The Impact of Assimilation upon Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brethren Immigrant Churches

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Immigration is a significant factor in Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brethren church growth, and as the churches mature and move through the life cycle, they are faced with the challenge of retaining the next generation. This next generation's assimilation into Canadian culture and their resulting so-called Silent Exodus from the Chinese church is impacting parents and the mission of the church, creating a gap that needs to be addressed.

The Mennonite Brethren Chinese Churches Association (MBCCA)[1] presents a historically compact case study of the life cycle of church movements: pioneers of church planting only half a century ago are chronicled along the next generation; successive waves of immigration and cultural realignment occur within the Chinese Canadian communities; and ecclesial impact is felt as the Canadian-born adult children assimilate into ethnically unmarked Canadian society. Systematic qualitative research with Chinese Christian pastors and parents confirms the impacts upon parents when their children separate from the Christian faith and/or the Chinese church—impacts that have been exacerbated by a paucity of

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1 The Mennonite Brethren (MB) church, having navigated the transition from a European ethnic base to a missional stance, was well fitted to minister to Chinese-speaking Christians—especially in British Columbia—who were creating new Anabaptist communities.

public acknowledgment and pastoral response.[2] Because the MBCCA[3] churches are part of a young movement, I will briefly report on the earlier historical Chinese church growth and movement in British Columbia and Canada given that the development of Chinese churches in Canada has more historical depth and scope in other denominations.

This article thus (1) reviews foundational personalities who responded to Chinese immigration in the MBCCA churches and resulting pioneer churches; (2) documents the life cycle of the Chinese MB church in Canada; and (3) explores the sociological dynamics of acculturation of the Chinese church's second generation, consequent challenges of the church's retention of this second generation, and missional implications of subsequent impact on parents.

1. Mennonite Brethren Chinese Churches Association (MBCCA) History and Context

A. Reorientation of the Mennonite Brethren: From Ethnic to Missional

Although the "Canadian Mennonite Brethren movement was birthed in mission" that dates back to 1888,[4] the establishment of a Chinese Mennonite Brethren (MB) church plant comes late in the MB missions initiative because it was not until the period between the 1940s and 1970s that the Canadian Mennonite Brethren church "exchanged German for English as their primary language of religious usage . . . [a] first step in the transformation of a unilingual German religious community in 1910 into a multilingual multiethnic denomination by century's end."[5] The MB denomination concurrently began removing its

2 The full study can be accessed by permission through Bakke Graduate University, Dallas, Texas, Matthew R. S. Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents in Ethnoreligious Communities Who Have Been Impacted by Generational Assimilation" (PhD, Bakke Graduate University, 2023). Methods used include ministerial and scholarly publications, autobiographies, published historical secondary sources, structured interviews, and focus groups.

3 The MBCCA has been given official status by the British Columbia Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (BCMB) and led by various senior pastors where the role of the MBCCA executive board in the history of these churches has been to support them in relational, missional, communication, and educational ministries. The MBCCA has functioned as a link between Chinese churches and the BCMB.

4 Willy Reimer, "Executive Director: Looking Back—Looking Forward," *MB Churches of Canada Ministry Booklet* 2016, 4–5, https://issuu.com/mbherald/docs/ministry_booklet_-_issuu_-_smaller. Rooted in our historic priorities, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren movement was birthed in mission.

5 Gerald C. Ediger, *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940–1970* (Winnipeg, MB: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001), 3.

"protective boundaries" used to "conserve their historic identity" and develop "a theology of missional activism."[6] Although the "first Chinese church in Canada was established in 1892"[7] and "the first Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada founded in . . . 1888,"[8] the first MBCCA church was established just over fifty years ago. Contrary to Li Yu's documentation that "in the 1920s . . . a number of Protestant denominations, such as . . . Mennonite Brethren Churches, joined in the mission to the Chinese community,"[9] there is no historical documentation of the establishment of a Chinese Mennonite Brethren church until the early 1970s.[10]

One MB leader who contributed to changing "the way Canadian Mennonite Brethren related their witness to people of other ethnic origins"[11] was George Peters. Peters is credited for influencing, inspiring, and helping "shape modern missions for the Mennonite Brethren"[12] and known for his emphasis on "keeping church and missions together."[13] He noted that "missions were a part of Mennonite Brethren thinking from their beginning in Russia [and it has been evolving] over the years" and identified in various "entrepreneurial approach[es] to new starts [like] Henry Bartels going to China."[14] The road to change would be a long one as MB churches adjusted their witness to people of other ethnic origins, but that journey would end up paving a road for thinking differently about local home missions with newer immigrants to Canada and an MB response such as supporting ethnic church planting.

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6 Ediger, *Crossing the Divide*, 1.

7 Bruce L. Guenther, "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada," *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008), 379.

8 Ediger, *Crossing the Divide*, 13. The Mennonite Brethren traces its church growth in Canada back to large "Mennonite migrations . . . dating from the 1870s and the 1920s" (11), later incorporated in Canada under the name Mennonite Brethren in 1946 (Donald B. Kraybill, *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010], 132).

9 Li Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," in *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, eds. Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010), 237. See also Guenther, "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada," 380.

10 Guenther, "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada," 380.

11 Harold Jantz, "Created a Road We Are Still Upon," in *Canadian Mennonite Brethren: 1910–2010: Leaders Who Shaped Us*, ed. Harold Jantz (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2010), 112.

12 Jantz, "Created a Road," 118.

13 Jantz, "Created a Road," 119.

14 Jantz, "Created a Road," 119.

Guenther has "explored . . . [the history of] MBs who were culturally Dutch, German, Russian (DGR) and concluded [that the MB] denomination had an underdeveloped theology of culture from the very beginning."[15] MBs without the DGR ethnicity had to learn to seize the opportunity to explore denominational multiculturalism.[16] Isaac Chang, a retired MBCCA clergy, has noted that it could be very important for non-DGR Mennonites to be familiar with the culture of DGR Mennonites to learn from their degree of assimilation to Canadian culture. "It may help the Chinese MB churches increase their ability to assess cultural change [and be cautious of] holding to traditions only."[17]

One parallel experience between the German- and Chinese-speaking MB churches has been the impact of acculturation on their English-speaking youth and the resultant need for cultural change. The history of intergenerational tension over acculturation and language and cultural issues in the German MB churches and the need to make changes to eclipse the youth leaving is well documented.[18] The MB church would first have to deal with the "basic contradiction between the emphasis on ethnicity and the missionary nature of the church."[19] And it would take an MB pastor in proximity to the Chinese community to exercise this quality of theology in outreach mission to the Chinese.

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15 "Study Conference Reports, Culture, Gospel and Church: From Cultural Isolation to Multicultural Diversity," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 46, no. 12 (December 2007), 16.

