History, Current Status, and Future Prospect of
the Use of Internet for Evangelism in China

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Since the beginning of the Chinese Internet in mid-1990s, the number of netters in China has increased exponentially (Fig. 1). Chinese has become the most-used language on the Internet. At the end of 2012, there were 546 million Internet users (about 42% of the whole population) and 420 million Internet accessible smart phone users in China. And for the first time in history smart phone surpassed personal computer as the number one Internet access device.[1]
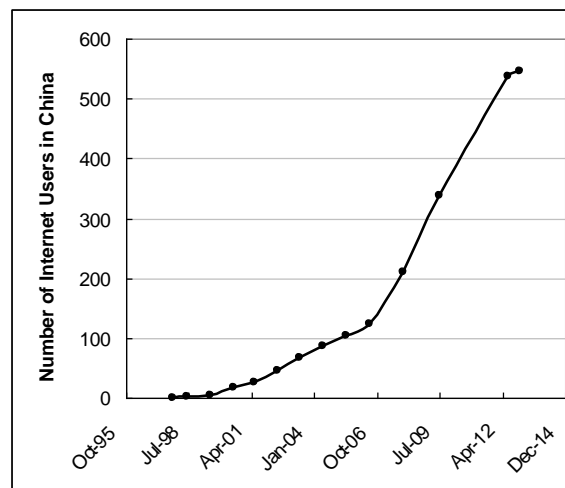

Figure 1

From the very early days of the development of Internet in China, the Internet has been used by Christians to do evangelist work in the Chinese language. Xuede Fan, a well-known Chinese Christian writer and "freelance evangelist" said that the Internet has been one of the greatest gifts God has given to the Chinese for freedom of speech and to the Chinese Christians for evangelism. Nowadays you do not have to travel far, but only need to have a computer (or a smart phone, etc.) to be a missionary, although "virtual".[2] Brother Fan strongly encourages more Chinese Christians to step out and join the army of "Internet missionaries".[3] The concept of "Internet mission" or

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[1] CNNIC, the China Internet Network Information Center, publishes related data every year. I have tracked the data for many years. PDF reports in English can be found on the CNNIC website, <http://www1.cnnic.cn/> (June 25, 2013)

[2] Fan shared about this in private conversations and in a few meetings of Christian co-workers.

[3] Xuede Fan, "A Pioneer of Internet Mission", prelude to Jidian, *Responses to Skepticism About Christian Faith*

"Internet missionaries" may require more in-depth discussion, but as a Chinese Christian who has witnessed the history of how Internet has been an important part of evangelism to Chinese intellectuals, and as a comrade of Brother Fan in Internet mission, I share the same thankfulness and enthusiasm. Ironically, the Chinese authority did not seem to hesitate in acknowledging the existence of "Internet missionaries". In January 2012, the *China Youth Research* journal, which is the official publication of the Central Committee of the China Communist Youth League, published an article titled "Be On High Alert to the Internet Spreading of Christianity"[4]. In it three examples of "Internet missionaries under the cover of public intellectuals" were given, and they are Jidian (the author), Xuede Fan and another Chrsitian writer (Yu Ge). The article is full of "cold war" ideological struggle mentality and conspiracy theory, with poor quality of research, but it reflects the nervousness and seriousness of the Communist Party and the Chinese government towards "Internet mission".

In this paper I would like to review the history and current status of the use of Internet (including new technologies such as smart phone) for evangelism in China, and share a few thoughts about the challenges and opportunities, as well as discuss the prospect of this field of mission. Because of my own long-time involvement and familiarity with the Internet mission, my sharing would in a lot of parts be from personal experience and historical points of view. It would also focus on simplified Chinese character based Internet in China without covering traditional Chinese character based Internet in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

1. History

The history of Internet mission on the Chinese cyberspace can be roughly divided into the "eras" of newsgroups and BBS' (1996-1997), forums and websites (1998-2004), blogs (2005-2010) and social networks (2011 to present).

