



Working Papers

Paper WP140, August 2017

Renegotiating Religious Transnationalism: Fractures in Transnational Chinese Protestantism

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This paper is published by the International Migration Institute (IMI), Oxford Department of International Development (QEH), University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK (www.imi.ox.ac.uk).

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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Abstract

This paper questions the extent future generations of immigrants will engage in transnational religious institutions. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork involving observations, interviews, and content analysis, I examine the participation of the leaders of the next generation of Chinese-Canadian evangelicals in a ‘negotiated transnational religious organization’ named the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism (CCCOWE) Movement. CCCOWE’s documents reveal it advances a notion of the ‘Chinese elect’ grounded on a pan-Chinese identity for global evangelism. I first demonstrate that this ethnically based mission is different from cross-cultural missions in mainstream evangelicalism. I then present how the subjects made sense of the CCCOWE experience at the global CCCOWE congress. I argue the rallying call grounded on Chinese ethnicity for global evangelism stands on tenuous grounds and propose linguistic, geographical, generational, and ideological fractures as salient factors that diminish future generations’ participation in transnational religious organizations. I argue these developments will push ‘negotiated transnational religious networks’ into a state of ‘renegotiation.’

Keywords: Chinese, Canada, Christianity, diaspora, religious transnationalism, ethnicity

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Contents

	The IMI Working Papers Series	1
	Abstract	1
1	Introduction	3
2	Transnational Chinese Evangelicalism in North America.....	3
3	Methodology	5
4	Negotiated Transnational Religious Organizations: The Lausanne and the CCCOWE Evangelical Movements	6
4.1	The Lausanne Movement and Global Missions	6
4.2	The CCCOWE Movement.....	7
4.3	The Chinese Elect	8
4.4	The Fractures in the 9 th CCCOWE Congress	10
4.5	Linguistic Fractures	11
4.6	Geographical Fractures	12
4.7	Generational Fractures.....	13
4.8	Ideological Fractures.....	14
5	Discussion: Renegotiating the Future of Religious Transnationalism	15
6	Conclusion	17
7	References	18

1 Introduction

This article's theoretical concern lies in whether future generations of diaspora communities will continue to be involved in practices of religious transnationalism through its ethnic institutions. I address this by using the case of Chinese-Canadian evangelicals (CCEs) participating in the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism (CCCOWE) movement, currently one of the largest transnational Chinese evangelical networks. While research on confirming the activities and characteristics of transnational religious networks have been fruitful (see Ebaugh & Chafetz 2002; Levitt 2004, 2007; Vasquez & Dewind 2014), less has been emphasized on the disconnects within. This article attempts to shed new insight to the phenomenon using a negative case by observing the 'possibility principle,' that is, there is a possibility in a break in CCCOWE's practices of religious transnationalism because of its internal fractures (see Mahoney & Goertz 2004). Furthermore, relatively little has been written about religious transnationalism between North America and East Asia compared to Latin America and Africa.

This article has three objectives. First, I reveal that Chinese evangelicalism (represented by CCCOWE Movement) and mainstream evangelicalism (represented by the Lausanne Movement) are 'negotiated transnational religious organizations' (NTROs: Levitt 2004) that present different discourses on global missions. I follow Joas' (2000) definition of discourse being the communication of a 'virtual world of ideal meanings' within a community that enables the normative regulation of human cooperation and care. Second, I highlight that while the ethnically-based NTRO CCCOWE propagates the beliefs of pan-Chineseness and the Chinese elect within the transnational Chinese evangelical community, there are disconnects within, over linguistic, geographical, generational, and ideological fractures. Third, I question whether ongoing cooperation within the transnational Chinese evangelical movement will continue into the future generations of Chinese diaspora congregations. I argue that there will likely be a period of 'renegotiation' in the future for members of the religious transnational network affected by the four fractures.

To achieve these objectives, I first provide the backdrop by synthesizing the literature on religious transnationalism, Chinese churches in North America,¹ and comparing the global evangelical movements led by the NTROs Lausanne and CCCOWE. After, I examine the perceptions CCE leaders have when engaging the global CCCOWE Movement and highlight each of the fractures with the next generation of CCEs. I conclude by discussing the implications of the findings on future practices of religious transnationalism and make recommendations for further study.

2 Transnational Chinese Evangelicalism in North America

Scholars of religious transnationalism have made strong empirical cases supporting the claims that the global transfer of religious goods and ideas through transnational religious networks (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011; Wuthnow 2009). These connections have contributed to the 'religious vitality' (Reimer & Wilkinson 2015) of immigrant diasporas in North America (Warner 1993). Many diaspora congregations maintain transnational relationships with congregations in their ethnic homeland (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2002; Levitt 2007; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011; Tam & Hasmath 2015), especially given the financial and personnel assistance they received with planting new congregations in their destination country (Levitt 2007; Tseng 2006; Wong 2015).

¹ Most of the literature is from America but these findings are generally applicable to Canada.

Evangelicalism, a type of Protestantism that prioritizes proselytization (see Hunt 2011), is particularly aggressive in its efforts to expand, and most Chinese Protestants in North America are of the evangelical stripe (see Tseng 2006; Yang 1999). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the histories of Chinese evangelicals in North America are deeply transnational. Congregations in Hong Kong and Taiwan assisted in planting churches during the onset of mass migration to North America beginning in the 1960s (Tseng 2006; Wong 2015). These immigrant churches have been instrumental in assisting new Chinese immigrants in North America in transitioning to their new homes (Warner 1993; Yang 1999). This also explains, in part, the higher likelihood for new Chinese immigrants to convert to evangelical Christianity (see Skirbekk et al. 2012).

