

## The Founding of the American Baptist Mission to the Chinese People

Dr. James W Ellis\*

Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

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\*Corresponding author: James W. Ellis

### Abstract

### Original Research Article

The American Baptist denomination established their South China mission during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The founding of the South China mission is an instructive story. It provides valuable information about western colonialism in Asia, the genesis of American Baptist foreign missions, the life stories and mission strategies of individual Baptist missionaries, and cross-cultural collaborations between westerners and early Chinese converts to Christianity. Relying on historical narratives and missionary memoirs, this brief essay provides a concise overview of an important chapter in the growth of global Christianity.

**Keywords:** American Baptist, South China, Mission, Teochew, Swatow.

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## INTRODUCTION

The American Baptist mission to the people of China followed a lengthy, circuitous route. The China mission actually began in Southeast Asia, as part of the American Baptist mission to the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand). Baptist missionaries planted a church for Teochew Chinese immigrants living in the Siamese capital of Bangkok in 1833. Soon thereafter, Chinese Baptist churches grew in the British colony of Hong Kong. Finally, after the Chinese mainland opened to missionary activity in the 1860s, American Baptists founded the South China mission in Swatow (Shantou), a district in the Guangdong province along China's southeastern coast. This area was the ancestral homeland of the Teochew people (Mandarin: Chaozhou, Cantonese: Chiu Chow). In each mission field, the focus was four-fold: evangelism, education, *women's work for women* [1], and medical care. This essay addresses the American Baptist missionaries who followed that circuitous route, specifically Rev. William Dean, Rev. Jehu Lewis (J. L.) Shuck, Henrietta Hall Shuck, Rev. William Ashmore, and Adele Marion Fielde.

### The Colonial Context

The founding of the American Baptist South China mission was an important part of the larger Protestant missionary movement in Asia. Similarly, the Protestant missions in Asia were an important component of the larger European and American colonial era.

In the fifteenth century, European empires expanded into South and East Asia beginning with the establishment of Portuguese trade ports in India, Malacca (in modern Malaysia), and Macau (Macao). From 1565 until 1898, Spain controlled the Spanish East Indies, which included the Philippines, parts of Formosa (Taiwan), and several Oceanic island groups. The Dutch ruled the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) from 1602 to 1942. The nineteenth century was a particularly violent period of conquest, as several industrialized European nations colonized vast regions of Africa and Asia. The British Empire expanded into Southeast Asia, beginning with the colonization of Penang (1786), followed by Singapore (1819) and Malacca (1824).

For European and American missionaries hoping to work in East Asia, particularly in China, the first few decades of the nineteenth century were a "period of prospecting, the period of surveying round about" [2]. The Qing dynasty rulers did not allow Christian proselytizing in China during this time, so western missionaries settled in European strongholds on the Malay Peninsula, Batavia (Jakarta), and Burma (Myanmar), or in the independent Kingdom of Siam.

China's leaders had valid motives for distrusting western missionaries, including their tendency to take advantage of *wars of aggression* to increase their access to eastern societies. China's Qing rulers had seen the British take India, the Spanish take the Philippines, the Dutch take Java, and they feared the western empires would next turn to China. As a result, they strictly limited foreign access to the mainland.

“[China’s] officials believed, many of them, and the common people were taught to believe that [Protestant missionaries] were the emissaries of a foreign power and that if they did not curb [missionaries, they might] soon bring down upon them a fleet of fire-ships and an army of red-bristled barbarians” [2].

Additionally, the beliefs of western missionaries clashed with traditional Chinese worldviews. Many Chinese people blended Confucianism, and Taoist and Buddhist practices in ways that conflicted with Christian doctrine. Western missionaries and potential Chinese converts often had radically different world-pictures, based on different cultural and linguistic histories. Whereas the Chinese mind-set was “rooted in concepts from the Sino-Tibetan family of languages,” the missionaries’ Christian ideas evolved from the Greco-Roman-Judaic “mental world” [3]. Even as missionaries “attempted to accommodate to Chinese culture and engage in dialogue,” they were often seen as propagating a strange, foreign religion [4].

Robert Morrison (1782-1834), an Anglo-Scottish Presbyterian, was the first Protestant missionary to China. Morrison arrived in Macau, on the south coast of China, in 1807 but soon moved to Canton (Guangzhou). At the time, China’s leaders only allowed foreigners to enter the country for trade. Therefore, Morrison evangelized in private and supported himself with secular jobs. Only a few western missionaries followed Morrison to China during the next couple of decades.

