
An ABC Church Plant

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WHY AN ABC CHURCH PLANT

The following is a compilation of insight and concepts derived from articles published in the ABOUT FACE quarterly newsletter (associated with the Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals, a ministry established by ABCs to enable the Chinese Church to more effectively minister to ABCs).

As Christians, we have a new identity in Christ. One's identity should not primarily come from one's ethnic group but from Christ. Is there a biblical basis then for the Chinese churches in America to target **ABC (American Born Chinese)** ministries? Yes, there are examples given by the early church that indicate an awareness of differences in cultural background and a conscious effort to care for those of a different background.

The book of Acts is a persuasive demonstration of how church leadership acted to resolve bicultural problems. "As the church in Jerusalem grew and became more diverse, different needs arose. The Hellenist Jews felt neglected by the Hebraic Jewish leadership. The leaders could have easily denied the problem and silenced the complaints. Instead, they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and chose and encouraged a new core of Hellenist leaders to minister to this special need within the church.

In Acts 11 and 15, some leaders concerned with the growth and expansion of the church found it difficult to accept the growing inevitable cultural diversity. They wanted to control the situation, but again the Holy Spirit overruled and the churches were set free to establish their own cultural identity and to develop their own leadership. Jesus Christ was the only foundation on which to plant the church. The Holy Spirit did not allow cultural preferences to strap down the church or hinder its growth." (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 3, August 1990, Wayland Wong)

By the year 2000, the ABC population [numbered] over 1,000,000 people. ABCs make up approximately 40% of the Chinese in America. There are now close to 30,000 new Chinese births annually. And if the immigration population continues to grow, the number of ABC births could easily double again in less than two decades.

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 20 No. 4, November 1998, Wayland Wong

Yet the number of ABCs in churches is less than 5% of the ABC population.

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 22 No. 2, May 2000, Wayland Wong

These principles must be applied to today's Chinese churches. The differences between **OBCs (Overseas Born Chinese)** and ABCs are similar to those faced in Acts. If we use the early church as a model, we will seek to minister to the special needs of ABCs. Pointing out differences between ABCs and OBCs is not aimed at dividing or stereotyping, but at bringing understanding and unity where there is misunderstanding.

"The bicultural characteristic (ABC/OBC) is often the dominant controversy in church life (also affecting family life...). It shapes our approach to doing church ministries and influences our way of seeing and understanding one another. It frequently overshadows any theological or social issue. At times its dominance has been felt in the energy given to denying its importance. Instead of understanding the distinctiveness of the two cultures and finding resolutions toward appreciation and acceptance of the differences, strong emphasis was focused on non-differences and on our

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commonality (e.g., “we’re Chinese” or “we’re one in Christ”). This unfortunate minimizing of differences has in the past been articulated by OBC leaders who remained outside of the confusion and frustrations ABCs experienced in trying to serve under them. Many ABCs in the Chinese churches were allowed to drop out, while church leaders made little effort to discourage the exodus. They simply ignored the differences between ABCs and OBCs, rather than adapt to the particular needs of ABCs. FACE has discovered the ABC casualty rate in the Chinese churches to be well over 75 percent. And the loss of leadership is reflected in the sparse number of mature ABC pastors in spite of a century or five generations of Chinese church history.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 1, February 1990, Joseph Wong)

Setting apart ABCs enables the church to more effectively target a ministry to ABCs, to better understand how to effectively make Christian life and service relevant to ABCs. The great need is to see that OBCs and ABCs are both striving to obey God and to make Christ known. We cannot allow cultural factors to become stumbling blocks rather than allowing spiritual principles to determine the course of ministry and Christian life for OBCs and ABCs. “By the year 2000, the ABC population [was] over 1,000,000 strong.... Yet today, the Chinese church, which should have had a flourishing ministry to the second and third generations, has found it very difficult to set ABC ministries free in their own churches.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 3, August 1990, Wayland Wong)

To the degree that ABCs have been treated like OBCs in the churches, we come to see the major reason for ineffective ministry to ABCs. An OBC pastoring ABCs is similar to an OBC pastoring a Caucasian church. Few would choose this.

“ABCs are Chinese who are born and raised in America. They are Chinese, but they are not OBCs, nor do they understand the Chinese language or their cultural heritage very well. ABC ministries can help ABCs to have a better identity and hopefully an appreciation of their roots and culture, but it still is from an ABC perspective. It will enrich their Chinese-ness, but they will, however, always be different from OBCs.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 5 No. 4, November 1983, Wayland Wong)

What is “culture?”

The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population

The American Heritage Dictionary

Through a series of questions and answers, as well as an appendix of reference articles, this paper tries to establish the need and the urgency for a maturing ABC ministry in the context of an ABC church plant.

An ABC church plant would accomplish the following:

- Stem the high dropout rate of ABCs from the local church
- Strengthen ABC leadership for the church through training, planning, and developing a Biblical mindset
- Cultivate Christ-centered ABC Christian families
- Increase the understanding of cultural differences between OBCs and ABCs, thereby affirming that each group has its own expressions and style
- Provide a unique opportunity to reach the growing unevangelized ABC population

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What are some barriers to growth for an ABC in an OBC church?

“ABCs have grown up in the context of American culture and language and yet have always had to be fitted and sometimes forced into a culturally Chinese church for worship, spiritual development, and service.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 1 No. 2, August 1979) Historically the original OBC founding fathers focused on ministering to the first generation like themselves and the new arrivals from China. Many believed that their children needed to be more Chinese than American in loyalty and cultural orientation. This ethnocentric bias or “desire to preserve Chinese culture has often led to the mixing of cultural preferences with the gospel and the fogging of an appreciation for ABCs.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 3, August 1990, Wayland Wong)

Therefore, the focus of most Chinese churches remains essentially unchanged and leadership is still mainly in the hands of succeeding immigrant generations. The atmosphere of the church remains more Chinese than American. Linguistically and culturally, ministry is still more suited for those who first language is Chinese and not English. Many OBC churches set up adequate programs for younger children, but they find it difficult to relate to and understand older ABCs, especially those in their teen years and above. Too often, ABCs find the experience in Chinese churches too traditionally Chinese and irrelevant to their lives in the United States. As a result, ABCs often feel themselves to be a stranger in a strange land in a Chinese church.

“One seeming lack of commitment and longevity of the [ABCs] relates to values. [OBCs] have a long tenure in a church for the purpose of maintaining the values of the clan or the community. [ABCs] generally have little sense of loyalty to that thinking. One seldom encounters commitment to one church by an ABC for the purpose of maintaining the values of the Chinese community.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 18 No. 2, May 1996, Alan Keung Ginn)

Another barrier to growth may be a problem of perception. It is common for OBCs to say that ABCs are bicultural. In thinking that ABCs are half-Chinese and half-American, OBCs expect ABCs to act and behave in certain Chinese ways. This results in conflict, confusion, and misunderstanding between OBCs and ABCs. The OBCs often see ABCs as oddballs and misfits. ABCs are not fully accepted as Chinese, nor are they fully regarded as Americans. This feeling of conflict makes it hard for many ABCs to stay in Chinese churches.

On the contrary, ABCs are not bicultural—they are not “half and half.” This blend of two cultures for the ABC results in characteristics and a personal culture that is unique to ABCs, a third culture. And while most ABCs have been influenced to some degree by Chinese culture, this influence on each succeeding generation will continue to decrease by greater degrees and the American culture will become the predominant influence on their lives.

Given the OBC belief that one’s family should be the center of a person’s universe, it is often painful and frustrating to experience the ongoing decentralization of Asian-American families, even churched ones. This reality is a fact in this country for every group of immigrants, regardless of origin.

