

Bernt Berntsen: A Prominent Oneness Pentecostal Pioneer to North China

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IN CHINESE CHRISTIAN history recent studies of Christian mission movements have taken a crucial new direction. However, there is still a relative lack of related historical study with regard to Pentecostal missionaries in this area.

In this essay I attempt to explore the work of an earlier Norwegian American Pentecostal missionary to North China—Bernt Berntsen, who influenced the earliest founders of the True Jesus Church (TJC), the largest Chinese independent Pentecostal-like church today. This essay will introduce Berntsen’s life and thought by comparing his Chinese periodical, *Popular Gospel Truth*, with other secondary publications. I will then address his concept of Oneness. With the connection between Berntsen and TJC’s “pioneers,” the origin of the latter’s Oneness purpose can clearly be traced.

It is well known that theologically the TJC has always distinguished itself from other Protestant churches. Initially TJC proclaimed that it is the only true church providing salvation. In keeping with this proclamation, as we can see, they named their church the “true” church. Secondly, they opposed the traditional Trinitarian doctrine, asserting the oneness of the Godhead. They also baptize people in Jesus’s name and generally advocate that the

identical nature between “regeneration in the Spirit” and “Spirit baptism” is different from the Pentecostal “two-stage” or “three-stage” model. In these matters TJC seems to be very similar with American Oneness Pentecostals.

BERNT BERNTSEN AND THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

Bernt Berntsen was born in 1863 in Larvik, Norway. He immigrated to the United States in 1893, settled in Chicago, and worked as a storekeeper in a local grocery store. He married Nagna Berg, and they had two children.¹ In 1904 he joined a nondenominational Norwegian mission society—the South Zhili Mission (南直隸福音會), founded by Horace William Holding. Berntsen came to China at the age of forty and started his mission work in Damingfu, Zhili Province (today’s Daming, Handan, Hebei Province).² In 1906 he came across an issue of *Apostolic Faith* and learned the news of the Azusa Street Revival, which interested him.

In 1907 he traveled to the Centennial Missionary Conference in Shanghai, expecting to meet someone who had experienced the Pentecostal gift of tongues; however, all the people he met told him that it was “the work of demons.” Upon his returning to the mission field, Berntsen received a letter from a friend in Chicago who claimed that she had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. With this incentive Berntsen determined to go back to the United States to experience the revival. In the same year he traveled to Seattle, where he met Martin L. Ryan, whose team was holding group prayer meetings. Here Berntsen sought for the Spirit baptism in the meetings but did not receive it. He then traveled to Oakland, California, where he attended prayer meetings held by William F. Manley, again without receiving the tongues-attested Spirit baptism. Finally he visited the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles,

where he was baptized in the Spirit and finally spoke in tongues.³ The September 1907 issue of *Apostolic Faith* reported this event.⁴

In the January 1908 issue of *Apostolic Faith*, Berntsen's Spirit-baptized experience was published, wherein he mentioned that five years before, a burden came upon him for "more of Jesus," although he was convinced that he had been "sanctified" years before. This, however, did not satisfy him. When he returned to China, the "more-of-Jesus" burden became stronger, and Berntsen said he had been hungry for a "melting power in the Holy Spirit." He also reported that as his wife read the above-mentioned letter to him, the "melting power" for which he had been praying came upon him, and he fell down on the floor crying out, "God's wonderful mercy." According to him, he was baptized in the Spirit on Sunday, September 15, 1907, the third day after his coming to Azusa Street.⁵ On this pilgrimage trip to Azusa Street he not only received the Pentecostal experience but also established his connection to the Pentecostal movement.

At the end of the same year Berntsen again went to China, with eleven new workers whom he had recruited in Seattle, and planned to find a place to house a number of orphans for whom he had been caring. At the same time he encouraged other Pentecostal missionaries to remain with him and help with those missionary candidates whom they considered to have a genuine call sufficient to sustain them in long-term missionary work in China.⁶ Soon after, he moved his base to Zhengding, Zhili, southwest of Peking (Beijing), which became his first mission station.⁷ He then stayed in Zhengding until he moved to Peking in 1917.⁸ In 1910 Berntsen left for his hometown in Scandinavia after a short time in the United States. While in Scandinavia he recruited twelve Norwegian missionaries to accompany him back to China.⁹ Reporting in 1911 on his mission stations based in Zhengding, the *Pentecostal Testimony*

of the North Avenue Mission (in Chicago) established by William Durham told about several missionaries and an orphan house there and how he kept his home open as a receiving station for missionaries, who, upon their arrival in China, needed a place to rest and study languages and to gain some knowledge, in a practical way, of the work in China.¹⁰ The previous issue of the *Pentecostal Testimony* claimed that Berntsen and his family were “their missionaries” and promised, “We will forward 100 cents on every dollar sent to us for any missionary, anywhere.”¹¹ In 1912 Berntsen established a Chinese language periodical, *Popular Gospel Truth* (通傳福音真理報), in order to spread his Pentecostal beliefs. It is said that this newspaper influenced the earliest TJC pioneers.¹²

