

Kuniya, Hiizu

(Hide) (1872–1962)

TADASHI INO

Tadashi Ino, Ph.D., was born in Tokyo, Japan. After working for a company as an engineer, he became a pastor and also served as a teacher and a chaplain. Currently, he works as a translator in the office of the Japan Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The title of his doctoral dissertation is "Paul's Use of Canonical and Noncanonical Wisdom Literature in Romans and the Corinthian Letters."

Hiizu (Hide) Kuniya was one of the earliest Japanese Seventh-day Adventist ministers.

Early Life

Hiizu Kuniya was born on October 10, 1872, in Shakuson-mura, Japan, as the third son of Hachizaemon in a farm family.¹ He worked in agriculture until he was eighteen years old. Then he went to Tokyo and became a student of Mokichi Fujita.² When he became twenty years old, he was called up for military service.

When he was a military treasurer, he had a conflict about death. Because of the kind coaching of a certain Christian, he converted to the Baptist faith. He was baptized on December 31, 1896, in China.³

In 1897 he returned to Japan and met an intern military medical doctor, Mokutarou Kawasaki. They contracted an intimate friendship with each other. Kawasaki was also a Christian. Kawasaki attended English Bible studies by William Calhoun Grainger, who was the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Japan. Kawasaki invited Kuniya to the Bible study. Kuniya was deeply attracted by the godly character of Pastor Grainger, and through the translation of Teruhiko H. Okohira, who was one of the earliest Japanese Seventh-day Adventists, he fervently studied the Scriptures. He was convinced that the Adventist message was the biblical truth and that Jesus Christ was coming soon. With the other three men, including Mokuataoru Kawasaki, he was baptized by Pastor Grainger in 1897 or 1899, probably in March or April, in the Meguro River, in the suburbs of



Hiizu (Hide) Kuniya.

Photo courtesy of Japan Union Conference.

Tokyo.⁴ This was the first official baptism in Japan.⁵

Missionary Work for Japan and Korea

When the Grainger family moved to a new house in Shiba-ku Shibakouen, after cleaning the whole house, T. H. Okohira and Kuniya hung out a sign, “Shiba Waei Seisho Gakko” (“Shiba Japanese-English Bible School”) and knelt down and asked for the blessing of God. This is the first Seventh-day Adventist educational institute in Japan.

One of the last words by Pastor Grainger, who passed away on October 31, 1899, always got Kuniya going.⁶ It was “Do you love your fellow men?” He immediately responded, “Yes, I do indeed.”⁷

After his former teacher’s death, Kuniya preached on the street, took up the colporteur work, and helped with the editorial work of Teruhiko H. Okohira for *Owari no Fukuin* (“The Gospel for the Last Days”),⁸ the first Seventh-day Adventist Japanese language periodical, and with Kawasaki, he worked for medical evangelism, which was emphasized by Pastor Grainger.⁹

In the summer of 1900, Kuniya married Tsugiko Kumashiro, who was the younger sister of the medical doctor, Kiku Kumashiro. Kumashiro and Kawasashi opened the small “Kobe Sanitarium,” which Kuniya supported, for poor Japanese people in Kobe.¹⁰ This sanitarium developed and became an important presence for the Adventist ministry in Japan.¹¹ Under the supervision of Elder Fielder, the Seventh-day Adventist Kobe Church was organized in 1904. Kuniya became elder of that church. A deacon was Kawasaki, and a deaconess was Kiku Kumashiro.¹² According to Kuniya, although the establishment of the church had growing pains, for a while it was the center of the Japanese missionary work.¹³

Kuniya accommodated requests from several places in his country and preached the Adventist messages there.¹⁴ In addition, in 1904, in Kobe, Kuniya met two Korean Christians. He told them about the seventh-day Sabbath, and they accepted the biblical truth and were baptized. This became the first Adventist work for Korean people. Kuniya went to Korea and engaged in the missionary work there.¹⁵ In 1907, with Okohira, he was ordained as a minister and became the first Seventh-day Adventist Japanese official minister.¹⁶

In 1909 Kuniya attended the General Conference Session and reported about his ministry and experience in Japan.¹⁷ After that the paper of Kawasaki, that was present there, about the medical missionary work in Japan, was read by Elder F. W. Field, who was superintendent of the Japan Mission.¹⁸

Like the apostle Paul, Kuniya had a conviction that it was his mission to proclaim the gospel in unreached places. While doing colporteur work, he went to many cities of his country, such as Toyohashi, Shingu, Wakayama, Amagasaki, Nagoya, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Saga, Kurume, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Miyakonojou, Kagoshima, Kanazawa, and Aizuwakamatsu and served to establish churches.¹⁹ He also went to Hokkaido to check out the prospects of evangelism.²⁰

His missionary work in Kagoshima is worthy of special mention.²¹ In the city, which was Okohira's hometown, he continued in the colporteur work and preached under tents and in halls for five years. He even transferred his legal domicile to the city. The Seventh-day Adventist Kagoshima Church was organized on June 26, 1911.²²

In 1918 Kuniya was called by B. P. Hoffman, superintendent of the Japan Mission, to drive forward the missionary work in Tokyo, the capital of Japan.²³ In the city of two million people, Kuniya was planning to visit every home.²⁴ As a result of the work by Kuniya, Choukichi Kamihira, and Elder Yasunosuke Watanabe, baptisms were often held in the Tamagawa River, and the Seventh-day Adventist Tokyo Church developed in a significant way.²⁵

