

**CROSS, CULTURE, CONFUSION:
CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY IN A CHINESE
CHURCH IN CANADA**

by

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B.A. (Hons), University of Alberta, 2005

RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

In the
Department of History

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2010

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ABSTRACT

Through oral history, this project studies a church congregation consisting of families from Hong Kong who came to Canada after the 1970s, professing Chinese ethnicity, while laying claims also to Canadian and Christian identities. As congregants made lives and raised children in both Chinese and Canadian cultures, they changed the way they imagined themselves as a community.

Their divergent Chinese, Christian, and Canadian self-identifications affected their varied understandings and experiences of community life at the church. Members conflicted in 2006 when they could not agree whether being Chinese was a defining characteristic of the congregation.

Research suggests that the church was for many older, Cantonese-speaking members an important community institution that kept alive their sense of being Chinese. Younger, English-speaking congregants, however, saw a community rooted in multicultural Vancouver. This study can offer insight into questions of personal and national identities, and the role community institutions play in sustaining identity.

Keywords: Chinese; Christian; Canadian; Hong Kong; Vancouver; identity; migration; religion; ethnic church; transnational; diaspora; astronaut family; community institution

DEDICATION

To my mother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My success is not mine alone.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Drs. Mark Leier and Jeremy Brown who provided the supervision necessary to see my project to fruition. This paper is all the better for their keen reading and constructive feedback.

I must thank Dr. George Agnes, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. He, more than anyone, helped to make this project possible.

Special thanks to Dave Whitson who read early drafts of my work and helped me sharpen my thesis. I have enjoyed our varied conversations and discussions.

My appreciation would be inadequately expressed without thanking the congregation of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church. I thank these people, especially members of Laundry Fellowship, for enriching my time in Vancouver. Their support and candour in sharing their lives with me all contributed to my understanding of Chinese life in Canada.

I am a son of Chinese immigrants, a transnational desiring to live multiple lives in multiple places. I am eternally grateful to the women who love me—Eunice, Ma, and Ah Po—each in her own way, time, and space.

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CROSS, CULTURE, CONFUSION: CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY IN A CHINESE CHURCH IN CANADA

I wanted this church to be Canadian Chinese, a Christian Canadian Chinese church, in that order ... But at Burnaby Pacific Grace, it was the Chinese heritage first, and then being a Christian, and then being Canadian.¹

We are Christians first and foremost ... Christian culture ... should permeate every aspect of our lives.²

Introduction

The “chapel” was the name the congregation at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church preferred for their gymnasium. Chinese men and women met in the chapel on weeknights to play ping-pong. Chinese boys and girls learned to put on their best behaviour during Sunday School there. Countless rounds of tag and other games also took place here whenever children got a chance—in the chaotic transition between the end of the English language worship service in the sanctuary and before Sunday School began, and as soon as class was over. It contained the children and their boisterous laughter for as long as the

¹ Darryl Crocker, interview with author, 11 March 2009.

² Paul Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

Cantonese worship service carried on in the sanctuary, earning its Sabbath respite only when the children left for lunch with their parents at one of the many *dim sum* restaurants in Vancouver. Few in the congregation could have predicted that the chapel would become the site of a significant conflict.

Fifty-eight people gathered in the chapel after lunch on 6 February 2006. That Sunday afternoon, they got together to discuss a very important matter—the future of the church. Like most important church matters, the meeting began with a prayer to invoke the Holy Spirit’s counsel. For the next three hours, the congregation, under the direction of the deacons, tried to define in a mish-mash of Cantonese and English the church’s core values—values that mattered most to the congregation, and values that could identify the church more pithily to the prospective pastoral candidates the deacon board was trying to court. When some members insisted that being Chinese was a core value, or a defining characteristic of the church, dissent erupted and conflict ensued. The heated debate brought forth no resolution, ending in confusion, frustration, and tears after time ran out. In the months that followed, many people left the church, including many who were lay leaders of the English Ministry that included the children of the congregation’s earliest members.³ What happened on 6 February 2006 was not fully understood right away. It was to haunt many members of the congregation for years to come. It was the start of a period of uncertainty in the congregation that developed into a crisis over its identity and ministry direction in the years from 2006 to 2008.

³ [Core Values Meeting Minutes], 6 February 2006.

The conflict was an unexpected event, since the congregation always had a strong and very particular Chinese identity. As one pioneer member of the church put it, “all were from Hong Kong.”

At the beginning, no one spoke English. Everyone spoke Cantonese. There was no one from anywhere else—no one from Mainland [China]; no one from Taiwan; no one from Asia other than Hong Kong. It was in fact a church with everyone coming from Hong Kong.⁴

The insight gleaned from this conflict is instructive, not only for an understanding of how the congregation had seen itself as a church community, but also what being Chinese meant to different generations of immigrants, in particular the post-1970 immigrants from Hong Kong who were able to maintain ties to the homeland to a far greater degree than Chinese migrants in pre-war years could. Not incidentally, this episode is a glimpse also of what being Canadian and being in Canada meant to this new wave of migrants, since Canada has instituted open immigration policies since the late 1960s that have resulted in a diverse and multicultural country, and one in which it is not clear what a “Canadian” is. In a political climate that favoured multiculturalism, when diversity was not only sanctioned but also encouraged, how have post-1970s immigrants from Hong Kong negotiated their Chinese, Canadian, and Christian identities, identities which were sometimes in tension in these early years of the twenty-first century? This case study of conflict over the identity of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church in Metro Vancouver—a church founded by post-1970s Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong—can offer insights into more general questions of personal and national identity.

⁴ Jon Lam, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

In his landmark tome *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson suggests that nationalism is the result of a shared consciousness developing out of the rise of publishing and literacy, and ultimately the development of common language communities and shared information systems. Central to this is the notion that the idea of nationalism—as spread through books, newspapers, and through discussions stimulated and shaped by popular media—creates nations. As people imagined and rallied around a common idea—the nation—that was constantly forming and being re-formed, empires and older dynastic states gave way to the modern nation-state in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century. The nation, for Anderson, was thus an “imagined community” made up of individuals loyal to this idea, and who share a bond with others in the community whom they do not necessarily know personally, but yet with whom they imagine a common oneness of identity, created both popularly from the bottom up and officially from the top down.⁵

Although Anderson had in mind the encouragement of national consciousness as opposed to regional or purely local identifications, his idea of imagined communities is useful in understanding how other smaller communities understand themselves. This thesis investigates the conflicts over how the congregation at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church has imagined and re-imagined itself as a community as its membership changed. It will also examine how different generations of Chinese-Canadians made choices about their identities. As different members asked in the chapel on that fateful day in 2006, was this a Chinese church or not? Did it cease to be Chinese in 2003 when Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church changed its name to Burnaby Pacific Grace Church? What did

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

being Chinese mean to the migrants from Hong Kong who formed the vast majority of the church's membership? And to their Canadian-born children? Most pertinently, perhaps, was the church that had been a Chinese, Cantonese-speaking Christian community in Canada going to stay that way, or would it decide to seek change?

“Religion” has its etymology in Latin, literally referring to that which binds together. As Anderson suggests, ideas and meanings fixed in scripts, letters, or ideograms bind all understanding readers to the same message, thus joining them in the same imagined community.⁶ A church congregation can thus be seen as the embodiment of community because membership is conferred through shared comprehension of sacred texts. I was intrigued by the role of the church as a community institution that binds together Chinese-Canadian communities, and by the role that Christianity played in their identities. The church, as shown in the events discussed below, was instrumental in fostering a sense of community for many Hong Kong immigrants at Burnaby Pacific Grace. This imagined community extended beyond the shores of Canada and kept alive congregants' transnational links with their former homes in Hong Kong.

However, it was at the same time a site of conflict where identities were negotiated and contested. I propose that church was, for many of the older members of the congregation, an important communal resource that mitigated their sense of displacement and helped to maintain their sense of being Chinese. It was comparable to the clan associations that were predominant for much of the earlier history of Chinese immigration to Canada. For some of their Canadian-raised children, and indeed for some parents too, the communities they imagined were subtly different, as were the identities

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

they envisioned and chose. To borrow the words of Ronald Suny, “History is never just lived, it is made,” a product of the choices of individual and collective actors.⁷ Burnaby Pacific Grace was making a choice on the kind of community it would be in the future.

The Chinese in Canada

This research attempts to fill in some gaps in an understudied area of Chinese immigrant history. It follows from where most narratives of Canadianization leave off, in the late twentieth century with the large wave of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong fleeing an imminent Communist takeover. Conceptually, while it is possible to identify the people of Hong Kong as British subjects prior to the handover in 1997, Hong Kong was a society populated predominantly by ethnic Chinese. Even under the rule of their colonial masters, the people of Hong Kong had maintained many aspects of Chinese cultural life. In this way, they made up part of a transnational Chinese consciousness that Tu Wei-Ming advocates for, in what he calls “Cultural China.”⁸ Thus, although a distinction can be made between immigrants from Hong Kong and those emigrating from within the territorial boundaries of China before 1997, this paper identifies the former as Chinese immigrants to stress the fact that they referred to themselves as ethnic Chinese, and to emphasize their membership in the Chinese diaspora and their participation as history makers in the story of Chinese life in Canada. Moreover, these were immigrants whose ancestral roots could be traced to China, many just a generation or two removed from the same districts in Guangdong province from which the earliest Chinese

⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Back and Beyond: Reversing the Cultural Turn?” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (December 2002): 1485.

⁸ Tu Wei-ming, ed., *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

immigrants to Canada originated. Yet, though they shared an ethnic link with their preceding kinsmen from rural China, they were typically wealthier, more educated and sophisticated, and more diverse in age and gender. They were quite unlike the mostly male labourers who formed bachelor societies in Chinatowns across Canada prior to World War II.

