



The First Harvest Thanksgiving Service at Ban Na Wai was attended by about 300 villagers, mostly pre-believers.

It was truly an eye opening experience for an urban Singaporean like me to see loads of newly harvested corn, pumpkins, rice, oranges, bananas, garlic and mangoes neatly arranged at the church altars. These were the first fruits of the Shan Christians, and some were even contributed by non-believers in the village. The Shan believers' objective was simply to give God their first fruits and their best. These first fruits were auctioned at the end of the services and the money was presented out of their own initiative to TPMC for its ministry in Singapore. TPMC, where Florence is from, adopted the 3 local Shan preaching points and has been a faithful supporter for many years.

As a neutral observer, I was very moved by this whole act of 2 different Christian communities from different lands and

culture, giving to the other's ministry. It wasn't about the amount of money. It wasn't about how money was collected - whether from the tithes of urban white collar workers or from the first fruits of village harvesters. It was about this common commitment and vision to build the Kingdom of God together, be it in a simple village or a trendy heartland. Indeed, we are all different parts of one body of Christ - if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. We are all in the same mission, together.

Made of Purpose and Passion

Now back to Florence, I have seldom come across a woman with such clear-mindedness and passion like her. She is joyful in the Lord and displays such dedicated urgency to reach the Shan for Christ. Anyone who interacts with her

will agree that she is always brimming with enthusiasm, energy and humour. Well, perhaps she was just humouring me on my random question to her about marriage! But Florence is no random woman. From her answer, I know that whoever partners her, in any area, must match that same passion she has.

During one of our meals, she shared why she does not consume food that is too oily. Her exact words - "eat healthy, so that we can live long and serve God!" This is how purposeful and passionate she is for the Lord.

Kop Kun Pra Chow ('thank God' in Thai) that the Shan has a passionate woman amongst them. I am sure, through her work, many more passionate Shan workers will be raised up to serve the Lord. *OMF*



Where Your Treasure Is

Author: Melville Szto

Name of R3 Reviewer: Koh Kim Tat Dean

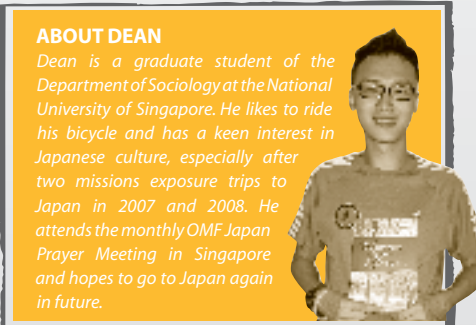
Where Your Treasure Is is an in-depth, personal and easy to read account of Melville and Salome Szto's journey of church planting in Hokkaido, Japan as OMF's first Singaporean missionaries, which began in the 1970s over a span of 19 faithful years of service.

The narrative in Szto's book is divided into 2 main sections: firstly, the author's calling and preparation as a young adult to serve the Lord in Japan and secondly, his ups and downs in the experience of church planting in Japan. With regards to the former section of the book, a crucial point that spoke to me and resonated well with the theme of the section was that of preparation for the mission field. While it is good to be eager for young people to get into the field, many do not realise that waiting and equipping for the job is just as important: these include considering Bible training and cross-cultural training as well as opportunities to serve in their own churches.

The learning of the Japanese language proved to be daunting to Melville not only in terms of just learning the fundamentals of the language, but also in how one needs to know the right words and tone of expressing oneself appropriately according to the social context and level of formality with the person(s). The author had his fair share of misunderstandings and embarrassment due to his lack of "social awareness" during the initial period in Japan. Moving on to the church planting process in Hokkaido, the Szto's were encouraged by whom they coined as the "Big Six", 6 local Japanese who were baptised in the Christian faith and became the pillars of growth of Itoi Church. Readers of this book will also get a sense of how "hard" the ground is in Japan, as evident from many Japanese who "dropped out" of the faith. And for those who chose to accept Christ in their lives, they must be prepared to pay the price, such as opposition from their spouses or close family members.