OBCs must remember that they were the first ones to leave their families and their countries. What ABCs are needing is a direct outgrowth from a decision of an immigrant family to relocate to America and acculturate and assimilate. What heals ABCs is God’s love through His church and His Spirit.

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 22 No. 1, February 2000, Kenneth Uyeda Fong

“I feel that abusing the bicultural model to stress cultural continuity between American-born and overseas-born Chinese peoples can make us lose sight of one great reality: the pervasive, enormous impact of the American reality. As people are born into the New World or immigrate young enough to

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be shaped in their early formative years by the New World, there is tremendous discontinuity that occurs. We have only to speak of the generation gap in Chinese church circles to know the truth of this discontinuity: it really is not so much a generation gap as it is a cultural gap.

The ABCs are a new creation, created by the American context. The ABCs are part of a new people—Asian Americans—finding that they share a new culture with other American-born Asians. ABCs are not part-Chinese, part-American, in culture. ABCs *are* a culture. It is good anthropology (refer to *The Bicultural Bridge* by Paul G. Hiebert) to say that when people come from different cultural backgrounds to live, work, play, and worship, a new culture is created.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 9 No. 1, February 1987, Donna Dong)

For an OBC or ABC pastor to effectively pastor people of different cultures is very difficult. This is especially true when the cultures such as east and west tend to be quite opposite in basic ways. Generally speaking, one is quiet and meditative, and passive, while the other is outspoken, active, and aggressive. A pastor functioning according to one culture will have difficulty understanding and sympathizing with those of the other culture and will tend to gravitate to a cultural comfort zone suitable for himself. This observation is not an indictment against any individual. “It is rather a recognition of the limitations we humans have in seeking to be all things to all men. We seem to be more ready to accept the need for special assistance with age differences (e.g., a youth pastor) than the need for assistance with differences that are cultural.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 5 No. 1, February 1983, Joseph Wong)

“To evangelize and build disciples, we do not require ABCs to cross any cultures to be in fellowship with the church, for it is the responsibility of the church to adapt to their needs. It is at this point that sometimes a pastor has to choose to fend off what hinders his flock from getting spiritually nourishing food. It is for them that the shepherd, placing all on the altar, has to ‘labor, powerfully works within him’ (Colossians 1:28) to lead the church aright culturally. Let the gospel come in purity to ABCs and be understood, embraced, and lived out.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 13 No. 2, May 1991, Peter Yuen)

Another barrier to growth deals with the balance of power in a church. It is reasonable to expect that “a new church, in one generation, would have ABCs constituting one-half the worshippers in the church.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 3 No. 3, August 1981, Peter Yuen)

“The ABCs entry into church leadership begins with Sunday School teaching. As most classes are in English and for ABCs, ABC teachers are greatly needed. Sunday School class is the proving ground for faithful, loyal servanthood of the church. There is an imbalance. The spiritual content of the Christian education of the church is half in the hands of ABCs, while only one-fourth or less of the decision-making authority is in ABC hands. ABC workers are proving proportionately faithful in the service of the church. Yet the directing of the church is minimally in ABC hands. Perhaps that responsibility without commensurate authority is a factor perpetuating ABC dropout or burnout.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 3 No. 3, August 1981, Peter Yuen)

ABCs are given little in authority and provide much in service.

What perpetuates this imbalance of power? “The rejections [from the OBCs] grow from the fear that [ABCs] may disturb the pattern of things in the church. They may upset people who are satisfied with the way things are. The OBC pastor is disinclined to move to fast. *It is simply not the Chinese way.* So the ABC is advised to wait, to be patient. At times this is good advice. Too often, it is not. Committed to work with the pastor, not over or around him, the ABC of integrity is locked into neutral. He experiences the sense of powerlessness and uselessness. For one who feels called to be woven into the fabric of church

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life and missions, this becomes a crippling blow. This may also explain why so many ABC assistant pastors have dropped out of ministry and why so few ABCs are entering the pastorate.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 2 No. 3, August 1980, Hoover Wong).

And while OBC leaders do care, “ABCs struggle over a nominal acceptance by OBC leaders.... ABCs fall short of the spiritual criteria set up by [OBC] leaders [due in part to differing cultural values]. In OBC eyes, ABCs are not qualified to be spiritual leaders of a church. ABC leaders are always asking for permission rather than participating in the decision making of the church. Such a second-class citizen finds it easy to think, ‘It’s *their* church.’” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 14 No. 2, May 1992, Joseph Wong)

The cultural gap has been an invisible wall keeping the majority of ABCs on the outside or on the fringe of the Chinese church. In the final analysis, ABCs feel underfed: their needs are not being met, their gifts are not being used, and they are not being drawn closer to God. For the small percentage of ABCs who remain in the OBC church, they are “torn between loyalty to church and family and their need for meaningful worship and service to God. [Thankfully, there is usually a vision for serving the ABC community.] Staying, [however], means cultural constrictions, conflicts with leaders, concerns being ignored, and isolation from many of their ABC friends.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 17 No. 1, February 1995, Joseph Wong)

Without a strong
ABC ministry,
ABCs will
inevitably drop
out of Chinese
churches.

Without effective ministries, we must further acknowledge the high dropout rate amongst ABCs. Some join Caucasian churches. Few venture to another Chinese church. The majority just drop out of church life. “Many have become successful middle-class Americans with very secular values—we have gained the world, but have lost our soul. Even worse, they are now raising their ABC families with the same value system, with very little moral and spiritual values on which to anchor their lives. And the succeeding generation of ABCs feels an even greater alienation from the Chinese church.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 15 No. 2, May 1993, Wayland Wong)

One thing OBCs have in common with ABCs is that they all raise ABCs. Although it is a common occurrence, losing their children to the world is a consequence these parents must avoid. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the Chinese church to establish a full, strong ministry to ABCs. “Setting ABC ministries free must be a priority for the Chinese church or we will find an immigrant church with a fortress mentality set on preserving its culture, while generations of ABCs both inside and outside the church have already been lost.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 3, August 1990, Wayland Wong)

Generally speaking, ABCs will never be able to run a Chinese church that is predominantly OBC, nor should they want to. ABCs simply want a church where they feel comfortable and that is able to minister to their particular situation and needs. ABCs need a place of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service in a style relevant to their culture. With people growing in Christ in their own language and cultural setting, they will hopefully draw closer to Christ and consequently, closer spiritually to each other.

Why the urgency to plant an ABC church now?

“The delay of every four or five years [for an effective ABC ministry] means the loss of another generation of ABCs going through the church.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 5 No. 3, August 1983, Wayland Wong) And the numbers *lost* continue to grow. As D/FW (Dallas/Fort Worth) ensues its rapid pace toward becoming a world class city, untold numbers of ABCs are relocating to the area for work opportunities, a high and affordable quality of life, excellent school systems, and so on. If we are serious about our mandate to evangelize the unreached, where are the churches that will open its doors to the ABCs?

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The D/FW area also has a viable ABC community of young Christian families and career people that are eager and “hurting” for a more effective ABC church ministry. “What ABCs seek is an opportunity to socialize and worship with others of similar heritage. Where a good church with relevant ABC ministries is discovered, many ABCs are readily attracted. It is a call to true and good relationship, community, and challenge for service.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 9 No. 4, November 1987, Peter Yuen).

If ABCs should continue waiting for Chinese churches to develop ABC programs to the point of greater effectiveness in reaching adult ABCs and ABC families, how long would ABCs have to wait? Based on the history of Chinese churches, the answer could be approximately 50 years. Few OBC churches have been able to both develop strong ABC programs and place a significant number of ABCs on their church ruling board. The Chinese Christian Union Church of Chicago and the True Light Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles are among them. Both churches required more than 50 years from their founding date to develop viable ABC ministries with a significant number of ABCs serving on their church boards.

