

The Impact of Generational Assimilation and Dechurched on Chinese Immigrant Diaspora Parents¹

Matthew R. S. TODD

CLIMB Intercultural Society, British Columbia, Canada

ORCID: 0009-0002-996-7379

Abstract: The study aimed to identify how Chinese Canadian, immigrant, Christian parents are impacted when their second-generation children abandon Chinese churches and often the Christian faith as well. The research involved eighty-four interdenominational participants drawn from clergy and parents. A qualitative research design with mixed methods was conducted in three phases, using open-ended surveys, rating scales, and focus groups. The goal was to analyze and quantify impacts and propose strategies to support affected parents. The data show that parents are variously impacted emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and socially. The top three negative effects on parents include blaming the church, self-blame, and silent suffering. The Silent Exodus and its impact on parents weaken the mission of the church. The significance of the research is that it offers recommendations that can help fulfill the mission of the church. These recommendations will empower parents by equipping them to cope with the impacts, improving churches' caring ministries, and destigmatizing the blame that attaches to parents because of the shame culture.

Keywords: acculturation, diaspora immigrants, generational assimilation.

Introduction

Chinese North American churches have been identified as leading church growth statistics;² however, attrition is high among the second generation (the North American-born children of Chinese immigrants), a problem popularly termed the Silent Exodus.³ The phenomenon manifests in large numbers of youth and young adults

1 Research completed at Bakke Graduate University, Dallas, Texas.

2 Kun Mu, "Faith and Community Building in Diaspora: An Ethnographic study of a Chinese Christian church in Canada" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2025): 26-31.

3 Pew Research, Religion Among Asian Americans (Oct. 11, 2023). Henrik Molintas, "Solving the 'Silent Exodus' from churches," *Lifeway Research* (Sep. 17, 2021).

silently leaving the congregations they were raised in. Given young adults' disengagement from organized religious practice, there is a need to study systematically the impact upon parents of their children's disengagement. Research questions used in this study focused on the ways Chinese Canadian, Christian parents born overseas, who raised their Canadian-born children in an ethnic church, are impacted when these children leave the church. The research also sought to determine what strategies to recommend to support and empower impacted parents.

Statement of the Problem

While the Silent Exodus of second-generation North American Chinese has often been studied, this research focused on what has not been studied—the impact of this dechurched on their parents. This study attempted to answer the question: In what ways are Chinese Canadian, immigrant Christian parents impacted when their youth abandon the faith and their ethno-religious community? In addition, it bridged that gap with recommended solutions.

First-generation immigrant Chinese parents experience new tensions and challenges with their children as they acculturate. As a result of cultural and familial forces, many of those children eventually exit their ethno-religious communities.⁴ The immigrant parents' intensely communal approach to meeting their socio-economic needs within an ethnic church is often not shared by their local-born children.⁵ Moreover, the children often do not share their parents' collectivist perspectives on group identity and interdependence, duty and obligation, or hierarchical deference, nor do they share the value placed on passing down language and culture.⁶

Young adults may follow multiple trajectories of retention or abandonment of religious faith and practice, as documented by large international mixed-methods studies.⁷ Recently, their choices have been analyzed in light of a secular generational shift as a part of human development labeled emerging adulthood.⁸

How much influence parents have on their children's religiosity is disputed. According to some sources, youth raised in religious families are more likely to be religious than those raised in nonreligious families.⁹ This finding is consistent with

⁴ Carolyn Chen and Jerry Z. Park, "Pathways of Religious Assimilation: Second-Generation Asian Americans' Religious Retention and Religiosity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 58 (3) (2019): 666–688.

⁵ Matthew R.S. Todd, "The Impact of Assimilation upon Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brethren Immigrant Churches," *Anabaptist Witness Journal*, vol. 10 (2) (November 2023): 65–88.

⁶ Chen and Park, "Pathways of Religious Assimilation," 667, 680.

⁷ Jacob Legault-Leclair, "The Family Transmission of Religion in Canada: An Intergenerational Approach to Religious Socialization," *Studies in Religion*, vol. 54 (2) (2025): 216–241. Conrad Hackett, "How Religion Declines Around the world," *Pew Research Center* (2025).

⁸ Adam Falewicz, Dariusz Krok, Ewa Telka and Małgorzata Szczesniak, "Religious Deconversion and Well-being among Emerging Adults. Mediating and the Role of Oversexualization and Body Image," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2025): 1–23.

⁹ Adam Gemar, "Parental Influence and Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Belief, Attitudes, and Practices: Recent Evidence from the United States," *Religions*, vol. 14 (11) (2023): 1–17.

social learning theory.¹⁰ However, there are conflicting “longitudinal studies that report little connection.”¹¹ Although parents have influence, many are dismayed to discover that influence is not a deterministic guarantee of the spiritual trajectory or outcome of their child.

