

China Union Mission (1901–1912)

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Joshua C. S. Chiu was born in Hong Kong, China. After graduating with a B.Ed. (Hons) from the Open University of Hong Kong and an M.Div. from the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Joshua was first employed as a teacher in a church school of Hong Kong-Macao Conference. Subsequently, he served as an editor and Internet Evangelist in the Chinese Union Mission.

China Mission was the first administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China. J. N. Anderson was its first superintendent. As the mission expanded, it was reorganized in 1909 as China Union Mission, which was dissolved three years later in 1912, allowing each mission unit to interact directly with the Asiatic Division.

The territory of the China Union Mission was China proper and its dependencies.¹ At the end of 1911, there were 12 organized churches and 42 companies with 595 members, together with 76 isolated Sabbathkeepers in a territory with an estimated population of 253 million. There were 10 ordained ministers, 10 licensed ministers, 78 licensed missionaries, and 37 colporteurs.²

Background

Interests to bring the Adventist message to China may be traced back to the 1870s.³ After Abram LaRue began colporteur work in Hong Kong in 1888, S. N. Haskell visited Hong Kong and Shanghai in 1890.⁴

In a joint meeting of the General Conference Committee and the Foreign Mission Board in 1898, it was decided to open up the work in China.⁵ Donations for the China Mission began to flow in.⁶ About this time a Chinese convert, Chan Joe-fat, from Portland, Oregon, decided to return to Taishan (Sun Ling) to share his newfound faith.⁷ During the next few years, as more money continued to flow in to fund the project, the Foreign Mission



Map of China Union Mission from 1912 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook.

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Board had difficulties in finding suitably qualified individuals to take on the China mission work.⁸

China Mission

During the General Conference Session on April 19, 1901, Jacob N. and Emma Anderson, a young couple from Wisconsin, were invited to be the first officially commissioned missionaries to China.⁹ At a meeting of the Foreign Mission Board on October 29, J. N. Anderson was also appointed superintendent of the newly organized China Mission.¹⁰ Thus, 1901 is often regarded as the year that China Mission was formed. Ida Thompson, a sister of Mrs. Emma Anderson who was originally planning to go to Brazil,¹¹ was reassigned to accompany them to China.¹² The Wisconsin Conference pledged to support financially Ida Thompson's missionary endeavor.

On January 4, 1902, Jacob and Emma Anderson, together with their four-year-old son and Ida Thompson left San Francisco for China, arriving at Hong Kong on February 2.¹³ One month later on March 1, 1902, Jacob conducted the first baptism in China consisting of six British sailors and an elderly man, the result of Abram LaRue's evangelistic effort.¹⁴ Later two Chinese nationals accepted the Adventist faith and joined the evangelistic team.¹⁵ Thus, the China Mission was officially formed, and its official address was listed at 3 Arsenal Street, Hong Kong, where Abram La Rue had been living since his arrival there.¹⁶

Eric Pilquist and wife Ida, who was working for the British and Foreign Bible Society in Xinyangqiao (, Sin lang Cheo), Henan (Honan) at the time,¹⁷ had expressed the desire to join the Adventist missionary team in China,¹⁸ and wrote a letter to Jacob Anderson to arrange a meeting in Shanghai in April 1902.¹⁹ The Pilquist's were eventually released by the Bible Society²⁰ and were able to officially become part of the Seventh-day Adventist missionary work force in China.²¹

Edwin and Susan Wilbur were the second missionary couple to be sent to China. They arrived in Hong Kong on October 31²² and became the first Adventist missionaries to base their work in China proper, in the city of Guangzhou, because Hong Kong, where the Andersons were, was a British Colony.²³ In November, with funds donated by some Chinese businessmen, Ida Thompson opened a Christian school in Hong Kong with 12 students, 5 of which joined the Sabbath-school.²⁴ At the end of 1902 in Hong Kong, there were 7 members in one company and 16 members in two Sabbath-schools.²⁵ In Taishan, 3 or 4 were in Chan Joe-fat's group.²⁶

During February 1903, Jacob Anderson visited Xinyangqiao, Henan, where he baptized six new Chinese converts on February 14. All were the result of Pilquits' effort. The first Adventist church in China mainland was formally organized on February 15. At about the same time, a small boys' school was opened in Henan.²⁷ On April 26 Abram La Rue passed away and was buried in Hong Kong.²⁸ After that the Andersons moved to Guangzhou.²⁹

The work in Henan continued to grow. Eric Pilquist wrote to the Foreign Mission Board, mentioning the need for a missionary doctor and printing facilities.³⁰ As a result, four doctors, Drs. A. C. and Bertha L. Selmon and H. W. and Maud T. Miller, as well as two nurses, Carrie Erickson and Charlotte Simpson, were sent to Henan.³¹

