

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN CHINA

For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fullness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ. (D&C 90:11)

In fulfillment of this prophecy, with unselfishness and love, missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have taken the good news of the gospel over the seas to China. The work has never been easy, but now, a century and a quarter after missionaries were first sent to Asia, there are two stakes of Zion in China.

The first LDS missionaries to serve in Asia were called by President Brigham Young in August, 1852. Four were specifically called to China. At that time, President Heber C. Kimball of the First Presidency gave these newly called missionaries the following instructions:

I say to those who are elected to go on missions, go, if you never return; and commit what you have into the hands of God-- your wives, your children, your brethren and property. The missions we will call for during this conference are generally not to be very long ones, probably three to seven years will be as long as any man will be absent from his family. If any of the elders refuse to go, they may expect that their wives will not live with them; for there is not a Mormon sister who would live with a man a day, who would refuse to go on a mission.

Three of the four missionaries called to China reached Hong Kong on April 27, 1853. They tried to penetrate more deeply into the China mainland, but found that the great Taiping Rebellion then raging in Southern China cut off all avenues of successful missionary work. Hong Kong was the only safe place.

From excerpts of a letter by Elder James Lewis, we can catch a glimpse of what missionary work for these three elders was like:

Hong Kong is a great military post belonging to the English Government with a barracks for an army of soldiers to be fitted out to any part of China or Japan. At this time there were two thousand soldiers there. We found a place to board at \$5.11 per week. We did not find a cordial welcome. We

found the newspaper stories about the Mormons from the U.S. in full circulation in reading rooms and the barracks, as well as the opposition of missionaries of Protestant and Catholic denominations.

Not understanding the language we could not go into the country because of hatred to foreigners, and the lies of missionaries against our people, which confined us to the island. Our only place for preaching was the public square or soldiers drill and parade ground. We received no welcome from the officers of the garrison or soldiers...

We then began to visit the people individually, so that we might clear our garments and bear a faithful testimony, after having travelled so far. The heat of the atmosphere was very oppressive, being reduced in bad health owing to change of diet, the matter of preparing it and so forth, our spirits were becoming depressed and not perceiving a cheering ray of hope in all our labors...

It became necessary for us to leave the country and no opening offered but to ship to San Francisco. After a pleasant passage, report was made to President Young of our labors which was accepted and we were released to return home. I obtained means and came home four hundred dollars in debt in 1854...

In all, these missionaries had remained in Hong Kong only four months.

It wasn't until 1921 that missionaries of the Church visited China again. At that time, China was governed by a number of warlords, who fought among themselves for control of the land. In the winter of that year, while traveling through eastern Asia on a special mission for the Church, Elder David O. McKay of the Council of the Twelve felt impressed to dedicate the land of China for the preaching of the gospel. On the morning of January 9, 1921, in a secluded grove within the walls of the Forbidden City in Peking, Elder McKay pronounced the following blessing upon the land, the people and the missionaries:

With grateful hearts, we acknowledge thy guiding influence in our travels to this great land of China....

In this land there are millions who know not thee nor thy work, who are bound by the fetters of superstition and false doctrine, and who have never been given the opportunity even of hearing the true message of their redeemer. Countless millions have died in ignorance of thy plan of life and salvation. We feel deeply impressed with the realization that the light of the glorious gospel should begin to shine through the dense darkness that has enshrouded this nation for ages.



To this end, therefore, by the authority of the Holy Apostleship, I dedicate and consecrate and set apart the Chinese realm for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored in this dispensation through the Prophet Joseph Smith. By this act, shall the key be turned that unlocks the door through which thy chosen servants shall enter with glad tidings of great joy....

That their message may be given in peace, we beseech thee, O God, to stabilize the Chinese government. Thou knowest how it is torn with dissension at the present time, and how faction contends against faction to the oppression of the people and the strangling of the nation's life. Holy Father, may peace and stability be established throughout this republic....

Heavenly Father, manifest thy tender mercy toward thy suffering children throughout this famine-stricken realm. Stay the progress of pestilence and may starvation and untimely death stalk no more through the land. Break the bands of superstition, and may the young men and young women come out of the darkness of the past into the glorious light now shining among the children of men. Grant, our Father, that these young men and women may, through upright, virtuous lives, and prayerful study, be prepared and inclined to declare this message of salvation in their own tongue to their fellowmen. May the hearts of this people be turned to their fathers, that they may accept the opportunity offered them to bring salvation to the millions who have gone before.