Much of the literature on the Chinese in Canada focuses on the experiences of these pre-World War II migrants from China, and depicts the hardship of their lives and the discrimination they faced in Canadian society and at the hands of the Canadian state. Social and community life for pre-war immigrants, Edgar Wickberg argues, was profoundly affected by restrictive immigration policies and a prevailing environment of anti-Chinese sentiment. The migrant workers were seen as little more than workhorses or machinery, cheap labour to be exploited. Because of their desire to retain practices that connected them to China and being Chinese, the predominantly white society of the time found their customs strange and foul, and kept them out of participation in “Canadian” life. The Chinese were heathen undesirables whose only hope of assimilation was to be Christianized. As a result of the anti-Chinese discrimination they faced and the very little English they spoke, these men, who had left families behind in China while they went in search of work, confined themselves to Chinatown and set up *huiguan* or native place and kinship associations for mutual aid. Similarly, the *Zhigongtang* provided assistance and protection for Chinese workers in mining towns, which enabled them to fight for fair treatment and strike successfully for higher pay. The thriving of such social

organizations, the authors suggest, were necessary to make life more tolerable for Chinese labourers.⁹

Peter Li also makes the case that the Chinese were marginalized because of prevailing racist views that reduced the Chinese to nothing more than a necessary evil. Li claims that the Canadian state discriminated against the Chinese in Canada through its political, social, and economic systems, in what he refers to as “institutional racism.”¹⁰ This developed over the period between 1858, when Chinese immigration to Canada began, and 1923, when it emerged fully and became formalized through legislation which made the Chinese categorically inadmissible for entry. While Chinese had to pay a head tax for Canadian immigration since 1885, they were fully excluded from admission from 1923 onwards. This became a time when even people of Chinese descent who professed their Canadian citizenship were ignored and denied basic civil rights. The Exclusion Era lasted until the end of World War II, after some Chinese fought in uniform as Canadian citizens and soldiers, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was successfully repealed in 1947. Li is sympathetic toward Chinese who felt an affinity with China because, he argues, the reception they received did not allow them to belong to Canada. The identity of these Chinese, according to Li, could therefore be thought of as involuntary sojourners.¹¹

While both Wickberg and Li were correct in their assessment of the difficult challenges Chinese immigrants faced in Canada for much of their history, their explanations and treatments were wanting in at least two respects. First, the authors’

⁹ Edgar Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1982).

¹⁰ Peter Li, *The Chinese in Canada*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Li, *Chinese in Canada*.

sympathetic portrayal of the immigrant as victim inadvertently strips the immigrant of agency, in contrast to Suny's emphasis on choice. It also downplays the importance of the church as a Chinese community institution, even when the role of Christianity in the assimilation and gradual acceptance of Chinese immigrants in the middle of the twentieth century has been acknowledged by these authors. In their placing of greater emphasis on structural causation, these Chinese immigrants became hapless victims of their repressive times who were delivered by the Christian God and the Pacific conflict—passive agents rather than makers of history.

Whatever the earlier experience, in the wake of World War II, Chinese who had been naturalized or born in Canada were accorded the rights of citizens and were gradually accepted as Canadians in a political climate of increasing openness. The ability to choose and make decisions about how they want to live life was significant, as *tusheng*, locally-born Chinese, came of age. Empowered by an education in the English language, they were able to seek opportunities beyond Chinatown that were previously unavailable to their parents. Wing Chung Ng has written about how these new Canadians constructed an amalgamated Chinese Canadian identity.¹² Since these *tusheng* saw their acceptance and upward mobility in terms of accommodation to Canadian norms and expectations, they turned their cultural orientations away from some of the institutions that were important to the older immigrants, such as the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association, an umbrella organization that represented the Chinese during the Exclusion Era.

¹² Wing-Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-1980: The Pursuit of Power and Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

Several changes in the immigration system in the post-war years gradually afforded more opportunities for Chinese wishing to be in Canada, and to become Canadian. Most notable was the universal point system introduced in 1967, a race-blind policy which applied equally to all prospective immigrants regardless of their country of origin. Immigration statistics cited by Li showed that 89,868 immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China combined were admitted to Canada between 1968 and 1976.¹³ This was a sharp contrast to the number of Chinese admitted before the adoption of the universal point system, in the years 1949 to 1955: 12,560.¹⁴ The implementation of a business class immigration program in 1978, and its subsequent expansion in 1985, brought into Canada many more Chinese immigrants, the vast majority of them being entrepreneurs from Hong Kong. The former British colony alone accounted for 243,888 immigrants admitted from 1985 to 1994.¹⁵ These post-war immigrants overwhelmingly chose to reside in the country's largest urban centres. Many had professional and technical qualifications, and they formed a new middle class together with an emergent generation of *tusheng* in Toronto and Vancouver. It was these post-1970s immigrants who became members of the congregation at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church and met several times each week to take part in various fellowship events and activities put up by the church.

Ronald Skeldon and Johanna Waters have thought of post-1970s immigrants from Hong Kong as transnationals—as people not bound to one geographic location, but

¹³ Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 99.

¹⁴ Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 96.

¹⁵ Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 99.

instead involving themselves in economic and familial activities spanning two or more locations at the same time. These authors labelled them “reluctant exiles”¹⁶ and “flexible citizens” respectively.¹⁷ Many of them left Hong Kong because of the political and economic uncertainty over the fate of Hong Kong, especially after the British colony would revert to Chinese rule in 1997. In contrast to their predecessors, post-1970s immigrants from Hong Kong tended to be well-educated, bilingual, and wealthy. Unlike the married “bachelors” of the Exclusion era, these newcomers brought their entire families with them and set up homes in new neighbourhoods beyond the ethnic enclave that was Chinatown. In a curious reversal, some of these new immigrants would choose to leave their families behind in Canada, shuttling frequently between the two continents while they worked jobs in Hong Kong or China, so as to maintain the high standards of living they were used to when they were living in Hong Kong. This phenomenon became common enough that it attracted particular attention popularly and academically as a new type of family—the “astronaut family,” a reference to how much of their lives were spent in the air.¹⁸

The “astronaut,” usually the father, would return to work in Asia shortly after immigration, perhaps vacationing in Canada several months a year while the mother stayed behind to take care of the children, who attended school in Canada. It was also not unheard of for both parents to be spend prolonged periods in Hong Kong, perhaps returning to Canada for a break after absences of six months to a year, and leaving

¹⁶ Ronald Skeldon, ed., *Reluctant Exiles? Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

¹⁷ Johanna Waters, “Flexible Citizens? Transnationalism and Citizenship amongst Economic Immigrants in Vancouver,” *The Canadian Geographer* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 219-234.

¹⁸ See Waters, “Flexible Citizens?”.

teenaged children to attend school on their own. When both parents were away, the children became known as “satellite” or “parachute kids.” This change in how the family was experienced as a community was facilitated to a very large extent by modern technology. Jet travel has shrunk the distance between Hong Kong and Vancouver to twelve hours. The ready availability of the internet enabled long-distance relationships to be maintained through e-mail and webcam chats, where loved ones could be seen in live video on computer screens.

The astronaut family is a prime example of the transnational lives some members of the congregation at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church led. Members of such an immigrant family are no longer tied down to a single geographical location, but instead cross state boundaries by participating in ongoing activities and relationships spanning two or more continents at the same time. The spatial separation of the family was one piece of proof, as Stuama Ghosh and Lu Wang argue, that transnational immigrants desired to live multiple lives in multiple places.¹⁹ Waters argues that an astronaut’s lifestyle was a compromise actively pursued by individual immigrants and families in order to find financial security in Asia and political security in Canada. In the pursuit of symbolic and cultural capital, children were kept in Canada to pursue a western education, ideally and ultimately at a western university. However, Waters has also noted that the intentions and aspirations of astronaut parents were not always passed on to their children. Indeed, satellite kids often found themselves desiring a different set of goals, as a result of their experiences of a greater degree of settlement and acculturation than their parents’.²⁰ For

¹⁹ Stuama Ghosh and Lu Wang, “Transnationalism and Identity: A Tale of Two Faces and Multiple Lives,” *The Canadian Geographer* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 269-282.

²⁰ Waters, “Flexible Citizens?”.

teens and young adults who had grown up in Canada, the cultural practices through which their parents kept alive the Chinese parts of their identities did not have the same resonance, and their expectations of community institutions such as churches were shaped differently by growing up here.²¹ This would sow the seeds of conflict among the congregation in Burnaby.

This pragmatic division of labour in the astronaut family is reflected in the observations of Wei Djao, who, in a discussion of the Chinese diaspora, characterizes Chinese culture as concerned with the here and now, more philosophical than religious.²² Long periods of separation as well as varying degrees of acculturation and unsettlement encouraged many immigrants to turn increasingly to Christianity to help them cope with their difficulties, and aiding the growth of ethnic churches. According to Fenggang Yang, religion has now become central to the lives and experiences of many Chinese immigrants:

The Christian church has some unique structures and functions that other ethnic Chinese organizations and associations do not have. The structure of congregations and an emphasis on fellowship groups help new immigrants find social belonging; weekly meetings provide opportunities for frequent and intimate interactions with compatriots; the proclaimed teachings help to create a loving and harmonious community where new immigrants can find spiritual peace and psychological ease; church activities and youth programs help to foster a moral environment for

²¹ See Jeffrey Reitz, ed., *Host Societies and the Reception of Immigrants* (San Diego, CA: University of California, Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies, 2003). Reitz suggests that for many first generation migrants, their primary sense of belonging continues to derive from involvements within their ethnic communities. For the second generation, though, these involvements with their culture of origin (the culture of their parents) often diminish, while their expectations of their adopted homeland increase correspondingly. When these are disappointed, they may feel adrift in both worlds.

²² Wei Djao, *Being Chinese: Voices from the Diaspora* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2003).

nurturing the growing second generation ... These features of the church are attractive to many new immigrants.²³

From the early days of Chinese immigration, some migrants saw church membership as an avenue of assimilation. Yang postulates that Chinese Christians in the United States formed “adhesive identities” by selectively melding and reconstructing their national, cultural, and religious identities into a hybrid based on Christian universalism.²⁴ Other scholars have supported this view of the ethnic church.²⁵ It accentuates the importance of ethnic self-identification. Because the immigrant is the agent, rather than the object of change, Yang argues that assimilation is not a trajectory or a teleological end, but a process the immigrant actively undertakes.²⁶ His notion of adhesive identities is premised on the ability of recent immigrants to exercise their variegated options, and it joins contemporary discussions of transnational identities, cosmopolitan identities, and hybrid identities, all of which presume the exercise of choice, and the active working out of what can become quite complex self-identifications.²⁷ It also provides a setting for the maintenance of continuing relationships

²³Fenggang Yang, “Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts,” *Sociology of Religion* 59, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 245.