16 "Study Conference Reports," 16.

17 "Study Conference Reports," 16.

18 See Cornelius F. Plett, *Hindrances to Growth, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred, 1985). Plett cites acculturating youth leaving over "cultural narrowness" in the MB ethnic churches (332). John H. Redekop, "Ethnicity as a Problem in Church Ministries," *A People Apart* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1987), 131–39. John A. Toews, "Facing Cultural Change," *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren, 1975) cites thirty-two congregations in Canada concerned over losing youth if the churches didn't change from German to English in next-generation ministries—a painful process for the parent generation (329, 323–41). Gerald C. Ediger, "Canadian Mennonite Brethren and Language Transition," in *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940–1970* (Winnipeg, MB: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001) cites the "tension and pain" (249) and "strain" (253) over the cultural assimilation (259) and language and cultural issues with the youth (250). Gerald C. Ediger, "Introduction: The Contours of the Divide," in *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940–1970* (Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001), 1–37, 192–94.

19 Ediger, "Canadian Mennonite Brethren and Language Transition," 132. "Non-ethnic Mennonites, at times, seem to perceive what many traditional Mennonites miss. Speaking as a 'non-Mennonite' Mennonite, David Chie challenged a large gathering of Canadian Mennonite leaders to take seriously the desire of his Chinese Mennonite church, 'We just want to be a church with Anabaptist essentials'" (132).

B. Pioneers of the Chinese MB Church

The Chinese MB church history and beginnings of the Pacific Grace Chinese and English ministries can be traced to the willingness of Rev. Henry G. Classen and Mrs. Sara Classen to respond to the request of the British Columbia Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (BCMB) for Henry to come to Vancouver as a city missionary November 1949 to 1950.[20] When the Classens arrived, Rev. Classen focused on visitation, street meetings, and Sunday school work. Almost seven years later, in July 22, 1956, the MBs built a new chapel named Pacific Grace Mission Chapel of the Mennonite Brethren. Pacific Grace Mission was founded to reach all the residents of the area surrounding the mission, including the Chinese from Chinatown.

Initially, only one out of seven people attending Pacific Grace Mission were of Chinese extraction. During the 1960s, however, that ratio began to change and reflect the increased Chinese immigration and movement into that sector of the city. Eventually the region became predominantly Chinese, and, according to Wayne Bremner, "by the late 1960s the majority of the children in Sunday school were of Chinese origin."[21] Eventually Rev Henry Classen and Sara began taking Chinese language lessons to use in the ministry.

It was becoming apparent that a Chinese assistant for the mission was needed. In efforts to reach the parents of the Chinese children attending Sunday school, Sara and co-worker Sue Neufeld started taking Cantonese language lessons, and a short-term Chinese worker, Rose Wong, was hired to assist with home visitations. By the autumn of 1972, twenty-two Chinese people were attending church.[22] The congregational and community response to the home visitations was positive, and in 1972 Henry asked Paul Li (Li Him-Wor), a student of Northwest Baptist Bible College, to work at Pacific Grace upon graduating. In May 1972, the MB conference appointed both Paul and Great Li as workers in the Chinese section of Pacific Grace.

By 1973 the Chinese fellowship at Pacific Grace Mission had grown from a small group to a large fellowship sharing the Sunday school and sanctuary space

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20 Matthew Todd, "Port Moody Church Celebrates and Looks Back," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (July 1, 2005), https://mbherald.com/port-moody-church-celebrates-and-looks-back/.

21 Wayne Bremner, "Henry G. Classen: City Missionary in Vancouver," on Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission website, *Profiles of Mennonite Faith* 47 (Fall 2010), http://www.mbhistory.org/profiles/classen.en.html.

22 Joseph Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 9, 2001, https://mbherald.com/we-are-in-the-same-family/. (This article was adapted from a February 2001 issue of the Chinese *MB Herald*, edited by Joseph Kwan and written by various members of the Chinese MB churches. Translation into English was done by Ed Leung of Richmond Chinese MB.)

with the English members of the church. The following year, in 1974, "a Chinese department was established with meetings conducted in Cantonese."[23] Notably, no major tensions ever developed between the Chinese and Caucasian believers in the mission; it was absolutely peaceful.

"Paul's ministry grew to include 45 people attending the Chinese speaking congregation, but his ministry was cut short due to cancer and his sudden death in 1975. Eddie Chu (Chu Yu-Man) assumed leadership for the Chinese congregation"[24] but left shortly after to answer a call to pastor the Hebron Chinese Church and continue his studies. Pacific Grace continued without a pastor for two years.[25]

On September 28, 1975, Pacific Grace Mission Chapel celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with the motto "25 years of Grace at Pacific." While the Chinese work continued to grow, the English Caucasian membership decreased, and on April 30, 1977, Pacific Grace dissolved as an organized church. In its place emerged a blossoming Pacific Grace Chinese church.[26] English-speaking Christians stayed behind until 1983 to help the Chinese church develop and to teach children in Sunday school,[27] but ultimately Rev. Classen's fruitful and visionary ministry was handed over to the Chinese Christians to carry on the gospel work.

In 1977 Rev. Classen "retire[d] from full-time service . . . due to failing eyesight."[28] He and his wife, Sara, had been MB denomination's first English ministries workers for a Chinese group. When the honorable Rev. Enoch Wong and his wife, Grace Wong, assumed primary leadership within the Pacific Grace Chinese church on August 1, 1980,[29] they built upon the Classens' legacy.

1. Pacific Grace Mennonite Brethren Church (Pacific Grace MB)

Converted to the Christian faith in 1945,[30] Rev. Enoch Wong (Chinese name Cheung Ho)[31] would eventually become a key figure in leading, advising, and

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23 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

24 Bremner, "Henry G. Classen."

25 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, November 9, 2001, interview with Dr. David Chan.

26 Walter E. Fast, "Apostle to the City," *The Life and Ministry of Henry G. Classen*, prepared for the Culloden MB Church, 1987, 347–70.

27 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

28 Fast, "Apostle to the City," 350.

29 Grace Wong, *Ripples: Eight Decades of God's Grace* (publisher undocumented, unknown, 2005), 32, 36. I have a personal copy of this unpublished book.

30 "Heart to Heart" Port Moody congregational members' discussion with Rev. Enoch and Grace Wong, May 15, 2010, 2:00–4:30 p.m. Translated notes taken by Matthew Todd.