The Silent Exodus can disturb a Chinese theological and cultural belief that the church is an extension of the Chinese family.¹² Some previous studies attribute blame by suggesting that the Confucian-based values and traditional parenting styles of overseas-born Chinese parents tend to push young people out of the ethno-religious community.¹³

As for the resultant impact upon parents, the leaving continues to be a heartache and concern among first-generation parents and pastors.¹⁴ Unease over negative life events may sap a parent’s confidence in the assurances of the faith preached in their churches and their zeal to serve. Consequently, this may manifest socially through withdrawal from engagement at church, volunteerism, and even attendance.¹⁵ Other parents stay within the church but passive-aggressively manifest their unease with apathy. The literature was searched for evidence of whether high parental religious commitment was associated with stress and a sense of personal failure in the event of grown children’s exodus.¹⁶ One study identified evangelical parents as more concerned about their children abandoning church than nominal Christian and non-Christian parents.¹⁷

Chinese culture is collectivist, wherein honor and shame are very powerful. “The sense of duty and obligation to family and group” can be so strong that the parents of those who leave may feel incapable, inadequate, or deficient; in other words, they

10 Kirsten A. Lesage, Maliki E. Ghossainy, Rebekah A. Richert and Kathleen Corriveau, “Social learning and Religion,” *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Evolution*, Jamid J. Tehranit, Jeremy Kendal and Rachel L. Kendel (eds), (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2025): 615–630.

11 Christian Smith, “Why Religion Went Obsolete: Not by Secularization Alone,” *Church Life Journal* (April 8, 2025): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/why-religion-went-obsolete-not-by-secularization-alone/>.

12 Nanlai Cao and Lin Lijun, “Contextualizing Transnational Christianity: A Relational Approach,” *Religions*, 15 (4) (2024): 1–13.

13 Jihan Medina Ramadhani and Cipto Wardoyo, “Tradition, Family Issue, and Educational Values in a Chinese-Canadian Living in Toronto: Analysis on Turning Red,” *Journal of English Education Forum*, 5 (1) (2025): 1–6. John Snelgrove, Natalie Chan and Hui Kar Yan Alison, “Why Hong Kong Millennial Christians Switch from Chinese Local Churches to International Churches: A Qualitative Study,” *Missionology: An International Review*, 49 (4) (2021): 332–347.

14 Ezra Sohn, “Attitudes of Asian American Christians Towards the Ethnic Churches They Left” (D. Min., Alliance Theological Seminary, Rockland New York, May 2017), 24.

15 Anja Moesker, De Muynck, Bram De and Ronelle Sonnenberg, “What Else Could We Have Done?: Parents’ Experience of Their Children’s Church Disaffiliation in Four Dutch Conservative Reformed Congregations,” *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 29 (1) (2025): 99–118; Paul Wink and Michele Dillon, “Spiritual Development across the Adult Life Course: Findings from a Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Adult Development*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2002), 86.

16 Glenda B. Wiebe, Barbara Pesut, David R. Kuhl and Thomas Heilke, “I Want Them to Question. I Just Didn’t Want Them to Question the Faith! Parents’ Experiences of an Adult Child’s Religious Deconversion from a Protestant Evangelical Tradition,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2025): 1–16; Jim Davis and Michael Graham, “What is at Stake?,” *The Great Dechurching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), xxiii, 9.

17 Barna Group, “How Concerned Are Christian Parents About Their Children’s Faith Formation?” (2022), <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-parents-concerns/>.

may feel that they have failed.¹⁸ The loss the Silent Exodus represents can lead to fears of “losing face” and feelings of shame and embarrassment.¹⁹

Context of the Problem

Chinese bicultural churches have separate congregations with two distinct languages and cultures. The bicultural churches in this study are either Cantonese–English or Mandarin–English. Although there is some crossover, generally the parents attend Chinese-language services, while their acculturating, locally born children attend English-language services.

Conceptual Framework

Concepts were drawn from four fields of research that include the broad cultural phenomenon of youth leaving the church,²⁰ generational assimilation research,²¹ emerging adulthood stage development theory,²² and parent’s religious commitment research.²³ Figure 1 depicts a conceptual model with these fields of research that help to understand the impact of generational assimilation on diaspora parents when their children leave their ethno-religious communities.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design with mixed methods (personal interviews, surveys, and focus groups), that allowed participants to freely express their views, observations, and experiences through different means. This approach provided a more comprehensive means of obtaining in-depth information from a cross-cultural population, including information about the parents’ church histories and quality of church life.

Study Participants

Participants had been, or were still, involved in a Chinese church in Canada. There was an attempt to ensure they shared a common Chinese heritage, a similar adult life stage, and familiarity with the Silent Exodus from their families or churches. The research was executed in three phases. Phase 1 involved Mennonite Brethren

18 Jing Zhang, “Understanding the Concept of Shame in the Chinese Culture,” *NYS Child Welfare / Child Protective Services Training Institute* 4 (2015): 1–2.

19 Jolene Kinser, “Chinese Christians Have Conflicted Feelings About Saving Face,” *Christianity Today* (May 3, 2024).

20 Davis and Graham, *The Great Dechurching*.

21 Chen and Park, “Pathways of Religious Assimilation,” 666–688.

22 Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist*, 55 (5) (2000): 469–480.

23 Isabelle Zammit and Laura K. Taylor, “Stage 2 Registered Report: Parent and Children’s Religiosity in Early Childhood: Implications,” *The International Journal of Psychology and Religion* (2024): 1–23; Richard J. Petts, “Parental Religiosity and Youth Religiosity: Variations by Family Structure,” *Sociology of Religion* (2014): 1–26.