The processes by which Protestant Christianity was introduced to mainland China were tightly entwined with international wars and treaties. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, China’s leaders opposed signing commercial treaties with western nations and opposed granting access to foreign Christian missionaries. This all changed in the mid-nineteenth century. Under terms of the Treaty of Nanking (1842), which ended the First Opium War between the United Kingdom and China’s Qing dynasty, foreign Christians were permitted to evangelize in five official *treaty ports*: Shanghai, Canton, Ningpo (Ningbo), Foochow (Fuzhou), and Amoy (Xiamen). The treaties that ended the Second Opium War (1858-1860) opened the entire Chinese mainland to mission activity. Article 29 of the Treaty of Tientsin, or Tianjin (1858), stated,

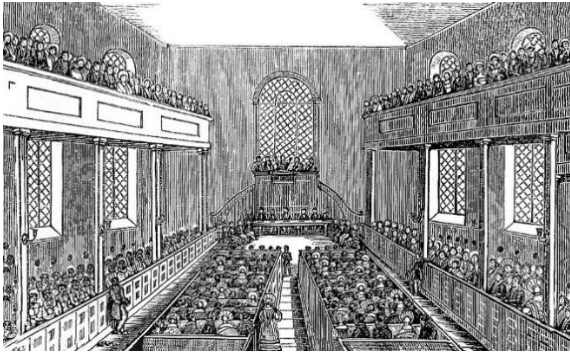
The principles of the Christian religion as professed by the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches are recognized as teaching men to do good and to do to others as they would have others do to them. Hereafter those who quietly teach and profess these doctrines shall not be harassed or persecuted on account of their faith. Any person, whether a citizen of the United States or a Chinese convert, who according to these tenets, peaceably teaches

and practices the principles of Christianity shall in no wise be interfered with or molested [5].

Chinese authorities initially refused to accept Article 29 of the Treaty of Tientsin, because opening the mainland to Christian missionaries was not in accord with popular sentiment and authorities perceived the term as an infringement on China’s national sovereignty. In the nineteen-twenties, during a period of intense nationalism and patriotism, Chinese officials derided the Nanking and Tientsin accords as “unequal treaties,” which were foisted on China by western imperialists [6]. One American Baptist writer lamented the Opium Wars resulted in forcing British opium on the reluctant Chinese, but concluded the opening of the Chinese empire to Christian missionary work, following the Treaty of Tientsin, counterbalanced this evil [7]. The mission movement that followed was one of history’s most important cross-cultural and religious encounters.

### American Baptist Conventions

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were around seventy thousand Baptists in the United States worshipping in over one thousand congregations and joined in approximately fifty distinct local Baptist associations. In May 1814, the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions convened in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The goal was “to organize a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort for sending the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen, and to nations destitute of pure gospel light” [7]. The Philadelphia delegates resolved to meet every three years thereafter in Triennial Conventions. To stress the Convention’s general purpose, it was later renamed the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions *and Other Important Objects Relating to the Redeemer’s Kingdom* [emphasis added]. Before long, however, the issue of slavery divided the American Baptist denomination along sectional lines, just as the issue would later divide the United States along sectional lines during the American Civil War (1861-1865). In 1845, the American Baptist convention board decided they would no longer appoint slaveholders as missionaries and Southern Baptists withdrew and formed their own convention, in Augusta, Georgia, in May 1845. The Southern Baptist Convention also focused on foreign missions, and eventually sent many missionaries to China. In 1846, the northern American Baptists’ General Missionary Convention [...] was renamed the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU).



Anonymous print showing the 1814 General Convention in Philadelphia

### The Siam Mission Field

The first American Baptist foreign mission was to Burma (1815). Rev. Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) and Ann Hasseltine Judson (1789-1826) led the Burmese mission. The second American Baptist foreign mission was to Siam (a western exonym used prior to 1949). The Buddhist Kingdom of Siam was Southeast Asia's only independent state during the era of European imperialism, though the British and French maintained areas of influence there as well.

The General Missionary Convention first sent Rev. John Taylor Jones (1802-1851) to Burma; he arrived in Maulmein (Mawlamyine) in February 1831 [8]. Jones worked with the Judsons for two years in Maulmein and Rangoon (Yangon). The mission board then decided to reassign Rev. Jones to neighboring Siam. He traveled by ship via Penang and Singapore and reached Bangkok on March 25, 1833. Rev. Jones was an accomplished linguist and he soon learned the Siamese language and translated the New Testament, which earned him the respect of many people in Siam. Rev. Jones also wrote Siamese books and tracts, which drew the attention and encouragement of the King of Siam, Nangklao, or Rama III, who reigned 1824-1851. Despite the encouragement Baptist missionaries found from Siamese authorities, they found relatively few actual Siamese converts to Christianity.

Although Bangkok was the capital of the Siamese, or Thai, people, ethnic Chinese constituted the majority of the city's population. In 1833, approximately half of Bangkok's half-million residents were Chinese. A small Chinese congregation began meeting in Rev. Jones' house and studied a Chinese translation of the Bible and Chinese religious tracts [9]. On December 18, 1833, Rev. Taylor administered his first baptisms in Siam, for three Chinese men. Over time, Baptist missionaries had far more success in finding converts among Siam's Chinese residents than among the indigenous Thai people. Many Chinese people living in Siam were temporary residents, there solely for trade or other economic opportunities, planning to return someday to their homes in mainland China. Missionaries campaigned for the General Missionary Conference to move Siam's Chinese

mission to mainland China, if such a move ever became feasible [7].

