I am not an American-born Chinese (ABC), but I am a wholehearted supporter of ABC ministries. I was born in Hong Kong and came to the United States when I was fourteen years old. Maybe because my haircut was too long for many Overseas-born Chinese (OBC) church leaders (although too short for some of my ABC brothers and sisters!), many people from Taiwan and Hong Kong thought that I was an ABC. Since they heard me speak English with some measure of ease, they would often ask, “Are you an ABC?” I would reply in Chinese, “No, I am from Hong Kong.” Then to the ABCs, it was obvious to them that I am not a fellow ABC. When they see me mingle with OBCs in a mixed crowd and speak Chinese, they knew that I was from Asia.

When I was in high school and college, pastors and other well-meaning middle-aged laypeople would often refer ABC young people to me, saying “Try to help him or “She needs someone like you.” What they meant was, since they--the elder OBCs–could not handle ABC young people, I, a younger person, should be able to do it. We, the younger OBCs, should take up the huge task of evangelizing and discipling the “young people in the church!” What a challenge! “Are we adequate?” I wondered.

Then I became the youth director of a Chinese church. The young people—high school and college aged—called me “Sam,” and the mature adults called me “Mr. Ling.” The young people expected me to understand their plight—“I do not get anything out of the Chinese service!”—while the older people expected me to act on their behalf to preserve Chinese culture—“My son does not behave well; you should straighten him out.” The adults wanted the attendance at youth meetings, English worship services, and youth Sunday school classes to be maintained and increased. The young people wanted to have the freedom to explore different ways to do ministry—not to do things in the “same old boring way.”

Then I became the pastor of a bilingual and bicultural church. There were ABC leaders and there were OBC leaders. Although we were a very friendly church, there were times when a person’s feelings and thoughts were not adequately communicated to another person. After some thought, I concluded that such misunderstandings were due to (a) pride and the flesh (b) personality differences—some people were outgoing, some more quiet, (c) the interests and beliefs of different sub-groups within the church were in conflict with each other, and finally (d) the differences in culture between OBC and ABC ways of thinking. Sometimes we did not like to admit that we are products of our own culture. We would like to think that we could, by the power of the Holy Spirit, overcome any misunderstanding if we just “talk things over.” Yet when we are humble and honest enough to reflect on the matter, we would admit that we are indeed products of our own culture. We are living examples of that culture. When two cultures come together they are bound to clash. And the Chinese church as a bicultural institution is here to stay. For the next fifty years the Chinese church in North America will be bilingual and bicultural. Therefore, let the OBCs learn the ABCs’ mentality, and let the ABCs learn the OBCs’ mentality.
We are a transitional generation. We grew up under the leadership of OBC pastors and lay leaders. Whether we are OBC or ABC, we have felt the tension of the two generations and the two cultures. And sometimes, because inter-generational differences are not recognized, young people become frustrated--no, they end up in despair. They feel betrayed by the church. Many times I weep with young adults who felt "burned by the Chinese church." They tell me they just cannot find feeding in the Chinese church. And they cannot wait forever until the Chinese church calls an ABC pastor. I try to understand and I try to weep with them... but what is the solution? Yes, many Chinese churches ought to call ABC pastors but until they do how do we minister to these burned-out wounded souls? These fallen soldiers need to "lick their wounds," experience healing and move on to productive ministry for the Kingdom of God. These "burned out" brothers and sisters need comfort, encouragement, and affection demonstrated to them so that they can love and give again. These "warriors for the truth" need to lay down their weapons and experience some peace, so that they can move on to "civilian life"--building up the Body for Christ, instead of participating in tearing it apart.

All of this "reconstruction" and "rehabilitation" requires some understanding of what I call the "Chinese" way of doing things.

Americans have always looked at the Chinese culture as a strange entity. On the second day of American high school, shortly after I arrived in suburban Chicago, I learned from my American schoolmate that "Charlie Chan made the best chop suey in town." I did not know who Charlie Chan was and I did not know what chop suey was. After two days of American high school, I found out. Americans have many stereotypes of Chinese people--as inscrutable, as "smart," etc. ABCs likewise tend to have some stereotypes of Chinese culture--their exposure to Chinese culture may have taken the form of sitting through Chinese classes in Chinatown, wondering when school would be over, sitting through Chinese sermons in church while reading comic books, and the ever-present pressure from Chinese speaking parents to study hard, work hard, get good grades, become a doctor, and marry a good Chinese boy or girl from a good Chinese family.