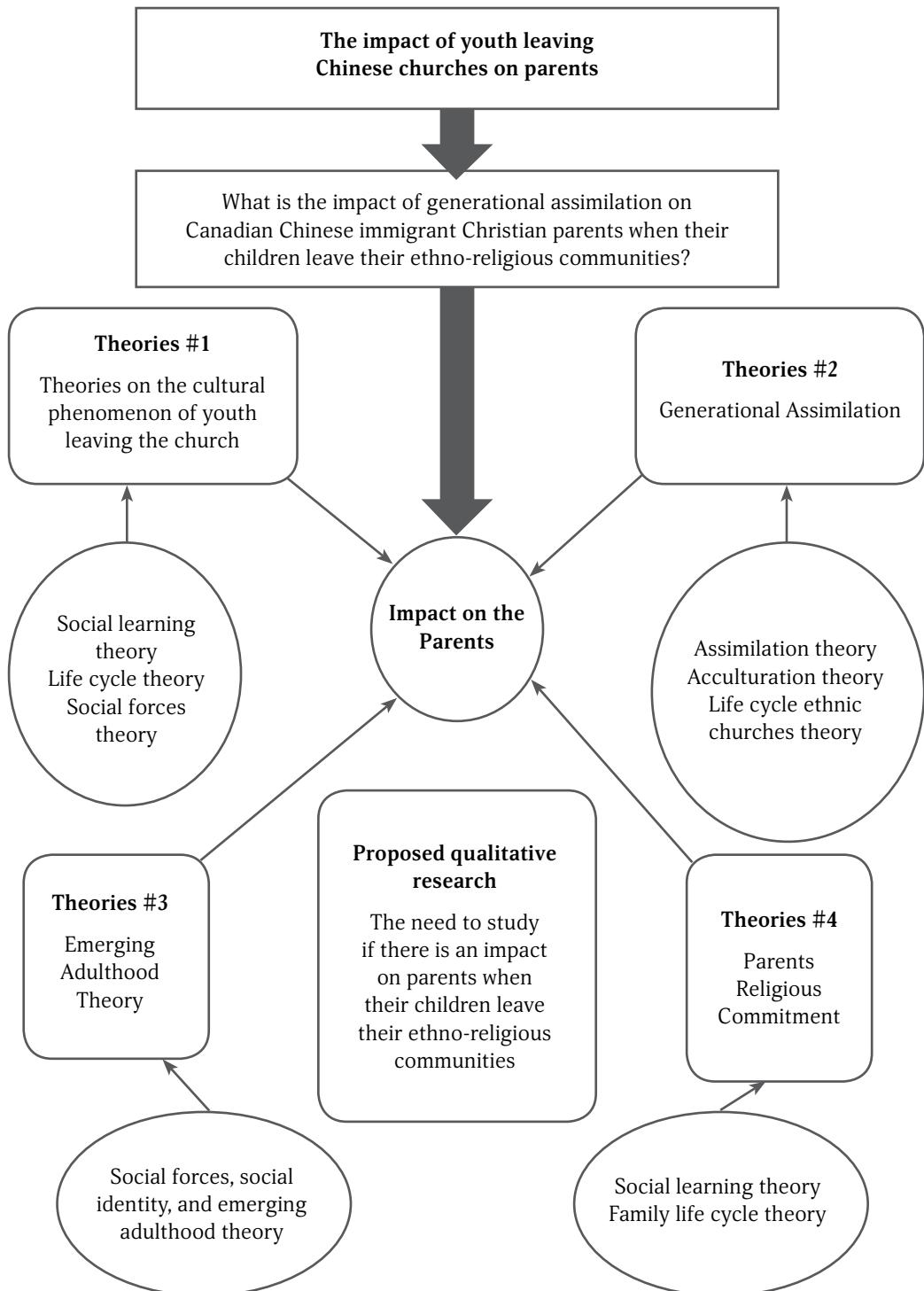


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

clergy, Phase 2 included impacted parents, and Phase 3 involved clergy from other denominations and parent focus groups.

Phase 1

Phase 1 participants included 30 formerly or currently employed Chinese Mennonite Brethren clergy, whose average age was 52. Their length of service ranged from 2 to 40 years. Of these participants, 27 were male and 3 were female. Using a qualitative survey with an open-ended format, clergy were asked to list three anecdotal observations of the various impacts of the youth exodus on parents. All data collected were coded and analyzed to identify patterns and themes. Examining the frequency of responses helped reveal the prevalence of experiences or behaviors that warranted further exploration. Coding identified similarities between observations, from which categories of impact emerged. The coded observations were ranked by frequency. Frequencies were then compared across several categories: Chinese versus English pastors, associate versus lead pastors, current versus past pastors, as well as years of service and age group.

Phase 2

Parents in Phase 2 must have had one or more children who were no longer attending the English-language congregation of the church in which they had been reared. Phase 2 participants included 30 Chinese Mennonite Brethren parents whose youth had left their churches. Thirteen of these parents were male, 17 were female, and the average age was 60. Phase 2 involved a 99-question survey of parents to describe the various impacts of the exodus on them. The survey instrument was created using items that the analysis of Phase 1 identified as most frequently mentioned. The survey had 10 sections (A–J). Nine sections asked a total of 66 free-form questions, which covered impacts on the parents and their spouses, explanations of their own children's exodus, the impact on their own faith journey, and recommendations to the church on how to support other exodus parents. In Section H, parents used a Likert scale to rate the applicability of each of the 33 parental reactions that clergy had reported in Phase 1. (It should be noted that, while most of this study employed a qualitative approach, this section used a quantitative approach to capture the intensity of responses.) Surveys were numbered sequentially in the order received. Responses to each question were coded. Descriptive statistics were compiled on demographics and levels of church participation. Data were examined for patterns, with particular attention given to the most frequent responses and outliers. Results were then compared with findings from Phase 1.