This book is recommended for all who have an interest of what life is like for missionaries as well as their children: there are sections which include

the childhood and boarding school experiences of Sharon and Mark, the 2 children of the Szto's. This is something of a neat feature because we often just hear about the experiences of the missionaries themselves but very little about what their children go through growing up in a foreign land. Personally it was quite enjoyable to read about Mark and his family as I met and knew him from Varsity Christian Fellowship in my undergraduate days. A definite must-read for all aspiring missionaries to Japan and those who are keen to know about church planting in Japan!



ABOUT DEAN
Dean is a graduate student of the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. He likes to ride his bicycle and has a keen interest in Japanese culture, especially after two missions exposure trips to Japan in 2007 and 2008. He attends the monthly OMF Japan Prayer Meeting in Singapore and hopes to go to Japan again in future.

The Japan Prayer Group meets every 1st Tuesday of the month from 7.30-9.30pm at the OMF office. Email sg-ccomm@omf.net if you would like to participate or find out more.

'Where Your Treasure Is' is on sale at OMF.

Point Me to the Skies

Author: Ronald Clements

Name of R3 Reviewer: Ng Tze Shien

The book *"Point Me To The Skies"* is a detailed and interesting narrative which recounts the story of Joan Wales, a missionary in China.

Her childhood was full of ups and downs. Her mother died due to poor health. Her father remarried twice after her mother's death, yet continued to support his daughter and was very proud of what she was doing as a missionary in China.

Joan encountered numerous setbacks and challenges throughout her life. She had to undergo training, such as working with children in a boys' home, and language lessons to prepare for missionary work in China. These training sessions were halted several times, for example, during the volatile period of the Second World War.

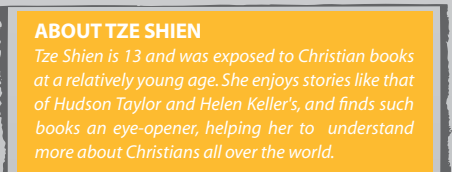
Reaching out to the Nosu people, who were violent, abusive and superstitious in those times was an equally difficult job. Joan worked with the Broomhall family and Ruth to set up a medical dispensary, with the hope that by bringing medical aid to the rural and indigenous Nosu people, they could share the gospel and bring the people to Christ.

Not all the people were very receptive to the gospel. The healing that the medical dispensary provided was also credited to the witch doctor, who would be summoned together with Jim Broomhall whenever somebody fell ill. Nevertheless, Joan, the Broomhall family and Ruth persevered in their outreach efforts. Even though Joan would be plagued with bouts of spiritual weakness, she continued to rely on God.

Soon, the invasion of the Communists forced them to evacuate China, barely 3 years after their initiative to reach out to the Nosu people. However, years later, when Joan went back, she found that some of the Christians were still there and the people were more receptive to the gospel.

Indeed, as I read the book, I think about how blessed I am in Singapore. Joan's story has inspired me to continue to have faith in God and trust Him. It is clear that through Joan's experiences, God's faithfulness and sovereignty reigns supreme. Even when times were bleak, she never gave up, and neither should I. In today's society, it is hard to find somebody with so much love, passion and dedication for God, to be willing to give up comforts for the poor in a foreign country. I strongly recommend this book and I hope that through Joan's story, you will be inspired to do what you can for Christ and live your life for Him.

If you often ask yourself, where is God in my life? What happens when things don't work out? Then this book is for you.



ABOUT TZE SHIEN
Tze Shien is 13 and was exposed to Christian books at a relatively young age. She enjoys stories like that of Hudson Taylor and Helen Keller's, and finds such books an eye-opener, helping her to understand more about Christians all over the world.

You can still get Point Me to the Skies from OMF at the promotional price of \$10 (was \$15). Promotion ends February 2010. *OMF*

The newly renovated OMF Office building is ready in February 2010! Our new contact number for OMF Singapore is 6510 3130.



go Asia

A missions newsletter by OMF Singapore

Mobilising Singapore for the Urgent Evangelisation of East Asia's Millions

House Churches A New Paradigm in Reaching the Japanese

by Louis Lau



HC in a karaoke room

Taking an elevator up to a 5th floor apartment on a Sunday late afternoon in the Tokyo bed-town city of Matsudo, one could hear worship songs and if not for this, no one would have guessed that a church service is going on. In bustling Shinjuku, the busiest train station in the world, young adults gather on Saturdays at a karaoke-box to worship God and study the bible. On Wednesday evenings, a group of working adults meet in a restaurant after work to eat together, study the bible and pray in Shinagawa, the business district of Tokyo.

