

**“To listen to” as “active passivity and deep activity”
for the “Cross-cultural” Matrix for Mission**

Megumi Yoshida

Introduction: “Doing Mission from the *Underside*”

The world situations are drastically changing from moment to moment. Last autumn, the American bubble economy collapsed, and it has caused a huge financial and economical crisis not only in the USA but also in the world. Suddenly, many people have lost their jobs and their sweet home. Japan is not an exception. In Japan, before Christmas and the New Year, many people were suddenly fired and then had to leave their flats owned by their companies. Unexpectedly, they became jobless and homeless!! More than one thousand seven hundred volunteers distributed warm food for five hundred jobless-homeless people every day from New Year’s Eve to January 5, 2009, at the Hibiya Park in Tokyo. In spite of such urgent predicaments, many Japanese still enjoyed their family time at their warm homes during holidays of the New Year Eve and the New Year. Can you imagine such situations in Japan?

This is one of many examples of the global surroundings in the world. Many people live in affluence and some of them feel psychological emptiness in their affluent life, whereas the weak are easily abandoned without warning. Such influences of the global economic crises are limited not only to workers but also their family. Many children suddenly can not continue their study at school and can not go to a doctor because their parents can not continue to pay their children’s school expenses and a charge for their health insurance. Nowadays, poverty is a social problem in Japan as well as other Asian developing countries. Such financial disparity is globally getting bigger and bigger on the world level. In the midst of such global world, where should we Asian stand for mission? In the CATS Congress VI, the theme “Doing Mission from the Underside” denotes the place, viz., “underside.” The ‘underside’ means “the bottom or lower side or surface of something” and “the side or surface of something that is underneath.” Further, the synonym of ‘underside’ is ‘bottom.’¹ Therefore, I would like to take a stance at the bottom, the *weakest*², the *most* marginalized.

¹ “underside”, *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary 10e*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

² I would like to emphasize the significance to take a stance from the superlative. [Megumi Yoshida, “Doing Praxis-Contextual Theology with the Most Marginalized in Japan”, presented to share the book in English of the Ecumenical Series of Tomisaka Christian Center *Vitality of East Asian Christianity: Challenges to Mission and Theology in Japan* (ISPCK, 2004) with ATESEA General

In this paper, I would like to introduce briefly the “Cross-cultural” matrix for mission which I proposed last year³, and I would like to show the contrast between our unconscious inclination to the ecclesio-centric paradigm from the view of Chinese translations of ‘mission’ with *missio Dei*, the people-oriented paradigm for action on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It can be said that we approach mission from the unconscious. Then, I would like to consider “to listen to” as “active passivity and deep activity” in order to compensate for the unconscious inclination with “to listen to”. The activity “to listen to” would then serve as a sufficient means for the “Cross-cultural” matrix for mission.

Mission: to be sent with vocation

Etymologically, the word ‘mission’ is delivered from the Latin *mittere* (to send, and to let go)⁴. It means to be sent with vocation. In the 16th century, the origin of ‘mission’ denoted the sending of the Holy Spirit into the world.⁵ Since the 16th century both Catholic and Protestant churches have been sending missionaries from the Western world to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands. At that time, missionaries justified their mission by claiming that they were ‘civilizing (the primitive people)’. Then, most of those areas where missionaries went were areas colonized by the Western countries from which the missionaries came. To take an instance, in the 19th century in the United Kingdom during the Victorian era, economic life, evangelistic Christianity, the Western way of living, and scientific technologies were considered as integral components of civilization. It was believed that such important matters must be spread to the ‘ignorant people of the world’.⁶

Nowadays, a century and a half later, Korean churches are sending many missionaries all over the world. Mission work comes not only from the Western world, but also from other countries as well. **Mission in reverse!** John Wesley (1703-1791) stated: ‘I look upon the world as my parish.’⁷ In the world, mission should not subordinate others, but

Assembly at Payap University in Chiang Mai, on October 19, 2005.]

³ Megumi Yoshida, “A Consideration on “Cross-Cultural Matrix” for Mission: A Christian Legacy and the *dao* of Tea as Japanese culture”, in *The Journal of Theological and Cultures in Asia (JTCA)* Vol. 7 & 8: *Rethinking Mission in Asia*, 2008/2009, pp. 161-179.

⁴ “mitto,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, New York: Macmillan, 1968.

