

MARY (WONG YEN) YEUNG: THE ORDINARY LIFE OF AN  
EXTRAORDINARY AUSTRALIAN CHINESE PENTECOSTAL  
PART I<sup>1</sup>

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INTRODUCTION

In early Australia, women comprised less than two percent of the Chinese population and so have been somewhat ignored in historical research.<sup>2</sup> Shen Yuanfang blames the noticeable absence of female biographies on illiteracy and self-abasement.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, several prominent women did make important contributions, including some key Christians.<sup>4</sup> The survival of an unusually detailed repository of sources offers the opportunity to investigate one such woman—Mary Kum Sou (Wong Yen) Yeung (1888-1971), a Pentecostal missionary from a well-known Chinese business Christian family.

Today, Pentecostalism comprises around sixty-five percent of the Christian population in China,<sup>5</sup> substantiating Daniel Bays' claim

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from a conference paper presented at *the International Conference on the History of Everyday Life in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, May 23-27, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>Sophie Couchman, "'Oh, I Would Like to See Maggie Moore Again!': Selected Women of Melbourne's Chinatown," in *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation and Chinese Communities in Australia 1860-1940*, Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald and Paul Macgregor, eds. (Fitzroy VIC: Otherland Literary, Journal 9, 2004), 175.

<sup>3</sup>Shen Yuanfang, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 48.

<sup>4</sup>Denise A. Austin, *'Kingdom-minded' People: Christian Identity and the Contributions of Chinese Business Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 208.

<sup>5</sup>Allan Anderson, "Introduction: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds. (Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 1; Rob Moll, "Great Leap Forward: China Is Changing and So Is Its Church—How New Urban Believers Are Shaping Society in Untold Ways," *Christianity Today*, 52, 5 (May 1, 2008) [ATLA Religion Database].

that it has played a major role in the nation's religious development.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is also of great interest to examine the life of one early church planter. Based on Mary's personal memoirs, letters and sermons, as well as oral interviews, archives and secondary sources, this article will reveal that Pentecostalism radically broadened her everyday life—from traditional home and business duties to church leadership and overseas missions.

### Traditional Family Life

Prior to her conversion to Pentecostalism, Mary's family life appeared very similar to that of most Chinese women of her time. She was the eldest of six children of James Chen Ah Kew (Kau c1835-1902), a gold miner who came to Victoria in 1853, and his arranged bride Lum Kou Gum (Gum Lum 1862-?), who arrived in 1887.<sup>7</sup> The family grew up in Wahgunyah, near Cowra, operating a convenience store and a land-clearing business on Blanche Street in this busy Murray River port.<sup>8</sup> There was a thriving Chinese community that worked mostly in mining and agriculture.<sup>9</sup>

As Morag Loh notes, the Chinese women's role was to care for the home, children and elders, although there was greater freedom

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<sup>6</sup>Daniel H. Bays, "The Protestant Missionary Establishment and the Pentecostal Movement," in *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, ed. Blumhofer et al. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 50-67.

<sup>7</sup>Mabel Wang, "My Melbourne," *The Age* (February 19, 1982), 3; "Chen, George Wing Dann", *Chinese-Australian Historical Images in Australia*, <http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/biogs/CH00821b.htm> (February 26, 2012); *Family Search*, <http://www.familysearch.org> (March 10, 2012).

<sup>8</sup>"Gum Lum," *New South Wales, Australia, Unassisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1826-1922*, <http://www.ancestry.com.au> (March 9, 2012); "Chen Family," *Chinese Museum*, <http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/biogs/CH00822b.htm> (March 9, 2012); Cora Trevarthen, "After the gold is gone: Chinese Communities in Northeast Victoria, 1861-1914," *Journal of Chinese Australia*, 2 (October 2006), <http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/jca/issue02/09Trevarthen.html> (March 10, 2012); Rod Lancashire, "European-Chinese Economic Interaction in a Pre-Federation Rural Australian Setting," *Rural Society Journal*, 10, 2 (2000), 229-241, <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.library.uq.edu.au/fullText;dn=200100766;res=APAFI> (April 25, 2012); *Flowers and the Wide Sea: The Epic Story of China's Centuries-Old Relationship With Australia* (Sydney: Australian Government and Screen Australia, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Cora Trevarthen, "After the Gold Is Gone: Chinese Communities in Northeast Victoria, 1861-1914," *Journal of Chinese Australia*, 2, <http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/jca/issue02/09Trevarthen.html> (March 10, 2012).

for those living in Australia.<sup>10</sup> Still, like most women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lum Kou Gum retained the traditional view that Mary should care for the home and for her younger brothers Matthew Wing Tang, George Wing Dann, William Wing Young and Peter Wing Shing, as well as her baby sister King Sui.<sup>11</sup> As with many other Australian-born Chinese, it appears that Mary struggled with “otherness.”<sup>12</sup> She writes:

I myself had no education, of either Chinese or English. I was not allowed to go to school because at that time the...custom would not allow any girls to read or write, so that they could be under man and do as he wish. It is a life of misery...[mother] would rather pay for the [government] summons, and keep me away as much as she could. I was only in the second class.<sup>13</sup>

Household chores were also quite a challenge for a young girl. Owing to the New South Wales/Victoria import duties, it was cheaper to buy meat across the river at Corowa; so before the John Foord Bridge was built, Mary had to swim over to Albury and carry meat back on top of her head.<sup>14</sup> Constrained by tradition, Mary’s life appears to have revolved around domestic duties.

