SINICIZING CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA:
THE CONVERSION OF CHEN QINGDE

John C. Chen

> [Chen Qingde] was a very dynamic, almost charismatic evangelist with a complete devotion to God and the Seventh-day Adventist church... wherever and whenever he spoke he would draw a large throng. He also was loving and generous.
>
> Calvin H. Chen[1]

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of dramatic changes in imperial China. One of the most important occurred when the Qing government abolished the imperial civil service examinations in 1905. This led the Chinese to give missionary schools greater consideration because they taught Western learning.[2] It also led to an increased tolerance for the Christian religion and created an opportunity for the Protestant missionaries in China to win an audience for their message which had fallen on deaf ears for the previous half century. All of the denominations realized that their messages would be much more effectively disseminated if the evangelist delivering the word of God was delivered by native speakers.[3] However, for a variety of reasons, this enterprise proved extremely difficult.

This article details how, in the first decade of the twentieth century, a Protestant sect known as the Seventh-day Adventists was

[1] Calvin H. Chen, "Stranded Scholar from China: The Life of Calvin H. Chen, M.D.," 31, Unpublished manuscript.

[2] Gael Graham, *Gender, Culture, and Christianity: American Protestant Mission Schools in China, 1880-1930* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Mary B. Bullock, *An American Transplant: The Rockefeller Foundation and Peking Union Medical College* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 32.

[3] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1928), 425-426.

able to sinicize their message and win over a segment of the population in South Fujian province. By focusing on the conversion and education of one young man, this article details how adherents of this sect not only brought its distinctive faith to China, but also imported its fundamentalist religious worldview. In the process, it examines the political situation in which this young man was raised, the sacrifices he made to become a Christian, and how believers in this new found faith were able to inspire him to become a "soul-winner" for Christ.

Chen Qingde was born in 1883 and grew up in Anhai, Fujian.[4] By all rights he should have been able to live a comfortable life, because his family owned eighteen businesses. Unfortunately this was not to be the case, as his father became an opium addict which led him to sell off all but one of these businesses.[5] By 1906, when Qingde was a young man in his early twenties, he decided to leave his home town for Xiamen, also called Amoy, which was located some thirty miles down the Pacific coast. The city was one of the first five Treaty Ports opened for commerce to the foreigners after the First Opium War ended in 1842. No doubt, Qingde thought it would be easier to find employment in a city with more economic activity than his home town. Moving to Xiamen meant that for the first time, he would have contact with foreigners who had a very different worldview than those of traditional China.[6]

Once in the city, Qingde began working for a man named Hong Jinqun peddling wax candles and gold paper money, both of which were used during traditional Chinese funerals.[7] At this time, gold paper money was burned to ensure that the deceased would have funds to spend in an afterlife. Because Hong was a recent convert to the Seventh-day Adventist faith, a new Christian sect that had recently arrived in Xiamen, he urged Qingde to investigate a new school called Mei Hua Middle School which had just opened in nearby Gulangyu.[8] When Qingde enquired about the school, he

[4] Calvin H. Chen, Journal entry, May 9, 1952. Qingde's son Calvin kept a journal of events from 1934 to 2005.

[5] May Chen, interview by author, Arcadia, California, September 24, 2004.

[6] Jin Huan Shi, "Nativism and Cosmopolitanism at Christian Colleges" in *Changing Paradigms in Chinese Christian Higher Education, 1888-1950*, Peter Tze Ming Ng and others (Solihull, West Midlands, United Kingdom: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002), 181.

[7] Calvin H. Chen, "Stranded Scholar," 29; Zeno Chen, interview by author, Arcadia, California, January 27, 2007.