⁵ “mission,” *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary 10e*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁶ Takeshi Komagome, “The Order of Civilization and Mission – the Presbyterian Church of England and Britain, China and Japan in the 19th century” in Japanese.

⁷ World Methodist Council introduced the words: “The World is My Parish – John Wesley”.

<http://www.worldmethodistcouncil.org>, accessed on March 23, 2008.

should serve others by sharing the Good News with them. In Asia, mission should be “people-centered,”⁸ and “sharing”⁹ with others for solidarity through “doing mission from the underside”. Strictly speaking, when taking ecological, economical, and political situations in the global world into account, mission should be “nature-people-centered” and sharing with ‘nature-others’. Based on the etymological meanings of ‘mission,’ ‘ministry,’ ‘culture,’ ‘community,’ ‘communion,’ and ‘communication,’ it can be said:

ministry in human-nature community and culture means to cultivate a cutting edge in our life through generations by serving God and human-nature communities. The Cross of Jesus Christ is crossing into cultures, viz., cross-cultural.¹⁰

The “Cross-cultural matrix” for Mission

Thereupon, I proposed “The Cross-cultural matrix” for mission. The capital “C” denotes Jesus Christ’s Cross crossing cultures, showing God’s working in humans/creatures. In doing theology in Asian contexts, the Cross-cultural matrix is *sine qua non*. The world ‘cross-cultural’ means that one crosses from one culture into another. Cultures meet and pass by each other. We take one culture and carry it across into another. The original meaning of ‘cross-cultural’ has nothing with the Cross of Jesus Christ, yet the Cross of Jesus Christ, the crucified God, and Jesus’ teaching crosses from one culture into another. When Christianity was born in the Middle East and was established as the religion in the West and then is rooted in Asian contexts, it shows how the Cross of Jesus Christ has enabled the church to carry out God’s mission in its ministry in various cultures.

In the Cross-cultural matrix for mission, it became clear as follows:

Christian faith and “Good News” are unconsciously handed down to generations in daily life. We are living “Here and Now”, and yet at the same time such “Here and Now” connotes the “There and Then”. This “Cross-cultural” matrix operates in the contexts of human beings and other

⁸ Wati Longchar, “Editorial-Rethinking Mission in Asia” in *JTCA Vol. 7 & 8*, 2008/2009, pp. vii-xii.

⁹ K.C. Abraham, “Living in a Religiously Plural World – Problems and Challenges for Doing Mission in Asia”, in *JTCA Vol. 7 & 8*, pp. 12-15.

¹⁰ Megumi Yoshida, “A Consideration on “Cross-Cultural Matrix” for Mission: A Christian Legacy and the *dao* of Tea as Japanese culture”, in *JTCA Vol. 7 & 8*, p. 165.

creatures for the ministry in mission.¹¹

***missio Dei*: the people-oriented paradigm for action on justice, peace and the integrity of creation vs. the unconscious inclination of the ecclesio-centric paradigm.**

- *missio Dei*: the people-oriented paradigm for action on justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

M. M. Thomas stated that the significant question is not what is God doing with the church in Asia as what is God doing in Asia and how the church in Asia may discern where Jesus Christ is at work in Asia and respond to Him as He acts, making His presence and Lordship known.

Twenty years ago, at the Asia Mission Conference, 1989, in Cipanas near Jakarta, Indonesia, Kim Yong Bock moved the understanding of *missio Dei* from an ecclesio-centric paradigm of Western Christendom to the people-oriented paradigm in a definitive manner in his keynote address.

The call to mission is, rather, to be an incarnating community among the communities of people. The *missio Dei* provided the basis for the church's involvement with the suffering and struggling peoples in the world. It called for Christian participation in society. ... the people in Asia who are the economically poor, politically oppressed, and culturally alienated and suppressed. ... The mission of God among the suffering people in Asia is to restore life and dignity to people so that they can be truly the image of God.¹²

In his "The Mission of God in the Context of the Suffering and Struggling Peoples of Asia", Preman Niles borrowed from and extended M. M. Thomas' and the South Korean theologians' thought by touching on "the main trusts of thought and action" in understanding *missio Dei* through the suffering and struggles of people in Asia, call to churches and Christians to "covenant together for action on justice, peace and the integrity of creation", and what it means "to engage in a conciliar process of mutual commitment [covenant] to justice, peace and the integrity of creation".¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 177.

