



Becoming Christian to Remain Chinese

Language Socialization and Identity Formation at the Chinese Christian Church of Berlin

With a case study of the Chinese Christian Church of Berlin, the biggest Chinese Christian congregation in Germany, this article deconstructs the calibration of a migrant religious community by analyzing the strategies of its leaders and the incentives of its members. Based on ethnographic data from extensive fieldwork, it documents how a Christian church transformed its structure and profile over the years to become an additional venue for Chinese language learning and Chinese identity formation. The article points out that migrant religious institutions do not necessarily have to function as sites of integration; they may also serve as an important space of socialization for migrant families, passing on the heritage language and culture from one generation to the next.

Keywords: Migration—migrant church—Chinese diaspora—Chinese Christians
—language socialization

In *Getting Saved in America*, Carolyn Chen titled the introduction as “Becoming Religious by Becoming American,” where she discussed how religions and religious conversions remake the Taiwanese immigrants in the US into Americans (Chen 2008). Many scholars have explored the role of religion in the migrant experience in the US (e.g., Levitt 2003; Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind 2009; Chen and Jeung 2012). Besides being a place of worship and fellowship, religious organizations may also serve as a vital platform for migrant communities. On the structural level, religious institutions may facilitate social, cultural, economic, or even political activities to help immigrants navigate life in the host country and expand their networks (e.g., Chen and Jeung 2000; Foley and Hoge 2007). On the individual level, religious rituals and vocabularies may provide important tools to mediate the challenges immigrants face in the new land, which would help them (re)construct their identities and orientations in the new life (e.g., Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2002; Lawrence 2002; Yang and Ebaugh 2001).

In Germany, migrant religious communities, particularly non-Muslim religious communities, have not yet received much attention. Among the current literature on non-Muslim religious communities in Germany, scholars tend to examine these communities through the lens of integration. A number of works have evaluated migrant churches and temples in terms of their contribution in strengthening the sense of identification with German society among the immigrants (Dümling 2011; Nagel 2014; Elwert 2015; Weiß 2017; Schiffauer 2006; Baumann 2004). This article sets the focus on the religious community itself and its role in the life of its members. Taking the Chinese Christian Church of Berlin (CCCB)—the biggest Chinese Christian congregation in Germany—as an example, the article deconstructs how the church became an additional space of socialization for Chinese migrant families, and how it realized the transmission of Chinese culture and language across generations.

Based on extensive fieldwork during 2011–2012 and 2015–2016,¹ this article provides a close-up case study of CCCB and analyzes the different factors in this process. The article shows that the composition of CCCB was the outcome of two coinciding factors. First, CCCB leadership made a strategic decision to strengthen its constituency by prioritizing the needs of families and adapting the structure and the agenda of the church accordingly; second, the steps taken to implement this strategy catered to needs among the Chinese migrant families and their wish to enhance the Chinese language capacity as well as Chinese cultural identity of their children. CCCB

thus became more than “just” a religious community: it transformed into a new venue for Chinese language learning and Chinese identity formation. By illustrating these aspects, most of which have gone unnoticed in prior research, this research offers new perspectives on migrant religious communities besides their role in the process of integration.

A brief history of CCCB and its unique profile

CCCB started as an informal Bible group of seven people in West Berlin in the 1980s, most of whom were Chinese-speaking students at Free University Berlin. As the number of members reached fifty, the community officially registered as a nonprofit association in Berlin in 1994. In 1999, through a network of Chinese-speaking pastors and active church members from Taiwan and the US, Rutgers Community Christian Church (RCCC), a Chinese Christian community in New Jersey with pronounced Baptist characteristics, became the backer for CCCB. Not only did RCCC provide CCCB with financial support but also sent its senior members to preach in Berlin regularly. The current pastor of CCCB, Li Xu, was introduced to Berlin through the elders of RCCC in 2006 and was later ordained in Berlin in 2010. With transnational support from RCCC in New Jersey, the number of church members has kept growing ever since. With roughly 250 members in 2016, it was the biggest Chinese Protestant congregation in Germany. Since 2006 CCCB rented the church building of *Evangelische Kirchengemeinde am Hohenzollernplatz* (Protestant Church at Hohenzollernplatz) in the southwestern part of the city, where they held their weekly service every Sunday afternoon and “an evening of worship” every Thursday evening.

