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## The Pentecostal Church in China

Robert Menzies,  
Guest Editor

華源協作  
CHINASOURCE



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## EDITORIAL

# Pentecostal Churches in China— An Introduction

By Robert Menzies, Guest Editor

*From the east coast to the west coast*

*The wind of the Holy Spirit will blow everywhere,*

*From the east to the west*

*The glory of the Holy Spirit will be released.*

*Good news comes from heaven,*

*Good news rings in the ear*

*Causing dry bones to become moist*

*Frail bones to become strong.*

*Full of the Holy Spirit, we will not turn back,*

*Step by step we go to distant places,*

*The lame skipping,*

*The mute singing,*

*The fire of the Holy Spirit*

*The longer it burns the brighter it gets.<sup>1</sup>*



The common thread that unites Pentecostals in China with other Pentecostals around the world is their sense of connection with the apostolic church as reflected in the book of Acts. Chinese Pentecostals pray for the sick, worship with joyful abandonment, speak in tongues, and seek the enabling of the Spirit for bold witness in the face of persecution because they find all these experiences described in the New Testament. The message and methods of the early church are models for their lives and ministry.

Although Pentecostals are thoroughly evangelical,<sup>2</sup> they typically affirm three distinctive doctrinal convictions. Pentecostals believe (1) the New Testament serves as a model for contemporary Christian life and ministry (thus, gifts of the Spirit are relevant for the church today); (2) the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) is a post-conversion enabling for ministry; and (3) (not all but many affirm) that speaking in tongues marks this “baptism in the Spirit” experience.<sup>3</sup>

This issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly (CSQ)* seeks to illuminate the origins, characteristics, and continuing influence of Pentecostal churches in China. While the contributors to this issue have studied widely and taught in a variety of academic institutions, they were asked to contribute to this issue because they are practicing Pentecostals and have ministered broadly in Pentecostal and charismatic churches in China. The contributors are not simply academicians who in a detached manner (and from a distance!) study about Pentecostals; rather, they are Pentecostal practitioners who have made significant contributions to the Pentecostal movement in China.

Dennis Balcombe planted the Revival Christian Church in Hong Kong and pastored this church for many years. However, his vision for China always included the millions who populate the mainland. In 1978 he began his ministry on the mainland and continues to bless churches there to this day. Balcombe’s humble bearing and Pentecostal message resonated with house church believers. Indeed, he has fanned the flame of Pentecostal revival in the Chinese house churches more than any other foreign Christian worker. So, it is a great joy to include Balcombe’s personal observations and reflections on the origins and growth of the Pentecostal movement in China.

I first met Evan Liu in China in 2002. A young man at that time, we met at a house church Christmas celebra-

tion. Little did I know that we would eventually meet again in this same city but a dozen years later. Since then, our friendship has grown, and our ministry interests have converged. Dr. Liu's journey of faith led him to pursue New Testament studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he earned a PhD. He is the founder of the China Servant Leadership Center and ministers widely in China. Dr. Liu's involvement in planting churches in China led him to embrace the Pentecostal experience and a charismatic approach to church ministry. He offers an informative, first-hand account of the charismatic character of the rural house churches and of the more recent emergence of large, urban house churches that combine Reformed theology with charismatic practice. The former is viewed through the lens of the "Back to Jerusalem" (BTJ) movement; the latter, through the lens of the "Mission China 2030" (MC 2030) movement.<sup>4</sup>

Zhang Li has pastored several house churches in China, served as a faculty member at a house church Bible school for the past twelve years, and now teaches at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in the Philippines. He is a dedicated and gifted ministerial colleague as well as a Christian brother and trusted friend.

The story of Pentecost in China is indeed remarkable, and these colleagues tell it well. The story begins with ordinary people like William Simpson and Serene Løland who were caught up in the fire of Pentecostal revival. The spark they released ignited into a flame that swept through the indigenous churches, groups like the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family, which in turn shaped the ethos of the dynamic house church movement that has registered explosive growth in the face of intense opposition.

Now, as China is undergoing rapid and massive transformation, Pentecostals in China face new and significant challenges. But we may find that these challenges represent fresh opportunities. If the last seven decades in China have taught us anything, they have surely taught us never to underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit. I am confident that you will be encouraged as you read these eye-witness accounts of the story of Pentecost in China.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's translation of song 747, "The Wind of the Holy Spirit Will Blow Everywhere," found in Lu Xiaomin, *Xin Ling Zhi Sheng* [Sounds of the Heart] (unregistered house church publication, 2003), 806.

<sup>2</sup> Pentecostals represent the majority of evangelical believers in many countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Although the early charismatics, such as Dennis Bennett, were thoroughly Pentecostal, the term "charismatic" is now often used to speak of a broader group, Christians who emphasize the power and gifts of the Spirit (essentially points 1 and 2 above) but are more flexible with respect to the relationship between tongues and Spirit baptism (point 3).

<sup>4</sup> For more on Pentecostal identity and theology, see Robert Menzies, "Pentecostal Theology and the Chinese Church," *ChinaSource Blog*, January 21, 2015, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/pentecostal-theology-and-the-chinese-church/> and *Pentecost: This Story Is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: GPH, 2013). A Chinese translation of this book is also available.

For more on urban and rural Pentecostal churches see Robert Menzies. "Urban Churches in China: A Pentecostal Case Study." *ChinaSource Quarterly*, ChinaSource, Summer 2015, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/urban-churches-in-china/>, and Robert Menzies, "A Strong Foundation: Pentecostal Revival in Yunnan Province," *ChinaSource Blog*, ChinaSource, April 18, 2022, <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/a-strong-foundation-pentecostal-revival-in-yunnan-province/>.

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## Pentecost in China (1): Origins

By Dennis Balcombe

Pentecostal Christians in many nations will tell you how Pentecost came to their nation in the first years of the twentieth century. Americans talk about the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, and people living in the UK speak of the early Welsh revival. At the same time great revivals took place in Ireland, South Africa, Pyongyang, Korea, and the Khasi Hills in India. But many have not heard that Pentecost also came to China in the beginning of the twentieth century.



Image credit: [Shangmei li](#) via [Unsplash](#).

### William Wallace Simpson

William Wallace Simpson (no relation to A. B. Simpson) was sent out by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) and began his ministry in Lhasa, Tibet in the late nineteenth century (1892).<sup>1</sup> To his knowledge no Christian had entered the city to bring the message of Christ, though other European explorers and travelers had previously reached the city.

One of the head lamas had gotten the word that Simpson and his entourage would enter Lhasa to bring the Christian religion. Thus, he stood outside the city and proclaimed that if this missionary dared to enter the city to preach his foreign religion, he would be struck dead by the Tibetan gods. After prayer and knowing he was being led by the Spirit, Simpson entered the city and began to prepare for ministry. However, before he could do anything, the lama who opposed him, for some unknown reason, died suddenly. This was one of the first examples of “power evangelism” in China, a term that later became popular under John Wimber of the Vineyard Movement in the second half of the twentieth century.

The superstitious people in Lhasa revered Simpson as a “god” with power. Of course, he denied he was a god, but this allowed him to preach Christ to them, and reportedly he made some converts. Later they gave him gifts of many of their precious temple artifacts (not realizing their archeological value), which he took back to the US and sold to a museum in Chicago. Through this he was able to finance his missionary work in China for several decades.

Around the turn of the century, Simpson was led by the Spirit to go to Beijing (then known as Beiping “northern peace”) to pioneer a Chinese church. During prayer, many in his congregation began to speak in tongues, an experience at that time known by them only through reading the book of Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14. The result was a revival in the church with many supernatural healings including one individual who was raised from the dead during a meeting. The year was 1900.

A few years later, the CMA denomination in America took a stand against speaking in tongues and other Pentecostal gifts.<sup>2</sup> Since the CMA leaders knew Simpson’s church in Beiping was now Pentecostal, they ordered Simpson to cease teaching Pentecostal doctrines, including speaking in tongues and spiritual gifts, or they would cut off his financial support. Simpson wrote back, “I am now the pastor of this church, and they are totally supporting me. I don’t care if you cut off my support, but I will not compromise on my beliefs.” True to their warning, the CMA leaders cut him off. Years later, after the formation of the Assemblies of God, he joined this Pentecostal denomination in 1918 and continued to plant churches and preach the Pentecostal message. Simpson remained in China until 1949, when he returned to the US.<sup>3</sup>

## **Women Missionaries**

After the Pentecostal revivals at Azusa Street and in the UK, many Pentecostal missionaries went to China and preached the Full Gospel<sup>4</sup> message. Significant Pentecostal revivals came to the Scandinavian nations, and many Pentecostal missionaries from Norway, Sweden, and Finland travelled to the interior of China taking the Pentecostal message.

One of these early Scandinavian missionaries was Marie Monsen (1878–1962). Some considered her the “mother of the house church.” Due to her Pentecostal beliefs, she was denounced as a heretic by other evangelical missionaries; however, her ministry impacted the churches in Henan.<sup>5</sup>

Many of these early Pentecostal missionaries were single young women who, at great cost and in the face of much opposition, spread the Pentecostal message throughout China. Serene Løland was among this group. She was from Norway and spent 50 years in China. The last years of her missionary life were spent in Hong Kong. I was privileged to work with her there in the early 1970s.

Sister Løland was the first Norwegian Methodist missionary in China, landing in Fuzhou (then spelled Foo-chow) in 1921. She later worked with the famous Spirit-filled Chinese evangelist, John Sung, who is reported to have led over 100,000 to the Lord through his powerful evangelical ministry, which was marked by signs and wonders. These converts were not only in China, but many nations throughout Southeast Asia.

Sister Løland also spent time in Shanghai where she helped many leading clergymen receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit during the great charismatic revival around 1948. At the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Shanghai more than 50 of the theological students, along with their president, Chia Yu Ming, came to her meetings and received the baptism of the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> Chia’s writings were the most popular theological books in China, even more than those penned by Watchman Nee, whose books were only read by members of his church, the Little Flock.

Sister Løland worked closely with the most renowned men of God during that period: John Sung; Watchman Nee; Wang Mingdao; Andrew Gi; and Markus Cheng. At one time, she was a member of Watchman Nee’s congregation. Sister Løland told me she prayed with Nee, and he received the baptism of the Spirit. But Watchman Nee never claimed to be charismatic.

After most missionaries were forced out of China, Sister Løland remained two more years and eventually, in March 1951, came to Hong Kong. She was greatly used of the Lord to promote the Pentecostal movement throughout Hong Kong, especially among the Pentecostal holiness churches. She left Hong Kong to return home to Norway in 1972. Her powerful testimony is related in her autobiography, *God in China* (now out of print).

## **Adullam Rescue Mission**

H. A. Baker, author of *Visions beyond the Veil*, (1920) ministered in Tibet from 1911 to 1919 and later in Yunnan, China from 1919 until 1950 when all missionaries were forced to leave China. In 1955 he went to Miaoli County, Taiwan, where he served until his death in 1971.

With his wife Josephine, Baker started a mission for street children living in village areas in Yunnan province called Adullam Rescue Mission. The children, aged six to eighteen, were uneducated and few had any knowledge of the Bible and Christianity. However, Baker led them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and they

saw a series of visions of angels, Jesus, heaven, and hell, which were later confirmed to them as they read the Bible. This was part of a significant Pentecostal revival in that part of China. Many of these children grew up serving the Lord, and many were later pastors of both house churches and Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches in Yunnan.