The Siam mission became a type of proving ground for early missionaries who would later go on to serve the Baptist mission in South China. Rev. William Dean arrived in Bangkok in 1835 and was the first Baptist missionary to study the Teochew Chinese dialect. Rev. Dean later served in Hong Kong and mainland China. Rev. J. L. Shuck and his wife Henrietta Hall Shuck reached Bangkok in 1836, but soon left for the Portuguese colony of Macau, the British colony of Hong Kong, and Canton, in China's Guangdong province. Rev. William Ashmore arrived in Bangkok in 1851 then went on to Hong Kong and to Swatow to lead the Baptist mission in South China. Rev. Sylvester B. Partridge and Adele M. Fielde also started in Bangkok before joining the South China mission.

### Rev. William Dean and the Teochew

William Dean (1807-1895) was born near Morrisville-Eaton, New York, U.S.A., and he attended the nearby Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution. He also took courses on Southeast Asian languages at the Burma School operated by Maung Sway Mung [10]. Dean was ordained as a Baptist minister in June 1834. In the same year, the Baptist board of foreign missions appointed Rev. Dean as a missionary to the Siam mission field. Rev. Dean and his wife, Matilda, sailed from Boston Harbor on July 3, 1834. They entered Siam in early 1835 through Burma (where they befriended Adoniram Judson), and began working with the indigenous Siamese and Teochew emigrant communities.



Rev. William Dean, ca. 1875.

The mission board directed Rev. Dean to pay "special attention" to the Chinese people in Siam [11 p. 320], in hopes this might lead to a future mission in China proper. Rev. Dean had studied Asian languages at seminary and he mastered the Teochew dialect, the chief language of the Chinese people in Bangkok and the larger Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora [12].

Rev. Dean first preached in Teochew in August 1835, to an audience of thirty-four. By the end of that year, a fellowship of fifty attended Dean's weekly Teochew sermons [9 p. 176]. By 1837, Rev. Dean was pastor of a congregation of eleven baptized Chinese members. The fellowship met in an area along the Chao Phraya River called Wat Koh, historically a center of Bangkok's Teochew Chinese society. Bangkok's contemporary Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church traces its lineage to this early congregation [13].

For many centuries, the Teochew people have lived in and around the city of Teochew (Chaozhou), in China's Guangdong province. Their distinctive dialect is part of the Southern Min (or Minnan) branch of Min Chinese. There were several periods of Teochew migration. During the Western Jin dynasty (265-316/7 AD), Teochew fled warring nomadic groups in their ancient northern Chinese homeland and settled in Guangdong. During and after the First Opium War, many Teochew left China for Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (principally Bangkok, Penang, and Singapore) in search of economic opportunities. They prospered in the Kingdom of Siam, where they were noted for their solidarity and the importance they placed on kinship. The Siamese monarch, Vajiravudh, or Rama VI (reigned 1910-1925), for example, praised the Teochew's ethnic loyalty and business acumen [14].

In early 1838, Rev. William Dean was suffering from ill health, so he briefly left Bangkok to recuperate in the Portuguese port of Macau. In Macau, Dean visited Rev. J. L. Shuck and his wife Henrietta (who will be addressed later). In a letter dated February 2, 1837, Henrietta Hall Shuck reported that a Teochew man named Ah Loo, who was working in her home, had been "bur [ied] with Christ in baptism, a willing convert from idolatry." According to Mrs. Shuck, this single conversion was "worth all the toils, pains, and sacrifices [the Shucks had] borne" [15]. After his conversion, in March 1838, Ah Loo returned for a visit to his home on the Chinese mainland, and "spent much time in talking to the people about Jesus" [15].

Rev. Dean convinced Ah Loo to return with him to Siam to work as an evangelist in his native language. Dean "felt quite sure that [Ah Loo] could be more useful [in Bangkok] than in Macau" [15]. Unfortunately, illness cut short Ah Loo's ministry and, by June 30, 1838, he had died in Bangkok. In spite of this setback, Rev. Dean recognized the value of preachers who were fluent in Teochew. In 1841, Rev. Dean initiated a theology course in Bangkok to train young Chinese men to teach the gospel to their compatriots. A few years later, the Bangkok church had thirty-five baptized members, thirty of whom were Teochew [9].