These are not your ordinary churches that exist in Japan. These are the House Churches (HCs) that have been sprouting up in some cities of Japan in recent years. This phenomena has been gaining momentum as some Japanese Christians and missionaries are going back to the first few centuries of doing church, that is Christians meeting in homes, worshipping God and studying God's Word as well as caring for one another within the communities they are in.

The HC gatherings (4 to 20 people) may seem small but in them, we see intimacy amongst members in getting to know each other and helping each other in

their growth. This is important particularly in the suppressed, "pressure cooker" society like Japan in which many young people find themselves sidelined and alienated in society. This has resulted in them withdrawing from the society and hiding themselves at home. In HC, these "hikikomoris" or shut-ins have found a new platform to express themselves. Yano-kun and Tai-kun are 2 examples of such young people who first walked into the house church with heads bowed and fear in their eyes. All praise to God for the transforming work in their lives. Now they are confident young men, loving God and taking on leadership roles in the HC.

Since late 2004, we began in a small way of using HC as the model in bringing the gospel to the Japanese. And in June

2006, the Kanto House Churches Network (KHCN) was established with some local Christians and missionaries. Our goal was to see HC networks being started all over Tokyo and the 6 surrounding prefectures. To achieve this and to see the outreach gaining momentum, we seek to partner with Christian lay leaders and other missionaries who share the same vision as us. It is amazing how God has opened doors and how He has connected us with Japanese as well as missionaries who have a desire to see Japan being reached with the Gospel in a different way.

The philosophy of HC is in simplifying the church and bringing the church (a community) to where the people are. Thus, HCs can meet at any day, any time and at any place such as homes, karaokes, restaurants, music studios, offices, universities and any available facility without incurring huge financial costs.

In Tokyo or in any city in Japan, the culture of shops, karaokes, restaurants and the likes are all visible along the train stations. And these places, especially the karaokes, are great locations to begin HC as they are easily accessible, inexpensive and can accommodate up to 30 people. The big, modern LCD screen in the karaoke is

Read, Review & Redeem!

Here are 2 selected book reviews from our Read, Review and Redeem (R3) competition held in November 2009





HC in rural Ibaraki – having HCs in rural areas have enabled more older folks to know the Lord

ideal for projecting powerpoint worship songs via a laptop. You can invite your friends easily to a neutral place; sing, study God's Word, share your lives, and pay around S\$7 for 2 hours of usage including a drink or even free flow of drinks and ice-cream in some joints. And you can just walk out without needing to clean up!!

Besides meeting on their own, each HC has the opportunity to meet and interact with other HCs once every 2 months for a time of celebration which is a gathering of all HCs throughout the Kanto area for worship and encouragement.

The churches in Japan are facing a crisis. The Christian Protestant population remains at 0.44% and in the last few decades, the number of churches is dwindling, the baptism numbers and Sunday Service attendances are dropping, and most alarming is the greying of pastors in Japan. According to statistics, pastors from age 51 and above form 84%, those from 41 to 50 form 16% and pastors aged 40 and below make up only 4%! This is not helped by the low enrolment of students in bible colleges throughout Japan.

Can the HC movement be a catalyst in saturating Japan with the Gospel? The vision is not church planting per-se, but starting and encouraging kingdom-focus communities (Christians identifying with the life of Christ, building relationships within a community and impacting society), using the HC structure which is easily reproducible.

Leaders are essential and key to our strategy. For them to reproduce and multiply HC networks, we have a monthly gathering for leaders and potential leaders for a 3-fold purpose of encouragement/networking, training and prayer. Through

such training, we can sharpen each other and also hold one another accountable.

One of Jesus' largely forgotten evangelism methods is found in Luke 10: 5-9 which seeks out "a man of peace" as a bridge to others. Jesus asked His disciples to "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you..." This person of peace is normally receptive to the Gospel, has a good reputation amongst his community and can effectively refer the Good News to a wider audience just like Cornelius, the Centurion (Acts 10:22).

