

## THE SUIPING MISSION STATION

The city of Suiping, 90 miles north of Kioshan, is a stop on the Peking-Hankow railroad, and the Suiping district is our mission field's northernmost border. The city itself is about 10 li (31/2 miles) west of the railroad. In the days when the railroad was built the Chinese, with earlier concerns, were against the railroad being any closer. The beliefs were that the railroad would disturb the "fengshui", peoples' fortunes in everyday life, the tranquility of the dead in their graves through eternity; the locomotive would terrify their small children. Everything new from the "foreign devils" would press against the values of old "middle kingdom". There seemed to be the feeling that foreign cultures would disturb the old peaceful China and disturb peoples' established customs.

The original plan was for the railroad to go through Loshan, Chenghungshien and Juning, and so follow the old established route between Peking and Hankow. But the people, especially in conservative Juning, made a bitter protest. They would for no price have the tracks near their houses. By one means or another, the three cities were spared from "misfortune" and the rail line was moved to go via Sinyang, Kioshan and Suiping and through the intervening towns. But in any event, they were required to be as far as possible from the cities themselves. For this reason the railroad ran 10 li, outside of Suiping. As a result the traveling public must either walk the long way or hire other transportation. But to go this 10 li distance in rain or extreme heat, as one has almost the whole year, is no joy and there are none who give free respite. Sedan chairs, wheelbarrows, ox carts and what not can be had; all at a stiff price. But the initial foolishness against the railroad is such that one proceeds to deal with it with resourcefulness and improvisation.

Now the foolish people of Juning begin their new attack. They found it costly because after the railroad was built 25 miles to the West they have lost much of their business. They next attempted to prevail on the authorities to have a spur of the railroad built to their town but have had no success.

Suiping is like many other towns, an attractive place with 14 foot wide through streets which have the advantage that most of the major streets have gutters alongside the street instead of in the middle as is the case in so many other towns. It has attractive Chinese houses and a lively trade because it is in a well populated area with prosperous farmland.

Suiping has some 30,000 residents, of which many are aristocrats by birth and occupation. There are many mandarin relatives and bankers in the city so it is no surprise that robbers last fall and winter in the area had an eye on prospects in Suiping. And, because of the insecurity associated with the robber bands, many of the well to do from the countryside came within the city walls with their valuables and their silver. It is common practice for the Chinese who have silver or significant possessions to keep them at home and bury them in the earth on their own farms, as it says in Matthew 25:25. They believe that it is better protected there than with the money changer or banker, and it might well happen that the bankers have been and are in league with the robbers. So when the robbers come there is no community that has its goods completely hidden in the earth because the robbers in most cases are well able to find where peoples' goods are hidden. And, if nothing is found, the robbers have very effective means to compel their victims to uncover their treasures.

In a city where rich people and scholars (such as Sinyang which is a city with schools) are in authority, people have tasted opportunity and there is strong defense against robbers. Based on this, and considering the mission work and Suiping, there is a lesson in this. The mission station in Suiping was first opened in the city under the supervision of the Kioshan station. The first Chinese evangelist, Chu, had just a year's experience. Another, Tsang, after a short time of work was forced to leave because feelings against him became so bitter that he was afraid to venture into the public street. The third, Chang, worked in Suiping a little over a year but was seriously injured. They attacked him on the street, threw him down and scattered the books he carried to the four winds. He was thrown in prison but fortunately when the case came before the mandarin he was released. And so ends the saga of the first mission efforts in Suiping!

After 1 ¼ years of language study, Pastor Hans M. Nesse was assigned to the Suiping station. As in other places where foreigners visit, the people were overwhelmingly intrusive and unashamed in their curiosity. It was not only that he had a following of curious onlookers in the street making remarks that were less than courteous but they also pushed themselves into his living quarters; and whether he wished to relax, work or read they crowded around until late at night. And they were less than reserved because several earlier visits by missionaries from Kioshan had somewhat accustomed them to foreigners.

From March 1912 until May 1913 Pastor Nesse was alone in a small Chinese hut. The place was gray, filthy and gloomy and it was so small and dark that in the daytime there was only a shaft of light in the yard. To stay in such quarters for very long was hardly tolerable; one must either rent a better facility or proceed to build a mission station. The one prospect was difficult and the other perhaps impossible!

Many missionaries entering new locations had over and over tried to purchase Chinese buildings in the town but were not able to do so. Pastor Nesse's first challenge was to try his luck to buy a facility. He did locate a Chinese facility and signed a contract. But when the transaction became known in the city there was overwhelming protest. There were mass meetings to protest the transaction and to pressure the mandarin to void the contract. The town leaders steadily pressured the mandarin who was not really against the contract but was worried about his own skin and initially acceded to the demand. Here, as in Sinyang earlier, the town leaders sent protest messages to Kiafeng (provincial capitol) about the contract and, in the same message, suggested the possibility of another location. They asserted that the owner of the original site was really unwilling to sell and furthermore, his neighbors did not want a foreigner living among them. They added that with some patience they could locate a far more desirable site for the honorable pastor. A considerable time thereafter the exalted citizens found a site. It lay outside the south gate of the city in the midst of a huge Chinese cemetery!

