

Missionary From Cathay: David Lin's Own Story

A man who traces his ancestors back 2,500 years to the court of China's first emperor, becomes the best-known Adventist in China.

by David Lin

I WAS BORN IN 1917, THE SECOND SON OF LIN BAO Heng, a graduate of Columbia University. He was serving at the time as Chinese vice consul in Manila. In the years that followed, my father was transferred first to Vancouver, British Columbia; then to Shanghai, and then to Surabaya, Java. While in Surabaya, my brother Paul, and I attended a private school where we learned to speak Malayan and to walk barefoot like the Java children.

My mother, Pan Cheng Kun, had, in her childhood, attended a Christian school in Suzhou, Jiangsu. While there, an American missionary, Miss Pyle, taught her to pray. Although for many years she neglected to do so, the trials of family life drove my mother to her knees. Once, when my brother, Paul, and I were small, I developed a high fever and was rushed to the hospital. My worried mother

knelt in prayer and promised God that if he healed me, she would bring me up as a preacher. Before the doctor had a chance to diagnose my case, I miraculously recovered. True to her word, my mother, from that day on, drilled into my head that I belonged to God and that I would one day become a preacher.

When Chiang Kai Shek came to power in 1927, my father lost his official position under the now-defunct Peking regime. We moved back to Shanghai for a time, and then on to Peking. I attended sixth grade at the Peking American School where Miss Moore was principal. One day she asked her pupils to tell what they wanted to be when they grew up. When I told the class that I was going to be a preacher, they were shocked. After that, I was regarded as an "odd fellow."

On Sundays, my mother took us to the Methodist church where we made friends with Pastor and Mrs. Fred Pyke, whose children were my schoolmates. In 1932 my father and mother moved to Hankow where he worked for the Bureau of Internal Revenue. I was left to stay with the Pykes.

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Missionaries assisted the governments of the countries from which they came in formulating treaties that provided for extraterritorial rights. This accorded aliens free access to the hinterland under government protection. These privileges were often abused by missionaries, who pressured local magistrates to render verdicts in favor of Christian landlords in lawsuits over land tenure. In disputes between Christians and non-Christians, the latter always lost. Adding to this source of aggravation, unfair treaties provided that Chinese courts had no right to judge cases of felony committed by foreign civilians, who were legally responsible only to their respective consuls. Foreign communities in treaty ports likewise prescribed special privileges for aliens. One park in the British concession in Shanghai posted a sign, "No admittance to dogs and Chinese."

It takes little imagination to see why such bullying practices caused widespread resentment. This bore fruit in 1900 in the Boxer uprising of patriots, who aimed to drive out foreign aggressors and punish the corrupt Ching officials. Mounting animosity against imperialist aggression was also a cause of the bourgeois revolution led by Sun Yat-Sen, who finally succeeded in overthrowing the Ching Dynasty.

An understanding of the political background of missionary activities requires mention of the Taiping revolution, which agitated China from 1850 to 1864. This movement left a dent in the history of the nation and of the Chinese church. Hong Xiu-Quan, the leading genius of the Taiping revolution, studied the

Bible for himself, and created what he called the "Peaceful Heavenly Kingdom," which had as its aim the establishment of God's kingdom on earth through military conquest. A visiting missionary once asked his spokesman, "Do you keep the Sabbath?" "Yes," was the reply, "we observe the Sabbath. At midnight we offer prayer and praise. After peace is restored, we plan to enforce the Sabbath in earnest. Saturday is the Sabbath."

Missionaries first saw Hong Xiu-Quan as a wonderful convert, but later on despised him

as a radical ignoramus, theologically speaking. Their opinion of him influenced the imperialist forces, who were already dissatisfied with his program of dealing with foreign powers on equal terms. They could hardly count on him to honor the treaties they had concluded with the Ching Dynasty. Hence they decided to work

with the imperial government, which they knew would serve their purposes better, suppressing what they called the "Taiping Rebellion." No less significant a figure than Charles G. Gordon was enlisted to command the colonial forces to fight with the Ching army in its assault against Nanjing, the capital of the Peaceful Heavenly Kingdom. Thus the first grand attempt by a Chinese convert to Christianize his country by force of arms was defeated before it could be tested on a nationwide scale.