Chinese churches in Germany mainly exist in the form of *Freikirchen* (free churches) within the German categorization of church institutions and often focus on missionary work (Währisch-Oblau 2005; Oblau 2006, 2011). Most Chinese churches in Germany are founded and supported through mission societies or mission-oriented institutions overseas, typically from Chinese Christian communities in the US. Scholars have pointed out that Chinese Christian communities overseas, both in the US and Europe, insistently emphasize the mission exclusively among ethnic Chinese immigrants (Yang 2002, 2010). Similarly, the majority of members at CCCB were missionized and newly converted to Christianity after arriving in Germany.² The name of the church, *Bolin huaren jiaohui* (Berlin Chinese Church), implied that the threshold of entrance was Chinese ethnicity. The congregation of CCCB mainly consisted of first-generation Chinese immigrants, most of whom were Chinese citizens born in mainland China, and the second generation, many of whom were German citizens born in Germany. During the time of my fieldwork, there were a handful of members coming from Taiwan and Malaysia, as well.³

As a Chinese migrant church in Germany, CCCB developed a unique profile over the years. It had neither contact with German churches in the city, nor with any church in China. An annual “Christian Camp” was organized together among several active Chinese Christian churches in Germany, where members of CCCB also took part occasionally. However, in comparison, RCCC in New Jersey and its strong American Baptist church characteristics had rather the strongest influence on the structure and

dogma of CCCB through their years-long cooperation, particularly through Pastor Xu, who was baptized in a Baptist church in Taiwan himself. Although reflecting the Baptist tradition in theology and practice, the leadership of CCCB preferred to leave the definition of their denomination open and fluid. Besides positioning themselves in strong opposition to the Catholic Church (often with harsh criticism), CCCB branded itself as a general and benevolent church for all Christians and emphasized being “an independent church” that “does not belong to any denomination” (interview with Pastor Xu, December 2012).

The incentives of members at CCCB

How did CCCB become an additional socialization space for Chinese migrant families? What drew these families into the church, and what made them stay and actively participate? With extensive ethnographic data from two fieldwork sites—Sunday service at church and Saturday Bible study group—this section will explore the three main incentives among first-generation Chinese immigrants to bring their children to the Christian community over the weekend: the input of Chinese language and culture, the socialization of Chinese friends and contacts, and the perceived superiority of being Christian.

“Immersed in the Chinese environment” at the church

David⁴ was five years old, when I first met him during a Sunday service at CCCB in 2014. Both of his parents were Chinese immigrants who came to Germany first around 2002 as students, stayed and found jobs after graduation, and founded a family in Berlin with two adorable children. David was the younger one, born and raised in Berlin. He was in the last year of kindergarten when we met. After a big smile and a cheerful “Hallo” from him, I asked him in Chinese, “What’s your name?” The smile disappeared, and the five-year-old suddenly put on a stern face, shook his head slowly, and said to me “*Deutsch, bitte*”—“German, please.”

His parents were not at all surprised by his reaction. As a matter of fact, David’s lack of interest and capacity for speaking Chinese were rather part of the reason why his parents considered it necessary to take him to the church every week. David’s father, Mr. Xie, explained to me: “There [at Chinese language school] a teacher is teaching, children have to sit there and learn, it’s all fake, and children know that! . . . But here at church, this is a very natural environment . . . real and authentic. We are not pretending that we are teaching Chinese, but we all are just speaking Chinese naturally, this is very real. Only here children can really be immersed in the Chinese environment” (interview with Mr. Xie, December 2011).

During my fieldwork at CCCB, I encountered many parents who brought their children to church activities with similar motivation: language. To many first-generation Chinese immigrants, their children’s capacity for speaking Chinese represented the pedagogic ideas of Chinese parenting tradition, the continuity of Chinese culture and Chinese identity, and the inner connection between parents and children. While the core agenda of a Christian church like CCCB was meant to strengthen the Christian faith of its congregation, the unwritten goal of cultivating

Chinese language skill among children had become a priority for the community organizers in recent years. Teachers who supervised Sunday school at CCCB were asked to speak Chinese in the classroom, as it was the expectation from parents.