When Pastor Nesse saw the site he went directly to the mandarin and asked: "Am I a ghost or a dead person that you want to assign me a place among the graves?" To be in the area of the dead is one of the grossest insults possible as it suggests that one belongs in the company of the dead as neighbors. The mandarin did not realize that the newcomer had such an awareness of Chinese perceptions and was embarrassed, but he soon recovered and said: "The owner of the original site under contract is unwilling to sell so I cannot approve the contract" Pastor Nesse next suggested that the owner, neighbors and city leaders have a meeting at the mandarin's office to resolve matters and so it was arranged.

When the scheduled meeting commenced, the mandarin asked the owner so all to hear whether he was, or was not, willing to sell his property to the mission. "I certainly wish to sell" he answered "but the leaders in the town have by every means possible tried to hinder me". Now the situation changed, and after further discussions and negotiations, the mandarin approved the sale and stamped his "chop" on the sales contract – this finally after a half year of wrangling with the city leaders.

Now the missionary was able to make preparations to build a mission residence and a chapel and both were built and ready for use in May 1913. The missionary residence is 33x42 feet surrounded by verandahs. It is suitable for a family including a female missionary. The gate-house/chapel is 18x44 and has seating for about 150 congregants. There also are three small rebuilt Chinese houses of which the Bible woman occupies one; both as a residence and as a classroom for women. The other two are used for activities among the men. This overall property, as well as a smaller one purchased later nearby, cost all together \$2,843.93.

Since Pastor Nesse arrived in Suiping there has been one baptism, 8 are attending instruction leading to baptism and, of course, there are meeting attendees in addition. Now there is a great joy and optimism. In the fall of 1913 the attendance at the chapel services was such the many could not get in to the services. Here, as in Kioshan, the countryside robbers led people to flee to the city and so they came to church as well. Of the churchgoers the most are middle class with a sprinkling of the rich and the landowners. The majority of those seeking baptismal training can read and in an upcoming class there is mandarin. An older learned man in a high position is now baptized and teaches classes in the mission school. One characteristic of the baptized people and the catechumens in Suiping is that many of them earlier had practiced as Chinese physician. Perhaps there is merit in what one of them said "we physicians encounter sickness and feel sympathy for those who are suffering. Therefore we feel informed by Christ and his teachings and are motivated to serve those in need" One of the baptized is an artist who produces work that compares favorably with many amateur artists in the United States He is for the most part a farmer and works and looks like a typical Chinese farmer.

In the 19 months Pastor Nesse has worked in Suiping 25 have been baptized and seven are participating in the mission's programs. 32 are enrolled in training for baptism. The work is most promising but if it is to expand Pastor Nesse must receive funds to build a larger church facility, a school building and other important and necessary buildings.

### **Mission outstations:**

As to outstations associated with the Suiping mission, so far only two have been opened. They are new so as of this time little can be reported. The one, (Hungshan) has a notable past history that is of interest but will not be reported on here. The other, Chushitien, is a market town that lies some 35 li South of Suiping. God's word is already known there because six years ago a Christian evangelist unaffiliated with a foreign mission lived in Tsangchi, a country town 6 miles from Chushitien. His name was Limako and he came from Peking, He was called by the local inhabitants the "prophet from Peking". Limako was reportedly a worker of miracles and from his work a tremendous interest in the Bible and Christian teachings developed in the town and area. People traveled to our mission in Kioshan, and even as far as Juning, to have the teachings further explained. A deputation of 42 men came to the missionary in Kioshan and asked him to open an outstation in Tsangchi or Chushtien For one reason or another this did not get done and the Catholics, who had missions farther to the East, took the opportunity to open work in the town.

Under the circumstances discussed earlier there is some reluctance to assign an evangelist to those influenced by the "prophets" teachings. It will be interesting to see if the many people exposed to Christianity in Chushitien can return to true teachings again through our work which has just opened in Chushitien. God grant that this may occur! A trained evangelist named "Shi" has been assigned take over the work in this important and difficult location. Shy is a learned and upright man but has been a Christian for only one year and thus unproven in Christian outreach work.

The other outstation of Suiping is Hungshan, one of our mission field's first locations. The population is 12,000 and it is located 54 li Northwest of Suiping. It is a centrally located market town which with associated market towns may one day become the location for a native pastor's parish. It is too early to judge but it seems there are many friendly residents in Hungshan who so far have placed no obstacles to mission work. A house has been rented, an evangelist assigned, two are baptized and 8 are in baptismal training in Hungshan.

M.G.

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\*Translated from Norwegian