BERNTSEN’S AFFILIATION WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS AND THE SHIFT IN HIS THINKING

Since Berntsen’s visit to Azusa Street in 1907, his work had also been supported by other Pentecostal mission societies. After his first visit Azusa Street started to support his mission to China; hence, he used the name the “Apostolic Faith Mission” (AFM) when he came back to China. The AFM in China was a loose association of early American Pentecostal missionaries influenced by the 1906 Azusa Street Revival, mainly active in North China. Years later, many of the AFM missionaries in China became affiliated with the Assemblies of God (AG). By 1936 E. L. Brown was the sole AFM representative in China.¹³ One can see Mr. and Ms. Berntsen’s names as ministers listed in the Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God at the AG meetings held in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Chicago, Illinois, in 1914.¹⁴ In fact, besides the AFM, several weak Pentecostal mission societies also became affiliated with the newborn Assemblies of God.

It is worth noting that Berntsen changed his church’s name four

times. At the beginning he used the name *shitu xinxinhui* (Apostolic Faith Mission) or *xinxinhui* (Faith Union). When he moved to Beijing in 1918, his church was called *Fu yintang* (Gospel Hall). The next year, along with moving to Caoyangmeng nei Liangjiadayuan, Beijing, his church was renamed *Zhenshenjiaou xinxinhui* (The True God Faith Union). After this it was changed to *Shenjiaohui* (Church of God). As it relates to the name *Shenjiaohui*, it was speculated that this church was not of the Pentecostal denomination (Church of God, Cleveland, TN). In Tiedemann's opinion, this Church of God was a branch of the Adventists, since he found a record of the Church of God in the *Peking Who's Who*, and discovered an "Elder Bernstein" supervising a "Church of God" in Beijing in 1916.¹⁵

No further references to Berntsen's missionary activities were listed until 1933, when his name appeared on the list of the "seventy to go forth two by two, all Church of God elders."¹⁶ However, he did not abandon his Pentecostal faith. On the other hand, Tiedemann pointed out a salient point: in 1920 Bernstein's son, Henry, married Helga Nathalia Hansen (daughter of Pentecostal missionaries George and Sofie Hansen), and Bernt Berntsen was authorized by the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) to perform the ceremony. Hence, to some extent, it shows a certain connection between Berntsen and the Oneness Pentecostals. Interestingly his passport application of August 25, 1919, lists both the PAW and the Church of God.¹⁷ Affiliating with these two groups seems to satisfy his dual identities: Pentecostal and Adventist. We will talk further about his doctrinal perspective on these two issues. According to TJC's writings, Berntsen was regarded as an AG minister, but after being affiliated with the AG, he had left them before encountering the earlier TJC leaders. The reason why his church was called AG was probably in relation to his membership with the PAW, for

this denomination in China was called “Assemblies of God Gospel Hall”—神召會福音堂 (*shenzhaohui fuyintang*).¹⁸

Bernt Berntsen’s daughter, Ruth Ester Berntsen, carried on his work at Zhengding in the 1930s, evidently in the Oneness tradition. In August 1946 excerpts of a letter she had received from Chang Ying Shi (張應喜), who had been trained by her father and had subsequently been in charge of the work in China, were published in the *Pentecostal Herald*, the official publication of the United Pentecostal Church.¹⁹ According to TJC’s document, this Chang was a native of Shanxi, leading the “Oneness Assembly of God”—位神召會 (*yiui shenzhaohui*)—and converted several TJC members into this church. The document also shows that this church was named by Berntsen²⁰ and may be another reason why Berntsen’s church was called AG.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN BERNT BERNTSEN AND CHINESE CHURCH LEADERS

