

## Translating Global Western Worship Song in Local Chinese-Australian Congregational Space

Kenelm Ka Lun Chan 陈家麟

Alphacrucis College, Parramatta NSW, Australia

**Keywords:** Pentecostal – Worship – Sydney – Chinese – Diaspora – Song – Translations – Ethnomusicology – Megachurch – Hillsong

### Abstract

The translation of English worship songs within Chinese congregations is not a new phenomenon. Song translations accompanied the missionary and church movement in China. Many of these tunes are still used transnationally today (in China and Chinese diasporic communities across the globe), thus continuing the historical use of "western" songs in Chinese church worship repertoire and expression. This article focuses on the local Mandarin-speaking diaspora within Sydney, drawing upon the researcher's ethnographic study of the use of Mandarin translated worship songs and the practices associated with Mandarin translators in Hillsong (Hillsong 华语 *huayu*). This article focuses on the reception of translated songs in three Sydney-based Chinese congregations: Hills Chinese (a little-known local Mandarin service within Hillsong Church), and two comparable Sydney based Chinese Pentecostal congregations.

The article proposes that the use and meaning of the translated Mandarin songs is decided and evaluated by these local congregations as they navigate their own ecclesial, cultural, and social realities. Within these Pentecostal spaces, there is a shift away from any discussion of globalised music markets (i.e., Hillsong's global sound), towards the localisation that happens in the process of Mandarin translations and their use within these congregations. Furthermore, by focusing attention on these non-western voices it is hoped scholarship can assist a further shift away from the western dominant celebrities popular in contemporary music and its study.

## Introduction

Translation of worship songs is not a new phenomenon within Chinese congregations; from hymns brought from the west to current popular contemporary English worship songs, this practice is ongoing in the life of Chinese churches. One of the contemporary sources of translations is Hillsong Music. A well-known brand of English contemporary worship songs from a megachurch in Sydney Australia, these songs have been described as “a wave of new creativity in word and sound for the global church.”<sup>1</sup> Hillsong’s congregational music brand, Hillsong Worship, is tasked to “resource” the local (global) church.<sup>2</sup> But the question is, do these global musics produced by Hillsong “resource” local Chinese congregational spaces? And if so, in what ways? As a worship pastor, a Chinese Canadian and researcher, I ask these questions as I lead worship and pastor in “Hills Chinese” a small Chinese service (both Mandarin and Cantonese speaking) within Hillsong Church in Sydney. While there are reasons why a translated worship song works within Hillsong Church’s Pentecostal setting, is the often boasted of “global reach” of Hillsong inclusive of other languages, or only representative of the English-speaking church?

The focus of this article is how translated worship songs are used within Sydney’s local Chinese speaking congregations and their meaning evaluated through an ethnomusicological (as in, cultural musical practices) and theological (ecclesial practices, specifically Pentecostal) lens.<sup>3</sup> Within my study, seldom-discussed Mandarin-speaking groups’ perspectives are amplified through an ethnographic review of how Hillsong’s translated song is used. The team of Mandarin translators, known as Hillsong 华语 *huayu*, originate at the Hills Chinese service and work with leaders within the Hillsong community towards the larger goal of distributing translated songs. Following this, I move to explore two other sites and comparable local congregations within the Greater Sydney region, 天国 *tianguo* and 联合 *lianhe*, who also utilise the translated songs for their congregations. Finally, the usefulness of the translated Mandarin worship songs is evaluated as they are incorporated into this local Mandarin congregation’s *musicking* and contribute to the ecclesial and cultural experiences of the spaces.<sup>4</sup> This article argues that the focus on global translated worship songs should shift to its reception and application. In this way, the success of the translated song in Chinese

---

<sup>1</sup> “Hillsong Worship Offers Refreshing Masterclass With ‘Awake,’” *The Christian Beat* (blog), October 12, 2019, <https://www.thechristianbeat.org/hillsong-worship-review/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse Edwards, “Inside Hillsong Church’s Hit-Making Music Machine,” *Rolling Stone Australia*, 2020, <https://au.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/inside-hillsong-church-hit-making-music-machine-6661/>.

<sup>3</sup> Given this, my focus is not on the linguistic aspect of translations as I focus on the finished product of translations.

<sup>4</sup> The important concept of *musicking* by musicologist Christopher Small is drawn upon by ethnomusicological studies, studying the participants of a performance including the performers, the listeners, and others who contribute to the performance event (or space). See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

contexts is determined by its usefulness to the congregations and users, and not on the success of the original English version.

## 1. Literature and Context

### 1.1 *The use of translations within Chinese congregations*

In order to define the use and meaning of translated song within the Australian Chinese Pentecostal context as outlined above, it is vital to understand that there has been a long historical use of translated hymns within the Chinese church in literature.<sup>5</sup> Notably, Fang Lan Hsieh's historical account of Chinese Christian Hymnody traces the use of translation by tracing Chinese hymnal publications.<sup>6</sup> Due to the specific history of Chinese worship songs, it is difficult to separate the music from European and American roots, even though Chinese Christianity itself transcends the western missionary front. These translators (both missionaries and eventually local church leaders) have wrestled with the complexity of the Chinese language, but specifically with the balance of 文理 *wenli* (the poetic nature of Chinese) and 白话 *baihua* (the colloquial nature of the language). Currently, church hymnals often include revised translations of "western" hymns, as well as translations of newer English worship songs (such as Hillsong's *Shout to the Lord*).<sup>7</sup> However, given the decreasing Western influence on the church in China from the twentieth century onward, indigenous/locally written songs are usually now also included, which incorporate traditional Chinese melodies and/or Confucian philosophies.<sup>8</sup>