Despite the growth of Chinese evangelicalism in North America in the past few decades, many have noted that significant numbers of English-speaking members in the next generations of immigrants are beginning to leave the ethnic church, a phenomenon famously coined by Lee (1996) as the ‘Silent Exodus.’ Wong’s (2015) study of next generation CCE leaders and Wong and Tam’s (2016) study of CCE lay members found factors of debates on faith, science, and sexuality; mentorship; leadership; sense of belonging; relationships; transition support; and the overarching Chinese culture to be salient factors impacting whether CCEs choose to leave their immigrant churches by secularizing, joining non-ethnic churches, or joining other Chinese or pan-Asian churches. This phenomena of the next generation leaving the ethnic evangelical congregations because of declining identification with ‘Chineseness’ has also been observed in Southeast Asia (see Hoon 2015; Nagata 2005; Nyíri 2003).

This loss of the next generation coincides with the narrative of secularization in the global West (Pew Research Center 2015). For example, in Canada, scholars have observed a nationwide decline of ‘religious vitality’ outside of evangelical congregations (Reimer & Wilkinson, 2015) and especially among young adults (Penner et al. 2012). However, it is important to distinguish leaving the immigrant church because of declining ethnic identification from secularization as it involves different sets of causal mechanisms: the former being ethnically-based and the latter being faith-based. Nonetheless, Wong (2015) and Wong and Tam (2016) have found that the mechanisms of both declining ethnic identification and secularization occurs simultaneously and can even be mutually constitutive in influencing the decision of CCEs to leave the immigrant church.

While facing the hemorrhaging of the next generation of congregants, Chinese evangelical congregations in North America continue to maintain transnational religious connections and practices within ethnically based networks (Tam & Hasmath 2015; Nyíri 2003; Wilkinson 2000). However, despite these connections, scholars of Chinese transnationalism find that the overseas Chinese are not a monolithic identity (Ang 2001) and they exercise their own agency independent of their transnational religious commitments. In another study of CCCOWE, Nagata (2005) found that the Chinese Protestants in Canada, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore were reluctant to align with a pan-Chinese ideology given their different definitions on what being Chinese entails (also see Hoon 2015). In a similar vein, Tse (2013) found that the theologies and practices of Chinese Protestants are grounded in their local contexts over transnational commitments. These findings, along with this paper, support a growing body of literature in the study of religious transnationalism – that ‘migrant religions are not static, self-contained wholes that travel unchanged. Rather, in the process of moving and settlement... migrants constantly [contest] religious orthodoxy and heterodoxy’ (Vasquez & Dewind 2014: 258; also see Tweed 2005).

Given that a) many of the next generation of North American Chinese evangelicals are leaving the immigrant church, and b) many North American Chinese evangelical congregations maintain practices of religious transnationalism, I return to the question that drives this article: will

future generations of CCEs continue with practices of religious transnationalism through their ethnic institutions? Other scholars of religious transnationalism have previously articulated similar questions. While Wilkinson (2000) notes transnational networks have contributed to the growth of Asian Pentecostalism in Canada, he is unsure whether these networks will sustain its momentum into the future. Similarly, Levitt (2004) suggests that further work should be done to uncover ‘the extent religion will function as a catalyst for transnational practices’ for the future generations of immigrants. I address this broad theoretical question by using the case of CCCOWE and the CCE leaders of the next generation.

3 Methodology

The findings in this article are drawn from a two-year multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork of transnational Chinese evangelicalism in Canada (primarily in the Greater Toronto Area [GTA]), Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter Hong Kong), Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China (hereafter China). This article emphasized the data collection methods of observations and ethnographic interviewing (Heyl 2013) with the 18 English track delegates and the key leaders of the Chinese track delegates from Canada at the 9th CCCOWE Congress. Convenience sampling was used given my observations depended on those who attended the congress. I grasped opportunities to gauge the delegates’ reactions towards the events of the week over coffee breaks and sightseeing. Given the congress is for religious leaders such as pastors, lay leaders, and leaders of religious non-governmental organizations (RNGOs: see Tam & Hasmath 2015), it is a rich nexus to study transnational Chinese evangelicalism.

In this article, I use the term *English* in different ways. When I write *English-speaking*, it is used to describe the subject that uses English as the preferred language. When I use *English track*, it points to the CCCOWE congress’ English-speaking track of 132 delegates, as opposed to its Chinese-speaking counterpart of 1,042 delegates. When I write *English pastor* or *English delegate*, I refer to an ethnically Chinese clergy who is in charge of an English-speaking congregation. This distinction is necessary because Chinese churches in Canada are multilingual, with Chinese (i.e. mostly Cantonese or Mandarin) and English services.

As explained above, in light of diminishing ethnic identification with the immigrant church among next generation CCEs leaders (Wong 2015) and laypeople (Wong & Tam 2016), this article’s emphasis was to observe how this phenomenon manifests itself in NTROs. Therefore, I focus on the agents that engage NTROs. While a few of the 18 English-track delegates may not be second-generation CCEs themselves, they are the ones traversing the NTRO (i.e. CCCOWE) and engaging in its practices. Furthermore, these leaders of the next generation are most in touch with their congregational needs, a claim supported by previous congregational studies that key informants in leadership positions are accurate in representing their congregations (see Reimer & Wilkinson 2015). Concentrating on 18 English-track delegates come with a selection bias given they were selected by CCCOWE-Canada to attend the congress, so the likelihood of them being sympathetic to the CCCOWE cause may be greater than CCE leaders who were not chosen. However, as we shall find out below, this article’s findings become even more fascinating considering the 18 participants were supposed to be CCCOWE sympathizers.

