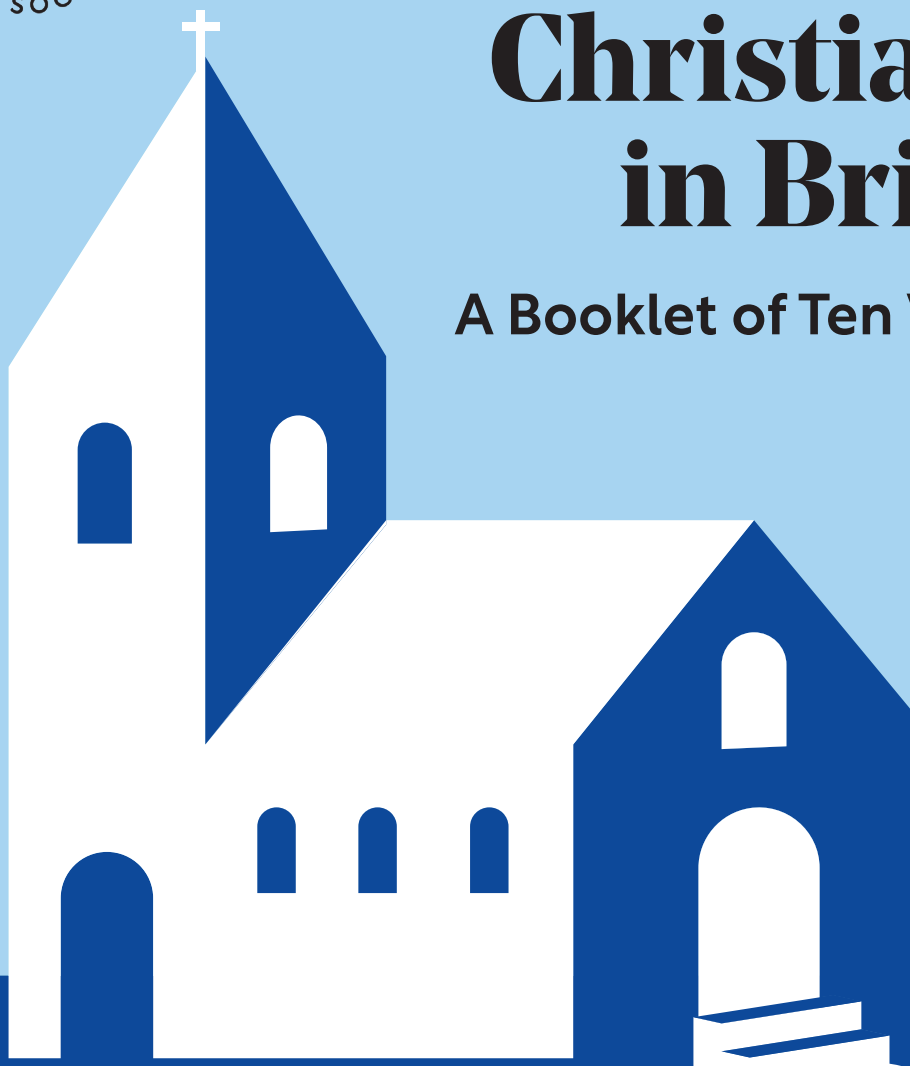




Chinese Christianity in Britain

A Booklet of Ten Vignettes



Dr Yinxuan Huang

About British and Foreign Bible Society

Around the world, the British and Foreign Bible Society is translating, producing, and distributing Scripture, helping people learn to read it, and equipping pastors and teachers. In England and Wales, we're resourcing churches and individual believers to increase their confidence in the Bible, and inviting change in how people see the Bible in wider culture. We want to see the Bible transform lives and impact society with the life-changing power of God's word.



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Preface

This booklet on the state of Chinese Christianity in Britain is an absolute gem that should be read carefully by everyone interested in the growth of Christianity in Britain.

It is based on research undertaken as part of a partnership between the British and Foreign Bible Society and the London School of Theology. As principal researcher, Dr Yinxuan Huang has not only designed and operated a robust research process but also written the findings up in an extremely engaging and accessible way.

These findings will prove invaluable to those seeking to nourish the discipleship health and missional engagement of Chinese Christians in Britain. But the approach taken and the findings summarised here will be of interest also to leaders of other non-English and English-speaking Christian communities throughout Britain because they touch on core issues of discipleship and Bible confidence, community and belonging, inter-generational transmission, contemporary challenges to the Bible, and specific strategies for engaging those who are spiritually open.

It provides an evidence-based and profoundly hopeful approach to these matters and I commend it to you warmly.

Paul Williams

Chief Executive

British and Foreign Bible Society

Executive summary

The British Chinese community is at a unique moment in its history. It is experiencing a huge influx of immigration from Hong Kong, with an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 British National Overseas visa holders expected to settle in the UK between 2021 and 2023.

Many of these new arrivals are Christians and are impacting the Chinese Church in this country. This cultural moment provided the impetus for the Bible and the Chinese Community in Britain (BCCB) project, an initiative of the British and Foreign Bible Society partnered with London School of Theology. Its aim is to establish a comprehensive understanding of how Chinese people in Britain engage with the Bible and its impact on their lives.

BCCB is based on a comprehensive survey, coupled with interviews and focus groups. Among its findings are:

- 1. The Chinese Christian community in Britain has increased very rapidly over the past two years**, by more than 25,000, and at least 27 new congregations have been started. At 28.8 per cent, this makes it by far the fastest-growing sector of the Church.
- 2. Around 75 per cent of Chinese Christians worship in Chinese churches.** The post-2021 wave of over 100,000 Hong Kong BNO arrivals is more likely to join non-Chinese churches than other first-generation Chinese immigrants. British-born Chinese and Chinese with Singaporean and Malaysian do not show a preference for Chinese churches.
- 3. The majority of Chinese Christians hold a high view of the Bible** and consider it central to their church experience. Bible engagement contributes to greater emotional resilience, with Christians who read the Bible regularly experiencing far fewer negative emotions compared to others.
- 4. Confidence in the Bible is high among Chinese Christians**, most of whom use it and feel positively towards it – though they aren't necessarily confident in talking about it with non-Christians. Those who use paper Bibles exhibit higher confidence in the Bible than those who use digital versions exclusively. Christians who are single or under the age of 30 generally exhibit weaker Bible engagement.

5. **Digital formats of the Bible have replaced paper Bibles** as the most widely used means of Bible engagement among Chinese Bible users. Most want improvements in understanding and applying the Bible, and evangelising to non-Christians. They also want 'better' Bible versions adapted to different purposes.
6. **Chinese church leaders are under pressure.** They are resilient, but working very long hours and a shocking 78 per cent have faced health problems, with many others facing financial problems.
7. **Chinese Christians involve themselves enthusiastically** in church services and small group gatherings, and in prayer and quiet times. Their spiritual life is inherently linked to their involvement in the church community.
8. **We shouldn't assume Chinese people in Britain are atheists.** Though 67 per cent don't have a religious affiliation, many religiously unaffiliated Chinese individuals in Britain hold beliefs in supernatural phenomena and supreme beings, with a significant portion identifying as agnostic.
9. **A third of non-Christian Chinese people in Britain are open to an invitation to church,** while another third are undecided. Around 46 per cent of non-Christian Chinese people are interested in exploring Christian perspectives on secular matters
10. **Chinese Christians value good, grounded Bible teaching,** close church relationships and mature leadership. They are put off by teaching detached from real life, lack of social support and authority-focused leadership.

Introduction

The Bible and the Chinese Community in Britain (BCCB) project was initiated in May 2021 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, partnered with London School of Theology. Its aim is to establish a comprehensive understanding how Chinese people in Britain engage with the Bible and its impact on their lives. We set out with three specific objectives:

- To develop an understanding of the spiritual and religious characteristics within the Chinese population in Britain
- To explore the state of Bible engagement in the Chinese Christian community and identify gaps between individual demands and church provision related to Bible use
- To elucidate the role of the Bible in transforming and shaping the lives and worldviews of Chinese Christians across all spheres of life

The BCCB captures a unique moment in history as the British Chinese community experiences another wave of immigration. The influx of Hong Kong migrants is the most significant factor, with the UK Government introducing a new immigration route for British National Overseas (BNO) status holders from Hong Kong on January 31, 2021. By December 2022, there have been a total of 129,415 grants of out-of-country BNO visas, while 105,200 people have arrived in the UK on the scheme since it began. It is projected that by the end of 2023, between 150,000 and 200,000 BNO visa holders will have settled in the UK.

The planning process for BCCB began in early 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic first hit the UK. As a research fellow at a secular university, I was working on a non-religious project. However, as a regular churchgoer, I noticed that the coronavirus outbreak had a profound impact on the Chinese Christian congregations in Britain. Inspired by a sociologist's intuition, I reached out to a dozen Chinese churches to learn how they responded to the pandemic. This became the prototype of BCCB.

Despite the data gathered from that research, I was troubled by a painful reality: Chinese Christians in Britain know very little about themselves. There has been no systematic research on Chinese Christians in Britain since Revd Stephen Y T Wang founded the first notable Chinese Christian congregation in Britain in 1950, namely the Chinese Church in London. While Christian leaders worldwide increasingly value research

in understanding the Church, finding valid data and records about the Chinese Church was almost impossible in Britain in 2020.

When I complained to God about the lack of research about Chinese Christianity in Britain, He asked me a simple question: 'Why don't you do the research for me?' As I prayed, it became clear that I was not alone in this mission. The passion and generosity of Bible Society and London School of Theology were critical to the project's success. A colleague reminded me that despite the lack of guidance from existing literature, this was God's work, and he would make a way for us.

The BCCB is the largest study of Christianity in the Chinese community in Europe, with three primary components. The first is a survey designed to gather information on the social attitudes and behaviour, religious participation, and patterns of Scripture engagement among ethnic Chinese people in Britain. The survey collected responses of 1,179 Chinese people in Britain from both Christian and non-Christian backgrounds. It consists of a general sample of 797 individuals, 152 (19%) of whom were Christians. The attention to Chinese Christians also motivated us to gather a booster sample of 382 respondents with assistance from our church and mission collaborators, 352 (92%) of whom were Christians.

The second component is a series of interviews with Christian workers and leaders to hear the voices of the Chinese ministry, covering 54 Chinese Christian churches or congregations across England, Wales, and Scotland. A total of 45 interviews lasting 3,213 minutes have been recorded.

The third component is a series of focus groups comprising both Christians and non-Christian Chinese from different backgrounds to learn about factors affecting church participation and interests in the Bible. Most of the survey respondents and all of the interview/focus group participants were Protestant Christians.

We are passionate about this research because we know it will benefit those dedicated to serving Chinese people in Britain. All its themes were inspired by conversations with Christian leaders, churches, and other organisations involved in BCCB over the past two years. It will provide a wide range of information and insights regarding key issues in Chinese ministry and help readers establish a comprehensive understanding of the state of the Christian faith and the impact of the Bible in British Chinese communities.

This booklet highlights the key findings of the BCCB in ten vignettes. These vignettes give the reader succinct and vivid descriptions that illustrate the hotspots of Chinese ministry in Britain and the ways individual Chinese engage with the Bible and other aspects of Christianity.