“The slow development of ABC programs in these early Chinese churches was due to the lack of adult ABC leadership. Since none was available, they had to grow their own. It took many years and after many dropouts before a few persevering ABC children survived the social-cultural barriers of the OBC churches, grew to spiritual maturity through para-church ministries, and eventually were elected to the ruling boards of these churches.

[In] more recently established churches, OBCs to some degree are reaching their own ABC children, teens, and college students, but have none or are lacking significant numbers of ABCs on their church ruling boards. Because of the greater availability of transplanted ABC leadership, both lay and clergy, to help these churches, the ABC leadership-development process has been shortened. It may take 30 years rather than 50 years from a church’s founding date before there is an emergence of a sizeable number of ABCs in decision-making [roles]. Because of this slow-development process, these churches at the 30-year mark are still only reaching a [small percentage of ABCs. DCBC is at this milestone and can testify to this truth.] How can we speed things up?” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 10 No. 2, May 1988, David Woo)

One answer is to establish churches primarily geared for ABCs and led by ABCs. These churches can bypass the 30- to 50-year process and have immediate effectiveness in ministering to ABCs.

“Realizing that only about one percent of ABCs were being reached by the Chinese churches and that more than a superficial facelift was necessary, FACE decided to add a new *face* to its ministry by encouraging ABC church planting. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- Many ABCs still have any affinity for Chinese people in their closest relationships.
- Today, some Chinese churches are becoming more Chinese in their cultural orientation because they are attempting to minister to a rapidly increasing number of new immigrants. ABC ministries are declining, rather than growing in some of these churches.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 11 No. 3, August 1989, David Woo)

In 1981, True Light Presbyterian Church commissioned one of its Bible study groups in Orange County, 40 miles away from Los Angeles, to plant a daughter church geared especially to reach ABCs in that area. Wayland Wong, a “home-grown” product of True Light and its missionary to Hong Kong for 16 years, was called back with his family to the States to serve as pastor.

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“An elementary school in Huntington Beach was rented on Sundays to begin the Family Bible Hour (Sunday school) and [worship] service. Every week it was truly a family effort. Chairs had to be set up, rooms arranged, equipment moved in and out, and the facility cleaned up afterwards. During the week, we used different homes for our core meetings, prayer, and Bible study clusters, and a high school fellowship. Our strategy has been to emphasize adults and family units, to nurture on all levels. On September 1990, we celebrated our tenth anniversary. [We started out with five families] and we now have over 75 families... averaging about 220 [people] in our worship service.” (*ABOUT FACE* Vol. 13 No. 1, February 1991, Annette Lum)

“As more people are saved through church planting than by any other outreach method, the Great Commission is best accomplished by planting churches. More ABC churches should be planted. We need to be reaching ABC families and not just young people.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 15 No. 2, May 1993, Wayland Wong) In the 1980s and 1990s, additional “ABC churches [were] planted wherever there [were] high concentrations of Chinese: San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 13 No. 3, August 1991, Wayland Wong). The time has come for D/FW to join the ranks of a metroplex with a substantial and effective ABC ministry.

With a church plant comes the opportunity for ABCs to be called into ministry and leadership. The Chinese church must be like the missionary going to China—his regional work is not done until he sees the establishment of indigenous leadership in the evangelized group. “There must be a new generation of pastoral and lay leaders to reach the next wave of ABCs in the 21st Century. Those in the Chinese church must find the ABCs who will continue the journey of faith.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 22 No. 1, February 2000, William Eng). The future of ministry to ABCs depends upon it... and God’s grace.

“The ABC leadership for the past 30 years has been fading. In the 1970s and 1980s, several ABC pastors became the advocates of ABC ministries for the Chinese church through leading seminars, speaking, writing and attending national conferences.... In 1978, church leaders at the North America Congress of Chinese Evangelicals (NACOCE) suggested that the ABCs set up their own organization. Accordingly, after much prayer and discussion, Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE) was formed and the first quarterly issue of *ABOUT FACE* was published....

Praise the Lord that in spite of the resistance and opposition, the Chinese church is still going through dramatic changes. ABC ministries are now an essential part of many churches. Churches are experimenting with new styles of contemporary worship. The concept of multi-staff consisting of both ABC and OBC pastors is spreading. Even separate boards are beginning to take hold. Progress and change, however, are not uniform across the country. Some churches are still generations behind, while others have continued to move forward and have already planted ABC churches. Yet today the Chinese church is still at a crossroads. The situation is extremely desperate. Over 95% of the ABCs are still outside of the church of Jesus Christ. The dropout rate of both ABC pastors and lay leadership continues to be a serious problem.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 22 No. 2, May 2000, Wayland Wong)

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The local Chinese church must do its part to raise up laborers to reach out to ABCs in the surrounding area as well as those across the country. “The church has been weak in identifying spiritually gifted ABCs and challenging them. There are too few role models for ABCs to follow.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 13 No. 3, Wayland Wong)

“ABCs must be able to interpret the teachings of Christ and apply them in the cultural setting of who they are as Chinese raised in the American society. Leaders who know their spiritual personhood and can exemplify Christ as needed are to be bridge-builders to the next generation. Keeping and finding ABCs in the [local] church means giving them ownership to a vision of a vibrant ABC ministry. This also means that authority must be delegated to those who are qualified to fulfill that ministry. Let them earn the position given. Brokenness must be modeled by the more mature OBCs and ABCs alike. Allow these potential workers to fail; allow failure to shape their character.... Invest and pour yourself into potential workers for the kingdom, and sometimes this may mean not necessarily in your own church, [but perhaps, a church plant].” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 22 No. 1, William Eng)

“How great it would be for ABCs to stay on steadfastly in the church and give their lives to the work of building a strong ministry for all who come after them, generation after generation.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 20 No. 2, May 1998, Peter Yuen)

DCBC (Dallas Chinese Bible Church) has strategic importance to meeting the needs of ABCs in the D/FW area. DCBC has the resources to establish an ABC church in a relatively short period of time. DCBC has the pastoral staff, the ABC membership numbers, financial resources, and lay leadership to establish an effective ABC church plant.

Pastoral Staff. Pastor Darrell Buhler and Pastor Daniel Indradjaja are well suited to pioneer this church plant. There are also other ABC pastoral resources in D/FW and at DTS (Dallas Theological Seminary).

ABC Members. DCBC has the most viable adult ABC ministry in D/FW—the English Career Fellowship and Cedar House Fellowship have sufficient numbers to contribute substantially to this new church. There are also numerous unchurched ABC Christians throughout D/FW, who have recently left other Chinese churches. These last few years have also seen amazing revival and renewal among ABC college students all across the country. Will Chinese churches offer them the opportunity for continued growth and effective service? The barriers seem too high. Many ABC college graduates going into careers or graduate school would also be prime candidates for attending an ABC church.

Financial Resources. Operational expenses would be kept to a minimum. The church plant would initially make use of the existing full-time DCBC staff and arrange to rent space from a non-profit meeting facility, such as a public school or local church, with nominal maintenance fees. The main income to cover expenses would come from the contributions of the targeted ABC members, which is expected to increase over time.

Lay Leadership. Amongst the lay people committed to the ABC church plant are at least five former deacons of DCBC, numerous Sunday school teachers, as well as several fellowship coordinators and worship leaders. In addition to DCBC leaders, many of the unchurched ABCs in D/FW also served as deacons, committee leaders, teachers, and counselors at their former Chinese churches.

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In realizing that ABCs are not effectively reached by the Chinese church and that more than superficial changes are needed, the time is ripe in D/FW for an ABC church plant. The need for an ABC church in D/FW is so great that many groups of people, other than those from DCBC, have either begun rudimentary ABC ministries or have begun discussing new church plans. If DCBC does not fill this vacuum, one or more of these other groups will do so in a way that is likely to be weaker than what DCBC could establish.

