

Conceptions of Christianity amongst Chinese International Students
at the University of Edinburgh

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on an ethnographic study which examines conceptions of Christianity through migration amongst Chinese international students at the University of Edinburgh using the proposed model of three priorities (intellectual, experiential, communal). The study contributes to knowledge of the Chinese Christian students' faith while the model offers an understanding of this population.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Shunshan walked out of the airport into the rainy street. She was wearing a new backpack and towing two extra-large suitcases. This was Shunshan's first time out of her home country, mainland China, and she will be spending the next few years living and studying in a foreign land. Many thoughts were in mind, "What will classes be like?" "How can I develop good relationships with my roommates?" She eventually gravitated towards an important question to her identity as a Christian, "What will church life be like here?" For Shunshan, the reality of moving to a new country meant new challenges and opportunities to every aspect of her life, including her Christian faith.

Shunshan's story highlights the need to understand how an individual's faith is formed and shaped through migration. Though this study began with the question "*how does migration affect one's Christian identity amongst Chinese¹ international students in Edinburgh?*" interviews pointed to a different direction. Rather than focusing on "Christian identity"², responses leaned towards how participants conceived Christianity. Rather than exploring how religion shapes individuals (where religion is the *subject* and people are the *objects*), this study explores how individuals' perception of religion transform (where people are the *subjects* and religion is the *object*). Eventually the questions posed by this study solidified into: *How do Chinese international Christian students in Edinburgh conceive their religion³? Do these conceptions shift as a result of migration and if so, how?*

Though Shunshan is not a real person, her questions and concerns reflect Chinese who study abroad. According to UNESCO's⁴ Institute for Statistics, China has a total of 869,387 students abroad for tertiary-level studies. Nearly a third (309,837) go to the USA.

¹ Participants come from mainland China and Hong Kong.

² The term "Christian identity" has many meanings. Is it primarily used to contrast the *social identity* of Christians with other groups historically? Or perhaps its primary purpose is to highlight the transforming influence of Christ of the *personal identity* of a Christian?

³ Emile Durkheim defines religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, Rand McNally Sociology Series (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 4.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Australia was the second hosting country with 128,498, and UK was third with 89,318.⁵ England's designated data body, HESA⁶, finds that for UK higher education institutions alone, the total number of domiciled students from China was 87,900 for the 2013/2014 academic year. This number has grown to 106,530 in the 2017/2018 academic year. In the same years, Hong Kong sent 14,725 and 16,350 students respectively.⁷ The University of Edinburgh matriculated 4,100 undergraduate and graduate students from China and Hong Kong.⁸ Students from China represent the largest body of non-EU domiciled international students from any one country while those from Hong Kong are the fifth largest.⁹

Literature Review

In the last decade, a sizeable number of studies have focused on the social, intercultural, and academic adaptation and social connectedness of international Chinese and other migrant students. They find that a wide range of personal and social factors influence the development of academic and intercultural competencies.¹⁰ Religion is an important factor for the migrant: religion can be the reason for migration, religion sustains people in times of difficulty, religion can serve as an identity marker in a new context or as a source for reconciliation and healing in cases where the story of migration and the migrant's experiences have been humiliating, hurtful, violent or demeaning. Religion can also aid a person in giving meaning to his/her migration experiences or function as a resource in resolving adjustment issues.¹¹ Smith observed that migrants also seem to turn to

⁵ "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students," accessed July 18, 2019, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

⁶ Higher Education Statistics Agency

⁷ "Where Do HE Students Come from? | HESA," accessed July 18, 2019, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>.

⁸ "Student Numbers 2017/18," The University of Edinburgh, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/annual-review/student-numbers>.

⁹ Unfortunately, religious affiliation among student body was not available for this study.

¹⁰ Jianjun Liu, "An Investigation on Intercultural Communication among Chinese Postgraduate Students at the University of Edinburgh" (MSc diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2007), <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/1942>; Yiran Wang, "Study on Transformative Learning of UK Students in China and Chinese Students in the UK" (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/31509>; Richard Easton and L. Sun, "A Real-Life Study of the Intercultural Communicative Competence of the Chinese MSc Students in Edinburgh University," *Scottish Languages Review*, 2008; Yun Yu and Marta Moskal, "Missing Intercultural Engagements in the University Experiences of Chinese International Students in the UK," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 49, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 654–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1448259>.

¹¹ Martha Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity: A Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration," in *Religion, Migration and Identity*, ed. Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, Methodological and Theological Explorations (Brill, 2016), 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h267.5>.

religion to ensure continuity with the past. Prema Kurian goes a step further than Smith, arguing that in situations of migration migrants seem to rediscover the importance of religion and intentionally embrace religion as an identity marker, thus becoming more religiously active in the new destination country than they were before migration.¹² I Sil Yoon explores the cultural identity markers of Korean Christian migrants to the UK as a source of hope for survival and thriving. Adopting transnationalism as the foundational theory to understand adaptation and identity formation, Yoon finds that the Korean migrants' Christian identity helped them to transcend cultural boundaries as well as to overcome challenges experienced as migrants.¹³

Religious communities also play an important role in the lives of migrants.¹⁴ In a study of Arabic Protestant Churches in New Jersey, Womack found that Arabic churches provided migrants with a sense of belonging within the wider American culture and Protestant heritage.¹⁵ Marie Friedmann Marquardt found that religious communities serve as a "training ground" for public participation and integration.¹⁶ Religious communities also serve as cultural retention or reproduction centres, and risk cultivating an exclusive identity, disallowing those who are different.¹⁷ Pyong Gap Min observed how the Korean Presbyterian Church functioned as an organization of cultural retention and reproduction in its teaching of Korean etiquette, language, culture.¹⁸ Yoon's study found that Korean churches, as "communitas", helped Korean migrants to preserve their Korean identity through Korean food and holidays.¹⁹

A much smaller body of research has focused on religion among the international Chinese student population in the UK. In 2012, Li found that Chinese postgraduate students benefited in a number of ways in their interactions with Christians from a local volunteer group.²⁰ Another project found that international Chinese students who

¹² Frederiks, 14.

¹³ I. Sil Yoon, "Korean Christian Students' Adaptation and Integration in British Society: Their Identity Formation and Negotiation Processes" *Studies in World Christianity*, 26(2), 133-154.

¹⁴ Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 15-17.

¹⁵ Deanna Ferree Womack, "Transnational Christianity and Converging Identities," n.d., 128.

¹⁶ Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 16.

¹⁷ Frederiks, 16.

¹⁸ Frederiks, 17.

¹⁹ Yoon, "Korean Christian Students' Adaptation and Integration in British Society: Their Identity Formation and Negotiation Processes," 26.

²⁰ Daguo Li, "Out of the Ivory Tower: The Impact of Wider Social Contact on the Values, Religious Beliefs and Identities of Chinese Postgraduate Students in the UK," *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 15, no. 2 (2012): 241-258, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.585339>.

participated in local Christian churches benefited from resources, such as friendship, language practice, information, and assistance that were often unavailable through the university campus.²¹ The dearth of studies on the religious lives of international migrant students in the UK is further compounded by the fact that the vast majority of qualitative research on religious lives of migrants are conducted in North America and very little comparative research has been conducted in other parts of the world to cross check their findings.²² Deborah Dickson's thesis in 2013 examined the changes in core values held by postgraduate students and visiting scholar who converted to Christianity while in the UK. Dickson found that her participants' core values changed in three ways: a significant increase in shared values related their Christian faith; for most, a reduction in emphasis on career, on being respected, and on being loved; and a shift in focus on self to concern for the other.²³

Methodology

This ethnographic study targets the student population of international Chinese Christians²⁴ at the University of Edinburgh. The researcher, a postgraduate student at New College and parishioner of a local Chinese church, began enrolling participants through his personal network of acquaintances from church and school. In order to broaden the scope of enrolment, the researcher attended the Sunday worship of two other churches and through the recommendation of acquaintances, was able to successfully enrol additional participants. Within a few weeks a total of twenty-two participants were enrolled.²⁵ See figure 1 for their church (pseudonym) participation/membership²⁶.

²¹ Yun Yu and Marta Moskal, "Why Do Christian Churches, and Not Universities, Facilitate Intercultural Engagement for Chinese International Students?," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 68 (2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.10.006>.

²² Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 14.

²³ Deborah Dickson, "Coming Home: A Study of Values Change among Chinese Postgraduates and Visiting Scholars Who Encountered Christianity in the U.K." (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2013), 281, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1782841641/?pq-origsite=primo>.

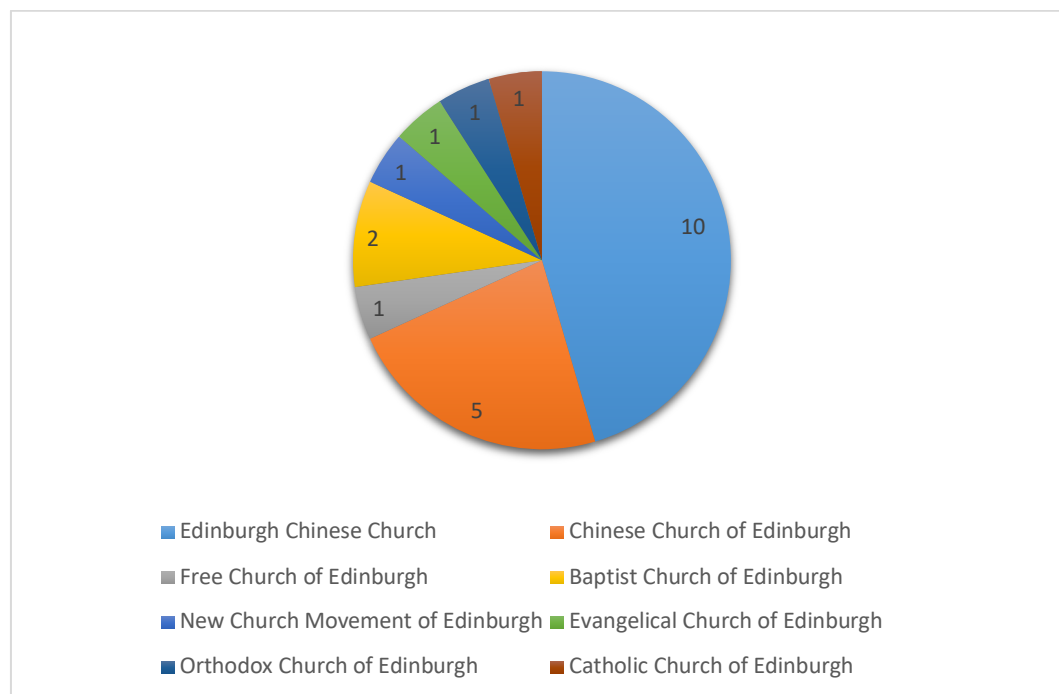
²⁴ The term "Christians" is used here, and throughout the study, to refer to all participants, including those of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. On the other hand, "protestant" and "evangelical" will not include Catholic and Orthodox traditions. David Bebbington's quadrilateral is used here to define "evangelicalism". See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359907>.

²⁵ See A.1 (in appendix) for enrolment list with select attributes. Note that some participants have graduated in the months before and during this study.

²⁶ The term "membership" is used loosely throughout this study. While membership is available in these churches, it is not a requirement for long term attendance. Membership means that one regularly participates in the activities of the church.

Due to the above enrolment method, several limitations must be noted. First, the study failed to enrol more participants from mainstream Scottish churches. Second, it did not enrol Chinese international students who can be found among international student fellowships across Edinburgh. Third, the researcher failed to enrol more than one participant from each of the Orthodox and Catholic Christian traditions. Finally, a significant proportion of the study's participants are students of divinity²⁷. This is both a limitation and advantage to the study. Its limitation is in its underrepresentation of non-divinity students, therefore inhibiting an accurate reflection of the general student population at the University of Edinburgh. Its advantage is that study data will be analysed by two separate populations (divinity students and non-divinity students).

Figure 1. Participants by church (pseudonym) membership/participation.



Twenty-two semi-structured interviews²⁸ were conducted: twenty were one-to-one, in-person meetings between 2 May and 24 May 2019 and one interview was conducted through an audio call phone application on 30 May 2019. One participant was excluded for not meeting the study's criteria of being a self-identified Christian at time of interview. The shortest interview lasted 33 minutes while the longest was 121 minutes, with an average

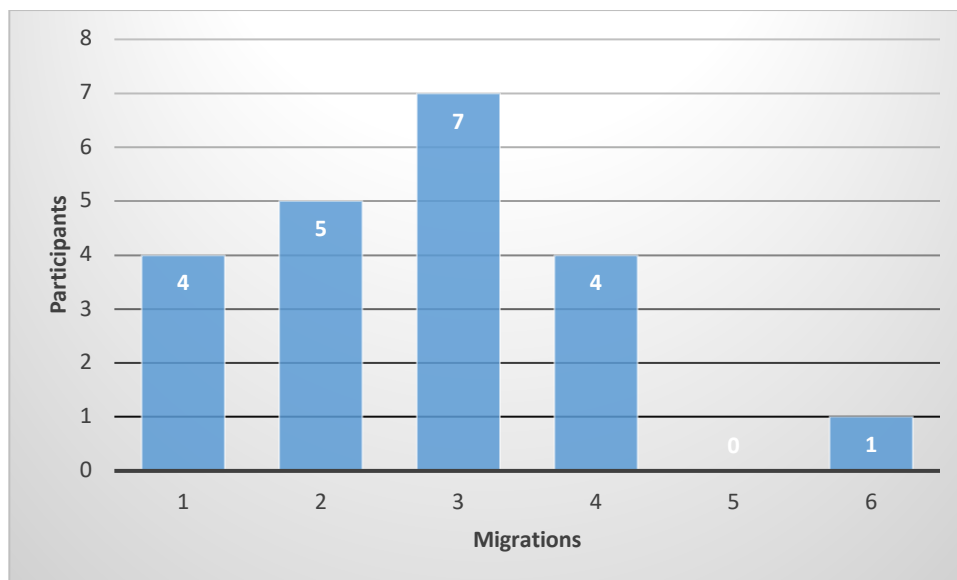
²⁷ Throughout this study, "divinity" will be used interchangeably with "New College" (NC). New College refers to the building in which the students of divinity conduct academic study.

²⁸ See appendix for full interview questions.

interview length of 69 minutes. Fourteen interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and seven were conducted in English. Interviews were carefully listened to, translated by the researcher²⁹ into grammatically correct English (if in Mandarin), and transcribed. Transcriptions were carefully reviewed while re-listening to the audio for translation and transcription accuracy. The transcription files were imported into NVivo 11 and analysed using descriptive and thematic codes.

