Believing through belonging: a sociological study of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain

Believing through Belonging: A Sociological Study of Christian Conversion of Chinese Migrants in Britain

by

Xinan Li

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

December 2018

Abstract

This study is the first in-depth sociological inquiry into Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, through the examination of different pathways to and stages of conversion to Christianity among contemporary Chinese migrants. In the last four decades, the rapid growth of Christianity among the Chinese worldwide has also sparked a growth in academic research. The Chinese has become the fourth largest ethnic minority group in Britain. However, their religious attachments and experiences have hitherto received scant scholarly attention.

The study seeks to fill the identified research gap by providing explorative sociological accounts of the socio-religious dynamics of the Chinese Christian communities in Britain, with a main focus on the issue of religious conversion. It draws on social scientific theories of religious conversion to develop a sequential framework for the documentation of typical conversion trajectories among Chinese Christian converts in Britain. The study takes a qualitative approach, employing in-depth interviews and multi-sited ethnography as the main investigative instruments, documenting three stages, namely, encounter, initiation and commitment, in Christian conversion. It proposes a thesis of believing-through-belonging for the understanding of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. Moreover, the thesis points to the commitment-centred conversion, as promulgated by Chinese migrant Christian institutions and practiced by individual Chinese Christians, as a key to understand the continuous growth of Chinese Christian communities in Britain.

Acknowledgement

My four years of PhD study has been a journey of *descensus ad inferos*. The immense transformation in my intellect and personality could not have taken place without all the generous help and support that I have received:

Special gratitude is extended to my supervisors, Dr Line Nyhagen and Dr Thoralf Klein, who are knowledgeable experts in their respective fields. They have embodied top-grade scholarship in their meticulous comments and corrections on my writings. They have patiently tolerated my ignorance and to a great extent encouraged me in my intellectual pursuit. I also thank Professor Sabina Mihelj, who kindly supervised my research in the first year. I thank Loughborough University, a truly world-class university, whose spirit of veritate, scientia, labore is engraved in my heart.

I thank Professor Paul Weller and Dr Alexandre Christoyannopoulos for acting as the external and internal examiners of this thesis.

Without friendship, these four years would have been meaningless. I am grateful to all the friends who have generously shared their stories with me. It is an honour and privilege to share the weight of their lives. I especially thank Dr Wu Zhang, the best friend of mine in Loughborough and a brother in Christ. The 'bromance' between us is beyond verbal expression. I am indebted to Dr Zhijia Yang, who has generously offered me financial support to make my field research possible. I also thank Mr and Mrs Burnard for offering me a part-time job over the years so that my humble living budget could be supplemented.

I thank those who have loved and cared for me, especially at the start of my study: Rev Chris Taylor, Rev Andy Thompson, and Fr Binu Palakapally of Loughborough University Chaplaincy, and also Fr Philip Sainter and Fr Paul Gillham of St Mary's Catholic Church in Loughborough. I also thank Fr Eamonn O'Brien who, although I encountered him by accident, offered me generous hospitality and great mentoring when I was in desperate need.

The family has always been the haven for me. It is my parents' selfless sacrifice that has enabled me to access good resources of education. Judged by the Chinese culture of filial-piety, I might not be a very good son for them as I have not been able to care well enough of the family. But I believe their sacrifice will not be in vain. My love is always with them and will be passed onto a future family of mine.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

This study is the first in-depth sociological inquiry into Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain[1] through the qualitative analysis of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants. Through semi-structured interviews with thirty Chinese migrant Christians and extensive ethnographic field research lasting for nine months, the research has explored and documented the social, religious, and cultural dynamics of the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. The research fills a knowledge gap in the existing studies of the Chinese in Britain, which is a lack of academic engagement of the religious aspect of the lives of the Chinese migrants. To set the stage for the research, this chapter firstly presents a case for the relevance of the social scientific research on Christianity and its intersection with the Chinese migration (in Britain in this research) from both academic and personal perspectives. Secondly, the aims and objectives, and the theoretical and methodological rationale for the design of the research will be explicated. The structure of the entire thesis with very brief introductions will be presented in the third section of the chapter.

1. Research background

Since the early 1980s, there has seen a resurgence of religion in China with the implementation of the Reform and Opening Policy (e.g., Overmyer, 2003; Madsen, 2010; Goosaert & Palmer, 2011; Yang, 2016). Among the five state-sanctioned religions in China (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism[2]), the phenomenal growth of Christianity often captures the headlines in Western media (e.g., Gardam, 2011; Anderlini, 2014; Philips, 2014). It is almost impossible to track the exact number of Christians in China. The Communist party-state, given its assertively secularist and atheist ideology, tends to underestimate the religious figures in general as a sign of its success in managing and

[1] I, the author, acknowledge that the thesis claims to cover 'Britain', while his field research has been conducted primarily in England, not Wales, and a little reference to Scotland. I contend that the focus of the thesis is the mainline Christian tradition, Evangelical Protestantism, adhered to by a majority of Chinese migrant Christians. This tradition can be represented through the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM), the earliest and largest ethnic Chinese Christian mission organisation in Britain, to which a large number of ethnic Chinese Christian institutions and individuals are affiliated. A contour of Chinese Christians in Britain can be found in Chapter Five of the thesis, and the sampling of ethnographic sites and participants for interviews can be found in Chapter Three on research methodology.

[2] Although Protestantism and Catholicism can be categorised into the broad Christian tradition, the Chinese state draws clear distinctions between the two in its official discourse. In this section, the term Christianity is used broadly to include many Christian traditions/denominations, such as Protestantism, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, etc. However, later in the thesis, the term Christian/Christianity is mostly used interchangeably with Protestant/Protestantism to denote a Christian tradition mostly adhered to by the majority of Chinese Christians.

controlling religion in contemporary China. According to the lately release Chinese State's whitepaper on religious affairs (Information Office of the State Council, 2018), there are 38 million Protestants and 6 million Catholics in China. However, the Pew Research Centre's (2011) figures show that there were approximately 58 million Chinese Protestants and nine million Chinese Catholics by 2010. Scholars who are optimistic about the growth of religion, particularly Christianity, such as Fenggang Yang (2014), predict that China will have become the world's largest Christian country by 2030 with over two hundred million Christians, which would account for 16% of the Chinese population.

The difference in statistical estimates can be influenced by different means of data collection, measurement and calculation. In the case of the religious statistics in China, one needs to take into account the political context, which is also the context for the production of social scientific data by China-based academics, to evaluate its reliability. Nevertheless, a wide range of journalistic and academic literature has affirmed the rapid growth of Christianity in China and among the world-wide Chinese population (e.g., Yang, 1999; Bays, 2003; Madsen, 2003; Nyíri, 2003; Lambert, 2006; Cao, 2010; Aikman, 2012, Dickson, 2013). In China, especially in recent years, Christianity has been growing rapidly and vastly in China's economically well-developed urban areas, which can be substantiated by the newly erected church buildings often with giant crosses at the top (e.g., Cao, 2010). Nevertheless, speaking from my personal experience, Christianity had never been part of my intellectual concern until a close relative of mine (Auntie Y) converted in 2012.

I was born into a non-religious family in a small city in Southwestern China, a region that is among the least economically developed regions in China. There is only one state-sanctioned Protestant Christian church, which can house approximately three hundred congregants. I visited the church several times on Sundays in 2013 and found the average size of the congregation attending the Sunday worship is relatively small, around 50 to100 people.

However, I did not realise the actual size of the Christian population in my hometown until I was invited to some Christian meeting places by Auntie Y. I was told that the state-sanctioned church functions like 'a banner for Christianity', meaning that although people may attend formal worship service at the official church, Christian activities such as Bible studies and fellowship meetings did not necessarily take place in the church. Rather, I found that there has been at least one Christian meeting place in each town or village surrounding the city, each with approximately ten to twenty worshippers. The organisational form of these

Christian meeting places resembles what has been described as a part of China's 'house church movement' (Cheng, 2003; see also Wielander, 2009; Fiedler, 2010; Lian, 2010; Koesel, 2013). While a few of these meeting places have been registered with and are affiliated to the state-sanctioned church, many tend to distance themselves from the official church by articulating distinctive 'orthodox' theologies and practices consistent with a literal interpretation of the Bible, emphasis on eschatology (e.g., the second coming of Christ, the imminent end of the world), and spiritual gifts (such as prayer healing, speaking in tongues).

In recollecting this memory, I find that I have shared the intellectual curiosity with a number of scholars of religious conversion in the 1950s to 1980s (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1967; Barker, 1984), which is how people can come to believe such things. As will be discussed in Chapter Three of the thesis, previous scholars of conversion have focused almost exclusively on the conversion to New Religious Movements (NRM) in the United States viewing it as the conversion to a specific religious ideology. Moreover, their assumption is that religious conversion would likely lead to a deviation from what can be characterised as the normative or majority beliefs and practices in a society. However, as Abel (2008:21) has pointed out, 'from a typical Chinese perspective', Christianity for many Chinese is in a sense a New Religious Movement in contemporary China. The Christian religion's organisational principle (belief-centred), the cultural context of the biblical language and narratives (its geographical origin in the Middle East), its theological/metaphysical assumptions (monotheism), just to name a few aspects, seem to be at odds with typical characteristics of what can be broadly construed as the *Chinese cultural-religious traditions*, e.g. the family-centred organisational principle[3], the Han-Chinese textual tradition, and polytheism/animism worldviews (cf. Yang, 1961; Feuchtwang, 2003; Chau, 2011). Thus, it was no wonder that I found Auntie Y's Christian conversion and her Christian beliefs and practices alien and foreign in the first place.

I came to a British university for the master's degree study in September 2012. A few months after my arrival, I was invited to a free café for international students hosted by some elderly English Christians at a local church. Thinking that Christianity was part of Western culture, I firstly attended a weekly English Bible study group, which was specifically targeting Chinese

[3] There is a religious dimension of family in China. As will be mentioned in Chapter five, Chinese values and cultural traditions can be passed down generation by generation through some embodied religious practices such as devotion and veneration of ancestors. Family, though differently organised, is important in Christianity too (see Chapter Five).

students, as an opportunity to learn more about Western culture. Having read the entire Christian Bible and attended the Bible study group for six months, I came to *believe* the Christian beliefs and received baptism at a local English church[4]. After gaining a master's degree in media and communication, I decided to shift my academic interest to the discipline of sociology with a focus on religion in 2014.

My subsequent studies in the sociology of religion have enabled me to translate my initial intellectual curiosity in sociological terms: how do people convert to Christianity? Furthermore, as an international student, I became more attentive to my role as a sojourner, i.e., a transitory migrant, in Britain, which can be a prelude for becoming a full immigrant to the country, as many Chinese migrants documented in this research would have been (see Chapters Five and Six for further illustration). The attentiveness to the different layers of my personal identity as a Chinese, a would-be migrant, and a Christian has helped to relate my initial intellectual curiosity about religious conversion to the issue of migration, particularly with regard to the Chinese in Britain, which have become the primary subject of investigation for this research.

As a preliminary inquiry at the initial stage of the research, I visited a number of Chinese Christian churches in England (especially London) and consulted experienced Chinese Christian ministers and laypeople to gain some basic information, such as the history and structure of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. In this preliminary study, I found that the Chinese Christians were in general very keen on sharing their 'faith journey' (See Chapter Seven for the practice of Christian witnessing), in which they often gave detailed accounts of 'how they have met the Lord' (Christian parlance, meaning the experience of Christian conversion, see Chapter Seven). According to a Chinese Christian minister, 'no one [Chinese] is born a Christian […] the Chinese churches are filled with converts' (interview with Paul, 1 May 2015). This remark corresponds to my observation that among my research participants, even those who were born into Christian families (some received infant baptism) have reported their experience of conversion in Christian terms such as 'recommitting to the Lord' and 're-born/born-again'. These observations have convinced

[4] Through four years' training in sociology, as well as my consistent personal reading and learning about Christian church history, theology, comparative religions, psychology and anthropology, at the point of writing-up the thesis, I find my personal beliefs and convictions have gone through a tremendous transformation. The transformation in my current perception and practice of faith (not necessarily Christian faith per se) has enabled me on the one hand being empathetic to the Christian experience of my research participants. On the other hand, it helps to create an intellectual distance from which I can remain critical to the subject that I have been studying for the doctoral project.

me of the importance of religious conversion in understanding the socio-religious dynamics among Chinese migrant Christians in Britain.

2. Research questions, aim, and methodological rationale

To understand the socio-religious dynamics in Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, the primary question, *why people convert*, can be operationalised in the following two questions for sociological investigation:

1) How and why do the Chinese migrants in Britain convert to Christianity?
2) What role does religious conversion play in building and sustaining various Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain?

As stated above, in my preliminary research I have identified the phenomenon of religious conversion as a unifying category leading the entire research and analysis. This research is oriented to the documentation and characterisation of the process of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants, through which many facets of the dynamic socio-religious culture of the Chinese Christian communities in Britain can be explored and incorporated into academic accounts. The present study closes the knowledge gap in the existing literature on the Chinese diaspora in Britain, in which the religious aspect, as an important part of lived experience of the Chinese migrants in the country, has been largely, if not entirely, overlooked. Inspired by Rambo (1993) and Gooren (2010), two prominent scholars of religious conversion, I develop a three-stage sequential model for the documentation and analysis of religious conversion substantiated in Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. Typical trajectories of conversion of the Chinese migrant Christians are presented in the empirical chapters according to this model. The theoretical model is potentially transferable to the understanding of the Christian conversion of other migrant communities in other national/cultural contexts. Furthermore, it is also open to amendments and revisions in the documentation and analysis of non-Christian religious conversion in later empirical studies.

This research takes a *qualitative approach* to the inquiry of the *lived dimension of religion*, which emphasises the study of 'religion as practiced and experienced by ordinary people in the contexts of their lived everyday lives', rather than merely focusing on the *belief dimension*, i.e., what people believe and how their beliefs can be prescribed by or be at odds with the beliefs transmitted by religious institutions (McGuire, 2008: 96). The present study employs what Berg (2007: 171-175) has called 'ethnographic strategies' to conduct the

investigation. According to Berg (ibid.: 172), regardless of the 'terminological preferences' of scholars of ethnography, the essential practice of ethnographic strategies is to place the researcher 'in the midst of whatever it is they study', so that the research can 'examine various phenomena as perceived by participants and represent these observations as accounts'. From a range of qualitative methods that can be used in an ethnographic study, two methods, *semi-structured interview* and *participant observation*, have been selected as the main investigative tools.

For this study, I have used the method of semi-structured interview to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the experience of migration and conversion of the participants through their verbal accounts. Thirty Chinese migrant Christian converts, as well as two English Christians who are experienced in evangelism among Chinese migrants, have been interviewed. According to scholars of conversion (e.g., Beckford, 1978; Snow & Machalek, 1984; Staples & Mauss, 1987; Jindra, 2014a), in most cases the converts tend to re-interpret their experience with a new frame of reference provided by their newfound religion, which is one of the rhetorical characteristics of conversion narratives. The accounts of religious conversion need to be examined in the respective contexts in which they are situated (see Chapter Three). Thus, apart from interviews, I have conducted participant observations in a range of different settings, such as church congregations, fellowships, Bible study groups, Christian camps and conferences, etc., where there is a constant presence and gathering of Chinese migrant Christians. The sampling of the multiple sites for ethnographic field work draws on the limited preceding literature on Chinese Christian communities in Britain (Liu, 1992; Nyíri, 2003; Dickson, 2013; Huang & Hsiao, 2015) and my personal contacts and connections with various Chinese migrant Christians in Britain. A triangulation of the empirical data with the preceding literature on Christianity in the Chinese diaspora in the British context and other national contexts (the United State, France, Germany) and my expertise in Chinese migration, religion and culture (especially Christianity) support the validity of this qualitative study.

3. Chapter plan

Having introduced the background, the research aim, the research questions, and methodological approaches of the research, I lay out the structure for subsequent chapters in the thesis.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter presents and discusses the literature that has been reviewed for the research. Provided with the aim and rationale of the research, a range of literature under the rubric of religion, migration, globalisation, race and ethnicity, and Christianity in Chinese diaspora are discussed in order to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the research. Literature on religion in contemporary Chinese and British societies is included in the chapter to provide context for the research.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first provides an overview of religion and migration in the era of globalisation, in the context of which new patterns of religious beliefs, practice, organisations and transmissions have emerged. Being an important contributor to contemporary transnational migration flows, the Chinese have migrated from China to North America and Europe where the Chinese are a minority. The global spread of Chinese diasporic communities has generated a scholarly discussion about the intersection of religion and migration in the emergence of new patterns in religious affiliation, religious transnationalism, and localised religious practices and conversion. In the second part of the chapter, the discussion of the preceding literature on religion, especially on Christianity in China and the Chinese diaspora in the West, helps to further establish the tradition of scholarship in which the research is situated. Finally, the changing religious landscape in contemporary Britain is briefly discussed, which on the one hand provides the local context in which the research is situated. On the other hand, it sheds light on the theoretical implications of this research: in Britain, where religious pluralism has become a reality with the continuous decline of institutional Christianity and the rise of the 'religious-nones' (cf. Lee, 2015; Woodhead, 2016), if migration in general is a source of religious plurality and vitality, can the Chinese migrant Christians be a force for Christian revival, as they themselves would have envisioned, in Britain and in Europe? This question will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three: Religious Conversion – The Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews a range of social-scientific studies on the phenomenon of religious conversion in light of the empirical data of this research. Key variables that have been commonly explored by preceding scholars of religious conversion, such as belief/worldview, identity, social network, and language, are identified and discussed. This thesis adopts Jindra's (2014a) definition of religious conversion which views the change of belief as the centre and prerequisite for changes that occur to the convert's identity, religious affiliation,

and language. It also acknowledges the shortcomings in preceding studies on conversion. Conventional analyses of religious conversion are 'preoccupied with linguistic practices and semantic regimes of converts while neglecting the embodied, sensual, and performative dimensions of conversion' (Williams, 2018: 2). I follow the emerging lived-religion approach, employing ethnographic strategies in the sociological inquiry, which not only focuses on ideas and perceptions, but also on the dimension of embodied, lived experience in conversion (e.g., the analysis of the experience of Christian encounter in Chapter Six).

Following scholars who have characterised religious conversion as a *process* (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1967; Rambo, 1999; Gooren, 2010) and in light of my empirical data, this chapter on the one hand identifies sociological, psychological, and religious factors, the interconnection and overlapping of which can influence the conversion process. The interplay between different factors can be presented as a network-like structure of religious conversion. On the other hand, the chapter also discusses different types of Chinese Christian converts drawing on Rambo's (1999) typology of religious conversion. Most importantly, this chapter develops a sequential model with three stages – *encounter, initiation,* and *commitment* – which provides the theoretical framework for the documentation and analysis of the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain in the empirical chapters from Chapter Six through Eight. Although contingencies can occur in a person's conversion trajectory (Gooren 2010), sequentially patterned stages of religious conversion marks important stages in the converted person's life.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter introduces and discusses the methodological rationale for my research. I have adopted a qualitative methodology and is grounded in the sociology of religion, as most of preceding research on religion in the Chinese diaspora has done. This methodology is useful in the in-depth exploration and documentation of the dynamic patterns in this emerging field of research. It enables the preliminary theorisation of a phenomenon (in my case, the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain). This chapter not only provides a theoretical foundation for the qualitative methodology, specifically the ethnographic strategies employed in my research, but also provides detailed accounts of the techniques regarding the sampling of individual participants and field sites, semi-structured interviews, and multi-sited participant observations. Moreover, this chapter explains how the qualitative data collected for this research is analysed through *thematic-network analysis* (Attride-

Stirling, 2001). A reflection on the methodology that focuses on contentions in the ethnography of religion is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five: The Chinese Christians in Britain – A Context

This chapter sets a historical and local context for subsequent presentations of empirical findings in the research of the Chinese migrants' Christian conversion. The chapter firstly outlines Chinese migration to Britain from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Chinese settlement in Britain has gone through over one century's change and transformation since the early 1800s. In the latest three decades, there has been a demographic change in the increasing Chinese population in Britain, which is a consequence of socio-economic and political changes in both the sending and receiving countries. Although the quest for understanding the Chinese migration has led to the emergence of related research, the religious aspect of the Chinese migrants in Britain has largely been overlooked in previous scholarly works. Thus, in this chapter, I draw on UK census statistics as well as my own research to present the religious composition of the Chinese in Britain. Furthermore, the chapter presents the structural characteristics of various types of Chinese Christian communities and the proselytising strategies promulgated and practiced among the Chinese migrant Christians which greatly contribute to the growth of the communities. A further sociological aspect, the gender dimension is also briefly covered in this chapter (see also in Chapter Nine for a discussion of future research directions).

Chapter Six: Encounter

This empirical chapter is the first of three empirical chapters. It examines the stage of *encounter* within the process of Chinese migrants' Christian conversion, according to the theoretical framework established in Chapter Three. In my sequential model of religious conversion, I contend that for a person to convert to a religion, he or she needs to have first and foremost encountered something (a piece of religious text, a religious artefact or building, etc.) about the religion or someone (a religious person, a religious group) of the religion. The primary religious encounter can in many ways influence many aspects in a person's conversion trajectory, such as his or her perceptions of the religion, engagement with its practices, and institutional affiliation with it. However, not all who have encountered Christianity would proceed on to conversion. This chapter draws on data from interviews and ethnography to explain how those who have encountered Christianity in various circumstances can continue their conversion trajectories. Following previous studies

(e,g.,Yang, 1998; Wang & Yang, 2006), I argue that the changes in larger social cultural contexts and the local social religious contexts are important factors influencing a person's conversion trajectory. Moreover, I observe a generational difference in the influence of different contextual factors in Chinese migrants' Christian conversion. I argue that while the older generation migrants seem to be influenced by drastically changing social cultural contexts in China before their migration to Britain, the Christian conversion of younger generation Chinese migrants tend to be influenced by the local social religious context in Britain.

Chapter Seven: Initiation

This chapter documents the second stage in the sequential conversion model, that of *initiation*. The Chinese migrants who have encountered Christianity under different circumstances and develops interest in the contents of the religion are likely to have proceeded in their conversion trajectories. Before making a commitment to the religion, they need to go through a transitional process in which tenets of the Christian faith, practices, and the communal aspect of Christianity can be introduced to them. This transitional stage is what I have identified as *initiation*, a term borrowed from anthropology (cf. van Gennep, 1960).

In this chapter, I capture the Chinese Evangelical Christian Culture (the CEC Culture), through which Christian beliefs and practices, and various faith communities are introduced to the potential converts. The CEC culture is characterised by the articulation of a unified Chinese identity, the representation of Protestant Evangelicalism, and the emphasis on Christian evangelism. I argue that although the stage of initiation is didactic in nature, different aspects of Christianity can be communicated and demonstrated to the potential converts by Chinese Christians in both institutional and everyday social settings. In the discussion of the initiation of potential Chinese converts, I focus on the practice of Christian witnessing, as one of the most important means for the Christians to perform and demonstrate their faith to the non-Christians. However, unlike previous studies that have focused more on the verbal forms of Christian witnessing, I argue that Christian witnessing needs to be understood as a collectively performed ritual in Chinese Christian context, which can influence potential convert's decision to convert. In my study, I identify the practice of prayer of decision (*juezhidaogao* 决志祷告) as a marker of the completion of Christian initiation for the Chinese Christian converts.

Chapter Eight: Commitment

Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants often does not end with the completion of initiation. For the new converts, they are required by certain religious teachings and the institutions to make further commitment, which is the 'culmination' of their conversion processes (Rambo, 1999: 168). Commitment is 'at the heart' of Christianity (Stark & Glock, 1968: 1). At *the stage of commitment*, the new converts are expected by the religious institutions to increase their intellectual understanding of the faith and their practice of the faith.

Through my research, I argue that a religious person's commitment needs to be developed through the cultivation of his or her belonging to the faith and to the faith-based communities, i.e., the cultivation of *religious belonging* and *communal belonging*. The religious belonging of Chinese Christian converts can be cultivated through their deepened understanding of and increased emotional attachment to their Christian faith. The cultivation of communal belonging can be achieved through the new Christian converts' increase in their practice of Christianity, especially the faith-informed ethics, such as love, care and voluntary service in community. Moreover, the converts' sense of belonging to faith-based communities is also a result of their constant negotiation and reconstruction of different layers of identities, through which their Christian identity often prevails among other identities. Proposing the thesis of *believing through belonging*, I argue that the commitment-centred Christian conversion, as promulgated by various Chinese Christian institutions and practiced by individual Chinese Christians, can explain the continuous growth of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This chapter revisits the aim, questions, and methodology, as well as key empirical findings. It summarises the entire thesis in the phrase *believing through belonging* as an overall characterisation of the Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants in Britain. The thesis emphasises the crucial role of commitment in the process of religious conversion, which is not only important for those who have gone through stages of encounter and initiation, but also key to understanding the role of religious conversion in sustaining the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. The chapter also points to three possible directions for future research, namely the further exploration of religious de-conversion/disaffiliation, the intersection of media and religion, and gender issues in the research on religion.

In the next chapter, the review of literature, will lay a theoretical foundation for the study.

Chapter Two: The Review of Literature

1. Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the literature that has been reviewed for the research. As stated in Chapter One, the project seeks to understand the dynamics of contemporary Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain primarily through the exploration of the phenomenon of religious conversion. Christian conversion, of various kinds and at different levels, constitutes a crucial part of the lived experience of many Chinese migrants in Britain. In this chapter, a range of literature under the rubric of religion, migration, globalisation, race and ethnicity, and Chinese diaspora is discussed in order to provide a theoretical foundation for the research. The literature on religion in contemporary Chinese and British societies is also included in this chapter to provide the local context in which the research is situated.

The second and third sections of this chapter provide an overview of religion and migration in the era of globalisation with a focus on religion in Chinese diaspora. Religion and migration are intertwined both historically and contemporarily. In the globalisation era, religion has crossed territorial borders of modern nation-states, migrating with its adherents globally. New patterns of religious beliefs, practices, organisations and transmissions emerge with the globalisation of religion. The Chinese have been part of the migration flows in the globalisation era, migrating from Chinese-majority societies in Asia to Chinese-minority societies such as in North America and Europe. The global spread of the Chinese diasporic communities has allowed scholars to explore new patterns of the intersections of religion and migration, such as the affiliation with traditional religions, religious transnationalism, the localisation of religious practices and religious conversion, of a particular people in different cultural context.

The fourth section provides contextual information that is key to situating this research. Statistically (see Chapter Five on the example of the UK), the Chinese can be construed as less religious than, if not the least religious among, many ethnic minority groups in the West. Although the present Chinese Communist state assertively promotes a secularist and atheistic ideology, China is by no means a non-religious country. This section firstly discusses contemporary academic engagement in religious issues in Chinese society with a focus on studies related to Christianity. The discussion then extends to studies of Christianity in the Chinese diaspora in the West.

In the fifth section, I briefly engage in the contemporary theoretical debate in British academia on the changing religious landscape in modern and contemporary Britain, to provide a broad local context in which this research is situated. This debate has occurred in context of two paradigm shifts within the contemporary sociology of religion – from the classical thesis of disenchantment/secularisation, to de-secularisation/sacralisation, to religious pluralism. The main theoretical debate addressed by the thesis revolves around the issues of believing and belonging. While the debate has yet to be concluded, in recent years, the phenomenon of *non-religion* has emerged to become a new focus for many scholars of religion. In this complex picture, the relations between religion and ethnic minority groups and migrants have always seemed closely intertwined, as argued in the first section. Nevertheless, the Chinese constitute a large and emerging ethnic minority group in Britain for which religious aspects largely remain under-researched. This project is thus explorative in nature, joining international scholarship in researching religion in Chinese society and diaspora in general, and contributing to the British academia as a piece of original empirical research that has the potential to inform and direct further scholarly inquiries.

2. Religion and migration: an overview

'People are on the move, so is their faith' (Connor, 2012: 7). The movement of religion, with its adherents crossing territorial borders, has been a historical as well as a contemporary phenomenon in both the East and the West. In the context of globalisation, religion and migration have been increasingly intertwined through the spread of modern technologies in areas such as transportation and communication, which have enabled greater connectivity and mobility of people than in the pre-modern times (cf. Beyer, 1994; Castles, 2002; Kivisto, 2014). In the present, the economically well-developed and politically stable countries in Western and Northern Europe and North America have been major receiving countries of global migrants for over half a century (Connor, 2014). According to the report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012), in the year of 2010, among the estimated 214 million international migrants, nearly half belong to the Christian tradition (49%), followed in second place by Muslim migrants (27%). Moreover, only 9% of the world's migration population are identified as religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

The terms 'religion' and 'religious', which are used by social scientists as analytical categories, are dynamic terms with different conceptual variations. The terms can be used to characterise different aspects, such as cultures, identities, relationships, power, and practices

of the lived experience of religious believers, practitioners, and adherents (Woodhead, 2011). Migrant religion is as dynamic as both the activity of migration and the phenomenon of religion, which undergoes moving, changing, integrating and transferring constantly (Connor, 2014). The dynamism of migrant religion is therefore a challenging subject for scholars. On the other hand, religion has received 'considerably less attention' compared to other aspects of migration such as class, race and ethnicity and gender in social-historical works up until the last three decades (Kivisto, 2014: 6).

In the research on migrant religion, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have contributed to identifying patterns and generating theories. The report by the Pew Research Centre (2012) mentioned above employs a quantitative methodology and uses large databases on international migration, thus enabling researchers to produce useful insights into global migrants' origins, destinations, and religious affiliations. Nevertheless, due to the insufficiency of worldwide census or survey data, and preconceived assumptions in their interpretation, there can be limitations and biases in such large-scale quantitative research in migrant religion. For example, the report has used the an 'origin-proxy' method, assuming that 'the religious composition of emigrants is the same as the religious composition of the general population in their country of origin' (Pew Research Centre, 2012: 74). However, this assumption can undercount the Christians emigrating from the Middle East, or the various religious people from Asian countries, such as India and China, where conventional categories of religion might not be directly applicable. It can also undercount those who start to adhere, i.e., convert, to a new religion after migration.

The quantitative methodology in researching migrant religion is useful in identifying trends and patterns of the migrants' religious affiliation, religiosity, and the interplay of religious identity, practice, economic and social status, levels of education, organisational characteristics, and religious contexts of reception countries (e.g., van Tubergen, 2006; van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011; Massey & Higgins, 2011; Connor, 2014). For example, in studies such as that by van Tubergen & Sindradóttir (2011), which focuses on immigrants and their religious patterns in eight Western countries, the immigrants of high religiosity are more likely to be unemployed and less educated at the individual level in host societies. At the contextual level, the religious context or the 'religiosity of the natives' of the reception country 'positively affect' immigrant religiosity (ibid). Further, the immigrants' religious commitment is also affected by the 'levels of modernisation' of the sending countries, indicating that the higher level of modernisation, the lower level of religious commitment

(van Tubergen, 2006). In addition, the disputed high religiosity of women is not generalisable for immigrants (ibid.). Furthermore, Massey and Higgins' (2011) study of the effect of immigration on religious belief and practice in the United States challenges the long-held view that migration is a 'theologising experience' (Smith, 1978: 1175). Massey and Higgins' (2011: 1371) use the data of the 2003 US New Immigrant Survey to point out that migration can be 'a disruptive event' that 'alienates' the immigrants rather than 'theologising them' in the context of the increasingly religiously and ethnically pluralistic and diversified global flows of migration. On the other hand, a number of preceding studies (e.g., Greeley, 1971; Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000) have regarded religion as a social institution which provides material and non-material resources that can mediate the migrants' adaptation and integration in the host society.

Connor's (2014) study, which focuses on patterns of immigrant faith in Western countries as major host societies for large numbers of immigrants, correlates the variables of religious identity, practice (primarily measured by attendance of religious organisations), and the immigrants' social economic status. These variables are cross-compared and interpreted in the general social-religious context of the receiving countries, in which Connor notices the great influence of various religious organisations on migration, characterising the highly diversified and complicated patterns of migrant religion as 'moving, changing, integrating and transferring faith' (Connor, 2014: 8). Nevertheless, specific patterns of migrant religion always need to be analysed in regard to the specific background of a migrating people, the religion they adhere to, and the specific society they immigrated to. The only possible sweeping generalisation that can be made regarding migrant religion seems to be that it will remain an 'important part of the world's public conversation so long as people are crossing international borders and religion is an important part of people's lives' (ibid.: 127). To sum up, the quantitative studies of religion on the one hand need nuanced analysis of statistical data; on the other hand, they invite more qualitative studies to provide local case studies to enrich the field of migrant religion.

A number of research projects of different sizes committed to the understanding of the contemporary circumstances of migrant religion have been pioneered in the United States, producing a collection of local case studies from the perspective of a single race and ethnicity or religion (e.g., Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; 2002). According to these studies, the US is a country built upon the foundation of a large amount of immigrants, initially from Europe, and successively from Latin America, Africa and Asia. With various

forms and expressions of Christianity being the majority religion, the US also has become a seedbed for accommodating a diversity of minority religious and spiritual traditions and practices, some of which have their origins and sources in the *world religions*, such as the Abrahamic and oriental traditions, while some have their roots in the local popular religious beliefs and practices of the places of origin of the migrants. Many of the latter religions have taken on the organisational principles modelled after Protestant Christian congregations (e.g., Pew Research Centre, 2010; Kivisto, 2014). In recent years, a large research programme, the Religion and Society Research Programme (2007 to 2013) was commissioned by the UK's research councils (AHRC/ESRC) in collaboration with a range of UK's universities. Among the 75 original research projects[5], there are case studies covering major migrant religious groups in the UK, including Muslim communities with Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Middle Eastern backgrounds, Hindu and Sikh communities with South-Asian background, Christian communities with African backgrounds, as well as Buddhist and other spiritual communities with East-Asian backgrounds.

Today, the advancement of transportation technology has enabled people to travel more conveniently and frequently than ever before. Since the mid-1990s, scholars have started to use the terms 'transnational' and 'transnationalism' to characterise 'actual, ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources – as well as regular travel and communication – that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalised ethnic community' (Vertovec, 2002: 12). Other terms, such as transnational migration, transmigration, immigrant transnationalism, religious transnationalism, transnational religion, etc., have been popularised in many studies (e.g., Vertovec, 1997, 2002; van der Veer, 2001; Kivisto, 2001; Levitt, 2001, 2007, Wuthnow & Offut, 2008, Vásquez, 2008; Waldinger, 2013). As Waldinger (2013: 759) has noted, migration is 'an inherently transitional process', in which many back-and-forth moves and exchanges always occur. Nevertheless, the high fluidity, mobility, and connectivity of the phenomenon of transnational migration and its intersection with religion has posed theoretical and methodological challenges to scholars.

Scholars have generally adopted two approaches to study the religions of transnational migrants, namely, the network-approach (e.g., Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2002) and the lived-

[5] For a list of projects under Religion and Society Research Programme, see: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/projects/overview

religion approach (e.g., Levitt, 2007). The network approach aims to understand the material and non-material religious connections of individuals and institutions across territorial boundaries of established nation-states in modernity. For example, in a volume edited by Ebaugh & Chafetz (2002), Yang (2002) uses a network approach to analyse transnational Chinese Christian communities. He finds three-layered transpacific networks formed by contacts between individuals, single churches, and parachurch organizations connecting migrants in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China to counterparts who are located primarily in the US, and Canada. However, the network analysis of transnational religion risks to neglect of the 'qualitative nature of relationships' that comprise the network structure itself (Vertovec, 2003: 647). Levitt (2001: 6) points out that 'transnational religious practices also involve the transformation of identity, community, and ritual practices'. In her important work *God Needs No Passport*, Levitt (2007) draws on the lived-religion approach to comparatively study Pakistani, Irish, Hindu and Brazilian immigrants living in the Boston area, revealing how the new immigrants are living their religion in transnational ways in the US (see Chapter Three for a further explication of the lived-religion approach).

As scholarship in the study of transnational migrant religion is extended, scholars cannot afford to favour one approach over another. As the attempts of formulating a 'universal and a priori' definition of religion and its related concepts often fail, scholars such as Vásquez (2008: 156) call for a re-conceptualisation and re-structuring of existing theoretical concepts and models. In his essay, he firstly identifies the theoretical languages as 'clusters of metaphors' used by preceding scholars to describe the constituents and relations in transnational religion, such as the 'spatial metaphor', which tends to emphasise the localities of migration and religion, the 'hydraulic trope', which describes transnational religion as flows, confluences, and streams, and the 'network' model, which focuses on the connectivity of different constituents (Vásquez, 2008: 165-166). He then draws on Bourdieu's (1977) 'praxis-oriented approach' and Foucault's (1980) notion of the intertwinement of power in 'the production of knowledge and selfhood' and argues for a multi-layered network analysis of transnational religion, or, in his terminology, 'a networks approach' (Vásquez, 2008: 169-170).

Vásquez's (2008) attempts to argue for a theoretically balanced analysis of transnational migrant religion, in which research needs to identify not only the structural changes such as locality, relationality and connectivity, but also to notice the 'phenomenological realities' (White, 1992, cited in Vásquez, 2008: 169) such as worldviews, beliefs, narratives,

discourses and emotions that are involved in the phenomenon. Vásquez (2008), as well as scholars such as Smilde (2004) and Everton (2015), who have also advocated the network-analysis approach, have inspired me with the visual presentation of the network-like structure of religious conversion in Chapter Three (Figure 2). In this thesis, I repeatedly refer to the lived-religion approach, as will be further explicated in Chapter Three on the theoretical framework. Having located my research within the scholarship of religion, migration, and transnationalism, the next section delves further into an emerging sub-field of migrant religion, that of religion in the Chinese diaspora.

3. Religion in the Chinese diaspora

The Chinese are 'special' in that they have migrated to virtually 'everywhere in the world' (Tan, 2015: xviii). Today, around fifty million Chinese are living in diaspora across the globe (my estimation according to Tan, 2013: 3-4 and Zhuang, 2013: 40). As a point of departure for this section, there is a need to briefly discuss the notion of *Chinese diaspora*. The term 'Chinese diaspora' has been popularised by scholars in the study of the 'Chinese living outside mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan', which can be conveniently described as '*Chinese lands*'. It refers to ethnic Chinese migrating, sojourning, and living globally (Tan, 2013: 2). According to Li and Li (2013), although the English term 'overseas Chinese' has a long history of usage, it often falls short in capturing a nuanced distinction of different identities among the diasporic Chinese. Within the Chinese diaspora, subtle distinctions are made between notions such as *huaqiao* (华侨, Chinese sojourners), (*haiwai*) *huaren* ([海外]华人, Overseas Chinese), *huayi* (华裔, of Chinese descent), and *zhongguoren* (中国人, Chinese nationals, sometimes citizens of PRC) (Li & Li, 2013: 15-28; see also Yang, 1999: 163-171). Furthermore, ethnic minority groups such as Tibetans and Uyghurs are often overlooked in the Chinese state's official policies and scholarly discourses, which tend to promote or described a 'transnational ethnic unity' among the 'overseas Chinese ethnic minorities' (Barabantseva, 2012: 78-79).

As Vertovec (1997: 278) has reminded us, with its etymological root in reference to the Jewish communities dispersed throughout the world, there can be three layers of meanings for the term *diaspora* in current usage, namely, diaspora as a 'social form', a 'type of consciousness', and 'a mode of cultural production'. And diasporas may emerge from migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporas, but not all diasporas develop transnationalism (Vertovec

2000:12). Further, 'not all migrants express a sense of belonging to a diaspora and that not all diasporas engage in concrete transnational activities' (Levitt, 2001: 5). An example of this complexity can be demonstrated through the group of *huayi* among the overseas Chinese, who may be (partly) of Chinese descent, but are not necessarily engaged in transnational activities between their countries of residence and of origin, and whose identity of being Chinese can be described as 'marginal' and 'unstable'(Yang, 1999: 169-171; also in some cases in my own research).

The subject of this research, the Chinese Christian communities in Britain, can include a wide range of population groups who may self-identify with some sort of *Chineseness*, whether national, cultural, political, or racial and ethnic. For the sake of convenience, I use the term *Chinese migrants* which is loosely based on four criteria to characterise the *Chineseness* as: 1) of Han Chinese birth/descent; 2) residing outside the 'Chinese lands' as defined above; 3) sharing a cultural identification as Chinese; and 4) having ancestral roots that can be traced back to China. These criteria will be revisited in the methodology chapter, Chapter Four, Section 2.2 on the sampling.

While research on contemporary Chinese transnationalism has increased in recent years (e.g., Chan, 1997; Pang & Lau, 1998; Pieke, 2007; Wickberg, 2007; Benton, 2003, 2011; Barabantseva, 2012), there is limited scholarly engagement with the religious aspect of transnational Chinese migrants (Tan, 2015). Having reviewed a large bulk of literature (e.g., Yang, 1999, 2002; Guest, 2003; Nagata, 2005; Benton & Gomez, 2008; Cao, 2010, 2013; Palmer & Goossaert, 2011; Palmer, Shive, & Wickeri, 2011; Tan, 2013, 2015; Tam, 2017), I find that the scholarly discussion of religion in the worldwide Chinese diaspora can, in one way, be classified according to different religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and a diversity of Chinese *folk or popular religious traditions*. Also, these discussions can be categorised according to the geographical areas where prominent flows of Chinese migrants and diasporic communities can be identified, such as South and Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, the American continent including Canada, the US and South America, and Western and Southern Europe.

In contemporary studies of religion in the Chinese diaspora, the relations between religion and the Chinese state form one of the most prominent topics. The development of the discussions of various 'religious questions in modern China' is deeply entangled with the turbulent process of the modernisation of China, as extensively presented in works such as

Mayfair Yang's edited volume *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (2008) and Goosaert and Palmer's important work *The Religious Question in Modern China* (2011). Although religious convictions can be a motivational cause for migration (Anderson, 2016), some cases of contemporary Chinese migration, such as the exiles of Tibetans (practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism) in India and the West (e.g., Goldstein & Kapstein, 1998; Shakya, 2000), the exiles of Uyghurs (practitioners of Islam) in the West and some Middle-Eastern countries (e.g., Gladney, 1991; Israeli, 2002), and practitioners of Falungong and similar *new religions and spiritualities* (e.g., Madsen, 2000) are both religiously *and* politically motivated.

There are also works dedicated to the understanding of 'modern Chinese religious transnationalism' from the perspectives of religious affiliations, cultural heritage and practices, and transnational activities and networks (e.g., Huang, 2003: 2005; Huang, Laliberté, Nyíri, Ownby, Weller, 2003[6]; Tan, 2015). Although, Weller (2003) has commented, most religious groups of the Chinese people, whether at home or abroad, do not have political agendas, their presence in different societies can have political implications. For example, the Taiwanese Buddhist organisation *Compassion Relief* needs to adapt to local authorities' regulations when operating in mainland China (Laliberté, 2003). And the Chinese state's repression of Falungong, which has eliminated the religion from mainland China and forced its transplantation and expansion to non-Chinese territories demonstrates the modern state's repressive power over religion (Ownby, 2003). The political repression and persecution of Falungong has also become a push factor for the transnationalisation of the religious movement.

Further, these works have to a great extent provided local case studies of the negotiation and contestation of Chinese ethnic identity, attempts of localisation, and globalisation of religious practices and ideals. For example, Chinese migrant Christian communities in (Eastern) Europe tend to articulate Chinese ethnic identity as the leading characteristic of their groups, while proclaiming a universal Christian message (Nyíri, 2003). The Chinese in Spain, the Philippines and Peru, where Catholicism is a majority religion, tend to practice a kind of religious syncretism, employing the Catholic practice of veneration of saints and the Virgin Mary as a means of localisation of their popular religious traditions and practices (Torruella,

[6] *The European Journal of East Asian Studies*, volume 2, issue 2 published in 2003 is a special issue on Chinese religious transnationalism.

2015: 329-350; Dy & See, 2015: 103-146; Lausent-Herrera, 2015: 185-240). And for the early generations of Chinese migrants, especially those from China's southeast coastal areas, their local deities, such as Mazu (妈祖), Guandi (关帝), some popular Buddhist and Daoist images and statues, especially the practice of ancestor worship, have travelled with them across borders (e.g., Madsen & Siegler, 2011: 227-231). These popular Chinese religious practices are often performed and expressed in a communal rather than institutional manner; they are often *diffused* in everyday and private realms and can barely be observed in formal and public arenas. The concept of 'diffused religion' is used by C.K. Yang (1961: 20) contrasting with the Euro-centric, Christian-centric notion of 'institutional religion'. Yang (1961) argues that instead of developing into institutionalised religions, the religiosity of the Chinese is widely diffused in many levels of the Chinese social hierarchy, representing and informing Chinese people's moral values and conducts.

