Lin, David Yaoxi (1917–2011), and Clara Ye Chi-sheng (1922–2018)

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David Lin (林耀西?, pinyin Lín Yáoxi?), a well-known Chinese pastor and administrator, and his wife, Clara Ye Chisheng Lin (葉 characterized) were best remembered for their courage and endurance they had shown for their faith in the face of extreme religious persecution during the tumultuous years when China underwent one of its biggest political changes in modern history.

Childhood Years

David Lin was born on February 15, 1917 in Manila, Philippines. He was the second son of Lin Bao Heng, a graduate of Columbia University in New York. At the time, David’s father was serving as the Chinese vice consul in The Philippines. During his childhood years, David lived in the Philippines, Canada, Shanghai, and Jakarta, Indonesia, where his father served as a diplomatic consul for the Chinese government. As a result, David not only learned his mother tongue of the Chinese language but also English and the Indonesian Malay language.

David’s mother, Pan Cheng Kun, attended a Christian school in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. An American missionary, Miss Pyle, had taught her to pray, a habit she neglected for many years until after she was married and gave birth to her elder son Paul and second son David. One day, David ran a high fever and was rushed to a hospital. Worried about her child, David’s mother knelt in prayer and promised God that if David would be healed, she would bring him up as a preacher. David Lin recalled later, “Before the doctor had diagnosed my case, I recovered instantly. Since that day Mother drilled into my head that I belonged to God and would become a preacher.”

In 1919, David’s father, Lin Bao Heng was transferred to Vancouver, B.C., Canada, where he served as Chinese consul. In 1921 the rest of the family joined the father in Canada, where they remained till 1925. The two boys attended the Magee school in Vancouver, while the family attended the Baptist church in that city.

In 1925, the family relocated to Soerabaya, Java, where Lin Bao Heng was appointed Chinese consul for Indonesia. There, the two boys, Paul and David, attended a private school run by an English lady, and learned to speak the Indonesian Malay language. Like the local children, they also learned to walk on bare feet.

When Chiang Kai-shek captured the government in Peking (Beijing) in 1927 and united China under one rule, Lin Bao Heng lost his official position under the defunct Peking regime. The family moved back to Shanghai, where Paul and David attended a school run by British schoolmasters in the British Settlement. Three years later in 1930, the family again moved to Peking (Beijing), where Paul and David attended an American school. David was in the sixth grade, taught by the principal, Miss Moore. One day, the teacher asked the students to tell the class what they wanted to be when they grew up. When it was David’s turn, he declared that he was going to be a preacher, to much of the surprise of the whole class. Thereafter, David was regarded as an odd fellow.

On Sundays, their mother, Pan Cheng Kun, took the boys to a Methodist church where they made friends with Pastor and Mrs. Fred Pyke’s children, James, Louise, and Ruth, who were their schoolmates. In 1932, when Lin Bao Heng moved to Hankow (Wuhan) to work in the Bureau of Internal Revenue, their mother, Pan Cheng Kun joined him and left the two boys with the Pykes. In Hankow there was no Methodist church, so Pan Cheng Kun visited many different churches in the city. One day a Seventh-day Adventist missionary came to solicit for donation. Lin Bao Heng bought a subscription and talked with the missionary in English. Subsequently, an Adventist Bible worker, Abbie Dunn, visited the Lin’s, and invited Pan Cheng Kun to attend the Hankow Adventist Church, where she was impressed by the reciting of the Ten Commandments by the church members during the worship service. Just prior to that time she was once challenged by her lawyer brother-in-law, who questioned her regarding the rules of the Christian faith.
When she told him that Christians lived by the Ten Commandments, he asked her to tell him what exactly are the Ten Commandments? Pan Cheng Kun was embarrassed that she could recite all ten of them. So, when she visited the Hankow Adventist Church, she was sure that she had found the church that she was looking for.

During the summer vacation, David visited with his parents in Hankow. His mother explained to him about the Sabbath doctrine. Upon return to Peking, the Pykes learned of his new belief, they tried hard to dissuade him. In the meantime, Abbie Dunn wrote to another Adventist Bible worker, Lucy Andrus, in Peking, who came to David’s school to invite him to study the Bible with her. This began a period of struggle for David — to keep or not to keep the Seventh-day Sabbath. By 1934, Pan Cheng Kun came back to Peking and she and David attended the Adventist church together.