31 Wong, *Ripples*, 25, 26.

promoting the future nurture of multiple young Chinese MB churches in BC and two in Venezuela. In August of 1976 he and his wife, Grace Wong, immigrated to Canada, where Enoch did itinerant work for Scripture Union Canada.[32] Eventually, he became full-time pastor of the first Chinese MB church in Vancouver. His deep love for the Chinese MB church and for church planting would influence the missional DNA and development of the MBCCA growth. His influence over the leadership, direction, church planting, and strategizing of the Cantonese, Mandarin, and English ministries of these churches has reverberated across several generations. MB denominational leaders outside the Chinese MB circle have sometimes affectionately referred to Enoch as the "pope of the Chinese MB churches."[33]

In 2010 when Enoch was asked to describe a bit about the history of the Chinese MB churches planted during his years of ministry, he said:

> I was in Toronto Canada with the Scripture Reading Society (Scripture Union Canada); I was to fly back via Vancouver to Hong Kong. . . . [However,] when I arrived in Vancouver, I was invited to preach—there was no [Chinese] pastor, only 30 people; God gave us the burden to stay.[34]

Grace noted that "the deacons from Pacific Grace MB church . . . invited [Enoch] to preach" at this church that had not had a "pastor for eighteen months [and where] attendance [had] dropped drastically. . . . We accepted the invitation . . . and set to work on August 1, 1980."[35] Pacific Grace MB "was officially registered in 1981, and the membership grew from 30 to 105 in 1983, and 240 in 1989."[36] Grace notes:

> There were not many young people [teenagers, young adults], in our church, yet they were eager to start a fellowship. Enoch challenged them to bring more friends and he would lead this fellowship if there were at least eight people. In the end nine were committed. The first meeting was a BBQ at Burnaby Centennial Park on the first Saturday of September 1980.[37]

32 Wong, *Ripples*, 29–30.

33 Matthew Todd, translated notes, "The Close of a Chapter: Celebrating the Ministry of Enoch Wong, Senior Servant of God," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (November 25, 2005): 26–27.

34 "Heart to Heart" discussion.

35 Grace Wong, "A Short Journey to Accomplish Great Things," *Ripples: Eight Decades of God's Grace*, (publisher undocumented, unknown, 2005), 32.

36 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

37 Grace Wong, "Remain in Him to Bear Fruits," *Ripples: Eight Decades of God's Grace*, (publisher undocumented, unknown, 2005), 37.

In 1989 Valerie Yiu began an "English worship service for English speaking Chinese youth."[38] Keynes Kan and Miller Zhuang joined the pastoral staff, with Zhuang eventually "sent to Venezuela where two Chinese MB churches were established."[39] Under the leadership of Rev. Enoch at Pacific Grace MB, during a period when "many Hong Kong peoples were immigrating to British Columbia on account of fears over the takeover of Hong Kong by China and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989,"[40] the Pacific Grace Chinese Church grew rapidly, to the point of seeking to initiate a church plant in 1990 with a congregation of approximately 50. Yu cites Pacific Grace as an example of the rapid growth of Chinese Canadian Protestant churches that became "capable of producing several generations of descendent churches in a short period."[41]

2. *Bethel Chinese Mennonite Brethren Church (Bethel Chinese MB)*

According to Joseph Kwan:

> Although Pacific Grace MB was the first Chinese church to be established, the first Chinese MB church that was registered with the government was Bethel Chinese Christian MB church, established in 1978 by the B.C. MB Conference Board of Church Extension under the leadership of David Poon. . . . It officially joined the B.C. MB Conference in 1980, becoming the first registered Chinese MB church in North America.[42]

Rev. Poon formerly had pastored at an Alliance church in Hong Kong and at Christ Church of China in Vancouver.[43] In 1978 Poon was formally accepted as a church planter and pastor of Richmond Chinese MB church, subsequently known as Bethel Chinese Christian MB church, where he would pastor until 2007.[44]

After several relocations, the church settled in Vancouver[45] and, by 1997, planted another church called North Shore Bethel Christian MB church. Poon

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38 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

39 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

40 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

41 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 235. Much of this new growth was fueled by immigration (236).

42 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

43 David H. Leung, "Not I, but Christ," in *Canadian Mennonite Brethren: 1910–2010; Leaders Who Shaped Us* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2010), 274.

44 Leung, "Not I, but Christ," 278.

45 Leung, "Not I, but Christ," 282.

has also had an advisory role to the MBCCA.[46] The church has had multiple English ministry pastors.[47]

C. Waves of Immigration Shape the Next Generation

The church that Pacific Grace MB established in September 1990 was called Burnaby Pacific Grace. Those congregants then planted another congregation, and by February of 1995 the Port Moody Pacific Grace Chinese Church began their first services.[48] In 1998, an English ministries (EM)[49] congregation began forming from a small class of English junior high students as Helen Chia (née Yueng) was helping with the Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) youth. In the autumn of that year, Matthew Todd became the charter EM pastor with Port Moody Pacific Grace, and by 1999, there were 46 attendees in the EM. By 2009 there were 125, and by 2010 there were 130-plus.

Previously, in August 1987, Enoch Wong, because of health reasons, had turned over the executive pastoral leadership of Pacific Grace MB (also known as North Side Pacific Grace) to Rev. David Chan.[50] Enoch continued to serve as a volunteer honorary advisor among the Chinese MB, however, with a vision of building up missional churches and church planting.[51]

Although the growth of the Chinese MB churches is rooted in evangelization and church planting, there were many Cantonese-speaking Christians who joined a Chinese MB church either because their original denomination in Hong Kong did not have a branch church in the Greater Vancouver area or because of invitations from friends.[52] As Kwan notes, "Most Chinese MB members were [from] . . . immigrant famil[ies] from Hong Kong."[53] The mother tongue of the

46 Leung, "Not I, but Christ," 281.

47 Notably, Ping On Cheng, Philip Yung, Kam Foon Tang, Nick Suen, Justin Yap, Derek Tou, and Tim Tse. Esther Poon, email interview by Matthew Todd, Vancouver, BC, October 11, 2018. Esther Poon (wife of Rev. David Poon) on the history of English ministries at Bethel Chinese MB church.

48 Port Moody Pacific Grace MB Church, *20th Anniversary Album: In Prayer We Multiply 1995–2015* (Port Moody, BC, publisher unknown, 2015), 5. Around 2003, the name of the church changed slightly such that the word "Chinese" was dropped and replaced with the words "Mennonite Brethren."

49 From this point forward EM refers to the common acronym that Chinese MB churches use to refer to their English ministries congregations.

50 Grace Wong, "Blooming and Blossoming," *Ripples: Eight Decades of God's Grace*, (publisher undocumented, unknown, 2005), 39.