This amazing book, *Visions beyond the Veil*, documenting the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these children, is available as a free PDF download.<sup>7</sup>

## Early Pentecostal Revivals

Also unknown to many are the great Pentecostal revivals that swept China, starting in the 1930s right up to the establishment of the PRC in 1949. My close friend, Reverend Moses Yu (1920–2010), told me that the indigenous Chinese Pentecostal revivals from the late 1920s through 1949 were powerful and widespread resulting in hundreds of thousands of conversions. However, few if any books giving testimonies to these revivals are available in bookstores. The reason is most of the publishers of books on Chinese church history are evangelicals, and many of their associated denominations hold to cessationism. This belief, which is adhered to by many even today, teaches that all supernatural gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues and miraculous healing, ended in the second century with the death of the apostles. Thus, Rev. Yu was invited to Hong Kong to conduct a week-long seminar at the Assembly of God Bible Seminary in which he documented in detail the great Pentecostal revivals in indigenous Chinese churches. They can be found today in the Ecclesia Theological Seminary archives in Hong Kong. Space will only allow me to briefly mention three.

***The Great Shandong Revival (1927–1937)***. Probably the most significant revival was the Great Shandong Revival which began in 1927 in Shandong province.<sup>8</sup> Rev. Yu, also my coworker, born and raised in Shandong, was only 12 years old when this great revival swept Northeast China. He could personally recount many events in this revival and had associated with the great men of God during that period: Rev. John Song; Wang Mingdao; Andrew Gih; Chia Yu-ming; Watchman Nee; Allan Yuan; and others. The missionaries and pastors associated with this revival were from the Southern Baptist church in the United States.<sup>9</sup> It was one of the great revivals recorded in church history.<sup>10</sup> Anyone visiting the house churches, and even official churches, in Shandong province today will realize much of the present church leadership are descendants of this great revival. In fact, this great Pentecostal revival spread throughout Northeast China.

A Baptist missionary, Mary Crawford, published a book, *The Shantung Revival*, in 1932. Again, since the manifestations of the Spirit in that revival go against the theological position of the Baptist church, it is not available from Baptist Press.<sup>11</sup> However, the copyright period expired, and the charismatic leader, Randy Clark, republished this book which is available today on Amazon.<sup>12</sup>

***The Jesus Family***. Directly related to the Shandong Revival, the Jesus Family movement was established in 1921 by Jing Dianying in the rural village of Mazhuang, Taian county of Shandong province.<sup>13</sup> This was a unique, Pentecostal communitarian church. The adherents lived in “Christian communes” in which resources were pooled and needs of the poorer in the community were met. In rural and semi-rural areas, members of the Jesus Family were formed into small communes of up to a few hundred with the believers working and living together and holding property in common under the direction of the family head. There were well over one hundred Jesus Family communities by 1949 with a total of several thousand members. All were run entirely by Chinese believers under the leader Jing Dianying (1890–1957).<sup>14</sup>

The Jesus Family was strongly millenarian, anticipating the imminent return of Christ, and it was very Pentecostal, basing its worship and behavior on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All the Jesus Family communities were disbanded in 1953, but even today many former adherents or their children are active members and leaders

in the Chinese Christian community. In the 1980s, some Jesus Family groups reappeared, but they are technically illegal and subject to persecution by the authorities.

I was privileged to meet many of the leaders of the Jesus Family when China opened in the 1980s and several years ago visited some of the local Shandong house churches whose roots can be traced to the Jesus Family. They would all rehearse testimonies of miracles, healings, and gifts of the Spirit that even today are in operation in their local churches.

**The True Jesus Church.** Another indigenous Pentecostal movement is the True Jesus Church. It was started in 1917 by Paul Wei, Barnabas Zhang, and others. It is a powerful Pentecostal church with many gifts of the Spirit, healings, and miracles. However, they are considered a “Oneness Church” and do not believe in the Trinity. They also meet on Saturday as they believe they must keep the Sabbath.

The True Jesus Church is currently one of the largest Christian groups in China and Taiwan, as well as one of the largest independent Chinese churches in the world.<sup>15</sup> A few years ago, on a visit to Wuchang, the head leader of the Three-Self church took me to visit one of the True Jesus churches. They had a huge building that could seat several thousand. He told me that one-third of all the Christians in the Wuhan area went to churches associated with the True Jesus Church. He said that since they are considered a local, indigenous Chinese, grassroots movement with no connection with the West, they are not persecuted in the same manner that denominational churches related to the West are. There are many large True Jesus congregations in Hong Kong and parts of England.

This brief historical survey,<sup>16</sup> based largely on personal conversations that I have had over the years, brings us to the brink of the post-1949 “New China” era and the emergence of the house church movement in China, which is the focus of my next article, “Church Growth in the ‘New China’ Era.”

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, Richard Simpson, a former street evangelist who was a part of my home church in Oakland, California, told me the testimony of his grandfather, a missionary to China.

<sup>2</sup> See William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 72 and G. B. McGee, “Simpson, William Wallace,” in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1070-71 on this matter and other aspects of Simpson’s life.

<sup>3</sup> McGee, “Simpson, William Wallace,” 1070–71.

<sup>4</sup> The Full Gospel is often understood as including all four elements of the Fourfold Gospel: Jesus is Savior; Healer; Baptizer in the Spirit; and Coming King.

<sup>5</sup> Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2002), 15-22. In addition to Brother Yun’s glowing remarks concerning Monsen’s impact, C. Douglas Weaver also describes Monsen’s influence on Baptist missionaries serving in China in *Baptists and the Holy Spirit: The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 266-67.

<sup>6</sup> Serene Løland, *God in China* (1973), 56. This book is now out of print.

<sup>7</sup> H. A. Baker, *Visions Beyond the Veil* (Faith, Hope, Prayer, 1920) Free PDF, accessed on May 15, 2023, <https://www.hopefaithprayer.com/visions-beyond-the-veil-free-book-h-a-baker/>.

<sup>8</sup> See “The Shantung Revival (1927-1937),” *Beautiful Feet*, accessed on May 15, 2023, <https://romans1015.com/shantung-revival/>.

<sup>9</sup> See the fascinating and informative interview with C. Douglas Weaver of Baylor University on Pentecostal Baptists. “Dr. Weaver discusses a seldom acknowledged 1930 Baptist ‘Pentecostal’ Revival in China” and emphasizes that there have been and still are many Pentecostal Baptists.” See “1930 Baptist ‘Pentecostal’ Revival in China” *Asian Center for Pente-*

**[Continued on page 14](#)**

## Pentecost in China (2)

### Church Growth in the “New China” Era

By Dennis Balcombe

#### General Observations

When I first arrived in Hong Kong in 1969, there was no accurate information about the church in China. The prevalent belief was that Christianity had been basically eliminated from China. It was common knowledge that all religion had been prohibited during the Cultural Revolution (1967–1976), the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church—which was totally under the control of the Communist Party and preached only liberal theology—was closed, house churches were prohibited, all clergy were sent to labor reform camps or prison, seminaries and Bible schools were closed, and all Bibles and religious books had been destroyed by the Red Guards.



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

It was assumed by many that the whole nation had become atheistic. As China began to open in 1978, one major ministry, Asian Outreach, printed a tract which simply described the beautiful mountain scenery in Guilin (such as you see depicted in Chinese landscape paintings), and ended with this question, “Is it possible all this somehow occurred through natural processes, or might there perhaps be a Creator?” One would ask, why were these gospel tracts not more specific in presenting Christ and the gospel message? The reason is there was a fear that any religious literature would be confiscated and those distributing it would be arrested. It was thought that except for a few older people in the villages, the whole nation was now atheistic.

Most liberal churchmen stated, “What Christianity could not do, Chairman Mao did. Chairman Mao made a ‘new man’ out of the Chinese race.”<sup>1</sup> They claimed crime, prostitution, the taking of illegal drugs, gambling, and other vices had been eliminated. Liberal churchmen stated, “While the people were relatively poor compared to most in capitalist nations, what they had they shared one with another, the government provided basic educational and medical services, everyone greatly loved Mao and the Communist Party, and most were very happy.” It was then often stated, “There is no need for Christianity, a Western religion that puts guilt on people and allowed imperialism to take root in China.”

However, within weeks of my first trip to Guangzhou in the spring of 1978, I found that was totally false. During the past several decades we have been learning about the terrible atrocities, massacres, famines, political infighting, and horrendous persecution of religious believers. Even now we hear about the horrors of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) in which an estimated 32 to 45 million lost their lives through famine with about ten percent being victims of the radical leftists. Victims of persecution during the Cultural Revolution—those who “struggled against” it were persecuted and tortured—number in the millions including hundreds of thousands of Christians. No one is sure of the total number of deaths during the Cultural Revolution, but it is possibly several million.

Prostitution then and today was rampant, but prostitutes then sold their bodies to get ration coupons which were needed to purchase food. We saw this everywhere after China opened in 1978 as even then food could only be purchased using both money and ration coupons. As we began to travel throughout China, we saw not only prostitutes, but beggars everywhere. Poverty was widespread, and on visits to hospitals we saw dirty, rundown buildings with almost none of the equipment or medication that a hospital would need.

The idea promoted by liberal clergymen in the West that Mao had made a “new man” was not true, but what was true is that the small, Protestant, house church of perhaps not more than one million believers in 1949, had grown by multiple millions.

I became aware of one group of 40,000 believers in a district in Guangxi province. They met in multiple house churches, but we were told they had only one complete Bible among them. Due to that report, in the first part of 1979 we began our Bible ministry to China (called “Donkeys for Jesus”), and during the 36 years from 1979 to 2015 (the year Xi Jinping began to take tight control of the nation), countless millions of Bibles were delivered to China from Hong Kong. Most were provided free to house church leaders, and thus during those years I was privileged to travel throughout this vast nation.

During the past few decades, I have met with hundreds of house church leaders, and even many TSPM pastors, and have ministered in both types of churches on multiple occasions. This is what I learned: Through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all Christians through which the Full Gospel<sup>2</sup> was preached, with healings, deliverances, and signs following, the Protestant church of a million or less grew to a church of 70 to 100 million believers, conservatively speaking.

Due to the strict control of people’s movements, including that of foreign visitors, it is impossible for anyone to conduct an accurate religious survey. However, these estimates are based on the percentage of known Christians in different districts and an analysis of general religious beliefs in the different provinces. Many believe that at least eighty percent of the Christians are either Pentecostal or charismatic. While this is hard to verify, I firmly believe most people converted to Christ due to miraculous healings, deliverance from demonic powers, and other miracles that proved the truth of the gospel.

## **Personal Reflections**

From 1979 to 1997 I made multiple trips throughout China. Weekly, I taught English in Guangzhou, led a few hundred students to Christ and baptized them in the Guangzhou reservoir. I helped to coordinate a Bible ministry through which thousands of Bibles entered China every week, and I travelled all over the nation meeting with Christian leaders in hotel rooms or public parks in major cities.