Mary’s next phase brought significant changes, although life still followed traditional norms. Conscious of the introduction of Australia’s Immigration Restriction Act (or ‘White Australia’ policy), as well as his own ill health, Chen Ah Kew moved the family back to his native village of Huangchun, Guangdong, in December 1901.<sup>15</sup> Having grown up in the reasonable comfort of rural Australia, the

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<sup>10</sup>Morag Loh, *Celebrating Survival—An Overview, 1856-1986* (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, 1986), 1-3.

<sup>11</sup>James Wong Yen, *And So It Was. . . The Christ Witness of a Chinese Mother Born in Victoria at the Turn of the Century, and the Story of Her Father, a Young Emigrant from China Who Established Family Roots in Northern Victoria in the Early 1850s* (self-published, no date), 12.

<sup>12</sup>Carole Tan, “Living with ‘Difference’: Growing Up ‘Chinese’ in White Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, 77 (2003), 106.

<sup>13</sup>RYA. Mary Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace—personal memoirs* (Hong Kong: no date). **Author’s note:** Since adding a [sic] following each instance of incorrect grammar and spelling would be cumbersome and because Mary’s direct quotes are important to the story and add a measure of authenticity (she being not well educated by her own admission), the author felt it appropriate to leave the quotes in their original form.

<sup>14</sup> Wong Yen, *And So It Was. . .*, 12; Esther Yap, *Personal interview with Denise Nicholls* (Melbourne, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> “Chen Family,” *Chinese Museum*. <http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/biogs/CH00892b.htm> (March 9, 2012).

living conditions in China were somewhat of a shock. Mary records her feelings the first evening in the village, where they lived in a:

. . . little wooden house, [lit by] a small kerosene light. I stood outside. I don't want to put my foot in, floor with no lining, and. . . whole row of idol. . . on this center long shelf. Our bed was wooden bed with straw mattress, after coming from sunny Australia, nice soft bed and pillow. . . everything is different. . .<sup>16</sup>

Things became more difficult for 13-year-old Mary as she was forced to have her feet partially bound and kept in embroidered, high-heeled shoes, despite her advanced age. This seriously affected her mobility and caused ongoing pain for the rest of her life. In reporting on this, Jan Ryan reinforces the stereotype of Mary as a 'passive victim.'<sup>17</sup> (Her later life would prove her to be so much more.) Chen built a small brick home with a tiled roof in a prime location on the inner edge of the village square. It had an entrance hall with tiled floor that led to a family room, a kitchen with a wood-burning stove, a washing area and a large bedroom. Drinking water was filtered through sand in an earthenware pot.<sup>18</sup>

The home was only partly completed when Chen died in March 1902, followed shortly afterward by two-year-old King Sui, who succumbed to illness. While Mary's brothers were sent to school to learn Chinese, she was still kept at home as a domestic helper.<sup>19</sup> Adjusting to the different living conditions in China was made all the more difficult with the added restraint of her bound feet and family grief—but overall, life remained more or less the same.

According to Chinese custom, continuous responsibility for household duties is only heightened with marriage. At the age of 16, Mary was matched with a prosperous Canadian Chinese from the Lee clan—a man some years her senior whom she had never met and who returned to Canada four months after the wedding.<sup>20</sup> Canadian immigration restrictions meant Mary only saw her husband during his infrequent visits home. As in most multi-generational families of that era, the husband and wife relationship was of little importance and was

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<sup>16</sup>Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace*, n.p.

<sup>17</sup>Jan Ryan, *Chinese Women and the Global Village: An Australian Site* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2003), 39-41.

<sup>18</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was. . .*, 39.

<sup>19</sup>Kate Bagnall, "Rewriting the History of Chinese Families in Nineteenth-Century Australia," *Australian Historical Studies*, 42, 1 (2011), 65.

<sup>20</sup>Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace*, n.p.?

based on shared obligations rather than on intimacy.<sup>21</sup> The wife of an overseas Chinese husband was expected to care for the husband's family and her own children.<sup>22</sup> Sophie Couchman explains: "Bound by Confucian ideology...women were subordinate to men," preferably isolated to domestic duties, including "care of the family, moral training of children, cleaning, washing and cooking."<sup>23</sup>

So, Mary established a comfortable home in Shenzhen and became occupied with the care of her daughter Yip Dee (1904-1918), and son Robert King Sun Lee (1908-2002).<sup>24</sup> She relied on family news from one of her brothers, who would occasionally walk three hours from their village to visit her; but eventually, all four brothers returned to Australia for work. Residing in a remote rural village, there is no evidence to suggest that Mary was influenced by topical debates on the "modern woman" in urban Republican China.<sup>25</sup> She fulfilled the traditional role of a dutiful wife, mother and daughter-in-law.