Shion, one of our pioneers in KHCN, has brought many of his Waseda University friends to the HC when he was a student and now, he continues to do so after entering the working world, bringing others to a HC he is leading in Shinagawa. Mrs Shiroe, a widow who has great influence in a farming town in Ibaraki Prefecture, is a woman of peace. She is well known in the town and together with her, we would travel from house to house to have bible study with her friends and relatives. Through this woman of peace, a few people, particularly the older folks, have become Christians.



HCs in Kanto meet every 2 months for a time of encouragement and fellowship

Many of us come from the traditional base of doing church and thus the house church concept may seem alien to most of us. Yet that was how the early church started. We are excited in seeing what God has been doing. House churches are a new paradigm in Japan. Will you partner us to be a part of this movement? To Him be the glory. *CAF*

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

How You Can Be Involved in House Churches

1. Pray for a movement of the HC that will stretch across Japan.
2. Adopt 1 or 2 HCs and pray for the multiplication of the HCs.
3. Come to Japan and avail yourself for a year or 2 in this work.
4. Spend a few months with KHCN and get involved in the starting of a HC.

Find out more:
www.kantohousechurches.com
louislau@omf.net

Journey Back to Taiwan

By Timothy Ho

The smell of 'stinky tofu' and the hum of scooters linger around me as I walk along a typical alley in Taipei. Little did I know that God would bring me back full circle to my roots in Taiwan to serve through OMF's Serve Asia programme. Although there was a bit of reverse culture shock, it's more of a strange familiarity.

The journey began when I was born 34 years ago in Taipei. Except my immediate family, the rest of my relatives are culturally Buddhist. I recall visiting temples with relatives as a young boy doing 'bai bai', or worshipping idols to ask for their favour. My family moved to the US when I was 8 as my father embarked on his first post as a foreign diplomat for Taiwan. Our family started attending church right away, and that was how I came to be a Christian, at the age of 13. However, real spiritual growth did not start until my last year at undergraduate school, when I understood what it meant to have a living relationship with Jesus.

Bible-based, mission-minded, and outreach-oriented churches fostered my Christian walk and helped open my eyes to God's mission. Involvement in church ministries and local outreach fueled my interest in serving God. Mission trips during graduate school years opened my eyes to a bigger God and His global mission, and deepened my appreciation of different cultures. I lived vicariously through partnerships with missionary friends.

A major trial a couple of years ago stretched my faith in God's promises. I was retrenched from the high-tech industry and had to leave the US due to my visa situation. It was difficult leaving the US, my home for over 24 years. Fear in future uncertainty paralysed me, but God gave me courage to take a step of faith, moving to Singapore in 2008 to seek what God has in store. God brought me halfway around the world back to my Asian roots and provided a meaningful position as high school science teacher at a Christian international school. He gave me the mission of educating students with a Christian-worldview.

While in Singapore, God brought along friends who are OMF missionaries serving in Taiwan. Through them and OMF literature, I was exposed to the spiritual needs of the working class in Taiwan. Little did I know that my own people group is the least reached Chinese society, and that less than 0.5% of



Tim, hanging out with kids in the Wanhua community

the working class is Christian. I discovered there were a couple of summer mission opportunities with OMF in Taiwan so I went ahead and applied to be on a Serve Asia summer team. In the meantime, I prayed that God would open the door for me to serve in Taiwan and give me a burden for my own people group. I attended a monthly Taiwan prayer group which gave me insight into the various ministries in Taiwan and the missionaries that serve there. Through OMF's STEPS Missions Weekend retreat, God showed me how important it is for missionaries to have prayer support, and that I would need to raise prayer support if I was to serve Him in Taiwan.

Fast forward several months later, I got the go ahead from OMF to join an international team to work with at-risk children's ministry in Taipei. Through a series of God-orchestrated decisions outside my control, I was able to trade my 1-month summer



Tim's ministry includes reaching out to children through games and Bible storytelling

trip for an 11-month Serve Asia internship which started in November 2009, and not have to worry about military service being a male Taiwanese citizen.