In this study, an “experience of migration”³⁰ is defined as an act of intentional and voluntary relocation (including to Edinburgh). Participants had an average of 2.7 migrations by time of interview, with a range of one to six migration. As figure 2 visualizes, most participants migrated four or less times.

Figure 2. Participant count by experiences of migration



The open nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to delve deeper into certain aspects of the lives of the participants.³¹ As an analysis was conducted, the researcher detected a pattern begin to emerge. For nearly all participants, three aspects (intellectual, experiential, and communal) of their Christian faith were uncovered for

²⁹ Translations were completed by the researcher in order to maintain participant anonymity.

³⁰ Though participants themselves may define this differently depending on whether they consider migration as separate events, a series of events, or a series of memories. Frederiks, “Religion, Migration, and Identity,” 13.

³¹ Svend Brinkmann, “Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

further “triangulation.”³² The researcher determined that a quantitative survey would be insightful in the present study for both its value in summarizing aggregate data and the additional information it offers to the microdata where qualitative data is inconclusive or contradictory. A follow-up survey was sent to participants in June 2019 to which participants responded quickly.³³ Follow-up, in-person interviews were deemed impractical as most participants were unavailable or out of the country. Several participants provided additional commentary explaining their choices in the follow-up survey.

It is important to note that interviews and surveys request participants to draw from their long-term memory. Long-term memory has been found to be remarkably robust and durable, making it a dependable historical source. However, its reliability is also influenced by the neurological, psychological, and social process of storytelling.³⁴ Oral sources are “not objective... they are artificial, variable, and partial.”³⁵ One way to resolve this paradox is by having interviewers interrogate both memory (“the past in the present”) and history (“the past”). Valerie Yow offers a helpful set of questions that interviewers remain mindful of the mood, emotions, certainties and uncertainties of the interviewee.³⁶

Qualitative researchers have generally assumed that there is no single objective truth that can be measured. Instead, they seek to explore participant experiences through a more holistic point of view.³⁷ A frequently cited shortcoming with semi-structured interviews is that researchers rarely allow for and consider the internal conflicts in participant narratives and descriptions.³⁸ By using two data gathering methods (semi-structured interviews paired with surveys), this study considers results from both methods and discusses the degree in which they corroborate, contradict, or are related to each other.³⁹

As a parishioner of a local Chinese church and student of divinity since September 2018, the researcher considers himself an “insider” and is recognized as an “insider” by participants. On a few occasions, participants inquired into the researcher’s background, to

³² Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, Second edition. (New York ; London: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

³³ See appendix for follow-up survey.

³⁴ Alistair Thomson, “Memory and Remembering in Oral History,” *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, November 10, 2010, 90, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0006>.

³⁵ Thomson, 90.

³⁶ Thomson, 91.

³⁷ Jane Kroger, “Identity Formation: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Inquiry,” 2007, 185–86.

³⁸ Brinkmann, “Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing,” 18.

³⁹ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Fifth edition. (Oxford: University Press, 2015), 638–40.

which the researcher described his conversion to Protestant evangelicalism in mainland China followed by seminary training in Southern California. As an “insider”, the researcher had privileged access to the knowledge of the group and was given access even if meeting for the first time. However, the researcher recognized that the insider status does not always guarantee greater access and may even generate dilemmas (for example how to approach enrolment while visiting new churches). In attempt to manage these drawbacks, the researcher adopted a dual role, also taking up the role of an “outsider” during enrolment and interviews.⁴⁰

A New Model?

The study echoes what Charles Glock and Rodney Stark have said about religion, that what it means to be religious (or in this case, Christian) is not the same to everyone. Even within Protestant evangelicals of the same church, parishioners think differently about their religion. In 1965, Glock and Stark proposed five dimensions by which religions can be ordered. They are the *experiential*, the *ritualistic*, the *ideological*, the *intellectual*, and the *consequential*. The experiential recognizes that the religious individual will at one time or another experience some religious emotion (ranging from joy to humility, peace to a sense of union with the divine). The ideological dimension highlights the expectation that religious adherents are expected to hold onto certain beliefs – content and range differing between traditions. The intellectual dimension supposes that the religious individual will seek to be informed and knowledgeable about the basic tenants of the religion. Finally, the consequential dimension comprises of the secular effects of religion on the behaviour, i.e. what the individual *ought to do* as a member of a certain religion.⁴¹

Other proposals include Joachim Wach’s three dimensions of religion (theoretical, sociological, and practical); Marie Cornwall et al.’s three components of religiosity (cognitive, affective, and behavioural)⁴²; Morton King’s nine dimensions of religion

⁴⁰ Robert V. Labaree, “The Risk of ‘Going Observationalist’: Negotiating the Hidden Dilemmas of Being an Insider Participant Observer,” *Qualitative Research* 2, no. 1 (April 2002): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794102002001641>; Jadwiga Leigh, “A Tale of the Unexpected: Managing an Insider Dilemma by Adopting the Role of Outsider in Another Setting,” *Qualitative Research* 14, no. 4 (August 1, 2014): 428–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113481794>.

⁴¹ Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, 20–21.

⁴² Marie Cornwall et al., “The Dimensions of Religiosity: A Conceptual Model with an Empirical Test,” *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 3 (1986): 227, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511418>; Lisa D. Pearce, George M. Hayward, and Jessica A. Pearlman, “Measuring Five Dimensions of Religiosity across Adolescence,” *Review of Religious Research* 59, no. 3 (September 2017): 367–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-017-0291-8>.

(creedal assent and personal commitment, participation in congregational activities, personal religious experience, and personal ties in the congregation...) ⁴³; others have presented up to ten and eleven dimensions. One model used specifically for Christianity is Monaghan's 1967 study in which he found three types of members among a fundamentalist church: *autonomy-seekers* (to learn God's word and shares in a strong and consistent desire for a submissive relationship to authority), *comfort-seekers* (seeking peace of mind), and *social participators* (desires friendly social interaction and human companionship). ⁴⁴

In *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark convincingly apply economic principles (such as markets, firms, market penetration, and start-ups) to explain the success and failure of religious organizations in America since the 18th century. ⁴⁵ The economic approach of religion has not been confined to America ⁴⁶ nor Christianity. Yang Fenggang has proposed a triple-market model, including a red market (officially permitted religions), a black market (officially banned religions), and a gray market (religions with ambiguous status) to analyse the religious environment of contemporary China. ⁴⁷

While generally sympathetic to the application of economic principles to religious markets, A.Y. Chau argues that the religious market model only works for religious cultures that meet certain religious and institutional demands. The practice of religion must be congregational (meaning that one must belong to a church and congregate with other members); membership must be exclusive, enduring, and active; institutions must be purposeful, expansionist, conversionist; and the overall religious market must be open and competitive. ⁴⁸ Chau then argues that the Chinese religious culture is not a neatly organized

⁴³ Morton King, "Measuring the Religious Variable: Nine Proposed Dimensions," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6, no. 2 (1967): 176–77, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1384044>.

⁴⁴ Leon Gorlow and Harold Schroeder, "Motives for Participating in the Religious Experience," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1968): 250, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1384632>.

⁴⁵ The second edition continues charting trends observed since the 1990s of the first edition. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005 Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 8–12.

⁴⁶ Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994): 230–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386688>; Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ Fenggang Yang, "The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China," *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 93–122, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2006.00039.x>.

⁴⁸ Adam Yuet Chau, "Modalities of Doing Religion and Ritual Polytypy: Evaluating the Religious Market Model from the Perspective of Chinese Religious History," *Religion* 41, no. 4 (2011): 547–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2011.624691>.

system and consists of a wide variety of beliefs and practices that go unnoticed in the religious economic model.⁴⁹ Chau proposes one method of simplification: by focusing on how people “do religion”, in contrast to how people “think about” religion, under five modalities. They are *discursive/scriptural* (focusing on the composition and use of texts); *personal-cultivational* (involving in the cultivation and transformation of self); *liturgical* (including the various rituals and rites and is the primary modality for religious specialists); *immediate-practical* (concerning with immediate results); and *relational* (emphasizing the relationship between humans, deities, and ancestors).⁵⁰

The researcher finds that the *discursive/scriptural*, *personal-cultivational*, and *relational* modalities have the most relevance to this study. Christianity is a text based religion and has a rich tradition of reading, thinking about, discussing, preaching, and commenting on the Old and New Testaments. Personal cultivation in Christianity has its own telos and is rarely discussed apart from the divine. The relational modality is significant especially among Chinese evangelicals who speak of nurturing a *guanxi* with God.⁵¹ The *immediate-practical* and *liturgical* modalities may not have obvious and significant implications for participants of this study. Chau finds that to the majority of the Chinese it was the efficacy of rituals which mattered. This is what he calls *efficacy-based religiosity* and contrasts it to *dharma-based religiosity* which characterizes the way people do religion in South Asia as well as monotheistic religions.⁵² *Dharma-based religiosity*, despite its name, does not require the individual to be a Hindu, Buddhist, or follower of another Indian religion. Instead, it is used to highlight a higher degree of confessionality, whether that is to a particular “path” or in the case of Christianity, a denomination or church. While *efficacy-based religiosity* is arguably very important within Protestantism in China⁵³, participants of this study rarely pointed to the efficacy of Christianity as a reason for conversion or staying on the “path” and instead operated with high levels of

⁴⁹ Adam Yuet Chau, *Modalities of Doing Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 67, <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199731398.001.0001/acprof-9780199731398-chapter-5>.

⁵⁰ Chau, 67.

⁵¹ Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, Blackwell Guides to Global Christianity (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 194.

⁵² Chau, “Modalities of Doing Religion and Ritual Polytypy,” 558–59.

⁵³ To many converts, the Christian god had proven more efficacious than the “false gods” of China and therefore Christianity was seen as an efficacious source of protection. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 79.

confessionality to Christianity along with varying degrees of confessionality to institutions and denominations.

Chau's modalities developed as he explored how traditional Chinese people interacted with rituals, for example ritual specialists hired to preside over a funeral. In the Chinese context, rituals are employed "to determine interpersonal relationships, distinguish right from wrong, resolve disputes, establish prestige, enforce the law, educate students, and express piety and sobriety."⁵⁴ On the other hand, Christianity tends to emphasize beliefs over rituals. While Chinese rituals (for example, holidays such as Chinese New Year and Qingming Festival and major life events such as marriage and death), are important in defining the Chinese identity, Chinese Christians have tried to differentiate the religious rituals from the secular rituals. Whereas religious rituals are rejected, some secular rituals are adopted by the church.⁵⁵ For example, Protestant Christians will reject the idea of inviting a Daoist monk to preside over the funeral of a parishioner (religious); they will celebrate Qingming Festival through eating (secular), but will not sweep the tombs of their ancestors (religious); and they will celebrate Chinese New Year, sometimes handing out "red envelopes" containing cash (secular).

Perhaps the most well-known example was the Chinese Rites controversy during the 17th and 18th century. Part of the debate was whether the Chinese ritual of honouring family ancestors was a secular ritual and therefore permissible or a religious ritual in violation of the Catholic faith.⁵⁶ Even today, among Chinese Protestants, ancestor rites and filial piety remain highly contentious. Oftentimes, an individual's conversion to Protestantism is seen by both the convert and outsiders as an abandonment of Chinese traditional values such as filial piety.⁵⁷ Whereas Chau's modalities seek to explain "doing religion" in the Chinese *ritualistic* context, this study explores how Chinese Christians prioritize various aspects of their faith. For this reason, a new model should be considered.

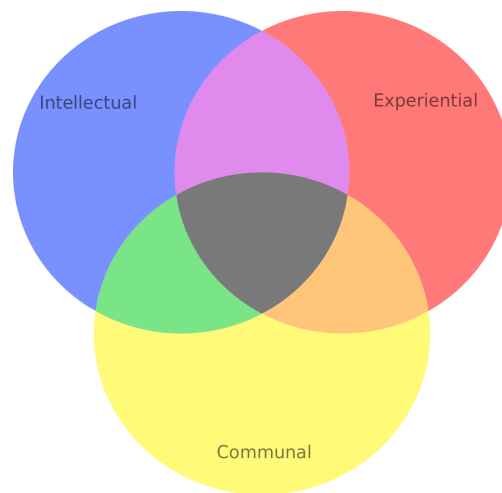
⁵⁴ Ge Feng and Zhengming Du, *Traditional Chinese Rites and Rituals* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 2.

⁵⁵ See Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 140–47.

⁵⁶ For a detailed account of the Chinese Rites controversy see Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 28–31.

⁵⁷ Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, *Meaning and Controversy within Chinese Ancestor Religion* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 134–35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70524-8>.

Based on semi-structure interview data and the researcher's experiences with and observations of evangelical Protestant churches, this study proposes to examine the way participants conceived their faith through three priorities, the *intellectual*, *experiential*, and *communal*. The *intellectual* emphasizes the desire for one to engage the mind with concepts and theologies about God and may include personal preferences towards certain theologies or denominations. The *intellectual* priority may also underlie many group activities such as listening to sermons at church, attending Bible studies with other Christians, or pursuing theological, biblical, historical, and/or doctrinal studies as a recreation or in the academics. Contrasting Glock and Stark's definition of the experiential as primarily focused on the religiously motivated emotional responses, this study broadens and contextualizes the *experiential* priority to refer to practices that engage the body, senses, and emotions (e.g. spiritual practices) with the divine. The experiential also considers the possibility of Pentecostal-charismatic experiences of "signs and wonders" and the "gifts of the Spirit". The last priority, *communal*, emphasizes the relational aspect of the Christian faith and refers to both the physical gathering of people (such as churches and fellowships) but also the negotiable sense of belonging⁵⁸.



The illustration is a reminder that these three priorities do not operate independently of each other. There are far too many examples of where overlapping may occur, but here we shall examine two. First, Bible studies may appear and function as an activity which primarily nurtures the intellectual aspect, however interviews reveal that these regular gatherings hold significant communal, and sometimes experiential, value. This is

⁵⁸ To belong is to be related to or be a part of something. It is the opposite of isolation. "To belong is to know, even in the middle of the night, that I am among friends." Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), xvii–xviii.

highlighted in the fact that several participants articulated that the primary motivation to attend Bible studies is rooted in a strong desire to cultivate relationships with other Christians and at the same time, to establish belonging. A second example is the spiritual practice of studying devotions. Depending on the individual its value may lie in the intellectual knowledge gained through reading the text or in the calming experiential presence of the divine through meditation. This is not to mention that devotions can be conducted in groups, which brings in the communal aspect.