The American Baptist mission to Siam enjoyed the acceptance of the Siamese monarchs. In 1851, the

King of Siam, Nangklao, or Rama III (reigned 1824-1851), issued a decree of tolerance for Christian worship and missionary itineracy. He also offered daily invitations to the female members of the American Baptist mission to come to the royal palace and give the women of the court English instruction [9]. Rev. Dean befriended King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V (reigned 1868-1910), and gave a translated copy of the Gospel of John to Queen consort Sunanda Kumariratana (1860-1880) [11].

In spite of its warm relationship with the royal court, the Siam mission saw far more Chinese converts than Siamese. Between 1869 and 1872, the ABMU mission board openly debated whether it would be prudent to suspend the work in Siam in order to focus its efforts and resources on the Chinese mainland. Rev. Dean elected to continue working in Bangkok and carry on the Siam mission's Chinese department, which grew slowly but steadily. By 1873, there had been thirty new baptisms and four young men were enrolled in the mission's theology class, training to become evangelists. In following years, there were more baptisms in Bangkok and at seven outstations, new congregations grew, new chapels were built, and new ordained and non-ordained ministers spread the gospel [9].

After training pastors and planting churches for nearly five decades in Siam, Hong Kong, and mainland China, Rev. William Dean retired from missionary service in the eighteen-eighties. He returned to America and died in San Diego, California, in 1895.

### **Rev. J. L. Shuck, Henrietta Hall Shuck, and the China mission in Hong Kong**

J. L. Shuck (1812-1863) and his wife Henrietta Hall Shuck (1817-1844) were pioneering American Baptist missionaries to the Chinese residents of Macau (1836-1842) and Hong Kong (1842-1845). J. L. Shuck was born in Alexandria, Virginia, U.S.A., and educated at the Virginia Baptist Seminary in Richmond. Henrietta Hall, who was born in Kilmarnock, Virginia, was the daughter of a Baptist minister. Rev. Shuck received an appointment from the Baptist foreign mission board to work with Rev. William Dean among the Chinese residents of Siam. The Shucks sailed from Boston in September 1835 and reached Bangkok on July 1, 1836. Almost as soon as the Shucks arrived in Bangkok, however, the mission board decided to transfer them to Macau, to begin a new mission field on China's southern coast.



Henrietta Hall Shuck and Rev. J. L. Shuck.

The Portuguese Empire established a settlement in Macau in 1557 and exercised jurisdiction over the Portuguese community living there for centuries thereafter. The Italian Jesuit priests, Michael Ruggieri (1543–1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) founded a Catholic mission in the Portuguese settlement around 1580.

The Chinese authorities and Portuguese Catholic residents did not warmly welcome the Shucks when the American Protestants arrived in Macau in 1836. According to Rev. Shuck, the couple landed in Macau “by stealth, [and they were] carefully watched by the Mandarines [sic] on the one hand, and the Portuguese officers on the other.” Rev. Shuck “was strictly prohibited by the civil authority from making any public efforts for the diffusion of the gospel. His labors were restricted to personal conversation, and the instruction of such persons as might visit his own house” [15]. In spite of the limitations, Rev. Shuck baptized a Chinese convert on January 31, 1837 [7], and a small congregation of about a dozen Chinese members grew. Henrietta set up a small boarding school for local Chinese children and taught them Bible lessons and verses.

The majority of Macau’s Chinese residents (as well as those in Hong Kong and Canton) spoke the Cantonese (or Yue) dialect. The Shucks worked diligently with local tutors to attain proficiency in Cantonese. In a manuscript dated 1841, Henrietta Hall Shuck wrote,

The acquisition of the Chinese language has often been represented as almost impracticable; and sometimes, on the other hand, it has been said to be very easy. It is of importance that the student should take the middle path, where indeed the truth lies. To know *something* of the Chinese language is a very easy thing; to know as much of it as will answer many useful and important purposes is not extremely difficult; but to be a master of the Chinese language, the writer considers extremely difficult [15].

Henrietta Hall Shuck suffered from various medical problems during her relatively short life. In 1842, the Shucks decided to move to Hong Kong,

hoping the new environment would improve Henrietta’s failing health. Hong Kong Island became a British Crown Colony in 1842, following the British victory over China’s Qing dynasty in the First Opium War. Just a few thousand people resided on Hong Kong Island in 1842, primarily Tanka living on junk boats and sampans and small communities of Hakka farmers. The Tanka and Hakka were largely unaware of Christianity; they followed Chinese folk religions, Taoism, and Confucianism.

The Shucks planted the first Baptist church in the new British colony. The Colonial Governor, Henry Pottinger (1789–1856) awarded Rev. Shuck a free grant of land in Hong Kong’s central business district, where Rev. Shuck built the “Queen’s-Road Chapel,” the city’s first official Baptist gathering place. This was followed by a second smaller structure “in the midst of the Chinese dwellings,” which Rev. Shuck called the “Bazaar Baptist Chapel.” Every Sunday, Rev. Shuck delivered three sermons; he preached twice to a Chinese audience in Cantonese and once to a group of British soldiers in English [15]. Henrietta Hall Shuck set up a boarding school for Chinese girls and boys in Hong Kong, as she had done in Macau. In 1844, there were thirty-two students, many of whom went on to spread the gospel in the local community [16].

