

# Paul Yin Hee Phang (1898–1989)

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## FAI LEONG

Fai Leong began his pastoral ministry in Kuala Lumpur in 1980, after he graduated from Hong Kong Adventist College. At the time of writing, he was the president of the Peninsular Malaysia Mission.

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Paul Yin Hee Phang was a pastor and administrator in Singapore and Malaysia.

## Early Life

Paul Yin Hee Phang was born in Mei Xian (Moy Yen), southeast China, on December 12, 1898.<sup>1</sup> He was raised in a Sunday-keeping Christian home.<sup>2</sup> His father, Phan Nyuk Thin, was a minister and educator.<sup>3</sup> He accepted the call of his denomination's Swiss/German Mission (Basel Mission) to serve as a missionary in British North Borneo (now Sabah) in 1910.<sup>4</sup> Three years after their arrival in Sabah,<sup>5</sup> the family got in touch with a relative who was an Adventist literature evangelist, Joseph Phang.<sup>6</sup> After a series of Bible studies, the parents became Seventh-day Adventists in 1915.<sup>7</sup>

## Education and Marriage

While he was in British North Borneo (Sabah), Y. H. Phang attended an English school operated by the Church of England.<sup>8</sup> After his father, Nyuk Thin Phang (N. T. Phang), became an Adventist, the whole family moved to Penang.<sup>9</sup> K. M. Adams, the Singapore training school principal, traveled to Penang to personally invite his father to take ministerial training in Singapore, and the entire family moved with him.<sup>10</sup> Later his father served as a Bible teacher in the training school and was the first national Seventh-day Adventist ordained minister in Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup>

In 1917 Y. H. Phang was baptized at the age of 19 by F. A. Detamore.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, in 1919, he began working as the first literature evangelist in Thailand<sup>13</sup> and served there until the end of 1921.<sup>14</sup> In 1922 he was called to teach in the Malaysian Seminary in Singapore.<sup>15</sup> In Singapore, he met Loh Kui Len from Sandakan, British North Borneo (Sabah) and married her on November 14, 1922.<sup>16</sup>

## Ministry

Y. H. Phang was sent to Shanghai for his ministerial training in 1924.<sup>17</sup> Prior to his trip to China, Pastor Phang and I. C. Schmidt were asked to raise \$50,000 in Singapore currency for the expansion of the Malaysian Union Seminary.<sup>18</sup> With the money raised, a seminary hall and an industrial hall were built.<sup>19</sup> The project brought

genuine relief to the congested school.<sup>20</sup> After his graduation in 1926, he was sent from China to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to be the pastor of the Chinese church.<sup>21</sup> Later he was transferred to Ipoh and pastored there for four years.<sup>22</sup> While he was pastoring the church in Ipoh, he organized a Missionary Volunteer Society (now known as Youth Ministry).<sup>23</sup> From Ipoh, Pastor Phang was transferred to Penang where he worked as a pastor for a year:<sup>24</sup>

Y. H. Phang was ordained to the ministry in 1935 in Singapore<sup>25</sup> and pastored the Chinese church in Singapore until he was called to administrative ministry in 1946.<sup>26</sup> In 1941, Pastor Phang was selected as a delegate to represent the Malaysian Union Mission<sup>27</sup> at the General Conference Session held in San Francisco, California, USA, from May 26 to June 7.<sup>28</sup> He and two other delegates sailed from Singapore on April 24.<sup>29</sup>

After the December 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces, the Adventist work in Singapore, Malaysia, and other countries of the Far Eastern Division was soon affected. Foreign missionaries in some areas left and the remaining Malaysian Union Mission committee members met to plan how the Adventist work would continue under war conditions.<sup>30</sup> During the meeting, the work in Malaysia was separated into three missions so the task of caring for the church during that time would not be too daunting.<sup>31</sup> Pastor Phang became the director of the Southern Malayan Mission comprising "Singapore, Malacca, and the state of Johore."<sup>32</sup> The other two missions were the Northern Malayan Mission (Butterworth, Kedah, and Penang) headed by Director Daniel Liem, and the Central Malayan Mission (Dindings, Negeri, Perak, Pahang, Sembilan) headed by Director R. J. Moses.<sup>33</sup>

After the war, Pastor Phang was appointed as the first native president of the Malay States Mission (now Peninsular Malaysia Mission) in 1947.<sup>34</sup> It was a difficult time for him to lead the ministry in the mission after World War II. Under his leadership, there were five organized Chinese churches with five pastors and two Bible instructors.<sup>35</sup> There were also English-speaking pastors to work among the English-speaking communities.<sup>36</sup> There were two full-time workers to labor among the Telugu people.<sup>37</sup> There were two well-equipped Chinese primary schools: Teh Sin School in Kuala Lumpur and Sin Teh School in Ipoh.<sup>38</sup> The total enrollment for these two schools was 580.<sup>39</sup>

He led the mission in steady growth until his wife Loh Kui Len passed away on August 4, 1955, due to illness.<sup>40</sup> After his wife's passing, the church transferred him to Singapore to serve as the associate publishing director in the Southeast Asia Union Mission.<sup>41</sup> Later he took up the position of associate secretary of lay activities at the same union mission.<sup>42</sup>

## Later Life

In 1958 Pastor Phang married Christine Ang Po Tin.<sup>43</sup> Approximately two years later he retired and they relocated to Hong Kong.<sup>44</sup> In 1962 they moved to Fresno, California, USA.<sup>45</sup> He secured his USA citizenship in 1972, ten years after his migration.<sup>46</sup> He stayed active in the church for several years until it became inconvenient.<sup>47</sup>

Pastor Y. H. Phang passed away on September 27, 1989, in Glendale, California, USA, at the age of 90.<sup>48</sup> At that time his family included his wife Christine, seven children and one step-daughter, 16 grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, and five siblings: three sisters and two brothers.<sup>49</sup>

## Contribution

Pastor Phang was a pioneer in introducing and expanding Adventism in the Malaysian Union Mission territory. He was instrumental in raising funds from the public for hospital, educational, and church building projects in both Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>50</sup> He provided selfless leadership during the rigors of World War II, and afterward he continued his legacy of leadership in the Malay States Mission and Southeast Asia Union Mission.

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