In 1935, the year David graduated from high school, tragedy struck. At the time, his elder brother, Paul, was studying in Park College near Kansas City, Missouri. One day he was killed in a motorcycle accident leaving David to be the only son in the family. Relatives tried to dissuade David to become a minister by suggesting that he should choose a more lucrative vocation to bear the family’s financial burdens because preachers in China were poorly paid. But David did not change his aim in life.

Clara Ye Chi-sheng was born in Fuzhou, Fujian on October 20, 1922 to Christian parents, although they did not formally belong to any church or denomination. When Clara was seven years old, the family moved to Shanghai. Clara like to listen to sermons in church, and often attended Huai-En Tang in Shanghai by herself. During the Sino-Japanese war, the Ye family, the parents plus one daughter and three sons, again moved to the northwest town of Lanzhou, where they could be a bit safer because it was beyond the Sino-Japanese battle front line. But the city was still under constant Japanese air attacks.

One day in Lanzhou, Clara found a small pea-like growth on her eye and asked her father to take her to a hospital. He said he was free only on Sundays, but most hospitals at that time were closed on Sundays, except the Adventist hospital. While Clara was waiting for the doctor to see her, she met a nurse who had just come from Shanghai, and who invited her to attend the local Adventist church. She did and found out that Saturday was the true Sabbath. After attending the evangelistic meetings of Pastor Meng Zhaoyi with her mother and brothers in the summer of 1945, Clara decided to get baptized and joined the Adventist Church. So it was in the Lanzhou Adventist Church that Clara Ye got to know David’s mother, Pan Cheng Kun. Neither of them knew in that point of time that one day they would be related by marriage. But obviously, David’s mother did have a positive impression of Clara.

**College Education**

After his high school graduation, David went to the China Training Institute in Chiao Tou Tseng (????pinyin Qiaotouzhen), an Adventist junior college, to study Bible major. He was the only ministerial student who paid for his own tuition because all his classmates were recipients of scholarship set up to encourage young people to be trained for the ministry. Any student who could afford to pay tuition took either the pre-medical, the business or the normal courses. In this sense, David was again the “odd person” out.

When the Sino-Japanese war broke out in August of 1937, the school in Chiao Tou Tseng closed. David went to Hong Kong where he received funds from his parents to enable him to go to America to continue his ministerial study at Pacific Union College. During the war years, David’s parents moved to the northwestern city of Lanzhou, known as the “Free China” zone, which was never occupied by the Japanese military. However, Lanzhou was still badly hit by Japanese air raids but both David’s parents were not hurt.

In the first summer of 1938 in the United States, David went to San Francisco to do colporteur work in Chinatown. For the remaining four years, David worked in the college cafeteria, the machine shop, the bindery, or in the forest cutting cordwood to pay for his tuition. After graduation in 1941, David became romantically involved with a young lady, and their mutual affection grew with time. However, this lady had a different goal in life and was constantly urging David to change his study to medicine instead and to remain in the United States after graduation. Eventually David decided this was not what he wanted to do. Eventually they went their separate ways.

After Pacific Union College, David continued his graduate study at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Takoma Park, Maryland, where he also canvassed for a living in his spare time. In the winter, David worked in Danville, Virginia as a colporteur. He began working on his master thesis then, but because he needed to work to support himself, he did not complete the degree until 1946.

**Entry to Ministry**

In the fall of 1942, David was called to teach Chinese at Pacific Union College, a job that he resigned in 1943 and went to Honolulu to spend a year as a colporteur, setting a few new sales records. The thing that made him most proud was that in Hawaii, he gave Bible studies to a Japanese family and was able to win them to the Sabbath truth. In 1944, David returned to the west coast of United States and was called to prepare Chinese Bible correspondence lessons in conjunction with the church’s radio ministry, *The Voice of Prophecy*. David had to print the lesson by hand and had them duplicated by offset, because there was no Chinese type available. Even until today, these lessons have been used effectively by Adventist churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and other parts of the world where there are large Chinese settlements.
After the Second World War the church wished to restart the work in China. In November of 1945, China Division issued an invitation through the General Conference to David Lin to return to China to lead out in the radio ministry, which he accepted. Due to the maritime strike and other unexpected events, the trip was delayed till December 1946, when David was able to travel with a group of western missionaries to China on S.S. General Gordon. Upon arrival at Shanghai, he worked with Milton Lee in the Radio Department of the China Division office. It was in Shanghai that David Lin was introduced, by his mother and a few enthusiastic church members, to a comely young lady, Clara Ye Chi-sheng, who had befriended the Lin’s parents a few years earlier in Lanzhou while both families, Ye and Lin, were there to escape from the advancing Japanese army. Clara and David fell in love, and after a year of courtship, they were married on March 3, 1948. What made the young couple happy was that both David and Clara shared the same goal of devoting their lives to the service in ministry. To this union, they were blessed with five children, one son and four daughters. The names of their children, in age order, are: Flora, Roger, Eva, Ruby, and Angelina.