Years of missionary expansion also produced rapid gains made by colonial forces. Due to imperialist aggression, China had deteriorated into a semifederal, semicolonial coun-

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try. China's economy was strangled by alien powers that engendered a "comprador class" in the church as well as in trade circles. Instead of Christian fellowship, a master-and-lackey relationship arose between missionary and convert. Plans for gospel work were laid by missionaries, who put little stock in what Chinese workers had to say. The guiding policy was, "He who pays the money decides how the work should be done." Mission funds coming from abroad gave the impression that an abundance of money was available, and the offerings of Chinese converts made little difference. Still, they gave their "widow's mite," not aware that one day God would remove the extra burden of the missionaries' salaries, and provide for the creating of a truly self-reliant indigenous church in China.

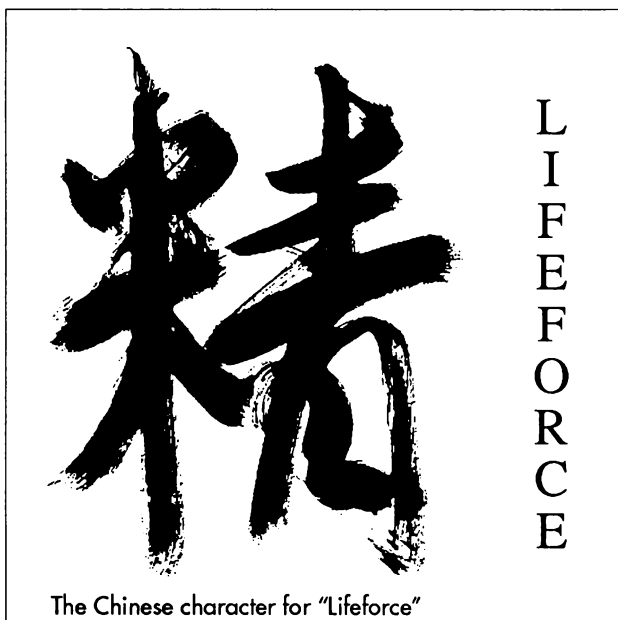
Adventist missionaries first landed in China in 1902, when it was shackled by a number of treaties forcibly imposed on it by foreign imperialists. Adventist pioneers in China worked under the disadvantage of being unfamiliar with a political and economic system for which they were not responsible. They had to learn a new language and strange cus-

toms. Just learning to reach the soul of the people and break down the wall of prejudice was a great challenge. Some missionaries resorted to offering material benefits to draw an audience. But the bait attracted only "rice Christians." Some wise missionaries lifted up Christ crucified, but the imperialist curtain obscured his image. So genuine conversions were few.

There was no Methodist church in Hankow, so my mother began visiting different churches in the city. One day an Adventist missionary came by, selling the Chinese *Signs of the Times*. My father bought a subscription and talked with the missionary for some time. Soon thereafter, a Bible worker, Miss Abbie Dunn, invited my mother to attend the Hankow Adventist church. Mother accepted the invitation and was impressed to find Adventist believers reciting the Ten Commandments.

This made her recall an experience she had had some years earlier. Her brother-in-law, a lawyer, had questioned her regarding the rules of the Christian faith. When she said that Christians lived by the Ten Commandments, he asked her, "Which ten?" She tried her best to recall them, but all she could remember and repeat were nine precepts. Her brother-in-law smiled and remarked, "You've been a Christian for 10 years, and you can't even recite the Decalogue correctly." Mother was chagrined. The Adventist church's emphasis on the Ten Commandments convinced her that they taught the truth.

During summer vacation, I visited my parents in Hankow. Mother explained the Sabbath doctrine to me. However, when I returned to Peking, the Pykes learned of my new belief and tried their best to dissuade me. Meanwhile, Abbie Dunn wrote to another Bible worker in Peking, Lucy Andrus, who came to my school one day, introduced herself, and invited me to study the Bible with her. Thus began my internal battle: Would I or would I not keep the seventh-day Sabbath? Finally, in 1934, when my mother came back to



The Chinese character for "Lifeforce"

Peking, I decided to attend the Adventist church with her.

Shortly after I graduated from high school in 1935, my brother, Paul, was killed in a motorcycle accident, leaving me the only child in our family. Relatives tried to dissuade me from studying for the ministry, pointing out that preachers in China are poorly paid, and I would need a more lucrative vocation if I planned to bear the family's financial burdens in the future.