I wanted to visit rural home churches, especially in Henan (where Hudson Taylor previously worked), but was told it was far too dangerous for a foreigner to visit them. However, knowing that our church was a Spirit-filled Pentecostal church, and almost one hundred percent of the Bible couriers and those supporting the ministry were Pentecostals, the Chinese believers wanted me to visit their home church coworkers’ meetings and teach on this subject.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in early 1988, they arranged for me to go into the rural areas of Henan, Anhui, and Zhejiang provinces to teach in coworkers’ meetings that numbered from 80 to 800 attendees or more. Meetings would last three to five days in one village, and then we would go on to another village. Usually, I would teach and preach for up to nine hours a day, but during that time, in every session, we prayed for the believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This continued until 1997 when I lost my visa. When my visa was restored in 2003, I continued this ministry until 2015 when I again lost my visa.

Before we visited China and taught the Pentecostal message, believers would experience miracles of healing and supernatural deliverances. This was due to the prayers of Christians. Even decades before I entered the rural areas to teach the Pentecostal message, churches had a habit of gathering early in the morning for prayer with these meetings often lasting up to two hours.

As people were baptized in the Holy Spirit, they also received gifts of the Holy Spirit: gifts of healing, words of knowledge, miracles, and so on. More than that, they received great boldness to openly preach the gospel.

Thus, healings and miracles that followed the proclamation of the gospel led to the conversion of thousands of people.

Space does not allow me to share even a small percentage of what I saw; however, I want to state that we saw thousands of coworkers filled with the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues and a massive outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Miracles, signs, wonders, and divine healings were seen everywhere we went. Many told me the main reason people became Christians was due to the testimony of divine healing, deliverance from demonic powers, and other miracles. While the Chinese church is not perfect—mistakes have been made, some false doctrine and teaching emerged during those years—nobody can deny that the Chinese church is like the church in the book of Acts. The gospel is widely preached with signs following; but, as in the first century, persecution is prevalent.

Hu Jintao was the moderate president of the People’s Republic of China from 2003 to 2013. He promoted the “harmonious society” policy. During those years we often visited the official Three-Self Patriotic Churches and with the approval of the authorities ministered in these churches in many cities. Many thus were opened to the work of the Holy Spirit with biblical worship services, praying for the sick, and the operation of the gift of the Holy Spirit. During those years official churches would unite with house churches to preach the gospel in their communities.

During recent years, restrictions on Christian ministry in general have increased and many overseas Christian workers have been forced to leave China. The government restricts the evangelism of children and youth, and Bibles can only be purchased in official church bookstores. Atheistic Marxist education is the norm for all Chinese young people. It would seem the present leadership of China is reversing the Open Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping which began in the 1980s. However, we thank the Lord that during the few short years China was open, thousands of Spirit-filled Christians from overseas entered China to provide Bibles, teaching materials, and to pray with countless tens of thousands of Chinese Christians to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Chinese church has a solid foundation based on the Word of God in which the Holy Spirit is honored. I believe despite temporary setbacks, the doors to China are still open in that the Chinese people are very open to Christ and the Holy Spirit. I believe that before the return of Christ, perhaps in our generation, this nation of 1.4 billion Han Chinese and other ethnic groups will be reached with the Full Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar assessment of the naïve sentiments at that time, see Ross Paterson’s foreword to Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), 7.

<sup>2</sup> The Full Gospel is often understood as including all four elements of the Fourfold Gospel: Jesus is Savior; Healer; Baptizer in the Spirit; and Coming King.

<sup>3</sup> “Coworkers’ meetings” refers to meetings for those actively engaged in ministry rather than the normal worship services that were open to all believers.

*Dennis Balcombe, an American who has served in Hong Kong and mainland China for 54 years, has a vision to provide a Bible to every Chinese desiring one, and that all Chinese Christians will experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He planted the Revival Christian Church in Hong Kong in 1969 and pastored this church for many years. He is currently the director of Revival Chinese Ministries International.*

## The Pentecostal Legacy of the Indigenous Churches in China

By Robert Menzies

One of the striking aspects of Christianity in pre-1949 China was the emergence of strong, vital, indigenous churches.<sup>1</sup> These churches were founded and led by Chinese Christians. They were established independently and operated without foreign finances, control, or leadership. Although these groups were largely overlooked by missionaries and have been neglected by historians, it is evident that they were extremely significant. More recently, Daniel Bays, a noted historian of Chinese Christianity, has highlighted the significance of these groups. Speaking of these independent Chinese Christian groups, Bays writes, “I believe that this sector [of the Christian Church] was far more interesting and significant than it might have been thought.”<sup>2</sup> Bays estimates that by the 1940s, these indigenous groups accounted for between twenty and twenty-five percent (or 200,000 believers) of all Protestants.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Bays notes that these groups have exerted a tremendous influence on the Christianity that has flourished in China since the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

There were indigenous churches that were not Pentecostal in character, such as the Little Flock (*Xiao Qun*) established by Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng) in the mid-1920s. There were also, certainly, a number of non-Pentecostal Chinese church leaders of stature. Wang Mingdao, for example, apparently had a Pentecostal experience in 1920, but later “backed away from full Pentecostalism.”<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact remains that of the three largest independent Chinese churches that sprang up in the early part of the twentieth century (the True Jesus Church, the Little Flock, and the Jesus Family), two were Pentecostal. One of these Pentecostal groups, the True Jesus Church, was by far the largest, single, indigenous Chinese church group of that era. This fact, coupled with the significant impact of the Pentecostal form of revivalism that swept through China in the 1930s, indicates that the majority of Chinese Christians prior to 1949, when able to develop their own Christian identity, gravitated to Pentecostal forms of worship and doctrine. It is worth noting, then, that indigenous Chinese Christianity was predominantly Pentecostal. It is evident that the legacy of these early indigenous churches lives on in the Christians and churches birthed in the revivals of the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> This legacy is conspicuously Pentecostal, and it is to this legacy that we now turn.

A survey of the larger house church networks in China that grew dramatically during this earlier era (1980–2000) reveals that a majority are Pentecostal in theology and practice. The Fangcheng (or China for Christ) Church, the Li Xin (or Zhong Hua Meng Fu) Church, the Yin Shang Church (in Anhui), and the True Jesus Church are all strongly Pentecostal groups. The China Gospel Fellowship should probably be categorized as Neo-Pentecostal, although it is home to many Pentecostals as well.<sup>7</sup> The Wenzhou church established by Miao Zhitong might also be described as Neo-Pentecostal. Non-Pentecostal groups would include the Word of Life (or Born Again) Church, established by Peter Xu, and Watchman Nee’s Little Flock (*Xiao Qun*), as well as several smaller groups that are largely reformed in theology and follow the cessationist teaching of the Indonesian-based Chinese pastor, Stephen Tong.<sup>8</sup>

A detailed analysis of these networks is beyond the scope of this short essay. However, I can offer a brief description of the largest of the house church networks operating in China in the 1990s, the China for Christ Church (sometimes called the Fangcheng Church).<sup>9</sup>

## The China for Christ (Fangcheng) Church

The China for Christ Church began in the Fangcheng district of Henan Province. It grew rapidly in the 1980s and constitutes a large network of house churches that span the length and breadth of China. Zhang Rongliang, recognized as the church's founding leader, described a key turning point in the life of the church: "In 1980, we received our very first Bibles from outside China. We held them in our arms and kissed them delicately, with tears in our eyes. They were the fulfillment of many years of fervent prayer and longing."<sup>10</sup> Decades of oppression had created a great longing and desire in the hearts of people for spiritual truth. In this explosive setting Zhang Rongliang and other Fangcheng leaders, such as Sister Ding Hei, began to preach the gospel with great boldness. In spite of hardships, the church began to grow exponentially. From 1980 to 1990 Zhang was a fugitive on the run from the authorities. He traveled throughout the country preaching and led many to Christ. He also trained a group of 80 men and women who became the core leaders of the Fangcheng Church. The church network grew from five million in the early 1990s to 10 million in the 1999.<sup>11</sup>

Another key moment in the life of the Fangcheng Church occurred in 1988. Dennis Balcombe, an American based in Hong Kong, traveled into Henan and for the first time met with the Fangcheng leaders. Balcombe's humble demeanor and Pentecostal message resonated with the Fangcheng believers. Sister Ding Hei described Balcombe's influence in glowing terms, noting that because of Balcombe's influence, "all our Fangcheng house churches, except for a few, accepted the Spirit-filled teaching."<sup>12</sup>

Some years ago in 2002, I met Zhang Rongliang in southwest China. We discussed various matters for about an hour and a half and then shared a meal together. While we were eating, Sister Ding, the second highest leader in the China for Christ network at that time, joined us.

During our meal Sister Ding, who was sitting next to me, raised a question about a book on Pentecostal doctrine that I had made available to them.<sup>13</sup> She suggested that baptism in the Spirit, although possibly an experience following conversion, could also take place at the moment of conversion. She felt the book implied that Spirit baptism must take place after conversion. I assured her that we were all in agreement on this point and that when most Pentecostals speak of baptism in the Spirit as subsequent to conversion, we actually mean that it is logically subsequent to conversion, a distinct work of the Spirit. Temporally, both could occur at essentially the same moment, as with Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. We continued our discussion and Sister Ding affirmed that their church was Pentecostal in nature.

Sister Ding then stated emphatically that their church came to these classical Pentecostal conclusions, not on the basis of receiving this tradition from others but rather as a result of their own experience and study of the book of Acts. She indicated that in the 1970s and 1980s they were quite isolated and experienced considerable persecution. In this crucible of persecution, they developed their classical Pentecostal orientation. At this time, their church began to grow rapidly and was widely recognized as the largest house church group in China.

As I reflect on this conversation, I can now see that there are several streams of Pentecostal influence that have impacted China's house churches. First, it is clear that there were seeds of Pentecostal teaching and revival planted by the indigenous house churches that were so prominent in China prior to 1949. Additionally, Sister Ding's testimony also points to the Chinese believers' sense of solidarity with the persecution and power of the apostolic church. Their context of suffering encouraged their own Pentecostal reading of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Dennis Balcombe's influence and teaching have served to encourage and give further impetus to Pentecostal revival in China. It is difficult to overstate the impact of Balcombe's example and teaching on the Pentecostal churches in China. Clearly, as Sister Ding notes, Pentecostal influences were already present in the Fangcheng Church. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Balcombe was a key in-

strument that God used to fan the flames.<sup>15</sup>

Toward the end of my time with Brother Zhang and Sister Ding, I asked them if they felt the majority of Christians in China were Pentecostal. Brother Zhang answered that apart from the government recognized (TSPM) churches and various smaller house church groups, the vast majority were indeed Pentecostal. He considered, in addition to their own church, the China Gospel Fellowship, the Li Xin Church, and the Yin Shang Church to be Pentecostal.

On another occasion late in 2002, I had the joy of teaching in an underground Bible school associated with the China for Christ network. During one of the breaks, the leader of the school showed me around and introduced to me some of the faculty members. During our conversation, I noted that their theological tradition was similar (*lei si*) to mine (he knew that I was an Assemblies of God minister). He stopped, looked at me, and said emphatically: “No, our theological traditions are the same (*yi yang*).” Later, with great excitement, he spoke of the hunger for the things of the Spirit in the churches in the countryside.

