

Law, Keem or Liu Jian (1867–1919)

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Law Keem (Liu Jian) was a pioneer medical missionary in southern China and the first Adventist Chinese national to return to serve in his homeland.

Early Life in America

Liu Jian (, also known as Law Keem or Charlie Keem) was born on May 19, 1867, in Xinhui (Sunwui), Guangdong, China.² In 1882, he arrived in the United States seeking an education. He and his father settled in Mariposa, California, where his father eventually became wealthy in the merchandise

business.³ Law Keem began to work for the Hutchins, a Christian family and started learning English from the Bible. When his family discovered his interest in Christianity, they tried to remove him from all Christian influences. Determined to learn English, Law arranged to go to school in Merced, California. There he attended Adventist meetings held by Frank T. Lamb and Lucius H. Church, and was baptized. He spent some time with the Lucius Church family in Fresno and then attended Healdsburg College. There he became acquainted with Ellen White, and she encouraged him to study medicine at the California Medical College in San Francisco, where he graduated in 1900.⁴ One San Francisco paper wrote that he was the star of the commencement exercises⁵

Dr. Law returned to Fresno and began a medical practice there, operating a private sanitarium between 1901 and 1904. He had apparently committed himself to return to China as early as 1902.⁶ Awaiting his appointment to China, he studied at the Post Graduate Medical School and Hospital in Chicago, where he married Edith Mary



Law Keem, c. 1906

From *Adventism in China Digital Image Repository*. Accessed September 23, 2020. www.adventisminchina.org.

Miller (born August 12, 1877, in Battle Creek, Michigan) on September 13, 1904. They had known each other at Healdsburg College and had worked together in Fresno. It is reported that Edith asked Ellen White about her relationship with Dr. Law, and White replied that Dr. Law was a good human being and a wonderful professional and that Edith should accept his friendship.⁷ Because they could not marry in California due to anti-miscegenation laws, their marriage was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, by A. T. Jones. The Associated Press picked up the news of their marriage and spread it nationally. One small Michigan paper published an article on the marriage headlined, "Weds a Chink."⁸ A report from Chicago quoted Edith as saying, "I married Dr. Keem because I love him and because I know he loves me. At first, during our courtship, I felt twinges of race prejudice, but this soon passed away. If a man and woman love they should marry. Prejudices of race or color ought not to stand in the way of the supreme passion that guides all our lives." Dr. Law was quoted as saying, "My wife and I talked over the matter of our racial differences during our courtship. We came to the conclusion that we loved each other, and that, we felt, was superior to every objection."⁹

Mission Service in China

While waiting to go to China, the Laws worked together to start a Chinese mission in San Francisco.¹⁰ Though the General Conference did not have the funds in place to provide for the Laws in China, they decided to send them in faith that the funds would be provided. The Laws departed from San Francisco and arrived in Hong Kong on July 26, 1905. Shortly afterward, the Vermont Conference voted to support a missionary in China. The General Conference accepted the funds for the Laws, who became the fifth Adventist missionary family to work in China.¹¹ Dr. Law was also the first Chinese national to return as Adventist medical missionary. After a few weeks in Hong Kong and then Guangzhou (then known as Canton), Dr. Law visited his home village where old friends and relatives crowded around to see him.¹²

The Laws spent a year and a half in Guangzhou with E. H. Wilbur and J. N. Anderson. Both of the Laws studied Cantonese.¹³ Early in 1907, the Laws went to Foshan (then known as Fat Shan) to begin pioneer work. While traveling from Hong Kong to Fat Shan, Dr. Law chanced to meet Dr. Wu Tingfang (, 1842-1922), the former Chinese ambassador to the United States. In their conversation, Wu was critical of the medicines given by the medical profession and testified to Dr. Law of the value of a vegetarian diet. Dr. Law assured him that they were in agreement, as he rarely gave medicine and encouraged vegetarianism. Wu was impressed, and they agreed to remain in contact with each other.¹⁴ Some years later, Dr. Wu, then serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the South West China "Constitutional Government", wrote to his connections in the Kwangsi (Guangxi), recommending Dr. Law's medical work and suggesting that he be given help in establishing a medical institution in Nanning.¹⁵ Dr. Wu, a strict vegetarian, had visited some Adventist sanitariums in the United States and had been greatly pleased with their methods of treating the sick.¹⁶ His contact with Dr. Kellogg and Adventist ideas of healthy living were part of the reason he was interested in starting a similar work in China.¹⁷ Wu supported the Chinese Revolution in 1911 and held high posts in the Republican Administration.

At Fat Shan, Dr. Law opened a dispensary and a chapel in a central part of town.¹⁸ At some point, he was ordained, and it was in this capacity that he baptized thirty believers in Foshan before returning to America on furlough in 1912. Among those baptized were Dr. Wong Shiu Leung and his brother, who later became an ordained pastor. Dr. Wong Shui Leung then took Dr. Law's place as the director of the dispensary in Fat Shan.¹⁹ Upon his return to China in 1913, Dr. Law was posted to Wuzhou (then known as Wuchow). He began work in Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi province, in 1914. He was eventually joined there by H. B. Parker and P. V. Thomas and his wife. Dr. Law's missionary work in Nanning was successful, and he opened a dispensary next to the mission's chapel. Like other Adventist medical establishments, it was known in Chinese as "The Little Eden Dispensary." The dispensary was a financial success, and the missionary work developed a good reputation. Preparations were underway to build a larger dispensary. James Schee of College View, Nebraska, had donated a large sum for the building of a hospital in Shanghai. That hospital could not be built, so \$1200 in gold was to be used to enlarge and equip the dispensary in Nanning. Dr. Law helped raise an additional \$2200 in Nanning for the construction. On May 2, 1919, Dr. Law became ill. After only four days of illness, he died on May 5, 1919. Reports stated that his death was the result of blood-poisoning. Funeral services were conducted by Rev. E. T. Loader, associated with the Church Missionary Society, and Mr. Robert S. Burris of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.²⁰ The dispensary in Nanning eventually developed into the Nanning Seventh-day Adventist Hospital. At the end of the Sino-Japanese War, Nanning Hospital, which was occupied by the Japanese military, was returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To honor the selfless sacrifice of the pioneer, a chapel was erected in 1945 and named Law Keem Memorial Chapel.²¹ After 1951, the hospital was taken over by the People's Republic government and it became the First People's Hospital of Nanning. A 2014 commemorative booklet called Dr. Law's dispensary "The beginning of modern medical services in the city of Nanning, Guangxi."²²