Kuniya often visited the grave of Pastor Grainger. By doing so, he never forgot "the first love."²⁶ "The first love" never got weakened, even at the time of persecution. On September 20, 1943, the police arrested 42 Japanese Seventh-day Adventists, including Kuniya.²⁷ He was incarcerated until the next February, when it was discovered he had a kidney disease and a cardiac disease and was placed in Jinbouchou Hospital. Fortunately, he recovered from his health ailments. Although some other Adventists served a much longer term in prison, Kuniya was exempted from prosecution and went free in October.²⁸ After the war was over, he immediately began visiting scattered believers and seekers in local regions to encourage them.²⁹

Demise and Legacy

After the days of the consistent fervent missionary life, he died on July 26, 1962.³⁰ At his funeral Elder P. H. Eldridge began his special sermon with the words, "One of our heroes of faith is fallen."³¹ Pastor Hiizu Kuniya faithfully served God as one of the pioneers, not only of direct evangelism but also of medical ministry in Japan. His contribution to Korean mission is never forgotten also. He was a minister, colporteur, editor, mission director, and faithful follower of his former teacher, Pastor Grainger, and an intimate friend of Mokutarou Kawasaki. What he has done became a solid foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Japan.

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NOTES

1. Tsumoru Kajiyama, *Shimeini Moete: Nihon Sebunsudeadobenchisuto Kyoukaishi* (The History of Japanese Seventh-day Adventist Church) (Yokohama, Kanagawa, Japan: Fukuinsha, 1982), 572.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Hiizu Kuniya (narrator) and Jiichi Yamamoto (editor), *Arano wo Hiraku Hito* (Tokyo, Japan: "Arano wo Hiraku Hito" Kankoukai, 1954), 34; Kajiyama, 28.
5. For the baptism prior to Kuniya's one, see Hidesaburou Machida, "Keizokuteki Soshikitekina Inori no Hitsuyousei," *Adobenchisuto Raifu* 103, no. 6 (June 2017): 6. See also, Kajiyama, 675.
6. Kuniya, 32.
7. Ibid., 28, 29.
8. This title was designed by Kuniya; Kuniya, 26. According to Kuniya, he was able to delight Pastor Grainger with it.

9. W. C. Grainger, "Japan," *The Missionary Magazine*, May 1899, 218; Kuniya, 34-37; Kajiyama, 33, 34; Hidesaburou Machida, "Nihon no Adobenchisuto Kyoukai niokeru Kikan no Yakuwari to sono Rekishi : 2 Ijidendou no Hataraki," *Adobenchisuto Raifu* 101, no. 7 (July 2015): 18.
10. Kuniya, 56-58; Machida, 19, 20; Kajiyama, 52.
11. Hidesaburou Machida, "Nihon no Adobenchisuto Kyoukai niokeru Kikan no Yakuwari to sono Rekishi : 2 Ijidendou no Hataraki," *Adobenchisuto Raifu* 101, no. 8 (August 2015): 18-20.
12. Kajiyama, 55, 56.
13. Kuniya, 58.
14. *Ibid.*, 38-43, 47-51; Kajiyama, 36-39, 45.
15. Kuniya, 66-73; Kajiyama, 59-65; Machida, *Adobenchisuto Raifu* 101, no.7 (July 2015): 20.
16. Kuniya, 58; Kajiyama, 567.
17. H. Kuniya, "Experiences in Japan," *The General Conference Bulletin*, May 25, 1909, 144, 145. At that time, Kuniya met kind E. G. White; Kuniya, *Arano wo Hiraku Hito*, 86, 87.
18. M. Kawasaki, "An Experience in the Medical Missionary Work," *The General Conference Bulletin*, May 25, 1909, 146.
19. Kuniya, *Arano wo Hiraku Hito*, 38-41, 41-43, 47, 48, 75, 76, 112, 113; Kajiyama, 44, 45, 46, 93-95, 100, 108, 109, 110, 113, 114. According to Kajiyama, in 1910, Mrs. Tsugiko Kuniya, with a few female Bible workers, successfully prosecuted the colporteur work in Matsumaya; Kajiyama, 118.
20. Kajiyama, 116.
21. Kuniya, *Arano wo Hiraku Hito*, 75, 76; Kajiyama, 109
22. Michiya Yuda, "Kagoshima Kyoukai no Enkaku (The History of Kagoshima Church)," in *Hi no Hashira*, 1991, the eightieth-anniversary issue of Seventh-day Adventist Kagoshima Church), edited by Kagoshima Kyoukai, 80, 97.
23. Kajiyama, 137, 138.
24. *Ibid.*, 138.
25. *Ibid.*

26. Jiich Yamamoto, "Atogaki (Afterword)," in *Arano wo Hiraku Hito*, 125.
27. Yonezou Okafuji, *Kibou eno Ayumi: Sebunsudeadobenchisuto Kyoudan Nihon Senkyou Hyakunenshi* (Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan: Fukuinsha, 2006), 55-58.
28. Kuniya, *Arano wo Hiraku Hito*, 115-119.
29. Ibid., 119.
30. Kajiyama, 573; Okafuji, 123.
31. Kajiyama, 573, 574; Okafuji, 123, 124.

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