

***“Together we ask, listen, discern,
plan, serve, and ask again...”***

"Hey! We hear you've done some research!"

Research on East Asians involved in BAM

In this Autumn 2021 issue of the OC Research Link the Global Research Team continues its series entitled **“Hey! We hear you’ve done some research!”** It contains an interview with our own Rahn Strickler. Rahn worked with East Asian Bi-Vocational Kingdom Workers to discover what aspects of their training and preparation were most helpful and what characteristics of their businesses contributed to greater Kingdom effectiveness. His work earned Rahn a DMin from Trinity International University and we think it will help the whole OC family move further in our serving, equipping, and connecting the Body of Christ and its leaders to advance God's kingdom among all people. Here’s Rahn’s story:

[GRT] Hi Rahn! We hear you did some research. What were the questions you were trying to answer?

[RS] My main question was “How can East Asian Christians with a growing burden to reach unreached peoples, especially Muslims, best be prepared to go where Christians are unwelcome?” Several main goals were set to answer this question. One was to discover best practices from existing Business as Mission (BAM) or Great Commission Company (GCC) models. Another goal was to draw out practices that may be unique to East Asian companies.

The second goal was to produce recommendations for preparing East Asian workers. This was accomplished by summarizing existing contextual materials and guidelines.

[GRT] Why was this important?

[RS] East Asian nationals have the opportunity to go to many previously ‘closed countries’ as workers and professionals; this is due to the expansive Belt Road Initiative the government has launched with over 100 countries throughout Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and even into South America. Many of these countries are within what we know as the 10-40 Window, inhabited by unengaged, unreached peoples. The projects being undertaken officially include major infrastructure engineering, through small to large enterprises, and service companies. East Asian missionaries believe they are being called by God to ‘finish the task’ to reach and disciple peoples in these underreached countries. Those who are called to go are almost all from non-registered fellowships, so several obstacles stand in their way:



- They are not recognized as religious professionals in country, so they cannot legally receive funding as vocational missionaries.
- The countries they feel led to go to are not open to issuing ‘religious worker’ visas, and do not welcome Christians.
- In order to function legally, they need to go with a trade or profession that the receiving country wants or needs.
- They also need to be prepared as mature cross-cultural disciple makers East Asia has been somewhat isolated for the past few generations, and most young people grow up in a mono-cultural and monolingual environment.

So, the question of preparing people for BAM or marketplace ministry as effective bi-vocational disciple makers became very important.

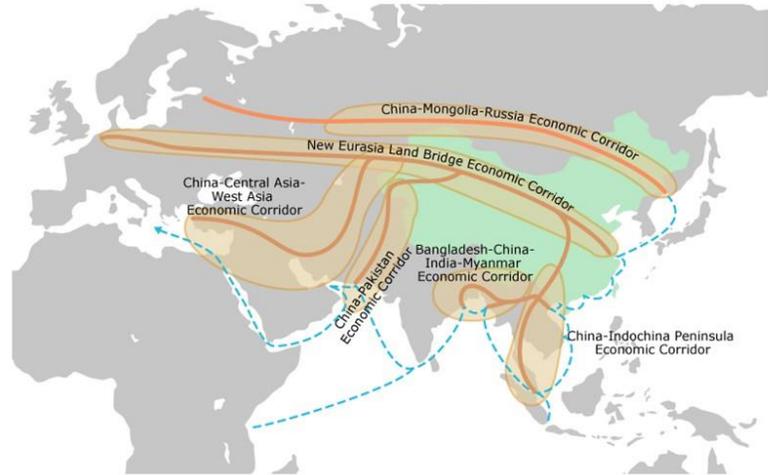
[GRT] What did you do?

[RS] In addition to an extensive literature review, I carried out in-depth interviews with leaders of businesses and professions. The initial scope included Western-led businesses working in East and Central Asia. The final sample of those included in the study were ten businesses in East, South and Central Asia, all led by believers from East Asia. I wanted to see what God was already doing through non-Western efforts. The intention was to conduct in-person interviews, followed by on-site observations of how the companies were being run, and seeing what impact they were having on their surrounding communities.