But the Lord arranged for me to attend an Adventist junior college, the China Training Institute in Chiaotouzhen. There I majored in Bible and was the only ministerial student to pay my own tuition. All my ministerial classmates were beneficiaries of a scholarship set up to encourage young people to train for the ministry. (Any student who could afford to pay tuition took pre-med, business, or the teaching course. Only those who could not afford an education applied for the ministerial scholarship.) In this respect, I was again an "odd fellow."

Then in 1937 came the Sino-Japanese war, and the school closed down. I went to Hong Kong. Funds from my parents subsequently enabled me to obtain passage to Pacific Union College, where I continued to study for the ministry. During the dreary war years, the northwestern city of Lanzhou where my parents were staying was badly hit in an air raid. All buildings around the house where my parents stayed were razed, but their home remained standing amid the rubble, a silent witness to God's care for his own.

To pay my way through college I held numerous jobs, from canvassing in Chinatown and working in the college cafeteria, machine shop, and bindery, to cutting cord wood in the forest. When I graduated in 1941, I continued my studies at the Adventist Theological Seminary in Takoma Park. While there I spent my spare time canvassing. In the winter I worked in Danville, Virginia, as a colporteur.

I soon began working on my Master's thesis. During this time I was called to teach Chinese at Pacific Union College, then spent a year as a colporteur in Honolulu. There, I gave Bible studies to a Japanese family and won them to the Sabbath truth. Next, I was called to conduct the Chinese Bible Correspondence School at the Voice of Prophecy. Since the Voice of Prophecy lacked Chinese type-characters, I printed the lessons by hand and duplicated them. I returned to Shanghai with a group of missionaries in December 1946, to work with Milton Lee in the radio department of the China Division.

In 1947, when foreign missionaries returned to China and the China Division held its first constituency meeting, a Chinese worker presented a formal request to the division president to turn over the division administration to Chinese workers. The plan was rejected. In a large meeting, the American division president stated that Chinese Adventists were spiritually immature and financially unable to assume the burdens of church leadership.

Just as that first serious attempt of Chinese workers to run their own church was squelched, the Kuomintang forces were facing

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disaster on the battlefield. The victorious Red Army was making speedy progress toward Shanghai.

By 1948, the liberation of Shanghai was imminent. Most of our missionaries had moved to Hong Kong, where a provisional China Division headquarters was set up. The radio department moved to Canton, where it functioned for six months; then it, too, moved to Hong Kong. I was appointed editor of the Hong Kong edition of *Signs of the Times*. In December 1949, the provisional office of the China Division turned over all duties to the Chinese staff in Shanghai, and I returned there as division secretary.

In 1950, shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, a team of Christian workers headed by Y. T. Wu and L. M. Liu called on the new government to demand implementation of the "Common Programme," which guaranteed religious freedom to all churches. They requested that the government investigate cases of violation and post notices on all churches to assure the people of their freedom to worship.

Premier Chou En-Lai received this group of Christian workers, and conducted three extended talks with them concerning the

government's policy on religious liberty. He explained that the country had just been through a tremendous shake-up, and might be likened to a patient recovering from a major operation. Church closure and Bible confiscation were just normal "side effects" that could be remedied. He also pointed out that simply posting public notices would not effectively solve the problem. Chinese Christians must examine themselves to discover the cause of the animosity of the masses against Christianity. For more than a century Christianity had been looked upon as an exotic foreign religion. The people had painful memories of atrocities perpetrated by imperialist forces working hand-in-glove with "Christian" missionaries.

The group of Christian workers got the point. They wrote the "Declaration for Reformation Through Self-administration, Self-support and Self-propagation." This document clarified the issue confronting the Chinese churches and called on all Christians who loved their country to stand on the right side. Thus, the program popularly known as the "Three-Self" Patriotic Movement was inaugurated. It set out to change the basic foreign essence of the Christian cause in China so that the masses would no longer look upon Christianity as an unwelcome intruder. Premier Chou En-Lai's proposal was not a new idea. Conditions were ripe for converting a foreign proselyting agency into a truly Chinese religious cause, so that the masses might recognize the change and lend their support.

Then, in June 1950, the Korean War broke out. As American GIs, fighting under the United Nations flag, drove into North Korea, Chinese volunteer troops marched across the border to push them back. Meanwhile, the American seventh fleet was ordered to patrol the Taiwan Straits. The fleet was to block any attempt by the Red Army to liberate Taiwan. China and the United States were at war.



Since the Adventist mission was an American organization, its assets were frozen in December 1950. In time the organized Adventist Church disintegrated. Politically active elements among our workers got the upper hand, and in December 1951 the division officers were replaced.

