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MARY (WONG YEN) YEUNG: THE ORDINARY LIFE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY AUSTRALIAN CHINESE PENTECOSTAL PART II

By Denise A. Austin

Overview

With ever-increasing notoriety, owing to her successful missionary activities and charismatic preaching style, Mary Wong Yen's public ministry in Australia blossomed. Ignoring the conventional restraints of society, religion, race and gender, she became a household name in Pentecostal circles. However, 1930s China was suffering from horrific violence through external attack and internal turmoil. So, rather than stay in the peace and security of Australia, Mary chose to risk everything and return to the mission field, where she met and married Chinese minister, Jack Yeung. Complimenting each others' giftings, the Yeungs further consolidated their effective missions and social welfare work in China. Even when forced to escape, then ultimately widowed for a third time, Mary (Wong Yen) Yeung's passion for missions remained unabated. Unlike many others, who willingly retired into obscurity in later years, Mary sustained her zealous work with social service endeavors in Hong Kong, leaving a legacy for generations to come.

Public Ministry

Just when it seemed like Mary had broken all cultural rules of propriety, the next phase of life took her further into public ministry in 'White Australia.' Despite the unwritten rule that "no Chinese wife, no Chinese woman, ever traveled to Australia unattended,"[1] the twice-widowed Mary returned to Australia unaccompanied in 1932 to settle her children into school. William Wing Young helped her establish a

[1]Eric Rolls, Citizens: Flowers and the Wide Sea (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996), 185.

tea shop, ably assisted by her son, James.[2] Skillfully now using "otherness" to her advantage, Mary was greeted by the Pentecostal assemblies as a local hero and was afforded an extraordinary opportunity, virtually unknown to Chinese women in mainline denominations. As Jacqui Grey points out, women in early 20th century Australia could not even open a bank account without their husbands' permission, yet 11 of the 18 early Pentecostal churches were founded by women.[3] Shortly after Mary's return, she told a crowded Richmond Temple assembly of the "heart gripping story of her work among the bandits in China."[4] Sundays were always spent at church and Mary became a much-sought after public speaker. Besides Richmond Temple, Mary also preached at Pentecostal services in Adelaide. In June 1935, Mary was a guest speaker alongside the popular American evangelist, Kelso Glover, at a special week-long crusade on Grote Street. Advertisements encouraged: "Everyone welcome. Come, come, come."[5] It appears that the Christian community could not get enough of the Chinese, female, Pentecostal, missionary anomaly.

With a heightened profile, Mary's public ministry continued even after her return to China in 1935. Again defying the tradition of domesticity, she installed eight-year-old Esther at boarding school in Hong Kong while a Christian friend, Edith Johnson, cared for the other children at a school in Melbourne.[6] The criticism that this must have brought, as well as the pain of family separation, serves to highlight Mary's deep spiritual motivation. It was not uncommon for a Chinese man to leave his wife and children whilst on a sojourn, but for the mother to leave was notably unusual. In December 1936, in yet another shredding of past matrimonial tradition, Mary herself chose to marry an ordained Presbyterian minister, who was also a practitioner of Chinese medicine and widower from Guangzhou, Jack Chick Nam Yeung (1885-1957) who oversaw 30 churches in six districts around Sunwai.[7]

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[2]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . ,46.
[3]Jacqui Grey, "Torn Stockings and Enculturation: Women Pastors in the Australian Assemblies of God", Australian Pentecostal Studies, 56 (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/aps/issue-56/torn-stockings-and-enculturation-women-pastors-in-/) (9 March 2012).
[4]"Other Denominations," The Argus (Saturday 26 March 1932), 13. (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/4443417?searchTerm=%22Wong%20Yen%22%20pentecostal&searchLimits=) (24 February 2012).
[5]"Pentecostal," The Advertiser (Adelaide) (Saturday 8 June 1935), 8. (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/40050578?searchTerm=%22Wong%20Yen%22%20pentecostal&searchLimits=) (24 February 2012).
[6]Yap, Personal Interview with Denise Nicholls.
[7]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . ,47.

He resigned from his denomination and entered into Pentecostal ministry with his new wife. Pastor Yeung used his training in traditional Chinese medicine as an effective evangelistic tool. Mary's life now revolved around organized public ministry with her new husband.