In 1948 the civil war in China had reached a decision point in favor of the Communist army, and the liberation of Shanghai was imminent. By December, most of the western missionaries had withdrawn to Hong Kong, where a provisional China Division headquarters was set up. The Radio Department moved to Canton, operated for six months, then moved to Hong Kong also in June 1949. David was appointed editor of the Hong Kong edition of The Sings of the Times. In December 1949, the provisional office of the China Division turned over all duties to the Chinese staff in Shanghai, and David Lin returned to Shanghai as Division secretary. Hsu Hua was Division president and S. J. Lee was treasurer.

The Korean war broke out in June 1950. As American soldiers fought under the United Nations flag and drove into North Korea, Chinese volunteer troops marched across the border to push them back. At the same time, the American Seventh fleet was ordered to patrol the Taiwan straits to block any attempt by the Red Army to liberate Taiwan. China and United States were at war. Since the Seventh-day Church and its mission organization was regarded as an American organization, its assets were frozen in December 1950. In time, the formal church organizational structure in China mainland completely disintegrated. Politically active elements among the church workers got the upper hand, and eventually the Division officers were replaced by alternative persons by December 1951.

David Lin and other church officers who were discharged got together to make slide rules for a living from 1952 to 1954. At the same time, they translated The Desire of Ages into Chinese. In time, other volumes of the Conflict Series were also translated. A group of young people from the Shanghai Seventh-day Adventist Church produced mimeographed copies of these books and distributed them. In 1955, David quit making slide rules for a living to compile a book on servicing X-ray machines, and then wrote another condensed book on Amateur Telescope Making.

### 20 Years of Imprisonment

In April 1958, David Lin was arrested on a counterrevolutionary charge, and was imprisoned for 3 years. Subsequently in 1960, he was sentenced to 15 years and was sent to a water conservation project at the White Lake Farm, where he pushed wheelbarrows, operated a power winch, and served successively as X-ray technician, power-station switch operator, and tractor electrician on a State farm. On March 28, 1991, David Lin was fully exonerated by the Chinese Government. As he recalled in his autobiography in 1993:

In all these years I received humane treatment and at times I could so arrange my work as to keep the Sabbath fairly well. My children came to visit me several times and on one occasion I baptized my son Roger in a moat. It has been said that I baptized some people in prison, but that was not true.

In retrospect, I praise God for His providential care in making all things work out for the good of all concerned. First, the years of trial have revealed many flaws in my characters, stressing my need to overcome them. Second, He who sees the end from the beginning put me in ‘cold storage’ to tie over the perilous years of the cultural Revolution. . . . I was in an ‘air-raid shelter.’ Only after many years did I realize that God had protected me from virtual disaster, for a political tornado stuck our home in 1966. My father had died in 1959; my mother, wife, son, and four daughters remained to brave the storm. If the Lord had not also miraculously preserved them in those trying years, they would not have come through alive.

After his prison term was over in 1975, David was transferred from the State farm to a coalmining company in Huainan, Anhui to translate technical literature where he worked for another five years. There he earned a regular wage and was able to enjoy Sabbath privileges.