## Conclusion

Why have Chinese Christians gravitated toward Pentecostal forms of belief and praxis? I believe the answer to this question is related to one of the great strengths of the global Pentecostal movement: its simple, straightforward approach to the Bible. Chinese Pentecostals love the stories of the Bible. They identify with the stories that fill the pages of the gospels and Acts, and the lessons gleaned from these stories are easily grasped and applied in their lives. In a country still populated by a large group of semi-literate people, the simplicity of the Pentecostal approach, rooted as it is in the biblical narrative, is a huge asset. The stories of the Bible and the stories of personal testimony often play an important role in Pentecostal worship and instruction. These stories make the communication of the message much easier, especially when cultural barriers need to be hurdled.

This is particularly so when the stories connect with the felt needs of the hearers as is generally the case with stories of spiritual deliverance, physical healing, moral transformation, and power to persevere. Here Sister Ding’s words echo loudly: the Chinese believers’ sense of solidarity with the persecution of the apostolic church encourage them to seek the same Pentecostal power.

The Chinese believers’ context of suffering encourages their own Pentecostal reading of the New Testament. One Chinese friend put it this way, “When Western Christians read the book of Acts, they see in it inspiring stories; when Chinese believers read the book of Acts, we see in it our lives.” The recent reemergence of Cultural Revolution-type opposition to the gospel in China makes this point all the more relevant. In China, a narrative approach to the Bible that takes seriously the spiritual needs of people and miraculous power of God is destined to win a hearing. This is the rich, Pentecostal legacy of the Chinese indigenous churches.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt, edited for this issue, from Robert Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” in *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future*, Vol. 1: *Asia and Oceania*, eds. Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House Publishers, 2015), 67-90.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel H. Bays, “The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900–1937,” in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 310. For similar estimates see Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 134, n. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bays, “Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, eds. Edith Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 140.

<sup>7</sup> Although several CGF leaders affirmed the Pentecostal distinctives noted above, a survey of 20 students at their Beijing seminary revealed that only seven viewed tongues as a sign of Spirit baptism and only nine said that tongues occurred in their churches often or occasionally.

<sup>8</sup> These conclusions are supported by: the results of a questionnaire completed by house church leaders from the Fangcheng Church, Miao's Wenzhou Church, and the China Gospel Fellowship (for a copy of this questionnaire, contact rmenzies@mail2go.net); an interview with the leaders of the Li Xin Church, including the founder, Uncle Zheng; an interview with Dennis Balcombe on Oct. 14, 2014; and my personal observations and conversations in China over the past 20 years. While Peter Xu's Word of Life Church is Pentecostal-like in many respects, I do not classify this group as Pentecostal since they were not receptive to prophecy or speaking in tongues.

<sup>9</sup> The government-recognized (TSPM) churches tend to be less open to Pentecostal values, although there are notable exceptions. For an analysis of TSPM attitudes see Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: AJPS Books, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Hattaway, *Henan: The Galilee of China*, The Fire & Blood Series, vol. 2 (Carlisle, UK: Piquant, 2009), 282.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 288.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Balcombe, *China's Opening Door* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), 110.

<sup>13</sup> A Chinese translation of William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield: Logion Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Connie Au, "Pentecostalism as Suffering: House Churches in China (1949-2012)," in *The Many Faces of Global Pentecostalism*, eds. Harold D. Hunter and Neil Ormerod (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2013), 73-99.

<sup>15</sup> The impact of Jackie Pullinger's ministry among drug addicts in Hong Kong should also be noted. See R.T. Kendall's description of her ministry in chapter 11 of his book *Holy Fire* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014).

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## **Pentecost in China (1): Origins**

**[Continued from page 7](#)**

*costal Theology*, January 6, 2023, accessed on May 15, 2023, <https://pentecost.asia/blog/1930-baptist-pentecostal-revival-in-china/>.

<sup>10</sup> C. Douglas Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019). 267, 326.

<sup>11</sup> Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 326, quoting Randy Clark, *There Is More!*, (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen-Baker Publishing Group, 2013) 187: "Clark then lamented that 'unfortunately, most Sothern Baptists are not aware of what happened during their greatest revival because several years ago Crawford's book was reprinted with almost all of the phenomena of the Holy Spirit edited out.'"

<sup>12</sup> Mary Crawford, *The Shantung Revival: The Greatest Revival in Baptist Church History* (Global Awakening, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Daniel H. Bays, "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 312.

<sup>14</sup> D. Vaughan Rees, *The "Jesus Family" in Communist China* (Exeter: Pasternoster, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> "Today, the TJC has a membership exceeding 1.5 million, the majority of whom live in China. It...has now reached fifty-eight countries on six continents." See Yen-zen Tsai, "Glossolalia and Church Identity: The Role of Sound in the Making of a Chinese Pentecostal-Charismatic Church," in *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, eds. Fanggang Yang, Joy Tong, & Allan Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 141.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this history, see Robert Menzies, "Pentecostals in China," in *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future*, Vol. I: *Asia and Oceania*, eds. Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House Publishers, 2015), 67-90.

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## Spirit-Empowered Chinese House Churches (1) Rural Revival

By Evan Liu

*Editor's note: This two-part article is adapted with permission from Evan J. Liu, "The Spirit-Empowered Mission of Chinese House Churches," in The Remaining Task of the Great Commission & The Spirit-Empowered Movement, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Opoku Onyinah.<sup>1</sup> Part 2 regarding urban revival follows.*



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).***

Most house churches are non-denominational, though they may bear some marks of influence from foreign missionaries and evangelists. They accept female pastoral ministry and thus have no problem ordaining women pastors. Some house churches may claim to follow certain foreign traditions such as the Western Reformers or Baptists, but this is not very common. In some of those house churches that follow certain foreign traditions, women are forbidden to teach adults or engage in pastoral ministry. Overall, the indigenous house churches prefer to express and bear witness to their Christian faith through their own Chinese style of worship and ministry. While they hope that someday their religious practices will be recognized and protected by the government, they do not fear suffering for the sake of their faith even as they pray for the government to regard them as good citizens.

### Persecution, Revival, and Mission

Chinese house churches have experienced all kinds of persecution under the government's strict supervision. Arrest, property forfeiture, and harassment cannot intimidate them, and they readily perceive all these miserable experiences as bearing the cross with Jesus Christ. With the belief that someday they will be rewarded by God in heaven for denying the world and persevering through trials, a good number of newly founded underground house church seminaries continue to increase every year, even though they face the possibility of being shut down and having their staff arrested. The conviction that underground Christian education is "approved by God if not by man" has greatly encouraged many Christian churches and organizations to take risks in China.

The recent rise of Chinese Christianity was in large extent due to the rapid growth of Christians in villages from 1985 to 2005. The religious passion of the Christian peasants encouraged them to rethink traditional understandings of Christian life and ministry. The path of discipleship for these farmers was narrower than that of Christians in the cities, but the former demonstrated an even greater power for hope and transformation than the latter. Christianity has planted deep roots in China since the 1980s because the power of faith impacted the lowest levels of society and expanded like a wildfire that could not be controlled by the government.

Before 2000, the house churches focused their mission primarily on domestic China, and after 2000, the mission focus began to shift from China to other countries. Two international mission movements originated from Chinese house churches and are well known around the world as "Back to Jerusalem" (BTJ) and "Mission China 2030" (MC 2030).

BTJ is a mission movement initiated by Pastor Shaotang Yang and Guquan Zhang in the 1940s which seeks to bear witness to the gospel along the Silk Road, moving from the west of China through the largely Muslim nations toward the ultimate destination, Jerusalem. When they founded Northwest Spiritual Fellowship (NSF) in 1946, Pastor Zhang's family was sent to Xinjiang province in the western corner of China. After the Communist Party took power in 1949, the missionary work in Xinjiang was quickly shut down by the government. The members of NSF in Xinjiang faced arrest and imprisonment from 1951 onwards, and Pastor Zhang was martyred in 1956. Simon Zhao, a member of NSF, was detained in a prison in Kashgar for 20 years (1951–1971).

After his release from prison, Simon Zhao spent a few years in Xinjiang. From there he moved to the middle part of China and began to proclaim the BTJ vision in other parts of China. The vision ignited many house church leaders, and they also advocated it by challenging churches to reach out to the lost souls in China as far as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1990s, the BTJ vision has been developed further by the house churches in the middle part of China. They emphasized that Chinese Christians should receive the evangelistic mandate from Western missionaries and send out 100,000 missionaries of their own to Islamic countries and Israel. The advocates of BTJ are deeply convicted that Jesus' *parousia* will surely happen immediately after the Chinese churches convert a great number of Muslims and Jews. This movement has been widely propagated by many rural, Chinese house church leaders from the 1980s to the present.<sup>3</sup>

Three Chinese leaders, Peter Xu, Brother Yun, and Enoch Wang, inherited Simon Zhao's vision of BTJ and promoted it among their churches for pan-China mission. After Brother Yun escaped from China to Germany in 2001, he boldly proclaimed the BTJ vision in Europe and predicted that one million missionaries would be sent out to the world by Chinese house churches.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of being promoted by the rural house churches, MC 2030 was championed by the intellectual house churches in megacities. The focus of the MC 2030 movement is that the Chinese churches should pay off the gospel debt owed to the Western Protestant missionaries who came to China beginning in 1807 and who were expelled from China in 1952. There were approximately 20,000 Protestant missionaries who served in China and taught the Chinese people to know Jesus Christ. So, the goal of the Chinese house churches is to send out 20,000 indigenous missionaries to other countries by the year 2030. The movement's founders come primarily from the house churches of the megacities of China, are all highly educated, and represent the elite Christian classes in the urban house churches.<sup>5</sup>

### **BTJ and Rural Revival from 1980 to the 2000s**

Peter Xu was the founder of Word of Life (Sheng Ming Zhi Dao) church in central China. The membership of this house church was estimated to be tens of thousands in the 1990s. Later Peter Xu also became the major leader of the BTJ gospel mission movement. He was arrested many times by the government. After serving several years during his last imprisonment in China, with the aid of the US government, Xu escaped from China to the US in 2002.

I interviewed Peter Xu in 2017 and he explained to me his understanding of why the village house churches experienced such huge revival from 1980 to 2002. He emphasized that the secret of this revival was its relationship to suffering, witness, and proclamation of the gospel without fear. He has participated in many supernatural services since the 1970s and witnessed many miracles of healing.

Peter Xu was a charismatic leader who practiced healing and deliverance with strong confidence. Due to his spiritual openness, Peter believed in spiritual images, dreams, prophecies, and other phenomena. When he

founded Word of Life (Sheng Ming Zhi Dao) in the 1980s, the church also received the transforming work of the Spirit (conversion) with weeping and mourning for many days.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002, when I went to the province in the middle of China where Simon Zhao, Peter Xu, and Brother Yun had all served, I also experienced the strong Spirit-filled atmosphere within different village churches. There were many revival meetings every month and often hundreds of village Christians gathered for worship, prayer, and study in these meetings. They usually lived together in a huge house for two weeks and, for security reasons, all the gatherings were held in the basement so that no sound could be heard by their neighbors.

