OUR MISSION IN MANCHURIA
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The Story of Covenant Missionary Work in North Manchuria from 1906 to 1938.

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The Board of Foreign Missions of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

WHY WE STARTED WORK IN MANCHURIA

The Covenant Church started missionary work in Kwangtung Province, South China, in 1906. By 1920 there were over 20 American missionaries on the field. In 1923 the Mission decided to throw more responsibility on the Chinese Church, so the subsidies from America for the support of local congregations and Chinese workers were stopped. It was felt that if the work had been started without a subsidy it would have made things simpler. In 1925 the anti-foreign movement started and soon things in the south were chaotic. Many of the Mission forces were off the field for the next three years. Political unrest and the new plan of finance pressed the idea of a new field as timely. The Filipinos were investigated but the time did not seem opportune. The Mission's attention was called to Manchuria. It was peaceful. It was rapidly filling up with people from China Proper. Dr. Jonathan Goforth, who was writing in the central portion, sent an urgent invitation to open work in the needy northern regions.

The Board of Foreign Missions referred the matter to Synod. Synod was assured that it would cost the Church no more to keep the work in the south and open a new work in Manchuria than they were putting into the South China field before the self-support era which began in 1923. With this assurance the Synod of 1933 approved of Manchuria as the Church's fourth foreign mission field.

In October, 1930, the first party sailed for the field, consisting of Dr. and Mrs. E. J. M. Dickson, Miss Dalian L. McCracken and Rev. J. G. Voas. Mr. Voas went to Peking, China, for language study, while the others proceeded to Harbin, Manchuria, to investigate the field. In June, 1931, Miss Ray A. Houston and Miss Muriel Milligan (now Mrs. J. G. Voas) sailed for the field. In March, 1931, the Board, acting on recommendations from the party in Manchuria,
definitely recognized Manchuria as a mission field of the Covenant Church and decided "that mission work be opened with Tsitsihar and possibly Harbin as centers, as soon as workers now studying have sufficient knowledge of the language, and that areas farther north be invaded as soon as possible." The Board appointed Dr. and Mrs. Dickson, Rev. J. G. Vos, Miss McCracken, Miss Huston and Miss Milligan as missionaries to the new field. Later it was decided that the Dicksons should return to South China. The Synod of 1921 ratified the action of the Board in establishing the new field in Manchuria.

OUR FIELD IN MANCHURIA

As now defined, our Manchurian field consists of an area, roughly triangular in shape, about 120 miles from east to west and 180 miles from north to south, bounded on two sides by railways. The region is very flat, a large portion being grassy prairie, though some parts are cultivated. The whole is entirely treeless except for a few low willows along streams. Millet, soya beans, corn and wheat are the principal crops. The climate is sub-arctic, with long, cold winters; for months the thermometer hovers around zero F., and occasionally dips as low as 30 or 40 F. below zero for a week or so. The summers are very short, but long hours of daylight compensate for this, and crops grow rapidly. Spring is the worst season, because of terrible dust storms. Fall and winter are the best seasons for country evangelistic work, because then the roads are dry or frozen, therefore passable, flies and mosquitoes are dead, and the people have time to attend meetings and hear the Gospel.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

The language is that form of Chinese known as "Mandarin," spoken throughout North China and Manchuria; the people are partly native Manchurians of Chinese race and partly immigrants from China Proper. In general, the people throughout our field are friendly and willing to listen to the Gospel, but very slow to accept it. Mission work among the Chinese people must be done "by painful steps and slow", for any attempt at quick results means an unconverted Church membership. There has never been a mass movement toward Christianity among the Chinese; it is uncommon for entire families to embrace the Gospel; converts have to be won individually and often against the intense opposition of their families and relatives. Probably the greatest obstacle in the way of mission work is the patriarchal form of social or-
A typical women's meeting. The photograph was taken in front of the residence of Misses McCracken and Burton, Taishan. Three of these women are new members of the Church. Some who were illiterate have learned to read.

One of the Mingkhi Christians in front of his shop. The sign says "TODAY IS SABBATH, CLOSED FOR ONE DAY." His name is Bern Again Wang.