What is lacking here is a comprehensive view of Chinese culture seen from the point of view of the Chinese throughout the ages. We shall attempt to outline some of the elements of Chinese culture as they find expression in the way people do things in the Chinese church. I write this piece at the risk of being misunderstood by my ABC friends. (My OBC friends may think that my portrayal of Chinese culture here is oversimplified and distorted.) But this is a risk I must take if there are going to be bridges of understanding between OBCs and ABCs. Let us try to understand one another!
What is culture? There are many ways to define it. On the surface, culture is the sum of behavior patterns of people. For example, Chinese eat rice with bowls and chopsticks; Americans eat steak and potatoes with forks and knives. Beneath the surface, however, are values what people think are important to them. For example, Americans value efficiency and speed when performing a task; the Chinese value saving face and maintaining personal relationships. Americans value the privacy of the nuclear family; Chinese value the broad relationships of the extended family or clan.

Then, if we dig deeper, there are beliefs that people in a given culture share; these have to do with what they think are "right." For example, Americans believe in progress through science and technology. If a firm makes so much profit this year, it must do better next year. Chinese, however, can often accept much social change—even a political revolution—without either hope or despair. Things come and go, but heaven knows best. So the Chinese often have a more resigned attitude toward change.

Finally, at the center of each culture is its worldview. What is "real" to people in that culture? For example, Americans and most Westerners view humans as the conqueror (or exploiter) of nature. Chinese, however, view humans as the partner, or correlate of nature. A typical Chinese painting portrays tall mountains and deep rivers, a small fisherman fishing in his little boat, or a tiny lady sewing inside a hut. Humanity is part of nature, its destiny is to harmonize with nature. Such is the Chinese traditional worldview.

According to the Bible, culture is humankind's response to God's command to take care of the world. God called upon humankind from the beginning to take care of the created world and to improve the quality of life (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Therefore, human beings, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27) and endowed with intelligence and hearts set out to create culture. There are good elements in every culture simply because culture is the product of human beings created in the image of God. However, every culture has been tainted by sin ever since Adam and Eve sinned, and therefore needs to be judged and cleansed and renewed according to the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As Christians and carriers of the good news of Jesus Christ, we take on three roles with respect to culture. First of all, we are servants: we serve those who need evangelism and discipling. Our whole ministry must be "receptor-oriented" rather than "preacher-oriented." We need to understand the culture of the people among whom we want to minister.

Secondly, we are bridge-builders: as products of one culture, we enter upon another to proclaim the Gospel, but also to understand the people's culture so that our message may not be distorted or misunderstood. If missionaries can cross oceans, learn the language, and adjust to the food and customs of the Chinese people just to bring them the Gospel, why can't we—OBCs and ABCs—learn to listen to the "language" and to adjust to the cultures of one another?

Thirdly, we are ambassadors for Christ. Our concern is that the message of reconciliation may get across. Our concern is that, while the message is preached, it gets through to the hearer. Real communication must take place or evangelism is in vain.