The lack of institutional mediation in religion, which differs from the Christian tradition in the West, can be one of the reasons for the relatively low integration and assimilation of first-generation Chinese migrants into the host societies in Europe, and possibly worldwide (Nyíri, 2003: 267). Nevertheless, the strong but fluid sense of being Chinese is very likely driving the birth and growth of clusters of Chinese migrant communities worldwide, some of which have emerged as Chinatowns. Since the 1980s, the world has observed a new wave of Chinese migrants, who are often identified as *new Chinese migrants* (e.g., Yang, 1999; Guest, 2003; Tan, 2015). They are often described as contrasting with the earlier generations – more mainlander Chinese (not only from south and southeast coastal areas), better educated, working in white-collar jobs rather than as undocumented manual labourers in restaurants and laundries, as did older generations of Chinese migrants (e.g., Pang & Lau, 1998; Parker & Song, 2007; Lam, Sales, D'Angelo, Montagna, & Lin, 2009). Weller (2003: 325) has observed that most Chinese migrants only become religious after leaving the homeland. My research also supports this observation. Among religious Chinese migrants in the West, Christianity seems to be more attractive than traditional Chinese religions to many.

So far in this chapter, I have reviewed literature on religion, migration, and some contemporary case studies of religion in Chinese diaspora in general. This helps to locate my research in the broader fields of religion and migration. The important issues, such as belief, practice, identity, and transnational activities and networks, identified in the review, have informed the data collection, sorting, and analysis in later empirical chapters. My research is

in a sense transnational in nature. Although methodologically I did not travel back and forth between China and Britain, the research aims to access the experiences of contemporary Chinese migrants, their Christian conversion and community dynamics in Britain, which necessarily leads to the discussion of the social-religious dynamics in both sending and receiving countries, contemporary China and the UK. The next section looks closer at the scholarship on Christianity in both mainland China and Chinese diaspora in the West.

4. Religion, Christianity, contemporary Chinese society and Chinese diaspora in the West

4.1. Religion and the study of Christianity in China

There have been abundant scholarly attempts to document, analyse, and interpret a diversity of religious traditions in Chinese society, from Max Weber's classic *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (1951), Macel Granet's *The Religion of the Chinese People* (1975), to C.K. Yang's (1961) sociological classic *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. One of the major tasks for the early scholars was to offer theoretical conceptualisations of religion, its characteristics, and functions in Chinese society. Contemporary scholars such as Goosaert and Palmer (2011) and Lu (2013) have come to realise that the notion of religion, initially introduced into modern China as a Western or Christian-centric term, has gone through a process of construction largely led by the intellectual elites and reinforced by the state. Moreover, the construction of religion in political, public, and academic discourses has always been associated with various political agendas in modern China. For example, the current Chinese Communist state, holding primarily a Marxist view on religion, has officially recognised five religions, namely Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. The state recognition and sanctioning of religion manifests an oversimplified categorisation of religion, neglecting various popular religious practices *diffused* in China's society.

At the same time, the academic study of religion has also been politicised in many ways (e.g., Yang, 2004; Fan, 2009). In the study of Christianity, which has always been construed as a foreign religion, a kind of Western ideology, and a cultural heterodoxy in both Chinese official and public discourse, the work of many Chinese scholars is 'informed by notions of political correctness' (Fiedler, 2010: 80). While many would 'laud' the resurgence of religion

in contemporary China as a result of the state's policy of protecting religious freedom[7], their works also reflect the restrictive political context with regards to matters of religion (ibid.). An example can be found in the continuous 'reasoning and politics of the debate on Christian population in China' (Huang & Zhai, 2011: 315). While the white paper released by China's State Council (2018) recognises near 200 million religious individuals in China (whereof 44 million Christians including Protestants and Catholics), the population of China's Christians, according to various resources using different methods of counting, can vary between 10 and 100 million (Huang & Zhai, 2011).

Given this highly politicised context, the empirical study of Christianity in contemporary China has been growing since the 1980s (Huang, 2009). According to Huang (2009), prior to the 2000s, the academic study of Christianity in China largely remained within the disciplines of the humanities, such as philosophy, history and literature. Social-scientific studies of Christianity have notably emerged since the 2000s (ibid.). Since the 1980s, there has been an 'upsurge of religion' in mainland China, in which the growth of Christianity is most phenomenal (Madsen, 2010). This upsurge not only changes the religious landscape in rural China (e.g., Liang, 1999), where Christianity is gaining large numbers of adherents; it also changes the urban religious landscape by attracting many social elites (e.g., Yang, 2005).

Scholars from both Chinese and non-Chinese backgrounds have engaged in the rapid growth of Christianity in China, offering analysis and interpretations from different respects. From a macro perspective, many scholars tend to attribute the growth of Christianity in China to the rapid and overall social changes occurring in Chinese society, such as the ideological vacuum after the disillusionment with communism, the collapse of traditional moral structures, and the relative liberalisation of religious regulations and policies (e.g., Hunter & Chan, 2007). Some point to the relation between Christianity and Western modernity, which seems to be attractive for the emerging middle-class in China's urban areas (e.g., Yang, 2005; Cao, 2010). Historians tend to situate the phenomenon in China's broader social-cultural history, analysing the dynamics of ruptures and consistencies between Christianity and Chinese cultural heritages (e.g., Lian, 2010; Bays, 2012). At the meso and micro levels, some scholars have turned to the new communal structures offered by Christianity. Although, historically, there have existed intermediate social structures between the levels of family-centred

[7] For the latest whitepaper *China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief* released by China's State Council in April 2018, see: http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm.

community and state in China, this intermediate structure has been destroyed since the seizing of power by the Communists in 1949. Christianity provides alternative structures to the traditional Chinese social structure, which also appeals to individuals' psychological needs and imagination of modernity (e.g., Fiedler, 2010; Liang, 2004).

In summary, to borrow Fenggang Yang's *market metaphor* (2006), the religious market in contemporary China has been thriving for four decades since late 1970s. Although political restrictions remain in both the religious and public domains, a growing number of scholars have conducted solid empirical research exploring the dynamics and the social, cultural, ethical and political implications of the phenomenal growth of Christianity among other state-sanctioned religions in China. While there are theorists focusing exclusively on the relation between religion and the state/politics, many empirical studies have been situated in specific local areas with a specific population group in both rural and urban China. Religion-wise speaking, a majority of studies have focused on Protestant-Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, which accounts for the main body of China's Christian population. There are only limited numbers of local case studies of Catholicism in China (e.g., Madsen, 1998, 2003; Wu, 2013).

Almost at the same time of the emergence of empirical studies of Christianity in China, some scholars have noticed the counterpart growth of Christianity among the new Chinese migrants in the West. Since my study can be located within this research stream, the next section briefly reviews some prominent works in this stream.

4.2. Christianity in Chinese diaspora in the West

Christianity has become one of the predominant religions adopted by the Chinese migrants in the West. Taking the British Chinese as an example, Christians account for over half of the religious British Chinese population (see Chapter Five). In the late 1990s, having observed the growing number of Chinese new immigrants' conversion to Christianity in the United States, American-Chinese sociologist Fenggang Yang emerged as a pioneer in the study of Chinese migrant Christians in the West with his widely cited work *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (1999). With the light that his works brought into this less researched area in the field of the study of Chinese migration and diaspora, a number of scholarly works focusing on issues such as identity, organisational structure, adaptation and assimilation, conversion, and transnational activities and networks of the American-Chinese Christians have been produced in subsequent years, many of which

are also situated in the US context (e.g., Yang, 2002; Ng, 2002; Guest, 2003; Wang, 2004, [and Yang] 2006; Cao, 2005; Wong, 2006; Ren, 2007; Abel, 2006, 2008). There are also comparative studies on the relations between religious and ethnic identities between American-Chinese Christians and Chinese migrant Christians in other parts of the world (e.g., Nagata, 2005), and on the structural differences between Chinese Christian and Buddhist institutions (e.g., Chen, 2002).

Compared to existing scholarship in the US, the study on the intersection of Christianity and Chinese migrants in Europe, especially in Britain, is relatively less flourishing. Garland Liu's (1992) PhD thesis is probably one of the earliest sociological studies in Britain that has examined a small Chinese migrant group in Scotland (Aberdeen and Elgin) with their ethnic Christian community which belongs to a Christian sect, the True Jesus Church. This group of Chinese migrants can be classified as an older generation of Chinese migrants who have migrated from the Southeast coastal areas of mainland China, including Fujian, Guangdong, and Hong Kong, and worked mainly in the catering business. According to Garland Liu (1992:6), the True Jesus Church in Elgin is 'essential' in 'reconsolidating and reinforcing the traditional power hierarchy' at the practical, ideological and the societal levels, which has helped to produce a communal homogeneity of the Chinese in Elgin (see Chapter Five, Section 3.1 for further discussion of Liu's work).

A comparative study by Nyíri (2003) has looked into new Chinese migrant Christians in the UK and Hungary, focusing on their proselytising efforts among local Chinese migrant communities. The study echoes Yang's (2002) earlier work by noting the transnational Christian network of the Chinese Christians substantiated by para-church organisations such as the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission, which is also a focus of my own research. Nyíri's study also noted how the Chinese migrant evangelical Christians negotiate multiple identities, which is compared with another Christian sect, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who also targets Chinese migrants in its evangelism in Europe.

Furthermore, a recently published piece of anthropological research by Huang (2017: 211) has investigated the 'career choice' of some female Chinese Christian ministers in the UK. The study explores the complexity of gender, Christianity and space through an inquiry into the paradoxical constructions of meaning within this group. Binary patterns such as 'past/present, home/diaspora, public/private, men/women, family/self' are constantly reflected, negotiated and transformed (see Chapter Five Section 3.1 for further discussion of

Huang's work). Two other studies that are directly relevant to the subject of my research in the UK context are related to educational issues, such as values and beliefs among Chinese international students and visiting scholars in the UK universities (Li, 2012; Dickson, 2013). Li's (2012) work has noticed the role of volunteer groups, especially the role of local Christian groups, in facilitating the adaptation of Chinese students in UK universities. In this process, Chinese students are likely to be engaged in various religious-affiliated dialogues, discussions and activities, which may impact on their values, beliefs, and identities. This experience of encounter with Christianity in Britain will be illustrated in Chapter Six of my thesis. Dickson (2013) is a Christian chaplain at the University of Nottingham, and one of the members of a Christian NGO, Friends International, a UK-registered Christian charity supporting international students. In her study, Dickson (2013) examines the value changes of Chinese students and visiting scholars in UK's universities who have encountered Christianity and returned to China. This study is transnational insofar as it was conducted on the basis of interviews that the author conducted with a number of Chinese returnees in China. It also provides important background information for my understanding Christian evangelical work among Chinese students and scholars, their conversion and post-conversion experience, which is also a potential area of investigation for me (see Chapter Nine for discussions on future research directions).

There are some overarching themes that especially concern scholars of Christianity and of the overseas Chinese. In general, these are related to the contestation, negotiation, and integration of Chinese ethnic identity with the identities of being migrant and Christian in the host societies. In this process, a new identity of being a Chinese migrant Christian is constructed to be 'adhesive' in Yang's (1999) term, meaning that the identity of the Chinese American Christians is multi-layered and composed of religious, cultural, and political dimensions. Some scholars, such as Nyíri (2003) and Cao (2005, 2013), are concerned with the institutional structure and communal dynamics of the Chinese migrant Christian communities. For example, Nyíri (2003) notices that the Chinese Christian converts are not very active in other social arenas other than participating in Chinese Christian communities. Christian communities can provide multiple resources for the Chinese migrants' adaptation to their life in the host society, but they can also hinder their social integration (Nyíri, 2003; see also in Chen, 2002; Guest, 2003). Furthermore, the ethnic Chinese church plays a very important role for lower-class migrants and second-generation Chinese, providing 'tutelage' (Ng, 2002) and acting as a 'surrogate family' (Cao, 2005).

As for the transnational activities and networks, Yang's (2002) work, mentioned in the previous section, was an initial attempt to map out the religious-based transnational Christian networks of Chinese as exemplified by a local case study on Houston, Texas. Similarly, Guest's (2003) work, which involves transnational field work, has provided in-depth descriptions of how Fuzhounese (Chinese migrants from Fujian Province) in New York exchange material and non-material resources with their hometown in China. Cao's (2013) study of Chinese Christian merchants from the Eastern Chinese city of Wenzhou in France (2010) highlights that their commercial networks are in many ways overlapping with their Christian networks. These networks have not only facilitated their adaptation to French society through church-centred community building, thus expanding their commercial networks further, but also constitute a manifestation of a renewed Protestant ethic in Weber's terms. Lastly, Kalir's (2009) research on Christian conversion of Chinese migrant workers in Israel, which somewhat resembles Dickson's (2013), has fleshed out their transnational influence in terms of religion, i.e., the spreading of Christianity in their hometown upon their return to China.

This section has reviewed a number of works on Christianity in Chinese diaspora in the West. The local case studies in the US have been a main contribution to scholarship in this area in the past two decades. Only a limited number of studies have been conducted in Europe, including in the UK. However, both the empirical and theoretical insights from previous studies have inspired my own research. This thesis is interested in the Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants in Britain, where institutional Christianity has been in decline in recent years. In the final section of this chapter I turn from the Chinese to the British social-religious landscape, to provide the local context in which this research is situated.

5. The changing religious landscape in contemporary Britain

From the twentieth to the twenty-first century, two major paradigm shifts have occurred in the sociology of religion in the West, moving from the thesis of secularisation to that of de-secularisation/sacralisation, to that of religious pluralism. Nevertheless, despite being subsumed under the category of the 'West', North America and Europe differ in their religious landscape and their social attitudes toward religion (Kuru, 2007). While the secularisation of Europe is an 'undeniable social fact' (Casanova, 2001: 1), the US seems to be the exceptional case among the economically well-developed countries for the time being (Berger, Davie, & Fokas, 2008). Research on the changing religious landscape in

contemporary Britain has been part of the secularisation-desecularisation/sacralisation debate. This strand of research was pioneered by Grace Davie (1990) and Steve Bruce (1995) and followed by a number of subsequent theoretical and empirical studies. These studies have been framed in the discussion of the relation between believing and belonging (e.g., Davie, 1990; Voas & Crockett, 2005; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Glendinning & Bruce, 2006; Day, 2009, 2016). In my study, I adopt the framework of believing and belonging to capture the process of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. In Chapter Eight and Nine, I will further explain how this theoretical framework is adapted.

Unlike China, where the state is taking an assertive stance on secularism via a de facto Marxist atheistic ideology and where despite this, religious freedom is constitutionally (arguably nominally) protected, Britain has its official religions of Anglicanism (the Church of England) and Presbyterianism (the Church of Scotland). Although 'the right to religious freedom is enshrined in law', the Anglican Church enjoys particular 'privilege and access to political power' (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016: 15-16). Although Christianity has historical roots and contemporary heritage in British society, constituting a large part of British cultural identification, the public influence of this institutional religion has seen a clear decline in contemporary times (e.g., Davie, 2000; Brown, 2001; Bruce, 2002; Woodhead & Catto, 2013), with a few exceptions in some Pentecostal and ethnic churches (Brierley, 2013). Historians such as Callum Brown (2001) and sociologists such as Steve Bruce (2002), Abby Day (2013) and Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (2013) have vividly portrayed the demise of a Christian Britain and the bleak future prospects for institutional forms of Christianity including Anglicanism.

In my view, the preceding scholarly debate on believing and belonging between Davie (1990), Voas and Crockett (2005), Glendinning & Bruce (2006) is largely a matter of difference in analytic approaches and the definition of key categories such as religion, belief, and belonging. The debate largely revolves around the condition of Christianity in contemporary Britain. Davie's (1990) thesis of 'believing without belonging' demonstrates a generational change in people's attitudes toward and practice of Christianity, primarily manifesting itself through the generational decline in church attendance over half a century. While church attendance has been declining, many people may culturally, if not confessionally, identify with Christianity, as demonstrated in the UK's 2001 and 2011 Census, in which around 70% people self-identified as Christians. Voas and Crockett's (2005) thesis of 'neither believing nor belonging' is also quantitively based. The two scholars

argue that British people's attitudes toward religion, including the absence of religion, can be transmitted between generations, which necessarily results in the decline of religious affiliation and attendance. Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) qualitative study, on the other hand, finds that people are shifting from traditional religious practice to alternative spiritualities. Glendinning and Bruce (2006), however, interpret the same phenomenon of 'religion giving way to spirituality' (in Heelas & Woodhead's word) not in religious terms, and point out that people's non-religious intentions and purposes such as health and well-being generate a shift in religious practices.

Abby Day (2010) reorients the debate by tracing the 'archaeology of the genealogy' of different disciplinary treatments of the notion of belief, distinguishing between the 'propositional belief' as the confession of religious creed and the 'performative belief' as a phenomenological structure underlying all sorts of human-social relationships. Day's distinction between propositional and performative belief underlines the over-simplification of religious categories used in quantitative research. Moreover, it suggests the relational nature of belief. In other words, people's accounts or statements of beliefs, not necessarily religious beliefs, are always grounded in their social relations. For example, when someone is mourning their deceased relatives by saying that they *believe in* an afterlife, this statement of belief is grounded in the mourner's relationship with his/her relative. Day's theory of belief has inspired me to include the category of *religious belief* in my study of the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants. Later in my empirical chapters, drawing on Smith's (2007) work, I argue that although the sociological approach to religion is not responsible for the verification of the truthfulness of certain religious beliefs, some Christian beliefs are emotionally appealing to the converts and can as such facilitate religious conversion. In other words, religious beliefs may not be metaphysically real; rather, they are *phenomenologically* real for the religious people (see Chapter Eight for further discussion).

In recent theoretical developments regarding the changing religious landscape in Britain, new categories such as *non-religion/non-belief* have emerged. More people who responded to questions of one's religious affiliation or attitude in various British social surveys as *none* (e.g., Lee, 2015). The rise of the *religious-nones*, as suggested by Linda Woodhead, does not necessarily indicate the return of secularisation (Woodhead, 2016). With the notion of 'belief' acting as 'the hinge that allows people to move between sacred and secular' (Day, 2016: 114), it is possible to find an 'unexclusive middle' ground in the old dichotomous characterisation of the social-religious status as being either religious or secular (Voas &

Day, 2014). Recognising the 'secular Christians' in contemporary British society means to recognise the people who 'pay at least lip service to so-called Christian values', but do not necessarily profess any religious doctrines and creeds and identify with any denominations, but remain interested in the symbolic representations of religion, such as church weddings and funerals (ibid.: 1). Furthermore, Woodhead (2016: 258-260) has argued that in light of the pluralisation of religion, beliefs, and the liberalisation of value systems, the category of 'non-religion' is becoming a 'new norm' in the construction of contemporary British social-religious landscape. While the institutionalisation of Christianity has led to people's taken-for-granted attitude toward religion, the 'cultural institutionalisation' of the norm of 'no religion' has become part and parcel of the religious pluralism (ibid.: 259). Contemporary Britain is no longer a 'Christian country', but somewhere between 'Christian, multi-faith, and the none' (ibid.: 260).

6. Summary

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature offering both theoretical perspectives and a contextual background in which my research is based. Having firstly located the research in the broad scholarship on religion and migration, I have further narrowed down the theoretical spectrum to focus on literature on religion in Chinese diaspora. The review then moved on to literature that is more directly relevant to this research, namely the preceding studies of religion, particularly Christianity, and the Chinese diaspora in the West. Moreover, the review has helped to identify contemporary research trends and key themes in the emerging empirical study of Christianity among the overseas Chinese in the West, which has laid the theoretical foundation for further interpretation and analysis of my empirical data in later chapters. Lastly, the review turned to the understanding of the local context, the changing social-religious landscape in contemporary Britain, in which my research in situated.

This thesis identifies religious conversion as a unifying category leading into the understanding of the dynamics of contemporary Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. Among the bulk of literature on Christianity in Chinese diaspora, only a few studies (e.g., Yang, 1999; Wong, 2006; Abel, 2008) have provided analytical treatment of the phenomenon of religious conversion. For example, although conversion appears in the title of Yang's (1999) classic study, his thesis is concerned with the identity construction of American Chinese Christians. As for Abel's (2008) doctoral thesis, instead of the analysis of the Chinese Christian conversion, he provides a comprehensive structural and functional

analysis of Chinese migrant Christians' congregational life. Lastly, Wong's (2006) work is one of the few that focuses exclusively on the analysis of conversion. However, his sample, which is limited to the Chinese atheist intellectuals in the United States, can be misleading in terms of constructing contemporary China as a predominantly atheistic country, which is obviously not the case according to my review of relevant literature. Furthermore, his over-reliance on Rambo's (1993) psychological theory on conversion, has to some extent limited the scope of his research and its theoretical implications for the broader scholarship of religious conversion.

Religious conversion is a highly complex phenomenon that can be subjected to different disciplinary investigations. The discussion of theoretical perspectives on religious conversion and my theoretical model for the documentation and analysis of the phenomenon is the focus for the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Religious Conversion – The Theoretical Framework

1. Introduction

As has been stated previously, what underlies the rapid growth of Christianity among the Chinese worldwide is the phenomenon of 'mass conversion' (Yang & Tamney, 2006: 126). The term 'mass conversion' as used by Yang and Tamney (ibid.) captures the 'phenomenon of religious conversion happening to many individuals in a society within a relatively short period of time'. Not only in the United States have ethnic Chinese churches witnessed a 'remarkable conversion rate' (Yang, 1998: 204; see also Chen, 2002; Wan, 2003; Guest, 2003; Wong, 2006; Abel, 2006, 2008), my own research, as well as preceding studies in the UK (e.g., Liu, 1992; Nyíri, 2003; Li, 2012; Dickson, 2013; Huang & Hsiao, 2015; Huang, 2017, will be discussed in Chapter Five) have observed a similar pattern of religious change within the Chinese diaspora in Britain. Thus, I contend that *religious conversion* needs to be taken seriously as an analytical category in my study. It can also contribute to the understanding of the socio-dynamics of contemporary Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain.

Religious conversion is one of the overarching themes in the academic study of religion. This chapter begins with an overview of prominent theoretical perspectives on religious conversion within the social sciences. Instead of a review of conversion literature in chronological order, the theoretical overview serves the development of my own model of conversion. The overview extracts from preceding studies the key variables, namely, belief or world view, identity, social network, and language, to understand how scholars have studied the phenomenon. A broad and inclusive definition of religious conversion by Jindra (2014a) is adopted to set the stage for subsequent discussion. The theories will then be contextualised within my research to firstly develop a typology of factors that influence religious conversion. The typology is secondly used to aid the thematic analysis of my qualitative data. And thirdly, a classification of different types of converts is critically adopted from Rambo's (2010) typology of conversion. This is to identify and understand the specific social group (the Chinese Christian converts) from whom participants of this research have been recruited. The third section in the chapter provides a critical evaluation of the process-oriented models by Lofland and Stark (1965), Rambo (1993), and Gooren (2010). Furthermore, a three-stage

sequential model constituting *encounter, initiation,* and *commitment,* is developed on the basis of a practical adoption of Rambo's (1993) *seven-stage model* and Gooren's (2010) *conversion career approach* to conversion.

2. Approaching religious conversion

Religious conversion is one of the most important themes in contemporary scientific studies of religion. Different disciplinary instruments have been employed in the investigation of the phenomenon. This may on the one hand reflect its complexity, which involves a multitude of elements and factors. On the other hand, the definition of religious conversion, like the definition of religion and some of its related concepts, is problematic because of 'disciplinary biases' (Gooren, 2010: 45). While some scholars have resisted 'all attempts to "standardise" conversion' (e.g., Jackson, 1908:97, cited in Snow & Machalek, 1984: 168), I consider it a worthwhile effort to provide a broad and operational definition of the term *religious conversion,* in order to include as many nuanced aspects as possible in my academic inquiries. As Peter Berger (1967: 175) has succinctly stated, 'definitions cannot, by their very nature, be either *true* or *false*', but should be assessed through their 'respective utility'. This section attempts, firstly, to provide a working definition of religious conversion by reviewing preceding scholarly approaches, whose disciplinary scopes, theoretical claims, methodological issues, and key variables are briefly evaluated. Secondly, I contextualise the theoretical discussions to the study of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain, in which the structure of religious conversion can be visually presented as a network constituting of social, psychological and religious factors.

2.1. A theoretical overview of religious conversion

Within the large bulk of social science literature on religious conversion since the 1960s that I have reviewed (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1965; Travisano, 1970; Straus, 1976, 1979; Greil, 1977; Heirich, 1977; Robins & Anthony, 1979; Bromley & Shupe, 1979; Richardson, 1977, 1980, 1985; Long & Hadden, 1983; Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984; Staples & Mauss, 1987; Gartrell & Shannon, 1985; Stark & Finke, 2000; Rambo, 1989, 1993; Paloutzian, 2005; Gooren, 2010; Jindra, 2014), there are more overlaps than fundamental disagreements. Scholars may differ with regard to their disciplinary scope, sample range of the study, definition of key terms, and methodology. It can be said that a general consensus that has been reached in all scholarly works is to note the literal meaning of the word *conversion*, i.e.,

to convert means to *change*[8]. The central question remaining to be debated is what it is that has (been) changed in and after religious conversion.

Prior to the 1990s, scholars tended to use a single analytic category or variable to configure their theories of conversion. For example, Lofland and Stark (1965: 862), who have authored one of the most cited studies in conversion literature, point out that 'there is a philosophy behind the way of life of every individual and of every homogeneous group at any given point in their histories'. By conversion, they understand the historical event when 'a person gives up one such perspective or ordered view to the world to another' (ibid.). In other words, for Lofland and Stark, religious conversion can be simply equated to the change of a person's fundamental world view, or *belief* per se; which seems to me almost a common-sense view held by many religious and non-religious people alike. Another key variable that has been used by scholars to characterise religious conversion is the change in a person's *identity*. In Travisano's (1970: 605) comparative study of conversion among Hebrew Christians and Jewish Unitarians, the religious change, i.e., conversion, 'involves the ubiquitous utilisation of an identity', meaning that converts strive to 'make their new identity central to almost all interactions'. Religious conversion in this sense refers to the disruption of identity. Thus, religious conversion occurs when a person has undergone a change in his or her beliefs about the nature of the world, the cosmos, and humanity, or 'root reality' in Heirich's term (Heirich1977: 674-675; see also Neitz, 1987: 63-64), and that person's religious identity is (re)presented as supreme above all other identities (Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984). Some scholars use the psychological category, the *self*, to describe such phenomenon as the 'unification' of 'divided self' (James, 2002: 165) or self-transformation (Staples & Mauss, 1987: 137; see also Stromberg, 1993; Popp-Bair, 2001).

Another important variable for scholars to capture religious conversion is the change in a person's *social network*. This strand of research (e.g., Greil, 1977; Bromley & Shupe, 1979; Long & Hadden, 1983; Barker, 1984; Richardson, 1985) aims to offer more sociologically based and sophisticated explanations of religious conversion than the so-called *brainwashing/coercive persuasion model* which tends to offer pathological explanations of people joining various *'occult' groups*[9]*'* (cf. Bromley & Richardson, 1983, Robins &

[8] Actually, the Latin *convertere* can mean to change (something into something else), but a more literal meaning is 'to turn' (here, from one religion to another).
[9] Much conversion research from the 1950s to the early 1980s was conducted in the context of the emergence of New Religious Movement, which consists of a multitude of religious/spiritual expressions and practices at

Anthony, 1979). Studies that resort to social networks as the key variable in the explanation of religious conversion emphasise the active search undertaken by converts, instead of simply assuming that people tend to be attracted by and passively subscribe to the beliefs and ideologies provided by certain religious groups and institutions. Research highlighting the role of social networks in religious conversion often understand conversion in terms of socialisation. The concept of socialisation has succinctly been defined by Long and Hadden (1983: 5) as 'the social process of creating and incorporating new members of a group from a pool of non-members, carried out by members and their allies.' An example of viewing both social networks and socialisation as key factors in religious conversion can be found in Greil's (1977: 122) research. He acknowledges that the socialisation influences religious searching by stating that 'the stock of knowledge developed out of the sedimentation of his past experiences sets limits to the range of perspectives he may find plausible' (Greil, 1977: 122). Greil concludes that 'an individual in a situation of social strain will be attracted only to those movement perspectives whose intellectual style is compatible with the cognitive style of the social group in question' (ibid.: 124). The variable of social network is also key for scholars such as Gartrell & Shannon (1985), Iannaccone (1994), and Stark and Finke (2000) who adhere to the *rational choice theory* in explaining religious conversion. Rational choice theory, and its large theoretical paradigm of the *religious economy*, as not directly related to the development of my theoretical framework, are not discussed in this study.

Regardless of specifics of methodology, almost all scholars of conversion identify *language* as an important medium through which variables such as worldview/belief, identity, network, practice and the like experience can be represented, and hence are accessible to the researchers. For some scholars, religious change is characterised as the change in a person's *universe of discourse* (e.g., Travisano, 1970; Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984; Staples & Mauss, 1987). The concept of the 'universe of discourse' is derived from George Herbert Mead's (1934: 598) reference to 'a system of common or social meanings' represented in language. Using this concept, Snow & Machalek (1984) develop four rhetorical indicators to identify converts, namely, 1) *biographical reconstruction, 2) the adoption of the master attribution scheme, 3) the suspension of analogical reasoning, and 4) embracement of the convert role* (Snow & Machalek, 1984: 173-174). In a later critique by Staples and Mauss (1987), the authors point out that Snow and Machalek's (1983, 1984) rhetorical indicators

variance with the Judeo-Christian tradition as established as mainstream in the US society (c.f. Barker, 1999). Bias-loaded terms such as cult, occultism, deprivation, etc., often appear in this strand of research.

can risk reducing religious conversion to 'a change in the way a person thinks and feels about his or her self', i.e., the change in 'self-concept', to a mere change in language (Staples & Mauss, 1987: 137). For Staples and Mauss (1987), only the indicator of biographical reconstruction can help indicate the occurrence of conversion. The other three indicators are useful in identifying the changes in the convert's reinterpretation of experience, reorientation of cognitive framework, and reconstruction of identity, which are 'product[s] of religious socialisation', i.e., 'religious commitment' (Staples & Mauss, 1987: 143-144).

Rambo's important work *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993) can be seen as a milestone in conversion research in its call for a holistic, interdisciplinary and open-ended model of religious conversion in contrast to the previous deterministic and universalistic theories. The book is largely theoretical and based on Rambo's extensive review of conversion literature, with a few empirical cases of Christian conversion as the interpretive key. This book and Rambo's own subsequent works (e.g., Rambo, 1999; Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999) have include insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and theology, and cover a wide spectrum of variables in the study of religious conversion. Not only does his work (Rambo, 1993) provides a typology of conversion for the identification of different types of converts (presented in the next section); he also develops a process-oriented, *seven–stage model of conversion* (see Section Three for further explanation), which is a critical synthesis of previous models. For example, the idea of construing conversion as a process rather than a momentary event can be found in Lofland and Stark's (1965) work. Conceptual traces of Rambo's stages of *crisis* (cf. James 2002[1902], Lofland & Stark, 1965), *quest* (cf. Lofland & Stark, 1965; Straus, 1976, 1979), and *commitment* (cf. Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984; Staples & Mauss, 1987), can be found in many preceding works. Rambo's work has in many ways inspired the development of my sequential model of conversion, which will be presented further in the next section.

Another scholar who has greatly inspired the development of my own theoretical framework is Henri Gooren (2005, 2007, 2010). Gooren's (2010) monograph within which he develops the *conversion career model* is one of the latest and most comprehensive studies of religious conversion. Based on a 'life-cycle approach', this model takes into account all kinds of religious participation in a person's life course, concerning not only one's affiliation with but also disaffiliation from a religion (Gooren, 2010: 51). Gooren's (2010: 48-49) conversion career model centres on his typology of various religious activities occurring in the process of religious conversion, namely, *pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and*

disaffiliation. This model can be useful in the systematic analyses of shifts in different levels of individual religious activity. Within this model, the *social, institutional, cultural and political, individual,* and *contingency factors*[10] influencing religious participation and change can be included and analysed (Gooren, 2010: 51-52). My adoption of Gooren's (2010) conversion career model will be presented in Section Three of this chapter.

Lastly, to summarise this theoretical overview, I draw on Jindra's (2008, 2011, 2014 a, b) works to provide a working definition of religious conversion. Jindra's (2014a) work is a micro analysis of individual converts' biographies using Gooren's (2010) conversion career model. For the comparative study of the lives of converts to different religions using 'biographical sociology' (Jindra, 2014a: 5), Jindra broadly defines conversion as 'changes in a person's religious belief that can happen suddenly and gradually', which is 'accompanied by an alternate view of reality and of self, and in general also entails a "reconstruction of biography"' (ibid.: 10). Her definition of conversion includes 'changes from one religion to a new one, a shift from no religious commitment to religious faith, and renewal of one's religious faith within one religious group' (ibid.).

Jindra's (2014a) definition of religious conversion is useful for my research in many ways. Firstly, it is a definition that is based on a comparative study, which makes the definition sufficiently inclusive for my study of the Chinese people's conversion to Christianity. As discussed in Chapter Two and will be discussed in the subsequent section below, the emergence of religion and religious pluralism is a reality in Chinese society. The Chinese conversion to Christianity can include not only a change from no religion or atheism to religious identity, but also shifts between religions, within Christian denominations, and the revival and renewal of the Christian faith. Secondly, it is a definition that avoids the oversimplified conception of conversion as change of belief or worldview, as advanced by Lofland and Stark (1965). Moreover, it confronts the critique of much conversion research for reducing religion to 'more generic features of social life' and overlooking religious contents and beliefs in conversion (Smith, 2008: 1564, see also Rambo, 1993). Furthermore, her definition takes into account the above-mentioned key variables in the study of conversion, such as belief, identity, social network, and language. By stating that conversion

[10] Or in Rambo's (1989: 49) terminology, 'components', in conversion process. Rambo (1989, 1993) proposes that the cultural, social, personal, and religious aspects need to be taken into account in the analysis of conversion processes. These aspects are specified in Gooren's work (2010) as factors influencing religious activities. My adoption of the typology of factors in religious conversion will be discussed in the next section.

'can happen suddenly and gradually', Jindra's (2014a) definition acknowledges the phenomenon that some converts often report to have a momentary spiritual/mystical experience that has contributed to their conversion. This makes her definition of conversion inclusive of religious categories and factors as will be illustrated in the next section.

So far, I have provided a theoretical overview focusing on the key variables in the preceding literature on conversion, and a working definition of religious conversion by Jindra (2014a). Also, I have briefly discussed and acknowledged inspiration taken from two key authors' works which contribute to my sequential model of conversion. Before extensively presenting the development of my own theoretical framework in the next section, I will contextualise the theoretical premises of my own research in the next section.

2.2. Contextualising the theories

The section above has provided a working definition that is inclusive of the prominent variables key to the study of religious conversion. To contextualise the theoretical perspectives, I now firstly create a typology of influencing factors in conversion processes based on Rambo (1993) and Gooren's (2010) works. The typology provides an analytical framework that accommodates the above-mentioned key variables in conversion research. Secondly, I draw on Rambo's (1993) typology of conversion to identify different types of Chinese Christian converts.

Among the many conversion theorists, Rambo (1989, 1993), Gooren (2010) and Lofland and Stark (1965), whose theoretical models of religious conversion are process-oriented, have greatly inspired my research. Especially Rambo's (1993) and Gooren's (2010) analyses of religious conversion have paid particular attention to the complexity of factors influencing religious conversion. Rambo (1989: 49) is one of the earliest scholars who proposed that cultural, social, personal and religious aspects need to be considered, and integrated where possible, in the analysis of conversion. This insight is a result of his attempts to avoid disciplinary biases in the psychological, sociological, anthropological, and religious/theological interpretations of religious conversion. Gooren (2010: 51-52) identifies five factors that can influence a person's conversion, namely, social, institutional, cultural and political, individual, and contingent factors. According to his classification, social factors can include a person's social relations grounded in his or her familial, friendship, and religious networks. The institutional factors consist in the mundane influences that the religious institutions and organisations can have on people's everyday life. The cultural and

political factors can refer to the social-religious contexts at the local, national, and global levels. Sometimes the intersection of religion, race and ethnicity, and migrants can also be a cultural and political factor. There are overlaps between the individual and the contingency factors. These two factors mostly include a person's beliefs or worldviews, feelings, life events and situations, personalities, and religion-related social encounters (e.g., actively or passively receiving religious messages, meeting with religious people). These factors are highly personal, sometimes private, and often unpredictable.

The *thematic analysis* (see Chapter Four for further details about method of my analysis) of the qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and ethnography for my research is inspired by, and moves beyond, Rambo's (1993) insights and Gooren's typology of factors for conversion. The analysis of my qualitative data is conducted at three levels, the religious, the sociological, and the psychological. A range of many minor factors influencing religious conversion are also included. Table 1 below presents the three levels of analysis with related influencing factors extracted from my data:

Levels of analysis	***Influencing factors***
• ***Religious***	Religious background/upbringing, religious information and knowledge, religious practice, religious commitment and belonging, religious emotion, religious/spiritual/mystical experience, religious worldview/beliefs
• ***Sociological***	Family background (religious, economic, political), social networks, social changes experienced (before and after migration, in China and Britain), lived experience of migration, institutional influence on conversion (the supply-side, the individual demands)
• ***Psychological***	Sense of belonging, experience of crisis (physiological, economic, cultural and political, psychological/emotional, spiritual), 'turning-point' life events, quest for moral values and ethics, self-reflexivity

Table 1. Three levels of analysis of the influencing factors in Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain

Although, theoretically, the qualitative analysis can be conducted at different levels, in practice, the boundaries between these levels are often blurred. The many minor factors can, on the one hand, be studied with different disciplinary approaches. On the other hand, the

factors often overlap and intertwine with each other, which makes clear demarcations and disentanglements difficult, if not impossible, as visualised in Figure 1. Inspired by the network-approach in the study of transnational migrant religion (see Chapter Two, Section 2), I find that the many minor factors are interconnected with each other. This can be visually presented as a *network-structure of religious conversion*[11] (see Figure 2). For example, when my research participants were narrating their pre-conversion experience in a semi-structured interview setting, they often brought up their family background, including their family's social-economic-political status, and sometimes their family's cultural-religious activities and practices that they have experienced before their Christian conversion. When telling their stories of encounter with Christianity, many would mention the assertive secularist/atheist political propaganda in China, their experience of crisis in meaning and quest for alternative moral values and ethics, and their spiritual fulfilment found in Christianity, these factors thus appeared together in their narratives of Christian conversion. These examples will be discussed in the empirical chapters from Chapter Six through Eight in this thesis.

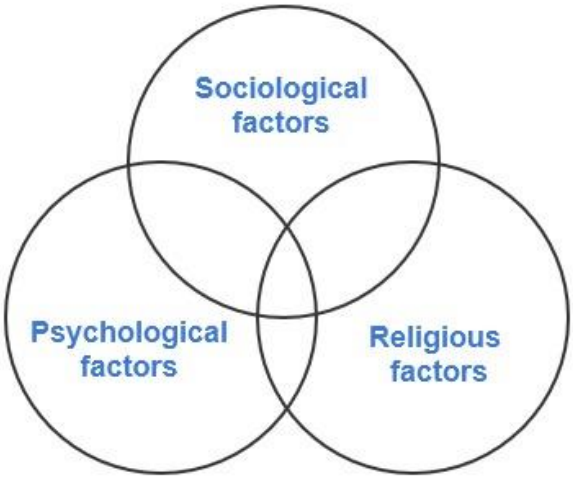

Figure 1. A visual presentation of the overlaps between three bodies of factors in the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain

[11] The theorisation of *the network structure of religious conversion* requires nuanced analysis of the push and pull effects of different factors, and evaluation of the strength and weakness of the ties between specific factors. It will become part of the agenda for my future research.

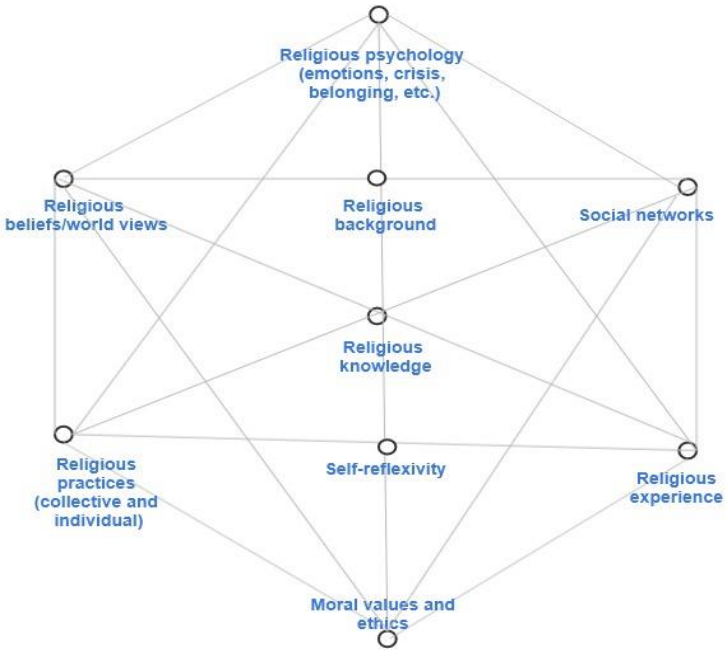

Figure 2. A visual presentation of the network-like structure of religious conversion

The second task of the theoretical contextualisation is to develop a scheme for the identification of the social group, the Chinese converts to Christianity, from which the participants of my research have been recruited. Regarding this question, Rambo (1993: 13–14) takes an anthropological *etic view* in the beginning of his work, presenting a typology of religious conversion for researchers to identify different types of converts:

> Type 1. Apostasy/defection: the repudiation of a religious tradition by previous members.
> Type 2. Intensification: the revitalised commitment to a faith with which the convert has had previous affiliation, formal or informal.
> Type 3. Affiliation: the movement of an individual or group from no or minimal religious commitment to full involvement with an institution or community of faith.
> Type 4. Institutional transition (or denominational switching): the change of and individual or group from one community to another within a major tradition.
> Type 5. Tradition transition: the movement of an individual or a group from one major religious tradition to another.

Rambo's (1993) typology is critically adopted in my research. Regarding Type 1, I have met four Chinese migrants who fall into the category of *apostasy/defection* in my ethnographic research. However, the situation of each case is complicated. For example, none of them claim to be atheist. While two self-identify as Christians, they refuse to go to church and reject many of the church's doctrinal and moral teachings. One has given up the Christian

identity while constantly 'drawing wisdom from not only Christian but other religious and spiritual traditions' (my field reflection, 6 March 2017). While the focus of my current research is on conversion rather than *deconversion*, to use Streib's (2012) term, I acknowledge that there exists a group of former Christians within and outside the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain (see Chapter Nine for a brief discussion on future research directions). Secondly, there are cases of Type 2, *intensification*, among my participants. As I will discuss in Section Three of this chapter, religious conversion is often a chronological rather than an instant process, and the development and maintenance of religious commitment are not necessarily linear, but sometimes it can be described as iterative. In my research, I have documented cases in which persons coming from a Christian background have experienced a renewal of their faith after migration. There are also examples that can be characterised as *conversion-disaffiliation-reversion* in terms of their experience of development of religious commitment. These cases are presented and discussed in Chapter Eight on commitment.

The majority of my participants can be categorised as falling within Type 3, *affiliation*. Many among this group tend to acknowledge the influence of the assertive atheist ideology in China's public sphere prior to their Christian conversion. Some would consider their pre-conversion non-Christian cultural-religious activities and practices such as temple-going, incense-burning, and ancestor worship (often with their families) as either a push or pull factors for their Christian conversion. The diversity of my participants' religiously affiliated pre-conversion experience and its influence on people's Christian conversion will be discussed in Chapter Six.

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, the Chinese Christian groups and churches in Britain mostly identify themselves as non-denominational or cross-denominational, apart from a few exceptions. Clear denominational distinctions are only made between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and sometimes with regard to Christian-affiliated traditions such as Jehovah's Witness and Mormonism, which many Chinese Christians often bluntly label as heretics *(yiduan* 异端*)* or evil cults/heterodox teaching *(xiejiao* 邪教*)*. Although I have met a few conversion cases within the broadly defined Christian tradition during my research, Type 4, *institutional transition/denominational switching* occurs only amongst a minority.

