Then, one can ask a few leading questions to start unpacking the situation. This way one begins to see not only what is different but why, as well as observing one’s own reaction and considering why it is so. Explanations that emerge may lead to greater tolerance and understanding of where the other person is coming from. Respecting differences creates a platform for building relationships.

### Extend Grace

There is a huge need to extend grace—both to oneself and to others. One will make mistakes—repeatedly. Some may be relatively minor while others may be much bigger. Laughing at oneself helps, even if sometimes you feel more like crying! I made the mistake of writing my Chinese name in the relevant space in my residence book (no longer needed for foreigners). Then, when I went to have it renewed, I was told I had defaced Chinese government property and needed to write a letter of confession. I swallowed my indignation and obliged. Grace allows for honesty and openness, humility and flexibility. These are vital as one adjusts to a new culture. Sharing one’s struggles is far better than pretending one has it all figured out. You will, with persistence and work, grow in your understanding—and then you will have to show grace to the newly arrived.

### Embrace the Challenge

There are no quick and easy shortcuts. For those who are hoping to be involved in China long-term, the effort is definitely worthwhile. The more one adapts, the more one appreciates being privileged to live in such a dynamic, culturally deep country—and it does get easier.

## A Beginner’s Bibliography

While there are many excellent resources on China and cross-cultural mission, the following list of titles was selected from the recommendations of the contributors to this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* with the expectation that they will be of great benefit to new expatriate Christian workers in China.

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### Films\*:

- Huozhe [To Live]* directed by Zhang Yimou (1994)
- Qiu Jiu Da Guansi [The Story of Qiu Jiu]* directed by Zhang Yimou (1992)
- The Joy Luck Club* directed by Wayne Wang (1993)
- The Last Emperor* directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (1987)
- Wo de Fuqin Muqin [The Road Home]* directed by Zhang Yimou (1999)

\* Special thanks to Andrea Klopper for her film recommendations.

*Andrea Klopper has taught in South Africa, the United Kingdom and China; she has mentored Mandarin language students and developed a cultural orientation and acquisition program which she used in two organizations. She enjoys reading, cycling in her city as well as making local friends.*