

## China, Its Biblical Past and Future, Part 2: The Sabbath and Some of God's Witness in China

By [COGwriter](#)

In the previous article, various Chinese characters were displayed which suggested that the biblical account of Adam and Eve as well as that of the flood and the tower of Babel was known by Chinese writers thousands of years ago.

Did China receive any type of Christian witness throughout the centuries?

Were doctrines such as the seventh day Sabbath known or observed in China?

Is anything happening in the People's Republic of China today?

This article will attempt to provide some answers to those questions.

### From Earliest Times

According to a book by Chinese researchers, the seventh day cycle was known to the Chinese from the earliest times:

The week is not an institution based on natural phenomena, such as the day when the earth turns on its axis, the month with its lunar relationship, nor the year marking the earth's excursion about the sun. The week dates exclusively to the original days of creation, a period of time observed by the Chinese in spite of their thousands of years of isolation from the rest of the world and its customs.

An old Chinese saying, *the returning seventh day*...points up the fact that from very early times the Chinese have recognized the recurring seven day cycle which marks the week...

Even today, the seventh day of the first lunar month of the Chinese year is known as "the birthday of mankind"...Just as it was not the day of man's creation which was to be celebrated, but rather the following day of rest, so the Chinese celebrate the seventh day as a lingering memorial of God's creative work and the creation of mankind (Kang C.H., Nelson E.R. *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1979, p. 55).

Notice also the following:

Confucius, writing about 500 B.C., recognizes a seventh-day cycle culminating in a cessation of work. He wrote in his *Book of Changes*,

"this rule goes and returns, every seven days it comes again..."

"The ancient kings on this cumulating day (i.e., the Sabbath), closed their gates, the merchants did not travel, and the princes did not inspect their domains." (Cited in Neumann B. *A History of the Seventh-Day Sabbath Among Christians in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America*. The Bible Sabbath Association, 2004, p. 8).

### The First Century

One legend, that was written down in the late 1800s, but has been questioned, concerns the apostle Thomas:

The Rabban Song, which has been passed down orally by generations of Indian Christians, recounts Thomas' career in India in some detail. It states that the apostle arrived in India in late A.D. 49, stayed briefly then went to China. This generally agrees with Indian traditions. Such a trip would have occurred shortly after Thomas's arrival in South India. Farquhar and Garitte believe that it is unlikely that Thomas actually went to China proper--certainly not Peking--within the short space of perhaps a year allotted by the Indian narratives. They believe that he did evangelize in what are now Burma and Malaysia for a short time before returning to South India. According to the Rabban Song, between A.D. 52 and 59 Thomas founded seven churches and baptized one king...In A.D. 69, Thomas settled permanently in Mylapore...According to most Indian traditions, Thomas died of stab wounds on July 3, A.D. 72. The Brahmin priests of Mylapore feared that Christianity would eclipse Hinduism (Ruffin C.B. *The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary*. Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington (IN), 1997, pp. 132-134).

Since there has long been interaction and travel between China and Malaysia, if Thomas did go to Malaysia in A.D. 50, then it is possible that from those missionary efforts, the first witness could have spread to China. Since Thomas was trained by Jesus, he would have kept the seventh-day [Sabbath](#).

### **The Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Centuries**

Apparently no later than the seventh century, history suggests that there were Sabbath-keepers in China who claimed Christianity.

"Christianity Today" (CT) reported the following on *Christianity in China*:

#### **Did You Know?**

In 635, a Christian leader from Persia named Alopen arrived in Chang'an, the capital of the Tang dynasty. Christianity was at first welcomed by the Chinese. But two centuries later, imperial persecution forced Christians to flee mainland China. A nine-foot-tall limestone monument in Chang'an, erected in 781, commemorates the "Luminous Religion" brought by Alopen and his fellow missionaries. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/index.html#didyouknow> viewed 08/03/09).