The following three chapters are titled “Intellectual”, “Experiential”, and “Communal”. The aim of each chapter is to investigate how and why each priority changes through migration. More specifically, two methods of data collection (semi-structured interviews followed by surveys) were conducted to track these changes in each participant. The advantage of incorporating these methods is that they can be used to explain each other. Pseudonyms will be used to mask the identities of participants. As mentioned in the discussion of enrolment, the large number of students in divinity allows us to do analysis on three populations: New College (participants who are students of divinity), non-NC (participants who are/were not students of divinity), and all participants.

Chapter 2: Intellectual

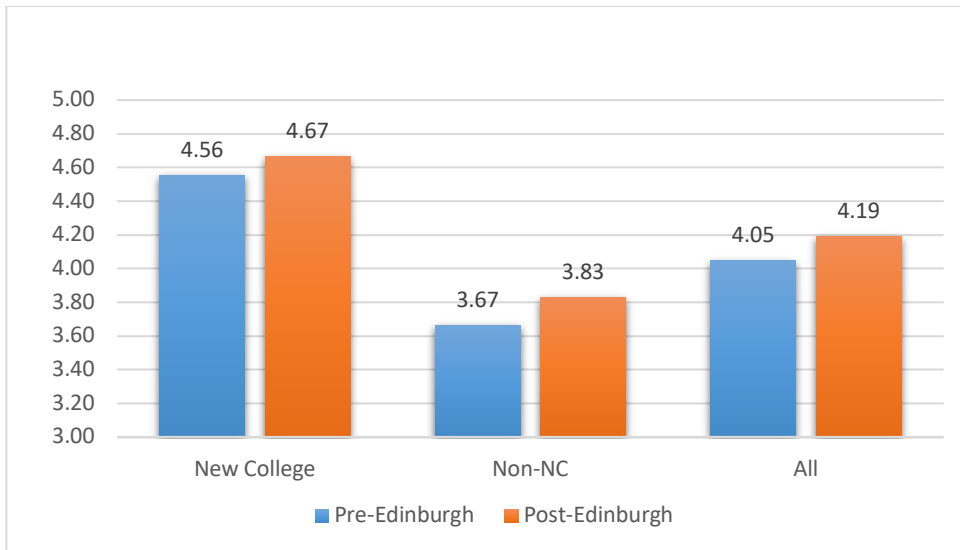
In this chapter we examine how the intellectual aspect of participants is shaped through migration to Edinburgh. Most frequently the intellectual aspect of participants was assigned to activities including but not limited to attending and leading Bible study, listening to or preparing and preaching sermons, reading the Bible and other literature related to Christianity, participating in regular studies with leaders of their church, and reflecting on theological topics related to their Christian faith. In this chapter we explore responses among divinity students. For non-divinity students, one case of both higher and lower prioritization of *intellectual* will be examined.

General trend

See figure 3. Pre-Edinburgh average of importance of the intellectual aspect was 4.05 with a post-Edinburgh average of 4.19, a change of +0.14. The intellectual aspect was the highest average for the New College participants in both pre- and post-Edinburgh while it was the highest average for pre-Edinburgh, non-NC participants and the importance of intellectual saw a slight increase of 0.17 for non-NC participants.⁵⁹ While the survey data suggests that the intellectual aspect only slightly increased for all participants, individual and group scores along with qualitative data provide more insight into the effects of migration on this particular aspect.

Figure 3. Average score of the intellectual aspect by population group

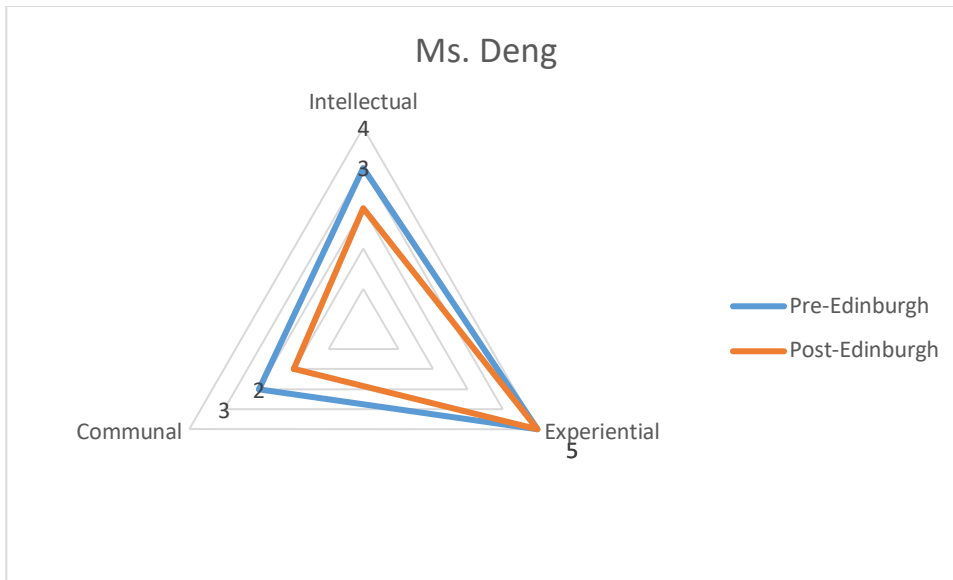
⁵⁹ Data is available in appendix: A.2.1, A.2.2, and A.2.3.



Divinity students

The graph shows the high level of importance that New College participants placed on the intellectual aspect of their faith, both pre- and post-Edinburgh. High pre-Edinburgh scores can be partially explained in that several of these participants have previously (just before attending Edinburgh) completed a theological degree. While completing the degree, participants are typically involved in and developing their intellectual aspect of the Christian faith. Seven of the nine divinity students reported the highest score of 5 for the intellectual aspect since coming to Edinburgh. Furthermore, these participants spoke of academic studies and the environment of New College as neither contributing to nor hindering personal faith. Beyond the four participants who reported a score of 5 in both pre- and post-Edinburgh, three participants reported an increase of 1. The study finds that the majority of New College students hold and retain a high importance on the intellectual aspect of their personal faith in significant part due to their studies.

Ms. Deng was born in Hong Kong and has lived and studied in several places prior to Edinburgh. Though she started out at a conservative, fundamental denomination in Hong Kong, Ms. Deng became acquainted with writings of the Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, as well as the Pentecostal gift of visions after her departure from Hong Kong. For Ms. Deng, Chinese churches tend to overemphasize intellectual activities such as memorizing Bible verses. But for her, it is also important to sense God in one's life.

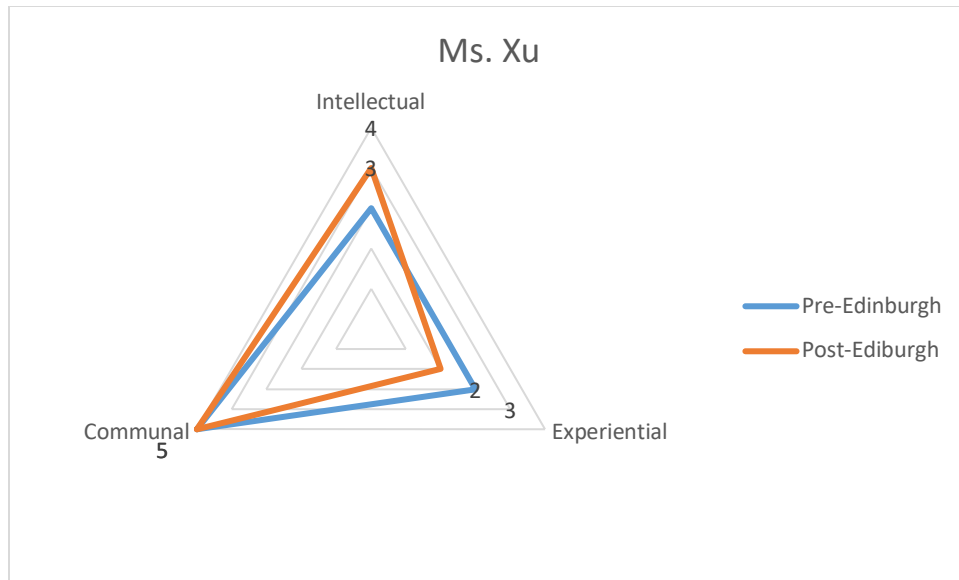


Ms. Deng is one of the two participants who reported a score less than 5 in post-Edinburgh. Ms. Deng explains placing less importance on the intellectual aspect, “this in the sense that I have already obtained a few theological degrees. I think nowadays what renews my faith is usually experience rather than knowledge. But, of course, I still enjoy joining/leading Bible Study or hearing a very solid sermon.” The other participant, Ms. Wu (also PhD in divinity) also noted that her “intellectual understanding of God hasn’t evolved much throughout [her] stay in Edinburgh.” For both Ms. Deng and Ms. Wu, the intellectual aspect is sufficiently mature and therefore prioritized lower than experiential.

Non-NC students

For non-NC participants, the *intellectual* average is significantly lower. The following two case studies are representative of reporting higher (case 1) or lower (case 2) importance in the intellectual aspect as a result of migration.

Ms. Xu recently graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a PhD in Medicine. She was introduced to the Christian faith while in mainland China. Despite an unpleasant first contact with Christianity, Ms. Xu insisted on attending Bible study in order to refute Christianity in a rational and systematic way. However, after a period of studies and prayer, Ms. Xu converted and was baptized in a registered TSPM church. Upon arrival at Edinburgh, Ms. Xu attended a Scottish mainstream church where she has capitalized on the rich theological instruction of her church and fellowship.



Prior to Edinburgh, Ms. Xu attended a registered TSPM church in an urban city in mainland China. According to Daniel Bays, one of the reasons why “cultural Christians” rarely attend registered TSPM churches and associate themselves with Protestant seminaries is due to the low intellectual level and somewhat anti-intellectual tendencies of the fundamentalistic nature of evangelical theology which undergird the vast majority of Chinese churches.⁶⁰ Young and middle aged Chinese urbanites, not necessarily affiliated with “cultural Christians”, deem the anti-intellectualism and lack of necessity for formal theological training of the charismatic rural house church to be inferior.⁶¹ However starting in the 1990s demographics began to shift away from the “four many’s” (the elderly; women; the illiterate; the sick)⁶². Urban TSPM churches saw younger and more educated members.⁶³ Also emerging in the 1990s was the term “intellectual elite”. It describes, as the name suggests, intellectuals from major cities who primarily work in universities but also hospitals, research institutes, and Sino-foreign joint enterprises.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 201; Daniel H. Bays, “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today,” *The China Quarterly* 174 (June 2003): 494–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009443903000299>.

⁶¹ Nanlai Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China” (Indiana University Press, 2013), 154–56.

⁶² Alexander Chow, “Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today,” *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2014, 161, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341340>.

⁶³ Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 95, <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/10.1093/oso/9780198808695.001.0001/oso-9780198808695>.

⁶⁴ Chow, 96.

In her interview, Ms. Xu only briefly mentioned the role of male leadership⁶⁵ and only in the context of a pair of Chaoxian⁶⁶ sisters who founded and continue to play an influential role in the direction of the church. The Korean-Christian environment is especially hostile to female leadership due to it being dominated by Confucian notions of gender hierarchy, namely that women must learn to accept their inferior status and that virtue is obtained through obedience to three men (father, husband, and son) in their life cycles.⁶⁷ Mr. Xu complained about the gender inequality she witnessed, “It is as if women are second tier Christians... they don’t think women should do much.” It was after coming to Edinburgh and observing the radically different ways in men and women interacted in the church which prompted Ms. Xu to see what the Bible had to say about women’s roles in the church, “from reading the Bible, there is no first and second tier. I think that the correct view is that there are a lot of things women can do if they have the time and faith, but there are certain things women should not do.”

While attending this church, Ms. Xu described the prioritization of *experiential* above *intellectual*, giving both a score of 3, as part of the church teaching, “in China, I was encouraged to prioritise in that way.” Despite this, Ms. Xu described a balanced (intellectual-experiential) faith with personal sin in context of Reformed theology and gender issues within the church as key points of discussion.

After Ms. Xu came to Edinburgh for her studies, she decided to attend a Scottish mainstream church due to the unfair treatment of women in her previous church and concerns that the Chinese church in Edinburgh may be similar. Also afraid of joining a “heretical” church, Ms. Xu prayed and eventually “God led [her]” to her current church. Ms. Xu describes it as quite similar in teaching and style to her Chinese church. However, they introduced a “more complex system of theology”. Furthermore, Ms. Xu attends a home group with professors from a local Christian seminary. These professors “had a great influence on [Ms. Xu]” and being pastorally minded, thought about ways to help Ms. Xu nurture her faith. Furthermore, when asked to describe “Christianity”, Ms. Xu thought about “teaching”. For her, this refers to knowledge about the object of the Christian faith –

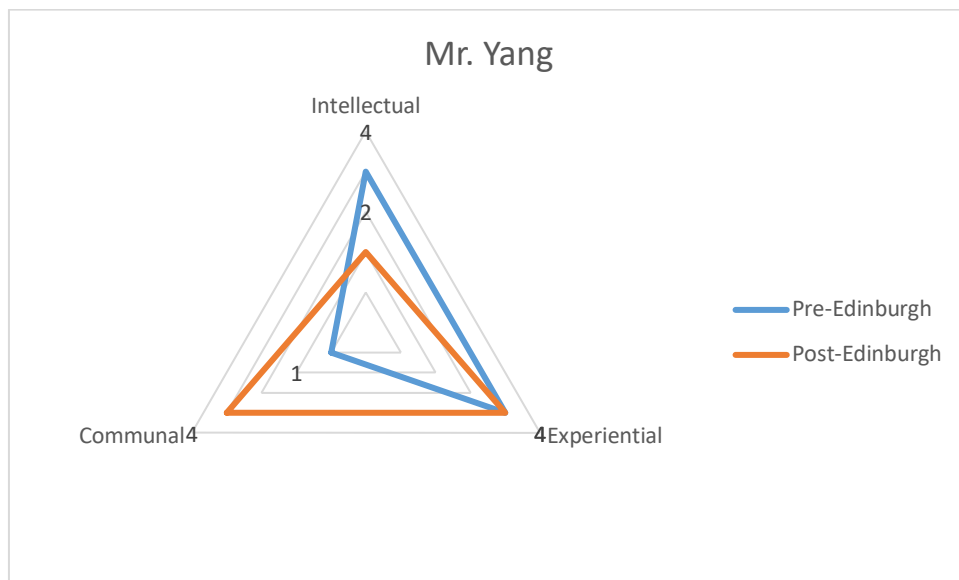
⁶⁵ Contrary to what Nanlai Cao has noted about leadership gender among urban TSPM churches, namely that theologically trained men typically assume leadership roles. See Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China,” 149.

⁶⁶ The Chaoxian ethnic group are the descendants of Korean immigrants. Most live in Northeast China.