1.1. Newsgroup and BBS years (1996-1997)

The Chinese Internet using Chinese language started within the group of overseas Chinese students, intellectuals and professionals, specifically in the U. S. In the earliest days of the Internet (1992-1995), there was only primitive way of connection using "usenet" (or "telnet"), and there were "newsgroups" in which people shared common interests would communicate. In 1992, some Chinese students and scholars in the U. S. invented a way ("HZ code") to input Chinese characters on PCs, and set up a Chinese language newsgroup called ACT, or "alt.chinese.text".[5] It soon became a popular BBS for overseas Chinese students and scholars, though it was very

on the Chinese Web, Houston, TX: Christian Communications Inc. of USA, 2009

[4] Peng Zuo and Yanlong Li, "Be On High Alert to the Internet Spreading of Christianity", China Youth Research, January 2012. (In Chinese) <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_9268b867010139yn.html> (June 25, 2013)

[5] ACT was closed before the turn of the century and no longer exists. Some of the postings about Christianity were archived on Jidian Links website's Apologetics category, <http://www.godoor.net/jidianlinks/apologetics.html> (June 25, 2013)

primitive and nothing like today's web-based forums with user-friendly interfaces and functions. The postings on ACT were extremely diversified, ranging from political commentaries to scientific discussions, from Chinese cuisine to Chinese riddles. The newsgroup provided much attractive opportunity for the overseas Chinese students and scholars to communicate in their native language. Many "high-hands" (outstanding writers) and "celebrities" emerged during this ACT era. Even in this early period of time, there were debates about Christianity. There were a few ACT celebrities who took a lot of effort to criticize and attack the Christian faith. Among those was the famous Chinese netter Fang, Zhouzi (pen name), who became well-known for his attacks against Christianity, his defense and promotion of Darwinism, and his "lower critics" of what he called "the errors-everywhere book of Bible". At the same time (in 1995), a few Christian netters started to participate in discussions about Christianity on ACT, including Elim (pen-name), Enoch Wang, Gang Zhao and Jidian (my pen name – "Jidian" is the Chinese *pin yin* for Gideon). Almost all of these "Internet mission pioneers" were professionals or students in science and engineering in the U. S. who came from mainland China, and thus had similar background with Fang and his fellow "Christianity bashers". The "Great Debates of Faith" soon became a much attention-catching theme with many on-lookers. The silent clashing of thoughts and the conflict of fundamental worldviews and values quickly showed themselves in the debates.

Christian netters were the minority on ACT, and the apologetic postings were quite immature and unrefined. Nonetheless, a number of Christians gradually became actively involved and committed in responding to the anti-Christian messages for the purpose of clarifying about what Christians truly believe and leading people to God. While we gained experience and improved their writings, a few of us became friends over the Internet. We shared the same background, vision and burden, and we started to encourage and help each other through prayers and sharing.

Meanwhile, from 1996 on, some of the universities in China began to have BBS' (Bulletin Board Services) which were opened to public (today the university BBS' are strictly controlled and no longer open to all). Although similarly primitive as the newsgroups, the BBS had categorization for the topics. Amazingly on one of the earliest university BBS' (the one of Nankai University) there was a "Bible Board" among many Boards. It did not take long before those of us Chinese Christian netters in the U. S. (but with mainland China background) joined the Bible Board, on which there were already Chinese Christian netters in Taiwan. It also attracted the "Christianity-bashers" such as Fang Zhouzi. This BBS Board of a university inside China soon became a significant "battlefield" for the "War of Faith" across the ocean, as well as an excellent "mission field" for us oversea Chinese Christian netters. It was for us like "virtual home-coming", where we were able to have free discussion with the college students netters in China about Christianity ("free" with the exception of sensitive political contents), and the Gospel of Christ and the Christian Faith could be positively introduced to students and intellectuals in China. The new technology was