²⁴ Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

²⁵ See Erika A. Muse, *The Evangelical Church in Boston’s Chinatown: A Discourse of Language, Gender, and Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); and Kwai Hang Ng, “Seeking the Christian Tutelage: Agency and Culture in Chinese Immigrants’ Conversion to Christianity,” *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 195-214.

²⁶ Yang. *Chinese Christians in America*.

within Chinese-Canadian communities. As this paper shall describe below, conflict arises when members of a community make different choices for themselves with respect to the degree of assimilation they want.

It was against a backdrop of increased Chinese immigration through the 1970s that Chinese Mennonite Brethren Churches came into being in Canada. The first Mennonite Brethren Chinese-language church, Pacific Grace MB Church, started as a ministry of Reverend Henry G. Classen from Aberdeen, Saskatchewan. Sent forth by the British Columbia Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches' Board of Church Extension, Reverend Classen started Christian meetings on the streets of Vancouver's inner city in the early 1950s and began a mission to the poor living along skid row, establishing what became known as Pacific Grace Mission. Though the mission originally conducted worship services in German and English at its chapel, as the numbers of Chinese residents in nearby Chinatown grew steadily in the post-war period, the mission extended its evangelistic efforts to target the Chinese specifically in 1972. The following year, the Chinese who attended Pacific Grace Mission Chapel requested to meet separately because of their large numbers. So it was, in 1974, that a Chinese department within the mission was established, with meetings conducted in Cantonese. The upsurge of Chinese immigrants attending the chapel in the next three years coincided with a decline in the number who spoke English, and led to the discontinuation of English services in 1977. In April of that same year, the church chose to minister to ethnic

²⁷ On transnational identities, see Kathryn Mitchell, "Transnational Subjects: Constituting the Cultural Citizen in the Era of Pacific Rim Capital," in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, eds. Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini (New York: Routledge, 1997), 244-245; on cosmopolitan identities, see Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis 2: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century* (London: Continuum Books, 2003); and on hybrid identities, see Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

Chinese in the Cantonese language exclusively and formally changed its name to Pacific Grace Chinese Church.²⁸

Driven by the massive influx of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong following the creation and expansion of business immigration in the 1970s, the church continued to grow steadily in the next decade. In 1990, about 50 members led by Keynes Kan and Enoch Wong were “sent out with tears and prayers” to establish a new church in neighbouring Burnaby.²⁹ The move to set up a church in Burnaby was motivated by two factors. It was, in one part, a response to overcrowding in the aging facilities in Vancouver, and in another, a response to the opportunity for growth presented by the ever-growing population of new Chinese immigrants increasingly drawn to the promise of a suburban lifestyle in the community of Burnaby, immediately to the east of Vancouver. While Burnaby offered relatively affordable housing and high quality schooling, this movement of families into suburban living recreated the challenge of remaining connected to institutions in Chinatown that kept alive their Chinese roots and affiliations.

Burnaby Pacific Grace Church

On September 1, 1990, Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church was established. The name for the new church seemed a natural and logical choice, since the congregation was entirely Chinese, part of the wave of immigration from Hong Kong in the late 1980s.

²⁸ For a more detailed history of Pacific Grace Church, see “We are in the Same Family: The Growth of Chinese MB Churches,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 9 November 2001, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://old.mbherald.com/40-21/family.html>; and *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. “Pacific Grace Mennonite Brethren Church (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada),” accessed 10 October 2010, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/contents/P335.html>.

²⁹ “We are in the Same Family.”

The congregation was hopeful that the church would continue to expand through incorporating other members of the Chinese diaspora already in Vancouver, as well as the anticipated exodus from Hong Kong as the clock ticked down toward the colony's scheduled Communist takeover in 1997. According to Jon Lam, a long-time member who started attending the church with his wife in 1991:

They just started Burnaby [Pacific Grace Church] maybe for a few months before we started attending there. There were less than a hundred people in total, and the majority of them, they were families of similar age, of our age. Everyone would bring their babies to the fellowships, put their babies next to them, and we'd continue on with whatever we were doing. We're all from Hong Kong. We spoke one language, had a similar culture, and we're all immigrants too. It might even be fair to say that the reason why we came here is similar. The majority of us—we arrived before 1997—but we came here mainly because of 1997. I think because the background is similar, age similar, what we're concerned about, very similar, and we're much smaller, [we were] much closer; everyone knew everyone.³⁰

The church grew rapidly as the congregation invited other new immigrants like them to the services. At first, the church rented the Ellesmere United Church building for its meetings. The church offered Sunday School, Sunday worship services, a choir, children's ministry, and four fellowship groups in its programming. Increasing attendance prompted the church to seek out and rent a second location to accommodate its growing membership. A martial arts studio across the street from Ellesmere United Church provided the extra space needed for Sunday School classrooms. With some renovation

³⁰ J Lam, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

work, Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church was able to add a library, a church office, and a multi-purpose room to its two sites at the corner of Ellesmere and Hastings in 1992. As a result of continued growth, the church established a satellite church further to the east in Port Moody in February 1995.³¹

By late 1998, there was sufficient demand from younger members of the church and some of their parents that Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church began developing a youth ministry at the martial arts studio to offer services in the English language. One such parent was Helen Ng. She and others supported an English Ministry for their children. “Because we saw our kids,” Ng recalled, “They were growing up. They didn’t see themselves as Cantonese-speaking Chinese-Canadians. They don’t speak Cantonese, most of them who grew up in Canada. We saw the need that they should integrate with the local community.”³²

The optimism in the air was unmistakable. The church had momentum on its side, showing encouraging signs of steady maturation. It had been independent from Pacific Grace MB Church since 1991. The satellite church in Port Moody had come of age by 1998 and did not require further financial sponsorship from the parent church in Burnaby. The babies that Helen Ng and Jon Lam and other young parents brought with them to fellowship meetings were blossoming into teenagers who populated the incipient English-language ministry. A pastor from Canada—a first for the church—was hired in late 2002. The family of Reverend Darryl Crocker became the first non-Chinese faces in Burnaby Pacific Grace when he moved with his wife and four children from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, to oversee the running of the English Ministry. “I just fell in love with the

³¹ “We are in the Same Family.”

³² Helen Ng, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

focus on the Great Commission—making disciples,” said Reverend Crocker, “That’s what brought us here ... I felt the direction of the leadership of the church was really focused on outreach, missions, [and] evangelism.”³³

“At the time we hired our Caucasian pastor,” recounted Andrew Yeung, a lay leader of the English Ministry, “we had mentioned to him that in five years’ time, we wanted see him develop the English group in such a way that would let the English group become an independent church.”³⁴ The thought of planting another church was a very exciting prospect for the congregants, especially for the parents who spearheaded the charge to begin a separate ministry for their children in English. This practice was in line with that of the mother church, Pacific Grace MB Church in Vancouver, which, including Burnaby Pacific Grace, counted at least eight churches in the Pacific Grace family of churches. These parents could see that immigration, while it provided a steady stream of new Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong for the time being, was not indefinite. Many parents saw the future of the congregation in their children who were attending Canadian schools. Cantonese was the language of yesterday; English was the language of tomorrow.

Swiftly the fledgling English Ministry took flight. From barely a one-page write-up in English in an otherwise Chinese annual report in 2001 and none in 2000, the English Ministry commanded ten pages in the annual report for 2002 and eight in 2003, reporting from various departments and committees. The parents had hoped that their children would evangelize to their English-speaking friends much in the same way they

³³ Darryl Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

³⁴ Andrew Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

themselves were evangelizing to Cantonese speakers in Vancouver, since they thought the English language was the key to sustaining future growth.

“Because we had other races coming to our church,” Ng noted, “Burnaby Pacific Grace was [no longer] just for Chinese. Hopefully it could be expanded as a community church and [become] localized.”³⁵ Thus, six months after the Caucasian pastor came on board, the issue was raised at the Annual General Meeting on February 16, 2003.

Reverend Crocker added:

I made the comment, you know, we could call ourselves Burnaby Pacific Grace Community Church. But, then, people responded that that says we’re more involved in the social needs of the community, and we’re not that kind of church. That’s important, but that’s not our main focus. ... Then I realized that’s more of a negative than positive word to Chinese.³⁶

For Helen Ng and other parents who supported the development of an English Ministry, anchoring the church in Canada by integrating itself better with the neighbourhood community in which it was situated offered the prospect of enhancing their children’s sense of being Canadian. However, it was precisely this idea of being anchored in Canada and in Burnaby that others in the congregation feared, some of whom were astronaut parents who spent significant periods of time away from Burnaby, for they still valued their mobility and ability to stay in touch and in step with Hong Kong. Also, the congregation’s rejection of the idea of a community church reflected the perception that some community churches concerned themselves primarily with local issues of

³⁵ Ng, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

³⁶ Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

social justice, such as homelessness in Vancouver, instead of matters closer to the hearts of many in the congregation—the attainment of spiritual perfection through diligent study of the Bible with others in the same ethnic community, and the preservation of their ethnic identity.

Still, there was overwhelming support for change. Of the 78 people gathered in the chapel for the annual general meeting in 2003, 74 voted in favour of removing “Chinese” from the church’s name, formally changing it to Burnaby Pacific Grace Church.³⁷ By removing the word “Chinese,” the congregation thought that the new name would broaden the church’s appeal, allowing it to grow and enlarge its territory. It was hoped that the new name would make the church appear more welcoming and inclusive of non-Chinese people, thereby winning it the favour of both God and Man.

