

World Christianity Seminars – Michaelmas Term 2026

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Jesus Family church, Mazhuang, Shandong. Photo: Joseph Yu, 2009, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

“Heaven Above, Mazhuang Below”: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family for World Christianity

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Abstract: Is Pentecostal conversion a rupture with the past or its continuation? Students of World Christianity know the debate best from Africa, where Allan Anderson has argued that Pentecostals and the older religion seek answers to the same questions but offer radically different solutions. This paper takes that claim to a Chinese case, to a different kind of evidence, and into theology, which by Anderson’s own account has approached the question only through the loaded language of “syncretism.” Jing Dianying (1890–1957), founder of the Jesus Family in Mazhuang, Shandong, came to Pentecostal Christianity after a Confucian schooling, Daoist austerities on Mount Tai, and a lifelong search for interaction between Heaven and humanity. Historians have read his movement as popular religion in Christian dress, as a refuge for the deprived, or as heresy. Jing’s own hymns, letters, and prayers tell another story: he kept a cosmological question and gave it a Christological answer, Jesus the “God-man,” and he moved from dismissing prayer as superstition to praying in tears. Drawing on my *Spirit(s) and Chinese Religiosity* (2026), I argue that a convert’s written theology, read critically, shows what practice alone cannot: where, in a Chinese life, the rupture actually fell.



Jacob Chengwei Feng (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is a Visiting Scholar in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, with the Cambridge Centre for Chinese Theology, and a Visiting College Research Associate at Wolfson College. He is an Affiliate Assistant Professor of Theology and Leadership at Fuller and an Affiliated Research Professor in the Public Theology and Science Council for East Asia at the International Public Theology Forum Center, and he leads the Theology Interest Group of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. His research spans World Christianity, Chinese Christianity, pneumatology, and religion and science. He is the author of *Spirit(s) and Chinese Religiosity: Retelling the History of Chinese Christianity from a Pentecost Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2026), *Science, Religion(s), and Spirit(s) in China* (Brill, 2026), and co-editor (with Brian Chiu) of *Chinese Christianity and Bible Translations* (Asia Research Center Press, 2026, forthcoming).