

## XMHD, Shanghai

by

Jerry Berg

Lexington, Mass.

jsberg@rcn.com

[www.ontheshortwaves.com](http://www.ontheshortwaves.com)

Previously posted at [ontheshortwaves.com](http://www.ontheshortwaves.com) are two items about mediumwave religious station XMHD that operated from Shanghai, China in the 1930s and early 1940s. One is a 78 rpm XMHD promotional recording containing music and a fund-raising message from Phillip Lee, identified on the record label as Secretary and Program Director of the station's parent organization, the Shanghai Christian Broadcasting Association.<sup>1</sup> The record can be seen and the audio heard at <http://www.ontheshortwaves.com/XMHD.html>.

When we posted the record we asked if anyone had any further information on XMHD. Subsequently we received an article about the station from Jim Bowman, whose father was Dr. Robert H. Bowman, co-founder of the Far East Broadcasting Corp. in the Philippines. The one-page article, "XMHD-China," was from the *International Christian Broadcasters Bulletin*, date unknown but probably sometime in the 1960s or 1970s. It described the station's origins and its religious programming. The article is at <http://www.ontheshortwaves.com/Stations/XMHD-Shanghai.pdf>.

### I.

We have found two additional sources containing information on XMHD. One is a book by Michael A. Krysko titled *American Radio in China*.<sup>2</sup> The theme of the book is that American radio activities in China in the 1920s and 1930s presumed that the development of the medium there would follow familiar American patterns, and showed little regard for the distinct dynamics of China, thus "getting it wrong" in many areas—political, economic, and social.

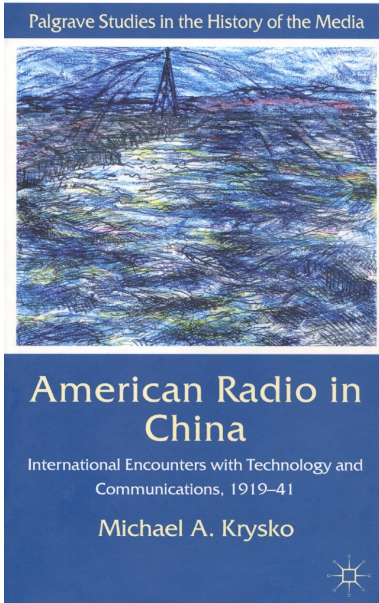
Krysko tells six different stories in as many chapters. In the first chapter he describes how the failure of the Federal Telegraph Co. of California to appreciate the various political intricacies of the rise of Chinese nationalist (and Japanese imperialist) elements cost the company, in 1929, its groundbreaking 1921 contract establishing the first radiotelegraph link between China and the United States. Chapter two is the story of RCA's decision in 1932 to

---

<sup>1</sup>Identified as Gospel Music Director in the July-December 1939 *Christian Broadcast Bulletin*.

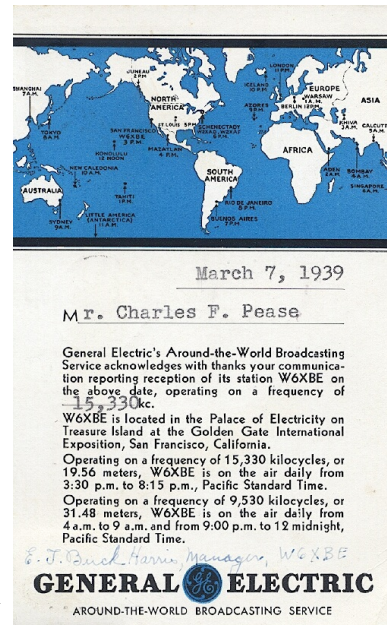
<sup>2</sup>New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan (St. Martin's Press), 2011. The book began as a doctoral dissertation: Michael Alexander Krysko, *China Tuned Out: American Radio in East Asia, 1919–1941*, Ph.D. diss. (Stony Brook: State University of New York, History, 2001).

continue operating its Mukden radiotelegraph station, over Nationalist Chinese objections, after Japan established a puppet regime in Manchuria. The resulting Chinese decision to sign an agreement with RCA-rival ITT to operate a competing Shanghai-San Francisco circuit led to a suit by RCA. The decision in China's favor by the international court in the Hague was an important factor in RCA's eventual retreat from the international radiotelegraph market.



