

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 14

---

Volume 14 • Number 2 • April 1990

---

## Evangelical Review of Theology



WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP  
Theological Commission [p. 99](#)

extensive use of English as the medium of instruction. This schooling p. 167 was intended to be of a quality equal to the best available in the West and consistent with the moral precepts of Christianity. In the twentieth century these schools would provide models for new Chinese policies in education. One illustration of this approach contained the analogy of grafting elements of the Western system onto the ancient trunk of Chinese culture, not with the purpose to

denationalize the Chinese. In giving them a better civilization we would not do so by sapping the foundations of institutions which have long been revered for their local and national associations, and which, without material change, may be made the best elements of the new system.<sup>60</sup>

This was a more conscious effort to reform Chinese society, while at the same time protecting the integrity of Chinese culture in an era of change and modernization.

The next decades would bring new pressures and influences on mission education and modifications would need to be made. But they were made on the basis of the divergent mission educational philosophies that had emerged and been formulated in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

---

**Dr. Charles W. Weber is Professor of History at Wheaton College, Illinois. This paper was presented at the International Symposium on the Indigenization of Christianity in China, in December 1988 in Taipei. p. 168**

# Training Missionaries in Asia

Titus Loong

*Printed with permission*

Here in Asia, for the last twenty years, churches have started to see their part in preaching the gospel to all nations by crossing cultural and linguistic barriers. Mission-minded Christians realize the value of learning new languages and the significance of planting churches cross-culturally. They also recognize how Christian professionals can become strategic tentmakers in some countries.

Asian mission is new. Churches and sending agencies are still working hard to improve areas such as orientation and training, children's education and care for missionaries' parents. Many Asians start their missionary services hardly prepared to face the conditions. Asian missionaries are in some aspects quite different from Western missionaries. Though some Asians may be well supported financially and prayerfully, they often lack adequate pastoral care from their churches. Unlike their Western co-workers, Asian missionaries are often 'first generation' Christians. Their missions awareness comes from hearing talks and reading books about current world mission

---

<sup>60</sup> McCoy, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

issues, rather than from parents and Sunday schools. Asian missionaries might also have to overcome additional cultural barriers if they send their children to boarding schools.

In order to serve the Lord in cross-cultural settings, one must be spiritually mature and knowledgeable about missions. It is important to learn church planting and other cross-cultural skills. As a matter of fact, one needs to learn to live cross-culturally.

## **OBJECTIVES OF ACTI TRAINING**

The ethos of my own institute, the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute, is practical missionary training in a cross-cultural community, with a strong emphasis on missiology. We aim to avoid any dichotomy between practical and academic training.

The training objective at the ACTI is fourfold: to experience cross-cultural community life, to learn cross-cultural evangelism and church planting, to find self-identity (as families or individuals) in a cross-cultural context, and to develop creative Asian perspectives on missions. This objective is achieved through learning and living in the ACTI community. [p. 169](#)

### **Intensive English Speaking Environment**

Asian missionaries today face a unique difficulty. We have to adjust to two new languages and two new cultures. We must study the target language as well as English, and learn to adjust to the local culture as well as the 'missionary culture' which is still largely Western. English and Western ways usually predominate in missionary gatherings. Asian fellow missionaries will have to find their own way to fit themselves in. ACTI not only provides English classes for missionaries, it also uses English as the teaching and communicating medium and requires trainees to complete a research paper in English on a topic relevant to their future ministry.

### **Pitfalls of Short-Term Trips**

Some question the need for live-in cross-cultural training since there are short-term trips available to Christian workers for cultural exposure before their missionary assignment. Personally, I see limitations in these mission trips. During the trip individuals are highly motivated to identify with the local culture, because they know that within a short period of time they are returning home. The excitement they experience in a new culture is enough to carry them through. But problems such as the frustrations of language learning, loneliness, or the difficulties of educating children fail to be considered. Singles may not have thought seriously about the question of parenting children on the mission field. Or perhaps on a disastrous mission trip a candidate may see only the worst aspects, and then decides that he or she cannot be a career missionary. Here at ACTI we spend a long time living together and discussing how to equip ourselves for long term service.

