

# Network for Research into Chinese Education Mobilities

## 中国教育流动研究网络

### Newsletter

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<https://chineseedmobilities.wordpress.com/>

Dear NRCEM members,

We hope this message finds you well. We are excited to share new research insights in this month's highlight: [Dr Yun Yu](#) from East China Normal University discusses church participation experiences of Chinese international students in the UK. You can read the report [here](#) and access Dr Yu's journal article [here](#).

In addition, we have added a new section, 'Capacity Building' on our Network [website](#). You can read academic writing and publication sharing by [Dr Cora Lingling Xu](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

For the latest updates, please visit [Research Highlights](#) and [Events](#). You can follow us on [Facebook](#) and on Twitter [@ChiEdMobilities](#)

Yours sincerely,  
Network for Research into Chinese Education Mobilities (NRCEM)

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### **Research Highlights**

#### **Church Participation as Intercultural Encounter in the Experiences of Chinese International Students in the UK**

Yu, Y., & Moskal, M. (2018). [Missing intercultural engagements in the university experiences of Chinese international students in the UK](#). *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. doi: 10.1080/03057925.2018.1448259



## Abstract [中文摘要](#)

The recent flourishing of student mobility has seeded a booming research area in intercultural education and integration, as more and more students engage in this migratory trend. This project is a mixed-method analysis of church participation as a direct intercultural encounter in the experiences of non-Christian Chinese international students in the UK. The study employs survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis as research methods to investigate the intentions behind and purposes of the intercultural engagement between churches and non-Christian Chinese students. The study also presents the western culture, Christianity, as well as the cultural/religious background of Chinese students, and highlights Christian ambitions and missionary strategies (working model) towards non-Christian international students. The findings indicate that social connections with the host environment and the nature of organisation play a significant role in the cross-cultural adaptation and individual development of international students. Besides offering an explanation for the mechanism behind the students' church participation, the findings also indicate that the overwhelming Chinese students (especially in Business Schools) constrain their intercultural communication within the campus. Therefore, to some extent, it is the churches rather than the university facilitates the intercultural engagement for international students.

## 中文摘要

随着国际学生的不断增加，学生流动方面的研究主要集中于跨文化教育以及社会融入。本研究探索了在英中国留学生（非基督徒）参与教堂文化活动的社会现象。该研究采用多种研究方法，包括：问卷，半结构式深入访谈，参与观察以及文献分析，深入分析了基督教堂与中国留学生互动交流的原因，目的，以及影响。该研究还探索了西方基督教文化和中国学生的宗教文化背景，揭露了英国基督教堂对中国学生战略性传教活动以及拓展中国基督教市场的愿景。研究分析指出，国际学生与当地环境的社会联结以及互动平台的性质对学生跨文化适应以及个人成长发挥重要影响。除了解释学生参与教堂活动背后的动态机制，该研究认为，大量中国学生涌入英国校园（特别是商学院）限制了学生多元文化交流。从某种意义上来说，教堂的一系列针对中国学生的文化活动提供了更多（相较于大学校园）的社会融入与跨文化参与的机会，大学需采取措施在多元文化的校园环境下推动切实有效的跨文化融合与交流。

This study focuses on intercultural encounters and engagement in the cross-cultural experience of international students. It investigates the cultural experience of Chinese students in and around religious organisations in the UK. At a general level, it explores the role of intercultural encounters and interaction in students' overseas experiences; at an

individual level, it examines in detail the intentions, the processes, and the influences of church participation on Chinese international students; and at the organisational level, the study analyses the motivations and missionary model of faith-based organisations through the social support they offer to the international Christian community.

The study aims to address the overarching research question: What is the role of Christian churches in the intercultural experiences of Chinese international students in the UK? There are five sub-questions further developed from both student and church perspectives to comprehensively explore the main issue: 1) Why do non-Christian Chinese students choose to go to churches after they arrive in the UK? 2) Do Christian churches serve as a medium of intercultural encounter for Chinese international students? How do they serve? 3) What is the institutional motivation of the Christian community for attracting international students, especially Chinese students? 4) What are the Christian churches' strategies in working with Chinese international students? 5) What and why is more important for students, religious or intercultural experience?

In order to answer the above questions, the present study used a combination of survey, participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interview, and document analysis methods. The fieldwork took place in two Christian churches located in the area of an established university campus in the UK. In total, 501 Chinese Master's students of the university completed the survey, of whom 15 students who were frequent churchgoers were invited to take part in semi-structured in-depth interviews. In addition, five Christian church representatives were interviewed, including group leaders and volunteers with different responsibilities in the international groups.