The connection between Berntsen’s Faith Union and TJC’s earlier pioneers has been pointed out by several scholars, while even TJC members also admit to this connection. Their three major founding pioneers, Paul Wei (Wei Enbo), Zhang Ling-Sheng (Zhang Dianju), and Barnabas Zhang (Zhang Bin), all had contact with Berntsen. Upon receiving Spirit-baptism through AFM in Shanghai in 1909, Zhang Ling-Sheng went to Beijing in 1917, where he was ordained as an elder by Berntsen and Elder “Qui” (奎長老).²¹ However, scholars state that Zhang was ordained by “elder Peterson,” and Zhang persuaded this Peterson to keep the Sabbath;²² I believe it was Berntsen. The writings of TJC claim that Zhang had persuaded Berntsen to keep the Sabbath. Although Berntsen once accepted this suggestion, he subsequently changed his worship day to Sunday again. Because of this, Wei blamed Berntsen for being weak in his faith.

This account is very similar to the description of “Elder Peterson.”²³ *Popular Gospel Truth* recorded the testimony of Barnabas Zhang’s Spirit baptism, which shows his association with Berntsen’s organization.²⁴ Besides, Zhang also describes his contact with Berntsen, and Zhang was asked to operate the church together.²⁵

Paul Wei had a stronger tie to Berntsen than Zhang. In Wei’s autobiography he mentioned his recovery from being sick through the prayer of *Xin Shengmin* (新聖民),²⁶ and through him he was acquainted with Berntsen. They became close friends. Berntsen helped Wei very much in his faith formation.²⁷ However, their friendship did not last long since Wei, who opposed the legitimacy of denominations, kept experiencing many “revelations,” one of which led him to insist on revoking the title of pastor, because Jesus said, “Do not be called teachers.”²⁸ He also had other “revelations,” such as practicing facedown immersion baptism, canceling every denominational name, and changing the name of his group to the “Universal Correction Church” (萬國更正教). Wei also informed many mission church leaders to do the same. Wei then established the True Jesus Church in 1917, which meant that he officially severed his relationship with Berntsen’s church.

Another event reinforced the tension between Wei and Berntsen. According to Wei, Berntsen’s AFM had a bank account at the Tianjin Bank. When Wei needed to borrow money in order to open another branch of his fabric store, he went to Berntsen for a loan; however, Berntsen required 2 percent interest on the loan. When Wei was not able to pay back the loan on time, Berntsen not only wrote to request the payment but also sued Wei, with Zhao Deli and Xin Shengmin. Gradually Wei’s attitude toward Berntsen became bitter, and Wei condemned and rebuked Berntsen, both in his speeches and many times in his writings. Wei constantly described Berntsen as a mammonist. However, we can see different descriptions of the

transaction through a comparison to Wei's report. For example, by contrast, Barnabas Zhang, one of the three major pioneers of TJC, reported that Berntsen loaned the money to Wei to earn interest. When Berntsen became aware of Wei's failing business, he wanted to withdraw the money he had loaned; however, Wei was unable to repay the funds. Therefore, the case was brought to court for a resolution of the matter.²⁹ In summary, Barnabas Zhang's account offers another perspective on this event.

It is said that when Paul Wei was dying in September 6, 1919, Berntsen visited him. They shook hands and emotionally cried loudly in united forgiveness. During the visit Wei queried Berntsen again about his willingness to accept facedown baptism. Berntsen replied, "If the Holy Spirit does so proclaim it, then you may enter the 'Holy of Holies.'" Wei died later that day amidst his own laughter, when he proclaimed, "Behold, the Angel has come."³⁰

Besides TJC's earlier leaders, Wang Mingdao (王明道) might have met Berntsen. Wang mentioned that he was expelled from a Presbyterian school in Baoding in 1921. At that time he was strongly influenced by some AFM missionaries who proclaimed that being baptized by immersion was the biblical way. According to Wang, "Those AFM ministers once 'disturbed' Presbyterian churches."³¹ Wang was subsequently rebaptized by immersion by AFM pastor Zhu Dingchen. Zhu also led other students to seek Spirit baptism. Although Wang claimed to receive this experience, in reality he was suspicious of its moral justification.³² When Wang returned to Beijing years later, he again attended Zhu's meetings. He said that the church had been called "Faith Union" but was changed to "Church of God" (*Shen de jiaohui*). The leader was a Norwegian old man, and since they did not have a regular chapel, meetings were held at this old man's reception room. Wang also said that the "Norwegian old man" lived in a courtyard.³³ What

Wang described fits Berntsen's characteristics, his living conditions, and his manner of functioning. When Berntsen moved his base to Beijing, his church did change its name to "Church of God," and he was in his sixties at that time. As for the description of the meeting place, we can refer to what Henry Berntsen mentioned, "We do not rent houses to establish Gospel Halls... we should follow those disciples, to preach and establish church in a believer's home, everywhere."³⁴ Additionally, the location this periodical calls "*Liangjia dayuan*" was identical to Wang's description. Therefore, I think this "Norwegian old man" was Bernt Berntsen.