The ten vignettes are:

1. The epic growth of the Chinese Church
2. The landscape of Chinese churchgoers
3. The Bible confidence personas of Chinese Christians
4. Perceptions and impact of the Bible
5. Understanding Chinese Bible users: patterns and needs
6. Leading the way: resilient leaders and their insights
7. Private and communal practice of Chinese Christians
8. The myth of atheism among Chinese people
9. Mission opportunities among non-Christians
10. These are the reasons why people love and dislike the Church

These vignettes are designed to emphasise the Bible's role among Chinese Christians, highlight the essential elements of the Chinese mission field, capture the swift transformations it has recently undergone, and provide insights into how non-Christians and those with critical viewpoints perceive the Christian faith and the Chinese Church in Britain. We hope the report will be useful to anyone interested in understanding the Chinese Christian community in Britain. The BCCB is not only a study of a particular group of people but also a reflection on this mission of God. Therefore, we invite our readers to engage with us and share their feedback and insights. Each section of this booklet concludes with a thought-provoking question that encourages you to reflect on and apply it to your church community and ministries.

At the end of the booklet, you will also find our recommendations and useful resources for all individuals, churches, and missional organisations dedicated to serving Chinese communities in Britain. We hope that this booklet will inspire further dialogue about the role of the Church and the Bible in the lives of ethnic minority communities in the UK.

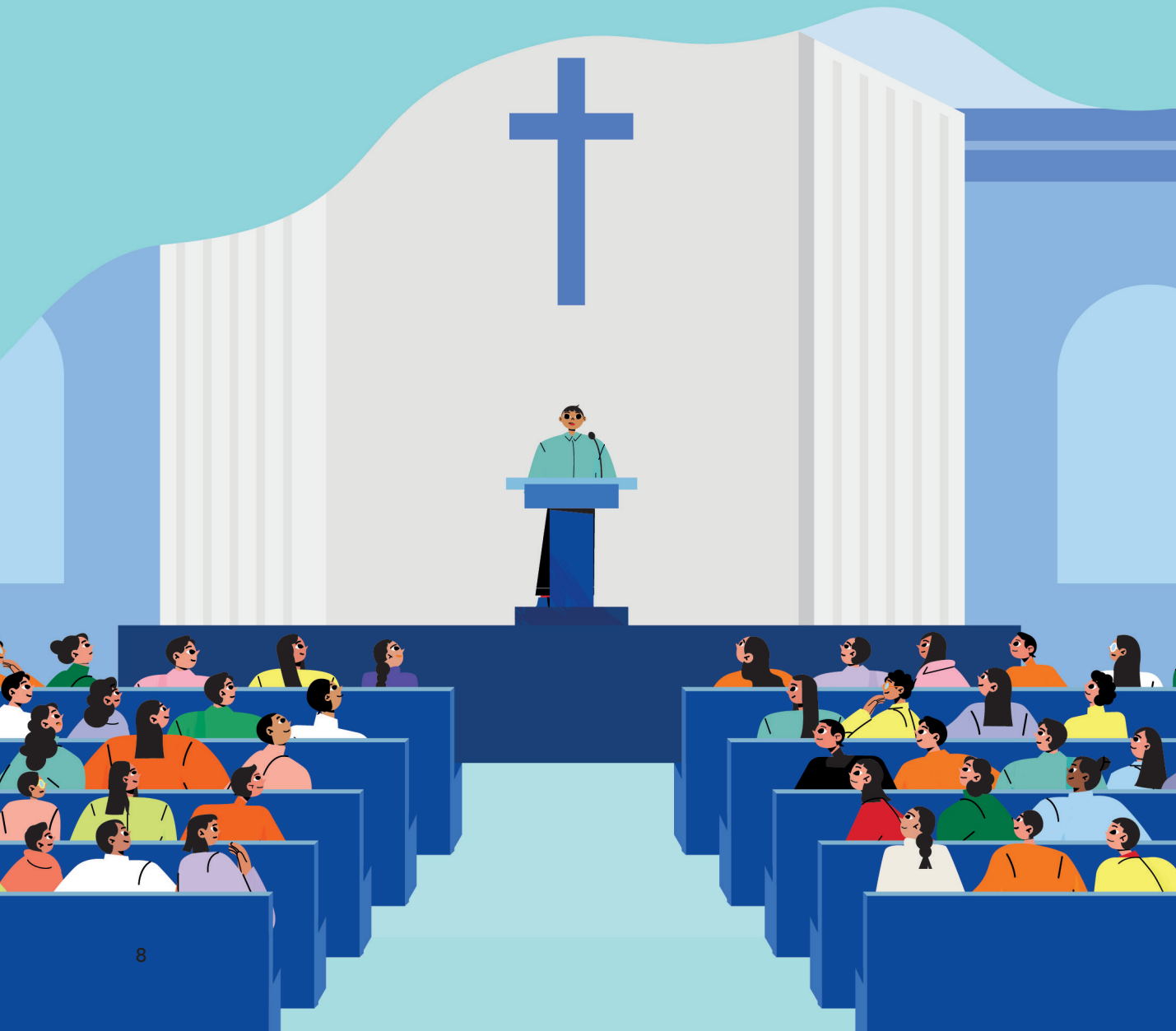
Finally, we are deeply grateful to all those who have supported us in this project, especially the participants who took the time to share their stories and experiences with us. We want to thank the London School of Theology for its vision, leadership, and partnership. Without their support and commitment, this research would not have been possible. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to supporters of Bible Society, whose generosity and commitment have been instrumental in bringing our research to fruition and making a lasting impact on the field.

Dr Yinxuan Huang

October 2023

1

The Epic Growth of the Chinese Church



It's a cliché that the proportion of the UK population identifying as Christian is shrinking (though there is a different story to tell about churchgoing). Presently, according to the 2021 Census, less than half of the population in England and Wales (46.2%) identifies as Christian. This is a decrease from 59.3% in 2011. But the Chinese Church in the UK is experiencing the opposite trend, with a notable increase in Chinese people who call themselves Christian. Over the past two years, the number of Chinese Christians in Britain has risen by more than 25,000, according to our model projections. Furthermore, BCCB found that at least 27 new Chinese churches, congregations, and Christian organisations were established in the country between January 2021 and January 2023².

Rates of change in the Chinese Christian community in Britain, 2011–2022

	Chinese congregations and Christian organisations	Chinese Christians
2011 total number	138	83,072
2021 total number	174	89,475
Total change (N)	+36	+6,403
Mean annual change (%)	2.6%	1.5%
2021 total number	174	89,475
2023 total number	201	115,290*
Total change (N)	+27	25,815
Mean Annual change (%)	15.6%	14.4%

*Projected number

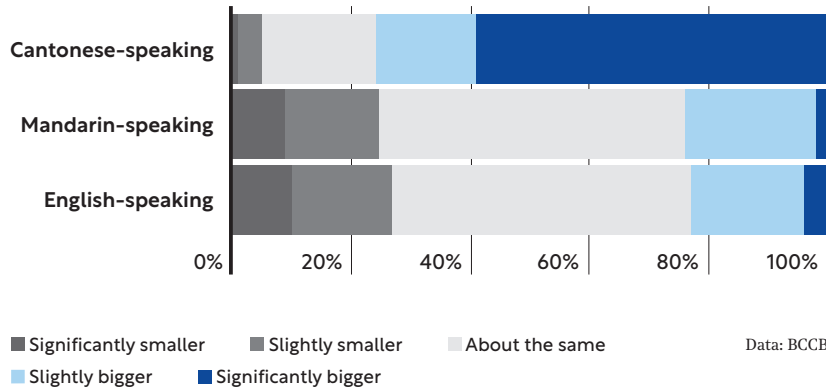
Data: 2011 Scotland Census, 2011 England and Wales Census, 2022 Annual Population Survey, and BCCB

¹Unless otherwise specified, 'Chinese' in the booklet is used as an ethnic concept and refers to huaren, that is, ethnic Chinese people, who were born in the UK or migrated from other parts of the world.

²The data collected provides a comprehensive perspective, encompassing information from a wide range of sources including mission organizations, church groups, and leaders within the diasporic Hong Kong Chinese Christian community.

Is your congregation bigger or smaller compared to 2019?

Base: Church leader interviewees, n=45



Nevertheless, it is worth noting that growth is not taking place everywhere. In the church leader interviews, each interviewee was asked to compare the current size of the Cantonese-, Mandarin-, and English-speaking congregations they served to pre-Covid levels. Their answers cover 54 congregations across Britain and are categorized by means of a five-point Likert scale. ‘Significantly bigger/smaller’ indicate a change of 50% or more, while ‘slightly bigger/smaller’ indicate a change of less than 50%.

Nearly 60% of the Cantonese congregations have witnessed significant growth in the past two years. Only one Cantonese congregation reported significant shrinkage. By contrast, Mandarin and English congregations show more mixed results. In both cases, there are more reports of ‘significant decrease’ than ‘significant increase’, although the current sizes of most congregations appear to be similar to their pre-pandemic sizes.

Highlights to take away:

- In the last two years, ethnic Chinese people in Britain have been the one of the most eye-catching mission fields in the UK
- The expansion of the Chinese Church is primarily driven by Cantonese-speaking newcomers from Hong Kong
- As with all immigration waves, the current surge will eventually decelerate. To seize this crucial evangelism opportunity, Chinese Christians must act quickly, or they may miss this important window for outreach

Think and apply:

How can we ensure that we are making the most of this window of opportunity for outreach to the Chinese community in the UK?

'The rapid growth of the Chinese ministry in Britain is impossible to overlook. In particular, the recent Hong Kong to UK immigration wave is a mission wave engineered by the Missio Dei. Churches in the UK have an unprecedented opportunity to work together and ride this mission wave. We should join God in his work by expanding the capacity of existing churches and actively planting new churches in strategic locations to reach the unchurched.'

Revd Henry Lu

General Director, Chinese Overseas Christian Mission

2

The landscape of Chinese churchgoers



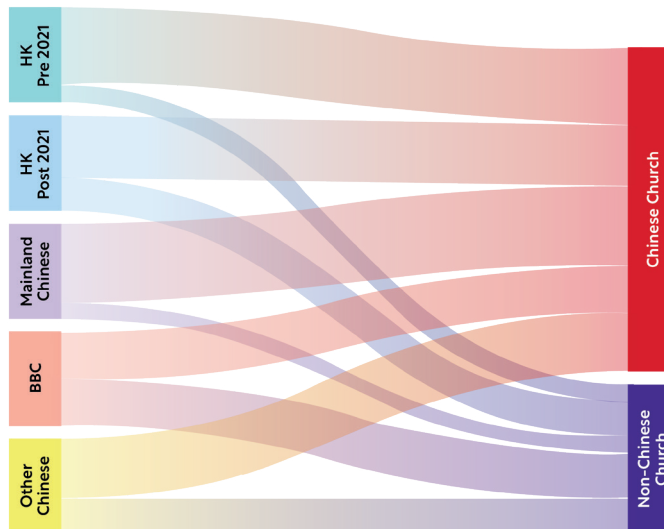
Where are Chinese churchgoers in Britain? Approximately 75% of Chinese churchgoers prefer to worship at Chinese churches, while the remaining 25% choose to attend local non-Chinese churches.