The organization, commonly called the "Big Family System," by which all the brothers, with their wives and children, live in the same house or yard with their parents. The men have to obey their fathers or older brothers as long as these are living, and the wives are completely under the (often cruel and despotic) control of the mother-in-law. It is a reversal of the Biblical principle that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. A minority of families live by the "Small Family System," similar to our own, and these often become happy Christian homes, filled with peace and harmony, a striking contrast to the constant quarreling and petty tyranny which characterizes the "Big Family System."

The second great obstacle is illiteracy. It is no easy task to memorize thousands of complicated ideographs, and in the past educational opportunities have been few. The majority of the people are unable to read and write, and among women illiteracy is almost universal.

The standard of living is relatively low. It is common for entire families to have as living quarters only a single room with a share in a kitchen outside. Except in large towns, practically all houses are made of mud, and almost the only fuel is straw and brush. The common food of the mass of the population is wheat flour, prepared in various macaroni-like forms. Anything approaching a balanced diet is impossible except for the well-to-do; most of the people live largely on flour and water, supplemented with cabbage and corn meal mush, through the long winter and spring months. Chronic nasal catarrh is almost universal through the winter and spring. All Manchurian children, except those of the well-to-do, have terrible running noses three quarters of the year. Sanitation and hygiene are almost non-existent. In summer dysentery rapes and in winter influenza. Tuberculosis is very common and the people know nothing concerning its cause, prevention, and cure.

Buddhism is the prevailing religious system, but popular religion is a composite polytheism including many gods, spirits and devils; in addition to this there are a multitude of superstitions. Unlike ourselves, the Chinese see nothing inconsistent in holding several religions at once; the idea of absolute truth, with its corollary of the falsehood of contrary systems, is not in all their thought.
POLITICAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING MISSION WORK

In August, 1931, the missionary party settled in Taishih, capital of Heilungkiang Province. As far as is known, this was at that time the farthest north mission station on the continent of Asia. Our missionaries were almost the first foreigners, except Russians, who had ever tried to reside permanently in that city, and the police were determined to prevent their settling there if possible. It became necessary to live in a hotel for about five weeks as permission to rent a house could not be obtained. The American Consulate in Harbin made vigorous protests and finally permission to rent was granted.

On September 14, 1931, the Japanese army seized Mukden, metropolis of South Manchuria. On November 14 the Consulate telegraphed advising our missionaries to leave Taishih temporarily, which they did. On November 20 the Japanese took Taishih. On February 5 they took Harbin. By summer practically the entire country was in their hands. The authority of the Republic of China in Manchuria vanished rapidly, leaving conditions chaotic for a time. Banditry was rife in country districts; for over two years it was impossible to visit the towns in our country field as travel away from railway lines was unsafe for foreigners. Even trains on main line railways were often derailed and the passengers robbed. Gradually banditry was put down and it has now been entirely eliminated throughout our field.

The Manchoukuo Government is the organ through which the Kwantung (Japanese) Army governs Manchuria. All real power is in the hands of Japanese, and the final authority is the Japanese military establishment. Even in small towns there are several Japanese advisers to control the actions of Manchoukouo officials. The government is very efficient and has brought some beneficial changes to the country. Postage rates have been lowered, currency unified and stabilized, a Central Bank established, many new railway lines built, and communications in general much improved. Much has been done to educate the people in sanitation and hygiene and to prevent epidemics of plague, cholera and other diseases.

On the other hand, the Manchoukuo Government is founded on a totalitarian doctrine of the state. Apparently everything within the territorial limits of the country is to be investigated and controlled by the government. Our missionaries and their work have been investigated many times. Foreigners throughout the country are regarded with extreme suspicion by the authorities. The Manchoukouo Board of Education has announced that all religions will be investigated by the government; those which are found to be heretical or harmful will be suppressed, and those which are found to be good will be guided and controlled by the government. Just what this will mean for the future of Christian work in the country is not yet evident. Nor is it evident what standard of judgment will be employed in investigating the various religions and deciding which are “heretical”.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK

When our missionaries settled in Taishih in 1931 their knowledge of the language was insufficient for effective work. Much time was spent in language study. An English Bible Class was organized, however, and soon was attended by quite a large group. Later Chinese services were started in the missionaries’ homes. In the fall of 1934 a special room for meetings was provided. Church attendance grew and a larger place was rented in the fall of 1935, the money being subscribed by the local Christians with some help from the missionaries, but without any subsidy from the Mission treasury.