Popular Chinese contemporary worship songs, although often written in Hong Kong and Taiwan (港台音乐 *gantai'yinyue*), still carry influences from western musics due to the writers' exposure to the American CCM markets. For example, the American-Taiwanese group 赞美之泉 *Zanmeizhichuan* ("Streams of Praise" in English) writes and produces songs inspired by western musical conventions/melodies, and resources Chinese congregations around the world. This phenomenon is overviewed by Wong's study that follows the group in their ministry.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the popular Taiwan-based Joshua band 约书亚乐团 *yueshuya'yuetuan* (a

<sup>5</sup> There is recognition that Christianity in China comes in waves, before the documented hymnals to be mentioned in the next note. There is a wide variety of work that recognises the existence of Christianity before "Western" missionaries enter, but for the purpose of this paper will highlight two key works: Amos Yong, "Whither Asian American Evangelical Theology? What Asian, Which American, Whose Evangelion?," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (2008): 22–37; Connie Oi-Yan Wong, "Singing the Gospel Chinese Style: Praise and Worship" Music in the Asian Pacific" (PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> What was introduced were translated hymnals within vernacular languages, firstly traced in Cantonese and eventually to Mandarin (or 普通话 *Putonghua*). See Fang-Lan Hsieh, *A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody: From Its Missionary Origins to Contemporary Indigenous Productions* (New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Darlene Zschech, *Shout to the Lord*, Shout to the Lord (Sydney, Australia: Integrity/Hosanna! Music, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Hsieh, *A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody: From Its Missionary Origins to Contemporary Indigenous Productions*, 132–40.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive exploration, see Wong, "Singing the Gospel Chinese Style."

band established from the Taipei Pentecostal church Bread of Life) continues to translate popular English contemporary worship songs, including Hillsong. Additionally, often works from 吕小敏 *Lu Xiaomin*, a reportedly illiterate peasant women from Mainland China who has written over 1000 “Canaan hymns,” are used within Chinese church congregations.<sup>10</sup>

Swee Hong Lim, a postcolonial liturgist, addresses the Asian music contextualisation process using Western translated songs. He suggests that worship practices within the Chinese church community be evaluated as congregational *musicking*.<sup>11</sup> This article employs Lim's song-phases in the contextualisation process as a way to map the Chinese church's use of the western songs, where (i) *adopted* songs are imported resources of Western music that help a faith community,<sup>12</sup> (ii) *adapted* songs are a middle-ground embracing local Chinese expressions in a Western frame,<sup>13</sup> and (iii) *actualised* songs draw inspiration from local culture moving away from Western conventions.<sup>14</sup> Lim categorises songs created by Chinese diaspora groups such as Streams of Praise (a Taiwanese-American group) as adapted, noting that although they use Chinese expressions and idioms, these groups identified still predominantly use western conventions and melodies. He argues that these actualised songs should steer away from Western conventions towards 吕小敏 *Lu Xiaomin's* “indigenous” Canaan hymns.<sup>15</sup> The question is whether work done with translated songs by Mandarin teams can facilitate this process of moving away from “adopted” Western songs to instead “adapt” them, and, beyond this, “actualise” Chinese songs.

### **1.2 Congregational Music Studies**

This study sought to investigate the song translation and selection process (suitability for performance or music in a congregational setting) using a Chinese lens. Christian Congregational Music (CCM) Studies is an emerging area of study, often undertaken as an interdisciplinary frame (between ethnomusicology and theology, for instance).<sup>16</sup> Here, ethnomusicology provided the ability to review music as a cultural practice and draw on the

---

<sup>10</sup> Irene Ai-Ling Sun, “The Canaan Hymns: Songs from the House Church Christians in China,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, Kindle Edition (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 2679–2875.

<sup>11</sup> Definition provided by musicologist Christopher Small, where to “musick” is to participate in Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*.

<sup>12</sup> Swee Hong Lim, “Forming Christians through Musicking in China,” *Religions* 8, no. 4 (2017): 5.

<sup>13</sup> Lim, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Lim, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Account has been made by both Sun and Wong in their respective work, see Sun, “The Canaan Hymns: Songs from the House Church Christians in China”; Wong, “Singing the Gospel Chinese Style.”

<sup>16</sup> As ethnomusicologist Mark Porter suggests, ethnomusicology as the means for interdisciplinary study to cover further aspects and dimensions of Christian Congregational Music. Mark Porter, “The Developing Field of Christian Congregational Music Studies,” *Ecclesial Practices* 1, no. 2 (2014): 149–66.

researcher's emic perspective to the culture.<sup>17</sup> This disciplinary field's focus has shifted over time from “western” researchers examining “the others” to a space where a researcher can present their own cultural music practices and incorporate insights from participating in musicking within one's social dimensions. Ingalls, Landau and Wagner demonstrate how CCM can capture the church's broader “musical life” using ethnography, and include discussion of the various genres of hymnody and contemporary song in their study.<sup>18</sup> To perform in church contexts is to perform theology, which allows the “interplay of the musical creator's intentions, performance contexts” to be incorporated as data along with “music styles” and “meanings of song texts.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore ethnomusicology works particularly well alongside congregational studies for theological discussions of lived ecclesial and cultural experiences, drawing on ethnographic methods to discuss ecclesial implications, especially in Pentecostal contexts.<sup>20</sup>

This article seeks to highlight local evaluations of global worship repertoire. However, any discussion of a translated worship song's usefulness must involve music localisation and theological contextualisation. Ingalls, Reigersberg and Sherinian's volume on musicking in local communities worldwide gives examples of communities across the world in which songs are “locally meaningful and useful in the construction of Christian beliefs, theology, practice or identity.”<sup>21</sup> Importantly, localisation in Christian music-making focuses on “practices that do not fit neatly within the model of either indigenisation or its converse, assimilation.” Specifically, these communities are not just musicking from their tradition or simply fully “assimilating” into the foreign practice introduced.<sup>22</sup> The nuances will be explored further here also.