Finally, I find Type 5, *tradition transition* problematic when applied to the Chinese context. Unlike the monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, a variety of non-

Christian cultural-religious activities and practices which can be conveniently categorised as *Chinese popular religion* (cf. Feuchtwang, 2003), often do not necessarily require any formal conversion. This is also applicable to some popular forms of Buddhism and Daoism practiced by many Chinese. For those who have talked in their Christian conversion testimonies about their pre-conversion experience of Chinese popular religion are not necessarily making a *transition*. Chinese popular religion, instead of viewing it as a unified entity, is widely *diffused* in Chinese society and Chinese people's everyday life (cf. Yang, 1961). Boundaries of beliefs, practices, and communities of Chinese popular religion are often not dogmatically defined. In other words, Chinese popular religion does not constitute a particular *religious tradition*, as institutional religions; rather, a *religious culture*. The Chinese popular religious culture greatly informs Chinese social structure and Chinese people's moral conducts (cf. Yang, 1961; Feuchtwang, 2003). In the interviews, I have documented several cases in which participants have maintained conceptions and practices inherited from the *culture* of Chinese popular religion, such as ancestor worship, meditation, and incense-burning, while being committed Christians. Thus, I view this group of Chinese Christian converts as Type 3, *affiliation* – they affiliate to a specific institutional religion from minimal or no religious commitment through Christian conversion.

This section has been an attempt to contextualise some theoretical perspectives on religious conversion in my own research. The effort has been made firstly by generating a three-level analytic model of many influencing factors in religious conversion with the inspiration from Rambo (1993) and Gooren's (2010) works. This analytic model has been put into practice in the thematic analysis of my qualitative data. Moreover, Rambo's (1993) typology of converts has been critically adopted and has helped me in the identification of different types of Chinese Christian converts among my research participants. In the next section, I draw on the process-oriented models of conversion developed by previous scholars (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1989, 1993; Gooren, 2010) to develop my own three-stage sequential model of conversion.

3. The process-oriented sequential model of conversion

3.1. The process-oriented model of conversion

What has made Lofland and Stark's (1965) work cited in almost all conversion literature is their prototypical, process-oriented model in the analysis of conversion to a minority

religious group called the Divine Precepts (the D.P) in Bay City, US. The religion is part of the Reverend Moon's Unification Church in San Francisco, which has been studied also by scholars such as Eileen Barker (1984). The model divides the process of conversion to the D.P. into seven stages organised in a sequential manner:

> For conversion a person must:
>
> 1) Experience enduring, acutely felt tensions
> 2) Within a religious problem-solving perspective,
> 3) Which leads him to define himself as a religious seeker;
> 4) Encountering the D.P. at a turning point in his life,
> 5) Wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts;
> 6) Where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized;
> 7) And, where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction. (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 874)

Although Lofland and Stark's (1965: 163) model has outlined different 'conditions' that a convert to the D.P might have experienced, the critiques of their model have identified its insufficiency in empirical strength and applicability beyond conversion to *cults* (Snow & Machalek, 1984: 184; Richardson & Stewart, 1978: 28, 31). Some scholars have criticised the model's neglect of the socialisation process before conversion (Greil, 1977; Long & Hadden, 1983), and the way the authors 'explain away affiliation with marginal groups as the result of irrationality or emotional instability' (Gooren, 2010: 23). The limitations of the model have also been acknowledged by Lofland in his follow-up works (Lofland, 1977; Lofland with Skonovd, 1981). Nevertheless, this model has clearly influenced Rambo's (1993) later theoretical development.

Rambo's (1993) seven-stage model has been developed in terms of the developmental psychology of religion (cf. Fowler, 1981), and not only critically adopts Lofland and Stark's (1965) model but is also influenced by Christian missiological work by Tippett (1977, cited in Rambo, 1989: 51). The seven stages in his model include: 1) 'Context [the ecology of the conversion process]', 2) 'Crisis [the catalyst for change]', 3) 'Quest [active search]', 4) 'Encounter [advocate and potential convert in contact]', 5) 'Interaction [the matrix of change]', 6) 'Commitment [consummation and consolidation of transformation]', and 7) 'Consequences [effects of converting process throughout the change]' (Rambo, 1993: 165-170).

Although being a psychologist, Rambo's (1993) model is a theoretical endeavour to integrate the sociological, psychological, anthropological, and religious dimensions of conversion. As mentioned previously, Rambo (1993) rejects an oversimplified and reductionist approach to conversion. Although he has attempted to incorporate the religious dimension in his theory, his treatment of religious factors in conversion is limited only to the function of propositional beliefs or theologies. In the book, he writes that 'the central effect of theology on conversion is the creation of norms for what is expected in the conversion process and the shaping of expectations and experiences of converts' (Rambo, 1993: 181). Further critiques from Kahn and Greene's (2004: 240, 256) empirical testing of Rambo's model have questioned the 'operationalisation' of the *context stage* in a sequential model[12]. In other words, the context of conversion needs to be analysed at different stages in a person's conversion process, rather than as an independent stage.

Lastly, Gooren's (2010) *conversion career approach* is the most inspiring for the development of my own theoretical approach on religious conversion. The term *conversion career* firstly appeared in J. T. Richardson's (1980: 49) article, which metaphorically refers to some converts' (to New Religious Movements) 'sequential trying out of new beliefs and identities in an effort to resolve felt difficulties'. Richardson intended to make a theoretical effort to 'move beyond' the conventional theoretical constructions of religious conversion in binary terms, such as 'fast/slow' or 'abrupt/gradual' (ibid.), and to identify the multiple events taking place in conversion (ibid.). Gooren (2010: 48) defines the term 'conversion career' as 'the member's passage, within his or her social and cultural context, through levels, types and phases of religious participation'. In comparison with Richardson's (1980) definition, Gooren's (2010: 51) focuses on a person's religious participation within his or her life course, which he calls a 'life-cycle approach'. For Gooren (2010), it is the socially and institutionally related religious activities that are central to his characterisation of the different levels in which a person is located in the conversion process:

1) Preaffiliation: describing the worldview and social context of potential members of a religious group in their first contacts to assess whether they would like to affiliate themselves on a more formal basis.
2) Affiliation: being a formal member of a religious group. However, group membership does not form a central aspect of one's life or identity.

[12] Rambo's (1993: 17-18) model was intended as a 'sequential' and 'systematic' one. However, he also acknowledges that in real life, conversion is characterised by a 'spiralling effect, a going back and forth between stages', which is not necessarily a unidirectional movement.

3) Conversion: used in the limited sense, refers to [radical] personal change of religious worldview and identity. It is based both on self-report and on attribution by others. These others can be people from the same religious group, but also outsiders (my note).
4) Confession: a term from theology for a core member identity, describing a high level of participation inside the new religious group and a strong 'missionary attitude' toward non-members outside the group. People thus use the testimony they have of their conversion experience to engage in evangelising activities (my note).
5) Disaffiliation: a former involvement in an organised religious group (Gooren, 2010: 48–50).

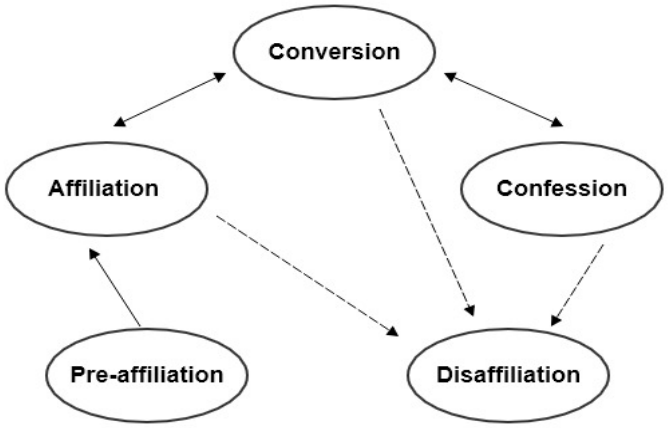

Figure 3. Movement between levels of religious activity in the conversion career approach (Gooren, 2010: 50)

Gooren's (2010: 48, 51) 'typology of religious activity' emphasises a person's 'religious participation and change' in the process of religious conversion. As illustrated in Figure 3, these levels of religious activities are not necessarily subject to a chronological order; however, certain sequential movements can be identified. After a person's initial active contact with a religious group or the passive exposure to a religion, i.e., at the levels between *preaffiliation* and *affiliation*, it is possible for an individual to proceed or recede in any levels of his/her *conversion career*.

Gooren's (2010) conversion career model makes a breakthrough from Rambo's model, which sometimes can be too individualistic by focusing on a person's psychological dimension in conversion, such as in his use of the terms *crisis* and *quest*. On the one hand, Gooren's (2010) theory attends to the sociological factors in conversion, such as the broad and local social-religious context, the person's social-institutional affiliations and networks. On the other hand, Gooren's (2010) theory includes variables such as belief/worldview, identity and belonging, which can be difficult to operationalise, accessible, through not only relying on the individual's verbal accounts of conversion experience, but also observable practices and activities. This makes ethnographic methods powerful tools in researching religious

conversion (see Chapter Four). However, Gooren's (2010) terms, such as *conversion* and *confession*, can sometimes be problematic in dealing with non-monotheistic, non-confessional religions. The empirical cases that he used to back his theory are mostly conversion to and disaffiliation from monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam (Gooren, 2010: 69-129, with only one exceptional case related to Buddhism; ibid.: 78-79],). In the remaining part of this section, my own sequential model of conversion is developed on the basis of a critical adoption and synthesis of Rambo (1993) and Gooren's (2010) theories.

3.2. A three-stage sequential model

A theoretical model is a 'strategy for organising complex data, not as universal or invariant' (Rambo, 1989: 51). And the model is supposed to be a tool which should be 'suggestive and organisational', not limiting (ibid.). The three-stage sequential model of religious conversion for this research is a synthesis of Rambo's (1993) and Gooren's (2010) process-oriented models. It is developed for the documentation and analysis of the large amount of qualitative data I have gathered for the understanding of the dynamics of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain by focusing on typical trajectories of conversion.

To develop my own theoretical model, I follow Yang and Abel's advice (2014) that a comprehensive sociological analysis of religious conversion needs to have three levels, the micro, the meso, and the macro. At the micro level, psychological factors such as changes in personal emotion and sense of belonging, religious factors such as changes in a person's religious belief, practice and institutional affiliation, and sociological factors such as personal bonds and networks need, to be considered. At the meso level, the changes and conditions of local and congregational settings in which my participants are situated need to be examined. And at the macro level, the broader social-religious context and, especially for the migrants, and changes in this context, are also important in understanding their lived experience of conversion and migration. These three levels of analysis will be interwoven in the academic account in later empirical chapters.

The conversion processes are highly complex with unpredictable, contingent situations and events occurring at any stages in real life, as mentioned previously. Nevertheless, sequential occurrence of certain events in different trajectories of conversion can be identified. As for Rambo's (1993) theory, I regard the *seven stages* in his model as theoretical variables reminding scholars about crucial events in conversion process. For example, the encounter stage in Rambo's (1993) model describes the event of encountering a religious person or any

religion-related materials or phenomena, which can be regarded as the starting point for conversion. A person's encounter with a religion can be a contingent event in his/her life. The event can be re-interpreted as religiously meaningful by the person as part of the his or her reconstructed biography after conversion (cf. Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984). Thus, in my model, *encounter* is set as the first stage in which a person's pre-affiliation and affiliation to religion, in Gooren's (2010) term, needs to be included. In the analysis of *the stage of encounter*, the convert's background can be examined in the contexts of broad social-cultural changes, of the local social-religious 'ecology' (Yang & Wang, 2006: 179) and of migration. At this stage, some people would experience what some scholars (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1993) have called a 'crisis' in terms of physiology, finance, psychology and metaphysical worldviews, and hence would develop a 'quest' for a religious solution. However, some people do not actively engage in religious phenomena. Rather, they can be *socialised* into a religious community and thus proceed in their trajectory of conversion. The stage of encounter is analysed in Chapter Six.

For the second stage in my model, I use the term *initiation* to describe those Chinese migrants who have encountered Christianity and proceeded in their conversion processes. The term was initially inspired by the contemporary Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (the RCIA programme) of the Roman Catholic Church. This term refers to a didactic process offered by Roman Catholic institutions to aid adult conversion and acceptance into the church (cf. RCIA, USCCB, 2017). In my research, the term *initiation* is used in a sociological sense, denoting a transitional stage at which a potential convert enters or is introduced into a religious system, which can include beliefs, practices, institutions and communities. It is at this stage that the potential convert can learn and be taught about basic tenets of belief and practice of a religion, and be further socialised into the religious communities. In the Chinese Christian context, a convert is often required to say a decision prayer (in public or in private) and to receive baptism. My analysis of *the stage of initiation* focuses, firstly, on identifying and presenting *the Chinese Christian evangelical culture* in Britain, which has played a crucial role for the initiation of many potential Chinese Christian converts. Secondly, I illustrate how potential converts can be socialised into the culture and become converts. In Rambo's (1993) term, it is the *interactions* between individuals and the religious institutions that will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven.

Lastly, I borrow Rambo's (1993: 168) term *commitment* to describe the 'culmination of conversion process'. According to Gooren (2010: 50), at the stage of *commitment*

(*confession*, in his term[13]) the converts are likely to gain a 'core member identity with a high level of participation inside the [new] religious community and a strong evangelism on the outside'. The term *commitment* has been widely used in the analysis of phenomena such as power, religion, occupational development, and political behaviour. (Becker, 1960). In Christianity, commitment is 'at the heart' of the religion, both organisationally and theologically (Stark and Glock, 1968: 1). Commitment is 'a consequence of the person's participation in social organisations' (Becker, 1960: 32). It is a 'side bet', i.e., a person's emotional, intellectual, financial, and social investment in social organisations substantiated through 'a line of consistent activities' (ibid.). The Chinese Christian converts who have gone through stages of encounter and initiation are likely to commit to the religion by practicing it. The practice of religion is often required by religious beliefs instantiated and represented by religious institutions and conditioned to specific culture. In my analysis of *the stage of commitment* of Chinese migrant Christians, I firstly present how Chinese Christian institutions expect the converts to commit to the religion. Then I focus on how Chinese migrant Christians develop their commitment to Christianity through the cultivation of religious and communal belonging. Converts are likely to deepen their understanding of religious beliefs by finding experiential relevance of religious beliefs in their everyday life, which strengthens their adherence to the religion (in other words, their religious belonging). Moreover, a convert's development of commitment is also manifested through his/her practice of faith-informed ethics. Among Chinese Christians, their practice of moral values such as love, care, and voluntary service in the religious community is likely to enhance their adherence to the religious community (communal belonging). Chapter Eight will demonstrate the commitment of Chinese migrant Christians in Britain and propose the thesis of believing through belonging.

4. Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on religious conversion for the development of my own theoretical model. It has firstly provided a theoretical overview of prominent authors' works in the field of conversion studies. Having identified the key variables, namely, belief/worldview, identity, social network, and language, used by previous scholars to

[13] Gooren (2010: 148 Note 10) balked at the choice of the terms between 'confession' and 'commitment'. He contends that people at earlier stages in their conversion processes can also be 'fully committed' to their faith and religious group (ibid.). However, I did not follow his terminology because of the difference in my conceptualisation of stages in conversion process.

approach the phenomenon of conversion, I have attempted to contextualise the theoretical perspectives in my research. The theoretical contextualisation is done through identifying influencing factors in conversion process at different analytical levels. This not only helps with the thematic analysis of my qualitative data, but also assists in organising data. Drawing on Rambo's (1993) work, I have then classified different types of converts found among the participants sampled for my research. Finally, in this chapter, the classic process-oriented models of conversion by Lofland and Stark (1965), Rambo (1993), and Gooren (2010) have been critically evaluated and adopted. This is a move toward the development of my three-stage sequential model of conversion. My theoretical model contains three stages, namely, *encounter, initiation, and commitment*. Using this model as a framework, I document and analyse typical trajectories of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain from Chapter Six through Eight. In the next section, the research methodology, which is closely related to my theoretical framework developed in this chapter, will be presented in detail.

Chapter Four: Methodology

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to understand the socio-religious dynamics of Chinese Christian communities in Britain by examining Chinese migrants' conversion to Christianity. Drawing on social scientific theories of religious conversion, the previous chapter has developed a three-stage sequential model as the framework for the documentation and analysis of my empirical data. In the development of the theoretical model, some methodological issues regarding the sampling of research participants and the analytic method have been mentioned. This chapter elaborates on the methodology of my research.

This thesis adopts a qualitative methodology and is grounded in the sociology of religion, as the majority of preceding research on religion in Chinese diaspora has done. This methodology has been extensively used in exploration and documentation of the dynamic patterns emerged in the field. It enables the preliminary theorisation of a phenomenon (in my case, the Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants in Britain). To be more specific, my research employs 'ethnographic field strategies' (Berg, 2007: 171), which encompass methods such as the semi-structured interview and multi-sited participant observation. I have conducted interviews with thirty people from the social group I have identified as Chinese migrant Christian converts (See Chapter Three, Section 2.2) and with two English Christians who have been experienced Christian evangelists among the Chinese migrants in Britain. In addition, multi-sited participant observation has been conducted in a range of gathering settings, such as church congregations, fellowships, Bible study groups, Christian camps and conferences, where there have been stable presence of large numbers Chinese migrant Christians. Details of the data collection methods are presented in the next section in the chapter. In Section Three, I report on the analytic method for qualitative data, the *thematic-network analysis*, which has been mentioned in the previous chapter (see Chapter Three, Section 2.2). Finally, in Section Four, I reflect on my ethnographic research experience.

2. Data collection

2.1. The theoretical rationale

Scholarship in the social scientific study of religion can be methodologically divided into two groups, the 'generalisers' and the 'particularisers' (Spickard, Landres & McQuire, 2002: 1).

The generalisers often take a quantitative approach relying on survey data, membership lists, and observable and quantifiable practices. The quantitative methodology in social research on religion can be useful in the presentation and prediction of the overall trend of religious composition and landscape in a society (e.g., Pew Research Centre, 2012) and to devise generalisable theoretical schemes for the measurement of individual religiosity and commitment (e.g., Stark & Glock, 1968). Whereas the particularisers who take a qualitative approach, are dedicated to document the minute details of specific groups of people, their religions in different levels of contexts that the people and religions are situated. In the research on religion, the quantitative approach can provide answers to questions such as *how many religious people there are in a society* or *how often people practice their religion (measured by religious service attendance or frequency of private religious practice).* The qualitative approach, for its part, can shed light on the 'quality', which is 'essential to the nature' of religious phenomena. The qualitative methodology aims to investigate the 'meaning, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions' of religion, which constitute the 'essence and ambiance' of religion (Berg, 2007: 3). The aim of this thesis (see Chapter one, Section 2) requires a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology, which explores religion as 'diverse, complex and ever-changing mixture of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences, and commitments' lived by its adherents (McGuire, 2008: 185).

This study takes *lived religion* as a theoretical approach (as mentioned in Chapter Two) to religion in the context of migration. In the last two decades, the study of 'religion as practiced and experienced by ordinary people in the contexts of their lived everyday lives' has emerged as an important theoretical approach to religion (McGuire, 2008: 96; see also in Hall, 1997; Orsi, 1997, 2003; Ammerman, 1987, 2007; Neitz, 2011). The lived-religion approach challenges the conventional academic treatment of religion in dichotomous terms, such as 'public/private', 'political/domestic' (Orsi, 2003: 173). Ammerman (2007: 9) recognises that boundaries between seemingly opposing realms, such as the religious and the secular, and the individual and the institutional, in real social life are 'permeable'. This means that religion studied as people's lived experience is 'not necessarily private or internal'; 'it is often practiced in public or in collective acts and understandings' (Neitz, 2011: 54).

Taking a lived-religion approach, my research is informed by scholars such as Snow and Machalek (1983, 1984), Staples and Mauss (1987), and Jindra (2011), who have focused on the 'retrospective narrative-based analysis of conversion testimonies' (Williams, 2018: 2).

However, the analysis of accounts of conversion experiences tend to emphasise the linguistic practices and semantic schemes of converts while neglecting the 'embodied, sensual, and performative dimensions of conversion' (ibid.). Thus, my study of Chinese migrants' conversion to Christianity also takes into account the influence of institutional and wider social contexts in which Chinese migrant Christians are situated. It aims to understand conversion in a holistic manner.

This qualitative research can be described as *ethnographic.* In the family of qualitative methodologies, ethnography has been employed for my qualitative investigation as a distinctive methodology (a theory, a set of fundamental principles and practices, or specific methods). Ethnography, originally the investigative tool practiced by cultural anthropologists, has also been widely practiced by social scientists (Berg, 2007). Although the conceptual meanings, terminologies, and applications of ethnography can differ among different ethnographers, the ethnographic methodology 'rests on a number of fundamental criteria' (O'Reilly, 2009: 3). According to O'Reilly (2009:3), ethnography is 'iterative-inductive research' which requires the researcher to move iteratively and reflexively between research design, data collection, and analysis, and to use inductive reasoning to report research findings. Ethnographic research often does not proceed in a linear fashion. Rather, it is a 'spiral' progress (ibid.: 15), as will be substantiated below in the section on the recruitment of participants, the sampling of observational sites, and designing of questions for interview.

The flexibility of ethnography allows a range of qualitative research methods to be used in ethnographic research. For this study, I have employed semi-structured interviews and multi-sited participant observation as the two main instruments for qualitative inquiry. Through semi-structured interviews, the data on how Christian conversion and migration are experienced and understood by my interview participants can be accessed and collected through verbal accounts of the participants. Mostly, the interviews have been audio-recorded, sometimes aided by the instantaneous note-taking and reflective notes after the interviews. As for the multi-sited participant observation, I have followed the lead of my participants into the Christian gathering sites where they are based. The method aims to gain insights into contextual influence on the participants' conversion experience. At the preliminary stage of my research, I observed that although individual Chinese Christians are primarily situated in a specific Christian setting – a church congregation, a fellowship, or a Bible study group – there is also a dimension of mobility in their religious participations. In other words, people do not only participate in one single Christian gathering site, but also move between different

Christian groups and participate in different communal religious events and activities. The mobility of my research participants requires the practice of participant observation in multiple settings in order to gather sufficient contextual information; hence the multi-sited ethnography. The remaining part of this section expounds on the specific practices in the semi-structured interviews, and on multi-sited participant observations in the research.

2.2. Semi-structured in-depth interview

The recruitment of interview participants

Before proceeding to the phase of formal data collection in 2016, a preliminary research was conducted. At this stage, to familiarise myself with the research subject, I approached a range of people who were likely to inform me about the Chinese Christian communities in Britain, including local (Chinese) Christian leaders and laypersons, university chaplains, and scholars. In the meantime, I read extensively on not only sociology but also Christian theology and history which enabled me to understand terms and categories that would emerge along with the continued interactions with Christians. Having familiarised myself with the research subject and established a personal social network among the (Chinese) Christians, I started recruiting participants for semi-structured interviews in January 2016 using *purposive snowball sampling*.

Snowball sampling, as a 'nonprobability sampling strategy', also known as 'chain referral sampling' or 'respondent-driven sampling', is one of the most frequently practiced sampling strategies for qualitative researchers (Berg, 2007: 44). It is 'sometimes the best way' to locate potential participants 'with certain attributes or characteristic necessary in the study' (ibid.). The development of snowball samples is based on a referral chain, which is driven by the referral by one respondent to another. However, recognising the particularities of the sampled participants requires the researcher's 'special knowledge or expertise', which I have gained through the preliminary inquiry (ibid.). In other words, snowball sampling is often driven by particular purposes of the research. Through the preliminary research, a number of potential participants with traits that are directly related to my research were identified. These traits can be summarised under two rubrics: Chinese migrants and converts to Christianity.

In Chapter Two (Section Three), I have listed three key criteria to characterise *Chineseness*, namely familial Chinese bloodline, cultural Chinese identity, and ancestral roots in China. Concerning the status of migration, I have included in my sample persons who have migrated

to Britain and stayed in the country for at least five years[14], who may have been granted British citizenship or permanent residency in the country. This practical criterion excludes a large number of Chinese students at British colleges and universities, who in some cases can be counted as migrants but will not necessarily stay beyond the time of their studies. In addition, the migration experience of current students might be rather limited compared with people who have lived and worked in Britain after being students (many of my participants are student-turned immigrants)[15].

A similar criterion, namely that the participants need to be Christians for five years, is also applied in identifying them as Christian converts. I reckon that *being a Christian for five years* is likely to allow a person to have relatively sufficient experience of Christianity, enabling him or her to provide quality information on his or her conversion experience. Further, I follow Yang's (1999: 71) advice which is to use *receiving water baptism* as an 'operational indicator' to identify Christian converts, other than self-identification. This is a practical criterion to identify committed Chinese Christians. As will be discussed in Chapter Five and the empirical chapters, the majority of Chinese Christians in Britain can be categorised as *Protestant Evangelicals*, for whom baptism is mostly practiced among the adults as a public declaration of their Christian identity indicating their commitment to the faith.

In my research, 32 participants were recruited for semi-structured interviews from January 2016 to March 2017. Among these participants, 30 are Chinese. Two are English Christians experienced in missionary and ministerial work among Chinese migrants. The interviews with the two English Christians was intended to gather information on their opinions of the Christian evangelical ministries and their experience of the growing Chinese migrant communities in Britain. I classify the 30 Chinese participants into four groups according to the range of their age as a marker of their experience of migration[16]: Group 1. aged between

[14] According to British law, those who have lived and worked in the UK for at least 5 years are eligible to apply for British citizenship (c.f. https://www.gov.uk/british-citizenship).
[15] A subtle distinction needs to be made between those Chinese migrants who have gained permanent residency in Britain and those who have gained British citizenship. Presently, the P.R. China does not recognise dual citizenship. This means that those who have taken the British passport must give up their Chinese citizenship. Instead, many Chinese migrants only hold permanent residency that guarantees their legal rights of working and living in the UK.
[16] This marker is widely applicable but not definitive. I assume that those who migrated earlier tend to be older. However, there are exceptions. For example, a senior participant in my study (aged 73) migrated to Britain as a dependent of her child in 2008. However, her child has been studying and working in the country for over twenty years.

17 to 24, Group 2. Aged between 25 to 45, Group 3. Aged between 46 to 65, Group 4. Aged 66 and above. The majority of my participants fall into Group 2 and 3. Three people are in Group 1. And six people are in Group 4. In terms of the educational level, most of my participants are as well-educated, with bachelor's degrees or above. The majority of my sampled participants are Christian pastors and lay leaders, academics, professional workers in managerial positions, and self-employed entrepreneurs.

I would argue that my sample of participants reflects the characteristics of a larger social group, the *new Chinese migrants*, whose migration has usually taken place in the 2000s. This group of Chinese migrants contrast with the old generation of migrants in many ways (cf. Pharoah, Bell, Hui & Yeung, 2009). The distinction between the old and the new Chinese migrants will be discussed in Chapter Five. As a preliminary summary, the old generation of Chinese migrants is less well-educated than the new generation, working in manual-labour-intensive industries such as the catering business. Some may have been and can remain undocumented workers and asylum seekers. Among my participants, I have interviewed two male Chinese migrants who do not have university degrees and workable English language skills. They migrated to Britain and have worked in Chinese restaurants for over 10 years. One of them remains an undocumented worker until this day. Further, during my field research, I also observed that there are many female homemakers, who in terms of the time of migration (migration after the 1990s) can be categorised as the new migrants. Some of them have low levels of education and their English language skills can be lower than conversational level, as Liu (1992) has found (see Chapter Five). I have interviewed one such female Chinese homemaker and documented her conversion testimony given in public church gathering settings (Field Note, March 17, 2016).

In summary, 32 participants have been recruited through purposive-snowball sampling for in-depth interviews from January 2016 to early 2017. Apart from the two English lay Christian ministers who are experienced in evangelism among the Chinese migrants, all 30 participants are *new Chinese migrants* who have converted to Protestant Evangelical Christianity. To demonstrate the diversity and the characteristics of the subject population, a range of sub-criteria including age, level of education, and profession have been used along the way of sampling. A gender balance is kept intentionally in the recruitment of participants. The gender dimension is not examined particularly in this study. In Chapter Five (also in Chapter Nine on future research direction), I draw on previous literature and my observations to provide an account of gender issues among Chinese Christians in Britain. As there is no

definitive guideline determining the exact sample size for a qualitative project, the size of my sample was informed by the concept of saturation in qualitative data analysis (cf. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006: 59). A list of my participants containing pseudonyms, gender, age, education, occupation, year of migration, and time of interview is attached in Appendix I.

The interview

Interviewing is one of the most important strategies for qualitative inquiries, and it can simply be defined as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Berg, 2007: 90). Denzin (2001: 26) notes that people live in a 'performance-based, dramaturgical culture'. Qualitative interviewing in this sense can be considered a type of *social interaction* (cf. Goffman, 1959) performed in a complex, dramaturgy-like setting, where meanings of discourse, narrative, and culture converge and inform conversational actors. In terms of the different manners in which interviews can be conducted, qualitative interviews can be categorised into three types, the structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Bryman, 2012: 210-213, see also in Berg, 2007: 92-97). *Structured interviews* are often highly standardised with the exact ordered and worded question sets for all participants; whereas *unstructured interviews* are completely unstandardised with no preconceived questions. Semi-structured interviews have been employed in my research.

The semi-structured interview is with a set of questions prepared by a researcher for the investigation of a series of issues with the other person. It requires the researcher's experience in discerning real-life scenarios in the interview setting, through which he or she can add or delete questions and probe certain issues further with the participant. My research investigates the lived experience of religious conversion and migration. *Lived experience* is by definition a kind of highly 'personal knowledge' gained through a person's 'direct involvement' in everyday events (Lived experience, 2011). This knowledge can be accessed by others through verbal representations by the person. The manners in which people verbally represent their lived experience can vary from one person to another. Given the diversity and variety of data on people's lived experience, I consider semi-structured interviews the most appropriate method for collecting the relevant data for my research.

An interview guide was developed to address the research question on Christian conversion of the Chinese in the context of their migration to Britain. The guide contains three sets of questions covering issues of migration, experiences of religion, faith, belief, conversion experience, and identity. Questions concerning the participants' personal information, such as

their age, educational level, job, and migration status, which often function as conversational starters, are merged into the interview practice. For example, my interview often starts with asking the participants about their time of migration. Following the lead of this question, many of my participants would provide a narrative of their study, work, and life experience in Britain, sometimes without me asking probing questions. The revealing of my personal identity as a Christian often facilitated conversations about the participants' own experience of and opinions about their religion-related issues (see Section 4 in this chapter for reflexivity). Both English and Mandarin Chinese were used in my interviews. The interview guide is attached as Appendix II. To answer the second research question concerning the relation between the individual experience and institutional and contextual influence, a method beyond the individualistic method of interviewing is needed; hence the participant observation.

2.3. Multi-sited participant observation

Ethnography, with its roots in the anthropological study of aboriginal tribes and their cultures, has been widely used in the study of religion (Spickard et al., 2002). Its main method is that of *participant observation*, during which the researcher can document events and activities at a real-life setting through means of note-taking, video and audio recording, etc (O'Reilly, 2005, 2009). Oral accounts by various individuals, documentations and publications relevant to the research, even artefacts can be gathered and accounted for as data in the ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Both pre-arranged and casually arising conversations with multiple individuals, known as *ethnographic interviews*, can take place in ethnographic field work (ibid.).

Ethnographers of religion often 'choose a religious locale, spend time (often very brief) with its inhabitants, listen, watch, question, think, listen again – and then write reports telling the readers what goes on there' (Spickard, Landres, & McGuire, 2002: 10, emphasis in original). Conventionally, ethnographers of religion tend to conduct their research focusing on one single site, which is known as *congregational study* in the ethnography of religion, particularly Christianity (e.g., Ammerman, 1987). Single-sited ethnography has also widely been used by preceding scholars who have studied Christianity among the Chinese diaspora in the United States (e.g., Yang, 1999; Abel, 2008). However, in the era of globalisation, the increasing mobility of people not only blurs boundaries between nation-states and institutions, but also challenges traditional ethnography (Marcus, 1995).

In the case of my study, not only do the Chinese migrants move from their places and cultures of origin to the host society of Britain, but also their institutions and communities of different sizes often change in forms and move from one place to another. To track the dynamic changes and developments of the Chinese migrant Christians and their communities, multi-sited participant observation has been practiced in the research. Multi-sited participant observation can be characterised as a 'bottom-up approach in mapping out the ever-unfolding mobility and connections', rather than the conventional single-sited observation, the scope and scale of which seems to be limiting in the study of migrant religion (Xiang, 2013: 283).

In practice, Marcus (1995: 105-113) proposes a number of 'tracking' strategies for conducting multi-sited ethnography, including following people, things, metaphors, plots, life histories, and conflicts. In my research, instead of practicing prolonged immersive field work in a single Chinese Christian gathering site, I have practiced what Brockman (2011) has called *short-term participant observation* for nine months in different types of Christian communities in Britain where the Chinese migrants constantly attend. These communities include both Chinese and English-led Bible study groups (mostly Chinese ones), fellowship meetings, congregational church services, and parachurch organisations (Christian missionary organisations). Due to the limit in time and finance, and the qualitative nature of this research, instead of ambitiously pursuing an all-encompassing survey of all kinds of Chinese Christian communities in Britain, I have followed the leads of my participants, and have endeavoured to visit the Christian gathering sites where they usually attend. These sites are located in cities and university towns in England, including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Canterbury, Luton, Nottingham, Leicester, and Loughborough. Through my personal connections, I have also been granted access to and participated in a number of events, including evangelical camps, mission conferences, weekend Bible and Christian study programmes hosted by the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (the COCM), the largest Chinese Christian mission organisation in Europe based at Milton Keynes.

During the multi-sited ethnographic field research, I have not only participated in events and activities, but also conducted on-site ethnographic interviews (conversations) with various Chinese Christians, ranging from religious professionals and laypersons to sometimes non-Christian participants in those communities. I have also collected some internal publications in order to provide a general account of the conditions of contemporary Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. I use these materials in Chapter Five to further describe the local context for the discussion of empirical findings.

However, while highlighting the usefulness of multi-sited ethnographic methods in my research, I also acknowledge the critiques and limitations of short-term, multi-sited participant observation as well as the problematic role of the researcher in practicing ethnography (e.g., Marcus, 1995; O'Reilly, 2009; Brockmann, 2011). These problems will be reflected upon in Section Four of this chapter. Having collected a large amount of qualitative data recorded and documented in audio and textual manner, the next section presents how the data can be analysed in an organised and structured manner.

3. Data analysis

The collection, sorting, and analysis of qualitative ethnographic data is a 'reflexive' and 'spiral process' (O'Reilly, 2009: 14). My research questions were formulated based on insights gained through preliminary inquiries into the research subject, the Chinese migrant Christians in Britain. The data cumulatively collected through semi-structured interviews and multi-sited participant observations was iterative-inductively analysed along with the theoretical development of the thesis (see Chapter Three). In other words, the collection and analysis of my data often proceeded in parallel.

The field research for this study started January 2016 and formally ended in March 2017. As informed by Guest et al. (2006: 59), my qualitative interview data started to saturate, i.e., all key issues had emerged and certain patterns were identified, after fifteen interviews had been conducted. Further interviews and participant observations were conducted to strengthen the *thickness* of the data (cf. Geertz, 1973), which allowed the patterns to emerge more fully and clearly. The data corpus of my research consists of audio recordings (with transcriptions), textual documentation of semi-structured interviews, field notes, reflexive memos written during and immediately after the ethnographic fieldwork, internal documentations and publications of various Christian institutions, and information gleaned from the web. To make sense of different corpuses of data and to present the data in a consistent scholarly narrative, a theoretical framework has been developed (see Chapter Three, Section 3.2). The substantive analysis of data is a process during which different data sets are unpacked and organised in a structural and *thematic* manner.

According to Braun and Clark (2006: 4) thematic analysis is a 'foundational method' for qualitative analysis, with the help of which the researcher can identify, analyse, and report patterns, i.e., recurrent themes within the data. Furthermore, he (or she) interprets various

aspects of the research topic (ibid.: 6). Scholars' use of particular terminologies in this analytical method can vary. In my discussion, I follow Attride-Stirling's (2001) explication of the method as the analysis of 'thematic network' as an effective way to organise my data.

Attride-Stirling's (2001: 388-389) *thematic-network analysis* recognises that key information contained in different chunks of qualitative data can be extracted and organised in a three-level structure of *basic themes, organising themes, and global themes.* The relationship between these three tiers of themes is visually presented in Figure 3.

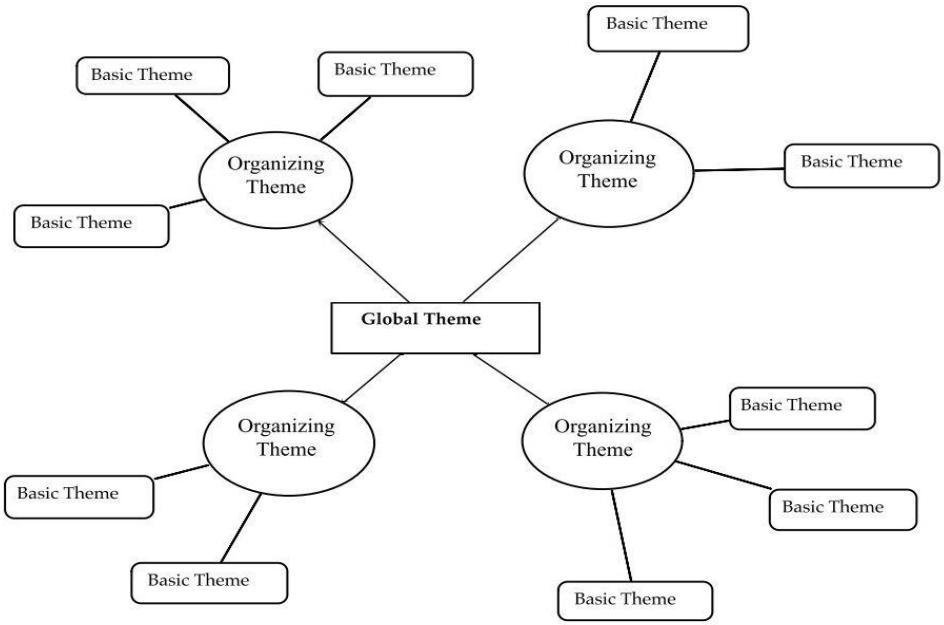

Figure 3. Structure of a thematic network (Attride-Stirling's, 2001: 388)

The *basic themes* are the 'lowest-order premises evident in the text' (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 388). As the basic themes may only represent isolated characteristics of a piece of textual data, to make coherent meaning of various basic themes invites the researcher to relate one basic theme to another. An *organising theme* can emerge with the relation of several basic themes together, manifesting a 'cluster of similar issues' as a larger category or pattern (ibid.: 389). A higher level of abstraction can take place when a 'super-ordinate' claim, assumption, or assertion can be made as a *global theme* (ibid.). Global themes are located at the macro level, presenting arguments or positions about an issue or reality. The three levels of themes can thus form a network-like structure which summarises the analytical process of abstracting themes from a lower order to a higher order. Thematic-network analysis is useful in sorting out the complexity of qualitative data. Table 2 gives an example of how the three-level themes can be extracted and abstracted from my qualitative data.

Global themes	Organising themes	Basic themes
A person's religious background can either contribute to or hinder Christian conversion.	• A person's social (familial) background with regard to religion • A person's preconception, practice, and participation in religion before Christian conversion	• Born into a religious family • Born into a non-religious family • Has religious family members or friends • Non-religious education • Was taught about atheism • Used to regard religion as superstition • Used to regard Christianity as a Western culture • Heard about Christianity before coming to the UK • Participated in Chinese cultural religious activities • Went to a Christian church
Religious practice is crucial in a person's conversion experience.	• Embodied religious practices • Faith/belief/religious knowledge-strengthening religious practices • Faith-informed ethical religious practices	• Kneeling/praying/singing, etc. • Receiving water baptism by immersion • Bible / religious texts reading • Christian witnessing • Conversion testimony giving • Caring for the needy • Serving in the church • Sharing meals
Psychological factors can greatly influence a person's religious conversion.	• Post-migration crisis-narratives • Social/psychological/spiritual needs • Quest for moral/meaning/metaphysical certainty	• Feeling lonely after migration • Health crisis • Financial crisis • Need for social resources • Need for comfort • Need for solutions to practical concerns • Need for forgiveness for past wrong doings • Seeking moral guidance • Seeking meaning for life • Seeking metaphysical certainty

Table 2. A sample coding table of the religious factor and its constituents.

Table 2. presents three global themes, which are important insights gained through the analysis of my qualitative data. Having sorted my qualitative data, in the form of transcripts of audio recordings, field notes and memos in textual form, I started to look for basic patterns emerging in the data corpus, which form basic themes. For example, whenever the participants were talking about their family members' or friends' relation to religion, these small chunks of data could be put under the rubric of an organising theme, 'A person's social

(familial) background with regard to religion'. The organising theme is a category assigned to include a number of basic themes. Further, I find that, although religion, particularly Christianity in China, is in many ways under-represented and miscommunicated, many of my participants have had some preconceptions, practice, and participatory experience of religion before their Christian conversion, which is another organising theme. From these two organising themes, I can come up with a summarising point, 'A person's religious background can either contribute to or hinder Christian conversion' as a global theme, an insight, a position, and a minor argument that can contribute to the construction of my thesis.

As I have presented and visually illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 in this chapter, there are many interconnections and overlaps between the basic themes and the organising themes. These themes can represent a range of influencing factors in Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants in Britain, which can be analysed at three levels, the psychological, the sociological, and the religious. Within my sequential model for conversion (See Chapter Three, Section 3.2), different levels of themes can be deployed and interwoven into a consistent academic narrative of my research subject, (see Chapters Six through Eight). Lastly in this chapter, I reflect on some problematic issues regarding the methodology used in this research.

4. Reflexivity

The rationale of qualitative research is 'based on a critique of quantitative, notably, survey and experimental research' (Hammersley, 1990: 597). The critique is made on the grounds of the overly simplistic, naturalistic, and reductionist theoretical assumptions of quantitative methodology (ibid.). Conversely, criticisms can also be directed at qualitative research, especially at ethnographic methodology. The credibility and validity of ethnographic research can be strengthened through an increase in the awareness of the researcher's reflexivity (O'Reilly, 2005; 2009). Scholars have identified four problematic issues inherent to ethnography, namely, 'the problem of subjectivity, the insider/outsider problem, the question of researcher identity, and issues of power' (Spickard, et al, 2002: 5). There are no easy solutions to these problems. In this section, I address these four issues drawing on my personal experience of conducting this research.

Regarding the problem of subjectivity, I consider it to be the 'partial nature of all ethnographic accounts' (Davidman, 2002: 19). Ethnographic accounts are necessarily limited by the subjectivities of researcher and the researched individuals. Conventional sociology

argues that ‘we can only trust our knowledge when we obtain it in ways that are divorced from our selves’ (ibid.: 20). However, this stance can only partially reflect the epistemological assumptions of the social sciences in its high regard of structure and rationality. Sometimes, an overly naturalistic epistemology can overlook phenomenological aspects such as personal knowledge, attitude, and experience as part of knowledge of broad social processes (cf. Gorton, accessed 2018). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the focus of qualitative social research is on *meaning*, which is an interpretivist approach contrasting with the naturalist approach in epistemology (ibid.). The ‘voice of authority’ (O’Reilly, 2009: 191) of this research, on the one hand, is established through the presentation of methodological details in this chapter and the internal consistency of academic narratives and arguments in subsequent empirical chapters. On the other hand, I argue that becoming self-reflexive about my own role and identity in research has enabled me to be sensitive and empathetic to the researched persons but also to remain critical.

The insider/outsider role of the ethnographer has always been a contested issue in ethnography. Nevertheless, for a piece of qualitative research involving ethnographic methods, the more or less explicit goal is to ‘gain an insider perspective and to collect insider accounts’ (O’Reilly, 2009: 110). Being a Chinese, (migrant) and Christian myself, my role as an ethnographic researcher of the same subject and the related communities can in a sense be described as an insider role. However, there has been a process of becoming an insider in the beginning of the research. Firstly, as will be illustrated in Chapter Five, the Chinese migrant communities in Britain are highly diversified. For a typical independent Chinese migrant Christian church, there are different congregations for different sub-groups in the church. These sub-groups are mainly divided by the language and dialects used among the members. For me, a mainlander Chinese, speaking native Mandarin Chinese and with typical Chinese looks, to get access to the Cantonese-speaking Chinese groups and the English-speaking second-generation groups has required some efforts. Secondly, as has been revealed in preceding studies (cf. Yang, 1999; Guest, 2003; Abel, 2008), Protestant Christian communities, and not only Chinese ones, are well-known for internal conflicts and struggles over administrative and theological issues (cf. McCulloch, 2010). Although being a Christian convert myself, to challenge my previously held presuppositions and beliefs and to be able to converse and understand my Christian participants from different theological grounds, I have taught myself philosophy and Christian theology.