May the elders and sisters whom thou shalt call to this land as missionaries have keen insight into the mental and spiritual state of the Chinese mind. Give them special power and ability to approach this people in such a manner as will make the proper appeal to them. We beseech thee, O God, to reveal to thy servants the best methods to adopt and the best plans to follow in establishing thy work among this ancient, tradition-steeped people. May the work prove joyous, and a rich harvest surpasseth all understanding...

Brother Hugh J. Cannon, who was present on the occasion, recorded the following: "The brethren felt that his prayer was acceptable to the Almighty. His spirit gave approving testimony and at the same time revealed for their comfort and blessing some things which should transpire in the future."

Due to civil war and other turbulent events within China, a Chinese mission was not established until 1949. On July 14th of that year, Elder Matthew Cowley of the Council of the Twelve stood on Victoria Peak in Hong Kong with a few other members of the Church, and invoked the blessings of the Lord upon their labors as they started a preparatory work among the Chinese. A special "Peak Ceremony" is still held every year in Hong Kong to commemorate this important event.

With Elder and Sister Cowley were Hilton A. Robertson and Henry Wong Aki, a Chinese-American member of the Church from Honolulu, and their wives. Brother Robertson had already been president of the Japan Mission until 1921, of the Central Pacific Mission with headquarters in Hawaii during 1936-40, and thereafter over missionary work among Chinese in Chinatown, San Francisco. As the newly set apart president of the China Mission, he had recorded the following in his journal:

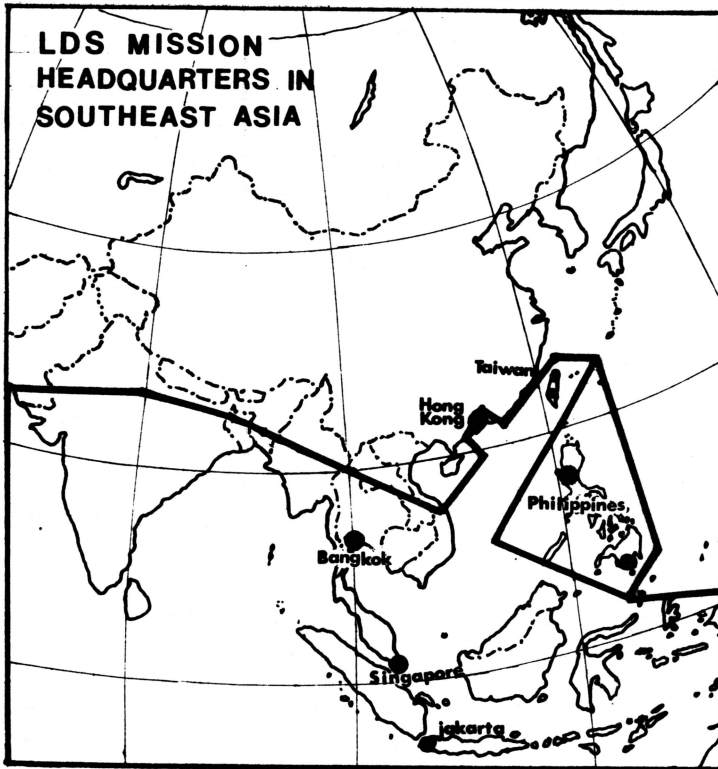
This is the toughest assignment I have ever had; with no knowledge of the language, no members, neither friends, nor literature excepting the Bible and that, neither of us can read, not even Brother Aki. Then to help matters out a big war just over the back fence and the people anticipating a home run to be knocked over into our yard most any time.

On February 25, 1950, the first two missionaries, H. Grant Heaton and William K. Paalani, arrived and began proselyting. Their first responsibility was to master the difficult language, in which they were amazingly successful. On December 31, 1950, they baptized three persons. A year later eight elders were laboring in Hong Kong. The membership rose to seventeen. Study classes were conducted regularly, as were testimony and sacrament meetings on the Sabbath, with an average of thirty in attendance.

But progress in spreading the gospel was to stop. The continuing revolution within China and the outbreak of the Korean War in June, 1950, prevented further missionary work.

Missionary Work in Hong Kong

In 1955, more than a century after the first missionaries called in 1852 had arrived in Hong Kong, the Southern Far East Mission was organized, with H. Grant Heaton as the first mission president. The new mission included Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, and all of Southeast Asia. Since this area included hundreds of millions of people of extremely varied linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds, the new mission president was forced to concentrate primarily on the Chinese who lived near at hand. In July, President and Sister Joseph Fielding Smith, President and Sister H. Grant Heaton, and eight elders embarked for Hong Kong and arrived in the colony on August 15, 1955.