capable of breaking through the geographic limitations. The news that "two famous netters were converted to Christianity and the debate about God became heated on ACT" made it to the "Top 10 News of Chinese Internet" selected by *Xin Yu Si* (*New Threads*, a website established by Fang Zhouzi that later became very influential) in 1996. In 1997, that "War of Faith" between Christian netters (Gang Zhao and Jidian were named) and Fang "was extended to the Internet inside China" made it to the "Top 10 news" again. During this period of time, Chinese Christian netters in North America with Mainland background started to fellowship with Christian netters in Taiwan. Writings by the Taiwan netters were widely distributed on Internet in China, and the Taiwan netters (who pioneered the Internet even before the Nankai time) Became mentors for those of us in the U. S. (The mutual commitment in Internet evangelism also wonderfully helped Gang Zhao and a sister in Taiwan know each other, fall in love, and eventually get married to each other). In 1996, Gang Zhao and Jidian joined Enoch Wang and a few other early-time Internet co-workers to serve as volunteers for the newly established Chinese Christian Internet Mission (CCIM). The Chinese Christian netters in the U. S. were united in the same ministry and began to have organized collaboration as well as fellowship and friendship that would last till today.

The Internet mission for people in China and overseas at the ACT and BBS time was mainly focused on apologetics and the presence of Chinese Christians' voices was still in its infant stage and pioneering, but the impact was already meaningful and the historical significance was already there. Fang Zhouzi later went back to China and became a very famous, celebrity-style writer known for his fight against fraud, academic corruption and pseudoscience (especially Chinese medicine, which he believes is typical pseudoscience).[6] His anti-Christian writings are less known today compared to his fame in other areas, but he really contributed to the spread of the Gospel in a very special way. Because of the anti-western and anti-religion tradition of the Chinese intellectuals, and because of the semi-underground status of the house churches in China (where most Chinese students meet), the chances that an average Chinese would be exposed to Christian discourses are slim. However, responding to criticism of Christianity by people like Fang on the Internet has given Christians a precious opportunity to explain our faith positively, and the nature of Internet makes it possible to go beyond the limitation of geographical location and people groups. The approach Fang and people like him used to criticize the Christian faith was based on a scientism philosophy (not unlike that of the new atheism people such as Richard Dawkins – in fact Fang recently tried to advocate the new atheism in China but did not seem to get much support). Fang's approach is typical and representative of Chinese intellectuals who got much influenced by modernism (the young "post-80" and "post-90" generations, in contrast, are more influenced by post-modernism). The debate or conversation thus had very important apologetic significance. In this sense Fang indeed was a special (although involuntary) and paradoxical vessel in God's plan of evangelism for China.

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[6] "Fang Zhouzi" on Wikidepedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fang_Zhouzi> (June 25, 2013)

1.2. Forum and Website years (1998-2004)

At around 1997-1998, web-based (WWW) Chinese websites and interactive forums started to bloom in China and overseas. The 1990's also happened to be also the hottest years of the "Heat of Conversion (to Christianity)" for overseas Mainland Chinese intellectuals, after the Tian'anmen Square Massacre in 1989, when disillusion about political movement led to thirst of spirituality. In very short time, Chinese Christian netters started to be involved in discussions on the earliest web-based forums. A few Christian netters (including Silu and Jidian) were invited to be the Board-masters for some of the most famous forums on culture and society (e.g., the "St. Paul Church" Forum of Xisi Hutong[7], which was one of the most lively forums of this once very influential, dissident-oriented website). More and more Christians joined in the on-line discussions and the apologetic postings by the Christian netters became more mature. Christian netters gradually established very good dialog relationship and even friendship with young intellectual seekers, some of whom later on became Christians and even "Internet celebrities" themselves.

This period of time also saw the mushrooming of many Christian websites, most of which appeared to be more cultural than evangelical for survival. The CCIM website at this time became a good resource website with its on-line library and forums, mostly containing apologetic materials such as collections of previous on-line debates and discussions about Christianity.[8]CCIM also helped the most influential Chinese evangelical and Christian magazines such as *Overseas Campus* and *Chinese Christian Life Quarterly* to put their magazines on the Internet, and merged with a Christian music ministry ("Red Bean Music Ministry"). As one of the main CCIM co-workers, I volunteered to gather and archive the on-line apologetic materials. In 1998 I began my own apologetic and Christian culture website, "Jidian's Links",[9] for the same purpose of helping seekers in China and supplying more resources to intellectual Christians in China, whose number also started to grow during this time. The website was originally hosted by a U. S. company. In 2000, Silu (pen-name) in Nanjing established an evangelical (culture-oriented) website called "God's Door".[10] Although its contents were on-line articles collected from other websites and it was maintained by Silu himself only, its excellent selection of articles and faith-based cultural insight made it a very unique website, and soon became an influential website in China among Chinese intellectuals. Many Chinese intellectuals and well-know Internet writers frequented the website, and viewed it as a good "door" through which to learn