There is a price to be paid—the unselfish, selfless love of the mind of Christ (Philippians 2). Look at Paul's example. He would rather be separated from Christ if only he could bring the Gospel to his kinmen, the Jews (Romans 9:1-5). Paul loves the people of his culture—not out of some altruistic loyalty to his culture but for the sake of the Gospel. Secondly, Paul is willing to look at his own culture (Judaism) with the searching light of the Gospel. He knows that, as a former Pharisee, the righteousness
of God is revealed quite apart from, and in contradistinction with, the works-oriented scheme of salvation known as “the law” (Romans 3:21-24). So Paul's love for the people of his own culture is not uncritical. His love is not blind. It is realistic because it is for the sake of the Gospel. Thirdly, Paul knew a commitment from the Lord Jesus to be an apostle to the Gentiles; that he may bring about “the obedience of faith” of the nations (Romans 1:15). Paul had a cross-cultural motive: he had a heart big enough for foreigners. Finally, Paul looked forward to the day when every culture would learn and obey the feet of Jesus (Ephesians 1:10; Philippians 2:11). Therefore Paul claims his citizenship not with Judea and Rome, but with the Kingdom of Heaven (Philippians 3:20). Paul's identity is far greater than his Jewish heritage or his Greek-Roman society. Paul was first and foremost a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Thus, as servants, bridge-builders, and ambassadors, let us imitate the example of Paul. Let us seek to preach the Gospel to the Chinese people— to OBCs and ABCs alike— that souls of men and women may turn to Jesus Christ for salvation. Let us together aim at the discipling of both the OBC and the ABC generation. And let us aim at the transformation of both OBC and ABC culture by the power of the Gospel. Let us work so that an indigenous bicultural church— deeply rooted in both OBC and ABC culture— may flourish in North America, embodying the best of both cultures and joyfully serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our aim then is to seek an indigenous bicultural church raised up in North America that we may seek an understanding of OBC-ABC differences.

THE INDIVIDUAL VS THE GROUP

When the Chinese church tries to evangelize the community, it often commits the error of trying to reach the individual at the neglect of the family. For example, a church tries all methods of evangelism— crusades, films, Chinese classes, English classes, and Vacation Bible Schools (VBS). And it discovers that the easiest groups of people to bring into the church building are the children and the youth. So it sets elaborate programs for the youth. Usually parents of young children are grateful to the church: "My kids need to socialize with other Chinese kids!" "My daughter needs to learn Chinese!" "My son needs to learn how to get along with others in a Chinese way!" So they bring their children to Sunday school or Chinese class or VBS. But when the Chinese church attempts to evangelize a Chinese-American teenager, especially one from a non-Christian family background, conflicts begin to appear. The young person often does not let his parents know what is happening— he/she may be shy, unable to express his newfound faith in Jesus Christ in the Chinese language, or unable to communicate with his parents in any important matter at all! So what does the church do? It makes demands on the teenager. To attend Sunday school, worship services, youth meetings, discipleship cell groups, camps, social events, and during that the young person now develops a whole new set of friends, none of whom his parents recognize from before! Now the parent gets suspicious of the church. If the new convert's behavior at home improves (helps with household chores, does not talk back or argue with parents), everything is fine. But, as the new convert spends less and less time at home and church activities, the parents feel that they have lost a son/daughter.

What has happened is that the Chinese church has adopted a Western cultural concept—the importance of the individual— while trying to evangelize a basically Chinese social unit—the family. How much better if the church learns to communicate with the parents from the very beginning of the evangelistic process? How much better if the church, in its evangelistic efforts, seeks to demonstrate to
the parents that they are respected and honored as heads of the home!

Western culture values the autonomous individual; Chinese culture values the wholeness of the family or clan. That is why in the Chinese culture an individual must not "stand out like a sore thumb." Actions, which are perfectly natural in American society -- talking about one's achievements and celebrating them -- would be taboo in Chinese society. Such behaviors may be interpreted as "showing off," "pride" or worse, "disrespect."

A Chinese-American graduate from college. His parents come on campus, bringing Chinese food and talking loudly as they arrive. They complain about the American food on campus and want to know where they can take pictures. The Chinese-American is thoroughly embarrassed and often completely infuriated. "This is my graduation and you have humiliated me in front of my peers!" What the graduate does not understand is that the family has adopted the graduation event as a communal celebration. The son/daughter going off to college was a communal family affair -- the parents have worked hard to pay for the college education with their blood, sweat, and tears. Now all that sacrifice is paying off -- it is time for the family to celebrate. Two understandings of the same graduation event -- one Western, one Chinese -- can lead to much conflict.

Take the wedding as another example. A young Christian couple is engaged and selects June 10th as the date for the wedding. They have contacted their minister, who agrees graciously to officiate. They have contacted their friends in the Youth Fellowship, all of whom rejoice with them and volunteer to prepare refreshments, decorate the reception hall, drive the bridal cake, take pictures, etc. The Fellowship even canceled its weekly meeting on June 10th. All of a sudden however, the parents want to change the date because it is "unlucky." Furthermore, they augment the guest list to three times the original size. They insist on an elaborate wedding banquet in the best, largest Chinese restaurant in town. The young people are infuriated. They come to complain to the pastor and the youth counselor. What should they do? All the plans are set, and now the parents "pull this one on us."