⁶⁷ Pyong Gap Min, “Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in the Korean Immigrant Community in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (2008): 225.

that is, God. The Bible, which was once a “spiritual guideline” had now become a historical book filled with evidence of God’s grace. These two factors combined may contribute to her adjustment to less importance placed on the experiential and more placed on intellectual.

Mr. Yang recently graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a PhD. During university years, Mr. Yang was invited by American Christian missionaries to attend a fellowship group. After intellectually understanding the basics of the Christian faith and having a religious experience, Mr. Yang converted to Christianity. His participation in a “charismatic” church before migrating to Edinburgh led to some conflicts with the less charismatic Chinese church in Edinburgh.



For Mr. Yang, the intellectual aspect saw a marked decline in importance (from 4 to 2). Based on our interview, the pre-Edinburgh importance placed on the intellectual aspect was important in his process of gaining trust in the Bible as a credible document and witness of biblical prophecies: “I spent a lot of time thinking. I am a person who needs lots of evidence. I can’t believe in something through emotions alone... later, I slowly discovered that what the Bible said is real. It is what God said... I found evidence in the Bible that God really exists, including Old Testaments prophecy to New Testaments events. The prophecies were true across time.”

For Mr. Yang, his knowledge of charismatic practices became a source of tension with the less charismatic Christians of Edinburgh. “I used to be very proud... I thought I knew more than other people. How could you not know about gifts of the Spirit?”

Describes his change in understanding: “I realized how much I needed brothers and sisters’ support and encouragement. This might have to do with the concept of community... together we all have our own weaknesses but we support each other. I didn’t know that before, but now I do.”

Based on this small sample size, migration did not result in any meaningful change in the importance of the intellectual aspect of participant faith. Priority in the intellectual aspect began and remained high. Part of the explanation could be due to (1) the high proportion of New College students and (2) that most migrants are from major urban Chinese cities (n=11) or immigrated from a location outside of China (n=7). In their study, Christian Matthew Guest et al. examined Christian students across several universities in the UK and found that student faith remained fairly immune to intellectual challenges caused by academic studies through a recasting of faith identity in non-cerebral terms.⁶⁸ New College participants of this study responded similarly when asked if academic studies led to faith crises. Mr. Kai, a postgraduate student in divinity, speaks of classroom challenges to the historicity of Jesus’s resurrection. He responds, “[these challenges are] a positive thing. It forces me to think deeply about what I believe... because they are still intellectual issues, they haven’t affected my [faith] life.” Another participant, Mr. Dai, a doctoral student in divinity, said “my faith hasn’t been negatively impacted [by academic studies] during my time at New College.” Another doctoral student in divinity, Ms. Jiang, highlights an important nuance: “academic studies and faith are two things, though not entirely separate. Faith will influence a person’s topic and thesis.”

For those individuals who reported an increase in priority of the intellectual, reasons included greater emphasis on obtaining or maintaining intellectual knowledge of the Christian faith as a result of rising personal interest, demands of academic study, and church influence. Those who reported a decrease cited a shifting of emphasis towards the experiential for its potential to nurture and sustain growth in personal faith. As one participant noted “I think the building up of spiritual life [through the experiential] is very important.”

⁶⁸ Mathew Guest, *Christianity and the University Experience: Understanding Student Faith* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 131.

The researcher notes the limitation of these findings due to small sample size. Additionally, further research is needed to study how migration affects international Christian students who come from rural places in China.

Chapter 3: Experiential

In this chapter we shift our focus to the experiential aspect of participant's Christian faith and explore how migration affects it. Experiential is challenging to define. In general, the term *experiential* used in this study connotes a human being's encounter and relationship with the Christian God, practices that sustain and nurture the human-divine relationship, and an awareness of God's presence in one's life that is often difficult to describe yet indisputable to the recipient.⁶⁹ The survey also includes the "charismatic" and "Pentecostal" practices of the "gifts of the Spirit".⁷⁰ In this chapter we explore the polarization of responses to charismatic practices, the terms *dailing*⁷¹ and *gandong*⁷² frequently used among evangelical Protestants, as well as the two non-Protestant participant and their conceptions of the experiential. In closing, we consider how the participants of this study might respond to "Independent Network Charismatic" Christianity, a movement which has embraced the experiential in response to an oversaturation of the *intellectual* in churches in the USA.

General trend

First, a brief discussion of the general trend (see figure 4). Pre-Edinburgh average of importance of experiential aspect was 3.67 with a post-Edinburgh average of 4.10, a change of +0.43, the greatest change of all three aspects. For New College participants, experiential was reported as the second most important aspect with an average of 4.33 for both pre- and post-Edinburgh. Non-NC participants had the lowest average (3.17) pre-Edinburgh, with experiential seeing the greatest growth of +0.75 to 3.92.⁷³ This chapter explores this change by considering qualitative data of individuals and the group.

⁶⁹ Jill Harshaw, *God beyond Words: Christian Theology and the Spiritual Experiences of People with Profound Intellectual Disabilities*, Studies in Religion and Theology (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016), 12.

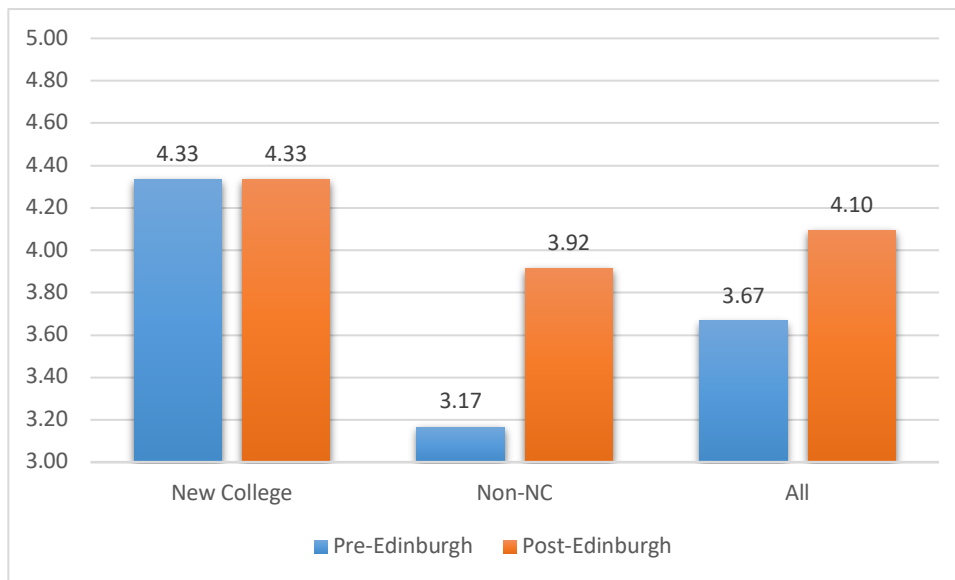
⁷⁰ While the vast diversity among these groups is appreciated, Allen Anderson notes that "some sign of miraculous intervention, (often called 'gifts of the Spirit') is a common feature of global Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. Allan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Second edition., Introduction to Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), 2.

⁷¹ Translated "leading" and used to refer to "God's leading" (*shen de dailing*) in which God is described as the one who walks in the front while the participant's role is to follow behind, not lagging behind nor overtaking God.

⁷² Translated "touched" or "moved" and while not explicitly a Christian term, is used by Christians to describe an emotional response to interaction with the divine. Sometimes it is used to explain a particular response, for example "I was deeply moved by God to attend this church."

⁷³ Data is available in appendix: A.2.1, A.2.2, and A.2.3.

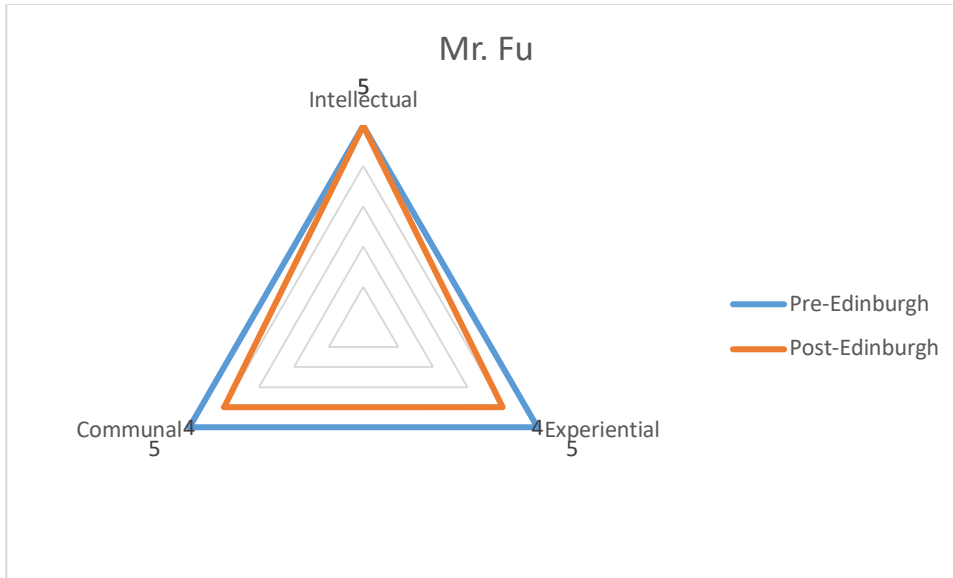
Figure 4. Average score of the experiential aspect by population group



Pentecostal-charismatic practices

The majority of participants did not mention Pentecostal-charismatic experiences during interviews and surveys. The small handful who brought it up are sharply divided: they either spoke of these Pentecostal-charismatic experiences as vital to their faith or explicitly rejected these practices. Presented here are two New College participants who represent one or the other side.

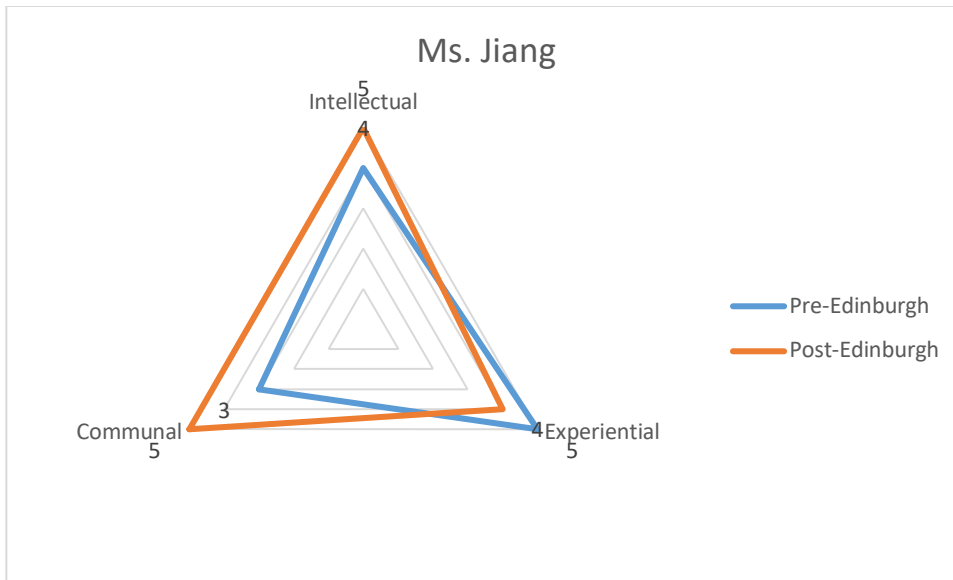
Mr. Fu is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in divinity. He converted to Christianity as a university student in mainland China. After graduation, Mr. Fu was “called to ministry” and studied abroad in a seminary closely associated with the Assemblies of God. There Mr. Fu found the gifts and powers of the Spirit to be instrumental to his faith. Upon completion of his seminary degree, Mr. Fu migrated to Edinburgh for further studies. At Edinburgh, Mr. Fu worshipped at Chinese churches but eventually settled in a Scottish mainstream church which had a similar emphasis of the gifts and power of the Spirit to his previous church. For Mr. Fu the “gifts of the Spirit” are a way in which Christians seek and maintain a relationship with God so that their faith is lived out and authentic (zhenshi) in a secular world.



Despite his emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit, Mr. Fu places high importance on both the intellectual and experiential aspects. He reasons that he cannot “say E[xperiential] is [his] priority before I[n]tellectual, which occupies most of [his] time.”

Ms. Jiang, also a doctoral student in divinity, has lived in several locations before migrating to Edinburgh. She converted to evangelical Protestantism in China and has studied religion and theology in Hong Kong and North America. During her time in Hong Kong, Ms. Jiang attended a “Little Flock”⁷⁴ church, which she reflected on as having significant influence on her Christian faith but also holding reservations about the church and particularly its theology.

⁷⁴ Also called the “Assembly Hall” and “the Local Church”, the movement centred around Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee). Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 129.



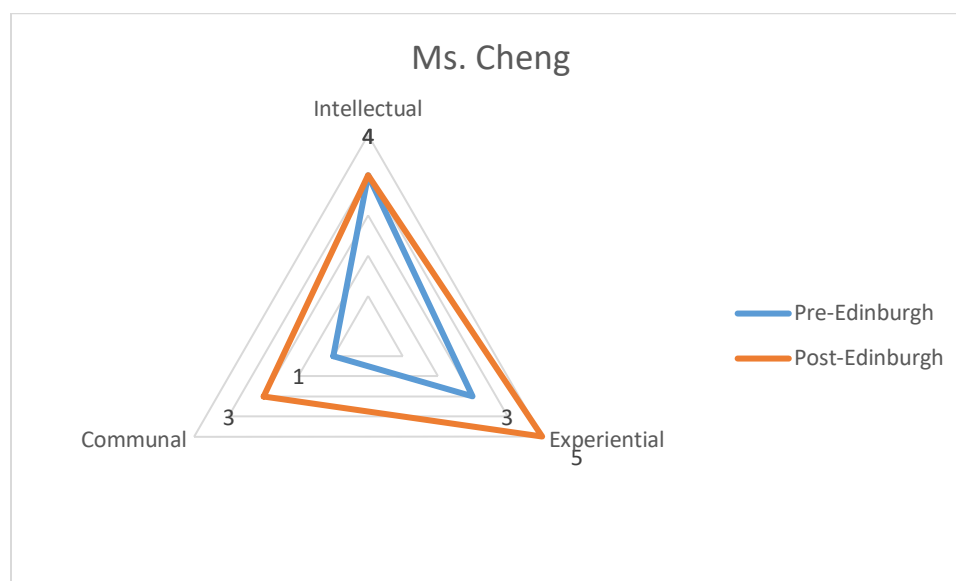
The Little Flock church has some practices such as prayerful reading, shouting out loud, and prophesying, which may or may not be considered charismatic. At least one author, Jiayin Hu, a member of the Little Flock, has argued that their practices are not charismatic.⁷⁵ During our interview, Ms. Jiang spoke at length about her experiences at the Little Flock church, beginning with its theology and then proceeding into practices that she found problematic. Nee taught *trichotomism* or the view that human beings are made up of three components: spirit, soul, and body. The goal for each member of the Little Flock is to be a “spiritual person” in all things. Sometimes this encouraged members to “push [all] things onto God”. For example, other members would say “that since they are a very spiritual person and see things from God’s perspective, that [Ms. Jiang] should trust them” in order to persuade Ms. Jiang to listen to their advice. In another example, church service begins with singing songs for the explicit purpose of filling members with the “spirit of joy.” This misled some members including Ms. Jiang, who have a difficult time to “feel lifted up”, to believe that they are not “spiritual people”. For these and other reasons, Ms. Jiang began to doubt the Little Flock church by her second year in Hong Kong. Ms. Jiang’s experiential score saw a decrease from 5 to 4. She explicitly noted twice that “My experiential part doesn’t contain interactions with the supernatural and signs.”