The change in name and focus held great promise. “I remember a lot of people in the English Ministry were happy about it,” said Irene Chik, part of the younger ministry and daughter of an astronaut father. “It felt like we were given an identity. We were not just kids that our parents brought to church; we were going somewhere on our own as well.”³⁸ The church, moreover, was in good financial health and had the luxury of considering different options for a future church building as the existing rental agreement with Ellesmere United Church neared its end.³⁹ Fourteen years after its establishment, Burnaby Pacific Grace Church had grown sufficiently physically and financially to

³⁷ BPGCC 2003 Congregation Meeting Minutes, February 16, 2003. The other 4 voted in favour of changing “Chinese” to “Community”.

³⁸ Irene Chik, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

³⁹ BPGCC Deacon Meeting Minutes, 7 January 2003.

purchase its own building, reuniting its Cantonese-language service and English-language service under one roof at the corner of Ingleton and Triumph in July 2004.

With the addition of Associate Pastor Crocker and his family, and the more inclusive name, the church, in particular the English Ministry, continued to flourish and grow in organization and sophistication. It tripled in size, reaching nearly a hundred people in attendance weekly in 2005. In that same year, the ranks of the church had swollen. Three hundred and forty-six people filled the pews on an average Sunday, including individuals who claimed Korean, Japanese, Persian, and Scottish descent—all of whom participated in the English Ministry worship services. As one church member who attended Cantonese services recalled, “We ceased to be, at least on the English Ministry side, an exclusively Chinese church.”⁴⁰

Yet, in spite of the addition of the Crocker family, a former deacon who preferred to remain anonymous was unequivocal that Burnaby Pacific Grace “has always been, and still [was], a Chinese church.”⁴¹ After all, leadership meetings continued to be conducted in Cantonese, the working language at the church. Reverend Crocker, who spoke only English, had to participate in these meetings through a translator. Cantonese was often heard in the hallways of the church as parents talked to their children and other adults, even if the children conversed in English with their friends at church and at school. Even when Sunday School teachers taught the children of the church in English, “when the teachers had trouble explaining something, they switched to Cantonese [because] they’re

⁴⁰ Anonymous B, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

⁴¹ Anonymous A, interview with author, 9 March 2009.

more confident in Cantonese.”⁴² Thus, it seemed, that language was closely tied into the identity of this congregation.

The tension between old and new would soon take centre stage at the church. The name change had seemed like a non-event at the time of its passing in 2003. It was tabled and passed without debate or controversy, treated, as it were, as a footnote in the church’s history. Nevertheless, it appeared to bear fruit, enabling the growth of the English Ministry. However, the significance of what had been set in motion was to come fully to the fore three years after “Chinese” had been dropped from the name. It revealed a deep and growing cleavage in the church. While the name change proposition had been greeted with enthusiasm at the Annual General Meeting of 2003, a meeting held one Sunday afternoon in February 2006—the one described in the introduction of this paper—was, in the words of Associate Pastor Darryl Crocker, “very painful, very hurtful.”⁴³

At issue were the core values of the church. “God,” according to Burnaby Pacific Grace Church’s Five-Year Development Plan Proposal, “has given each church its own unique set of characteristics and values, which [are] called the church’s core values.” Identification of such core values would supposedly set the ground for unity and make the church’s development more effective. Core values were to drive every aspect of church ministry. The deacon board had identified five core values, based on a survey carried out amongst the congregation:⁴⁴

1. We are a biblical truth teaching based church.

⁴² Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

⁴³ Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

⁴⁴ Five-Year Development Plan Proposal, undated, *circa* February 2006. This document formed the basis for discussion at the core values meeting on 5 February 2006.

2. We are a Chinese background development church.
3. We are a program-integrating church.
4. We value our heritages from Pacific Grace MB Church.
5. We are a pastoral leadership based church.

Of these, the second core value aroused the greatest controversy. At this emotionally charged meeting, strong opposition flew in the face of those from the Cantonese Ministry who insisted that Burnaby Pacific Grace was a Chinese church. According to Helen Ng, the focus of the church had changed. “[The church] was not stressing on trying to integrate with the community as much. [We were] going backwards, being *Chinese* Chinese.”⁴⁵ “What marks a church?” asked Eugene So, a parachute kid in university who was an active Sunday School teacher until his departure in 2007.

For some people, what marks the church is—we are ethnically Chinese, our culture is going to be Chinese. This is the marker of this church. But for others, why are these markers for the church? Shouldn’t the church be universal? If we look at the children who are growing up in a Canadian culture, because Burnaby Pacific Grace is based in Canada, you’re not going to move Burnaby Pacific Grace back to Hong Kong! For them, that shouldn’t be the identity of the church.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ng, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

⁴⁶ Eugene So, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

No one had foreseen the potentially divisive nature of the question at hand. Was Burnaby Pacific Grace a Chinese church or not? One member expressed the dilemma this way:

We wondered if we would break off as two different churches or stick together as one church. We started reflecting on who we were as a church. We wanted to see not only our direction for the future, but we also wanted to understand who we were as a church. The name change debate also came up. Did we value keeping our Chinese identity? Or maybe moving on to a more Canadian identity? We really wanted to reflect on how we were, and hopefully, in seeing that we would have a clearer picture of how our future would look like.⁴⁷

To some, especially members of the older Cantonese-speaking congregation, that the church was, and still was, Chinese seemed to be an inalienable fact. Everyone in the Cantonese congregation had emigrated from Hong Kong. Even though the English Ministry had seen more growth, the Chinese Ministry still remained the larger of the two, with two worship services that, combined, doubled the number of people attending the English worship service. Yet to those who had been participating in the church as part of the English Ministry, the church's Chinese-ness was a matter of history, not an inevitable future. It was indeed true that the church had been founded by members who migrated to Vancouver from Hong Kong in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, for the English-speaking members, though English was a second language for many of them, this fact merely determined how the church came to be, and not where Burnaby Pacific Grace Church should be headed. As far as they were concerned, the significance of being

⁴⁷ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

Chinese for the church had already been decided when “Chinese” was removed from its name back in 2003. Thus, how one could or should be Chinese became a diverging point for members in the two language ministries.

Since the term “core values” was never properly defined at the meeting in 2006, the people who were gathered together that day struggled with questions of who they were, who they wanted to be, and who they could be. Nor was the rationale for the exercise fully explained by the committee of deacons who proposed the core values. One member of the congregation used the metaphor of cutting a cheesecake, to suggest that the core of the cake would be visible whichever way it was cut. He wondered how the proposed core value would be found in a non-Chinese attending the English Ministry.⁴⁸ “It’s really a bad thing,” said Reverend Crocker, “because the deacons never did a proper way of presenting the core values... They presented it as this is where we are going—we are a Chinese-based Hong Kong church, and we’re going to stay this way too.”⁴⁹

The recollection of this event below by various eye-witnesses present showed the confusion that was the order of the day:

It was initiated by a very small group of people, like four or five. Maybe they discussed with some, or just a few, so-called leaders or department heads, maybe. I don’t even know. But we know it’s only a committee. They talked about it and then they brought it up. That’s about it. There’s no discussion, no opinion sharing, that kind of thing. People had brought up that they didn’t agree... It

⁴⁸ [Core Values Meeting Minutes].

⁴⁹ Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

was not even discussed or shared or meetings held to communicate. Nothing like that.⁵⁰

The definition of “core values” changed every time there was a change in the person providing the definition. This was from within the [core values] committee itself. The purpose, again, we have more than one version. Different committee members came up with a different version to justify why they wanted to do it. By the time we got the draft, it’s almost like it’s a finished product... They just expected people to pass it without any complication at all. But, of course, it ended up becoming so complicated it was not even passed.⁵¹

One group would say, “Shouldn’t core values be the stuff that never changes (with stuff like theology, understanding of the Bible, who God is, stuff like that)? Shouldn’t that be the core values of the church instead of what marks the church, which somehow could change over time as the demographics change? ... The children (who would grow up in Canadian society) wouldn’t be Chinese. What if they marry someone who’s not Chinese? Does that make them not part of the church anymore?”⁵²

Because the English group was relatively smaller, the discussion was mostly dominated by the Chinese group. Being that way, the parents who really were for our English Ministry direction

⁵⁰ Ng, interview with author, 14 March 2009.

⁵¹ J Lam, interview with author, 14 March 2009.

⁵² So, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

(growing off as a different church), they really took a stance against some of the more traditional thinking of other parents.⁵³

When people disagree with the second core value, you might presume that it must be the people who were attending the English service, but that's not true. A lot of people who were attending the Chinese worship disagreed with that too.⁵⁴

Our church had a history of growing to a certain size and then planting another church, so that we would be able to reach out to many different locations. Our pastor came in with this thinking that [he] needed to help this English group grow up. The problem came when we moved into our new building. Suddenly there was a little more hesitation because this building could support both the Chinese and English sides. Was this plan of developing the English group still valid?⁵⁵

When we were coming up with the core values, we would be shown what the core values were. It was just funny because, you know, on the one hand, I would hear that we had come up with these core values. But then, on the other hand, I would sense that it looks like not everyone's agreeing upon it, which was kind of strange.⁵⁶

In the face of strong resistance, the deacons' lack of satisfactory answers and their high-handed response to questioning betrayed the lack of transparency and accountability at work, and led to ongoing feelings of mistrust amongst the congregation.

⁵³ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

⁵⁴ J Lam, interview with author, 7 December 2007.

⁵⁵ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

⁵⁶ Gary Poon, interview with author, 28 February 2009.

Uncertainty complicated the matter. Since the formal organization structure of the church was never made clear, the status of the more junior English Ministry, and plans for its autonomy or even independence, got stuck in limbo. What was clear, however, was that a parent-child relationship existed between the two ministries. That the English Ministry was subservient to the Chinese Ministry appeared to be reflected in the way the congregation organized itself. A deacon was assigned to English Ministry in the same way that deacons were assigned to the audio-visual, library, music, or Sunday School departments. Yet the English Ministry functioned separately from the Cantonese. It had its own music band, offered a different Sunday School curriculum, and was responsible for its own audio-visual needs, as well as the programming of its fellowship groups. It even sent out its own missionary teams. To confuse things further, though the English group had a Ministry, and referred to the Cantonese side as the Chinese or Cantonese Ministry, it was referred to by those who spoke Cantonese as the English Department, which diminished its standing to that of just one of the many departments the Chinese Ministry ran. This organizational ambiguity would not be sorted out until after a senior pastor was appointed.