What is happening again is that the parents look upon the wedding as a communal event. They, the parents, are the host of the wedding. They decide which relatives and friends to invite because it is they who are bringing into their family a daughter-in-law! To the Chinese parents, sometimes the bridegroom and the bride are incidental to the wedding. The important thing is that the family is getting married to another family. Therefore the deciding over the gifts, whether or not to distribute Chinese pastries to relatives, how many tables or guests are assigned to the bride's family, and how much to tip the waiters. All of these minute details are ways to celebrate the climax -- the blood, sweat, and tears of the years -- they are going to get a daughter-in-law and soon will become grandparents!

The person in American culture needs to empathize with this family-oriented way of thinking. We are a transitional generation. We need to deal with our Chinese-speaking elders in the communal way and deal with our peers and our children in the American, individual-oriented way. Such are the pains of living through a cultural transition -- and we would experience much joy if we did it as servants of Jesus Christ!

THEORY VS RELATIONSHIP

They young people in a church demand an English-language service. The pastor and older people think that the better solution in meeting the needs of the "young people" (even though these "youths" are in their 30s and have children of their own!) is to have the Chinese service translated into English. The ABC young adults feel that they will not be properly fed from Scripture if they have to sit through
a bilingual service. So they list reasons why there should be an English service. The pastor is handed this list. He responds with bouts of anger: "Don't you know that this is a Chinese church?" he roars. "You are Chinese! You should speak Chinese! And we are doing you a favor by translating the services into English! What more do you want?"

The young adults, feeling humiliated by such an unsympathetic shepherd, gather to lick their wounds. Some draft proposals to start an English service despite the disapproval of the church authorities. Others leave the church and begin attending an English-speaking church nearby. Still others—unfortunately for them—leave the church, never to attend another church again.

I am not trying to determine the pros and cons of an English service here. What I am trying to describe, however, are two different ways of looking at a situation. Again, the difference lies in the two cultures, Chinese and American.

The American way of doing things says: when you face a problem, when a need arises in a group, you make a study. You look at what the concrete needs are; what are some options; and which one is the optimal way to meet the need? Then you write up a proposal, listing the costs and benefits; and present it to the board. And if the board is halfway intelligent, it should buy the proposal, with funding coming from the budget. This is the way things are done in an American corporation; this is the way things should be done in the church as well.

The Chinese way of doing things is to acknowledge first that there is a problem. There are needs. Now as we try to find a solution to meet the need, how can we do so without offending anyone? How can we preserve the unity of the group? How can we make sure that the pastor continues to command the respect of the young people (even though they are 30-plus years old)? How can we make sure that the two congregations, which will emerge—Chinese-speaking and English-speaking—will get along with one another? How much do we share the same values? How will "face" be lost? Who will suffer a sense of insecurity in the process? How will the older people fit into the new scheme of things—will they feel left out of place? We have always done things in this way—preserving faces for everyone, especially the pastor and the board. Naturally, this is the way to handle this situation with the ABC's.

The American looks at the theoretical foundations of the projects they undertake. Is this the right thing to do? The person immersed in Chinese culture looks at the interpersonal relationships, which would be affected by any new project: Is this the best way to do it?

If the Chinese church, a bicultural institution, is to survive the next fifty years, we must learn to compromise between the two ways of doing things. In order to truly compromise and accommodate one another, it would really help if Chinese-speaking pastors and church leaders receive some training in management, parliamentary procedure and marketing/church growth research.

DIFFERENCE vs. EQUALITY

The bilingual Chinese church is having a board meeting. The meeting is held in English. An English-speaking person is discussing the pros and cons of a new proposal. And he turns to the pastor and says, "We believe that this proposal best meets the spiritual needs of our English-speaking people." He fully expects the pastor, who is awkward in English, to respond with his own set of pros and cons on the issue. What the English-speaking person expects is a genuine debate to ensue. He has treated his pastor as an equal, because he treats everyone else in society as equals. He talks to his boss at work this way, so naturally the pastor is addressed in a similar fashion.