When her husband died, Mary moved back to Melbourne in 1917 (her mother following in 1923),<sup>26</sup> yet emphasis on the home continued, despite her religious conversion. Less than 100 Chinese women lived in Melbourne at that time; but being Australian-born, Mary was not subject to the immigration restrictions that her brothers' wives faced.<sup>27</sup> The whole family converted to Christianity through English classes hosted by the Church of Christ in Carlton.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Zuo Jiping, "Rethinking Family Patriarchy and Women's Positions in Presocialist China", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 3 (Aug 2009), 542-557 <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uq.edu.au/docview/219750918> (April 28, 2012).

<sup>22</sup>Bagnall, "Rewriting the History of Chinese Families in Nineteenth-Century Australia," 65.

<sup>23</sup>Sophie Couchman, "From Mrs Lup Mun, Chinese Herbalist, to Yee Joon, Respectable Scholar: A Social History of Melbourne's Chinatown, 1900-1920," in *The Overseas Chinese in Australasia: History, Settlement and Interactions*, Henry Chan, Ann Curthoys and Nora Chiang, eds. (Canberra: National Taiwan University and Australian National University, 2002), 132-133.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Wing-Tang, "A Potted History of Auntie Mary," *Personal e-mail correspondence with the author* (May 8, 2012).

<sup>25</sup>Louise Edwards, "Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China," *Modern China* 26, 115 (2000), <http://mcx.sagepub.com/content/26/2/115> (April 28, 2012).

<sup>26</sup>William Wing Young Chen, *The Mission Work of Bro. & Sis. C.N. Yeung* (Hong Kong: Oriental Full Gospel Church, no date).

<sup>27</sup>Couchman, "From Mrs Lup Mun, Chinese Herbalist, to Yee Joon, Respectable Scholar," 132; John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 50.

<sup>28</sup>Mabel Wang, *Personal phone conversation with the author* (March 19, 2012); A.B. Maston, "Churches of Christ," *Jubilee Pictorial History of Churches of Christ in*

Even with their new-found faith, many traditional customs were upheld. So, in October 1918, Mary's brothers arranged for her to marry Andrew Wong Yen (1882-1928), a fellow parishioner, fruit merchant and widower from a neighboring Sunwai village.<sup>29</sup> Andrew and Mary established a home at 108 Lygon Street; and Mary had six more children—James (1919-1978), Dorothy (1921-1925), Ida (1922-2004), Vena Grace (1923-1986), David (1924-1994) and Esther Thyra Me Ho (1926-2011).<sup>30</sup> Although the couple continued to struggle with their literacy, they operated a successful fruit shop. Mary's first son Robert also worked for her brothers' Wing Young and Company on Little Bourke Street.<sup>31</sup> While conversion had brought some changes in terms of English lessons and Christian business networking, Mary's routine continued to revolve around the home and the family business.

### Church Leadership

Thus far, Mary's life was fairly typical of many early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese women in Australia, but it expanded substantially to include church leadership when she adopted a Pentecostal spirituality. This movement, which emerged from global Methodist and holiness cultures in many countries between 1893-1907, centered on the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' as a post-conversion manifestation of 'gifts of the Spirit,' including *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), healing, prophesy, miracles and empowerment for evangelism.<sup>32</sup> While present

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*Australasia* (1903), <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/digital/jph/JPH417.htm> (April 28, 2012).

<sup>29</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was*. . . , 22.

<sup>30</sup>Kelso Glover, "Home Going of Brother Wong Yen," *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (September 1928), [webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au](http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au), <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1928-september/home-going-of-brother-wong-yen> (February 24, 2012); "Through Sorrow to Service", *The Latter Rain Evangel* (January 1931), 22-23, [http://ifphc.org/pdf/LatterRainEvangel/1930-1939/LRE%201931/1931\\_01.pdf#Page22](http://ifphc.org/pdf/LatterRainEvangel/1930-1939/LRE%201931/1931_01.pdf#Page22) (February 28, 2012); "The Chen Family, Melbourne, 1928", *Culture Victoria*, <http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/chinese-australian-families/9413/the-chen-family-melbourne-1928> (February 26, 2012).

<sup>31</sup>Wang, "My Melbourne," 3; Sophie Couchman, "The Banana Trade: Its Importance to Melbourne's Chinese and Little Bourke Street, 1880s-1930s," in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, Paul Macgregor, ed. (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), 80.