It is essential to recognise the difference between Hong Kong migrants who arrived before and after 2021. The vast majority of those arriving post-2021 are new BNO arrivals. Among pre-2021 Hong Kong migrants to Britain, 21% tend to choose non-Chinese churches. In contrast, a significantly higher percentage (38%) of recent Hong Kong arrivals are shown to favour non-Chinese churches.

Mainland Chinese-background Christians are the most likely to attend Chinese churches, with only 17% choosing non-Chinese churches. British-born Chinese individuals are the only group that demonstrates a greater interest in non-Chinese churches, with 51% preferring them. The 'Other Chinese' group, which comprise mainly Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese, also shows a relatively higher likelihood of favouring non-Chinese churches, at 40%.

Church choices by Chinese sub-group

Base: Christian sample, n=504



HK=Hong Kong Chinese; BBC=British born Chinese; Other Chinese comprises mainly Taiwanese, Malaysians, and Singaporeans; Pre-2021=moved to the UK before 2021; Post-2021=moved to the UK in 2021 or 2022

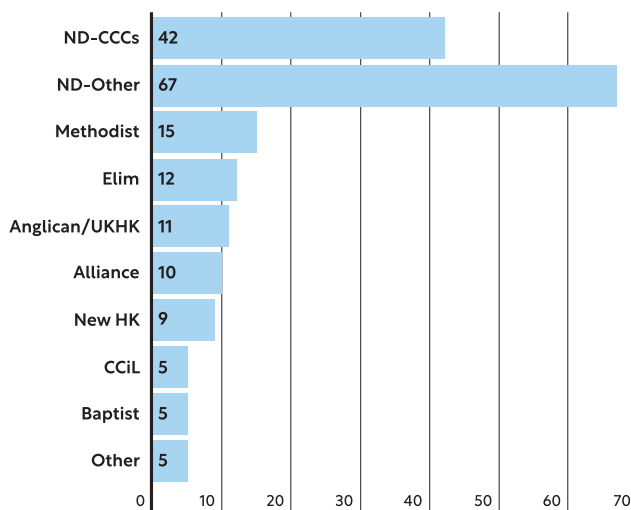
Data: BCCB

Note: The chart highlights percentage flows rather than actual population sizes. Each box should be understood as showing the distribution within that specific group, not the group's relative size in the overall population.

This chart displays the number of Chinese congregations categorised by denomination. As we can see, the majority of Chinese churches are now independent and non-denominational, surpassing the number of Chinese Christian Churches, most of which were originally the first Chinese churches established in their respective regions inspired by the ministry of Revd Stephen Wang. This trend can be attributed to the continuous growth of Chinese immigration and Chinese Christianity over the last three decades.

The three primary denominations within the Chinese Church are Methodist, Elim, and Alliance. While historically the Chinese Church has maintained a strong Evangelical Christian culture, Elim, which follows a Pentecostal tradition, has emerged as the fastest-growing Chinese denomination in Britain, having established four new congregations in just the past two years. It is worth noting that we have not included nested congregations, as they represent a unique church structure that requires further exploration in terms of denominational affiliation.

Additionally, it is interesting to consider the nine new Hong Kong churches, including the Good Neighbour Church and the Hong Kong Christian Church in the UK, which were all established by Hong Kong Chinese immigrants in 2021 and 2022. These churches are primarily attended by BNO immigrants.



Note: ND = non-denominational; CCC = 'Chinese Christian Church';
 New HK = All new Hong Kong churches established in 2021 and 2022;
 CCIL = Chinese Church in London

Data: BCCB

³ The figure is based on statistics and data available up until November 2022. Any developments or changes in trends occurring after that date are not considered.

⁴ A nested congregations is a Chinese sub-congregation within a non-Chinese church. Most of the hosting churches are part of the 'Welcome Churches' programme equipping churches to become 'Hong Kong Ready' (www.UKHK.org) by encouraging and training churches to give a good welcome to new arrivals from Hong Kong.

Highlights to take away:

- While the majority of Chinese churchgoers in the UK attend Chinese churches, it is worth noting that one in four may choose to attend non-Chinese churches
- The new wave of over 100,000 Hong Kong BNO arrivals is more likely to join non-Chinese churches than other first-generation Chinese immigrants
- British-born Chinese and Chinese with Singaporean and Malaysian do not show preference for Chinese churches in Britain
- Most Chinese churches in the UK are now independent and non-denominational, often describing themselves as 'evangelical church'
- 'The Chinese church' is highly dynamic and diverse, largely owing to the historical and recent migrant waves from East Asia

Think and apply:

In what ways can churches adapt their outreach and evangelism efforts to reach a wider audience, including those who may not prefer Chinese churches?

'I wear a stole, which is a liturgical vestment that hangs down on either side of my neck, to the right and left. On it, I have the Chinese characters for East and West, and at the back of the neck, a cross of Christ. This is because I believe that Christ can reconcile East and West, both in our personal identities and globally. This is the hope that drives my biblical hermeneutic. When people ask about my stole, I know that it's only the Spirit that can move hearts and bring understanding, as I have stood on all sides.'

Revd Mark Nam

Assistant Curate at United Church in Longwell Green and St Anne's,
Diocese of Bristol, Founder of The Tea House

3

The Bible Confidence personas of Chinese Christians



If you are involved in ministry of any kind – intercultural youth, counselling, and the like – you know the importance of the Bible. All church leaders involved in this study, without exception, agreed that their churches are Bible-centred – at least they have been trying to run the churches in a biblical way. How then, are Chinese Christians engaging with the Bible? Are they active Bible users? What is the role of the Bible in their lives? Are there any challenges when it comes to the Bible engagement of Chinese Christians? In order to establish a comprehensive understanding of how Chinese Christians interact with the Bible, a Bible Confidence scale was designed to measure the degree of relationships between each person and the Bible.

The scale covers five core domains:

1. **Operational:** How often do Chinese Christians use the Bible through different media?
2. **Performative:** Do Chinese Christians seek guidance from the Bible in real-life situations?
3. **Emotional:** Can the Bible generate positive emotions and bring Chinese Bible users closer to God?
4. **Cognitive:** How knowledgeable do Chinese Christians feel about the Scriptures?
5. **Missional:** To what extent do Chinese Christians desire to share the Bible with their non-Christian family members and friends?

Domains and Items

Base: Christian sample, n=504

Operational		%Weekly
I read or listen to the Bible on my own		86%
I read or listen to the Bible together with other people		65%
I use supplementary sources to learn more about the Bible		43%
Emotional		%Agree
I feel closer to God when I read or listen to the Bible		84%
Compared to my family and friends, the Bible can bring greater love and comfort		70%
If the Bible were a person, s/he would be my best friend		65%
Performative		%Agree
I seek guidance from the Bible when facing important life decisions or crises		65%
I seek guidance from the Bible when managing relationships with family, friends, and colleagues		58%
I seek guidance from the Bible when navigating everyday issues		48%
Cognitive		%Agree
I have little problem with understanding what the Bible says		52%
I know how to apply the Bible to everyday life		40%
I am confident about guiding other Christians in interpreting the Bible		37%
Missional		%Agree
I am actively taking part in Bible-related ministries		10%
I actively share God's words in the Bible with my non-believing family and friends		21%
I have been actively sharing the Bible and its messages on social media		35%

Data: BCCB

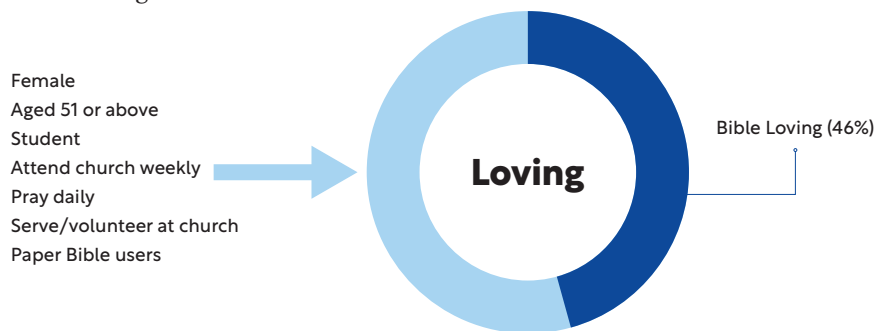
In the Bible Confidence Scale, each of the five domains is comprised of three questionnaire items. The responses to these questions help us explore the characteristics of Chinese Bible engagement in Britain from various perspectives.

Our findings indicate that respondents exhibit greater confidence in the emotional and operational domains of Bible confidence. For instance, 86% of Chinese Christians report weekly Bible engagement, and 84% agree that they feel closer to God when reading or listening to the Bible. The Bible also has a significant impact on the lives of Christians, as nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents say they consult the Bible when facing important life decisions or crises.

Conversely, Chinese Christians tend to have less confidence in the missional and cognitive domains. For example, only 21% of Chinese Christians actively share God’s words from the Bible with their non-believing family and friends, while only one in ten participate actively in Bible-related ministries. The cognitive domain also yields a relatively weaker outcome, which stems from Chinese Christians being less confident in applying the Bible to real-life situations and guiding other Christians in interpreting the Bible. Three out of five respondents admit that they struggle with understanding how to apply the Bible to everyday life.

Using an advanced statistical model called Latent Class Analysis, we are able to reveal three types of Bible Confidence Personas of Chinese Christians in Britain. They are:

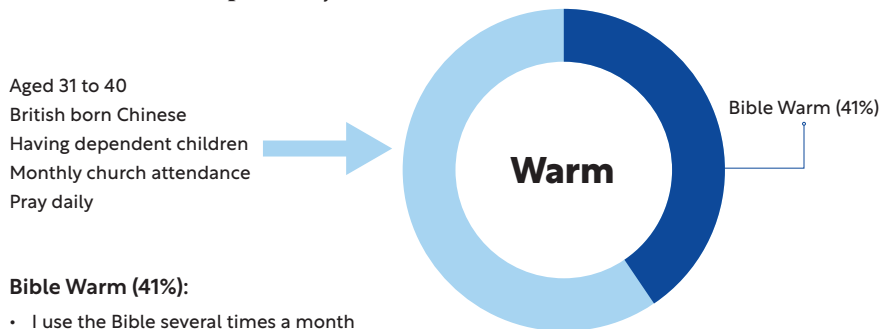
- 1. Bible Loving (46%):** Chinese Christians who fall into the Bible-Loving category exhibit high levels of Bible confidence across all five domains. Nearly half of the respondents are classified as Bible-Loving.