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[7] The forum still exists today, with new board-masters. <http://www.xici.net/b2546/index.asp> (June 25, 2013)
[8] Today CCIM's website still exists but is blocked by the Chinese government. The main contents are no longer apologetic resources but church-building materials such as the *ChurchChina* e-magazine. <http://ccim.org/> (June 25, 2013）
[9] Jidian's Links kept being updated and maintained by myself until 2011, when I joined OCM and started leading the work of OCM's evangelical websites. The old website can still be viewed on the Internet although it is no longer updated. <http://godoor.net/jidianlinks> (June 26, 2013)
[10] Silu, now a busy house church leader and a scientist faculty at an elite university in Shanghai, stopped updating the website at around 2010, but the website still exists. <http://godoor.com> (June 26, 2013)

about Christianity and Christian culture. God's Door has been one of the best evangelical websites that non-Christians would visit. (Many other Christian websites only have contents suitable for Christians, and would sound too "religious" for seekers.) Being a personal friend with Silu and having served together with him on the Internet, I transferred my Jidian's Links to be hosted by God's Door in the end of 2000, and being inside China helped increase my website's influence among people in China.

With the growth of churches in the cities of China, and the development of Internet, Christian netters were no longer rare species in the Chinese cyberspace. More and more professionals and intellectuals were willing to witness for the Gospel after they became Christians, which was an answered prayer for some of us earlier Christian netters (I started praying for that earlier, when there were very few of such persons). These Christian professionals and intellectuals were much different from the so-called "cultural Christians" prior to them in that they were truly committed to the faith while the latter might only be scholars who had friendly feelings to Christianity and who were researchers of the faith but not true followers of Christ.[11] These "on-line Christians" (including myself) realized that in order to actively carry out the evangelical and cultural mission, we need to enter the public domain on the Internet, and go to people in non-Christian, "secular" cyberspace. So during this time, more and more Christians netters started to participate in sharing, discussions and dialogs in secular forums. Most of these forums were known to be influential, pro-democracy, friendly to the West, "right" forums ("right" on China's political spectrum being actually "liberal" relative to the conservative Communist ideology). Examples include Huatong Forum (no longer existing today), Tianya's Guantian Teahouse[12] and Kaidi's Maoyan Kanren[13]. The now famous and influential Reformed house church pastor Yi Wang used to be a famous dissident and friendly to Christianity writer on Guantian Teahouse (and I befriended him and met him in Chengdu where he lived and which was my hometown when he was still a seeker). The freelance evangelist and "Internet missionary" Xuede Fan became a well-know "public intellectual" soon after joining Maoyan Karen taking my suggestion, where he had so many fans as well as passionate opponents that his postings would easily attract thousands of hits. Lao Ku, then a well-known Internet novelist, wrote an article accusing "the Old Testament God" as "bullying and peremptory", and the article was immediately added to Fang Zhouzi's Collections of Anti-Christian On-line Writings.[14] A few years later, I met Lao Ku in Beijing, and he told me he was already a Christian. I suggested that he wrote his testimony, and he did. His testimony was published later on *Chinese Christian Life Quarterly*, and I was equally eager to add it to the Collection of

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[11] An article titled "Cultural Christians in China", which has good description of this group in English, can be downloaded from the Friend of Church in China (FCC) website. <http://thefcc.org/General_Downloads.html> (June 29, 2013). I created a Cultural Christians website in Chinese in 1998 as a by-product of Jidian's Links, which is no longer updated. <http://www.godoor.net/whjdt/> (June 29, 2013)

[12] Guantian Teahouse BBS. <http://bbs.tianya.cn/list-no01-1.shtml> (June 29. 2013)

[13] Maoyan Karen Board. <http://club.kdnet.net/list.asp?boardid=1> (June 29, 2013)

[14] Collections of Anti-Christian On-line Writings On *Xin Yu Si* website. <http://www.xys.org/pages/christianity.html> (June 29, 2013)

Apologetic On-line Writings on Jidian's Links.[15] A few more years passed by, and I learned that Lao Ku became a full-time Christian minister. His story is not the only one of its kind, but representative of many. Personally, I would occasionally get an email or an on-line message from a netter (whose name I normally could not recognize), and be told that many years ago she or he used to debate or discuss with me about Christianity as an atheist on a forum (which does not even exist any more), and is now a Christian or even a full-time Christian worker/minister. And I know for sure it is not because that I was persuasive, but that God's power and the Holy Spirit's work are great and amazing.