Every morning the believers rose at 5:00 and prayed and worshiped until 7:00. Then, apart from a break for lunch, Bible instruction filled the day. They sang hymns in the evening after dinner and went to bed around 9:00. When I ministered there, I sensed the presence of the Spirit in a powerful way. It seemed Pentecostal fire was ignited each day by sincere prayer, fasting, and worship. Due to the believers' passionate pursuit of the Lord, the atmosphere dramatically changed. We were all filled with a strong sense that God was present.

The catalyst of the revival among the village churches was the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit-filled revival and mission swept through the rural areas during and after the 1980s, numerous grassroots Chinese began to embrace Christianity. Poverty and sickness became the catalyst for Chinese farmers to experience spiritual miracles and open their hearts to follow Jesus. Many village church leaders told me similar stories concerning how the revival began to sweep through their areas. It always started with miraculous healing and deliverance. There were many sick families and people suffering from poor hygiene and demonic possession in their areas because of severe idolatry. Once people got sick or developed psychological disorders, they did not have enough money to receive medical treatment. Thus, they had to seek spiritual mediators or monks for protection and restoration. However, then their situations typically turned even worse.

Finally, when they heard that Christian pastors could provide healing and deliverance, as a last resort they invited the pastors to help them. To their surprise, the bad situations changed radically and became good. Through the ministry of the evangelists, the sick were restored, those with mental illness were cured, and the oppressed were set free through the casting out of demons. This turn of events brought repentance to the whole village, which gave up idolatry and other sins. Revival would sweep through the area as people began to listen eagerly to the message of the evangelists.

The Chinese village revival sounds very similar to Luke's narrative of events in the Samaritan village recorded in Acts 8:5–17. The evangelists usually encouraged the new Chinese believers to pray earnestly for God's forgiveness and the outpouring of his Spirit. When the Holy Spirit filled the believers, they were usually flooded with joy and manifested some spiritual gift such as speaking tongues, prophecy, or interpretation of tongues.

The revival fire was also accompanied by persecution. The believers used many methods to enhance the security of their meetings, but still they were often discovered by local government officials. Christians' property would be forfeited once they were accused of attending illegal religious meetings, and they could be put into prison for several months or even several years depending on their role in the organization and operation of the meetings.

I investigated some typical rural churches from 2002 to 2004 and found that although the revival fire had not been quenched, many young adults had left their churches for megacities to improve their physical lives, hoping for financial prosperity. Those who remained in the churches were old people, teenagers, and young mothers with small children. However, God can make all things work together for good. Soon after the rural

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## Spirit-Empowered Chinese House Churches (2) Urban Revival

By Evan Liu

Mission China 2030 (MC 2030) debuted in September of 2015 in Hong Kong with its first international convention. The movement was initiated by urban Chinese house church leaders, primarily from Beijing and Shanghai, such as Ezra Jin from Beijing Zion Church, Daniel Li from Beijing Great Commission Church, and Quan Cui from Shanghai All Nations Church.<sup>1</sup>



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

### MC 2030 and Urban Revival During 2000 to 2018

MC 2030 had strong momentum at the beginning and mobilized many mainland Chinese house churches to participate. However, the movement declined significantly after the government shut down the Beijing Zion Church which had played a leading role in the movement. Since the movement has not been widely supported by overseas Chinese churches, its lasting impact and influence have been negligible.

I met with the three major leaders of MC 2030 from 2012 to 2019. Ezra Jin and Daniel Li studied at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and they both embraced evangelical study of the Bible and charismatic ministerial practices. Quan Cui, a charismatic church leader, was called by God to Shanghai in 1999 to plant churches. When SARS hit the east coast of China in 2003, church attendance at Chinese churches increased rapidly in the cities. Quan Cui founded All Nations Church in Shanghai, and the church experienced a great revival in 2008 through weekly prayer meetings where the people worshiped the Lord freely with speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts for several hours without stopping. When the Holy Spirit touched the congregation, repentance and manifestations occurred. The whole church was overwhelmed by a great transformation, and it increased from 200 to 2000 people during the next two years.

From 2011 to 2012, the church faced significant persecution due to the large size of its congregation. When the government came to tear the building down, revival fire decreased, and the church lost many members. When I met Quan Cui in 2013, he was still very excited about building numerous cell churches in Shanghai to form a great network. However, when I met him again in 2019, he seemed exhausted by some developing issues which meant that the church could not go back to the rapid growth stage of the previous period. Quan Cui noted that now he focuses on developing high quality small churches without being bothered by their numbers, calling these seedbed churches.

Ezra Jin was invited to minister to a small church composed of Chinese Koreans in Beijing in 2007. This church grew quickly and became the largest house church in Beijing with hundreds of members. It was named Zion Church. This church's quick growth was the result of the strong work of the Spirit among intellectuals in Beijing which impacted them in a variety of ways.

Zion Church tried to balance an emphasis on evangelical theology with charismatic practice, so the church's stance regarding speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other spiritual practices was very positive. When I taught among them in 2017, some members were using healing and deliverance as effective ways to pray for people. From the pulpit, Zion Church was evangelical in its interpretation of the Word of God, and in its ministry practice it was open to charismatic gifts. Once again, the church's revival incurred persecution. Toward the end of

2018, Zion Church, because of tremendous pressure from the government, was forced to give up the lease on the building it was using for its meetings. Later, the church split into small groups and encouraged the members to do “walking worship.”

Since it became difficult for churches to utilize public spaces, many house churches were forced to rethink their strategies and explore new ways of being the church. In this new context, the pursuit of God’s powerful presence became the focus of these small evangelical churches. Many house churches were comfortable with practices associated with healing and deliverance, and they believed in the power of charismatic prayer. In recent years, many evangelical churches, and some Catholic churches, have become passionate about studying divine healing through programs offered by various international ministry schools. These schools usually teach perspectives on divine healing popular in charismatic circles in the West.

Additionally, many house churches embrace the five-fold ministry concept derived from Ephesians 4:11 and believe apostolic and prophetic ministries are still relevant for the contemporary church.<sup>2</sup> These groups refuse to accept cessationism and insist that five-fold ministry is needed for the church to be healthy and function like the first-century churches described in the New Testament. These groups also tend to discard supersessionism and believe that many Jewish people will come to faith in Jesus after the Gentiles who are “saved” reaches its divinely appointed number (Romans 11:25–26).<sup>3</sup>

### **Prominent Spirit-Empowered Ecclesiastic Signs**

I have participated in establishing house churches in China since 2001, and from my observation, signs of spiritual revival usually include passionate preaching, evangelism, healing, deliverance, and speaking in tongues. When a house church has been established for one or two years, there will often be a turning point for the church to grow with spiritual power if the church receives baptism in the Holy Spirit. After planting churches in several cities of China, I have observed a similar pattern. When people earnestly pray for healing and deliverance, miracles will take place. When people repent and confess their sins, they will feel the bondage fall and experience a heartfelt sense of joy.

When a believer’s spiritual eyes are opened to see visions and they begin to speak in tongues, their hearts will experience a transformation that enables them to break through intellectual barriers or reservations. Often, when I see people speak in tongues and receive healing from the Holy Spirit, they are filled with joy and thanksgiving. Then, their lives manifest a great change with a strong desire to seek the Lord and grow in the Spirit. This charismatic breakthrough creates good soil in people’s hearts so that the Word of God can multiply quickly after being sown into it.

Another charismatic sign is the revival of the connection with our Jewish roots. In recent years, traveling to Jerusalem for conferences and tourism has become popular among Chinese churches generally. Many charismatic Christians go to Jerusalem and claim to receive special visions or hear God’s voice in the Holy Land. Also, many Chinese churches, especially those which emphasize charismatic gifts, are beginning to keep Old Testament festivals and weekly sabbaths believing that this connection with our Jewish roots is pleasing to God and walking in his path for renewal.

Many Chinese Christians also attend various charismatic conferences held in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or cities in China. They use social chatting tools to forward prophetic messages translated from foreign prophetic centers to their friends. Social media has become a powerful tool for Chinese believers to follow charismatic trends and prophetic emphases.

From 2018 to 2019, I began to direct the planting of prayer houses in several cities of China, and finally, there

were three prayer houses established in three different cities of China. When I planted a Chinese House of Prayer (CHOP), I aimed for equipping intercessors, reviving passion for God, and engaging in spiritual warfare for city transformation by making CHOP the mission temple of God. In CHOP, Chinese intercessors met together and prayed from morning to evening every day. The prayer was intertwined with worship, speaking in tongues, vision-sharing, prophecy, engaging in spiritual warfare, and teaching. Many of the participants claimed to receive fresh anointing and vision from God, and they were filled with hope to break through their spiritual bondage and win spiritual battles in their lives. However, when so many good signs occurred in these CHOP meetings, spiritual opposition also came with the appearance of local authorities checking on what was taking place in the apartment leased by CHOP.

Finally, a CHOP on the east coast of China was closed at the end of 2019 due to severe persecution. Nevertheless, it left a good legacy for the local churches, and many believers' eyes were opened to see the real presence of God and dedicate their lives to follow him. Later, the fire from this closed CHOP was transferred from the east coast to the northern part of China which became a mini-Pentecostal missionary movement. This CHOP represents a Pentecostal outpouring that testifies to the fact that revival and persecution are usually inextricably related. They go hand in hand, one encouraging the other. Ultimately, they both come from the spiritual realm when lives are transformed in the Spirit-empowered community.

### **Conclusion: Eschatology and Temple Community**

Many house churches earnestly seek spiritual gifts to enable the ministry of the church. These churches believe China is the primary nation God will use to reach Muslims and Jews around the globe so that the great commission can reach its finish line, and Christ's millennial kingdom will be established after the seven years of terrible tribulation (Daniel 9:27). These Chinese Christians generally hold firmly to a premillennial eschatology and believe a third temple will be established in Jerusalem. They also foresee that artificial intelligence technology will be used by the anti-Christ to control the world (Revelation 13:18) and then the calamity of seven years will sweep over the world after the rapture of God's chosen.<sup>4</sup>

The house churches proudly proclaim that they are the true temple of God because they worship him with a true heart. They believe that the temple community is the authentic dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, and that Chinese churches will carry the gospel of Jesus to all nations before Christ's *parousia*. These Chinese Christians emphasize that the temple community should be filled with spiritual power and love.

Moreover, I believe that one essential characteristic of a revival movement, if it is to keep moving forward, is the sustenance and development of the Spirit-filled community. This could be a five-fold ministry church, a twenty-four-hour prayer house, or an intercessional fellowship that engages in spiritual warfare. This Spirit-filled community needs to embody several features.

- First, it will embrace significant hours of prayer and worship daily in order to birth a strong spiritual anointing and atmosphere.
- Second, the community members will be comfortable with participating in healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare.
- Third, lukewarm Christians will repent and receive revival (the second blessing or Spirit baptism, according to some Pentecostal scholars) which will open their spiritual eyes.

**[Continued on page 29](#)**

## China's Pentecostal Churches Changing Times, New Approaches

By Zhang Li

The church in China has experienced many ups and downs over the past twenty years due to rapid urbanization, evangelistic outreach, and severe restrictions. Since the early part of this century, the five largest house church networks (China for Christ, China Gospel Fellowship, Yinshang Church, Lixin Church, and Word of Life), all of which originated in the rural areas of China, have shifted their focus to the cities. At the same time, the presence of missionaries intensified with significant involvement in evangelism, church planting, Bible training, and theological education. For the first 15 years of the twenty-first century, the church in China enjoyed a period of growth, outreach, and revivals, even in the face of great challenges.