The first convert, baptized December 16, 1933, was Mr. Chih K’o-chen, who later served for nearly three years as chapel keeper and Mr. Von’ assistant. On account of ill health he has now returned to his home in South Manchuria.

The first permanent country work was opened in the fall of 1934 in Mingkui, on the eastern border of our field. The missionaries and native workers made repeated trips to that town. A few Christians of other denominations there formed a nucleus. In December, 1934, a chapel was rented in Mingkui, and the following spring a better place was obtained. For the equivalent of U.S. $30 the building was leased for three years, after which time the $30 will be refunded by the landlord; meantime he gets the use of the money as his rent. The money was raised by the Mingkui Christians with help from the missionaries, but without Mission subsidy. Since 1935 the local groups in both Taishih and Mingkui have been independent of financial support by the Board of Foreign Missions.

In the spring of 1936 chapels were rented in l-an and Taikang and work was started in those places.
The following table shows the growth of the Church statistically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Taishaliar</th>
<th>Mingehali</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptized on prof. of faith</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant baptisms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total baptisms</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From other Churches</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined other Churches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present communicants</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Of a total of 68 persons baptized, 3 were baptized during 1953, 1 during 1954, 23 during 1955, and 26 during the first half of 1956.

**OUR STAFF OF MISSION WORKERS**

- Miss Rose A. Houston
- Miss L. I. McCreven
- Rev. J. G. Vos

Mrs. Li is a member of the Covenant Church in Tak Hing, South China, and graduate of the Gilling Women's Bible Seminar, Nanjing, China. Mr. Kao, Mr. Chang, and Miss Li are graduates of the Newchwang Bible School, Yingkou, Manchuria. Mr. Kao is a member of the Covenant Church; Mr. Chang and Miss Li are Presbyterians. All are sound in the faith and earnest workers for the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THE PLAN OF EVANGELISM**

The Mission, with the Board's approval, has adopted a plan for evangelism which is in essence as follows. Small chapels are to be rented in the principal towns of our field as soon as possible. This expense is to be borne by the Mission for one year or until there are ten adult communicants in a place, after which all expenses must be borne by the local group. Each worker of the Mission is to visit each chapel twice yearly, remaining two weeks or more in each place. The Christians are taught to meet for worship each Sabbath, and when a representative of the Mission is not present, the local Christians take turns leading prayer meetings, depending on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit for leadership. The Mission aims to help groups of Christians by periodic visits, but no group or church is to be provided with a permanent preacher until able to provide the support of some in

**STANDARDS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

Persons who have heard the Gospel message and desire to learn more are enrolled as inquirers. When they definitely decide to accept Christ they are registered as catechumens. The applicant signs a registration card which contains a confession of personal sin, a profession of faith in Christ, and promise to attend services, keep the Ten Commandments, and adhere to the doctrines of the Bible. Registration is followed by six months of instruction in the Bible and Christian doctrine. After this the candidates are examined and may be baptized. For baptism and Church membership, a credible profession of faith in Christ is required, that is a profession accompanied by a consistent life. Absolute requirements for membership are: (1) complete separation from idolatry; (2) careful observance of the Lord's Day; (3) evidence of regular Church attendance; (4) if unmarried, a solemn promise never to marry an unbeliever; (5) if head of a family, evidence that family worship is held in the home daily. In addition, all applicants profess their faith in the doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. These standards are distinctly higher than those of most churches in Manchuria, and it has been found very difficult to maintain them; but it is better to hold high standards and build solidly than to have a rapid growth with an unconverted, worldly membership.

**CHRISTIAN LITERATURE PUBLISHED**

While most of the literature used in our Manchurian work is obtained from other denominations or publishing houses, it has been found advisable to prepare certain material of our own for the instruction of our membership. The principal publications, to date, are as follows:

1. "The Principles and Practice of the Manchurian Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church," a 7-page leaflet containing a summary of Christian truth, the obligations of believers, the
nature and Organization of the Church, and the aims of the Reformed Presbyterian Mission.