In July 1937, Japan invaded China. Mary's journals during this time provide a fascinating glimpse into the dangers she faced while undertaking ministry. Japanese aircraft circled over Sunwai several times a day, so low that Mary could actually see the pilots' faces and the bombs hanging on each side of the plane. The aircraft bombed the Sunwai railway station, as well as the waterfront and some city streets, with an estimated 300 killed, although nobody from the Pentecostal congregation was injured.[8] Many churches were closed during the war and one of Mary's orphanage building projects was postponed.[9] The Yeungs evacuated to Jiangmen only four days before Sunwai was taken by Japanese troops.[10] In that city, they opened a mission in a shop-front and a free Christian school for 60 disadvantaged children. During 1938, Jiangmen was also bombed by the Japanese and on one occasion the Yeungs were in a train that came under machine gun fire. Nevertheless, they continued to minister in refugee camps around Jiangmen and Guangzhou. Mary writes:

> Very little transport is available; thousands of small boats have been destroyed by Japanese gun-fire and what fishing vessels that have not been destroyed have been commandeered. Starvation is so great. Money cannot purchase food. Human beings become like animals eating pig food mixed with clay. . .The Lord is keeping us calm and in peace, trusting in Him we placed a candle on the pulpit for light and went on preaching to comfort the people. . .Of the many thousands on the refugee road many would not reach their destination. Little children suffering from food shortage would be left on the roadside to die of cold and hunger. . .When the air raid siren sounded, greater panic struck, with people rushing in all direction for what little shelter there was. . .At night we were raided and our city of Kong Moon would be plunged into darkness as the power house switched off the lights. You could hear

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[8]Mary Yen Yeung, "Missionary News: Sister M. Yeung," Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (August 1939), webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1939-august/missionary-news-sister-m-yeung/) (26 February 2012).

[9]RYA. Mary Yeung, Personal Memoirs (no date).

[10]Eulogy for Esther Yap – read by Rev. Denise Nicholls

> grown-up people and children running in the darkness, falling over trees and shrubs to find shelter. . .[11]

In late 1938, the Yeungs eventually escaped to Hong Kong. Mary immediately returned to Australia with her daughter, but her husband had to apply for an immigration permit. The horror of war was not something any of them would forget.

Mary's public ministry focused on raising financial support for her workers in China. Mary and Esther arrived back in Australia on 29 May 1939, aboard the S.S. Nellore, greeted at the wharf by all the members of the Assemblies of God in Australia's (AGA) missions board.[12] The AGA had been established two years before and had a total membership of around 1,000 people in 38 different Pentecostal assemblies across Australia, including Richmond Temple.[13] Although it was clear that the devastation of Japanese occupation had taken a toll on her health, in typical Mary-style, she commented to her attentive supporters:

> The voyage was a very pleasant one. I had a wonderful opportunity of witnessing for Jesus of His mighty power to save to both English and foreigners. One young man promised to make a decision for Christ.[14]

She also reported that the mission in Sunwai was continuing during her absence, with overseas finances still able to be smuggled in twice a month under the cover of darkness by Hong Kong travellers transported in a junk. This supported her two indigenous workers, as well as some elderly congregation members. Mary comments: "They are real saints and are too old to work, and we keep them in rice to save them from starving. Let us bear this burden cheerfully, for God loves a cheerful giver."[15] She was clearly concerned for her own husband, adding:

> Pray also for Pastor Yeung, my husband, that the way will soon be opened up for him to return to Australia to join me in the work in this

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[11]Ibid., 52.
[12]Mary Yen Yeung, "Missionary News: China," Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (July 1939), webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1939-july/missionary-news-china/) (26 February 2012).
[13]PHCS. "All Australia Conference", The Glad Tidings Messenger, 3, 5 (April 1937), 6.
[14]Mary Yen Yeung, "Missionary News: China."
[15]Yeung, "Missionary News: Sister M. Yeung" (August 1939).

> land on behalf of the Chinese suffering millions. We want to give them the Pentecostal truth. The field is ripe, and whitened unto harvest, but the labourers are few.[16]

Mary opened the Pagoda Trading Company on Victoria Street, North Melbourne, but she soon embarked on another itinerating tour to raise support for China.[17] Her son writes: "Her message always was the simple message of God's salvation as in John 3:16 with a little episode from China." During mid-1939, Mary spoke at a crowded Chinese Association Hall in Bendigo about the needs in China and it was reported that:

> . . .though a heathen idol had been placed in the centre of the Hall, Sister was able to preach under the anointing of the Spirit, and she feels that a work has been done in the hearts of the listeners.[18]

The gathering also gave her a financial offering towards the work. Never complacent for a moment, when someone brought Mary a cup of tea, she pointed out that the people of China were still thirsty for the Word of God. Mary also preached at Ballarat and Adelaide to large crowds. Opportunities opened up for Vena and Ida Wong Yen to occasionally minister in song at Richmond Temple.[19] Esther and Vena later even attended Sydney Bible Training Institute in Strathfield, fulfilling their mother's original dream.[20] It seems that Mary's children also became involved in her public ministry.