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource.

With the new religious regulations that were implemented in 2018, waves of systematic persecution have flooded the house church movement and changed the landscape of Christianity in China. Many churches have been shut down and almost all missionaries were forced out of the country. With the removal of the missionaries and many of the ministries they initiated, the Chinese church is beginning to feel the pain of isolation. The recent wave of persecution has diminished the church in terms of its size, social influence, outreach ministries, and even its global vision. The spiritual passion blazing for decades has started to cool down with the number of Christians attending church dropping. However, in the midst of all of this, the persecution also serves to sift the church, to purify it, and to make it stronger and more independent.

In this short paper, I will first describe new developments pertaining to the five large house church networks noted above. Then, I will discuss the emergence of Pentecostal churches in this new season of restrictions. Finally, I will offer some concluding reflections on the nature of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in China.

### Developments with the Big Five

I recently spoke with one prominent leader from the China Gospel Fellowship who has close connections with the other large networks. According to this leader, their theological stance, as well as that of the other four networks, has not changed much over the years. However, their strategy for church planting has shifted during these past decades. Twenty years ago, “these groups almost certainly represented a significant majority of the house churches in China.”<sup>1</sup> The following statement, which was made almost twenty years ago about the theological orientation of the large house church networks, still remains true today: “The overwhelming majority of Christians in China today are at least charismatic.”<sup>2</sup> These groups are largely charismatic in essence and some, overtly Pentecostal, even though some prefer “evangelical” to describe their theological stance.

These church networks began to focus on the cities in response to the rapid urbanization that took many of their members (rural migrant workers) to the urban centers in search of opportunity and prosperity. As the number of migrant workers grew, the churches grew as well. For the first ten years of the new millennium, the number of churches rapidly multiplied in the cities. The number of believers continued to multiply over the next ten years. As these churches and the new migrant believers took root in urban soil, they encouraged

many of their city friends to join the church as well. When we think of Chinese Christians in the 1980s and 1990s, the typical representatives would be believers who lived in the villages. Yet, because of their effective evangelistic work, more and more educated middle-class people who lived in the cities began to respond to the gospel and join the church. The demographic landscape of these house church groups, and Christianity in China as a whole, has thus shifted significantly since the beginning of the new millennium.

Starting from 2018, the government has sought to impose more restrictions on house churches. As a result, many churches have been shut down or forced to operate “underground” in small groups. These churches are even more marginalized than in the past because now Christians in public schools, in the Communist party, and in government departments are forced to sign an agreement, promising not to become involved in church activities. The pandemic made things even worse. Some of the churches in the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF) lost between thirty and forty percent of their members. The other networks were impacted in similar ways as well. Nevertheless, the leader with whom I spoke is still optimistic about the future of the CGF network. He believes that another revival will shake China within the next five to ten years.

### **New Expressions of the Pentecostal Church**

At the same time, during this period (2000–2018), with a growing number of educated people joining the churches, the house church movement has become more diverse in its theology and practice. Today, while the traditional house church networks are decreasing as a percentage of Chinese Christianity, new house church networks that operate online are influencing more people and drawing more churches together, even in the face of growing challenges and persecution. Comparatively speaking, their number may seem to be insignificant at this point, but they are gradually gaining strength and today represent the new face of Christianity in this digital era.

Another new development worth noting is the emergence of churches that have a clear and explicit Pentecostal identity. A number of Christians who have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit like those early believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) consciously identify with the Pentecostal movement and embrace its distinctive doctrines and practice. They are not ashamed to be known as Pentecostals.

I recently spoke with an alumnus who graduated two years ago from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) in the Philippines. Currently, this brother serves as the assistant pastor of a Pentecostal church in the southern part of China. The founding pastor of this church, who is also studying at APTS, became a Christian in a TSPM church in 1992. After his conversion, he was passionate about sharing the gospel with others. However, the leaders in the TSPM church sought to dampen his evangelistic zeal. This man received the Pentecostal gift in 2002 after encountering missionaries associated with the Canadian Assemblies of God. In 2004 he started his own church. The Canadian missionaries worked behind the scenes, praying with him, encouraging him, accompanying, and comforting him when he was lonely. During 2008 and 2009, another group of Pentecostal missionaries came to equip him and other church leaders. At this time (2008–2009), another missionary from New Zealand started to share about other dimensions of Pentecostal and charismatic practice in the church.

This Pentecostal church is a growing, vital group. They have been forced to change the venue of their meetings every year due to the growing number of believers attending the church. They launched a plan to plant more churches in different cities in their province. Even though they were under investigation and persecuted last year, the church was still able to function well through online services combined with in-person services. Their impact continues to grow.

According to this pastor, there have been three models for the house church in China so far: model 1.0 is the

traditional house church, normally meeting at an individual's home; model 2.0 is when the church rents a large meeting place to accommodate more people; model 3.0 appears from the outside to be very much like model 1.0; but, thanks to the new technology, all of the home groups can be connected as one church.

A typical Sunday worship service begins with praise and worship, which is followed by announcements, Holy Communion, the collection of an offering, and testimonies. The sermon follows and then, after the sermon, there will be an altar call. The service ends with a song to encourage the members to bear witness throughout the following week. This church acknowledges and accepts the foundational doctrines of the Assemblies of God. They have strong connections with APTS and other AG churches in the region. The church leadership is very passionate about connecting with other Pentecostal churches. A single spark can start a prairie fire in Pentecostal circles. Even though they are still small in numbers, they are strong and unified in their voice as a Pentecostal church.

### **Concluding Observations**

Most of the independent house churches in China are fond of the term "evangelical" because it serves as a safe designation for their theological self-understanding and church practices, even though according to most systems of classification, they often might be identified as Pentecostal or charismatic churches. The term "charismatic," to some degree, often carries negative connotations in Chinese house church circles. There are three reasons for these negative associations. First, the TSPM church, from its inception, has largely neglected the work of the Spirit. Second, the expression of charismatic gifts in the church is often confused with superstitious practices which are routinely rejected and criticized by the majority in China who are steeped in Communist ideology. Finally, some Christian denominations, particularly those associated with the Reformed tradition, often denigrate the charismatic and Pentecostal movements. However, as Pentecostal churches and denominations grow and exert their influence, and as Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries, both inside China and beyond, join to promote Pentecostal distinctives, particularly as these align with evangelical values, they will be acknowledged, understood, and embraced.

Pentecostals could play an important role as the house church movement seeks to establish its identity. If we Pentecostals are able to humbly, but confidently, articulate who we are, what we believe, and the biblical basis for our beliefs, we might offer the house church movement the spiritual resources that are vitally needed by a church that is facing tremendous opposition. As one house church leader put it, "While we believe the apostles are gone [limited to the Twelve], the Spirit of the apostles is still the same." I do believe that by planting churches, producing helpful and edifying Christian literature, and networking with other churches from different traditions, we can bear witness to this reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

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## Yan's Conversion and Pentecostal Experience

By Zhang Li

Yan became a Christian in 1998, a year that will be long remembered for a major flood that devastated the southern part of China. The beginning of the new millennium also became the watershed in China for fast economic development and galloping church growth as millions of people, seeking prosperity, immigrated to the cities. Recognizing this seismic social shift, the largest house church networks, all of which had originated in rural areas, shifted their focus to the cities. As a result, many immigrant workers and urban dwellers

came to faith because of the mission work of these church networks and the evangelists they sent to the cities. Some migrant workers brought their faith with them when they arrived in cities teeming with people.

Yan's cousin was one of these Christian immigrants. She became a Christian in Hainan province where she worked, and later brought the Christian faith to her hometown. She brought several Christian books to Yan's home, including a Bible. Every night before she fell asleep, Yan read from these books. The Bible was not easy for her to understand. However, one book, a collection of many testimonies, gripped her heart. Yan began to think that if the God described in this book truly is the God of universe, then he might be willing to listen to her prayers as he had for others. Yan began to pray and eventually started attending a local church. Her decision to follow Christ quickly followed. Then, she moved to a nearby city where she began to study the Bible.

This was the golden age of Christianity in China (1995–2015), especially for Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. At this time, an old missionary lady from Singapore attempted to teach Yan to speak in tongues without success. A mission team from Beijing came to visit the churches in her city. Yan had the opportunity to pray with this team. Some of them also prayed in tongues during the prayer meeting. One leader from the team insisted that speaking in tongues cannot be taught, because it is a gift from God. They laid hands on Yan and prayed for her to receive this gift, but she did not receive the gift of tongues at that time. Yan, with a sense of desperation, continued to pray fervently for this gift. She firmly believed that if she earnestly sought this gift, it would eventually be granted to her by God.

Later, Yan had an opportunity to study at an underground Bible school in Xuzhou. This Bible school was associated with the house church networks. Some of the faculty members frequently spoke in tongues during their prayer meetings. It was in this Spirit-filled atmosphere that she discovered her spiritual gift as a worship leader. Sadly, the school was forcibly closed because the director of the school was arrested by the authorities. All the students, including Yan, were sent back to their homes to protect their safety. When Yan arrived back at her home, she read the promise in Luke 11:13 that the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. She also saw that in Acts 1:8, Jesus encouraged his disciples to seek the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. The breakthrough for Yan finally came one evening. She started to speak in tongues while she was dreaming. When she woke from her dream, she could not stop speaking in tongues for quite some time.

The Lord was faithful in fulfilling his promises to Yan regarding her life of discipleship after her Pentecostal experience. She summarized her prayers for her Christian walk with three phrases: fruitfulness in ministry, divine guidance for direction, and wisdom to handle persecution.



Image credit: A friend of ChinaSource. For illustrative purposes only.

In 2004, Yan went to a nearby city and began her studies at the Southwest China Bible School (SCBS). Yan studied there for one year. During the missions practicum required by the school, she and her team went to minister to an unreached people group, the Yao people. The peace of the Lord was with them, and the people accepted them gladly when they arrived at their village. They sang Christian songs with a group of young people and, by explaining the meaning of the Christian songs, they were able to share the gospel with them. On the second night, seven of the young people responded positively to the gospel and committed their lives to the Lord. Two years later, three brothers from this area came to the SCBS to receive more training in the Bible. They became full-time ministers after their graduation, sharing the gospel in their home region to this day.

Yan was then invited to join the school as a faculty member after her graduation in 2005. The school played a significant role in training ministers for minority people groups. Through the ministry of this school, more than twenty minority people groups have been reached. Yan teamed up with other coworkers, built friendships with the students, impacted their lives spiritually, and equipped them in God's truth and in ministerial skills. Today, many of these students are still standing firm in their Christian faith and actively serving the Lord. During this period, Yan, together with her husband, was also involved in the ministries of several local churches. Through her ministry in both the Bible school and the churches, the Lord has touched and transformed many lives.