---

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan PJ Stock and Chou Chiener, “Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108–24; Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner, “Prelude: Performing Theology, Forming Identity and Shaping Experience: Christian Congregational Music in Europe and North America,” in *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience* (Routledge, 2016), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Drawing on disciplinary insights from Roger Haight and James Nieman, “On the Dynamic Relation between Ecclesiology and Congregational Studies,” *Theological Studies* 70, no. 3 (2009): 577–99; Paul Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds?,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 13–35.

<sup>21</sup> Monique Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Zoe C. Sherinian, “Introduction: Music as Local and Global Positioning: How Congregational Music-Making Produces the Local in Christian Communities Worldwide,” in *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ingalls, Reigersberg and Sherinian do acknowledge the work of Chupungco in the discussion of liturgical inculturation, which initiates that a new cultural liturgical practice is created when introducing liturgical practices into a new culture, A+B = C. See Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992).

### 1.3 Theology behind Translations and Worship Practices

As noted, translations have been integral to Christianity as the mediation between ecclesial and cultural practices. Oxford scholar Lamin Sanneh outlines the act of translation of the Christian message as both missiological and theological. He suggests that Christianity is fundamentally a *translated religion* since early Christianity grew via interpretation into different languages and contexts, eventually adopting the cultures it was embedded in.<sup>23</sup> Sanneh suggests that *translations* then should be the language of Christianity. The theological understanding of other cultures as a destination of God's salvation and kindness is vital, and focuses on those who receive or hear the message.<sup>24</sup> Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong suggests Sanneh's work provides a basis for Christianity beyond the West, which centralises the continual interface of gospel and culture from its beginnings.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, Sanneh considers the growth of Christianity as extending beyond its colonial histories, and suggests the emergence of the Church in China as one of the current pillars to see Christianity move beyond the western-centric focus.<sup>26</sup> Translation, was and currently still is, the vehicle for the interaction of Christian message (and practice) and culture (especially via vernacular language).

As this article engages with Pentecostal congregations, it is essential to note worship practice as an important aspect of Pentecostal theology, which is an embodied experience.<sup>27</sup> Daniel Albrecht's work on Pentecostal/Charismatic liturgy suggests the importance of space, leadership, and congregational elements, which is explored in my research ethnography.<sup>28</sup> Amos Yong in his collaboration with ethnomusicologists in *Spirit of Praise* suggests that Pentecostal congregational *musicking* through song is a means of oral tradition, theologising through singing their beliefs in music.<sup>29</sup> Within these spaces, the ecclesial meaning is outworked through song.

---

<sup>23</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Sanneh, 32.

<sup>25</sup> This discussion from Yong allows for his discussion on Asian American Evangelical theology, which this paper acknowledges but may not draw fully from given my ethnomusicological focus. Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (InterVarsity Press, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 127–136.

<sup>28</sup> For one example, Miller and Yamamori's account of Global Pentecostalism suggests Pentecostal worship focuses on emotion and physical expression showing the embodiment of worship within Pentecostal theology. Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Press, 2007), 142.

<sup>29</sup> Amos Yong, "Improvisation, Indigenisation, and Inspiration: Theological Reflections on the Sound and Spirit of Global Renewal," in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, Kindle edition (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015).

### **1.4 Hillsong as Global Distributor and Local Congregation**

Studies on Hillsong have depicted the church both as a marketing brand<sup>30</sup> and movement.<sup>31</sup> Hillsong (formerly Hills Christian Life Centre) has grown from a small Sydney congregation in 1983 into a multicampus church with twenty-eight different campuses across several continents (including campuses in the UK, South Africa, United States, and Indonesia).<sup>32</sup> Hillsong Church operates on a “one house many rooms” model, where each campus carries the same brand and “sonic experience.”<sup>33</sup> Hills Chinese, one of the congregation sites, is located within this context, and uses the translated songs.

## **2. Methodology and Design**

### **2.1 Author's Location**

It is important to acknowledge my location as a researcher and my rationale for studying translated Mandarin songs.<sup>34</sup> I have been involved in Hillsong Church for eight and a half years, volunteering in several creative and pastoral ministry areas, and am now the worship pastor within the Hills Chinese service. I hold an “insider” or emic perspective as a performer and leader within the organisation of Hillsong church, and specifically at the Hills Chinese site.<sup>35</sup> My cultural background is also relevant to this study which focuses on Chinese Australian Pentecostalism. Born in Hong Kong, I grew up in Canada within a sizeable Chinese population from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. I therefore identify as a 1.5 generation

---

<sup>30</sup> My reference is to Ethnomusicologist Tom Wagner's several works on the Hillsong Brand. Tom Wagner, “Branding, Music, and Religion: Standardization and Adaptation in the Experience of the” Hillsong Sound,” *Religion as Brands: New Perspectives on the Marketization of Religion and Spirituality*. Edited by Jean-Claude Usunier and Jörg Stolz. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, 59–73; Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner, “The Evolution of Hillsong Music: From Australian Pentecostal Congregation into Global Brand,” *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012): 17–36; Mark Evans, “Creating the Hillsong Sound: How One Church Changed Australian Christian Music,” ed. Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner, *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3_4).

<sup>31</sup> See works such as sociologist Gerardo Martí, and volume edited by Riches and Wagner written from insider and outsider authors. Gerardo Martí, “The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment,” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2017): 377–86, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx059>; Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner, *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> “About Hillsong Church | Hillsong Church,” accessed May 7, 2019, <https://hillsong.com/about/>.

<sup>33</sup> As seen in Wagner's study within Hillsong London, and also Mark Evans' piece on different global campuses within Hillsong. See Wagner, “Branding, Music, and Religion: Standardization and Adaptation in the Experience of the” Hillsong Sound”; Mark Evans, “Hillsong Abroad: Tracing the Songlines of Contemporary Pentecostal Music,” in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, Kindle Edition (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Drawing on the examples of Stock and Chiener through Fieldwork from Home, where Chiener studies a musical genre from her hometown, allowing her to research as an insider and a student of the particular Nanguan music. See Stock and Chiener, “Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives.”