The pastor feels humiliated. He remains silent for a while, then mumbles something to the effect...
that “you young people do not really understand the situation.” What the pastor is trying to communicate is “I am the pastor. Do not treat me as your equal; treat me with respect. And if you respect your elders, you would not talk to them like this!”

For thousands of years, Chinese people have been accustomed to a hierarchic way of leadership. There is the emperor on top, with different gradations of government officials. On the local level, there are the landowners (gentry) who act as the middlemen between the peasants and the local government officials. Everyone knows who the “big man” are in town—the heads of the landowning households. And they are addressed as “tajer” (in Cantonese, dai yan), meaning “great person.” In another sphere of life, students address their teacher as “master,” or “teacher” (hsien-sheng, or in Cantonese, sin sang). Fifty years after the student graduates, he or she still addresses the former teacher as “hsien-sheng” bringing gifts at New Year’s and other occasions. The student’s parents continue to address the former teacher as “hsien-sheng” always finding ways to show gratitude for having nurtured their son or daughter. Such is the way the Chinese look upon a person who exercises some leadership role in society.

The Americanized Christian looks upon the pastor as a friend. The pastor is an equal in Christ—we are all equal in Christ. The cultural Chinese Christian looks upon the pastor as a leader. The Christian layperson may gain some access into the personal life of the pastor, befriending the pastor and his family. But when the group is discussing official business, there is an invisible line drawn—the pastor’s opinion is to be respected and never contradicted in public. The pastor’s view is to be respected, and loyalty is to be shown. In his mind, loyalty to the pastor and faithfulness to the ministry of the church is one and the same thing.

What ABCs need to do is to show sufficient respect to the OBC pastor in order to establish rapport and communication. Once the pastor is assured that the ABC is loyal, he will grant numerous requests. As a pastor, however, the elder shepherd needs to humble himself, and make himself accessible to the American-born Chinese church members, so that they can get close to him. (Galatians 3:28)

LOVE VS RESPECT

When Americans want to show affection and love toward each other, they jump up and down, dance around the room, hug and kiss each other. When a Chinese-American goes to school in America, he or she is exposed to this way of publicly demonstrating affection (PDA). However, in the Chinese home, he or she finds that his or her parents rarely show affection towards one another—and almost never toward the children. The young person concludes that his or her parents are cold and are too wrapped up with work at the restaurant/factory to care for the children. All the children ever get are admonitions to study hard, get good grades, become a doctor, and so forth. And the children are expected to abide by certain rules. For example, when using chopsticks to pick up food from the dishes in the middle of the table to one’s own bowl, one must never point at another person, never pick up a piece of meat/vegetable from the far side of the dish, or from the bottom; always eat a bite of rice first at the beginning of the meal, wait for the head of the family to dig into the dishes of food, then pick up a piece of vegetable, then a piece of meat. And when a visitor comes, always show up in the living room and call them “Uncle so-and-so” or “Auntie so-and-so.” Then one is to disappear into the bedroom or play quietly—no, silently—in their presence.

Such rules and regulations make a Chinese-American weary. And when the young person brings a friend home, he or she is further embarrassed by how the mother piles food on top of the visitor’s rice bowl and insists “You must eat! You are a growing person!” The ABC responds, “Does not mean...”
8

know that we know how to use chopsticks and we can get our own food into our own bowls? And doesn’t she know that this is too much for anyone to eat, without getting indigestion?”

Rules and regulations are ways the Chinese community preserves harmony, order, and respect. Think of “respect” as the Chinese equivalent of “love.” If you really love your parents, you study hard and say “Good morning, Father” every day, first thing in the morning. When you enter the living room, whether leaving the house or coming back home you always address “Father” or “Mother” before moving on with your business. Such respect is appreciated by the elder person. The parents will conclude, “This young person is a really good person. He/she will go far. I like him/her.”

Westernized Christians express their love to one another by playing tennis together, inviting each other over for barbecue dinners, holding bridal/baby showers for each other’s wives, and going camping together. All of this is foreign to the traditional Chinese adult. This is true in the traditional Chinese church as well.