As many second-generation Chinese immigrants were not fluent in Chinese, conducting Sunday school in Chinese could be challenging for the teachers. Ms. Zheng, one of the teachers in the class for children between six and eight years old, considered it important to “set the rules straight” with the young pupils in her class and to make sure they were in a Chinese-speaking environment as long as they were in the church. “We are the Chinese church, if we don’t even speak Chinese here, where else?” Ms. Zheng asked me rhetorically. “We tell some stories, but mainly do handiwork and drawings. . . . We, teachers and parents, we have to set the examples to speak Chinese, not only in the classroom, but everywhere in the church, anytime on Sunday afternoon” (oral communication, September 2015).

CCCB provided Chinese immigrants in Berlin with a unique environment where Chinese was the dominant language. Parents not only valued the Chinese-speaking environment within the church but also the Chinese traditions and customs in the community life of CCCB. The major Chinese traditional festivals were elaborately planned and earnestly celebrated, both during the Sunday service and among Bible groups. Pastor Xu gave festive sermons, and church leaders offered special programs echoing major Chinese holidays. The church committee and Bible Group Captains organized grand entertainment shows and a lavish banquet during Spring Festival. Among all these activities, the engagement of children always played a prominent role.

Parents spoke highly of the “Chinese-ness” in the setting of CCCB and these Chinese events. Ms. Ye, a mother of two daughters, expressed her motivation in this way: “When they are here, they can meet other Chinese children. Even if they do not always speak Chinese to each other, to hear Chinese everywhere is already very helpful. . . . It is very important for us to have this environment, to bring our children here and let them be immersed in the Chinese culture.” Ms. Ye was particularly pleased when she saw this “immersion” went beyond the church hall. During the course of my fieldwork, the elder daughter of Ms. Ye became good friends with two other girls her age from the same Sunday school class. Ms. Ye’s face lit up every time she talked about her daughter’s friendship: “They will go to a birthday party together next weekend! . . . This is really good! . . . Ah, this is exactly why we insist on bringing them to church every Sunday! So that they can have Chinese kids as friends!” (oral communication, September and November 2015).

Ms. Meng, mother of three children and Sunday school teacher herself, agreed with Ms. Ye completely. “I tried different Chinese language schools before, it didn’t work very well. My sons hate it when they have to go to ‘school’ over the weekend. . . . Then I slowly realized that it is much better to take them here! Actually, the most important thing is not to have Chinese classes, but rather the Chinese environment! Think about how we grew up, right? Which one of us learnt Chinese during Chinese class at Chinese language school? It is after all the environment!” (oral communication, November 2015).

“Make real Chinese friends” at Bible group meeting

It was Saturday. The CCCB Bible group Noah’s Ark was meeting in the parish house of Trinity Church in Charlottenburg in the western part of Berlin to have their weekly gathering. The meeting began at 9:30 in the morning with a prayer. The group sang a few gospel songs together, before they proceeded to the main session of Bible reading, interwoven with discussions and testimonies. The entire Noah’s Ark group consisted of about twenty adults and fifteen children, while an average turnout was usually about twelve to fifteen adults and ten to twelve children.

The venue of this Bible group meeting was only five hundred meters from Huade Chinese Language School, the biggest Chinese language school in Berlin. *Huade*, literally meaning “China and Germany,” was founded in 1992 and attracted more than five hundred pupils every Saturday in 2016. All the children in Noah’s Ark were attending Huade School at the same time, which was why the timetable of the Bible group connected closely with the schedule of the Chinese language school. Every Saturday morning, parents first brought their children to Huade School, where classes started at 9 am, before they walked together to the Bible group meeting. As the meeting ended punctually at 11:45, parents picked up all the children from Huade School, where the Chinese language classes ended at midday. Every Saturday around noon, the entire Noah’s Ark group shared a common lunch together, which they referred to as the “Feast of Love.” Each member brought one or two dishes from home; all the dishes were put on a long table to create a buffet.

This Saturday was no exception. I sat down next to Mr. Song at the lunch table, who was attending the Bible group with the elder two of his three children. Both Mr. Song and his wife were born and raised in Fujian Province in South China. They came to Germany to study in 2000, then stayed and founded a family. Mr. Song was working as a software engineer in a small town near Frankfurt (am Main) as we met, while his wife and their children lived in Berlin. “Actually, we could have moved. My wife stays at home anyway. But we decided to keep the family here and I commute every week. People all say that schools in Hessen are actually better, but that town [where I work] is too small! No Chinese church, no [Chinese] Bible groups, not to talk about a Chinese language school, not possible at all! How can my children learn any Chinese?” Mr. Song drove at least five hours each way to commute, and I could almost see all the miles on his face as we were speaking. “But it is not easy for my wife, either. She has to take care of three children here, all by herself! Our youngest is only two years old!” (interview with Mr. Song, February 2016).

