

Guo, Ziying or Keh, Nga Pit (1865–1937)

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Guo, Ziying (), also known in early denominational publications as Keh, Nga Pit, is usually acknowledged as the first ordained national Chinese minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China. He played a central role in the expansion of Adventism in southeast China's Guangdong () and Fujian () region. Keh, Nga Pit is the Romanization of his Chinese name in the Hokkien dialect (), while Guo, Ziying is the pinyin of his Chinese name.

Guo was born September 28, 1865, at Chiupo, near Xiamen (Amoy), Fujian Province, in a Chinese non-Adventist Christian family. Educated in the English Presbyterian School in Xiamen (reportedly at a collegiate level), he became the principal of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary there!¹ The story of Guo's conversion to the Adventist faith had an interesting twist.

In 1904 a young man named Timothy Tay () came to study at the Xiamen school where Guo was. Tay was from Singapore and had been baptized by R. W. Munson into the Adventist faith when he was 20 years old. His father, a businessman from Fujian who had married a Malayan wife, wanting his son to study Chinese and learn to speak the local dialect, decided to send Timothy Tay to Xiamen. A model student at the school, Tay excelled academically. One Sunday, Tay went to the market to buy some fruits and vegetables. Upon return, he was called to the principal's office where Guo asked him why he bought food on the Sabbath. "Sir, your student did not buy on a Sabbath," Tay replied. "Today is the first day of the week." It was then that Guo had his first Bible study on the Sabbath doctrine. Though Guo could hardly believe what he found in the Bible, he finally became



Guo Ziying, c. 1906 in Xiamen.

From *Adventism in China Digital Image Repository*. Accessed January 4, 2020. www.adventisminchina.org.

convinced that Saturday was the true Sabbath.²

Once having accepted his new faith, Guo decided to resign his principal position. His friends and colleagues tried to persuade him not to, but to no avail. His wife and daughter pleaded with him in tears as they thought that it would bring shame to the family. But Guo's mind was made up. After resigning the principalship, he bought a small church nearby and shared his newfound faith with his community.³

Timothy Tay told Guo about a group of Sabbath-keepers in Canton, led by an American missionary. Guo decided to travel to Canton to meet Jacob Nelson Anderson and was eventually baptized by him. Recognizing that he was the lone Sabbath observer in Xiamen, Guo asked whether the Adventist Church could send an evangelist to assist him in Amoy. The request reached the General Conference, which appointed a young couple, Winford C. and Bessie Hankins, as new missionaries to China. They arrived at Amoy on May 21, 1905, and Guo and his wife welcomed them to their home.⁴ The Hawkins eventually settled in Kulangsu, where most of the foreign missionaries lived. In December 1905 a Chinese Bible Institute convened at Canton, a first for the Seventh-day Adventist Chinese workers in that area. Guo, accompanied by three other workers, attended the meeting. He participated not only as an interpreter, but also as one of the speakers on Sabbath. It amazed others that he could speak Cantonese as well as his native Amoyese.⁵ In the spring of 1906 J. N. Anderson ordained Guo, making him the first indigenous Chinese minister in China.⁶

Guo Ziyang continued to work with Timothy Tay in holding evangelistic meetings in nearby villages, which generated much interest among the people there. Later, Guo and Tay traveled to Shantou (Swatow), another seaport in South China, to preach to the Christians there. They met Hong Zijie, a local Chinese Christian leader, who also tried to disprove the Sabbath message, but only found himself accepting it instead. It was the beginning of Adventism in the Shantou area. Interestingly, both in Xiamen and in Shantou, native Chinese believers initiated the Adventist message and not foreign missionaries.⁷ Being a good scholar, Guo embarked on writing a book in Chinese, with 20 chapters, setting forth the main points of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. In the March 15, 1906, issue of *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Edwin Wilbur, who co-authored the book, reported that the draft manuscript was completed and was being checked by J.N. Anderson.⁸ It marked the beginning of Guo's participation in the publishing ministry. Guo continued to write a number of pamphlets and expositions on biblical prophecies in Chinese, while still devoting much of his time to preaching among his own people in Fujian and Guangdong.

In 1907 Guo went to Chaozhou (), a city about 25 miles from Shantou, and found a group of 25 people who, based on their own study of the Bible, had decided to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Also, on their own accord, they abstained from tobacco and alcohol. A Seventh-day Adventist Church formed there still exists today.⁹

Then the denomination called Guo to Shanghai to join the Signs Publishing House as the Chinese editor of the *Chinese Signs of the Times Monthly*. He worked diligently to build up the Chinese publishing ministry.¹⁰

In early part of 1912 Guo returned to Xiamen to take up evangelism. He immediately began the study of Foochowese. After a few months, Guo took the gospel message to Fuzhou (), the northern part of the Fujian Province.¹¹ It was there that he started a school that later became the Fuzhou Sam Yuk School. In 1913 Guo became its first principal. The next year he passed the responsibility to C.C. Morris, who was also the president of the North Fujian Mission.¹²

In 1920 because of health problems Guo was relieved of the work in Fuzhou. Returning to the South Fukien Mission, he devoted his time to evangelism until his failing health stopped his public ministry. After an illness lasting two years, he passed to his rest on August 14, 1937.¹³ His name continued to appear in the SDA Yearbook until 1928.

His eldest son, Joseph Keh, married Hong Zijie's daughter, Mary. They immigrated to San Francisco and were among the founders of the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Church in that city. In addition, Guo had two other sons and a daughter. Guo, Ziyong's untiring evangelistic efforts in southeast China made a major impact on the communities of Adventist believers in that region.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "Keh, Nga Pit," in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996.

2. Young, Samuel, ed, "Keh Nga Pit," *Chinese SDA History*, Hong Kong: Chinese Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, 2002, 493-495.
3. Ibid.
4. E. H. Wilbur, "Canton and Amoy, China," *ARH*, September 28, 1905, 13.
5. E. H. Wilbur, "Chinese Bible Institute," *ARH*, April 12, 1906, 17.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. second rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "Keh, Nga Pit."
7. Bruce W Lo, "Guo Ziying or Key Nag Pit," *Adventism in China*, accessed June 15, 2016, www.adventisminchina.org/individual-name/nationals/angtaukiet.
8. W. C. Hankins, "China," *ARHR*, March 15, 1906, 15.
9. *Chinese SDA History*, 494.
10. B. L. Anderson, "N. P. Keh" Obituary, *The China Division Reporter*, March 1, 1931, 8.
11. Ibid.
12. Anderson, "Guo Ziying," *Adventism in China*.
13. B. L. Anderson, "N. P. Keh obituary," *The China Division Reporter*, March 1, 1931, 8. The beginning of this article states that Keh died on "August 14, 1937." But the article was published in the March 1, 1931, issue of *The China Division Reporter*, which means that the death year must be wrong. It is our best estimate that "1937" is a typo and should have been "1927," which matches better with the fact that "Keh" name appeared the last time in the 1928 *SDA Yearbook*.

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