The following excerpt provides more information on this:

#### **The Chang-An Monument**

"It was in the year 1625; the Jesuits had infiltrated the fabric of the Chinese cultured classes, when a sensational discovery was made. A large monument stone inscribed with nineteen hundred Chinese characters, and fifty Syrian words, was unearthed just outside the walls of Chang-An, the ancient capital of the Tang Dynasty. The news of this discovery caused a bustle of excitement in the ancient metropolitan city, and thousands were anxious to know what information about their cultural heritage was hidden in the writing.

The Jesuits, who were regarded as the teachers and scholars, were immediately summoned to decipher the inscriptions. To the astonishment of these haughty priests, there before their eyes, was a description of the prestigious position, and vast extent of the seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Christian Church of the East of a millennia before!

The ancient Chinese characters were inscribed in 781 AD, at the command of Emperor Tae-Tsung, to honor the arrival of an Assyrian missionary and his companions to the capitol in the year 635 AD from Ta

Tsin, or Judea. The stone revealed beliefs and practices of the primitive Christian church, which were unrelated and out of harmony with the Roman Catholic beliefs.

One of the passages reads:

"On the Seventh Day we offer sacrifices after having purified our hearts, and received absolution from our sins. This religion, so perfect and so excellent, is difficult to name, but it enlightens darkness by its brilliant precepts."

In a state of shock, the Jesuits, and the Mandarins, a class of scholarly religious Chinese rulers, worked to alter the Chinese characters to reflect the Catholic doctrines, for if the expectant population were to learn what the stone really said, it would greatly damage their beliefs in the Catholic doctrines, and diminish the influence of the Mandarins.

But something very different than the expected resulted. Today, after carefully comparing the known facts of history with an examination of the historical and doctrinal facts written on the stone, a fraud is obvious.

The Chang-An Monument, or the "speaking stone," as it is called, is considered to be as important a find as the Rosetta Stone, for it had the inscriptions in more than one language. The truth was preserved because the Jesuits were not able to read the inscription that was in Syrian.

From the reading of the stone today an irrefutable fact of history quickly becomes obvious. That ancient Sabbath-keeping Christianity had been very prominent and extensive throughout the Orient as late as the eighth and ninth centuries. " (Excerpt from "Our Sabbath Heritage" by James Arrabito. Sabbath Sentinel. September-October 2000).

How long some in China kept the Sabbath is unclear. But apparently some did. And since that monument dates from the eighth century to commemorate the arrival from Judea of missionaries in 635, it is certainly possible that Sabbath-keeping occurred well after the monument was made. It is also possible that Sabbath-keeping occurred in China previous to that particular missionary trip and that no records were made (or at least found) as well.

Here is more information about this period:

The earliest record of any Christian mission to China is found inscribed on the Nestorian monument in Sianfu, erected in A.D. 781. Sianfu was the capital of the T'ang empire (A.D. 618-906) and the center of the then-greatest civilization in the world. This monument recorded the visit to the T'ang court of a band of Christians led by Alopen from Ta-chin (Syria). Alopen brought with him the "true scriptures." They were given to T'ang T'ai-tsung who commanded that they be translated in the royal library. These Christians flourished under royal sponsorship until A.D. 845, when they suffered persecution, and soon afterward, near extinction...

In 1908 other Christian documents were found...Sir Aurel Stein, a British archaeologist, purchased these ancient manuscripts, one of which was dated 641 A.D., and is thus the oldest Chinese translation of any gospel portion. It is thought that these documents were written by the same Christian group as those in Sianfu (Kang C.H., Nelson E.R. The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1979, p. 28).

It seems that, perhaps because they had some type of contact with professors of Christ in the Tang Dynasty, that Chinese astrologers somewhat misunderstood some of the message and came up with the following:

Beautiful people come from the West. Korea, China and Japan are gradually at peace. (Pui-Hua R. Ancient Chinese Prophecies Till the End of the World. AuthorHouse, Bloomington (IN), 2008, p.85)

All negative forces are subservient...China now has a saint. Even if he is not that great a hero. (Ibid, p. 89)

The Bible warns of the beast and false prophet ([antichrist](#)) coming from Europe--an area west of China. If the Chinese revere someone as a saint, who is not that "great a hero," it appears that many in China will fall for these false [European leaders](#) that will be rising up relatively soon (these individuals are alive today).

