

Hakka Mission (1909–1951)

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The Hakka Mission was not defined by territorial boundaries but instead by the extent of the Hakka-speaking people in the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian in the South China Mission. Hakka men were renowned for their extensive literary works, judicial skills and business enterprises. Their women did most of the manual labor and for that reason never adopted the habit of binding the feet.¹

Initial Incidents

The first time a Seventh-day Adventist had contact with Hakka people was in Singapore. A Hakka student, Mr. Lam, who was attending the Methodist school received a tract about the Sabbath from national Adventist missionary Timothy Tay. When Lam returned home in poor health he made contact with missionary John Anderson in Canton (Guangzhou) in 1905. Anderson treated his sickness and studied Scripture with him. In turn, Lam distributed tracts among his Hakka friends in Hong Kong and two of them joined the Guangzhou SDA church. Ancient animosity between the Hakka and Cantonese was recognized early by the Adventist missionaries, prompting a determination to adopt a two-pronged evangelistic campaign, one directed among the Cantonese and another among the Hakka.²

Anderson was teaching at the mission school in Guangzhou where seven Hakka students were attending in 1907. He formed them into a separate Bible class in the Hakka language. He had a good grasp of their dialect and was able to appeal to them in their own tongue.³ He also opened a separate chapel in Guangzhou for the purpose of preaching to the Hakka people and giving them a place to worship.⁴ He visited and preached in their rural communities, one he named Pok Loh or Bok Lo, downstream on the East River. Anderson, still a single young man, wrote at the time, "I think I have found my life-work here. There are ten million Hakkas for me to labor for, and I pray the Lord for strength and wisdom."⁵

A Special Mission for the Hakka People

Early in 1909 Anderson, in company with Winfred Hankins, went to Weichow (Huizhou) to explore possibilities for making that city the headquarters for work among the Hakka. They agreed on its suitability and left a national evangelist there to begin work. Four canvassers assisted by selling the monthly periodical *Gospel Herald* (Fuh-In-Hsuen Pao) in the vicinity.⁶

On March 31, 1909, Anderson moved from Guangzhou to Huizhou in order to focus work among the Hakka people.⁷ For twelve months he lived in a shanty with a low ceiling, one tiny window, one tiny door and a roof of thin tiles that did little to protect him from the intense heat. His lantern shone so brightly each evening that it attracted the curious to peer in his window and disturb his privacy. In 1910 he married a fellow missionary teacher in Guangzhou, Amanda Van Scoy, and after a mission house was built in Huizhou he and Amanda settled in to begin their work in earnest.⁸

Within twelve months of entering Huizhou Anderson had opened a small chapel in the city and was supervising national evangelists at two out-stations, an elementary school, and three canvassers moving from one market town to another.⁹ One of the out-stations he identified as Moi Lung near the coast. They were Hokkien people, speakers of Hokkien, who had greeted Anderson enthusiastically with fire-crackers and shouting out, "The foreign preacher (Muh-su) has come!"¹⁰

In January 1910 church officials voted that Sherman and Mary Nagel, recent arrivals in China, should proceed to Guangzhou to learn the Hakka language and then join Anderson at Huizhou.¹¹ When the Andersons took a furlough the Nagels replaced them. Sherman held the position of director of what was called "the Hakka work."¹² It was first designated "the Hakka Mission" in the 1918 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*¹³

At the beginning of 1914 the baptized membership among the Hakka people stood at twenty-seven.¹⁴ By the end of the year it was reported to be sixty-nine. At the same time statistics showed that two organized churches were open, ten out-stations with national evangelists in charge were functioning and nine elementary schools with a total enrolment of 255 were operating.¹⁵ Civil strife in southern China was first mentioned in denominational periodicals in 1916. The fighting hindered travel within the region.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the mission cause continued to prosper. The 1919 report noted that the baptized membership had risen to over four hundred and the total school enrolment was nearly four hundred. The total included fifty in a girl's school in Huizhou which Mary Nagel conducted as part of her ministry for women.¹⁷ It came to be known as the Bethel Girls' School.¹⁸ Highlights of the 1920 report spoke of more than twenty out-stations in the field and a staff of nearly forty evangelists, school teachers and canvassers. Some Hakka converts were engaged by sister missions. The baptized membership was estimated to be 530.¹⁹ In 1921 Lo Sin Tshoi, one of the early converts, was the first from the Hakka people to be ordained for ministry.²⁰

The Nagels went on furlough in February 1922 and the Andersons returned to direct the mission.²¹ Anderson reported in 1923 that Huizhou was under siege for two months with cannon balls being lobbed into the city.