⁷⁵ Fenggang Yang, Joy Kooi-Chin Tong, and Allan Anderson, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies ; v. 22 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2017).

God's leading

Of the three aspects, Non-NC participants saw the greatest increase in their experiential averages. Two case studies are presented to highlight this increase.

Ms. Cheng is an undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. Born in Hong Kong, Ms. Cheng moved to a major urban city in mainland China at a very young age. Although her parents were “non-practicing” Christians at the time of her birth, she was introduced to Christianity through an extended family member. After conversion, Ms. Cheng and her family attended church but developed very few long-term relationships with other Christians. Ms. Cheng described her pre-Edinburgh faith as predominantly family-centred and private. Her eventual attendance at the University of Edinburgh was a difficult process.



Studies find that for a number of reasons (such as loneliness, difficulties in cultural adjustment, academic stress) international students are at greater risk of various psychological problems.⁷⁶ Ms. Cheng's trouble began early on as the University of Edinburgh was not her first choice university, and with only two weeks of preparation before courses began. Arriving in the gloomy September weather, Ms. Cheng recalls sitting in her dark room and feeling that "life was meaningless".

⁷⁶ Sakurako Chako Mori, "Addressing the Mental Health Concerns of International Students," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 78, no. 2 (2000): 137–44, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb02571.x>; Greta Bradley, "Responding Effectively to the Mental Health Needs of International Students," *Higher Education* 39, no. 4 (June 1, 2000): 417–33, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1003938714191>.

Ms. Cheng came to realize that she was helpless and needed to depend on God. “So, in a spiritual way, my relationship with God has become closer.” Though Ms. Cheng initially resisted multiple invitations to attend fellowship, she eventually recognized it as “God’s will”. For Ms. Cheng it was the sharing of testimonies and life experiences that introduced the value of fellowship to her. For Ms. Cheng the value of the communal increased simultaneously with the experiential, which was cited as a key factor in becoming less depressed.

A 1999 review of around 80 studies that examined the relationship between religious involvement and depressive symptoms found that people who are frequently involved in organized religion and who highly value their religious faith for intrinsic reasons are at substantially reduced risk of depressive disorder. They are less likely to become depressed over time and recover from depressive episodes more quickly.⁷⁷ A more recent evaluation of studies prior to 2010 indicate that religiosity is related to less depression in two-thirds of studies.⁷⁸ Despite the recent rise of secularism in Edinburgh⁷⁹ and the finding that religious behaviour has been associated with worse mental health in highly secular parts of the world,⁸⁰ attending several Christian groups of a local Chinese church was instrumental in Ms. Cheng feeling less depressed.

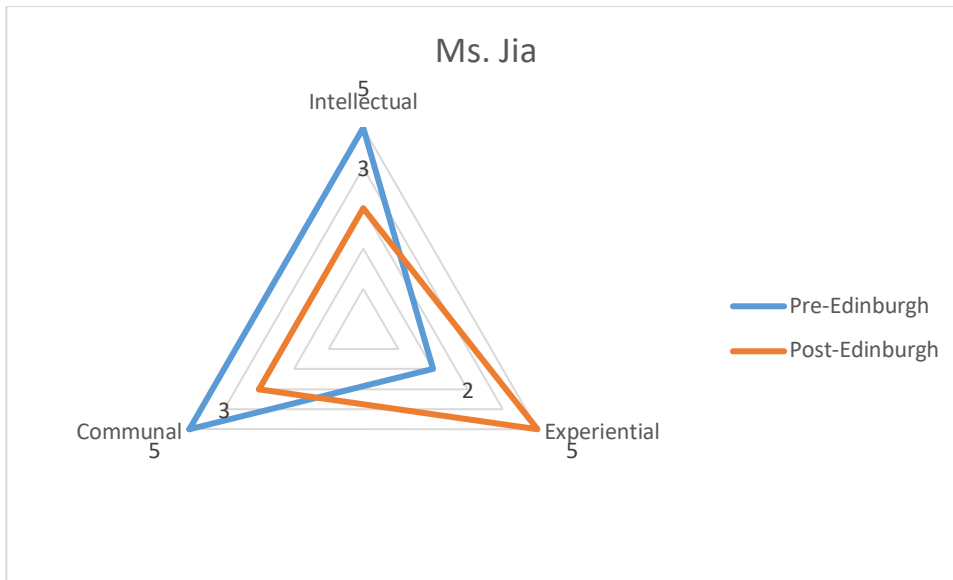
Ms. Jia is a doctoral student who has lived and studied in Edinburgh for nearly three years. She was born in mainland China and went abroad to another East Asian country for graduate studies where she converted to Christianity. Ms. Jia has previously spent many years working in both her new country as well as mainland China. Ms. Jia connects many details of life including previous migrations and current studies with “God’s leading”.

⁷⁷ Michael E McCullough and David B Larson, “Religion and Depression: A Review of the Literature,” *Twin Research* 2, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 126–36, <https://doi.org/10.1375/twin.2.2.126>.

⁷⁸ Harold G. Koenig, *Religion and Mental Health: Research and Clinical Applications* (London: Academic Press, 2018), 312.

⁷⁹ Claire Miller and Neil Pooran, “Huge Decline in Religious Beliefs among Edinburgh Residents,” *edinburghlive*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.edinburghlive.co.uk/news/edinburgh-news/huge-decline-religious-beliefs-among-16104848>.

⁸⁰ Koenig, *Religion and Mental Health*, 312.



Ms. Jia's case highlights the prominence of "God's calling" in the lives of these migrants. The notion of "calling" refers to God calling his people to express faith in specific areas of life. Rejecting the monastic's view that "calling" was primarily to take one "out of" the world, Luther and Calvin both saw calling as God calling one "into" the world.⁸¹ Max Weber argued that the Puritans, who affirmed Luther and Calvin's view of calling, adopted a lifestyle of asceticism and dedication to hard work ("for the devout to become certain of their state of salvation"⁸²), influencing the development of capitalistic life. Weber also argued that capitalism, rationalistic pursuits, and the disenchanted world eventually replaced Christian asceticism and made "calling" obsolete.⁸³ While the notion of calling has lost much ground since the Puritans, Roman Williams observed that it is still alive and well among evangelical Christians from Asia pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in the USA. Employing the narrative and visual approaches, Williams finds the idea of a calling compelling and helpful in one's understanding of a coherent past, a present within evangelicalism's metanarratives, and an uncertain future.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Alister McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, June 1999, 31; Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, "Calling and Vocation at Work: Definitions and Prospects for Research and Practice," *The Counseling Psychologist* 37, no. 3 (April 2009): 426, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000008316430>.

⁸² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* / Max Weber ; New Introduction and Translation by Stephen Kalberg. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 121.

⁸³ Weber, 124.

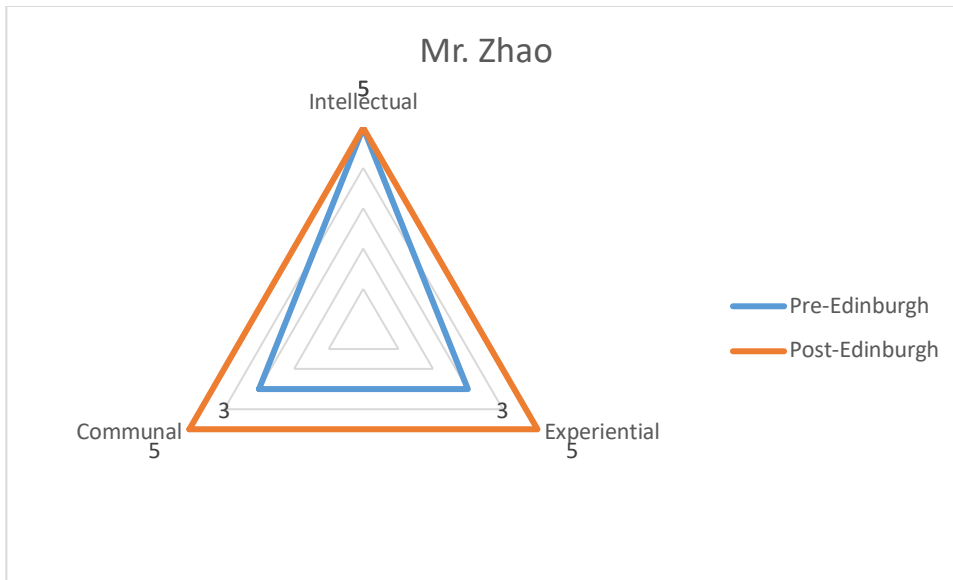
⁸⁴ R. R. Williams, "Constructing a Calling: The Case of Evangelical Christian International Students in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 276, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srs054>.

There are two problems with the current literature on “calling”. First, “calling” places too much emphasis on an individual’s career. Second, rather than speaking of career in a general sense, “calling” or *huzhao* is used by Chinese evangelicals primarily as a “call” to full-time work as a church minister, seminary professor, or missionary. It can also be used in sense of a “call” to a major life decision, such as career, marriage, relocation, etc. For these reasons, the researcher suggests the use of the term, “leading” (*dailing*). This term has several advantages. It reflects participants’ navigation the present and near future, without the requirement of having a clear sense of the final destination. Participants used the term “leading” *dailing* more than twice as much as “calling” *huzhao*. Examples of participants seeking for “God’s leading” include deciding whether to migrate or not, in developing non-career skills, how to live as a Christian, in deciding which academic institutions to apply for and what field to study. *Dailing*, as a term to describe how individuals perceive God’s involvement in their lives, has the clear advantage of not avoiding close linkages that “calling” has with career.

Engaging the senses among non-Protestants

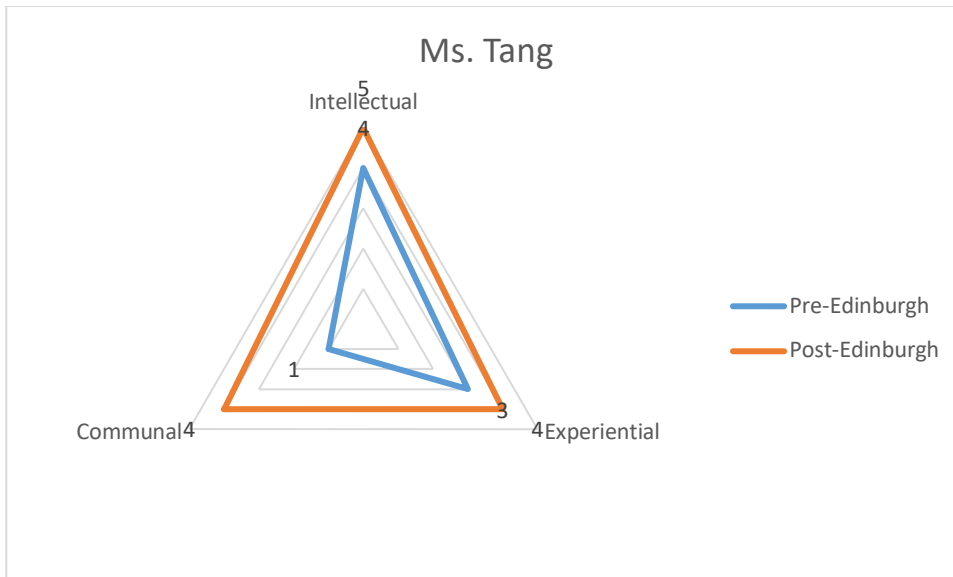
Up to now, discussions have centred on Protestant evangelicals. Whereas Chinese evangelicals tend to focus on the singing and sermon aspects of church, placing very little or no emphasis on other aspects such as religious icons and scents, in this section, a baptized Orthodox Christian and Catholic catechumen speak of the experiential priority in their faith.

Mr. Zhao was born near Fuzhou in mainland China and brought up in an evangelical Protestant family. After migrating to the USA as a teenager, Mr. Zhao converted to Jehovah’s Witnesses in response to a personal crisis. Five years later, he converted to Orthodox Christianity and is currently pursuing a doctorate in divinity.



After leaving the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mr. Zhao attended several churches including Chinese evangelical churches similar to those of his childhood. Mr. Zhao also visited a Greek Orthodox Church for the first time, during which his sense of smell and sight were “overwhelmed” by scents and icons. At Edinburgh, the Orthodox community that Mr. Zhao participates in is overseen by a monastic priest who hosts numerous activities, including liturgies every day of the week, special student service on Thursdays, and special pilgrimage trips in Scotland. For Mr. Zhao, the *experiential* as the engagement of senses in communion with God is vital to his personal faith.

Ms. Tang was born in a major urban city in mainland China. She first encountered Christianity during her university years. Shortly before coming to Edinburgh, Ms. Tang had a personal experience after which she came to faith in Christ. Ms. Tang visited several churches before settling into a Catholic church.



For Ms. Tang, the *experiential* is best described as the emotions which manifest from “religious experiences”. Commenting about her follow-up survey, Ms Tang says that “I gave 4 points [in experiential] because I often go to *jiaotang* (the church) and that feeling ... for example when I am perplexed, is very important.” While the church and its atmosphere promote religious experiences which lead to peace and comfort, Ms. Tang notes that she occasionally has the same experiences while praying alone in her room.

Independent Network Charismatic Christianity

In their book, *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders Are Changing the Religious Landscape*, Brad Christerson and Richard Flory explore the rapid growth of “Independent Network Charismatic (INC)” Christianity in the USA since 1970. The authors describe INC as networks of strong, dynamic leaders exerting influence through media and relationships. Their growth is attributed in part to the decline of denominationalism along with the rapid growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity.⁸⁵ One critical finding of the study is that young followers of the INC movement are overwhelming not satisfied with traditional Protestantism in their focus on the intellectual component of Christianity, namely the passive learning of information about God. This has led to an information-saturated, experience-hungry congregations, which are “doomed to fail”.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Brad Christerson and Richard Flory, *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders Are Changing the Religious Landscape* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 4–5.

