



Zhang Ziqian and wife, c. 1996.

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Ziqian, Zhang (1913–2005)

JOHN ZHANG, AND HOPE ZHANG

John Zhang

Hope Zhang

Zhang Ziqian (), also known as Djang Dzi Chien, Chang Tzu-Chien, or Chang Dzu Chien in older church publications, was a well-known pastor and church leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the west and

northwest regions of China. His ministry of 71 years extended well beyond the post-China Division era.¹

Early Life

Zhang Ziqian was born on February 5, 1913, to a poor rural family in Shaanxi Province, China. His parents were Sunday church believers. In 1927, Zhang came into contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church when he was studying at a Bible school run by the British Baptist Church in Dong Guan (董关), Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. However, because of his present bias against Adventist beliefs, he often invited his classmates to debate the truth of the Bible with Adventist Church ministers. Later, Zhang gradually gained a deeper understanding of the Adventist teachings and, in 1931, he was encouraged by his sister to study at Northwest San Yu Middle School in Cō Tān Zhèn (曹潭镇), Xi'an City, where students could offset their fees by part-time work. Pastor Wu Shao Xiu (吴绍修) had a baptismal Bible study with Zhang during his time at San Yu Middle School. Eventually, Zhang was baptized by Z. H. Coberly (柯伯利), the then-president of the Shaanxi Mission, and joined the Adventist Church on January 27, 1932.

Ministry

After graduating from Northwest San Yu Middle School in the summer of 1934, Zhang decided to enter into denominational service at Shaanxi Mission in the China Division. From 1934 to 1936, he served as the executive secretary of the Shanghai Signs of Times Publishing House in Shaanxi Province and then served as the treasurer of Shaanxi Mission from 1938 to 1944.⁴

In February 1938, Zhang Ziqian married Wang Hui Xian (王惠仙). This marriage was blessed with three sons and two daughters.

In the spring of 1944, the president of the China Division E. L. Longway, the Division treasurer A. Appel, and Pastor Jia Tai Xiang from Shaanxi local church ordained Zhang, who then served as the executive secretary of Shaanxi Mission after ordination. Zhang was called to Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, in the summer of 1947 to serve as the president of the Gan Qing Mission.⁵ In 1950, when foreign missionaries left China due to political reasons, Zhang Ziqian began to serve as the president of the Northwest China Union Mission⁶ and was responsible for the work in five provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang.⁷ The National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement took over all Protestant Churches in China.

Connections among the churches in the five northwestern provinces began to decrease due to the particularity of the situation at the time. The church schools and hospitals were taken over by the government. The churches entered a period of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation "Three-Self" management, and the ministers were forced to make a living on their own. During this period, Zhang Ziqian worked in department stores, dyeing and sewing factories, dairy farms, etc., while taking care of church work and shepherding members.⁸

The Cultural Revolution that began in 1966 had a catastrophic impact on Chinese churches. Religious freedom policy had been arbitrarily trampled, church buildings were forcibly occupied, normal worship and gatherings were cancelled, and ministers were closely supervised and censored. During this period, Zhang Ziqian lost his freedom for seven years and suffered severe persecution and torture both physically and mentally.

All this did not distract his relationship with God, but on the contrary, made his trust in God firmer. During this period, worship meetings continued at his home quietly without interruption. When Lanzhou Church resumed worship in 1980, more than 20 people who had consistently attended the Sabbath meetings in Zhang's home regained their mission and confidence in evangelism and moved forward to spread the gospel. As of 2003, the number of baptized people in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province reached 2,000 in just two decades, and the churches and registered places of worship in northwestern provinces increased to more than 50 while the number of baptized people exceeded 8,000. As of 2021, the number of church members in Gansu Province alone has exceeded 5,000.⁹

Later Life

After 1980, the domestic church in China began to enter a period of rapid growth. Due to the extreme shortage of pastoral staff in the Adventist Church at that time, Zhang Ziqian and a number of ordained Adventist ministers traveled all over China to train ministerial workers, hold ordination ceremonies, and prepare a group of pastoral staff for the growing Adventist congregations in China. Even approaching the age of 90, Zhang rode his bicycle to churches and registered places of worship far away to preach, visit believers, and manage church affairs.

Legacy

His words, deeds, and faith set a good example to aspiring young ministers in China. On November 8, 2005, Zhang Ziqian passed away at the age 92 and rested from 71 years of untiring service for the Adventist Church, leaving a legacy of faith and generosity that had a profound impact on the Seventh-day Adventist movement in five northwestern provinces of China.¹⁰

SOURCES

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association. Various years.
<https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

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Zhang, Ziqian. “ Zhāng Z qián de jīnglì jí xīběi jiāohuì de jì nsh [The Experience of Zhāng Ziqian and A Brief History of Northwest Adventist Church], unpublished autobiography, available from Adventism in China: Center for Chinese Adventist Heritage Collection. Accessed on November 20, 2021. <https://ccah-collection.weebly.com/zhangziqian.html>.

NOTES

1. Hope Zhang and John Zhang, personal knowledge from being grandchildren of Zhang Ziqian.
2. The Northwest San Yu Middle School was officially known as the Northwest China Union Mission School 1932-34, Northwest China Union Training Institute 1935-46, and Northwest China Union Academy 1947-1950.
3. Zhang, Ziqian. “ Zhāng Z qián de jīnglì jí xīběi jiāohuì de jì nsh [The Experience of Zhāng Ziqian and A Brief History of Northwest Adventist Church], unpublished autobiography. Accessed on November 20, 2021, <https://ccah-collection.weebly.com/zhangziqian.html>.
4. “Shensi Mission,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), 113; (1944): 95.
5. The official name of the Gan Xing Mission at the time was Kanchingning Mission, “Kanchingning Mission,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 96.
6. “Northwest China Union Mission,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1950), 103.
7. The official name of this administrative entity was still “Northwest China Union Mission” in the 1950 edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. But due to the loss of connection of China Division with the world church, this mission was essentially functioning as a self-governed conference. Zhang Ziqian’s name was still listed as president of Kanchingning Mission, and he was in fact coordinating the Adventist work in all five provinces listed in the text, thus functioning essentially as the president of the northwestern region.
8. Zhang, Ziqian. “ Zhāng Z qián de jīnglì jí xīběi jiāohuì de jì nsh [The Experience of Zhāng Ziqian and A Brief History of Northwest Adventist Church], unpublished autobiography. Accessed on November 20, 2021. <https://ccah-collection.weebly.com/zhangziqian.html>.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

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