In spite of the hardship of taking care of three children by oneself, the exhaustion of driving more than five hours twice a week, and the fact that the public schools in Hessen had a better reputation, Mr. Song and his wife still preferred to keep the family in Berlin. The Chinese Church, Bible group, and the Chinese language school were the reasons Mr. Song gave me when I asked him about his motivation to stay in Berlin. Mr. Song’s nine-year-old daughter, SS, was circling around the buffet table with her best friend, QQ, as I was talking to her father. QQ’s parents joined our conversation, as they were very glad to see SS as a regular play date for their daughter. “They go to the language school together and sit in the same classroom,” said the mother of QQ, “here [pointing at the playground] they play together, and tomorrow [Sunday] they

can be together at church for a whole afternoon.” QQ’s father added, “it does not even matter if they are speaking German among themselves, it matters that they make friends, make real Chinese friends” (oral communication, February 2016).

Besides the immersion in Chinese language and culture, parents at CCCB desired the potential friend circle and social life their children could cultivate during their participation in the Saturday Bible group meeting and Sunday school. For the rest of the week, parents frequently and enthusiastically arranged play dates and other get-together possibilities to strengthen the contacts and relationships among the Chinese friends their children made at CCCB. They believed in the impact of being in a particular setting and being in constant contact with a particular group of people—“a natural environment” that would enhance the Chinese language capacity of their children while enlarging their Chinese social circle and strengthening their Chinese identity.

The meaning of being Christian

Besides the importance of bringing the second generation into close contact with Chinese language and culture as well as friends and acquaintances, the value of Christian faith was also an essential incentive. The CCCB church leadership emphasized repeatedly and explicitly the superiority of being Christian, while the adult members of CCCB passed it on to the next generation as a motive to spend a significant part of their weekend within the church community.

At CCCB, the positive impact of Christianity on the quality of family life was addressed publicly and frequently. Pastor Xu, church committee members, and Bible Group Captains often talked about the importance of choosing the *zhengque de pei’ou* (correct spouse) to form a *jianquan de jiating* (sound family), which meant that choosing a Christian partner was the only way to have a good family life. Among the members of CCCB, a “Christian life” was understood not only as one way of leading a good life, but it was the very definition of a good life. During all the baptism ceremonies I attended, as the newly baptized member stood up from the water after the full-immersion ritual, the crowd unanimously expressed their happiness by shouting, “Now you can finally have a good life!”

Such emphasis on the “sound family” was passed on to the second generation. The preaching and teaching of leading a Christian life was the main theme at Sunday service and Sunday school. For many parents, it was also crucial to encourage their children to take part in more church activities to provide them with a sense of “how other Chinese Christians live” and “cultivate friendships with other Chinese Christian children.” Pastor Xu mentioned these points in his sermons and constantly reminded all the members in the congregation to be “confident about their choice to lead a better life.” This self-awareness of being “better” was particularly visible during their missionary work. They approached non-Christian Chinese and asked questions like “Are you happy?” and “Do you have a meaningful life?” When the answers were “Yes,” they asked the follow-up questions, “How can you possibly be happy, when you are not Christian?” and “How can you have a meaningful life, when you do not know God?” The missionaries at CCCB often reminded each other to be “friendly and polite, to show our Christian character,” because in their opinion, these virtues were the unique qualities that only Christians could possess.

Parents brought their children to CCCB over the weekend, as they were deeply convinced of the positive impact a Christian church could have on the younger generation. “Why should I bring them to some language school, when they can be in the house of God?” asked one parent, while chatting with me in Martin Luther Room during Pastor Xu’s sermon. Besides the wish for the second generation to have a Chinese-speaking environment on weekends, the conviction of church being a “better place” and Christians being “better people” played an essential role as well to motivate the first-generation Chinese immigrants to bring their children to CCCB.

“More than 200 Chinese gathering together is itself the best environment for children,” said Ms. Huang. She and her husband had been active members of CCCB for almost ten years. Living in the outskirts of Berlin, the couple had to drive fifty minutes each way every Sunday afternoon to attend church service with their two children. When I asked her about their motivation, she summed up her belief in this way: “Good values, good world view, and spiritual life orientation. Parents do not even need to guide children to learn anything here, they are already surrounded by the best education, all in Chinese, they can just watch, hear, and learn. For parents, there is no better place to bring your children to!” (interview with Ms. Huang, May 2016).