Sensing the schismatic potential of the topic, the deacons and pastors wisely curtailed the core values exercise. But although superficial unity was preserved, the leaven of suspicion had seeped in.

[Brothers and sisters] got together in harmony before. After that, they didn't talk to each other. They blamed each other. They

pointed fingers at each other and talked behind each other's backs.⁵⁷

You could see it amongst people. They were once friends, but they don't really want to associate with each other anymore. They don't have the same relationship anymore.⁵⁸

One by one, people who wanted the church to be more inclusive, including those who were non-Chinese, began to leave the church in the following months. The English Ministry, not surprisingly, was the hardest hit. The average attendance fell to 73 in 2008, a loss of more than twenty percent.⁵⁹ The number lost was in actuality greater, as it was partly offset by new cohorts of Grade 7 teens who were automatically promoted to the English Ministry at the start of each school year. To sum up, uncertainty in the congregation developed into a crisis over its identity and future ministry direction.

Nevertheless, Reverend Crocker laid out an optimistic, even ambitious, road map at an English Ministry leadership meeting in June 2006.⁶⁰

As the Burnaby Pacific Grace Church English Ministry, we exist to glorify God by making disciples for Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit demonstrated in:

1. Contagious Fellowship (Hebrews 10:24, 25)
2. Christ-Centred Worship (John 4:24)
3. Christian Growth (II Tim 2:15, 3:17)
4. Church Leadership (Mark 10:43-45)

⁵⁷ Ng, interview with author, 14 March 2009.

⁵⁸ Anonymous A, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

⁵⁹ 本立比頌恩堂2008年報 Burnaby Pacific Grace Church 2008 Annual Report.

⁶⁰ English Ministry: Purpose, Mission, Values, Vision and Strategy, 16 June 2006.

5. Community Outreach (Acts 1:8)

“I want people to know that [this] is a Chinese church with a Caucasian pastor that is open to anybody to come. ... I think the reason we took the word ‘Chinese’ out was so we could be a communi-, uh, a church that opens its doors to everybody. ... We want to be a positive witness in our community, especially to those close to our church.”⁶¹ It is clear from Reverend Crocker’s words that he understood being Chinese in racial and ethnic terms, which the congregation could choose to subsume under another, presumably Canadian, identity. His vision of the church, in contrast to that of some transnationals in the congregation, was a community rooted physically and geographically in Burnaby.

Lurching in its identity crisis, Burnaby Pacific Grace renewed its efforts in finding someone to fill the vacancy of senior pastor, the chief executive. Keynes Kan, the founding pastor of the congregation, left to pastor another church in Hong Kong in 1997.⁶² The next senior pastor, Chit Ming Chan, resigned after eight months on the job in June of 1999.⁶³ The church had been without a senior pastor since. It was hoped that a senior pastor would provide the leadership necessary to steer the congregation out of the wilderness and into the promised land where it felt it rightfully belonged. A suitable candidate was finally found in 2007. Reverend Paul Lam took office in September of that year, ending Burnaby Pacific Grace’s long search for someone to fill the top job. Having been an English teacher for much of his life in Hong Kong, Reverend Lam was bilingual,

⁶¹ Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

⁶² “Personalalia,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 26 September 1997, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://old.mbconf.ca/mb/mbh3618/personal.htm>.

⁶³ “Personalalia,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 22 October 1999, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://old.mbherald.com/38-20/people.html>.

fully fluent in Cantonese and English. He was looked upon favourably because of his experience with Chinese churches, having pastored a church in Seattle, Washington, one with a history that reached back more than a hundred years, and for his familiarity with issues that confronted children of immigrant parents, children who were often more westernized than their parents were. The new senior pastor set to work immediately and began talking to members of the congregation with a view to reconciliation.

Reverend Lam skillfully manoeuvred through the potential minefield as he tried to rally the church together again. In advance of the Annual General Meeting of 2008, he preached on his vision for the church—that every person would become a “fully-functioning follower of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴

We are Christians first and foremost, we should really see what the Bible says ... It's not so much just our own upbringing, our own cultural baggage. Being Christian, we should always look to God first, and then let that Christian culture be the predominant culture. That should permeate every aspect of our lives.⁶⁵

This message of being “fully-functioning followers” was sufficiently ambiguous to appease both factions in the church, whether they believed in serving the community of believers at the church or seeking the lost outside of the church in Vancouver.

Additionally, the pastor proposed various activities to draw the church closer together. Andrew Yeung credited the new Senior Pastor “a lot for seeing these tensions and working away to smooth over these bumps.”⁶⁶ Among the church-wide initiatives

⁶⁴ [Discipleship], undated, *circa* January 2008.

⁶⁵ P Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

⁶⁶ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

Reverend Lam planned were an excursion to Lynn Valley in August 2008 and a Mini-Olympics sports carnival in September. Although the day trip to Lynn Valley was cancelled due to inclement weather, the Mini-Olympics brought the entire church together for half a day of merriment. These initiatives were carried out in hopes of mending the rift between English and Cantonese-speaking members. They provided an opportunity for members of the church who might not otherwise interact during the weekend services to begin a process of re-engagement.⁶⁷

Most noteworthy in this process was a series of meetings Reverend Lam organized with outside help from the denomination the church belonged to, the Mennonite Brethren Conference of British Columbia. Styled as ReFocusing Summit meetings, the four meetings took place between February and June 2008 and were designed to include the whole church on a spiritual discovery process. The task of articulating Burnaby Pacific Grace's collective identity was broken down into stages, facilitated by Reverend Dave Jackson from the Conference. Reverend Jackson led the church congregation through an assessment of its history—discussing unresolved tensions, examining its present context, and evaluating its ministry direction and model. Congregants who were not in attendance at the Summit meetings held over two days each time on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings had the opportunity to participate through “pulse groups” which followed each Summit and took place during Sunday School hour. Much like how the pulse is read in traditional Chinese medicine, pulse groups were designed to help the congregation discuss the preliminary findings of each Summit in small groups, so it could put a finger on the church's rhythm. Through

⁶⁷ P Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

“pulsing,” individual members of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church could affirm, reject, or add to the discoveries from the Summit meetings. In essence, pulse groups sharpened the work done at the Summits.

Compared to the core values exercise from a few years ago, the ReFocusing Summit meetings were recalled more fondly. “The one activity I really enjoyed from the first meeting was looking at where we had been as a church,” Andrew Yeung reflected.

We would all get together and brainstorm certain events that we remember, for example, the hiring of a pastor or a particular baptism that was really reflective. Because we had so many individuals brainstorming, we really had a good list of different past events. We could post them all on the board and look and see and say, “Wow, God was leading us in this direction.”⁶⁸

Gary Poon, a Sunday School teacher, spoke on the openness he experienced at each Summit:

We were very keen in terms of communication with the rest of the congregation as to the issues that we’ve had in the past. I think that level of communication was missing in the past when we had these core values in the sense that, even though when there were disagreements, I did not sense the issue being addressed publicly by the church. It was just sort of a known problem that everyone knew about but [did] not actually address. Whereas, here in the Summits, I thought they were a lot more honest, first of all, in recognizing that there were issues in the past, and not only that, and also publishing these issues into documents, communicating to everyone so that everyone could be on the same page. I sensed that was missing a little bit when we were coming up with the core

⁶⁸ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

values. ... I did not sense the same sort of transparency [back then].⁶⁹

Helpful though they were, the ReFocusing Summits were not without casualty. They tore the scabs off old wounds and forced the congregation to confront difficult issues they had ignored in the past. First, the congregation identified that what they had found most painful was the loss of young adults and leaders from the English Ministry. Second, the core values were re-visited and people found that there were very different expectations of what the English Ministry was to be. While some had seen it as a full ministry to reach out to the community, many others simply saw the English Ministry as a tutelary service for their children going to school in Canada. Reverend Crocker remembered that a parent had told him, “Pastor, you want to go out and evangelize the neighbourhood. We just want you to teach our children the Bible.”⁷⁰

Perhaps the most visible of casualties was the resignation of Reverend Crocker, who had recognized the growing rift between his vision for the English Ministry and the direction the church seemed to be headed for. He announced his decision during the first Summit in February, citing poor ministry fit.

I wanted this church to be Canadian Chinese, a Christian Canadian Chinese church, in that order, based on the Word of God, in the context of a Canadian culture, with respect to the Chinese heritage. But at Burnaby Pacific Grace, it was the Chinese heritage first, and then being a Christian, and then being Canadian.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Poon, interview with author, 28 February 2009.

⁷⁰ Crocker, interview with author, 11 March 2009.

⁷¹ Crocker, interview with author, 11 March 2009.

The unresolved tensions within the congregation were so significant that Reverend Lam, under advisement of Reverend Jackson, decided to hold a special “forgiveness service” midway through—and consequently extend—the process of ReFocusing. It was hoped that reconciliation would take place through public confession, prayer, and Holy Communion at the service. In spite of the lingering conflict, Reverend Jackson’s expertise at fostering dialogue was evident, and in contrast to the deacons who had shown that they were inexperienced at leading discussion or vision-casting exercises and unaware of concepts of transparency and accountability.⁷² He devoted one Summit meeting to exorcising some metaphorical demons that became manifest through “pulsing.”

Poor communication was one such demon. When asked if he thought the conflict in 2006 had been resolved, Jon Lam replied, “No, never. The problem is too big for anyone to handle. What I think the church decided to do was to sweep it under the rug.”⁷³ Many had felt that conflict and confrontation were taboo, and avoided talking about the problems that hindered relationships within the congregation. This was an “elephant” in the church that the congregation had been ignoring, and Reverend Jackson made note of the need to send off this unwelcomed guest:

Initially some felt the word “tension” was too strong since it spoke of confrontation. It was thought that a “lack of harmony” better expressed the difficulty. However, as discussion continued, it became very apparent that

⁷² Congregational Summit One ReFocusing Digest, by Dave Jackson, undated, *circa* February 2008; and Going Deeper: A Special Summit ReFocusing Digest, by Dave Jackson, undated, *circa* March 2008.

