

**Issues in Spiritual Direction with Chinese
and Korean Immigrants to NZ**

by

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Introduction

Forty years ago my husband and I went to Papua New Guinea to help with mission work. We were very aware of the cultural differences between us and the local people. We tried to learn their way of doing things and why they acted in certain ways. The people lived a subsistence life style, and the Australian government officials used both stick and carrots to get the people to put some energy into making some money and thinking for the future.

Many of the reasons for their behaviour lay in the history of war and retribution that could occur at any time. What we saw as laziness came out of their history. As we worked through this transition we started to see that some of the rules imposed on people are our cultural mores, rather than “rules” needed for Christian living. It made us reassess our own lives, and the work of missions generally.

In this paper I am continuing to look at how to reach people within the parameters of their culture. These days we find that instead of missionaries having to go overseas, various peoples from many lands are coming here. The easy option is to try and help them become like us, which often happens without people realising it, or to criticise them for being different, without understanding that God accepts us as we are, and that Christians from other places are accepted by God as they are. I see that these people need to be helped through transition from immigrants into people who are holistic in their faith, their two cultures, and in their identity as New Zealanders. Not all these people are going to stay. Many come for different periods of business or study. I posed myself the question, “how to make Jesus more real to them?”

One of the great messages of Pentecost is that everyone heard “the message” in their own language¹. I feel many people need to be able to listen to God if not in their own language at least in a context that is culturally safe for them. I have used the people in my own community that in the natural course of life I have come to know, as a basis for my study.

The Chinese

“Andy”, a new immigrant from China, started coming to our church several years ago. We had to overcome communication difficulties and we needed to explore ways to incorporate him into the church and community, and help him grow in his faith. We soon found he was married and wanted to bring his wife to New Zealand. A church family took him in as a boarder and “adopted”² him. He is part of their family, with their surname, and joins in with family celebrations etc. Ruth, his wife, became part of the family when she came to join Andy in NZ. This concept is not uncommon to Chinese. (I have a cousin who has lost most of his family. He wanted to set up a business in China, and was adopted by a family and now goes by their name and can do business as a native in China.) Andy had been a high school teacher, and Ruth a university lecturer in China. Here, they both worked hard in a Chinese restaurant until Andy was able to buy his own. They now have a son Matthew. They are quiet, keep a low profile and often find God’s presence in church worship although they cannot follow all of the service.

¹ Acts 2v7

² This was informal as it is not legal to adopt adults.

Chinese want to blend into our culture. *“The more successful Chinese became, the more invisible they needed to be...”*³

They do this in various ways:

1. *geographic spread and size of the Chinese population. They are often scattered among the community in various places.*⁴
2. *avoiding incidents. They try and keep inside the law and take abuse rather than make an issue out of what happens.*
3. *normalizing. They try to live as they perceive other kiwis do.*
4. *acting passively. It is usual for Chinese to accept rather than fight “the system”*
5. *identity manipulation.*⁵ *Using an English rather than their Chinese name unless their Chinese name is in common use.*⁶

Asian people do suffer from discrimination⁷ and it is natural for Chinese immigrants to find ways to lessen the impact of this by changing their behaviour.

History

The Chinese have come from a closed society that was regulated in ways that we find difficult to imagine.⁸ There had been early missionary work in China but missionaries had long been expelled. There had been teaching that the west and its teaching and life style are evil. Even if this thinking and teaching had not been believed, there might have been some doubts regarding the morality of kiwis when people settled in New Zealand.

Another cultural issue for Chinese is the one child family. One Chinese young man explained it to me,

*“Children were the wealth and future for the family, now there is just one. Every hope and dream for the family is in the one child. Two sets of grandparents and the parents dote on the child. It is an enormous pressure. They will sacrifice all for the child. The child has no cousins and no aunts and uncles. It’s every step and word is noted.”*⁹

Some Chinese come from a background of persecution. There have been many Christian martyrs in China. It is not a safe place to be a Christian now. There has grown up a very active underground church which is a “home church” found all over China. Its story is of miracles, beatings, imprisonment, and hardship.¹⁰ Chinese could also be part of the state approved church. People in these two streams did not and often do not appreciate each other. Many people in the state approved church, had a close and quiet relationship with God. They kept a low profile in their church and community. These people were not able to be involved in mission. Some have read the book *The Heavenly Man* and have been moved to tears, as it has given them a different point of view. *The Heavenly Man* is about the protestant underground church, and its focus on

³ The Chinese in NZpG223

⁴ The Chinese communities in Auckland are an exception to this.