For several years between 1842 and 1853, Rev. William Dean also lived and ministered in Hong Kong. Tang Tui and Koe Bak, two Teochew evangelists who had trained in Bangkok, accompanied Rev. Dean to Hong Kong. The Teochew evangelists and Rev. Dean worked closely with Rev. Shuck and another Baptist missionary from the southern United States, Rev. Issachar Jacox Roberts (1802–1871) [17]. Rev. Shuck and Rev. Roberts evangelized in Cantonese, while Rev. Dean and the Teochew evangelists evangelized in the Teochew dialect. They started two new Teochew congregations: the Cheung Chau Baptist Church (1844) and the Hong Kong Swatow Baptist Church (1848). In a letter dated May 14, 1844, Rev. Shuck expressed enthusiasm for the Hong Kong mission’s success among Teochew residents. “Mr. Dean has a large and interesting congregation, and many more [Teochew] people are securing ground and settling here. Our present prospects are so encouraging that we hope to have several more *native* preachers in full employment before the year ends” [15].

In November 1844, Henrietta Hall Shuck died at the age of twenty-seven, following the birth of her fifth child. She was buried in Hong Kong Cemetery. The following year, Rev. J. L. Shuck went on furlough to the United States and formally affiliated himself with the new Southern Baptist Convention. He later returned to China and settled in Shanghai, where he and Matthew Tyson Yates (1819–1888) organized the Southern Baptist mission on China’s mainland.



**Burial site of Henrietta Hall Shuck, Hong Kong Cemetery**

### **Rev. William Ashmore and the South China mission at Swatow**

Since Rev. John Taylor Jones' arrival in East Asia in 1833, there had been many Chinese converts in Siam and Hong Kong. China's Qing dynasty rulers, however, had not allowed western missions on the Chinese mainland. This changed in the late 1850s. By terms of the Treaty of Tientsin, or Tianjin (1857-1858), China opened several ports to foreign trade and missionary activity. Soon afterward, American Baptists established a South China mission headquartered in Swatow (Shantou) under the guidance of Rev. William Ashmore.

Rev. William Ashmore (1824-1909), was born in Putnam, Ohio, U.S.A. He attended the Western Baptist Theological Institute in Covington, Kentucky. While ministering to a small church in Hamilton, Ohio, he applied for foreign mission service with the ABMU. The mission board appointed Ashmore to the Teochew mission in Siam. Rev. Ashmore and his wife, Martha, left the United States for Bangkok on August 17, 1850. In January 1851, they reached Hong Kong, where Rev. Ashmore spent three months studying the Teochew language. The Ashmores arrived in the Bangkok in April 1851. Rev. Ashmore spent the next few years conducting Sunday services and prayer meetings, preaching in the streets, and training native evangelists.



**Rev. William Ashmore, ca. 1875**

Martha Ashmore developed serious health problems and in 1858 the family, which by then included two sons—William Ashmore, Jr. (born 1851), and Frank (born 1853)—returned to Hong Kong, where Mrs. Ashmore convalesced. Rev. Ashmore met with Rev. J. W. Johnson, the director of Hong Kong's Baptist mission station, and they agreed the China mission should be relocated to the mainland. In May 1859, the ABMU's executive board authorized Rev. Ashmore to open a mission station in "the Tie chiu [Teochew] district ... at such a place as he may deem most judicious" [18].

Ashmore selected the area around Swatow, a collection of districts on the coastal border of the Guangdong and Fujian provinces, 170 miles northeast of Hong Kong. This is where the Han River empties into the South China Sea. Japanese pirates had used the area as a base to attack China's coast since the late Ming dynasty (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The majority of people in the Swatow area spoke either the Teochew dialect or Hakka Chinese. The Teochew were *lowland people*, who lived near the coast; the Hakka were *highland people*, who lived in the hilly interior. Although Portuguese ships first reached Swatow in the early sixteenth century and European and American opium traders plied the coastline between Hong Kong and Swatow, most people in the area had had little or no contact with westerners [19].

Rev. Johnson preceded Rev. Ashmore to the new mission location. Ashmore took an extended furlough to attend to family matters and finally arrived in the Swatow area in July 1863. Although Swatow was open to foreign commerce, when Rev. Ashmore arrived the few foreigners living in the area were sequestered on Double Island (Mayu), at the mouth of Swatow harbor. Small, picturesque Double Island, which was noted for its two low peaks, both about fifty meters high, was a five-mile boat ride from Swatow's city center. During 1863-1864, Swatow's entire missionary force consisted of the Double Island contingent of Rev. Ashmore, Rev. Johnson, their wives, and four members of the English Presbyterian mission, including a medical missionary named Dr. Gauld.