The balance of the book is about broadcasting. Chapter three deals with the development of Chinese broadcasting in the 1930s and its growing popularity with all sectors of the population. One American trade official observed that while it had been rare to see a radio antenna anywhere in rural areas, by 1937 “a network of bamboo poles and wires on the humblest of buildings in small villages attests the extent to which radio has penetrated the country.”<sup>3</sup> The International Settlement in Shanghai, from which a variety of stations operated with little regard for Chinese law, was a particular problem, but the Nationalists were often successful in imposing their will there even before Japan became the dominant force in the settlement.

Those interested in station history will be especially drawn to chapters four, five and six. In chapter four, Krysko covers the origins of W6XBE, later known as KGEL, which came to air in 1939.<sup>4</sup> Although W6XBE was not a Chinese station, but rather an American shortwave station beaming to the Far East (and South America) from San Francisco, it helps the author make his point, for while a variety of reasons were put forth in support of the role that the station might serve in advancing cross-cultural Chinese-American relations, its main audience was in fact China's English-speaking expatriate community, hungry for a reliable connection to America. The station's Sunday mailbag program, where Americans at home could send messages to friends and family in China, was a big hit.



Another Shanghai “X” station, American-owned XMHA, is the subject of the sixth chapter. XMHA was a particular thorn in the side of the Japanese after war between China and

<sup>3</sup>*American Radio in China*, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup>Krysko reprises his earlier telling of this story: Michael A. Krysko, “Homeward Bound: Shortwave Broadcasting and American Mass Media in East Asia on the Eve of the Pacific War,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (November 2005), p. 511.





does a good job of describing and analyzing the station's programming and placing it in the context of the wider American missionary activity in China and the missionaries' close ties to the Nationalists. (XMHD promoted Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang as "model Christians.")<sup>7</sup>)

The station broadcast in both Chinese and English. Although nearly all its board members were Chinese (some American born), XMHD clearly reflected a western, mostly-American identity. For a long time it had a 15-minute afternoon news program sponsored by the British-owned *North China Daily News*. A typhoon took XMHD's iron antenna masts down soon after the start of the war with Japan in mid 1937. From early August the station carried on using bamboo poles as masts. To assist XMHD, XMHA began offering some religious programming, and it was XMHA technicians who completed the repairs that brought XMHD back to full operation in early 1939.

Follow Up The  
**NEWS BROADCASTS**  
Over XMHD  
By Subscribing to the  
"North-China Daily News"  
or the  
"North-China Herald"

"North-China Daily News" Subscription, including delivery:  
Shanghai . . . . per annum \$24  
Other parts of China " " \$32

"North-China Herald" (Weekly)  
China or Japan . . per annum \$18  
(Shorter periods in proportion)  
(Adv.)



The Japanese advance in China was accompanied by the closure of numerous Chinese stations. XMHD, however, was located at 128 Museum Road, which was within Shanghai's International Settlement.<sup>8</sup> To take advantage of the extraterritoriality enjoyed by the big powers and to give the station some cover, XMHD was transferred to American ownership. This provided little respite, however. The Japanese jammed its signal and eventually reduced its power so it could not be heard outside Shanghai. The end apparently came in December 1941 when Japan occupied the International Settlement.

---

<sup>7</sup>*American Radio in China*, pgs. 141-142.

<sup>8</sup>This was the Christian Literature Society Building. Besides the Christian Literature Society and the Shanghai Christian Broadcasting Association, 128 Museum Road also hosted other Christian organizations, including the Church of Christ in China, the National Anti-Opium Association, and the Nanking Theological Seminary.

