

## Canadian Chinese Churches – SCBC’s Opportunity to Receive

By Rev. Derek Li (translated by Deacon Robert Lam)

To grab an opportunity is to make sure we do not miss it, to respond quickly for the best and desired results. In the past, Canadian Chinese churches have, whether by intention or not, jumped on many opportunities such as receiving overseas students in the 1970’s and immigrants from Hong Kong in the 1990’s. That’s how we developed and continue into this decade. It looks like these opportunities reoccur every twenty years or so.

1. The 1970’s: I came to Canada in 1973 to study in Vancouver and then went to Montreal. Despite these two cities being far apart geographically, Chinese churches and campus fellowships (CCF) were the same in warmly receiving Chinese students from overseas, assisting them in their studies and their life in a new country, building friendships, and even taking them out on sight-seeing trips. They would drive us to church for Sunday worship and fellowship meetings. Students at the CCF had a lot in common in terms of cultural background, language, goals/directions, plus being separated from their families in Hong Kong. Students back in those days came from more blue collar families. They had to be very careful not to over-spend, so they would find part-time jobs during free time and holidays to supplement their school fees and living expenses. They were quite clear about their life objectives. Under the love and caring of Christians, they tasted and experienced Christian faith and Christian living. Many students who accepted Christ in the late 60’s to early 70’s were called to dedicate their lives to full time ministry, and I am one of those. At the 40th anniversary of my mother church in Montreal, there were already over 40 brothers and sisters serving God in various full-time ministries.
2. The 1990’s: In the 90s Hong Kong was facing the return of sovereignty to China. After the signing of the Sino-British memorandum in 1983, it began to enjoy rapid economic development following the implementation of the “reform and opening-up” policy of China. Many immigrants returned to Hong Kong from Canada for better jobs and career development. Then as more political uncertainties developed with the approach of 1997, people again considered emigration. Most of them were motivated by investment, while others were retirees, setting up their new homes in Vancouver and Toronto to turn a new page in their lives. It should also be noted today that some Canadians who returned to Hong Kong in the 1990’s are now considering moving back to Canada for new reasons.

SCBC witnessed fast growth in membership owing to the influx of immigrants from Hong Kong in the 1990’s that eventually led to the need of expansion to our present facilities. In the early 90’s I was serving at a church in Ottawa and saw this wave of people coming to Canada with their whole family, intending to build a permanent home here. Their young kids, who were in Kindergarten or Primary School then, are now in their thirties. Many are married with kids. Churches provided them with Chinese classes (increasingly in Mandarin) for their children, as well as forums on immigration, Canadian law and naturalization. The purpose was to connect with them. While Canadian Chinese churches expanded greatly in numbers through planting new churches, acquiring and building new facilities, further development was somehow slowed down because of increasing internal conflicts and diversification of views and opinions amongst

members. Although the growth of Chinese churches in North America regrettably came to a halt, the Gospel continued to spread to the community.

3. The 2010's: Seven out of ten immigrants from Asia chose to live in Canada, with half of them looking for better lives and education environment for their children. In the beginning of the present decade we saw more and more immigrants from mainland China as a result of more open policies and the much improved financial conditions. They were seeking unique ways to send their children to schools in North America. Consequently today we find many "single mothers" staying in Canada for the sole purpose of taking care of their kids who are attending school here. Understandably, they often feel lonely and helpless, especially if their children are encountering trouble adapting in studies and behaving badly. They have to face challenges and struggles alone if no support is available to help them. Recently we have come across this at SCBC, which suggests that we should seriously consider a new ministry in this area.

Mainland Chinese constitute the largest group of immigrants in the last ten years. Unlike their Cantonese predecessors in the 80's and 90's they have received higher education, but they do not find opportunities for development in their own areas of expertise, forcing them either to start from junior positions or to seek jobs in other areas. Since most of their family members are still in China, they often shuttle between Canada and China. To them, no place can really be called "home" unless all family members are together. To SCBC, it is a new challenge to start a systematic "reception" ministry for them. It would be especially helpful for those new to Canada without any connections. If we could reach out to them upon their arrival in Toronto, making friends with them and helping them to settle in, it would aid tremendously in bringing them to Christ just like the past.

Finally, we have noticed that many Cantonese immigrants of the 80's who have left Canada and returned to Hong Kong are now considering coming back to Canada for various reasons (please refer to my November article "Sunset ministry? Certainly not!"). Some people in this group might have experienced the reception ministry when they first came to Canada as students many years ago, but now what they need is a different kind of ministry. For instance, when I came to SCBC last year after having left Canada for 25 years, my needs were finding a place to live, getting driver's license, buying a car, obtaining house insurance, adapting to shopping, buying food, the amount of tips expected in Chinese and western restaurants, entertainment and leisure etc. Parents will require information about schools, Christians about churches, and in general information about Canada, government policies, tax return requirements, and how to establish circles of friends. Realistically, it is not simply a vague "reception ministry", we must devise a detailed plan in order to serve them effectively.

With our membership close to two thousand, we should be able to reach out to a large number of people once a detailed reception plan is drawn up. In addition, we could join hands with other churches in the community to promote the availability of our services to new and returning immigrants. In this way we are serving a dual purpose: becoming a blessing to other people as well as an evangelistic church. Through our acts of love, caring and sharing of the gospel we bear testimony for Jesus, opening the doors of SCBC not only to those who are already Christians but also to those who have never experienced the love of Jesus before.