Bible Loving (46%):

- I use a Bible on a weekly basis
- I follow the Bible to navigate through everyday life
- The Bible brings me closer to God
- I feel knowledgeable about the Bible, although there is space for improvement
- I always tell my non-believing family member and friends about the Bible

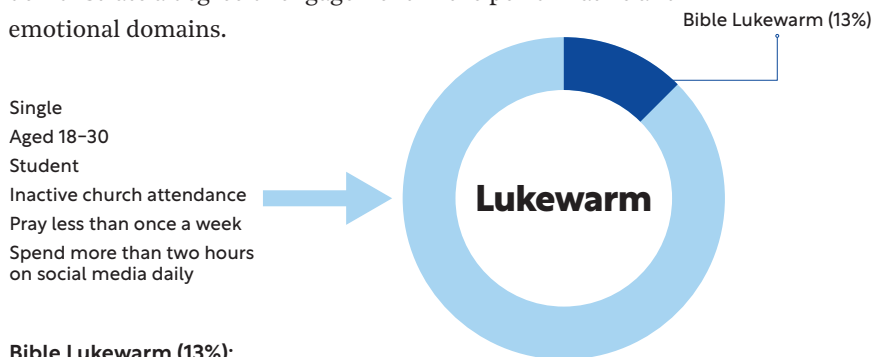
2. **Bible Warm (41%):** Participants in this persona display high operational and emotional Bible confidence, while their scores in the remaining three domains – conditional, cognitive, and missional – are comparatively lower.



Bible Warm (41%):

- I use the Bible several times a month
- The Bible often brings me positive emotions
- I turn to the Bible when facing important life issues or choices
- I feel somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible, but I lack confidence to talk about it
- I occasionally tell my non-believing family members about the Bible

3. **Bible Lukewarm (13%):** The Bible Lukewarm persona is characterised by low levels of operational, cognitive, and missional Bible confidence. However, individuals in this group are labelled as 'lukewarm' because they continue to demonstrate a degree of engagement in the performative and emotional domains.



Bible Lukewarm (13%):

- I occasionally use the Bible
- The Bible has little effect on my spiritual life
- I acknowledge the importance of the Bible, but this is not affecting my lifestyle
- I do not feel too knowledgeable about the Bible
- I rarely tell my non-believing family members and friends about the Bible

Data: BCCB

We continue this analysis by exploring the key factors associated with the three personas. Several noteworthy insights emerge.

1. **Generational gap:** as older generations demonstrate higher Bible confidence, it's crucial to address the spiritual needs of younger generations and foster connections between different age groups.
2. **Underrepresented demographics:** women and married individuals tend to show greater Bible confidence. Efforts should be made to engage men and single individuals to help them grow in their own faith.
3. **University students:** university students often display polarised attitudes towards the Bible. There is much space for investment to bridge this divide and encourage spiritual growth and explorations.
4. **Private and communal practice:** Bible confidence is closely linked to frequent prayer and regular church attendance. On the other hand, engaging with the Bible will in turn inspire and nurture these practices.

Highlights to take away:

We examined the Bible confidence of Chinese Christians by assessing their patterns of Bible engagement:

- Overall, it is clear that Chinese Christians care about the Bible – it is a centrepiece of their religious life
- A considerable number of Chinese Christians are active Bible users. They would like to seek guidance from the Bible in real-life situations. The Bible generates positive emotions and brings Chinese Bible users closer to God
- They are, however, less confident with their Bible knowledge as well as sharing the Bible with their non-Christian family members and friend

We found three Bible Confidence Personas of Chinese Christians in terms of their Bible confidence:

- More Chinese Christians (46%) appear to be Bible Loving. They see the Bible as a key element of their life and are keen to share it with other people
- A large population (41%) of Chinese Christians are identified as Bible Warm. They frequently use the Bible and are happy to let the Bible transform their spirituality and life. However, they feel less knowledgeable about the Bible and are shy about sharing it with other people
- Only a small portion (13%) of Chinese Christians is classified as Bible Lukewarm. Christians with this persona acknowledge the importance of the Bible, although they lack passion to engage with it

We showed you that the three personas are associated with different social and demographic characteristics:

- Women, older individuals, and those who actively practise their faith and participate in church activities tend to have higher confidence in the Bible among Chinese Christians
- Christians who are single or under the age of 30 generally exhibit weaker Bible engagement

Think and apply:

In what ways can we use popular technology, such as AI and social media, to promote Bible engagement among Chinese Christians?

How can we effectively train and equip Chinese Christians to confidently share the Bible with their non-Christian family and friends from different religious and cultural backgrounds?

Do you know any Christian friends who rarely read the Bible? Let's consider how to make those who are Lukewarm, Warm again!

Speak to the youth in your church and find out which aspects of the Bible they are most interested in exploring.

'The Bible drives everything we do in our church. As a pastor, it is sad to see people who call themselves Christians but do not even read the Bible.'

Dan

Mandarin-speaking Pastor, Chinese Christian Church in London (CCIL)

'There are obviously many more ways you can explore the Bible in this day and age. There are apps, social media outlets, and YouTube videos. But I think the objectives never changed – you need to read it, understand it, believe it, and share it. No single dimension is easy, but none of them is dispensable either.'

Professor Kwok-Leung Cheung

Associate Minister, Nottingham Chinese Christian Church

4

Perceptions and impact of the Bible



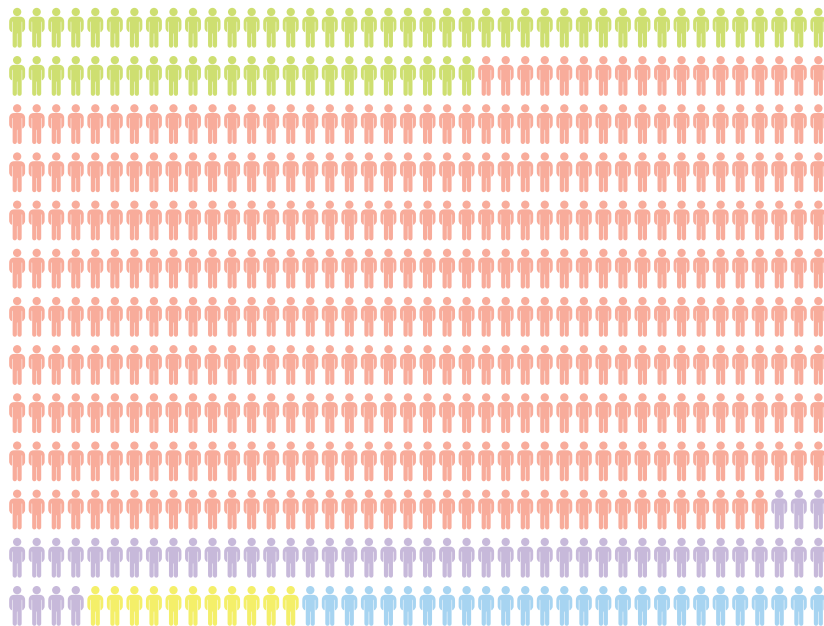
The Bible holds a crucial role in Christianity. However, different people have different perspectives on what it means. So, what exactly is 'the Bible' according to Chinese Christians? Does the Bible have a real-life impact among Chinese Christians in Britain?

At the outset, we find that nearly three in four Chinese Christians believe the Bible is 'the inspired word of God and has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal'. Some 12% of the respondents said it is 'the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word by word'. For the others, 9% mentioned 'factual or historical errors' in the Bible, while 2% said the Bible 'was not inspired by God'. The rest 5% of the sample selected either 'Don't know' or 'None of the above' in the questionnaire.

The point to grasp here is that Chinese Christians hold a predominantly high view of the Bible, with it being central to their church experience.

What do you think the Bible is?

Base: Christian sample, n=504



- The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word by word (12%)
- The Bible is the inspired word of God and has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic, rather than literal (72%)
- The Bible is inspired by God but has some factual errors (9%)
- The Bible was not inspired by God (2%)
- Other (5%)

Data: BCCB

As Chinese Christians delve into the Bible and actively engage with its teachings, they experience a notable impact in various aspects of their lives.

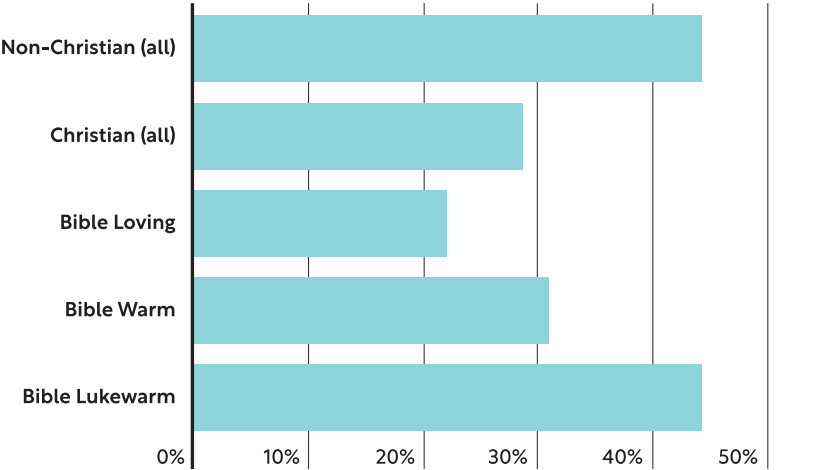
One prominent example concerns mental health. Our study finds that negative mental health is very common amongst Chinese people in Britain. Apart from the present challenges of the cost of living crisis and inflation, common across the UK, Chinese people in Britain face other types of challenges. For example, many new Hong Kong BNO arrivals we spoke with noted the immigration trauma and cultural shock while they try to settle in the UK.

Over one-third of participants reported frequently (i.e. at least weekly) experiencing negative emotions like depression, loneliness, and anxiety within the past month. It's important to note that mental health concerns affect both Christian and non-Christian Chinese groups. However, Christians (29%) are considerably less likely to experience these negative emotions compared to non-Christians (44%).

Furthermore, engaging with the Bible appears to be part of a cluster of factors with a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of Christian believers. If we hold other sociodemographic factors constant, Bible Loving Christians are more likely to find solace and contentment, with only 22% reporting negative emotions. In contrast, the likelihood of individuals experiencing negative emotions doubles in the case of the Bible Lukewarm persona.

I have often experienced negative emotions like depression, loneliness, anxiety in the past month

Base: All respondents, n=1,179



Data: BCCB

⁵ These include age, gender, marriage, occupation, and Chinese sub-groups.

Highlights to take away:

- The majority of Chinese Christians hold a high view of the Bible and consider it central to their church experience
- Bible engagement contributes to greater emotional resilience, evidenced in the compelling example concerning the mental well-being of Chinese individuals. While Chinese people in Britain appear to frequently face negative emotions such as anxiety, those devoted to Bible engagement – namely the Bible Loving Christians – experience far fewer negative emotions compared to others

Think and apply:

What are the criteria for successful Bible engagement? In the next five years, what can your church or ministry do to facilitate greater engagement with the Bible?

'For Chinese people in a bustling city like London, it can be challenging for people to connect with one another and form deep relationships, especially when they live far apart. We need to remember that our faith is not just about knowledge or good works, but about relationship with God and one another. Over the last 25 years, I have seen countless lives transformed through a deep engaging with God's word.'

'However, in our concern for clear Bible teaching, it is important we do not lack concern for individuals and the community. We need to strive to create an environment that fosters both a deep understanding of the Bible and a genuine love for people.'