After Law Keem's death, Edith and her family remained in China until November 22, 1919. The family then returned to Fresno. Edith eventually moved to St. Helena, California. She died at the age of 102 in Angwin, California on September 11, 1979.²³

There were five children in the family: Ivalyn Lethe Biloff (1906-1983), Irma Offenback (1908-2005), Wilma Edith Dorward (1910-2007), Russell Eugene Law (1912-1993), and Wilton Keene Law (1915-2014).²⁴

Legacy

Even though his 14 years of mission service were cut short by illness that costed his life, Law Keem is fondly remembered by the people of Southern China where he established two hospitals, one in Foshan and one in Nanning. In addition to his medical service, many also remembered him for his untiring pastoral ministry in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi.

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Centennial Commemoration 1914-2014 of The First People's Hospital of Nanning in Chinese. Published in 2014 by The First People's Hospital of Nanning, Guangxi, China. Selected extracts translated by Bruce W. Lo, 2019.

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"Died: Edith M. Law..." *ARH*, October 25, 1979.

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"Weds a Chink." *Pinkney Dispatch*, September 22, 1904. Accessed March 1, 2019, <http://pinckneylocalhistory.org/Dispatch/1904-09-22.pdf>.

"While waiting for..." *ARH*, January 5, 1905.

"Young Chinese Wins Degree as a Physician." *San Francisco Call*, May 17, 1900.

NOTES

1. In Chinese, the family (last) name always comes first. For that reason, he was known as Law Keem to the people of that time, because his family name is Law. Law Keem was the romanization of his name in the Cantonese dialect, as his family came from Guangdong. To the people of today, he will be known by his pinyin name: Liu Jian because "pinyin" is now the accepted International standard.

2. P. V. Thomas, "Pastor Law Keem, M. D.," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, June 15–July 1, 1919, 10–11.

3. Chicago Inter-Ocean, "Married a Chinese," *Hawaiian Star*, October 17, 1904, 7.
4. Bruce Lo, Interview with Rebecca O'Hare, January 26, 2016.
5. "Young Chinese Wins Degree as a Physician," *San Francisco Call*, May 17, 1900, 5.
6. Ellen G. White, Manuscripts and Letters, Ms126-1902.
7. Bruce Lo, Interview with Rebecca O'Hare, January 26, 2016.
8. *Pinkney Dispatch*, September 22, 1904, 3, accessed March 1, 2019, <http://pinckneylocalhistory.org/Dispatch/1904-09-22.pdf>. At least 21 other newspapers picked up the story including papers in Boston, Philadelphia, Toledo, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, San Jose, Salt Lake City, Honolulu, and San Francisco.
9. Chicago Inter-Ocean, "Married a Chinese."
10. "While waiting for...," *ARH*, January 5, 1905, 24.
11. F. M. Dana, "Vermont's Aid to China," *ARH*, October 19, 1905, 16. The other four families were: Jacob and Emma Anderson, Edwin and Edith Wilbur, Harry and Maude Miller, and Arthur and Bertha Selmon.
12. Law Keem, M.D., "China," *ARH*, October 26, 1905, 16-17.
13. Law Keem, M.D., "China," *ARH*, February 22, 1906, 15.
14. Law Keem, M.D., "Fat Shan, China," *ARH*, June 6, 1907, 15-16.
15. A. L. Ham, "Early Days in Kwangsi," *China Division Reporter*, November 1, 1940, 5-6.
16. J. H. Kellogg, "Minister Wu Ting-fang on the Simple Diet," *Good Health*, June 1906; W. A. Ruble M. D. "General Conference Medical Department Report," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 8, 1918, 106.
17. A. L. Ham, "Early Days in Kwangsi."
18. E. H. Gates, "China," *ARH*, July 25, 1907, 18-19.
19. "Wife of Dr. Wong Shiu Leung..." [with photo] *Asiatic Division Outlook*, February 1 and 15, 1922, 10.
20. Charles L. Boynton, ed. *Directory of Protestant Missions in China*, (Shanghai and Peking: Kwang Hsueh Publishing House. 1919, 197.

21. Gilbert Shim, "Biography of Loh Big Wah, MD," in *Chinese SDA History*, Samuel Young, Editor, Hong Kong: Chinese Union Mission, 2002, Volume 2, 551-553.
 22. *Centennial Commemoration 1914-2014 of The First People's Hospital of Nanning*, in Chinese, published 2014 by The First People's Hospital of Nanning, Guangxi, China. Selected extracts translated by Bruce W. Lo 2019
 23. "Died: Edith M. Law...," *ARH*, October 25, 1979, 32.
 24. Daniel Mitchel, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://records.myheritagelibraryedition.com/research/record-1-447813071-2-346/edith-mary-law-born-miller-in-myheritage-family-trees>.
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