

# CHINA AND VIETNAM: MISSION AND REVOLUTION

## I. Introduction

The following cluster of articles narrate how Communist revolutions in China and Vietnam brought important changes to the Seventh-day Adventist communities in those areas; they also analyze the significance of those changes for Adventism in Asia and other developing nations. The articles about China were written six to seven years after the victory of Chinese Communist forces in 1949. The account of how Adventists in Vietnam responded to the imminent capture of Saigon was written shortly after the fall of that city this year.

It is startling that the authors, all of them eyewitnesses to the events and conditions they describe, focus on the same issues. Consequently, while the articles provide interesting historical information, they also suggest how that information might affect our present understanding of Adventist mission.

For years, the articles about China have cir-

culated privately. This is the first time they have been printed. They came to SPECTRUM from Pastor S. J. Lee, one of the authors, in response to queries from editors about the accuracy of a secondary account of the Adventist church in Communist China submitted for publication to SPECTRUM.

Pastor Lee has been employed by the Seventh-day Adventist church for over 50 years. During that time, he served as treasurer and business manager of the Chinese Signs of the Times Publishing House and the Shanghai Sanitarium and Hospital, and also as assistant treasurer of the China Division. After the Communist victory in 1949, Pastor Lee became treasurer of the entire China Division until 1957 when he was permitted by the government to leave. He brought with him his account of the events following the Communist take-over.

Subsequently, he became president of the Malaya Mission of Seventh-day Adventists and

most recently, at an age when most workers would be enjoying retirement, he has been auditor (and sometimes acting treasurer and acting secretary) of the South China Island Union Mission, with headquarters in Taiwan.

The analysis of the events recounted in Pastor Lee's narrative was written by his friend and colleague, Pastor David Lin, when they were still working together in China. For those acquainted with Adventist mission in China, Pastor Lin has become an ideal of heroic faith.

The son of a Chinese government official, David Lin attended the Peking American School, the Adventist China Training Institute and then traveled to the United States to study at Pacific Union College, from which he received a B.A. in theology in 1941. He became active in the Voice of Prophecy, returning to China in 1946, just after World War II, to establish a radio ministry there.

When the American Adventists left in 1949, David Lin resisted their pleas to leave with them and remained to serve as secretary of the China Division during the time Pastor Lee was treasurer. Pastor Lee reported this year from Taiwan that

David is still in labor camp. His 15 years of hard labor were up last year and he was offered freedom on condition that he would give up his faith and would no longer preach

Jesus Christ. While in camp, he had managed to convert a few of his fellow prisoners and had baptized them. For this, he was sent to Shanghai for punishment. He refused to accept the conditions and as a result he is still held in camp.

Pastor Lee has expressed unequivocally his wish that both his own article and that of David Lin be published. Given the fact that Pastor Lee was with David Lin when he wrote his analysis and that Pastor Lee, from his posts in the Far East, has remained informed of David Lin's status, the editors believe that Pastor Lee is in the best position to decide Pastor Lin's desires concerning publication. In February of this year Pastor Lee repeated what he said before.

About the articles written by David Lin and me, you have my full permission to print them if you see fit to do so. . . . There is nothing in the articles written by David or by me that would jeopardize his or anyone else's safety now. . . .

I might tell you a little about how David wrote those articles and why he did it. He was not instigated by the Communist authorities to do so as some have accused him of. When he learned that I had applied for permission to leave China for Singapore, he urged me to be sure to warn our people (the leaders of our work) everywhere to avoid the

*The following is excerpted from a letter by S. J. Lee to Roy Branson, dated May 11, 1975: "The information you desire to know about China today can be very briefly stated. Ever since the cultural revolution in China, our contacts with our people in China have been cut off and we have had no contacts with them ever since.*

*From information that has trickled through, we have learned that there are no organized churches existing anywhere in the mainland; that only in larger cities are churches to be found with only a few elderly people and some children in attendance. The young people do not attend church services any longer. In some areas, worship is not permitted while elsewhere worship in the homes is allowed, but no dissemination of religion is permitted outside the home. This condition*

*differs in places. Some of our overseas Chinese friends who have returned to the mainland for visits all tell different stories; some have told of finding small groups meeting together on Sabbaths, while others reported that they cannot even find any of our former believers.*

*As far as organization is concerned, there just is no more. The Communists have been successful so far in carrying out their avowed determination to stamp out religion. . . . The fate of others than David Lin who have been imprisoned is still unknown. Our believers in Hong Kong have not been able to get any news from their relatives in the mainland about church activities. As a matter of fact, they do not dare to write about it. So this is all I can tell you about what goes on in China today."*

mistakes that had been made in China and that brought about so many problems and hard feelings by the nationals against the missionaries, and to be forewarned as to what would happen to the Church if and when the Communists took over other countries. . . . SPECTRUM is honored to print the reports of both Pastor Lin and Pastor Lee.

Similarities between conditions in China when it became Communist and those in South Vietnam when its government surrendered to Communist forces have been noted by none other than Pastor Lee himself. According to Dr. Bruce Branson's account, Pastor Lee made the comparison in a letter he wrote to Adventist clergy and members just before the fall of Saigon.

Interestingly, Dr. Branson, one of the very last Adventists to leave South Vietnam this year, is the grandson of W. H. Branson, the last missionary president of the China Division, and one of the last Americans to evacuate Shanghai in 1949. He is associate professor of surgery at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine and chief of surgical services at the University Medical Center. In the autumn of 1973, he spent three months as the initial faculty member sent by the Loma Linda School of Medicine to establish its affiliation with South Vietnamese medical schools and with the newly acquired Saigon Adventist Hospital.

The final article in the cluster discusses Adventism in Asia and was written by Gottfried Oosterwal, chairman of the Department of Mission at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. His comments are based on unique training and experience. Having received a doctor's degree in theology and anthropology from the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, Dr. Oosterwal for several years headed the Adventist mission in the Indonesian part of New Guinea. In addition to establishing churches and a mission school, he discovered several new tribes. In many scholarly anthropological journals and monographs, Dr. Oosterwal has analyzed the social and belief systems of these tribes.

His experience in the Pacific and Far East continued with his becoming dean of the School of Religion at Philippine Union College and visiting professor at the University of the Philippines. Since going to the seminary, Dr. Oosterwal has lectured and written extensively on the Seventh-day Adventist theology of mission. He has contributed frequently to SPECTRUM and written the book, *Mission Possible*. Dr. Oosterwal discusses the implication of the events in China and Vietnam after spending several months visiting Adventist institutions, clergy and lay members throughout the Far Eastern Division in the autumn of 1974.

The Editors