

Szechwan Mission (1917–1919)

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The Szechwan Mission (Sichuan Mission) was officially formed in 1917 as a subdivision of the West China Mission. Merritt C. Warren served as director throughout its short history.

Early in 1914 Seventh-day Adventist officials in China laid plans to enter Szechwan (Sichuan) Province and establish a mission station. They chose Arthur Allum () and Merritt C. Warren () to pioneer the enterprise. Leadership anticipated that they would leave central China and travel west, remaining in Chungking (Chongqing), Szechwan, for 10 months. During their absence their wives found safety at mission headquarters in Shanghai. The three national staff members selected to accompany the men were Dju Dzi Ih (), Shi Yung Gwei () and Li Fah Kung (), all from Honan Province. The five men hired a houseboat to transport them and their supplies from Yichang in Hubei Province to Chongqing, many kilometres upstream on the Yangtze River.¹

Arriving in Chongqing, the missionaries found it difficult to find lodgings and had to rent another houseboat moored outside the city. Finally, they secured rented quarters and hired contractors hired to construct a small chapel and bungalows for the mission staff. The solidly built structures had stone basements, brick walls, and tiled roofs. After the completion of their living quarters, the wives left Shanghai and made the long trip inland to join their husbands. In the meantime, the Chinese nationals canvassed the city and surroundings, securing hundreds of subscriptions to *Shi Djao Yueh Bao* (Signs of the Times). On July 3, 1915, the missionaries baptized four individuals, the first-fruits of the Szechwan enterprise. A second company of believers formed in a market town to the south of Chongqing.²

The Szechwan Mission officially formed in 1917 as a sub-division of the West China Mission. When the province was divided for easier administration in 1919, Merritt C. Warren then assumed the position of director of the East Szechwan Mission.

Church administration regarded the mission efforts made in and around Chongqing as a stepping stone to eventually entering Tibet. In February 1917 an exploratory trip extending further west to Chengdu () eventuated in the establishment of another stage in the quest to reach Lhasa (See article West Szechwan Mission). The literature evangelists continued to strengthen the mission cause, six of them reporting a total of more than

2,000 magazine subscriptions for the quarter ending June 30, 1917.³

Mounting success prompted the addition of Claude Blandford () to serve as secretary/treasurer of the mission and supervise the colporteurs. Dr. John Andrews () arrived to engage in some medical work, and his wife focused on activities for the youth among the member families. Mrs. Warren nurtured the growth of the Sabbath Schools within the territory. Two of the three national staff members among the pioneering party, Li Fah Kung and Shi Yung Gwei, continued with the mission.⁴

Acting on recommendations made at the General Conference session in San Francisco, March/April 1918⁵ the Far Eastern Division Council took action in March 1919 to reorganize the administration of mission work in China.⁶ Initially, leadership separated the Szechwan Province into three regions: East Szechwan Mission centered at Chongqing, West Szechwan Mission with headquarters at Chengdu, and the extreme west designated the Tibetan Mission headquartered at Tachienlu (today's Kangding).

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. F. Arthur Allum, "Ichang, Hupeh," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, May 1, 1914, 1, 2.

2. F. Arthur Allum, "Notes of Progress From Szechwan," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, October 1, 1915, 2.

3. Merritt C. Warren, "Szechwan, West China," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, November 1, 1917, 2.

4. "Szechwan Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918), 160.

5. Clarence C. Crisler, "Administrative Changes," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, June 1, 1918, 16.

6. Clarence C. Crisler, "Notes from the Spring Council," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 1, 1919, 5, 6.

7. "West China Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1920), 174.

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