BERNTSEN'S ONENESS PENTECOSTAL AND SABBATH BELIEF

Berntsen's Pentecostal experience can be traced to the Azusa Street Revival. Nevertheless, if one reads Berntsen's periodical carefully, he will find that his belief was not identical with those of Azusa Street; rather, it was very similar to the Oneness Pentecostals. As we have seen, the Oneness wing of Pentecostalism assumed the identification between "regeneration in the Spirit" and "baptized in the Spirit," as well as the oneness of the Godhead. This implies that they refused both the two-stage and the three-stage model. Rather, they followed the function of Acts 2:38. While they viewed conversion, baptism in water, and baptism in the Spirit as a complex unity, they still insisted on the initial evidence doctrine. In other words, speaking in tongues was a condition for salvation.³⁵ African American Oneness Pentecostal leader G. T. Haywood thought that the "rest" quoted in Matthew 11:28 should be understood as "the full salvation," and he connected this verse with Isaiah 28:11-12, claiming that by being baptized in the Spirit and speaking in tongues, one acquires "the full salvation."³⁶ It has been said that those from the Oneness camp have their roots in William Durham's

teachings. Frank Macchia emphasizes that Durham challenged the three-step model advocated by early Wesleyan Pentecostals of justification, entire sanctification, and Spirit-baptism.³⁷ Since Christ's "finished work" on the cross and in the Resurrection is sufficient to completely save us, one must be born again and entirely sanctified at the moment of faith in Christ, which can be called "single-work perfectionism." Durham, however, did not include Spirit baptism within the fullness that is achieved through faith in Christ and His finished work. The Oneness Pentecostals who came from Durham's wing, however, did take Durham's position in this direction.

In 1916 Berntsen announced "Statements of Zhengdingfu Xinxinhui" on the front page of issue 13 of *Popular Gospel Truth*, which intended to explain their basic beliefs. The first article, "Baptism by Immersion in the Name of Jesus Christ," was apparently related to the statement of the Godhead.³⁸ According to this statement, we can see that Berntsen's doctrine of the Godhead was obviously not traditionally Trinitarian. Berntsen also pointed out elsewhere that the Father gave His name to Jesus; hence, Jesus is the true God. Besides, he enumerated other verses to demonstrate his arguments; for example, he thought that "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27, NIV) means the indwelling of the Spirit; hence, Christ is the Spirit. In Colossians 2:9 (MEV), "For in Him lives all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," he claimed that everything of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, for Jesus represents the Father, Son, and the Spirit.³⁹ To sum up, it is the Holy Spirit, and only one Spirit shares three names.

As for Spirit baptism, Bernsten was also obviously familiar with Oneness Pentecostals. He frequently argued that receiving "baptism in water and the Spirit" can be regarded as effective salvation. By quoting John 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, he argued that

being baptized by the Spirit into one body, which can be viewed as the body of Jesus, qualifies one to ascend to heaven with Jesus. Obviously Berntsen's perspective in Spirit baptism distinguishes him from the majority of Pentecostals.

Simultaneously Berntsen also emphasized the doctrine of "initial evidence" by quoting so-called "key passages" in the Book of Acts, while connecting it to the process of salvation.

Among the earlier three pioneers of TJC, Wei was considered the key person in establishing the organization and teaching its doctrines. When he initially engaged in Pentecostal beliefs, he was very close to Berntsen. Compared to what Wei stated in 1917 about doctrines of revelations from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can discover the similarities with Xinxinhui's statements of faith established by Berntsen. Wei claimed that the Holy Spirit directed him to preach the following "Correction of the church's principles":

1. Must seek baptism in the Holy Spirit, for if one is not born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.
2. Must receive baptism by complete immersion in water, for Jesus was baptized in the same way.
3. Be baptized in the name of Jesus, rather than in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.
4. Must keep the Sabbath, and one should not keep the Sabbath on Sunday.
5. Revoke the title of pastor, for we only have a master, which is Jesus Christ.
6. Do not call God as Shangdi 上帝 or Tianzhu 天主; instead, call God Shen 神 or Zhenshen 真神.⁴⁰

Except for the last two articles, the revelations he claimed to have received from God were actually not different from the messages preached by Berntsen. Subsequently TJC added foot washing as one of their “Ten Main Doctrines and Beliefs.” Briefly we can say TJC’s beliefs were related, to some extent, to Bernt Berntsen.