If a group unaffiliated with DCBC establishes an ABC church, it is easy to see that DCBC could lose many of its ABC members. Furthermore, since an independent ABC church would have no ties to DCBC, it would be more difficult to provide DCBC with ABC ministry resources. A DCBC church plant would not only meet the needs of ABCs at DCBC, but also meet the needs of ABCs in the D/FW area and continue to help meet the needs of DCBC as the mother church.

What's are the characteristics of an ABC church plant?

An ABC church plant is not an attempt to split the churches; rather an attempt to enhance the ministry so that all the Chinese, both OBCs and ABCs can be fully ministered to. Let's "enlarge our concept of the church beyond the walls of a local church. Let's call it the city church. The variety of churches in the [D/FW] area may then be viewed together as the church of [D/FW]. Each church would have its special focus, trying to meet the many needs of a specific group of people. Thus, no single church has to carry the responsibilities for all the needs of the city. Instead the work is shared." (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 5 No. 1, February 1983, Joseph Wong)

There are advantages in having a Chinese church when seeking to evangelize the Chinese. Likewise, there are similar advantages to having an ABC church. There is wisdom in providing pastoral care from one of similar cultural background. And there is greater consistency in viewing a city of churches, rather than only the local congregation, as the basic expression of the body of Christ. Local churches need to be clear about what they can and cannot do.

Does this mean that we neglect the OBCs? No! Wherever there are Chinese in the United States, there has been a proliferation of Chinese churches. In D/FW, there is no shortage of Chinese churches ministering to the OBC, while there is an acute shortage ministering to ABCs.

Church splits are caused by broken communication and by immaturity and carnality, [usually on both sides].

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 7 No. 2, May 1985, Peter Yuen

Unity is an attitude of identity with others. Unity requires us to seek the benefit for others and to see that as benefit for all. Being together in the same place and at the same time sharing the same theology... does not necessarily prove unity.

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1980, Joseph Wong

The relationship between a church plant and its mother church must be defined and cultivated. A mature, interdependent relationship can be defined as follows: "Interdependence can only be achieved between independent parties. The steps are from *dependence* to *independence*, then to *interdependence*. If one of the parties is still dependent on the other, cooperation will not be truly interdependent. Instead any joint decision will be the result of submission by one side or the graciously giving in by the other side, and not a result of mutual agreement. Therefore, it is important for both sides that the ABCs first achieve equal status, becoming truly independent." (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 1, February 1990, Joseph Wong)

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An ABC ministry would have difficulties achieving a sense of independence in an OBC setting. A church plant, or a separation of communities, would allow for the autonomy necessary to achieve independence in order to strive for interdependence between the larger OBC and ABC communities.

“*Separation* [of OBC and ABC] ministries is necessary because each community has different spiritual and social needs. One pastor or one ministry cannot hope to meet all these needs. We believe only leaders and people of similar cultural background can have the informed insights to plan and to guide [for more effective ministry].

Autonomy [as defined by a church plant] is necessary because both groups need the freedom and latitude to analyze their problems, envision their solutions, and grow through their mistakes.... The element of trust and good will is [especially important here].

We hope separation and autonomy do not lead to isolation. There are some ministerial bridges between [ABCs and OBCs].” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 3 No. 2, May 1981, Joseph Wong)

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Across America
(CAC).

As the early church in Acts “crossed national boundaries and grew increasingly complex in its cultural diversity, it allowed churches to develop and grow in their own unique ways. This gives us some principles for developing an ABC [church plant]:

Complementary rather than competition. An ABC [church plant] adds and builds upon the [OBC church] by ministering to their grown children and families. The ABC ministry should naturally spring from the OBC ministry, so it should not be seen as competition or a threat. If the ABC ministry grows, it is to the glory of God and the OBC church for we will be meeting the needs of the next generation and not losing them to the world....

Effectiveness rather than divisiveness. Having a special ministry to the ABCs is to recognize the unique cultural identify and needs of ABCs. Rather than dividing families and splitting churches, [the perspective should be that of opening doors to greater growth in stemming the flow of dropouts and keeping the ABCs in the church. ABC church planting is the best means for reaching unchurched ABCs. Most ABCs still have an affinity for Chinese people in their closest relationships]....

Completeness rather than disunity. The establishment of an ABC [church plant] completes the ministry of the Chinese church. It is a maturing church that acknowledges the reality and value of the growing diversity instead of regarding the different expressions and models of the Chinese churches as disunity. Each generation has its own cultural changes with its own expressions and style.” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 12 No. 3, August 1990, Wayland Wong)

Advocating an ABC church plant is not a denial of our need for the OBC church. As Chinese Christians, we “cannot simply reject [the values of our parents]. It is not proposed here that parental views be wholly and uncritically adopted either. Rather, we need to hold a delicate and ever changing balance. Christ told us that we must be willing to ‘forsake father and mother and brother,’ yet the same Bible tells us to ‘honor your mother and father.’” (*ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 6 No. 2, May 1984, Samuel Moy). Through our fellowship, we can enrich each other’s lives. It is, however, within our diversity and differences that we must manifest true unity in the Holy Spirit.

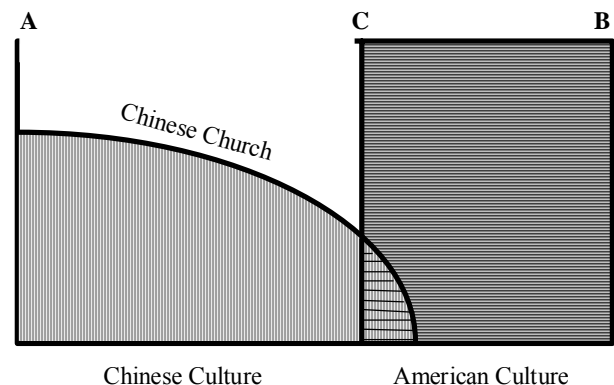
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OBCs AND ABCs: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE ON HOW ONE SEES THE ABC MINISTRY? *ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 1 No. 3, November 1979

When you consider ministering to ABCs, what do you understand this to mean? It varies with one's background. The OBC with a firm Chinese cultural background finds himself satisfied in the church if the service and ministry are conducted completely in Chinese. But as the church continues to function through the years, OBC leaders discover that more and more of their children are English-speaking.

To meet their need, an English Sunday School class is started for them, and as these children get older, they are expected to attend worship service. Because they complain about not being able to understand the Chinese service, the church again adjusts to this by translating the service from Chinese to English. Meanwhile, there are many ABCs who, being old enough to decide for themselves, have dropped out of church. These who drop out and others who are inclined to follow their steps complain that they do not want to sit through long, boring worship services and that the teaching is not presented in a way interesting and relevant to them. The sensitive OBC leadership foresees this, or at least responds to this, and begins some concerted effort to do ABC ministry. What is understood to be ABC ministry here is usually an effort to meet the needs of the few young people who are bordering on dropping out.

The diagram depicts the span of cultures. At line A is Chinese culture; at line B, American culture. The whole spectrum in between represents the milieu of Chinese in America. The area under the curve represents the Chinese church. Those under the curve between line A and line C represent the OBCs in the church most of whom, though somewhat bicultural after being in this country for a number of years, are strongly Chinese in culture. Those under the curve to the right of line C represent the few ABCs in the church. This is usually understood by an OBC to be the target of ABC ministry.



On the other hand, when an ABC Christian considers ABC ministry, that sector under the curve is just a small though immediate part of it. The ABC remembers the many friends he once had in Sunday school and church who have dropped out and gone the way of the world. He thinks of his many peers and relatives, his very own brothers and sisters, and their children for whom the Chinese church has not had an effective ministry. He realizes that over more than half of the Chinese population in this land are ABCs, few of whom are reached for Christ, and this portion will be increasing as the years go by. In contrast to the OBC, he seems the whole span from line C to B as the target of ABC ministry.