⁸⁶ Christerson and Flory, 160–61.

Could an “INC-like” Christianity develop in contemporary China within its “Pentecostal” churches? Donald Miller and Nanlai Cao find that many young urbanites do not find some of the practices of Pentecostal churches in China to be attractive.⁸⁷ Though the experiential scores increased the most among non-NC participants of this study, the most frequently cited reason was an increase of sensing “God’s calling” and/or “God’s leading”. For New College participants, the sense of “calling” and “leading” was experienced before coming to Edinburgh and therefore its importance remained at a similar level in the post-Edinburgh survey. This may explain why experiential scores for New College participants did not change.

⁸⁷ Yang, Tong, and Anderson, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 27; Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China,” 156.

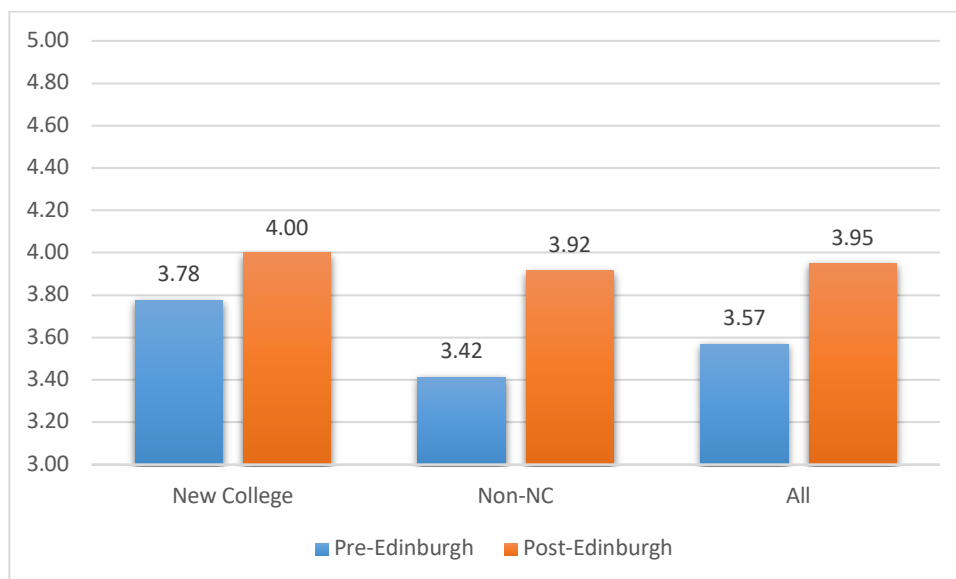
Chapter 4: Communal

Whereas the previous two chapters have focused on the personal dimensions of conceptions towards Christianity, this last chapter examines the social dimension. The communal emphasises the relationship between Christians. The most common examples include post-worship tea, games, group outings, and eating together – all of which can promote an individual's sense of belongingness and connectedness. In this chapter

General trend

Pre-Edinburgh importance communal aspect was the lowest with a reported average of 3.57 and post-Edinburgh of 3.95, a change of +0.38 yet remained the lowest average of the three aspects (c.f. experiential average of 4.10 and intellectual average of 4.19). New College participants reported minimal change in importance of communal, with a pre-Edinburgh average of 3.78 and post-Edinburgh average of 4.00, a change of +0.22. On the other hand, non-NC participants had a pre-Edinburgh average of 3.42 with a post-Edinburgh average of 3.92, a growth of +0.50 and tying with the importance of experiential.⁸⁸

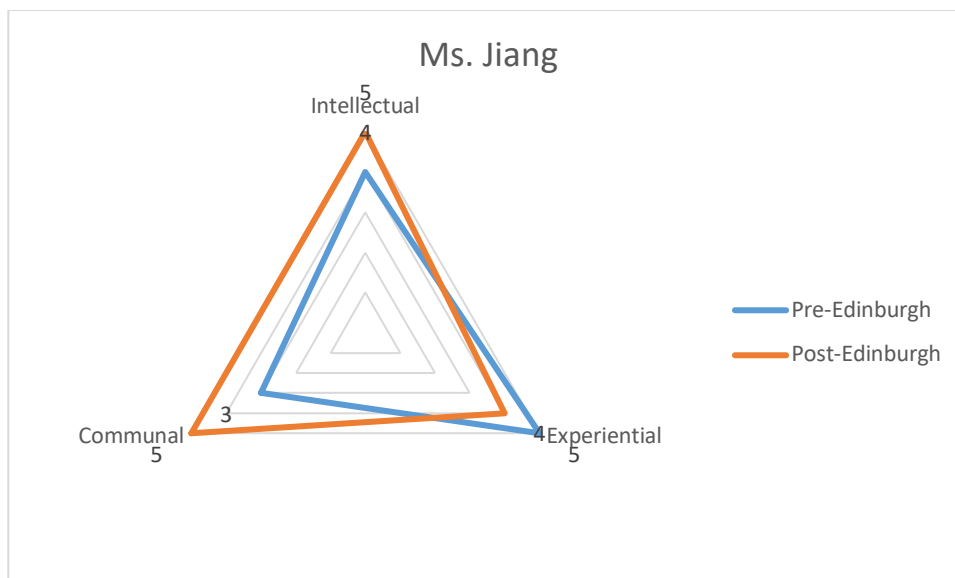
Figure 5. Average score of the communal aspect by population group



⁸⁸ Data is available in appendix: A.2.1, A.2.2, and A.2.3.

Participants seemed to be most divided about the importance of the communal aspect with the only decrease of 3 reported across all three aspects, and two participants who scored communal 2 points higher after migrating to Edinburgh. All but four participants reported a change in importance of the communal aspect. Ms. Deng, who scored a 2 in post-Edinburgh communal gave the reason that since she is a long time Christian, church attendance is a given, and less emphasis is placed on its importance to her Christian faith. Mr. Xiong also scored a 2 in post-Edinburgh communal. Our interview revealed that Mr. Xiong spends many weekends throughout the year traveling between churches and fellowships on continental Europe to speak. His focus, while as a student at Edinburgh, is clearly not on the nurturing of his own faith in the communal aspect. Two case studies are presented to elucidate some of these changes.

Ms. Jiang is a doctoral student from mainland China. Ms. Jiang converted to Christianity while in China and later immigrated to North America to study theology. Due to the sparse population of Chinese people and radically different expressions of Christianity in her newfound hometown, Ms. Jiang struggled to find a consistent place of worship for nearly two years. Upon coming to Edinburgh, Ms. Jiang has quickly settled in a Scottish mainstream church.



Research has found that social networks are vital for international students in contributing to their well-being, happiness, acculturation, and social stability.⁸⁹ Ms. Jiang's experience highlights the importance of these social, including religious, networks:

"Then I went to [North America]. Those two years were my lowest point of my spiritual life... I found an Anglican church and fell asleep during service. They were all grey haired people. They knew each other but no one wanted to communicate with me; we were so different! I wasn't so interested in their teaching and worship style. I didn't have a consistent Christian community to worship at... There were no Chinese churches near me... No one reads the Bible with me. My best friend was a Muslim. There were so few people there. We had postgraduates in the single digits. Most were old. The younger people were just me and my Muslim friend."

In a study of Asian international students in Australia and Singapore, Catherine Gomes finds that international students make friends with other international students more so than their domestic peers.⁹⁰ In the case of Ms. Jiang and her Muslim friend, similarity⁹¹ in age was cited as the reason for friendship. Though deeply dissatisfied with her situation and recognizing that those years was the lowest point of her life, she "sensed that God was still with [her]." After migrating to Edinburgh, Ms. Jiang "said to [her]self 'I must find a place to worship!'... I don't think I'll ever want to leave the Christian community." Ms. Jiang is satisfied with her Scottish mainstream church in its community, resulting in an increased post-Edinburgh communal score.

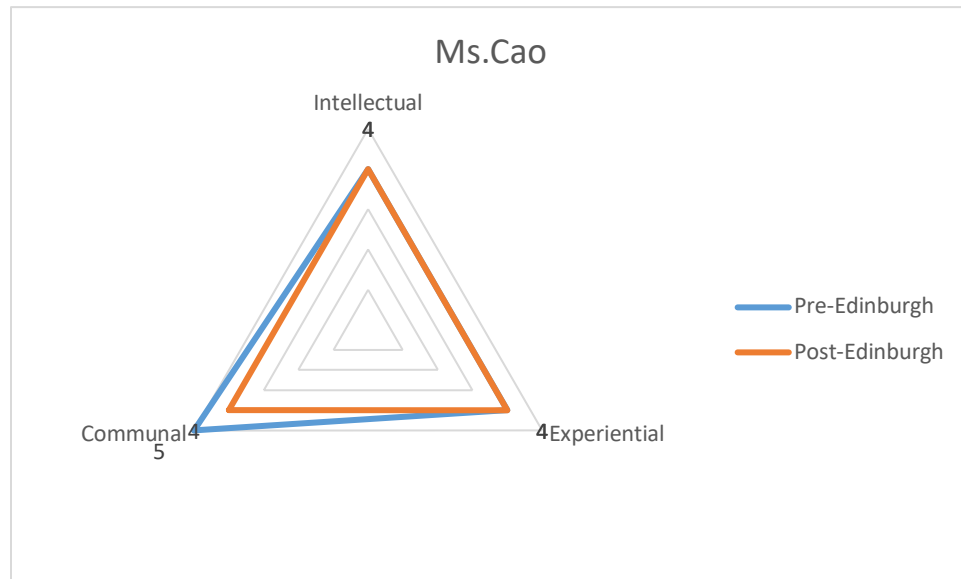
Ms. Cao is a postgraduate student from mainland China. Like many from her background, no members of her family were Christians (with the exception of her paternal grandmother). After she graduated university, Ms. Cao converted to Protestant Christianity through attending Bible study at fellowship alongside reading the Bible privately. Shortly after her conversion, Ms. Cao relocated to a major urban Chinese city where she continued to meet with others Christian through one-on-one Bible study and

⁸⁹ Catherine Gomes et al., "Home Away from Home: International Students and Their Identity-Based Social Networks in Australia," *Journal of International Students* 4, no. 1 (2014): 2–15; Kazuhiro Kudo and Keith A. Simkin, "Intercultural Friendship Formation: The Case of Japanese Students at an Australian University," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2003): 91–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0725686032000165351>.

⁹⁰ Ly Thi Tran and Catherine Gomes, *International Student Connectedness and Identity: Transnational Perspectives*, vol. 6, Cultural Studies and Transdisciplinarity in Education (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2017), 109.

⁹¹ Kazuhiro Kudo and Keith A. Simkin identify similarity of age as an important element of friendship formation. Kudo and Simkin, "Intercultural Friendship Formation," 100–101.

fellowship. Months later she returned to the smaller, prefecture-level city where she attended a TSPM church. All three of the mainland churches which Ms. Cao attended were described as conservative. Ms. Cao's time at a mainstream Chinese church in Edinburgh has been challenging to her theologically and culturally.



Based on interview data, Ms. Cao described her pre-Edinburgh communal as mostly rooted in her relationships with key individuals. In her one-on-one Bible studies, Ms. Cao described this older lady with appreciation: “one older sister took responsibility for me. I really like her because she is very much like Jesus... [when] I couldn’t go to church, she would sacrifice her time to come and visit me despite over an hour of travel time.” Later, another older woman would influence Ms. Cao in encouraging her towards “consistent Christian behaviour and speaking truth”. For Ms. Cao these positive relationships translated to a high pre-Edinburgh communal score.

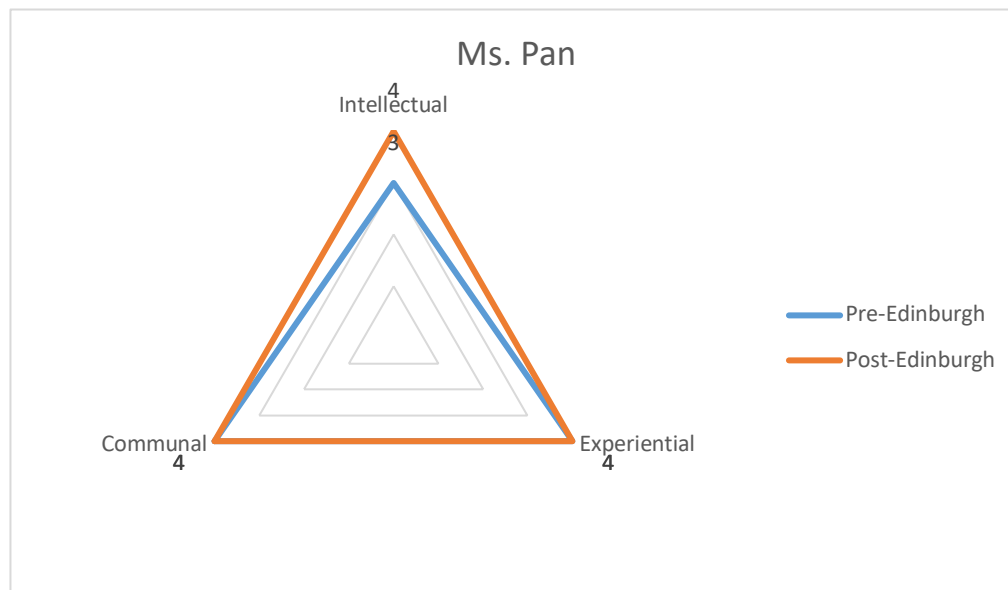
Ms. Cao’s initial experience at a mainstream Chinese church in Edinburgh was not a positive one. Despite some similarities between her former church and the new one⁹², Ms. Cao reported that initially the church did not seem too welcoming. Ms. Cao was not alone in this feeling, Mr. Fang also noted that “when I first arrived, I wondered why people only hung out with people they liked. They didn’t really speak with new people... it was hard to feel like I belonged” in speaking about the same church. However, Ms. Cao saw the

⁹² Peggy Levitt has noted that in some denominations, the “model” for prayer and administration are similar around the world, therefore migrants know how to participate in any church wherever they are. See Peggy Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life,” *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 1 (2004): 6.

perceived flippancy amongst members of the church as the more serious issue, “[the church] seems to emphasize God’s mercy but do not have enough respect for God himself... I believe we need some restraint here,” and “the church seems to be very embracing – for example, girls dressing very little or dying their hair.” This account supports Alexander Chow’s speculation that contemporary Protestantism in China tend to adopt theologies that underscore fundamentalism and pietism.⁹³

When individuals move to a new religious community, they are not automatically inducted into the church and often undergo a process by which they attempt to recreate their former religious context.⁹⁴ Ms. Cao’s painful process ultimately ended in frustration when she “came to realize that not every church is perfect... so I decided to be more merciful and not expect people to be the same as me.” One reason for this change was to limit the negative impact it might have on her faith, “I shouldn’t allow the environment to negatively affect my relationship with God... coming here presented many challenges, exposing my weaknesses and failures.”