<sup>35</sup> Several examples (though non-exhaustive) of emic/etic perspectives can be found in the volume for Hillsong Movement Examined, through Riches, Soon and Parkes' work as being members of the church. Riches especially in her work identifies her emic perspective and location within the church through her work. See Riches and Wagner, *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*.

immigrant.<sup>36</sup> Like many Canadian diaspora who have their distinct ethnicity, I navigated “parallel” worlds: school and work were predominantly “western” versus the Chinese cultural heritage of my family and friends, which was dominant at church. My later experiences as a migrant to Australia navigating the various social, cultural, and ecclesial factors at Hillsong Church as well as my experience in Australian Chinese migrant communities contribute to my initial interest and rationale for this study as well as its methodological lens.

## 2.2 Methodology and Design

My research employed ethnographic methods in two ways: (i) participant-observation across three congregation sites and (ii) ethnographic semi-structured interviews with 16 individuals attending the churches, stratified between leaders, translators, and congregational members. At each congregation site, I observed the worship service components, which incorporated the music accompaniment and singing, making various audio recordings and observation notes. The following table outlines the details of each congregation site:<sup>37</sup>

Figure 1: Congregational Research Sites

Name/Pseudonym	Church Model	Demographic	Location	Translated Songs Used
Hillsong Hills Chinese <sup>38</sup>	Monolingual Mandarin service within a larger Sydney originated megachurch	A mixed demographic of young adults (aged 18-30), young families (aged 30-40) and older (aged 50 and above).	Baulkham Hills, a suburb with a rising Chinese population.	Uses mainly Hillsong translated songs and other contemporary worship songs
天国 <i>tianguo</i> Church <sup>39</sup>	Primarily Chinese	A broad demographic	a Sydney suburb in	Uses translated

<sup>36</sup> A term used for migrants who have moved to another country as a child or in adolescent age. This term, for instance, was used in Kim et al.'s qualitative research on an Asian-American 1.5 generation, which was a commonly experienced situation for the 1.5 generation across different countries such as Canada and Australia. See Bryan SK Kim et al., “A Qualitative Study of Adaptation Experiences of 1.5-Generation Asian Americans.,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2003): 156.

<sup>37</sup> Pseudonyms were assigned to the other two churches for confidentiality during participant-observation

<sup>38</sup> Hillsong Hills Chinese was not assigned a pseudonym as it is traceable given the researcher location. Another rationale is to highlight the service as one of the only non-English speaking congregation within Hillsong Australian campuses, and it is important to identify the community itself.

<sup>39</sup> The pseudonym 天国 means Kingdom, a reflection of the eschatological focus of the church in their ecclesiology



	Pentecostal Church	of older (aged 50 and above), with younger leaders (aged 20-40)	Greater Sydney Area; with a high Chinese population.	and Chinese indigenous songs such as Streams of Praise (see Chapter 2)
联合 <i>lianhe</i> Church <sup>40</sup>	Multicultural church model with a predominantly Chinese heritage congregation	A range of demographics, with young families (aged 30-40), a broader demographic of age 50 and above. Notably, there is a mix of cultures (White Australian and Middle Eastern) alongside the mainly Chinese congregation.	a Sydney suburb in Greater Sydney Area; with a high Chinese population.	Uses translated Mandarin worship songs.

The interview questions discussed the potential themes within their selection of songs, as well as their understanding of the meanings of translations and translated songs, and the use of these songs within their churches. All individuals interviewed were first and 1.5 generation immigrants who still use Mandarin either as a language to minister and/or to express themselves:<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The pseudonym 联合 means unity, a reflection of the church model to facilitate multiple cultures, uniting in one space

<sup>41</sup> A term used for migrants who have moved to another country as a child or in adolescent age. This term, for instance, was used in Kim et al.'s qualitative research on an Asian-American 1.5 generation, which was a commonly experienced situation for the 1.5 generation across different countries such as Canada and Australia. See Kim et al., "A Qualitative Study of Adaptation Experiences of 1.5-Generation Asian Americans."

Figure 2:

Site	Name	Region of Origin	Description
Hillsong Chinese Community/Hillsong 华语 <i>huayu</i>	Service Pastor 1*	Hong Kong	A couple who started the Chinese community, service pastor of Hillsong Hills Chinese and part of the Eldership of Hillsong Church
	Service Pastor 2*	Hong Kong	A couple who started the Chinese community, service pastor of Hillsong Hills Chinese
	Chen	Mainland China	Hillsong 华语 <i>huayu</i> and translations team member for Chinese community, a lay pastor
	Tan	Malaysia	Lay Pastor within the Chinese community in Hillsong
	Tsai	Taiwan	Member of worship team and translator on Hillsong 华语 <i>huayu</i>
	Yuen	Mainland China	Worship leader in Hills Chinese for over 30 years
	Ying	Taiwan	Involved with Hillsong church and also attended the Hills Chinese service.
	Lo	Taiwan	Involved with Hillsong church and also attended the Hills Chinese service.
天国 <i>tianguo</i> Church	师母 <i>shimu</i> <sup>42</sup>	Taiwan	The wife of the senior Pastor oversees the worship ministry in the church.
	Zhao	Taiwan	Served in the worship team for one year as, new vocalist, a university student.

<sup>42</sup> The title given to the "Pastor's Wife," almost like "Spiritual mother."