The life of discipleship (or following Jesus) in China often includes persecution, particularly for ministers. However, Yan insists that persecution does not define the nature of one's faith; rather, it is one's response to persecution that defines their faith. Since Yan has become involved in ministry after her Pentecostal experience, she has received the wisdom and boldness needed to handle persecution. The Lord has been faithful in his promises by providing her with wisdom, peace, and strength when she has faced challenges.

In July of 2005, Yan participated in a training for Sunday school teachers with about 50 people in her city. The security guards discovered this training session and reported it to the local police. All the Christians involved were taken to the police station, including an instructor from Taiwan. Some of the members of the group responded by crying and with great fear. Yan, however, had a strong sense of peace and felt confirmation from the Spirit that none of them would be affected by this. At the end of the day, all the Christians were released unharmed.

In September of 2005, while Yan was serving at the SCBS, a group of police came to raid the school as the students were studying in class. The police took all the people, including two missionaries who were present at that time, to the police station. The police interrogated the students and faculty one by one. When it was Yan's turn, the promise of Jesus came to her mind that the Holy Spirit would give her words to speak when she was questioned by authorities (Luke 12:11–12). Her calmness encouraged the others who were frightened and worried. They were able to answer the questions posed by the police calmly and with wisdom. Nobody was affected by this incident, and the two missionaries were able to stay in China and continue their ministries. The students were able to return to their homes peacefully. Six months later, the school resumed its training program at a new location with more students joining the original group. These persecutions did not decrease Yan's earnestness and enthusiasm but served as markers and witnesses of her Christian faith.

More recently, Yan encountered persecution again in March of 2022. This time she did not experience the persecution alone but with her husband and two children. In 2018 the new regulations regarding religious activity signaled great changes and increased pressure for Christians in China. Yan and her husband considered how they might respond when trouble came. Yet, when the persecution finally came into their lives, the promises of the Bible became very real to them.

When the authorities came to question them at their rented apartment, they were given strength to respond spontaneously with wisdom and confidence. They did not deny their involvement in ministry. The authorities threatened them and then left. This investigation was just the beginning, and police officers would constantly call or visit their apartment over a period of many months. Yan and her husband still participated in ministry after this incident, but in a more limited way. God allowed these challenges into their Christian lives not to undermine their faith but, rather, to let them experience his presence and promises in a deeper way.

As the pressure continued to grow and the “space” for her ministry became more limited, her presence and that of her family posed a very real threat to the Christians they were serving. Finally, through God’s mercy, Yan and her family were able to travel to the Philippines. Currently, she and her husband are serving at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary with the hope that they might reach more people from this new platform for ministry.

Yan declared, “I am just an ordinary Christian, but my God is not an ordinary God. He can do extraordinary things through ordinary Christians like me.” God revealed himself to Yan, chose her, equipped her, and granted her opportunities to grow and participate in ministry. God has guided her through good times and difficult times. Yan’s testimony represents what hundreds of thousands of Chinese Christians have experienced over the past twenty-plus years.

*Zhang Li interviewed Yan and translated her story into English.*

#### **Spirit-Empowered Chinese House Churches (1): Rural Revival**

**[Continued from page 17](#)**

revivals began to fade, the spiritual fire began to spread to the cities which were booming as a result of massive urbanization. Many young adult Christians, when they moved from rural areas to the cities, formed house churches composed of urban laborers.

This brings us to part two of our study and the story of urban house churches.

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<sup>1</sup> This two-part article is adapted with permission from Evan J. Liu, “The Spirit-Empowered Mission of Chinese House Churches,” in *The Remaining Task of the Great Commission & The Spirit-Empowered Movement*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Opoku Onyinah (Tulsa: ORU Press, 2023), 207-220.

<sup>2</sup> Huang Jianbo. “From East to West - History and Reflections of the Northwest Spiritual Labor Group.” *Holymountain*, June 17, 2020. [黄剑波：自东而西——西北灵工团史述及思考 - 教会历史 圣山网论坛：恩典中国的异象 \(holymountaincn.org\)](http://www.holymountaincn.org).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hattaway, “A Captivating Vision: Why Chinese House Churches May Just End Up Fulfilling the Great Commission,” *Christianity Today* 48.4, 84 (2004); cf. Ezra Jin, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations: A Biblical Foundation* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003); Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew T. Kaiser, *The Rushing on of the Purposes of God: Christian Missions in Shanxi Since 1876* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 255-256.

<sup>6</sup> Later, this spiritual weeping became a sign for the church to discern whether a believer had received the born-again experience. Therefore, the church was also called the Born-Again church by others.

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## Learning from the Larger Story

Robert Menzies

Many of you, after reading these various accounts of the origins and growth of Pentecostal churches in China, may feel some discomfort. I understand that. It all sounds a bit unusual: stories of miracles, visions, and glossolalia—a bit too optimistic. Where are sober-minded critiques of these events? What about the prayers that go unanswered? Are there no evangelists that give up in the face of fierce persecution? What about church splits, leaders who fell, and those discouraged by unrealized expectations? It all sounds a bit too much like the book of Acts.



Perhaps in future issues of the *ChinaSource Quarterly* some of these questions can be explored. But for this issue I felt that it was important that you hear directly from Pentecostal church leaders who have served in China for many years and who are active participants in the Pentecostal movement. They offer first-hand, eye-witness accounts of key events, and they do so from the perspective of Pentecostal “insiders,” people who have contributed to the story. The ongoing story of Pentecost in China is not a story that can be easily found on the shelves of your nearest library. Its dynamism and ethos are not readily grasped or communicated by detached scholars.

So, if you are feeling some discomfort, that may be a good thing—a sign that your own presuppositions are being challenged, your perspective stretched. With this in mind, I offer two concluding observations concerning the Pentecostal movement in China and, more specifically, why it is an important part of God’s larger redemptive story. First, I believe that the Pentecostal churches in China have an important contribution to make to the larger, global body of Christ. Secondly, I also firmly believe that the Pentecostal movement, both in China and globally, desperately need the larger body of Christ.

### The Chinese Church’s Contribution

Pentecostals the world over celebrate the present-ness of the kingdom of God. God’s awesome presence in our midst, his gracious willingness to bestow spiritual gifts, his desire to heal, liberate, and transform lives—all of these themes, so central to Pentecostal piety, highlight the fact that God’s reign is *now present*. Pentecostals proclaim a God who is *near*, a God whose power can and should be experienced *here and now*. This element of Pentecostal praxis, for the most part, has served as a much-needed corrective to traditional church life, which has far too often lost sight of the manifest presence of God. As traditional churches in the West have increasingly lost touch with the supernatural elements of the Christian faith, Pentecostals have reveled in their worship of an immanent God, *a God who is truly with us*. Although many in an increasingly secular West struggle to understand this kind of faith, Pentecostal churches around the world are growing with such rapidity that one scholar has suggested the Pentecostal movement should be identified as “the most successful social movement of the past century.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, in the midst of this growth and exuberance, Pentecostals face a very present danger. The emphases that have enabled Pentecostals to make a unique contribution, also render us susceptible to an unbalanced triumphalism. Our vision can (and often has) become so fixated on God’s power and triumph that we lose the ability to see his hand in the midst of suffering, rejection, and opposition. Our emphasis on the present-ness of the kingdom is easily twisted into an arrogant and unbiblical over-realized eschatology, where there is little room for weakness. Luther named it well: a “theology of glory” that had little room for a “theology of

the cross.”<sup>2</sup>

In view of the obvious strengths and vulnerabilities of the Pentecostal movement, the emergence of Pentecostal churches in China is especially important. Their experience reveals that Spirit-inspired ministry consistently encounters rejection as well as acceptance, and that the suffering and opposition that result from this rejection are part of God’s divine plan. Ultimately, they serve to advance the gospel. Like the narrative of Acts, our story this side of our Lord’s second coming is not a tale of triumph upon triumph, but rather an account of “acceptance and rejection, triumph and tragedy.”<sup>3</sup> This story, told extensively in the experience of the post-1949 church in China, has the potential to serve as an important, cautionary tale—a story that might help curb the triumphalism (over-realized eschatology) latent within the much-needed Pentecostal emphasis on the presence of God’s kingdom.

### **The Pentecostal Movement’s Need**

My father was a church historian. He loved to speak of the value of studying church history and often described the rich truths and important perspectives that flowed from his study. When it came to the emergence of the modern Pentecostal movement, my father was quite clear. He emphasized that the unusual experiences that marked the Azusa Street Revival and later Pentecostal gatherings were not unique. Indeed, he pointed to over 20 charismatic movements that have appeared throughout church history, most of which experienced similar phenomena. Prophecy, healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues—these experiences are not new or novel, nor were they one hundred years ago. These kinds of charismatic experiences have punctuated the life of the church in diverse places and among different groups at various times over the past 2,000 years. No, the modern Pentecostal movement in this regard is not unique.

“What is unique about the modern Pentecostal revival,” my father would say with a gleam in his eye, “is that it has survived.” If we study these charismatic movements of the past, we find *that none of them ended well*. This is a sobering fact. The Montanists are an excellent example of a charismatic group that probably started well but ended badly. The list of other such movements is painfully long. Most started well, but all of them remained on the periphery of the life of the church. In time, due to an over-emphasis on charismatic gifts and a lack of grounding in Scripture, these groups went astray. A charismatic leader or self-proclaimed prophet would arise and lead the group into self-destructive fanaticism and heresy.

However, here is where the modern Pentecostal movement is different. Here we find its uniqueness: *the Pentecostal movement has survived long enough to become a part of mainstream Christianity*. It survived, and it did not remain on the periphery. Indeed, the Pentecostal movement began with a strong sense that it was a part of the larger evangelical church.<sup>4</sup> Over time, relationships with the broader church deepened and matured. The result was, in my view, a wonderful cross-pollination. The Pentecostals influenced their evangelical neighbors, and in turn they too were impacted by their evangelical brothers and sisters. One positive aspect of this evangelical influence was an affirmation of what was present from the beginning—a strong commitment to the Bible as the standard, the measuring stick, for doctrine, practice, and spiritual experiences.

So, while the experiences (prophesy, healing, tongues, and so on) of the modern Pentecostal movement are not new, the fact that it has become an integral part of mainstream, orthodox Christianity—indeed, a vital part of the global evangelical church—is unique. Herein lies the Pentecostal movement’s significance and incredible promise: for the first time in the history of the church a charismatic movement has become mainstream and significantly impacted the church universal. This is no doubt the case because the early Pentecostal leaders were committed to judging their theology and practice, their spiritual experiences, according to the Word of God. The warm relationships that developed over time with their evangelical brothers and

sisters clearly facilitated this healthy and essential posture. If the early leaders of the Pentecostal movement had departed from a firm commitment to judge their message and experience against the standard of the Bible, history tells us that the movement would have become marginalized from the larger body of Christ and spiraled downward into irrelevancy due to heresy and excess. Thankfully, this was not the course of the modern Pentecostal movement.

My prayer is that this important cross-pollination might continue, both in China and around the world. I believe this issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly* will further this important task.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>2</sup> See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Theology of the Cross: A Stumbling Block to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality?" in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Russell P. Spittler*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert Menzies, (JPTSS 24; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 150-63.

<sup>3</sup> Martin W. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology*, (JPTSS 26; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), viii.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 3-35.

