

Demographic and Organizational Characteristics of Early Adventist Mission in China (1902-1930): A Reflection on its historical context and the relevance to the issues of today

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ABSTRACT

Compared to many other protestant groups, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a relatively late-comer to the China mission field. Yet within a few decades Adventist Mission had become an influential organization in many parts of that nation. Its impact went well beyond its own church membership but was felt by a sizable segment of the Chinese society, both secular and religious, as China emerged from a feudalist society into modern nationhood. This paper traces the humble beginning of the Adventist Mission in China in 1902 to the time it grew into a full Division status as China Division of SDA Church in 1930.

The paper begins by examining the internal momentum of the Seventh-day Adventist movement toward foreign mission by introducing the concept of *time to Global Mission* (TGM) to compare SDA Church with other similar denominations (or movements) that emerged out of the Great Awakening period of the Euro-American religious history. The entry into the Chinese mission field was obviously a result of this momentum.

The paper then proceed to examine the pattern in which the SDA mission in China evolved in the next 30 years. In particular, it analyzes the different demographical and organizational characteristics of the early Adventist mission in China as it interacted with a nation and society in a state of flux. Statistically speaking it is interesting to observe the rate of growth of: the number of SDA missionaries in China, the ratio of male to female missionaries, the number and locations of the mission stations, the funding of new mission initiatives, the appointment of indigenous ministers, and the ratio of expatriate to national workers. Two interesting observations may be made with respect to this period: (a) The Adventist Mission in China gave early attention to ethnic minority Chinese often in remote regions of the country and not just focusing on the Han majority and the population centers. (b) Financial funding for new mission initiatives were provided not only at the General Conference level but often by local conferences / churches in the home field.

The paper concludes with an examination on two characteristics of the early China mission that may be relevant to current discussion in the SDA Church today: (a) The number of credential women missionaries in the mission field, and (b) The ratio of national to expatriate employees in the mission workforce.

Keywords: Adventist mission in China, time to global mission, China mission demographics, ethnic minority Chinese, gender in mission workforce, expatriate to national employee ratio