	Wang	Mainland China	A worship team member, singer and drummer
	Teng	Mainland China	A worship team member, keyboardist
	Leong	Malaysia	Worship team member, worship leader
	Ping	Mainland China	Worship team member, vocalist
联合 <i>lianhe</i> Church	Josh	Australian	Pastor of 联合 <i>lianhe</i> Church, white Australian who aims to build a multicultural church
	Shan	Mainland China	Serves in the church as a main worship leader, interpreter, prayer leader

### 3. Findings from Congregational Sites

#### 3.1 Hills Chinese Service

Hills Chinese is a language service run by Hillsong for a Sydney-based diaspora congregation mostly composed of first and 1.5 generation migrants (currently around 150-170 Mandarin and Cantonese speaking congregants). The service pastors began this language service in the early nineties from Hillsong's Sydney city campus (then Sydney Christian Life Centre). The Chinese community grew via two services (run entirely in Cantonese and Mandarin). One of these services transitioned to an English language service, however Hills Chinese continues on the grounds of the Sydney Hills Campus. Its congregational leaders are often the first to translate and use the Mandarin versions of Hillsong music, working as Hillsong 华语 *huayu*, Hillsong's Mandarin song translations team. The Hills Chinese pastors sit on the eldership of Hillsong, with their cultural background from Hong Kong allowing them to create space for Chinese immigrants at the church, whether from Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore or Malaysia.<sup>43</sup> In this congregation, Hillsong 华语 *huayu* also serve as leaders.

#### 3.2 The Hillsong 华语 *huayu* Team

The Hillsong 华语 *huayu* team are primarily volunteers involved in the Chinese service. The translators are representative of the community that is diverse in their Mandarin-speaking backgrounds (See Figure 2 in Research Methodology and Design). Chen, one of the main translators in the team and within the Hills Chinese service, oversees the translation process representing both the songwriter's vision and the intention/meaning as understood by the

<sup>43</sup> Author's interview with Gordon and Susana Lee from Hills Chinese, dated 19 January 2020

wider Hillsong church. She emphasises that Hillsong 华语 *huayu* must experience the song as used in the congregation first (within the larger Hillsong congregation) before they translate it into Mandarin. Xu, a member of the team for over ten years, suggests:

“You come across a good song that resonates with you that you think it's good, that you think it's going to help more people resonate with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit...it's a tool for other people to get closer to God.”<sup>44</sup>

Xu and the other translators experience the songs within an English congregation, but through their bilingual lens then seek to bring what they have experienced as “useful” to their own cultural community. As in, the bilingual translators first “musick” as congregation members within the Hillsong English ecclesial setting and then mediate between the ecclesial experience and cultural/linguistic understanding. This “sharing” into Chinese through translation is critical because the translator’s work encompasses more than the act of translation. The translators, working with the Chinese community leaders, determine what is eventually used and useful in their own cultural service.

The translations team demonstrate an intentional and nuanced recognition regarding the cultural exchange between English and Mandarin expressions. For example, Xu explains:

In English, there are many words...usually express[ed] using different phrases, different ways. You don't just use one word to describe the differences. Especially when there are a lot of words that describe feeling in the lyrics, then it will be difficult. There are differences in the language. Where in Chinese, you don't describe your feeling in certain ways.

Tan explains mediating the gap between languages, here expressed within Hillsong’s specific vernacular in the example of the word “seasons”:

In Chinese translations, “seasons” is understandable, but you tend to use it as a period of time rather than the word. So, we need to make a choice to say either seasons or a period of time.

... The word seasons is going to appear more and more in our preaching, in the way we are stating, in the way we are singing our songs... Seasons have become an acceptable term in Christian circles now.

The word “seasons” at Hillsong is used as a metaphor to explain spiritual growth. This provides one example of how Tan and others in the team need to determine if these nuances can

---

<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that the author left the original phrasing as was spoken by the participant. While there may be grammatical issues for an English speaking, the author believes it is important to show that the participants are bilingual (and some trilingual). The author argues that it is important to maintain the interview data as it was originally spoken to capture the bilingual/trilingual nature in which the participants think from.

indeed be mediated, should be introduced and eventually what is best for the community and congregation.

To address these issues, Chen, as the leader of Hillsong 华语 *huayu*, focuses on Chinese cultural conventions through her application of 信达雅 *xindaya* (A Chinese criteria of translations applied from her university translations course in Mainland China):<sup>45</sup>

信 *Xin* is faithfulness to see whether you are faithful to the original text.

达 *Da* means accuracy, whether you accurately reflect the meaning or the meaning behind it.

雅 *Ya* means elegance, which is the...higher-level goal to reach. It reflects whether or not we can keep the rhyme, whether we can polish the sing-ability.

Overall, there is an effort to maintain the song's intent (in this case, the progressive freshness of the original songwriting), but also to make it understandable to the Chinese community. The 信达雅 *xindaya* convention allows for the evaluation of translated songs into the culture, and ultimately the focus of the gap is on the recipient Chinese language, the Chinese communities, and their receptivity. As such, the translators navigate the needs of the 1.5 and more transient transnational community in song. In addition, the team works with cultural informants outside of Hillsong who provide insights alongside Chen and others who are 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants to Australia.

One key observation from Chen is that translators are usually aware of the huge demand amongst Mandarin/Cantonese speakers for English songs and contemporary musical currency. 崇洋媚外 *chongyangmeiwai* is a phenomenon within China where the younger generation have a tendency to "flock to anything foreign." This is an important aspect Chen aims to address within her work, aware of the skewed demand for anything foreign (mostly "western") shifting focus away from what is locally produced within Chinese communities (in this case she speaks from her knowledge of her home in Mainland China). For this reason, Chen contends that translations were "never meant to be the end." Instead, translations are:

"Meant to be a channel, meant to be something in between ... that creativity being inspired, being stirred up in them, for them to have a platform ... A lot of it I see translations as a practice, as a warmup, before they do their own thing."

<sup>45</sup> One example of a discussion of the use of Xin Da Ya, read Theo Hermans, "Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, no. 3 (2003): 380–89.

In this way, Chen's commitment reflects a movement towards "adapted" song and therefore a deepening process of contextualisation. In her view, the translated songs should inspire creative song writing in the Chinese language. Thus, she agrees with Lim that local musicking is important and is seeking the team to move towards actualising songs, and a possibility of a new local sound to arise inspired by these resources.

### ***3.3 Translations used in Hills Chinese***

Hills Chinese focuses on the language and cultural needs of the local Sydney Chinese community to grow spiritually through their preferred language (the one they express best). The service pastors suggest:

"Language-wise, culture-wise, and a Chinese community in an English Church, we [created] a community model that people can feel connected, encouraged to use their gifts ...use their language to express their spirituality."