However, there were no deaths or injuries among the church members. Soldiers robbed them of their belongings and destroyed the furniture in two chapels. "Under such conditions," he wrote, "mission work is difficult, if not well nigh impossible."²² Surprisingly, membership numbers climbed to 818 by the end of 1925, twice that of the nearby Cantonese Mission.²³ It was the apex of mission membership because ongoing war conditions during the 1930s hampered advances.

Introduction of Medical Work

In 1926 it was announced that a hospital/dispensary would open in Huizhou as a component of the Hakka Mission.²⁴ Drs. Herbert and Ethel James arrived to pioneer the enterprise and by January 1927 they reported they had treated 2,250 patients,²⁵ some of them lepers. The institution came to be known as the Fui-On Hospital.²⁶ The lepers were quarantined in house boats moored in the East River near the hospital. In 1932 two nurses comprised the first graduation class.²⁷ One more graduated in 1933 and another four in 1934.²⁸

War Conditions

At the close of 1938 the statistical report revealed a drop in membership for the first time in the mission's history.²⁹ It occurred in the context of the fall of Huizhou to Japanese forces, the evacuation of administrative, teaching and medical staff from the city and many members fleeing to the mountains.³⁰ World War II only prolonged unfavorable conditions. Hakka Mission administration was handed to national men who did their best to maintain momentum. The hospital re-opened as a clinic and the mission director, Elder Kang Kedian 康家典, also used the premises for an evangelistic crusade.³¹ Courageous colporteurs proved to be a valuable asset, continuing their work during bombing raids.³² In 1940 two colporteurs were imprisoned for forty days and on their release they canvassed and sold literature to their captors.³³

Window of Peace

After World War II optimism returned. During the period 1938-1947 no large annual meetings for reporting and planning were possible. The situation was redressed when peace returned. A general meeting was held at which sixty expatriate and national leaders in the South China Union Mission met in Guangzhou, November 20-29, 1947.³⁴ Later, at an executive session in May 1948 the director of the Hakka Mission, Elder Li Daming 李大明, requested that he be transferred to evangelistic work. Elder Zhang Quo-en 張國恩 was elected to replace him.³⁵

A major undertaking after the war years involved the provision of a better medical facility. Early in 1948 the China Division provided funds for improved facilities in Huizhou. Doctor W.C. So 蘇 (Sū Huìchuān) had valiantly persevered during the war at the Wai On Hospital-Clinic, evacuating the premises four times during hostilities. He contributed personal funds to add to the China Division allocation, enabling an official opening of the new

facilities on March 27, 1949.³⁶

Bamboo Curtain Falls

Within months of the opening of the hospital political conditions in China deteriorated abruptly as hostilities increased and a communist takeover became imminent. Church officials retreated to command posts in Shanghai and Hong Kong, later concentrating all in Hong Kong.³⁷ By October 1949 administration throughout the greater part of China was placed into the hands of experienced national leaders.³⁸ Reports of mission progress in mainland China, including the Hakka region, rapidly tapered off and effectively ceased in 1951.³⁹ Final statistics for the Hakka Mission, published in 1951, were eleven organized churches and four companies functioning with a total baptized membership of 714.⁴⁰

Directors of the Hakka Mission

John P. Anderson () 1909-1913; Sherman A. Nagel () 1913-1921; John P. Anderson 1921-1932, Paul V. Thomas () 1932-1938; John P. Anderson 1938-1940, Kang Kedian () 1940-1941; Hu Dechun () 1941-1947; Li Daming () 1948; Zhang Quo-en () 1948-1951.

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