Nevertheless, my personal identity as a 'liberal' academic has sometimes raised suspicions at the initial period of recruiting participants who can be categorised as conservative evangelical Christians. In Bielo's study of Bible study groups of American evangelical Christians, he was also confronted with conservative Christians' suspicion of his personal religious and political commitment (cf. Bielo, 2009: 40, 29-43). This problem has been solved through the rapport building with those who were likely to be recruited as my participants through my continuous attendance of a range of Christian events and activities during the field work.

Finally, regarding the power relation between the participants and myself, I have endeavoured to build and maintain friendly relationships. Moreover, in my research practice, I have in most circumstances made explicit my role as a researcher of Chinese Christians prior to revealing my identity as a Christian. Also, I have also tried to avoid discussing my personal theological, political, and ethical views. Another dimension of the issue of power relations regarding this research comes from the participants' identities defined by the Christian institutional hierarchy. As will be mentioned in Chapter Five, those who are ordained as pastors and missionaries or institutionally recognised as lay leaders, as well as their spouses, are endowed with more authority in Chinese Christian communities than are ordinary laypeople. Speaking from my personal experience, most Chinese Christian leaders who I have come across during the research have been very generous, kind, and open to my inquiries. Nevertheless, I did not realise there was a power issue until two church ministers declined my interview requests due to their concern of misrepresentation. Five of my participants who serve full-time in Chinese church-related institutions, although having agreed to be interviewed, refused to be audio-recorded. Their accounts have been documented through interview notes and memos.

As a qualitative research involving human participants, the project gained ethical clearance from Loughborough University's Ethics Committee. The research does not involve any participants from vulnerable groups. Interviews have been conducted with the consent of the participants (See Appendix III and IV for samples of the Participant Information Sheet and the Informed Consent Form). Participant observation in the religious settings has been conducted with the permission of the persons in charge. In my field research, most interlocutors were informed about my identity as an academic researcher. No incentives were given to the participants. A majority of the interviews were conducted in public settings, such as libraries and cafes. A few were conducted at the participants' homes with their permission.

In this thesis, all participants and religious institutions, apart from the COCM, have been anonymised, and are assigned pseudonyms.

Having reported in detail on the research process of data collection and analysis, and reflected on some problematic methodological issues, I will now present the empirical findings of the research. The next chapter provides a general account of the religious landscape of the contemporary Chinese migrants in Britain, with a focus on the structural dynamics of the Chinese migrant Christian communities. It describes the local context that sets the stage for further discussions of research findings according to my theoretical framework.

Chapter Five: Chinese Christians in Britain – Context and Background

1. Introduction

In the latest UK Census (ONS, 2015), the British Chinese are recorded as the fourth largest ethnic minority population in Britain. Although the Chinese are statistically the least religious among other British ethnic minority groups, two religions, Christianity and Buddhism predominate the religious composition of the British Chinese[17]. The Chinese Christians outnumber Buddhists both individually and institutionally. The mainline tradition that the Chinese migrant Christians adhere to can be characterised as the *Protestant Evangelicalism*, with the first Chinese Christian church established in London in 1951.

Having provided the theoretical and methodological rationales in the previous two chapters, this chapter aims to set the context for the presentation of empirical findings from the research on Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. It provides an overview of the historical and local context in which my research is situated. In the next section, I outline the Chinese migration to Britain from both historical and contemporary perspectives. The Chinese settlement in Britain has gone through change and transformation since the early nineteenth century (Benton & Gomez, 2008). Along with the continuous growth of the Chinese migrant population, the last three decades have seen a demographic change among the Chinese migrants in Britain, which is a consequence of the socio-economic and political changes in both the sending and receiving countries. Although the quest for understanding the Chinese migration has led to the emergence of related research, the religious aspect of the Chinese migrants in Britain has largely been overlooked in previous scholarship. I also present the religious composition of the Chinese in Britain, drawing on the census data and my own research.

The third section focuses on Chinese Christians in Britain. Preceding scholars have shown that Chinese migrant Christians in the West have travelled transnationally and formed various

[17] There is a bias in the categories of religion in the UK's census which does not include religious categories such as Daosim and folk religion of the Chinese. It can be argued that the belief and practice of Chinese folk religion remains popular among contemporary Chinese and the Chinese in diaspora (c.f. Madsen & Siegler, 2011). And the religiosity of the Chinese is diffused in Chinese society rather than expressed in institutionalised religions (c.f. Yang, 1961). Nonetheless, in terms of the number of self-identified adherents of organised religions, the population of Chinese Christians and Buddhists are prominent among the religious British Chinese.

transnational networks (e.g., Yang, 2002; Nyíri, 2003; Shen, 2010; Tam, 2017). In Britain, Chinese Christians have formed communities of different sizes and dispersed in many British cities, towns, and villages. Many are virtually connected through the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (the COCM), the largest transnational Chinese Christian mission organisation in Europe based in Milton Keynes[18]. The connections established by individuals (especially the missionaries) are largely grounded in the 'ethno-religious space' of the Chinese Christians (Huang & Hsiao, 2015: 379).

The section below presents the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain from the historical, structural, theological and gender perspectives. Next, I focus on discussing the distinct proselytising strategies promulgated and practiced by Chinese migrant Christians in Britain which informs the subsequent presentation of empirical findings.

2. The Chinese in Britain: an overview

Although the earliest Chinese presence in Britain can be dated back to the late seventeenth century, the settlement of the Chinese migration in the country really began in the nineteenth century (Parker, 1997). Comparing with what has been bemoaned earlier by Watson (1977: 181) that 'the Chinese are undoubtedly the least understood of all Britain's immigrant minorities', studies of Chinese migration in the West have been burgeoning since the 1990s (Pieke, 2006). The early Chinese migration to Britain was largely the result of imperial Britain's expansion of maritime trading ambitions in East Asia (Jones, 1979; Parker, 1997; Benton & Gomez, 2008). Early Chinese migrants in Britain were mostly seafarers sojourning in the British seaports of London and Liverpool (Parker, 1997: 68-70). Unlike the early Chinese settlements in Southeast Asia and the US, which were often a result of 'long-term planning' by Chinese entrepreneurs and physical labourers, the Chinese seamen's early settlements in Britain were largely 'by accident' (Benton & Gomez, 2008: 25). This contrast is a result of the difference in the openness of the 'economies and frontiers' of different regions (ibid.). The early Chinese seafarers who resided in a few densely packed streets in British seaport cities formed the prototype of what is presently known as Chinatowns in the

[18] The Chinese Overseas Christian Mission was established in Britain in the 1950s. Its Christian mission activities are primarily based in Britain. In recent years, it has extended its mission outreach to other European countries. The COCM also operates at an international level. It has branches in the US, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia.

UK. However, in terms of size, complexity and diversity, the early Chinatowns in Britain failed to compete with their counterparts in the U.S. (ibid.).

Chinatown was known to be an 'ethnic enclave' in which the Chinese migrants worked and traded in small businesses such as restaurants, laundering, grocery stores, sweatshops and travel agencies (Pieke, 2006: 87). However, the early development of Chinatowns in Britain has gone through much vicissitude before the Second World War. A large number of Chinese seafarers and labourers who contributed to the Allied Powers had by 1934 been forcefully deported from British soil (Benton & Gomez, 2008: 25-31). In the early 1950s, only around 400 Chinese residents dwelt in Liverpool (ibid.: 30-31). The re-entry of the Chinese in Britain started after the Second World War, with a majority of Cantonese-speaking people emigrating from Hong Kong (then still a British colony) and Guangdong (China's Southeast coastal province), and Fujian (Southeast China coastal province). In the meantime, ethnic Chinese from countries and areas outside mainland China, especially Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore started arriving in Britain[19]. The Chinatowns in Britain started to re-emerge from the 1960s. However, they largely lost their residential function (apart from the one in Liverpool), compared with their counterparts in North America, and have become 'commercial, emblematic, and place[s] for Chinese day-out' (Benton & Gomez, 2008: 180).

Although having established emblematic Chinatowns in Britain, the Chinese communities, unlike other ethnic minority groups in the country, are generally 'poorly organised' compared with their counterparts in Southeast Asia and North America (ibid.: 201). Scholars of the British Chinese have identified a range of Chinese social groups organised on the basis of economic activity, trade, clan/familial relation, birth place, and religion (Jones, 1987; Benton & Gomez, 2008). Chinese institutions such as Chinese schools, media, and churches and temples have also been founded (Benton & Gomez, 2008). Since the late 1970s, Chinese community centres started to be built in many large cities with the support from local authorities. The centres aimed at providing social service to the Chinese communities (ibid.: 169). However, this effort of mobilising and organising the Chinese migrants in the country has been largely and peculiarly in vain (ibid.). While the economic and trade-based Chinese associations often fail to thrive, due to their constant internal conflicts and competitions, the

[19] The Chinese emigrated from South China coastal areas and Southeast Asia consist of the first wave of Chinese migrants in Britain. In latest years, there has seen a demographic change in the Chinese migrant population with more mainlander Chinese.

clan and birthplace-based associations are struggling to survive (ibid.). According to my own observations, in everyday life, one of the means that are most frequently seen for the Chinese migrants to gather for communal events and activities has always been the voluntary associations built on the basis of birthplace (*tongxianghui* 同乡会). Nevertheless, gatherings organised on the principle of birthplace often fail to develop into full-fledged, place-based communities.

Scholars such as Jones (1987: 246) speculate that one of the reasons that the British Chinese have failed to establish ethnicity-based communities is that they 'have always regarded themselves as sojourners rather than permanent settlers'. Recognising Sun Yat-sen's (the 'founding father' of the Chinese Nationalist Party in the early twentieth century) analogy of the Chinese in the world as 'a rope of sand', Benton and Gomez (2008: 109-174, see also Pieke, 2007: 88-90) point to the structural attributes of the British Chinese, such as their dispersal across Britain, and the intra-ethnic competition among business owners and groups from different places of origin. Nevertheless, given the condition of dispersal and competition which has led to the failure of sustaining many Chinese migrant communities, there has been a continuation of a loosely defined Chinese identity expressed and manifested in different forms among the British Chinese.

The formation and representation of identities of the Chinese diaspora, particularly in Britain, has been studied by several scholars (e.g., Watson, 1977; Li, 1993; Parker, 1994, 1997; Song, 1996; Modood, et al, 1997; Chan, 1997). In this brief overview, I draw on five key variables used in statistical research to capture the Chinese migrants' identity, namely, self-description, marriage and relationship, social contact and support, language use, and religion (Modood et al, 1997).

The Chinese, despite their diverse places of origin, have a keen awareness of being Chinese by self-description. However, among the second generation, identification with Chinese culture tends to drop (Verma, 1999). The second-generation Chinese in Britain tend to struggle with the ambivalence and confusion of identities between binary categories, Chinese (Asian)/British or East/West, which is a result of stereotyping and discrimination that they might have experienced from both within the Chinese communities and from British society at large (e.g., Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999). In terms of marriage and relationships, Chinese youngsters, in particular, tend to be open to inter-ethnic marriages and relationships (Modood et al, 1997). Familial and ethnic-based social contacts and supporting networks

among the Chinese have generated an image of the Chinese migrant society as 'introvert and self-reliant' (Benton & Gomez, 2008: 335). As mentioned above, although the Chinese often do not actively seek social support in institutions such as Chinese community centres, the Chinese tend to maintain a life style that is close to Chinese culture, for instance, Chinese food, and tend to live in places with Chinese clusters (cf. Benton & Gomez, 2008: 423 Note 58). Language often serves as a primary channel for self-expression, socialisation, cognition, and identity-formation. Although many Chinese families make efforts to ensure the transmission of Chinese culture through language to the next generation, there has been a decline in competence in the Chinese language among second- and third-generation British Chinese (Modood, 1997). The second-generation Chinese who are descended from Cantonese-speaking families can mostly speak but scarcely read and write Chinese (Wong, 1988; Parker, 1994). This is the result of the awareness among the young Chinese that English-language education can better ensure upward social mobility (Parker, 1994; Benton & Gomez, 2008).

Among the five defining variables of Chinese identity, the influence of religion seems less prominent than others. In both the preceding analysis and the latest census, religion seems to be irrelevant to over half of the Chinese migrants in Britain (Modood, 1997). Nevertheless, Verma et al (1999) find that even among those Chinese adolescents who are non-religious or inarticulate about their religious identity, ancestor worship, one of the most important aspects in Chinese popular religion, carries a vital function for Chinese migrant families in Britain in reproducing and transmitting core Chinese values, such as filial respect and obedience, to the next generation. In the next section, I further explicate religious aspects of the Chinese in Britain.

2.1. The religious composition of British Chinese

In the 2011 UK Census (ONS, 2015), which includes the category of religion by self-identification, irrespective of specific beliefs and practices, the British Chinese are characterised as the least religious group compared with other ethnic minority groups. Among nearly 400,000 British Chinese (in England and Wales), over half (56%) do not identify with any religious tradition. This figure surpasses that of ten years earlier by 3% (cf. Weller, 2008). This must be seen in the context of the rapid growth of the Chinese population in Britain by 73% since 2001 (ibid.). The census data shows that two religions are predominant among the religious Chinese. The Chinese Christians almost double the

Buddhists. Figure 4 below provides a visual sense of the statistical religious composition among the British Chinese.

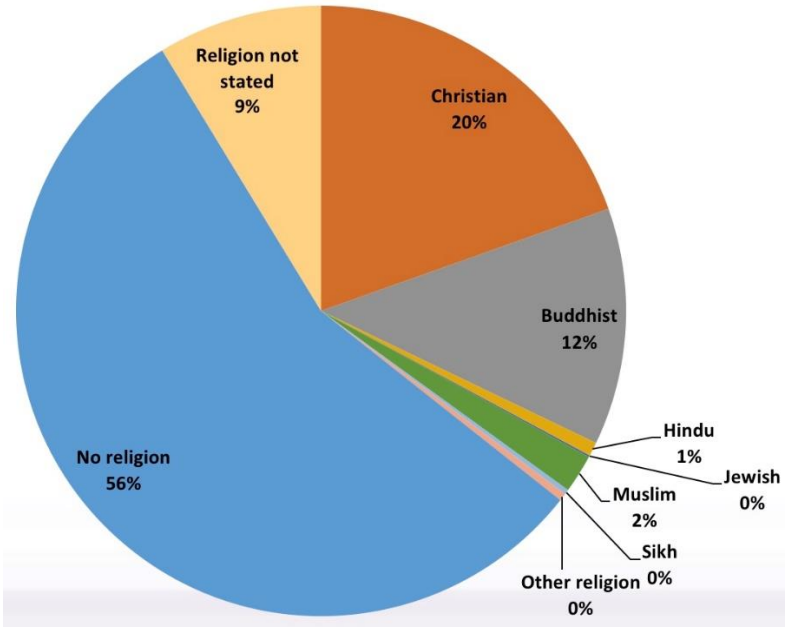

Figure 4. The religious composition of British Chinese according to the UK's 2011 census (ONS, 2015)

In an online list of the Chinese religious associations and organisations in the UK (2010)[20], there are 135 Chinese religious associations and organisations, the majority of which are Christian churches and fellowships dispersed across Britain. There are only 13 associations and organisations affiliated to religions other than Christianity, such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. The British Taoist (Daoist) Association (BTA) was founded in 1996 (About the BTA, accessed 2018) by four British Daoist priests ordained in China, following the lineage of the Quanzhen Dragon Gate Sect (Quanzhen Longmenpai, 全真龙门派). It promotes Chinese Daoist teachings through organising activities such as meditations and retreats in Britain. The extent to which British Chinese have been involved with the BTA is unknown due to the lack of historical records and literature. Notable are the Chinese Buddhist organisations, for example the Foguangshan (translated into English as Buddha's Light, 佛光山) Temples in London and Manchester.

[20] The list was previously published online by a Hong Kong-based trans-Europe Mandarin Chinese newspaper via the link: http://www.chineseineurope.net/cms/2010/0303/63.html (Retrieved January 27, 2015). The link is no longer available by the time of writing-up the thesis.

The London (and Manchester) Foguangshan Temple is part of the Buddha's Light International Association. It is part of a transnational network of Buddhist temples and organisations located in Taiwan, mainland China, Hong Kong, North America, Australia and Europe. It was founded by the Venerable Master Xingyun in 1992 promoting the idea of Humanistic Buddhism (*Renjian fojiao* 人间佛教). Although the British Chinese Buddhists are not my primary concern, I have made some interesting observations regarding this group in the beginning of my research. In a field visit to London Foguangshan Temple on the 14th May 2015, which was the Buddha's birthday according to the Buddhist calendar, I participated in the public procession and the ritual of water-bathing the Buddha's statue in Leicester Square, central London. The event was very high-profile, with officials, practitioners and scholars of Buddhism from the local authorities and academic institutes attending. It also attracted over 1,000 participants and spectators to the event site (2015-16 Activity Report, London Foguangshan Buddhist Temple). Among the participants, there were not only Chinese, but also many non-Chinese. So far, I have not found any other Chinese migrant religious organisation that has received the same level of public attention and official endorsement as the Foguangshan Temple. This observation largely echoes with Carolyn Chen's (2002) comparative study of the religious varieties among Chinese Buddhists and Christians in the US. Chen (2002) finds that the Chinese Buddhist temples and organisations carry their outreach ministries beyond the Chinese ethnic confines to reach broadly into local communities, whereas the Chinese Christians in the US tend to evangelise internally. This phenomenon is not only the result of the majority/minority dynamic in the religion and the ethnic group's status in the host society (cf. Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Chen, 2002), but also the ethno-centric proselytising ideologies and strategies employed by the Chinese migrant Christian communities in the West (e.g., Nyíri, 2003; Huang & Hsiao, 2015, discussed later in the chapter).

Last to mention in this section is Chinese popular religion in the diaspora. The study of the Chinese popular religious beliefs and practices in diaspora in the West is methodologically very difficult. This is because Chinese popular religion often does not operate on an institutional basis but is more grounded in traditional Chinese culture and people's everyday lives, i.e., the diffusiveness of religion in Chinese society (cf. Yang, 1961). It is an area where census instruments fall short, as the categories of religions used in the UK Census primarily account the institutional religions and assume a *world-religion-paradigm* (cf. Smart, 1998). According to Benton and Gomez (2008: 276), the '[folk] gods and ghosts are rarely

worshipped publicly in Europe' compared with the Chinese in Southeast Asia where Chinese temples and shrines of local gods and goddesses can easily be found. However, in my research, I have observed the enshrinement of popular Chinese deities such as Caishen (the deity of wealth, 财神) and Guangong (a deified Chinese historical figure known for his justice and righteousness, 关公) in Chinese homes, restaurants, stores and supermarkets with incense burning before the shrines. Chinese popular religion as practiced and performed in the Chinese diaspora in the West deserves further scholarly attention.

Having briefly examined the historical and contemporary socio-religious dynamics of British Chinese communities, the next section focuses on Chinese Christians in Britain.

3. The Chinese Christians in Britain

3.1. The structure of the Chinese Christian communities in Britain

As Chen (2002) has pointed out, Christians are very good at forming and sustaining communities, and adherents of other religions, such as Buddhists, have in many ways mimicked the strategies of community-organising from Christians. Christianity, with its particular institutional tradition, can be a powerful remedy for the lack of institutional affiliation commonly seen among Chinese in the diaspora. Scholars such as Jones (1987) have also noticed that the Chinese migrant churches in London are among the few successful examples of surviving and thriving Chinese migrant communities in Britain. The earliest Chinese migrant Christian community in contemporary Britain can be traced back to the year 1951, when the Chinese Church in London (CCIL) was founded by Reverend Stephen Y.T. Wang (CCIL, 2000). After nearly seventy years of growth, how have the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain developed? Specifically, how do Chinese migrant Christians start, form, sustain, and spread their communities throughout Britain? These questions are addressed in this section, providing a local context in which this research is situated. Later in this section, the focus will be given to the proselytising strategies commonly seen among the Chinese Christians as one of the most important factors contributing to the Chinese migrants' conversion to Christianity and the building of related communities.

As mentioned previously, the Chinese Christian organisations in Britain far outnumber other Chinese religious associations. In my ethnographic research, I have found that there are basically three types of Chinese Christian institutions: church congregations (independent and

associated), fellowships, and Bible study groups[21]. Different sizes of communities of Chinese migrants are often formed around these Christian institutions. The Bible study group is the most foundational Christian institution for Chinese Christian communities. A Bible study group can initially be organised and led by local English Christians, the leadership of which can be passed on to Chinese when there is a stable Chinese membership. There are also cases where Chinese migrant Christians voluntarily start their own Bible study groups. Although started by Christians, some non-Christian Chinese migrants often also participate in Bible study groups. The size of these groups varies from three to 30 persons. Christian fellowships are in many ways similar to Bible study groups – while the latter is oriented to be didactic, communicating and sharing knowledge of the Christian Bible and the faith – a fellowship often functions as a platform of socialising between the members where only limited amount of religious knowledge would be communicated during the meeting. To quote from a lay Chinese Christian Minister, Paul (interviewed May 1, 2015), 'any one [a Christian] who knows something about the Bible and feels called by God can start sharing whatever they know about the Bible [i.e. to start a Bible study group]'. 'A Christian fellowship is in a sense a lesser church, without hiring an ordained pastor' (ibid.). Paul further remarked, 'the [Chinese] Christian fellowships are often developed from voluntarily organised Bible study groups, in which people meet regularly […] they [the Christians] can worship together, study the Bible together, and listening to sermons from invited pastors or speakers together […]'. Despite not being ordained, Paul was a lay preacher serving in a local Chinese Methodist church in a small city in England. He is a frequent guest speaker in another local Chinese Christian fellowship.

According to Paul, when a fellowship grows to a certain size, 'often with at least ten households as regular members', the fellowship can afford hiring an ordained pastor, which is one of the prerequisites for a 'proper church'. According to a list of the UK Chinese Churches provided by the COCM[22], there have been 128 Chinese churches and fellowships in 71 British cities and towns. Although the COCM can be described as a non (or cross)-denominational Chinese Christian mission agency, it belongs to the Protestant Evangelical tradition. It meets the four main characteristics identified by David Bebbington (1989: 2-17), a renowned historian of Christianity, namely, 'biblicism' (holding the Bible as the ultimate

[21] Fellowships and Bible study groups can be both independently organised and with affiliations to churches.
[22] For the COCM's list of Chinese churches and Christian organisations in Britain, see: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/76492a_4734f84da65949fd962fd96142cce0c7.pdf and https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/76492a_19c8495ad45449a4812260bf063977fe.pdf

authoritative text), 'crucicentrism' (a theological focus on the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross), 'conversionism' (emphasising universal necessity for Christian conversion), and 'activism' (a disposition of active evangelism in the world). The denominational bias of the COCM can lead to the exclusion of other Chinese Christian bodies in Britain from their pastoral concerns, such as the Chinese Catholic groups and other Christian-affiliated groups.

There are at least three Chinese Catholic groups in Britain (London, Glasgow, and Manchester). According to my personal conversation with Father Brian (May 6, 2017), an Irish Catholic missionary priest who is experienced in promoting Sino-British Catholic exchange, Chinese migrant Catholics are aware of the large number of Chinese Protestant Christian churches in Britain. However, no formal connections have been made between the Chinese Catholic and Protestant communities in Britain so far. Another example is the exclusion of other Christian-affiliated groups, such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, in which there is also presence of Chinese migrants (my observation). And the Chinese communities of the True Jesus Church (TJC), a Christian group originating in the 1920s in Beijing and currently operating from Taiwan, in Scotland and Northeast England have also been excluded from the COCM's pastoral and mission concerns (cf. Liu, 1992).

The earliest sociological research focusing on the religious aspect of the Chinese migrants in Britain that I have retrieved is a doctoral thesis by Garland Liu (1992) examining the Chinese communities of the True Jesus Church in Elgin and Aberdeen, Scotland. The TJC Chinese communities in Scotland were formed in the early 1960s out of immigrant students, workers, and fishermen from Malaysia and Hong Kong (ibid). In contrast to the later Chinese migration to Britain after 1990, which saw a phenomenal growth in women migrants, early Chinese migrants to Britain were mostly men (Liu, 1992; Huang, 2017). Liu (1992: 334-335) identifies a pattern that during the 1960s and 1970s, the Chinese who settled in Scotland tended to go back to their places of origin for 'wife-hunting'. Early Chinese male migrants, who held traditional Chinese family values in high esteem, often wished to start their own business (usually in catering) and considered wives as 'co-worker(s)' who could support their business and fulfil their goals of establishing families in an alien land (ibid.: 225-226). This phenomenon echoes with my observations of the many Chinese homemakers living in Britain and actively participating in the Chinese Christian church communities mentioned in Chapter Three. Since the TJC is theologically exclusive and morally conservative, a system of endogamy has been promoted in the community, which has greatly contributed to its strong spiritual solidarity and religious identity (Liu, 1992: 67-68, 256-257). And Chinese culture,

especially the values and language, is often more successfully passed down from the first to the second/third generations of the Chinese migrants living in the relatively enclosed TJC communities than among other Chinese migrants (Liu, 1992; Li, 1995).

Liu's (1992) work, as well as the studies by Chen (2005) and Huang (2017), are rare among the existing literature in that they have paid a particular attention to gender issues, which have long been overlooked in research on religion in the Chinese diaspora. While my own research does not focus on gender issues, I acknowledge that there have been previous studies in this respect, which are briefly discussed in this section along with my own observations[23].

Since the 1990s, there has been a demographic change among Chinese migrants in Britain. The fact that the PRC has become the largest migrant-sending country to Britain has caught the media headlines (e.g., Telegraph, 2013; Economist, 2016). At the same time, the conventional image of Chinese migrants in the country has been changing, from undocumented workers in restaurants and sweatshops to professionals in high-end industries, from less educated to well educated, from small business owners to young entrepreneurs and, most importantly, from a largely Cantonese/Fuzhounese-speaking population to Mandarin-speaking one. Chinese Christian institutions have responded to the changes in the demographical characteristics of the Chinese migrants in Britain in recent years.

In my research, I have observed that women are very actively participating in contemporary Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, especially in Christian ministry and leadership. My observations confirm those made by Huang (2017). Huang's (2017) work is a study of gender issues from the perspective of the female Chinese migrant missionaries in Britain. Her article depicts how single young women and married couples migrating to Britain from mainland China have emerged as a prominent group in Christian ministerial careers, e.g. as missionaries commissioned by Chinese churches and mission organisations (Huang, 2017). Generally, there are more single women and married couples than single men serving full-time in Chinese Christian ministries (Huang, 2017). A lack of professionally trained Christian clergies (pastors and missionaries) has been a commonplace within overseas Chinese Christian institutions (cf. Yang, 1999). Huang (2017) identifies the gendered

[23] As noted in Chapter Four on methodology, the sampling criteria of the participants for my study does not include a gendered perspective. Rather, a gender balance is intentionally kept in the samples. In the thematic analysis of the empirical data, patterns in the conversion trajectories of my participants generally do not reflect a gendered difference. In Chapter Nine, the conclusion chapter, I point out that the gender dimension can be further explored in conjunction with the issue of religious transmission in future studies.

conception embedded in traditional Chinese culture in which males are supposed to be the major financial supporters of families. In addition, influenced by a post-socialist gendered discourse, Christian missionary work has stereotypically been viewed as a lower-class career path, as it heavily relies on unstable and moderate income from church support and individual donations (Huang, 2017). Further, in my personal conversations with missionaries and volunteers at COCM (e.g., Informal conversation with Wenwen, female, 28 Feb 2017), the ethic of obedience and service to others is often highlighted as a 'virtue' necessary for Christian ministers. This ethic is often contrary to some qualities, such as dominance and self-reliance, which is often characterised as *masculine*, compared with the *feminine* ethics such as obedience and voluntary service (cf. Huang, 2017). As a result, there are fewer single males than females serving as full-time clergies in Chinese migrant Christian communities.

Huang's (2017) observations echoes with Chen's (2005: 336) earlier research on Chinese religious women's construction of spaces, in which 'independence and authority of themselves' tend to be balanced with their maintaining of nuclear family. Huang (2017) further points out that the female Chinese missionaries seem to live in a paradox, in which a dichotomy – the sense of masculinity required by their profession and the sense of femininity required by the religious precepts and family values – are continuously negotiated. Although missionary work often involves close relationship-building requiring the expression of love and care, which are often stereotypically construed as feminine qualities, the Chinese female missionaries are often trained to 'work on their own', a 'job description associated with masculinity', due to the lack of clergies, (Huang, 2017: 221). However, in their families, the married female missionaries often 'retreat' from a strong position to a relatively week position to maintain a 'better marriage', in which the 'gender ideologies' of the traditional Chinese and conservative Protestantism meet in the celebration of 'chastity, submission, subordination, and domesticity' (ibid.: 222, 223; see also Cao, 2010: 97-125).

My research experience resonates with Huang's (2017) findings, exemplified by an observation made in a visit to a married Chinese couple's house party (also a Christian fellowship meeting) for Chinese New Year (5 Feb 2016). The couple were both committed Christians attending a local Chinese church in the Midlands. They are students-turned-immigrants who have been living in Britain for near twenty years. At the party, they talked about their conversion experience, which was partly the result of their children's conversion. Cun, the woman, converted earlier than Yin, her husband. Although both of them were very well-educated (each holding a doctorate), Yin has worked as a professional and was largely

financially responsible for the family, while Cun worked as a part-time Chinese school teacher. However, Cun appeared to be more active in leading the fellowship meeting. In conversation, Cun mentioned that she had been recommended by the church elders for full-time ministry, but she declined the offer and recommended her husband instead. She considered it 'not appropriate' for a woman to take a leadership role in the church while her husband was 'serving the secular world'.

Further to Chen (2005) and Huang's (2017) focus on women's role in Chinese migrant religious communities, I find that the institution of marriage and family is given high importance among the Chinese migrant Christians, including both laypeople and clergies. According to my observation, for the ordained Chinese clergies, both male and female, marriage is almost an unwritten prerequisite, with only a few exceptions. In an unrecorded conversation with a then COCM volunteer (28 Feb 2017), she said that married clergy can better embody the Christian family values vis-à-vis believers and can provide better marital counselling to the unmarried and married. Similar to the aforementioned Chinese TJC community, although not required, dating and marrying within the religious community is not required, but highly encouraged in the mainline Chinese migrant Christian churches. This point can be substantiated through my interviews with some Chinese Christian elders, during which I was often advised to date a 'sister in Christ' (*jidutu jiemei* 基督徒姐妹) when discussing marital issues.

So far in this section, I have drawn on materials from scholarly works, church resources, and my own research, providing a sketch of the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. The section portrays a dynamic picture of the communities from a historical, structural, theological, and gendered perspective. Through the presentation of gender issues within the communities and, earlier in this section, of institutional distinctions, the notion of the family and its role in sustaining the community becomes obvious. It is also a phenomenon that has been noticed in several preceding studies (e.g., Liu, 1992; Yang, 1999; Chen, 2005; Guest 2003; Cao, 2005; Huang, 2017). As mentioned above, the institutions of marriage and family are one of the many points at which Protestant Christianity and Chinese culture can resonate with each other, at least to some extent, although contradictions and conflicts between the two also co-exist (cf. Yang, 1999: 132-162). In the next section, I discuss common proselytising strategies through which new members can be attracted and recruited

into Christian communities, starting with the illustration of the family metaphors in the language use among Chinese Christians.

3.2. Chinese Christian proselytising in Britain

Recollecting the memory of my first participation in a COCM's camp in 2016, as a participant researcher, I described myself experiencing a kind of 'culture shock' among the young Chinese Christian attendees (field note, 26 March 2016). Although I had conducted some preliminary research the previous year, the Christian settings that I had visited were mostly Bible study groups and Christian churches and fellowships led by English Christians, where there was a frequent presence of Chinese (most of them Christians). In those settings, people often addressed each other by their first name, including the ordained pastors; except for the title of Father usually added when addressing a Catholic priest. The 'culture shock' that I experienced in the Chinese-majority Christian community at the COCM Easter camp was the observation that the participants were addressing each other as 'brothers' (*dixiong* 弟兄) and 'sisters' (*jiemei*/*zimei* 姐妹/姊妹). Despite having read about this phenomenon in preceding literature (e.g., Abel, 2008: 84), as Chinese myself, I understand that forms of address such as 'brother' and 'sister' are reserved mostly for addressing the family members. Moreover, in Chinese, the word 'brothers', in most everyday settings, is addressed as 'xiongdi', putting the older brother before the younger; whereas in Chinese Christian settings as 'dixiong', suggesting s a Christian faith-informed ethic, putting the younger brother first[24].

Further, I have observed that unlike in many Protestant English churches in which ordained pastors are often not addressed with titles such as 'Reverend' in ordinary occasions, the Chinese usually address ordained male pastors with the title 'Reverend' added after their surnames. In Chinese, it is 'xx [the surname] *mushi* (牧师)', which can be translated as 'pastor (literally: 'shepherd-master') xx [the surname]' in English. This minute detail can indicate the authoritative power endowed in the ordained pastors in Chinese churches. The wives of the pastors are addressed with the title *shimu* (师母) following their surnames assumed from their husbands as 'xx Shimu'. The title *shimu* can be translated in English as 'pastoral mother' (literally: 'master-mother'). Contrary to the authoritative power relation implied in addressing Chinese male pastors, the title *shimu* in addressing the wives of ordained Chinese Christian ministers indicates a close and familial, intimate relationship

[24] C.f. The Gospel according to Luke, Chapter 9 Verse 48 (Bible, RSV)

between these women and other members of the community. In real-life scenarios, for example the COCM camps, while the guest speakers are mainly ordained male pastors (with a few exceptions), the women, including single women missionaries and wives of the pastors, are often assigned to be in charge of pastoral care ministries, such as offering prayer and counselling services. The familial language used in Chinese migrant Christian communities leads to a further discussion of the proselytising strategies commonly seen among the Chinese migrant Christians. In subsequent empirical chapters, particularly Chapter Eight, further illustrations will be given of the cultivation of communal belonging of the Chinese Christians, which is a manifestation of the *family metaphor* used in Chinese migrant Christian communities.

Preceding scholars have noticed that although Christianity in general has assumed a position of holding certain universal truths, and Christian evangelism is supposed to be carried out beyond any socially constructed boundaries, the mainline Chinese Christian communities, both in North America and Europe, tend to grow within the specific ethnic boundaries (e.g., Yang & Ebaugh, 2002; Nyíri, 2003; Chen, 2005; Huang & Hsiao, 2015). This may partly be a result of the majority-minority dynamic of a religion in the host society and among the Christian migrant population (Yang & Ebaugh, 2002). Nevertheless, it is also a consequence of the theological and missiological orientations prescribed by the Chinese migrant Christian institutions such as churches and mission agencies.

In Huang and Hsiao's (2015) study of the Chinese Christian mission movement in Western Europe (Britain and Germany) and during my observations, a sentiment bemoaning the secularisation, especially the decline of institutional Christianity in the West, has been identified among both Chinese migrant clergies and laypeople alike. This sentiment expresses an enthusiasm for 'reverse mission', the Christian mission strategy carried out by the non-white immigrants to the West in an attempt to 're-Christianise' the West (cf. Währisch-Oblau, 2001). For instance, after 2007, after Reverend Henry Lu's appointment as General Director of the COCM, the mission agency started reorienting their mission toward 'reaching the Chinese to reach Europe', instead of the former emphasis on planting churches for exclusively for Chinese (COCM, 2010).

According to Huang and Hsiao (2015), the COCM's vision of mission would take three steps in the long run. Firstly, they aim to evangelise the large number of Chinese students (and visiting scholars) in British universities by establishing campus-based ministries. Following

this step, ministries of returnees will be established in both Britain and China to facilitate the adaptation of converted Chinese students and scholars who return to China, in order for them to become (lay) evangelists. Thirdly, ministries of the second/third-generation Chinese in Britain and Europe will be established in order for the Chinese to re-evangelise the secularised Europe. To determine to what extent that the COCM's mission has been successfully carried out would require a longitudinal study. As far as Huang and Hsiao (2015) and my own research are concerned, the COCM's mission strategy, which has also been promoted in many mainline Chinese Christian communities in Britain, has been partially successful so far.

According to my observations, the campus-based Chinese Christian evangelical ministries have developed well in almost all British universities. Some operate independently with the support from local (both English and Chinese) Christian communities. Some are directly subject to the supervision of the local Chinese migrant churches. Preceding studies have noted the many cases of Chinese students and visiting scholars in British universities who have converted to Christianity through their encounter with the Christian ministries on campus, as will be further discussed in Chapter Six (see also Li, 2012; Dickson, 2013). The students (and some visiting scholars), especially the Mandarin-speaking students who come from mainland China, are one of the major sources who have contributed to the demographical change in the new Chinese migrant population in Britain. Over half of my interview participants are students-turned-immigrants, even though many Chinese students, unlike their counterparts in North America, tend to go back to their places of origin upon the completion of their study, due to the restrictive British immigration policy, (Mathou and Yan, 2012). Those who have stayed in Britain become what the Chinese Christian leaders would call the 'elite soldiers for Christ' (*Jidu de jingbing*, 基督的精兵), the carriers of evangelical mission, as captured in Huang and Hsiao's (2015) study. Those who have returned to China are expected to become 'ambassadors for gospel' (*fuyin de shizhe*, 福音的使者), who are likely to set up Christian ministries for returnees in mainland China (Dickson, 2013; Huang & Hsiao, 2015). So far, there has been little research focusing on the religious transmission from the first to the second/third generation British Chinese. During my fieldwork, I noticed the development of second-generation ministries in some large Chinese churches in major British cities. This is also one of COCM's primary pastoral concerns. Further research will be needed in this area (see Chapter Nine on future research directions).

Having presented the Chinese migrant Christians proselytism, drawing on my research, I conclude this section by responding to a question raised in Huang and Hsiao's (2015: 391) article: are the Chinese Christians in Britain exhibiting a kind of 'ethnocentrism' or a 'cosmopolitanism in disguise' in the pursuit of proselytisation? Firstly, I acknowledge the point that, instead of facilitating the adaptation and integration of ethnic migrants into the host society, as conventional sociological research would argue (e.g., Yang, 1999), the Chinese migrant Christians in Britain have 'utilised' religion to reinforce ethnic boundaries (cf. Huang & Hsiao, 2015: 392). This point will be discussed in Chapter Seven where I characterise the particular *Chinese Evangelical Christian culture* that contributes to Christian conversion of the Chinese in Britain.

Secondly, the lived-religion approach that I have adopted for my research can provide empirical evidence for locating the larger theological-ideological discourse prevalent in mainline Chinese migrant Christian communities. The church historian Brandner (2009) has documented and discussed the construction of theological discourse among China's unofficial house churches. This theological discourse takes the Christian revival in the Chinese world as a starting point for constructing an imagined Christian geography in which China plays as vital a role in contemporary times as the Christian West did in history. A good example of this discourse can also be found in an observation that I made at a day-conference hosted by a Chinese church in a city in Northwest England (14 Nov 2015). The theme of the conference was exploring the relationship between 'the rise of China and Bible prophecy'. At the conference, the guest preacher and the pastor were very optimistic about the rapid growth of Christianity in China and among the Chinese worldwide. The message they preached centred on the Chinese as a 'God-chosen' people for Christian gospel in contemporary times and China as 'New Jerusalem', a symbolic spiritual centre of Christian faith. Their preaching in this sense can be described as 'ethnocentric', as it constructed a Chinese-centred theological discourse (Huang & Hsiao, 2015: 392). However, 'aspects of cosmopolitanism' can also be found (ibid.). The church, instead of naming it as a 'Chinese church' as other Chinese churches would often do, was located in an English Christian education institute and named as 'xx [the church's name] International Church'. On the day of the conference, although it was primarily in Chinese language, at least 10 English guests were invited, to whom an interpreter was assigned. On the ground of Chinese-centricity, the preachers encouraged the congregants (mostly Chinese) to 'catch up with the trend of God', to break through their

‘comfort zone’ in Chinese communities, and to engage a wider audience (the English) in evangelism.

Later in this thesis (Chapter Eight), I also describe that many Chinese migrant Christians who, while remaining committed to the Chinese Christian communities, are more than willing to participate in events and activities beyond the Chinese ethnic boundary as a means of not only ‘witnessing to the world their Christian faith’, but also articulating their unique Chinese identity in a globalised cosmopolitan society in Britain. Thus, instead of posing an *either-or* dichotomy, I propose a *both-and* understanding of Huang and Hsiao’s (2015) question: empirical evidence of both ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism can be found in the Chinese migrant Christian’s proselytising strategies.

4. Summary

This chapter has provided the local context for the discussion of empirical findings on how Chinese migrants convert to Christianity and commit themselves in related communities. The chapter has firstly provided an overview of the history of the Chinese communities in Britain. Drawing on statistical data as well as my own research, I have briefly presented the religious composition of the Chinese migrants in Britain. A large proportion of this chapter has been dedicated to presenting a complex picture of Chinese Christians in Britain. In the second section, I drew on both scholarly works and materials gathered in my research to present the Chinese migrant Christian communities from a historical, structural, theological and gender perspective. Starting from the family metaphors used in Chinese migrant Christian communities (a point which will be further illustrated in the empirical chapters), I have focused on discussing the theological-missiological orientations of the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. Conclusions have been drawn from acknowledging the strengthening of the ethnic boundary as a result of the articulation of the particular Chinese-focused Christian proselytising strategy promulgated by the Chinese Christian institutions. Nevertheless, there are also cosmopolitan aspects of the Chinese migrant Christian communities, which can be supported with my empirical evidence. Although Chinese Christian proselytism has operated largely within an ethnocentric framework, the proselytising strategy is rooted in a broader theological-ideological discourse which highlights the crucial role of the revival of Christianity in contemporary China within a geography of world Christianity, which is in accordance with an ‘imagined’ Christian order construed by Chinese Christians (Huang & Hsiao, 2015: 392). In practice, while remaining

committed to the Chinese community, Chinese migrant Christians have gone beyond the ethnic boundaries articulating their Christian faith and unique Chinese identity in Britain.

Chapter Six: Encounter

1. Introduction

Drawing on the preceding literature, statistics, and my own observation, the previous chapter has provided an overview of Chinese Christians in Britain from a historical, sociological, theological-missological perspective. In view of the local context, through chapters six to eight, I present and discuss the empirical findings from this research in relation to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Three. Chapter Six documents and analyses the first stage of Chinese migrants' Christian conversion, that of *encounter*. As stated in Chapter Three, for a person to convert to a religion, he or she needs to first and foremost encounter something religious (a piece of religious text, a religious artefact, a religious architecture, etc.) or someone affiliated to that religion. These things and persons become a window for the person to get in touch with the religious world. The experience of encounter with such things and persons can contribute to the person's conception of religion, and his or her subsequent practice of the religion and affiliation with the respective religious institutions and communities.

Nevertheless, methodologically, the researcher can only have indirect access to the experiences of encounter as recounted by the converts as part of their *reconstructed biographies* (cf. Snow & Machalek, 1983, 1984). For converts, one of the indicators for their own religious commitment is that they tend to adopt an *attributive linguistic scheme*, constructing casual relations between their pre-conversion experience and the event of conversion, as well as attributing their religious conversion as the consequence of some transcendental being or power (Snow & Machalek, 1984; Staples & Mauss, 1987). For the Christians, in their narratives of conversion, *God* or the *power of the Holy Spirit* are generally attributed to as the source for their conversion. In the analysis of the interviews with my participants, as well as of the respective contexts, their pre-conversion experience and their Christian conversion are not necessarily connected by a causal relation. However, for the converts, even experience that seems to negatively influence their conversion (e.g., the atheist education) can be re-interpreted by them through the adoption of interpretive frames of reference provided by Christianity.

This chapter begins with an illustration of how the Chinese migrants encounter Christianity in China under various circumstances before their migration to Britain. Although, in today's

China, the rapid growth of Christianity, especially in its various localised forms, is a reality, the religion remains under-represented in the officially sanctioned media and the broader public discourse. For many Chinese, Christianity is construed primarily as a 'Western' religion, ideology or culture. However, the presence of Christianity in contemporary Chinese society has penetrated the officially sanctioned confines and has permeated into society as a cultural or religious alternative to the *Chinese cultural-religious traditions*, which have been widely regarded as normative in Chinese society (see Chapter Two, Section 4.1). It is in this context that many Chinese migrants have encountered Christianity prior to their arrival in Britain.