Revd Henry Eatock-Taylor

Pastor of Mandarin Congregation, St Helen's Bishopsgate

5

Understanding Chinese Bible users: patterns and needs



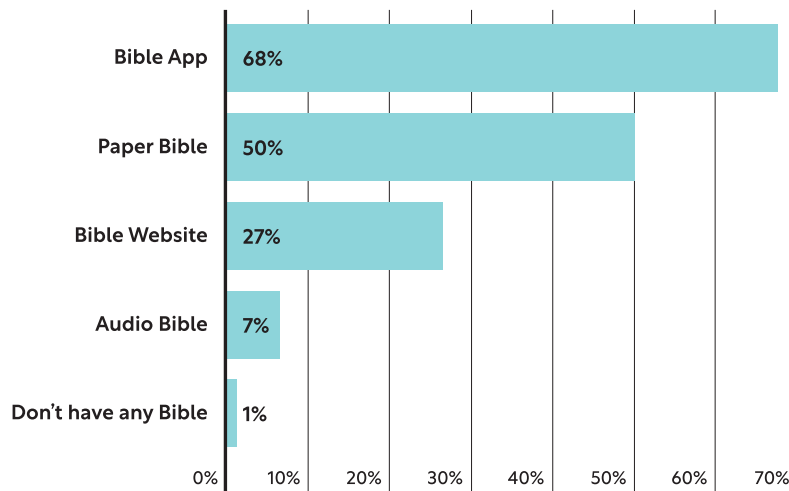
Bible engagement starts with the Bible. Now that we have seen that Chinese Christians and churches tend to be Bible-centred, it is valuable to investigate how they use the Bible and what they need to enhance their Bible engagement.

We start with a question asking Chinese Christian Bible users which formats of the Bible they use most frequently.

Chinese Christians are most likely to read the Bible from Bible apps. While 68% of the respondents prefer apps for Bible-reading experiences, only 50% mentioned printed copies. Somewhat surprisingly, the preference of Bible apps over printed copies is consistent across Christians aged between 18 and 50. The only group of respondents who display a preference of print over apps are those Chinese Christians aged 51 or above. Mainland Chinese Christians appear to be significantly more likely than other Chinese Christians to pick a printed format of the Bible. Bible Confidence has little effect on patterns of Bible interactions. A considerable proportion (27%) of the respondents reported using a website for Bible interactions frequently. Only 1% said they did not have a Bible of any kind.

Most frequently used formats of the Bible

Base: BCCB Christian sample, n=504



Data: BCCB

In our survey, approximately 55% of Chinese Christian respondents indicate that they use supplementary resources for Bible engagement, demonstrating a trend of seeking additional materials to support spiritual growth.

Different age groups prefer different resources. For younger respondents aged 18 to 35, the most popular form of Bible supplementation is 'Christian music and hymns', with 36% of them choosing this option. In contrast, for the other two older age groups, 'online visual or audio Bible resources' emerge as the top choice.

It is important to highlight that traditional printed materials seem to be losing ground to digital resources, as the latter are more popular across all age groups. This is especially relevant for the middle group ('36 to 50'), who may arguably experience greater time constraints and work-related pressures.

Do you use additional sources to supplement your Bible engagement?

Base: BCCB Christian sample, n=504

18 to 35: 51%

Most popular forms of Bible supplement:

- Christian music and hymns (36%)
- Online visual or audio Bible resources (27%)
- Books and other printed materials (25%)

36 to 50: 54%

Most popular forms of Bible supplement:

- Online visual or audio Bible resources (35%)
- Online written Bible resources (33%)
- Christian music and hymns (32%)

51+: 61%

Most popular forms of Bible supplement:

- Online visual or audio Bible resources (42%)
- Online written Bible resources (39%)
- Books and other printed materials (30%)

Data: BCCB

Now that we have examined methods of Bible engagement, let us turn our attention to the needs of Bible engagement in the Chinese Church.

When we ask Christian respondents in the survey to select the things that they need to improve their Bible engagement, nearly 70% of the respondents who have dependent children under 18 mentioned ‘know how to share the Bible with youth/children’, marking a significant demand for catechising ‘second generation’ Chinese Christians. Other items selected by more than half of the respondents include ‘know how to apply the Bible to my personal life’ (60%), ‘understand the historical and cultural backgrounds of Bible stories’ (58%), and ‘know how to share the Bible with non-Christians’ (52%).

Chinese Christians seem content with the Bible they have. Just over one in five of the respondents said they would like to ‘have a better access to the Bible’.

Base: BCCB Christian sample, n=504

What do you need to improve your Bible engagement?	%
Know how to share the Bible with youth/children*	69%
Know how to apply the Bible to my personal life	60%
Understand the historical and cultural backgrounds of Bible stories	58%
Know how to share the Bible with non-Christians	52%
Understand what the Bible teaches about prominent social and political events nowadays	46%
Know where to get suitable supplementary materials	43%
Understand the language and meaning of the biblical messages	42%
Have someone read or study the Bible with you	41%
Have more time to read or listen to the Bible	37%
Other	22%
Have better access to the Bible (e.g. printed Bible, Bible app, audio Bible, etc)	21%

*Only includes respondents who have dependent children aged under 18.

Data: BCCB

Finally, the BCCB surveyed Chinese Christian participants to determine their likelihood of purchasing new Bibles, assuming cost was not a factor. The findings reveal a significant demand for additional Bibles among these individuals.

A resounding 81% of native Mandarin-speaking Christians and 71% of native Cantonese-speaking Christians express that they are 'likely' or 'very likely' to acquire 'a Chinese study Bible designed for in-depth exploration'. Furthermore, 'a Bible translated into modern Chinese language' would appeal to both Cantonese and Mandarin-speaking Christians. As expected, native English-speaking Chinese Christians demonstrate less interest in Chinese Bibles. However, parents with dependent children across all linguistic groups indicate that a youth Bible, specifically tailored for young Chinese individuals, would likely serve as a valuable addition to their household.

If price were not an issue, how likely would you be to buy the following editions/versions of the Bible?

Base: BCCB Christian sample, n=504

Cantonese

Likely or very likely to buy %

- A Chinese study Bible allowing deeper exploration (71%)
- A Bible translated into twenty-first century Chinese language (50%)
- A youth Bible specifically edited for young Chinese (76%)*

Mandarin

Likely or very likely to buy %

- A Chinese study Bible allowing deeper exploration (81%)
- A Bible translated into twenty-first century Chinese language (63%)
- A youth Bible specifically edited for young Chinese (79%)*

English

Likely or very likely to buy %

- A Chinese study Bible allowing deeper exploration (32%)
- A Bible translated into twenty-first century Chinese language (19%)
- A youth Bible specifically edited for young Chinese (55%)*

*Results for the 'youth Bible' item include only respondents who have dependent children aged under 18 Data: BCCB

Highlights to take away:

- As we enter a dynamic digital world, the Bible is also evolving. Digital formats of the Bible, particularly Bible apps, have replaced paper Bibles as the most widely used means of Bible engagement among Chinese Bible users
- Chinese Christians display a strong inclination towards using supplementary resources for Bible engagement, with varying preferences across age groups. The increasing prominence of digital resources suggests that church leaders should adapt their approach to Bible study and spiritual growth to accommodate these evolving preferences
- A majority of surveyed Bible users seek improvement in sharing the Bible with youth, applying it to personal life, understanding historical and cultural contexts, and evangelising to non-Christians
- There is a strong demand for 'better' Bible versions – study Bibles designed for in-depth exploration, a Bible translated into modern Chinese language, and a youth Bible tailored to young Chinese individuals would be appealing to Chinese Christians

Think and apply:

Given the popularity of supplementary resources among Chinese Christians, what materials could you introduce to further facilitate Bible engagement in your congregation? How can these materials be tailored to meet the needs of different age groups in your church? and cultural backgrounds?

Would you be willing to conduct a survey or initiate a group discussion in your church to identify the needs for better Bible engagement?

Based on the strong demand for 'better' Bible versions, how might your church encourage and support the use of study Bibles, modern Chinese language Bibles, and youth Bibles? How could these specific versions contribute to deeper understanding and engagement among your congregation members?

Pastor Lee and his wife Candy used to run a takeaway shop for 30 years. The couple are now leading a church in Kent and have turned their shop into a spacious meeting point for local Chinese people.

Candy said, 'We always work together. I don't know if, you know, working together has its ups and downs. So we pretty much know each other's temperament. Working for God can be stressful. But thankfully we can cope with it most of the time.'

Pastor Lee added, 'The only thing that is impossible to cope with is God's words. As a Chinese pastor, it is often very challenging as the theological training and materials targeting Chinese audience is scarce. That is why I feel pressured because I know people expect flawless teaching. God is flawless. We are not. That is why we are keen to learn more about the Bible with our congregants. The demand will never stop.'

Pastor Lee and Candy

Elim Full Gospel Chinese Church (Canterbury)

6

Leading the way: resilient leaders and their insights



The BCCB was motivated by a concern for Chinese ministry. But what exactly is ‘Chinese ministry’? What is God calling Christian leaders to do in response to the changing landscape of the Chinese mission field? What are the Church’s most urgent lines of inquiry?

The 45 interviews with church workers, ranging from lay leaders in local churches to general directors of large mission organisations, allowed us to learn about their experiences, insights and needs over the past few years. These stories have provided fresh perspectives at the church level and enabled us to capture the key issues associated with Chinese ministry right now, which are illustrated in the word cloud below.

The size of each word is determined by how frequently the theme was mentioned in the interviews. The three most commonly mentioned issues in Chinese ministry are ‘co-workers’, ‘youth’, and ‘space’.

Base: Church leader interviewees, n=45



The central issue for ‘co-workers’ is the scarcity of pastoral resources in the Chinese Church. As the mission field expands, the Chinese Church is urgently seeking pastors and mature lay leaders who can not only teach the Bible but also guide congregants in addressing everyday issues within and beyond the church community. The demand for co-workers is so widespread that 41 out of 45 Chinese Christian workers mentioned it.

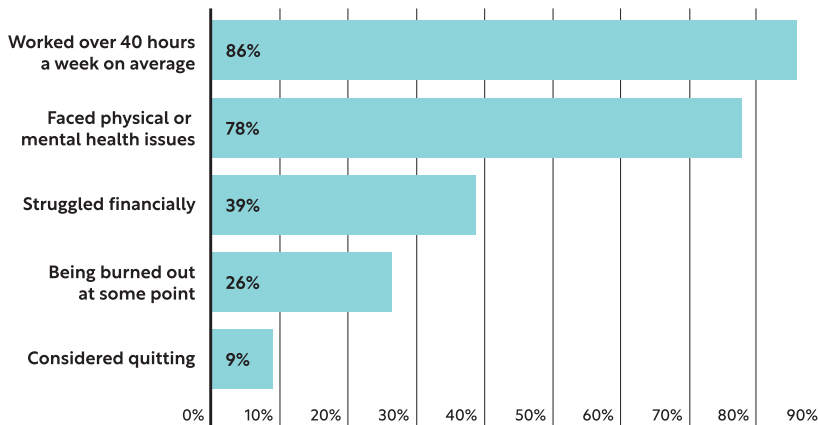
Youth Ministry is another concern that has garnered more attention than adult ministries in the Chinese church. This is primarily because many new Hong Kong immigrants arrive with their dependent children, leading to a sudden influx of Cantonese-speaking youth in churches.

These youngsters arguably face more challenges during this transitional period than their younger peers. Furthermore, finding a youth pastor is even more difficult.