## The 19th Century

Chinese Sabbath-keeping was also going on in the 1800s.

Notice:

At the close of 1846 Hung journeyed to Canton after hearing that a Christian missionary from the West resided there. He studied there under Mr. Roberts, the missionary, for almost a month, and read new portions of the Bible. Young missionaries from abroad, also studying under Mr. Roberts, were jealous of Hung's talents and earnestness. They brought about his removal! Hung left the city somewhat saddened.

Returning to south-central China, Hung found that the number of villagers who listened to him and were baptized soon numbered almost 2000. They had to form congregations among themselves, and became known as "the congregations of the worshippers of God." For short, they were dubbed "God-worshippers."

Continuous study of the Bible convinced Hung that his people should not smoke tobacco or opium-which the British were selling to the Chinese-that they should refrain from intoxicating drinks except under special circumstances, and that the [Sabbath](#) should be observed on the *seventh day*. The missionaries were quite displeased about the fact that "the Sabbath is observed not upon the same day as in Europe, theirs being the Saturday of our reckoning."

Hung further noticed that [Jesus didn't rise: on Sunday morning](#), but "three days after his death" (Hoeh Herman L. [The Dramatic Story of Chinese Sabbathkeepers](#). Good News Magazine, December 1955, pp.5-7).

Also notice:

In southern China in the late 1840's, a unique brand of Christianity emerged -- the Taiping Movement. Millions accepted its leadership, but foreign "Christian" missionaries rejected it.

The Taipings revered the Torah and adopted the seventh-day Sabbath! This is the story of one man's search for God. It is the corruption of that search by the counsel of politically motivated associates. It is also the story of an attempt to bring a better life to the people of China and how that quest was thwarted.

There is no doubt that the Taipings sought to create a theocracy. Their constitution insisted on high moral standards, church attendance, and compassion towards the needy. For example, opium smoking, the use of tobacco and wine, prostitution, foot binding, the sale of slaves, gambling and polygamy were all forbidden. Hong tried to model his government on the precepts of the Books of Moses to the extent that he understood these...

One of Hong's innovations was to see God as a family!...

The Ten Commandments were the standard by which the whole community was expected to live. The Taipings quoted from them extensively and wrote commentaries on them which adding references from Chinese proverbs and other writings.

For example a commentary on the Ten Commandments has these comments:

"The Ten Heavenly Commandments were established by the Great God.

"The First heavenly Commandment: Thou shall honour and worship the Great God.

"The great God is the Universal Father of all nations of the world. All men are given birth and nourished by him, all men are protected by him and all men ought, therefore to worship him respectfully morning and evening, and to acknowledge his grace. There is a common saying, "Produced by Heaven, nourished by Heaven, and Protected by Heaven..."[Michael II, 119-120]

The seventh Commandment was expanded to; "Thou shall not commit adultery or be licentious." The Commentary makes it clear that the commandment includes "the casting of amorous glances...", which is consistent with the commentary of Christ himself on the subject...

The seventh-day Sabbath was carefully observed. On Fridays a large flag was displayed, signaling the approach of the Sabbath. Its observance began at sunset on Friday...

There are two sad lessons, of course, in the story. The first is that having set out with such vigour to draw near to God and to improve the lot of their country, the Taiping leadership appears to have been caught up in the politics of the world, which for some then became an end in itself. The potential for power may have meant that the quest for truth came second. The other sad lesson is that those "Christian" nations and their religious establishments in objecting to Taiping Christianity cut off all help to a movement which if successful would have seen an entirely new form of Christianity. Had it been permitted to follow the patterns of the past with regard to the changing of dynasties, China would today be a Sabbath-keeping nation. And after one hundred years of Sabbath-keeping, where might that nation be today in its knowledge the Great God? (Lyll Leon J. How China Almost Became a Sabbath-keeping Nation! (Part 2. The Sabbath Sentinel. November - December 2001).