<sup>32</sup>This experience is described in Acts 2; Gary B. McGee, "'Brought into the Sphere of the Supernatural: How Speaking in Tongues Empowered Early Pentecostals,'" *Encounter*, 4, 1 (Fall 2007), [http://www.agts.edu/encounter/articles/2007\\_fall/mcgee.htm](http://www.agts.edu/encounter/articles/2007_fall/mcgee.htm) (March 7, 2012); Frank D. Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology," in *The*

in Australia as early as the 1870s, by 1907 Pentecostalism had gained organizational forms.<sup>33</sup> By the early 1920s, crowds of up to 4,000 people were gathering in regional revivals.<sup>34</sup> Mary describes her experience, possibly during the second visit of British healing evangelist Smith Wigglesworth:

In the year 1923 a revival came to Australia, my husband and I both received the wonderful baptism of the Holy Ghost, according to Act 2:4. . . . I was caught up in the cloud to meet the Lord, in the air. . . .<sup>35</sup>

She continues:

The night I received the Holy Ghost I never forget as long as I live. I was praising God all night. The Lord filled me with the Holy Ghost. I was under the power trembling all night shaking. A personal baptism with Holy Ghost and fire. I was in the presence of God, I meet Jesus face to face.<sup>36</sup>

Her experiences seemed to have continued with the Sunshine Revival (1925-1926), led by Mexican-American evangelist Adolpho Clarence Valdez.<sup>37</sup> The Wong Yens, as well as Lum Kou Gum, became zealous members of the 300-member-strong Richmond Temple, later pastored by Charles L. Greenwood.<sup>38</sup> Stephen Hunt finds that there is a

*Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made To Travel*, Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, eds. (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 13.

<sup>33</sup>PHCS. "Pentecost in Australia," *The Apostolic Faith*, 2, 13 (May 1908), 1.

<sup>34</sup>**Phillip Duncan**, "**Pentecost in Australia, Chapter 1**", [webjournals.alphacrucis.edu](http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu), <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/EB/pentecost-in-australia-duncan/pentecost-in-australia-chapter-1> ( March 7, 2012); Mark Hutchinson, "'The Normal Vision': Revival Thought in a Leading Australian Pentecostal Journal (Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger) 1928-1948," *Paper Delivered at the Pentecostal Heritage Conference, Heritage 2003: Revival* (Southern Cross College, July 2003), <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/aps/issue-8/05-the-normal-vision-revival-thought-in-a-leading-> (August 20, 2011).

<sup>35</sup>Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace*, n.p.

<sup>36</sup>RYA. Mary Yeung, *Sermon Notes on 2 Kings 1-1* (no date).

<sup>37</sup>Denise A. Austin, *Our College: A History of the National College of Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God in Australia)* (Sydney: Australian Pentecostal Studies, 2013), 12.

<sup>38</sup>Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 90.

strong link between religion and the transformation of self-identity,<sup>39</sup> which was apparent in Mary, whose her life had been revolutionized:

It was like stepping out of a starless night into a day of eternal light, like being lifted from a bottomless pit on to solid rock. He is my savior, baptiser, healer and coming king; He filled me with the Holy Spirit, it is joy unspeakable and full of Glory.<sup>40</sup>

From this point onward, it appears that she began to look well beyond the confines of her own home, and daily life increasingly meant church involvement. The Wong Yen family attended Richmond Temple's Sunday services, Sunday school, weekday choir practices and other meetings. Andrew and Mary were active in evangelism each weekend, visiting "the aged, poor and needy Chinese men in institutions and out into the open-air meetings."<sup>41</sup> Daughter Esther comments: "Most of our lives were spent in church."<sup>42</sup> and various nieces and nephews also made regular visits.<sup>43</sup> Mary's life bore little resemblance to traditional stereotypes of Chinese women in early Australia.

Personal devotion was emphasised in this new spirituality. Mary's son James notes that: "Mother was in constant daily prayer, praying for God's guidance and seeking the Holy Spirit to teach her."<sup>44</sup> Although still semi-illiterate, she would pray three times every day, "weeping before the Lord and reading the Word of God. . . ."<sup>45</sup> Mary's commitment to prayer is evident in her writing:

He who love God find real joy in prayer. . . we find fellowship with God, compassion, life, power, knowledge of his presence fill our soul with His glory. I prove God. He hears and answers prayer. . . Prayer will over throw the devil. . . if we do not delight in the hour of secret prayer, it is because you do not live in harmony with the laws of God. I know we are not all perfect, but I know there should be a longing in the heart for a better way. . . . You never be successful winning soul for Christ until you enter into fellowship with Christ. Sometimes you may

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<sup>39</sup>Stephen Hunt, *Religion in Everyday Life: The New Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 170.

<sup>40</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was. . . .*, 24.

<sup>41</sup>Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace*, n.p.

<sup>42</sup>Yap, *Personal interview with Denise Nicholls*.

<sup>43</sup>Wang, *Personal phone conversation with the author*.

<sup>44</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was. . . .*, 25.