Ms. Pan converted to Protestantism while in mainland China. However, her early years in the new faith were spent in an unregistered student fellowship group which had participating students from nearby universities. For Ms. Pan, the communal aspect of her Christian faith remained significant before and after Edinburgh.



⁹³ Chow, “Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today,” 164; Ryan Dunch, “Protestant Christianity in China Today: Fragile, Fragmented, Flourishing,” in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, N.Y. ; London: MESHARPE, 2001), 201.

⁹⁴ Scott M. Myers, “The Impact of Religious Involvement on Migration,” *Social Forces* 79, no. 2 (2000): 762, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/79.2.755>.

She notes that following her baptism, nearly all of her extracurricular time was spent in the fellowship. “The foundation of my faith was gradually established through serving the church, serving others, and serving God.” Despite her busy schedule as a full time student, Ms. Pan discovered that the time she spent facilitating weekly girls Bible studies, playing the piano during Sunday service, and helping to cook lunch helped mould her personality to better work with others while also bringing her joy and peace. After moving to Edinburgh, Ms. Pan attended a Scottish mainstream church which she describes as having “had the greatest impact on my faith so far” for having missionaries report their services in the mission field.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The aims of this ethnographic study were two-fold. First, it discussed how the various models (e.g. Glock and Stark, A.Y. Chau) of understanding religious identity may be problematic to the target population. It then proposed a model of three priorities (intellectual, experiential, and communal) to examine how the population conceived their Christian faith. Second, it investigated how migration to Edinburgh impacted participants' conceptions of Christianity. More specifically, semi-structured interviews and follow-up surveys were conducted to examine how individual's scores in the three priorities shifted as a result of migration.

The two data gathering methods produced a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of participant change through migration. The unique aspect of the study is that it has captured general changes to an individual's faith through migration. While it is only a rough glimpse, the study provided a vivid picture of participants' change through migration. One finding is that non-NC participant conceptions of the Christian faith have become more important in the experiential and communal aspects. This finding concurs with what Timothy Smith has observed in that migrants seem to turn to religion due to the support, structure, intimacy, and in some cases, continuity with the past. Prema Kurian further suggests that some migrants seem to rediscover the importance of religion and intentionally embrace religion as an identity marker, therefore becoming more religiously active in their host country.⁹⁵ For several participants of this study, migration to a context where the religious environment is different from that of their homeland provided the freedom necessary for people to experiment with new Christian identities, resulting in greater religiosity.⁹⁶ The study also found that for participants who study divinity, migration to Edinburgh did not cause any significant change in any of the three aspects. In the next sections, we discuss how participants chose church membership and the study's contribution to religious transnationalism. The chapter concludes by considering study limitations and proposals for future improvement.

⁹⁵ Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 14.

⁹⁶ Williams, "Constructing a Calling," 257.

How do participants choose which church to attend?

In his 1970 book, *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran develops his philosophy based on the idea that social structures are critical to mission strategy. One of the more controversial aspects of his philosophy was the “Homogenous Unit Principle” (HUP).⁹⁷ McGavran understood this as “simply a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common,” where the dividing unit might be tribe or caste, culture or language, country or city. Though McGavran noted that “the homogenous unit is an elastic concept, its meaning depending on the context in which it is used,” it clearly leans towards division by ethnicity and nationality.⁹⁸ Note that its purpose in context was to allow multi-individual conversion with minimal social dislocation.⁹⁹

Wayne McClintock notes that McGavran’s HUP arise from his interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20: “all the nations” must mean tribes, castes, lineages, and classes, thereby providing a theological basis for “people group” approach to evangelism. The logical outcome of evangelism based on people group is the establishment of people group churches founded on the HUP.¹⁰⁰ McGavran further justifies this by examining the New Testament churches, concluding that its congregations were mono-ethnic in character.¹⁰¹ McClintock is not satisfied with this explanation, “[o]ne can only conclude that he has fallen victim to the all too common practice of legitimating a theoretical position by a selective reading of the evidence contained in the text.”¹⁰²

Despite McGavran’s insistence on adopting sociology and anthropology in his missiology, McClintock finds McGavran’s sociological assumptions of the structural-functional school of anthropology to be lacking and largely outdated. According to McClintock, this school is deficient in three ways: first, they view communities as isolated (which is not appropriate as people are connected both locally and globally); second, due to

⁹⁷ It was hotly debated during the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and ultimately abandoned as a tenant of the Church Growth Movement. Mark Pickett, “Caste-Sensitive Church Planting: Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *Transformation* 32, no. 3 (July 1, 2015): 180–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378814537763>.

⁹⁸ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1970), 85–87.

⁹⁹ Pickett, “Caste-Sensitive Church Planting,” 178.

¹⁰⁰ Wayne McClintock, “Sociological Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *International Review of Mission* 77, no. 305 (January 1988): 107–8.

¹⁰¹ McClintock, 108.

¹⁰² McClintock, 108.

their perception that communities are isolated, they tend to ignore complex web of interaction between communities and the wider society; and third, they tend to view history as static and ignore social change.¹⁰³ “Many churches may be satisfied with defining “a church for all peoples” as meaning, “a separate church for each people group.” Yet it seems difficult to justify this position considering Mark 11:17 and Acts 13:1, where the Greek word “ethnē” means “people groups foreign to a specific people group” and also “non-Israelite Christians”.¹⁰⁴ Erik Hyatt believes that Mark 11:17 clearly advocate multi-ethnic inclusion within the local church.”¹⁰⁵

In his analysis of the Hindu caste system in contemporary South Asia, Mark Pickett found that the caste system is undergoing immense change. Intracaste solidarity has been on the rise and caste remains one of the most significant parts of one’s identity.¹⁰⁶ Pickett describes the caste system as primarily a structure revolving around ideas of “kinship and kingship,” and not a philosophy based on hierarchy or socio-economic differences.¹⁰⁷ Therefore it is not necessary for one to abandon their caste identity when converting to Christianity. An uninformed, blanket application of McGavran’s HUP suggests that it would be best for those within the same caste to worship together, but to do so is viewed as an attack on the caste system and the society itself. Pickett is careful to not advocate for the caste system, quoting Newbigin, “the witness of separate congregations in the same geographical area on the basis of language and culture may have to be accepted as a necessary, but provisional, measure for the sake of the fulfilment of Christ’s mission.”¹⁰⁸

Since 1970 we have seen a pushback against the HUP. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith’s 2000 *Divided by Faith* was credited for bringing the conversations on race and religion back into evangelicalism by discovering that its emphasis on individualism, free will, and personal relationships contributed to a passive racism.¹⁰⁹ By the late 2000s, the pendulum has largely swung (back?) towards ethnic plurality as a virtue in church and the broader society – the topic of ethnicity remains a necessary fixation. A

¹⁰³ McClintock, 111.

¹⁰⁴ William Arndt and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.*, Third edition (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 276.

¹⁰⁵ Erik Hyatt, “Missions Sunday: From Homogeneous to a Heterogeneous Unit Principle,” January 29, 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Pickett, “Caste-Sensitive Church Planting,” 182.

¹⁰⁷ Pickett, 182.

¹⁰⁸ Pickett, 185.

¹⁰⁹ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 170.

brief survey returns books such as George Yancey's 2003 *One Body One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches*, Kathleen Garces-Foley's 2007 *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission*, and Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park's 2011 *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation*. Yet despite their best efforts, white evangelicalism's efforts at racial reconciliation have largely failed, according to J. Russel Hawkins and Phillip Sinitiere.¹¹⁰

In short, McGavran's HUP relies on an oversimplification of identity, as if people are *only* bounded by the nationality and ethnicity of a people who are assumed to share a common history and set of values and norms. This study finds that choosing which church to attend and participate in is significantly more complicated than the HUP would suggest. Participants cited numerous reasons for attending a mainstream Chinese or Scottish mainstream church are summarized as follows:

1. *A church's close proximity to the participant's residence was the most commonly cited factor.* This was true for participants who attended either a Chinese church or a Scottish mainstream church.
2. *Some participants cited "correct teachings" of the church as a pre-requisite for participation,* where definitions of orthodoxy depended on the individual and in every case, was carried over from their previous church. Whereas one participant determined that Reformed theology was the only acceptable theology for the church, another was only interested in "biblical fidelity" in church's preaching. Furthermore, this study finds that participants of Scottish mainstream churches were more likely to consider orthodox teaching as a pre-requisite to church attendance.
3. *Some participants chose to attend a church due to affinity to language and culture, not nationality.* This can be described by the *homophily* principle in which contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people.¹¹¹ This occurred with both Chinese churches as well as Scottish mainstream churches. When asked why she

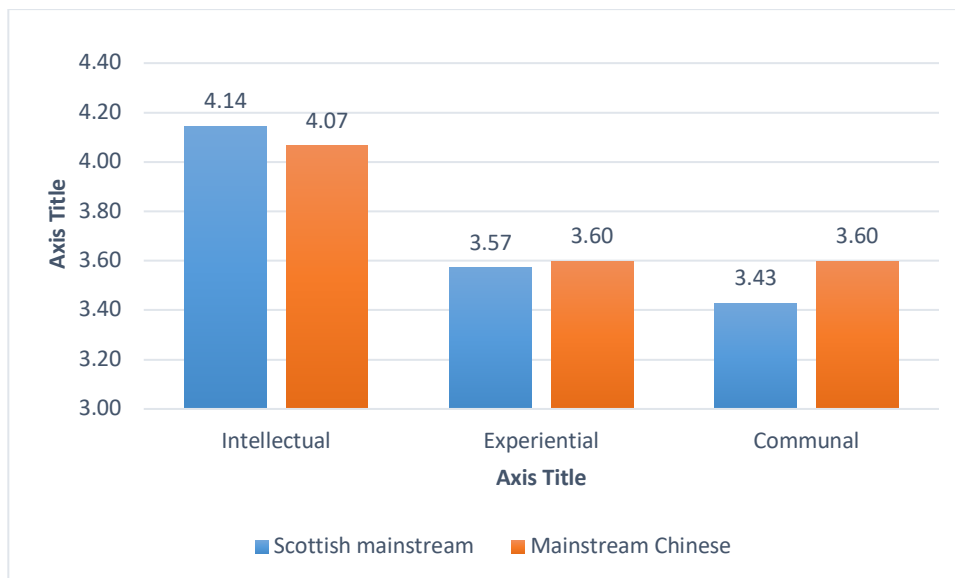
¹¹⁰ Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion after Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 256–62.

¹¹¹ "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks | Annual Review of Sociology," accessed August 3, 2019, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415>.

attends a Scottish mainstream church, Ms. Sun replied, “I feel that my heart language is English because most of the education I received is in English.” Similarly, Ms. Pan says “for my religious understanding, English is a more familiar language.” Another participant who attended a Scottish mainstream church but eventually settled into a mainstream Chinese church said Mr. Yan: “I think that with Chinese... it is possible to discuss very deeply. We can have heart to heart conversations.” Mr. Yan almost mentioned that it was difficult to develop close and deep relationships with native UK people. International student participants of Greta Bradley’s study had the general perception that while UK people were outwardly friendly, relationships rarely went past the superficial stage.¹¹²

4. *Participants did not choose to join a Chinese or Scottish church based on their intellectual, experiential, and communal scores.* Pre-Edinburgh data from those who attend a mainstream Chinese church vs. Scottish mainstream church are too similar (see figure 6). This hypothesis needs further testing with more data.

Figure 6. Averages of pre-Edinburgh values by church

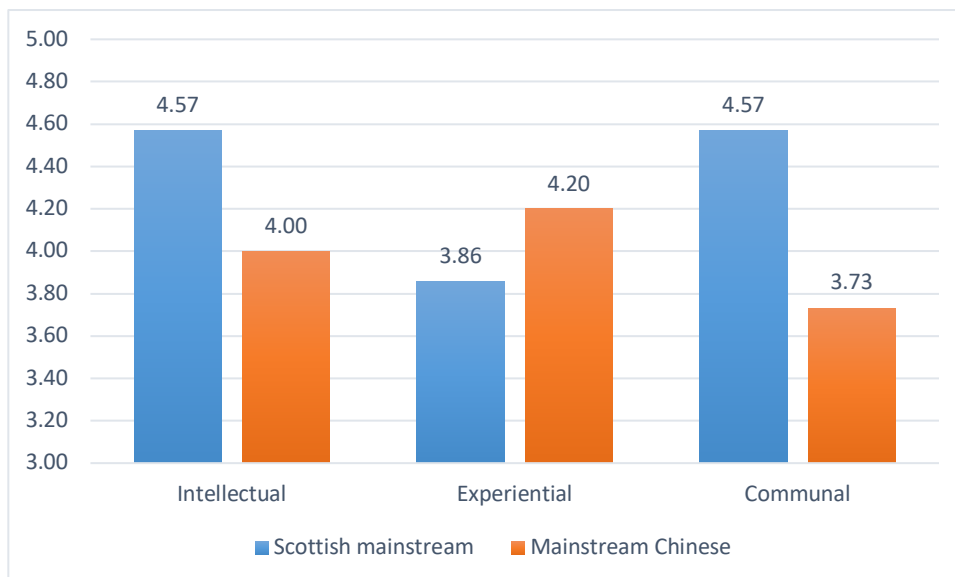


The study also makes the following conclusions and hypotheses regarding participants after their migration to Edinburgh:

¹¹² Bradley, “Responding Effectively to the Mental Health Needs of International Students,” 426.