Phase 3

Phase 3 was conducted with three Chinese interdenominational focus groups of between 6 and 10 people each. Focus Group 1 was composed of male clergy, whose

average age was 55. Focus Group 2 was made up of parents whose youth still lived at home; 57% were male and 43% female, and the average age was 41. Focus group 3 was made up of parents whose youth had dechurched; 90% were female and 10% male, and the average age was 58. Focus groups completed a pre-focus group questionnaire, anecdotally rating the intensity of various impacts on parents. Phase 3 provided observational data that aided in interpreting the themes and patterns found in Phases 1 and 2. It also gathered recommended ways parents could be supported by the church. The study presented open-ended questions to Chinese clergy, non-impacted parents, and impacted parents. The focus groups rated the intensity of the impacts on parents as low, medium, or high. Focus group recordings were transcribed, key words and phrases were identified, and occurrences of themes were analyzed. Reported impacts and recommendations were compared. Answers to questions were analyzed as to the degree they substantiated the key research question. Evidence in support of themes was provided through quotes from participants' comments. Comparisons were made across the three groups and with data from the first two phases.

Research Design

This research was executed stepwise in phases (Table 1). Analysis of findings from each of the earlier phases (i.e., transcribed and coded) informed the design of subsequent phases.

Table 1
Participants and Overview of the Three Phases of Research

Phase	Procedures	Participant Category	Sampling	Denomination	Purpose
1	• open-ended survey	• former and current clergy	convenience	MB	• identify themes in participants' observations of how parents are impacted
2	• survey (open-ended questions and Likert scales)	• Exodus parents, i.e., parents of emerging adult children who had left the Chinese church in which they were raised	snowball	MB	• description, in parents' own words, of how they are impacted • obtain recommendations to support impacted parents
3	• pre-meeting survey • focus group	• clergy • non-Exodus parents • Exodus parents	convenience snowball	various Protestant	• obtain further data on impact • obtain recommendations to support impacted parents

Ethical Considerations

The research followed the Belmont Report with regard to respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The study received IRB authorization.

Findings

Phase 1

Analysis of commonalities in the reported impacts led to the identification of four categories: emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social. For example, parents who had been observed as experiencing stress, frustration, shock, hurt, or sadness, or as expressing a sense of failure, self-blame, or guilt, were identified as being impacted in the emotional category. Among the parental reactions most frequently reported by clergy (Table 2), the top two were anger toward or blaming the church and self-blame. The third most frequent observation was that parents tend to be at peace if the child attends another church. The fourth highest observation was suffering in silence. Phase 1 established that 100% of the clergy perceived an impact on parents. The pastors' observations were similar regardless of their position as lead or associate, or the language of the congregation they served. Some differences in perspective were associated with the pastor's age and length of service. Generally, the data showed that pastors with more years of ministry service have seen more dimensions of the impact (e.g., stress).

Table 2
Top Eight Clergy Observations of Impacts on Parents

Rank	Phase 1			Impact Category	Phase 2
	Description	Freq.	%		Representative Parent Survey Responses
1	Anger, blame of church pastoral staff	12	40	Spiritual	<p>“No pastoral staff or leaders are able to or interested in answering [my children’s] questions about Christian faith...Church members are objectified as machines to keep the church running, not persons.”</p> <p>“If young adults feel the church is their home and get nurtured there, they would not leave. Bonding between the pastor and other young adults is a major factor.”</p>

Rank	Phase 1		Impact Category	Phase 2
	Description	Freq.		Representative Parent Survey Responses
2	Sense of failure in parenting, self-blame, guilt	10	33	<p>Emotional</p> <p>"I feel upset with myself that I cannot lead him to God."</p> <p>"We blame ourselves for not giving full support to our children's needs."</p> <p>"It feels I am the only bad sheep; I see others doing well, as if nothing happened."</p> <p>"Socially people do judge, especially when my husband and I are very involved in our ministries at church. They start to wonder why our daughter doesn't come anymore."</p> <p>"Parents who experience their adult child leaving understand you are not to blame."</p>
3	At peace if child attends another church	9	30	<p>Spiritual</p> <p>"The decision to leave our church is not a departure but a transfer only, so it does not bother me."</p> <p>"I do not mind the adult child joined another church if he still has faith in God."</p>
4	Suffer in silence	8	27	<p>Spiritual</p> <p>"Not much support received."</p> <p>"Church showed concern about the children's leaving but did not show support."</p>
5	Stress, anxiety, frustration, shock	8	27	<p>Emotional</p> <p>Impacted "more emotionally."</p> <p>"We went [through] different stages emotionally, but at last we accepted reality."</p> <p>"I felt sad and frustrated."</p> <p>"We have frustrations and sometimes feel helpless."</p> <p>"It's so hard, and we worry about his spiritual life."</p> <p>"The leaving of my children in fact was a reality check of the state of the church."</p>
6	Disappointment	6	20	<p>Emotional</p> <p>"We were in disbelief and disappointed."</p> <p>"Feel a bit disappointed, upset, helpless, but need to accept."</p>
7	Feeling shame (withdrawal)	6	20	<p>Social</p> <p>"I want to leave this church as well. My husband said this was not our problem, and we should not leave this church...It is hard to find another church that fits our age."</p> <p>"Nobody really cares whether my children left church, therefore I don't feel supported...Maybe they have judged me."</p>