### **Experience Oriented**

One alumnus later told us that the missiology studied at ACTI has proved very practical. He found his missionary identity when God spoke to him through difficulties. Had he not had chances to think through the biblical basis of missions, and what it would take to be a long term missionary, he might have found it very difficult to continue his cross cultural service. The months spent at ACTI have helped trainees gain the quality of 'stickability'. A single missionary shared that the experience of rooming with people of other cultures was not easy, but proved helpful for her life on the mission field.

At ACTI, trainees not only study the 'why' and 'who' of missions, the basic information about world evangelism, but also explore the 'how', p. 170 'what' and 'where' of missions. Trainees learn to set short and long term goals. It is a pre-field training designed for those seriously called to serve cross-culturally on a long term basis.

### **Missionary Family Life**

ACTI also provides time for couples to sort out their roles as husbands or wives and establish how to serve together effectively. Alumni couples have found that ACTI life had enriched their relationships. Families can spend time talking to missionaries. Lectures on missionary family life have helped trainees with questions of the education of their children. Some choose to send their children to boarding schools while others decide not to. During our mission study trips we have taken them to visit CheFoo School or Faith Academy.

*Preliminary orientation* Six months before candidates arrive, ACTI sends out materials for trainees to read. They are informed about Singapore culture, the church situation, and things they need to know as new guests. Suggestions are included for cross-cultural community living as singles, couples or families, as well as on how to improve one's English. Later they are encouraged to start praying for their fellow trainees in their batch.

*Orientation week* The first week is scheduled lightly so that trainees have time to adjust to time difference and climate. Families need additional time to settle down. The week is devoted to let everyone learn as much as possible about living at ACTI and in Singapore. We apply the culture bonding principle and facilitate early exposure to the new environment.

## **THE CURRICULUM AT A GLANCE**

Each year we have a ten-month training course for new missionaries. Local church involvement and mission study trips are provided for broader exposure in their cross-cultural experience.

Mornings are occupied by formal missiological classes and seminars, audio-visual presentations and discussions. We look into theological and historical perspectives of missions, cross-cultural church planting, cross-cultural communication, the study of different world religions and people groups, practical and current topics such as missions in a revolutionary age, basic health, missionary family life, education of children and handling stress. p. 171

Some very practical topics are studied; for example, Muslim women, the Charismatic movement in Asia, spiritism in the Philippines, how to cultivate understanding with one's sending churches, folk religions, cross-cultural counselling, missionary children's education and urban missions.

There is a concern that trainees might spend too much time reading books. Ideas are therefore expressed and challenged through classroom and informal discussions. Trainees also compare notes about their previous church-planting experiences.

We have six weeks of linguistics and phonetics, cross-cultural Bible study and cultural anthropology. Afternoons are left for counselling, prayer, study or rest.

During the two mission study trips, trainees learn from national church leaders and missionaries in different countries. By doing so we extend our lecture room outside Singapore.

## **THE OPERATION OF THE ACTI TRAINING PROGRAMME**

In the ACTI operation we emphasize team work between staff and trainees. On the one hand the staff provides a suitable environment for learning. On the other hand we offer trainees the privilege and responsibility of sharing in the operation. We respect their input of ideas and labour so that they will be creative counterparts while maintaining the role of learners.

### **Conducting a Learning Community**

Community living is not something new, but something that has disappeared from view. Today we have more possessions, more freedom and access to personal conveniences. All these things *separate* rather than unite us.

Training through community living corresponds to the concept of building the Body of Christ through small groups or retreats. But cross-cultural training in close proximity for ten months is more than attending retreats. It places a strain upon the participants, both trainers and trainees. But as with any skill, knowing comes from practising. The whole thrust of ACTI is to expose everyone to active interpersonal interactions in a cross-cultural Christian caring and sharing context.