Concerning the link between Berntsen and the Oneness Pentecostals, there are some connections that must also be noted. As mentioned earlier, in 1910 Durham’s North Avenue Mission stated that Berntsen was a missionary sent out by the church. Furthermore, Durham’s “finished work” theory became a crucial element to subsequent Oneness Pentecostals. Durham himself had been a Pilgrim to Azusa Street too, but his “finished work” perspective in sanctification soon conflicted with the Azusa Holiness “three-stage” statement and resulted in a separation between the two parties. Berntsen determined to stay with the North Avenue Mission, which might have brought about a change in his thinking. According to his testimony in Azusa Street, he claimed to be sanctified before Spirit baptism, which was a typical holiness-Azusa Street’s view. *Popular Gospel Truth* also shows Berntsen’s position in the Oneness wing, which had gradually departed from the main lines of the Azusa Street tradition. Additionally we find that he published subsequent Oneness Pentecostal leaders such as G. T. Haywood⁴¹ and Frank Ewart,⁴² both of whom were followers of Durham.

As we noted earlier, Mr. and Mrs. Berntsen had been listed in the AG ministerial list in 1915.⁴³ At this point it is clear that Berntsen was a certified AG minister. It is worth noting that 1915 might be the climax of the Oneness issue raised in AG and Pentecostal communities. In the same year the headline of the *Weekly Evangel* was, “The Sad New Issue,” which intensely criticized the Oneness view. Interestingly Berntsen’s mission field report in North China appeared on page 4 of this issue of the newspaper. Compared to

the headline, Berntsen's viewpoint should be what the official position condemned. During the same year the *Minutes of the General Council of Assemblies of God* mentioned the model of baptism, which refused the ongoing tendency of re-baptism; verily, the emphasis here is connected with the issue of the Godhead.⁴⁴ The same minutes increasingly made some statements of faith, which were apparently directed toward the "new issue," which referred to equating rebirth with Spirit baptism as an unbiblical teaching. Then it stated that the Spirit and the blood, the Father and the Son, and Christ and the Holy Ghost cannot be confused.⁴⁵ The minutes of 1916 spent two pages stating that AG observes the traditional Trinitarian view.⁴⁶ William Menzies described "considerable tension in the air" in the 1916 General Council where all preachers and churches were forced to take a stand on the new issue. The council began with the Trinitarians at a decided advantage: they regained some of the leaders who had been participating in the Oneness wing.⁴⁷ With the "Jesus only" issue, the AG lost more than 150 ministers.⁴⁸ After this event we no longer see Mr. and Mrs. Berntsen's names on the ministerial list for 1917. It is possible that he reconfirmed his position in this issue and determined to leave the Trinitarian AG.

Besides the Oneness Pentecostal agenda, Berntsen had another view that is worth noting—the Sabbath. At this point Berntsen's views seem to be very similar with TJC. In issue 13 in 1916 of *Popular Gospel Truth*, Berntsen declared that from July 1, 1916, onwards his church would worship on Saturdays instead of Sundays, for it had been three days and three nights from Jesus's burial to His resurrection. He then said Jesus died on the preparation day of the Passover, which should be Wednesday, and Jesus was resurrected on a Saturday night; hence, we should worship on Saturdays (three days from Wednesday).⁴⁹ In the same issue of this newspaper

Henry Berntsen mentioned the reason his father had, overnight, changed worship day from Sundays to Saturdays, which he had been thinking about and praying about for thirteen years. Berntsen had received an earlier publication talking about Jesus being resurrected on Saturday and was almost persuaded at that time; however, on reflection, he also worried about his Xinxinhui companions possibly blaming him (and discontinuing their financial support to him) for the change. However, he ran into Xin Shengmin, who had kept Saturdays as the official worship day and who claimed he received a revelation about this truth from the Holy Spirit at the same time Berntsen made his decision, which appeared to Berntsen as a confirmation of the “truth.” Thus, commencing on July 1, 1916, he determined to worship on Saturdays. He also wrote to his son, Henry, who was in Sunjiazhuang at the time, and told him to also follow his decision.⁵⁰ Regardless, the next year he abandoned his change of keeping the Sabbath and declared that worshipping on the Western Sabbath day is equivalent to worshipping on Sunday in China, because of the eighteen-hour time differences between China and the Garden of Eden.⁵¹ But in 1919 Berntsen announced in *Popular Gospel Truth* that he would keep Saturday as the Sabbath again.