For the next several years, a number of us who had been discharged got together to make slide rules for a living. At the same time, we began translating the *Desire of Ages*. Eventually, we completed translation of the entire Conflict of the Ages series. These books were micrographed and distributed by a group of young people from the Shanghai Seventh-day Adventist church.

In April of 1958, I was arrested and charged with being a counter-revolutionary, and given a 15-year sentence. I was sent to a water conservancy project where I pushed wheelbarrows, operated a power winch, and served successively as an x-ray technician, power station switch operator, and tractor electrician on a state farm. However, during my entire imprisonment, I received humane treatment. At times, I could even arrange my work so as to keep the Sabbath fairly well. My children were allowed to visit me several times. On one of these occasions, I had the privilege of baptizing my son, Roger, in a moat.

During the "Cultural Revolution" my whole nation went berserk. The rumpus started with the organizing of young people into the "Red Guard" to protect Chairman Mao from "bourgeois elements." It was said that these elements threatened to undermine our socialist system. Religious people naturally became targets of

attack. Our oldest daughter, Flora, had been an annoyance to her school because of her Sabbath "truancy," so our home was the first to be attacked when the Red Guards launched a city-wide onslaught on the bourgeoisie. Our home was ransacked six times through those tempestuous months. The Red Guards made it a point to come with their war drums on the Sabbath. All my books were piled in our alley and burned.

At one point, a voice told my mother, then 72, to go stay with her aunt in Tientsin. She stayed in Tientsin long enough to escape the most dangerous months. During the time she

was away, my wife, Clara, was beaten, had her hair cropped, and was forced to stand in the street as a public spectacle. She faltered under the strain and for a time lost her sense of God's presence, but she rallied, repented, and served the Lord faithfully thereafter.

During my absence, my wife managed, with God's

help, to nurture each of our five children in the way of the Lord. When our youngest daughter, Angelina, was quizzed by a panel of grade-school teachers, they asked her, "Who taught you to keep the Sabbath?"

"The Bible," she answered.

"Do you mean that you will read only the Bible, and not Karl Marx?" was the next question.

"No," Angelina replied, "I read the Bible and also Karl Marx, and I will obey what is true."

We can only believe that the Holy Spirit gave her wisdom to answer as she did. If her mother had not taught her to love the Lord and his Sabbath, the Holy Spirit could not have helped her as fully in that crucial hour.

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However, our children's lives were not without difficulty. For a time, three of them succumbed to political pressure and signed up for the rustication program that was implemented in 1969. Eva, Flora, and Roger answered Chairman Mao's call for unschooled youth to go "up to the hills and down to the countryside." They went together to the hills of Gweizhou. Life was difficult. Only Roger, who could cut wood in the forests, made a fair living. He helped his sisters survive through those eight dreary years. Of course, God did not forsake any of them.

When Eva returned, she found work in a factory, where she determined to faithfully observe the Sabbath. She was forced to relinquish the bonus paid to workers who put in full hours, and this drastically reduced her paycheck. However, the management saw that she was truly conscientious, and arranged to allow her to finish her weekly quota in five days if she could. The Lord gave her hands speed and improved her productivity until she became the only worker paid a full bonus for working a five-day week.

During these trying years, my family would have suffered far more had it not been for God's protection through a rich aunt. When she left China, she entrusted her funds to my mother, asking that they be used to assist needy friends and relatives. When this aunt later died in the United States, her funds—which included not only a savings account but also several gold bars and some silver coins deposited in a bank vault—remained in my mother's custody. When the notorious "Gang of Four" came to power and ransacked the banks, the crypt containing the aunt's gold and silver was left intact. After the "Gang" lost power and we were free to open the vault, bank clerks expressed surprise at the miraculous preservation of this one crypt.

When my term of imprisonment ended, I was transferred from the state farm to a mining

establishment in Huainan, Anhui, to translate technical literature. There I worked for five years, received regular wages, and enjoyed Sabbath privileges. Finally, on March 28, 1991, I was fully exonerated. Today, in retirement, I receive a pension and live in Shanghai, serving as one of the pastors in Mu En Tang.

When the People's Liberation Army defeated the Chiang Kai-Shek forces in the bloody battle along the Huai River and then crossed the Yangtze River to liberate the South, some Christians prayed that God would drown the hated Communists. But when the Communists came to power in 1949, they lost no time cleaning up the brothels, gambling casinos, and opium traffic. Stringent measures were taken to stop the white slave traffic.