⁵ The Chinese in NZpG223

⁶ The Chinese population has grown from 44793 in 1991 to 104,580 in 2001. Some of these statements may not be relevant to some of the newer immigrants in larger centres.

⁷ Dragons on the Long White Cloud Ch7

⁸ The one child policy

⁹ Personal conversation with Chinese students. July 02

¹⁰ Heavenly Man

mission, its rapid growth, and its persecution. The underground church is illegal, radical (as it needed to be to survive in a hostile climate), and has received backing from the west. One of the issues that the Chinese government has with it, is they are committed to spreading the gospel.¹¹

The Catholic Church in China has the same problems and blessings as the protestant church does.¹² Some of it is tolerated by the state, and the underground Catholic Church is outlawed and its members suffer persecution.

One elderly lady in our church helps with Sunday school. It has changed her personality. She did this in China, and it has given her “a place to be”. She is now a contributing person in the church, which gives her acceptance and self worth.

It is hard to get a job if your English is poor, and it can be necessary to buy a business in order to make an income. Apart from that there are a few Chinese¹³ people in employment. These are the people that have moved into our church. Although are nearly all underemployed, they have set up a support group. At the moment they are studying the book “Forty Days of Purpose”¹⁴. They will also do an “Alpha Course” with Chinese sub-titles next. This is sponsored by a couple of local Churches. These people have set up a Chinese society that includes many non Christians.

The Koreans

“Lou”, a Korean, came to see me about 7 years ago. He is a well educated Korean with good English skills and a warm outgoing personality. He was the church administrator in his church, as was I. In the Korean hierarchy he was dealing with an equal. He told me they wanted to start a Korean Church in Whangarei and would like to hire our church to have their services. I enquired of other churches that had Koreans using their premises and got similar replies. They are loud, lovely and their children are uncontrolled and inclined to damage things. They were with us for a couple of years until they needed to use the church more times than we could accommodate. We found the same problems that other churches have.

The Koreans are well organised. They have an English language school to which they try and bring people in from Korea, and they bring people in to train at the Bible College intern program. Several also are involved in importing goods from Korea. One with very good English is employed as an interpreter.

The Koreans have a history of war and occupation. The Japanese invasion and then the Korean War. This has left their country divided in two. Korea as we now know it, is South Korea. They were left poor and wounded and have tried hard to become a successful state. Education is highly valued and Korean children often go to the state school in the morning and a language school (English) in the afternoon. Schooling starts at 3 years old. Higher education is sought after.

¹¹ <http://backtojerusalem.com>

¹² <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/index2.html>

¹³ This may not be the situation in Auckland.

¹⁴ By Rick Warren

Koreans did not call one another by name, but by position designating titles such as “uncle” or “teacher”, “little brother”, “Master”, etc.. Position was fearfully important and the acceptance of it was not to be questioned, not only in the family, but also in society and business. One’s rank is determined, if not by birth, then by education or lack of it, by success or failure, or by the haves and have-nots.¹⁵

To be an ordained pastor in Korea you need to have a PhD in order to achieve the required respect. Another cultural difference is the intensity of the Korean’s desire to achieve. I have heard things such as, “every Korean who comes to Whangarei is going to become a Christian and a member of our church.” “Every Korean who comes to Whangarei is going to prosper and become rich”. They would be considered Pentecostal, however their services are very formal compared to the average NZ Pentecostal church.

Korea has gone from a country of poverty to a country of prosperity. They have worked very hard to make the change. I have heard it said by them “if Kiwis worked like we do, this could be the richest country in the world”. In some of their churches they have picked up the American doctrine of prosperity. They preach it and they try and help people achieve it.

Not all Koreans fit in with this type of Christianity. Tom, a young Korean who had been brought up in New York came to Whangarei. Although Korean was his first language he fell out with the established church on issues of control, money, and ethics. He has now started another Korean church under the banner of a Pentecostal denomination. He could not cope with the culture of a Korean church. Like many immigrants in New Zealand he had difficulty coping with the differences, not just with the Koreans, but also with the Kiwis.

The Koreans are very proactive in lifting their profile. They want to take a leading role in the celebrations of other churches and in outreach ministry. They will ask to bring a choir, give a presentation etc. They are looking at being leaders rather than followers. They also have a proactive way of caring for their flock. They have a prayer meeting at 9.00pm each night to see that their people have a ‘quiet time’. The time is not quiet though as neighbours can testify. They see that members go to English classes, get jobs and do study. They import new cars from Korea for members. The Korean church operates as a community. They look after the money of their people. Church is “whole of life”. When one of them banged into my car I used the church to recover the cost.