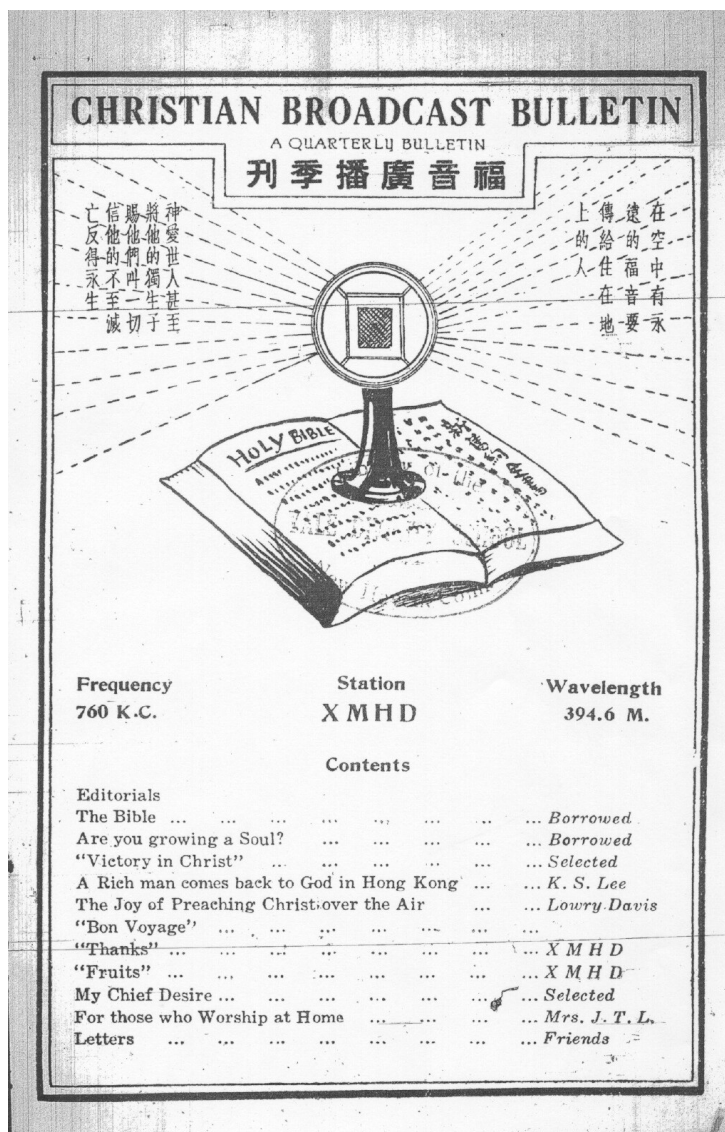
## II.

One of the many original sources cited by Krysko is the Christian Broadcast Bulletin, a periodical issued by XMHD's parent organization, the Shanghai Christian Broadcasting Association. I was fortunate to be able to borrow, through inter-library loan, ten microfilmed issues of the Bulletin that are on file at Yale University. Although their numbering is not entirely consistent, the group appears to comprise all the issues published from January 1937 through December 1940. The Bulletin was published quarterly at first, twice yearly from July 1938 through December 1939. A single copy covered 1940. Issues were usually around 40 pages in length, some longer. The first half of each was in English, the second half Chinese. The first of the issues reviewed is for the period January-March 1937 and is denominated Vol. 1, No. 3, suggesting that publication of the Bulletin probably started in 1936.

The copies give a flavor of the station and the times. The cover features a logo of a Bible and a microphone, plus the station call letters, frequency and wavelength, and a table of contents. Among the many "contents" items listed in various copies of the Bulletin are:

- "My Experience of Preaching Over the Radio"
- "Why Do I Study the Bible Daily"
- "The Radio In Christian Service"
- "My Plans and Subjects for My Noontime Meditation"
- "American Business Man's Testimony"
- "The A.B.C. of Prayer"
- "The Radio—A Means to Bring Him In"

In one contents list was an item entitled "La Voz de los Andes." XMHD had received a copy of an HCJB publication describing that station's "Radio Circle," and reprinted it with this introduction (HCJB started broadcasting on Christmas Day, 1931):