### **Facilitating Cross-cultural Modes of Thinking**

One common question asked is whether a missionary from (say) Korea [p. 172](#) going to the Philippines needs to know about cultures other than the one to which he is going. The need is obvious, in view of a fast-changing and internationalized world. When someone from country A already knows to a certain extent the culture of people C, D, or E before going into country B, he has already developed some skills in cross-cultural thinking. He will observe differences and listen to others before he jumps to a quick conclusion about who is right or wrong. His experience reminds him that it could be a matter of different ways of doing the same things.

### **Providing Asian-Western Dynamics at ACTI**

Western missionaries are seen as successful if they can adjust to the culture of their host country. However, the success of Asian missionaries is partly judged by how well they can get along with the other (Western) missionaries.

One goal at ACTI is to prepare Asian candidates for the times when they will interact with fellow non-Asian missionaries. In other words, ACTI plays a significant role in the missionary training of non-Western missionary candidates in such a way that our community living also simulates the missionary compound or missionary circle culture. ACTI tries to keep the community size small, to imitate the one-to-one and small group interaction which takes place on the field.

One of the 'simulation activities' which happens at ACTI is the afternoon tea time and Friday night prayer meeting (with tea to follow). Other simulation activities include recreation, such as volleyball matches. Both ball games and tea were once considered a waste of time by some Asian trainees.

But by participating, the Asian candidates have a chance to practise and adjust their views before facing the real situation on the field. A Korean alumnus serving in Taiwan said that he is now able to appreciate, and relax in, the weekly prayer meeting with his fellow missionaries. When cake is served, he picks up a fork, and enjoys it. Seemingly harmless situations such as these can trigger many problems for Asian missionaries who are unprepared to handle them. Another Asian missionary lady felt hurt when she tried several times to say something amusing to a Western group but none laughed. Jokes are

in fact the hardest of all aspects of a culture for foreigners. This explains why the Friday night prayer meetings at ACTI have come to mean much to the trainees. We see our Western trainees as very good bridges between the West and the East. p. 173

### **Building a Cross-cultural Trust**

To build a trust in one's own cultural context is not always easy. It is even more so in a multi-cultural situation:

Trust is a necessary condition for stable cooperation and effective communication. The higher the trust the more stable the cooperation and the more effective the communication. (Johnson 1975: 388)

When the trust level is high in field ministry, missionaries will be able to express openly their feelings and thoughts and to discuss their different opinions and ideas. By contrast, it is difficult to work with someone who suspects everything seen and told. Such an attitude is very destructive to the person and to his service. At the ACTI, members of the cross-cultural community can learn how to build trust through observation, self evaluation and the weekly tutorial time with lecturers. Commitment is required.

### **Application of Group Dynamics**

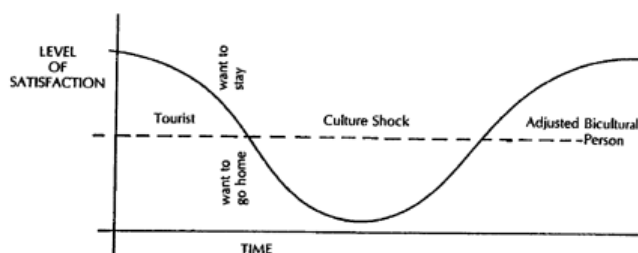
Lectures on awareness and handling of group dynamics are offered during the first term. Throughout the months that follow, staff and trainees can try out these theories and principles among ourselves by experience and observation. Trainees, and staff as well, go through what Johnson (quoting Tuckman) suggests as the 'stages of development of learning groups'.

During the forming stage, there is a period of uncertainty in which members try to determine their place in the group and the procedures and rules of the group. During the storming stage, conflicts begin to arise as members resist the influence of the group and rebel against accomplishing the task. During the norming stage, the group establishes cohesiveness and commitment.... setting norms for appropriate behaviour. Finally, during the performing stage the group develops proficiency in achieving its goals ... (Johnson 1979: 423)

Paul Hiebert (1976: 40) sees three stages in one's cross-cultural experience: 'tourist', culture shock' and 'adjusted bicultural identity'.