Among moral values, God regards especially highly filial obedience. The "first commandment with promise" requires us to honor our parents. Among ancient peoples of the world, China is the only one with a book called *Xiao Jing*, whose contents are devoted to teachings on filial piety. Its folklore boasts 24 anecdotes to be taught to the younger generation on the meritorious acts of sons and daughters who honored their parents.

China enjoys a rich heritage. I believe God has preserved this country for a purpose. Although China did not enjoy the privilege of direct revelation as did the Jewish people, it was not wholly ignorant of saving truths. The name *Shang Di*, the Chinese term for God, corresponds to the Hebrew *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. Chinese linguists affirm that the Cantonese dialect has preserved the ancient pronunciation of Chinese characters most accurately. Now the Cantonese pronounce the word for *God* as "Sheong Dai," which is closer to *El Shaddai* than the Mandarin vocalization given above.

China does not claim to be a paragon of morality. It is afflicted with its share of social ills and moral decay. But when compared with other nations, and despite its ignorance of Holy Scripture, the annals of Chinese history do not

record a single instance of the visitation of God's wrath on a Chinese city for moral depravity. In ancient Chinese art and sculpture one does not encounter pornography, such as was discovered in Near and Middle East excavations.

Recently, the government launched a nation-wide "Clean Sweep" campaign against obscene literature, films, and videotapes, raiding the secret hide-outs where these things were produced. Results were gratifying. Even if these measures may not be thoroughgoing, such an ethical stance in itself puts the Chinese ruling party on a higher moral plane than professedly "Christian" nations that collect taxes from licensing brothels and casinos.

Chinese churches made a fortunate decision indeed when they broke their ties with foreign missionary societies and thus "quarantined" themselves from Western decadence. However, the full significance of the severing of their ties with foreign missionary boards is not limited to this alone. This self-reliance has contributed to spiritual maturity. Chinese Christians have learned to look to Christ instead of to men for power to finish the gospel commission.

Many people outside China think that the Three-Self Committee is an institution subsidiary to the government. This is not true. It is a civilian organization that receives no money from the government, but operates on funds derived from church offerings and rent on church property. Mu En Tang, the church in Shanghai where Adventist members worship, is supported entirely by their offerings. Sermons in the Adventist church are not cen-

sored, and no government cadre sits in the committee meetings. The minutes are not submitted to the Bureau of Religious Affairs or the police for inspection. Adventists are free to preach all the cardinal doctrines of their faith. The same is true of the congregation that meets on Sundays in the same building.

The Chinese Christian Council is a nationwide organization in charge of the religious activities of all churches. Denominational names have been discontinued, but their different beliefs and practices remain and are respected. The Shanghai Christian Council, with the Three-Self Committee, arranged for Adventist believers to worship in the centrally located Mu En Tang instead of in separate homes. They worked out an agreement

whereby Adventist services are conducted by Adventist pastors paid from Adventist tithe, and their freewill offerings go into a common pool for operating expenses. The first Sabbath service was held on February 18, 1989, and since then four baptismal services have netted 360 converts.

According to the present arrangement, the Seventh-day Adventists in Mu En Tang are recognized as Adventist believers (*xin tu*), not as the Seventh-day Adventist Church (*hui*). (This last name would indicate the existence of a distinct ecclesiastical organization, which in fact does not exist. The China Division of Seventh-day Adventists, with its union and local missions, ceased to exist in 1958.)

A number of Chinese Adventists still refuse to have anything to do with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Some complain that it smacks of a union of church and state. They

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refer to Ellen White's statement entitled "Our Attitude in Regard to Politics" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 391). But we note that these words were written in 1899 to teachers and managers in our schools in America, where party politics created a situation of rivalry quite different from what exists in China today. Ellen White's words in *Testimonies*, Volume 1 are more applicable here:

Many Sabbathkeepers are not right before God in their political views. They are not in harmony with God's word or in union with the body of Sabbathkeeping believers. Their views

do not accord with the principles of our faith. . . . These brethren cannot receive the approval of God while they lack sympathy for the oppressed colored race and are at variance with the pure, republican principles of our Government (pp. 533, 534).

Many forms of church-state relations have existed and continue to exist in different countries. We cannot fully fathom the purposes of God. But as I review the past hundred years and the history of China, Christianity, and the Adventist Church, I can only exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"