¹² Yap Kim Hao, *From Prapat to Colombo: history of the Christian Conference of Asia [1957-1995]*, Hong Kong: CCA, Word Maker Design Pte Ltd, 1995, p.147.

¹³ Preman Niles, "The Mission of God in the Context of the Suffering and Struggling Peoples of

- The unconscious inclination of the ecclesio-centric paradigm from the view of Chinese translations of “mission”

When we use the translations of “mission” into Chinese characters, Chinese characters translated ‘*den-dou*,’ ‘*sen-kyou*,’ and ‘*fu-kyou*’ would imply that actions in mission are described from the side of those who are involved in mission’s work. Each Chinese character has own meaning.

The ‘*den-dou*’ = ‘*den* (to inform, to tell)’ + ‘*dou* (*dao*, way)’

The ‘*sen-kyou*’ = ‘*sen* (to spread universally)’ + ‘*kyou* (teachings, doctrine)’

The ‘*fu-kyou*’ = ‘*fu* (cloth, to extend all over)’ + ‘*kyou* (teachings, doctrine)’

As we have seen above, it is obvious that all these expressions of the Chinese characters are described from the side of those who inform, tell, spread, and extend teachings, doctrine and way of Christianity universally all over. When we use these translations in our contexts, could not we say that unconsciously we are inclined to the ecclesio-centric paradigm? Is it sufficient?

In contrast, the perspective of *missio Dei* from the people-centered paradigm for action on justice, peace and the integrity of creation, viewing those translated words of ‘mission’ into Chinese characters, we would have questions. Where are the suffering and struggling peoples? Does mission’s work mean to inform and extend Christian teachings and doctrine widely? Is it allowed to stay in the ecclesio-centric paradigm unconsciously?

“To listen to” as “active passivity and deep activity”

In the first place, we have to listen to voiceless voices, groaning, mourning, gentle breeze’s sounds, and echoes to understand reality. Taking notice of what people are saying to us, we should lend our ears to realities in our contexts deeply. God calls Israelite, “Hear, O Israel (*shema* Israel)” (Deuteronomy). God called to Moses out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ (Exodus 3:4) In the Bible, when God calls people and they hear and listen to God’s voice, people have been already required to positive respond with action to God’s voice. The Hebrew ‘שמע’ (*shm*)’ means to hear, to lend an ear to, to listen, to attend, to understand, and to obey.¹⁴ When Moses went up to God and the

Asia”, in *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No.1, April 1990.

¹⁴ “שמע”, *Langenscheidt’s Pocket Hebrew Dictionary to The Old Testament: Hebrew-English*,

Lord called to him from the mountain, God said, “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.” (Exodus 19:5 in NRSV). This “obey” is ‘שמע (*shm*)’, and is also translated into “hearken” (the JPS 1917 edition). In the New Testament, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27), the third person plural form of the Greek ‘ακούω (to hear)’ and ‘ακολουθέω (to follow, to obey)’ are used in the present tense.

In the juvenile literature *Momo (The Grey Gentlemen in English)*¹⁵ by Michael Ende, which was also made into a film, the heroine Momo, a vagrant-looking girl, devotes herself to listen to what other people say. That is all she does, but that gradually changes peoples’ heart hardened in a modern capitalistic-controlled society and eventually the whole society is improved peacefully. Momo’s act of hearing/listening turns out to be involved with the deep, fundamental nature of human beings.

As compared with the other five senses, — to see, to taste, to smell, and to touch —, to hear/to listen is passive behavior rather than an active one. We need to hear and to listen to God’s voice, people’s voiceless voices, and echoes of nature in our contexts, before taking action in mission, and before speaking verbally. Utterance is a very active behavior such as God created through his words. To listen to is rather passive behavior, but at the same time is very active. God requests us to follow and obey the Lord, and through listening to others like Momo, people’s hardened hearts are melted and changed. These passive and active phases of listening to can be called “active passivity and deep activity”. When we remember this factor in our mission, we can compensate the unconscious inclination to the ecclesio-centric paradigm with the “active passivity and deep activity”, for through listening to mission work can be not only active but also passive. This “active passivity and deep activity” would be *sine qua non* for mission in our contexts.