The third section of this chapter shifts the focus to the Chinese migrants who have encountered Christianity in Britain. I firstly acknowledge the importance of the changing larger social-cultural context – 'the process of coerced modernisation' in modern China and the various political turbulences in modern and contemporary China's history (Yang, 1998: 237, 248) – as main contributors to the 'mass conversion' (Yang & Tamney, 2006: 125) of the Chinese to Christianity. However, for the more recent Chinese migrants to Britain who are likely to be young, and who have experienced little of China's socio-political turmoil, Yang's (1998) early explanation is insufficient. The new Chinese migrants in Britain not only recognise the influence of the Chinese state's anti-religious ideology, but also tend to be open to receive social, cultural, political, and religious views and ideas alternative to what they have previously been taught and indoctrinated with in China. In terms of religion, migration to Britain has allowed the Chinese to access a religiously pluralistic environment. With the expectation to adapt to and integrate into British society, the encounter with Christianity in various circumstances has become part of the Chinese migrants' initial experience of learning about the Western culture, which is likely to motivate them to proceed onto their conversion trajectories.

2. Encountering Christianity in China: the public presence of Christianity in China

As stated in Chapter Two (Section 4.1), the resurgence of religion, especially the phenomenal growth of Christianity in contemporary Chinese society since the 1980s, often captures media headlines in the West. Scholarly efforts have been made to understand the causes, consequences and implications of China's 'religious revival' (Vermander, 2009: 4). Christianity or, more precisely, Protestantism and Catholicism are two of the five officially

sanctioned religions in China that have been under-represented statistically in the government's reports and also discursively in Chinese media (see Chapter One, Section 1). For many Chinese today, Christianity remains to be construed as a Western religion, ideology or culture. Many people would understand Christianity in terms of the Chinese cultural-religious traditions, such as the example of Xinyi's parents given in this chapter. Nonetheless, the presence of Christianity, in its various forms, in modern and contemporary Chinese society is a fact, as well as an emerging cultural phenomenon in both rural and urban China today (cf. Lian, 2010; Cao, 2010). In general, the representation of the religion, specifically Christianity in China's public arena is far beyond the political confines.

Of the participants in my study, over two thirds stated that they have seen official Christian churches, and publications, and have participated in Christian activities in the cities where they come from. It is widely known that the Chinese state has instituted tight regulatory policies regarding religious activities. Christian activities, including evangelism, collective worship, Bible study, fellowship meeting, and conferences, etc., are permitted by the local Chinese authorities according to respective laws and regulatory policies if carried out in officially sanctioned religious sites. As for church buildings and religious publications, the same principles apply. However, according to my participants, as well as the literature (e.g., Cheng, 2003; Wielander, 2009; Koesel, 2013), innumerable unofficial and unregistered *house churches*, and *illegally* published Christian books, booklets and leaflets, as well as various Christian-affiliated events and activities, have mushroomed beyond the state's regulation.

For a Chinese living in mainland China, he or she can encounter Christianity in both its official and unofficial forms. Among my participants, there are many cases that can illustrate this point. Today, it is difficult to sum up the geographical spread of Christianity in contemporary China due to the lack of overall socio-religious surveys. However, the public presence of the Christianity can be found in every province of China except Tibet and Xinjiang, where only a small number of Christians can be identified due to these regions' special ethno-religious backgrounds. It can be inferred from my interview data that in the provinces in China, where there were prominent Western Christian missionary activities took place in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, the legacies of the early missionary movements have contributed to the local development of Christianity in contemporary times. Evidence for the statements above can be found in the interviews with 22 participants in my study. For example:

You've been to Shandong […] So, you should have noticed the Hongjialou Catholic Church, right? It's famous […] I always found it [the church building] interesting in my childhood […] It's so big and so distinctive among the surrounding buildings.

(Zhaoyi, male, interviewed on 18 Jan 2016)

There's a Christian church not far from my home. It's a famous one in Qingdao, built by the Germans. It should be the Lutherans in the first place […] When I was very young, my grandma used to take me to the church from time to time to sit there listening to their singing [worship].

(Yue, female, interviewed on 11 Feb 2016)

You know we are from Shanghai, we are no strangers to Western-style buildings […] I know and have visited to a couple of the old church buildings […] I remember they are called St. John's or something. Now, I know they were named after the Christian saints. But, to be honest, I still can't tell which are Catholic churches, and which are Protestant […] Their styles look just like many church buildings in England […]

(Mr Mei, with Mrs Mei, interviewed on 29 Jan 2016)

The church I went to in Hangzhou is Chongyi Church. I suppose that probably all Chinese Christians must have known this. It's the first church built by Rev Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission.

(Jiangyin, female, interviewed on 10 Feb 2016)

You walk a few miles in Wenzhou city, you would probably stumble across a Christian church […] They [the church buildings] have got big crosses on top […] They look very high-profile […] I guess that's why the government wants to remove them [the crosses on the top of the church buildings].

(Chenran, male, interviewed on 5 Nov 2016)

The interview excerpts above include only a few among many of my participants who are able to identify their experience of churches as part of their experience of encountering Christianity in China. Both Zhaoyi and Yue are from Shandong province, North China; Mr and Mrs Mei are from Shanghai, and Jiaying and Chenran are from Zhejiang province, East China. All these places used to be fields for Western Christian missionary movements since

the late nineteenth century. Hongjialou Catholic Church (洪家楼天主堂) mentioned by Zhaoyi is located in Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong. It was built by the Austrian Franciscan missionaries in the 1870s, desecrated during the notorious Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s, and restored in 1985[25]. The German Lutheran church mentioned by Yue was one of the oldest Christian churches in Qingdao (a coastal city in Shandong). Both church buildings are built in a distinctively European architectural style. Although Mr and Mrs Mei did not specify a church, 'St. John's' refers to one of the renowned Christian universities established by the American Episcopalian missionaries in the 1920s. The university properties were confiscated by the Chinese Communist state in the 1950s, and the on-campus church was demolished in the 1970s. Chongyi Church (崇一堂), mentioned by Jiaying, is the largest Chinese Protestant church in the world which can hold 5.500 people (Xu, 2012). Today's Chongyi Church was built on the original site of the first church established by Rev Hudson Taylor (戴德生). Hudson Taylor is one of the most influential figures in the history of Christianity in China. Taylor, the Englishman who headed the China Inland Mission, one of the largest evangelical mission societies in the nineteenth century that focused on China's rural population, is revered almost as a Protestant *saint* among Chinese Christians up to today (Nyíri, 2003; cf. Cohen, 1957).

For Chenran, the city of Wenzhou that he comes from is now known as 'China's Jerusalem' (Cao, 2008, 2010, 2012). Wenzhou is approximately three hundred kilometres away from Jiaying's hometown of Hangzhou, an important economic portal in Zhejiang Province. In the last four decades, Wenzhou has become known to the world not only for its many successful Chinese merchants, but also for the rapid growth of its Protestant Christian population and the expansion of Christian churches in one of China's most economically developed urban areas. However, the unprecedented development of Christianity has caused increasing tension between the church and the Chinese state. Depicting Christianity as a 'foreign religion' (*waiguo zongjiao,* 外国宗教) or 'Western culture/ideology (literally, 'form of consciousness')' (*xifang wenhua/yishi xingtai, 西方文化/意识形态*) is commonplace in China's public media discourse (e.g., Huangqiu, 2015). According to Cao (2008: 63), the local authorities in Wenzhou (and possibly elsewhere in China) remain suspicious of the

[25] For a brief history of Hongjialou Catholic Church, see: http://www.hjljt.com/a/view/opinion/2017/0828/206.html

rapid growth of Christianity. Nonetheless, they tend to welcome, albeit implicitly, the moral uprightness arguably represented by the 'boss Christians' (*laoban jidutu*, 老板基督徒), a popular nickname for the Christian entrepreneurs in Wenzhou. These 'boss Christians' tend to articulate and practice a kind of Weberian *Protestant ethic*, relating their achievement of economic wellbeing to their Christian moral values as well as affirming their attitudes of patriotism and non-political attitude to reassure the state (Cao, 2010). On the other hand, the local authorities in Wenzhou initiated a large-scale demolition of 'illegally' built church buildings and the 'high-profile' church-top crosses (in Chenran's words) in 2015, which not only intensified tensions between Christians and the Communist state but also raised international attention and criticism (Huangqiu, 2015).

The tensions between the Chinese Communist state and religion (especially Christianity) can be manifested and represented in ordinary people's attitude toward religion. Five of my participants stated that they had 'become Christians' but only received their baptism after their migration to Britain. Chenran said, in another part of his interview, that his father used to caution him not to be 'brainwashed by the Western religion (Christianity)'. Chenran was born into a middle-class family in Wenzhou and initially migrated to Britain as a master student in 2011. After his graduation, he worked in the financial sector and has since gained permanent residency in Britain. Chenran said that he encountered Christianity while he was in high school in China when two of his Christian classmates gave him some Christian booklets and invited him 'secretly' to a Christian student group held by a local church. He said that Christian evangelism was prohibited by the school's administration, and 'any student who was known to spread the gospel on campus would be warned and even expelled'. Chenran became a Christian (by saying the prayer of decision) when he went to a local university and joined an 'underground' Christian student fellowship. But he 'chose' to be baptised only after coming to Britain, as he was concerned about his family's reaction to his Christian conversion.

Similar to Chenran, Xinyi, another interview participant of mine (female, interviewed on 3 Nov 2016) also became a Christian when she was in a Chinese university but was not baptised until after her arrival at Britain. Apart from the similar conversion trajectory, Xinyi also shares a similar migration experience with Chenran. Both are students-turned Chinese immigrants in Britain. When recollecting her conversion story, Xinyi said,

> My grandma was a Christian, but neither of my parents are […] She used to tell me stories from the Bible, like the story of Adam and Eve, the Great Flood and Noah's ark […] I only took those stories as mere stories until I went to university and met Sister Liu, a sister in Christ […] I was baptised in a Chinese church in L city in the UK […] When I finished my master degree, I chose to be a volunteer for the COCM for one year. My parents, especially my father, were extremely concerned about my decision […] We quarrelled a lot over this […] He thought that I would become a Buddhist nun [*nigu*, 尼姑].
>
> (Xinyi, female, interviewed on 3 Nov 2016)

Xinyi is from Henan Province in central China, where the number of Protestant Christians is 'particularly high' in rural areas compared other Chinese provinces (Fiedler, 2010: 74; cf. Liang, 1994). According to Xinyi, her grandmother belonged to the early generations in Henan who were converted by Western missionaries. But her grandmother's Christian faith did not transmit to her parents, as 'both of them worked in the government system'. Her parents' non-religious identity is probably a result of their socio-political status, since any religious belief is strictly prohibited for Communist Party members. Her father's understanding of Christianity in the case of Xinyi's conversion is in terms of Buddhism, which can be seen as a more *Chinese* religious tradition, whereas Christianity is seen as a *Western* religion.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the appearance of Christianity in China's public arena goes far beyond political constraints. Apart from the conspicuous church buildings in cities, both the preceding literature and a number of my participants state that although public Christian evangelism outside the officially sanctioned religious sites is strictly prohibited by regulations, the many ways that a Chinese can encounter Christianity are subtly grounded in people's everyday lives. For example,

> Having had some discussions about religion and faith issues, the two classmates handed me some gospel leaflets asking me if I would be interested to go to their meeting.
>
> (Chenran, male, interviewed on 5 Nov 2016)

> Our English teacher [an American] often invited us to her flat for a coffee salon […] I went there to practice my spoken English […] We would talk a lot of things about Western culture […] We would discuss and compare cultural difference between China and the West […] I knew something and said something about Daoism and Confucianism and she told us something about Christianity in return […]

(Lily, female, interviewed on 11 Nov 2016)

> […] Well, I think the first time I heard something about Jesus was on the tube while I was commuting […] That lady was almost shouting to us about Jesus, Heaven, God, and so on […] I felt very embarrassed and pretended to ignore her […] Now I know she's an evangelist […] I kind of admire her courage to evangelise in public. I just think she could probably phrase her message in a more moderate way and do it [evangelism] in some different manners.

(Feng, male, interviewed on 1 Sep 2016)

> […] During that time, I was very depressed. A colleague of mine came to console me […] I found she was very warm-hearted and trustworthy and went to the church with her, though I believed nothing about Christianity.

(Tian, female, interviewed on 26 Apr 2016)

The above four interview excerpts display four scenarios in which my participants encountered Christianity in China. I speculate that these scenarios of Christian encounter are very common among Chinese Christians. As mentioned previously, Chenran received Christian booklets and invitations to Christian meetings by his Christian classmates, all of whom risked being expelled from the school. Jia's example can be typical among Chinese university students who wish to practice their oral English with their foreign teachers (waijiao, 外教) from native English-speaking countries and hired by many Chinese universities. It is not known how many of these foreign teachers have a Christian background and are engaged in Christian evangelism. Their influence can be inferred from the authorities' concern of possible 'cultural infiltration' by 'international right-wing Christians' in China's higher education institutions (e.g., Xi, 2013). Feng's case might not be that commonly seen in China compared with Chenran and Jia's cases, as the political sphere concerning Christianity remains tight in China. But I also have personally seen Christians handing out leaflets at street corners in a Southwestern Chinese city, risking being dispelled and even arrested by the police.

Yuan's example is the most commonly seen in Chinese Christian conversion narratives that I have collected and observed, regardless of geographical location and social status. In this type of conversion narrative, the Christians account their experiences of a physiological, psychological, social, and financial *crisis*, and how their Christian friends or family members

offer them counselling and support. According to multiple accounts by my participants, as well as previous analyses of such crisis (e.g., Lofland & Stark, 1967; Rambo, 1993), it is very common for a person, whether religious or not, to consider religious solutions when encountering certain religious persons who are likely to provide help during materially or spiritually challenging times. As for Yuan's case, she was depressed about some family issues while she was working in China. Being a scientist, religion had hardly been one of her central concerns; it was from the encounter with her Christian colleague who offered her emotional support that she started her trajectory of conversion to Christianity.

This section has illustrated typical scenarios in which non-Christian Chinese encounter Christianity in China and through which they start their conversion trajectories. On the basis of these illustrative examples, I argue that Christianity, despite the political constraints, is in many ways under-represented in contemporary China's public arena. Nevertheless, the public appearance of the religion is visible and practiced far beyond the political confines and is rooted in people's everyday lived experiences. It is through lived experience that an individual person can encounter a religion. However, in my three-stage sequential model for religious conversion, the encounter with religious things and persons, although a prerequisite, does not necessarily lead to a person's continuation on their trajectories of conversion. For those who have encountered Christianity, what has led them to proceed in the conversion process?

3. Encountering Christianity in Britain: the significance of contextual factors

Comparing with China, where Christianity remains widely regarded as a *heterodoxy*, the Christian heritage in Britain is grounded in history and can be represented in many ways in contemporary times. For Chinese migrants in Britain, it is easier to encounter Christianity by way of its many cultural representations, such as the ancient parish churches and cathedrals spread across the country, Christian-themed art works in galleries and museums, public holidays and events (e.g., Christmas and Easter holidays) etc., as well as individual Christians in the form of colleagues, friends, classmates, and even street evangelists. Still, not everyone who has encountered Christianity will proceed to convert. For those who have encountered and converted to Christianity, whether in China or in Britain, the experience of encounter has provided opportunities for alteration in their *meaning systems*. The concept *meaning system* is adopted from the psychologist Paloutzian (2005). It refers to the changes in a converted

person's 'purposes, goals, values, attitudes and beliefs, identity, and focus of ultimate concern', which are 'components' of a person's meaning system (Paloutzian, 2005: 332).

The subtitle of this section suggests a focus on the various circumstances in which Chinese migrants can encounter Christianity in Britain. It begins with an illustration of the significance of the changing social-cultural contexts and the local socio-religious context in Christian conversion of the Chinese migrants. Previous studies have indicated that contextual factors play a crucial role in religious conversion (e.g., Yang, 1998; Yang & Wang, 2006). Through my research, I have found that generational differences exist regarding the influence of contextual factors. While the conversion of relatively older Chinese migrants (around and above 50 years old) have been influenced by the drastically changing social cultural contexts in China before their conversion, the younger-generation migrants have been more strongly influenced by the local socio-religious context they experienced in the British society. Moreover, I argue that it is the social-cultural and religious contexts at different levels experienced by the Chinese migrants that can explain their Christian conversion continued after various Christian encounters.

3.1. The changing social cultural contexts

Yang's (1998) early work argues that the drastically changing social-cultural contexts in modern and contemporary China, as experienced by the converts, are among the most important factors for Christian conversion of Chinese immigrants in the US. My research confirms his observation with regard to Chinese migrants in Britain around and above the age of 50 from mainland China. In my sample, seven participants from mainland China, including the aforementioned Mr and Mrs Mei, who are aged above 60, have directly experienced the multiple social, economic, political and cultural movements in modern and contemporary China that have caused immense turmoil. For those who were born after the 1970s, particularly the intellectuals, they were likely the witnesses or even direct participants in the nationwide social-political movements during the mid and late 1980s. These movements started with peaceful public protests and demonstrations initiated by the students and workers calling for the socio-political reform of the Party-state, but culminated and terminated in the Tian'anmen Square Incident on 4 June 1989 (cf. Zhao, 2004). The interview excerpts presented below give two examples of how the experience of China's social-political turbulence has traumatised two of my participants, Ms Wen and Beifang.

> It is painful to think of that period […] My father was starved to death […] My husband was violently criticised and denounced [*pidou,* 批斗] causing him lifelong disability […] You know, it's been so hard for me to trust anyone since then […] I thought the Christians [in Britain] were just another bunch of ideologues who were trying to persuade me of another kind of ideology. I wouldn't allow anybody to brainwash me again […] It's just their [the Christians] ideology seems to be gentler than the Communists' […] I didn't believe we [humans] should be divided by class […] I didn't even want to hate or blame anyone. But I didn't know how to love my enemies. But it sounded intriguing […]
>
> (Ms Wen, female, interviewed on 26 Apr 2016)

> Although I was not a leader, I was an activist in 1989 […] I went to the protests and demonstrations with the workers until there were curfews in our city from 4 June for several days. I learned from TV that they [the Chinese army] cleared up the [Tian'anmen] Square with armed force […] and people died […] I was so dismayed about the Chinese politics […] I joined the religion [*ru jiao,* 入教] (Christianity) as a rebellious act against my former political stance in the first place […]
>
> (Beifang, male, interviewed on 10 Jul 2017)

The excerpts above provide examples of how the Cultural Revolution has traumatised Ms Wen, and how Beifang was dismayed about politics through the experience of the political turbulence in China in 1989. Ms Wen is in her late 70s. Born into a Party official's family, witnessing the death of her father, she luckily survived the famine and the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s. She migrated to Britain in the late 1990s with her child. In the interview, she said that she encountered Christianity in Britain through a Chinese friend who was also a convert. Although she did not state whether she held any atheist position before her conversion, it is clear the she understood Christianity primarily as a type of ideology in the same sense that communism is an ideology. However, encountering Christianity through her friend, the Christian doctrine of love for enemies (cf. Matthew 5: 43-48) has provided her with an alternative to the class-conflict-based Marxist values with which she was indoctrinated in Communist China. The 'Christian ideology' appeared to her as 'intriguing', which was one of the reasons that prompted her further exploration of and conversion to the religion.

Beifang is in his late 60s. He was an activist in a series of social-political movements in 1980s China. Although he did not participate in the protests in the Tian'anmen Square, he

was a local leader of a trade union in his city. After the Tian'anmen Square Incident, he worked as a human rights lawyer and was imprisoned for his social activism for three years. He was released in the late 1990s and migrated to Britain as an asylum seeker with the help of some of his friends. His attitude of being 'dismayed about politics' is typical of a few of my participants who have also witnessed China's political turbulence in 1989. For example, when the Tian'anmen Incident occurred, Mr Mei was already studying at a British university. He participated in the protests with other Chinese students in front of the Chinese embassy in London after the Incident. When he learned that the government had violently cleared up the Tian'anmen Square on 4 June 1989, he was determined not to return to China. Although Beifang did not state his pre-conversion attitudes to Christianity in the interview, encountering Christianity has diverted his convictions from wanting to change and reform Chinese politics through political activism to seeking religious solutions to the problems. For him, the encounter with and conversion to Christianity was a 'rebellious' act against his previously held political convictions.

The traumatic experience of Chinese migrants such as Mr and Mrs Mei, Ms Wen, Beifang, and several others is part of China's 'coerced modernisation' (Yang, 1998: 248). In the Harvard sinologist Weiming Tu's (1994: vii) words, 'the untold suffering of the Chinese people' caused by wars, political turmoil, cultural disruptions and destructions brought about by the Western and Japanese imperialist powers before 1949 and the Communists after 1949, has made 'marginality, rootlessness, amnesia, anger, frustration, alienation, and helplessness' part of the 'collective psyche of the modern Chinese'. Before encountering Christianity after their migration, the meaning system of these participants though not entirely identical, can be viewed similar in many ways. From the interviews, it is difficult to tell to what extent they held Marxist-Communist ideological beliefs and values. In terms of their political identity, some (e.g., Mr & Mrs Mei, Ms Wen) stated clearly that they were members of the Communist Party; while others were more obtuse. Nevertheless, similar patterns can be found in their pre-conversion conceptions of and attitudes toward religion, and in the changes which occurred after their encounter with Christianity in Britain. The patterns can be substantiated through an excerpt taken from the interview with Mr Mei below:

> You know I was trained as a scientist […] I know there are many churches in Shanghai. But to me, Christianity was no more than a Western religion […] To be honest, religion was never my concern. You know we were told to be very aware of the infiltration of the Western anti-China ideology […] I had always thought of myself as a hardcore atheist […] You know I've

> got a lot of questions for them [the English Christians whom he met after the arrival at Britain] […] I now think that I've got questions is perhaps a sign that I was thinking about my atheism. Perhaps I've never been an atheist at all […] I think I was pretty annoying at that time […] I really appreciated their patience […] I think it has to be God who has knocked on my door long before I came to this country.
>
> (Mr Mei, with Mrs Mei, interviewed on 29th Jan 2016)

In the interview excerpt above, Mr Mei posed a dichotomous distinction between religion and science (scientism) by firstly asserting his identity as a scientist and also stating that religion was 'never his concern'. His awareness of Christianity as a 'Western religion' and the possible 'infiltration of the Western anti-China ideology' through Christianity manifests a typical Communist Party discourse concerning Christianity. This discourse of conflict between the East and the West, grounded in the larger international political context of the Cold War from the 1950s through the 1990s, has to some extent attenuated in contemporary China's political discourse regarding religion, specifically Christianity[26]. Nevertheless, the ideological influence of this discourse is lingering among many contemporary Chinese. For example, in the aforementioned Chenran's interview, his father used the word such as 'brainwash' to caution him upon his Christian conversion. For Mr Mei, his encounter with and subsequent conversion to Christianity has enabled him to reflect on his atheist position. Through his critical enquiry of faith-related issues after encountering Christianity in Britain, he started to doubt the validity of his atheism, which contributed to his conversion.

In the examples above, we can see how the changes in the social-cultural contexts in modern and contemporary China, as experienced by the older Chinese migrant Christians in Britain, have impacted on their established meaning systems. Having gone through a traumatic experience, their established meaning systems were subjected to doubt and change. The encounter with Christianity after their migration has thus offered them opportunities for an alteration in their meaning systems. This observation resonates with theories of *crisis-led religious conversion* (e.g., Lofland and Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1993; see also Chapter Three). In accordance with this strand of theories, the drastically changing social cultural contexts in China that have brought physiological and psychological traumas to the many Chinese who directly experienced them, have motivated them to seek alternative meaning systems to

[26] Instead of posing a conflictual discourse between religion/Christianity and the Communist ideology, the contemporary Chinese state emphasises the 'sinicisation of Christianity', which is an ambition to achieve total control of the growth of Christianity in China (c.f. Yang, 2000).

substitute old ones. For some, religion becomes the option. The younger generation of Chinese migrants do not necessarily experience traumas and crisis so profound as the older generation. For the younger generation, many can have gone through atheist ideological education, and have encountered Christianity while in China. What motivates them to proceed further in their conversion trajectories after migration to Britain? The next section will explore this question.

3.2. The local context

Yang and Wang (2006: 179) have found that while the changing social cultural contexts in China remain prevalent in the conversion narratives of Chinese Christians in the US, the local context or the 'ecology of local churches' is important to explain the variations of the churches that the Chinese converts have joined. As presented in Chapter Five and further explored in the next chapter, the mainline Chinese Christian communities have emerged and developed in Britain for nearly seventy years. Apart from the independent Chinese churches in Britain's major cities, there are numerous small Christian institutions such as Bible study groups and fellowships dispersed in almost every British city and university town. The Chinese Christian institutions have carried out active proselytising among Chinese migrants both old and new, in public as well as in private settings. Nevertheless, Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain is not only due to the contribution of Chinese Christian proselytising, but also of that of local English Christians.

Scholars such as Li (2012) and Dickson (2013) have noted that a range of English churches and other Christian organisations in Britain have established international ministries offering support to migrants, especially to international students in British colleges and universities, aiming at Christian evangelism. Drawing on my personal experience, I can say that I have encountered Christianity through friends and colleagues in China before coming to Britain for my master's degree in 2012. However, although there have been Chinese Christian communities for many years in Loughborough where I studied initially, I was not approached by Chinese Christians. Rather, it was a group of local English Christians approached me, inviting me to their free café for international students and later to a Bible study group. I am not alone in this experience. Among my participants who are student-turned-migrants, both the older and younger generations, many share the experience of being approached by local English Christians and invited to their events and activities. For example,

> I lived in a host family […] I thought it would be good to have some local people taking care of me […] I could practice my English with them [the host family] My host mom and dad told us that they were Christians. Although I didn't know much about it (Christianity), I think religion is about teaching people to be good. And they [her host parents] were very, very kind and gentle […] They have helped me a lot, you know, they often drove me to the supermarket […] They often asked me to join their family dinners […] On Sundays, they drove us to a church […] They said they were Christians […] They taught me how to read the Bible.
>
> (Ju, female, interviewed on 15 Sep 2016)

> I received leaflets about their free café and went there because it was free […] It was in a local church building […] I kept going because I could practice English with them […] Although our conversation did not often go deep, that was enough for me […] I didn't care too much whether they were Christians or not in the first place […] They sometimes talked about God or Jesus and the Bible, which I didn't have much interest in as well […] I just thought religion is not a bad thing, it is supposed to teach people to do good things […] One day, I thought why not just read the book [the Bible] […] The point to study in this country is to learn about their culture, isn't it?
>
> (Tian, female, interviewed on 26 Apr 2016)

The above two interview excerpts provide examples of how Chinese migrants encounter Christianity through local English Christians. Ju, a student-turned-migrant entrepreneur, is in her early thirties. Some of my participants, such as Ju and the aforementioned Zhaoyi, chose to home-stay with a local host family which could offer them practical support. According to Ju, she had some preconceptions about Christianity, i.e., encountered Christianity in China, but it was her Christian host family that introduced her to the religion after her arrival in Britain. For those who did not home-stay with Christian families, especially those who were students at British colleges and universities, their experiences of encountering Christianity in Britain can share similarities with Tian's example.

For Tian and many other student-turned-migrants, the language barrier was one of the greatest challenges to their adaptation and integration. In another part of my interview with Ju, we discussed her impressions and experience as an international student. According to her, Chinese students are often 'shy', 'unconfident', 'unsociable', show a 'lack of critical thinking', and are 'reluctant or unable to articulate their own ideas and opinions'. She said that although there were various student groups in universities, only a few 'outgoing and bold' Chinese students would participate in the student societies. Tian's perception of the

experience of the Chinese students in Britain in many ways corresponds to what has been documented in the existing literature (e.g., UKCOSA, 2004; Li, 2012). According to Li (2012) and Dickson (2013), when the needs and aspirations of the Chinese students for further social and cultural connections in the local British society cannot be met by the educational institutions' provisions, religious-affiliated organisations, which are often Christian, can fill the gap.

Through extensive field research, I have found that many of these Christian organisations are voluntarily organised by local English Christians, supported by local churches, university chaplaincies, and Christian mission organisations. They often present themselves as weekly or fortnightly free cafés located in university chaplaincies or church buildings that are close to the city/town centres and universities. Some of these organisations are service-oriented, focusing on providing social, psychological, even financial support, while others are conspicuously proselytism-oriented. Only a few specifically target Chinese. Participating in events and activities organised by these organisations, international students enjoy multiple benefits – linguistic, financial, social and cultural.

Initially, some of the participants may not show interest in the religious dimension of these organisations. However, over time, some develop an interest in the religious aspects. As Tian said, she considered her Bible reading as an act of learning about Western culture through a religious lens. Her interest in Christianity seems to have developed accidentally. Comparing her preconceptions about religion with Ju's, we can see that, for both of them, religion has the didactic function of 'teaching people to be good/to do good things'. In other words, their positive preconception of religion (especially for Ju who has positively associated her preconception of the 'goodness of religion' with her impression of the 'good Christians' of her host parents) influenced their decisions of continuous participation in Christian-related activities. In the conversion testimony delivered by Tian publicly at a church gathering (the same date as my interview with her) and in which she accounted her choice of becoming a theological seminarian (preparatory missionary), she stated that one of her motivations for becoming a preparatory missionary was to 'pass down whatever gifts' she 'had received [from God and other people] to more people'. Thus, it can be inferred that Tian has also had a very positive impression of Christianity through the help and support offered by other Christians when she encountered Christianity in Britain.

At a macro-level analysis, although the younger generation of Chinese migrants have not experienced the same traumatic social changes as their predecessors, the rapid social, economic and cultural changes in China in the latest four decades have posed challenges, particularly in terms of people's values and beliefs. These challenges seem to have encouraged some Chinese student-turned migrants to take advantage of the 'alternate meaning systems' (Yang 1998, 251) available in the British host society. At a meso-level of analysis, the values and beliefs embodied by the local Christians whom the Chinese migrants encounter in Britain can be regarded as constituting a 'religious organisational ecology' (Yang & Wang, 2006: 180), which has greatly influenced the Chinese migrants' perception and practice of Christianity following the encounter. At the micro-level, the 'sociological interaction rituals' or 'favour-fishing rituals' (Abel 2006: 176) in everyday life, such as the hospitality that Ju received from her host parents, as well as a range of group events and activities hosted by the Christian organisations, have provided tangible and practical benefits to those who have encountered Christianity in Britain. These benefits have made the participation in Christian-related activities attractive to the newcomers. At the same time, the offering and reception of benefits can be seen as an important *socialisation process* (cf. Long & Hadden, 1983), through which Chinese migrants learn from the embodied Christian values and beliefs and 'pass down' the 'received gifts' to more people (in Tian's words). Questions about that what the Chinese migrants can *learn*, how they learn from whatever forms of Christianity that they have encountered, and how they can proceed in the conversion process, will be explored in the next chapter on the stage of *initiation*.

4. Summary

This chapter has illustrated how a range of my participants in China and Britain have encountered Christianity. Although a range of political restrictions remain regarding the development of religion in China, especially Christianity, the presence of Christianity in public arenas in contemporary Chinese society is beyond political control. Religion can be encountered by Chinese people through their everyday lived experience. In Britain, where Christianity is part of cultural heritage, it is easier for Chinese migrants to encounter Christianity represented by various Christian institutions and individuals. Having encountered Christianity, what leads the potential converts to proceed on their conversion trajectories are various contextual factors. For the older generation of Chinese migrants who have experienced drastic social cultural changes in contemporary China, encountering Christianity

provides them with opportunities to alter their established meaning systems. For the younger generation, encountering Christianity in the local British society has provided substantive support for them to adapt to and integrate in the host society. Moreover, the Christian beliefs and values embodied by the Christians whom the Chinese migrants have encountered can be a resource motivating the potential converts to proceed with their Christian conversion.

In general, the Christian encounter constitutes a preliminary socialisation of the Chinese migrants into various Christian-related communities. To achieve conversion for those who have encountered Christianity, the potential converts need to move on to another stage in their conversion trajectories, which is the stage of *initiation*.

Chapter Seven: Initiation

1. Introduction

The previous chapter has shown how Chinese migrants encounter Christianity in various circumstances before and after their migration to Britain. This chapter explores how individuals proceed in their conversion trajectories. I use the term *initiation* to capture the transitional stage between the initial contact with the religion, i.e., the stage of *encounter*, and the making of religious *commitment* in the sequential model of conversion trajectories. The term 'initiation' was initially inspired by the contemporary Roman Catholic Church's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programme. This refers to a didactic process offered by Roman Catholic institutions to aid adult conversion and acceptance into the church (cf. RCIA, USCCB, 2017). In my research, the term *initiation* is used in a broader sociological sense.

The term *initiation* is also borrowed from anthropology (cf. Gennep, 1960), where it describes the transitional process in which a person is introduced into a social group. The process is often didactic and accomplished through formal, ritual or ritual-like ceremonies and celebrations. In my study, those who have experienced drastic social cultural changes and encountered Christianity through embodied Christian values and ethics are likely to develop an interest in the religion. For these potential converts to make their decisions of conversion, they often need further introduction to the beliefs, practices, and communal aspects of Christianity. Upon the acceptance of basic tenets of Christianity, a person can be described as being successfully initiated into the religion. The stage of *initiation* is accomplished at the point where the person makes up his/her mind about conversion firstly through a *prayer of decision* (*juzhi daogao* 决志祷告), and then receives baptism as a marker through which he or she can publicly declare his or her newly gained Christian faith and identity.

In this chapter, I firstly draw on my ethnographic data to portray the Chinese Evangelical Christian culture (the CEC culture) in Britain. This culture is manifested in three aspects, the articulation of Chinese identity, the representation of Protestant Evangelicalism, and an emphasis on Christian evangelism. I argue that the CEC culture plays an important role in the initiation of potential converts of Chinese migrants into Christianity. Although Christian initiation is didactic in nature, the communication and demonstration of religious tenets of Christianity often does not occur in formally organised didactic settings. Rather, it is through

the potential converts' experience of the CEC culture. Within the CEC culture, I identify the aspect of emphasising active Christian evangelism through the *performative profession of Christian faith* as being key to initiate potential converts, as well as recruiting new members into the Chinese Christian communities. The third section of this chapter illustrates the performative profession of Christian faith through the analysis of the practice of Christian witnessing, a typical Christian practice commonly seen among Evangelical Christians. The practice, apart from its verbal forms, is grounded in the context of the CEC culture collectively represented by the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, informing the potential converts not only about basic Christian beliefs, but also about ritual, devotional and ethical practices, and the communal aspects of Christianity.

2. The Chinese Evangelical Christian culture

Culture is probably one of the most fluid and elusive concepts in both academic and popular usage. Although it is not a central concept for this research, I find it a useful category in this chapter to capture a wide range of interrelated, sometimes overlapping activities regularly or irregularly occurring within and around Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. The interrelatedness and interactions of the many elements in these activities form what the anthropologist James Bielo (2009:10) called 'dispositions' of certain social 'institutions'[27]. These elements can include 'inclinations of action, thought, embodiment, interpretation, belief, interaction, and speech' (ibid.). In this sense, a *culture* can be viewed as a continuous social process of the formation of multiple dispositions and the sustaining of particular identities with *coherence*, which can be manifested through a wide range of socially situated activities (Bielo, 2009: 10-12; cf. Waters 2002: 127, citing Bell, 1976: 66). Thus, what this section endeavours to do is to provide an account of what I call the *Chinese Evangelical Christian culture (the CEC culture).*

Within the CEC culture, I identify three key aspects: a strong Chinese identity, a distinctive religious identity of being an Evangelical Christian, and a disposition towards active Christian evangelism, all of which are not only being articulated but also performed in various social settings. I argue that this culture has played a crucial role in the initiation of those who have encountered Christianity. To illustrate the CEC culture, I present examples of activities taking place in and around the Chinese Christian fellowships and Bible study

[27] For Bielo, the term institution refers to 'any relatively durable set of social relations which endows individuals with power, status, and resources of various kinds' (Thompson, 1991:8, cited in Bielo, 2009: 10).

groups in this section, which are foundational institutions in Evangelical Christianity (cf. Bielo, 2009). These activities are documented in the field notes and reflections jotted down during my ethnographic fieldwork in various social settings involving Chinese migrant Christians in Britain.

2.1. The identity of being Chinese

In October 2014, not long after starting my doctoral studies, I came across several Chinese in a post-service social setting at St John's, an evangelical Anglican church in M town in the Midlands region of England. When they learned that I was a Christian and a doctoral student studying religion, they asked me if I was interested in starting a new Chinese Christian fellowship with them, the M town's Chinese Christian Club (MCCC). At that time, although I was ignorant about the general structures of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, this was what I intended to study. I already knew that there had been one Chinese church, a Chinese Christian fellowship, and several English Bible study groups involving the Chinese in M town. I doubted the necessity for a new one, since the Chinese population in M town is not very large compared with other British cities.

Very soon, I learned from Mr and Mrs Mei, the two senior organisers of the group, that although there had been a Chinese church in M town, the church primarily consisted of Cantonese-speaking people, whom they would refer to as 'the old generation Chinese migrants'. It was a small church sharing the worshipping venue with another Anglican church of around 40 congregants. The church adopted an ostensible denominational affiliation with the Methodist church, which is rare among the Chinese migrant Christian churches in Britain. I visited the church three times and found that its service was conducted mainly in Cantonese. Sometimes, the church service would mix in some English whenever there was an English pastor or preacher. The Chinese Christian Fellowship in M town (the MCCF) was based in the university's chaplaincy. According to Mr Mei, the fellowship had a history of 'over thirty years'. And the dominant language of the fellowship largely depended on the leadership's background. In 2014, the fellowship's leader was a female university student from Singapore, whose mother tongue was Hakka (a south-eastern Chinese dialect). Although she spoke good Mandarin as well, she decided to lead the MCCF in English as she wanted the fellowship to be more 'inclusive' of students from broadly defined Chinese backgrounds. However, according to my observation, the MCCF was not very successful in recruiting new members, despite its inclusive orientation. From 2014 to 2015, there were only six regular attendees

who were largely the leader's classmates and friends (one Malaysian, on Singaporean, one from Hong Kong, one Taiwanese, one Chinese mainlander, and one young Englishman interested in Chinese culture). Some local Chinese residents and English church pastors or elders would come to support the fellowship from time to time.

In the interview with Zhaoyi, another founding member of the MCCC, he gave his opinions on the failure of the MCCF and the necessity for a new Chinese-speaking Christian fellowship in M town. Unlike some of my participants who in the first place would attribute their conversion or starting of a Christian ministry to 'God's guidance' (see the example of Haiqing in the next section), Zhaoyi's reason for a Chinese-particular Christian fellowship was his concern for the differences in the effectiveness and efficiency of communication between English and Chinese for the increasing number of Chinese people (mainly students) in M town, as he said:

> You know I've been here for that many years [10 years]. Here, I do everything in English. I mean, I don't have any problem with English. It's the language of their country [Britain]. English has its own advantages […] the English Bible is very convenient to use and well translated from those ancient languages […] Here's the problem. The first time I went to a church in China several years ago, I joined a prayer meeting. But I found I could hardly pray in Chinese. That was a shocking moment […] I've been a Christian for so many years here [9 years], although I went to the Chinese churches and COCM's camps many times, it was at that moment I came to realise that I'm so well-versed in everything in English, that I can't even say a prayer in my mother tongue […] I always wanted a fellowship in England, in which I can speak, communicate something deeper within me with people who share a similar culture with me.

All preceding studies on the Christianity in Chinese diaspora have noticed the importance of language in forming the Chinese-speaking ethnic minority communities in an English-speaking majority society (e.g., Yang, 1999; Guest, 2003; Wong, 2006; Abel, 2008). Having completed a doctoral education and proceeded into the business sector, Zhaoyi, who migrated to Britain in 2006, stands in sharp contrast with the stereotypical image of the older generation of Chinese migrants as described in Chapter Five. In the interview excerpt above, Zhaoyi emphasised his English proficiency by praising the English version of the Christian Bible. His concern for the need of a new Chinese-speaking fellowship was on the ground of the language used, not only in religious settings, but also in everyday communication. The word 'shocking' (*chijing* 吃惊) used in his depiction of his incapability of uttering Chinese

prayers, and his longing for 'deeper' self-expression and communication reveal not only his linguistic limitations, but also his anxiety over issues regarding identity and culture.

The longing for sustaining a Chinese identity among migrants was one of the motivations for establishing a Chinese-speaking Christian fellowship that distinguishes itself from other Chinese Christian groups. The MCCC is intended to fulfil the cultural needs for both religious and everyday expression specifically in Mandarin Chinese. In the meantime, the fellowship became a site for reproducing and articulating Chinese identity in the English-majority social context. Not long after the establishment of the MCCC, a female Chinese student, Shiwei, who was a new member, decided to receive the Christian baptism. A conflict over the venue for baptism emerged between the MCCC and some local English Christian groups and was triggered.

The MCCC met weekly at St John's Church. The Anglican church, with three different Sunday worshipping services, a number of ministries and cell groups, was very popular among the local Christian communities. Also, there was an evangelical ministry, the World Café, based in the church, with a history of over a decade. It was started by a group of English Christians (average aged over 60) hosting international students, visiting scholars, and other migrants locally. The café was intended to provide socialising opportunities for non-British or non-English-speaking people in M town. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of Chinese students enrolled in and scholars working at the local university in M town, who form a large group of regular attendees at the World Café[28]. As far as I am aware, there were three English couples who were also co-organisers of the World Café and were running regular Bible study groups in their homes. They were very experienced in proselytising among international students, especially the Chinese[29].

Shiwei was a student in M town's university from 2013 to 2015. She started attending Esther's (a local senior female English Christian, one of the World Café's co-organisers) home English Bible study group in early 2014. She was preparing to be baptised during the 2014 summer holiday. Although studying the Bible with Esther, who attended a local Pentecostal church, where there is no Chinese presence, Shiwei attended St John's, as it was

[28] Ethnographic conversations and observations in 2014 to 2015.
[29] I did not check if these Christian evangelist couples preserved records of students baptised through their evangelising efforts. From 2014 to 2017, there was news circulating about baptisms of Chinese students, visiting scholars, and migrants among the Christian circuit in M town. My speculation would be around three to five (possibly more) new Chinese Christian converts each year in M town.

the first Christian church she knew in M town. What is more important for Shiwei was that there were Chinese members in St John's. She was invited to join the MCCC in late November 2014 and gradually stopped going to Esther's Bible study group.

Shiwei was baptised at St John's in February 2015. Prior to her baptism, Esther approached Mrs Mei (one of the elderly co-organisers of the MCCC), discussing the venue of Shiwei's baptism after a MCCC's meeting. In a field note (13 Jan 2015) taken after the meeting, I remarked that in the discussion, Esther proposed that Shiwei should be baptised in the Pentecostal church where she herself was a member. She considered the Pentecostal church 'more life-giving' than a 'traditional church such as St John's', and the baptism should be conducted in a church that was 'filled with the (Holy) Spirit' with 'blessings from more spirit-filled people'. However, Mrs Mei insisted that the baptism should be conducted at St John's, since 'St John's is a mainline Christian denomination in M town', and it was very 'formal and orthodox' (*mingmen zhengpai* 名门正派). She argued that the 'Whole Gospel Church' (the Pentecostal church that Esther attended) was a small church which is not known among the local Chinese. She wanted the baptism of Shiwei 'not only to be a life-turning event for Shiwei, but also to give voice to the Chinese Christians, and bear witness to God's love for Chinese people *too* (*Shangdi* ye *ai zhongguoren* 上帝也爱中国人, with an emphasis on the word *ye*, too)'. Mr Mei, Zhaoyi, and Lei (a visiting scholar and another co-organiser of the MCCC) agreed with and supported Mrs Mei in the argument.

In the dispute over Shiwei's baptism venue, the MCCC's intention of articulating the Chinese identity in the English-majority Christian context is explicit. Esther's insistence was made on religious grounds, arguing that Shiwei needed to overlook aspects such as tradition and ritual represented by St John's Anglican church and focus on the spiritual development. Mrs Mei and her supporters' argument focused on the representativeness of St John's among the local Christian communities. Mrs Mei considered the baptism of Shiwei at St John's a good opportunity for representing the Chinese Christians in the local English-majority Christian community. Although not making an explicit religious argument, Mrs Mei resorted to religious language, emphasising 'God's love for Chinese too'. This emphasis suggests that although Christianity has a historical heritage in Britain, the Chinese should not be excluded from this religion which claims a universal and unconditional love from God.

Drawing on the ethnographic data of the MCCC, I have illustrated how the Chinese migrant Christians tend to articulate a distinctive Chinese identity in Britain. In the articulation of

Chinese identity, the use of Mandarin Chinese language is highlighted as a unique characteristic of a newly formed Chinese Christian community, the MCCC. Moreover, through the disputes between a MCCC's member with a local English Christian over the issue of a Chinese student's baptism venue, I have presented a paradoxical picture in the Chinese migrant Christians' articulation of their Chinese identity. The paradox lies in the assumption of universalism in Christianity which can sometimes transcend ethnic boundaries, while the need and expectation to represent the Chinese in local English-majority Christian communities can sometimes be in conflict with this Christian universalism.