The believer with vision, whether OBC or ABC, will see that line C will gradually move to the left side as the years go by—a larger and larger portion will be ABCs. This means that the Chinese church must gear itself to an increasingly effective work among ABCs by enlisting pastoral staff and lay leaders capable of meeting these needs.

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ONE MILLION BY 2000!

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 20 No. 4, November 1998, Wayland Wong

...The ABCs have arrived. By the year 2000, the ABC population will be over 1,000,000 strong. They have increased in geometric proportions. There are now close to 30,000 new Chinese births annually in America. And if the immigration population continues to grow, the number of ABC births could easily double again in less than two decades. The tragedy is that the demographics in our churches do not reflect this growing segment at all.

A new challenge. This generation of ABCs is further removed from the Chinese churches than ever before. Forty years ago, the church, besides proclaiming the gospel, was a center for the Chinese community, meeting social needs, and providing community services. Now people have many more options. The Chinese cultural clubs, the Chinese schools, and all the temples are competing for their attention. Many secular organizations are outshining the churches in areas of service. Work, school, and a rat-race culture are also demanding so much time that people have lost sight of what is really important.

A new breed. Today's ABCs are caught up in a Western cultural diversity called postmodernism, which most Chinese churches cannot understand, much less cope with it. Their view of God, their moral and ethical values, and their behavior are a genuine cause for alarm. When absolutes are rejected and traditions are no longer relevant, people owe loyalty to no one. They set their own ground rules and change them whenever it is to their advantage.

The present training. A major concern is what is happening in higher education. Most ABC seminarians are being trained to think "Asian American," because it is politically correct way for the moment. Meanwhile, most Chinese churches are not ready for this, thus making it difficult for ABC seminarians to become suitable candidates for Chinese churches. These churches are still very ethnocentric and the Asian-American theme is a threat to their very existence.

The immovable church. The Chinese Church in America is over 100 years old, but not much has changed in that it has remained a first-generation church in pastoral staff, lay leadership, and cultural style. For this reason, after decades of work among children and young people, there is little evidence of a thriving second- and third-generation ABC community in our churches. This is particularly apparent in the lack of ABC pastoral and lay leadership. While many churches have started English-speaking services, few have become predominantly ABC congregations with mature ABC adults and families. Will it ever be possible for the Chinese church to avert a meltdown in ABC ministries in the coming decade?

A vision for the future. ...It is urgent for every church leader to focus on the nearly insurmountable challenge of meeting the needs of the [1,000,000] ABCs. Insurmountable, yes, but God is able. He is looking for leaders, both OBCs and ABCs, like those of Issachar who "understood the times and knew what to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). We need people empowered by the Holy Spirit, who, understanding this growing secular generation, will rise to the challenge. Knowing what to do and willing to take a risk, they will give their lives to the mission of building a church that is able to reach and serve the Chinese community in America and be a shining light to the world.

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REACHING ABCs... WHO ARE WE WORKING WITH?

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1980, Wayland Wong

...The difference between ABCs and OBCs is not just a matter of the place of birth, but mainly a difference of cultural background. ABCs have an American cultural upbringing. And culturally speaking, this may include many OBCs who came to the United States during their very early formative years. It must be stressed that making this distinction between ABCs and OBCs is not to say one is superior or inferior to the other, but simply to point out that the differences are real. And if the church is concerned with reaching ABCs, it must take this into consideration.

How Chinese? How American? ABCs are a mixed lot. It is impossible to stereotype an ABC because of the wide spectrum into which they fit. So many different factors influence an ABC's culture that examples could be found from one extreme to the other. On a scale of 1 to 10, from the very Chinese on the left to the very American on the right, one would find that most ABCs probably fit somewhere in the middle. But more and more ABCs are moving to the right, that is, becoming more American by the mere fact that they are of a later generation of ABCs in America.

How an ABC is made. The following is a very general scale by which we might gauge an ABC. There are several important factors that will influence his Chinese-ness or American-ness: where he was born, where his parents were born and raised, the culture of his upbringing, his schooling, the kind of church to which he belongs, and how he sees himself. All these factors are interrelated, and some factors will affect a given person more significantly than will others. Thus, given a set of factors, even the most sophisticated computer cannot prescribe how an ABC is likely to turn out in the end.

A Cultural Scale

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Chinese Culturally	Asia				<i>BIRTH</i>		America				Very American Culturally
	From China		<i>PARENTS</i>				2 nd , 3 rd Generation ABC		Very Western		
	Chinatown Community				<i>ENVIRONMENT</i>		Suburbia				
	Inter-racial, Asians				<i>SCHOOLING</i>		All White				
	Chinese Church		<i>CHURCH</i>				Caucasian Church				
	Bilingual										
	Chinese				<i>SELF-IMAGE</i>		American				

Another element, which must be taken into account, are the three stages of a person's life—childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Some factors may change in different periods of a person's life and therefore may be a major influence moving the person to the right or the left in the scale.

Various characteristics of an ABC. Generalizations may be misleading, for there are likely to be many exceptions. But the following chart will indicate some of the different characteristics of ABCs in the various aspects of his life.

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ABCs: Characteristics Tendencies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<i>More Chinese</i>	Conservative	<i>OUTLOOK IN LIFE</i>							Liberal	<i>More American</i>	
	Traditional								Broad-minded		
	Inward	<i>SOCIAL</i>							Outward		
	Non-involved								Involved		
	Passive	<i>WORLD</i>							Aggressive		
	Family-Centered	<i>RELATIONSHIPS</i>							Individualistic		
	Relational	<i>ACTIVITIES</i>							Pragmatic		
									Goal-oriented		

Who shall we attend to? Some ABCs, culturally more Chinese, fit well into the present Chinese churches and should continue to do so, and put their effort into service there. They may see no need for any special emphasis for ABC ministry. Other ABCs who are more American culturally fit easily into the Caucasian churches. They may not be able to understand why more ABCs don't join them. They should by all means continue to serve and fellowship with that church. Obviously, both of these two groups have found their places and are quite satisfied.

The remaining ABCs are the ones on whom we must focus our attention: those in the middle and still in the Chinese churches but are not really satisfied or happy with them; or the vast majority of ABCs not in the churches today, who feel neither comfortable nor welcomed in the present Chinese or Caucasian churches. It is these ABCs, both within and without the church, that we must address ourselves....

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AMERICANIZING... READY OR NOT
ABOUT FACE, Vol. 3 No. 4, November 1981, Peter Yuen

The moving cultural stance. Many factors determine how Chinese or how American a Chinese person is, be he an OBC or an ABC. As each of the various factors influencing one's cultural inclination is laid out on a scale of 1 to 10, a composite picture emerges describing the whole spectrum from the various conceivable cultural facets, with *Chinese-ness* on the left side and *American-ness* on the right side. As one takes a composite of his own place in all of these spectra, he has an estimate of his own cultural stance at this point in time in his life and growth.

A Cultural Scale

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
<i>Very Chinese Culturally</i>	Asia						<i>BIRTH</i>							America	<i>Very American Culturally</i>
	From China						<i>PARENTS</i>		2 nd , 3 rd Generation ABC						
	Very Chinese								Very Western						
	Chinatown Community						<i>ENVIRONMENT</i>							Suburbia	
	Inter-racial, Asians						<i>SCHOOLING</i>							All White	
	Chinese Church						<i>CHURCH</i>							Caucasian Church	
	Bilingual														
Chinese						<i>SELF-IMAGE</i>							American		

To be sure, there are some born in Hong Kong who came as preschoolers with their families to America and are as culturally ABC as many who are born here. And there are some born in this country of parents who are loyal to Chinese traditions and who restrain their children from becoming culturally American. These are likely to be more Chinese than the aforementioned preschoolers from Hong Kong.