⁷³ J Lam, interview with author, 14 March 2009.

there are significant tensions between the Chinese and English ministries.

The word tension was not too strong!⁷⁴

Reverend Jackson's remarks evidenced the prevalence of avoidance as a face-saving technique within the congregation.

Differences in leadership styles and expectations placed upon leaders also contributed to tension and breakdown in trust. The congregation was able to identify its cultural background as a factor. Some people reported feeling more familiar with a more authoritarian style of leadership, one compatible with their expectation of Confucian order, but others had come to expect greater openness and egalitarian leadership in line with what they had experienced elsewhere in Canada. People in office, including some lay leaders, did not always show that they valued consultation and feedback.

Disagreement, some in the congregation charged, had been misconstrued as challenge to the leaders' authority and their supposed superior spiritual discernment.⁷⁵

Furthermore, some leaders in the English Ministry reported feeling constrained by the Chinese Ministry. The parent-child relationship that some members across ministries had at home was carried over to church, where the English Ministry was perceived as the baby and junior ministry of the Chinese. There was no true representation on the deacon board for the English Ministry, and some in the English Ministry lamented that the Chinese Ministry was overreaching and trying to have the final say on decisions the English Ministry made. This involved choices in programming, such as how often the fellowships carried out Bible studies, and the order and style of worship during Sunday services, such as whether the music was overly expressive. This meddling raised

⁷⁴ Going Deeper, 5.

⁷⁵ Going Deeper.

questions of whether such interference was justified, and whether the English Ministry was a full-fledged ministry or subordinate to the Chinese.⁷⁶

Again, the lack of clearly defined processes, especially in conflict resolution, led to ongoing uncertainty over how the church was to be run. Was the English Ministry poised to be an independent church? How did the English Ministry fit into the church organizational structure? Was the congregation, as one member of the Chinese Ministry suggested, a collection of “Cantonese immigrants from Hong Kong with English-speaking second generation and a few of their friends of different ethnic background?”⁷⁷ There were no definitive answers. Even the church governance structure was shrouded in fog. Reverend Jackson reported that the congregation was “confused as to who is doing what and who has which role.”⁷⁸ Inadequate communication exacerbated what looked like a lack of transparency. The congregation did not have a reliable model for conducting town hall meetings. Few in the congregation knew or understood due processes and proper procedures. Many reported feeling a lack of accountability from the deacons, whom they accused of having a separate agenda that was taking the church in a different direction. Other allegations of misconduct included ignorance of and disregard for by-laws of the church. The deacon board had not shared minutes of its meetings with the rest of the congregation. The weak organization of the church handicapped the congregation in the challenge of operating in a mixed cultural environment.⁷⁹ Hence,

⁷⁶ Going Deeper.

⁷⁷ Church Profile, undated, *circa* April 2008.

⁷⁸ Going Deeper, 7.

⁷⁹ Going Deeper.

these findings reinforced the urgency for the congregation to develop good organizational structures, communication methods, and administrative procedures.

“After the Summits,” Irene Chik observed, “it felt like the Chinese side was a little more involved with the English Ministry. [There had been] many programs and events, trying to make the Chinese side and the English side more similar to each other.”⁸⁰ Subsequent to the ReFocusing Summits, the congregation adopted an official Ministry Direction in November 2008, which would serve as the blueprint for future church development. Accordingly, Burnaby Pacific Grace described itself as “One Church, One Leadership, and Two Expressions (English & Chinese)”:

We are a church of more than one distinct congregation. Each congregation seeks to minister to and evangelize a separate people group. The church still remains one through its shared leadership and programs.

We envision a growing, caring, adventurous community of believers, enriched by multiple generations and cultures, deepening in their love for Christ and teaming together with passion to reach and serve others.

The different generations and cultures within the church were to be interdependent. This interdependency was defined as “the capability and the humility to play the role of a leader, a team-player and a follower as needed.”⁸¹ Therefore, the new Ministry Direction appealed to the English Ministry congregation by affirming its autonomy to run its programs in ways it deemed suitable, while at the same time it reconsolidated the church by acknowledging one common leadership at the top.

⁸⁰ Chik, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

⁸¹ Ministry Direction 事工方向, 9 November 2008.

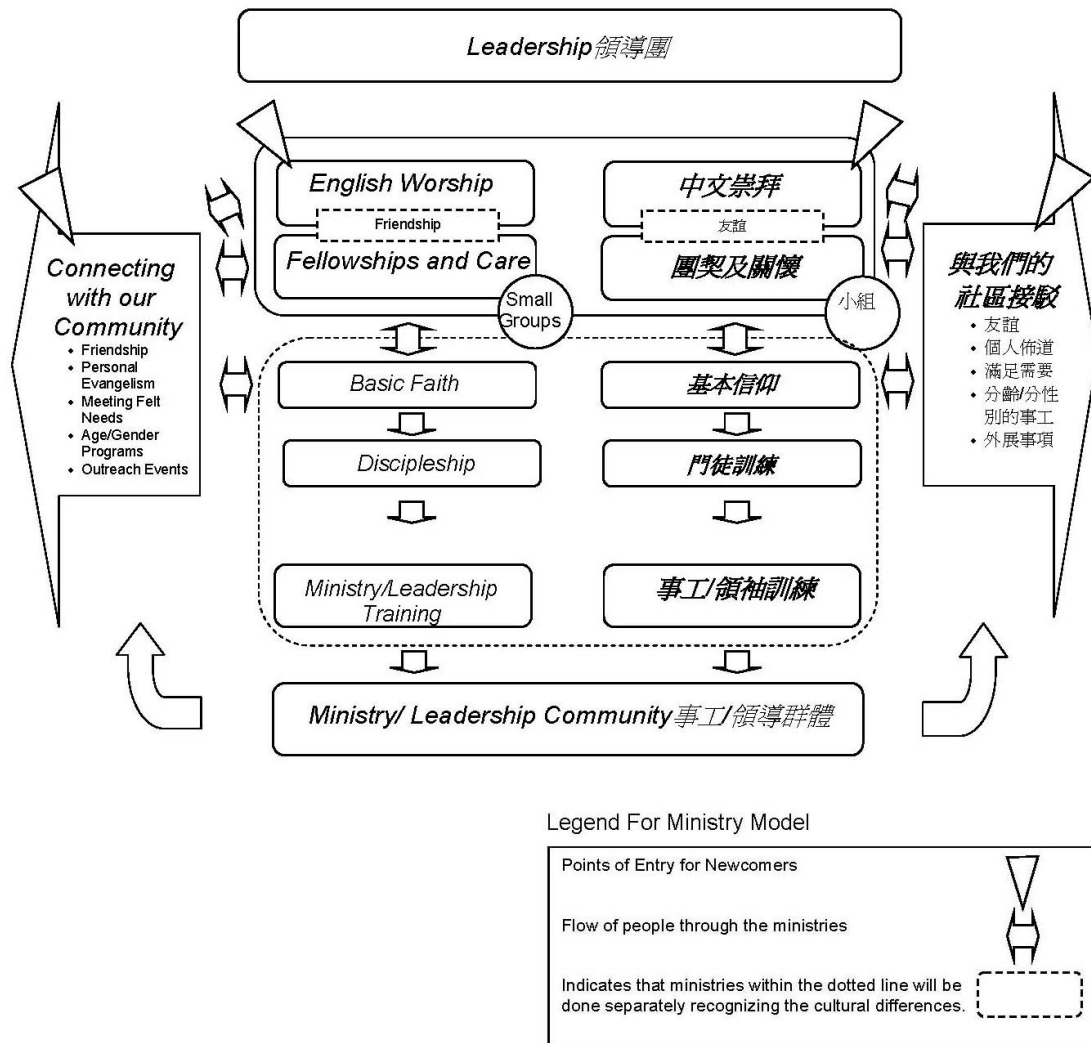


Figure 1: The new ministry model adopted by the church in November 2008. The English Worship is described on the left hand side whereas the Chinese is on the right. Both are directly under one common leadership and are depicted identically, in English and Chinese respectively, in their organizational setup. Source: Ministry Direction 事工方向, 9 November 2008.

Even so, for Senior Pastor Paul Lam, the Summit meetings were only a qualified success:

Yes, on the surface, you might say that this has been resolved. There is still some ill-feeling which lingers. Some of the major players are still in church today, but I don't know if they are on full speaking terms again. Of course, those non-Chinese have left.

They are no longer in church. I don't think [the conflict] is fully resolved. It was evident when the ReFocusing Summit was looking at the past history of the church. During that time, at the beginning of 2008, you could sense that there was tension in the church. People were quite sensitive to the findings of the ReFocusing. They were eager to take part in the pulse groups. The pulse groups are another means of collecting opinion. I did organize a reconciliation meeting in the form of sharing, praying, and Holy Communion. I think that helped, but again, I think some ill-feelings still die hard.⁸²

A member of the Cantonese congregation remarked, "What had been had come around again. It's not going to change things." Still, he quipped when asked if the ReFocusing Summits brought about change in the church:

Pastor Darryl left, so that was a major change. I guess we now have a new banner up! ... I'm not so clear about where we want to go. They have a new group [to help with implementation] called the Strategic Implementation Team, and the joke for the rest of us is that they SIT around and do nothing.⁸³

When told that Burnaby Pacific Grace had decided to position itself as a multi-ethnic church with a multi-generational Chinese heritage, Reverend Crocker maintained his reservations:

I saw that on the banner, and thought "How are you going to do that?" ... It's a great statement, but unless you have an action plan and the people are excited about it, I don't see it happening. When I was active there, the English Ministry had Persian, Iranian,

⁸² P Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

⁸³ Anonymous B, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

Korean, Japanese, English, and Chinese. We had the foundation to do it, and we were becoming that. And then the Chinese leadership, from my point of view, they held a rein saying, “No, we don’t want you to become that. You just stay Chinese.” ... I’d love to know how they are going to do that. It sounds good and looks good on paper, but a year from now, will you see any difference?⁸⁴

Identity and Community: Imagining Membership

Several themes can be highlighted from this account of five years of turmoil for further discussion, not least because they speak to the larger questions of identity and community. First, this identity crisis confirmed that the name change of 2003 was, for at least most of the people in the Chinese language services, really more one of form than of substance. In spite of the absence of “Chinese” in the church’s name, the people I interviewed almost uniformly said that the church was unquestionably Chinese. “The mandate of the church,” according to one member of the Chinese Ministry, “has to do with catering to the immigrant Chinese population. Burnaby Pacific Grace still is a Chinese church.”⁸⁵ Reverend Crocker confirmed this view. “Our church wants to send a short-term missions team, but they want to send them back to China or Hong Kong.”⁸⁶ Though the church was situated in Canada, the congregation still maintained transnational links with Hong Kong that it actively renewed.