Analysis: The incentives of first-generation Chinese immigrants at CCCB

Parents like Mr. Xie and Mr. Song appreciated the “natural environment” of speaking Chinese and making Chinese friends at CCCB, as well as the advantage of being immersed in a Christian community at the same time. Compared to alternative institutions like Chinese language schools, parents embraced the implicit socialization at CCCB, where knowledge was delivered through informal corporeal interaction with personal observations and experiences. When parents praised the “real and authentic” environment, they were addressing the impact of implicit socialization, where the transmission of principles, habitus, and cultural capital could be far more effective and formative than the explicit one written in the textbooks (Bourdieu and Passeron 2011). Not only could their children improve their knowledge of Chinese language and culture, the perceived superiority of being around fellow Christians served as added incentive to bring the children to service on Sunday and Bible group meetings on Saturday. The first-generation Chinese immigrants placed their children into the reproduction of a culture they approved of as parents and counted on the informal, unscripted “diffuse education” to enhance their Chinese identity and provide moral guidance.

Parents like Ms. Huang considered “good values” and a “good worldview” as unique features of CCCB that could not be found elsewhere, especially compared to their everyday life routine. Compared to the alternative of Chinese language schools, parents particularly approved of the Christian setting at CCCB. As they believed in the superiority of Christianity, incubation at a Christian church served not only as a favorable method of transmitting the Christian faith from one generation to the next but also the foundation of a good life for their children’s overall future. This attitude echoes findings among Asian migrant families in the US. The older generation in Asian American families often hold the opinion that the public schools in the US do not offer any “moral education” to their children (Chen 2006, 2008; Zhou and

Bankston 1998; Yang 2010). Min Zhou and Carl Bankston illustrate how Buddhist and Catholic institutions transmit the heritage language and culture to the younger generation. Chen and Yang both describe how Christian churches become very attractive among Chinese immigrants by framing children's obedience to parents with Christian vocabulary and invoking the authority of Jesus Christ to discipline the younger generation. Among my interlocutors in Berlin, applying Christian doctrines on the second generation as a parenting tool played a minor role. However, the shared faith in Christianity conveyed numerous advantages of spending weekends with the Christian community. Combined with the Chinese language programs and Chinese social contacts, taking part in Christian church and its Bible group meetings created new paths for the second-generation immigrants to strengthen their Chinese identity, and to enhance the connection between parents and children.

Both the faith in implicit socialization and the faith in the superiority of Christianity laid a solid foundation for the first-generation Chinese immigrants to bring their children to CCCB over the weekend. Meanwhile, the church leadership keenly detected the "faith" among the parents and effectively offered an answer to their wishes. In the next section, I will analyze the church's strategies and illustrate how the pastor and church committee together designed their church programs to effectively provide Chinese immigrant families in Berlin with a place that could go far beyond being a house of worship.

The strategies of the church leadership at CCCB

It might seem natural that Chinese migrant families were drawn to CCCB, as it provided them with an ideal setting to pass on Chinese language and culture and the Christian faith and networks from one generation to the next. However, in comparison with other Chinese churches in Germany and Chinese Christians overseas, the demographic structure of CCCB was rather an exceptional case of its own. As I will show in the following paragraphs, the active participation of families at CCCB was the outcome of intentional strategies by the church leadership.

A shift in the demographic structure of the congregation

Among the Chinese population in Germany, students constituted a significant proportion. At the end of 2015, 119,590 Chinese citizens resided in Germany with Chinese passports, 32 percent of whom were holding residence permits for educational purposes. Chinese students have been the largest group of foreign students at German universities since 2004. Not only have Chinese students made up a substantial percentage on German campuses, they have also become the growing, if not dominant, power among Chinese Protestant communities across the country (Oblau 2006; Lüdde 2011). For decades, CCCB was a student-based community as well. The student-focused profile of CCCB back then was not only the consequence of the demographic features of Chinese residents in Germany. Among Chinese Christians overseas, in Europe as well as in North America, many churches refer to *Zhongguo yixiang* (God's Chinese vision) that China "will rise not only in the economic sphere but also in the spiritual realm" (Cao 2019, 9). Built on this vision of a "China mission,"

many Chinese missionaries and church leaders overseas specifically target Chinese students, as students are likely to return to China and therefore bring the gospel back to their homeland (Huang and Hsiao 2015). Being closely connected with RCCC in the US, CCCB was shaped by the “China mission,” too, and had once undertaken a variety of mission activities that specifically targeted Chinese students in Berlin.