Furthermore, Harry Miller brought a Washington hand press with him.³² In summer 1903, four missionary stations were opened in Henan.³³ Xincai (, Sin-Tsai) became the mission headquarters for Central China where the six new missionaries were located.³⁴ On November 14 Eric Pilquist was ordained.³⁵ By the end of 1903, there were four ordained ministers in China.³⁶

On August 1 Ida Thompson's boy's school in Hong Kong was closed due to her illness.³⁷ But she opened a girls' school in Guangzhou the next year on March 17, 1904, which later became known as the Bethel Girls' School.³⁸ Edwin and Susan Wilbur, who were relocated to Guangzhou, opened a boys' school on August 11.³⁹ It later became known as the Yizi Boy's School. From that point onwards, the new address for China Mission was listed as in Guangzhou.⁴⁰

In August 1904, Guo Ziyong (, Keh Nga Pit or Kay Nga Pit), an ordained Chinese preacher from Xiamen (Amon) of another denomination began to keep the Sabbath due to the influence of Timothy Tay, one of his students from Sumatra.⁴¹ It led to the opening of work in South Fujian with a central station at Gulangyu (Kulangsu), an island off Xiamen led by the W. C. Hankins and B. L. Anderson.⁴² It also led to the starting of Sabbath services, led by Hong Zijie (, Ang Tsu Kiet), in Chaozhou (, Chiu Chow).⁴³ Guo Ziyong became the first native Chinese Adventist minister to be ordained in 1906.⁴⁴

On March 14, 1905, tragically Dr. Maude A. Miller passed away due to illness.⁴⁵ In June the first Chinese paper, *Fuh-In-Hsuen-Pao* (Gospel Herald), was printed by the Seventh-day Adventist Mission Press at Shangcai Hsien, Henan.⁴⁶ The printing press was relocated to Xinyangqiao one year later.⁴⁷

In the next few years from 1906 to 1909, under the leadership of missionary couples Dr. Liu Jian (, Law Keem)'s, Percival J. Laird's, John P. Anderson (single at the time), and E. H. Wilbur's, new works were opened in Foshan (, Fat Shan), Changsha, Hakkas, and Jiangmen (, Kongmoon).⁴⁸ In 1907 19 workers gathered for a workers meeting in Shanghai on February 10-20.⁴⁹

In 1908 the headquarters of China Mission was relocated to Shanghai.⁵⁰ H. H. Winlow came to China as the secretary-treasurer⁵¹ and B. A. Roberts of the Pacific Press joined the publishing work in China.⁵² Harry Miller rented a building for the publishing press from Clarie Soong, father-in-law of H. H. Kung, Sun Yat-sen, and Chiang Kai-shek.⁵³ From August 1, 1908, the Chinese paper, *Fuh-In-Hsuen-Pao* (Gospel Herald) was printed in Shanghai.⁵⁴ A cottage was built at Mogan Shan (, Moh Kan Shan), west of Shanghai, as treatment-rooms for the sick workers.⁵⁵ By the end of 1908, there were 126 members in five churches, 6 ordained ministers, 3 licensed ministers, 23 licensed missionaries, and 30 colporteurs in the China Mission.⁵⁶

The China Union Mission

In January 1909, as I. H. Evans, treasurer of the General Conference, visited the missionaries of China,⁵⁷ a meeting was held in Shanghai. It was decided to subdivide the territory of the China Mission into ten mission

fields each with its own superintendents and advisory committees. J. N. Anderson was elected as assistant superintendent of both the China Mission and the Eastern Mission Field and H. H. Winslow as the secretary-treasurer. It was also decided to send out at least forty families with enough doctors to locate at least one in each field during 1909 and 1910.⁵⁸ In reality, only nine families arrived in 1909.⁵⁹

A few months later, it was further recommended to constitute the Chinese territory as a union mission that comprises 10 mission fields:⁶⁰

1. North China Mission (Zhili, Shanxi, and Shandong);
2. Northwest China Mission (Shaanxi and Gansu);
3. West China Mission (Sichuen, Yunnan, and Guizhou);
4. South China Mission (Guangxi, Guangdong, and Fujian);
5. Central China Mission (Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Jiangxi);
6. East China Mission (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui);
7. Manchuria mission;
8. Mongolia mission;
9. Turkestan mission; and
10. Tibet mission.

