NOT A "PROFESSIONAL MISSIONARY" IN SIGHT

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An example of how Christianity is spreading around the globe without the input of "missionaries" and a short reflection on the challenges and opportunities facing the church in the UK.
Category: Africa

Over the years, I've argued that most "mission" in the world is carried out by everyday Christians, not "professional missionaries". The best example of this phenomenon that I've come across in a long time comes from the UnHerd news website:

> *Several years ago, I spent a significant amount of time in East Africa, researching the involvement of local Christian denominations in politics. While in Addis Ababa, Ethiopiaâ€™s capital, I learned that China was engaged in significant infrastructure building, including a major roads project that locals referenced with a nickname that I could never quite make out: they were either calling it â€œthe Confucian Roadâ€ or â€œthe Confusion Road.â€ Both labels accurately apply to the impact of Chinaâ€™s growing presence in Africa, not only for the African nations, but also for China itself.*
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> *Much has been made of the influx of Chinese money and workers into Africa over the past two decades, as China has become the primary economic partner for the continent. Both the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University and the consulting firm McKinsey & Company have compiled the numbers â€“ and theyâ€™re staggering. China-Africa trade reached a high of $215 billion in 2014;Â $143 billion in Chinese loans have poured in to Africa between 2000 and 2017, and annual inflows of foreign direct investment have exceeded $3 billion in recent years.*
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> *McKinsey says there are around 10,000 Chinese-owned firms operating in Africa.Â CARIâ€™s data shows over 227,000 Chinese workers in Africa as of 2016, though others say the number is nearer 1 million.*
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> *Much of the commentary on this relationship has focused on whether this is good for Africa; cash infusion and needed infrastructure development versus the danger of long-term debt and Chinese neocolonialism. Equally important, though largely overlooked, are the impacts that this growing relationship will have on China. The intention is to import much-needed natural resources for Chinaâ€™s huge economy, but this link is also causing China to import something that it has been trying to eliminate at home: religion, and particularly Evangelical Christianity...*
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> *...Hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens have gone to work in Africa, where they have encountered foreign cultures that leave many of them feeling alienated. For some of these disaffected Chinese workers, a source of comfort has come from religion, most notably the Evangelical Christianity that pervades much of sub-Saharan Africa. Evangelicalism prioritises conversion of non-believers, and the Chinese, heavily discouraged from practicing religion at home, are attractive potential converts.*
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> *Many local African churches have reached out to Chinese workers, including incorporating Mandarin into services.Â A number of Chinese, in turn, have welcomed the sense of*

> *community and belonging that these Christian churches offer. And a small but growing number of ethnically Chinese missionaries from Taiwan and other countries are specifically targeting Chinese nationals in Africa, preaching to them with a freedom theyâ€™d never be allowed in the Peopleâ€™s Republic.*
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> *Many of these Chinese workers are returning home, and theyâ€™re bringing their newfound religion with them.Â Visitors to the coastal province of Fujian, for example, now hear South African accented English and see houses adorned with crosses.*

Make sure that you read the whole article.

Through history, migration has probably been the most important feature in the transmission of Christianity. Christians have taken their faith with them when they move to new areas and others, as in this story, have encountered Christ when they have moved to new parts of the world. Migration into the UK brings hope to the UK as believers from parts of the world where the faith is more vibrant and thriving move here, but it also brings huge opportunities as those from areas where it is difficult to be Christians have the opportunity to encounter Jesus for the first time. Are we making the best of both the hope and the opportunity?