Concluding remarks: To listen to as “active passivity and deep activity” space and time to others

When we listen to faint voices of the crucified God the Cross of Jesus Christ, voiceless voice of people, and slight echoes of nature, the deed of listening to offers space and time to others. To exist means to occupy space and time. Through the deed to listen to,

Langenscheidt: Hodder and Stoughton, p.356.

¹⁵ Michael Ende, *Momo*, Thienemann Verlag, 1974.

space and time for others are provided in the occupied space and time. So we can share the same space and same time. This implies the “active passivity” and such way can distinguish just activity and the “deep activity”. Through listening to God’s groaning in our contexts, to listen to voiceless voice, and to listen to a gentle breeze, we have already started to communicate with them mutually and to interpenetrate each other reciprocally.

Additionally, I would like to add my experience. Last year, in Stuttgart, Germany, I made Japanese green tea and served tea with simple sweets to participants at a morning meditation instead of talking for fifteen minutes. It was non-verbal communication. We heard sounds of making tea, drinking tea, and eating sweets. After the meditation, all told me how deeply it touched them. With moving the depth of our psyche, we can communicate deeply and understand each other deeply. Such solidarity arouses power from the bottom to take action. Here I would like to make tea and serve tea to you. This is not traditional Japanese tea ceremony, but our daily tea. How do you feel? The core of the original Jesus movement was a radical egalitarianism of spirituality and materiality by healing and commensality.¹⁶ Jesus shared food with the most marginalized, ate together at same table.

It is interesting that in Japan, the ‘prohibited’ Christianity lived on in making and drinking as the *dao* of tea. It is said “peacefulness through a bowl of tea”. Serving tea and sweets, drinking tea and eating sweets were associated with the Holy Communion. Eating and drinking is a basic human act for sustaining our physical body and life itself. The significance of the Holy Communion is also seen among the indigenous people in Taiwan Island.¹⁷ Christian faith lives in the midst of sharing our daily bread/rice/chapatti/noodles/potatoes with other people. Therefore, to share our daily bread/rice/chapatti/noodles/potatoes with others including creatures is the most basic activity in ministry of mission in the “Cross-cultural” matrix.¹⁸

It is not only in Asia but also in the West that serving and commensality are important. In the Bible, three visitors enjoyed the hospitality of Sarah and Abraham at Mamre

¹⁶ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, pp.66-74, and pp. 106-109.

¹⁷ Megumi Yoshida, “In Search of the Profundity in East Asian Christianity: Using Images as the Logos of the Soul” in Yeow Choo Lak (ed.), *Doing Theology With Asian Resources: Innovative Theological Education in Asia Vol. 5*, Manila: ATESEA, 2008, pp. 165-167.

¹⁸ Megumi Yoshida, “A Consideration on “Cross-Cultural Matrix” for Mission: A Christian Legacy and the *Dao* of Tea as Japanese Culture” in *JTCA Vol. 7 & 8*, p.178.

(Genesis 18:1-8). It is considered that Sarah and Abraham served God as three visitors and God promised the birth of their son and Sarah was embarrassed because of her age.

Moltmann was interested in this theme's image of the icon in relation to his perichoretic idea¹⁹, and found freedom in hospitable relationship. Hospitality is neither to dominate guests, nor to do as one pleases. Hosts offer their space for guests to share time and space. Its relationship does not come into existence without guest[s]. Moltmann considered such a hospitable person is "friendly, well-disposed, open, pleasant and loving" and can have fellowship with strangers to let them share one's life and to have interests in their lives. He considered that only this freedom as community or solidarity can heal wounds²⁰, and that such freedom as reciprocal participation can go beyond the limitation of individuality²¹. Moltmann argued that such freedom allows everything to be itself in its own unique nature, and love binds. He called unity in diversity and diversity in unity by the Holy Spirit the trinitarian fellowship.²² Through giving space and time to others and share them together such as "to listen to" and commensality, mission work can become active passivity and deep activity.

¹⁹ Megumi Yoshida, "The icon image of "The Holy Trinity" by Andrei Rublev and Moltmann's theological reflection", presented at One-day Seminar "Religion and the Arts" at John Kydd Room, Elmfield House, University of Birmingham, UK on May 6, 2008.

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A universal affirmation*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1992, p.119.

²¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The doctrine of God*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981, p.56.

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *ibid.*, p.220.