To successfully understand the Korean religious mentality, it is essential to understand Shamanism. Shamanism sets forth a universe in which human beings, animals and inanimate objects all have a spiritual side. Hananim is the chief spirit and some scholars have said that he dominates the lives of the Koreans as they are always talking about him. In spite of their reverence for Hananim, Koreans do not appear to worship him, as he "remains remote from the events of the world and rules the world through power delegated to lesser gods" (Yoo 1987:10-11).¹⁶

¹⁵ Dream your Way to Success Pg 7

¹⁶ <http://www.rickcross.com/reference/yoidoyonggi/yoido4.html>

In addition, Yoo points out, the traits developed through shamanistic practice "greatly affected the Korean appropriation and expression of Christianity, through revival enthusiasm and other-worldly orientation" (Yoo 1987:12). It is said that Dr Paul Yonggi Cho used this as a basis for some of his Korean teaching.¹⁷

The Koreans present themselves as intense, spiritual, and in control of themselves. I never had the feeling in dealing with the Koreans that they were the under-dogs.

What these two groups of people, Chinese and Koreans, have in common is they are immigrants to New Zealand; strangers in a foreign culture. Many of them have limited English and so find it is easy to limit their contacts to those of their own language group.

The Questionnaire

To try and bring some understanding in this, and find out how we can help them become integrated in their new land, their new Church, and in their spiritual and prayer life, I sent out a questionnaire to a number of Chinese and Koreans,¹⁸ however only half were filled out. Language was the big barrier.

I asked questions trying to find what was the image of God that these people have, and how they communicate with God. Many of the answers were what I call clichés. They were answers learned by rote. I asked about what it takes to be a successful Christian having seen the intensity with which the Koreans apparently work at their Christianity. I got a list of things to do, more reading, praying, giving etc. Although I asked, I didn't expect anyone would have been receiving Spiritual Direction or keeping a journal. I was surprised to find that 3 people did keep journals in some form. One person was receiving Spiritual Direction.

I was careful not to use the word *meditation*, because some of the religions of the east have a philosophy and practice of Nihilism¹⁹. This is meditation with an empty mind, which is the opposite of Christian meditation, which is focusing on God, or a scripture. I tried to ask the question in other words. One person answered yes.

I asked about their religious background and language to see if there were any differences in culture that were established. I found that the sample was too small to make a determination.

The question that evoked the most written answers was a question about the way we do church in New Zealand. The answers were almost unanimous. We are too casual. We call our pastors by their Christian names instead of using the title "pastor" or reverend". We don't know how to pray properly²⁰.²¹ Most of these were from Koreans. The Chinese used the word "relaxed".

In each question I had a space for people to write their own answer. This written answer was used by most people, and I sensed a real passion in their answers.

¹⁷ as above

¹⁸ See Appendix A

¹⁹ The Universe Next Door

²⁰ I don't really know what this means as the questionnaire was anonymous and I couldn't follow up on it.

²¹ When Koreans pray it is loud, all at once, and intensely emotional.

I learned from the questionnaire that culturally our churches are causing offence to some immigrants because of their informality.

Many of respondents didn't know how to meditate, or personalise their faith. Some of them saw success as knowing what needs to be done, and doing it. Most of the Chinese did not answer this question.

Some respondents had not thought through what they learned of their faith to make it personal, e.g they hadn't tried to find a personal image of God.

Summing up relevant cultural issues.

*People coming to NZ with a non-English speaking background found it extremely difficult to enter the workforce because employers were reluctant to employ people whose first language was not English, or had a different cultural background to local- born applicants.*²²

Asians stand out. They look different. If they are new to NZ they also talk differently. Asian people feel a need to find ways of fitting in to their new life in NZ.²³

*We need to understand that there are many world views. Whatever one we adopt will be limited, so the place to start is in humility. We tend to adopt positions that yield power to us whether they are true or not*²⁴.

Spiritual Direction

When people come to us for Spiritual direction we need to meet them with humility and openness.²⁵ Adeney says in *"The first task of a stranger in a foreign culture is to listen and learn"*. When we meet with someone from another culture this is how we begin.