Swatow is spread across a flat, low-lying, sandy coastline, and the early missionaries considered the environment unhealthy. Therefore, in 1864 Rev. Ashmore bought property for the mission headquarters at Kakchieh (which roughly translates as rocky corner), a rough, stony hillside on the southern shore of the harbor, a mile across the water from Swatow. Eventually, with proper care and cultivation Kakchieh became "the most beautiful and convenient headquarters to be found in [the American Baptist China] missions" [7].



Postcard showing the Kakchieh compound, ca. 1900.

### The South China mission and indigenization

Rev. J. W. Johnson organized the mission's first church on Double Island in 1860, with the help of Chinese Christians who had come from Hong Kong. The following year, the Hong Kong evangelists moved inland and opened a second small chapel in the village of Tat Hau Po, six miles from the coast. Later, Rev. Ashmore came to visit the new meeting place in Tat Hau Po. This set a successful pattern: indigenous Chinese believers would first enter a local village and teach the residents about the "worth-while-ness of Christianity." The Chinese evangelists would then initiate two or three-person prayer meetings and Bible studies, which might attract others. After this initial process was complete, western missionaries would arrive to "work 'with' the Chinese, not just 'for' them" [18]. By the early twentieth century, there were over two hundred regular meeting places for Baptists in the region around Swatow, mostly in private homes [18].

Baptist missionaries recognized indigenization was vitally important to maintaining the church in China. For example, Rev. R. H. Graves, the Southern Baptist missionary who led the work in Canton, was a vocal, well-published advocate of the indigenization of Chinese Christianity, the idea that "the main work in the evangelization of a people must be done by that people themselves" [20].

The South China mission grew slowly, but steadily. By 1862, there were nine baptisms and two of those early converts went on to become ministers. In 1863, there were seven additional baptisms and five small outstations were set up [18]. In 1864, Rev. William Dean stopped at Double Island, on his return trip to Siam from a furlough in the United States, and he administered six baptisms. There were sixty-two new members of the Baptist church in Swatow in 1865, two were ordained ministers, and thirty-five or forty more members by 1870. In total, the South China mission recorded nearly two hundred fifty baptisms by 1872 [18]. Throughout the early years of the South China mission, however, there were far more converts than indigenous leaders who became ordained ministers. The first missionaries to Asia, whether Protestant or Catholic, were hesitant to cede control to new, indigenous Christians.

After Swatow was opened to foreign commerce, it grew very rapidly, from a relatively modest coastal village into a bustling regional trade center. By the mid-1860s, as many as seventy foreign trade ships were in its harbor at a single time. Revs. Ashmore and Johnson began holding English-language services every Sunday for foreign visitors. The captain of an American merchant ship and three English sailors were among the South China mission's earliest baptisms.

Rev. Ashmore noticed a change occurring in Chinese Christianity over course of the 1860s. Frequently, newer Chinese converts were more educated and affluent than those of the past, and Ashmore thought this was having a positive impact.

Ah, it was all very well so long as these [western] Christian teachers got 'only a few simple minded, easily persuaded people to join their new doctrine,' but it takes on quite a different aspect when they see some gray-haired and studious idolater breaking up his idols, chopping them to pieces and then declaring in the midst of his own people, far from a missionary settlement, that he means to become a followers of Jesus, and when they see people of standing and marked and conspicuous talent adorned with academic honors, who have nothing to gain and a vast deal to risk by becoming disciples. ... [T]hese cases of conversion are assuming a contagious aspect, and even threaten to become an epidemic [18].

ABMU policy dictated that each missionary administer their own defined field. Therefore, Rev. Johnson and Rev. Ashmore divided the various outstations. Rev. Johnson supervised the older outstations: Double Island, Tat Hau Po, and a few others, while Rev. Ashmore supervised the newer ones. Each of them received valuable assistance from local, ordained ministers and assistants. In 1869, Rev. Johnson left China and returned to the United States to become a minister in Petaluma, California. Thereafter, Rev. Ashmore was the South China mission's sole ABMU administrator and was even more reliant on local Christians. Three Teochew assistants—Hu Sin Se, Chang Lim, and Kai Bun—helped Rev. Ashmore with daily chapels and Bible classes at the central compound and accompanied him on itinerant trips to neighboring villages. They often traveled by houseboat along Swatow's inner harbor.



Rev. Ashmore's houseboat

In 1867, Chinese Christians established the region's first truly indigenous Baptist congregations at Tang Leng and Tie Chiu Hu. Tang Leng had twenty-eight members and an ordained minister named A-Sun; Tie Chiu Hu had eight members and a minister named A-Ee. Dozens of new indigenous churches soon followed. By 1870, Chinese congregations were independently conducting business meetings and voting on how to manage their finances, without ABMU oversight. Chinese Baptists still came from neighboring towns and villages to visit the central compound in Kakchieh for quarterly meetings and communion, but as time passed and the outer fields grew the South China mission became less centralized and less dependent on the foreign missionaries' supervision.