As mentioned above, the Sabbath was also one of the core beliefs for TJC. Tiedemann argued that these encounters between Berntsen and the TJC pioneers had a bearing on the development of Pentecostal-Sabbatarian elements in TJC.⁵² According to TJC’s statement, in 1916 Zhang Lingsheng advised Berntsen to observe the seventh-day worship, and Berntsen was persuaded by Zhang and he announced it in *Popular Gospel Truth*.⁵³ Furthermore, according to Barnabas Zhang’s account, in 1917 Zhang Lingsheng left for Tianjin to cope with personal issues. On this trip he stopped in Beijing to discuss the issue about the Sabbath with Berntsen.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the Berntsens said that he had, for more than ten years, already thought about keeping the Sabbath. Moreover, at that time he had not been engaged in the Pentecostal movement. Yet they never mentioned Zhang Lingsheng's persuasion. Judging from this time element, Zhang Lingsheng started to keep the Sabbath earlier than Berntsen, and the first time they met each other was in 1914. Barnabas Zhang also announced that he had kept the Saturday Sabbath before encountering Berntsen.⁵⁵ By his record it happened in the spring of 1915, before Berntsen announced keeping the Sabbath. In addition, Paul Wei was reported receiving Seventh-Day Adventist's teachings in 1915.⁵⁶ To sum up, it seems impossible for TJC's pioneers to be influenced by Berntsen on the issue of the Sabbath. At the same time, only minimal information can demonstrate that Berntsen was persuaded by TJC's pioneers to keep the Sabbath.

A salient point worth noting is the root of the Adventist "Church of God." Tiedemann discovered that the record about "Elder D. Bernstein in the Church of God, Beijing" was in 1916, which was precisely the year Bernsten announced the precept to keep the Sabbath. Interestingly, in the meantime he kept preaching the Pentecostal beliefs, in spite of his involvement in the Sabbath-Adventist movement. According to his newspaper, Berntsen's church had actually been changed into the Church of God. Tiedemann indicated that this church should be in the Sabbath-Adventist tradition. As I noted above, Berntsen was simultaneously affiliated with the PAW. It seems that the connection with these two denominations satisfied his dual identity: Pentecostal and Sabbath-Adventist. Berntsen might have been equally comfortable with these beliefs.⁵⁷

In summary, with respect to the Sabbath beliefs, we can conclude that TJC's Sabbath announcement might not have come from Berntsen. On the other hand, TJC's one-sided statement claimed

that Berntsen was influenced by the former to keep the Sabbath; however, there is no direct evidence to prove it. In issue 18 the report of *Popular Gospel Truth* seemed to exclude the influence of TJC. It is also possible that both parties had held the idea of seventh-day worship before they met each other. For Berntsen, who had never announced the idea in public, the encounter with Zhang Lingsheng simply reinforced his idea that worshipping on Saturdays was the truth. It is also possible that Berntsen deliberately lowered the degree of Zhang's influence.

CONCLUSION

To summarize from Berntsen's biography, first, Berntsen emphasized doctrines that were inconsistent with the contemporary phenomenon of Pentecostalism. He kept revising his beliefs and always had the courage to reflect and adjust his ideas when he felt that was biblical. From another perspective, he may have been thought of as being unstable. However, to his credit, he freed himself from the bonds of tradition in pursuit of the truth. Berntsen marched according to his own convictions.

Second, similar to other missionaries who "plunged" into the Pentecostal movement, Berntsen's mission enterprise was given impetus and deepened by his experience of the Spirit. His mission work in North China directly contributed to the establishment of an influential Chinese independent Pentecostal denomination, The True Jesus Church. His position in Chinese Christian history should be reappraised.⁵⁸

44. This may be an attempt to distance themselves from non-trinitarian Oneness groups, like The True Jesus Christ, who present speaking in tongues as a necessary sign of salvation.
45. Dunch, "Protestant Christianity in China Today: Fragile, Fragmented, Flourishing," 215.
46. See also Balcombe, *China's Opening Door*, 188–191.
47. Wesley, *The Church in China*, 91–103.
48. I would like to thank Timothy Yeung, Yee Thamwan, and Don Parrett for their contributions to this essay, especially for their help in collecting data from questionnaires and interviews.