[8] Zeno Chen, ibid.

found that he would be allowed to work during his residence and defray his educational expenses.[9]

At Mei Hua, Qingde made the momentous decision to convert to Christianity, which became of the most important decisions of his life.[10] It resulted in the cutting off of ties with his family.[11] Not only would he sacrifice his share of his father's estate, but his name would be stricken from the family's genealogical record housed in the Chen family temple. This record had been kept for over twenty generations in Qingde's family and traced his ancestry all the way back to the Southern Song dynasty.[12]

Though no record indicates exactly what Qingde's thinking process was at this point in his life, we can speculate as to the reasons that might have played a role in his decision-making. This analysis is borrowed from immigration history and can be classified as push and pull factors.[13] For Qingde, one of the push factors was the empire's political troubles, that had contributed to his family's crises and impacted the development of his personal identity. In traditional China the development of an identity followed a clearly predictable path. A son, especially the oldest one like Qingde, would be groomed to succeed his father as head of the family. At some point, he would become a paterfamilias or head of the household in turn. To be such a figure would give him nearly undisputed decision-making power within such a family.[14] This position was reinforced by the community and by local officials who pursued a hands-off policy on issues that were regarded as family matters. This stance gave other members little recourse when its head behaved unwisely, as happened in the case of Qingde's father. It meant that his father could do unthinkable things such as sell his wife, children, and family property to support his habit and the government would not intervene. By reading biographies of

[9] Gideon Chen, interview by author, Arcadia, California, November 6, 2004.

[10] Philip W. Pitcher, *In and About Amoy*, 2d (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, 1972), 237, states that there were forty-two Adventists in Xiamen in 1906. Qingde's conversion was probably in that year.

[11] According to C. K. Yang, *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: The Technology Press, MIT, 1959), 5, 89, Qingde was breaking a very strong tradition in China since the family ordinarily exerted control over an individual from cradle to grave. Under the value of filial piety, a child owed his father absolute obedience no matter what he did.

[12] Calvin Chen, "Stranded," 30; Zeno Chen, interview by author, September 17, 2004. Zeno Chen, telephone interview by author, November 19, 2007.

[13] James Ciment, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Immigration* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2001) 1: 257-276.

[14] Yang, 91.

Qingde's contemporaries, one can see these things happened frequently during this period.[15]

While the turmoil in Qingde's family of origin may explain why he began to question the values of his traditional Chinese upbringing, it does not account for why he was pulled toward Christianity as an alternative way of finding his purpose in life. Such a change became possible because of the arrival of Protestant missionaries in China, which began in 1807 with the coming of Robert Morrison. It accelerated after Xiamen and other treaty ports opened after the First Opium war. However, Morrison and the other Protestant missionaries, found it very difficult to convince the Chinese of the truth of their teachings. It took Morrison seven years to baptize his first convert.[16]

With this record in mind, it is important to consider what factors proved useful in the Adventists' effort to persuade a young man like Qingde to make a commitment to their religious community. Some factors were not the result of anything the Adventists did, but rather a product of the times. By 1906, Protestant missionaries had been coming to China for nearly a century. During this time the attitude toward Westerners had changed considerably, especially in the Treaty Port cities like Xiamen where merchants, diplomats, and missionaries had been active for at least a half century.

So part of the reason the Adventists in Xiamen were able to attract attention was based on their connection with America; a country allied with other Treaty Powers. Another factor was the relatively benign reputation the Americans had since they, unlike the British or the French, had not waged aggressive wars against China. In addition, they had not supported the opium trade.[17] On the other hand, the Americans had taken the lead in barring the

[15] *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman: A Story Told to Ida Pruitt by Ning Lao Tai-tai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 12, 46. 81, 162, *A Chinese Testament: The Autobiography of Tan Shih-hua* as told to Sergei Mikhailovich Tretiakov, trans. anonymously (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), 7.

[16] George H. McNeur, *China's First Preacher,* Liang A-fa, 1789-1755 (Shanghai: Kwang Hsieh Publishing House, 1934; Oxford University Press, China Agency, 1934), 21.

