

## Come With Me: The Augustana Mission in Honan Province, China

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I want to preface this commentary with a fact that early on there had been quite a few foreign missionaries to China. From Europe, Hudson Taylor, China Inland Mission in Norway and the USA. The Landahls, Ronnings, and other brave and saintly men and women.

Come! Let us try to trace the footsteps of a Swedish farmer's young son about a hundred years ago. Yes it was that long ago that Pastor A. W. Edwins felt a call from God to go to China, to bring Christ and his saving grace to the teeming masses of China, at that time, a relatively unknown part of the world.

Put away your cell phones and your laptop. Forget the thought of flying your favorite airline with its wide body jets. Lay aside your electronic quartz watches and put away your thoughts of tuning into CNN or Fox news or picking up the *New York Times*. There is no Mayo or Bethesda Hospital where we are going today.

Yes, we are turning back the calendar to 1905, just about 100 years ago. A short synopsis of the trip, "JUST IMAGINE!"

The early Augustana missionaries were to face the challenges of a different culture, different language, separation by distance and time with limited medical service, continual war, civil unrest, many of them as different as one can imagine. A recent internal upheaval known as the "Boxer Rebellion" threatened the lives of all foreigners. Knowing all this and the knowledge of the tenuous financial support from the Synod, they still answered the call.

Restriction of time precludes me from speaking of all the challenges, so I will try to limit my thoughts to the time and distance with corresponding implications.

The call from God posed many personal challenges. One was finding a wife; one needed a helpmate. Accepting the challenge of distance, time, culture, language, and lack of medical facilities. Add to that the economic and political instability.

He was happily situated in a growing church in Stillwater, Minnesota, but he was willing to heed the call. He found his wife at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Clayton, Wisconsin. He courted and married her in September 1905. Shortly after their marriage they left for China.

#### WHAT A HONEYMOON!

Train to Puget Sound, steamship to Shanghai via Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki, Japan. In Shanghai they transferred to a small river steamer “The Chang An” that carried them to Hankow. From there they would transfer all of their belongings to a “Chinese junk.” This junk would take them up the Han River to Fengchung, now known as Hsiangfan. The junk was powered by sail and/or by trackers (men pulling the boat along a path on the riverbank). Trackers were employed when there was no wind or the current was too strong against them. They would then set to work to pull the junk up the river.

Rev. Trystad, a Norwegian missionary, kept a journal on the trip from Seattle to Fengchung. There exists a true document about that trip. What forethought on his part.

They arrived December 2, 1905. Elapsed time? 77 days! This meant it would take at least 77 days to get a letter home to family, friends, and headquarters in the USA if all went well. That meant 154 days for word to reach home that all was well.

The journal noted good days and slow days by the distance covered. “Today was slow day, 30 li, 10 miles, 3 li to a mile.” “Today was a good day; we covered 90 li, 30 miles.”

“Time and Distance.” There were times when the missionaries could get off the junk and walk the path along the river. This would make the load lighter for the Trackers and also relieved the boredom. Nightfall the junk would tie up to the bank. Which bank was predicated by the local civil conditions, bandits, or strife.

The master of the junk would decide which side was the safest based on word of mouth from the local residents or down-stream boats. A means of communication we later called the “Bamboo Telegraph.” Quite accurate!

The new missionaries studied the language for about a year while in Fengchung. They were, however, anxious to get started, so now it was time to find a field for the Augustana Mission (the Swedes). With the help of the Norwegian Mission, Rev. Landahl, Rev. Ronning, and a Chinese Christian named Lee they hired a Ma Cheh, the Chinese version of the covered wagon. With two wheels instead of four they set out heading north to the province of Honan. While traveling cross-country they came to a huge crowd enjoying a “Bashi” (live theater). While passing through the crowd the anti-foreign sentiments started to grow and threatened this band of foreigners passing through. The driver of the Ma Che tried to outrun the mob, but the cart would not move fast enough. One of the missionaries reached into his pocket and took out a handful of “Peecher” (small denomination Chinese coins), throwing them to the rioting crowd. These coins drew the attention of the mob away from the foreigners to finding and picking up the coins; they made their getaway.

After days visiting many cities they came to Hsuchow Fu. This, it was decided, was to be the center for the Augustana mission.

Hsuchow Fu, later on to be known as Hsuchang, was located on the North-South Railroad, “Pinghan Lu,” Beijing to Hankow with an extension to Canton on the south China

coast. Hsuchang was well located below the east-west railroad. “Lunghai” was about 80 miles north with the capital of Honan just north at the intersection of the Pinghan north-south railroad and the Lunghai east-west railroad.

A mud hut with dirt floors was procured for a home for the new foreign missionaries. A chapel was also procured to serve as a church. This too had dirt floors, mud walls, and a thatched roof. The new mission was set; the young Swedish American couple moved in and started to work. Looking forward to the first convert and first baptism.

The joy of the first convert and baptism was also accompanied by the arrival of their first child, Theodore. This child lived only three days and was buried on the lonely hostile plain of central China in a grave dug so as to protect the remains from a local threat, grave robbers.

The new mission field became more hospitable with the arrival of Deaconess Sister Ingeborg Nystul. They were no longer alone. Their term was for seven years. Seven years had to pass before they could return home on furlough for one year to their family and friends

As the years passed, separation in time was shortened. Faster trains, faster ships on the Pacific, with greater frequency. I can remember my Dad enthusiastically coming into the house with a letter from the USA, examining the postmark and announcing that the letter took only six weeks to get to them (42, 43, or 44 days). TIME and DISTANCE.