The fast increase of Christian websites, normally with their own forums, also brought new challenges. More and more Christians joined the discussions about faith and Christian life. Some of us had grown, so there were a lot of needs beyond apologetic resources, for Christian life, including bible study, spiritual life, marriage and family, and theology training and equipping, etc. Although many Christian organizations and churches began to realize the necessity to make use of the Internet and built their websites providing these contents, the needs still were greater than the supply. Diverse theological standings quickly became obvious and theological tension and disagreement among Christians caused a lot of conflicts and division. Evangelical Christians also had to defend their faith against many extreme thoughts, heresies and cults. Many young Christians had a lot of questions and struggles with the life of faith, and the virtual nature of communications through Internet started to show the limitation of the Internet as a mission tool, and the necessity of follow-up work of real, "on the ground" churches. The "on-line Christians" also needed a lot of pastoral care and counseling themselves, if not more. On the positive side, all these challenges also started to bring changes in the "Internet ministry". Those of us in the U. S. had face-to-face meetings and retreats, and we grew amid many struggles and difficulties with a lot of prayers and God's care. The Chinese churches, both overseas and in China, are typically influenced by separatist and even anti-culture views on the relationship between faith and culture, and very conservative and backward when it comes to new technologies. But by this time many of Chinese Christians began to realize that we did not have choice but to make good use of the Internet as a tool for evangelism. The Internet mission became more mature and purposeful.

1.3. Blog years (2005-2010)

With the growth of city churches in China and the fast increase of number of Christian netters, apologetic resources were less important and only one among the many needs in this period of time. The Chinese Internet mission made changes accordingly. For example, under the leadership of Enoch Wang, CCIM started to change the ministry focus to serve the churches in China. It provided on-line training and long-distance learning for bible study and theology education (with the help of Reformed theology

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[15] Collections of Apologetic On-line Writings on Jidian's Links.
<http://www.godoor.net/jidianlinks/apologetics.html> (June 29, 2013)

educators such as Sam Ling). In 2007 the first issue of the Reformed-oriented electronic magazine *ChurchChina* was published.[16] The e-magazine provided in-depth insight and analysis to help build up house churches in China. The transformation was representative and indicative of the changes in the Internet ministries.

During this period of time, personal blogs became popular in China. Blogs provided a new, easy-to-use, effective and interactive communication tool for Christians to share their personal experiences, thinking, testimonies, writings and multi-media contents. Its resourcefulness and usefulness soon got recognized by Chinese Christian netters. In 2004 and 2005, the author opened a few blogs on a few public websites, including BlogChina, which was very influential among Chinese intellectuals at that time. Some of my postings were even recommended to the front page of BlogChina website, so the browsing hits were very high. In 2006, after a meeting of *Overseas Campus* magazine core writers, a group of us OCM writers decided to open a cultural blog, *The Humming Hobbit*,[17] on Sina Blog, the most popular blog site in China, as a team. On this team-work blog (which I serve as the administrator while also one of the main posting contributors), we shared our commentaries to current affairs, thoughts about history and culture, and personal experiences, all from a Christian world view background. The blog soon became very successful with many hits and interactive comments and dialogs. This experiment encouraged OCM co-workers and the blog became the starting point of OCM's Internet ministry. By then OCM had published the *Overseas Campus* paper magazine for 14 years and the church and Christian character-building *Behold* paper magazine for five years. Both magazines were very successful and of high quality. However, thankfully, the OCM leaders (led by Rev. Edwin Su) was not complacent, but realized the urgency of the electronic age and the necessity to break into the Internet field for evangelizing the e-generation and making use of the new Internet technologies and applications (such as blogs). It was at that time that I became more involved in OCM's Internet ministry, initially as a volunteer helper.