## “La Voz de los Andes”

“Station XMHD” (The Christian Broadcast Association) is very happy to make connection with the above station which has call letters HCJB or “Heralding Christ Jesus’ Blessings.” We shall enlist Prayer-partners for this station and trust that they will also get the friends who listen in to the “Voice of the Andes” to pray earnestly for us here and for China. We, of the Christian Broadcast Association, send to you there our greetings. We dare to take from your “Bulletin” the few words printed. We are anxious for our friends here to know you and something of the work you are doing there. \* \* \*

The bulletins also contain a general schedule of the day’s program, Bible readings, the text of on-air talks, offers of tracts, stories of religious conversion, plus occasional photographs of station premises and personalities.

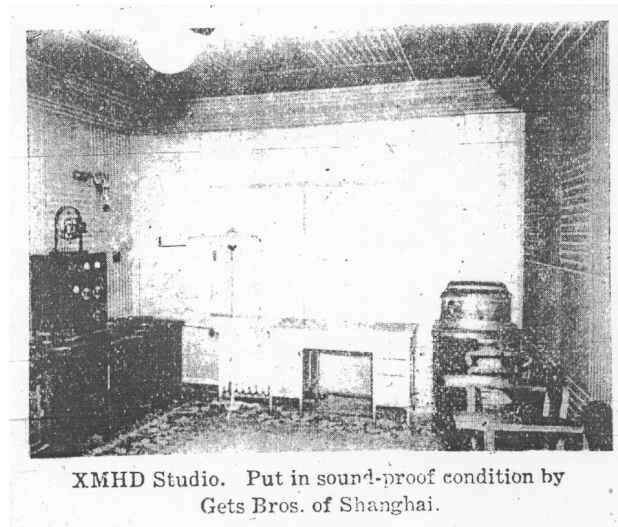
The bulletins also contain a number of advertisements for such products and services as a department store, a tailor, a piano company, a typewriter company, a travel bureau, a food company, and “Dr. Williams’ Pink Pills” (for tired blood).

The image shows two side-by-side advertisements. The left advertisement is for 'SHANGHAI'S NEWEST DEPARTMENT STORE'. It features a central circular illustration of a large, multi-story building. Text around the illustration includes 'SHANGHAI'S NEWEST DEPARTMENT STORE' at the top, '統徵 辦銷 環中 球華 貨物 產' on the left, and '海上 大新 有限 公司' on the right. Below the illustration, it says 'THE SUN CO. (SHANGHAI) LTD.', 'Nanking & Lloyd Roads', and 'Tel. 97000 to all Departments'. A small '(廣告)' is in the bottom left corner. The right advertisement is for 'ROBINSON'S'. It lists 'PIANOS, ORGANS, RADIOS' and 'GRAMOPHONES, RECORDS, MUSIC'. It also mentions 'Musical Instruments', 'Pianos for hire from \$12.00 to \$16.00', 'Tuning by Steinway experts', and 'Construction and Repairing of any instrument by Craftsmen'. It includes the name 'ROBINSON PIANO COMPANY', 'Successors', and the address '276 Kiangse Road near Nanking Road' with 'Telephone 10868'. A small '(Adv.)' is in the bottom left corner.

At the start of 1938 the Bulletin detailed the consequences of the station’s antenna problems. “Many, many times, as you have experienced, the transmitter has not transmitted the message clearly from our studio. This machinery is very delicate. It takes one with real knowledge of its working to know how to adjust it properly. We ask your kind indulgence and help. The antenna is not as it should be, but it cannot be changed just now for obvious reasons”<sup>9</sup> (the war). Eventually they were able to address some other problems. “The machinery in the studio has been put in excellent condition. New microphones and pick-ups replace the old ones. Station XMHA kindly assisted us in this matter. ¶Getz. Bros. put our studio in excellent condition so that now we can invite anyone to visit us to sing or play. ¶Even though not fully