The ABC would do well to express “love” to his or her parents in the ways they can understand—bringing the first paycheck home to the parents, bringing home some food (fruits or meat) from Chinatown, or observing the parents’ birthdays. In church, saying “Pastor So-and-so, good morning!” would go a long way to winning that pastor over to the ABC segment of the church. Respect spells love.

Increasingly, the older generation of pastors and parents are opening up, learning to express their feelings with words and gestures. This is a most encouraging trend.

SELF CONFIDENCE VS HUMILITY

Americans are used to talking about their strength and accomplishments. One may add that American Christians are also used to talking about their weaknesses and failures with their friends and increasingly in public. American churches are used to Christians giving testimonies of how God has used them, and the whole congregation rejoices.

The Chinese, however, are used to hiding their accomplishments and accentuating their weaknesses in public. In applying for a job in America, the Chinese is modest by saying, “I know a little bit about computers” while he/she may hold a master’s or doctoral degree in computer science. The American employer expects the applicant to list his or her accomplishments. The Chinese has been trained to hide them instead.

In dealing with traditional Chinese, one must be careful not to be too “flashy” about one’s own credentials or accomplishments. While giving thanks to God for the ways He is using us, we must be careful to tell our Chinese friends that, “in and of myself, I am nothing.” Our admission of our weaknesses is a way we identify with those we talk to. We are saying, “We are equals; I am not your superior.”

ABCs are often annoyed by these statements of politeness. For example, while the ABC would say, “Thanks for the delicious dinner and a delightful evening!” to the host, an OBC might say, “I am sorry to have caused you so much trouble. You must have prepared for days.” While an ABC master of ceremonies would say to the guests, “I am glad you came,” the OBC says, “Thanks for giving up your valuable time.”

This does not mean that while dealing with OBCs we must first crucify our self-confidence. On the contrary! Those with real self-confidence would be willing to accommodate the other person’s way of doing things in order to win him.

A word about security—the OBCs often say that the ABCs have an identity crisis; that they do not know who they are, and therefore suffer from a lack of self-confidence. The ABCs, as a matter of fact, do not have a monopoly on the identity problem. The Chinese race as a whole has suffered from...
a corporate identity crisis for the last one hundred years. Lack of confidence and security has plagued our people as a whole. The Bible tells us that true security comes from the Lord who is our shelter and our strength. In Christ we are made free.

The world is dying to get some security. It takes secure, free people to help make others secure and free. The Christians has the only true source of security. Let us share it with others!

ORGANISM VS. ORGANIZATION

The Bible speaks of the church as a body. It also regards the church as an organization—the Bible gives qualifications for leaders, and provides a structure for church leadership.

The ABCs used organizational structures. We are taught to think in terms of structures and goals. We assign lines of authority and hierarchical charts. We define each position in an organization with title, job description, and criteria for evaluation. We organize an organization to accomplish objectives and goals, either to plan or to evaluate progress. We write memoranda, we take and approve minutes, we write reports, and we keep files. We accept people into the membership of the church with ceremony and certificate, we assign them tasks and give them titles. We send our young men and women off to seminary to earn degrees, and then we ordain them and call them “Reverend.”

All of this is somewhat foreign to the Chinese mind. Whereas the Western mindset is oriented to things logical, cognitive, and intellectual, the traditional Chinese mindset is oriented to either the mystical-natural, or to the pragmatic-social.

The traditional Chinese world view looks upon man as a correlate of nature. The object of life is to become fully in tune with nature. Thus, poetry and art are important parts of life; they are not merely decorations for life, they are expressions of life itself. Yet, on the other hand, from Confucius we learn the proper ways for a social leader to behave—a prince should rule his people with virtue. This traditional Confucian philosophy is a combination of mystical thought and social ethics. Neither of the two components—mystical or pragmatic—is particularly logical or cognitive in nature.

Translated into everyday life, this means that the Chinese mind is basically uncomfortable with organization, red-tape, paperwork, official and formal lines of authority, formal membership in an organization, and business meetings. The Western mind is “left-brain” oriented; it is cognitive. The Chinese mind is “right-brain” oriented; it is aesthetic.