The negotiation between the religious and national identities among the religious Chinese migrants is an ongoing process (e.g., Yang, 1999; Chen, 2002). There is no easy solution to this issue. In an interview, Yue, a female Chinese Christian minister, said that although she considered the Chinese language to be the best tool to accurately communicate Christian messages among the Chinese, she also wished to encourage Chinese migrants, both old and young, to be integrated more into local British society. However, 'people's time and energy are limited', she said, it was not appropriate 'to push too hard on their own decision-making' between attending the English church and the Chinese church. In Chapter Eight, the issue of identity negotiation will be revisited when discussing the cultivation of belonging for the Chinese Christian converts. The next section focuses on another aspect of the CEC culture, the representation of Protestant Evangelical Christianity.

2.2. The representation of Evangelical Christianity

Sustaining and articulating a distinctive Chinese identity within an English-majority Christian context is important for the Chinese migrant Christians. Conversely, what is of equal importance to the Chinese identity is the Christian identity. In multiple places in this thesis, I have argued that Christianity is largely construed as a Western religion for many contemporary Chinese. Although many Chinese today may have encountered Christianity in China in various circumstances, those who have their first contact with Christianity in personal forms still sense the difference of Christianity compared with their preconceptions of the religion. How do Chinese Christians represent Christianity to their fellow Chinese compatriots who are non-Christians? This section attempts to answer this question using my ethnographic data on an overtly religious setting, a Chinese Christian fellowship meeting (5 Nov 2016).

Example #1.

The fellowship meeting is held weekly on Friday evenings by the Chinese Baptist Church in L city [the CBCL]. The organisational structure of the CBCL fellowship is in many ways very typical among the many Chinese migrant Christian fellowship meetings that I have participated in in Britain. It was opened with a simple shared meal with two or three Chinese dishes cooked at the church's kitchen or sponsored by volunteers who serve the fellowship on a rotating basis [the names of the providers are mentioned during the thanksgiving prayer].

Not only those who have been long-term members of the church, but also those who were invited, including the non-church member Christians and non-Christians who were friends, relatives, classmates, and colleagues of the church members were present. There were 37 people attending the fellowship meeting on the night of my visit. After the meal, all attendees were invited to sing three praise songs, one was titled The Love Lived Out [*Huo chu ai*, 活出爱, a well-known Chinese Christian praise song], to say some common prayers [on the well-being of the church members and the 'spirit-filled' operation of the Bible study, etc.] together, and were divided into three groups according to the attendees' self-identified degrees of 'Christian maturity'.

Although the CBCL fellowship did not provide a fixed standard to define the fellowship attendees' faith maturity, a practical differentiation policy was made based on the time of their conversion by baptism. My observation was that those who have been baptised Christians for one to three years would be recognised as 'young Christians' [immature in faith], regardless of their biological age, forming two groups. Those who have been baptised Christians for over three years were considered 'mature Christians', forming another two groups. The standard was not enforced, since there were three non-Christian attendees accompanying those who had invited them to the fellowship, joining the group that was labelled for the 'mature Christians'. The CBCL practiced a pragmatic and inclusive policy to incorporate all attendees into Christian groups.

The core part of the fellowship meeting was a Bible study session, in which a selected passage in the Bible was read firstly verse-by-verse by each group member. After the reading, each member was invited to share their thoughts and comments on a particular verse or the entire passage. The non-Christian group members were aided by the persons sitting next to them to identify the correct verses and to join the group reading and discussion. And the group leader would take opportunities to insert his comment on others' opinions and make a brief summarising statement of the passage that had been chosen for study. Although non-Christians did not join much in the commenting-and-sharing session, they were more open in the discussion session in which people tended to share their conversion stories.

> In the discussion session, the topics were largely around some theological issues and testimony-sharing. The non-Christian members were invited to briefly introduce themselves. During their self-introductions, the group leader and some members posed questions in attempt to find out their personal views and opinions regarding Christianity or other faith-related issues. Through the session, I found that the three non-Christian group members can be categorised as *encountered-Christianity-yet-unconverted*. One was the husband of a Christian member who had been a church member for seven years. The other two were personal friends of another two Christian members in the group. These non-Christians members 'may have held a certain degree of theistic beliefs' and were 'interested in some Christian doctrinal debates' around issues such as creationism and original sin. They appeared to be very interested in 'listening to others' stories', as they often actively responded to some people's sharing of their 'faith journeys' and witnessing of 'miracles'.

Example #1 is part of an ethnographic field note in which a typical Chinese fellowship meeting, containing sessions such as group meal, Bible study, and discussion, is described. It provides detailed information for understanding how Christianity is represented in a Chinese migrant Christian community, especially to non-Christians. Firstly, previous studies (e.g., Yang, 1999; Abel, 2006, 2008) have noted that the group meal with Chinese dishes can be seen as a ritual-like practice in almost all Chinese migrant Christian communities, regardless of their types and sizes. The provision of free meals or meals with a limited charge is one of the many important strategies for the Chinese churches to attract new members. Further to this strategy, an ethic of voluntary service and mutual love informed by Christian faith is promoted by church institution such as CBCL. The promotion of a faith-informed ethics is through the thanksgiving prayer offered before the group meal, and later in one of the praise songs. The praise song titled 'Love Lived Out' (*Huo chu ai* 活出爱) is a modern popular Chinese Christian praise song which emphasises the theme of love. It has a less religious tone comparing with the other two songs, apart from the one verse saying, '*Jesus' love alights me*' (*Yesu de ai dianliang wo* 耶稣的爱点亮我), which reveals the Christian theme. I argue in the next chapter that the ethic of voluntary service offered to the community is regarded as a sign of religious commitment among the Chinese migrant Christians.

Some large Chinese Christian fellowships are aware of the diversity of their attendees in terms of their religious background. For example, the CBCL fellowship practically differentiated the members according to their time of conversion by baptism. The non-

Christians attendees were inclusively incorporated into the Christian groups through group Bible-reading and the encouragement to share their views and opinions.

Bible study session and discussion are the most important part of the fellowship meeting. As has been pointed out in Chapter Five, mainstream Chinese Christians in Britain can be characterised as Protestant Evangelicals, for whom the Christian Bible is regarded as the highest authority, important for personal faith and community organising (in Bebbington's [2003] word, *biblicism*). In the CBCL fellowship, the Bible became a tool mediating the relation between group members and the group leader (a lay minister or elder in the church): a biblical passage was chosen for each group member to read verse by verse. After reading the Bible passage, the group leader commented on the verses in the passage with reference to other biblical passages, devoid of context. It is in this manner, Christianity was represented by the Chinese Christians to the non-Christians as a 'canonical religion' (Benton & Gomez, 2008: 272), which is a religion centred on a sacred text, the Bible.

In many cases, fellowships are led by committed laypersons due to the lack of professionally trained pastors in Chinese Christian communities. As mentioned in the field note, many theological issues can be covered in the discussion sessions during the fellowship meeting. Although some theological questions can be solved through finding relevant texts in the Bible, some have no easy answers. When the discussion of an issue for which one can find no clear-cut answer in the Bible, the group leader of the fellowship meeting often diverts the discussion to the sharing of conversion testimonies of the members. This is the point at which the Christians can witness to the non-Christians about the changes and transformations that Christian conversion can bring to their lives. The practice of Christian witnessing is very important for the initiation of the 'encountered-Christianity-yet-unconverted', i.e., the potential converts. This will be further discussed in the next section.

This section has used an example of a Christian fellowship meeting to demonstrate how the Chinese migrant Christians represent and reproduce Protestant Evangelical Christianity to their non-Christian compatriots. In this process, ethics such as love, inclusivity of non-Christians, and voluntary communal service are highlighted as particular to Christianity by the Christian institution. The fellowship created a space in which the discourse was framed with a Christian overtone, allowing the sharing and exchange of individual narratives, ideas, and opinions. It is in this space that Christians evangelism is often performed.

2.3. The emphasis on Christian evangelism

Chinese migrant churches in Britain, like their counterparts in the United States, are churches made of converts (cf. Yang, 1999: 70). Unlike that of in the contemporary West, where Christianity is an established tradition with a historical heritage, Christianity in contemporary Chinese society is largely an emerging tradition. The emergence of Christianity in modern China has been entangled with Western imperialism in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, as well as the religion's efforts at indigenisation and localisation in Chinese culture (cf. Lian, 2010). For the establishment and growth of various Chinese Christian communities in Britain, the work of evangelism becomes one of the essential organising principles.

American scholar Carolyn Chen (2002: 215) conducted a comparative study of the 'religious varieties' between a Taiwanese migrant Buddhist temple and an evangelical Christian church in the US. Her study's focus is on the different types of 'public engagement' of these Chinese religious organisations, which can be viewed as a 'combination of religious ideals, outreach strategies, and representations of racial and religious difference' (ibid.). Her findings show that the Buddhist temple, construed as a 'religious foreigner', seeks to assume an American identity by downplaying their founders' ethnic and cultural identity and reaching out further into local non-Chinese communities (ibid.). By contrast, the Chinese Evangelical Christian church tends to evangelise *inwardly*, by articulating and reaffirming the Christian identity among church members and recruiting new members primarily within the ethnic Chinese community (ibid.).

My research, though not comparative, resonates with Chen's (2002) observation regarding the ethnocentric evangelical strategy of Chinese churches (see also Chapter Five, Section 3.2). Take the example of the COCM, the largest and leading Chinese Christian evangelical mission organisation based in Milton Keynes, England, whose mission statement states their vision for evangelism is to 'reach the Chinese to reach Europe' (see Out History, COCM, n.d.). A literal rendering of Chinese version of this slogan is: 'may God's grace be upon the overseas Chinese, so that the gospel can be spread throughout Europe'[30]. Although in recent years, the COCM has expressed an increasing interest in evangelism among second-generation Chinese in Britain and in Europe in general, the majority of their ministries remain

[30] The slogan in its original Chinese form is: 神恩泽侨胞，福音遍全欧 (*shen'enze Qiaobao, fuyin bian quan'ou*).

focused on the evangelical work among the Mandarin-speaking and Cantonese-speaking Chinese migrants, especially students.

The emphasis on Christian evangelism not only remains in the institutional slogan but can be practiced in a more subtle and everyday manner by individual Chinese Christians. In the previous section, an example has been given to illustrate how Christianity is represented in an institutional setting, a regular Chinese Christian fellowship meeting. The examples presented below are two scenarios reconstructed from my field notes, documenting how Christian evangelism is conducted in everyday settings.

Example #2: Introducing grace before meal

6 Feb 2015, Hong's Chinese restaurant, M town, England

It was a group meal of the MCCC on the occasion of Shiwei's baptism and the upcoming Chinese New Year on 18 Feb 2015. The meal's venue was Hong's, one of the best-known Chinese restaurant in M town. 13 people were gathered for the meal, among whom six were regular Christian members of the MCCC: four students, one visiting scholar and one Chinese academic, and the rest were friends of the MCCC members. Among the seven non-Christian members, three had attended Shiwei's baptism service and also had attended the MCCC at least twice.

After ordering the dishes, Zhaoyi [the co-organiser of MCCC] invited all who came for the meal to introduce themselves in a very casual manner. He began by saying 'it's because of *yuanfen* [缘分, literally: 'fate' or 'relationship brought about by fate'. A Chinese way of saying 'it's a pleasure to'] that we can gather together here. I don't know where you are from, but for me, who have lived in England for near 10 years, we are all Chinese'.

After the self-introductions, all dishes were served. Zhaoyi again stated 'now we've all come to know each other. I can recognise that some of you have come to our MCCC, and some of you haven't. But you probably know that we are Christians. We Christians say grace, a prayer before meal, asking God's blessing to be upon the food and everyone else. So, let us pray together'. Everyone sitting around the table closed their eyes when Zhaoyi was leading the prayer. After the prayer, people were ready to eat. They began talking about various topics. Some were related to religion and Christianity. I heard Pin [a Christian member] explain to two of her friends about the prayer. Shiwei's baptism was also discussed during the meal.

Example # 3: Family gathering for meal with evangelical purpose

7 Feb 2016, Mr and Mrs Yin's home, B city, England

It was three days before the 2016 Chinese New Year [10 Feb 2016]. I travelled with Zhaoyi, a friend of mine, to B city to visit a Chinese couple who used to live in M town. Zhaoyi told me that they were the people who 'led him to Christ', and they were very popular among the local Chinese Christian circuit for their hospitality and their spirituality ['love for the Lord', *ai Zhu* 爱主, in Zhaoyi's original Chinese]. They attended a Chinese evangelical church in B city and ran two weekly Bible study groups at their home. Nevertheless, I was told that the day was not primarily for Bible study, but a family meal before Chinese New Year, and Mr and Mrs Yin had invited 'probably up to 20 people' to their home.

There were 27 people gathered in Mr and Mrs Yin's house for the meal that evening. The main dish for the family meal was dumplings. Dumpling-wrapping is very commonly seen among the Chinese migrant communities, especially for festive occasions. Almost all guests have participated in dumpling-wrapping: three to four people were in the kitchen in charge of boiling the dumplings, three were in charge of making doughs and stuffing, and the rest, regardless of how skilful they were (learning) wrapping dumplings. Mrs Yin was very active and remained talkative throughout the meal. Her topics ranged from daily family affairs to church affairs to faith and religious issues.

The meal lasted for about three hours. After the meal, some people left, and some stayed for tea and snacks. Mrs Yin asked a young female guest to play popular Chinese hymns on the piano and invited those who knew the lyrics to sing along, as she humorously remarked 'it is said that singing can help burn your calories and your digestion. We've just eaten a lot, so let's sing together, shall we'. After they had sung some hymns, she invited all who stayed to sit around a table, and asked people to share 'the life with the Lord' in the past year. There were some non-Christians among the gathering [I was unable to identify all the non-Christians due to limited time] […] Mrs Yin opened her Bible to quote some verses explaining to a non-Christian female who seemed to be interested in Christianity about 'God's promise' and the notion of Trinity.

The two examples presented above document two different everyday settings, one in a Chinese restaurant and the other in a private house of a Chinese Christian couple, compared with the formal institutional setting in the Example #1. The group meal is the contextual element common in all these examples. In the previous analysis, I have noted that the offering of free meals or meals with a limited charge by Christian institutions can be an important strategy of attracting new people to Christian fellowship meetings (cf. Abel, 2006). However, this should not be mistakenly understood as if those who were attracted to

Christianity through accepting the invitation to free meals and eventually converted were 'rice-bowl Christians' (Yang, 1999: 90). 'Rice-bowl' or 'rice' Christian is a popular phrase used in the Christian circuit to identify those who convert for the primary purpose of receiving practical material benefit (cf. Definition of Rice Christian, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

I argue that the group meal among Chinese migrant Christians can be understood as a ritual. Abel (2008) conceptualises *ritual* as a form of social interaction that is 'routinised or regularised in some way' (Abel, 2008: 86). His definition of ritual is similar to Rappaport's (1999) understanding of ritual as 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers'. In this sense, the activity of group meal organised by the Chinese Christians, regardless of the specific venue where it might occur, can be viewed as a ritual event. Firstly, the time of the group meals that I have participated in and observed, not only in religious but also in public non-religious settings, are linked with specific religious or festive events. What lies at the heart of the group meal is essentially the social interaction among participants. In the Christian context, some ritualistic acts, such as saying prayer/grace before meal, hymn singing, Bible reading, etc., are *performed* and carry a religious symbolism. The ritualistic acts in these public everyday settings, as demonstrated in the above examples, often become conversation starters for possible discussions of religious or faith-related issues.

It is in such everyday settings that Chinese Christians can find opportunities to conduct evangelism, introducing Christianity to the non-Christians. According to my experience, religious and faith issues are often intentionally avoided by many Chinese in their everyday conversations. It is often considered a sensitive and mysterious topic which is likely to leave a negative impression on either of the interlocutors. In the examples presented above, we can see that in everyday settings, particularly during group meals and gatherings in a private household setting, the Christians can use simple but effective ritualistic acts such as prayer before meals, faith-story-telling, hymn-singing to function as conversation starters. These ritualistic acts, performed in everyday settings, on the one hand help articulate their Christian identity in front of non-Christians in a non-intrusive manner. On the other hand, these acts contain basic tenets of Christian beliefs and practices that can be repetitively introduced to the potential converts in group settings. These acts form what I call the *performative profession of Christian faith* by Chinese Christians, which plays an important role in the Christian initiation of potential converts.

For Chinese Evangelical Christians, the practice of witnessing constitutes an important part of the performative profession of faith. The next section focuses on this particular practice and its role in Christian initiation.

3. Christian witnessing in initiation

In Chinese migrant Christian communities, the practice of giving accounts of one's Christian experience is referred to as *shuo/jiang jianzheng* 说/讲见证. It means speaking about/giving a testimonial account of how one become a Christian. This practice is not particular to the Chinese Christians, and finds its root in certain forms of modern American *fundamentalist* Christianity (cf. Ammerman, 1997:198). According to the anthropologist Susan Harding's (1987: 167; cf. 2000) examination of the 'rhetoric of conversion' of American fundamentalist Christians, Christian testimonies are finely structured and strategic verbal presentations of accounts reconstructed around the themes of the presenter's experience of Christian conversion. Bielo (2009:114-115) broadly defines Christian witnessing as 'any interaction between a Christian and a nonbeliever in which the spiritual faith of the former is demonstrated (intentionally or unintentionally) for the latter'. However, it is difficult to empirically document 'witnessing encounters as they naturally occur' (ibid.:117). To tackle the problem of the high spontaneity of witnessing practice, instead of following Bielo (2009) whose focus is on the preparatory work done in the Bible study group, I focus on the didactic effect of Christian witnessing in the initiation of the Chinese Christians who were once potential converts to the religion.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the stage of initiation is didactic in nature. Through initiation, potential converts can learn not only basic tenets of Christian beliefs and practices, as presented previously, but also the communal and institutional aspects of Christianity. For Chinese migrant Christians, Christian witnessing is not primarily a formalised 'rhetoric of conversion' with strategies as can be documented in various conversion testimonies, nor is it mere reconstructed personal stories filled with religious terminologies and fixed patterns of linguistic schemes (though it can be the case) carried out in intentional ways (Harding, 1987: 167). I argue that Christian witnessing is a collective ritual practice grounded in the communal context of Chinese Christian communities in Britain and facilitating the initiation of many potential converts. To illustrate the argument, I draw on my interviews with a participant who has encountered Christianity in China and converted to Christianity in Britain through his participations in COCM events.

> I love reading a lot […] you know I'm no stranger to the Christian stuff. But I never believed anything about it […] I took it more as a kind of philosophy which helped me thinking […] I was very depressed for a while […] They [the people in the church] tried to help, but it didn't work out very well […] Eventually, I was recommended by our church to go to a COCM conference on fighting depression […] I didn't expect much from it […] until I heard a sister's story, whose life journey was almost identical with mine […] If I believed in reincarnation, I would say that she's probably from my previous life. I've never known that God can be that real to me personally. I believed that He must have sent the sister at the point in my life to let me know that He was there.
>
> (Yu, male, interviewed on 19 Nov 2016)

The interview excerpt above is part of the conversion account from Yu, a male participant in my research. Yu's mother was a Christian convert in China. He said that he had had some knowledge about Christianity before his arrival in Britain due to his reading Christian literature under his mother's influence. This can be considered his initial *encounter* with Christianity. However, the encounter did not lead him further on his conversion trajectory until he came to the UK. In general, Yu's account is a typical *crisis-led conversion narrative* (see Chapter 3), in which his interpretation of his conversion is in accordance with the Christian frame of reference.

Taking a closer look at his accounts, we can see that although Yu did not become a Christian upon his arrival in Britain, he continued to go to church, as he did with his mother when in China. It was a Chinese church in a city in northwest England that Yu had been attending since his migration. It was that church that recommended the COCM conference on depression to him. As stated above, the nature of Christian witnessing is essentially the interaction between Christians and non-Christians through which tenets of faith can be demonstrated. Apart from making propositional statements of *belief*, the demonstration of Christian faith can be done in the practice of a range of ethical precepts such as love, care, and service, as indicated in the previous section. Clearly, Yu received some help and support from the church that he initially attended, but with limited effect. And the people in the church kept looking for resources that could help Yu, which eventually led him to the COCM conference, at which Yu was converted.

In my research, I have come across and documented many crisis-led conversion narratives, which in many ways resemble Yu's accounts. In these narratives, the potential converts

always accounted their experiences in various physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and financial crises, which can often find their resonance in other converts' witnessing testimonies. And it is in the Christian communal gatherings that I have found most witnessing testimonies in various forms took place. In the remaining part of this section, I focus on a COCM Christmas camp, an event that can be viewed as a typical representation of Chinese Christian communal gatherings.

As mentioned previously, the COCM is the largest Chinese Christian mission organisation in Europe. It is based in Milton Keynes, England, with an over sixty-year history of Christian evangelism among the Chinese in Europe. Presently, the COCM's evangelistic focus is on Chinese students, young Chinese professionals and entrepreneurs, and second and third-generation Chinese in Britain and Europe. Since the 2000s, the COCM has continuously run student camps, professional training camps, weekend Bible camps, family camps, and Christian-themed conferences open to the Chinese people in Europe. During my research, I participated in five COCM camps for students during the Christmas and Easter holidays from 2015 to 2017, as well as two conferences. In this section, I use my field notes taken at the Christmas camp in 2016 which lasted for four days from 28 December 2016 to 1 January 2017, to reconstruct my experience of the event.

> There were approximately 250 participants at this year's Christmas camp. The participants included young Chinese students and migrants from all over Britain [the majority], 15 short-term missionaries from the US, Italy and Australia, pastoral and supporting staff who were also COCM co-workers based in the headquarters in Milton Keynes and other places in Britain. All participants were divided into different groups and resided full-time in the COCM conference centre, with all Chinese meals provided.
>
> The organising structure of the camp resembles an extended COCM gospel preaching event, containing collective worships, sermons and mini dramas played by different participant groups. There were sessions of *spiritual practices* of Bible reading and group prayers and reflection in each morning and evening carried out by each group. Group discussion followed each sermon session in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The schedule of the entire camp was very intense, which created an emotionally involving and intellectually engaging atmosphere.
>
> In a conversation with a participant who has been to several previous camps, he said that '*the closer it is to the end of the camp, the more emotional people can get. They tend to share more private things in their groups toward the end as some of them would never meet again.*'

> In the last night of the camp, many people tended to stay up very late having in-depth, emotionally charged conversations with one another. The topics can range from the person's experience with study, work, life, family, friends, colleagues and romantic relationships.

The text above is a reconstruction of my experience of one COCM Christmas camp according my field notes. It provides a sense of the structure of the a typical COCM student camp in which both young Christian and non-Christian Chinese can attend during their stay in Britain. Two thirds of my research participants have attended at least one such COCM event. Twelve of them have made their *prayers of decision* (*juezhi daogao* 决志祷告) at or after the events. Seven have stated that their faith has 'deepened' through attending the COCM events.

The decision prayer implies a decision (*jue* 决) and an act of will (*zhi* 志) (Abel, 2008: 159). It is a ritual that can be verbally uttered in public or in private, and in which a person prayerfully states his or her decision to convert to Christianity, or 'to follow Jesus' (in Christian parlance). I cannot find any theological exposition on this practice. The Christians often reference a verse from the Christian Bible, in which it states, 'if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Romans 10:9, RSV). The practice is of great importance for and is widely observed among Chinese Evangelical Christians. It is an indicator that the person is converted to Christianity, and Christian baptism will usually be administered to a person who has made his or her decision of conversion through such prayers. Some people delay their baptism after their prayers of decision. Among my participants, especially those who have encountered Christianity and said they have 'come to believe in the Lord' (*xinzhule* 信主了) while in China but not baptised (e.g., the examples of Chenran and Xinyi, see Chapter Six), many identify the practice of prayer of decision as the marker for their Christian conversion. For them, Christian conversion means coming to *believe* in basic tenets of Christian beliefs. However, in my analysis of Christian conversion, in which conversion is construed as a process rather than a momentary act such as making a decision of belief, I see the prayer of decision, as widely practiced among the Chinese Christians, as an indicator of their accomplishment of Christian initiation.

Drawing on the previously mentioned concept of *ritual* as a *routinised and regularised social interaction*, we can see that the entire COCM student camp is filled with a collection of rituals. There are religiously oriented rituals such as collective worship, sermons, public and private prayers, scripture-reading, and dramatic representations of biblical stories; as well as

socially oriented rituals such as group dining and personal story-sharing and discussions. In these rituals, basic tenets of Christian beliefs, theologies, narratives can be collectively expressed, represented, reproduced, and communicated to non-Christians and new Christian converts by the more 'mature' Christian participants, e.g., short-term missionaries and pastoral staff. Evangelical Christian practices such as such as intensive Bible reading and reflection, petitionary and intercessory prayer, and collective worship, which are often separately performed in ordinary Chinese Christian gatherings, can be collectively embodied in the COCM event. As the language of the entire camp was Chinese[31] , a strong sense of ethnic belonging can be nurtured in a relatively short period of time. This immersive experience in an enclosed Chinese cultural setting can sharply contrast with that of being a member of an ethnic minority group living in an English-majority social context. This is the reason that the participants tend to share more private and even intimate information about themselves towards the end of the events. As one participant said to me after the camp, 'finally, I came back to the UK'. After four days of intensive interactions in a full-Chinese setting, he said that he could 'barely speak English'.

The COCM events, as exemplified through a Christmas camp, create a short-term but very typical Chinese Christian community, with the institutional structures and functions highly condensed in a specific place and time. The participants, as long as they have had some knowledge about Christianity, i.e., *encountered* Christianity, can identify certain aspects of Christianity, such as sermons (beliefs and theologies), collective worship, prayer, and scripture reading (practices). Most importantly, it is the broadly defined, global Christian Chinese community that is introduced to the participants. Hui, a female participant who converted during her participation in a COCM Easter camp (8 May 2016), said that apart from gaining further knowledge about Christianity, she felt that she 'wouldn't be alone in being a Christian', since she 'would have a home with brothers and sisters around the world'. In this sense, the ostensible ethno-centricity of the CEC culture also contains a sense of cosmopolitanism.

4. Summary

This chapter has presented the second stage of initiation in my sequential model for the analysis of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. The chapter begins with the

[31] The camps that I have participated are all in Mandarin, while there are also Cantonese camps.

presentation of the *Chinese Evangelical Christian culture*, as an important context in which the Chinese migrants who have encountered Christianity in both China and Britain can proceed in their trajectories of conversion. Empirical evidence from my multi-sited participant observation and semi-structured interviews with individual Christians have been used to illustrate the three main aspects of this culture. The articulation of Chinese identity is demonstrated in the form of promoting the use of a specific Chinese language within a community in English-majority social context. (Evangelical) Christianity is represented as a Bible-centred religion which employs the Christian authoritative text, the Bible, to mediate relations between Christians and non-Christians, leaders and the laities. And the ethics of mutual love and voluntary communal service informed by the Christian faith is also performed to the potential converts as a form of Christian witnessing. Christian evangelism, although can be performed in formal institutional settings such as fellowships, are carried out more subtly in everyday settings.

Next, the chapter focused on the illustration of a specific practice, Christian witnessing. Preceding scholars have emphasised the verbal aspects of Christian witnessing, which is construed as primarily a verbal demonstration of Christian faith, intentionally or unintentionally, by Christians. In this thesis, I argue that Christian witnessing is a collective ritual practice grounded in the communal context of Chinese Christian communities in Britain facilitating the initiation of many potential converts. The argument is illustrated through presenting the a COCM Christmas camp as a short-term but typical Chinese migrant Christian community. Many potential converts who have been initiated through participating in a range of collective communal activities provided by the Chinese Christian institutions are likely to convert to Christianity. The completion of their Christian initiation is marked by their prayers of decision to conversion, which is often followed by the receiving of baptism.

Having encountered Christianity and completed their initiation, how do Chinese Christians proceed in their conversion trajectories? The next chapter will further probe this question.

Chapter Eight: Commitment

1. Introduction

The conversion trajectory of a person does not end with the completion of initiation. For Chinese migrant Christians, although the new converts' Christian faith and identity are affirmed and publicly declared within in the Christian communities through their prayers of decision followed by the ritual of baptism, many also proceed further in their conversion processes. Scholars have used different terms to capture the converts' continued engagement in the faith-related activities subsequent to the stage of *initiation*, such as 'continuous conversion' (Coleman, 2003), 'confession' (Gooren, 2010), and 'commitment' (Rambo, 1993). Such continued engagement in faith fulfils certain religious precepts as represented through religious institutions and becomes part of the converts' post-initiation lived experience. As Berger (1967: 158) succinctly summarised, conversion is 'nothing much … the real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility'.

This chapter use the term *commitment* to capture the post-initiation stage in my sequential model of religious conversion. Rambo (1989: 58, also in 1993) identifies the stage of *commitment* as the 'consummation' of the conversion process. At this stage, activities such as 'decision-making, rituals, surrender, testimony manifested in language transformation and biographical reconstruction, and motivational reformulation' are likely to occur and facilitate the individual's development of commitment (Rambo, 1993: 124). In my study, receiving the ritual of baptism is considered a marker for commitment in a person's conversion trajectory. Commitment lies 'at the heart' of Christianity both theologically and organisationally (Stark and Glock, 1968: 1). It means that a person's commitment to the faith is a prescribed by certain religious doctrines and is also widely welcomed in religious communities.

The term *commitment* has been used broadly in the social scientific analysis of phenomena such as power, religion, occupational development, political behaviour, etc. (Becker, 1960). Sociologist Howard Becker (1960: 32) conceptualises commitment in economic terms, which is regarded as a 'side-bet', the unilateral investment of finance, time, emotion and so forth by a person, to link 'extraneous interest with a line of consistent activity'. It is a consequence of a person's increase in his/her participation and involvement in a social organisation or group.

What I find useful in Becker's (1960) definition is the particular attention to people's 'line of consistent activity' in the development of commitment. Following a *lived-religion approach*

which highlights the importance of the analysis of people's practice of religion, *the stage of commitment* can be characterised as the stage after initiation at which converts are likely to *develop further attachment to the religion through an increase in participation and involvement in the religious communities*. Going through the stage of initiation, the potential converts become substantive converts with basic tenets of Christian beliefs, practices and communal aspects introduced to them. At the stage of commitment, converted persons are likely to develop a 'missionary attitude' (Gooren, 2010: 49), not only increasing their own understanding of and emotional attachment to the faith, but also intensifying their practice of the faith, including the practice of faith-informed ethics.

In this chapter, I propose my thesis of *believing through belonging*, as inspired by scholars such as Davie (1990), Voas and Crockett (2005), and Day (2009, 2010). I argue that commitment is not only important to understanding Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain, but also key to the sustaining of Chinese migrant Christian communities in the country. To illustrate the arguments, I firstly discuss how converts' commitment is represented and expected by the Chinese Christian institutions. Secondly, I use the term *religious belonging* to present how the Chinese Christians are likely to respond to the institutions' expectation of commitment by cultivating a sense of belonging to the religious faith. The religious belonging is instantiated in the converts' increased understanding of and emotional attachment to the religion. Lastly, I use the term *communal belonging* to capture how the converts can continuously practice Christianity as they have been initiated through the CEC culture. The continuous negotiation of different layers of identities and the practice of faith-informed ethics are at the centre for the cultivation of communal belonging. The cultivation of religious belonging and communal belonging largely contributes to the development of commitment for Chinese migrant Christians in Britain. Consequently, the commitment-centred Christian conversion as preached by the religious institutions and practiced by individual converts has contributed to the continuous growth of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain.

2. The institutional aspect of commitment

As stated previously, Christians are very good at forming institutions and communities of different sizes and at different levels. And the communal aspect of Christianity, in many ways, supplements the lack of institutional structure among the Chinese diaspora. The strong institutional and communal affiliation has made the Chinese migrant Christian communities

stand out among Chinese communities in Britain (see Chapter Five). Social institutions and communities are made up of individuals. Some scholars who have followed the lived-religion approach in their studies of religion point out that religious individuals do not necessarily adhere to the institutional prescriptions in their everyday life (e.g., Hall, 1997; Orsi, 1997, 2003; McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2007; Neitz, 2011; Nyhagen and Halsaa, 2016). Through my research, I find that ideas promulgated by religious institutions can have consequences upon individual religious persons. Therefore, the institutional dimension of religion also needs to be considered in the study of lived religion.

In the study of religious commitment among Americans, Stark and Glock (1968: 16) use the term 'expectation' to capture the role of religious institutions in the development of individual religious commitment. In my study, what do the Chinese Christian institutions expect from the converts? To answer this question, I firstly draw on my observation at a baptism service at a mainline Chinese Christian church in S city, England (the SCCC, documented on 5 June 2016). *Example #1* below presents an excerpt from my field note documenting the liturgical formula that the pastor used in conducting the baptism service. Contextual information is provided in the paragraph after the example.

> Example #1.
>
> Scenario: The liturgical formula of baptism at SCCC, 5th June 2016
>
> The minister: Do you receive Jesus as your personal Lord and saviour?
>
> The convert: Yes. I do.
>
> The minister: Do you renounce the evil Satan?
>
> The convert: Yes. I do.
>
> The minister: Do you promise you will read the scripture, pray daily, and come to church to worship regularly?
>
> The convert: Yes. I do.
>
> The minister: xxx [the name of the baptismal candidate], I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
>
> The congregation say together: Amen!

The SCCC is a non-denominational church, which is typical among most Chinese Christian churches in Britain. The Chinese migrant churches (with a few exceptions) often do not strictly adhere to particular Christian liturgical traditions, such as those of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism or Lutheranism (cf. Yang, 1999). As I have previously participated in both Catholic and Anglican baptismal liturgies, I noticed that the SCCC's baptismal liturgical formula is somewhat *innovative* compared with the ones that I have experienced before[32]. The first two questions asked by the minister include some basic tenets of Christian beliefs, such as the personal salvation through 'receiving Jesus as one's personal lord and saviour', and the attribution of the source of evil to 'Satan'. The innovativeness of the liturgical formula lies in the third question. It informs the baptismal candidates about Christian practices, such as daily scripture reading, praying, and regular church attendance, as construed as necessary elements of Christian life. In this way, the questions in the baptismal liturgy can convey the institution's expectations for the converted individuals, in which not only core Christian beliefs are reiterated, but also necessary practices for Christians were articulated.

Baptism, as well as the Holy Communion (or Lord's Supper), are considered the two most important ritual events among most Chinese churches (cf. Yang, 1999: 58-61). Unlike the monthly Sunday Communion service[33], baptism service is conducted far less frequently, often only once or twice a year at the SCCC. The church owns a large building that can house three different congregations simultaneously (the Cantonese, Mandarin, and English-speaking) with up to around 400 congregants. According to Rev. Ruth, the chief pastor of SCCC, there are around 15 to 20 people baptised at the SCCC each year. A large proportion of the baptismal candidates are Chinese students studying in the universities and colleges in S city.

Before baptism, each baptismal candidate would be required to take some catechetical sessions, the time of which can various between three to twelve months. The baptismal candidates would also be encouraged to 'actively participate in' various fellowship meetings, Bible study sessions, and other church-related recreational activities. This is how 'the people

[32] For examples of the Anglican liturgical formulas for the rite of Christian baptism, see: https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/christian-initiation/holy-baptism-accessible-language/holy-baptism

[33] According to my observation, the mainline Chinese Protestant Christian churches in Britain generally observe a tradition of monthly communion service. There can also be variations to this norm depending on the church's specific denominational affiliation or other practical necessities.

in the church can get to know them better through their testimonies of faith' according to Rev. Ruth. She also considers the 'churching time before baptism' crucial for the baptismal candidates to 'see for themselves how Christians live and behave'. (Quotes above taken from the interview with Rev. Ruth, 11 May 2016)

The 'churching time before baptism' and the catechetical sessions described by Rev. Ruth, can be considered part of *Christian initiation* for the baptismal candidates at the SCCC. As mentioned previously, the completion of initiation is marked by the prayer of decision said by the potential converts, which is often followed by baptism. However, as I will show in the interview excerpt below, it is possible for those who have said their prayers of decision to delay their baptism. It seems to me that Christian baptism can be viewed as a demarcation between the stages of initiation and commitment. During Christian initiation, the potential converts are taught by the Christian institutions and individuals with tenets of Christian beliefs and practices, and would have completed their preliminary socialisation with related faith communities. For the potential convert to develop a commitment to the faith, the Christian institution expects the 'confession of faith', in Gooren's (2010: 49) term, which is best substantiated through receiving baptism in a public church gathering setting. For example,

> […] As a missionary focusing on student ministry, I often encourage them [the young people] to get baptised after they have prayed the decision prayer. You know, some young people need a bit of a push, otherwise they would drift away […] I often encourage them to be brave and take a further step […] I won't say that you are saved through baptism. We [the Christians] believe we are saved by having faith in Jesus and God's grace […] Indeed, it [baptism] is a ritual. But it is important. Can you imagine a Christian who always remains silent about his [or her] faith? You must let people know that you are a Christian […] Baptism is a good opportunity for you to declare to others that you are a Christian […] You'll set a good example before the non-believers […] After your baptism, the people in the church can know you better. It means that you are received in our big family completely.
>
> Yue, female, interviewed on 11 Feb 2016

The excerpt above is taken from my interview with Yue, who was once full-time missionary at the SCCC for eight years. In the excerpt, Yue gives her opinion on the significance of baptism, as she understood, for the converts and the church community which she serves. In the interview excerpt, Yue said that although the church's evangelical ministries are oriented on the basis of encouragement, particular persuasions were needed to 'push' those who have

decided to convert to receive baptism. For Yue, an important element of Christian commitment is to be outspoken about one's Christian faith and identity, as her rhetorical question stated that she could not 'imagine' a 'Christian who remains silent about his or her faith'. In her theology, baptism is not a prerequisite for Christian salvation. Concerned about the lack of commitment among the new converts, Yue regards baptism as a good opportunity for the new converts to declare their faith publicly before the church congregation. Since there would be both Christians and non-Christians attend the baptism service, the ritual of baptism of individual candidates can 'set good examples' for those who have converted but are not baptised, as well as for the non-Christian attendees. In other words, the baptism service can be an opportunity for Christian witnessing. Moreover, Yue affirmed the sociological significance of the ritual of baptism. As the mentioned in Chapter Five (Section 3.2), the family-metaphor is popularly used in Chinese Christian communities. The reception of baptism in public setting in the church marks beginning of Christian commitment, through which the person is warmly welcomed to join the church family.

At the baptism service, not only the SCCC members, but also the friends, classmates, colleagues and relatives of the 12 baptismal candidates were invited to attend the service. Some had travelled for hours to S city. Through my casual conversations with the candidate-affiliated attendees, I found some of them were neither regular SCCC members, nor Christians. Among these attendees, some who lived in S city said, they had been invited to the SCCC before for fellowship meetings and other social activities at least once. When asked about their motivations for the attendance, some said that they were 'curious' about the baptismal ritual and Christianity in general. Although they were not Christians, they considered baptism an important event in their friends' (the baptismal candidates) lives, so that their attendance was to demonstrate their support. In my conversation with the Christian attendees who personally accompanied the candidates, I found that some had played the role of mentors to the candidates prior to their baptism. For example, one Christian attendee said that he helped a candidate write about her conversion testimony and witnessed her uttering decision prayer. Some of the Christian attendees also brought their family and friends to the service.

To sum up, this section has illustrated the commitment that is expected from individual converts by the religious institution, the Chinese church and its leadership. The illustration revolves around the event of Christian baptism, which I regard as a ritual event demarcating the *stage of initiation* and *commitment* in the Chinese migrant Christians' conversion

trajectories. It indicates the beginning of the stage of commitment for the new converts. In Example #1, the liturgical formula used in the baptism service has revealed the church's expectation for the new converts in terms of basic tenets of Christian belief and practice. Apart from the religious dimensions of the commitment such as beliefs and practices, according to my interview with Rev. Ruth, consistent communal participation is also of great importance as part of Christian commitment. Through the interview with Yue, a missionary at SCCC, another aspect of Christian commitment, a convert's articulation of his or her Christian faith and identity in public, expected by the Christian institution, is also demonstrated.

According to my research experience, SCCC is a typical mainline Chinese migrant Christian church in Britain in terms of its size, structure, theological orientations, and its connection and affiliation with other Chinese Christian communities in Britain. Thus, I consider its expectations of Christian commitment are likely to be applicable to other Chinese Christian institutions in Britain. In the next section, I present how individual converts can respond to the institution's requirement for commitment.

3. The cultivation of religious belonging

In Stark and Glock's (1968) theory, religious commitment has five dimensions, namely, belief, practice, knowledge, experience and consequence. The dimension of *belief* consists the 'expectations that the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook, that he will acknowledge the truth of the tenets of the religion' (ibid.: 14). The dimension of *practice* includes the public and formal aspect of rituals, and the private and less formal aspect of devotion (ibid.: 15). The dimension *experience* encompasses the 'feelings, perceptions, and sensations' that can be experienced by religious individuals. The dimension of *knowledge* refers to the religious institution's 'expectation that religious persons will possess some minimum of information about the basic tenets of their faith', including rites, scriptures, and histories (Stark and Glock, 1968: 16). The last dimension is that of *consequence*, which can be seen as the 'effects' of the religious belief, practice, experience and knowledge in a person's everyday life (ibid.: 16). In this theoretical categorisation of religious commitment, I find the dimensions of knowledge and experience is of high relevance to the cultivation of a person's sense of belonging to a religion, i.e., *the religious belonging*.

The term religious belonging is adopted from Joachim Wach (1958: 32), a scholar of comparative religion, denoting a religious person's 'total response of the total being (feeling, will and intellect) to Ultimate Reality'. To make sociological sense of Wach's definition of religious belonging, I draw on Yuval-Davis' (2006: 199) definition of *belonging* as 'an act of self- identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way', which needs to be examined at different levels, the social, the emotional, the ethical and political. Synthesising Wach and Yuval-Davis' theories, I contend that a person's religious belonging can be sociologically examined as that person's intellectual understanding of tenets of the religion, emotional attachment to the religion, and practice of ethics of the religion. This section is concerned with the first two components of a Chinese Christian convert's belonging to Christianity, namely, their deepened understanding of Christian faith and their emotional attachment to Christianity. The third component, ethical practice, will be examined in the next section.

At the stage of initiation, the potential converts have learned about basic tenets of Christianity and have converted to the religion. However, the commitment to Christianity, as required by the religious institutions demonstrated in the previous section, requires the new converts to deepen their understanding of and increase their emotional attachment to their faith. The empirical evidence from my research shows that it takes a lot of intellectual and emotional efforts for the Chinese converts to make sense of Christian beliefs, as part of their commitment to the faith. For example, in the interview with Rev. Zhou, the chief pastor of a Chinese church in a city in southeast England, he said,

> You know, it's not easy to come to believe in the Lord […] I was not born into a Christian family […] I read a lot […] the Buddhist sutras, Daodejing, I-Ching, you name it […] I found the Bible very easy to understand and convincing […] You know, the truth should be very accessible to people. God wants to reach us […] We [Christianity] have got only one book. They [other religions] have got so many books. But they don't make things clearer […] It [the Bible] told me directly that there's a God. I just need to believe in Him, I mean, to believe in Jesus to be saved […] I wished someone could have told me earlier about it [Christianity] […] I have wondered for so many years […] It's a book [the Bible] that can guide your life. It's very practical. It's a handbook for your life […] I've prayed and tried hard to make the church biblical. I think people can easily tell [if a church is Bible-centric]. There's this [Holy] Spirit moving the people […] I think many people wish to have a new life […]
>
> (Rev Zhou, male, interviewed on 4 Nov 2016)

The excerpt above contains much information on Rev. Zhou's personal view of the unique characteristics of Christianity, the significance of the Christian Bible, and his personal view of the church. When discussing the question why people convert to Christianity, he quoted a verse from the Bible stating, 'because Jesus says he's the way, the truth and the life' (cf. John 14: 6, RSV). In the interview excerpt, Rev. Zhou firstly states his non-Christian background, suggesting that he has gone through a conversion process. He demonstrates his intellectual efforts made in the quest for religious meaning in reading books and scriptures of many traditions. Through extensive reading, he identified with the Christian tradition of which the core scripture, the Bible, has fulfilled his intellectual quest for 'truth' and meaning. For him, the fulfilment is also a result of the accessibility of Christianity through the Bible alone, rather than extensive readings in scriptural classics in other non-Christian traditions. The Christian tradition represented in the Bible also provided him with practical guidelines for his pastoral practice, as he regards the Bible as a 'handbook for life'. As a pastor, he has strived to apply biblical principles in his pastoral work and has expressed his expectation to transform his congregants by offering them a religiously meaningful 'new life'.