51 Wong, "Blooming and Blossoming," 39–40.

52 Kwan, "Building People Takes a Hundred Years?," *MB Chinese Herald* (January 2010), 11–12, 11.

53 Kwan, "Building People Takes a Hundred Years?," 11–12.

MB Chinese churches' initial groups and congregations was Cantonese. New immigration from China would later prove to be a challenge for these congregations when large numbers of Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrated into British Columbia and Alberta. Once the Cantonese congregations were planted, they pragmatically discerned their mission work by establishing English- and Mandarin-language congregations.

Canadian social trends indicate that the larger concentrations of Chinese population are found in both the Vancouver and Toronto areas[54] but that the Chinese MB church plants have been largely a Metro Vancouver phenomenon—with the exception of Chinese MB congregations in Winnipeg, Regina, and Calgary, and two Chinese MB church mission plants in Venezuela.

Eventually Hong Kong immigration numbers declined and MBCCA churches began determining new directions. In 1997, on account of the large influx of Mandarin-speaking Mainland China immigrants coming to British Columbia, Port Moody became the first church to initiate a vision to focus their outreach on Mandarin immigrants,[55] with Mandarin fellowship and worship services. The plan to reach Mandarin peoples was put in place by Rev. Keynes Kan and his advisor, the honorable Enoch Wong, with Rev. Hua providing oversight. By 1998, Leo Chia began pastoring the fellowship (targeted to be a congregation). The group grew to seventy in 1999, becoming independent (and off subsidy) by 2000 under the name Pacific Grace Mandarin Church, then moved in 2002 to Burnaby. Chia eventually planted two more Mandarin church offshoots—Maple Ride in 2006 and Surrey in 2009.[56] By "1999 simultaneous translation for Mandarin-speaking Chinese was being added to many worship services."[57]

Church planting in the MBCCA churches became a passion.[58] As Kwan observes, "Chinese MB churches are especially keen in church planting and overseas missions."[59] Thus, rapid growth has been a constant theme for the MBCCA. By 2016 there were "19 Chinese congregations, [and] . . . exploring the possibility of partnerships between Chinese and Caucasian churches in Richmond and Prince George."[60] By 2018 the British Columbia Mennonite

54 Calgary and Montreal are about tied for the third-highest Chinese populations.

55 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

56 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family," 5. The data here was obtained in a personal interview with Rev. Leo Chia, March 11, 2020.

57 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

58 See Appendices for the list of MBCCA church plants.

59 Kwan, "Building People Takes a Hundred Years?," 12.

60 MB churches of Canada 2016 National MB report, 20, accessed January 3, 2020, https://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/MB-Churches-of-Canada-Ministry-Book-download-3.pdf [registration required]. These 19 churches sit in a Mennonite global community of 470,000 members in 3,000 congregations (30).

Brethren Chinese churches constituted twenty congregations; the Manitoba Conference included the Winnipeg Chinese MB church (developed in the 1980s for refugees and students); the Saskatchewan MB Conference included the Regina Chinese Community church (registered in 1989), and the Alberta MB Conference included Mountain View Grace Church (1995). In 1991, the Pacific Grace Chinese church established a church in Porte la Cruz, Venezuela, and a second mission church in Caracas, Venezuela.

When society thinks about people from a Mennonite denomination or Anabaptist tradition, Pat Johnson observed, it generally evokes pictures dating back to the Reformation of the 1500s; in Metro Vancouver, however, "the word [*Mennonite* has] increasingly conjure[d] images of newcomers from China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in Asia who have discovered an old form of Christianity and made it their own."[61] In the past several decades, "twenty Chinese MB churches [have been established] in seven cities in three different countries. . . . Fourteen of these churches are in Vancouver's Lower Mainland."[62] Chia has established several Mandarin-speaking congregations, while some of the other Chinese MB churches have provided some form of Mandarin ministries.[63] And Kwan reported that the MB denomination was determining to do a Chinese church plant in the province of Ontario.[64]

2. The Life Cycle of the Canadian Chinese MB Church

A. Immigrants Creating Churches as Community

The Canadian Chinese Mennonite Brethren churches interface with the historical narrative history of Chinese immigration—an experience all immigrant Chinese Canadian Christians share regardless of denomination. One aspect of the development of the Chinese church is their utilitarian approach to joining ethnic faith communities; looking for community is a "characteristic path of

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61 Pat Johnson, "Pacific Spirit: Chinese Mennonites Reflect West Coast Mix," *Vancouver Courier*, May 16, 2014, https://www.vancourier.com/news/pacific-spirit-chinese-mennonites-reflect-west-coast-mix-1.1064330.

62 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

63 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family." Leo Chia, phone interview with Matthew Todd, Burnaby, BC, March 12, 2020. Alice Leung, email interview communication with Matthew Todd, Vancouver, BC, March 11, 2020. Both Chia and Leung noted that the MBCCA currently has two Mandarin congregations (NSPGMC and PGMC), and approximately eight Mandarin ministries in its sphere that include Bethel Chinese Christian MB, House for All Nations, Maple Ridge, Pacific Grace MB, Port Moody Pacific Grace MB, Richmond Chinese MB, Surrey Grace Mandarin, and Willingdon Church.

64 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

adaptation of immigrants" to the North American context,[65] [where] . . . one of the first acts of [many] new immigrants is to found [or join a] . . . church."[66] Yaxin Lu et al. note that "the Chinese Christian church plays an important role in coping, acculturation, and assimilation processes for many Chinese immigrant families."[67] In the church, they are able to find "material, social, and emotional support," relationships, and communities that "correlate with positive outcomes in marriage and family life."[68] H. B. Cavalcanti and Debra Schleef note that while some ethnic peoples turn to religion to aid in the process of acculturation to the host country others use religion to maintain their own ethnic and cultural ties.[69]

Will Herberg recognizes that ethnic churches frequently are an outgrowth of ethnic immigration,[70] as they help provide support for a sense of identity[71] along with "continuity and security" through the disorientation period of "migration and resettlement."[72] The churches create communities where initially the "primary expression of . . . unity [is] language" and a shared culture.[73] Immigrant churches "represent a fusion of religion and culture that [is] of the very texture of immigrant life . . . more a racial and cultural than a religious institution."[74] Charles Hirschman agrees with Herberg's analysis that ethnic churches provide immigrants "cultural continuity and . . . psychological benefits of religious faith following the trauma of immigration."[75] He argues that "the centrality of

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65 Charles Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 1207.

66 Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1208.

67 Yaxin Lu, Loren Marks, and Lorenda Apavaloiae, "Chinese Immigrant Families and Christian Faith Community: A Qualitative Study," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (December 2012), 118.