The study finds that, church participation as a form of cultural engagement was not an accidental choice for the Chinese international students. Instead, it is related to the students' considerations of and negotiations with the challenging host environment. Expectation gaps (such as the language barrier), constrained intercultural communication within universities, public discrimination, and loneliness, all occurred simultaneously at the beginning of their intercultural interaction in the campus-based university. The students' need for language practice, a social network, and cultural knowledge, together with their motivation to engage with the local community pushed them to seek broader social contact to obtain the resources required to complete the adaptation process. Church participation for Chinese students seemed to be a mark of desperation in their pursuit of interaction with natives outside of the university, since their courses and the university provided so little opportunity due to the high numbers of students there from China. Therefore, the cultural interactions around the Christian churches responded in a supportive way to fill the gaps and meet the needs of Chinese students.

Interaction between the churches and the non-Christian Chinese students took place on common ground but with divergent ultimate goals. Showing mutual understanding of and tolerance towards each other, both sides worked together and actively communicated in the Christian community. In terms of their divergent ultimate goals yet clear mutual understanding, on the one hand, the needs of the Chinese students in the adaptation

process made it possible for the churches to organise social events in order to attract students. However, on the other hand, most Chinese students tended to be indifferent to the mission orientation of the churches and instead concentrated on the social support that was helpful to them. Therefore, for the Chinese students, church participation had more of an intercultural than a religious meaning. Nevertheless, although it was simply a kind of intercultural experience for the majority, for a few of them it brought religious transformation.

This study establishes that the nature of the organisation in the host country has a profound influence on intercultural interaction and engagement for international students, and highlights the potential effects on behaviours and values after religious communication and interaction have taken place. It identifies the social connections with the host environment and organisational factors that play a significant role in the cross-cultural adaptation of international students. It contributes to an understanding about the diversity of intercultural encounters in a meaningful sense, and uncovers the essence of individual interactions and social integration in the cross-cultural interaction.

On a practical level, the study reveals the problem of university involvement for international students. The findings emphasise the needs of international students particularly in terms of cultural engagement and involvement within the campus-based university and calls for UK universities to consider ways to establish an inclusive atmosphere in the international education they claim to be offering. It also emphasises how the acceptance of host nationals and inclusion in social activities bring a sense of belonging for international students in the host country. Meaningful intercultural contact and learning depends on a multicultural environment, the facilitation by institutions, and the students' motivation to engage. Facilitating intercultural communication requires considerable effort to nurture intercultural competency and provide sufficient and meaningful intercultural encounters.

### **Bio**

*Dr. Yun Yu is Post-doc researcher in Faculty of Education, East China Normal University (ECNU), China. Her research interest is around international and comparative education, social mobility, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural engagement and inclusion. She is the author of [Missing Intercultural Engagements in the University Experiences of Chinese International Students in the UK](#) (Yu and Moskal, 2018). Her prior research in doctorate study was Church Participation as Intercultural Encounter in the Experiences of Chinese International Students in the UK. If you have any enquiry, please contact [emmayuyun@163.com](mailto:emmayuyun@163.com).*

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### **Capacity Building**

## How to Manage Your Time During the PhD: Balancing the Thesis, Writing for Publications and Gaining Teaching Experience

This post was originally published at the [FERSA blog](#).

During my PhD career at [Cambridge](#) (September 2012 to July 2016), I spent around 95 per cent of my time in a magical sphere called the [University of Cambridge Writing Group](#). In this space, I wrote nearly my entire thesis, published three peer-reviewed journal articles, won a Best Paper Award and landed a job as Lecturer in Education immediately after graduation. I now have friends who write to me from time to time to get my advice on time management, on job hunting and on work-life balance. While I keep emphasising to them that publication is the most important, I feel obliged to tell the ‘truth’ behind all these ‘hard facts’ or what some people would call ‘achievements’.



Cora Lingling Xu

The truth is, when my current Head of School asked me how I found my experience at Cambridge, I told him that these have been the best four years of my life so far. This is the truth. Yet this is not all the truth. There were difficult periods throughout my PhD, moments of doubt, agony, and despair—this is no news to anybody pursuing or holding a PhD. What I want to share in this post, therefore, is how I have survived all the difficult moments. I want to offer three reflective moments.

### Moment 1

Venue: Tea Room, Sociology Department, Free School Lane

Date: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012

Attendees: Moira, Christine, Dee and Emma

Event: This was probably the second Writing Group session that I had attended. Moira, Christine, Dee and Emma were all senior PhD students finishing their PhD theses. These were the people that I later looked up to and often sought advice from. During one break, Moira made a comment about minding her 'authorial voice'. This little phrase stuck with me ever since. I started to realise that the PhD experience (at least for social sciences) was really about developing an academic identity that is primarily represented by one's written work.