It is important to note this article was developed spontaneously and serendipitously over a side-trip in my multi-sited ethnographic study and this has implications in how readers may assess its validity. First, some data presented in this article was drawn from a broader dataset collated over a

two-year period from interviews that were not focused on CCCOWE in particular. Depending on the reader's methodological orientation, this approach may enrich the validity or suggest a methodological flaw. I believe the former is the result. Second, while key CCCOWE-Canada gatekeepers gave permission to conduct fieldwork at the congress, some of the delegates were unaware I was conducting research at the time – an ethical dilemma often associated with ethnographic research (Murphy & Dingwall 2013). For their protection, all names are either not provided or they are provided pseudonyms since unpopular opinions may elicit negative repercussions from the CCE community.

Beside the 18 English-track CCE delegates, there were key leaders among the 40 Chinese-track CCE delegates that participated in the congress. To ensure I had a balanced perspective on both Chinese and English tracks, I had numerous conversations about the congress with Chinese-track leaders from Canada in the long subway commutes over 45 minutes long. In addition, I made an effort to cross over to the Chinese-speaking sessions on several occasions for a more balanced observation.

Immediately recording the field notes after notable events on a smartphone ensured the integrity of the fieldwork. I arrived at the article's findings through the analysis of field notes, archival documents, and interview transcripts using NVivo. Adopting a grounded theory approach (Charmaz & Mitchell 2007), themes emerged inductively through the iterative and recursive process of coding the data, reviewing of literature, and conducting the fieldwork.

Understanding questions of validity in unstructured observations, several drafts of this article were sent to five members of both the English and Chinese sides of the CCE delegation. Follow-up interviews were conducted with key informants half a year later to gauge their reflections on the congress. I duly implemented their feedback to ensure I am accurately interpreting and representing their social reality.

4 Negotiated Transnational Religious Organizations: The Lausanne and the CCCOWE Evangelical Movements

In this section, I compare the Lausanne and CCCOWE evangelical movements. The Lausanne Movement is the largest transnational organization that sustains the mainstream discourse on global evangelicalism. In comparison, the CCCOWE Movement is an offshoot of the Lausanne Movement that has developed its own unique discourse on global missions based on Chinese ethnicity.

Both movements are mature arrangements of what Levitt (2004) calls 'negotiated transnational religious organizations.' She defines these as "an emerging set of cross-border organizational arrangements [that] are still being worked out" (3) and these "emerge organically, in response to the challenges posed by a particular context" (10). There is an absence of "strong federated institutional structure or rules. Instead, individuals and organizations enter into informal agreements with one another that... are more flexibly constituted" (8). Levitt's original conception of NTROs specifies these arrangements are for 'migrants,' a fitting description for CCCOWE's aspiration to be a global platform for Chinese migrants. Conversely, Levitt's conception of 'migrants' is inapplicable in the case of the Lausanne Movement because the network is based solely on the belief of a global Christendom with little consideration for ethnicity. I call both arrangements 'mature' because they are more centralized and established than what Levitt's original conception suggests.

4.1 The Lausanne Movement and Global Missions

The International Congress of World Evangelization called by evangelical icons Billy Graham and John Stott held in Lausanne in 1974 produced the Lausanne Covenant – the most recognized document that outlines the modern evangelical agenda. This event marked the beginning of the Lausanne Movement, which shaped the evangelical movement for the next four decades (see Hunt 2011). The Lausanne Covenant has been renewed twice, with the most recent iteration being the Cape Town Commitment in 2011 (The Lausanne Movement 2011b).

The Lausanne Movement continues to be active in promoting global evangelism. Its appendages are regional offices around the world that coordinate regional consultations and conferences. It employs specialists called ‘catalysts’ who champion different initiatives for evangelism, such as research, diaspora networks, technology implementation, and healthcare. For churches and Christians who want to be involved, it is an open platform to plug into the evangelical network.

The Lausanne Movement has been actively renewing itself over the past five years. Facing the threat of aging, it moved away from its presidential model and incorporated a more oligarchic leadership. It has been trying to involve younger leaders by deliberately appointing quadragenarian catalysts rather than relying solely on the venerable leaders from the old evangelical guard. Furthermore, there is a newfound emphasis on promoting diversity by appointing catalysts who are diverse in nationality, ethnicity, and gender.

Since 1974, substantial changes have taken place in the field of global missionary outreach. For many, ‘Reaching the Unreached’ is the motto for this era of missions (see Johnson 2001). Given the restricted access of the ‘10/40 Window,’² among other countries, a shift to pragmatism has emerged. ‘Creative access platforms,’ innovative programs used to circumvent a country’s means of excluding foreign religion, have become the model to enter countries that do not issue visas for missionaries. In other words, in order to deploy missionaries to those locations, missionary agencies enlist professionals or entrepreneurs as missionaries instead of clergy (see Tam & Hasmath 2015).

The Lausanne Movement is largely regarded as one of the primary global networks championing mainstream evangelicalism today. Recently, it has strove to renew itself and transcend ethnicity and nationality. It facilitates the transnational transference of ideas and networks evangelicals and like-minded Protestants. Mirroring this effort is the CCCOWE Movement.

