

## Summary

Lam Chi-fung played a transformative role in shaping the Hong Kong Baptist life during a transition period between 1950 and 1970 when Hong Kong Baptists experienced a rapid growth. Lam was the crucial person facilitating the return of Baptist missionaries to Hong Kong after their expulsion from mainland China in 1949. He was also key to building a relationship with Governor Alexander Grantham, the government, and Baptists in the development of Hong Kong Baptist ministries. Under Lam's leadership, Hong Kong Baptists were transformed from a local church of a nominal size without external assistance before 1950, to a large denomination which, partnering with overseas Baptists and aided by the government, planted numerous churches and important institutions by 1970.

Baptists were the first Protestant group which reached out to the Chinese. While working in India, William Carey converted the first Chinese in 1800, and Joshua Marshman translated and published the first Chinese Bible in 1822. William Dean established the first Chinese church in 1835 in Bangkok. Jehu Shuck and Issachar Robert were the first missionaries who created a foothold in Hong Kong and established the first churches on Chinese soil in 1842, when Hong Kong was ceded to the British as a result of the First Opium War. As more treaty ports were opened to the west after the Second Opium War in 1860, the early Baptist missionaries in Hong Kong departed for mainland China. Native Baptists were left alone with little support other than a small amount of remote support given by Baptist missionaries in southern China.

Despite the many difficulties they encountered, Hong Kong Baptists beginning in the early twentieth century built a self-governing church. During this period, local lay leaders played an important role in establishing and developing Baptist ministries in the colony. Lam Chi-fung emerged as a lay leader under such a context. Coming from a Baptist family in Chaozhou, China, Lam had strong Baptist roots. As the son of the first Chinese Baptist minister in his hometown, Lam was educated in Baptist mission schools while in China. After moving to Hong Kong, Lam became a successful businessman and was heavily involved in Baptist churches there. He was the longest-serving leader of the denomination body, Hong Kong Baptist Association, from 1941 till his death in 1971.

Lam's leadership and significance in Hong Kong Baptist life became more prominent and visible beginning in the mid-twentieth century. When China was taken over by Communism in 1949, large numbers of refugee flooded Hong Kong resulting in a sudden increase in both social and spiritual needs. As the British government was struggling to recover from its war-torn economy, it could allow no resources to cater to the needs of the surging population in the colony. This dire

situation created a large gospel field in Hong Kong with tremendous needs for churches, schools and social welfare services. Lam, being the de facto head of Hong Kong Baptists, responded to the needs under the changing context by soliciting assistance from foreign missionaries and collaborating with the Hong Kong government.

Once China was completely under the control of the Communist Party, all foreign mission agencies were forced to leave the country. Out of fear that Hong Kong would soon be taken over, only a few actually went to Hong Kong. For example Southern Baptists, who once had over 200 mission personnel in China, sent only a few missionaries to the British colony. Most foreign missionaries ended up in other places with Chinese populations instead of in Hong Kong. In view of the situation, Lam took the initiative to attempt to alleviate the concerns of Baptist missionaries and used every means to invite their return. As a successful businessman who knew well the importance of “guan-xi” (relationship), the Chinese way of building connections with people to get things done and to maintain long-term relationships, Lam was able to build friendships with missionaries and foreign visitors to ensure their ongoing supports to Hong Kong Baptist work. As a result of his relentless effort, the number of Southern Baptist missionaries increased from only three in 1952 to over eighty in 1970, and the mission funds allocated to Hong Kong by Southern Baptists increased from zero in 1950 to over US\$ 1 million annually in the early 1970s. Southern Baptists became the largest mission group in Hong Kong.

Lam was the key person who collaborated with the government to develop Hong Kong Baptist ministries. At the time when the colonial government was seeking help from churches and charitable organizations to provide education and other social services to meet Hong Kong needs, Baptists were found to be favorable partners. Due to his skill in building “guan-xi” with people, Lam established a friendship with Sir Alexander Grantham, Governor of Hong Kong from 1947 to 1957. As a result, Hong Kong Baptists were given free land grants and interest-free loans to establish a number of major institutions. During Grantham’s governorship, there were in total close to 400,000 square feet of land given to Baptists for schools, hospital and social centers, all in prime locations. Land has always been a scarce resource in Hong Kong. The government had never granted such large tracts of land in the urban area free of charge to private organizations. Besides obtaining free land grants and interest-free loans, getting the required government permits to operate an institution was equally important. Hong Kong Baptists were the only church organization which was granted permission to establish a university in the colony. The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong had made a similar request to open a tertiary school in 1961, and was declined. The

collaboration between Lam and Grantham helped to build the Hong Kong Baptist structure.

While large mission sources were allocated to Hong Kong as a result of Lam's effort to invite missionary support, there were tensions between local Baptists and foreign missionaries. Apart from the usual conflicts such as the language barrier and cultural differences between foreign and indigenous workers, the presence of large missionary resources was seen by some natives as a hindrance to church growth and the independence of local Baptists. The return of foreign missionaries also caused concerns with the deterioration in indigenization. As large resources were put into education and social services, there were debates as to whether the efforts should be used in churches for direct evangelism rather than in institutions for indirect evangelism. Despite the tensions and different opinions, Lam's strong leadership style and dominant personality made it difficult for others to resist his efforts. At times, he might even have pushed his ideas without sensitivity to teamwork.

When collaborating with the government, Lam faced the issue of separation of church and state, a principle which is cherished by Baptists all over the world, particularly by Southern Baptists. Lam handled the issue in a pragmatic way. Knowing that there was no unified view among the missionaries in regard to which government subsidies were considered acceptable and which not, Lam carefully navigated his way to seek different kinds of government aid so long as they were not clearly forbidden in the view of the Baptist mission. With his pragmatic approach to the interpretation of the principle, Lam was able to continue to get government help and at the same time receive huge financial and personnel support from Southern Baptists to build Baptist organizational structures in Hong Kong.

As a result of Lam's effort and leadership, Hong Kong Baptists entered into a changing landscape between 1950 and 1970. With the help and support received from Southern Baptists and the colonial government, Hong Kong Baptists grew from a nominal denomination of seven churches and chapels with 5,500 members in 1950 to fifty-five churches and chapels with a total membership of over 20,000 in 1970. In addition to becoming the largest denomination in the territory, Hong Kong Baptists also established a number of important institutions including the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Baptist Hospital, the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, the Baptist Assembly (a Baptist campground), the Baptist Press (a Baptist publishing house and a bookstore), and a Baptist social welfare centre. Instead of natives working alone, there were foreign missionaries serving alongside the locals in every ministry. Instead of relying on church resources alone, government aids were received to build the ministry. Instead of concentrating on direct evangelism through churches, indirect evangelism through

schools and social service institutions was equally emphasized. The Hong Kong Baptist life was no longer the same. Lam played a crucial role in transforming it during the period between 1950 and 1970.