In general, as one remains in this country, most of these factors will find him more and more to the right, *Americanizing* as time goes on. A few exceptional factors might find him moving toward the Chinese culture, factors such as enrolling in a Chinese 100A class at the university, or a trip to visit China to find one's roots, or even cheering the Taiwan Little League team to another championship. But on the whole, input to our psyche from school, from work, from community, even from church, and from home, especially where television rules as master teacher, continues to move us day by day, year by year, to be more and more American.

One has a particular composite cultural stance at a particular point in time.

Despite the pronounced resistance of some staunch advocates to maintain Chinese culture, all who are around him and he, too, are moving up the numerical scale, becoming less Chinese and more American as long as he and his family and descendants stay in this country. In fact, one is ever unhappy resisting this progress. Granted some newcomers from Asia go through very trying times adjusting to life in America. But after some years, it is only natural and befitting in this country to move westerly, culturally speaking. That is true whether one is OBC or ABC. There is progress individually and as a family to become increasingly suited to American culture.

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“**Let’s get together.**” Now in the Chinese church, as OBCs and ABCs worship and serve and fellowship, from time to time OBCs will say, “Let’s get together. Let’s work together. Let’s worship together. Let’s have a social or picnic together. Let’s evangelize together.” Remember that it is natural and concordant to move right on the scale. Moving left causes a disruption and discontinuity. Thus, OBCs should be gradually becoming more Americanized by the influence of ABCs rather than ABCs becoming more Chinese by OBCs. Even OBCs who have been here for a few years find it uncomfortable to have new arrivals from Hong Kong call for a more purely Chinese environment.

It is natural
(and OK) to
move westerly
here.

Wherever “I” stand on the cultural spectrum, those on one side of “me” seem to be backward and those to the other side seem too American. “My” position is the correct position. But “I” am moving to the right and that comfortable position goes with “me.” Fortunately, for some, they are gifted with a capacity to be sufficiently comfortable over a wide zone on the cultural scale.

The phenomenon of resistance to leftward influences operates in the home as well. Parents from the Orient, bringing their families over to America, find their children influenced by American ways. Calling upon their children to be more Chinese—speak Chinese and maintain Chinese customs and manners—finds even the most obedient of children slipping off, if not to American ways, to lose their Chinese patterns. Children who came as teenagers can understand more the sympathies of their parents. But those who came as a younger age find it quite discomfoting and sometimes impossible to meet their parents’ cultural and linguistic expectations. To be sure, those who are born in this country and are brought up in our American society sometimes find it nothing short of a shock to be expected to conform to Chinese ways.

As it is true in the home, so it is in the church. Having ABCs meet with OBCs in the Chinese church is more difficult for ABCs than for OBCs. It is not intended here that there should be no united functions in the church. There is value in such and some ABCs do enjoy get-togethers with the whole church. But it should be realized that such functions call upon the OBCs to move forward and the ABCs to turn around and move backward from what is natural and comfortable. The camp song “The more we get together, the happier we’ll be,” is therefore more likely true for the OBCs than the ABCs.

Now as we consider a concerted effort by the church to become more effective in its work with ABCs—to try to conserve ABCs for the church and God’s kingdom as they grow up within the church—we need to realize that “getting together” in the middle is not the middle. The church must bend in the ABCs’ favor in order to be in the middle of the comfort zone.

Getting together in
the middle is a greater
strain for ABCs
than for OBCs.

Understanding and support. On the whole, the leadership and the more mature and stable ones in the Chinese church are OBCs. The younger and less mature, the fragile psyche are likely to be ABCs. Let Paul’s injunction in Romans 15:1 shape our strategy for church life and ministry: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and just not please ourselves.”

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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICANS

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 6 No. 4, November 1984, Sam Moy

Many speakers and writers have recently been calling for unity among ABCs and OBCs. They assert that too much has been made of the differences between the ABC and the OBC and that as Christians we should be “one in Christ.” While I affirm the need for unity in Christ, I believe that we must be very aware and sensitive to the significant differences between ABCs and OBCs. It is only after we have a clear understanding of the important differences that we can, as the body of Christ, move toward greater unity, love, and peace.

This article is not meant to create more divisions; rather to facilitate unity by clarifying the significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Thus the purpose of this article is twofold:

- Identify six significant differences between traditional Asian culture (includes Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and Western culture (as exemplified in the United States)
- Discuss the effect of these differences on personal and spiritual growth, family life, and church life

Six Major Cultural Differences

It needs to be noted that stating there are differences between the two cultures is not saying that one is better than the other. They are different expressions of God’s creation, each with its assets and deficiencies as evaluated by the rule of Scripture. Furthermore, while most if not all ABCs do not adhere to all six of the Western values, all ABCs are exposed to them and will take on some of them. Finally, while these value differences are presented as a dichotomy, they are actually a continuum, more gray and not really black and white.

The Group and the Individual

The first difference between Asian and Western cultures is that Asian cultures values “collectivity or group orientation,” whereas Western culture values “individualism.” For Americans, the individual is the central figure in life; life resolves around him. For Asians, the family or clan is given prominence over the individual. An illustration of this difference is seen when I introduce myself. In Chinese, I say my surname first and then my given name. The reverse is true when I introduce myself in English. This simple difference reflects a much deeper cultural bias wherein Asian culture the family name is more important than the individual.

Duty and Rights

Asian cultures values “duty and obligation,” whereas Western culture values “personal rights and privilege.” In the United States, we have the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, which serve to ensure individual rights and freedom. In Asian culture, there is a sense of duty and obligation (especially to the family) that overrides individual rights and privilege. For example, a Chinese college student might set aside his personal preference and take a major that his family decides upon because of this sense of loyalty to the family.

Hierarchy and Equality

Asian culture values “hierarchy and status,” whereas Western culture values “equality and egalitarianism” in social relationships. In the United States, there is great concern for equal rights and the democratic process. In contrast, in Asian culture, there is a much greater emphasis on roles, position, and status. It is

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important for the Chinese child to show respect to those in higher position. So when I was growing up, I addressed my older brothers in Chinese by their titles and not their first names (e.g., “big brother” instead of “Steve”). This sense of hierarchy is very clear in the traditional Asian family, where father is the head, next in line is mother, then the oldest son, etc.

Deference and Assertiveness

Asian culture values “deference and respect,” whereas Western culture values “assertiveness.” Deference and modesty are seen in a Chinese person’s reaction to a compliment. If a friend were to tell my mother that her son was smart, she would probably deny it and say that her friend’s son was smarter. On the other hand, Americans value the ability to be assertive and confrontive so that they are more aggressive in demanding their rights.

Restraint and Expressiveness

Asian culture values “self-control, restraint, and patience,” while Western culture values “emotional expressiveness.” Americans tend to be very open with both verbal and physical expressions of affection and other emotions. There are many positive connotations associated with emotional expressiveness; e.g., one is open, honest, in touch, etc. However, in Asian cultures, children are usually taught to curb and control their emotions. Thus Asians are often stereotyped as being quiet and respectful. It is not unusual for a Chinese father to rarely tell his children he loves them or for a traditional Chinese couple to ever show affection in public.

Achievement and Personal Growth

Asian culture values “hard work and achievement,” while Western culture emphasizes “personal growth and social maturity.” Most Asian students excel at school and work. Indeed, Asians are probably the most financially successful of the minority groups in the United States. Hard work and achievement are believed to bring success, happiness, and most of all, honor. However, Americans tend to place a greater emphasis on personal development and social maturity. Thus, American parents are often very concerned about their child’s personal and social adjustment and are more tolerant of less than excellent performances in studies or work.