The Chinese churches also started selecting their own members to send out on evangelizing trips [18]. The Tang Leng congregation was the first. After weeks of deliberation, in 1872 Tang Leng's indigenous leaders decided to dispatch two members to conduct local mission work, and to pay their salaries. The congregation selected two capable men, voted on their remuneration (which came from the local church's donations), and sent the men out to suitable villages. At the next communion, the men reported on their activities and the results of their attempts to spread the gospel. Within a year, the indigenous churches were supporting two new outstations and many more followed.

### The Ashmore Theological Seminary

Nineteenth century western missions emphasized evangelism, education, and medical care. The early South China mission focused particularly on evangelism and education. Influential American Congregational administrator and theorist of foreign missions, Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) led an effort to place the emphasis of overseas missions' on "Christianization," rather than on bringing "civilization" through mission school education [21]. Anderson's ideas influenced the American Baptist missions in East Asia. The ABMU mission board considered its primary objective to be "proclaiming to the people the way of salvation" through "personal acceptance of Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord" [18]. Education was a tool for spreading the gospel message. Teochew men took classes in Christian doctrine with Rev. Johnson in Hong Kong beginning the 1850s and

they continued to do so when the mission relocated to the mainland.

The Teochew people on China's mainland were in close contact with those living in Hong Kong and Siam, and over time there were constant interchanges of missionary personnel and "native converts and laborers from one field to the other" [7]. In 1865, a group of Teochew converts from various outstations around Swatow went to Hong Kong to evangelize among their relatives. Before they left, Rev. Ashmore offered them an *ad hoc*, though thorough, course in evangelism and missionary training at the Kakchieh compound, which included a series of weeklong meetings for communal prayers, scripture exposition, and Bible study.

In following years, Rev. Ashmore developed more formalized bimonthly theological courses that ran for a week at a time [18]. When Rev. Ashmore's students were not in the classroom, they traveled through the mission field and applied what they had been studying. In 1870, Rev. Ashmore wrote, "A well trained ministry ... is the want of the day. [W]e make the Bible our textbook, and from it, we propose to teach the various branches of evangelistic, systematic, and pastoral theology. In [evangelism], especially, [indigenous students] need a thorough induction, as that is more than [pastoral theology], the work for which they are designated" [18].

Rev. Ashmore's first students were older men, who made their livings in workshops and farming and had little formal education. As younger students became involved and suitable Chinese translations of theological textbooks became available, the course of study lengthened to four years. Soon students were covering evangelism, pastoral theology, and a variety of other topics. This was the origin of the Swatow Theological Seminary. Rev. Ashmore was superintendent and his teaching staff included several other missionaries and local teachers who were familiar with the Teochew dialect. Ambitious students who wished to do more-advanced work went to bigger cities and enrolled in larger seminaries and schools of theology.

In 1904, the Ashmore family purchased a tract of land beside the Kakchieh compound and began construction of a three-story building for the seminary and a dormitory. When the building was finally completed in 1907 (after Rev. Ashmore had returned to the United States for the final time), the Swatow Theological Seminary was renamed The Ashmore Theological Seminary.

### The Girl's School and Woman's Bible Training School

The South China mission excelled in educating both males and females. Rev. J. W. Johnson and his



wife founded a school for local girls in Hong Kong in 1851, which they relocated to Double Island in 1861. Mrs. Johnson continued to run the girl's school in a small building near the Kakchieh compound for more than a decade, until she retired from the mission field. Henrietta Partridge took over leadership of the school from 1874 until her death in 1882. The girl's school had a dormitory that could accommodate thirty-two students. Mrs. Partridge implemented a system of self-support. Each girl was expected to help with the cooking, cleaning, washing, and general housekeeping [18]. The girls took courses in theology and the Bible, Chinese Classics, history, and practical vocational skills, including needlework and embroidery [18].

Many Protestant (and Catholic) missions in China taught young women to sew and embroider. The curriculum of the American Episcopal "Church Training-School for Women" in Shanghai, for example, included reading and writing, Bible study, memorizing hymns, and training in embroidery. The Episcopal school was established in 1896, to prepare students to work in parishes and for the general "uplifting of Chinese womanhood" [22]. The school's graduates became *Bible women*, missionary assistants, or pursued secular vocations in the sewing, needlework, and embroidery industries.

Historians credit Lida Scott Ashmore, Rev. William Ashmore's daughter-in-law, with bringing the skill of western lace making and embroidery to China through the South China mission and its girl's school [23]. *Swatow lace* was a very popular consumer item in mainland China and Hong Kong, especially among western tourists, throughout the twentieth century [24].