Note: Hung (per Dr. Hoeh) and Hong per L. Lyell are the same person.

(More on what occurred with the Tai-Ping can be found in the article [The Dramatic Story of Chinese Sabbathkeepers.](#))

The 20th Century

Related to the Church of God, Seventh Day (CG7):

The work in China, first mentioned in 1916, was apparently growing, for in 1921 it was reported that Elder Bernstein was supervising the work in Peking, and there were other elders in different parts of China...

1922: Activity Expands...Some 150 letters were sent to prospective ministers in foreign fields...China, Africa, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Japan, Philippines, western and eastern India, South America, and other places...These were Sabbath-keeping ministers...

By 1923, the "Big Push" was going at full gallop...Arrangements were being made to print Church of God literature in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, and Chinese, as well as two languages in India. (Nickels R.C. History of the Seventh Day Church of God. 1988, pp. 98-100,147)

1933...Church of God elders {included} B. Bernsten, China (Dugger A.N., Dodd C.O., A History of True Religion, 3rd edition. Jerusalem, 1972, 1990 reprint, pp. 300, 304)

In 1949, China officially became atheist and took harsh steps against religion. So many fled according to a report to CG7's A.N. Dugger:

In Formosa, there was a Church of God group which published a paper in Chinese, "The Holy Spirit Times." This group had originated in Peking over fifty years previously. While editor of the Bible Advocate, Dugger sent tracts to two Sabbath ministers, for them to translate into Chinese. One of them was Elder Pilquist. The Formosa church reported to Dugger that there were one thousand churches in China when they had to flee (1949) to Formosa. A few thousand actually did escape Communist China to Taiwan. In Korea, David G. Beattie was a missionary. (Nickels R.C. History of the Seventh Day Church of God. 1988, p. 182)

Later, during the 20th Century, [Herbert W. Armstrong](#) felt called of God to attempt to fulfill the requirements of Matthew 24:14:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

The question was, how could the true Church of God (COG) provide a witness to the People's Republic of China?

One way was the sending into China, literature produced by the old Worldwide Church of God, such as its *Plain Truth* magazine. Although it is unclear why the communist officials allowed any of this, the fact is that this did occur. It may be that since the *Plain Truth* magazine had such a high circulation (over 8,000,000 copies printed per month, which was one of the highest monthly circulations of any magazine in the world), that the communist leaders wanted copies to see what people throughout the world were reading.

Another way was to witness to China was to reach portions of it via short-wave radio. In the latter half of the 20th Century, Herbert Armstrong broadcast into China over Radio Ceylon. And although this was in English, it did provide a partial witness.

Another was to go to China. But this proved impossible at first. The Chinese government would not let Herbert W. Armstrong in because of his early writings about aspects of communism. But God wanted a witness in China--the Bible essentially demanded a witness to China.

So, what to do?

Instead of giving up, Herbert W. Armstrong decided to write a hypothetical article about what he would tell then Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (now spelled Mao Zedong). This was published in the March 1977 edition of the *Plain Truth* magazine under the title *The Private Conference with Mao that Might Have Taken Place*.

An idea inspired by God?

Yes, I think so because after Chinese leaders read that, they apparently decided that Herbert W. Armstrong was someone that they would allow to go to China.

So in late 1979, Herbert W. Armstrong, Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God, the top COG leader in the entire world, did personally go to China. Notice what he wrote about it:

Returning  
December 18, 1979

from

China

Dear Brethren and Co-Workers with Christ:

I am back from probably the most important and successful single trip overseas. I was honored to be...invited as a guest speaker and for personal conferences with leaders of the Communist People's Republic of China. There I spoke with leaders who shape the minds and thinking and beliefs of one fourth of all the people on earth!...

Government limousines drove up to our aircraft as we landed. A welcoming delegation had come to the airport, including the president and vice-president of the educational system, which includes the national library....

God was with us. He gave us great favor in the eyes of our Chinese hosts.