[17] George Patterson, *Christianity in Communist China* (Waco: World Books, 1969), 28; William R. Hutchison, "A Moral Equivalent for Imperialism and the Promotion of Christian Civilization, 1880-1910" in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880-1920*, Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 175.

immigration of Chinese laborers to their country, which had provoked a boycott of American goods in China in 1905.[18]

The Adventists used various strategies to bring a young person like Qingde into their fold. One such strategy was to provide new personal bonds to support him in a new community. Another approach was to give him a new worldview to replace the traditional Chinese perspective on life.[19] One of Qingde's most important bonds was with Hong Jinqun, his employer at the gold paper-making money factory, who introduced the Adventist faith to Qingde and served as a mentor and father/elder brother figure. Later he would create a family connection with Hong by having his eldest daughter marry Hong's youngest son.[20] Qingde also formed a strong connection with Mei Hua's school principal Benjamin L. Anderson, who became his father substitute. Before coming to China, Anderson earned a Master's degree in Social Work from an Adventist college in Nebraska.[21]

Another way the Adventists increased the bonds among their new converts was by isolating them in an enclave together, thereby having them live separately from both the Chinese and other Protestant Christians. When Qingde attended Mei Hua, he most likely lived and worked on the school grounds. The Adventists were very keen on students working while attending school, which followed one of their prophet's recommendations. Among the enterprises they had on campus was animal husbandry, where cows were milked and their produce sold to the foreign community residing in the International Settlement of Gulangyu.[22] The Adventist's stance on keeping their believers separate from the world led to physical, social, political, cultural, and intellectual isolation from other Protestant Christians as well as Chinese society at large.

They adopted this stance from William Miller, the progenitor of many Adventist beliefs and practices, who led a movement named

[18] Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers), 96-97. She refers to Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868-1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983), 104-123.

[19] Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 15, 103-108, calls the process of tying new members into the church "encapsulation."

[20] Gideon Chen, interview.

[21] Calvin Chen, "Stranded Scholar," 45.

[22] Calvin Chen, ibid; Walton J. Brown, compiler, *The Chronology of the S.D.A. Education*, 2d (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education, 1979), 10.

after him from 1831 to 1844.[23] Based on his study of the Books of Daniel and Revelation, the prophetic books of the Bible, Miller believed that the world would soon end and predicted it would be in either 1843 or 1844. The failure of this prophecy led to a collapse of his movement from which a remnant coalesced around Ellen White. Her followers became known as the Seventh-day Adventists. This new faith continued to subscribe to many of Miller's views, though they did concede that it was necessary to build houses of worship, schools, and hospitals while waiting for Christ's return.

Another method of tying new members to the Adventist community, also used by other Protestant denominations in China, was related to replacing their traditional Chinese world view with a Western one.[24] This attitude probably impeded the efforts of the first Protestant missionaries who came to China in the early nineteenth century, and was an approach which tied Christianizing with Westernizing.[25] Before the Boxer Uprising the resistance of the Chinese was much more significant to this process, but in 1906, with modernization being encouraged by the imperial government, the resistance to Westernizing lessened, especially in treaty ports like Xiamen.[26]

To ease the transition from Chinese Confucianism, Adventist missionaries emphasized the similarities between Christian teachings and traditional Chinese values. For example, they stressed the importance of honoring one's parents and the elderly.[27] Later in his sermons, Qingde would preach that Confucius could be saved even though he had not heard the message of Christ and salvation, because he lived and taught what was morally right.[28] Finally, Guo

[23] Whitney Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 287-321, discusses Millerism within the context of religious enthusiasm in upstate New York. For an interpretation of the Millerite movement by an Adventist historian, see Richard Schwartz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 31-57.

[24] Albert Feuerwerker, *The Foreign Establishment in China in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1976), 48.

[25] Ruth Hemenway, *A Memoir of Revolutionary China, 1924-1941* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 69.

[26] Jon L. Saari, *Legacies of Childhood: Growing Up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 51.

[27] Ruth Chen, "South Fujian, Holy Week: Its One Hundredth Anniversary.," trans. Z. Chen, L. Liu, and M. Wang. Published by the Mei Hua Alumni Association, 2004.

[28] Gideon Chen, interview. M. Searle Bates states that as Confucianism weakened, missionaries in the twentieth century came to think of Confucianism as a source for moral standards, "The Theology of American Missionaries in

Ziying, the first ordained Chinese Seventh-day Adventist pastor, wrote a tract using a poetic form of the Xiamen dialect to introduce the Adventist message to the people of the region. Instead of focusing on how Jesus saves, his poem "The Song of Filial Piety" reinforced the importance of an essential Chinese value. Several generations of students who attended Mei Hua Adventist School sang, studied and memorized its words.[29]

Something the Adventists did not talk about, but may have made their religion attractive to their Chinese converts, was an overlap of their beliefs and practices with the failed Taiping movement a half century before.[30] Although the Adventists shared a number of beliefs and practices with the Taiping and other Protestant groups such as prohibitions against opium smoking, footbinding, and idol worship, they had three major beliefs that together made their version of Protestant Christianity unique in China: a distinctive view about the millennium, their worship on the seventh day as the Sabbath, and a belief in the divine inspiration of a living prophet.