Eventually, the Australian immigration authorities granted Chick Nam Yeung a visa to "engage in missionary work" which drew him into Mary's world of Australian Pentecostalism.[21] Just a month after World War II broke out, Greenwood again invited Mary's family into the pulpit for an emotional service at Richmond Temple. Chick

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[16]Ibid.
[17]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . , 45.
[18]Mary Yen Yeung, "Missionary News: Sister Yueng Visits Bendigo. . . , " Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (October 1939) (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1939-october/missionary-news-sister-yueng-visits-bendigo/) (26 February 2012).
[19]"Pentecostal," The Argus (Melbourne) (Saturday 9 September 1939), 25 (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11260731?searchTerm=%22Wong%20Yen%22%20pentecostal&searchLimits=) (24 February 2012).
[20]Denise Nicholls, "Proclaiming Christ: The History of Three Generations of Australian-born Chinese Women in One Family" in Sisters of the Son (Melbourne: Access Publishing International – in print), 6.
[21]Yeung, "Missionary News: Sister Yueng Visits Bendigo. . . .".

Nam spoke about their ministry in China while Mary interpreted. Esther sang "Jesus is all the World to me" in Chinese (presumably Cantonese). Greenwood added hopefully: "This little girl, who recently returned from China with her mother after having witnessed some of the horrors of war, may yet be out telling the Gospel story to her own people."[22] Chick Nam and Mary continued iterating, conducting two successful tent crusades in Sydney, despite the fact that the tent was blown down during a wind storm.[23] Revealing the pressures of travel, the Yeungs requested special prayer for their children while they were away from home. By April, Mary was ministering in Queensland, including Toowoomba, Ravensbourne, Brigalow and Kingsthorpe.[24] It was reported of the Toowoomba meeting:

> Seven Chinese citizens were interested in the meetings and we hope for a rich harvest amongst these dear people later. Pictures of the Chinese refugees and of the work and workers in Canton were thrown on the screen with the aid of the epidiascope, and backed home Sister Yeung's appeal for her native land.[25]

Mary had become something of a celebrity among Pentecostal assemblies across Australia.

This missionary's primary goal was to keep the needs of Sunwai ever before the Australian assemblies. As I note in a previous publication on the Salvation Army during the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Christians in occupied China walked a tentative line between collaboration with and resistance to the Japanese administration.[26]

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[22]Charles L. Greenwood, "Missionary News: Missionary Night at Richmond Temple", Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (November 1939), webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1939-november/missionary-news-missionary-night-at-richmond-templ/) (24 February 2012).

[23]Mary Yen Yeung, "Missionary News: Brother and Sister Yueng," Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (January 1940), webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1940-january/missionary-news-brother-and-sister-yueng_1740/) (26 February 2012).

[24]"Revival Tidings: Sr Yeung's Visit made a Blessing," webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1940-april/revival-tidings-sr-yeungs-visit-made-a-blessing/) (30 April 2012).

[25]Ibid.

[26]Denise A. Austin, "A 'Model' Cooperative Effort: The Salvation Army during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945)" in Baptism by Fire: The Chinese Church during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Lee Kam-keung, Lau Yee-cheung and Lee Wai-yat, eds (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2011), 338.

No doubt Mary's coworkers faced these same challenges and they reported that many people in the district were dying of starvation, hypothermia and bombings, while countless others had attempted to escape into the mountains. However, several people had been converted and baptized in water.[27] Despite such tremendous challenges, Pentecostal outpourings continued in many different regions,[28] which must have encouraged Mary to continue her itinerant ministry.

The Yeungs continued to travel throughout Australia and beyond, visiting many different denominations, including the AGA, Foursquare Full Gospel Church, Apostolic Church and Churches of Christ Chinese Mission.[29] In 1944, Mary was invited by the Foursquare Full Gospel Church to preach in their New South Wales congregations, including Orange, Cessnock, The Entrance, Forbes, Parkes, Manly and Katoomba, where she was the speaker at their inaugural service.[30] Clearly, her ministry was effective as she was invited for a return tour the following year. In 1947, the Yeungs were invited to speak at gospel meetings across both the north and south islands of New Zealand. In May that year, Pastor Yeung baptised a number of Chinese converts at the Apostolic Church on Punt Road, Richmond.[31] In Adelaide, Mary was the guest speaker at Bible Standard Mission meetings, a "Youth Revival Crusade Rally," a "Grand Missionary Rally" and a "National Revival Crusade." Advertising stated that Mary and Esther's "ministry has thrilled Adelaide gatherings."[32] Esther, who was described as a "gifted young missionary," sang in Chinese and delivered a "stirring message for young people," while Mary preached on "Miracles, Signs and Wonders in China."[33] This mother and daughter ministry duo of

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[27]Ibid.