When the new mission first opened there was no Church literature in Chinese, and since the Language Training Mission had not yet been established, the eight missionaries were left to learn Chinese on their own. Six were assigned to learn the Cantonese dialect spoken in Hong Kong, and two were assigned to learn the northern Mandarin dialect spoken by Chinese in Taiwan. Eight more elders arrived during 1955. Ten hours of language study per day were set aside. By the end of the year missionaries were sent out two by two to teach the native Chinese. The emphasis at first was with those Chinese in Hong Kong who could speak English.

In November, the first two branches of the mission were opened. Later, on April 26, 1956, the first eleven converts in the newly opened mission were baptized in the mission home swimming pool. By May of 1959, just three years later, there were ninety-one full-time foreign elders and twelve full-time local missionaries, with five organized proselyting districts and eight branches.

After President Heaton, President Robert S. Taylor became the mission president, and then Jay A. Quealy, Jr. Both Presidents Taylor and Quealy were greatly concerned about securing permanent meeting places for the saints. A number of chapels were purchased by the Church, most of which were located on the top floors of apartment buildings.

By the time of President Quealy, the mission had expanded to include two member districts with eight branches in Hong Kong, three districts in Taiwan and one in the Philippines, as well as servicemen's groups in the outlying areas of Vietnam, Burma, Laos, Malaysia and Pakistan. However, missionaries or servicemen still presided in most of these areas. Since local members were directing only a few of the branches and districts, one of the most important tasks was to develop more local leadership.

At the beginning of 1965, it was decided that the time had come to create a full-fledged member district in Hong Kong. President Luhk Wihng-wàah was sustained as the district president, with Ngh Gât-hing as first counselor and Héui Túng-Jihng as second counselor. (Brother Ngh is presently serving as Hong Kong's stake patriarch, and Brother Héui is a high councilor.) By mid-1965, all but two of the branches of the Hong Kong district were presided over by local Chinese brethren.

In August of 1965, President Keith E. Garner arrived in Hong Kong to direct the mission. Under his guidance, extensive work was carried out in organizing and strengthening the auxiliaries and the local membership. It was during his administration, in December of that same year, that one of the most significant events in the history of Chinese missionary work occurred--the Book of Mormon was printed in Chinese. The Chinese edition of this sacred scripture became a valuable proselyting tool, and an important means for strengthening the faith and understanding of the members as well. In 1966, the first chapel built by the Church was completed in Un Long (Yünlöhng 元朗) in the New Territories (see map on page 54). The sight of that beautiful chapel, filled to capacity with Chinese members of the Church, is an inspiring and unforgettable experience.

In May of 1967, riots broke out in Hong Kong. By July, civil disturbances incited by Communist elements in the city had become so severe that it was necessary to evacuate about half of the missionaries then laboring there. Terrorist activities continued until September, at which time order was once again restored to the colony.

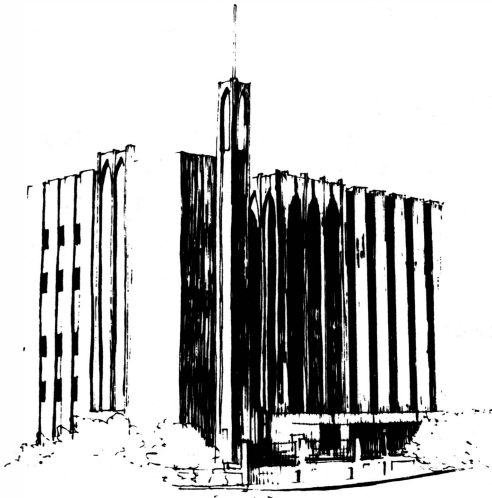
On July 14th, 1968, Warren Brent Hardy, a former missionary to Hong Kong and Taiwan, became president of the mission. (Sister Hardy had also served as a missionary in Hong Kong.) Through his efforts, the missionary force was again built up, and the Church organization strengthened. Because of the rapid progress being made, on November 1, 1969, the Southern Far East Mission was divided, with the Hong Kong and Taiwan zones becoming a separate mission. Then, on January 1, 1971, the Hong Kong-Taiwan Mission was divided again, to form separate Hong Kong and Taiwan Missions.

On July 4, 1971, President William S. Bradshaw and his wife and family arrived in Hong Kong to direct the mission. Like the Hardys before them, both President and Sister Bradshaw were returned Hong Kong missionaries. Because of their language ability and unusual sensitivity towards the Chinese people, they were greatly loved and respected. In 1973, a beautiful chapel in Kwun Tong (Güntöhng 觀塘) was completed. Then, in the spring of 1974, the dream of many of the members came true as Hong Kong's first temple excursion group travelled to attend General Conference in Salt Lake City and enter the temple there. In June of that same year, the Chinese edition of the Doctrine and Covenants came off the press, a great blessing for the Chinese people.