On the issue of the millennium, the Adventists were focused on the imminent return of Christ. However, unlike their Protestant missionary rivals, they did not believe that he would come only after the world had been converted to Christianity. A precondition to Christ's return, was that their message be heard by everyone in the world and all be accorded a chance to accept or reject it.[31]

China, 1900-1950" in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, John K. Fairbank, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 141.

[29] Guo Zijing, *Xingxiaoge* ["Song of Filial Piety"], partial trans. Zeno Chen. Privately published, c. 1906.

[30] While it is not known whether Qingde heard stories about the Taiping, we do know that they continued to circulate long after the movement was suppressed. Harold Schiffrin in *Sun Yat-sen Reluctant Revolutionary* (Boston and Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 22-23, notes that Dr. Sun Yat-sen heard them. So did Pearl Buck whose Chinese nanny told them to her when she was a child, Theodore F. Harris, *Pearl S. Buck: A Biography* (New York: John Day Company, 1969-1971), 35.

31 For a brief description of the distinction between pre-millennialism which was the view of the Adventists and post-millennialism which was held by the mainline Protestant churches in China, see John F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millennialism, 1780-1850* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 4-7. The Adventists rely on Matthew 24: 14 for their view that Christ will come again when the message has been preached to the whole world. They assert that this does not mean that the whole world would have converted to Christianity as some other denominations have taught, Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Twenty-seven Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 342.

While their beliefs on the millennium did not tally precisely with that of the Taiping's,[32] in other areas they matched Taiping practices exactly. For instance, the Taiping, Seventh-day Baptists, and the Adventists all worshipped on the seventh-day of the week.[33] However, the Sabbath-keeping Baptists had only a small presence in the Middle Kingdom, whereas the Seventh-day Adventists rapidly became the largest new Protestant denomination to enter China after 1900.[34] In this respect, Adventist practice coincided exactly with that of the Taiping.[35]

Finally, unlike the other Protestant denominations in Xiamen, the Adventists were a sect, not a church. In Ernest Troeltsch's classic definition, practicing Adventists in America and all those in China were still sect members because they had converted to this faith. In contrast to a sect, a church was characterized by members who were born into it.[36] The Adventists' acknowledged prophet Ellen White was still alive and giving counsel to its leaders and members.[37] The acceptance of a prophet was a third area of affinity between the Adventists and the Taiping movement. Mrs. White, like the Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan, had visions from God and was

[32] Hong Xiuquan's millennium involved creating the Heavenly Kingdom on earth, Rudolf G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, Center for Chinese Studies, 1982), 68. This was not the Adventist view, though when Protestant missionaries met the Taiping, they thought they were similar to the Millerites, Wagner, 117-118. Since the Taiping was a failed movement and ideas like theirs were considered a threat to the government, it was probably best that Adventist beliefs about the millennium did not tally too closely with theirs.

[33] The Seventh-day Baptists arrived in Shanghai in 1845, Latourette, *Christian Missions in China*, 312. However, in 1905 after over sixty years in China, they had only 65 members. By contrast the Adventists had 66 members after only three years of mission work, *China Centenary Missionary Conference Record* (New York: American Tract Society, 1907), 74, 77.

[34] Albert Feuerwerker, *The Foreign Establishment in China*, 44. According to *The Chinese Year Book, 1938-1939 Premier Issue* (Chungking: Council of International Affairs, 1939), 74, notes the Adventists were the seventh largest Protestant denomination in China after the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Lutherans. This calculation excludes inter-denominational or non-denominational organizations such as the China Inland Mission.

[35] Augustus F. Lindley, *Ti-ping Tien-kwoh: The History of the Ti-Ping Revolution* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 319; David Lin, *China Letters: A Collection of Letters* (Rapidan, Virginia: Hartland Publications, 1993), 9.