### The Cultural Revolution

While David Lin was in the prison, the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. Young people, usually students, were organized into “Red Guards” to protect the socialist system from being undermined by bourgeois elements. Christians were targeted for attacks. Since David was exiled in a farm, he was spared the suffering caused by the major upheavals in society. But his family, his wife Clara, his children, and to some extent his mother were not able to escape the painful experience. Because of her refusal to attend school on Sabbath, Flora, David’s eldest daughter was viewed as a truant and the Lin’s home was the first to be targeted when the school sent Red Guards to launch a
city-wide campaign against those who were labelled as “counter-revolutionaries”. With war drums the students forced their way into the Lin’s house, ordering Clara Lin and mother-in-law, Pan Cheng Kun to stand facing the wall, and then ransacked the home. They then forced Clara Lin and Pan Chen Kun to kneel outside and threw their household belongings, especially ancient cultural artifacts, including books, pictures, and pictures onto the street in a pile and set it on fire. David’s mother, Pan Chen Kun, who was 72 at the time found it hard to endure the suffering and was moved to Tientsin (today’s Tianjin) by some close relatives to tide over the most dangerous months. But, David Lin’s wife, Clara, continued to suffer persecution. She was beaten many times, her hair was cropped to shame her, and she was forced to stand on the street to be a public spectacle.29 Many years later, David Lin commented on his wife with emotional admiration,

In moral stamina my wife stands highest in God’s estimate; for He suffered her to undergo the toughest trials, and though she faltered once and lost His presence, by His grace she finally overcame. As for Mother and me, God saw that we might not survive, and put us under shelter.30

Later in 1969, three of the Lin’s children, Flora, Roger, and Eva, went to Guizhou province in southern China for rustification - sent to reside in countryside or the farm for reform. Flora and Eva both found work where they could keep Sabbath, while Roger found a country town where he made iron moulds in a local workshop. Throughout the decade of Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, especially during the early few years, Mrs. Clara Lin was the one who bore the brunt of the persecution. In one instance, for three consecutive months, the manager of the apartment building where they lived would lead a group of people to come to the Lin’s home early every Sabbath morning, took Clara Lin away trying to force her to sweep the street on Sabbath. When she refused to do it, they would physically beat her until she was black and blue, and then they would bring her back in the afternoon. They tried their very best to dissuade her from keeping the Sabbath. After she had recovered for a week, the next Sabbath they took her again. Once she passed out, they poured cold water on her head to wake her up. Week after week, it lasted for three months. Each time the family, particularly the children would pray for God’s intervention. When the apartment manager realized that he could not change Clara Lin’s mind, he returned one afternoon, completely changed his approached, and agreed to let Clara Lin to sweep the street after sunset on Sabbath. From that time onwards the time of extreme physical torture was over.31 It is worth noting that throughout those perilous years, due to the fine example set by Clara Lin, all of Lin’s children remained faithful to their Sabbath faith.32

**Post Prison Years**

In 1978 David Lin return to Shanghai to join his family. As children of counter-revolutionary parents, David Lin’s children were denied higher education. With the assistance of former friends in China who are now in the United States, their son Roger was sponsored by Ms. Hsu Ping to continue his education at Pacific Union College. A few years later, Dr. Alice Holst, set up a scholarship fund for his four daughters. The four girls too also went to United States for further education.33

In 1989 David became the pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Mu En Tang, one of the largest Adventist churches in China at that time. On March 28, 1991, David was fully exonerated, and the record of his imprisonment was officially erased. In 1997, at the age of 80, he fell from his bike, broke his left hip, and decided to truly retire after surgery. After this retirement, he followed his children to the United States and resided in Highland, California. He spent many of his retirement years doing translation work as well as providing educational facilities for his home country of China.34

On February 10, 2011, David Lin passed away at the age of 94 after a short period of illness. Seven years later, Clara Lin also passed to her rest on March 7, 2018.

The moving story of courage and endurance of David and Clara Lin continues to live on in the collective memories of not only the Adventist Chinese community but also in many western individuals who have an interest in the Adventist history in China.

**SOURCES**


Secretariat Appointee Files, RG21, File 00046343. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver spring, Maryland.

NOTES


5. Ibid., 1.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 2.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


17. Ibid.


19. GCA, File No. 00046343, Lin David Appointee Files, RG 21, Versatile Box 2057, User box 9876.


23. Ibid., 4.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.; Clara Lin, David’s wife reported in her Memoir that it was on May 8, 1958 that David was arrested and was in prison for 3 years before being sent to the White Lake Farm (Clara Lin, “In the Hands of God,” unpublished manuscript, 2005, 12).

26. According to David Lin’s youngest daughter, Angelina Lin-Johnson, he also baptized his daughters while he was in the farm. See Angelina Lin-