CHAPTER 5

BERT BERNTSEN: A PROMINENT ONENESS PENTECOSTAL PIONEER TO NORTH CHINA

1. The elder child is a boy, whose name is Henry Bernhard Berntsen. His name can be seen many times in *Popular Gospel Truth*, and many articles in this periodical were written by him. His name has also appeared in Paul Wei's (the major pioneer of TJC's publication) *The True Witness Book of the Holy Spirit*, vols. 1, 3, which says Henry practiced exorcism for Wei's daughter with him. In *Word and Witness* 9, no. 9 (1913): 4, his name is also mentioned as: "Our own son, Henry, a mere boy, is having his call renewed to preach." Those documents show that Henry became an important assistant to Berntsen; however, he later worked for an American-Asiatic underwriter in Hankou. The other child is a daughter named Ruth, who married a missionary named Matron Redmon and sustained Berntsen's mission work in China after Berntsen's death. She was obviously affiliated with the Oneness camp.
2. R. G. Tiedmann, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 2: *1800–Present* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 550.
3. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville: Nelson Electronic, 2006), 260–261.
4. *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 10 (September 1907): 1.
5. *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 12 (1908): 3.
6. Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 261; Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 550.
7. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 261.

8. See *Popular Gospel Truth* 15 (1917): 1. The preface mentioned that the base of this periodical will move to No.1, Xinglong Street, Qianmengwai, Beijing.
9. Allan Anderson, *Spreading the Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 133. Furthermore, *Popular Gospel Truth* 3, (1914): 5, mentioned this trip to North Europe; in the previous issue his son, Henry, also talked about this trip. His passport shows that he went to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark during the span from April to November 1910. See also *Department Passport Application*.
10. *Pentecostal Testimony* 1, no. 8 (1911): 13.
11. *Pentecostal Testimony* 1, no. 5 (1910): 10–11.
12. Daniel Bays, “Indigenous Protestant Churches in China, 1900–1937: A Pentecostal Case Study,” in Steven Kaplan, ed., *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 124–143.
13. R. G. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 121–122. Chinese Christian leader Wang Mingdao witnessed that “Pentecostal churches in China had been Pentecostal Church, Apostolic Faith Mission, Church of God (神的教會 and 上帝教會), now most of them are called Assemblies of God (神召會).” See Wang, *The Fifty Years* (Taipei: Olive Christian Foundation, 1996), 80.
14. *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands Held at Hot Springs, Ark. April 2–12, and at the Stone Church, Chicago, Ill. November 12–29, 1914*, 13.
15. Gary Tiedemann, “The Origins and Organizational Developments of the Pentecostal Missionary Enterprise in China,” *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 138.
16. Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 550.
17. Tiedemann, “The Origins and Organizational Developments of the Pentecostal Missionary Enterprise in China,” 138–139. I also later received a copy of this passport application; indeed, I found that he was both a PAW and a GOC (Adventist) minister.
18. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Mission Societies in China*, 199.
19. *Pentecostal Herald* 21, no. 1 (1946): 8.

20. Wei Yisa, ed., *Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the True Jesus Church—Special Issue* [English title] (Nanjing: The True Jesus Church General Assembly, 1947), J4.
21. We have no further information about the identity of this elder “Qui” and are unable to be sure if he is a Chinese or a Westerner, but his name appeared in *Popular Gospel Truth* and seems to be one of Bernsten’s main assistants.
22. Deng Zhaoming, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations,” in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds., *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2005), 442; David A. Reed, “Missionary Resources for an Independent Church—Case Study of the True Jesus Church,” presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 2011, 13.
23. Deng, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations,” 442: “Shortly thereafter Zhang had a vision that the Sabbath was to be observed and convinced elder Peterson to change the day of worship to Saturday in July, 1916.”
24. *Popular Gospel Truth* 4 (1912): 2.
25. Barnabas Zhang, *Travel Notes of Preaching* [English title] (Nanjing: The True Jesus Church, 1929), 9.
26. Xin is a Chinese, baptized in the Spirit in Shijiazhuang, who came to Beijing from Zhengdingfu, and became an elder of AFM. See *Popular Gospel Truth* 14 (1916): 8.
27. Paul Wei, *True Testimonies of the Holy Spirit* [English title], unpublished, 2. Wei recalled that, “I went to Dong Chen Faith Union next day; upon encountering the pastor in this church, he looked very poor. While he looked poor, morally he seemed to be better than other church’s Christians... from that day on, they became close friends, he helped Paul Wei understand a great deal of Bible truth.” Also see *Popular Gospel Truth* 13 (1916): 1–2.
28. Wei, *True Testimonies of the Holy Spirit*, 17. In Chinese, pastor is written as 牧師 (*mushi*), and the word “*shi*” means teacher; that is the reason why some Chinese indigenous churches, such as TJC and Little Flock, avoid using this term.
29. Zhang, *Travel Notes of Preaching*, 27.
30. Wei, *Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the True Jesus Church*, M9–M10.