"Spiritual direction proposes to help people relate personally to God, to let God relate personally to them, and enable them to live with the consequences of that relationship. The development of any interpersonal relationship is a mysterious process; hence anyone who agrees to help two or more individuals develop their relationship with God should approach the task with humility and reverence, in the spirit of a companion rather than a trailblazer".²⁶

The spiritual director needs to be the one who reaches out and communicates to the immigrant. Matthew 25 v35 says *"I was a stranger and you invited me into your home"*²⁷.

²² Chinese in NZ pg175

²³ Dragons on the Long White Cloud Ch 6

²⁴ The Universe Next Door pg196

²⁵ Strange Virtues pg215

²⁶ The Practice of Spiritual Direction 136

²⁷ The Living Bible

Essentials for effective communication are:

- Genuineness - i.e. self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-expression²⁸
- Non-possessive love - i.e. acceptance, respect, and warmth,
- Empathy - i.e. sensitivity, accurate understanding of the situation and feelings, detachment, and the ability to communicate these,
- Humility, - Bernard Adeney says “a humble spirit of openness to God and the stranger may be our most valuable asset in a foreign culture”²⁹.
- Love - is the ultimate praxis that breaks down cultural barriers.³⁰

In an article called ‘Comprehending Otherness,’³¹ Stephen May says, “We all find otherness difficult...Until we at least accept that people are different from us...what hope is there for us? If for Christians it is only God who can ultimately break down the barrier, we have to pray that it will be broken down – and that it is not affecting us more than we think”.

Issues for Spiritual Directors to be aware of when dealing with Asian immigrant directees

- Culture Shock – Disorientation, vagueness, homesickness, depression.
- Disappointment - All is not as rosy as expected in this new country.
- Rejection – Underemployment and racist comments.
- Isolation – Lack of language skills.
- Grief – Directees may be missing family & friends from home. Remember grief is circular and recurs from time to time.³²
- Insecurity – Cultural differences, and not knowing how to behave in certain circumstances.
- Anger – Ethical differences that are offensive, e.g. casualness in church, Westerners are always giving and never wanting to receive³³. (One spiritual director will go and visit for a coffee if asked by an Asian. This can really open up the relationship.)
- Noise – people who have a background of Shamanism find it hard to find God in “the small still voice”, and so need help in finding stillness.³⁴
- Liminoids – People on the threshold of our culture who despise, or resent it. They need encouragement to move, or to leave.³⁵
- Educating the directee - Possibly the directee has no language or understanding of issues in spiritual direction, i.e. image of God, meditation, contemplation, different ways of prayer, journaling etc.³⁶

²⁸ People Skills Ch15

²⁹ Strange Virtues pg 28

³⁰ Strange Virtues pg 53

³¹ Reality Magazine 2.9.02

³² See appendix B.

³³ Strange Virtues Pg 50

³⁴ Shamans call up spirit by banging with sticks on the floor or drums. In Christianity they counteract this with loud praying and calling to God. When the Koreans were using our church the neighbours were constantly complaining of the noise.

³⁵ Strange Virtues pg 135

³⁶ The Practice Of Spiritual Direction Ch4

- Language of the heart. - It is helpful to see if it is possible for the person to be in a group that meets for prayer and fellowship in their heart language if at all possible. This is usually the language they use in conversing with God.
- Holy listening – Directors pray before directees arrive, asking to be awake to the Holy Spirit’s presence, and to put aside any personal concerns³⁷.
- Unease - It may be necessary to bring more structure into the process of Spiritual Direction to make the directee comfortable with the process.

Conclusion

Having completed this study I feel as if I have more understanding of these “strangers” in our community. It is my responsibility to find ways to communicate and make them feel part of us. In spiritual direction I am the one that needs to look out for the special needs of these people so that they can grow in God and expand their experiences of faith.

My thanks to my Spiritual Director, my Supervisor, my daughter Ruth, and others who have helped and encouraged me with this paper.

³⁷ Holy Invitations Pg132

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Appendix A: Questionnaire for participants in order to research about the Pictures of God of Asian Christians in NZ

Please note there are no right or wrong answers. You may answer yes to more than one in each section if you like. The questions are a guide to help my understanding. Draw a ring around the letter of the answer you want to answer yes to. **(A)** If you want to just write your answers on another piece of paper that will be OK.

1. How do you think about God?
 - A God is an eye in the sky watching what we do.
 - B God is the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth.
 - C God is the provider of all we need.
 - D God is the shepherd who cares for us.
 - E Write your own answer.

2. Who is Jesus Christ for you?
 - A A great prophet from God.
 - B A wise and good man from history.
 - C The Son of God.
 - D Your saviour and/or friend.
 - E Write your own answer.