<sup>45</sup>Yeung, *The Miracle of Grace*, n.p.



feel all your work is vain and burden press upon you, and the Victory can never be gain, get alone with God and pray.<sup>46</sup>

Esther adds that everyone who met her mother said she was “a wonderful witness of God’s love. . . . She would lock herself in room with the Bible, and God would speak to her through scriptures.”<sup>47</sup> Mary even considered enrolling in a Bible school (possibly the short-lived Victorian Bible Institute operated by Valdez and then Kelso Glover).<sup>48</sup> In 1925, when her youngest daughter Dorothy died at only four years of age, this did not dissuade Mary’s faith. Her favourite hymn became: “Where Jesus is tis heaven, O hal-le-lu-jah, yes tis heaven, tis heaven to know my sins forgiven on land or sea; what matters where Jesus is, tis heaven there.”<sup>49</sup> The individual spirituality of her church experience was evident.

Early Pentecostalism was small, fragmented and largely female-led,<sup>50</sup> so it is no surprise that Mary was thrust into a leadership role. Without the restrictions of mainline denominations, Pentecostal women became preachers, Bible teachers, evangelists, church planters, missionaries and denominational founders.<sup>51</sup> Julie Ma notes that strong teaching on the ‘call of God’ opened unprecedented opportunities for Asian women.<sup>52</sup> Mary clearly benefited from this fluid egalitarianism, being described as “a very good preacher.”<sup>53</sup> She writes of her life: “From the devil to the pulpit, a servant of the devil to the servant of our living God. Hallelujah.”<sup>54</sup> Almost completely self-taught, Mary also contributed many articles to the *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings*

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<sup>46</sup>RYA. Mary Yeung, *Personal journal*.

<sup>47</sup>Yap, *Personal interview with Denise Nicholls*.

<sup>48</sup>Austin, *Our College*, 13.

<sup>49</sup>Yeung, *Personal Journal*.

<sup>50</sup>Elizabeth Brusco, “Gender and Power,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, Andre Droogers, Cornelis Van Der Laan, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 82.

<sup>51</sup>Janet Everts Powers, “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy:’ Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Empowerment of Women,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made To Travel*, Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, eds. (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 313.

<sup>52</sup>Julie Ma, “Asian Women and Pentecostal Ministry,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds. (Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 129.

<sup>53</sup>Duncan, “Pentecost in Australia: Chapter 1.

<sup>54</sup>Yeung, *Personal journal* (no date).

*Messenger*, which had a strong missions focus and circulated among Pentecostal assemblies across Australia and beyond.<sup>55</sup>

As with other Chinese Christians of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia,<sup>56</sup> the Wong Yens remained concerned about their native land. They wrote to George M. Kelley, an American Assemblies of God missionary, offering to financially support a worker for their district of Sunwai, Guangdong, although a suitable candidate was not available at that time.<sup>57</sup> When Andrew Wong Yen died unexpectedly on August 20, 1928,<sup>58</sup> Mary's spiritual expression had already prepared her for the mission ahead.

### Daily Life in Missions

Willem Marie Speelman argues that people's spirituality can both affect and direct their daily life, including eating, housing, clothing, working, traveling, communicating and celebrating.<sup>59</sup> This was certainly true of Mary's Pentecostal spirituality. On Christmas Day 1928, this single mother burst through all remaining vestiges of tradition when she made the decision to become a missionary in China—and unprecedented move for an Australian Chinese woman of this era. As one Pentecostal pastor noted, she had “the call of God on her soul to preach the full gospel to her own people.”<sup>60</sup> It was widely believed that the ‘gift of tongues’ was for the rapid advancement of the gospel worldwide, which heightened the movement's eschatological, pre-millennial urgency.<sup>61</sup> Pentecostal missionaries had been in China since 1907, attracting around 1,000 adherents within the first decade.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> **Anonymous**, “News: Farewell to Sister Wong Yen,” *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (May 1929), [webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au](http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au), <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1929-may/news-farewell-to-sister-wong-yen> (February 24, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Denise A. Austin, “Citizens of Heaven: Overseas Chinese Christians During Australian Federation,” in *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation, and Chinese Communities in Australia 1960-1940*, Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald and Paul Macgregor, eds. (Melbourne: Otherland, 2004), 83.

<sup>57</sup> “Through Sorrow to Service,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*.

<sup>58</sup> **Glover**, “**Home Going of Brother Wong Yen**.”

<sup>59</sup> Willem Marie Speelman, “A Spiritual Method for Daily Life Practices,” in *Towards A Theory of Spirituality*, Elisabeth Hense and Frans Maas, eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 59.

<sup>60</sup> Duncan, “Pentecost in Australia: Chapter 1.”

