



Chinese war refugees in straw huts.

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## Hupeh Mission (1915–1951)

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### Introduction

The Hupeh (now Hubei) Mission ( ) was a part of the North Central China Mission in 1910, ministered from the expatriate district in Hankow (now Wuhan).<sup>2</sup> Later, the name of the governing body was changed to the North China Union Mission.<sup>3</sup> A re-organization took place in 1919, placing the mission in the Central China Union Mission.<sup>4</sup> Its headquarters remained in Hankow.

In 1911 some students from Hubei Province were attending the China Training School in Chowkiakow (now Zhoujiakou), to the north in Henan Province. In October a revolution broke out and Hubei became a battlefield where north and south armies met in combat. The American Consul advised that the school in Henan be closed during the hostilities. To avoid the battlefields the Hubei students were forced to walk a circuitous route for eighteen days to reach their homes safely.<sup>5</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist mission had, by that time, generated enough interest among young people in Hubei to encourage some to train for ministry. The mission had opened a chapel in Hankow, but it was destroyed in the fighting.<sup>6</sup> To replace it a large compound was rented, and a new chapel built in addition to a boarding school for sixty young men and women. It was located at Wangjiadun, a northern suburb of Hankow.<sup>7</sup> These improvements circumvented the need for Hubei students to go to Henan for their advanced studies. Annual meetings were also held in Hubei Province by visiting church officials, the 1912 gathering attracting approximately eighty people.<sup>8</sup> In 1913 two double-storied homes were built to provide new offices and housing for resident missionaries.<sup>9</sup>

## Official Inauguration of the Hupeh Mission

Prior to 1915 there was considerable capital expenditure and evangelistic activity by Seventh-day Adventists in Hubei Province. However, the official inauguration of the mission entity did not take place until the Asiatic Division Conference of May 1915 in Shanghai. It was there that Roy Cottrell (Kāng Shèngdé, ) was voted as the initial director of the Hupeh Mission, he already being a resident and evangelist in Hankow.<sup>10</sup>

## Mission Highlights

The mission struggled financially during its infancy and lacked sufficient expatriate leadership. This was evident in the fact that the Hankow boarding school was forced to close in 1917 and 1918 because no expatriate teacher was available. At the same time there was a concerted push to have all aspects of the mission self-supporting so that adequate staff could be employed.<sup>11</sup> The situation showed signs of improvement by 1920 with the school functioning again and more than half of the forty-four students paying full fees.<sup>12</sup>

Walter Strickland, mission director in 1921, gave a comprehensive report at the time that told of a mission team of twenty-five individuals including nine evangelists, two lady Bible workers, five canvassers, six school teachers teaching at five schools, and office staff. The baptized membership in twelve provincial stations numbered 231.<sup>13</sup> Two years later the annual report told of fourteen stations and a baptized membership of three hundred!<sup>14</sup>

Annual statistical reports of the mission were instructive. In 1929 there were a reported 386 baptized members.<sup>15</sup> By 1939 the numbers had dropped to 291.<sup>16</sup> The totals had steadily increased to a peak of 504 in 1933,<sup>17</sup> and then dropped away. It is easy to attribute the losses to war conditions, but it should be noted that the rising totals to the peak in 1933 occurred during civil unrest. In fact, the mission that was born at the time of revolution experienced wave after wave of warfare until the 1950s. Expatriate and national missionaries, together with the membership, repeatedly had to endure dangerous conditions.

Hubei Province was geographically in the center of China and was often the meeting place of opposing armies from north and south. This fact was illustrated with the September 1926 Siege of Wuchang, across the river from Hankow. The Hupeh Mission had a chapel in Wuchang. During the hostilities over thirty members and mission workers took refuge in the chapel. The streets became littered with the dead who died of starvation. A canvasser, the only one strong enough to make an escape from the chapel, made his way across the river to the mission compound in Hankow to plead for help but nothing could be done until the southern army recaptured the city in early October. Even though the members in the chapel only had rice gruel to eat, none of them, including five children, lost their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Due to continued unrest no annual gatherings of members could be held during the years 1926 through 1928 and most of the mission schools had to be closed. The boarding school at Wangjiadun reopened in 1929 with an enrolment of fifty young men and women. A major flood followed by famine and banditry occurred in 1930 and 1931. On two separate occasions mission evangelists were captured by bandits but they were miraculously set free while other captives were executed.

War conditions returned in 1938. The mission clinic in Wuchang was destroyed by bombing. Twelve staff were in the building at the time. Two had to be dug from the ruins, but all survived. Across the river thousands flocked to the grounds of the newly-built Wuhan Sanitarium and Hospital, believing they were safer there than in their homes. A sea of grass huts grew rapidly, and the hospital was overwhelmed with four hundred patients a day. The mission started a school for the children, Bible studies for the adults and a literature drive among the throngs of people.<sup>19</sup> It was later said, "The hospital is joined with the work of the church, and the church is joined with the work of the hospital. They cannot be separated."<sup>20</sup>

The war conditions of the late 1930s had scarcely abated when events of the Second World War began to impact the Hupeh Mission. The expatriates evacuated the country, leaving the national workers to nurture the membership. Reports of activities were rare and unreliable, but it appeared a faithful core of believers, numbering approximately three hundred, kept the chapels open.<sup>21</sup> The most severe bombing of Hankow occurred in December 1944. Buildings all around the city chapel were levelled but the mission property remained intact. Six provincial chapels functioned during the hostilities. When peace came it was reported in 1948 that eleven chapels and six elementary schools were open in the Hupeh Mission. At that time the membership stood at 411.<sup>22</sup> The last report before the communist takeover, one published in 1951, noted that

the membership had risen to an all-time high of 538.<sup>23</sup>

## Directors of the Hupeh Mission

Roy Cottrell (Kāng Shèngdé, 康圣德), 1915-1916; George Harlow (Hā Lóu, 哈路), 1916-1917; Harold Blunden (B Lúndūn, 布伦登), 1917-1918; Orrin Hall (Hán Shànglǎng, 韩尚朗), 1918-1919; Walter Strickland (Sh Juélún, 舒觉伦), 1919-1922; Charles Lillie (Lín Míngzhèng, 林明正), 1922-1924; A. J. Weaner (Wèi Ernà, 魏尔纳), 1924-1926; D. S. Williams (Wèi Lièwén, 魏列文), acting 1927; H. L. Graham (Gé Lièhàn, 葛列汉), 1928-1931; Clarence Davis (Dài Tiāndé, 戴天德), 1931-1935; B. C. Clark (Kè Lākè, 柯拉克), 1935-1941; Y. S. Leng, 1941-1943; Shen Tien Ran (申天然), 1943-1950; Wang Jing Bo (Wāng Jìngbō, 王敬波), 1950-1951.

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