The issue of space has subtly emerged as a challenge that could impact many Chinese churches, particularly their Cantonese-speaking congregations. Most Chinese congregations in Britain do not own their own church buildings. As the recent wave of immigration broadens the scope for evangelism, space has quickly become a concern, with churches needing more physical space to accommodate newcomers and new ministries. Additional key themes extracted from the interviews include 'Hong Kong', 'training', 'media', and 'disciple-making'.

Did you experience the following in the past 12 months?

Base: Church leader interviewees, n=45



Data: BCCB

One should not introduce the Chinese ministry without mentioning its Chinese Christian leaders. Nearly nine in ten of the leaders in the interviews mentioned that, on average, they worked over 40 hours a week in the last 12 months. A shocking proportion of them, 78%, had faced health problems. A considerable proportion (39%) struggled financially, due to issues like lack of income and church offerings during lockdown. While a quarter of the interviewees experienced burnout at some point, only 9% considered quitting from their roles. As one pastor expressed, 'I am undoubtedly exhausted, but the spiritual rewards make it all worthwhile. If I were to quit, who else would pastor them? How could I bear to leave them?'

Highlights to take away:

- Lack of pastoral resources and mature lay leaders, the booming demand in youth ministry, and extra space to host the rapid increase of Chinese churchgoers are the three main concerns of Chinese church leaders
- The Chinese Church has some of the most resilient leaders; nevertheless, they are facing multiple challenges, such as long working hours, health issues and financial difficulties

Think and apply:

How can we better support resilient leaders in the Chinese Church, who are facing challenges such as long working hours, health issues and financial difficulties? Are there any specific areas where local churches, missional agencies and other Christian groups in the wider British Christian community can provide assistance?

Why are Chinese churches lacking pastors? Is this phenomenon related to church culture and leadership model?

Before the pandemic, Pastor Chiu led a 250-strong Cantonese-language congregation in Manchester. Then the pandemic hit, services went online, and the British government started to give visas for Hong Kong residents. The result is six-fold growth, the congregation now standing at 1,500 people. 'It's amazing,' he said. 'But the influx, the growth has been so big that sometimes I feel quite tired or exhausted to respond to all the needs of the church. Sometimes it is overwhelming. When I feel frustrated, I need to pray to God, just like Moses.'

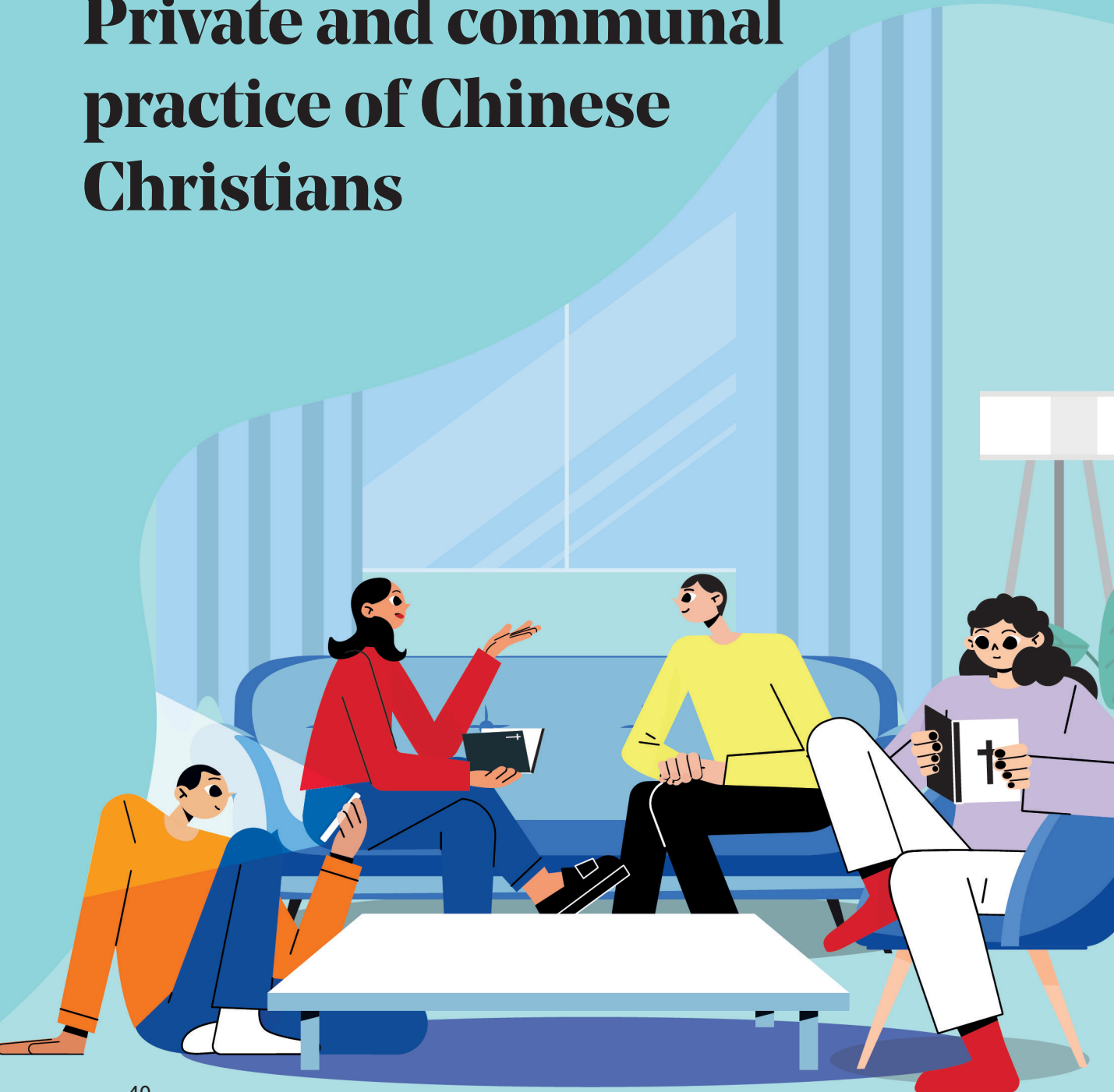
Pastor Chiu's prayers are for more pastors and greater financial resources to be able to serve the burgeoning community. Despite the tiredness, however, he feels that this is his 'calling'. 'For me, it's amazing to see lots of people from Hong Kong moving to the UK. I wonder if God will use them to do something in the UK, I can't say a revival, but we can preach the gospel to the local people. I want my congregation to get involved, so at least they can preach the gospel to their neighbours,' he said.

Revd Wai Chor Chiu

Minister-in-Charge, Manchester Alliance Church

7

Private and communal practice of Chinese Christians

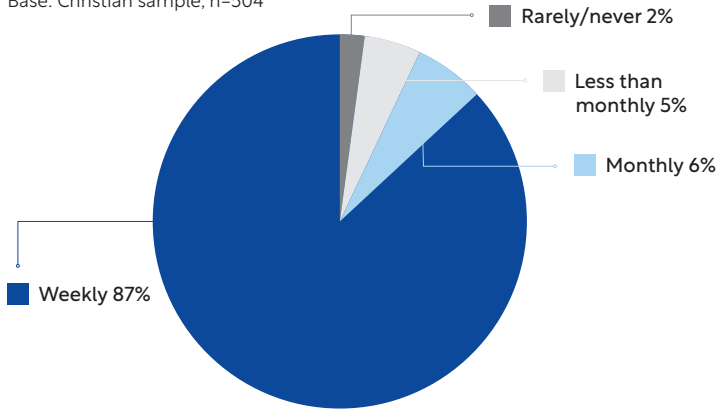


C hristianity is more than just an identity; it encompasses both personal and communal aspects that are essential to a believer's spiritual journey. The Bible encourages Christians to engage in a continuous and intimate prayer life while emphasising the importance of gathering together with fellow believers. These two dimensions – private practice and communal participation – are integral to Christian life and serve as a reflection of an individual's spiritual state.

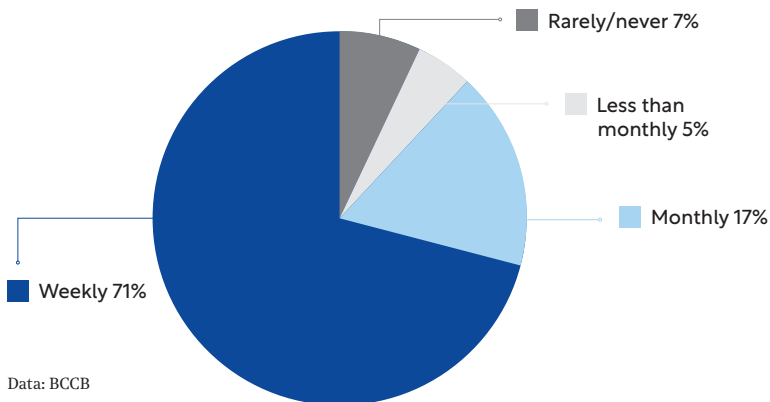
The BCCB survey shows that Chinese Christians are active in terms of in both private and communal practice. Our general sample shows that 87% of Chinese Christians reported attending church on a weekly basis. When it comes to attendance in small group gatherings, such as fellowships, Bible study groups and prayer meetings, 71% of participants attend on a weekly basis.

Sunday service attendance

Base: Christian sample, n=504



Attendance in small group gatherings such as fellowships and Bible study groups

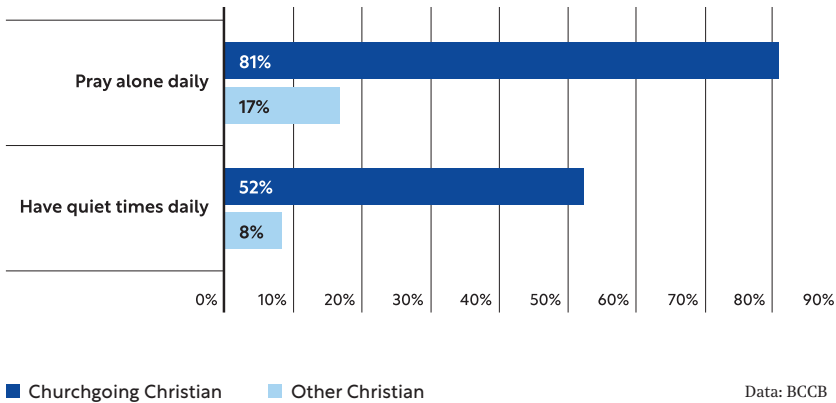


Regarding private practice, four out of five churchgoing Chinese Christians (defined as attending Sunday services at least monthly) pray individually on a daily basis. More than half of them (52%) have personal quiet times every day.

There is an apparent association between church attendance and private practice. For Christians who attend Sunday service less than monthly, they are far less likely to pray (17%) and have quiet times (8%) on a daily basis.

Private practice of Chinese Christians

Base: Christian sample, n=504



Highlights to take away:

- Chinese Christians demonstrate a profound dedication to their faith, as evidenced by their enthusiastic involvement in church services and small group gatherings, and their fervent engagement in prayer and quiet times
- For Chinese Christians, their spiritual life is inherently linked to their involvement in the church community. Engaging with one without the other is simply impossible

Think and apply:

How can we foster a sense of interconnectedness between individual spiritual life and church life among our Chinese Christian members?