Not too long ago, a China M. K. (Missionary Kid) related how his father grieved over the death of his father. He grieved over the death of his father, but he mourned more so in the fact that his dad had been dead for about 90 days without his being aware of his passing. Again the pain experienced by “Time and Distance.”

The Christian Church was growing. The various Lutheran churches in China decided that a seminary was needed for the training of Chinese pastors and Bible women. Even during that early time the missionaries felt that the Chinese Church should be totally in the hands of the Chinese. Hence a seminary was built in Shekow, located approximately fifteen miles north of Hankow on the Pinghan Railroad.

A tract of land was purchased, and a seminary and dormitories were built. Six houses were built for faculty and families. Pastor Edwins and family moved to Shekow in 1921.

1927 was the year of “the great exodus.” A revolution in China threatened the lives of the foreigners. Many missionaries left China and returned to their native homelands. In 1929 missionaries returned to their respective mission fields in China.

1929-30: Two mission Children died from hydrophobia (rabies). All pets in Shekow were to be destroyed. Every mission person in Shekow was required to have the anti-rabies treatment, daily inoculation in the stomach that required serum from Hankow. By the end of the series of inoculations the needles were dull from use. They didn't have the disposable needles that we have today, so they were boiled and used over and over. If I remember correctly, Sister Hilda Petterson of the Norwegian Mission administered all the shots. The two children were buried in the Red Clay of China.

My brothers and others with greater exposure to the Rabid Puppy were sent to Shanghai for a more potent inoculation. “TIME and DISTANCE”—another threat to life.

When Mission Children were ready for college, they boarded a river steamer for Shanghai where they would board a Trans-Pacific steamer for the USA. On arrival in the States they would take a train for their final destination. “TIME AND DISTANCE from “Home.”

While in China, the mission children were isolated and protected from many and sundry influences considered by parents to be evil and undesirable, such as movies, dancing, smoking, and cards. But come the time to go to the States, they went and had to survive the rigors of this new world.

Many came here to Gustavus Adolphus for college. “Home away from Home.”

Did I say earlier that they didn’t have cell phones? There wasn’t trans-Pacific air service. There were no “satellites,” or did they have a satellite? Better and more responsive in comparison to the modern technology? “Prayer.”

In reverence, I refer to the prayer life of the missionaries. Prayer was an intricate part of the missionary life. Prayer was the “GO TO” for the isolated missionary. Prayer was an immediate source of peace and comfort.

Just to review a normal family “religious life schedule”:

While at school: ASK Morning Chapel, meals, prayer before and after Sunday morning church. (Not just one hour). At home: Sunday worship service in the Chinese Church. Week days: Before and after each meal a blessing, morning devotions, evening devotions, Scripture reading and prayer. Wednesday afternoon: mission prayer meeting, and Augustana Service. Prayer was also a solace or a balm to the void left by “TIME and DISTANCE.”

“Let’s take it to the Lord in prayer,” “Leave it at Jesus’ feet,” “I’ve prayed about it; don’t worry” were the common answers to troublesome problems and threats. There was nothing too small or too great that couldn’t be brought to the Lord in Prayer.

In closing, one incident comes to mind. Mrs. Ashcraft, wife of the Methodist bishop, was seriously ill. I don’t know what her illness was, and it really makes no difference. She was so ill that the Sunday evening Song Service at the China Inland Mission compound on

Kikungshan was to be given over to prayers for Mrs. Ashcraft. The closest hospital was in Hankow. Again "TIME and DISTANCE" precluded transporting Mrs. Ashcraft. So prayer was the only answer. Doctors were tending to her, but prayer was to be the defining ingredient. The service was held outside in the courtyard, a foot-pumped organ was playing. Hymns were sung from the "Songs and Solos," and as darkness crept in, lanterns were hung from the branches of the trees and gave us light. It was a cool evening, clear skies, moon high in the sky, and songs and prayers were raised to the heavens. Rev. Torvalson, a Norwegian who spoke English and Chinese with a Scandinavian accent, was moved to pray. And pray he did. As he turned his face up to the heavens, he pleaded with the Lord for the well-being of Mrs. Ashcraft. In closing his prayer, still with his face to the night sky, he shook his fist and closed with "And LORD VE MEAN BIZZNESS." The next morning word spread. Mrs. Ashcraft was improving. Need I say More?

While all the missionaries were extremely challenged, the earlier missionaries were up against the unknown.

At this time I want to honor with love and with the utmost respect the founders of the Augustana Mission in Honan. To name them and honor their memory:

Rev. and Mrs. N. Benson

Mr. and Mrs. Forsberg

Dr. and Mrs. Lindorff

Rev. and Mrs. Lindell

Rev and Mrs. Lindbeck

Rev. and Mrs. Vikner

Rev. and Mrs. Hanson

Rev. and Mrs. J. L. Benson

Rev. and Mrs. Swenson

Dr. and Mrs. Colberg

Dr. and Mrs. Friberg

Rev. and Mrs. Carlberg

Rev. and Mrs. Lundeen

Rev. and Mrs. Edwins

Rev. and Mrs. Trued

Not to be forgotten: “the Single Ladies””

Sister Ingeborg Nystul

Esther Anderson

Sister Thyra Lawson

Dorothy Ekstrand

Sister Elvira Pearson

Minnie Tack

Dr. Viola Fisher

Stella Carlson

Emelia Ring

Ruth Nystrom

Sister Hanna Engberg.

These and others were a sainted group.

Was there, or is there, a satellite? In the case of the China Mission, and all Christians, I think there was and still is a living satellite, Jesus Christ.



God bless the memory and the work of our fathers and mothers. The China Christian Church is growing.

“TO HIM BE THE GLORY.”