*Initial or forming stage:* like a tourist, full of curiosity and motivation. This is usually the first two month of ACTI experience.

*Storming stage:* the person is encountering culture shock as well as spiritual crisis or interpersonal conflicts. These happen around the third to the fifth month of the training course. Some trainees get sick, p. 174 lose weight or become quiet and passive. Others might challenge the staff or other trainees.



*The above graph describes a phenomenon which takes place during ACTI training.*

A group will go through a period of challenging the authority of the co-ordinator. It is an ordinary occurrence and should be expected.... Participation in a co-operative learning group requires students to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning of the other members of their group ... Sometimes group members will resist these responsibilities and attempt to return to the more traditional passive, self-centred, minimal-effort student role. (Johnson 1975: 425)

In the Asian context, the staff must not overlook the emotions of Asian trainees underneath their seemingly obedient or calm outlook. Sincere one-to-one sharing usually helps a great deal to turn passive members back to their active, performing roles. Asian trainees need more initiative to be supplied by staff.

*Norming stage:* the person is coming up from the pit of depression. During the fifth or sixth month trainees begin to eat and sleep better, talk more and enjoy each other's presence. They have begun befriending local Christians as well.

*Performing stage:* this describes an adjusted bicultural person. After six or seven months, our trainees have gained much understanding of the life and service of a missionary, and have learned to witness and help in a church of a different culture.

More than a personal experience, it is a group experience. Johnson (1975: 427) also included a last group stage called 'terminating'. ACTI p. 175 is a group which ends totally when trainees go on to their assigned countries to serve. They may not see each other again. Staff need to help them as much as possible to have interpersonal conflicts resolved before the group ends. The life of a missionary is always on the move, but not every missionary has learned to move on feeling guilt-free or hurt-free.

### **Mission Study Trips**

The experience of travelling together provides a preparation for the trainees' future missionary career, rather than a time to do lots of evangelism. At ACTI we require the wives and children to go along so that parents can be trained to handle travelling situations. For example, the father may have to fill out four or five forms while the mother watches over the children and their belongings. What if the entire family cannot fit into a tricycle? What about evening meetings? Will the wife stay behind alone with the children? Older Asian kids have to learn Western table manners at mission hostels, another subculture.

## **WHOLISTIC TRAINING FOR MISSIONARIES: FORMAL AND INFORMAL**

Grunlan and Mayers wrote:

In Societies where formal education is based on the teacher-pupil educational relationship, telling is the primary means of teaching ... Influence of the teacher on the student is thus only in the specific area of the course. Evaluation is thus of minimal value within the life of the student because only end results are tested and evaluated, i.e., the examination. (Grunlan and Mayers 1979: 81)

Two questions have often been raised regarding missionary training programmes:

1. Should ACTI and similar institutions aim for theological accreditation?
2. Or is ACTI a type of informal *training* (as opposed to the 'formal' degree programme offered by Western seminaries)?

I would like to pose the following points for discussion and allow the group to draw conclusions:

1. It is commonly noticed that some 'missiologists' have not been actively involved in mission work. After intensive studies they are no longer 'fit' for field assignment. Why? They could be too old and their children are schooled. Perhaps they have too much head knowledge; p. 176 therefore they are not bold enough to move on. We therefore question whether formal, academic missiological study alone in a seminary is adequate for missionary service.
2. Some Asian missionaries, after their first two terms of service, will seek academic studies. They benefit much from missiological studies and can gain much insight from their own as well as others' experience.
3. Today's technologists provide a useful model. They have their formal training (one chooses a major, evaluated through exams, which leads to a degree). Yet they are also required to take job-related training before their work. In the same way, ACTI is on-the-job training for new missionaries. That is why the Singaporean government looks at ACTI members not as students but 'trainees' and grants them work permits.