⁸⁴ Crocker, interview with author, 11 March 2009.

⁸⁵ Anonymous B, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

⁸⁶ Crocker, interview with author, 12 December 2007.

When questioned as to how much the church was Chinese, people based Chinese-ness on racial and linguistic/cultural terms. “It sounds kind of shallow, but it does start off with your skin colour,” noted Eugene So:

Because that’s the first thing people see. Oh, you have Asian features. You have brown eyes, black hair. I think it’s also related to the things that you grow up with that you enjoy, like food... Food is an ethnicity marker, I think.⁸⁷

For Andrew Yeung, his sense of being Chinese was based primarily on language. “Growing up in Canada, I may be able to speak fluently in English, but at the heart of the matter, although my Chinese is not very good, I tend to use it more frequently.”⁸⁸ He reported that he felt more Chinese than Canadian

because of Cantonese. Speaking Cantonese connected Yeung to his family, especially his grandmother who lived with him and spoke only Cantonese.⁸⁹ Others informed me that the church was Chinese because it was made of Chinese immigrants who conducted matters in a “Chinese way,” such as through the face-saving measures highlighted



Figure 2: The banner heralding the new church vision. Image courtesy of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://wpmu.bpgcc.bc.ca/about-us/theme-of-the-year/>.

⁸⁷ So, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

⁸⁸ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

⁸⁹ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

earlier.⁹⁰ From responses such as these, being Chinese was understood by many as a characteristic that is practised and manifested regularly.

Perhaps more importantly, the church had, despite the absence of the word “Chinese,” retained a Chinese name, 本立比頌恩堂.⁹¹ Speaking on the name change in 2003, one youth leader who was a fellowship counsellor said, “I didn’t expect much to change at all actually. I think it’s more of a thing for outsiders to see rather than something inside the church.”⁹² Andrew Yeung added:

The Chinese Ministry, they are our parents. With the English group growing up in this Canadian culture, I believe our parents started to see that the focus should shift towards, well, you’re in Canada. It should be more English-directed and fit into the culture here. As well, the Chinese also understood ... that immigration [from Hong Kong] had slowed down in recent years. As Chinese parents, they realized this and saw the future as mostly English.⁹³

⁹⁰ Anonymous A, interview with author, March 9, 2009.

⁹¹ The Chinese name is made up of two parts. 本立比 is the transliteration of “Burnaby.” 頌恩堂 can be rendered as Church of Extolling Grace. It is also the Chinese name of Pacific Grace, the mother church. Thus, 本立比頌恩堂 can be understood as Burnaby Pacific Grace Church.

⁹² Anonymous C, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

⁹³ Yeung, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

Although the name change was not the reason behind the splits in community, it demonstrated that this group of post-1970 immigrants from Hong Kong were transnational historical actors who were mindful of their multiple identities and who could be strategic in how they talked about identity. Though some had thought that the change better reflected the ministry and direction of the church back in 2003, others had seen the change as nothing more than a marketing ploy. Whether Burnaby Pacific Grace was called “Chinese” was secondary.



Figure 3: A sign displaying the name of the church in Chinese and English at its main entrance. Photography courtesy of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://wpmu.bpgcc.bc.ca/gallery/church-building-photos/>.

That it had a name in Chinese was a clear indicator to churchgoers coming from Hong Kong that the church provided services in Cantonese for Chinese immigrants just like them.

For many first-generation immigrants, Burnaby Pacific Grace continued to function as a cultural refuge in the Canadian culture that surrounded them. One Chinese migrant from Hong Kong saw the church as an institution which grounded him to Chinese culture in a diverse Canadian landscape:

I always think that I am not Chinese enough; I think more like a CBC [Canadian-born Chinese]. ... I would say the church made me more Chinese. Without being involved in the church, I would be more CBC. Aside from my family, most of my conversations in

Chinese and being with Chinese people occur at church. Most of my Chinese friends belong to the church. Otherwise, outside the church, most of my friends would be CBC or Caucasian.⁹⁴

Two other members related the cultural affinity they felt at the church:

I feel that these people understand me, since we have similar pasts, similar childhoods. In that sense, I can relate to the people at church.⁹⁵

I prefer a Chinese church because, culturally, it's easier for me to adapt. ... Picking something that might be familiar would, at least, be something for me to grab hold of when I'm in an unfamiliar place.⁹⁶

The opinions above illustrate the important role the ethnic church plays in immigrant life, even when it is an institution fraught with tension where people negotiate and contest identities.

The Chinese church was a community institution that reified Chinese culture and connected these immigrants with their Chinese networks through space and time for the immigrants at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Reverend Lam,

The parents themselves are not fully acculturated. Some of them may not have the ability to get fully integrated in society. Some of them just choose not to get fully integrated. They want to retain their cultural identities as Hong Kong Chinese; they want to

⁹⁴ Anonymous B, interview with author, 2 March 2009.

⁹⁵ Chik, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

⁹⁶ Anonymous C, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

express themselves as Hong Kong Chinese even though they live in a Canadian society. They would find it very difficult to sever their ties with their birth place, Hong Kong. It would be very painful for them to give up their cultural roots, if they live like a Caucasian Canadian, if they really don't live like a Hong Kong Chinese anymore. I think that would mean death to part of their past. I don't think the parents, especially those who come from Hong Kong, are really willing to give it all up. Because of that, they find it uneasy when they find their children become less and less like them.⁹⁷

Even though the church located itself in Burnaby, and most of the congregation did not live in Chinatown, their cultural locus was not Canadian but Chinese. Although many Chinese families no longer live in enclaves, as traditionally defined, in some Vancouver suburbs, notably Richmond and Burnaby, the Chinese populations are now so large that they can support a variety of community institutions traditionally associated with enclaves. According to the 2006 census, approximately every one in three persons living in Burnaby is Chinese; in Richmond, this figure approaches one in two.⁹⁸ The ethnic church is one of the most important such institutions in permitting Chinese identities and ties to Hong Kong to be regularly renewed and rehearsed. At Burnaby Pacific Grace, Hong Kong, and being Chinese, were the primary references for many of the immigrants, and even some of their *tusheng* children.

For many in the congregation, this emphasis on being Chinese complicated their sense of being Canadian. Irene Chik, who grew up in Vancouver, said that she “[doesn't]

⁹⁷ P Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

⁹⁸ Statistics Canada, *Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census: Canada's Major Census Metropolitan Areas*, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/p24-eng.cfm>.

have a strong sense of what being a Canadian really is. It seems like a very open and flexible meaning. Anybody can make up their own Canadian culture.”⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that the congregation understood being Canadian in a somewhat different way from being Chinese. People understood and expressed their Canadian-ness as a legal identity. Being Canadian was clearly identified with legal citizenship and explicitly identified with living in a community with various legal and personal freedoms, as well as being ambiguously understood as an environment where multiple cultures co-exist. Being Canadian meant “freedom of speech, freedom of choice, better living environment, [and] better quality of life.”¹⁰⁰ This was doubly true for immigrants from Hong Kong like Helen Ng and Reverend Lam, who enjoyed civil liberties they might not have if they had stayed in Hong Kong. As Reverend Lam put it:

I am proud to be a Canadian citizen. Being Canadian means that I can enjoy all the freedoms expressed or stated in the constitution. I can have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press. I am entitled to all the benefits that the Canadian government provides for me: access to education, mobility to move around in the country, to look for work, to establish my career. And I have this wonderful environment to raise a family. All my children are growing up here, and are receiving good education. I have the privilege but also the responsibility to support the government in whatever way I can. I pay tax; I do my best to be a good citizen; I don’t break the law; I don’t engage myself in any criminal activity. Of course, if the government puts forward a policy I don’t agree with, I will try to raise my opinion. And also, I

⁹⁹ Chik, interview with author, 10 March 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Ng, interview with author, 14 March 2009.

participate in the federal, provincial, and municipal elections to exercise my right and my duty as citizen of this country.¹⁰¹

This is consistent with scholarly characterizations of Canadian nationalism as a “civic nationalism” as opposed to a nationalism with ethnic roots.¹⁰² For many of these Hong Kong immigrants, being Chinese as a Canadian citizen is arguably superior to being Chinese as a citizen of the People’s Republic of China.

This all makes the initial support for the name change in 2003 puzzling. I have concluded that the name change was a pragmatic gesture, but the church’s strategy of outreach through a new name was not sufficiently debated at the time it was adopted. The congregation was initially in favour of the change because it was in line with the congregation’s desire to expand its membership among English-speakers and through the English medium. Dropping “Chinese” was thought to widen the church’s appeal and signal its welcome of people who were non-Chinese. In 2006, however, the debate focused more directly on what the church was and what it wanted to become in the future. Part of the conflict was semantic, as members of the congregation could not decide whether the proposed core values should reflect the church’s current state of being or emphasize its future inclinations and aspirations. Some members had argued, though, that rather than identifying demographic characteristics or even strategic goals, core values should reflect spiritual characteristics of the church if they were more dominant.

However, the congregation could not agree on which values should dominate. Some saw the church’s Chinese roots to be a permanent and distinctive marker of its

¹⁰¹ P Lam, interview with author, 4 March 2009.