**Left: Students produce needlework at the South China mission school.**

**Right: Lida Scott Ashmore (seated second from the right) and her colleagues, 1924.**

In addition to the boy's and girl's schools, the American Baptist South China mission had a Woman's Bible Training School (which as the name indicates was intended for older students). Adele Fielde was its director.

Adele Marion Fielde (1839-1916) was born in East Rodman, New York, U.S.A., and raised in the Universalist Church. She graduated from the State Normal School in Albany, New York, and became a teacher. In 1864, Fielde became engaged to Cyrus Chilcott, a graduate of Rochester Theological Seminary

and an ordained Baptist minister. Chilcott sailed for Bangkok in August 1864 to join the Siam mission. Fielde left to join him on December 20, 1865, but during her voyage, Chilcott died. Field continued on to Bangkok and became the mission's first unmarried female missionary. She stayed until 1871. During her years in Bangkok, Fielde mastered the Teochew dialect and taught Bible lessons in Teochew. She later published a Teochew language guide, a Teochew-English dictionary, and a collection of Teochew folktales [25].

In 1871, Fielde returned to America on furlough, and she stopped on the way at the South China mission to meet Rev. Ashmore. Rev. Ashmore recommended to the Baptist mission board that they reassign Fielde to the Swatow district and, beginning in February 1873, she spent twelve years in China. By 1873, there were eleven scattered outstations and approximately two hundred Baptist church members, mostly women. Fielde immediately had a structure built in Kakchieh to house a new Woman's Bible Training School. It was among the first schools in China specifically intended to train Bible women, preceded only by the True Light Seminary (1872), which Harriet Newell Noyes ran at the American Presbyterian mission in Canton. Chinese Bible women were evangelists and educators who served alongside Protestant female missionaries from Europe and the United States.

Female missionaries bold enough to venture outside mission compounds into the countryside on itinerant journeys relied on the assistance of Bible women. Because there were serious risks when traveling alone, female missionaries usually took along well-trained indigenous Christian women who were familiar with local geography and customs [26]. Bible women were also fluent in the local dialect and were essential to effective evangelization. Western women were an unfamiliar presence in China's interior and were rarely permitted to enter the inner spaces of homes without a Chinese companion. Bible women helped missionaries gain access to places they could not have gone otherwise.

Adele Marion Fielde recruited and trained Bible women in a methodical manner. She invited local Christian women to Kakchieh, but only those who were of "suitable age" and whose "domestic relations [were] such that they [could] be absent without neglecting any home duty" [18]. The women went through two to four months of training, studying Bible lessons in depth, one at a time. After each lesson, the women went in pairs on itinerant trips to surrounding villages to teach what they had learned to female family members and acquaintances. They took tracts and a compendium of the New Testament Gospels in the Teochew dialect that Fielde had prepared. The Bible women's goal was to persuade potential new converts to come to Kakchieh and learn more. During her years at the South China

mission, Adele Fielde trained more than five hundred Bible women [27].

Fielde enjoyed a collegial, complementary relationship with her male missionary associates. In her memoir *Pagoda Shadows: Studies from Life in China*, Fielde wrote,

During the years that I have been training, using, and working with native female evangelists at Swatow, there has been no friction between my work and that of my associates, Dr. Ashmore and Mr. Partridge, who have been training, using, and working with native preachers in the same field, at the same country stations, and with similar methods and aims. ... [W]e agreed that the supervision of male helpers would remain with the male missionaries, and that the direction of female helper would rest with me [28].

Over time, the Woman's Bible Training School grew into a four-year course of study, in session nine months of the year, with eight teachers. Close to one thousand students had attended by the beginning of the twentieth century [18].



A portrait of Baptist Bible women, ca. 1884

## CONCLUSION

Between 1860 and 1900, approximately two thousand people joined the Baptist church in South China. In any given year, there were more than one thousand active local converts, and a remarkably small number fell away after professing their new faith [7]. The South China mission became a model for other others to emulate. In 1900, Baptist historian Edmund Franklin Merriam wrote that the mission was “generally recognized as one of the best organized in China ... a reputation gained chiefly by the [its] efficient leadership.”

Bible principles have been constantly applied to the conduct of the churches [and] the churches have also been trained in self-reliance and in self-help, and in a desire to achieve complete self-support. ... By admirable and efficient methods of organization, with elders in every little church, with the leading members trained in Bible study, and Christian

women taught in the word, the Southern China mission has been welded into an effective force for carrying on the work of the gospel among the people in these neighborhoods, and for reaching out into the region beyond [29].

This essay offers only a quick overview of the founding of the American Baptist South China mission, and it relies heavily on missionary memoirs and early historical narratives. A more complete survey remains to be written regarding the South China mission's development and influence, during both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The goal of this brief sketch was to help ensure the memory of the American Baptist missionaries and early Chinese Christian converts does not fade over time.

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