[28]David Cheng, "Translation of a Chinese Letter from our Student, David Cheng, Who is Attending Truth Bible Institute at Peking, China," Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger (June 1940) (http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/AEGTM/1940-june/translation-of-a-chinese-letter-feom-our-student-d/) (25 February 2012).

[29]Yap, Personal Interview with Denise Nicholls.

[30]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . , 53.

[31]"Apostolic Church," The Argus (Melbourne) (Saturday 3 May 1947), 28. (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/22423874?searchTerm=%22Yeung%22%20pentecostal&searchLimits=) (24 February 2012).

[32]"Religious notices," The Advertiser (Adelaide) (Saturday 10 May 1947), 15. (http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/74633527?searchTerm=Mr%20N.C.%20Yeung%20pentecostal&searchLimits=) (26 February 2012); "Religious Notices," The Advertiser (Adelaide) (Saturday 17 May 1947), 16.

[33]Ibid.

Australian Chinese Pentecostals must have caused quite a stir among the wider community.

Focus on Social Service

Again defying cultural expectations of matriarchal duty to family in later life, the unstoppable Mary chose to devote the rest of her life to social service.[34] In 1948, the Yeungs returned to Hong Kong, renting a cottage they named *Canaan,* to minister to the flood of refugees escaping the communist advance in China. Using money from the sale of their house in Melbourne, as well as donations from family and supporters, they purchased a block of land in Ngau Chi Wan village.[35] The community-oriented Oriental Full Gospel Church was officially opened on 2 July 1950 and the congregation soon grew to over 130 people.[36] Mary tells the story of one 12-year-old boy whom they found living in a pig sty, so her husband built him a little hut and provided for his schooling.[37] She also journals about an elderly lady in a remote village she visited who was being so violently abused by her son-in-law that her arm had been broken and her leg injured. She could not afford to enter a retirement home, so Mary arranged for her to move in with a Christian family and paid all her expenses.[38] The Yeungs' work affirms research that states that faith continues to be integral in later years.[39] Revealing her underlying motivation, Mary writes:

> My children say it is time for you to settle here with us now. You have done your work, it is time for you to retire. But it is not God way since last August God laid the burden on my heart for the poor and need ones, the sick and afflicted and the destitute children…and the beggar, the blind and lame…they can't go into a church, sit down to hear the message for simple souls can't read nor write, they would not know or understand the preaching of the word of God.[40]

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[34]Ken Blakemore and Margaret Boneham, Age, Race and Ethnicity: A Comparative Approach (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 83.
[35]Yeung, The Miracle of Grace.
[36]RYA. Mary Yeung, Personal Notes (Hong Kong: 1960).
[37]Yeung, The Miracle of Grace.
[38]Yeung, Personal Notes.
[39]Mary Maynard, Haleh Afshar, Myfanwy Franks and Sharon Wray, Women in Later Life: Exploring 'Race and Ethnicity (Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2008), 117.
[40]Yeung, The Miracle of Grace.

With this vision in clear focus, a school for orphans and other needy children was founded.[41] Social service had become Mary's consuming passion.

In 1951, the Yeungs returned to Australia to establish a headquarters for the Oriental Full Gospel Church at 1447 Burke Road, East Kew, operated by a local committee.[42] Mary's faithful brothers and Esther provided a deposit for a home.[43] Ever pushing the boundaries of tradition, Mary also influenced younger family members. Her nephew, Peter Wing Tang, recalls that his aunt intervened when his parents initially opposed him marrying a non-Chinese Australian woman. He notes: "Aunty Mary 'stepped in' and reminded my parents that more important than culture or race was the fact that both Margaret (my wife) and I were both strong Christians and committed to our faith and to each other."[44] Mary's faith continued to dictate her value system.