Tan, one of the translators and a lay pastor in the community, adds:

"Without providing a Mandarin-speaking service, or Cantonese [translation], they would not have a chance of experiencing serving God or sharing their testimony. So, without the translations or opportunity for them to go up [on the platform] and share something, sharing communion or sharing a giving message or testimony, they would have missed out a lot."

The leaders have identified the need for both language-ability and cultural familiarity in order to facilitate participation in ecclesial practices such as serving, testimony, communion, and listening to the preaching. Left within a larger English-speaking congregation, the community would not have stayed. Tan emphasises:

"[The people in the community] couldn't read the English words on the screen; we realised that it was very important that they could sing along and learn to worship God through music and songs."

Worship through music is an essential aspect of Pentecostal congregations and this is no different at Hills Chinese. Hillsong attendees hold the understanding that the song teaches the faith and is therefore a large part of the ecclesial practices of the church. The inclusion and use of Chinese lyrics greatly aided the growth of the community. This led to translated songs and also the translation of other key materials such as sermons. Such communications are essential to running this service and serving the Chinese community, and eventually were the basis for his pastoral role in the broader Hillsong 华语 *huayu* team.

Language allows for better understanding linguistically and was also identified as increasing accessibility in the liturgical functions of the church and assisting attendees in their expression of faith. The services originally ran as bilingual (both English and Mandarin). However, the pastors soon changed the service to operate as monolingual (Mandarin) to expand the strategic placement of the Hills Chinese ministry.

“The decision was to make it home to the [local] community that's there. So, in our view, the focus on language helps, making it Mandarin, and helps make it home for a community.”

Yuen, a worship leader in Hills Chinese, notes how effectively translated songs elicit a congregational response, leading to “declaration, confession and revelation.” Yuen used the word 感动 *gandong* (to be touched and elicit a deep emotional response) which she linked with the congregation’s expression of their faith. She notes this also for herself as a worship leader and within the congregation.<sup>46</sup> The “monolingual” Mandarin focus helped increase these effects:

“Now we have moved to all Mandarin, I find it's easier to 感动 *gandong*. The translators understand Chinese, and their quality / understanding of literature is stronger. The quality of the Chinese becomes closer, accurately representing the song. Secondly, words can reach listeners. Two areas, accuracy and 感动 *gandong*.”

The improved language accuracy/ability within the Mandarin-focused strategy reaches the congregation more effectively, and for Yuen allows a deepened response in worship.

From my experience as a congregation member and worship leader, the aim is to maintain the church's “identity” and “experience” as one would have in other campuses within the Hills Chinese “room.”<sup>47</sup> The pastors emphasise sharing the same experience of the *home* for the Chinese community within the megachurch, explaining that translated song allows this:

“They would have the same experience as a westerner, in our next-door Convention Centre, experience the worship. The Chinese people have the same experience. So, bring it to a level of experience of what the Australian congregation is experiencing. The lyrics, the music, the anointing.”

As the community has chosen to be part of the megachurch, the pastor’s concern is to maintain continuity across Hillsong’s various congregations, or “rooms.” The translated songs

<sup>46</sup> Author's interview with Yuen, recorded 17 January 2020, original language of the interview is in Cantonese.

<sup>47</sup> Author's Interview with Service Pastors from Hills Chinese, dated 19 January 2020

allow Hills Chinese to maintain its identity as Hillsong, with that same “anointing” of worship across the many rooms.<sup>48</sup>

While a shared experience is emphasised by the leaders, there are also various efforts within the service that both celebrate and cater to the recipient culture. The Mandarin-focused service emphasised Chinese celebrations (Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival) and their more culturally focused variations of Australian holidays such as Mother's Day and Father's Day.<sup>49</sup> This is significant to note as the community celebrate the culture, they create spaces representative of their diasporic reality: creating space to hold onto their Chinese culture in what is otherwise an English ecclesial setting at Hillsong Church.

### 3.4 天国 *tianguo* Church

This section outlines the musicking practices at the second congregation. 天国 *tianguo* church is a Sydney based congregation located in a suburb with a large denomination of Chinese immigrants. 天国 *tianguo* represents an indigenously Chinese denomination called Bread of Life which has global reach. Compared to Hills Chinese, which is a service within one large megachurch, 天国 *tianguo* is more independent in their choice of what happens within the service, and specifically the songs selected for the congregation.

天国 *tianguo* runs two services on a Sunday, one Mandarin service at 10:30 am and one English service at 5:30 pm. Therefore, my participant observation focused on the 10:30 am service. The Mandarin service is comprised of 1st generation older members (aged 40-70), and a worship team comprised of the younger members of the congregation (roughly ranged from 16 to 30-year-old members), with the exception of 师母 Shimu, the Pastor who leads the worship team.<sup>50</sup> There was a clear theme of missions/discipleship at the church that was observed through what occurred on the platform (preaching, communion, announcements, worship). For example, the church's mission was displayed on banners on the platform.<sup>51</sup>

Songs and musical accompaniment were used within the service to accompany prayer (for example before the start of service), at the welcome (where the congregation sung to each

<sup>48</sup> The anointing of the music is understood by the pastors to be the Holy Spirit coming to power amongst the congregation (as identified by Evans in his discussion of "the Hillsong Anointing"). Mark Evans, *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 100–101.

<sup>49</sup> Often looking for more popular songs or Chinese written song items that speak to the Mandarin Community and values, drawing on Chinese cultural values of family

<sup>50</sup> The worship team comprises four vocals, a drummer, and two keyboards on an elevated platform. 师母 shimu in the Chinese culture is a name given to a teacher or master's wife. (Master in the sense of a master-apprentice relationship). Within the Chinese church, the name is for the pastor's wife, which indicates her seniority as 母 mu, the word meaning mother, being the church's spiritual mother figure.