In 2009, taking advantage of the platform of Sina Blog Circles, OCM established a Christian writers' Circle called "Jerusalem's Starlight"[18], which has since gathered dozens of outstanding Chinese Christian bloggers (today the Circle has already more than 600 members). In 2010, OCM decided to initiate a comprehensive Internet ministry called "iCampus", which included Ai-kan.net[19] ("ai kan" meaning "love to read"), OCM's own blog cultural website, and Ai-wen.net[20] ("ai wen" meaning "love to ask"), a Q&A website for seekers and new believers. The pilot project showed significant success with very positive responses, and full-time and part-time co-workers were employed in China to edit and manage the websites. OCM's Internet ministries may be in some senses representative and in other senses pioneering among those of the Chinese Christian organizations. The organizations rich resource in trained writers and high quality contents are the basis for good development of the ministries.

1.4. The Social Network Years (2011-present)

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[16] ChurchChina e-magazine website. <https://www.churchchina.org/> (June 30, 2013)
[17] The Humming Hobbit blog. <http://blog.sina.com.cn/hobbit> (July 1, 2013)
[18] Jerusalem's Starlight Blog Circle. <http://q.blog.sina.com.cn/hobbit> (July 1, 2013)
[19] Ai-kan website. <https://www.ai-kan.net/> (July 4, 2013)
[20] Ai-wen website. <https://www.ai-wen.net/> (July 4, 2013)

In 2011, as popular social networks such as Facebook and Twitter became more prevalent outside China but were blocked in China, Weibo ("mini-blogs) became a widely accepted new social media in China. Weibo has some similarity to Twitter, but is much more rich in and versatile for multi-media contents (pictures, videos and audios, etc.). By then there are much more Christians on the Chinese Internet (there is no accurate data available for the total number, but it should be millions), and many joined Weibo quickly.[21] It did not take long before many Christian ministries and churches started using Weibo as a tool for reach-out and evangelism. Today there are many well-known Christian Weibos that have tens of thousands of "fans" (a few celebrities have millions of followers). Weibo is also often used to distribute multi-media contents for evangelism. I joined many Christian co-workers and became active in evangelism using Weibo, Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter and other social media, and would meet Christians I got to know through the social networks when I visit China.

The OCM's Internet ministry, as an example, continued to grow. In 2011 a pre-evangelical e-magazine for the post-90 young generation called "Ai-digu" ("love to chat") was launched as an experiment. In 2013 we adjusted the strategy and approach of the e-magazine, and decided to use more testimony stories of post-90 Christians and incorporate more multi-media contents, and changed the name of the e-magazine to "OC Ai-Mengxiang" ("ai mengxiang" meaning "love to dream").[22] In June 2013, we decided to create and publish a more comprehensive e-magazine based mainly on the contents of the paper magazine, but with higher frequency of publication more timely response and interaction, and aiming for more agile distribution on the Internet and on smart phones. The young generation targeting OC Ai-mengxiang will become part of this new OC e-magazine.

2. Current status

Many websites and forums that Christian netters were actively involved in do not exist any more today. Some evangelist websites have stopped updating, including God's Door and Jidian's Links (typically those previously managed by individuals, because of the owners' new responsibilities, etc.). It is all by God's amazing grace that even to this day some of us "dinosaur Christian netters" are still actively participating evangelism on the Internet, even though the technologies, tools and methodologies are very different today.