At about the same time that the Asiatic Division was formed at the 1909 General Conference meeting, I. H. Evans was elected vice-president for the division. The newly organized China Union Mission was placed under that division.⁶¹

In the same year, the family of J. N. Anderson, Ida Thompson, A. C. Selmon, Esta Miller, and O. J. Gibson returned to the United States for a short period. Anderson and Selmon were delegates to the General Conference⁶² J. P. Anderson relocated to Huizhou (Wai Chow Fu) to lead the new work of the Hakka region.⁶³ F. A. Allum was called to help a new group of Adventist converts led by Han Chongzhen (), a pastor of the China Christian Independent Church (⁶⁴ B. L. Anderson opened a boarding boys' school at Gulangyu.⁶⁵

In December, 1909, Elder W. A. Westworth was appointed superintendent of the new China Union Mission.⁶⁶ In 1909 *Fuh-In-Hsuen-Pao* was renamed *Shi-Chao-Yueh Pao* (The Signs of the Times),⁶⁷ which was printed in Mandarin and Wenli.⁶⁸ On December 27 the office, type-room, and pressroom of the Chinese press in the building rented from Charlie Soong was destroyed by fire. The English type was saved, but the Chinese type was

lost.⁶⁹ Within a month the new type was bought, and the operation of the press resumed with a Chinese New Year's special issue of *Shi-Chao-Yueh Pao*. The press then prepared to move to a new building at their own property.⁷⁰

In February 1910 O. J. Fish found that Jiaxing (, Kashing) and Zhejiang have great potential for their work. The Fish's relocated there with Mrs. B. Miller.⁷¹ However, only several weeks later, O. J. Fisher left the field due to illness. Li Fakong joined Mrs. B. Miller's work. Due to the problem of the dialect, they relocated back to Shanghai.⁷² In June 1910 the Nanyang Industrial Exposition was held in Nanjing (Nanking). This was the first great industrial exhibition organized in China. Taking advantage of this event, 22,000 copies of a special edition of the *Shi-Chao-Yueh Pao* were printed and sold. A mission compound was rented in Nanjing led by E. Pilquist and F. A. Allum generating great interest.⁷³ After the two-month's work, five persons decided to join the church.⁷⁴

In 1910 the China Union Training School was founded in Zhoujiakou (Chowkiakow), Henan.⁷⁵ At about this time, August H. Bach started work in Beihai (Pakhoi);⁷⁶ F. A. Allum and Esta Miller started work at Hankou opening three companies;⁷⁷ and Law Keem organized a church with 12 members in Foshan.⁷⁸ In the summer J. N. Anderson had to return to Wisconsin due to the health condition of his wife.⁷⁹ In the fall, Ida Thompson brought her sister Gertrude Thompson with her to Guangzhou.⁸⁰

During 1910 there were only five missions operating in the China Union: East China Mission, North Central China Mission, South Central China Mission, South China Mission, and Southeast China Mission.⁸¹ The territory of the North China Mission and the West China Mission had not yet been entered. All the mission fields of Northwest China, Manchuria, Xinjian (Chinese Turkestan), and Tibet were not yet actually organized.⁸²

In the spring of 1912, Hong Zijie was ordained to the gospel ministry⁸³ and later became the treasurer.⁸⁴ He was the second Chinese native minister to be ordained. In the same year, S. A. Nagel and Ida and Gertrude Thompson went to Hong Kong to reopen the work there.⁸⁵ However, Gertrude passed away on August 8 due to malaria and typhoid.⁸⁶ Before she died, the sisters took in about seven hundred yearly subscriptions of *Signs of the Times* in Hong Kong.⁸⁷ Due to their efforts, six persons were baptized on August 25.⁸⁸ There was a Sabbath School with 35 members.⁸⁹ During the summer the China Union Training School moved to Nanjing.⁹⁰

At a joint meeting of the Asiatic Division and China Union Mission Committees held on November 10-15, 1912, I. H. Evans suggested to dissolve the China Union Mission and make each of the missions self-governing, to stand on the same basis and relation to the Asiatic Division as Japan Mission and Korea Mission.⁹¹ Thus, there was no union level entity between the Asiatic Division and the missions in China since 1913⁹² until the reorganization of the Asiatic Division in 1915.⁹³

List of Chief Officers

China Mission (1901-1909)

Superintendent: J. N. Anderson (1901-1909)

Secretary-Treasurer: Mrs. Emma T. Anderson (1905-1908), H. H. Winslow (1908, 1909)

China Union Mission (1909-1912)

Superintendent: W. A. Westworth (1909-1911), I. H. Evans (1911, 1912)

Assistant Superintendent: J. N. Anderson (1909, 1910), A. C. Selmon (1911, 1912)

Secretary-Treasurer: H. H. Winslow (1909, 1910), T. F. Culhane (1910, 1911)

Secretary: W. E. Gills (1911, 1912)

Treasurer: C. N. Woodward (1911, 1912)

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