Rank	Phase 1		Impact Category	Phase 2	
	Description	Freq.		Representative Parent Survey Responses	
8	Hurt, sadness, grief,	6	20	Emotional	<p>"We were upset for child #2 not going to church. We could not do anything but to tell him he is making a mistake."</p> <p>"I cried for child #2 a lot for not attending church anymore. Sometimes seeing other families' children who love and serve God on Sunday can trigger my emotions."</p> <p>"I did experience unhappy feelings because I am worried, hurts my feelings when she left the church...She still is not going to any church and that worries me more."</p> <p>"We are sad she no longer attends church with us... We just miss her when we go to church."</p>

Phase 2

Of the Phase 2 parents, 59% agreed with the observation that parents are impacted by youths' exodus. Each of the perceptions of impact on parents most frequently reported by pastors in Phase 1 was corroborated to some degree by parents in Phase 2 (Table 2). Worry and sadness were frequently expressed. Parents blamed pastors for perceived shortcomings in role modeling, mentoring, guiding, caring, sympathizing, and leading by example. As shown by the indices, for every impact category except social impact, parents whose exodus experience included at least one dropout reported greater impact than did parents whose exodus experience was solely of youth moving on to another church (Table 3). Moreover, stronger impacts were associated with a higher proportion of dropouts within a family's exodus experience (data not shown).

Table 3
Mean Impact Intensity Reported by MB Exodus Parents in Phase 2, by Category of Youth Church Exodus

Parent Group	Emotional Impact	Social Impact	Psychological Impact	Spiritual Impact	Total Impact Index
DO only	5.8	3.3	4.6	5.4	19.1
Mixed DO and MO	6.0	3.3	4.5	5.0	18.8
MO only	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.0	12.2
Overall	4.8	3.2	4.0	4.4	16.3

* Note. Total impact index is the total of a person's self-rating scores on all four impact dimensions. Possible values range from 4 (least impact) to 40 (greatest).

* DO = dropout (left the church).

* MO = moved on (moved on to another church).

Among parents who experienced an exodus, 62.5% indicated the impact on them had not been settled. One parent said, “The disconnect [of their second child] with God hurts and [is] not fading” and “we blame ourselves.” A mother shared that she cried a lot over her child leaving the church and felt emotionally triggered when seeing other families’ children in Sunday services. Significantly, one-third of this convenience sample of parents had been coming to terms with the exodus experience for nearly 10 years and still had not found peace over the exodus of their child or children. Typical comments included, “I am still trying to find peace” and “Still waiting for God to answer.” When parents were asked how long the impact on them would last before it was settled, 10 parents in pain stated that it would not be “until the children come back to faith.” However, some parents said they had come to terms with the painful reality that their children might never return to the church of their upbringing. One recognized that “valid reasons of language barrier and identity recognition” explained their child’s move to another church.

Table 4
Phase 2 Parents’ Self-Report on How Long the Exodus Impact Took to Settle

VAR45: In your situation, how long has the impact lasted before it finally settled? __ Years __ Months	%
1 year or less	12.5
2–4 years	31
Never settled	62.5

Parents expressed the need to be supported and not judged by the church if their child exited. They recommended more care and equipping to support, encourage, and empower parents who experience youth exodus in their families. One parent recommended that the church should reach out to parents who had withdrawn and that the church should be “less judgmental.”

A surprising finding from Phase 2 was the disparity between clergy and parents in ranking the emotional impacts. That is, parents’ reporting of negative and positive reactions was unmatched, whereas clergy observations converged.

Why were the lists of clergy observations and parents’ self-reporting so unmatched in the order or sequence of perceived importance? The question to consider was whether the negative effect had been downplayed, or was a manifestation of the Chinese cultural practice of “saving face.” That is, did parents present themselves in a “face-saving” way in public settings, such as in an interview or community conversation at church? Some researchers have noted that objective evidence does not necessarily corroborate how people present their lives or families in interviews and on Facebook.²⁴ In consultation with Chinese clergy and researchers, it was sug-

²⁴ Huu Dat Tran and Pham Phuong Uyen Diep, “Me, Myself, and I: Self-Presentation, Self-Esteem, and Uses and Gratifications on Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok,” *First Monday*, vol. 30 (3) (2025): 1–17; Tracy K. Wong and Chloe A. Hamza, “Online Self-Presentation, Self-Concept Clarity, and Depressive Symptoms: A Within-Person Examination,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 54 (2024): 997–1013.

gested that perhaps both a strong personal Christian faith and traditional Chinese family values might influence Exodus parents to keep the matter within the family, downplaying its negative impact in public. In Chinese culture, like other shame and honor cultures,²⁵ it is socially undesirable to expose or casually speak of something shameful in the family to others outside the family.