Some of the previously influential Christian sites and forums are still in operation (e.g., Grace On-line,[23] Jonah's Home,[24] Rainbow Covenant,[25] etc.). New portal type websites were built in more recent years (e.g., InLord Info,[26] Cry in the Desert,[27] etc. There are quite a number of portal sites built by heretic and the "Three-Self", i.e.,

[21] I personally follow dozens of influential Christian Weibos. See my Weibo at <http://www.weibo.com/jidian55> (July 4, 2013)

[22] OC Ai-menegxiang website. <http://ocimx.com/> (July 4, 2013)

[23] Grace On-line website. <http://www.edzx.com/> (July 4, 2013)

[24] Jonah's Home Forum. <http://www.jonahome.net/> (July 4, 2013)

[25] Rainbow Covenant BBS. <http://bbs.creaders.net/rainbow/> (July 4, 2013)

[26] InLord Info website. <http://inlord.cn/> (July 4, 2013)

[27] Cry in the Desert website. <http://www.kuanye.net/> (July 4, 2013)

government-sanctioned, para-church organizations or churches, which are not listed in this paper. One heretic church called "Young Disciples of Jesus" (YD)[28], is extraordinarily aggressive and have set up a lot of normal-looking websites, e.g., The Christian Post, Christian Today and Gospel Herald, etc.). But many of the new evangelist websites that have big impact and large audience are multi-media (video, audio and social media) content providers, e.g., YesHeIs Chinese,[29] Good Friend Radio,[30] Gospel Video,[31] Christian Video,[32] etc. Most of these ministries are also good at using social networks to distribute their content. At OCM, we also try to make full use of social media in organized team work.

Social media and the "new media" provide new opportunities and challenges to the Internet mission. They will play an especially important role in the evangelization of the young "e-generations", e.g. the "post-90" group.[33] Ministries such as OCM's Ai-mengxiang e-magazine are important, pioneering effort in this field. More of the opportunities and challenges will be discussed in the next two sections of this paper.

At the church-building side,

3. Future Prospect

We have seen very fast changes and updating of new technologies in the past twenty years, and the trend will certainly continue. The future of Internet will be more digital, mobile, "smart" and personal. Besides the continued growth of social media (Weibo, for example, is now a "nation" of 300 million people), one trend that may worth special attention is the fast development of mobile Internet access on smart phones in China. Today there are more than 500 million mobile cell phone users in China. Many Chinese people who did not have a personal computer now can access the Internet and social media on their smart phones. It is expected that by 2015 China will have 700 million mobile Internet users.

So apps for smart phones now become a crucial new field in which Christians can create and develop new tools for evangelism and Christian build-up. YouVersion, one of the most successful bible apps developed in the U. S. (with over 50 million subscribers), has its Chinese version, although it was blocked in China a couple of times. Other Chinese bible apps have been developed in China. One of them is the WeDevote ios (iPhone and iPad) app jointly developed by CCIM and BestTec (a Christian IT company in Beijing), which was launched in 2013.[34] In May 2013

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[28] Christianity Today published a series of articles on the YD controversy.
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/september/david-jang-second-coming-christ.html> (July 4, 2013)
[29] YesHeIs Chinese website. <http://www.yesheis.com/zh-hans/> (July 4, 2013)
[30] Good Friend Radio website. <http://www.liangyou.net/> (July 4, 2013)
[31] Gospel Video website. <http://www.fuyin.tv/> (July 4, 2013)
[32] Christian Video website. <http://www.yimaneili.com/> (July 4, 2013)
[33] See my other paper for this course, "Thoughts from Attending the 'Reforming Churches in China' Conference", which includes a section on evangelizing the "post-90" group.
[34] WeDevote (Wei Du Sheng Jing) ios app download page.
<https://itunes.apple.com/cn/app/wei-du-sheng-jing/id654898456?mt=8> (July 4, 2013)

BestTec also finished developing the ios app for OCM's Aiwen.net.[35] Now seekers and new believers in China can ask questions about bible and Christian faith using their iPhones. There has been talk about cooperation to develop bible app and Q&A (such as Ai-wen) app jointly.

One example for new social media is WeChat (or "Weixin" in Chinses). In 2013, this new social media and smart phone app/communication tool in China, has become very popular and is soon thought of as the "next big thing". Many people in China use it with their smart phones to communicate and share multi-media contents with friends and family, and Christian workers also use it to communicate with people in China. A few Christian ministries in China have started to use WeChat Platform to distribute contents and promote ministry, but the number is small because it is such new technology (in North America, there might be none besides us yet). At OCM we started our WeChat Platform in June 2013 and promoted it on social media. All contents are from OC products and publications, and more than 50 subscribers have subscribed it each day. It is not only an effective way to promote our products, but also a unique evangelizing product itself. Other new technologies and tools will come in the future, and we will keep being forward-looking, flexible and adaptive to serve the seekers with whatever tools best serve them.