I had been invited to visit China some five or six years ago, by the Chinese Ambassador in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At that time the government at Peking refused to admit me, saying I had written articles against communism...

...I go to them with the message of hope--the Kingdom of God, when God will open all minds, and bring them to salvation.

Jesus did not come on a soul-saving mission! The gospel is good news, which God has called me to proclaim.

On this basis, not judging or condemning them, but bringing to the leaders of the most populous nation on earth Christ's message of hope, I was enthusiastically welcomed. The most universally believed lie and false doctrine with which Satan has deceived the whole world of "Christianity" is that all not now "saved" are lost. That is not true. They are neither saved nor lost--they are not yet judged.

Jesus said plainly, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Unless the Father draws them, atheists, and communists cannot come to Jesus. He said so in plain language! (Armstrong HW. Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Volume 2. Worldwide Church of God, Pasadena. 1987, pp.611,613,614).

Notice, that unlike the typical Protestant or Roman Catholic view, Herbert Armstrong wrote about the proper COG view--and that is that we in the COGs do not believe that nearly all the Chinese who ever lived will be condemned. An article of related interest may be [Hope of Salvation: How the COGs differ from most Protestants](#).

Herbert Armstrong may have also visited PRC as a guest of the government in 1981/2. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that Herbert Armstrong did make many visits to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and other Asian leaders during the last decade of his life.

Later, Herbert W. Armstrong received an invitation to go to China and to personally meet with Mao's successor Deng Xiaping. The event was televised in PRC and Hong Kong:

November 18, 1984...

In China I and my entourage were guests of the government that rules over nearly one fourth of all humanity. Our visit was on national TV and on front-page newspapers with a nationwide circulation of 200

million. It was even on Hong Kong television news. I was received in both Beijing and also in Shanghai with all the honors of a head of state...

Deng Xiaping admitted to me that China has made some serious mistakes which he is trying to correct. It was heartening to hear so powerful a man admit mistakes and work to correct them.

More than ever before I see the need to pray earnestly, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I have been given the opportunity to speak some very straight truths to China and Nepal...We go from here to Sri Lanka, then another visit to the King and Queen of Thailand, then Tokyo once again, then home (Armstrong HW. Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Volume 2. Worldwide Church of God, Pasadena. 1987, pp.632,634,635).



Herbert W. Armstrong greeting Chairman Deng Xiaoping

Furthermore, after personally going to China, Herbert W. Armstrong arranged for the biblical [Feast of Tabernacles](#) to be held in China for several years. Thus many from the COG were keeping the Sabbath in China during parts of the 20th Century (and although they are not considered to be Chinese nations, the Feast of Tabernacles is still held each year Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia--it has also been held in Singapore). Since Church of God services are normally held about 9-10 times per feast, and since the communists would monitor the services, that another witness was provided to China during that time.

### The 21st Century

According to Paul Wong, a minister of the True Jesus Church in Houston (not a Church of God), there were many Sabbath-keepers in China in the 20th and 21st Century who apparently met in houses. And while he has claimed that many were part of the Pentecostal movement, I have not seen evidence of this in prior centuries (though since the records are incomplete, there may have been).

Paul Wong visited some Sabbath-keepers in China and reported this about them in the 21st Century:

The house churches are not affiliated or associated with any organization and certainly have no formal ties with any Christian churches outside China. When the organized churches were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, traditional forms of Christian ministry were also done away with. The dynamics of house churches, therefore, flow partly from their freedom from institutional and traditional bondage (Wong P. HOUSE CHURCHES IN CHINA. Sabbath Sentinel. November-December 2000 <http://www.giveshare.org/churchhistory/sabbathchina.html> 6/24/06).

Thus there are some in China trying to worship God in spite of official discouragement and persecution.



But the question for the Church of God remains, how can a better witness be made to China?

Well, many COGs have reached China via the internet. Even websites, such as the COGwriter website reaches someone in PRC every day.

We in the [Continuing Church of God](#) are also sending literature to China.