Charles, who was born and raised in Shanghai, arrived in the UK in 2012 to pursue his PhD. His encounter with Jesus occurred in 2015, at a gospel camp organised by the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission in Milton Keynes, which led him to be baptised at a Chinese church in London the following year. When asked about his faith, he said: 'My faith means everything to me. Knowing that God loves me fills me with joy and keeps me smiling every day. I pray a lot and take my Bible with me all the time.'

Despite his deep-rooted beliefs, Charles's parents are not fully supportive of his conversion. However, he remains steadfast, saying: 'It can be challenging when your loved ones are not supportive, but that is exactly why I need to hold on tight to God. If I stop praying, attending Sunday service and Bible study groups, I will soon drift away and be unable to develop a deeper understanding of God's love and purpose for my life.'

Charles

is now in Glasgow and attends a local English-speaking church

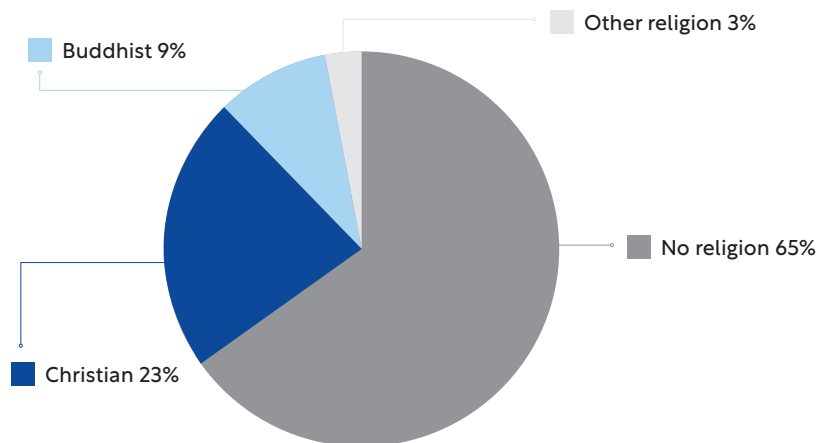
8

The myth of atheism amongst Chinese people



The 2022 Annual Population Survey reveals that Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, make up 23% of the Chinese population in Britain. While 23% may appear to be a small percentage, it is significantly larger than the proportions of Christians in mainland China (5%), Hong Kong (12%), and Taiwan (4%). Christianity is the predominant religion within the British Chinese community, surpassing the combined total of all other religious groups.

However, upon initially examining the graph, it may seem well reasonable to assume that the majority of Chinese individuals in Britain identify as atheists. Indeed, close to two out of three respondents report having no religious affiliation.



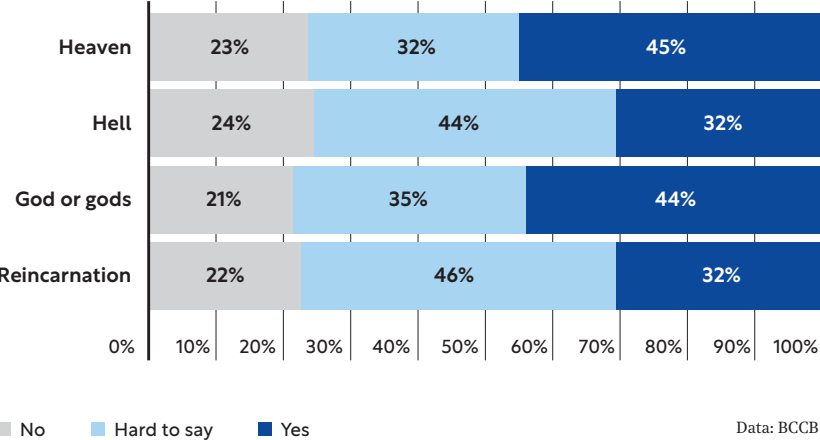
Data: 2022 Annual Population Survey

Despite common assumptions, it would be incorrect to presume that most Chinese people are atheists who do not believe in supernatural phenomena or supreme beings. The key point to grasp here is that the composition of the religiously unaffiliated is much more complex than it appears. The perception of faith and spirituality within this group is diverse, rather than cohesive

In the BCCB survey, we questioned religiously unaffiliated participants about their beliefs in heaven, hell, supreme beings such as God or gods, and reincarnation. Intriguingly, we discovered that the majority answered ‘yes’ to all four inquiries. Almost half of the unaffiliated respondents believe in heaven (45%) and supreme beings (44%), while approximately one-third (32%) believe in hell and reincarnation, respectively. Furthermore, many people felt it was ‘hard to say’ when responding to these questions, indicating a substantial proportion of agnostics within the Chinese community.

Do you believe in the following?

Base: Non-Christian sample, n=675



Highlights to take away:

- Approximately 67% of Chinese individuals in Britain do not identify with a specific religious affiliation
- Christianity tends to be more prevalent among Chinese diaspora communities compared to those in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan
- The absence of religious affiliation should not be equated with atheism. Many religiously unaffiliated Chinese individuals in Britain hold beliefs in supernatural phenomena and supreme beings, with a significant portion identifying as agnostic

Think and apply:

How can we establish connections between the Bible and the social, cultural, and spiritual issues faced by the Chinese community in the UK today, to make more non-Christian Chinese people realize that Christianity is not a 'Western' religion and encourage them to seek answers to life's questions in the Bible?

The couple came to the UK in July 2021. Neither of them was Christian. But on arriving in the UK they began to attend church services online, ultimately joining a local congregation.

'The first time I came to church and sang the songs, I felt moved and tears dropped,' said Maggie. 'It was so touching. It was a relief of what I had suppressed.' Abel added, 'I felt that God was leading my life, so when we came to the UK it felt quite natural to go to church.'

Neither had read the Bible much before coming to the UK. Now, they are starting to encounter it through Bible study groups and small group sessions held by their local church. Abel said, 'I find that now, when I read it, I can understand the meaning.'

Abel and Maggie

attend a Chinese Church in Manchester

9

Mission opportunities among non-Christians



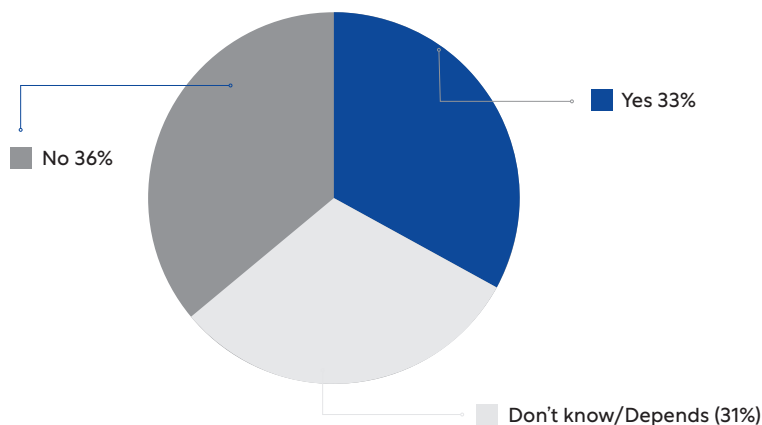
We have seen in the last vignette that many religiously unaffiliated in the Chinese community in Britain are in fact not atheist – they are trying to believe in something. But if you invited one of them to your church today, how many would actually accept the invitation?

In our survey, we also posed the same question to non-Christian participants. The responses revealed that 36% said ‘No’ and 33% replied ‘Yes’ to the question. Additionally, there is a significant group (31%) that seems to represent a ‘persuadable middle ground’. Amidst the recent surge in immigration from East Asia, it is reasonable to assume that the evangelism opportunities for Chinese individuals have expanded even further.

In addition, among those who responded positively, 22% have previously attended a church service. This compares to 14% in the ‘Don’t know/Depends’ group and 9% in the ‘No’ group. Therefore, individuals with prior church experience are more likely to be open to the church again than those without such experience.

I am happy to take part in a Christian event, such as a Sunday service or a small group gathering, if invited.

Base: Non-Christian sample, n=675



Data: BCCB

Next, we asked the non-Christian respondents to further share the aspects of Christianity they would like to explore most. At the outset, 35% of the respondents said they were ‘not interested at all’.

The survey reveals that non-Christian Chinese are particularly curious about:

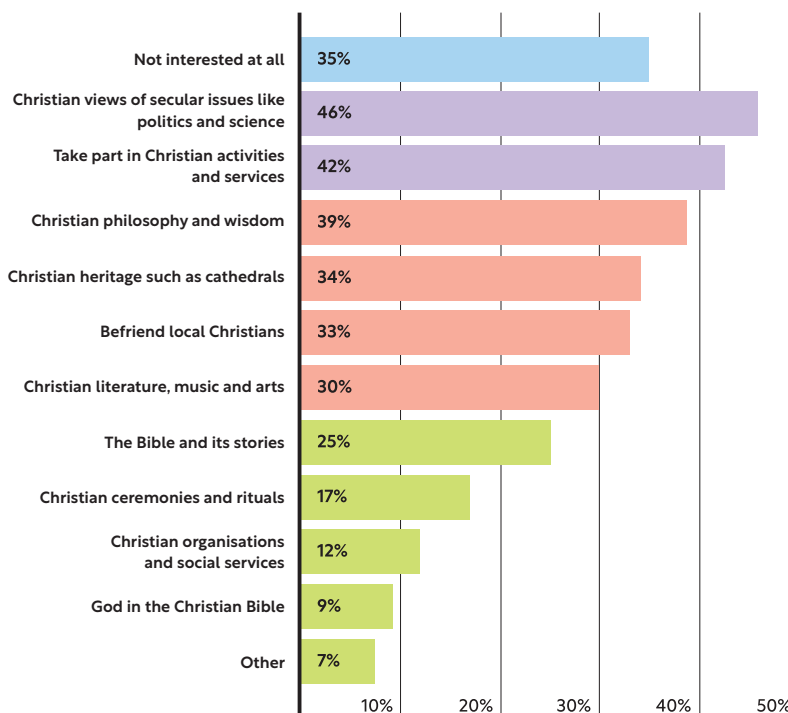
1. How the church views secular issues such as politics and science (46%)
2. Experience Christian activities and services (42%)

Other notable aspects include ‘Christian philosophy and wisdom’ (39%), ‘Christian heritages such as cathedrals’ (34%), ‘befriend local Christians’ (33%), and ‘Christian literature, music and art’ (30%).

On the other hand, a smaller portion, just 9%, express interest in exploring ‘God in the Christian Bible’. When it comes to the Bible, one in four respondents indicate an interest in ‘the Bible and its stories’. However, the importance of the Bible cannot be overlooked, as it serves as the foundation for interests including ‘Christian views on secular issues’ and ‘Christian philosophy and wisdom’.

What aspects of Christianity interest you most?

Base: Non-Christian sample, n=675



Data: BCCB

Highlights to take away:

- Approximately one-third of non-Christian Chinese individuals are open to accepting an invitation to attend a church service, while 36% express no interest. Importantly, there is a sizable group (31%) who are undecided and could potentially be persuaded
- The primary area of interest for non-Christian Chinese individuals in exploring Christianity relates to the Christian perspective on secular matters, such as politics and science (46%). In addition, the opportunity to participate in Christian activities and services attracts significant interest (42%)
- Non-Christian Chinese individuals tend not to prioritise God (9%) and the Bible (25%) when talking about Christianity, even though these aspects are central to the topics they express curiosity about

Base: BCCB Focus Groups, n=3 (16 participants)

Think and apply:

What are the trending topics within Chinese churches and Chinese communities in Britain today? How can we effectively engage non-Christian Chinese individuals by exploring biblical teachings related to these contemporary concerns?