Effects of These Differences

On the Family. These six differences can cause many problems and conflicts in Chinese individuals, families, and churches. When OBC parents maintain their traditional Asian orientation, while their ABC children adopt Western values, they often “can’t understand” their ABC children and vice versa. The result is confusion, anger, and pain for parent and child alike.

These cultural differences can also cause problems in a marriage, where one spouse is more Asian and the other more Western. The more Asian spouse may want to spend more time with his/her parents, reflecting the strong Asian value on family, duty, and respect. The more Western spouse might not understand why it is important for his/her partner to visit his/her parents.

On Self-Image. For the ABC young person, there can be a great deal of confusion when his parents want him to act one way (e.g., show deference and respect), but American society influences him to act another way (e.g., be assertive). As a result, many first- and second- generation ABCs suffer from low self-esteem, poor self-image, and depression. Such poor personal adjustment undoubtedly inhibits spiritual growth and renders the person a less effective servant of God.

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In the Church. These differences also affect the churches. Those that have strong OBC leadership may want Chinese as the primary language, because it makes them feel more at home and enhances their worship of God. But with the language also comes the culture and traditions, and it is these that make the OBCs more comfortable. This is fine and right if there are no ABCs in the church. But if there are, then the church must deal with a second language and culture. Just as the OBC has the need and right to worship in Chinese, the ABC also has the need and right to worship in English.

Again, it is more than just the language; it is the culture. Sermons preached in Chinese should use Chinese illustrations. These will help the OBC hearer to better understand the message and enhance his worship experience. On the other hand, sermons preached in English should use American illustrations. Translation from Chinese to English is ineffective because the difference is more than just language. Therefore, the Chinese church must minister effectively to the different linguistic and cultural needs of its people.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are significant differences between Asian and Western cultures, and therefore between OBCs and ABCs. These differences go far beyond language and affect the very basic areas of our existence impacting us personally, in our families, and in our churches. To neglect or deny the reality of these differences and their potential effects is to deny the richness and diversity of God's creation. If we are to strive toward unity in the Chinese church, then we must begin by recognizing and affirming our differences as well as our commonalities. We must then strive to meet the diverse needs of our people as God gives us the strength and ability.

As we call for unity, we must be careful and thoughtful in the way we define it. Paul exhorts us to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This "unity" refers to our "oneness in Christ." As the church, we are one body with Christ as our Head. As the body, we need to work together to fulfill our common mission "to make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28: 18-20).

Just as the physical body has many parts, each with a different function (I Corinthians 12:12-26), so the Chinese church in America also has different parts, each with its own function. The OBC "part" of the Chinese church body might fulfill the mission of the church by ministering to OBCs and by sending missionaries to China, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries. The ABC "part" of the Chinese church body might have a different role in the mission. This might be to minister to ABCs and support ministries to ABCs.

As ABCs and OBCs, we are to "keep the unity of the Spirit," carefully considering our differences and their effects on us individually, in our families, and in our churches in order "to live a life worthy of the calling with which (we) have been called" (Ephesians 4:1).

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WHAT ABCS NEED

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 18 No. 3, August 1996, William Eng

Many ABCs suffer from behavioral traps that produce much pain and distress. Following are a few insights from Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend's book, *False Assumptions: Relief from 12 "Christian" Beliefs That Can Drive You Crazy*, that could be applied to ABCs.

ABCs, like most human beings, have a need to bond to others. This is an essential spiritual and emotional need, for we were created as relational beings who need connection with God and others. ABCs, whose parents do not provide for this need of intimacy, have great difficulty trusting, being intimate with, and depending on others. As a result, they are emotionally dysfunctional and may become depressed or may even seek comfort in food rather than in the love of others.

ABCs have a need to separate from others and to take ownership of their lives. We must discover our own individual identity. We are not just our parent's son or daughter. We must discriminate between the areas of responsibility that God has and has not assigned to us. This learning of responsibility includes global ecological stewardship as well as the personal ability to say no when another person, whether family or friend, asks you to do something when you have a true need for time for yourself. We must learn to set boundaries around our own personal domain, which includes our spiritual well being. Chinese parents, who do not allow their children to have adequate personal boundaries, often cause them to have problems saying no to requests that are too much for them to handle. They have trouble staying focused, getting organized, and controlling their lives. Some express anger very visibly, suffer a panic attack, or get depressed when they feel overwhelmed by all the people for whom they feel responsible.

This need is also why the Chinese church should allow their ABCs to assume their own personal role in decision-making in the church. Without their own set boundaries and identity, ABCs will not be able to find focus and commitment in the Chinese church.

ABCs also need to distinguish between good and bad. Besides learning how to love (bond), and how to say no (establishing boundaries), we need to resolve the problem of good and bad. The truth is: we are imperfect people living with imperfect people in an imperfect world. We come to accept that our parents (and Chinese church leaders) are not absolute and perfect. From holding impossible ideals for ourselves and others, we move to grieving over our losses; forgiving others including our parents, siblings, and people in the church; and receiving forgiveness from them as well. When we accept our sinfulness as something that draws us to Jesus, we become wise and more able to receive His grace by faith with truly thankful hearts.

Those who are injured in this third stage often struggle with perfectionism, overoptimism, denial, and shame. They cry out that life isn't fair. The result can include ... addictions in which the "bad" part of a person's character acts out....

ABCs can become adults in spite of being treated like children by our own parents or church elders. In this final stage, a person moves from emotional childhood to emotional adulthood. God desires that we be mature—to become like the Lord Jesus, to be Christlike. We learn to take authority over what the Lord has given us: our gifts, our values, careers, marriages, friendships, and callings. We do not have to depend on the approval of our Chinese parents. As emotional adults, we value their input but feel free to choose

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our own way in the world. As freed adults, we can take the responsibilities of committed Christians in the Chinese church.

However, ABCs who do not grow up and have been prevented from developing in the previous three stages either have problems submitting to authority, or they are overcompliant and rule-bound. Some ABCs either question authority at every turn or they never do. They either break the rules, or they follow them to the letter....

Many people, including ABCs, are damaged during all four stages. For example, you might have trouble making attachments with people. So you set to work on that—only to discover in the process that you can't set limits with others. And this inability, in turn, causes you to avoid people instead of confronting them. Your isolation consequently increases.

What heals ABCs is God's love through His church and His Spirit. When individuals have been hurt, they need the love of other believers. The grace of God is seen in our loving one another. In understanding the developmental needs of ABCs, hopefully the Chinese church can help lead the hurts and give love to the ABC part of the church family.

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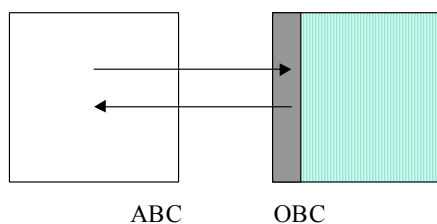
OBCs AND ABCs: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN CONVERSATION?

ABOUT FACE, Vol. 2 No. 4, November 1980,

...The healthy homogenous psyche of the ABC. An ABC or an American is considered to be psychologically healthy if he is honest and open, expressive of his true feelings. He is considered neurotic if he lives defensively, covering up what are his innermost thoughts and feelings. Two ABCs or Americans can get along and understand each other perfectly well if they will each be honest and open in their communicating. True inner feelings, whether positive or negative, can best be spoken by one and understood by the other by speaking sincerely and listening caringly.