68 Lu et al., "Chinese Immigrant Families," 118–19.

69 H. B. Cavalcanti and Debra Schleef, "The Case for Secular Assimilation? The Latino Experience in Richmond, Virginia," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (2005), 480. See Fabian Dawson, "Religious Connections Help New Immigrants with Social Integration," *New Canadian Media* (November 2, 2021), https://newcanadianmedia.ca/religious-connections-help-new-immigrants-with-social-integration/. Dawson reports that immigrants tend to see "religious communities as a place of social integration [transitional institutions], especially in the first years after arriving in the country."

70 Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press Edition, 1983), 14.

71 Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 12.

72 Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 16.

73 Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 11, 13.

74 Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 110.

75 Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1206.

religion to immigrant communities can be summarized as the search for refuge, respectability, and resources."[76] Herberg's and Hirschman's sociological theory on the role of religion in the origins and adaptation of immigrant groups applies to the planting and growth of the MBCCA churches.

As we turn to British Columbia's Chinese community—the specific context of the current study—Li Yu shows how since 1858[77] Christianity has come to be seen less as a Western religion than as a belief that could now be endogenously Chinese.[78] Yu notes that the Chinese churches flourished numerically only after the Second World War, when "the assimilating role of the churches gradually weakened as the mainstream denominational churches withdrew from the community and self-managed Chinese churches came into being."[79] These cultural churches now provide holistic sociological and spiritual functions in supporting the Chinese family and cultural heritage.[80]

B. Assimilating into the Host Culture

Classical theories on phases of immigrant assimilation plausibly explain why the needs of various youth outgrow the ethnic church.[81] Milton Gordon theorized that immigrants go through up to seven types of assimilation.[82] One important category is "cultural assimilation, involving a change of cultural patterns to those of the host society."[83] A rebuttal to earlier more monolithic classical models of assimilation is that there are multiple routes to assimilation.[84] As ethnic churches go through life cycles, assimilation challenges the retention of the second generation. Research suggests that if the church "resists" "adaptations" over

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76 Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1228.

77 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 237.

78 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 245.

79 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 245.

80 Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, "Structural Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 2 (2000): 135–53.

81 Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, and Milton Gordon, "The Nature of Assimilation, in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed, Peter Kivisto (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005), 95–110. Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964),

82 Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 70–71, 76.

83 Russel A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, ed. Norman R. Yetman, 6th ed. (Needman Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 292.

84 David G. Embrick, "Assimilation," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. William A. Darity, Jr., 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2008), 190.

"cultural" and "linguistic preservation," youth may leave, which is a "problem of organizational adaptation."[85]

Assimilation theory has been evolving to include differences among Asian families.[86] Cavalcanti and Schleef, for example, identify various trajectories in Asian assimilation.[87] Current theorists studying Asians and acculturation conclude that the "acculturation strategy" of the second-generation immigrants is "associated with" immigrants' drive toward "well-being."[88] Ruth H. Gim Chung's research resonates with the point that acculturation impacts parents,[89] pointing out that the "cost of migration" is acculturation of the second generation[90] and that the first generation feels the impact of acculturation the most.[91] In these more secular times many immigrant youth are opting for secular trajectories that negatively impact parents.[92]

In light of this challenge, many Chinese parents are looking for help raising their children in the way of their own cultural values[93] and are bringing their families to church because they see the positive influence the church is having on families and children.[94] It has been noted that "second-generation Asian [North] Americans who grew up as Protestants convert [to Christian faith] at higher rates . . . than . . . Protestant peers in the general population."[95] Evangelizing second-generation youth is a fruitful field. The challenge has to do with generational assimilation when they become emerging young adults.

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85 Gordon, "The Nature of Assimilation," 325, 326.

86 Peter Kivisto, ed., *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005). See also Cavalcanti and Schleef, "The Case for Secular Assimilation?," 473.

87 Cavalcanti and Schleef, "The Case for Secular Assimilation?," 473–84.

88 John W. Berry and Feng Hou, "Immigrant Acculturation and Wellbeing in Canada," *Canadian Psychology* 57, no. 4 (2016): 254–64. John W. Berry and Feng Hou, "Acculturation, Discrimination and Wellbeing among Second Generation of Immigrants in Canada," *International Journal of International Relations* 61 (2017): 29–39, 30.

89 Ruth H. Gim Chung, "Gender, Ethnicity and Acculturation in Intergenerational Conflict of American College Students," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 7, no. 4 (November 7, 2001), 377.

90 Chung, "Gender, Ethnicity and Acculturation," 377.

91 Chung, "Gender, Ethnicity and Acculturation," 384.

92 Cavalcanti and Schleef, 473, 480.

93 Lu et al., "Chinese Immigrant Families and Christian Faith Community," 119.

94 Lu et al., "Chinese Immigrant Families and Christian Faith Community," 121.

95 Carolyn Chen and Jerry Z. Park, "Pathways of Religious Assimilation: Second-Generation Asian Americans' Religious Retention and Religiosity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58, no. 3, (2019), 676.

3. Sociological Dynamics of Acculturation

A. Maturation of English-Language Ministries of Chinese Churches

The growth of self-managed Chinese churches combined with the history of Chinese immigration since the 1980s[96] has contributed to the growth of the Chinese Christian community as Chinese churches have "adjusted their mission strategies to meet the needs of Chinese immigrants"[97] and provided a context to "solidify the Chinese identity of their members."[98] Feedback on the Chinese MB churches in Canada indicates that, amid this growth, all of the MBCCA churches have had to grapple with generational assimilation and the emerging young adulthood of their English ministries.

Some have suggested that a dynamic besides assimilation in the equation of the Silent Exodus is a reaction by emerging young adults in the Chinese church against pressure to preserve and retain Chinese identity and language. Some have referred to this pressure as keeping the church Sino-centric or as Asian radicalization. In response, one should not overlook the fact that Chinese transnational immigrants coming out of Hong Kong and China have been a part of a country with a colonial and xenophobic history.[99] The national aspirations of China, for example, are xenophobic and Sino-centric. Given China's history with foreign imperialists, including the humiliation and loss of control of their country, this is

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96 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 240.

97 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 234.