4.2 The CCCOWE Movement

With some Chinese leaders also attending the 1974 Lausanne meeting, 60 Chinese religious leaders around the world from different affiliations felt the need to begin a diaspora evangelical movement to respond to the call for global evangelism by forming CCCOWE. In 1976, CCCOWE held their first international conference in Hong Kong with great success, gathering over 1500 attendees from 27 districts around the world. The conference resulted in the CCCOWE Declaration (CCCOWE n.d.) proclaiming the fourfold purpose of CCCOWE is to bridge the gap between 1) two generations, 2) the old and new, 3) the East and West, and 4) denominations. Some know CCCOWE as the ‘Chinese Lausanne’ and is currently one of the largest transnational Chinese evangelical networks working cross-denominationally between interested churches, seminaries, mission agencies, and RNGOs.

Similar to the Lausanne Movement, the CCCOWE Movement was designed to be a hub to coordinate evangelism efforts within regions with significant Chinese evangelical presence. To

² Countries located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. Also known as the ‘resistance belt.’ Nearly five billion people live in this window, making it the prime target for evangelism.

achieve this, CCCOWE promotes cooperation and strategies to advance global missions with the purpose of renewing Chinese churches and evangelizing to the Chinese diaspora and homeland. CCCOWE's branches are divided into 73 district committees around the world, with a comprehensive catalogue of Chinese churches in each respective district. Regional and international conferences continue to this day and its overall attendance has remained relatively consistent. Each of its past few global congresses has been held once every five years. Some Chinese evangelicals even regard CCCOWE as the highest level of transnational evangelical cooperation in the Chinese context, with one senior member of the Canadian delegation summarizing in his interview that the CCCOWE Movement is the 'moral authority' for Chinese evangelicalism.

4.3 The Chinese Elect

At a cursory level, CCCOWE's mission statement and archives aligns with mainstream evangelicalism agenda of 'Reaching the Unreached.' However, a more critical read reveals a core belief that I call the 'Chinese elect,' which I define as a special calling for the Chinese people group to evangelize to the world. This notion of the Chinese elect is grounded on several factors, such as a 'pan-Chinese' diaspora, socioeconomic status, education, work ethic, and entrepreneurial spirit (see Nagata 2005, Nyíri 2003). CCCOWE's former general secretary, the top CCCOWE position, Morley Lee summarizes the rationale in his paper 'Chinese & World Missions' published on CCCOWE's English website:

Why are the Chinese the largest people group in the world?... Christians believe, 'It's because God wants the many Chinese people to work for Him.' In the eternal plan of our God, we are convinced that Chinese people are very capable candidates to carry out the Great Commission. Chinese are not only blessed with bright minds, most of us are also hard-working and quick to learn new languages. Whether for survival or a better life, Chinese people would strive to achieve the goals against all odds... Nowadays, most Chinese there are listed among professionals such as scientists, engineers, doctors, professors, computer experts as well as entrepreneurs and businessmen. Can we say this big change in Chinese' vocational paradigm happened in the past century is due to pure chance? (M. Lee & Lee 2007)

The notions of the Chinese elect, having been actively proliferated by CCCOWE since its inception, circulate in other nodes of the transnational Chinese evangelical network (see Nyíri 2003) and continue to be as of this publication.³ In short, CCCOWE's global mission sets an inimitably Chinese agenda distinct from Lausanne's more inclusive approach.

The tension within CCCOWE to present both a Chinese and English discourse on global missions can be found in its anthem. This CCCOWE anthem is sung during the opening and closing of all their assemblies in both Chinese and English at the international and regional level meetings.

Official CCCOWE Chinese Anthem

主愛中華，恩寵有加；地大物博，代出俊哲。

³ Some may recognize this to share similarities with the notion of 'Back to Jerusalem' popular in China in the early 20th century. However, further empirical evidence is necessary to confirm an intellectual genealogy. CCCOWE's Chinese elect position also resonates with a growing body of literature on 'Chinese exceptionalism' in the social sciences, though that is a discussion for another time.

人道既窮，天道斯通；天人合一，惟信可期。
勉我教會，造就門徒；舉目望田，耕耘收成。
普世華民，作主忠僕；高舉十架，天下一家。
廣傳福音，靈命日新；佳美腳蹤，可西可東。
最後一捧，迎頭趕上；主來在望，凱歌高唱。

Official CCCOWE English Anthem

Praise God for all His wondrous blessings, to Chinese freely giv'n.
The ways of men have led astray, but through Christ God has shown the way.
O church of Christ make disciples, turn your eyes to visions above.
May we for him bold servants be, bear the cross in love and unity.
Proclaim the good news of salvation, with the minds renewed by truth.
In faith we'll run the race to win, shout the vict'ry, Hail the coming King.

My Translation of CCCOWE Chinese Anthem

God loves and blesses the Chinese abundantly;
The land is vast, bountiful, and good ministers are created every generation.
The way of man is corrupt, the way of heaven is the way;
God and man as one, through faith can we anticipate.
Help our church to develop disciples;
Look at the field, plow hard for a good harvest.
Chinese people around the world as faithful servants of God;
Uphold the cross, the world as one family.
Spread the gospel far and wide and renew our spiritual lives daily;
Our beautiful feet can carry us to the East and to the West.
May we press forward with the final baton;
The Lord's return is imminent, let us sing the victory song.

While ideas from the Lausanne Movement regarding the impending end of times and the need to train disciples to evangelize are clearly written in both versions, there are some significant differences. My literal translation from the Chinese version above highlights how declarations of being the Chinese elect, pan-Chineseness, one family, the final baton, going East and West, are stripped from the English version. Instead, the English version mitigates the ethnic dimension of the original Chinese text and conveys the mainstream mission concepts of the Lausanne Movement.