We in the [Continuing Church of God](#) also have the url [www.ccog.asia](http://www.ccog.asia) which has articles in Mandarin Chinese. We are also getting our *Bible News Prophecy* magazine translated into Mandarin Chinese by a CCOG-affiliated Sabbath keeper who lives in PRC. Various articles, like [How to Prevent Sin](#) have been translated into Mandarin: [如何不犯罪](#); the article [Read the Bible](#) was translated and uploaded: [读圣经](#). Other articles have since also been translated and upload.

Efforts to reach more of the Chinese are happening We in the [Continuing Church of God](#) are reaching many in China.

Bibles themselves are getting popular in China:

In China it is known as the "sacred doctrine" and it has become one of the country's bestselling books. Yet it has nothing to do with the thoughts of Chairman Mao and its teachings have been in conflict with the forces of Communism for generations.

Demand for the Bible is soaring in China, at a time when meteoric economic growth is testing the country's allegiance to Communist doctrine. Today the 50 millionth Bible will roll off the presses of China's only authorised publisher, Amity Printing, amid public fanfare and celebration.

In the past, foreign visitors were discouraged from bringing Bibles into the country in case they received some heavy-handed treatment from zealous Customs officials.

Such is the demand in China for Bibles that Amity Printing can scarcely keep pace. Early next year it will move into a new, much larger factory on the edge of the eastern city of Nanjing **to become the world's single-biggest producer of Bibles...**

Of the 50 million Bibles Amity has printed, 41 million were for the faithful in Chinese and eight minority languages. The rest have been for export to Russia and Africa. Sales surged from 505,000 in 1988 to a high of 6.5 million in 2005. Output last year was 3.5 million and is expected to rise in 2007.

My hope and prayer is that the Chinese will actually [read the Bible](#) and learn the true faith that was "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Those in (and outside for that matter) China should also study the true [History of Early Christianity](#) so that they will not be deceived by preachers of false religions that call themselves Christians.

Currently, many in China also read COGwriter articles, go to COG websites, like that of the [Continuing Church of God](#), and watch YouTube videos such as those on the [ContinuingCOG](#) and [Bible News Prophecy](#) channels. We also have a Mandarin Chinese focused website [www.ccog.asia](http://www.ccog.asia) which also has some information in English.

At least one person from China has expressed interest in attending services of the [Continuing Church of God](#) and has done so.

Matthew 24:14 will be fulfilled and those in China will receive that witness prior to the great tribulation (vs. 21).

And ultimately, the two witnesses who will reach the entire world (Revelation 11:3-12), will also get the warning message as well as the good news of the [kingdom of God](#) into China.

Although more will be done, it appears that throughout history, there has been some biblical witness in China, and we in the [Continuing Church of God](#) are trying to do our part in the 21st century.

Other articles in this series will try to address some of the other witnesses that God has provided to the Chinese peoples, as well as His plan for the Chinese peoples.

To [China, Its Biblical Past and Future, Part 1: Genesis and Chinese Characters](#) or To [China, Its Biblical Past and Future, Part 3: China in Prophecy](#) or to <http://www.ccog.asia>

[China, Its Biblical Past and Future, Part 1: Genesis and Chinese Characters](#) This article provides information showing that the Chinese peoples must have known about various accounts in the Book of Genesis up until their dispersion after the Tower of Babel. [China, Its Biblical Past and Future, Part 3: China in Prophecy](#) What is Ahead for China? What will happen to nearly all the Chinese? [The Dramatic Story of Chinese Sabbathkeepers](#) This reformatted *Good News* article from 1955 discusses Sabbath-keeping in China in the 1800s. [The History of Early Christianity](#) Are you aware that what most people believe is not what truly happened to the true Christian church? Do you know what the doctrines of the early church were? [Continuing Church of God](#) The group striving to be most faithful amongst all real Christian groups to the word of God. Here is a link to its website with a Mandarin Chinese focus: <http://www.ccog.asia>.

[Back to COGwriter home page](#)

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