<sup>61</sup> Allan Anderson, “Pentecostalism in India and China in the Early Twentieth Century and Inter-Religious Relations,” in *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*, David Westerlund, ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 119.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Woods, “Failure and Success in the Ministry of T.J. McIntosh, the First Pentecostal Missionary to China.” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*,

Although Mary was not sponsored by any missions agency, Andrew Wong Yen had invested in the China Steamship Line, Wing On and Company and other businesses that provided some support.<sup>63</sup> The family fruit business was taken on by Mary's brothers, who also financed her ministry<sup>64</sup> and held monthly interdenominational prayer meetings in their homes to encourage her supporters.<sup>65</sup> So on April 3, 1929, Mary, with her five small children and elderly mother, left Australia aboard the *S.S. Tanda*.<sup>66</sup> They were accompanied by William Wing Young and family, who planned to expand their business prospects abroad.<sup>67</sup> The Pentecostal experience had taken Mary from house-bound daily duties to a life of missions work.

Mary was clearly driven by a pioneer spirit; and although she networked with other Pentecostal missionaries, she remained independent.<sup>68</sup> Since she could not read or write Chinese, one of the Kelleys' converts, Wai Lin, became her valued assistant, later migrating with her back to Australia. Despite her educational limitations, Mary preached in her local dialect with great impact. Kelley described her as a valuable co-worker through whom many were "saved and baptized in the Spirit."<sup>69</sup>

Only days after her arrival in Jiangmen, Mary met an indigenous leader of the local Baptist church who, being concerned at the declining number of attendees, offered to rent the Baptist church hall for some meetings. Richmond Temple donated money for hymn books and Bibles. So in September 1929, Mary commenced a two-

<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj12/woods.html> (March 5, 2012); George Kelley, "The Call of China," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (October 20 1923), 2, [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1923/1923\\_10\\_20.pdf#Page2](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1923/1923_10_20.pdf#Page2) (February 28, 2012).

<sup>63</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was...*, 27.

<sup>64</sup>Lynette Pearson, *Personal phone conversation with the author* (March 26, 2012); Mabel Wang, *Personal phone conversation with the author*.

<sup>65</sup>Peter Wing Tang, *Personal e-mail correspondence with the author* (May 16, 2012).

<sup>66</sup>**Anonymous**, "News: Farewell to Sister Wong Yen."

<sup>67</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was...*, 29.

<sup>68</sup>George M. Kelley, "A Five-Dollar Missionary Offering," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (April 6, 1929), 10, [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1929/1929\\_04\\_06.pdf#Page10](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1929/1929_04_06.pdf#Page10) (February 28, 2012); F. Tuck, "Missionaries from China [J and J Beruldsen]," *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (May 1929), [webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au](http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au), <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1929-may/missionaries-from-china-j-and-j-beruldsen> (March 7, 2012).

<sup>69</sup>George M. Kelley, "Work in Canton," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 863 (August 30, 1930), n.p., [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1930-1939/1930/1930\\_08\\_30.pdf](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1930-1939/1930/1930_08_30.pdf) (February 24, 2012).

week campaign, with a daily schedule that included a morning prayer meeting, an afternoon meeting for Christians, and an evening evangelistic meeting.<sup>70</sup> Her ‘gospel family’ also provided food and clothes to disabled beggars on the streets. She tells of one man with no hands or feet who was carried around on another man’s back. When he became too heavy, he had to roll along the ground, receiving cuts and bruises from the rough stones. Mary’s mother supervised the construction of a wheelchair for the delighted man. This early pioneer work saw worthwhile results.

After some hesitation, Mary’s brothers agreed to defy paternal tradition and allow the indefatigable woman to establish a mission in the family home in October 1929.<sup>71</sup> Huangchun was among the 26 villages in the sub-district of Ngai Sai in Sunwai, one of the four districts forming the county of Siyi, Guangdong. From Jiangmen, it took several hours by river junk to Sunwai City then a two-hour walk to the village.<sup>72</sup> Huangchun included communal areas, an ancestral hall and family homes. A river acted as a natural boundary, and the other sides were walled, with a large gate and several multi-story posts for armed guards. Rice and vegetable crops were grown outside the walls and paths connected the various villages. Sunwai was comprised of more than 100,000 people, but there was some resistance to Christianity. However, the fully furnished family house and compound became a productive mission, as well as a school for girls.<sup>73</sup> Mary employed two full-time teachers to run the education program.<sup>74</sup> Pentecostalism had indeed come to the region!

During mid-1930, Kelley, Mary, William Wing Young and some other workers conducted a special week-long crusade. One young businessman, who claimed to have recently been healed, facilitated the meetings at his ancestral hall and held a prayer meeting in his own

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<sup>70</sup>**Mary Yen Yeung, “Sister Wong Yen writes from China,”** *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (November 1929), [webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au](http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au), <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1929-november/sister-wong-yen-writes-from-china> (February 24, 2012).

<sup>71</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was*. . . , 33; PHC Mary **Yeung**, “**Foreign Mission News: Mrs. Wong Yen Writes from China**,” *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (April 1930).