3. Why were you created or born?
 - A To care for your parents in their old age.
 - B To be a missionary to your own, or some other race of people.
 - C To be parents and carry on the family tradition.
 - D For God's pleasure.
 - E Write your own answer.

4. What do you need to do to be a successful Christian?
 - A Spend time praying every day.
 - B Try hard to keep to Christian principles, and life style.
 - C Develop a warm and loving relationship with God.
 - D Give as much money as possible to God's work.
 - E Write your own answer.

5. How do you understand Life?
 - A A preparation for eternity.
 - B A race, a battle or a game to be won.
 - C A journey to be traveled.
 - D A trial to be endured.
 - E Write your own answer.

6. What was the religious culture of your parents.
 - A They belonged to another religion.
 - B They were Christians, as were most of our neighbours and friends.
 - C They were Christians, but not many of our friends were.
 - D They were not interested in any religion.
 - E Write your own answer.

7. Is there anything in the New Zealand way of doing Church you find hard to understand?
- A The way people worship in the service.
 - B The way people react to each other.
 - C The type of prayers we have.
 - D The sermons that you hear.
 - E Anything else you would like to suggest.
8. How does God speak to you?
- A In a voice in your mind.
 - B When you read the Bible.
 - C Through nature and creation.
 - D When you sit and think about God.
 - E Write your own answer.
9. Do you keep a book or a journal to write down what God says to you?
- A Yes I do, and I use it sometimes.
 - B Yes I do, and I use it regularly.
 - C No, I had not thought of doing that.
 - D No I am too busy to spend time writing.
 - E I use another way of remembering.
10. When you pray do you
- A Ask God for the things you need, and for your friends and family?
 - B Read a scripture and imagine what it would be to have been there?
 - C Give God praise and thanks?
 - D Sing praise songs to God?
 - E Write your own answer.
11. If you have a prayer partner, or spiritual director, or pastor that you meet with do you
- A Share with him/her what God is saying to you.
 - B Try and tell them good things.
 - C Use it as a time to be accountable for what is happening in your life.
 - D You don't have one.
 - E Write your own answer.
12. What is your country of birth?.....
13. What is your Nationality?.....
14. What is your Language?.....

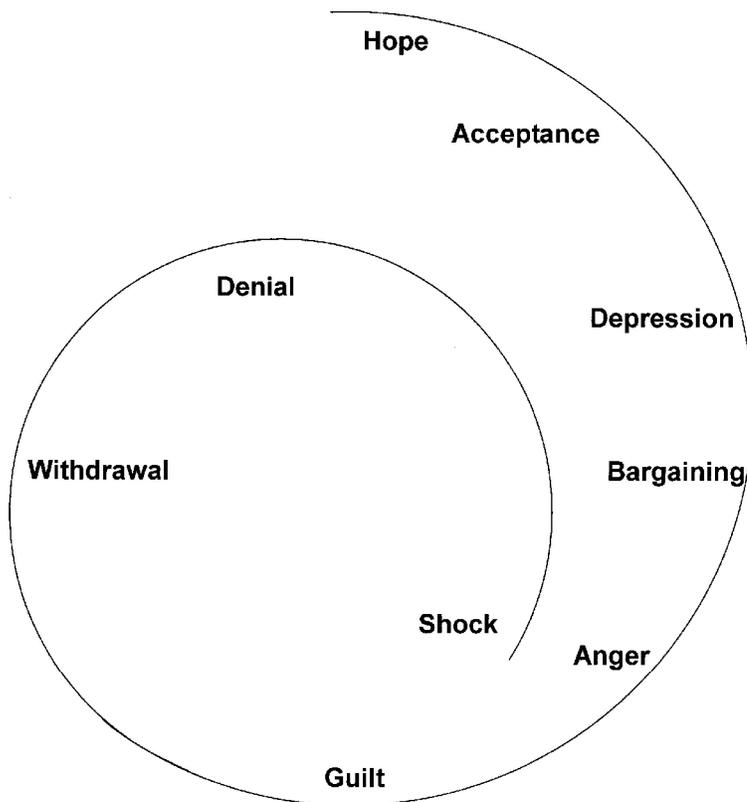
Thank you for your help in this research project. I hope that what I learn from it will help me and other people in ministry in New Zealand serve your community with more understanding and sensitivity.

Appendix B: The Grief Cycle

By Graeme Young Whangarei Baptist Church
(Used with permission)

THE PROCESS OF GRIEF

We may go through



Pauline Causley