

Abstract.

During 1949 and 1950 the Communist movement in China extended its control from certain peripheral zones of China to the entire country. Though it was uncertain at first what their attitude towards churches and missionary societies would be, during 1950 it became clear that the new government would use the Chinese Churches to persuade the missionaries to leave.

The China Inland Mission was the largest missionary society in China, often with well over 1000 members plus families. It served nowhere else. It was the first to penetrate beyond China's eastern sea-ports and its founder had served in China since well before its formal institution as the CIM in 1865.

The CIM was very self-contained with its own 100% in-house management: bank, network of guest centres, children's schools, language schools, and missionaries espoused local lifestyles. Even the few denominational churches which the CIM planted were entirely within the CIM's ambit rather than relating to like-minded churches outside of the CIM's areas of work. Some of the CIM's members were said to be "more Chinese than the Chinese."

While the CIM at first planned to sit-out the Communist pressures – as they had done before during civil instability and had even evacuated temporarily towards the coast, the Government's more devious pressures meant that by early 1951 the entire Mission had to plan an immediate and total withdrawal.

Conferences at Kalorama, near Melbourne and Bournemouth in England, were the twin foci of the decision to redepoly the Mission in East Asia. Henceforth it would be known in Asia, though not yet in the homelands as *Overseas Missionary Fellowship*, or simply OMF. Although there was ambivalence among some leaders about serving elsewhere than where the founder had aimed, invitations from Overseas Chinese across Southeast Asia greeted the survey teams who visited the various countries and the Mission's Directors resolved to serve with them.

Further investigation showed large areas of unevangelised territory in many of the countries in East Asia, notably Philippines, Japan, Thailand and the Chinese resettlement *New Villages* in Malaya.

Other missions nearby had no immediate plans for evangelism in these areas and the CIM was generally welcomed to come and "occupy" them.

Thus the large, monolithic, unitary CIM was carved into a dozen or so separate ministries, most of them separated by a sea journey, nevertheless in general they retained, remarkably, much of their traditional in-house ethos.

Where the newly-named OMF entered a totally unevangelised area, there was little problem apart from negotiating visas with bureaucratic governments; although unlike in China, no two of these "new" cultures or languages were quite the same. The Mission commenced traditional missionary work and planted churches, which they sought to place under national leadership as soon as possible. In general these churches were in the baptistic tradition, with an element of Presbyterianism in the inter-congregation aspects of church life.

In a few countries OMF served alongside well-established national churches, either because this seemed the best way ahead and because there was a welcome there, or because – as in Indonesia – there was no other way to obtain a visa.

Most remarkable was the CIM's Anglican Diocese of East Sichuan. This was the fruit of evangelism by CIM's Anglican missionaries and the last expatriate bishop doubled as the CIM's East Sichuan Superintendent until a Chinese episcopate was ready to take over. It was resolved to continue with an "Anglican Field" in East Asia and after some deliberation about Thailand, this was established by invitation of the Bishop of Singapore, in the southern part of Perak State, Malaya or in OMF parlance, *North Malaya*.

The Anglican field was the subject of much more negotiation with existing ecclesiastics than any other new field, as it involved the CIM in the unfamiliar task of having to integrate with an existing diocese which espoused totally different traditions of spirituality and administration. This was particularly hard for the older missionaries who had served long in the China situation. However it was a great learning experience for serving with the confessional churches elsewhere as well as in Malaya. A few OMF missionaries were ordained by the Anglican Bishops in Singapore and Malaya.

In Indonesia and Taiwan, OMF related to and served with existing churches but the relationship was usually on a purely local basis and only indirectly involved the ecclesiastical

hierarchy. In these countries, a few missionaries were ordained by the local churches, mostly as Presbyterian ministers.

Surveys were made of opportunities and needs in the Indian subcontinent but no missionaries were assigned there long term. It was felt that the churches there had less need of missionaries, as compared to East Asia, moreover there were few Overseas Chinese.

Countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Korea were considered but entered only at a much later date. Missionary Hospitals were opened to meet an acute humanitarian need in Thailand and missionary clinics as needed elsewhere. OMF's own Christian publishing and bookshops supported the evangelism in most countries and a warm relationship was built up with the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), whose high-power transmitters in Manila were able to cover East Asia as well as to beam into all parts of China.

Also a learning experience for the International Headquarters in Singapore, were on the one hand the pressures placed on them by fundamentalist groupings, mostly in or from the USA. On the other hand stood the local WCC-related Councils of Churches, some of which tended to be monopolistic when governments offered them authority to co-ordinate, say, visa approval, or broadcast airtime. Most of these Councils tended to espouse liberal theology and to promote a concept of organic, rather than invisible church unity.

A chapter each deals with the respective countries to which OMF went in their early post-China days and endeavours to show the problems in perspective and to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the very varied approaches, so that we may understand and learn from them. These chapters are of widely varying length, reflecting the problems or absence of them, in commencing service in each respective country

This study concludes with a bibliography and a timeline of the main events affecting the withdrawal from China and redeployment in East Asia.