South Vietnam was also part of the Hong Kong Mission, and under President Bradshaw's leadership, the first full-time missionaries of the Church to labor in that country arrived in April of 1973. Building on the foundation already laid by LDS servicemen, the missionaries were extremely successful in bringing many choice families into the Church. The Saigon Branch was thriving, and plans for building a new chapel were well under way. But tragically, in April of 1975, the missionaries and as many members as possible were evacuated as the Communists captured the city of Saigon. The Church was forced to withdraw all of its operations from South Vietnam.

On July 4, 1974, President Jerry D. Wheat and his family arrived in Hong Kong. President Wheat had been one of the eight original missionaries who came to Hong Kong in 1955. His love for the Chinese people and great enthusiasm for the work of the Lord had a profound effect upon both the missionaries and the members. Under his leadership, a number of long-awaited goals were finally achieved.

In August of 1975, an Area Conference of the Church was held in Hong Kong. The visit of President Kimball and other General Authorities to Hong Kong has had a lasting effect upon the growth of the Church there. A new mission home, built on the site of the original home, was completed just in time to host guests for the conference.



On April 25, 1976, the Hong Kong District became a stake. Under the direction of the new stake presidency, inspiring progress in membership growth and activity has already been made. The saints in Hong Kong have sacrificed greatly to build a beautiful new stake center, and plans for a new chapel are as of this writing already on the drawing board.

The missionary program also expanded under President Wheat. At the present writing there are over fifty local members serving as full-time missionaries, in literal fulfillment of President McKay's blessing that "the young men and women may...be inclined to declare this message of salvation in their own tongue to their fellowmen." Missionaries are more successful and are baptizing more people than ever before. New proselyting areas, including the Portuguese colony of Macau, were also opened.

In July of 1977, President David H.H. Chen (Chahn 陳), the first Chinese mission president, and his family arrived in Hong Kong. President Chen was born in Manchuria, his wife in Shanghai; because of his background he has a special love for the Chinese people and for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As a young man he witnessed both the Japanese and the Russian occupations of China during World War II. Then, after the war, he went to Whampoa, where he studied at the famous Chinese Military Academy. As an officer in the Nationalist Chinese army during the Chinese civil war, he fought on the southern mainland of China after the Nationalist retreat. There he was captured by the Communists and placed with many of his fellow Nationalist soldiers in an interrogation camp. But he was able to escape in 1950 and make his way to Hong Kong as a refugee.

Shortly after his arrival in Hong Kong in 1950, President Chen made the acquaintance of President Grant Heaton, who had just begun the work of organizing the new Southern Far East Mission. President Chen recalls: "There were so many refugees then, and nearly everyone was empty in the stomach. The others churches offered food and clothing and many people went to them. But this church offered us the truth." President Chen and one of his closest friends joined the Church within a year, and six months later, by special permission from the First Presidency, they both were ordained elders and called as full-time missionaries.

After completing his mission, President Chen came to the United States, received his Ph.D in government and history from the University of Utah, and taught at BYU-Hawaii. He and his wife, a midwife who had been working at a hospital in Los Angeles, were married in 1970. (She had also left China in the 1950's.)

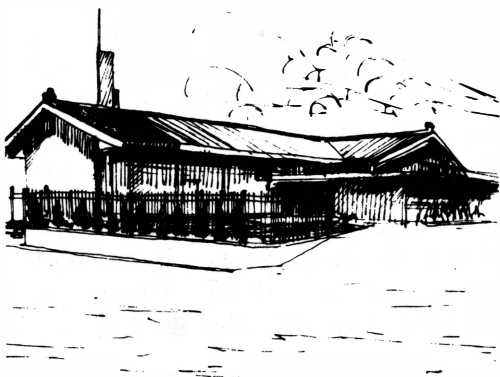
In 1977, President and Sister Chen were called to return to Hong Kong and serve their people once again. "We feel so good now about going back," said President Chen. "We have dedicated ourselves to the Lord, and we want with all our hearts to help, love and serve the missionaries."

Missionary Work in Taiwan

Proselyting in Taiwan began officially while President Heaton was serving as mission president of the Southern Far East Mission (1955-1959). Taiwan has been the seat of the Nationalist Chinese government since 1949. When Robert S. Taylor was called to become mission president in 1959, there were three member districts in Taiwan.