What does an ABC Christian do? How could life go on in the church without clearly defined lines of authority and function, without job descriptions, criteria for evaluation, and business meetings? I think here is not a matter of choosing between having organizational apparatus and not having them. Rather it is a matter of making sure that the OBC leadership understands what a group is trying to do before the OBC receives any memo or report; before the formal meeting takes place; before he is made aware of the formal lines of authority. Build the relationship; organizational matters will follow smoothly. Ignore the rapport with the leaders, and no matter how much organizing you do, things will not be understood. Things don't get done.

It is an art to understand the ambiguities of the Asian way of doing things. And just like any other art, practice makes perfect. Spending time with Chinese people will help one understand this ambiguous style.

Whether one is at home with a cognitive or an aesthetic, a left brain or a right brain culture, we need to be “whole brain” people, reaching out in wisdom and in love in the name of Christ.
LEADERSHIP: CREDENTIALS VS SERVICE RECORD

We in Western society are used to formalized means of recognizing leadership. We recognize a person with an academic degree or a professional license. In church, we recognize a person with a Master of Divinity who has been ordained. We put him or her in charge of a congregation, and he or she (in many churches) presides over the official board. Such leadership positions are accepted by all who know how the organization works.

In Chinese circles, however, the axiom “Respect is earned, not conferred” really comes into play. Chinese laypeople recognize the pastor as leader not because he or she has a degree, or is ordained, but rather because he or she has demonstrated himself or herself to be a leader through years (note the underlining of the word “years”) of consistent faithful service. The Chinese respond to a coordinator of clean-up who cleans up himself; to a transportation coordinator who also drives and gives rides himself; to a coordinator of Christian education who also teaches Sunday school well; to a pastor who serves Christ humbly, both in the pulpit and in the janitor’s closet. This does not mean that the Chinese church should make the pastor do everything. This is just to say that humble service is what people recognize as a sign of leadership.

Chinese people recognize a leader who commands respect from the group. This is seen in the case of the pastor, in dynamic preaching which communicates God’s truth to the hearers. In a way, this is most biblical: people recognize a leader who evidences spiritual gifts and who shows himself or herself to be a servant. Gifts and service serve as signs of leadership.

A leader in the Chinese mind is a strong person who holds the group together. And people build relationships of respect and loyalty with the leader.

An ABC can command respect in the Chinese church if he or she demonstrates to be truly filled with the Holy Spirit and an effective communicator. After all, this is what the church expects of any OBC leader.

Once a leader, however, a person needs to show compassion and understanding to the people in the group. For example, some OBC laypeople would have a hard time trying to voice their opinions, especially complaints, to an ABC pastor (or to an Americanized OBC like myself). The pastor will have to reach out and find out what the people are thinking; the people are not always going to volunteer their opinions. Sometimes the pastor or elder has to use another person who understands the laypeople on a more intimate level, to find out what the people are thinking. Just issuing memoranda to the people, asking them to fill out surveys, making a “Suggestions Box,” and so forth, would not suffice. There needs to be the personal reaching out to the people – this is what they expect in the leader.

However, in the case of an OBC pastor and an ABC congregation, the laypeople need to reach out to the OBC pastor and find out how he feels and what his thoughts are. In reaching out, up or down, we build our credentials as genuine contributing members of the community.

SPIRITUAL GIFT VS SECULAR CREDENTIALS

We have said that the Chinese way of recognizing leadership is through gifts and humble consistent service. This is true enough and quite biblical. However, equally true is the fact that many Chinese, especially middle-class, suburban professionals, have great secular expectations of their leaders in addition to the spiritual qualifications.

Westerners recognize a person by his or her academic training and professional experience. A
The person who qualifies is given a position of leadership. The Chinese mindset, akin to the description Paul gave the Jews (who "look for a sign," 1 Corinthians 1:24), looks out for a leader whom they can not only respect, but also admire.

Some of the Chinese secular credentials, which the Chinese people expect in their leaders, include these criteria: age (the older, the better); the ability to speak the Chinese language; family background; advanced degrees in secular universities; marriage and children (signs of nature and stability); a house (evidence of responsibility); and being on a social par with other middle-class urban professionals.

The age qualification is something about which we can do nothing. We become old only as the years go by. However, ABCs and other Americanized OBCs would do well to try to learn the Chinese language in order to communicate with OBC church people, as well as command their respect. Missionaries from the Western Chinese community to China why can't we learn each other's language in order to communicate in a bicultural church?