<sup>51</sup> Translated from the original Traditional Chinese text: (1) Everyone disciples to fulfil their call as apostles, (2) Everyone starts small groups to build the Church, (3) Everyone spreads the gospel to save souls, and (4) The Great Commission fulfilled.



other and newcomers), during the congregational worship set (three to four songs), in the response to the preaching, and in the benediction. At 天国 *tianguo*, songs play an integral role, as songs are chosen to accompany the Pastor's teaching. The leader's priority to disciple their congregation affects their decision of what songs to allow within this space.

When 师母 *shimu* was asked about her criteria for the songs chosen for the service, she considered a level of *congregational appropriateness*, which particularly described the song's effectiveness to aid the congregation in worship. Therefore, translated songs are not excluded from her criteria. One measure of effectiveness that she identified was the relevance and alignment with the preaching to the congregation that week. Another notable measure was the relevance and alignment to the *culture* of the community. Here, 师母 *shimu* suggests that "because we are a *Chinese church*, we sing songs that are from a *Chinese worship team*." 师母 *shimu* is concerned about how the congregation eventually responds to the song, as a *Chinese church*. Thus, language becomes essential for their congregation:

"We have different aged people. If we say middle-aged people, they do not like to sing in English. They usually sing in Chinese to be 投入 *touru*."

By 投入 *touru*, 师母 *shimu* is suggesting the ability for the congregation to immerse in worship, at least to participate through response (singing, raising hands and body language). At 天国 *tianguo*, cultural relevance is essential regardless of whether a song is translated or was written originally in Mandarin. For 师母 *shimu*, the origin of the song is essential to its selection, and it will be better received if 天国 *tianguo's* team recognise the song as originating from a Chinese worship team. The teams that are regularly used in the repertoire include Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 *yueshuya'yuetuan* (who perform Hillsong and other songs from English congregational music producers) and Streams of Praise 赞美之泉 *zanmeizhichuan* (who write and produce Mandarin worship songs). These teams are also more likely to make their songs available on social media:

"Sometimes we do not know the songs are translated. Because what we get from YouTube, we already have the translated song in Chinese, we do not know if it is from Hillsong or another church. We pick three songs."

师母 *shimu* and her team access the songs via these platforms, and they evaluate translated songs the same as any other accessible Chinese song. However, to be selected for worship, the song needs to be sung in Mandarin, and preferably performed by Chinese performers. YouTube videos are most accessible for the team (and eventually the congregation members) to perform (and therefore join in musicking).

Secondly, the team's ability to perform a song is essential to whether it is considered "appropriate." The team members referenced how their team is smaller than the teams who perform on YouTube and their ability to perform a song is therefore limited by their musicianship and environment/setup. Musical elements such as melody and rhythm were also a factor; 师母 *shimu* referred to 不顾身的爱 *bugushendeai* (*Love on the Line*) by Hillsong Music.<sup>52</sup>

"Well, in English, the songs compared to the Chinese worship songs I am used to singing, I find that the beat, where we come into the song, it's different. Notably, the Bridge of 不顾身的爱 *bugushendeai*, when you come in, it is quite different coming in compared to a Chinese worship song."<sup>53</sup>

The tempo of the song (written in 6/8) is not typical of Chinese worship songs she is used to singing, as the beat and rhythm were challenging to understand and perform for the worship team. When the team is not confident in performing and using the song, they are more likely to choose a song that enhances congregational musicking and participation.

### 3.5 It is still very 西方 *xifang* (western)

Some direct questions were asked to members of the team regarding their impression and selection of Hillsong songs. 师母 *shimu* responds that they usually would not know the original song before its translation by groups such as Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 *yueshuya'yuetuan*. In fact, the interviewees directly associate Hillsong translated songs with Joshua Band, who have been translating and publishing songs as a third party. Often the translated songs are kept the same as the original English song in linguistic expression and musical arrangement.<sup>54</sup> For this reason, her responses interchanged between Joshua Band and Hillsong Music but still addressed the use of translated song product directly. Hillsong as a group is perceived as targeting a "younger" audience and are considered identical products aside from language. 师母 *shimu* suggests:

"There are a lot of translated songs, but only a few songs we sing we can use like 神羔羊配得 *shengaoyang'peide* (Worthy is the Lamb), this one is easy to sing. 基督是我满足 *jidu'shiwo'manzu* (Christ is Enough) is also

<sup>52</sup> Aryel Murphy, Brooke Ligertwood, and Scott Ligertwood, *Love on the Line*, OPEN HEAVEN/River Wild (Sydney, Australia: Hillsong Music, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 and Hillsong Worship, *Love on the Line/奋不顾身的爱, 何等荣美的名* (Taiwan: Hillsong Music, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> Joshua Band has released translations officially before Hillsong 华语 has been established and distributing in-house translations. See for instance Joshua Band website for their discography, which includes groups such as Hillsong, Gateway Music and Bethel. Joshua Band, "Asia for JESUS 约书亚乐团 - 專輯 (Joshua Band - Discography)," March 28, 2020, [https://www.joshua.com.tw/web/?menu=album&menu\\_id=27](https://www.joshua.com.tw/web/?menu=album&menu_id=27).

possible. However, 恩典之洋 *endianzhiyang* (Oceans) is hard for Chinese churches.”<sup>55</sup>

Here 师母 *shimu*'s response indicates that even if some songs were translated (such as Oceans, which is translated as 恩典之洋 *endianzhiyang*, oceans of grace, by Joshua Band), this is not enough indication that she and the team can choose it for the congregation. 师母 *shimu* notes:

“恩典之洋 *endianzhiyang* is not good to sing. In English worship songs, there's a *specific feeling*. We can hear it, but I can't express it, aside from the melodies. Joshua Band-translated songs I can hear right away it's not [original] Chinese songs.”