'In our church, we try to address hot and real-life topics both in sermons and conversations. We have members who come to me to share their struggles with sexual identity, and our church provides a safe space for them to journey alongside us. This has given me a deeper understanding of where these issues come from, and as a result, we approach these topics with compassion rather than condemnation. We have discussed topics such as Brexit, North Korea, and abortion. We don't take political sides, but we try to see the broader effort of understanding the complexities of people and situations. It's important to recognise that painting hard lines isn't always effective when dealing with complex issues. At the end of the day, it's about being gracious, understanding, and giving off love to those around us.'

Pastor Bert Han

is an American born Chinese who currently serves with the Birmingham Chinese Evangelical Church

10

These are the reasons why people love and dislike the Church



Why do people come to your church, and why do they leave? Many church leaders have expressed a desire for honest feedback and insights about their churches and ministries. However, obtaining such feedback is not as simple as it might seem. In Chinese culture, offering critical reviews (especially towards leaders) is sometimes discouraged, as it tends to be perceived as confrontational and potentially causing a loss of face. As a result, asking questions like, ‘What do you think are the biggest problems with your church?’ can feel uncomfortable.

To address this challenge, we set out to ask these difficult questions within the context of Chinese ministry. We intentionally used a duo of discussion questions in our two focus groups, which consisted of current and former church attenders, as well as Christians and non-Christians, to unearth insights into the main question posed at the start of this section. The two questions we asked were: ‘What are the aspects of the churches you have attended that you particularly appreciate? And what are the aspects you dislike?’

The results can be distilled into four primary categories, representing shared perspectives among the participants:

- 1. ‘Down-to-earth’ Bible teaching:** In the focus group, participants unanimously agreed that making Bible teachings and discussions relatable is crucial for engaging churchgoers. They emphasised that, for Chinese individuals, it is difficult to connect with or maintain interest in Bible study if the content doesn’t resonate with their personal and social experiences in daily life. This disengagement between context and content may weaken people’s sense of belonging to the community, which could further diminish their motivation to engage with the Bible due to its perceived irrelevance. Church members appreciate ‘down-to-earth’ Bible study sessions and sermons that address real-life issues they encounter and that are relevant to their personal lives. They are disappointed when the message from the pulpit only preaches lofty things that are detached from their everyday concerns. This message strongly echoes what Vignette 9 and 10 illustrate.
- 2. Relationship matters:** Nearly all Chinese church participants mentioned that they initially came to the church due to introductions from family or friends. Similarly, the human factor plays a greater role than theological teachings in retaining Chinese attenders. When people choose to stay or leave, the sense of belonging provided by the church is more important than the quality of the pastor’s sermons. The cultivation of relationships produces trust, reciprocity, and testimonies, which generate greater desire for spiritual growth. On the other hand, interpersonal conflicts are a major reason why many people choose to leave the church, and even their faith.

- 3. Good leadership:** The participants in our discussion became aware that their assessment of the church largely depended on their evaluation of its leaders. Many Chinese churches in the UK uphold certain traditional Chinese values to varying extents, such as senior leaders possessing significant authority and influence, expecting respect from others. However, particularly for the younger generation of Chinese born after the 1980s, they desire to see a leadership and church culture that is gradually renewing and becoming more grounded. In other words, they prefer church leaders who not only teach but also walk alongside them. For lay leaders, they want their pastors to serve as mentors. For seekers and ordinary believers, they hope that church leaders will spend time listening to their thoughts, questions, and even doubts about their faith. On the other hand, the single most frequently mentioned reason why our participants left their previous churches is hypocrisy. In the view of our participants, hypocrisy represents a significant chasm. On one end lie the biblical messages of love, kindness, and redemption, while on the other end is the absence of these messages in practical application. Most of the time, since pastors occupy the highest positions, they are held accountable to a greater extent.

Highlights to take away:

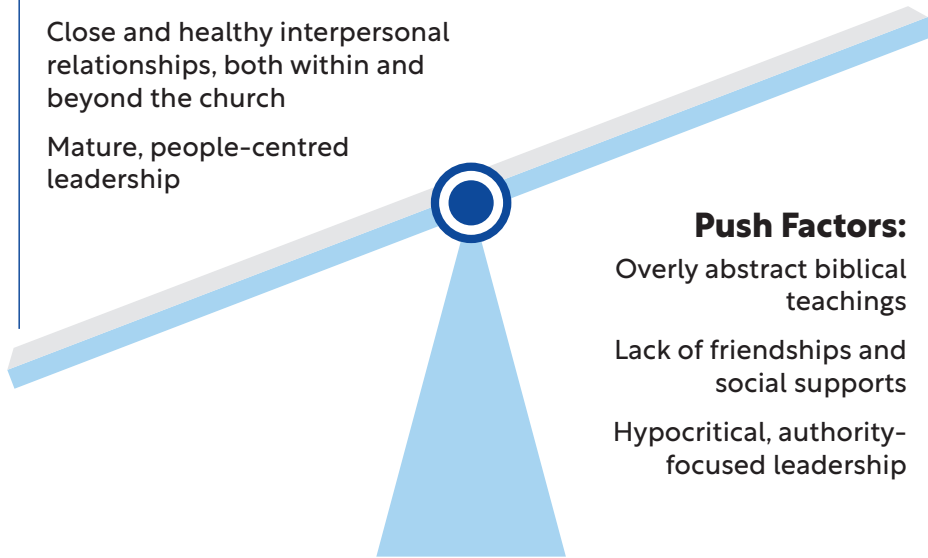
The Pull and Push Factors of the Chinese Church

Pull Factors:

Bible teaching addressing real-life issues

Close and healthy interpersonal relationships, both within and beyond the church

Mature, people-centred leadership



Push Factors:

Overly abstract biblical teachings

Lack of friendships and social supports

Hypocritical, authority-focused leadership

Think and apply:

What strategies can we implement to avoid making our Bible teachings seem disconnected from the daily lives of our congregation members?

How can we encourage the development of genuine friendships and social support for under-represented minorities in our church community?

In what ways can we identify and address any signs of hypocrisy within our leadership and promote a more transparent, humble approach?

'I love studying the Bible in my church because my pastor always cares what we are going through and give us much space to discuss our doubts. This is reflected in his sermons as well. There is also much trust between us. Such "Bible culture" has indeed transformed my life in many ways, because it is really down to earth.'

Catherine

Hong Kong Chinese, young professional, Manchester

Frankly speaking, Bible teaching in my previous [Chinese] church was really dry. I didn't see how the sermons and the Bible study sessions had to do with me. It was always about God this, God that [...] I knew this happened in lots of Chinese churches. But I never heard anything about the things many of us cared about, like social justice, racism, sufferings. Now you know I am in a different non-Chinese evangelical church I like it, of course. You know, Bible-related conversations in this church are all, like Catherine said, down to earth.'

Monica

Mainland Chinese, undergraduate student, Liverpool

11

Next Steps



Britain has experienced a historic surge in its ethnic Chinese population, primarily driven by Cantonese-speaking newcomers from Hong Kong. As this expansion will eventually decelerate, it is crucial for Chinese Christians and UK church leaders to act quickly in order to seize this valuable evangelism opportunity. The ten vignettes of this prominent, but long-neglected mission field in this booklet summarise its key features.

This final chapter provides some recommendations for church leaders and missional agencies in the UK to effectively engage with the Chinese community in terms of Bible engagement and church involvement.

Prioritise relatable Bible teaching: to foster a strong sense of belonging and motivation to engage with the Bible, church leaders should deliver Bible study sessions and sermons that address real-life issues and resonate with the daily experiences of Chinese Christians. Bridging the gap between theological teachings and personal relevance is essential for maintaining interest and deepening engagement with the Bible.

Nurture interpersonal relationships: strong interpersonal and intercultural relationships within the church community are crucial for retaining Chinese attenders. Churches and missional agencies should take advantage of the social function of the church and cultivate cultural awareness, trust, reciprocity, and shared testimonies. Encourage small group gatherings and activities that facilitate relationship-building and foster a sense of belonging.

Develop people-centred leadership: Chinese Christians, not least the younger generation, desire an empathetic and relatable leadership style. Church leaders should strive to serve as mentors, walking alongside their congregants and providing guidance in both spiritual and personal matters. Demonstrating a genuine commitment to biblical teachings and addressing issues of hypocrisy within the church will help foster an environment of trust and transparency.

Engage with the religiously unaffiliated: many Chinese individuals in Britain do not identify with a specific religious affiliation, but they may hold beliefs in supernatural phenomena and supreme beings. Church leaders should seek opportunities for dialogue and engagement with those open to exploring Christianity, addressing their questions and concerns in a respectful and compassionate manner.

Better to be together: as the Chinese Church grows, it faces challenges such as a lack of pastoral resources, a high demand for youth ministry, and the need for additional space to accommodate increasing numbers of attenders. Churches and Christian organisations in the wider British Christian community should actively respond to these concerns, developing strategies and mobilising resources to engage with this mission of God. Chinese Christian leaders, on the other hand, should also actively seek conversations and unity with other, non-Chinese bodies of Christ.

Utilise digital platforms for Bible engagement: with the increasing popularity of digital formats of the Bible among Chinese Christians, church leaders should consider making use of these platforms to facilitate engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the Bible's historical and cultural context. Offer digital resources, such as Bible apps and online study groups, to cater to the needs of tech-savvy congregants.

The BCCB has given us the opportunity to reflect, reconnect, and root in the ongoing Chinese ministry. It is now not only a research project, but a platform that brings together churches, Christian organisations, theologians, pastors, missionaries, lay leaders and all who are interested in this great mission. We shall continue to hear, learn, and inspire each other and keep going together.

Bible Society is known to our research participants as 'servant of servants'. Please feel free to speak to us if you have any questions, ideas, or thoughts. We would like to offer our service to you as well, so that we can experience God's amazing grace together.

Research, Courses, and Resources

Chinese Study Bibles:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/products/chinese-study-bible-international/>

Lumino research:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/lumino/lumino-about/lumino-research/>

Mourning Elizabeth:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/the-bible-the-funeral-and-the-coronation/>

The Bible Course:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course/>

The Romans Course:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/resources/the-romans-course/>

Bible Trek:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDhZpxDjQwRMRANLoYZTNGg>

Rooted Journal:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/resources/rooted/>

Rooted Juniors:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/resources/rooted/rooted-juniors/>

The Pitch film competition:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-us/our-work/england-and-wales/the-pitch/>

Open the Book storytelling project:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/>



About the author

Dr. Yinxuan Huang is Quantitative Research Manager at the British and Foreign Bible Society. He has designed various research projects that focus on the evolving landscape of Christianity in the UK. His work on Chinese communities and Chinese Christianity in the UK has been featured in Christianity Today, BBC, The Independent, Huffington Post, and other media outlets and broadcasts.