By 1965 there were approximately 3,000 members of the Church in Taiwan, organized in sixteen branches scattered over the island. Eighty-three full-time missionaries labored among the saints.

Under President Quealy's administration the first Church buildings in a Chinese mission area were constructed. The first to be started was the Taipei (Táiběi 台北) chapel for the use of two Taipei branches. It was designed after the manner of a stakehouse with seating capacity of approximately 1,800 when the recreation hall is used. Seeing such a large building filled to capacity during a stake conference is an inspiring sight to Chinese members and to missionaries laboring among the Chinese people. The Taipei chapel was finished and dedicated under the leadership of President Keith E. Garner, who arrived in Hong Kong with his family as successor to President Quealy on August 13, 1965.



By December of 1965 one of the most momentous tasks of the Church in Asia was completed as the Book of Mormon was published in Chinese. The translation was, in large part, the work of Brother Hú Wéi-yī (胡唯一), a counselor in the Taiwan Mission Presidency. (When the Taiwan stake was formed in August 1975, Brother Hú was called as stake patriarch.)

In September 1969 the First Presidency announced that a new Southeast Asian Mission would be formed from a division of the Southern Far East Mission, and that the latter would be named the Hong Kong-Taiwan Mission. At that time, there were three member districts in Taiwan. Missionary activity increased extensively as elders, trained at the newly established Language Training Mission in Laie, Hawaii, arrived in more frequent and larger groups. A major effort was made to reactivate inactive members. By the end of 1970, ninety full-time missionaries were laboring in Taiwan and nineteen branches were in operation--sixteen were Chinese branches; the remaining three were organized for Americans stationed in Taiwan.

In the early part of 1971 the Hong Kong-Taiwan Mission was divided once more. In the resulting division President W. Brent Hardy served as the head of the Hong Kong Mission and Malan R. Jackson served as the first president of the Taiwan Mission. President Jackson had helped to establish the Southern Far East Mission as a missionary in Hong Kong from 1955 to 1958. He had also served as a District President over one of the Hong Kong districts while he was working there for the Bank of America in 1963 and 1964.

At the time President Jackson arrived in Taiwan, Chinese membership in the Church stood at approximately 4,500. Mission headquarters were established in Taipei and plans were immediately begun for construction of a mission home. Shortly after his arrival, President Jackson reorganized the districts in Taiwan and began placing greater emphasis on the calling of Chinese brethren to preside as district presidents and branch presidents. Plans were also finalized for a third chapel to be built in the central Taiwan city of Taichung (Táijūng 台中).

On July 4, 1974 Thomas P. Nielson became the new president of the Taiwan Mission. Focusing on missionary cultural awareness and proselyting effectiveness, President Nielson stressed the need for missionaries to become sensitive teachers of the gospel to the Chinese people.

In August of 1975, an Area Conference of the Church was convened in Taiwan. Held in the prestigious San Yat-sen Memorial Hall (the same place where the funeral services for President Jyǎng Jyè-shí were held), the Area Conference received radio and television coverage throughout Taiwan. The visit of President Kimball and the other General Authorities to Taiwan has had a lasting effect upon the strength of the Saints and the growth of the Church there.

On April 12, 1976, the Taipei District became a stake. Formed under the direction of Elders Gordon B. Hinckley and Adney Y. Komatsu, the Taipei Stake became the first stake in Taiwan. The former district president of the north district, Jāng Yī-chīng (張滿清), was called as the stake president. Not only was the Taipei Stake the first stake in Taiwan, it was also the first stake formed in China in this latter-day dispensation. Perhaps most importantly, the Taipei stake promises to be the first of many strong stakes of the Church in China.

When the Taipei Stake was formed, six branches became wards. Five additional branches were still included within the stake boundaries. The Taiwan Central District had six branches, the Taiwan Southern District seven branches.

In the summer of 1976 the Taiwan Mission was split into the northern Taiwan-Taipei Mission and the southern Taiwan-Kauhsiung (Gāusyung 高雄) Mission. President Boyd Hales was called to preside over the newly-formed Taiwan-Kauhsiung Mission. In July of 1977 Frederick Crook, a former Taiwan missionary, became the new president of the Taiwan-Taipei Mission.

YOUR ROLE IN THE HISTORY OF CHINA

Missionary work in China has just begun. Chinese members of the Church are pioneers in their own land much the same way that early members of the Church were pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley. They are grateful to the missionaries for bringing the light of the gospel to their people, and are eager to do their part in building the Kingdom of God in China.