The American sociologist Christian Smith (2007) points out that without questioning the metaphysical truthfulness of certain Christian beliefs, Christianity makes 'phenomenological' sense in general. Based on a broad examination of the doctrinal, practical, moral, and communal aspects of Christianity, Smith argues that 'belief content of the Christian faith gives rise to certain practices and experiences – particularly emotional ones – that many people find highly engaging, compelling, persuasive, and convincing' (Smith, 2007:167). Unlike Rev. Zhou, whose approach to Christian conversion is achieved primarily through intellectual efforts, there are Chinese Christians who have converted not on religious-intellectual grounds, but on the ground of the emotional aspect of Christianity. For example, Hui is a young Chinese female academic whom I interviewed, in the interview, she said,

> The idea of God was OK for me […] You know we the Chinese have always believed in *tian* 天 [translated as Sky, which religiously can be rendered as Heaven, suggesting a transcendent realm beyond the human and material worlds]. I just find the idea of sin [*zui* 罪, in Chinese this can literally mean crime] quite puzzling. I'm not a bad person, at least not a criminal. That's why I always refused to admit that I'm a sinner and confess my sins […] You know, his [the preacher's] sermon that night helped me a lot. I remembered he asked us to write down whatever we have done wrongly in the past and make a wish to try to correct them in the future and nail it on the cross. […] I think it's a very good idea […] Now I have read the

> Bible, and found that many things that we might consider OK are not allowed in God's eyes […] I'm not perfect, and I can't promise to correct all my bad habits instantly, but at least I now have the motivation to try […] I think you just have to look around and see what a mess we (the human beings) have made in the world, the wars, plagues and death […] I do wish that more people can admit their sins, come to Jesus, and do the right things […]
>
> (Hui, female, 8 May 2016)

The quote demonstrates the process of how Hui came to accept and understand the Christian notion of sin. At the beginning of the excerpt, Hui stated her acceptance of the Christian belief of God on the ground of her understanding of *tian*, a metaphysical category in Chinese language and culture (as noted in the excerpt). What has kept her from committing to the Christian faith was the notion of sin, one of the core Christian beliefs. According to Smith's (2007: 172), the Christian notion of sin can sound 'negative and gloomy', even 'intellectually far-fetched' for the non-Christians. As I have noted in the interview excerpt, the Christian notion of sin is rendered in Chinese language as a legal and moral term, *zui* 罪, literally meaning crime. Initially, Hui found the notion of sin repugnant by stating that she did not consider herself a morally 'bad person'. What has facilitated Hui's acceptance of the Christian notion of sin, leading to her commitment to Christian faith, was her experience at a COCM camp.

As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, COCM camps have played an important role in the conversion of many Chinese migrants in Britain. Hui attended an Easter camp in 2016 (25 – 28 March), during which she decided to convert, and was baptised later in the same year, i.e., to make a Christian commitment. According to her account, it was the preacher's sermon, in which a linkage between the Christian notion of sin and the Chinese moral notion of *zui* through *the relocation of the abstract concept in the everyday experience*, that facilitated her intellectual understanding and emotional acceptance of the Christian belief of sin.

Upon her conversion and the commitment to the Christian faith through Bible-reading, Hui adopted a Christian frame of reference for the interpretation of her lived experience. The Christian notion of sin is rooted in the Christian view of human nature as intrinsically evil and in need of redemption (Smith, 2007). Although Hui found the theological idea repugnant in the first place, she learned to attribute her dissatisfaction with many sufferings in the real world to the Christian-based view of human nature as evil. By making experientially relevant

connections between her lived experience and Christian beliefs, Hui not only dissolved her negative emotion towards certain Christian categories such as sin, but also developed a 'missionary attitude' (Gooren, 2010: 49). She demonstrated her Christian commitment through the eagerness to evangelise, as she 'wished' that 'more people can admit their sins and come to Jesus'.

This section has presented examples of how Chinese Christian converts develop their commitment to the faith through the cultivation of religious belonging. In the example of Rev. Zhou, the religious belonging is cultivated through his increase in the intellectual understanding of Christian faith through extensive reading. For Hui, the religious belonging is cultivated through increasing the emotional attachment to Christian faith. Although some tenets of Christian beliefs appeared to be emotionally repugnant to Hui, through the connections made between her lived experience of the world and the Christian beliefs, she not only found the Christian notion of sin emotionally acceptable, it also provided her with the motivation to conduct Christian evangelism.

In the next section, I illustrate how the converts cultivate their *communal belonging*, another dimension of their commitment, through the practice of faith-informed ethics.

4. Believing through belonging

The subtitle *Believing through belonging* for this section is inspired by the different theses revolving around the issues of believing and belonging popularised and debated among a number of British sociologists (e.g., Davie, 1990; Bruce, 1995; Voas & Crockett, 2005; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Glendinning & Bruce, 2006; Day, 2009, 2010, 2016). These theses have been part of a grand theoretical debate on the phenomenon of secularisation in the sociology of religion. They are academic efforts made in understanding the role of religion in contemporary society through the examination of the intersection of religious belief, practice and identity politics in people's lives. In light of the believing-belonging framework, I propose the idea of believing through belonging for a comprehensive understanding of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain with a focus on the Chinese Christians' commitment. The elaboration of the idea starts from an explanation of the Christian notion of 'life' that appeared in Rev. Zhou's interview excerpt in the previous section. It is a popular term in the Chinese migrant Christian communities.

The notion of 'life' is part of a type of salient Chinese Christian parlance which draws heavily on the Christian Bible's New Testament usage of the word, which appears in multiple places in the text. For example, in the Gospel According to John (14: 6, RSV), Jesus proclaims that he is 'the way, the truth and the life'. And in of Paul's epistles, the term 'life' refers to the 'new life' given by the 'Holy Spirit' after the individual's Christian conversion (e.g., Romans 8:2, 10; 2 Corinthians 2:16). In my research into various Chinese migrant Christian communities, I have noticed different forms of expressions of this parlance such as 'to live a life in Christ', 'to cultivate the (Christian) life (*suzao [jidutu] shengming* 塑造[基督徒]生命,), 'to share/spread the life of Jesus' (*fenxiang Jidu de shengmin*g 分享基督的生命, meaning *living a Christian life imitating Jesus and share the life experience with others*) frequently emerge in sermons, discussions in Bible study groups and fellowship meetings, the COCM events.

4.1. The cultivation of communal belonging

I identify the Chinese Christian parlance of 'life' as the representation of the intersection of two aspects of what I have characterised as the Chinese Evangelical Christian culture (see Chapter Seven, Section 2.2): the representation of Evangelical Christianity and the emphasis on Christian evangelism. And also, this parlance is a representation of another aspect of the Chinese Christians' commitment, the sense of belonging cultivated through the practice of Christian faith-informed ethics, such as love, care, and voluntary service in the community. To illustrate these points, I firstly present three interview excerpts with my brief comments. In-depth analysis will follow in the next section of discussion.

> I chose to be fully committed to the CBCL simply because I was deeply moved by the pastor's deeds […] Rev. Tang's [Chief Pastor of CBCL] wife has been ill for a long time. He has to spend a lot of time taking care of her […] To be honest, I do love to go to the All Saints' [an Anglican evangelical church in L city well-known for its international ministry]. Their sermons, music, and various international activities are brilliant […] But, I can't help returning to the CBCL. I think I see the life of Christ in him [Rev. Tang]. You can't imagine how much suffering he's gone through. That kind of love Christians always talked about is very real to me in him […] You know, I didn't like kids very much before. But over the years, I've been involved with the church's Sunday school. I find kids are actually adorable […] I would say that he (the pastor) showed me how to love in real life. He excavated the capability of love within me. It's not easy. I have to endure something that I don't like in the first place […] All I can do is just to love them [the children at Sunday school].

(Xinyi, female, interviewed on 3 Nov 2016)

The above excerpt is from my interview with Xinyi (also mentioned in Chapter Six), a well-educated young female entrepreneur who has studied and lived in Britain for eleven years. In the excerpt, she provides her reasons for remaining in the CBCL, while another international English church, which provided better sermons and activities, she could have chosen instead. I find Xinyi's comparison of the Chinese migrant church and local English church in terms of the quality of preaching, worship music, and socialising activities a typical narrative commonly seen among the participants in my study who are also well-educated with good English proficiency. However, she, as well as all my participants, has retained her commitment to the Chinese Christian communities, while some attend local English churches from time to time. In Xinyi's case, the reason for her to remain serving the Chinese church was that the ethic of love embodied by the church's pastor. Although Xinyi did not like children initially, her Christian commitment is a source that motivates her to put the ethic of love, as informed by her faith and embodied through the pastor, into practice. Thus, she became a Sunday school teacher at the Chinese church.

> I don't really mind which church [to go to] as long as it preaches an orthodox gospel […] I've been to many churches, both in China and here [Britain]. I do think that in terms of the quality of sermons, the Chinese churches are generally not so good as the English churches. But I think I can serve the Lord better in the Chinese church […] I mean, you know, I work in an English company, workable English is not a problem for me […] But I can share my life experience in the UK, as well as serving those young brothers and sisters there [a Chinese church in L city] more practically […] I often give them lifts in my car […] I can cook for them, I can take them around the city […] You know, I'm a bit shy. I'm not a good speaker. But I like doing practical things for them.

(Chenran, male, interviewed on 5th Nov 2016)

The quote above are is my interview with Chenran (also mentioned in Chapter Six). He was converted in China, baptised in Britain, initially attended an international church in mid-west England and is presently serving as a lay leader of the student ministry at a Chinese church in L city. Similar to Xinyi, Chenran is also well-educated, working as a young professional with excellent English proficiency. He also had some experience of international English churches, which he considers better than many Chinese churches in many ways. However, instead of being attracted to the international churches, Chenran chose to remain committed to the Chinese church, as he could better serve in the student ministry. The ethic that Chenran

has been practicing is primarily the ethic of care for others, which is part of his Christian commitment. Recognising his own introvert personality, his practice of the ethic of care is grounded in 'doing practical things', such as giving students lifts with his car, cooking, and tour-guiding, which are everyday matters rooted in his everyday life.

> When I first believed [i.e., converted and was baptised], I felt that I've got so much to share with people. I was so excited about believing the Lord. I feel the enthusiasm to tell them [other people] the good news. But having volunteered for COCM, I found that people won't listen to you unless you live your life like Christ […] We [the volunteers at COCM] have to do all small things, liking cooking, cleaning, bed-making […] We felt so tired during the camps. But I'm excited to serve the brothers and sisters at our age from all over the UK […] I've learned in that one year [of volunteering in COCM] how to serve, to spread the good news from the small things we do. You know God cares about those things.
>
> (Tangna, female, interviewed on 17 Oct 2016)

The quote is taken from my interview with Tangna, a former volunteer at the COCM. Tangna is a student-turned-migrant. She converted to Christianity after coming to Britain. At the beginning of the excerpt, she describes her experience of religious zeal as a new convert as she wished to talk to other people about her conversion. The religious zeal of new converts has been well documented in preceding literature (e.g., Barker & Currie, 1985). The religious zeal of the new convert suggests a desire to conform with the 'norms' prescribed by the group to 'ensure acceptance' in the group (ibid.: 312). As Barker and Currie point out, while it is relatively easy for the new convert to assume his or her newly gained religious identity soon after conversion, religious commitment is 'sustained by interaction with other believers' (ibid.: 305). In Tangna's case, she adopted a missionary attitude in her eagerness to 'share the good news' with others soon after her conversion. Nevertheless, it was during her volunteering at the COCM that she came to realise that 'people wouldn't listen' to her unless she could put the faith into practice. In her words, this means to 'live like Christ'. Joining COCM, Tangna started to learn about the meaning of Christian commitment. For her, to commit to the faith meant voluntary service in the community, doing 'small things' for other fellow Christians.

The above three interview excerpts with my comments illustrate three key elements in the Chinese migrant Christians' practice of faith-informed ethics, namely, love, care for others, and voluntary service in community. They are also part of the culture of Evangelical

Christianity as represented in the Chinese migrant Christian communities (see Chapter Seven, Section 2.2.). For those who have gone through their faith initiation in Britain's Chinese Christian communities, the practice of these faith-informed ethics is, one the one hand, usually learned through their initiation. On the other hand, it contributes to the enhancement of the Chinese Evangelical Christian culture. The commitment, represented as the 'Christian life' mentioned at the start of this section, is embodied in the individual Chinese Christians' practice of the faith-informed ethics. Although there are alternative church communities available, the practice of faith-informed ethics becomes an important part in the cultivation of a sense of belonging for the converts, inducing them to commit themselves in the Chinese church communities. As a result, even Chinese migrant Christians with a good proficiency in English remain committed to the Chinese churches.

However, not all Chinese Christians attend Chinese churches exclusively. The next section discusses the issue of 'choice of church', briefly mentioned in two examples above, in more depth.

4.2. Identity and belonging

The previous section examined the Chinese migrant Christians' commitment to the faith in the form of practicing faith-informed ethics such as love, care and voluntary service in the community. This section focuses on another aspect of commitment, that of the Chinese Christians' *selective commitment* to specific Christian communities in Britain. Such selective commitment is often the result of the interplay of their multi-layered identities and sense of belonging.

'Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 202). Yang (1999) has documented that for some Chinese immigrant Christians in America, 'being Christian' is construed in part as 'being American'. This is because many American churches have been 'effective in proclaiming a particular American value system – conservative Protestantism' (Yang, 1999: 191). The Chinese church in which Yang conducted his research identified with this American value system, along with advocating the ethical values in Chinese Confucianism that appeared to be compatible with conservative Christian moral codes (ibid.). However, in my own research, I find that few Chinese Christians, associate their Christian identity with the identity of being British. Nevertheless, they recognise the Christian heritage in Britain, and their experience of which

has helped them make sense of their Christian conversion. For example, in the interview with Jiaying, a female participant, she said,

> The first time I came to England, when I saw the peaks of those old church buildings, I was amazed. How God has loved this country, I thought […] I know now that not many English people would go to church. But I still think it [Britain] is a Christian country. You still can find the Christian spirit imprinted in all respects in the English culture […] I don't think you have to be a Christian to be more welcomed here [in Britain] […] I think there's a reason that God has taken me to this country. Maybe, He [God] wanted me to do my part to bring the gospel back to the English people […] I didn't change my nationality, I'm always a Chinese. I need a permanent residency to stay here and to work legitimately. You know, I also need to keep my Chinese passport. I don't want to apply for a visa when I need to go back to China.
>
> (Jiaying, female, interviewed on 10 Feb 2016)

The interview excerpt above gives an example of the interplay of a Jiaying's understanding of Christianity in Britain, her Christian identity, and the identity of being Chinese. Jiaying is in her early fifties. She converted to Christianity and was baptised prior to her first arrival in Britain as a visiting scholar in 2005. She then pursued a doctoral degree in science at a prestigious British university and has worked and lived in a city in England since 2007. Similar to many of my participants, Jiaying *imagined* Britain as a 'Christian country' prior to her arrival at the country. After coming to Britain, she started to notice the ongoing secularisation in the country, as manifested in her observation that 'not many English people would to church'. Nevertheless, due to her previous Christian conversion, an emotional attachment was established within her between the Christian cultural heritage represented by the old English church buildings and her understanding of 'God's love' for the English nation.

Several years later after her completion of the doctoral degree, Jiaying married a white English man. She said that her husband was a 'nominal Christian' who had gone to a church school when he was young but had never practice the faith since then. Several months before their wedding, Jiaying took her husband (her fiancé at that time) to a local Anglican-evangelical church of which she was a member. There was a Chinese Christian fellowship based at the church. She introduced her husband to the 'brothers and sisters' in her local Chinese Christian fellowship, who later helped enormously in organising Jiaying's wedding ceremony. Jiaying understood this part of her migration experience from the perspective of

her faith as 'God's calling' for her to re-evangelise her husband, who represents the white English 'nominal Christians'. Finally, Jiaying clearly articulated her Chinese identity, which partly related to her nationality of being a Chinese citizen. I understand Jiaying's decision of retaining her Chinese citizenship, as well as her gaining permanent residency in Britain, was made on practical grounds. Her identity of being a Chinese is not predicated on a 'right-based' notion of citizenship (cf. Nyhagen, 2015: 768). Rather, her Chinese identity is based on her identification with the Chinese culture and belonging to the Chinese Christian fellowship located in an Anglican church, through which the Chinese identity can be represented and reproduced.

Jiaying's *imagination* of Britain as a Christian nation and her emotional attachment made through the association of English Christian heritage with her own Christian experience, are typical among my participants. Similar to Jiaying, some of my participants also *believe* that God has sent them to Britain, with its Christian heritage, for a purpose. This type of teleological interpretation of the lived experience reflects what scholars have written about 'religion as a meaning-maker' (Nyhagen and Halsaa, 2016: 105) for people to make sense of the changing social context in their migration. Moreover, through religious conversion, people's view of the 'root reality' (Nietz, 1987: 63) is also changed (see also in Chapter Three, Section 2.1 on the definition of religious conversion). Conversion to Christianity has provided the Chinese migrants with an interpretive frame of reference, according to which their experience of social and religious changes can be understood by themselves as *plausible* and teleologically meaningful (cf. Berger, 1967).

The term 'imagination' that I used to describe the Chinese Christians' understanding of the British Christian heritage and its association with their own conversion is borrowed from Benedict Anderson (1991). In his interpretation of the historical roots of nationalism, Anderson (1991: 6) proposes that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact … are imagined'. By 'imagined', Anderson does not suggest that such a vision for creating and maintaining a community is not real. Rather, the term highlights the 'ongoing conceptual work required to create an image of community' (McGuire, 2008: 205). Apart from *imagining* the relationship between personal Christian conversion and the British Christian heritage, another motif in the Chinese migrant Christians' narratives of commitment is imagining a *Christian universalism*. For example, in the interview with Fengfei, a female participant in her late fifties, she said,

> They [the English Christians] have treated me very well […] They helped me practice English, […] offering counselling when I had troubles with my ex-husband […] I can trust them [the English Christians] […] I've stayed there [in the English church] for several years. It's not that I don't know there are Chinese (Christian) groups nearby. I just got used to go there [the English church] […] I was invited to join the MCCC by Mr Mei. We have known each other for some time. I think we [Chinese Christians] ought to learn God's word in Chinese. It is our mother tongue […] I think we [Christians] are supposed to be one family, aren't we? Although we go to different churches, we believe pretty much the same thing.
>
> (Fengfei, female, 1 Feb 2016)

The quote above is an account of Fengfei's involvement and participation in both a local English church and a Chinese Christian fellowship. She came to Britain in the early 1990s, stayed in a town in England, first studied and later worked at a university in the town for nearly thirty years. She became a Christian in 2005 and was baptised in a Baptist church several miles away from her home. There was a large English Christian church in the town which was closer than the Baptist church, and there was a Chinese group in the church. When asked why she chose to go to a church that is further away from her house than the other, she gave the answer above.

As mentioned in Chapter Six on the experience of encountering Christianity, expressions such as 'feeling welcomed' and 'being treated well' by other Christians is a typical theme frequently emerged in the Chinese migrants Christians' descriptions of their initial experience of Christianity. It denotes a positive first impression of Christianity. This positive first impression often generates further positive emotional attachment to not only the religion, but also to a specific faith community. As Fengfei stated, she 'trusted' the English Christians in the Baptist church and 'got used to' attending the church, even though it is further away from her home rather than the one nearby.

However, Fengfei's *belonging* to the Christian community is not one-dimensional. Apart from attending the English-speaking Baptist church, she was also one of the founding members of the Chinese Christian fellowship in M town, the MCCC, mentioned in Chapter Seven. In another part of our conversation, it became clear that the reason she gave for her participation in the MCCC was similar to that of other founding members of the MCCC, which was a perceived need to learn more about the Christian faith in the Chinese language. In my research, I have found that many of my participants who are well-educated and are

proficient in English have had the experience of multiple affiliations with different Christian groups beyond the Chinese-speaking Christian churches and fellowships.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section in the examples of Xinyi and Chenran, some Chinese Christians remained regular members of a Chinese Christian group and also attended English-speaking churches for 'better sermons' and 'traditional Christian worship music'. Some, like the example of Mr and Mrs Mei in Chapter Seven and Fengfei in this section, have chosen to belong to English-majority churches simply because they 'feel welcomed'. However, the difference between these two examples is that some Chinese Christians would be assertive in their Chinese identity exemplified by Mr and Mrs Mei in Chapter Seven, while others such as Fengfei, were either intentionally or unintentionally blurring the boundaries between different racial and ethnic identities in a Christian community. Nevertheless, adopting Staples and Mauss's (1987: 136) *rhetorical indicators for religious commitment* (see Chapter Three), we can see that whether or not the Chinese migrant Christians are assertive about their ethnic identity as being Chinese, they have 'embraced a master role' of being Christian in the first place. In other words, their religious identity of being Christian often trumps the ethnic identity of being Chinese which can be expressed in the form of expressing their sense of belonging to the larger universal Christian community. 'We are one family', and identical or similar expressions can be found not only in Fengfei's, but also many other Chinese migrant Christians' narratives.

In Jiaying and Fengfei's examples in this section, both of them have been attending English-majority churches while also participating in local Chinese Christian groups. Apart from the faith-based imagination of Christian identity and lived-experience-based selection of communal belonging, another example is given below to illustrate how a Chinese migrant Christian can negotiate different identities in the development of commitment.

> I'm Chinese by birth […] I mean I have a Chinese face, I speak the Chinese language, I love Chinese food more than English food […] I have a British passport simply because of my family. You know my mother married a British man, and I came to this country when I was 15. Thank God I'm so lucky that my father has loved me very much. And I don't think I've experienced much discrimination in school as a Chinese migrant. Some of my fellow young Chinese friends might not be so lucky as I am […] I don't have any problem work with English people. As you know, I worked part-time in McDonald's to support myself when I was in college […] I was baptised in a Methodist church […] I went to xx [a US city] for exchange for one year […] I was in the music team there [a Baptist church]. I didn't come

> back to the Methodist church. I joined the Vineyard church for a while [a charismatic-Pentecostal church]. But I just didn't think I could serve fully with all my potentials there […] You see, I can do so many things here [the Chinese church in S city]. I can cook for those brothers and sisters. I'm also in the music team here […] I don't really mind if they [the congregants] are English or Chinese. I go to where I can serve the most.
>
> (Jiajie, female, interviewed on 17 Feb 2016)

Jiajie was a young Chinese migrant Christian in her late twenties. She is what has been identified as a 1.5-generation immigrant, also known as British-Raised-Chinese (BRC, for different types of Chinese migrants in Britain, see Chapter Five). In terms of national and ethnic identity, she identifies with her Chineseness in term of *culture*, including certain physiological characteristics, the Chinese language, and Chinese food as markers of Chinese culture. She is a British citizen because of her current familial background. As certain forms of racial discrimination against the Chinese have been observed and experienced by generations of Chinese migrants in Britain (cf. Parker, 1994), Jiajie was aware of the precarious situations that some of her fellow Chinese migrants would have experienced in Britain. Nevertheless, she is generally satisfied with her own upbringing in Britain. And her description of the work experience suggests that she has well adapted to and integrated in British society.

According to Jiajie, she encountered Christianity in her college and was baptised in an English Methodist church. But in our extended conversation, I found that she adopted the same *Christian universalism* expressed by Fengfei in the previous example, believing in and imagining the unity of all Christians. This suggests that denominational variations of Christianity were not of her concern. Thus, in her account, we can see that she has had a diverse experience of different types of Christianity. The reason for her to finally join and stay in the Chinese church in S city was similar to that of Chenran, as presented in the previous section. Jiajie expressed a strong sense of belonging which was grounded in her capability to practice her faith-informed ethic of voluntary communal service.

This section has so far given three examples illustrating the interplay of identity and belonging in the development of commitment to specific Christian communities of the Chinese migrant Christians in Britain. The first example highlights the *imagined* nature of the Chinese Christians' identity and belonging. As McGuire (2008: 205) has noted, the word 'identity' suggests the concept of 'sameness', and 'group identity implies some basis for

homogeneity'. Many Chinese Christians, both before and after their conversion, have a preconceived idea about 'Britain as a Christian nation'. This idea is reinforced by their post-migration experience of the British Christian cultural heritage in their everyday life as represented by the old English church buildings. After their Christian conversion, meaningful connections can be made between certain Christian beliefs, the embodied representation of Christianity, and their own personal experience. Further, the imagined *Christian universalism* is a motif in the practice of Christian commitment. As the example of Fengfei and other examples discussed above, many Chinese Christians have analogously identified the Christian institutions, such as various churches and fellowships, as 'family', and the members of which are recognised as 'brothers and sisters'. Finally, in Jiajie's case, we see a good example of the integration of different identities: Chinese in terms of culture, British in terms of citizenship, and Christian in terms of practice.

All three examples in this section portray an important dimension in the Chinese migrant Christians' commitment, the *dimension of communal belonging.* Having converted to Christianity, they have adopted the Christian identity as the primary identity over other identities. The religious identity has become the basis for their negotiation and reconstruction of other identities, informing their belonging to specific Christian communities. Their communal belonging is, on the one hand, grounded in their social relationships with other Christians and their fellow Chinese friends. On the other hand, the sense of belonging to a specific community is also informed by their practice of faith-based ethics such as love, care, and voluntary communal service. The dimensions of *communal belonging*, as well as the aforementioned *religious belonging,* constitute the commitment of Chinese migrant Christians. The cultivation of religious belonging can provide resources for the cultivation of communal belonging. I argue that it is the commitment-centred Christian conversion, as promulgated by the Chinese Christian institutions and practiced by individual Chinese Christians, that has contributed to the continuous growth of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. Hence my thesis of *believing through belonging*.

5. Summary

This chapter firstly presented the Christian commitment as required and expected by the Chinese Christian institutions as the regular practice of faith, articulation of Christian identity, and the continuous communal participation. The chapter then moved on to illustrate how individual Chinese Christians respond to the institutional expectations for commitment

as the cultivation of religious belonging. I argued that a person's cultivation of religious belonging as part of their post-initiation commitment can be understood as the deepening in their intellectual understanding of the faith and an increase in their emotional attachment to it. Further in the chapter, to propose the thesis of *believing-through-belonging*, I discussed how the Chinese Christians can cultivate their communal belonging, another important dimension in their Christian commitment, through the negotiation and reconstruction of their identities and the practice of faith-informed ethics. The cultivation of the religious belonging and communal belonging is of great importance to the development of commitment for the Chinese migrant Christians. And, the commitment-centred Christian conversion, succinctly formulated as *believing through belonging*, can not only help us understand Christian conversion of Chinese migrants, but also explains the continuous growth of Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. This argument will be revisited in the next chapter of conclusion.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This research is the first in-depth sociological inquiry into Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 Chinese migrant Christians (and two English Christians experienced in evangelism among the Chinese) and extensive ethnographic field research lasting for nine months, this thesis has presented the socio-religious dynamics of Chinese migrants with a focus on Chinese migrant Christians in Britain, and typical trajectories of Christian conversion of the Chinese in Britain have been identified and discussed. The research fills a gap in the existing scholarship on the Chinese in Britain, which exhibit a lack of academic engagement with the religious dimension, particularly Christianity, in the lives of the Chinese migrants. The discussion of my empirical findings has been framed in accordance with a three-stage theoretical model of religious conversion. The theoretical model is an operationalisation of a synthesis of Rambo (1993) and Gooren's (2010) theories, contributing to the scholarship of religious conversion. The three-stage sequential model can be transferred in further research on religious conversion in other contexts.

In this concluding chapter, I firstly revisit the initial aims of my research, as well as the research questions. Key research findings from each empirical chapter are then summarised. The significance of the research, contribution to knowledge, theoretical implications, and directions for future research are also briefly discussed.

1. Research aim, questions, and methodology revisited

As stated in Chapter One, this thesis has been dedicated to exploring and developing an understanding of the socio-religious dynamics of Chinese migrants in Britain. This aim has been achieved through empirical research on the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, which constitute over half of the religious Chinese in Britain. The Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain mainly consist of new converts to the religion. This research takes *religious conversion* as a unifying category leading the empirical research and analysis, in which a wide range of factors commonly used in the sociological study of religion, such as belief, practice, language, identity, social network and belonging, can be included and extensively explored (see Chapter Two and Three). Thus, the academic narrative of this thesis focuses on accounting how Chinese migrants have become Christians, i.e., *how and why religious conversion occurs*.

Drawing on preceding social scientific research on religious conversion, most notably in this thesis, Rambo (1993) and Gooren's (2010) works, this study views religious conversion as a process-oriented phenomenon situated in specific social-cultural contexts that can be subjected to different levels of analysis. As discussed in Chapter Three and Four, different categories of factors, *the psychological, the sociological, the religious*, can influence the conversion process both positively and negatively. In real life, contingencies can disrupt the ostensibly unilinear conversion process (see Figure 3, Chapter Three). Nevertheless, patterns emerging from the analysis of qualitative data can help characterise typical trajectories of conversion of Chinese migrant Christians. A *sequential model* developed in Chapter Three, containing three stages, *encounter*, *initiation*, and *commitment*, has been used in the analytical discussion of the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain in Chapter Six through Eight.

This research has taken a qualitative approach in terms of methodology, interrogating the *lived-dimension of religion* (see Chapter Four Section 2.1). Two methods, *semi-structured in-depth interview* and *multi-sited participant observation*, which are two important instruments in 'ethnographic field strategies', were selected as the primary investigative tools (Berg, 2007: 171). Since the qualitative data collected through interviewing the converts can be viewed as the re-interpreted and reconstructed accounts of their experience, the conversion narratives of the converts need to be examined in the respective contexts that they are situated. Thus, apart from interviewing 30 Chinese migrant Christians, participant observation was also conducted in various sites where the Chinese Christians have gathered in Britain, to collect data on the local context that the interview participants are situated in. For an explorative research project, the multi-sited participant observation has to a large extent enabled me to capture main characteristics and variations of the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain (see Chapter Five) and helped to triangulate the participants' accounts with both preceding literature (and other textual resources) and my research experience. Thus, the primary aim of the research, understanding Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain through understanding the Chinese conversion to Christianity, has been achieved.

Regarding the two main research questions, *1) how and why the Chinese migrants convert to Christianity*, and *2) what role religious conversion plays in sustaining the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain*, the thesis provides significant answers from a sociological perspective. In brief, although religious conversion is a highly complex phenomenon with

contingent factors influencing its process, different persons' trajectories of conversion can be inductively identified and characterised into three sequentially occurring stages of conversion. The three stages in the conversion process, which forms the theoretical framework in the analysis of the empirical findings, have been developed in Chapter Four. The logic of the three-stage sequential model for religious conversion is summarised below.

For a person to convert to a religion, he or she needs to firstly *encounter* something (a piece of religious text, a religious artefact or architecture) about the religion or someone (a religious person, a religious group) of the religion. Secondly, the person who has encountered the religion and become a potential convert needs to go through a transitional stage, the *stage of initiation,* during which the person is likely to be introduced to the different aspects of the religion, including the beliefs, practices, and the communities associated with the religion. The initiation can be carried out in both a formal manner such as the catechetical sessions that a baptismal candidate receives in a church, and an informal manner which takes place in everyday social settings. Lastly, the person who has gone through the first two stages and has received ritual ceremonies publicly declaring his/her religious conversion (in the case of Christianity, water baptism), is ready to proceed to the third stage, the *stage of commitment*, as the culmination of the entire conversion process. The commitment of a converted person is on the one hand required by certain religious teachings represented by religious institutions. On the other hand, the converted person's commitment is conditioned to specific *cultures*. The convert's commitment to the religion is developed through the cultivation of a sense of belonging to both his/her religious faith and to the community, which I have termed 'religious belonging' and 'communal belonging'. Thus, belonging is central to the development of the convert's commitment. And the commitment-oriented conversion promulgated by religious institutions and practiced by individual converts is of great importance to the building and sustaining of the communities of different sizes associated with religion. Hence my thesis of *believing through belonging* is formulated as a characterisation of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. The next section revisits key empirical findings of these three stages of the Chinese migrants' Christian conversion.

2. Empirical findings revisited

Encounter

As summarised above, the Chinese migrants' conversion to Christianity usually starts from the individual person's *encounter* with the religion represented in whether material forms or personal forms. Although there remains a range of political restrictions in the development of religion in China, especially Christianity, the presence of Christianity in public arenas in contemporary Chinese society is beyond political control. Christianity can be encountered by Chinese people through their everyday lived experience. In Britain, where Christianity is part of its cultural heritage, it is easier for Chinese migrants to encounter Christianity represented by various Christian institutions and individuals. Having encountered Christianity, what leads the potential converts to proceed on their conversion trajectories are various contextual factors. For the older generation of Chinese migrants who have experienced drastic social cultural changes in contemporary China, encountering Christianity provides them with opportunities to alter their established meaning systems. For the younger generation, encountering Christianity in the local British society has provided substantive support for them to adapt to and integrate in the host society. Moreover, the Christian beliefs and values embodied by the Christians whom the Chinese migrants have encountered can be a resource motivating the potential converts to move on to the next stage in their conversion trajectories, the stage of initiation.

Initiation

At the stage of initiation, those who have become potential converts through various forms of Christian encounter can have more opportunities to expose themselves to different aspects of Christian culture. In Chapter Seven, I captured the Chinese Evangelical Christian culture (the CEC culture), characterised by the articulation of a unified Chinese identity, the representation of Protestant Evangelicalism, and an emphasis on Christian evangelism. The CEC culture is the culture that many Chinese migrants would contact if they initially encountered Christianity in Britain through the Chinese migrant Christian communities. The CEC culture has played an important role in the initiation of potential Chinese convert to Christian. It through the stage of initiation that the potential converts can be introduced to more tenets of Christian beliefs, ritual and devotional practices, and the communal aspects of Christianity.

As I pointed out in Chapter Seven, the Christian initiation is didactic in nature. Although I am aware of occasions that there are formal catechetical sessions organised by the church institutions (see Chapter Eight, Section 2), and the institutional settings are important for

Christian initiation (see Chapter Seven, Section 2.2). I argue that Christian initiation can often be completed through the potential converts continuous involvement in everyday social settings organised by the Christians, such as group meals and festive gatherings. In my discussion of initiation, I focused particularly on how the Chinese Christians performed and demonstrated their faith to the non-Christians, i.e., the practice of Christian witnessing as a means of Christian evangelism, which is also a core part of the CEC culture. Different from previous studies, my exposition of the Chinese Christians' witnessing practice was not limited to the verbal practices. Rather, I used an example of a COCM Christmas camp as a short-term and condensed version of ordinary mainline Chinese Christian communities in Britain, to demonstrate the practice of Christian witnessing as a collective ritual practice grounded in communal context. The practice of Christian witnessing in communal context is effective in the initiation of potential Chinese convert into Christianity. For many Chinese Christians, the completion of their initiation is often marked by their prayers of decision to convert. And baptism, as a marked for the start of Christian commitment, is often followed, though sometimes can be postponed due to personal reasons.

However, Christian conversion does not end with the completion of initiation. For many new converts, they can expect the 'culmination' in their conversion process (Rambo, 1993: 168), the stage of commitment.

Commitment

Commitment is 'at the heart' of Christianity (Stark & Glock, 1968:1). For a new convert, his or her commitment needs to be developed through continuous acquisition of religious knowledge, participation in religious communities, and interaction with religious as well as non-religious people. The commitment of a religious person fulfils the requirements of certain religious teachings represented through institutional expectations from the individuals. And also, it is shaped and conditioned by specific cultures in which the convert is situated.

Chapter Eight discussed how the religious commitment of the Chinese migrant Christians can be developed. According to Stark and Glock (1968: 14-17), in the discussion of religious commitment, five 'dimensions', namely, belief, practice, knowledge, experience, and consequence, need to be considered. For Chinese migrant Christian converts, one of the observable signs of their commitment is their religious practice, such as the increase in participations in various Christian communal activities and devotional practices. Over time, some of these become routinised as part of the converts' everyday life. For the Chinese

Christians, the increase in the practice of religion is understood as 'the work of the Holy Spirit' and the routinisation of some practices, such as churchgoing, scripture reading, praying, is regarded as the norm for Christians in accordance with their interpretation of certain religious teachings. The increase and routinisation of practicing Christianity also fulfils the expectation of the religious institutions. This has been illustrated through my documentation of a somewhat 'unorthodox' liturgical formula for baptism used by a Chinese pastor and interviews with several Chinese Christian ministers (see Chapter Eight, Section 2).

As stated in Chapter Three, belief is at the centre of religious conversion. Although the converts would have known and accepted the basic tenets of some Christian beliefs through the initiation stage, for the development of their commitment, they need to further their understanding of Christian beliefs. From the interviews and ethnographic data, it becomes clear that many Chinese Christian converts tend to draw connections between certain metaphysical beliefs and their personal lived experience of the world in the explanation of their beliefs. The literal reading of the Christian Bible, as well as other religious contents, such as sermons, discussions and publications that they have listened to, participated in and consumed both online and offline (mostly in the Chinese language) have become main sources for the accumulation of their religious knowledge. The accumulation of religious knowledge through both lived experience and the practice of religion in various ways has helped the Chinese Christians to deepen their understanding of Christian beliefs. It has enabled them to adopt a 'missionary attitude' as another important marker of their commitment (Gooren, 2010: 49). This process is what I have termed as the cultivation of *religious belonging*, meaning the deepening of the understanding of religious beliefs as a prerequisite for their deeper commitment to the religious faith, informing their cultivation of belonging to specific faith communities.

Another important dimension of the Chinese Christians' development of commitment is achieved through the cultivation of *communal belonging*. The cultivation of communal belonging can be seen as a continuation of the influence of the CEC Culture, particularly the performative profession of faith, through which the Chinese Christians have been initiated. In my empirical data, I find that the Chinese Christians can maintain a consistent articulation of a unified Chinese identity and express their sentiments and concerns about the Chinese communities. Nevertheless, the Christian identity has enabled the Chinese migrant Christians to move beyond some preconceived, 'imagined' boundaries, such as (sub) ethnicity and social class defined by job profession (Anderson, 1991:6). Even parts of the gender hierarchy

within Christianity have been challenged in the mainline Chinese Christian institutions in Britain (e.g., the ordination of female ministers and missionaries; see also Chapter Five). In the practice of faith-informed ethics, such as love, care, and voluntary communal service, the Chinese migrant Christians are not only initiated through the CEC Culture, but also contribute to the culture as an important marker of their commitment. Although the Chinese remain the priority targets of proselytisation for the mainstream Chinese Christian institutions in Britain, some Chinese churches have extended their evangelistic outreach to the local British society and individual Chinese Christians working for international Christian organisations. In these cases, their sense of belonging is not confined to the Chinese communities alone, but extends to a broader, imagined, worldwide Christian community.

3. Conclusion and future research directions

The thesis of *believing through belonging*, proposed as a result of my research, is inspired by existing sociological debates on contemporary Britain's changing religious landscape (see chapter Two). It briefly summarises the answers to my research questions from a sociological perspective. It does not suggest that the Chinese migrants' conversion to Christianity is primarily a *rational choice* based on pragmatic concerns expected to be fulfilled through the participation in religious communities, although this can be the case for some converts in the first place (see Abel, 2008). Rather, the thesis emphasises the importance of commitment in the process of religious conversion. The development of commitment is not only important for the Chinese migrant Christians who have gone through the stages of encounter and initiation in their process of Christian conversion. It is key to understanding the role of religious conversion in sustaining the Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain. Although, the individual trajectories of religious conversion may differ from one person to another, I argue that my three-stage sequential model is widely applicable in understanding the Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain. The theoretical model developed through this research can be a useful tool that is transferable to the understanding of Christian conversion of other migrant communities in other national and cultural contexts. Further, the model can be used in later empirical studies for its applicability in the documentation of non-Christian religious conversion.

As pointed out in Chapter Three (Section 2.2), my theoretical model of religious conversion does not consider the phenomenon of religious de-conversion or disaffiliation. As some scholars argue (e.g., Dennett & La Scola, 2010; Streib, 2012), there are methodological

difficulties in accessing empirical data on religious de-conversion or disaffiliation. In my discussion of different types of Chinese Christian converts in Chapter Three, I have acknowledged the existence of some Chinese migrants who used to be converts to Christianity but who have deconverted or disaffiliated from the religion in different ways. These people remain my personal contacts and are not included in my list of research participants (Appendix I). As far as I am aware, some online-based communities providing resources for Chinese Christian deconverts have recently emerged. In my view, one of the most important questions for future research in this area would be considering why these people are de-converting or disaffiliating from Christianity to which they used to be committed. In the Chinese context, would their experiences of deconversion differ from those who have hitherto been researched in the West (e.g., Dannett & La Scola, 2010; Streib, 2012)? If so, how? Theoretically, I am curious about whether theories and models of religious conversion can be used in the documentation and analysis of deconversion or disaffiliation. And methodologically, how can future researchers in this area create better strategies of recruiting religious deconverts, as their population and appearance are not so visible as the converts in online and offline communities?

Regarding the online communities, my research has gradually made me aware of the important role of digital technologies in the dissemination and promulgation of religious information and knowledge (e.g., Campell & Lövheim, 2011). In the Chinese context, as stated previously, religion, especially Christianity, remains largely under-represented in mainstream Chinese media. However, speaking from my personal experience, the rapid emergence of digital social media is changing the situation. In my research, I find that the social media, particularly the WeChat app for Chinese, has become an important tool for proselytisation, knowledge and dissemination of information, communal mobilisation and organisation among Chinese Christians. Further, the digitisation of religious texts, such as the digital Bibles and devotional apps, seem to be widely used among Chinese Christians. The question regarding how digitised religion can influence people's perception and practice of religion deserves further investigation. Being trained as a sociologist of religion with some experience in media and communication studies, I am personally interested in knowing whether the emergence of 'digital religion' can change the existing power structure of media representations of religion in China. In the case of Christianity, attention should also be paid to understanding the theological, political, moral, and ideological substructures underlying the media contents provided and promulgated by the Chinese Christians. In the context of

migration, questions such as how religion (Christianity) is communicated and mediated by Chinese migrant Christians, and how it differs from those who live in China, is directly relevant to my research. Comparative studies on similarities and differences in media representation and practice of (different) religions between the Chinese migrants in the West and in China will contribute to understanding not only the materiality of religion, but also media and socio-religious dynamics in different regional contexts.

Finally, I address the issue regarding gender and religion, the intersection of which can also become a promising agenda for future research. Aspects of gender among the Chinese migrant Christians have briefly been mentioned in Chapter Five (Section 3.1). Some recent studies (e.g., Chen, 2005; Huang, 2017) have documented how religious Chinese migrant women have negotiated their identities in religious communities and their families. In my research, I noticed that in mainline Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain, the religious institutions have challenged conventional patriarchal understandings of Christianity through the practice of ordaining women as ministers and missionaries. This has partly arisen due to practical concerns about the disproportion of genders in Chinese migrant Christian communities (see Chapter Five, Section 3.1). According to my observation, females generally outnumber males in Chinese migrant Christian communities in Britain (see also, Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012). Does this reflect the gender structure among Chinese migrants in Britain? Are Chinese women more religious than men? Quantitative surveys and statistical analysis will be required to answer these questions. Relating to my study, an important yet unexplored intersection of gender and religious conversion is the issue of religious transmission between different generations of migrants. According to the theoretical implication of Callum Brown's (2001) work *The Death of Christian Britain*, women has played crucial roles in the generational transmission of religion in traditional British families. However, in modern times, the improvement of women's social-economic-political status is one of the many contributors to secularity in the West (Zuckerman, 2014). In this study, I have purposely kept a gender balance in the recruitment of participants. Some second-generation Chinese migrants have also been interviewed. I have observed the influence of the family on individual converts' Christian conversion. An interesting question for future research is to what extent first-generation Chinese migrant Christians can influence their children's religion. This question deserves further focused collection and analysis of qualitative empirical data.

Bibliography

Abel, A. (2006). Favor Fishing and Punch-Bowl Christians: Ritual and Conversion in a Chinese Protestant Church. *Sociology of Religion*, *67*(2), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/67.2.161

Abel, A. S. (2008). *"It's the People Here": A Study of Ritual, Conversion, and Congregational Life Among Chinese Christians*. PhD thesis. University of Massachusetts.

About the BTA. (n.d.). Retrieved July 3, 2018, from http://www.taoists.co.uk/main_files/aboutus.htm

Aikman, D. (2012). *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing.

Ammerman, N. T. (1987). *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.