3. "The Christian's Preparation for Baptism," an 8 page leaflet which sets forth the nature of the Christian life and the requirements for baptism and Church membership, with an appeal to Christians to separate from the sins of the world and live a holy life without compromise.

4. "A Brief History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church," a 115 page book adapted and translated from the book of the same title published by Synod in 1929. The translation also includes the Covenant of 1871, with the confession of sins, and chapters 25 and 30 of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony ("Of Civil Government," "Of the Right of Disent from a Constitution of Civil Government"). This is the first time any of this material has been available in the Chinese language. 5000 copies have been printed with funds privately subscribed, together with a grant from the Witness Committee. It is intended to send a free copy of this book to every pastor, evangelist and theological student in China and Manchuria, as far as possible, as a testimony to the truths of the Reformation for which the Covenanter Church witnesses.

DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE

A lending library of several hundred Christian books has been developed in Tatsihar; the number borrowed is about 600 per year. Much might be written of the influence and spiritual growth due to the reading of good books. Tens of thousands of tracts have been given out and hundreds of Christian books sold, besides 456 Bibles and New Testaments and large numbers of Gospel portions. The Gideons provided 60 special Bibles which were distributed to the Tatsihar hotels. Also large quantities of literature have been distributed, and books and Scriptures sold, in the various substations.

WORK AMONG WOMEN

Women's work has been done mostly in homes, as it is difficult for women with small children to attend meetings, especially in cold weather and because many are too poor to ride in a drosky. More than 70 women in Tatsihar have been given definite instruction from week to week. The illiterate are taught to read from simple Bible stories; those who can read study the Bible. All memorize Psalms, Commandments and verses. Monthly meetings are held...
when they review the work done, have a Gospel talk, personal testimonies and prayer. Talks on hygiene and care of children, singing and refreshments make these meetings happy and helpful. The attendance is from 12 to 20 or more women, with a larger number of small children. Three have been baptized, 15 others profess to believe, and several are members of other churches. Many have been forced to drop their study lest they become Christians. Besides these 75, many of their friends and neighbors have heard of the love of God, homes have been transformed, husbands influenced, evil habits overcome, and at least one life saved from suicide.

SABBATH SCHOOL WORK

In Minghsui the attendance at children’s meetings was over 100 for a time. Three have been baptized. One boy nine years old by singing Psalms and telling Bible stories interested his father, who came to Church, became a believer, led his wife to Christ, and asked Mrs. Li to go to their home to assist in burning their idols.

ENGLISH BIBLE CLASSES

About 75 persons have been enrolled in the English Bible Classes, first taught by Mr. Vos, then by Miss McCracken and later by Miss Huston. Many of these have made the “Great Refusal”; 6 have been baptized; 9 have enrolled as believers; 15 were already members of other denominations; several others profess faith in Christ as their Savior. Many of these have never used tobacco, others have given up the habit; two or three have renounced cigarettes, wine and gambling; one testifies that his home has been transformed since he believed in Christ.

HOW TO SUPPORT THIS WORK

First and most fundamental is prayer. Our missionaries in Manchuria are faced with a task for which only divine strength can avail. In addition to the ordinary routine of missionary work, which must be prosecuted against all the opposition of the devil and his hordes, they have two special difficulties at the present time: (1) They must maintain the independence of the Church.

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Right: Rev. and Mrs. J. G. Vos.
Left: George and Catherine Vos.
and safeguard the principle of the Headship of Christ over His Church against the Erastian encroachments of a non-Christian government which is determined to control all organizations within the territorial limits of Manchuria. (2) They must hold forth and propagate the doctrine of the Mediatorial Kingship of Jesus Christ over the nations, in a land where freedom of speech is unknown and not the faintest criticism of the government is tolerated. Faced with such conditions as these, they are sure to fail unless sustained by the power of God. Therefore our missionaries need your earnest, believing prayers for themselves, their work, and their Manchurian constituency.

The second way of supporting the work is by financial contributions. Members of the Covenant Church should contribute to the Budget through their congregational treasurer. Others can send contributions (designating them for Manchuria) to Mr. Joseph M. Steele, Treasurer, Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1304 Arch Street, Philadelphia Pa.