<sup>72</sup>George M. Kelley, “A Door of Opportunity,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (July 5, 1930), 12. [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1930-1939/1930/1930\\_07\\_05.pdf#Page12](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1930-1939/1930/1930_07_05.pdf#Page12) (February 28, 2012); Wong Yen, *And So It Was*. . . , 3.

<sup>73</sup>“Through Sorrow to Service.” *The Latter Rain Evangel*; Wang, *Personal phone conversation with the author*.

<sup>74</sup>PHC. “Pentecostal Church, Sun Wai, China,” *The Pentecostal Church, Richmond Temple: Souvenir* (Easter 1939), 33.

home. Despite warnings from village elders, Mary persisted. Kelley noted regarding her that “the opposition availed nothing.”<sup>75</sup> On the third evening, 30 people gathered for a prayer meeting, which lasted until 4 a.m. the next morning, with many people seeking and receiving the experience of being baptized in the Holy Ghost. Converts included those from wealthy families, despite fierce opposition from relatives.<sup>76</sup> Marginalized as both Christian and Pentecostal, believers often had rocks and cow manure thrown at their houses.<sup>77</sup> Anti-Christian agitators almost stopped a Christian wedding ceremony passing through the village gate, until authorities cleared the way.<sup>78</sup>

Another ongoing concern was the nightly bandit attacks on the village. Esther recalls regularly running to the wall towers when the alarm bell rang.<sup>79</sup> Mary even had to herd her family into a tower late one evening when two of the children were seriously ill with measles. Toine Van den Hoogen argues that the intense reality of the spiritual compels people to disrupt daily life in order to endure the unbearable.<sup>80</sup> Village outreach had many challenges, but Mary chose to persevere.

The public meetings, centered on Mary’s work, grew until around 300 people were attending three daily services, with evening meetings often running all night. Apparently, at least a dozen people “received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit...singing and speaking in tongues. Some spoke in English, though they did not know the language. . . . Demons have been cast out and a number of sick have been healed.”<sup>81</sup> Mary walked on her stunted feet from 10 to 24 kilometers each day, visiting villages to pray for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. She was also well received when she held three days of meetings in the home village of her “dear husband” Andrew. She describes the scene:

God came down in mighty Holy Ghost power. Conviction came upon young and old. One young girl about 14 years of age called out, “Have mercy upon me a sinner,” and many confessed their sins weeping with tears of repentance. A large number stood up for the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Eight have received according to Acts 2:4.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Kelley, “A Door of Opportunity,” 12.

<sup>76</sup>Kelley, “Work in Canton,” n.p.

<sup>77</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was*. . . , 41.

<sup>78</sup>Yeung, *Personal journal* (no date).

<sup>79</sup>Yap, *Personal interview with Denise Nicholls*.

<sup>80</sup>Toine Van den Hoogen, “Elements of a Theory About ‘Lived Spirituality,’” in *Towards A Theory of Spirituality*, Elisabeth Hense and Frans Maas, eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 16.

<sup>81</sup>“Through Sorrow to Service”, *The Latter Rain Evangel*.

<sup>82</sup>Mary Yen Yeung, “Foreign Mission News: Sister Wong Yen Writes from China”, *Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger* (June 1930),

Many were converted and baptized in the river, while two reportedly spoke in tongues for the first time.<sup>83</sup> A supportive businessman financed Mary's further outreaches around the district, using Kelley's tent. Her return as a Pentecostal pioneer was vastly different to her former experience in China.

The missions work also involved management responsibilities. With 60 enquirers undertaking a regular Bible study, Mary's home became too small; and so a larger premise was needed, preferably more centrally situated. Requesting money from Pentecostal assemblies in Australia, she wrote:

It is with a heart full of praise to God that I write, letting you know that the Lord is with us all along the way, and that we are having very precious times. . . . There is a great need of a church here for us to have a place of worship, and I am looking to the dear ones in Australia for help to build, so that those who have come in and received the baptism of the Holy Ghost may have a place to meet in. . . . The fields are white unto harvest, and the souls in China are dying in darkness. Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into this great field.<sup>84</sup>

An ideal block of land beside the river was donated by a female convert, who was the wife of a wealthy real estate dealer.<sup>85</sup> Through funds raised from overseas Pentecostals, her own congregation and a supporter in India, the 400-seat, non-denominational Fook Yum church was constructed on the site.<sup>86</sup> Since Mary was not an ordained pastor, she felt it important to have visiting ministers from Guangzhou conduct baptismal and communion services. Eventually, a Chinese pastor was installed to lead the church.<sup>87</sup> Mary's commitment to church planting, discipleship and networking led to a thriving Pentecostal community.

Experiential power encounters were prominent in Mary's ministry in China. Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong points out that there is a continual expectation of the Holy Spirit's intervention in

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*webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au*, <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1930-june/foreign-mission-news-sister-wong-yen-writes-from-c/> (26 February 2012).