Moral: This revelation was pivotal in that I made a conscious decision to frequent the Writing Group, because this was so much more than a writing space. It was a place for me to get inspiration, seek advice and develop friendship; it was my support network and my 'security net'. I am not asking everybody who reads this post to join the Writing Group (although it is a worthwhile idea), but rather I am suggesting that buddies at the Writing Group were the ones who helped me survive all the self-doubts, agony and despair. It is essential for PhD students to feel secure and supported among like-minded friends. So, your first task is to seek such a space and grow with it.

## **Moment 2**

Venue: Barbara White Room, Newnham College

Date: April 2014

Attendees: Writing Group buddies

Event: I received a notification from the European Educational Research Association (EERA) that my article had won the [Best Paper Award](#) and that it would be published in the European Educational Research Journal (EERJ).

Moral: Start publishing as early as you can. I learned about the EERA Best Paper Award competition when I attended the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in 2013. The prospect of publishing a paper at the EERJ was appealing. I carefully studied previous winning essays and prepared my article while I was conducting fieldwork. At that time, I only had some preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews. However, I wrote up my analysis and got helpful feedback from my supervisor Professor Diane Reay and my friends, including Dr Erin Spring, who was then a PhD student. This was [my first article](#), published in early 2015.

When I nearly finished my first phase of fieldwork in March 2014, I wrote another article for a conference in Denmark. This article was based on more comprehensive analysis of the

bulk of my empirical data. Although the analysis was relatively crude and broad-stroked, I gained some valuable feedback at the conference and [my article](#) was included in a special issue, published in October 2015.

As I was writing my findings chapters, I began to write [my third article](#), which was submitted to the British Journal of Sociology of Education in early 2015. I received reviewers' 'ruthless' feedback in July 2015, which, when I look back now, was hugely beneficial to strengthening the rigour of my analysis. I submitted my revised version in September 2015 and the article was accepted in February 2016.

To summarise, it is never too early to write for publications during your PhD. I began writing for publication as soon as I had some data at hand to analyse. I was constantly thinking about the next article and how I could make sure that I had a worthwhile message to communicate to readers of my targeted journals. My motto, which I have inherited from my wise Writing Group buddies, is that you write (a lot) to become a good writer and similarly, you write (a lot of articles) to become a good published author.

What I found most beneficial was that I had supportive but critical colleagues to comment on my drafts. At Cambridge I co-organised a reading group with Dr Selena Yuan in which we regularly critiqued on each other's works and helped each other publish more effectively. Cambridge is a gold mine of talented and critical friends, so start building a network to support each other's publication journeys.

### **Moment 3**

Date: Some time in 2015

Venue: Origin 8 Café, FOE

Attendees: Elizabeth and Pu Shi

Event: I came out of GS4 and ran into Elizabeth and Pu Shi, who were having a meeting at the café. Upon learning that I was acting as a Teaching Assistant to facilitate a Master's research methods class, Elizabeth commented that I was career-oriented.

Moral: Yes, I was quite strategic about gaining teaching experience during the PhD. Since 2013 I had been supervising Tripos Sociology papers and Research and Investigating projects. However, I ensured that such teaching did not take up too much of my time. Now that I think about it, I spent around ten to fifteen per cent of my time doing supervisions and acting as a teaching assistant. I also gave some guest lectures at different universities, such as the University of Northampton and the Open University of Hong Kong. These experiences proved instrumental for informing my pedagogical understanding and helpful in allowing me to construct a coherent narrative about my repertoire of teaching experience.

To return to what I set out to answer in this post: How did I manage my time during PhD in order to balance finishing the thesis, writing publications and gaining teaching experience? Firstly, I established an important network of support from which I gained inspirations, friendship, and a sense of security. Secondly, I began writing for publication as soon as the early stages of my data collection, and I kept writing for publications throughout the PhD journey. Lastly, I strategically sought opportunities to gain teaching experience, while ensuring that teaching did not take up too much of my time.

*Dr Cora Lingling Xu graduated with a PhD from the [Faculty of Education](#) at the University of Cambridge in 2016. Her doctoral thesis examined the identity constructions of tertiary-level border-crossing students from mainland China to Hong Kong. She is currently a [Lecturer in Education](#) at Keele University. You can follow Cora on Twitter [@CoraLinglingXu](#) and find out more about her research on [Academia.edu](#) and [Research Gate](#).*