The proper bi-level psyche of the OBC. A proper OBC is one who is reserved, well-mannered, and thoughtful as to how he comes across to others. One who speaks his mind indiscriminately is perhaps regarded as foolish and neurotic. Two proper OBCs will get along perfectly well if they treat each other with due respect and reservedly speak out what is properly fitting to say. If there are deep feelings inside, whether pleasant or unpleasant, these can be communicated by carefully chosen words that merely hint at what those deep feelings might be. The listener will hear the words, the tone of voice, sense of manner or delivery, and even see the body language and can interpret the true inner feelings in all its beauty—or ugliness—as the case may be, without upsetting the external demure of speaker or listener.

When they get together. When a proper OBC and a psychologically healthy ABC or American get into sharing of deep inner feelings, the dynamics of fellowship can become rather complex. The ABC or American, not being accustomed to interpreting what is below the surface, regards the words spoken by the OBC at face value. The OBC, expecting true and deep feelings of the American to be tempered by proper manners, is shocked to hear such stark, frank expressions interpreting that there is yet to be a quantum jump in the seriousness in inner meaning that is not expressed.



Because the OBC can understand the expressed meaning of the ABC, he might come away thinking how ill-mannered the ABC is, but he will understand his feelings. Because the ABC or American is unaccustomed to interpreting the inner feelings of the OBC by what his surface expressions are, he comes away shaking his head muttering, “The inscrutable Chinese.”

It would be well for ABCs to let open and honest, true feelings come across more gently and carefully to an OBC who is unadapted to western ways. And when he speaks, gently probe for true inner feelings. It would be well for OBCs to cushion themselves with patience and try to respond in like clarity. While disrespectful and ill-mannered conduct is never excusable (only forgivable), open honesty is commendable.

ABC: *Would you like a Coke?*
Thirsty OBC: *No, thanks.*

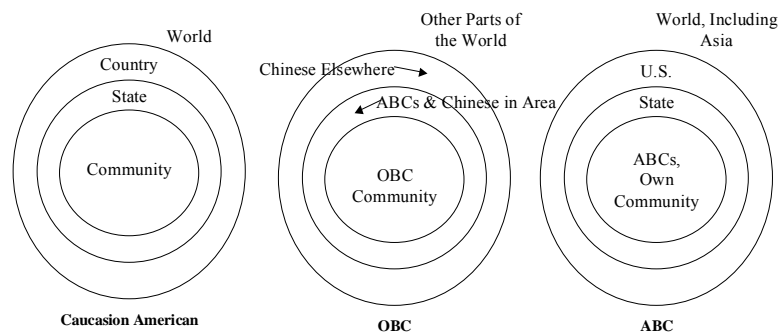
OBC: *We'll have you over to dinner sometime.*
Hungry ABC: *Great! When?*

An ABC Church Plant

OBCs AND ABCs: A DIFFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE REGARDING THE GREAT COMMISSION *ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 1 No. 1, April 1979, Donna Dong

Acts 1:8 describes the Great Commission in sequential manner, in a set of concentric circles. The disciples of Christ were to first be concerned for Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and finally the uttermost parts. Translated to our day, we can see a Caucasian American living in Oakland to understand the Great Commission to mean reaching the people in Oakland, then California, then the United States, and then every foreign country until every tribe and people is reached. This is the natural order in the Christian whose spirit is in tune with the Spirit of God.

Perspectives of the Great Commission



Now what is the natural order and thinking of a Chinese who is born and raised in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or elsewhere in East Asia and has come to the United States and participates and worships in a Chinese church? Jerusalem, that innermost circle, translate to Chinese, more specifically, OBCs. Judea becomes the second circle out, perhaps other Chinese, such as ABCs and perhaps Chinese back in Asia. Samaria might be a ministry to Chinese in South America or Africa, or perhaps to Americans here who are not Chinese, be they red or yellow. Finally, the uttermost parts translates into reaching all the peoples of the world.

An ABC applies the Great Commission in a rather different order. First to be reached are his inner circle friends, relatives, and community. While some of these may be Chinese, a good number of them are probably not Chinese. Judea, the next circle, is likely to be more geographic than racial. (The OBC has a more racial perspective.) Then Samaria is farther out, perhaps to all peoples in this country, and finally, to the uttermost parts, which includes the rest of the world. Now Asia is simply part of the uttermost parts to the ABC.

Missions for the ABC is different than for the OBC. To most OBCs, evangelizing in Hong Kong is “going home,” while to many ABCs, it is an “uttermost parts” of the earth mission. And ABC would just as easily be challenged to go to Europe or Africa or South America as to Asia. The first wave of some 15 ABC foreign missionaries from the 1950s to the 1970s bears this out.

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OBCs AND ABCs: A DIFFERENCE IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE *ABOUT FACE*, Vol. 1 No. 2, August 1979, Donna Dong

In your life with Christ, what do you find most compelling? The redemptive mandate? The creation mandate?

Creation Mandate

By creation, we refer to the teaching of Scriptures that the world we live in is originated by God, that He pronounced it good, and has commissioned the human race to fill the earth and subdue it and to exercise dominion over all living things. People refer to this commission as the “creation mandate,” a commission that God has never revoked even with the fall of the human race. 1 Timothy 4:4-5, which speaks of our enjoyment of God’s gifts, is based on the creation mandate.

Redemption Mandate

By redemption, we refer to God’s sovereign activity of restoring all of creation, lost through man’s rebellion and sin, to Himself by the costly sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross. Disciples of Christ everywhere are commanded to go into all of the world and preach this gospel about Christ, making disciples of every nation. People refer to this command as the “redemptive mandate.”

So, which of the two mandates do you find most compelling in your Christian life? As biblical Christians who seek to obey the whole counsel of God, we should be building our lives on both. But I want to suggest that OBCs derive a great proportion of their motivation for Christian life and ministry from the redemptive mandate. And I believe that for ABCs, the creation mandate is as mighty a motivational factor as the redemptive mandate....

OBCs derive much motivation for Christian life and ministry from the *redemptive mandate*.

I was one of two speakers for a Chinese church retreat of an OBC youth group. I am third-generation American-born. My brother, the other speaker, was overseas born. And he was speaking on the reason why his audience, as Christian young people, should be good students in their schools. In the split-second before he continued, I mentally ran through the reason I usually give when teaching the same material: as Christians, we are called to be good students because God created the world. The academic disciplines, such as the humanities and sciences, become an opportunity to study the world that God created. And our studies feed our worship of God.

ABCs favor the *creation mandate*.

The actual reason that my overseas brother gave ran something like this: as Christians we need to be good students and do the best we can to become qualified and expert in our field of learning. Otherwise we will have no credibility in our witness for the gospel. Remember the great impression that early missionaries to China, like Mateo Ricci, made for the gospel? They were greatly learned men, and because of their learning found widespread acceptance for the preaching of the gospel.

Was one of us wrong in the reason we gave? No. And we both honor Christ as Creator, Lord, and Savior. And yet it is interesting how one drew motivation on creation, the other on redemption!... The great need

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is to appreciate ABCs and OBCs in the context of their respective backgrounds and to see that they are both striving to obey God and to make Christ known.

The OBC comes from the Asia context in which Christians still number in the minority. Their concern for their kinsmen very closely parallels Paul's agonized concern that his own people may know Christ. The OBC's task is clear: to declare Jesus Christ where He is unknown and untried.

The ABC grows up and witnesses to Jesus Christ in a western, largely post-Christian context where religion is allowed, but only a small, meaningless compartment of life. The culture professes to have tried the Christian faith and have found Christ irrelevant to its world of concerns. The ABC's task, then, is also declaring Jesus Christ, but with great emphasis on His lordship and relatedness to all of life and all human concerns. The doctrine of creation, coupled with the doctrine of redemption, gives him adequate biblical foundations to live a decompartmentalized Christian life totally integrated around the Lord Jesus Christ.

ABCs and OBCs do well to learn from one another and from the special gifts of faith that each has been given, to the end that God's people be built up and Christ glorified.