[36] Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (*Die Soziallehren de christlichen kirchen und gruppen*), 2 vols., trans. by Olive Wyon, intro. Charles Gore (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), 331.

[37] Mrs. White had urged the Adventists to bring the Adventist message to China in 1892, Don Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966), 231.

accepted as a prophet by fellow believers.[38] The Presbyterians and American Reformed churches, which had been active in Xiamen for the past five decades, could trace their doctrinal ancestry back to the Protestant Reformer John Calvin in the sixteenth century.[39] However great he was as a theologian, Calvin did not claim to have prophetic visions or receive instructions directly from God.

Furthermore, the Adventist's comparatively late entry into China worked to their advantage as they escaped the taint other Protestant denominations incurred from their support of the imperial government's suppression of the Taiping Rebellion.[40] They were also not touched by the calls for vengeance of some Protestant missionaries that followed the Boxer Uprising and opened those who expressed such feelings to the ridicule of the American press including two sharp essays by Mark Twain.[41]

Another way the Adventists differed from the other Protestant denominations in Xiamen, was their refusal to work cooperatively with them. Before arriving in China, the other churches had signed a comity agreement to work cooperatively on projects of mutual concern such as education and medical care.[42] They did this because of their difficulties in converting the Chinese and the discovery that they had to simplify things as the Chinese did not understand doctrinal particularities.[43]

[38] Ellen White was born in 1827 and died in 1915. Richard W. Schwartz, *Light Bearers*, 64-66, discusses her visions. The most thoughtful discussion of Ellen White remains Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). Ellen White never claimed to be a prophet but only a "messenger," Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 224. Also, neither Mrs. White nor the Adventists have ever advanced the claim that her writings were more important than the scriptures, *Questions on Doctrine* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2003), 80; cf. Hong Xiuquan's "cleaning up" of the Bible stories, Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 254.

[39] Pitcher, *Amoy*, 95.

[40] Thomas H. Reilly, *Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*, 164.

[41] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism" in *Missionary Enterprise*, Fairbank, ed., 359. Twain's two articles dealing with this issue are "To a Stranger Sitting in Darkness," 172 *North American Review* (1901): 161-176 and "To My Missionary Critics," ibid.: 520-534, cited in *Missionary Enterprise*, 415, footnote 79.

[42] Kathleen Lodwick, *The Chinese Recorder Index*, 3d, 2 vols. (Wilmington: Scholarly Publications, 1986), xiii.

[43] Bates, "Theology," 141. A consequence of the Protestant denominations working together is that it gave the Chinese the idea that doctrinal differences were not essential to their message. From this it was one short step to concluding that some kind of general acceptance of Protestantism was sufficient to be called a Christian. The Adventists by insisting on the unique message made sure their converts knew that their doctrinal beliefs were a necessary part of being an Adventist.

The Adventists, believing that they had no duty to observe an agreement which they did not draft, went on to aggravate the other denominations by working to persuade their members to join Adventists faith.[44] In fact, the very first ordained Chinese Adventist minister, Guo Ziying, had been converted from Presbyterianism by a Chinese national from Singapore.[45] Such actions led to charges that they were "poaching" on another church's flock.[46]

However, it is highly unlikely that Qingde ever considered seriously the doctrinal differences his new religion had with the other Protestant denominations in Xiamen before making a decision to join the Adventists. This attitude would have been encouraged by members in his new community whose believers were taught that the Adventist's teachings were the sole road to personal salvation and an eternal life to come. This meant that all other denominations, including the Protestant ones in Xiamen, were in error. Hence, there was no need to investigate their claims.[47]

Overall the Adventists kept their members in close contact and isolated from the rest of society. Only those involved in evangelistic efforts to convert non-Adventists or those who worked in the medical profession were encouraged to keep in contact with people who were not fellow believers. The Adventists saw the world as a hostile, irredeemable environment where Satan was strong. They kept their eyes firmly on the world to come and looked constantly for signs of the imminent return of Christ.[48]

On the personal side, Qingde's renunciation of his family freed him to accept unreservedly his life in the community and unleashed hitherto untapped energies for his new found faith. This led to him to complete his education at Mei Hua School in 1909, as a member

[44] Lodwick, *Chinese Recorder*, xiii. Milton T. Stauffer, ed., *Christian Occupation of China: Special Commission on Survey and Occupation* (Shanghai: China Continuation Committee, 1922), 70.