## **FEEDBACK FROM ALUMNI**

Five years ago when ACTI was taking shape, the committee was fully aware of the high drop-out rate among Asian missionaries. The main reasons are: lack of cross-cultural knowledge; lack of contact with home churches and thus lack of supportive pastoral care; and difficult interpersonal relationships with fellow missionaries. A fourth reason could be the education of children.

The usefulness of a training programme can be evaluated through observing the life and ministry of the alumni and gathering their honest feedback. Twenty-nine ACTI alumni are now serving in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Pakistan. Three caught dengue fever within their first year. Two missionary wives have experienced a miscarriage. Another two have had children born to them. One suffered months of bed-ridden severe back injury. Two families sent their young children to boarding school and can only see them twice a year. Two had to make trips home on occasion to sicknesses or death of parents. Some families experienced two or three of the above-mentioned traumas.

The first batch are already having their home-assignment (furlough). The second batch and some of the third batch have completed their language study. All are doing well in church planting or teaching. I have visited several of them and have been keeping close contact through correspondence. As far as I know all enjoy a stable single life or marriage, and are relating well to colleagues. An alumnus put it this way: 'It is not without difficulties, but we know that those are to be p. 177 expected, and that one by one the difficulties will be overcome. Some Western co-workers still "surprise" us from time to time but I can learn to accept them.'

One couple has seen their new church become independent. As a fruit of their discipling and training ministry, the two-year-old church in Taichung has a strong deacon team and is calling for its own pastor. Those couples serving in Japan have to be more patient, and expect slower growth in the numbers of believers, as this is the church situation in that country. A lady alumnus in the Philippines is helping to organize churches for converts from the slum areas.

Couples with children have commented that ACTI has helped them prepare for their children's education. In one case the mother learned to escape from being very tense (when she and her child went through culture shock) to becoming relaxed and

comfortable in their new surroundings. They have been sending their daughter to an 'MK' school for three years now; and the child can still speak her mother tongue, much to their comfort.

Another couple has made the difficult decision to send their children to boarding school. The decision came as a result of hearing other missionary parents' testimony and visiting the CheFoo school.

All the Westerners expressed how beneficial ACTI has been to them, simply because they have been accustomed to living with Asians as minorities. At times the ACTI community living was difficult to them. They discovered their pride and insecurity. Sometimes it was hard to realize that, for example, the Asian fellow trainees were financially stronger.

Singles have found it extremely lonely, even when they can mix well with other trainees. The problem of loneliness is then dealt with and prayed for. One said she was bored. Cross-cultural and isolated life-style can hit singles very hard when they have no one to turn to. Singles are able to look at these issues carefully at ACTI before they have to face the stress of language study on the field.

## LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

ACTI (or rather its predecessor AMTI) was started in 1985 by the Overseas Missionary Fellowship because churches in Asia were calling for a training programme for cross-cultural missionaries. It aimed to emphasize practical training in community, focusing on biblical and missiological insights and seeking to develop creative Asian perspectives on missions. The programme has trained 29 Asian **p. 178** and Western missionaries in the past four years. The graduates are now serving in six countries as church planters and cross-cultural professionals.

In 1988, in order to enhance inter-mission involvement in this programme, OMF invited 8 other mission agencies to join in reconstituting the Board of Directors. The coming together of nine mission agencies to form ACTI was indeed God's doing. It was an answer to the prayers of many Singaporeans who are interested in the training of cross-cultural missionaries. The various agencies had been running on their own for too long, sometimes even to the point of competing with one another, especially in the areas of finance and personnel. That is all in the past now. With co-ordinated strategies, combined income and the better use of existing personnel, the work of training should take a leap forward. The future looks bright.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Grunlan, Stephen and Mayers, Marvin. 1979. Cultural Anthropology, A Christian Perspective.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Hiebert, Paul G. 1976. *Cultural Anthropology.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.
- Johnson, David W. and Johnson, Frank P. 1975. *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

---

**Dr. Titus Loong is a Chinese missionary to Singapore and Director of the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute. He is a medical doctor and missiologist. **p. 179****