The Yeungs opened a new store which sold Chinese silks, table linens, brassware and other gifts but Mary's occupation on the voting register was still listed as "missionary."[45] Chick Nam Yeung died on 11 September 1959 and within one week of his passing, Mary admitted: "…I was…longing to return, take up the work among the poor, the Mercy fund work…."[46] One of her sons encouraged her to move in with his family, offering to create a special prayer room where Mary could invite friends to pray.[47] However, Mary would not be dissuaded:

> Then, the next day, it was Sunday. I was weeping for to be back and starting this work God put before me. Oct 13th, I was praying for His definite leading and burden. Strong desire to go. Next morning, 14th, God definite show me to ask my brother to let me have the will money for my fares and a great need for…a septic toilet and there are other little thing may be done and a small freight…The Lord continued leading me in my old age. Giving up once again, take up my cross, follow Jesus, leaving my love one walking alone with Jesus, I turn down every opposition for me to go. I must obey.[48]

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[41]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . , 56.
[42]Chen, The Mission Work of Bro. & Sis. C.N. Yeung.
[43]RYA. Mary Yeung, Personal Memoirs (1959).
[44]Peter Wing Tang, Personal Email Correspondence with the Author (16 May 2012).
[45]Wong Yen, And So It Was. . . , 45; "Mary Yeung", Australian Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980, (http://www.ancestry.com.au/) (9 March 2012).
[46]Yeung, Personal Memoirs (1959).
[47]RYA. Yeung, Personal Memoirs (no date).
[48]Yeung, Personal Memoirs (1959).

Therefore, in 1965, Mary returned once again to Hong Kong and enlisted the Assemblies of God trained pastor, James Orr, as the new minister of Oriental Full Gospel Church, which opened chapels in Yuen Long and Macau.[49] She also established a "Mercy Work" at Ngau Chi Wan Mission, with the help of a colleague, Winnie Wan.[50] Ever relying on Australian supporters, she writes: "If you can stir the public to give some thing to repair the church it will be most appreciated. I'll look after the supervision myself and handle the repair bill."[51] Mary also founded Yeung Jack Nam Memorial Kindergarten, directed by Reverend Daniel Chan – one of the original children educated in the Yeungs' school. A home for the aged was also established. Mary writes:

> God know my heart. I ask for a place where I can be among the poor, suffering, hungry children, naked ones, homeless ones. Psalm 132:14-15-16. This is my rest for here to dwell for I have desire it. . . Since God called me it is 38 years ago, my whole heart was among the poor. . .now at my old age, the love of God more stronger than ever for the great need before me, the suffering children.[52]

She further explains to her children:

> I am writing…to let you know I am not a ordinary mother. I am called and ordained by God…I am going back for God work…We only take the poor class of children can't pay their school fees, no food, no clothing, last month now 150 children….[53]

This agile 78-year-old was consumed with providing for the needs of others.

Ultimately, Mary handed the Oriental Full Gospel Church over to the Mission Covenant Church of Norway, which eventually included 11 churches, 4 kindergartens, a secondary school, a primary school and an aged care home.[54] Mary's original vision for social service was carried out in her life and in the lives of hundreds of other people in Hong Kong. Returning to Australia, Mary died on Sunday, 28

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[49]RYA. Mary Yeung, Letter to Oriental Full Gospel Church Melbourne (June 1959).
[50]Chen, The Mission Work of Bro. & Sis. C.N. Yeung.
[51]Yeung, Letter to Oriental Full Gospel Church Melbourne.
[52]RYA. Mary Yeung, Divine Call sermon notes (13 January 1966).
[53]RYA. Mary Yeung, Personal letter to Jimmy and Dulcie Wong Yen (27 December 1966).
[54]"Welcome to the Mission Covenant Church of Hong Kong," The Mission Covenant Church (http://www.mcc.org.hk/english.htm) (28 April 2012).

March 1971, at the age of 82.[55] Two years after her death, the 'White Australia' policy was officially abolished. Mary's later life was spent in devotion to social service, giving her all to helping the destitute.

Conclusion

At the height of the White Australia Policy and predominantly paternalistic Christian conventions, Mary (Wong Yen) Yeung emerged as a highly sought-after public speaker across many different Pentecostal denominations in Australia and New Zealand. The dangers of the Sino-Japanese War did not deter her unwavering commitment to the Chinese people. Although willing to sojourn for seasons back in Australia, after the death of her third husband, Mary's missional drive saw her return to Hong Kong to continue vital pioneering work in social services. Without a doubt, Pentecostal spirituality transformed the ordinary life of this extraordinary Australian Chinese woman. At the close of her memoirs, Mary writes:

> May I just add this little verse – God grant that these simple words so full of truth, may be to you my readers and many others, a means of salvation and you that you may say as the confession of your soul:
>
> In peace let me resign my breath
> And Thy salvation see
> My sins deserve eternal death
> But Jesus died for me.[56]

[55]Alena Lee, Personal Email Correspondence with the Author (15 June 2012).
[56]RYA. Yeung, Personal Memoirs (no date).

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