1. *Participants of Scottish mainstream churches report higher scores in the intellectual and communal aspects than their Chinese church counterparts. See figure 7.*
2. *A higher communal score reflects a higher level of satisfaction with the church. Their most frequently cited reasons for satisfaction include well prepared sermons, faithfulness to the Bible, and a strong sense of belonging.*
3. *A lower score (3 or less) in communal may reflect a lower sense of belongingness in church, a lower level of engagement, and/or a lower desire for belongingness.*
4. *Disappointment in the church was occasionally reported among those who attend Chinese churches. Among these participants, the most frequently cited reason was an initial sense of disconnectedness. However, the initial sense of disconnectedness was eventually overcome by religious obligations and desire for belongingness. This response was not reported among those who attend mainstream British church.*

Figure 7. Averages of post-Edinburgh values by church



In his chapter, *Efficacy, not Confessionality: On Ritual Polytypy in China*, Chau argues that the West has historically been strong in its confessionality. However, more recently with the New Age Movement and rise of multifaith religiosity in the West, it has

become uncannily like China in its ritual polytropy¹¹³ in that New Agers are not so much concerned with following a particular religious tradition but rather seek “connection”. Whereas the Chinese ritual economy and Western New Agers reject confessionality in favour of efficacy or connection, participants of this study can be described as “communality, not confessionality”. “Communality” is reinforced most frequently through a common language and culture, but also through a negotiable sense of belonging. “Confessionality” can either refer to one’s loyalty to the Christian faith or to a particular denomination/church. While participants maintain high confessionality to the Christian faith, loyalty to a particular church or denomination is much more fluid. Church membership and belongingness operate closely together: membership in a particular church may contribute to an increase in a sense of belongingness while for another participant, a decrease in a sense of belongingness may prompt participation in another church. Furthermore, several participants were able to simultaneously belong to a mainstream Chinese church as well as a Scottish mainstream church if their time allowed it.

Transnationalism and World Christianity

David Maxwell points out that “World Christianity” is a problematic term as it suggests a homogenization in Christianity that rarely happens. “Global Christianity” is also not preferred since the term “global” is a broad and confusing term with connotations of the elimination of the local, and along with it, the possibility of local Christianity. Maxwell suggests that the term “transnational”¹¹⁴ since it allows multidirectional analysis without privileging the West.¹¹⁵ Maxwell concludes his article with the note that while there is

¹¹³ “Polytropy” is a term coined by Michael Carrithers to describe the many sources for spiritual sustenance that people turn towards. Adam Yuet Chau, “Efficacy, Not Confessionality: On Ritual Polytropy in China,” in *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Inter-Communal Relations Around Holy Places*, ed. Glenn Bowman (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2015), 79, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?docID=982089>.

¹¹⁴ The term “transnationalism” was first introduced into migration studies in *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, in which Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton used the term to highlight the emergence of a social process in which migrants established and sustained relations with their countries of origin while living in new destinations. Nina Glick Schiller et al., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences ; v.645 (New York: Academy of Sciences, 1992).

¹¹⁵ David Maxwell, “Historical Perspectives on Christianity Worldwide: Connections, Comparisons, and Consciousness,” in *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, ed. Joel Cabrita and Emma Wild-Wood, Theology and Mission in World Christianity ; v. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 53.

abundant scholarship on local appropriations of Christianity, religious transnationalism needs development.¹¹⁶

Albeit very limited, this study contributes to religious transnationalism by examining transnational religious exchange of its participants. With massive numbers of *haigui* returnees¹¹⁷, they not only contribute to China's economic modernization and "channel the appeal of Chinese values and culture to other countries" but also act as conduits for religious exchange as their conceptions of Christianity change through migration.¹¹⁸

It would be difficult to say that Chinese international students of this study engage in transnational religious exchange due to their transience. Most participants of this study volunteer in the ministries of the local churches and become the recipients of religious exchange. When asked about how their religious experience abroad may impact their return home, participant responses could be summarized as *cautious optimism*, highlighted below:

"If there are any opportunities to share what I have learnt here, I will share. How they respond depends on their own background. In general I think the response should be positive." (Mr. Huang, MDiv Theology and Religious Studies)

"...in reality, China is much more open today than 30 years ago. It is more globalized and therefore its differences from the west may not be that huge." (Mr. Dai, PhD Theology and Religious Studies)

The other direction of *transnational religious exchange* is to consider how these international students impact their churches in Edinburgh. One participant, Mr. Xiong (a young man studying PhD in divinity, with over a decade of pastoral experience) has certainly made his mark on the churches he attends. Mr. Xiong attended the student fellowship and after realizing that its participants' maturity of the Christian faith was too varied, he began hosting a second fellowship at his home for Christians more established in their faiths. According to him, the second fellowship would allow its participants to go

¹¹⁶ Maxwell, 64.

¹¹⁷ *Haigui*, or sea turtles, primarily refers to the Chinese students or professionals who go back to China after their temporary overseas studying or working experiences.

¹¹⁸ Although there is indication that the dropout rate of students who convert and return to China is very high due to their difficulty in adjusting to local Chinese churches. Yang, Tong, and Anderson, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 21; Yangwen Zheng, *Sinicizing Christianity*, Studies in Christian Mission ; v. 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 92.

deeper in faith and theology while simultaneously functioning as ministry training so more individuals could be reinvested back into the church's various ministries. Mr. Xiong's impact has certainly left its mark considering that this researcher attends that fellowship.

Study Limitations and Further Research

This survey portion of this study functions as an exploratory trial. Verification of these findings require a much larger, more diverse sample size. Future studies must consider the diversity in religious background and church membership of Chinese international students. Some are born into and raised by deeply committed Christian family members while others convert as adults. Back in their home country, church attendance varies greatly: ranging from unregistered house churches and registered TSPM churches to denominational churches in Hong Kong and elsewhere. While abroad, students regularly attend Chinese, mainstream Scottish, Catholic, and Orthodox churches, among others.

The researcher also finds the three priorities model to be a good start in analysing Chinese international students and their changing conceptions of Christianity. However, the model may consider the addition of at least two other priorities: *practical* and *ritual*. As migrants to an unknown land, the practical needs of the student are heightened. The *practical* priority may explore how an individual perceives the role of the church in supporting international students and its engagement in the public (e.g. public welfare, evangelism). As previously discussed, Protestant Christians avoid the term "ritual" (*yishi*) for its non-Christian religious overtones. Yet Protestant rituals such as baptism and communion, cultural rituals including the celebration of Chinese holidays, and church specific rituals such as how worship is conducted are important aspects of conceptions of Christianity. One possible solution is to design a more complicated survey. Instead of asking for direct response (e.g. how important is the intellectual aspect?), the survey might ask: "How important is communion?" (ritual) "How often do you seek language help from church members?" (practical)

With the increase of global mobility of international students,¹¹⁹ further research on how their conceptions of Christianity change through migration. The three priority model functions as a baseline and may be modified in order to more accurately study other

¹¹⁹ Simon Marginson, *International Student Security* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 219.

transnational Christianities, for example African Pentecostals in Yemen, Cuban Catholics in the USA, or rural Chinese international students in the UK¹²⁰.

¹²⁰ Even research on rural to rural migration in China is sparse. Robyn R. Iredale and Fei Guo, *Handbook of Chinese Migration: Identity and Wellbeing* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 4.

Appendix

Interview Protocol

1) Demographic Data

- a) Please tell me about your background: where were you born? What cities have you lived in and how many years in each? Briefly describe your life in each location.
- b) What is your educational background?
- c) What programme do you study here? How many months/years are you into the programme and how many months/years are left? Briefly, why did you decide to study at Edinburgh and what are your motivations for this area of study?
- d) How is your education being funded?
- e) Do you work? If so, how many hours per week and what kind of work do you do?
- f) What are your plans after graduation?

2) Religious Data

- a) Please tell me a little bit about your family background. When did you become a Christian and what are some key moments that drew you towards Christianity?
- b) Home (baseline)
 - i) Please describe the church(es) you attend back at home. What activities did you participate in (e.g., Bible study, prayer meeting, Sabbath worship, etc.) and what responsibilities, if any, did you have? If you did not attend church, describe any interactions you had with Christians and Christianity back home.
 - ii) Please recall the central Christian examples back in your home city and country. Examples include events, sermons, personal relationships, community, etc.
 - iii) What did you understand about Christianity and/or being a Christian? By Christianity I refer to church experience, Christian practices, theology, Christian community, and involvement outside of church, etc.
 - iv) Try to recall how important being a Christian was for your personal identity. In what ways and to what degree was your personal identity linked to Christianity?
- c) Migration (Edinburgh)

- i) What role, if any, did Christianity play in your decision to come to Edinburgh to study? Calling?
 - ii) Please describe the church(es) you currently attend in Edinburgh. What activities do you participate in and what responsibilities, if any, do you currently have? If you do not attend a church for Sunday worship, please describe any Christian gatherings with which you are involved.
 - iii) [If attending church] What similarities and differences from your home church have you observed?
 - iv) In what ways have your understanding of “Christianity” and/or being a “Christian” changed after coming here to Edinburgh? Again, recall central events, sermons, or personal relationships that may have caused a change in understanding in church experience, Christian practices, theology, community outside church, other Christian groups, etc.
 - v) What is your reaction to these shifts in understanding? Do you see them as largely positive or negative, or neutral? Why?
 - vi) Have these shifts changed the relationship between Christianity and your personal identity? For example, do you see Christianity as a more important or less important part of your personal identity? Or is the relationship entirely different?
 - vii) Have these shifts changed your own religious practices such as church attendance and participation, church-related activities, and non-church faith-based activities? If so, please describe.
- d) Return home
- i) Imagine returning to your home and your home church. How might your new perspectives about Christianity shape your church attendance and participation? What about church-related and non-church faith-based activities?
 - ii) In returning to your home community, how might your “new” religious identity be received by your church community, family, and friends?

Migration and Christianity

Purpose: To track the change in personal priorities of the Christian faith through migration to Edinburgh

Instruction: Please rate the importance of each aspect in your personal Christian faith in (1) the most recent location before Edinburgh and (2) after coming to Edinburgh.

Definitions:

Intellectual – focusing on engaging the mind with theologies and concepts about God.

Experiential – devotional life; spiritual life and practices; interaction with the supernatural; practices that engage the body, senses, and emotions; (Pentecostal/Charismatic experiences of) signs and wonders.

Communal – church and fellowship; sense of belonging.

* Required

1. Your first name: *

2. (Pre-Edinburgh) Intellectual *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

3. (Pre-Edinburgh) Experiential *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

4. (Pre-Edinburgh) Communal *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

6. **(Post-Edinburgh) Experiential ***
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

7. **(Post-Edinburgh) Communal ***
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low importance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	High importance

8. **Any additional comments?**

A.1 Participant (pseudonym) with select attributes

	Name	Church (Pseudonym) in Edinburgh	Programme and Subject of Studies	Year in Programme
1	Mr. Kai	Edinburgh Chinese Church (ECC)	MTh Theology and Religious Studies	First year
2	Ms. Deng	Chinese Church of Edinburgh (CCE)	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	Second year
3	Ms. Tang	Catholic Church of Edinburgh	MSc Languages, Countries and Cultures	First year
4	Mr. Dai	ECC	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	First year
5	Ms. Jiang	Baptist Church of Edinburgh	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	First year
6	Mr. Xiong	ECC	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	Second year
7	Ms. Xu	Free Church of Edinburgh	PhD Medicine	Graduated
8	Mr. Zhao	Orthodox Church of Edinburgh	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	First year
9	Ms. Wu	CCE	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	First year
10	Ms. Cao	ECC	MSc Education	First year
11	Mr. Zhang	ECC	BSc Chemistry	Graduated
12	Mr. Fu	New Church Movement of Edinburgh	PhD Theology and Religious Studies	Fourth year
13	Ms. Zhuang	ECC	PhD Chemistry	First year
14	Mr. Fang	ECC	MSc Computing and Informatics	First year
15	Ms. Jia	ECC	DPsychotherapy Counselling and Psychotherapy	Third year
16	Ms. Ni	CCE	MLA Architecture and Landscape Architecture	Second year
17	Mr. Huang	CCE	MDiv Theology and Religious Studies	First year
18	Ms. Cheng	ECC	MChem Chemistry	Second year
19	Ms. Sun	CCE, Evangelical Church of Edinburgh	BSc Sport	Graduated
20	Mr. Yang	ECC	PhD Computing and Informatics	Graduated
21	Ms. Pan	Baptist Church of Edinburgh	MSc International Development	Graduated

A.2.1 Values of the three aspects of all participants, with averages and change.

Participant	Pre-Edinburgh				Post-Edinburgh		
	I	E	C		I	E	C
Mr. Kai	5	4	4		5	4	4
Ms. Deng	4	5	3		3	5	2
Ms. Tang	4	3	1		5	4	4
Mr. Dai	4	4	4		5	4	4
Ms. Jiang	4	5	3		5	4	5
Mr. Xiong	4	5	5		5	4	2
Ms. Xu	3	3	5		4	2	5
Mr. Zhao	5	3	3		5	5	5
Ms. Wu	5	4	4		4	4	5
Ms. Cao	4	4	5		4	4	4
Mr. Zhang	3	3	3		4	3	5
Mr. Fu	5	5	5		5	4	4
Ms. Zhuang	4	3	5		5	5	4
Mr. Fang	3	4	4		3	3	3
Ms. Jia	5	2	5		3	5	3
Ms. Ni	2	3	4		4	4	3
Mr. Huang	5	4	3		5	5	5
Ms. Cheng	4	3	1		4	5	3
Ms. Sun	5	2	3		4	4	5
Mr. Yang	4	4	1		2	4	4
Ms. Pan	3	4	4		4	4	4
Average	4.05	3.67	3.57		4.19	4.10	3.95
Change					+ 0.14	+ 0.43	+ 0.38

A.2.2 Values of the three aspects of New College participants, with averages and change.

Participant	Pre-Edinburgh				Post-Edinburgh		
	I	E	C		I	E	C
Mr. Kai	5	4	4		5	4	4
Ms. Deng	4	5	3		3	5	2
Mr. Dai	4	4	4		5	4	4
Ms. Jiang	4	5	3		5	4	5
Mr. Xiong	4	5	5		5	4	2
Mr. Zhao	5	3	3		5	5	5
Ms. Wu	5	4	4		4	4	5
Mr. Fu	5	5	5		5	4	4
Mr. Huang	5	4	3		5	5	5
Average	4.56	4.33	3.78		4.67	4.33	4.00
Change					+ 0.11	0.00	+ 0.22

A.2.3 Values of the three aspects of non-New College participants, with averages and change.

Participant	Pre-Edinburgh				Post-Edinburgh		
	I	E	C		I	E	C
Ms. Tang	4	3	1		5	4	4
Ms. Xu	3	3	5		4	2	5
Ms. Cao	4	4	5		4	4	4
Mr. Zhang	3	3	3		4	3	5
Ms. Zhuang	4	3	5		5	5	4
Mr. Fang	3	4	4		3	3	3
Ms. Jia	5	2	5		3	5	3
Ms. Ni	2	3	4		4	4	3
Ms. Cheng	4	3	1		4	5	3
Ms. Sun	5	2	3		4	4	5
Mr. Yang	4	4	1		2	4	4
Ms. Pan	3	4	4		4	4	4
Average	3.67	3.17	3.42		3.83	3.92	3.92
Change					+ 0.17	+ 0.75	+ 0.50

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