98 Yu, "Christianity as a Chinese Belief," 242.

99 Xenophobia can be an irrational or unreasoned fear of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. It can manifest in how an ingroup perceives and relates to an outgroup, including a fear of losing identity, suspicion of the outgroup's activities, and a desire to secure a presumed purity. It can also be exhibited in the form of an uncritical exaltation of another culture. Xenophobia is an appropriate term to use in this context given that the origin of segregated Chinese churches was due to historical bigotry and injustice against Chinese. Jonathan Tan notes that some xenophobia toward Caucasians exists (Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008], 111–33). Tan argues that the history of segregated Asian churches is "primarily because of discrimination and stereotyping arising from [Asians'] physical inability to blend in with the dominant white American society" (60). This has resulted in many Asians "choos[ing] to establish and maintain their own churches . . . rather than assimilating into existing white . . . churches," though the two groups may speak the same language and share the same doctrine (59). Curtis Paul DeYoung et al. also concede that even if racism had not been part of the Chinese experience, the move for separation exists because "culture and ethnicity are . . . central concerns" (Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., "Separate but Equal," in *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 113).

scarcely surprising. It is reasonable to assume the transference of such sentiments to some of the Canadian Chinese immigrant churches, and this may factor into a Chinese church's posture against assimilation.[100]

Kwan once commented on this demographic, asking, "Should these young Christians be members of English-speaking departments in existing churches, or should they form separate churches?"[101] A couple of the English ministry pastors chose the latter route, taking initiative to form separate churches: Pacific Grace MB church merged a group from their English congregation with the Vancouver MB church, creating South Hill MB Church in November 2007. The merger was classified as a venture into a multicultural church model. Pacific Grace sent English pastor Mike Nishi to give leadership to the merged congregations. The union of these two congregations lasted for six years until dissolving in 2013.[102] Another English ministry church planter, who formerly served with Bethel Chinese MB church, was Nick Suen, who, with the blessing of the BCMB planted an English-speaking church called Faithwerks in 2008.[103]

By this time (2008), the Chinese MB churches in British Columbia and English ministries membership "constituted more than 10 percent of the Mennonite Brethren in the province."[104] The 2008–2009 period represented a high-water mark for the MBCCA English ministries congregations as reflected by a survey conducted between July and October 2008 to profile the English ministries of twelve of the English congregations in the Greater Vancouver area. The findings were quite revealing: those twelve Chinese MB churches[105] represented a total group of approximately 3,000 Chinese MB congregants, all from Cantonese

100 See Fenggang Yang, "Preserving Chinese Culture," *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 132–62.

101 Kwan, ed., "We Are in the Same Family."

102 "South Hill Mennonite Brethren Church (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, November 8, 2016, https://www.gameo.org/index.php?title=South_Hill_Mennonite_Brethren_Church_(Vancouver,_British_Columbia,_Canada).

103 "Faithwerks (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)," accessed January 19, 2020, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Faithwerks_(Vancouver,_British_Columbia,_Canada)&oldid=155557. Nick Suen, "No "'In-crowd' at Neighborhood Church," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, May 1, 2011, http://mbherald.com/tag/nick-suen/.

104 Guenther, "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada," *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, 380.

105 The MBCCA churches represented were Bethel CCMB, Burnaby PG, North Shore Bethel, North Shore PG, Pacific Grace MB, Port Moody PGMB, Richmond CMB, South Vancouver PGMB, Tricity CC, Vancouver CMB, and Vancouver Christian Logos.

language-based churches.[106] The English ministries represented 21 percent of the total congregants surveyed, of which 20 percent were identified as being in the career and family categories, 28 percent had attended college, and 52 percent had attended high school.[107] In 2008 the participating churches had been in operation anywhere from three to thirty years (by 2022 the churches' duration of operation ranged from seventeen to forty-four years). The participants in the English ministry congregations in 2008 had been operating for periods of 2 to 22-plus years (by 2022, between 16 and 34 years). With the exception of Port Moody Pacific Grace and Vancouver Chinese MB, which in 2008 had approximately 125 and 75 people respectively in their English ministries, all other Chinese MB churches had an average of 42 people in their English ministries. And, again with the exception of Port Moody Pacific Grace and Vancouver Chinese MB, most of the English ministry (EM) full-time pastors had served fewer than 5 years with their current churches. Churches like Bethel Chinese MB and Pacific Grace MB had already experienced having multiple EM pastors (EM pastoral attrition was becoming a pattern). When documenting what the participants considered to be their major sources of future growth for English ministries, the majority cited the Awana[108] and children's ministries (9 out of 12 churches had Awana); only 2 English congregations cited expectations for future English ministries growth to come from multicultural outreach.

The survey also asked questions regarding the EM church mission and vision and future goals. Results showed leadership development and outreach as being among the highest needs in the EM. One of my research focuses at the time was "to portrait the development of an English ministry from beginning to teenage, to self-responsible adult and take care of others stage."[109] On October 15 and 16, 2008, a significant MBCCA English pastor's retreat was held at Loon Lake, British Columbia, with representation from fourteen of the English pastors who filled out the EM profiling survey. The meeting minutes[110] noted that the gathered

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106 The Mandarin congregation of Rev. Leo Chia was not included in this survey because it was a young church plant.

107 David Leung, MBCCA English ministry profile document "English Ministry at a Glance as of 2008/9" (Abbotsford, BC: unpublished, 2009).

108 "Awana is an international, nondenominational, Bible-centered youth organization that provides weekday clubs and programs for 3-year-olds through 6th grade. The acronym Awana comes from the first letters of the phrase 'Approved workmen are not ashamed' (II Timothy 2:15)," accessed October 30, 2023, https://awanacanada.ca.

109 Matthew Todd, "The Development and Transition of English Ministry in the Chinese Canadian Church," *MB Chinese Herald* (October 2009), 16.

110 MBCCA English Pastors (2008). MBCCA English Chapter pastors meeting minutes, October 16, 2008, Loon Lake, BC, MBCCA English pastors retreat, October 15–16, 2008.

group had expressed collective interest in exploring what could be mutually done among them. Attending EM pastors also expressed concern about the church model and that none of the Chinese MB churches had a clear vision statement that included the English ministries. They recognized that the vision for the whole church was primarily crafted by executive clergy and boards and not by the English-language pastors.[111] Understandably, there was not a single case where the EM pastor could autonomously strategize a destination vision in a Chinese MB church to address acculturation and adaptation to Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) culture and CBC networks, or CBC outreach and mission potential. It was noted that, for the most part, EM congregations have been started in Chinese churches to keep the second generation with their families in the church and that there was a need for a paradigm (church model) flexible enough for a vision held in common by Chinese churches and their respective EM congregations.[112]

In 2008 and 2009, the English Chapter of the MBCCA pastors assessed a "profiling [of] what age groups existed in [their Lower Mainland] churches." It was stated then that "all but two of our English language congregations had college, university, career, and family couples in them. Only two were exclusively teen ministry congregations."[113] In 2011, Rev Yiu Tong Chan of Vancouver Chinese MB church noted that "we are all experiencing an exodus of the English-speaking second generation . . . [and a] shortage of second-generation church ministers."[114] Warren Lai sharpens this observation, stating:

> As immigrant families of previous years mature, the Chinese Canadian churches (like many other immigrant churches in North America) experience an increasing, if not massive, loss of their second and third generations; and for those so-called CBC's who stay, they pose questions about the *raison d'être and the mission of the Chinese Canadian Churches.*[115]

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111 I want to acknowledge that currently in 2023 one emerging trend related to the Silent Exodus and assimilation in Chinese MB churches is that there are now more church boards including representatives from English ministries as deacons. However, in an August 20, 2023, phone interview with MBCCA lead pastor Dr. David Chan, it was noted that no one from the English ministries is an executive lead pastor in the MBCCA churches.