¹⁰² Raymond Breton, "From ethnic nationalism to civic nationalism: English Canada and Quebec," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 1988): 85-103; Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalisms* (London: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995).

identity, possibly even a distinct Chinese brand of pious Christianity augmented by Confucian ethics of industry and discipline, whereas others argued that the church's primary identity should be based on its teachings of salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, teachings which they believed transcend ethnic and cultural values, be they Jewish, Gentile, or Chinese. Most of the congregation were caught in between, tugged on both ends by the communal pressures of being Chinese, for example, to speak or behave in certain ways that minimize conflict, and by the challenges of Christianity to act in ways that sometimes went against the cultural norms of the transnational community they were immersed in, such as to love thy neighbour.

This conflict appears to be resolved, at least in part, by the series of ReFocusing Summit meetings in 2008, including a special "forgiveness service" where congregants confessed their misdeeds to one another and asked for mutual forgiveness. The 2008 meetings were successful in moving the church forward because they reconciled the congregation's Chinese and Christian identities, stressing its Chinese heritage, Canadian reality, and Christian hope for the future. A few who were interviewed remained skeptical, however, as they felt that the 2008 meetings were an attempt by the deacon board to assert dominance, and institute an authoritarian, top-down form of church polity, all in the name of maintaining superficial unity.

Concluding Remarks

This study seeks to better understand how people from Hong Kong living in Canada understood themselves as Chinese and as Chinese-Canadians, and the ways in which one particular community changed how it imagined itself as migrants made lives in Canada and raised children who were born here and grew up in both Chinese and

Canadian cultures. It also aims to elicit greater clarity on the role of church congregations as institutions that brought Chinese people together into communities of worship, and also communities in which some of these people could be Chinese and have their identities as Chinese regularly renewed. These kinds of community institutions are particularly important as Chinese families become established in Canada, move out of enclaves into the suburbs, and raise sons and daughters who are ethnically Chinese and, yet, socially shaped by Canadian schools and Canadian popular culture. This question of self-identification in the second generation—and the intergenerational tensions that arise out of this—are, of course, issues in every immigrant community and not unique to the Chinese diaspora.

Nevertheless, the identity of “Chinese” remains very strong in the Chinese diaspora. The events described here shed light on how this has been sustained, as well as some of the tensions that can follow from efforts to sustain it. They highlight, first, I believe, the central role of language in sustaining imagined communities among migrants, imagined communities that, ideally, integrate younger generations with those who have gone before. Clearly, though, the language of the old country cannot have the same role or the same meanings in the lives of youth that it has for their parents. It was these differences that gave rise to conflict precisely as the outreach work of the English Ministry bore fruit. In addition, the conflicts and tensions outlined here illustrate the challenges facing Chinese churches as community institutions, institutions endeavouring to hold together communities that come over time to be imagined differently by people of different generations, and by people who hold different visions of how their multiple identities may combine.

The events at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church, and the ways that the congregants talked about them, demonstrate very clearly that churches are important community institutions where immigrants try to recreate aspects of life in their homelands. Family network patterns of the past from Hong Kong were recreated, even if they might have been modified to suit the Canadian context. In fact, members often likened the church to a family and people sometimes addressed one another as brothers and sisters. For the



Figure 4: “Church Family Photo,” June 2010. Photography courtesy of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://wpmu.bpgcc.bc.ca/gallery/family-photos/>.

immigrants at Burnaby Pacific Grace, the church was an important communal resource that helped to ease their feelings of displacement and maintained their connections to being Chinese. This thesis proposes, indeed, that the church was experienced by the migrant generation as a place where they could continue to be Chinese, in the company of others who understood their language and culture, and where they could find refuge from “mainstream” society. When this was threatened, they protected their vision of the church.

Their sense of community was a spiritual one, not only in a religious sense, but also, more importantly, an abstract, metaphysical bond among a group of transnational Chinese in Canada. These links of community were sometimes maintained even across great distances, as some individuals chose to work and live in Asia. This was a very different sense of community from what the people in the English Ministry had in mind, who mostly saw a concrete, grounded, and expanding community of believers in Burnaby. Therefore, community could be said to be highly delocalized for at least some Chinese members of the congregation. For them, the church fulfilled in the early 2000s some of the roles that clan associations performed for immigrants of earlier periods, among which were the preservation and transmission of Chinese culture to their offspring. Thus, the older generation of immigrants who made up the Cantonese congregation and who expressed a strong association with being Chinese saw Burnaby Pacific Grace Church as a key institution in helping them sustain their Chinese identities in Canada.

Even so, because of this key function of ethnic sustenance, the ethnic church is fraught with tension. Just as truly, it is a place where changing and conflicting ideas about community, religion, ethnicity, and citizenship are worked out, developed, and changed. For the second generation of Canadian-born children, and for others who supported the Christian outreach aspirations of the English-language ministry, their parents' ties to the past and to Hong Kong were less important than the congregation's future in multicultural Vancouver. They wanted the congregation to grow, as they took God's message to their friends, not all of whom were of Chinese origin. They imagined their church community growing to include friends of many different origins who would

come together in their celebration of Christ. Conversely, some of them could also envision the church declining, if it remained frozen in its Cantonese past, ministering mainly to the older generation.

The conflict over the core values of the congregation brought this tension in the church into sharp relief in 2006. Dissatisfied with the predominance of ethnic identification in the church, some people from the English Ministry chose to leave the congregation. As individuals who were moving into lives very different from those of their parents, they had choices that their parents didn't have, and were able to seek out other communities for both worship and friendship or fellowship. Their Hong Kong-born parents, in contrast, only really felt comfortable with each other and therefore they stuck together with greater determination. This exodus of young people from the church brought about uncertainty over the congregation's ability to sustain growth in their absence, and over whether it would enter a period of slow decline as its founding members aged. The tensions arising from the conflict were resolved for some, but not all of the congregants, with the appointment of Reverend Paul Lam as senior pastor. Under his leadership, the congregation underwent a series of ReFocusing Summits which re-defined the church. The congregation thenceforth aspired to be a multi-ethnic church with a multi-generational Chinese heritage. Both ministries were acknowledged as having equal standing, and as being interdependent. However, while those associated with the Chinese Ministry were able, in this vision of the congregation's future, to retain their emphasis on being Chinese, it would be the remaining members of the English Ministry who would carry the burdens of institutional survival in Burnaby, because they operated in a language that connected the congregation to the rest of Canada.

Although a summary assessment must necessarily be speculative, it can be suggested that for these remnants of the English Ministry, their identities, and their understandings of being Chinese-Canadian, were very different from those of their parents. Although both Cantonese and English congregations could be described as being comprised of Chinese-Canadian Christians, for the former who were from the older, migrant generation, being Christian and being Canadian were thought to add to an identity that remained, at its core, Chinese. For the younger generation, however, their attachments to their Chinese identity were different, and perhaps more complicated. They were Canadian in ways that their parents could never be, and their sense of community included Canadian peers, Canadian families of their own, and Canadian futures. For still others, it was their Christian identity that was primary, an identity that was augmented by being Chinese and being Canadian. These individuals sought a spiritual authenticity that was free of cultural baggage, and they imagined a role for themselves in helping the church to grow in Burnaby. This led to a fundamentally different vision of the church than the delocalized community that their parents sought. However, it reflected—even more fundamentally, I would argue—a different vision of themselves and of what it means to be a Chinese-Canadian.

APPENDIX

This project was based on oral history interviews conducted between December 2007 and March 2009 with church leadership and laity of Burnaby Pacific Grace Church. They took place one-on-one in semi-public places such as cafes and libraries, or in the privacy of the respondent's home, as each respondent decided. Responses were recorded in English and Cantonese, and translated and transcribed by the author where necessary. The interviews were informal and unstructured insofar as there was no set order of questions. As Studs Terkel observes, "The question-and-answer technique may be of some value in determining favoured detergents, toothpaste and deodorants, but not in the discovery of men and women."¹⁰³ I wanted to engage in conversations with members of the church that would invite them to talk in some depth about their identities as Chinese-Canadians and as Christians, but I felt that I could not capture the substance of their experiences and aspirations through a standardized list of questions and answers. These were conversations that I expected would vary, necessarily, according to the ideas that my respondents proposed themselves.

Potential interview subjects began with people known to me through my time at the church as an observer-participant. These individuals were selected subsequently to include perspectives both from the church leadership and ordinary members of the congregation. Requests for additional interviews were circulated through word-of-mouth.

¹⁰³ Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (London/New York: Penguin, 1974), 10.

Though all possible subjects could be considered post-1970s Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, I sought to incorporate as many points of view as I could, by involving men and women of different ages and of different levels of participation in the church, both in capacity and in duration as a member of the congregation. The participants in my project, however, were mostly from the younger generation of English-speaking members, though I did obtain a modest sampling of the more senior Cantonese Ministry.

Respondents were asked to assume that I had no prior knowledge of the church's history. They were typically asked to begin by commenting on their participation at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church and their knowledge of the church's history. As the interview progressed, I drew from an inventory of topics to generate conversation and solicit the interviewee's opinions and perceptions on the name change in 2003, the conflict in 2006, as well as what these events meant to them as Christians, and as Chinese-Canadians. The themes in question included the respondent's personal history with the church, the length and level of involvement, reasons for participation, thoughts on being Chinese, on being Canadian, on being Christian, the church community at Burnaby Pacific Grace Church, and how these might have changed over time. Each interview took between one to two hours in length. Follow-up interviews were arranged when further questions arose.

While oral history is not without problems, the chief of which include memory, recall, and veracity, I believe this research has enabled me to gain significant insights into how most participants felt about the events and issues in question. My objective was to record these immigrants' history as lived experience. My aim was to consider the ways in which these immigrants exercise choice to construct their multiple identities. Ethnic self-

identification was of the utmost importance to my research, as was the relationship between ethnic and Christian self-identification. I was known by all respondents as a graduate researcher, a temporary member of the congregation, and hence an observer-participant who was not embroiled in the power struggle of the church. I made it clear that my sojourn at this church was temporary, and I had no wish to participate in the church beyond my temporary residence in Vancouver and beyond the scope of this project. All participation in the interviews was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed if requested, and it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw at any time.

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