[GRT] What went right?

[RS] Because of long-standing relationships, interviews opened up with some outstanding, established, world-class companies, as well as with some brand-new enterprises. The range included manufacturers with up to 10,000 employees, to service companies with three entrepreneurial founders, to agricultural coops with several layers of people groups reaching other unreached peoples, to profitable hospitality businesses and youth outreach and development programs. There was a great deal of openness and cooperation with each of the interviewees.

The Belt and Road Initiative: Six Economic Corridors Spanning Asia, Europe and Africa



[GRT] What went wrong?

[RS] Just about the time I was setting up the interviews, the ‘big country’ started cracking down on Christians in general. One of the principal contacts had to leave the country suddenly. It became obvious that it would be problematic for a foreigner to do interviews or ask too many questions. I had to switch to doing everything virtually.

[GRT] What did you learn?

[RS] The interviewees felt – to a person – that a calling to bi-vocational or marketplace ministry is just as valid as what we normally term ‘full-time’ or vocational ministry, whether in a local church or mission setting. It was an important life development step for them to see that about themselves. It is their hope that others would recognize the validity of their calling also. However, most of the interviewees shared how difficult it has been for them to receive support for their non-traditional way of doing missions. Most congregations and organizations in East Asia have adopted the 19th and 20th Century models of vocational missions. God had used vocational missions to reach their own people; why would it not be just as effective now? Only three of the ten interviewees were ‘sent’ and are supported by a church. There were several exceptions where the leaders were able to partner with other BAM enterprises, and with local churches, but the majority felt rather alone.

In spite of isolation, or maybe because of it, I discovered a rich practice of spiritual discipline being carried out by these individuals. In many cases, they had to cast themselves on the Lord on a regular basis to solve problems when they faced corruption or issues of trust in the culture. Their difficulties

encouraged them to sustain a deep and regular dependence on the Living God to carry out the calling they had received. “One has to have a daily walk with the Lord in order to not just survive in business, but to thrive.”

Evangelism and disciple-making is being carried out by the companies I interviewed. One group of companies had seen over two thousand people come to the Lord. Church planting is also happening in some, though that has taken longer than expected. Several of the larger groups were recognized locally and in one case, nationally for the overall positive impact they were having on their communities.

[GRT] Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

[RS] Intentionality and strategic planning are important parts of the modern missions' enterprise, especially in the West – God certainly uses those processes to reach and disciple peoples. We can also recognize the seemingly 'serendipitous' and faithful work of the Holy Spirit as God accomplishes His purposes in response to prayer.

One great example was with a group working among an unengaged and unreached people. They had successfully started a hospitality enterprise among these people, while simultaneously involving local believers from the majority ethnic group as their partners. People had come to faith, and house groups were beginning to multiply.

Twenty-five years previously, this researcher was with a group who had gone to that same area prayer-walking and asking God to do the impossible—to start a movement among this people group! However, no foreigners could receive visas to live there. So, we had to abandon plans we were forming to send workers, and we committed these people to the sovereignty of God. In His good time God brought another team from an emerging missions' movement to mobilize local believers from another ethnic group to accomplish what had been prayed for!

“Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!” Psalms 46:10

[GRT] Thank you, Rahn, for broadening our horizons and deepening our conviction that the Lord is building His church!

Rahn and Stephanie Strickler



Rahn and Stephanie began their ministry with OC International in Taiwan in 1980 and have helped start and rebuild teams of cross-cultural workers in three different countries in Asia over the years. Now located in the US, the Stricklers partner with East Asian leaders to facilitate evangelism and discipleship training among Easy Asian peoples in the worldwide diaspora. In 2020 the Stricklers helped launch a worldwide network for Diaspora Ministry (Reaching People on the Move) for OC Global Alliance coworkers and their ministry partners—this is now a Thematic Team for the OC Global Alliance. Rahn’s research on Business as Mission is helping to mobilize new Kingdom Workers for Marketplace Ministry and BAM initiatives.

Questions or Comments?

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