112 MBCCA English Pastors, MBCCA English Chapter pastors meeting minutes, October 16, 2008.

113 Matthew Todd, "The Development and Transition of English Ministry," 16.

114 Foreword by the Rev. Yiu Tong Chan, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: A Dialogue among North American Asian Christians," in *Asian and Multicultural Ministries in Canada Conference proceedings 2011 and 2012*, eds. Joyce Chan et al. (Richmond, Canada: Asian and Multicultural Ministries in Canada, 2015), viii.

115 Warren Lai, "Is There a Future for the Chinese Canadian Churches? Challenges, Opportunities and Responses," in *Looking Back, Looking Forward: A Dialogue among*

The more recent event of a new wave of immigrants coming from Hong Kong[116] because of pressure from Beijing has opened up opportunities and growth for Cantonese and English congregations, but the Silent Exodus issue remains.[117]

This Silent Exodus of CBC young adults away from their family congregations merits more consideration given the anecdotal recognition of its reality and the associated challenges, especially the resulting impact on parents. Now, in the year 2023 and following, is a good time for these churches to reflect on the dynamics of the development and transitioning of assimilating youth. Timothy Tseng encapsulates the problem: "The Silent Exodus of younger Asian[s] . . . from immigrant Asian churches has continued unabated since the 1970s. . . . Asian Christians in Canada . . . now face a critical 'tipping point' regarding their ministry to emergent adults (late teens, college age to late 20s)."[118] The impact on overseas-born Chinese (OBC) [119] parents appears to be the most underreported part of the story.

B. Impacts of the Silent Exodus

David H. Leung points out that comparative perceptions of the overseas-born Chinese (OBC) fell outside the scope of Todd's 2015 research[120] on the Silent Exodus of emerging adults from Chinese churches in British Columbia and

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North American Asian Christians, eds. Joyce Chan et al. (Richmond, Canada: Asian and Multicultural Ministries in Canada, 2015), 67.

116 Ian Young, "Thousands of Hong Kong-Born People Move Back to Canada, Once Again Reversing a Migration That Has Shaped Cities across the Pacific," June 13, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3014256/thousands-hong-kong-re-returnee-migrants-move-back-canada.

117 This past spring (2023) I was in a discussion with the BCMB conference minister where the pressing need was expressed to gather Chinese church leaders to strategize about the Chinese MB churches' future and how to tackle challenges that include the Silent Exodus. See also Paul Lam, "The Chinese Mennonite Brethren in Vancouver," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 37 (2019), 45–52. Lam notes the challenge of "hemorrhaging faith" (49) and youth leaving because they feel the "church is not theirs [but rather] their parents'" (50). Furthermore, there continues to be "resistance to change" and a struggle to implement a "clear vision and detailed long-term plan" to doing "neighborhood and multiethnic ministry" (49).

118 Timothy Tseng, "Intergenerational Mission: The Tipping Point of Asian North American Churches," *Looking Back, Looking Forward: A Dialogue among North American Asian Christians* (Richmond, BC: Asian and Multicultural Ministries in Canada, 2015), 50.

119 OBC is the common acronym used in Chinese MB churches to refer to overseas-born Chinese, particularly first-generation Chinese adults and parents.

120 Matthew R. S. Todd, *English Ministry Crisis in Chinese Canadian Churches* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

Alberta.[121] From this observation emerged the current 2023 study of OBCs, which includes Mennonite Brethren Chinese Church Association (MBCCA) clergy and parents impacted by the Silent Exodus.[122] The qualitative research involved three phases: (1) a survey of Canadian MB Chinese clergy on how MB Chinese parents are impacted by the exodus; (2) a survey of Canadian MB Chinese parents; and (3) a set of interdenominational Chinese focus groups—one each for clergy, parents with young children, and parents whose children had left the church. Each phase solicited perceptions of why emerging adults had left; the emotional, spiritual, and social impact of these departures upon parents;[123] and participants' recommendations for action.[124]

Findings from the three phases were strongly convergent.[125] There is a significant difference in the intensity of impacts and subsequent reactions between the parents who are affected by their CBC children dropping out of the family church and those who are primarily affected by their children moving on to another church. Findings showed conclusively that parents are intensely impacted emotionally when the second generation leaves their ethnoreligious community and the faith. Pastors and parents reported parental experiences representing four primary overarching emotional response themes: surprise (includes initial shock, confusion, disillusionment, and stress); fear (includes anxiety, worry, feeling overwhelmed and inadequate, and the absence of harmony); anger (includes frustrated, upset, hurt); and sadness (includes disappointment, grief, hurt, and sense of loss). The research showed that these

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121 David H. Leung, "Research Addresses 'Silent Exodus,'" *MB Herald* (November 20, 2015), https://mbherald.com/english-ministry-crisis-chinese-churches/.

This data was generated in the findings and included in Todd's PhD study in Appendix B (Matthew R. S. Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents in Ethno-religious Communities Who Have Been Impacted by Generational Assimilation" [PhD diss., Bakke Graduate University, 2023]).

122 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents." See Appendix B, tables A28, B29, B82, B83, B84, and Appendix C pre-focus group questionnaire table C22, "Why the Next Generation Leaves," found in Appendix C raw data.

123 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 20, 261. Impact definitions: Emotionally—feelings, upset, fear, absence of harmony, unhappy, emotional experience. Socially—embarrassment, saving face in community. Spiritually—impacts on faith, belief, hope, willingness to serve, and connectedness to God, community, and family (494).

124 Todd, "Recommendation and Conclusions," in "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 21. Transformational Interventions, Strategies, and Solutions from Recommendations to Help Impacted Parents, 280–81.