Why would there be such a difference in the English translation? While an explanation may be that the Chinese version utilizes Chinese couplets that cannot be easily captured in translation, it is peculiar how only themes of ethnicity and cross-cultural missions are omitted. On this basis, I anticipated that I would find a misalignment on the global missions' agenda when I attended the global CCCOWE congress in Taipei.

4.4 The Fractures in the 9th CCCOWE Congress

The disjunction behind the Chinese and English CCCOWE anthems manifested when I attended the 9th CCCOWE congress in Taipei from August 22-26, 2016. The congress was packed with worship sessions, action research workshops, sermons, and networking opportunities that revolved around the core themes of discipleship and evangelism. The delegates were mostly clergy or leaders from parachurch organizations hailing from all around the world (see Table 1). It is worthwhile to note that the number of Mainland Chinese participants was not publicized due to legal concerns. The congress was held in the largest megachurch venue in Taiwan that can simultaneously seat over 2500 people.

Table 1: Countries and Number of Delegates at CCCOWE's 9th Congress

Country	Chinese Track Delegates	English Track Delegates
Australia	54	4
Canada	40	18
Hong Kong	232	16
Indonesia	54	16
Italy	26	0
Malaysia	86	9
Philippines	16	10
Singapore	50	18
Spain	25	0
Taiwan	290	8
Thailand	10	9
United Kingdom	11	6
United States	72	10
Others	76	8
Total	1,042	132

Note. 'Others' includes Argentina, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Ecuador, France, Ghana, Japan, Macao, Mongolia, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. These were omitted from this table given their relatively lower participation numbers.

Within CCCOWE, there were two language tracks using Chinese (i.e. *huayu* or Mandarin) and English respectively. The Chinese side had over 1,042 registered delegates while the English side had 132. Once factoring in the volunteers, walk-ons, media, journalists, and other staff, the congress

had around 1300 total attendees from around the world. Both tracks shared the same programs with some keynote speakers overlapping. The Chinese and English sessions were also separated into two spaces during most of the day, reuniting only in the morning and evening sessions. The congress was mostly held in a roundtable format, with each table having approximately eight delegates from different countries to promote regional diversity.

As foreshadowed in my analysis of CCCOWE's anthem, during the course of the congress, there were clear linguistic, geographic, generational, and ideological fractures that emerged between the English and Chinese tracks. These highlighted the differences in understanding what it means to be a Chinese and evangelical in the context of transnational Chinese evangelicalism. While I present them as discrete categories, some themes overlap and intersect.

4.5 Linguistic Fractures

Linguistic fractures are the language barriers between people within the NTRO. This separation is exemplified with the congress being divided into Chinese and English tracks. There was the obvious spatial divide where the Chinese track enjoyed the modern auditorium befitting of an American megachurch while the English track was situated in a partitioned conference room sans windows. While the joint worship sessions were contemporary in style, fully equipped with fog machines and lighting effects, they were conducted primarily in Chinese. Only occasional stanzas were sung in English throughout 20-minute sessions of singing, leaving many non-Chinese speakers idle in the audience.

The issue most English delegates took offense to during the congress was that of translation. On the second day, there was a joint session on the history of Christianity in Taiwan. Organized by CCCOWE's Taiwanese delegates, that session was conducted solely in Mandarin and Taiwanese. Delegates from the English track, some who were white and did not speak Chinese, became visibly upset and a number of them walked out partway through the 90-minute assembly. Wondering where they went, I left the main hall as well and came across a handful of English-track delegates sitting around a table complaining about the lack of translation.

The translation issue strikes a nerve among English-speaking CCE delegates who have had a history of feeling like second-class members in their own church. One quinquagenarian English-speaking reverend who grew up in the GTA CCE community walked up to the table shaking his head, 'I'm too old to take this crap anymore' and everyone knew precisely what he meant. Being personally acquainted with this pastor from my fieldwork, I am aware of his history of feeling slighted as an English pastor in CCE churches. A CCE academic from a GTA seminary told me in confidence afterwards, "CCCOWE doesn't do the English people right. It's disrespectful to the white people who paid so much to fly here. And CCCOWE's general secretary wonders why the English attendance has dropped from 250 since the last congress!"

This unequal English-Chinese dynamic among CCEs is a sensitive topic to breach. I witnessed a CCE journalist's interview on the subway ride with a quadragenarian reverend named Fred (pseudonym) from a CCE church in the GTA. Fred described the CCCOWE congress, "The songs, the subtitles, and the setup are very Chinese. For English pastors it's pretty tough." His friend Mack (pseudonym), also a quadragenarian reverend of another CCE English congregation in the GTA, playfully hollered to Fred from across the subway car, "Be honest! You'd be fired if they published this!"

Receiving complaints about the lack of translation, CCCOWE's general secretary personally gave a sincere apology to the English delegates the next day. He also ensured that it would not happen

again for the rest of the congress. Two days later, the translation was forgotten again on another joint session on the Christian reformation. A white pastor from Hong Kong told me, “if I really wanted to learn about the Reformation, I could probably just Google it rather than sitting here and listening to a language I don't understand.” Some other English delegates already seemed too jaded to care, with most of the CCE English-track delegates opting out of the joint evening sessions to tour Taipei's night markets instead.