These secular expectations of the Chinese people may not be biblical. Nevertheless, the Americanized Chinese church leader would do well to recognize that these expectations exist, and they die hard.

Where one can do nothing about some of these credentials, it is best to rely on the Holy Spirit and demonstrate one's life that he has cultivated all credentials - the presence of God in the individual's life. Sooner or later, God will bring about the response from those people who are serious about God.

LUBRICATION AND PRESERVATION: IMPLICIT OR EXPLICIT?

Each community or culture has its own values and develops rituals to affirm these values. For example, playing tennis or golf together is a sign of friendship among Americans. In American society, such rituals of friendship are clearly defined so that each person's privacy is not invaded. In Chinese culture, a very high premium is placed on the affirmation of communal values. Often, the birth of a baby, a wedding, or a funeral is much more than the occasion; it is a means of bringing the clan together to affirm the family's cherished values.

Take the wedding reception as an example. The ABC is bored at a wedding banquet in which the uncle of the bride makes long speeches and goes to great length to introduce every single relative who is alive, whether present at the banquet or away in Alaska. Sometimes the pastor is asked to make a speech more likely than not, the pastor is asked to offer a prayer.

To the Chinese, especially the parents of the bride and groom, such speeches and prayers are more than a mere introduction of guests and demonstration of gratitude to God for the food. It is a communal affair. The pastor represents God's blessing upon the bride and the groom; also God's blessing upon the two families.

The Chinese pastor is often called upon to perform a sundry list of non-pastoral functions (for example, to be present at a birthday of "red-egg" banquet, to settle a household conflict, to give advice whether a family should invest in such and such a business, to offer counsel as to which college or major a young person should choose, and so forth). Most often, the pastor is asked by the parents to "tell the kid to straighten up," to behave and to respect his or her parents.

All these expectations are placed upon the pastor -- and upon any community leader -- because they have become a symbol of the values cherished by the community. When a Christian recognizes this fact, and uses his or her position for the sake of the Gospel, much good may result. When the individual abuses power and gets involved in people's lives for personal profit (for example, helping people apply for an immigrant visa for a fee or a "red envelope"), the power of the Gospel and its credibility is lost.
What the Americanized person needs to understand is the tremendous importance of these rituals of value affirmation for the Chinese family and community. If the Gospel is to make an impact upon the Chinese community, indigenous Christian ways of affirming Christian values must be designed for the Chinese people so that they can celebrate the Lordship of Christ in a cultural form which they recognize.

CONFRONTATION VS CONCILIATORS

The final element of leadership and organizational style we shall discuss is the matter of conflict management. In Americanized circles, verbal, direct confrontation is normal and expected. When a person does something wrong, he or she should know about it, in person, orally, and directly. In Chinese circles, however, direct confrontation is "face-destroying." It tears apart the fabric with which the community is woven.

A more accepted way of dealing with conflict is through indirect conciliation. For example, a person wants to voice a complaint in the church. He or she speaks to a responsible layperson, and that middleman brings up the subject with the pastor or the official board. In all of this, we need both ABCs and OBCs to be bridgebuilders, to be peacemakers for the sake of the unity of the Body.

Instead of directly confronting an OBC person, the ABC can employ the technique first approaching an English-speaking OBC who understands both the ABCs point of view and the cultural forms of the OBC involved. By going through this route, the OBC's face is saved, and one has won a brother or sister. Why not? What is there to lose?

CONCLUSION

We are living in a transitional age. The OBC leaders in the Chinese church fully recognize that they, too, are living in a transitional age. The future leadership belongs to the English-speaking to the ABCs. The ABCs very often feel that the OBC pastor does not understand this. I find that most of them do understand it.

The problem is that the transition must take its course through a whole generation. Some of us cannot wait that long. I can understand their feeling. However, we are talking about moving a whole culture, deeply entrenched in a millennia-old tradition to a Western-style organization and leadership. It is no small task. It is going to be painful for those who cherish the tradition. It will be a tremendous responsibility for the new generation to pick up the baton.

The baton belongs to the future leaders. Will they be patient and understanding so that when the time comes, they will indeed step on to the front stage of the Chinese church?