However, the participation of students was consistently decreasing in more recent years, while families with children became the majority. Back in 2003, CCCB had fourteen Bible groups, six of which consisted entirely of students, while almost all eight other groups had members who were students. In 2012, only one out of the eleven Bible groups was for students. Throughout the years of my fieldwork (2011–2012 and 2015–2016), there was a clear demographic shift among members of CCCB. Especially since 2010 when Xu Li became the ordained pastor, the proportion of students kept declining. Jobholders and families with children became the focus of the church leadership and started playing the central role in its activities.

By the end of my fieldwork in 2016, CCCB had roughly 250 members in total, and young participants under the age of eighteen constituted between one-third and one-half of the community. A regular Sunday service at CCCB usually attracted around one hundred to 120 adults and sixty to eighty children. It was no coincidence that parents overwhelmingly spoke in favor of the church as an ideal space to be on the weekend. The church leadership devoted many personnel and resources into the development and improvement of Sunday school, as well as adjusting their schedule with school holidays and integrating children into various aspects of the church life. During the time of my fieldwork, there were four classes for different age groups at Sunday school. Each class was taught and supervised by six to eight church members. This meant that among the one hundred to 120 adults attending Sunday service, about thirty of them were involved in teaching classes at Sunday school for the second generation. As the work of Sunday school became increasingly important, the church committee added a new Department of Children into its organizational structure and held weekly meetings to arrange Sunday school and to offer special events for children of different ages.

In consequence, CCCB became a family-based congregation with a high percentage of children, while students only played a minor role. This composition contrasted significantly with other Chinese Christian communities in the country, most of which featured a high percentage of student participation, and this composition was the outcome of the CCCB church leadership’s strategies.

A shift in the baptism doctrine

By providing an environment for speaking Chinese language and emphasizing Chinese cultural heritage, CCCB managed to create desirable conditions for the first-generation Chinese immigrants in Berlin to bring their children over the weekend—not only to read the Bible and attend Sunday service to enhance their Christian faith but also to strengthen the second generation’s capacity for speaking Chinese language and sense of Chinese identity. Over the course of my fieldwork, CCCB took several measures to attract more families with children and keep children in the church. Besides adding the Department of Children, enhancing personnel at Sunday

school, and deploying resources into programs for children and families, the CCCB leadership were also willing to shift their theological principle on key issues.

As discussed in the previous section, the theology and practices of CCCB were heavily influenced by American Baptist tradition through the years-long patronage from RCCC in New Jersey, although both Pastor Xu and the church committee considered the church to be a nondenominational Christian community. Compared to Lutheran churches in Germany, one of the main features of CCCB was their refusal of infant baptism. Like many Baptist churches, CCCB only baptized adults and accepted only full immersion into water as the legitimate ritual.⁵ When I first visited their Sunday service in December 2010, Pastor Xu told me affirmatively that they would not offer any baptism, confirmation, or communion to anyone under the age of eighteen (interview with Pastor Xu, December 2010).

Interestingly, as the number of children within the congregation kept growing, the principle of adult-only baptism was silently changing. At the age of fourteen, children belonging to a Christian denomination in Germany conventionally celebrate confirmation of their Christian faith with bountiful presents from family and friends. However, as CCCB did not permit baptism under the age of eighteen, the young members could not take part in the same ritual with their peers and consequentially became resistant toward going to church with their parents. At the end of 2012, CCCB started offering “exceptional” baptism to teenagers, first at the age of fourteen, and later lowered to twelve, so that they could take part in the confirmation ceremony with their German friends and classmates. To emphasize that this was the “exception,” members between the ages of twelve and fourteen were accepted for baptism in different batches, one batch every six months. The sequence of baptism had thus become a public display of how the church committee evaluated the behavior of each teenager and rated every one with a different grade.