Ammerman, N. T. (2007). *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305418.001.0001

Anderlini, J. (2014). The Rise of Christianity in China - Financial Times. Retrieved July 23, 2018, from https://www.ft.com/content/a6d2a690-6545-11e4-91b1-00144feabdc0

Anderson, B. R. O. (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

Anderson, C. (2016). Religiously Motivated Migration. *Sociological Quarterly*, *57*(3), 387–414. https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12139

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Research*, *1*(3), 385–405. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107085301

Barabantseva, E. (2012). Who Are "Overseas Chinese Ethnic Minorities"? China's Search for Transnational Ethnic Unity. *Modern China*, *38*(1), 78–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700411424565

Barker, E. (1984). *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Barker, I. R., & Currie, R. F. (1985). Do Converts Always Make the Most Committed Christians? *Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion*, *24*(1970), 308. https://doi.org/10.2307/1385819

Bays, D. H. (2003). Chinese Protestant Christianity Today. *The China Quarterly*, *174*, 488–504.

Bays, D, H. (2012). *A New History of Christianity in China* (Vol. 7). John Wiley & Sons.

Bebbington, D. W. (1989). *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Becker, H. S. (1960). Notes on the Concept of Commitment. *American Journal of Sociology*, *66*(1), 32–40.

Beckford, J. (1978). Accounting for Conversion. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *29*(2), 249–262.

Bell, D. (1976). *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Vol. 20). New York: Basic Books.

Benton, G., & Gomez, E. T. (2008). *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Benton, G. (2011). The Chinese in Europe: Origins and Transformations. *Religions & Christianity in Today's China*, *I* (4), 62–70. Retrieved from http://www.eu-china.net/upload/pdf/materialien/RCTC_2011-1.62-70_Benton_Chinese_in_Europe.pdf

Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Pearson Education Inc.

Berger, P. L. (1967). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Doubleday.

Berger, P. L., Davie, G., & Fokas, E. (2008). *Religious America, Secular Europe?: A Theme and Variation*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Beyer, P. (1994). *Religion and Globalization*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Bielo, J. S. (2009). *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*. NYU Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brandner, T. (2009). Mission, Millennium, and Politics: A Continuation of the History of Salvation-from the East. *Missiology*, *XXXVII* (3), 317–332.

Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*, 77–101. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brierley, P. (2013). *London's Churches Are Growing*. Retrieved 20 June 2016 from http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/londonchurches.pdf

Brockmann, M. (2011). Problematising Short-Term Participant Observation and Multi-Method Ethnographic Studies. *Ethnography and Education*, *6*(2), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2011.587361

Bruce, S. (1995). *Religion in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bruce, S. (2002). *God is dead: Secularization in the West*. Blackwell Oxford.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th Ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buddha's Light International Association. (2012). Retrieved January 27, 2015, from http://www.londonfgs.org.uk/cms/article.php?id=86

Cao, N. (2005). The Church as a Surrogate Family for Working Class Immigrant Chinese Youth " An Ethnography of Segmented Assimilation. *Sociology of Religion*, *66*(2), 183–200.

Cao, N. (2008). Boss Christians: the Business of Religion in the "Wenzhou Model" of Christian Revival. *The China Journal*, *68*(1), 45–66.

Cao, N. (2010). *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Cao, N. (2012). Elite Christianity and Spiritual Nationalism. *Chinese Sociological Review*, *45*(2), 27–47. https://doi.org/10.2753/CSA2162-0555450202

Cao, N. (2013). Renegotiating Locality and Morality in a Chinese Religious Diaspora: Wenzhou Christian Merchants in Paris, France. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, *14*(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2012.739198

Casanova, J. (2004). Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration. *Eurozine*, 1–13. Retrieved from http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2004-07-29-casanova-en.pdf

Castles, S. (2002). Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalisation. *International Migration Review*, *36*(4), 1143–1168. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2002.tb00121.x

Chafetz, J. S., & Ebaugh, H. R. (2000). *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*. Altamira Press.

Chan, S. (1997). Migration, Cultural Identity and Assimilation Effects on Entrepreneurship for the Overseas Chinese in Britain. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, *3*(4), 211–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602389700000050

Chan, Y. M., & Chan, C. (1997). The Chinese in Britain. *New Community*, *23*(February 2013), 123–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1997.9976579

Chau, A. Y. (2011). Modalities of doing religion and ritual polytropy: Evaluating the religious market model from the perspective of Chinese religious history. *Religion*, *41*(4), 547–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2011.624691

Chen, C. (2002). The Religious Varieties of Ethnic Presence: A Comparison Between a Taiwanese Immigrant Buddhist Temple and an Evangelical Christian Church. *Sociology of Religion*, *63*(2), 215–238.

Cheng, M. M. C. (2003). House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China. *China: An International Journal*, *1*(1), 16–45. https://doi.org/10.1353/chn.2005.0011

Chinese Church in London [CCIL]. (2000). *Fifty Years of Growth*. London.

COCM | Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM) | What We Do | Strategies. (n.d.). Retrieved February 5, 2018, from https://www.cocm.org.uk/what-we-do-strategies

Cohen, P. A. (1957). *Missionary Approaches: Hudson Taylor and Timothy Richard*. Harvard University, East Asian Research Center.

Connor, P. (2014). *Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe*. NYU Press.

Davidman, L. (2002). Truth, Subjectivity, and Ethnographic Research. In V. Spickard, James, J. Landres, Shawn, & B. McGuire, Meredith (Eds.), *Personal Knowledge and Beyond* (pp. 17–26). New York and London: New York University Press.

Davie, G. (1990). Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain? *Social Compass*, *37*(4), 455–469. Retrieved from http://scp.sagepub.com/content/37/4/455

Davie, G. (2000). Religion in Modern Britain: Changing Sociological Assumptions. *Sociology*, *34*(1), 113–128. Retrieved from http://soc.sagepub.com/content/34/1/113.full.pdf+html

Day, A. (2009). Believing in Belonging: An Ethnography of Young People's Constructions of Belief. *Culture and Religion*, *10*(3), 263–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610903279671

Day, A. (2010). Propositions and Performativity: Relocating Belief to the Social. *Culture and Religion*, *11*(1), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610903528812

Day, A. (2013). *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen: The Last Active Anglican Generation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Day, A. (2016). Response to: Around Abby Day's Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, *7*, 97–111. Retrieved from http://research.gold.ac.uk/19410/

Day, A., & Lee, L. (2014). Making sense of surveys and censuses: Issues in religious self-identification. *Religion*, *44*(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2014.929833

Dennett, D. C., & LaScola, L. (2010). Preachers Who are Not Believers. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *8*(1), 122–150. https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2005.15.2.209

Denzin, N. K. (2001). The Reflexive Interview and A Performative Social Science. *Qualitative Research*, *1*(1), 23–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110384452

Dickson, A. D. C. (2013). *Coming Home: A Study of Values Change Among Chinese Postgraduates and Visiting Scholars Who Encountered Christianity in the UK*. PhD Thesis. University of Nottingham. Retrieved from http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13458/1/DD_Thesis_2_May_2013.pdf

Dy, Aristotle, C., & See, Teresita, A. (2015). Syncretism as Religious Identity: Chinese Religious Culture in the Philippines. In C.-B. Tan (Ed.), *After Migration and Religious Affiliation: Religions, Chinese Identities and Transnational Networks* (pp. 103–146). Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

Everton, S. F. (2015). Networks and Religion: Ties that Bind, Loose, Build Up, and Tear Down. *Journal of Social Structure*.

Fan, L. (2009). The Dilemma of Pursuing Chinese Religious Studies. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities & Social Sciences*, *2*(2), 29–48.

Feuchtwang, S. (2003). *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor*. London: Routledge.

Fiedler, K. (2010). China's "Christianity Fever" Revisited: Towards a Community-Oriented Reading of Christian Conversion in China. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, *39*(4), 71–109.

Fiedler, K. (2013). The Emergence of Christian Subcultures in China. In F. K. G. Lim (Ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives* (pp. 138–152). London: Routledge. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jr_Wj9KDWN0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA138&dq=the+emergence+of+christian+subculture+in+china&ots=mjHF7w-A2o&sig=VzvuKe1ihblu0XWZlA2sXQ1UDqk#v=onepage&q=the emergence of christian subculture in china&f=false

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon.

Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Furseth, I., & Repstad, P. (2006). *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Gartrell, David, C., & Shannon, Zane, K. (1985). Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach. *Review of Religious Research*, *27*(1), 32–48.

Geertz, C. (1973). *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*. New York: Basic books, Inc.

Giordan, G., & Swatos, W. (2011). *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice*. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-94-007-1819-7.pdf

Gladney, D. C. (1996). *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Global Times Editorial: Do Not Misinterpret Wenzhou's Demolition of Illegal Church Crosses（环球时报：莫误读温州对违建教堂十字架的处理）. (2015). Retrieved October 29, 2018, from https://www.guancha.cn/society/2015_08_05_329392.shtml

Goldstein, M. C., & Kapstein, M. T. (1998). *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Gooren, H. (2014). Anthropology of Religious Conversion. In L. R. Rambo & C. E. Farhadian (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195338522.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195338522-e-004

Gooren, H. (2010). *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gooren, H. (2007). Reassessing Conventional Approaches to Conversion: Toward a New Synthesis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *46*(3), 337–353.

Gooren, H. (2006). The Religious Market Model and Conversion: Towards A New Approach. *Exchange*, *35*(1), 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1163/157254306776066915

Goossaert, V., & Palmer, D. A. (2011). *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gorton, William, A. (n.d.). Philosophy of Social Science. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-sci/

Granet, M. (1975). *The Religion of the Chinese People*. New York: Harper & Row.

Greeley, Andrew, M. (1971). *Why Can't They Be Like Us? America's White Ethnic Groups*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Greil, A. L. (1977). Previous Dispositions and Conversion to Perspectives of Social and Religious Movements. *Sociological Analysis*, *38*(2), 115–125. https://doi.org/10.2307/3710172

Greil, A. L., & Davidman. (2007). Religion and Identity. In J. A. Beckford & N. J. Demerath (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (pp. 549–565). London: Sage Publications Ltd. Retrieved from https://www.dawsonera.com:443/abstract/9781446206522

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough? *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82.

Guest, K. J. (2003). *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*. New York: NYU Press.

Hall, D. D. (1997). *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton University Press.

Hammersley, M. (1990). What's Wrong with Ethnography? The Myth of Theoretical Description. *Sociology*, *24*(4), 597–615.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Harding, S. (1987). Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion. *American Ethnologist*, *14*(1), 167–181.

Heelas, P., Woodhead, L., Seel, B., Tusting, K., & Szerszynski, B. (2005). *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Blackwell.

Heirich, M. (1977). Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion. *American Journal of Sociology*, *83*(3), 653–680.

Huang, J. (2009). A Critical Review of Recent Twenty Years' Empirical Studies on Christianity in Mainland China(二十年来中国大陆基督教的经验性研究述评). *Review of Christian Thoughts(基督教思想评论第九辑)*, (9).

Huang, J., & Zhai, J. (2011). The Reasoning and Politics of the Debate on Christian Population in China （中國基督徒人數之爭的學理與"政治"）. *道风：基督教文化评论（Daofeng: Review of Christian Culture）*, *35*, 301–316.

Huang, J. C. (2003). Wings of Belief: Modern Chinese Religious Transnationalism. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *2*(2), 205–216.

Huang, Y. (2017). Becoming Missionaries: Gender, Space and Subjectivities in Chinese Christian Communities in the UK. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, *18*(3), 211–227. https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2017.1302987

Huang, Y., & Hsiao, I. (2015). Chinese Evangelists on the Move: Space, Authority, and Ethnicisation among Overseas Chinese Protestant Christians. *Social Compass*, *62*(3), 379–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768615587823

Hunter, A., & Chan, K.-K. (2007). *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Iannaccone, L. R. (1994). Why Strict Churches Are Strong. *American Journal of Sociology*, *99*(5), 1180–1211. https://doi.org/10.1086/230409

Information Office of the State Council. (2018). *China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief*. Retrieved from http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm

Israeli, R. (2002). *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*. Chicago: Lexington Books.

James, W. (2002). *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.49.204.146

Jindra, I. W. (2008). Religious Stage Development Among Converts to Different Religious Groups. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *18*(May), 195–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508610802115768

Jindra, I. W. (2011). How Religious Content Matters in Cconversion Narratives to Various Religious Groups. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, *72*(3), 275–302. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srq089

Jindra, I. W. (2014a). *A New Model of Religious Conversion: Beyond Network Theory and Social Constructivism*. Brill.

Jindra, I. W. (2014b). Toward an Integrative Theory of Religious Conversion: A Review Essay of The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion by Lewis R. Rambo. *Pastoral Psychology*, *65*(3), 329–343. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-014-0635-z

Jovchelovitch, S., & Gervais, M. C. (1999). Social Representations of Health and Illness: The Case of the Chinese Community in England. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *9*(4), 247–260. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1298(199907/08)9:4<247::AID-CASP500>3.0.CO;2-E

Kahn, P. J., & Greene, a L. (2004). "Seeing Conversion whole": Testing a Model of Religious Conversion. *Pastoral Psychology*, *52*(3), 233–258.

Kalir, B. (2009). Finding Jesus in the Holy Land and Taking Him to China: Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers in Israel Converting to Evangelical Christianity. *Sociology of Religion*, *70*(2), 130–156. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srp027

Keane, W. (1997). Religious Language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *26*(1), 47–71. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.47

Kivisto, P. (2014). Reframing Immigrant Religious Organizations and Practices. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, *27*(1), 1–17.

Klein, T. (2011). Conversion to Protestant Christianity in China and the 'Supply-Side Model': Explaining Changes in the Chinese Religious Field. *Religion*, *41*(4), 595–625. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2011.624694

Klein, T., & Meyer, C. (2011). Beyond the Market: Exploring the Religious Field in Modern China. *Religion*, *41*(4), 529–534. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2011.624693

Koesel, K. J. (2013). The Rise of a Chinese House Church: The Organizational Weapon. *The China Quarterly*, *215*(June 2013), 572–589. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741013000684

Laliberté, A. (2003). ‘Love Transcends Borders’ or ‘Blood is Thicker than Water’? The Charity Work of the Compassion Relief Foundation in the People’s Republic of China. *European Journal of East Asian Studies, 2*(243–261).

Lam, T., Sales, R., D’Angelo, A., Montagna, N., & Lin, X. (2009). *The Changing Chinese Community in London: New Migration, New Needs*. London. Retrieved from https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/5540/1/The_Changing_Chinese_Community_in_London.pdf

Lambert, T. (2006). *China’s Christian Millions*. Oxford: Monarch Books.

Lausent-Herrera, I. (2015). Between Catholicism and Evangelicalism: The Peruvian Chinese Community. In C.-B. Tan (Ed.), *After Migration and Religious Affiliation: Religions, Chinese Identities and Transnational Networks* (pp. 185–240). Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

Lee, L. (2015). *Recognising the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levitt, P. (2001). *Between God, Ethnicity, and Country: An Approach to the Study of Transnational Religion* (Transnational Communities Programme No. WPTC-01-13). Oxford. Retrieved from http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working papers/Levitt.pdf

Levitt, P. (2007). *God Needs no Passport: Immigrants and the Changing Religious Landscape*. The New Press, New York-London.

Li, D. (2012). Out of the Ivory Tower: The Impact of Wider Social Contact on the Values, Religious Beliefs and Identities of Chinese Postgraduate Students in the UK. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 15*(2), 241–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.585339

Li, Peter, S., & Li, Eva, X. (2013). The Chinese Overseas Population. In C.-B. Tan (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese diaspora* (pp. 15–28). London and New York: Routledge.

Lian, X. (2010). *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Liang, J. (1999). Rural Christianity and Chinese Folk Religion. *China Study Project Journal, 14*(2), 22–34.

Liang, L. (1994). Researches into the Present Circumstances of Protestant Christianity in China - a Sociological Analysis of Christianity in the Nanyang District of Henan Province. *Dangdai Zongjiao Yanjiu*, (1).

Liang, L. (2006). Social transformation and religious conversion: An investigation with Christians as objects (社会转型与宗教皈依:以基督教徒为对象的考察). *Journal of World Religion and Culture (世界宗教文化)*, (2), 72–81.

Liu, G. C.-M. (1992). *A Sociological Study of the Chinese People in Aberdeen and Elgin, With Special Reference to the Catering Business*. Aberdeen University. Retrieved from

http://digitool.abdn.ac.uk/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1430912795597~597

Lived experience. (n.d.). Oxford Dictionary. Retrieved from http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100109997

Lofland, J., & Stark, R. (1965). Becoming a World-Saver: a Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective. *American Sociological Review*, *30*(6), 862–875. https://doi.org/10.2307/2090965

Long, T. E., & Hadden, J. K. (1983). Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *22*(1), 1–14.

Lu, Y. (2013). From Typological Studies to Dynamic Analysis: On 'the Fluidity of Faith.' (从类型学到动态研究:兼论信仰的流动). *Society (社会)*, *2*(33), 33–52. Retrieved 7 Jun 2018, from http://www.cssn.cn/zjx/zjx_zjyj/zjx_zjxll/201310/t20131029_754327.shtml

MacCulloch, D. (2010). *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. Penguin.

Madsen, R. (1998). *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*. California: University of California Press.

Madsen, R. (2000). Understanding Falun Gong. *Current History*, 243–247.

Madsen, R. (2003). Catholic Revival during the Reform Era. *The China Quarterly*, *174*, 468–487.

Madsen, R. (2010). The Upsurge of Religion in China. *Journal of Democracy*, *21*(4), 58–71. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2010.0013

Madsen, R., & Siegler, E. (2011). The Globalization of Chinese Religions and Traditions. In D. A. Palmer, G. Shive, & P. L. Wickeri (Eds.), *Chinese Religious Life* (pp. 227–240). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marcus, G. (1995). Ethnography in/of the World System: the Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*, 95–117.

Massey, D. S., & Higgins, M. E. (2011). The Effect of Immigration on Religious Belief and Practice: A Theologizing or Alienating Experience? *Social Science Research*, *40*(5), 1371–1389. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2010.04.012

Mathou, C., & Yan, J. (2012). EU-China Student and Academic Staff Mobility: Present Situation and Future Developments. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, *1*(2), 282–300.

Maton, K. I., & Wells, E. A. (1995). Religion as a Community Resource for Well-being: Prevention, Healing, and Empowerment Pathways. *Journal of Social Issues*, *51*(2), 177–193.

McGuire, M. B. (2008). *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463376009385121

Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S., & Beishon, S. (1997). *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Nagata, J. (2005). Christianity among Transnational Chinese: Religious versus (Sub)ethnic Affiliation. *International Migration*, *43*(3), 99–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00327.x

Neitz, M. J. (1987). *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Neitz, Mary, J. (2011). Lived Religion: Signposts of Where We Have Been and Where We Can Go from Here. In G. Giodano & W. H. Swatos (Eds.), *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice* (pp. 45–55). New York: Springer.

Ng, K. H. (2002). Seeking the Christian Tutelage: Agency and Culture in Chinese Immigrants' Conversion to Christianity. *Sociology of Religion*, *63*(2), 195. https://doi.org/10.2307/3712565

Nyhagen, L. (2015). Conceptualizing Lived Religious Citizenship: a Case-Study of Christian and Muslim Women in Norway and the United Kingdom. *Citizenship Studies*, *19*(6–7), 768–784. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1049979

Nyhagen, L., & Halsaa, B. (2016). *Religion, Gender and Citizenship: Women of Faith, Gender Equality and Feminism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nyíri, P. (2003). Moving Targets: Chinese Christian Prosleytising among Transnational Migrants from the People's Republic of China. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *2*(2), 263–301. Retrieved from http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/157006103771378428

ONS. (2015). *2011 Census Analysis Index*. London. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/censusanalysisindex#ethnicity-national-identity-language-and-religion

O'Reilly, K. (2005). *Ethnographic Methods*. London and New York: Routledge.

O'Reilly, K. (2009). *Key Concepts in Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Orsi, R. (1997). Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, 3–21.

Orsi, R. A. (2003). Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address at Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt

Lake City, November 2, 2002. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *42*(2), 169–174.

Overmyer, D. L. (2003). Religion in China Today: Introduction. *The China Quarterly*, (174), 307–316. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009443903000196

Ownby, D. (2003). The Falun Gong in the New World. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *2*(2), 303–320.

Paloutzian, R. F. (2005). Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation: A Meaning-System Analysis. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (pp. 331–346). New York: Press, The Guilford. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

Paloutzian, R. F., Murken, S., Streib, H., & Roessler-Namini, S. (2013). Conversion, Deconversion, and Spiritual Transformation: A Multilevel Interdisciplinary View. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 2nd ed.* (pp. 399–421). New York: Guilford Press.

Paloutzian, R. F., & Park, C. L. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. New York: The Guilford Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

Paloutzian, R. F., Richardson, J. T., & Rambo, L. R. (1999). Religious conversion and personality change. *Journal of Personality*, *67*(December 1999), 1047–1079. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.00082

Pang, M., & Lau, A. (1998). The Chinese in Britain: Working towards Success? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *9*(5), 862–874. https://doi.org/10.1080/095851998340847

Pang, M., & Lau, A. (1998). The Chinese in Britain: Working towards Success? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *9*(5), 862–874. https://doi.org/10.1080/095851998340847

Parker, D. (1994). Encounters Across the Counter: Young Chinese People in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *20*(4), 621–634.

Parker, D. (1997). Chinese People in Britain: Histories, Futures and Identities. In G. Benton & N. Pieke, Frank (Eds.), *The Chinese in Europe* (pp. 67–95). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Parker, D., & Song, M. (2007). Participation and the Emergence of British Chinese Websites. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *33*(7), 1043–1061.

Pew Research Center. (2010). *Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe*. Washington, DC.

Pew Research Center. (2012). *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants*. Retrieved from: https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/

Pharoah, R., Bell, E., Hui, Z., & Yeung, F. (2009). *Migration, Integration, Cohesion: New Chinese Migrants to London*. *London: Chinese in Britain Forum*. London. Retrieved from http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&btnG=Search&q=intitle:Migration,+Integration,+Cohesion:+new+Chinese+Migrants+to+London#2

Phil Zuckerman. (2003). *Invitation to the Sociology of Religion*. New York: Routledge.

Philips, T. (2014). China on Course to Become "World's Most Christian Nation" Within 15 Years - Telegraph. Retrieved July 23, 2018, from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html

Pieke, F. N. (2007). Editorial Introduction: Community and Identity in the New Chinese Migration Order. *Population, Space and Place*, *13*(2), 81–94.

Pitt, J. E. (1991). Why People Convert: A Balance Theoretical Approach to Religious Conversion. *Pastoral Psychology*, *39*(3), 171–183.

Popp-Baier, U. (2001). Narrating Embodied Aims. Self-transformation in Conversion Narratives — A Psychological Analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *2*(3), 1–12. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/911/1991

Rambo, L. R. (1989). Conversion: Toward a Holistic Model of Religious Change. *Pastoral Psychology*, *38*(1), 47–63.

Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Rambo, L. R. (1999). Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change. *Social Compass*, *46*(3), 259–271.

Rambo, L. R., Bauman, S., & Fengjiang, J. (2012). Toward a Psychology of Converting in the People's Republic of China. *Pastoral Psychology*, *61*(5–6), 895–921. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0487-3

Rambo, L. R., & Farhadian, C. E. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. Oxford University Press (UK).

Rappaport, R. A. (1999). *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Ren, P. (2007). Church or Sect? Exploring a Church of New Chinese Immigrants in Southern California. *Marburg Journal of Religion*, *12*(1). Retrieved from: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.516.8526&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Revised Standard Version of the Bible. (1971). The United States of America: The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

Rice Christian. (n.d.). Definition of Rice Christian by Merriam-Webster. Retrieved February 5, 2018, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ricechristian

Richardson, J. T. (1977). Conversion and Commitment in Contemporary Religion. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *20*(6), 799–804. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427702000601

Richardson, J. T. (1980). Conversion Careers. *Transaction: Social Sciences and Modern Society*, *17*(3), 47–50. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02694632

Robins, T., & Anthony, D. (1980). Brainwashing and the Persecution of "Cults." *Journal of Religion and Health*, (19), 66–69.

Shakya, T. (2000). *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*. London and New York: Penguin.

Shen, Q. (2010). *Between Transnational Mission and Migration Life: Formation and Diversity of an Evangelical Chinese Community in Germany*. Phd Thesis. Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität.

Smart, N. (1998). *The World's Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smilde, D. (2005). A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Conversion to Venezuelan Evangelicalism: How Networks Matter. *American Journal of Sociology*, *111*(3), 757–796. https://doi.org/10.1086/497306

Smith, A. C. T., & Stewart, B. (2011). Becoming Believers: Studying the Conversion Process from Within. *Zygon*, *46*(4), 806–834. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2011.01226.x

Smith, C. (2007). Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account. *Sociology of Religion*, *68*(2), 165–178. Retrieved from http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/68/2/165.full.pdf%5Cnpapers2://publication/uuid/242018EF-426D-4C6E-8ABE-F8F53D1FFD97

Smith, T. (1978). Religion and Ethnicity in America. *The American Historical Review*, *83*(5), 1155–1185. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/83.5.1155

Snow, D. A., & Machalek, R. (1983). The Convert as a Social Type. *Sociological Theory*, *1*, 259–289.

Snow, D. A., & Machalek, R. (1984). The Sociology of Conversion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, (10), 167–190.

Song, A. M. (1996). *Family, Work, and Cultural Identity: Children's Labor in Chinese Take-Away Businesses in Britain.* PhD Thesis. London School of Economics and Political Science.

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Xiong, Z. (2006). Chinese Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments to Britain: An Empirical Study. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *19*, 37–53. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1080/07908310608668753

Spickard, J. V. (2006). What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, *19*(1), 13–29.

Spickard, J. V, Landres, S., & McGuire, M. B. (Eds.). (2002). *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*. New York: NYU Press.

Staples, C. L., & Mauss, A. L. (1987). Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *26*(2), 133–147.

Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. University of California Press.

Stark, R., & Glock, C. Y. (1968). *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Vol. 1). University of California Press.

Straus, R. a. (1979). Religious Conversion as a Personal and Collective Accomplishment. *Sociological Analysis*, *40*(2), 158. https://doi.org/10.2307/3709786

Straus, R. A. (1976). Changing Oneself: Seekers and the Creative Transformation of Experience. In J. Lofland (Ed.), *Doing Social Life* (pp. 252–272). New York: Wiley.

Streib, H. (2012). Deconversion. In L. Rambo & C. F. Farhadian (Eds.), *Oxford Handdbook on Religious Conversion* (pp. 271–296). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stromberg, P. G. (1993). *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stroope, S. (2011). How Culture Shapes Community: Bible Belief, Theological Unity, and a Sense of Belonging in Religious Congregations. *The Sociological Quarterly*, (52), 568–592.

Tam, J. (2017). *Renegotiating Religious Transnationalism: Fractures in Transnational Chinese Protestantism* (IMI Working Papers Series 2017, No. 138 No. Paper WP140). Oxford.

Tan, C.-B. (Ed.). (2013). *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tan, C.-B. (Ed.). (2015). *After Migration and Religious Affiliation: Religions, Chinese Identities and Transnational Networks*. London: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.

Tippett, A. R. (1977). Conversion as a Dynamic Process in Christian Mission. *Missiology*, *5*(2), 203–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182967700500206

Torruella, Irene, M. (2015). Transnational Ritual Practices among the Chinese Migrants in Spain. In C.-B. Tan (Ed.), *After Migration and Religious Affiliation: Religions, Chinese Identities and Transnational Networks* (pp. 329–350). Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

Travisano, R. V. (1970). Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations. In G. P. Stone & H. A. Faberman (Eds.), *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction* (pp. 594–606). Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell.

Trzebiatowska, M., & Bruce, S. (2012). *Why Are Women More Religious than Men?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tubergen, F. van, & Sindradóttir, J. Í. (2011). The Religiosity of Immigrants in Europe: A Cross - National Study. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *50*(2), 272–288. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2011.01567.x

UKCOSA. (2004). *Interntional Students in UK Universities and Colleges: Broadening Our Horizons*. London. Retrieved from https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/resources_download.aspx?resourceid=90&documentid=141

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB]. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved November 22, 2017, from http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/rite-of-christian-initiation-of-adults/

van der Veer, P. (2001). *Transnational Religions* (Transnational Migration: Comparative Perspectives No. WPTC-01-18 Peter). *Transnational Communities Programme*.

van Gennep, A. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. (B. Vizedom, Monika & L. Caffee, Gabrielle, Eds.) (Translated). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

van Tubergen, F. (2006). Religious Affiliation and Attendance Among Immigrants in Eight Western Countries: Individual and Contextual Effects. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *45*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2006.00002.x

Vásquez, M. A. (2008). Studying Religion in Motion: A Networks Approach. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, *20*(2), 151–184. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006808X283570

Verma, G., Chan, Y. M., Bagley, C., Sham, S., Darby, D., Woodrow, D., & Skinner, G. (1999). *Chinese Adolescents in Britain and Hong Kong: Identity and Aspirations*. UK, Ashgate: Aldershot.

Vertovec, S. (1997). Three Meanings of "Diaspora," Exemplified among South Asian Religions. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *6*(3), 277–299. https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1997.0010

Vertovec, S. (2000). Religion and Diaspora. In A. Peter, G. A. W, & W. Randi (Eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion* (pp. 27–29). Berlin & New York: Verlag de Gruyter.

Vermander, B. (2009). Religious Revival and Exit from Religion in Contemporary China. *China Perspectives*, *2009*(4), 4–15. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=47408467&site=ehost-live%5Cnpapers2://publication/doi/Article

Vertovec, S. (2003). Migration and other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization. *International Migration Review*, *37*(3), 641–665. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00153.x

Voas, D., & Crockett, A. (2005). Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging. *Sociology*, *39*(1), 11–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505048998

Voas, D., & Day, A. (2010). Recognizing Secular Christians: Toward an Unexcluded Middle in the Study of Religion. *The Association of Religion Data Archives*, (October).

Wach, J. (1958). *The Comparative Study of Religions*. Columbia University Press (1958).

Wahrisch-oblau, C. (2001). Mission in Reverse: Whose Image in the Mirror? *Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission*, *18*(4), 261–267.

Waldinger, R. (2013). Immigrant Transnationalism. *Current Sociology*, *61*(5–6), 756–777. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392113498692

Wan, E. (2003). Mission among the Chinese Diaspora: A Case Study of Migration and Mission. *Missiology: An International Review*, *31*(1), 35–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960303100106

Wang, Y. (2004). *Religious Conversion to Christianity Among Students from the People's Republic of China*. San Francisco, California. Retrieved from http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/wang.html

Waters, M. (2002). *Daniel Bell*. London and New York: Routledge.

Watson, J. L. (1975). *Emigration and the Chinese Lineage: the Mans in Hong Kong and London*. CA. Berkley: University of California Press.

Weber, M. (1951). *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. New York: Macmillan.

Wei, L. (1995). Variations in Patterns of Language Choice and Code-Switching by Three Groups of Chinese/English Speakers in Newcastle upon Tyne. *Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, *14*(3), 297–322.

Wei, L. (1993). Mother Tongue Maintenance in a Chinese Community School in Newcastle Upon Tyne: Developing a Social Network Perspective. *Language and Education*, *7*(3), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789309541359

Wei-ming, T. (1994). Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center. In W. Tu (Ed.), *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (pp. 1–34). Stanford: Stanford University.

Weller, P. (2008). *Religious Diversity in the UK: Contours and Issues*. London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Weller, R. P. (2003). Afterword: On Global Nation-States and Rooted Universalisms. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *2*(2), 321–328.

Wickberg, E. (2007). Global Chinese Migrants and Performing Chineseness. *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, *3*(2), 177–193.

Wielander, G. (2009). Bridging the Gap? An Investigation of Beijing Intellectual House Church Activities and Their Implications for China's Democratization. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *18*(62), 849–864. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560903174689

Williams, A. (2018). Lived Religion, Worship and Conversion: Ethnographic Reflections in an Abstinence- Based Christian Therapeutic Community. In S. Sremac & I. Jindra (Eds.), *Conversion and Lived Religion: Recovery, Imprisonment and Homelessness*. Palgrave.

Wong, L. fan. (2006). *From Atheist to Evangelicals: the Christian Conversion Experiences of Mainland Chinese Intellectuals in the U.S.A.* Boston University. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001043

Wong, Y.-F. L. (1988). *Education of Chinese Children in Britain: A Comparative Study with the United States of America*. University of London.

Woodhead, L. (2016). The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain: The Emergence of a New Cultural Majority. *Journal of the British Academy*, *4*(December), 245–261. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/004.245

Woodhead, L. (2011). Five Concepts of Religion. *International Review of Sociology*, *21*(1), 121–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2011.544192

Woodhead, L., & Catto, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Wu, F. (2013). *Sacred Word Over the Wheatland (麦芒上的圣言)*. Beijing: Religion and Culture Press (宗教文化出版社).

Wu, K. (2013). Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-Cultural Perspectives. *Asian Anthropology*, *12*(1), 70–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2013.789470

Wuthnow, R., & Offutt, S. (2008). Transnational Religious Connections. *Sociology of Religion*, *69*(2), 209–232. Retrieved from http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/69/2/209.full.pdf+html

Xi, W. (习五一). (2013). Be Alert to the Cultural Infiltration of International Right-Wing Christian Power (警惕国际基督教右翼势力的文化渗透. 马克思主义研究, (3). Retrieved from http://www.cqvip.com/qk/80453x/2013003/45288531.html

Yang, C. K. (1961). *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. California: University of California Press.

Yang, F. (1998). Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts. *Sociology of Religion*, *59*(3), 237. https://doi.org/10.2307/3711910

Yang, F. (1999). *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Yang, F. (2002). Chinese Christian Transnationalism: Diverse Networks of a Houston Church. In H. Eaugh & J. Chafetz (Eds.), *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks* (pp. 129–148). Altamira Press. Retrieved from https://www.purdue.edu/crcs/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/YangCCTransnationalism.pdf

Yang, F. (2006). The Red, Black, And Gray Market of Religion in China. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *47*, 93–122. Retrieved from https://www.purdue.edu/crcs/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Yang3Markets.pdf

Yang, F. (2012). *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yang, F. (2014). An Analysis of the Growth of Chinese Christians. Retrieved July 31, 2018, from http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001056046?full=y&archive

Yang, F., & Abel, A. (2014). Sociology of Religious Conversion. In L. R. Rambo & C. E. Farhadian (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (pp. 140–163). Oxford University Press.

Yang, Mei-Hui, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. California: University of California Press. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/ssxl5/Downloads/eScholarship UC item 3jn4j8cf.pdf

Yongjia, L., & Yeo, V. (2016). *The Anthropological Study of Religion in China: Contexts, Collaborations, Debates, and Trends* (No. 250). Singapore. Retrieved from https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Assets/repository/files/publications/wps16_250.pdf

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the Politics of Belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *40*(3), 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331

Zhao, D. (2004). *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*. University of Chicago Press.

Zhuang, G. (2013). China's Policies on Chinese Overseas: Past and Present. In C.-B. Tan (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (pp. 31–41). London and New York: Routledge.

Zuckerman, P. (2014). *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions*. New York: Penguin Books.

Appendix I

Profiles of Participants for In-Depth Interviews

Abbreviations:

PRC: The People's Republic of China

TW: Taiwan

HK: Hong Kong

SG: Singapore

MY: Malaysia

GB: Britain

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age (by the time of interview)**	**Place of Birth**	**Nationality**	**Profession**	**Education**	**Time of interview**
Paul	Male	64	HK	GB	Retired	PhD	1 May 2015
Rev Daniel	Male	46	TW	GB	Pastor	Master	13 Nov 2015
Zhaoyi	Male	28	PRC	PRC	Business	PhD	18 Jan 2016
Mr and Mrs Mei	Male/Female	69/59	PRC	GB	Retired	PhD	29 Jan 2016
Fengfei	Female	57	PRC	GB	Retired	PhD	1 Feb 2016
Nana	Female	25	GB	GB	Business	BA	5 Feb 2016
Mr and Mrs Yin	Male/female	51/48	PRC	GB	Academic	PhD	6 Feb 2016
Jiaying	Female	51	PRC	PRC	Academic	PhD	10 Feb 2016
Yue	Female	35	PRC	PR	Pastor	Master	11 Feb 2016
Eric	Male	19	HK	GB	Engineer	BA	12 Feb 2016

Jiajie	Female	27	PRC	GB	Teacher	BA	17 Feb 2016
Ning	Female	23	SG	SG	Artist	BA	18 Feb 2016
Lucy	Female	24	PRC	GB	Student	Master	7 Mar 2016
Mrs Hua	Female	58	PRC	GB	Academic	PhD	8 Apr 2016
Tian	Female	26	PRC	PRC	Seminarian	BA, Master	26 Apr 2016
Hui	Female	35	PRC	PR	Academic	PhD	8 May 2016
Rev Ruth	Female	21	MY	GB	Pastor	BA	11 May 2016
Kathy	Female	71	GB	GB	Lay minister	BA	7 Jun 2016
Ding	Male	24	HK	HK	Engineer	BA	20 Jun 2016
Kelly	Female	65	GB	GB	Lay minister	BA	6 Jul 2016
Feng	Male	47	PRC	PRC	Worker	Below BA	1 Sep 2016
Ju	Female	29	PRC	PRC	Business	Master	15 Sep 2016
Tangna	Female	24	PRC	PRC	Engineer	Master	17 Oct 2016
Xinyi	Female	27	PRC	PRC	Business	Master	3 Nov 2016
Rev Zhou	Male	63	TW	US	Pastor	Master	4 Nov 2016
Chenran	Male	29	PRC	GB	Business	Master	5 Nov 2016
Lily	Female	30	PRC	GB	Business	Master	11 Nov 2016
Ms Wen	Female	77	PRC	PRC	Retired	Below BA	12 Nov 2016
Yu	Male	43	PRC	GB	Business	PhD	19 Nov 2016
Beifang	Male	67	PRC	GB	Retired	BA	10 Jul 2017

Appendix II

Interview Guide

This interview guide contains four groups of questions regarding the participants basic personal information, migration, religion and identity:

1. Basic information of the participant s

What is your age?

How would you describe your nationality?

Are you married or co-habiting? Do you have any children?

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

Are you in paid work? If so, what kind of job do you have?

Current/prospective migration status

2. Questions on migration

1) When did you arrive in the UK? Did you come directly from China to the UK?
2) And which part of the UK did you firstly arrive at?
3) What were your motivations for coming to the UK?
4) Have you lived in the UK since you came here the first time?
5) Apart from work or study, how would you describe what you do in your free time?
6) How do you experience the life in Chinese migrant communities in the UK? How do you think it is the same or different from that of in China?
7) Do you think the Christian communities differ from other communities? If so, how ?
8) What role do you play in the Chinese Christian community(ies)?
9) Do you think your involvement in the (Chinese) Christian community(ies) influence your religious belief/faith? If so, how?
10) As a migrant, how important is it for you to belong to the Chinese Christian community here in the UK? How do you think the involvement in the (Chinese) Christian community(ies) influence your migration experience?

3. Questions on religion (for both religious leaders and laities)

1) When you were a child, did your family adhere to a religious tradition? How did you feel about that? (If so, which one, and who?)

2) Did you continue to adhere to the same religious tradition when you left your family home? (Prior to the arrival at the UK? If so, which one?)

a. Did you identify as religious when you arrived at the UK? (Do you consider yourself religious?)

b. If you did not profess a religion prior to the arrival at the UK, how did/do you think of religion/faith/belief?

3) How did you encounter Christianity in the UK?

4) (For those who have converted[34] after the arrival at the UK) How did you come to the belief/faith?

5) (For those who have not converted[35] but have stayed with Christian communities) What does the Christian faith mean to you – how important is it in your everyday life?

6) (For Christians) How do you practice your religion?

7) (For non-Christians who stay with Christians) How do you think of Christian religious practice? And do you personally have some religious practices?

8) (For both Christians and non-Christians) Which Christian gatherings do you attend? (churches, fellowships, study groups, etc.)? How important is it for you to be actively involved?

9) (For both Christians and non-Christians) Can you describe to me how you are involved in the Christian community? How do you get involved in the Christian community(ies)?

[34] Various Christian traditions hold different criteria to measure a person's conversion. As this is not a study of religious principles, I draw on a common criterion to refer to an observable sign of a person's Christian conversion, which is the receiving of baptism. Sociologically, baptism can also be seen as a recognition of a person's formal 'membership' in the broader Christian community that follow much of Protestant evangelical tradition.

[35] Since the majority members of the Chinese migrant Christian Community are Christians, I intend to conduct in-depth interviews mainly among the Christians also. The questions for the non-Christians would appear in ethnographic interviews, to complement the Christian perspectives, so that a holistic picture of the community can be represented.

10) Are you involved in other groups or activities outside your congregation? (Other Christian activities? Activities that are outside the Christian community – e.g., charity work? Sports clubs? etc.)

11) (For both Christians and non-Christians) Do you think your belief/faith and practice have influenced your involvement in the Christian community (ies)? If so, how?

4. Questions on identity

1) How would you describe your identity, or who you are? (this could include family, work, nationality, ethnicity, religion, parenthood, etc. – Start with an open question then follow up with specific questions)

2) Do you think of yourself as a Chinese migrant in the UK?

3) You identify as a Christian. How is it to live in the UK as a Chinese Christian?

4) Do you think of being a Chinese Christian in the UK?

5) What do you think of being a Christian among the Chinese in the UK?

6) What do you think of the emergence of Christianity in Chinese societies?

7) What role do you think that the Chinese migrant Christian community(ies) should play among and for the Chinese migrants living in the UK?

Appendix III

Participant Information Sheet

Believing through Belonging: A Sociological Study of Chinese Migrant Christian Communities in Britain

Name of main investigator: Xinan Li

Address: Department of Social Sciences

Brockington Building

Loughborough University

Leicestershire

LE11 3TU

Email: x.li5@lboro.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

This project aims to study the dynamics of Chinese migrant Christian community in the UK. Using ethnographic methods of participant observation and interview, the study aims to develop an understanding of 1) How the Chinese migrant Christians live their religion; 2)The role of religion in Chinese migrants' lives; 3)How the Chinese migrant Christian community has been formed and developed; 4) The relationship between 'lived religion' and ethnic/migrant community building.

Who is doing this research and why?

This research is currently a self-funded project motivated solely by academic curiosity and a general interest in the wellbeing of the Chinese people living in Britain.

The main investigator is a current postgraduate research student from the Department of Social Sciences of Loughborough University, supervised by Dr Line Nyhagen and Dr Thoralf Klein.

Are there any exclusion criteria?

This research is designed to include the broadly defined Chinese people who reside or study in the UK. There is no exclusion in terms of age (over 18 only), gender, education, occupation, and place of origin.

What will I be asked to do?

You will participate in an interview in which I will invite you to share your own stories of migration, life in the UK, your faith journey. I am interested in what your faith means to you, and how you put your faith into practice. I would also be very grateful if you could introduce me to your Chinese friends, family members and acquaintances, so that their stories can also be heard. With your permission, I would like to record the interviews.

I will also be participating in your congregation worship services, meetings, and other activities as long as I have the approval from your congregation leaders.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

Yes. *After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have I will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form, however if at any time, before, during or after the sessions you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact the main investigator. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.*

Will I be required to attend any sessions and where will these be?

Interviews will take place primarily in public or semi-public places such as cafes, public libraries, or separate rooms in your church. You may also suggest time and place of meeting of your own choosing.

How long will it take?

Formal interview will last up to 60 minutes. There might be another one or two follow-up interviews taken place, according to the insufficiency of previous interview.

What personal information will be required from me?

You will be asked to provide me your name, age, education, occupation, and year of migration, but all this data will be anonymised and kept confidential at all times.

Are there any risks in participating?

There is no foreseeable risk to the security of your life and property.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The information collected, including any recordings, will be anonymised and stored securely. Access to data will be restricted to the researcher and the supervisors. Only pseudonyms will be used in any public presentation of results.

I have some more questions; who should I contact?

Please feel free to send me emails to ask. You may also get in touch with my supervisors via email:

Dr Line Nyhagen (L.Nyhagen@lboro.ac.uk) or Thoralf Klein (t.e.klein@lboro.ac.uk)

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be expected to be presented and published for academic purposes, for example, conference presentations, journal articles, or books.

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Ms Jackie Green, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee:

Ms J Green,

Research Office, Hazlerigg Building

Loughborough University

Loughborough

LE11 3TU

Tel: 01509 222423 Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at:

http://www.lboro.ac.uk/committees/ethics-approvals-human-participants/additionalinformation/codesofpractice/

Appendix IV

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(To be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to participate in this study.	Yes ☐	No ☐

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____