<sup>9</sup>Christian Broadcast Bulletin, January-March 1938, p. 1.

paid up the new piano has been installed and it has made a marvelous improvement. New chairs have been put in the studio. . . .”<sup>10</sup>



There were many letters from listeners. Some authors were unnamed. Others were from persons with Chinese names, and many were from westerners located in various Chinese cities and beyond. Three letters that appeared in the Bulletin for the first quarter of 1937 caught my eye. They were from listeners “down under” who were able to hear the station’s mediumwave signal, and two were names that I recognized as being among the top DXers of their day: A. Mervyn Branks of Invercargill, New Zealand, and G. D. (surely Graham) Hutchins of Victoria, Australia. A third listener, also from Invercargill, was Robert Thomas.

From Invercargill, New Zealand -

“I know this isn’t a very good report but I was so excited to hear you that I thought I would write and let you know. I work every night except Saturday, so that is the only opportunity I have of hearing you.

May your broadcasts bring much blessing and beneficial results.

A. Mervyn Branks.”

A lengthy bio of Mervyn Branks, with many pictures, appears on the website of the New Zealand Radio DX League at <http://www.radiodx.com/articles/dxer-profiles-a-to-e/merv-branks/> and is well worth reading. He would have been 31 years old in 1937.

Graham Hutchins was the key man in the formation of the Australian DX Club in the early thirties. He is best remembered worldwide as the long-time host of “Australian DXers Calling,” Radio Australia’s DX program. He died in the mid sixties.

---

<sup>10</sup>*Christian Broadcast Bulletin*, January-June 1939, p. 1.

From Victoria, Australia,

Tonight at 11.40 P.M. (our time) or 9.40 P.M. (your time) I tuned in your station on 840 K.C. 357 metres. Signal strength was rather poor owing to static being very loud. This was QSA 3 to 4. R 3 to 4. R 3 to 4 Fading slowly.

When I tuned in your station a church service or religious service was being broadcast. This concluded with hymn at 11.50 P.M. (our time) Q S A 4. R 4. After this the announcer spoke and the station either closed down, or faded right out. I think you closed as I listened but heard no more.

If my report is correct, I would appreciate verification of same and please tell me if it was a church service from A Shanghai church, or from your studio.

Thanking you in anticipation,  
G. D. Hutchins."

I did not know anything about the third writer, Robert Thomas, but on inquiry to the New Zealand Radio DX League I learned from Bill Marsh, Jr. that in 1938 Thomas was President of the Southland Branch of the New Zealand DX Club, the country's first DX club and predecessor to the present-day New Zealand Radio DX League. Robert Thomas had been a member of the NZDXC since 1933, the year the club was formed.

From Invercargill, New Zealand

"I received your welcome and interesting letter, also the "Broadcast Bulletin," for which I sincerely thank you. It certainly is a very good Christian work that your station is doing, and it is to be hoped that you will receive the cooperation of your listeners.

I expect that you will have received many letters from New Zealand, from listeners who, like myself, are keen to have a verification of reception of X M H D.

Since first hearing your signals, some weeks ago, I have often "tuned-in" to X M H D at 1.00 A.M. (NZ time), and listened to your service. I am only able to receive X M H D between 1.00 A.M. and 1.30 A.M., because a powerful Australian station on 830 K.C. (3 G1) spoils your signals, but at 1.00 A.M. this station closes down, and leaves me half an hour of listening to your station before you close down at 1.30

I have a little four valve receiver beside my bed, and I usually wake about 1.00 A.M., and put on my ear-phones and listen to anything that may interest me at that hour. It is surprising the amount of enjoyment one can receive from his radio in this way. My finding of your signals was one of the "thrills" I will always remember, and it still gives me great pleasure to listen to the old Story, coming to me from far away China.

I have told many of my friends to listen for X M H D, and, wrote a little piece for a paper, in which I explained how and when your station can be heard in N.Z.

If there is anything I can do to help your work, please let me know, and I will try to do what I can. When you go on to 1420 K.C., I will be able to hear you from 12.30 A.M. Of course, some nights I cannot hear your station on account of static, but this is not always troublesome.