Instead of considering baptism as the unconditional love from God, CCCB was determined to transform the meaning of baptism into a prize to win and a reward to gain. Teachers and parents were rather pleased to see this change of policy. Not only did it allow children to take part in the confirmation with their German peers when they reached the age of fourteen, it also served as an extra scale to measure the performance of the second generation at church. This shift of confirmation policy showed how much CCCB valued the participation of families and children at their church. Deeply influenced by Baptist tradition, CCCB’s doctrines of performing only full-immersion baptism only for adults had been the bedrock of their belief. Nevertheless, when their position on baptism led to the reluctance of the second generation to take part in the church activities, the church committee efficiently started searching for solutions and eventually reset the ground of their theological belief.

Analysis: The strategies of CCCB church leadership

The input of Chinese language and culture, the socialization of Chinese friends and acquaintances, and the advantage of being Christian altogether made CCCB particularly attractive to Chinese immigrant families, especially families with children. CCCB’s strategies proved to be very effective, as both the number of families

and the proportion of young children continued to grow. The growth in membership translated directly into increased donations and the accumulation of wealth at CCCB. Due to Germany's migration policies in the past decades, the dominant channel of migration from China to Germany was education. Among the Chinese migrant families who obtained long-term settlement permits, a significant percentage of them were university graduates working as white-collar professionals with middle-class financial capacity. Compared to students, most of whom could only offer a few coins out of their pocket money each week, the well-off migrant families had a clear advantage in terms of donations.

In Germany, for members of German Protestant and Catholic churches, their contribution to the church is collected by church tax based on their monthly income, which is 9 percent (8 percent in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) of the income tax. However, for members of CCCB, the contribution rule was to donate 10 percent of the entire net income. The church committee of CCCB emphasized repeatedly that this was according to the biblical tradition of "tithe donation,"⁶ and a good Christian shall not bargain with God. To put these rules into perspective: the average monthly gross salary in Berlin in 2015 was 2,953 euros. A person with this income would pay 38 euros a month as a member of a German Protestant or Catholic church, while 186 euros a month as a member of CCCB. This particular donation rule together with the growing number of memberships led to the substantial accumulation of wealth at CCCB. Although the leadership carefully guarded the financial state of the church, it was known during the time of my fieldwork that they had already started searching for land in Berlin to purchase and to build their own church with their own funds.

Parents shared faith in the implicit socialization as a powerful medium to transmit knowledge and competence, and to transform the habitus and cultural capital of the next generation. The leadership of CCCB made a conscious choice to cater to the wishes of parents and restructured the congregation from student-focused to family-focused. Providing programs featuring Chinese language and culture and Chinese friends and social contacts, CCCB became an ideal venue for Chinese migrant families to extend their education over the weekend to strengthen the Chinese identity of the second generation in a Christian community. Based on the increasing number of members, the strategies of the church leadership proved to be very effective. With the enlargement of programs and the accumulation of wealth, the influence of CCCB as a migrant Christian church was impressively on the rise.

Can this model be learned and followed by other Chinese Christian communities? On the one hand, a great number of Chinese Christians overseas believe in "God's China vision" and place their hope on the mobility of students to bring the Christian gospel to mainland China in the long run (Cao 2019). Guided by this long-term goal, the focus on students would consequently still be the priority among Chinese Christian communities for the time being. On the other hand, as the percentage of multigeneration Chinese migrant families gradually grows, the demographic features of Chinese overseas could lead to a changing profile of overseas Christian communities. In Germany for example, similar shifts could be observed among Chinese churches in a number of small cities and towns in recent years, as the role of the second generation became increasingly important in each community. The

“success” of CCCB could be copied and pasted—a success in terms of membership, donations, and influence—when the church leadership determinedly prioritizes the needs of migrant families rather than students. However, as in the case of CCCB, disapproval from students and criticism from other Chinese Christians were inevitably a part of this development as well.⁷

Conclusion

With ethnographic data, this article shows that the unique structure of CCCB was the result of a combination of two main factors. First, the first-generation Chinese immigrants shared faith in the implicit socialization taking place within a good “environment” in which to spend time with their children over the weekend, as well as the wish for a more pronounced Chinese identity for their children. Second, the CCCB leadership was keenly aware of the potential of having a family-based congregation, and they decisively prioritized the demand of families with children by transforming their structure, programs, and dogma, while redistributing personnel and resources efficiently to reach these goals.