For cultural, personal, and conventional reasons, the tendency to announce the positive and the least hurtful or intense impacts may be the most plausible explanation for the discrepancy in positive and negative reactions reported among the parents and clergy in this survey. Regardless, in Section H of the survey findings, the parents collectively provided more negative sentiments than the few positive comments regarding their youths' Exodus. The content of the longer list is compatible with the clergy's observations, except that the prioritized order of mentions is different. Key in Phase 2 was the divergence in opinions and parental attitudes related to whether their child dropped out or moved on.

Phase 3

Focus Groups' Four Primary Themes in Order of Importance

Phase 3 participants agreed unanimously that parents are impacted by the exodus of their youth. One observation was that all three focus groups identified four primary themes. The caring ministry theme represents how the impact reverberates in parents' lives and their need for support. The Christ and culture theme represents how shame culture exacerbates the impact on parents. The scope of the impact theme highlighted variation on parents. The theological (biblical) equipping theme represents biblical teachings that could help parents cope with the impacts.

Table 5

Major Themes in Focus Group Discussion

Themes	Observations	Explanation
Caring ministry	408	Recommended helping impacted parents.
Christ and culture	146	Recommended addressing shame culture.
Scope of impact	122	Identified that parents are variously impacted.
Theological equipping	34	Recommended practical and biblical ways to equip parents.

The clergy Focus Group 1 had the highest number of mentions across all themes. The two parent focus groups had similar mentions on all themes except equipping. The 408 total mentions of caring ministry indicate a significant concern for helping impacted parents. The 146 mentions of Christ and culture and the challenge of shame culture indicate a need for clergy or the church to address same culture biblically to

²⁵ Lina Liw, Ayse Ciftci and Taewon Kim, "Cultural Values, Shame and Guilt, and Expressive Suppression as Predictors of Depression," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 89 (2022): 9099.

Table 6
Comparison of Focus Group Themes Based on Number of Mentions

Focus group	Themes			
	Caring ministry	Christ and culture	Scope of impact	Equipping
1	166	66	51	18
2	123	40	36	11
3	119	40	35	5
Totals	408	146	122	34

mitigate the impact. The 122 total mentions of the scope of impact substantiate the research question on how parents are variously impacted. The low number of 34 under the equipping theme identifies a gap in recognizing how biblical equipping could help empower parents struggling with impacts.

Phases 1–3

All three phases in this study validate that parents are impacted by the generational assimilation of their second-generation children when the youth abandon the faith and ethno-religious community. Comparisons across Phases 1–3 (Table 7) showed that four out of five sample groups ranked the emotional impact highest. Columns 2 and 3 indicate that psychological and spiritual impacts were ranked a close second or third by a majority of Phases 1–3 participants. Phase 1 clergy did not rank psychological impact as important. Social impact was ranked last by all groups

Table 7
Ranking Order of Reported Impacts in Phases 1 to 3

Phase	Participant	#1	#2	#3	#4
1	Clergy	Emotional	Spiritual	Social	
2	Parents	Emotional	Spiritual	Psychological	Social
3					
	FG 1	Emotional	Psychological	Spiritual	Social
	FG 2	Emotional	Spiritual Psychological		Social
	FG 3	Psychological	Emotional	Social	Spiritual

FG = Focus Groups

How these categories were defined:

Emotional—(externalized) feelings, upset, fear, absence of harmony, unhappy experience

Social—embarrassment, saving face in community

Psychological—(internalized) anxiety, stress, depression, impacts on healthy thinking

Spiritual—impacts on faith, belief, hope, willingness to serve, connectedness to God, community, and family

from Phases 1–3. Spiritual impact being ranked last by Focus Group 3 is an outlier. The intensity ratings on these four dimensions produced a ranking order of emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social.

Recommendations

Participants in Phases 1 to 3 recommended solutions for impacted parents under the categories of caring ministry, Christ and culture, and equipping. Phase 1 clergy recommendations focused on equipping parents. Participants recommended that parents remain patiently committed to serving and trusting God and live in hope. They also recommended that the English ministry's focus and structures be reviewed and improved to help the church be more open and inclusive.

Phase 2 parents focused on changing the church's approach to caring ministry. They advocated for more proactive care, transitional care, equipping care, and relational care. Parents recommended that there be a more truthful and transparent discussion on the impact on parents. Parents wanted the church to support them in moving past shame and blaming themselves. They also said the church should address the passivity, indifference, and lack of awareness toward the suffering of some parents. Second, Phase 2 also focused on equipping. Participants recommended the church support parents' spiritual disciplines as core sources of comfort. The strategic opportunity for leadership was to address deterministic thinking about the outcomes for children raised in the church and the common issue of proof-texting biblical promises such as Proverbs 22:6 and Acts 16:31. Parents need to be equipped with a biblical perspective on human free will, which factors into many youth leaving churches.

Phase 3 focus groups advocated for more caring ministry from the laity (support groups, prayer, community care, parent mentors, listening and empathy, comfort, visiting, fellowship, and encouragement).