What I have described is nothing new to the CCE scene. These are clergy who are familiar with feeling like second-class members in their religious communities. In CCE churches, the Chinese congregations' needs have consistently been placed above the English's (Wong 2015; Wong & Tam 2016). When CCCOWE did not accommodate the English language, it had rubbed salt into old wounds. It also highlights how CCE pastors of English congregations' lack of mastery over the Chinese language are barriers to connecting with the other Chinese evangelicals in CCCOWE. Ironically, the English track exists precisely because of CCCOWE's intent to corral the diaspora's English-speaking population but it has also served to highlight the linguistic differences within the NTRO.

4.6 Geographical Fractures

Geographical fractures are differences between people's place of origin that makes it difficult for NTRO members to identify with one another. To illustrate this fracture, I use the series of Action Research Model Development (ARMD) presentations that were a focal point of the congress. Discussants were assigned to present a series action research papers. These papers were collated from submissions across CCCOWE's global network and each made a case for a successful institutional model. The models presented were diverse, including community centers, simulation games, youth conferences, and RNGOs. A significant portion of the congress revolved around the ARMD presentations and delegates envisioning these models in their own context.

Many English-speaking CCE delegates shared that they were disappointed with the ARMD presentations since most reports were written from the East Asian or Southeast Asian perspective. For example, a community center model's mission in Taiwan is to help high school students stay off drugs. Once these high school students come of age, they help the community center by becoming mentors for the next wave of high school students. However, a senior English pastor from a large CCE church in an upper-middle class neighborhood in the GTA explained, “There's nothing we can learn from here. Our contexts are so different.” He elaborates that one of the reasons is the ‘cultural factor.’ He perceives Taiwan to be largely ‘monocultural’ and thus its models are inapplicable to the ‘multicultural’ Chinese churches in Toronto.

It is also difficult to implement new ideas once people leave the congress. Mack explains that CCCOWE is a meeting for the “golden and baked old boys club of the Chinese evangelicals around the world. If there is no concrete plan laid for the future at these conferences, then nothing gets done... What they talk about in the conferences is rarely implemented since everyone gets caught up with their busy life-style upon returning home.” So while learning new models can be eye opening, implementing these experimental ideas tend to be low on the priority list once CCEs return to their busy routine in Canada.

Adam (pseudonym), a Canadian who works as a catalyst for the Lausanne Movement and has participated in CCCOWE since its inception in 1976, sums it up by stating the central problem in maintaining unity in CCCOWE is that the diversity among the Chinese diaspora is increasing. “It's increasingly hard to rally under a Chinese identity. It's so diverse it loses meaning.” He marks the 1950s and 60s as an apex of Chinese migration and CCCOWE rallying under a pan-Chinese banner

for these first generation emigrants made sense in the 1970s. However, he believes that with the passage of time, geographical differences between each node of the diaspora have heightened and this trend will continue.

4.7 Generational Fractures

Generational fractures are the structural barriers that result from the preferences of succession within NTROs. They reflect what the incumbent leaders' perceive as desirable qualities in potential successors, such as educational attainment, language, age, gender, social capital, and socioeconomic status. The more desirable 'capital' (Bourdieu 1986) the individuals carry, the more likely they would successfully climb the NTRO's social hierarchy. Conversely, failure to accrue capital may result in a lower desire to engage the NTRO.

In CCE churches, there is a high demand for senior pastors in Cantonese congregations and a shortage of candidates to fill these positions. This is partly because of stagnated growth within Cantonese congregations since immigration from Hong Kong has slowed down considerably since 2000 (Statistics Canada 2014). English-speaking pastors are rarely sought because most cannot speak fluent Chinese or are considered too young. After all, few boardrooms would want to hire a senior pastor who is a generation younger than its incumbent board members. On one occasion, Mack vented his frustrations that despite being in his 40s, he still feels disrespected by being called 'Little Mack' at the church where he currently works because he grew up in that church.

Similar to CCE churches, CCCOWE has aged considerably since 1974. When I interviewed Roger (pseudonym), another catalyst from the Lausanne Movement, he shared with me that the Lausanne Movement regards one generation of leadership to have a 40-year window. Coincidentally, CCCOWE's 9th congress in 2016 is its 40th anniversary. Roger shared that the Lausanne Movement has been quite successful in renewing itself given its new CEO Michael Oh is only in his 40s. What he found most refreshing is that Oh has already announced he will be stepping down in eight years and has a clear succession plan. He maintains that CCCOWE needs to have a clear leadership transition model like its mainstream counterpart. Adam echoed similar sentiments, saying Chinese leaders between their 50s to 70s years of age have held onto power for too long and younger ones are just finding their footing. He maintains CCCOWE needs to find a way to connect to the next generation, especially English speakers.

The problem of succession poses the question on who will be the next generation to lead a NTRO like CCCOWE? Like in Canada, English-speaking CCEs have systemic obstacles to entering CCCOWE's key leadership positions given the demanding requirements of educational attainment, age, gender, language, social capital, and socioeconomic status. It is worthwhile to note that these qualities are not equal and their importance is context-dependent. For example, a venerable old pastor may be ushered into senior leadership despite not holding a doctorate.

First, an individual's educational attainment signals competence and legitimacy within the transnational Chinese evangelical milieu. A minimum requirement of a doctoral degree from a renowned evangelical university or equivalent is an unwritten rule to enter senior leadership positions (see Tam & Hasmath 2015). To suggest its rarity, only one pastor under 50 years of age held a doctorate among the 18 English-track delegates from Canada.

Second, in alignment with the Confucian virtue of age veneration, older leaders are celebrated (see Tam 2016). For example, while the congress professed the desire to include younger leaders, it seemed to struggle to act upon this goal. One senior Canadian delegate told me that the newest member voted into CCCOWE's executive committee was a septuagenarian who relies on a cane for

mobility. He expressed doubts about whether this individual will even be healthy enough to be around for the next congress in 2021. In comparison, the English-speaking CCE delegates largely fail the age benchmark given they mostly come from the second generation.