Several scholars in the US point out a similar phenomenon among migrant communities, where religious institutions serve as a haven of morality and shelter the mental growth of the younger generation (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Chen 2006; Waters 2009). In Germany, however, the discussion of migrant religious communities takes on a slightly different tone. Researchers frequently connect religious practices among immigrants with the question of integration, especially in research on Turkish immigrants and Islamic congregations (Fetzer and Soper 2005; Öztürk 2007; Ewing 2008). Studies on religious communities and religious practices of migrants rarely focus on the religious beliefs or activities of these congregations but rather prefer to measure their function and influence through the scale of integration. From Egyptian Christians to Vietnamese Buddhists, scholars examine communities of various religious and ethnic backgrounds and analyze how the religious institutions have served as sites of communication, mediation, and negotiation to integrate these communities into German society (Baumann 2004; Währisch-Oblau 2005; Dümling 2011; Lüdde 2011, 2013; Elwert 2015).

With the CCCB case study, this article takes a close look into the internal calibration of a migrant church and analyzes its impact on the migrant community from the perspectives of both church leaders and church members. Observing the beliefs and practices of the congregation, this article documents how the biggest Chinese Christian church in Germany developed its profile and shifted its focus over the course of a few years. Highlighting the incentives for church members and the strategies of the church leadership, it deconstructs how a Christian church became an additional socialization space for the Chinese migrant families in Berlin by transforming its structure and agenda. I argue that migrant churches in Germany do not necessarily have to function as “sites of integration” (i.e., Dümling 2011) into German society. As I have shown in this article, not only did the CCCB provide Chinese immigrants with opportunities to strengthen their religious faith but also additional occasions for Chinese families to emphasize their ethnic background, improve the capacity of

their heritage language, and enhance the Chinese identity of the next generation. In other words, becoming Christian does not necessarily make these migrant families “more German”; instead, it helps them to “remain Chinese.”

AUTHOR

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NOTES

1. During the course of my field research, I applied a range of ethnographic methods: participant observation, semi-structured and biographical interviews, discourse analysis, and photography. I conducted interviews with the pastor and church committee, as well as with dozens of adult members at CCCB, both during the Sunday service and the Saturday Bible meeting. Additionally, I collected extensive field notes and numerous sources and materials from all field sites. It is worth pointing out that, although I was in close contact with this community for a long period of time, I myself was not a member of CCCB, and neither a baptized Christian.

2. According to records available at CCCB, forty were baptized in 2006, followed by thirty-two in 2007 and twenty-three in 2008.

3. The term “Chinese” could indicate nationality, ethnicity, and language at the same time. Concerning discussion about people, I mainly use the terms “Chinese immigrants” and “Chinese students” to address those who are of Chinese nationality. To be specific, the terms refer to those who are of Chinese origin and living outside China—in the case of this article, in Germany—while still holding a Chinese passport. This means neither citizens of Hong Kong or Taiwan nor the ethnic Chinese population from Southeast Asia are included, mainly because they do not appear in the ethnography. I call the children of first-generation Chinese immigrants in my fieldwork “second-generation Chinese immigrants” or “children of first-generation Chinese immigrants,” although some of the second generation might have German citizenship. Concerning discussion about language, “Chinese” refers to the standardized form of Chinese language used in mainland China, which is recognized as the official language of China. I choose to use the term “Chinese language” mainly because the interlocutors in my fieldwork dominantly use the word “*zhongwen*” (Chinese language) during our conversations. Although “Chinese language” in this article refers to the same language as “Mandarin” and “*putonghua*,” I do not use these two terms, because neither the Chinese translation of “Mandarin” (*guanhua*) nor the term “*putonghua*” ever appeared during conversations presented in the article.

4. Except Pastor Xu, all names appearing in this article are pseudonyms.

5. There are numerous writings about the meaning and the importance of full-immersion adult baptism at CCCB, from their newsletters, magazines, and brochures to Pastor Xu's blog and all the materials on "The Basic Truth about Christianity" church members were circulating online.
6. Tithe donation is based on the book of Leviticus 27:30–34 and the book of Deuteronomy 14:22–29, according to the CCCB church committee.
7. While families received a warm welcome at CCCB, students expressed their experiences as "invisible" and attended other churches instead. Especially among students who used to be active members at CCCB, several expressed sharp criticism of the church leadership's focus on donations in recent years. For further analysis of other Chinese Christian churches and their relations toward CCCB, see Yu 2019.

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