<sup>83</sup>Kelley, "A Door of Opportunity," 12.

<sup>84</sup>**Yeung**, "Foreign Mission News: Sister Wong Yen Writes from China."

<sup>85</sup>Yeung, *Personal journal*.

<sup>86</sup>Wong Yen, *And So It Was*. . . , 38.

<sup>87</sup>Duncan, "Pentecost in Australia: Chapter 1."

response to prayer.<sup>88</sup> Veli-matti Kärkkäinen affirms that Pentecostals hold “an expectation of the miraculous as part of the Christian’s everyday life.”<sup>89</sup> Luke Wesley adds that Chinese Pentecostals anticipate divine assistance, including healing, raising the dead, divine wisdom, dreams, visions, prophesy, evangelism and miraculous protection.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, there have often been reports of a “mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit,” supernatural protection and miracles in China.<sup>91</sup> Mary’s colleague George Kelley was known for his zealous ministry, with healings, miracles, tongues and ‘faintings’ often reported in his meetings.<sup>92</sup> Pentecostals lived with the assumption that divine intervention would occur.

Mary also relied on power encounters, writing: “We have victory through the blood of the Lamb. Sunday night our little girlie took sick. She had a high fever. I prayed for her and the power of God came down and touched her.”<sup>93</sup> One of her female converts who had been miraculously healed later also prayed for a baby who had died, and it reportedly came back to life.<sup>94</sup> Even the expressive joy of Pentecostal funerals aroused the interest of hundreds of spectators. In Guangzhou, Mary visited her late husband’s cousin, who had joined a

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<sup>88</sup> Amos Yong, “‘The Spirit Hovers Over the World:’ Toward a Typology of ‘Spirit’ in the Religion and Science Dialogue,” *The Digest: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Foundational Questions*, 4, 12 (2004), n.p., [http://www.metanexus.net/digest/2004\\_10\\_27.htm](http://www.metanexus.net/digest/2004_10_27.htm) ( March 4, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Veli-matti Kärkkäinen, “Pneumatologies in Systematic Theology,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, Andre Droogers, Cornelis Van Der Laan, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 235.

<sup>90</sup> Luke Wesley, “Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 7, 2 (2004), 244.

<sup>91</sup> **Hermann Becker, “A Bandit’s Sword the Price of Revival,”** *Good News* (July 1924), 15, 7. <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/GN/gn-vol-15-no-7-july-1924/a-bandits-sword-the-price-of-revival-china> (February 24, 2012); James Moore Hickson, “**The Christian Healing Mission in China, Japan and the Philippine Islands,**” *Heal the Sick* (New York: E P Dutton and Co., 1924), <http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/EB/heal-the-sick-hickson-1924/04-the-christian-healing-mission-in-china-japan-an> (February 24, 2012).

<sup>92</sup> George M. Kelley, “Bible Conference in Canton,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (September 3, 1927), 10, [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1927/1927\\_09\\_03.pdf#Page10](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1920-1929/1927/1927_09_03.pdf#Page10) (February 28, 2012); “A Blessed Convention,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (December 13, 1913), 12, [http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1913-1919/1919/1919\\_12\\_13.pdf#Page12](http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1913-1919/1919/1919_12_13.pdf#Page12) (February 28, 2012); Mark W. Kelley, “Missionary Marriage and Civil War: George Kelley and Eugenia Wan in China, 1935-1950,” [http://uncw.edu/csurl/documents/MarkKelley\\_000.pdf](http://uncw.edu/csurl/documents/MarkKelley_000.pdf) (February 28, 2012).

<sup>93</sup> **Yeung, “Foreign Mission News”** (June 1930).

<sup>94</sup> Yeung, *Personal journal*.

Pentecostal group after he claimed to have received healing from a 10-year nose complaint, and his wife was cured of back trouble.<sup>95</sup> When Mary's own brother fell seriously ill in Hong Kong, she disregarded her own ill health, "stood on the promises and went," seeing him "healed...under the mighty power of God."<sup>96</sup> For this Chinese Pentecostal missionary, expectation of power encounters was commonplace and part of 're-scripting' the traditional narratives in line with the biblical stories that formed the core of Christian preaching.

### **Conclusion**

The personal writings of Mary (Wong Yen) Yeung provide unique insight into her life transitions. Clearly, her early years were marked by traditional conformity to the domestic duties of a devoted daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Although conversion to Christianity assisted her educational advance and opened new opportunities for business networking, her priority remained the care of her growing family. However, after a profound religious experience, Mary's horizons expanded from unprecedented leadership opportunities in church to courageous pioneering missionary opportunities as a single mother in China. Her remarkable contributions were not to stop there, however. The later years of this extraordinary Australian Chinese Pentecostal woman would prove to be some of her most fruitful ministry endeavors.

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<sup>95</sup>Yeung, "Foreign Mission News."

<sup>96</sup>Yeung, *Personal journal*.



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