Hoping to again hear from you,

P.S.:— I see by your "Bulletin," that you have Salvation Army officers sometimes assisting your sessions. I have many Salvation Army friends, and stations in NZ, who may know some of the Shanghai Salvationists. Perhaps you might sometime have the opportunity to ask Major Harris if there is anyone in NZ that he knows, and if there is, he may be able to speak from X M H D some evening after 9.30 P.M. (your time).

If a date was filed for any such broadcast, I would be pleased to let New Zealand listeners know the date and time, which could be given to me (by letter) in time to let them know.

Your letters take about four weeks to reach me.

Robert Thomas."



Although there were no other letters from DXers, a Major Archie Harris of the Salvation Army in Shanghai, which apparently had a program on XMHD, wrote in to report good reception, while Hermann Becker of Chihkiang, China, said that he was disappointed that he could not hear the station.

"I have your letter informing us that X M H D is on the air again, after the change over of the wave length. Yes, we shall take our place as usual this week, firstly on Wednesday night with the Chinese Officers and then Thursday night, our own half hour.

I listened today and also Saturday and Sunday afternoons and report good reception over the new wave length. You will be interested in knowing that I have heard from our Officers in Seoul, Korea, and they report splendid reception. They particularly enjoy the Army records and may I suggest that these be played a little more frequently. I am writing our Officers in Korea informing them of the change in the wave length.

I am pleased to be able to let you know that more records are on their way from London, and these we hope to let you have at an early date. With kind regards. God bless you."

Major Archie Harris

Salvation Army, Shanghai.

From Chihkiang, Hunan

"I received your Christian Broadcast Bulletin for August—September. Since then I have received a Phillips Radio Receiving Set No. 337 B. I can hear very well Berlin, London, Hongkong, Nanking about 470 meters Hankow 300 meters, but your station 375 meters I cannot hear. I think in the beginning of October we heard several times Chinese preaching, but never can hear Daily News Items English or anything else. We hear very well Hongkong at 1.30.

Have you an other length now? Or is your sender so weak that it cannot be heard so far away?

I would like to hear what you think about it, why I cannot "listen in." Should I be able to "tune in" I am willing to help a little in your work, which I heard from Leland Wang brings blessings to many.

Hermann Becker."

Krysko's book and these old copies of the Christian Broadcast Bulletin remind us of how interesting the intersection of radio and history can be.

~~~~~

Those wishing to read more about early radio in Shanghai will find that details on the early Chinese stations are few (at least in the English-language press). But there are some. On the internet look at (1) the already-mentioned "[Shanghai Radio Dial 1941](#)"; (2) "[Brief History of Broadcasting Stations in Shanghai](#)"; and (3) "[Radio History of Shanghai, China](#)." Also be sure to read (4) "[The Radio Scene in Shanghai](#)" by Dr. Adrian M. Peterson, Wavescan No. 337, June 10, 2001.

Among non-internet resources are these:

(1) Carlton Benson, *From Teahouse to Radio: Storytelling and the Commercialization of Culture in 1930s Shanghai*, Ph.D. diss. (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of Calif., Graduate Division, History, 1996), published by UMI Co., Ann Arbor, MI (UMI No. 9722865), esp. pgs. 78-118.

(2) Carlton Benson, "Back to Business as Usual: The Resurgence of Commercial Radio Broadcasting in *Gudao Shanghai*," in Christian Henriot & Wen-Hsin Yeh, eds., *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation* (New York, NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), pgs. 279-301.

(3) There are a few references to XMHD in S. Winifred Jacobson, *The Pearl and the Dragon: The Story of Gerhard and Alma Jacobson* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1997), pgs. 157-160, 176 (the author says that Gerhard, her father, served as XMHD's manager).

(4) And there are quite a few references to Shanghai stations (but not XMHD) in Bernard Wasserstein, *Secret War in Shanghai* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), all indexed under the various stations' "X" call letters.