125 See tables B27, B28, B32, and B34 on how CBC Exodus of the Chinese church affects the OBC parents—in Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents in Ethno-religious Communities Who Have Been Impacted by Generational Assimilation."

emotional impact themes are internalized and manifested and may lead to a sense of failure in parenting.[126]

The Chinese culture is a shame-and-honor culture, so when Chinese youth leave their ethnoreligious community, this can embarrass the parents, especially if they are serving in leadership positions. The practice of saving face in Chinese culture reportedly manifests in avoiding vulnerability, transparency, and deeper levels of community related to embarrassing family matters. Parents tend to conceal from the faith community what they are experiencing. They often become less willing to serve in leadership positions and either withdraw from serving or leave for another church.[127]

Parents also reported feeling less connected to God, community, and family. Social impact further manifests in parents feeling judgment, stigma, shame, blame, guilt, and failure;[128] they may alternatively blame themselves, their spouse, or the church.[129] Survey participants reported observing parents suffering in silence[130] and blaming church staff.[131] Participants also noted that parents struggle with regret and feeling helpless. Some of the feelings come from their own inner internalizations of shame-and-honor culture values, and some stem from social interaction in their communities. Their confidence is shaken as to the extent that preaching continues to apply to their families and youth. Parents might be helped in shifting away from an expectation that they can precisely determine how the church's ministry shapes their families and toward a broader sense of the probable outcomes of ministry.

C. Missional Implications Regarding the Silent Exodus

Research participants broadly agreed that there has been a deficit of caring ministry to deal with the impact of the Silent Exodus within Chinese churches. Recommendations for reducing harmful impact on parents who are part of a shame culture included the following:

- Reduce stigma by recalling a theology of grace;

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126 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 5. Clergy Categories of Impact Based off the Clergy Top Findings List, 219.

127 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table C124. Comparison Chart of Three Focus Groups on the Word and Phrase Comparisons, 751–52.

128 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table C124. Comparison Chart of Three Focus Groups on the Word and Phrase Comparisons, 751–52.

129 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 5, 219, Table C124, 751.

130 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 7. Summary of Top Five Thematic Findings from OBC Parents' Surveys, 222.

131 Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents," Table 5, 219, Table C124. Comparison Chart of Three Focus Groups on the Word and Phrase Comparisons, 751–52.

- Break the code of silence; limit the effects of shame and comparison and help congregants be more open about their lives and struggles. This could be done through things like training parent mentors, teaching, counseling, and creating safe spaces for listening.
- Convene workshops at which parents could work through their difficulties together.

It is imperative that Chinese churches equip parents with a theology of family and parenting in the life cycle to help them understand why youth leave ethnoreligious communities and why parents are impacted.

The Ongoing Mission of MB Chinese Churches in Canada: Addressing the Silent Exodus

Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brethren (CCMB) churches in Canada share a common history rooted in the immigration experience and founding of congregations that function not only in the traditional sense of a spiritual community but also as a cultural hub, helping families cope and acculturate in their new country. Henry and Sara Classen and Enoch and Grace Wong were foundational personalities within this group of church plants, providing a missionary legacy that capitalized on the Chinese immigration and resulted in rapid church growth; they could be viewed as pivotal to the present work in the Chinese MB church in Canada. They served the purpose of being missional to Chinese diaspora families during one phase of the life cycle of the Chinese churches.

Now the CCMB are in a different life-cycle stage, with new evolving spiritual/social needs of the Chinese diaspora in Canada. The development of language-based congregations in the Chinese church has brought new opportunities to address an underdeveloped theology of culture, an emphasis on ethnicity, and the missionary nature of the church. New challenges have also arisen in this context, foremost of which has been the so-called Silent Exodus of the second generation, precipitated by acculturation to the host culture as the Chinese church has entered a new phase of its life cycle.

The Chinese MB churches in Canada can and must learn from the past fifty years of history, adjusting their mission strategies to not only meet the new waves of immigrant families in 2023 but also address the missionary challenge of generational assimilation of the second generation into the Canadian host culture. Creating new Anabaptist communities in MBCCA churches today demands addressing the impact of the Silent Exodus of emerging adults on the health and mission of the church.

Notably, this qualitative study is the first to examine how Chinese parents are impacted by the exodus of their youth from church. This original contribution to the gap in knowledge corroborates that parents are variably impacted emotionally, spiritually, and socially on an intensity spectrum by generational assimilation when youth abandon their ethnoreligious communities and faith.

The study can serve as a resource to the Chinese church because it reveals a need for the church to improve their support systems for impacted parents—a need that typically is exacerbated if more than one child leaves the church. The Silent Exodus affects both parents and the mission of the entire MB Chinese church in Canada, making it imperative that parents be equipped and leaders strategize on how to address caring ministry, shame culture, and the scope of impact on parents.[132]

Appendix

MBCCA Church Plants

- 1989 - Abbotsford Chinese Christian Church; Vancouver Chinese MB Church
- 1991 - Tri-City Chinese Christian Church
- 1995 - South Vancouver Pacific Grace MB Church
- 1997 - North Shore Pacific Grace MB Church; North Shore Bethel Christian MB Church; Vancouver Christian Logos Church
- 1998 - Pacific Grace Mandarin Church
- 2005 - Richmond Pacific Grace MB Church; North Shore Pacific Grace Mandarin Church
- 2006 - Maple Ridge Pacific Grace Mandarin Church

North Shore Pacific Grace MB Church

Although each of the MBCCA church plants has an exceptional story that can be accessed on the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online website,[133]

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132 A discussion on the recommendations in this study are outside the scope of this article but can be accessed for strategies that can be used to minimize the impact of generational assimilation and contribute to healthier parent and family ministry.

The full study can be accessed by permission through Bakke Graduate University, Dallas, Texas, Matthew R. S. Todd, "Empowering Chinese Canadian Parents in Ethno-religious Communities Who Have Been Impacted by Generational Assimilation" (PhD diss., Bakke Graduate University, 2023).

133 See Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Welcome_to_GAMEO.

the North Shore Pacific Grace MB Church growth story is one that was born out of deep hardship for the church planter.[134]

The church work was started September 1, 1997,[135] by To Wang Hui, who interned with Pacific Grace MB church under David Chan (1994–1997) as an "associate pastor in Cantonese ministry."[136] He was supported by some people from Pacific Grace North and South site mission departments and a "few core families in the [North Shore] vicinity."[137] Backing also came from the Board of Church Extension in the BCMB. In 1998 the church was registered. By 2000 To Wang Hui was ordained (with Rev. Enoch Wong present).

In 2004 To Wang Hui was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and later liver cancer. Despite these difficulties the church grew in "quality and quantity."[138] To Wang Hui's legacy is a thriving Cantonese ministry currently led by Rev. Peter Teh, and a robust English ministry with the most recent English ministries pastor being Eileen Li.

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134 See To Wang Hui, *A Hot Stream Beneath the Frozen Man*, trans. by Priscilla Yuk Kit Yung (Vancouver, BC: Eternal Media Inc., 2009).

135 Hui, *A Hot Stream*, 154.

136 Hui, *A Hot Stream*, 6.

137 Hui, *A Hot Stream*, 62.

138 Hui, *A Hot Stream*, 85.