31. Wang, *The Fifty Years*, 79
32. Ibid., 79–82, 98.
33. Ibid., 93–94.
34. *Popular Gospel Truth* 22 (1920): 3.
35. Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 332.
36. Kenneth J. Archer, “Early Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9, no. 18 (2001): 64, 62.
37. Frank D. Macchia, “Baptized in the Spirit: Toward a Global Theology of Spirit Baptism,” in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed., *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 6–7.
38. *Popular Gospel Truth* 13 (1916): 1. Other articles have been written, such as the following: Holy Communion should be routinely held after sunset on Saturday. Keep the Sabbath. Foot washing. Believe in Jesus’s healing for every sort of sickness. Seek the Holy Spirit and be proofed by speaking in tongues. Preaching must be in accordance with the New Testament and the Old Testament.
39. *Popular Gospel Truth* 8 (1915): 1–3.
40. Xie Shundao, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* [English title] (Taichung: Palm Publisher, 1995), 180.
41. *Popular Gospel Truth* 3 (1911): 7; *Popular Gospel Truth* 10 (1916): 3.
42. *Popular Gospel Truth* 12 (1916): 6.
43. *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada, and Foreign Lands held at Turner Hall, St. Louis, MO, October 1–10, 1915*, 9–16.
44. Ibid., 5.
45. Ibid., 8.
46. *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada, and Foreign Lands held at Bethel Chapel, St. Louis, MO, October 1–7, 1916*, 11–13.
47. William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 118.
48. Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, 32.
49. *Popular Gospel Truth* 13 (1916): 1.
50. *Popular Gospel Truth* 14 (1916): 8.
51. *Popular Gospel Truth* 18 (1918): 7.

52. Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 550.
53. Xie, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 175.
54. Zhang, *Travel Notes of Preaching*, 25.
55. *Ibid.*, 4.
56. Xie, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 179, 181.
57. As we see the statement of faith of the official website of this denomination, we find that this Church of God believes in the Trinity of the Godhead and has no Pentecostal background. See General Conference Church of God (Seventh Day), "About Us: Introducing the Church of God (Seventh Day)," <http://cog7.org/about/> (accessed April 4, 2015).
58. This article has been partly modified and translated (from the original Chinese) by the author from "Bernt Berntsen: A Study of His Life and Thought with Reference of Oneness Pentecostalism," *Jian Dao* 38 (2012): 33–58. I dedicate it to the memory of my brother in Christ, Dennis Kam (1964–2015), pastor of Full Gospel Assembly, USJ (Subang Jaya), Malaysia.

CHAPTER 6
**CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF A SPIRIT-
 LED MOVEMENT: A CHINESE CASE STUDY**

1. This chapter engages the study of the Word of Life movement (WOL) in China that was regarded as one of largest house church networks in China with approximately 23 million affiliated believers (according to statistics in *Operation World*, 2001 edition).
2. The model used herein an adapted version of Howard Snyder's paper presented, as the keynote speaker, at the Global Consultation on Pentecost and New Humanity, sponsored by the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, in October 2009. It was later published as "The Pentecostal Renewal of the Church," in Howard Snyder, *Yes in Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission and Culture* (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2011), 259–294.
3. See Luke Wesley, "Is Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?" *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 2 (2004): 238.
4. Paul Hattaway and Joy Hattaway, "From the Front Lines with Paul & Joy Hattaway," *Asia Harvest* 2 (March 2002): 2.
5. Snyder, *Yes in Christ*, 285.