Third, there is a clear preference for male leaders stemming from both a patriarchal Chinese tradition and evangelicalism. For example, in some more conservative strains of evangelicalism, women still cannot occupy the most senior positions of leadership.

Fourth, there are language barriers to accessing the upper echelon of CCCOWE's global leadership team. All key CCCOWE meetings and correspondences are held in Chinese. In addition, I was surprised to discover the CCCOWE constitution, certainly a key document, has no English versions of publication.

Fifth, possession of social capital is also important to join CCCOWE's senior leadership. For example, a CCCOWE board member from Hong Kong told me that one needs to have established a positive reputation and sufficient connections to even be considered into CCCOWE's executive committee. Given how English-speaking delegates feel slighted over language issues like translation discussed above, it is difficult for them to keep coming back to CCCOWE to accrue such social capital.

Finally, the underlying requirements of educational attainment, age, gender, language, and social capital highlight the importance of socioeconomic status. Doctoral credentials for pastors are demanding and generally take years of ministry experience,⁴ the means to afford the education, the intellectual capacity, and a strong work ethic to complete the degree. Furthermore, participation in CCCOWE is often either self- or church-funded, which means the individual participant or his congregation needs to be able to afford the international travel.

4.8 Ideological Fractures

Ideological fractures are the ideological differences members of the NTRO have with those promoted by NTROs. In the case of CCEs in CCCOWE, mainstream and Chinese evangelicals qualify 'cross-cultural' missions differently. Using Winter and Koch's (2009) model of cross-cultural missions from the missiology literature, missions are not cast only in spatial terms but also of 'cultural distance,' which is "the cultural distance Christians need to go to communicate the gospel" and "the cultural distances that potential believers need to move in order to join the nearest church" (532).

A term used by both the CCCOWE and Lausanne Movement is 'diaspora missions.' It refers to missionary work conducted by one ethnic group towards co-ethnics in another location, including the ethnic homeland (see Nyíri 2003).⁵ For CCCOWE, central to this ideology is the pan-Chinese identity and that they are the elect race to do it. Comparatively, what I call 'mainstream missions' translates to a commitment to the Lausanne Movement covering both spatial and cultural distances.

Content analysis of the CCCOWE archives and observations of its congress reveals that while it acknowledges conducting 'cross-cultural missions' in spatial terms, it has little emphasis in covering cultural distance. In other words, CCCOWE's diaspora missions are for Chinese in one country to convert co-ethnics in another part of the diaspora. This is partly due to a utilitarian view of stressing how the Chinese are uniquely leveraged to carry the 'last baton' for missions. CCCOWE recognizes that the Chinese indeed have an easier time than their white counterparts using 'Creative Access Platforms' to enter restricted access countries, especially China (see Tam & Hasmath 2015).

⁴ For seminaries in Canada, one need to be have completed a Masters of Divinity to begin a Doctor of Ministry degree in addition to three years of experience at a church, a parachurch organization, or in the mission field.

⁵ Also see 'indigenization' in Wuthnow (2009: 52-53).

Furthermore, the Chinese diaspora is one of the largest people groups in terms of global population so there are no shortages of Chinese communities worldwide for Chinese churches to target missionaries towards.

However, how many English-speaking CCE pastors can truly identify with CCCOWE's diaspora mission? Most CCE clergy trained in mainstream evangelical seminaries develop a worldview of mainstream missions. Furthermore, members of the English-speaking CCE congregation are leaving the church, partly because they are growing disconnected with the Chinese culture (Wong 2015; Wong & Tam 2016). Most importantly, even if they wanted to subscribe to the diaspora mission discourse, there are significant hurdles given the linguistic, geographical, and generational fractures listed above. To use the linguistic fracture as an example, a CCE who cannot speak Chinese faces a substantial obstacle in proselytizing to a Chinese-speaking immigrant in Panama, who would likely only speak Chinese and Spanish.

Nonetheless, members of the English track believe that for CCCOWE to truly become a global movement, the English language needs to be accommodated. Perhaps the English track delegates feel they deserve a bigger role because they keep hearing that the English-speaking pastors are the successors of Chinese evangelicalism in North America. By the end of the congress, some English track delegates conflated that idea with their future stakes in CCCOWE. On the last day, the closing prayer of the English track by the CCCOWE-America's regional delegate was,

Even though we're not the majority here, but I believe leaders that come out of here will lead the Chinese side in the future and others. Lord God we love the Chinese. We never leave them behind. But you will use the Chinese and it's diaspora so that it's not only about the Chinese. But a movement that is about global reconciliation with God. It's above race, gender, class, and regions. And that you can make something that is broken for your glory.

This prayer closed with a resounding 'Amen!' from the English-track audience.

This presumption of future leadership in CCCOWE reflects a puzzling disconnect from reality. Indeed, the English-track CCEs may be overestimating their standing within the big picture of transnational Chinese evangelicalism. When interviewing one of the regional leaders of CCCOWE-Canada, he explained that CCCOWE really does not need an English track. The reality is that over 1,000 delegates attended the Chinese track – all being leaders of transnational Chinese evangelicalism. CCCOWE can be perfectly self-sufficient without expending extra resources to accommodate the English language. He even added that the English track should be grateful that there is even an English track in the first place given that it did not exist a few CCCOWE congresses ago.