Focus groups also recognized that more pastoral caring ministry was needed, including pastoral diagnostics,²⁶ counseling, instruction, training parent mentors, prayer, care for the whole family, and the provision of resources (web-based, online, or translated). They also identified the need to address shame culture. They suggested several ways to do this. Churches could destigmatize shame culture with a grace-based theological perspective. Churches could help break the code of silence regarding shame culture and its impact on parents. Churches could limit the effects of shame or making comparisons. Churches could comfort, affirm, and encourage parents not to carry guilt unnecessarily. The focus groups also advocated for practical and biblical equipping. They expressed the need to equip parents for family transitions, evolving parent roles, assimilation trajectories of the Silent Exodus, and preventative measures to remain committed to their faith. Focus groups also recommended equipping parents in hope, grace, providence, sovereignty, God's

26 Assessing the symptoms of impacted parents.

faithfulness, and being journey-oriented. They recommended initiating parent workshops to facilitate equipping and healing for impacted parents.

Discussion

Across all five sample groups, there was a high level of agreement (convergence) that corroborated the idea that parents are variously impacted on a spectrum when their youth leave their ethno-religious communities and the faith. It was established that the impact on parents was in four categorical areas: emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social. The top two parental reactions identified were anger or blaming the church, and self-blame. Of parents who experienced an exodus, 62.5% indicated that the impact on them was not settled. One-third of this convenience sample of parents had been coming to terms with the exodus experience for nearly 10 years and still had not found peace. The original contribution of this study is the revelation that parents are variously impacted and that this impact is exacerbated when multiple children abandon the faith and ethno-religious community. The study empowers parents by providing practical recommendations to assist struggling parents with integrating faith and parenting.

The study discloses that the Silent Exodus and its impact on parents affect the mission of the church. Part of the mission of the church is to help parents and families grow into mature believers who know and follow Christ. These mature believers will, in turn, be able to live out their faith in practical ways, bear witness, and make an impact in their communities for Christ (Matthew 28:18–20). This represents a missional opportunity to be seized by the church. The church can contribute to the maturity of parents and families by repairing what is broken and helping parents to live healthy and effective lives. Following the findings of this study, that would include helping parents experience healing (compassion, care, and support; bearing others' burdens), helping parents grow in life-giving community (relationships), and helping people grow in faith.

Implications of the study are that churches can support parents by addressing obstacles to family well-being and spiritual growth, addressing weaknesses in inter-generational discipleship, addressing the mentality that leads to parents retreating from active participation in the church, and fostering authentic community. The church must validate parents' family experiences connected with the church and help parents overcome negative Silent Exodus experiences in which they feel hurt, judged, or marginalized in their faith communities. This is a call for the church to listen to parents' stories, love, and pray. The recommendations in this study show that there are pathways for moving forward in hope. Strengthening the Christian family strengthens the church's witness and mission in the world.

The findings of this study diverge from those observed in broader mainstream church contexts, as Chinese Christian immigrant parents frequently face a more intricate set of challenges when their children disengage from the church. This complexity arises from the deeply interwoven nature of cultural and ethnic identity

with religious faith. While both groups of parents may experience distress over their youth's departure from the faith, Chinese parents must also contend with additional factors, including shame and honor dynamics, generational assimilation, and linguistic barriers. Before this study, the literature addressing the impact of dechurching on Asian parents has been notably scarce.

One limitation of this study is that the religious denominations and participants may not be representative of all Chinese Canadian churches.

Summary

The majority of Silent Exodus research on young adults exiting their bicultural Chinese churches in North America has focused on the young adults and the English ministry per se, but this research has focused on parents who have been impacted by the Silent Exodus. This study created a new “pathway” to answer the following questions: In what ways are Chinese Canadian immigrant Christian parents impacted when youth abandon the faith and ethno-religious community? What solutions can be recommended? The study confirmed that parents are impacted in significant ways. The findings and recommendations can empower leadership to support these impacted parents. This study was a small exploratory step that holds full potential for qualitative changes in Chinese Canadian churches’ ministry toward parents. This, in turn, will contribute to strengthening the mission of the church and point the way forward.

Bibliography

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties.” *American Psychologist*, 55 (5) (2000): 469–480.

Barna Group. “How Concerned Are Christian Parents About Their Children’s Faith Formation?” (2022). <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-parents-concerns/>.

Cao, Nanlai, and Lin Lijun. “Contextualizing Transnational Christianity: A Relational Approach.” *Religions*, 15 (4) (2024): <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/15/4/510>.

Chen, Carolyn, and Jerry Z. Park. “Pathways of Religious Assimilation: Second-Generation Asian Americans’ Religious Retention and Religiosity.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 58 (3) (2019): 666–688.

Davis, Jim, and Michael Graham. *The Great Dechurching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023.

Falewicz, Adam, Dariusz Krok, Ewa Telka and Małgorzata Szczesniak. “Religious Deconversion and Well-being among Emerging Adults. Mediating and the Role of Oversexualization and Body Image.” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2025): 1–23.

Gemar, Adam. “Parental Influence and Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Belief, Attitudes, and Practices: Recent Evidence from the United States.” *Religions*, vol. 14 (11) (2023):1–17. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/11/1373>.

Hackett, Conrad. "How Religion Declines Around the World." *Pew Research Center* (2025). <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/09/02/how-religion-declines-around-the-world/>.

Kinser, Jolene. "Chinese Christians Have Conflicted Feelings About Saving Face." *Christianity Today* (May 3, 2024): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/05/chinese-culture-saving-losing-face-christianity/>.

Legault-Leclair, Jacob. "The Family Transmission of religion in Canada: An intergenerational approach to religious socialization." *Studies in Religion*, vol. 54 (2) (2025): 216–241.