4. Final Thoughts

The Internet and new media have provided evangelical Christians with new tools to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Psalms 19:4).The development of technology has made it possible for us Christians to carry out the Great Commission in China very directly conveniently. It is especially strategic because of China's deep anti-religion and anti-western tradition. Using Internet (including mobile Internet by smart phones) Christians can reach out to groups of people in China who may otherwise never be exposed to anything about the Christian faith. And in today's China, there is serious thirst for meaning and value, for spiritual truth. Although there are indeed many bad things on the Internet that reflect the godless or idolatry thoughts, cultures, values, philosophies and religions, Internet or new media is itself just a tool and not necessarily evil. Christians with commission of Gospel and cultural transformation should be able to take advantage and make better use of the technologies to spread the Gospel and share our testimony. On today's Internet and social media, Chinese intellectuals and young people are talking about virtually everything (at least whatever survives the political censorship) and there is heated communication and clash of thoughts and beliefs, just as in Areopagus and Tyrannus in the Apostle Paul's days (Acts 17 and 19). Those of us Christians who have evangelical and cultural missions have to enter the speech forum in the open cyber space if we want to share the Gospel and influence the culture. We need to use the

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[35] Aiwen.net ios app download page.
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/oc-ai-wen-wang/id637209317?ls=1&mt=8> (July 4, 2013)

eternal Word of God to cast down the strongholds in culture and thoughts and "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God", and bring the heart and mind of Chinese Internet users (including smart phone users) "to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). People are asking questions and seeking spiritual help, and we Christians should be ready to "give an answer to every man that asks (us) a reason of the hope that is in (us) with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

While the capability of the Internet and social media provides many opportunities, they also bring with them many new challenges to evangelism. The following are examples of some of the challenges.

(1) Balance of truth and grace

When Christians are involved in apologetics on the Internet, we need a lot of patience and endurance to defend the Truth and bring the Love of God and spiritual caring to people in an environment that may be apathetic, unfriendly and even hostile. And with the advancement of new technologies and development of new platforms for sharing, it is getting much easier to speak or make comments on all kinds of topics. While at the beginning of the history of Internet mission there were only a countable few Christians on the Internet, now there may be millions of Christians who share and interact on the Internet and social media. Inevitably there are Christians who do not have the real calling but are over-zealous on apologetics, or who are not spiritually mature enough and would "fight" with flesh returning verbal attacks with the same. When Christians fail to show grace in heated debates, it hurts evangelism, gives bad testimony and does not glory God.

Another problem is Christians attacking each other over detailed and often not fundamental theological differences in an overly "sectarian" manner.[36] Very often before a Christian could share his thoughts or testimony, and help the seeker with his discourses, his fellow Christians would be too eager to point out his theological error or even label him "heretic", so to the seeker it quickly becomes another bickering event between Christians. And a lot of times the self-righteousness of those who think they are the "watchdogs of the biblical truth (theological correctness" (but often lack solid theological training) would make them overcritical, harsh and bitter. And the hurt by a fellow Christian is usually much harder to swallow, let alone to forgive.

On the other hands, the lack of biblical knowledge and theological equipment may also cause problems. In many cases Christians with poor training would be eager to share their faith, but say things with serious mistakes on the Internet or social media. It may cause even much greater damage when the Christian is regarded as a "celebrity" (e.g., being a famous movie actress with millions of "fans" on Weibo). The convenience of social media make the problem worse, and the post-modern

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[36] I discussed briefly about the "sectarianism" of some Reformed Christians specifically in my other paper for this course, "Thoughts from Attending the 'Reforming Churches in China' Conference".

environment may also put too much weight on charity at the expense of truth. "On-line Christians" have a lot to learn in terms of spiritual maturity and balance of truth and love.

(2) Resistance to technology and cultural isolationism

Many Christians seem to be much lagged behind the advancement of technologies and very slow to make use of new communication tools. While

Fear of losing control

(3) Fragmentation and superficiality

All the above challenges and more surely need a lot of prayers and help.