It can even be argued that this presumption of English leadership is peculiar given the global trends at hand. PEW's study of religion globally indicates that religiosity is generally declining in the global West, especially in Canada, Western Europe, and pockets of America (Pew Research Center 2015). Meanwhile, given the rise of Christianity in China, it is foreseeable that the Mainland Chinese may be leading the transnational CCCOWE Movement in the future (see Yang 2016). For example, bold claims of China deploying over 20,000 missionaries in the near future have been made at a secret Chinese evangelical conference in Seoul in 2011 (The Lausanne Movement 2011a).

5 Discussion: Renegotiating the Future of Religious Transnationalism

This article problematizes what being an ‘evangelical’ and ‘Chinese’ means in terms of transnational practices. There are two points regarding the significance of the findings. First, to put it under a theoretical lens, I return to Levitt’s (2004) conception of NTROs. With the future generations of CCEs experiencing linguistic, geographical, generational, and ideological fractures with NTROs like CCCOWE, the rally behind a so-called pan-Chinese elect identity lies on tenuous grounds and their continued involvement in CCCOWE is not optimistic. These disconnections have already been observed in varying degrees in other congregations within the Chinese diaspora, notably in Southeast Asia (see Hoon 2015; Nagata 2005). In short, the ‘cultural distance’ (Winter and Koch 2009) between future generations of CCEs and NTROs like CCCOWE will likely continue to increase over time.

As a result of these fractures, the nodes within Chinese NTROs will enter into a state of ‘renegotiation.’ In this case, renegotiation means that Chinese evangelicals in North America will need to decide whether they want to continue to engage with ethnically based NTROs like CCCOWE. Each successive generation’s diminishing identification to their immigrant congregations is a confirmed phenomenon (Wong 2015; Wong & Tam 2016; see also Hoon 2015; Nagata 2005;), and these same congregations will need to sort out its own succession plans. If the leadership of these North American immigrant congregations relies on the next generation, then it can be expected that the aforementioned fractures with religious transnationalism will increase over time. If these immigrant congregations maintain the status quo by continuing to rely on first generation immigrants for leadership, then it can be expected that the involvement with CCCOWE will continue until the trends of immigration change – perhaps only to postpone the inevitable.

Second, this model of ethnic congregations within the diaspora will likely reproduce itself elsewhere. Some Chinese-track CCE pastors justified that diaspora missions eventually becomes cross-cultural missions through what I call the ‘progenic approach.’ This approach acknowledges that even though converting co-ethnics in the first generation in other countries does not cover cultural distance, the progeny of those first-generation converts will be culturally equipped to evangelize to the people of the host nation. These CCE ministers argue that missionary work is a long-term project and it takes generations to convert a nation. Therefore, in theory, the evangelicals in the Chinese diaspora in Jamaica will convert indigenous Jamaicans to evangelicalism.

There are reasons to be skeptical of the progenic approach upon reviewing the track record of Chinese evangelical congregations within the diaspora. It has been observed that fundamentalist American evangelicalism blends well with traditional Confucian values and this partially accounts for why North American Chinese congregations have higher levels of social cohesion (Nyíri 2003; Yang 1999). However, it also partly explains why these same congregations have had a poor track record of reaching out to whites and other ethnicities by remaining ethnically exclusive (Yang & Ebaugh 2001). Most of the time, CCE churches keep to evangelizing to their co-ethnic immigrants and their next generation and few have been successful in transitioning into a multi-ethnic or pan-Asian model (Wong 2015; Wong & Tam 2016).

Just as Chinese Canadians struggle to incorporate white Canadians into their immigrant churches, what are the chances of success for Chinese immigrant churches in other diaspora countries to convert their hosts? Furthermore, few countries embrace immigration and policies of religious freedom and multiculturalism like Canada. Through their mission work to co-ethnics elsewhere, it is likely that Chinese churches will reproduce their current immigrant church models in being ethnically exclusivist, as has largely been the case in Southeast Asia (see Hoon 2015; Nagata 2005; Nyíri 2003). With the passage of time, it is probable the same fractures will emerge as the cultural distance grows between diaspora Chinese churches and the CCCOWE Movement. Ironically, even if the progenic

approach is successful, the increased diversity within Chinese diaspora churches will further draw it away from a commitment towards CCCOWE's transnational Chinese evangelicalism.

6 Conclusion

This article joins the growing literature of religious transnationalism that find migrants adjusting their conventional faith practices to fit their new contexts (see Levitt 2007; Tweed 2005; Vasquez & Dewind 2014). Within its transnational Chinese evangelical network, the CCCOWE Movement perpetuates the idea of the Chinese elect carrying Christianity's last baton and a pan-Chinese identity. However, buy-in is difficult from the perspective of the key leaders in the next generation of CCE congregations because of linguistic, geographical, generational, and ideological fractures. These fractures will likely widen in the foreseeable future throughout the rest of the diaspora and unravel ethnically based NTROs into a state of 'renegotiation.' It is unclear whether disassociation with ethnically based NTROs means the cessation of transnational ties altogether, as these ties may be simply replaced by non-ethnically based NTROs (e.g. the Lausanne Movement).

There are some limitations to the findings of this article. Changing a number of variables of the subjects such as the ethnic group, countries, religion, and institutions (i.e. the NTROs) may yield different outcomes. For example, few people groups in the world can claim the sheer numbers and scale of migration like the Chinese. In addition, other stripes of Protestantism or religions may have markedly different experiences with their NTROs. Further research of the aforementioned fractures along these variables would generate deeper insight into the religious lives of transnational immigrant populations.

7 References

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