Lesage, Kirsten A., Maliki E. Ghossainy, Rebekah A. Richert, and Kathleen Corriveau. "Social learning and Religion." *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Evolution*, Jamid J. Tehranit, Jeremy Kendal and Rachel L. Kendel (eds). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2025: 615–630.

Liw, Lina, Ayse Ciftci, and Taewon Kim. "Cultural Values, Shame and Guilt, and Expressive Suppression as Predictors of Depression." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol 89 (2022): 90–99.

Moesker, Anja, De Muynck, Bram De, and Ronelle Sonnenberg. "What Else Could We Have Done?": Parents' Experience of Their Children's Church Disaffiliation in Four Dutch Conservative Reformed Congregations." *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 29 (1) (2025): 99–118. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2024-0020>.

Molintas, Henrik. "Solving the 'Silent Exodus' From Churches." *Lifeway research* (Sep. 17, 2021): <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/09/17/solving-the-silent-exodus-from-churches/>.

Mu, Kun. "Faith and Community Building in Diaspora: An Ethnographic Study of a Chinese Christian church in Canada" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2025).

Petts, Richard J. "Parental Religiosity and Youth Religiosity: Variations by Family Structure." *Sociology of Religion* (2014): 1–26.

Pew Research. "Religion Among Asian Americans" (Oct. 11, 2023). <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/10/11/religion-among-asian-americans/>.

Ramadhani, Jihan Medina, and Cipto Wardoyo. "Tradition, Family Issue, and Educational Values in a Chinese-Canadian Living in Toronto: Analysis on Turning Red." *Journal of English Education Forum*, 5 (1) (2025): 1–6.

Sohn, Ezra. "Attitudes of Asian American Christians Towards the Ethnic Churches They Left" (D. Min., Alliance Theological Seminary, May 2017): 1–132.

Smith, Christian. "Why Religion Went Obsolete: Not by Secularization Alone." *Church Life Journal* (April 8, 2025): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/why-religion-went-obsolete-not-by-secularization-alone/>.

Snelgrove, John, Natalie Chan, and Hui Kar Yan Alison. "Why Hong Kong Millennial Christians Switch from Chinese Local Churches to International Churches: A Qualitative Study." *Missiology: An International Review*, 49 (4) (2021): 332–347. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00918296211019006>.

Todd, Matthew R.S. "The Impact of Assimilation upon Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brethren Immigrant Churches." *Anabaptist Witness Journal*, vol 10 (2) (November 2023): 65–88.

Tran, Huu Dat and Pham Phuong Uyen Diep. "Me, myself, and I: Self-presentation, self-esteem, and uses and gratifications on Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok, *First Monday*, vol. 30 (3) (2025): 1–17. <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/13711>.

Wiebe, Glenda B., Barbara Pesut, David R. Kuhl, and Thomas Heilke. "I Want Them to Question. I Just Didn't Want Them to Question the Faith! Parents' Experiences of an Adult Child's Religious Deconversion from a Protestant Evangelical Tradition." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2025): 1–16.

Wink, Paul, and Michele Dillon. "Spiritual Development across the Adult Life Course: Findings from a Longitudinal Study." *Journal of Adult Development*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2002): 79–92.

Wong, Tracy K., and Chloe A. Hamza. "Online Self-Presentation, Self-Concept Clarity, and Depressive Symptoms: A Within-Person Examination." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 54 (2024): 997–1013.

Zammit, Isabelle, and Laura K. Taylor. "Stage 2 Registered Report: Parent and Children's Religiosity in Early Childhood: Implications." *The International Journal of Psychology and Religion* (2024): 1–23.

Zhang, Jing. "Understanding the Concept of Shame in the Chinese Culture." *NYS Child Welfare / Child Protective Services Training Institute* 4 (2015): 1–2. <https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=cwcpstriaininginstitute>.

Вплив асиміляції поколінь і виходу з церкви на китайських батьків-іммігрантів у діаспорі

Меттью ТОДД

Міжкультурне товариство CLIMB, Британська Колумбія, Канада

ORCID: 0009-0002-996-7379

Анотація: Мета дослідження полягала у визначенні того, як на китайсько-канадських батьків-іммігрантів-християн впливає відхід їхніх дітей другого покоління від китайських церков і, часто, від християнської віри. У дослідженні взяли участь 84 учасники з різних конфесій, серед яких були священнослужителі та батьки. Якісне дослідження за допомогою змішаних методів проводилося у три етапи, використовуючи відкриті опитування, шкали оцінювання та фокус-групи. Метою було проаналізувати та кількісно оцінити вплив, а також запропонувати стратегії підтримки таких батьків. Дані показують, що батьки зазнають різного емоційного, психологічного, духовного та соціального впливу. Три головні негативні наслідки: звинувачення церкви, самозвинувачення та мовчазне страждання. «Тихий Вихід» і його вплив на батьків послаблюють місію церкви. Дослідження пропонує рекомендації для підтримки місії церкви, які допоможуть батькам подолати негативні наслідки, покращити служіння опіки у церкві та зменшити стигму вини, яка нав'язується культурою сорому.

Ключові слова: акультурація, іммігранти діаспори, асиміляція поколінь.

Надійшла до редакції / Received 13.09.2025

Прийнята до публікації / Accepted 29.10.2025