[45] Don Neufeld, rev. ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 335. For the story of Guo's conversion, see Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962) 3: 100. In Adventist literature Guo Ziying's name is romanized in the Xiamen dialect which makes most renditions of it Keh Ngo-pit.

[46] Frank Rawlinson, ed. *China Christian Yearbook, 1934-1935* (Shanghai: Christina Literature Society, 1935), 98.

[47] Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 8d, Samuel S. Hill, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 271, states that one sign that a religious organization is a sect is the view that they have the sole road to salvation and that all other religions are in error. They hold themselves aloof from them, seeing them as suspect.

[48] David L. Rowe, "Comets and Eclipses: The Millerites, Nature, and the Apocalypse" *Adventist Heritage* (Winter 1976), 14.

of its first graduating class.[49] Next, he showed the depth of his commitment by undertaking ministerial training at the school so he could become an evangelist. After finishing his ministerial training, he went into the South Fujian region where he disseminated the message.

Qingde proved a preacher whose charisma and rhetorical manner drew people to him.[82] His sermons, which emphasized the imminent end of the world and the dramatic and public return of Christ, were enhanced by illustrations of fantastic and terrifying images and beasts mentioned in the Books of Daniel and Revelation.[50] He also won people to his faith because he was a nice, friendly person who always wore a smile. In fact, many years after his passing, his former parishioners uniformly commented on this part of his personality.[51] In this way, he was able to set up four houses of worship in South Fujian.[52]

Though he would marry and have a family, Qingde's first commitment would be always to the Adventists and his congregations which often proved all-consuming. His activities included preaching sermons and using his fine voice to lead in the singing of Adventist hymns as well as raising money to build or renovate houses of worship. He set a standard of ministering to his flock that could not be surpassed since he spent each day of the week visiting members of his congregation.[53] Qingde's schedule meant that he was frequently away from his own home. His generosity to those in need was legendary. Once, after his wife made him a knitted sweater, he saw a man who was suffering from the cold and gave the sweater to him.[54] He often gave money to members who were in financial need.[55]

Qingde continued to serve his parishioners for over forty years. Because the Adventists believed that religion and politics should be completely separated, he ignored such great political events as the

[49] Calvin Chen, "Stranded Scholar," 30; Zeno Chen, interview; Gideon Chen, interview.

[50] David T. Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism" in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 44-45, has a copy of a similar chart.

[51] Ruth Chen, "One Hundredth Anniversary of the Chinese Adventist Church in Quanzhou" in "History of the Church," trans. Lora L. Liu and Mary Y. Wang. Privately published, 2006.

[52] Gideon Chen, interview.

[53] Zeno Chen, interview.

[54] Calvin Chen, "Stranded Scholar," 31; Gideon Chen, interview.

[55] Gideon Chen, ibid.

overthrow of the Qing dynasty, the death of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Sino-Japanese War, and the defeat of Jiang Jieshi by Mao Zedong in a civil war. Even after the Communist victory in 1949 his main concern was for his parishioners. In one instance, after one of his houses of worship was closed, he was able to reopen it because a Communist officer recognized him and remembered how Qingde had treated him for an injured foot.[56]

The life of Chen Qingde provides an example of how the Adventists in China were able to sinicize their version of Christianity and win a convert who in turn became a successful evangelist for their faith. Though membership of the Chinese Adventists stood at only 21,000 in 1951, and the overall total of Christians before that year never exceeded one percent of the population, the seeds they planted have been revived in a major way as China enters the twenty-first century. Recent estimates of Adventists in China have reached a third of a million. Some have placed the number of Chinese Christians as high as 130 million.[57]

[56] Ibid.

[57] "Religion and Public Life," *The Economist* (2007). See also http://www.cbn.com/CBNnews/86660.aspx (accessed January 29, 2008), http://www.adventistworld.org/article/php?id=189 (accessed January 29, 2008).