I am now based in the Wanhua district of Taipei, which is the oldest district and considered the 'inner-city' or 'red-light' district. There are plenty of opportunities for ministry to the marginalised population, and Taiwanese is commonly spoken. My ministry focus is working with at-risk children in the Wanhua community, through an after-school program, park outreach, and relationship building. I'm also spending time with teenage boys in the boys' reformatory on alternate Saturdays.

During my first weeks in Wanhua, I got to observe and help with the aforementioned ministries. Most of these children come from dysfunctional families and experience difficulties beyond what children with advantaged upbringing encounter. They are no different from at-risk children in other countries - they all desire to be loved and to be given attention. It has been encouraging to hear stories of seeds being sown in these kids through quality time spent with them, opening opportunities to share about the love of Jesus. The faithfulness of missionaries investing in these children along with fruits of their labor challenge me to have a bigger vision of what God can do with these precious children. That despite hurdles along the way, the community can be reached one child at a time, one family at a time. *CAF*

"Whoever marries me must love my Shan more than me!"

Florence Leow, OMF Singapore's missionary to the Shan people in northern Thailand, certainly has clear priorities.

This declaration was a response to my random and cheeky question to Florence if she will consider marriage at this point since it was not I 'but she who first bugged me'. We were at the 7-Eleven in the Chiangmai night market. I had followed Florence and her church team from Toa Payoh Methodist Church (TPMC) in November 2009 to visit the Shan ministries which she oversees.

Why Shan?

In 2000, the Lord gave Florence a vision of a land separated by a line with a different colour at each side. She did not know what it meant until she visited the Myanmar and Thai border where the Shan people reside. The Shan is a people group living primarily in the Shan State of Burma (southern Myanmar). Many of them crossed the border to northern Thailand and have no proper identification documents. Without official documents, they are unable to enter the city to find work and many remain in the refugee camp, with no chance of getting out for a brighter future.

When Florence saw the Myanmar-Thailand border during an exploration



A natural leader and 'big sister' amongst the Shan, Florence is often seen gathering the community.

Home Assignee Focus:

Florence – A PasSHANate Woman for Christ

By Lim Jia Ying



Florence in half Shan gear, translating a song by the TPMC team at Light of Love in Wiang Haeng

trip with OMF, she knew this was where God has called her. Wasting no time, she became a missionary with OMF Singapore and has been reaching out to the Shan in Chiangmai for the past 7 years. Hearing her speak fluent Shan and Thai is a cultural experience no money can buy. The speed of her speech is as quick as her mind. Her thoughts and decisions are always intentional towards building up the faith of the Shan Christians or reaching out to even more Shan.

Becoming All Things to All Men

Whether it is observing her counseling the Shan church leaders, checking out medication for incoming Singapore mission teams, translating a testimony to Shan pre-believers or doing her ministry planning every night, one thing is crystal clear - Florence is super passionate about serving God and bringing the Shan people to His Kingdom. Every action and decision she makes has a sound reason - and the reason is always centred on this purpose.

Watching Florence *live in action* made me realise how highly intelligent and versatile missionaries are. In order to reach out to their people group, they can somehow multi-task and become all things. Besides being church planters and disciplers, many missionaries are able to adapt and take on task like that of an English teacher, travel guide, dancer, cook, entrepreneur, child caregiver, counsellor and so on as the needs arise. What an amazing profession!



Distributing old clothes donated by Singaporeans and being 'image consultant' to the recipients is a forte of Florence as well.

Different Parts, One Body

So here I was in Chiangmai, hanging out with Florence nearly every waking moment, watching the energetic missionary conduct her ministry with such confidence and purpose. It was harvest time when we were there and we were just in time to attend the First Harvest Thanksgiving Services in 4 local Christian communities. Three of them were preaching points that Florence started, namely Light of Love in Wiang Haeng, Ban Na Wai and Arunothai Preaching Point. Another was in Kuchin Baptist Church, by invitation from the church. These thanksgiving services were also used as outreach platforms to invite other pre-believers in the village to join in the worship, hear real life testimonies and listen to the Word.