## Spirit-Empowered Chinese House Churches (2): Urban Revival

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- Fourth, when the anointing of the Spirit, angelic cooperation, the teaching of biblical truth, and holy relationships coalesce, lives will be transformed and the faith of many will increase rapidly.
- Fifth, prophetic vision, evangelism, and spiritual warfare will be released into the community so that the unity and love of the community will be tested.

Once the community can survive the spiritual trials with strong love and unity, they can be sent out by the Holy Spirit for mission and evangelism in other areas (Acts 13:1-3).

In conclusion, Spirit-empowered mission in China has taken many different forms and the resulting spiritual communities are now reproducing rapidly. Many Chinese will be reborn with a new knowledge of God through the new wineskins of these spiritual temple communities. I predict a large, Spirit-empowered missionary movement from China will be birthed from these supernatural, incubational communities, and it will sweep across the nations with signs and wonders in the coming decades.

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<sup>1</sup> 「宣教中国2030」第一届宣教大会, "Mission China 2030: The First Mission Conference," *Great Commission Journal* 119 (2015), 20-22, [http://www.globalmissiology.org/gcci/Chinese/b5\\_publications/GCB/2015/Dec/p20.pdf](http://www.globalmissiology.org/gcci/Chinese/b5_publications/GCB/2015/Dec/p20.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The five-fold ministry concept refers to the belief that all five of the ministry functions described in Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) are needed in and available to the church today.

<sup>3</sup> Supersessionism refers to the belief that the Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ and the church. Thus, the church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ, rather than the Jewish people or the nation of Israel, are now the people of God.

<sup>4</sup> For more on eschatology see Li Jin, "Eschatology and China's Churches," *ChinaSource Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2015), <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/eschatology-and-chinas-churches/>

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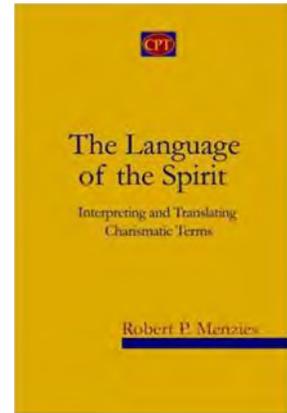
## BOOK REVIEW

### A Pentecostal Perspective on the Chinese Union Version

Reviewed by Mark Barclift

*The Language of the Spirit: Interpreting and Translating Charismatic Terms* by Robert P. Menzies. CPT Press, October 15, 2010, 136 pages. ISBN-10: 1935931016; ISBN-13: 978-1935931010; paperback. Available from [Amazon](#).

In the six illuminating, sometimes technical, chapters of *The Language of the Spirit*, Robert Menzies presents a clear case for the importance of unbiased biblical translations. Drawing on his background as a distinguished New Testament scholar and his years of service in China, Menzies addresses important issues that impact the translation of New Testament terms, particularly those related to the work of the Spirit or other Pentecostal themes.



As a theologian and Christian worker who has taught throughout Asia, including mainland China, I was attracted to this book because of the fascinating way in which the author references his own experiences of the Chinese church and culture while demonstrating the impact of biased or unclear translation on scriptural understanding. In each chapter, Menzies is careful to give parallel examples from common English translations, but he does not hold back from discussions of the specific Chinese characters chosen by the translators and their implications in Chinese culture.

Beginning with the challenge of interpreting certain texts, and in some cases illustrating how outright errors have made their way into the standard Chinese translation of the Bible, the Chinese Union Version (CUV), the author demonstrates why the hard work of interpretation must always precede the work of translation. Above all, the text must be allowed to speak for itself regardless of the presuppositions of the translators.

In his opening chapter, “Prophecy or Preaching?”, the author shares an experience teaching a group of Chinese believers on 1 Corinthians 12–14. In the midst of his listeners’ confusion as Menzies spoke of the nature of prophecy, he discovered that the CUV had translated the word for prophecy as preaching—not Spirit-inspired speech, but prophetic preaching. He then presents a history of the CUV and why it is as significant for Chinese Christians as the King James Version was for many English speakers in previous generations.

Produced by a committee of qualified scholars, the New Testament translation took thirty years to complete. What is important for this study is that Menzies demonstrates that in certain key places, the translators violated their own written principles of translation in order to produce a translation more in alignment with their own Reformed presuppositions than the text would allow.<sup>1</sup> Just as Calvin considered New Testament prophecy to be preaching, so the translators of the CUV forced this interpretation onto the text rather than following their own translation principles. The result is inconsistency from one passage to another.

In chapter two, “The Divine Spirit or the Human Spirit?” Menzies examines several passages written by Luke, Paul, and John where the term *pneūma* has been interpreted as God’s Spirit in some translations and as the human spirit in others. Whereas in the first chapter of his book we see that the CUV translators were guided by their theological bias, in this chapter it is their rationalistic bias that guides their translation decisions according to Menzies. Examples include Acts 18:25, 1 Corinthians 14:2, and John 4:23.

Chapter three, “How Shall We Translate *Paraklētos*?” rejects both the CUV translation, which uses Chinese characters with roots in the Confucian understanding of a master or teacher as well as those English translations which use a non-specific general term such as comforter or counselor. Instead, Menzies argues persua-

sively that the Greek *paraklētos* ought to be translated in the legal or forensic sense of an advocate or lawyer.

In chapter four, the author takes on the traditional translation of Luke 17:21, “Is the kingdom of God within you?” and argues from the broad context of Luke’s writings that the kingdom is never presented as an inner or invisible experience, but rather as an outward demonstration “manifest in dramatic acts of healing and deliverance; and it results in a radical reorienting of one’s life that has visible and tangible results” (p. 68). The better translation then, despite the more common “within you,” used by the CUV and some editions of the NIV, would be “among you” or “in your midst.”

“Did Jesus Send Seventy or Seventy-Two?” is a question that has been asked perpetually by scholars of the New Testament and is also the title of chapter five. In this chapter, after demonstrating that manuscript evidence is not conclusive on either side, Menzies digs into the potential symbolic nature of the number and arrives at a compelling conclusion. Rejecting the more popular view that the number finds its roots in the list of nations in Genesis 10, he proposes instead that one must read this Lucan account against the backdrop of the reference to seventy elders found in Numbers 11. Moses’ wish that “all the Lord’s people were prophets” thus looks ahead to the Pentecost account of Acts 2 and beyond. Listing numerous advantages to the Numbers 11 view, Menzies concludes that Luke finds continuing fulfillment of Moses’s wish in his accounts of the Spirit’s outpouring in Samaria, Cornelius’s house, and Ephesus.

In his final chapter, “Tongues or Languages,” Menzies builds on a 1994 article by Jenny Everts that appeared in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*.<sup>2</sup> The issue focuses on the translation of *lalein heterais glōssais* in Acts 2:4, 10:46, and 19:6. While most modern English translations consistently translate this phrase “to speak in other tongues,” the NRSV and the CUV use “other languages” in Acts 2:4 while reverting to “other tongues” in Acts 10:46 and 19:6.

This parallels the inconsistent translation of the Greek word for prophecy discussed in chapter one. In both cases, the lack of consistency confuses, rather than clarifies, the clear meaning of the text. Luke certainly intends for the accounts of Acts 10 and Acts 19 to be read in light of the outpouring of the Spirit first described in Acts 2. Some may argue that there is a difference in that only in Acts 2 do listeners hear and understand the message spoken in their own language. This misses the point. Luke has intentionally shaped his narrative to highlight the link between the three texts. The pattern is important to him. Luke desired to make the connection and establish Acts 2 as a model. In all three cases, “speaking in other tongues” refers to Spirit-inspired prophetic speech and serves as a sign that the Pentecostal gift has been received. There is no hermeneutical reason to translate the identical phrase differently. Instead, the lack of consistency obscures Luke’s message.

Menzies concludes this short book with a challenge to recognize the value in comparing translations produced by various cultures. He states, “Our context does impact how we read a particular text” (p. 113). By exposing ourselves to translations produced in societies and cultures distinct from our own, we can discover our own biases and arrive at a better understanding of the Scriptures.

In the context of China’s severe crackdown on religious liberty, particularly since the 2016 National Religious Work Conference, and the 2022 repeat of that conference in which the “Sinicization of religion” was again presented as state policy,<sup>3</sup> some may question the importance of a book like Menzies’s *The Language of the Spirit*. After all, with the full weight of the CCP being brought against biblical Christianity, how important is it to examine the comparatively minor errors addressed in the book? I suggest that it is even more important. Awareness of bias against the supernatural or against the Lucan emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit becomes more important as the state pushes back against the gospel. This is clearly seen in the persecutions of the first and second centuries and ought to be embraced again as the church in China faces the greatest persecution since the Cultural Revolution.

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## CHINASOURCE PERSPECTIVE

### Another Strand, Another Color

By Narci Herr



The church in China is a rich tapestry made of many strands differing in texture and color. In our content over the years, ChinaSource has sought to show the depth, breadth, and beauty of the Chinese church. We have looked at the Three-Self church, various strands of the unregistered church, and the Catholic church. But a key strand and its colors have been missing in our display of the beauty of the Chinese church tapestry. In this issue of the *ChinaSource Quarterly* we take our first in-depth look specifically at the Pentecostal church in China. To help us weave this strand into the tapestry, we are honored to have contributors who have been active participants in and observers of the Pentecostal church in China.

It has been a particularly rewarding experience for me personally to work with Dr. Robert Menzies and interact with the papers his writers have contributed as we put this issue together. I am not charismatic in my theology or practice, but I have interacted with many who are, including during the many years my husband and I served in Hong Kong and China. At times those interactions were challenging—it's much easier to serve with those who think, work, and pray in the same way—but I thought more, learned more, and grew more in my faith because of those opportunities to work and worship together. This issue of the *Quarterly* has been a further opportunity for me to hear and interact with the history, experiences, and theological reflections of my Pentecostal brothers and sisters—a further opportunity for me to grow and I am thankful.

It's also a fitting way for me to conclude my decade-long involvement in gathering and weaving the strands that make up the *ChinaSource Quarterly*. In my first month at ChinaSource I was given the finished articles for the summer 2012 issue, "[Chinese in Today's World](#)," to put on the website and create the email notification for subscribers. From that issue until now I've been involved in various ways, to different degrees, and with many editors—both guest editors and staff—to produce the four issues per year we strive for. It's been challenging at times but always rewarding to work with the people God has brought to us—each one has been a gift.

This is the last issue of CSQ that I will see to completion but the autumn issue on digital engagement in the Chinese context is already in the works. I look forward to reading those articles when they come out in September. The weaving continues both in displaying the beauty of the Chinese church and in gathering the wisdom and perspectives of God's servants who serve with that church. May we all continue to listen, learn, and grow.

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#### A Pentecostal Perspective on the Chinese Union Version

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<sup>1</sup> C. W. Mateer of the American Presbyterian Mission, Chuancey Goodrich, a Congregational missionary, and F. W. Baller, a Baptist missionary, who formed the core of the translation team, guided the project over the years, and significantly shaped the final product were all steeped in the Reformed tradition.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Everts, "Tongues or Languages? Contextual Consistency in the Translation of Acts 2." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* Vol. 2 Issue 4 (1994): 71-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, 16-17, <https://www.uscirf.gov/annual-reports>, accessed May 26, 2023.

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