This response summarises 师母 *shimu*'s criticism of the above translated song. While the song has been translated, the melody (and likely arrangement) is still “not Chinese” enough for her congregation to use. 师母 *shimu* adds:

“[Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 *yueshuya'yuetuan*] songs are not always best for the congregation. We like 恩典之洋 Oceans. The song is very hard for our congregation. In Mandarin, we find that when we sing, it is still very 西方 *xifang* (Western).”

Despite this, other songs such as 神羔羊配得 *shengaoyang'peide* and 基督是我满足 *jidu'shiwo'manzu* are selected for congregational use.<sup>56</sup> From observation, 师母 *shimu* evaluates an acceptable level of “western”-ness, as in there is acceptable western musical arrangement for the song to be used in the rotation beyond language accuracy.<sup>57</sup>

For the younger 天国 *tianguo* team members who are between 16-30 years of age, their preference for the song to be “Chinese” seems less crucial for them to 感动 *gandong* (engage/participate), but their adaptability is also reflective of the bilingual space they navigate as 1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generation immigrants. Most of the worship members were

<sup>55</sup>Originally song by Hillsong United, translations released and performed by Joshua Band Hillsong United, *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*, Digital, Zion (Sydney, Australia: Hillsong Music/Sparrow Records, 2013); Joshua Band 约书亚乐团, 恩典之洋 (即使我仍会软弱) *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*, 点燃 Set a Fire (Taiwan: Hillsong Music, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Hillsong Worship, *Worthy Is the Lamb, You Are My World* (Australia: Hillsong Music Australia, 2001); Joshua Band 约书亚乐团, 神羔羊配得 *shengaoyang'peide* / *Worthy Is the Lamb*, 抓住永恒 Eternity (Taiwan, 2002); Hillsong Worship, *Christ Is Enough, Glorious Ruins* (Australia: Hillsong Music Australia, Capitol, Sparrow, 2013); Joshua Band 约书亚乐团, 基督是我满足 / *Christ Is Enough*, 点燃 Set a Fire (Taiwan, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Their response was towards the finished translated product. The author acknowledges there is more nuance that can be discussed within linguistic studies, which is beyond the scope of this article.

international students who spoke English. For example, Zhao, a vocalist on the worship team, responded:<sup>58</sup>

“I listen to a wide variety [of music], I do not hold a preference. I listen to all. I listen to English songs which is Planetshakers and Hillsong. I believe there's a lot of Asian people, they listen to the songs outside of their church, but they don't understand [the English]. They love the melodies outside because it's different. To them, it's new. They want to be able to hear.”

For Zhao, and others who have responded likewise, Chinese youth listen to a variety of worship songs across both English and Mandarin. The “Asian people” referred to by Zhao (he just means the Mandarin-speaking countries) are receptive to Western songs and melodies.<sup>59</sup> Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 *Yueshuya'yuetuan*, for instance, is representative of a particular market as a group that translates between the two languages.

Mixed responses arose when translated songs were brought up. For some such as Teng, Wang and Leong, who were vocalists on the worship team, the question reflected me as the interviewer, and they asked, “why do we need to translate the songs that work well in English?” Their general response reflected their opinion that translated songs were often awkward, as the song they may know in English is now in Mandarin and arguably has not met the song conditions to be a “Chinese song” in language and arrangement.

Wen, a vocalist on the team, considered the purpose of the translated song was to share between the two cultural sides. She suggested that:<sup>60</sup>

“It is an excellent way to let different people be exposed to different versions of music. For example, if I sing English, some people cannot enjoy the meaning, but the translated songs can help them better understand what the writer wants to express.”

In the team's view, translations allowed for this understanding to happen if the original meaning was kept. However, there were still songs that arguably did not translate well and therefore should not be used by the congregation.

#### 4. 联合 *lianhe* Church: A Multicultural Model of Congregation

This section outlines the ethnography of the third and final site. 联合 *lianhe* Church is a small Pentecostal congregation located in another Sydney suburb with a sizeable Chinese-heritage

<sup>58</sup> Author's Interview with Zhao, dated 19 April 2019

<sup>59</sup> Zhao's response is reflective of Chen's interview response regarding the 崇洋媚外 *chongyangmeiwai*, infatuation of the foreign.

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with Wen from 天国 *tianguo* Church, dated 19 April 2019

population. The congregation is part of the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) network. 联合 *lianhe* is led by a white Australian pastor, Josh, who runs a multicultural church model that creates space for all cultures. This model differed from the other two sites visited (a language service within a megachurch and a Chinese church). Josh is clear that his end goal is not to build a "Chinese Church," but various circumstances led to this congregation being mainly Chinese. Interpretation into Mandarin/English is provided during their prayer meeting and worship service, and an interpreter (who can interpret in both English and Mandarin) stands next to the preacher, with a preaching roster that includes both English and Mandarin sermons.

Worship through music is one of the key components of the service. Translated songs are primarily used in this environment and are available to be sung in both English and Mandarin. Pastor Josh and the other leaders aim to create an intentionally bilingual space for the congregation. Screen displays are bilingual, and worship is led with song sections repeated and rotating between Mandarin and English. All the congregations sing along in the two languages, creating equal space for congregation members of each culture. The use of translated songs within 联合 *lianhe's* congregational musicking is clearly in support of their multicultural model. However, the population of the congregation still predominantly feels "Chinese" to me as the participant and observer.

#### **4.1 I resist the notion We are a Chinese Church**

When interviewed, the leaders highlighted their rationale to build a multicultural environment within 联合 *lianhe*. Josh comes from experience working in missions within the ACC denomination and multicultural settings. He responded upfront, "I strongly resist any notion we are a Chinese church. I don't want to attend a Chinese church and most of the people in my church don't want to."<sup>61</sup> Josh's response is indicative of his experience and aims to deter away from some of the diasporic church realities when working with the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation population:

"They always had a problem. They start off monolingual. and then their kids grow up and move to Hillsong or Planetshakers, to something not ethnic. By the time the pastors found out what's happening, they start a service for the youth, which keeps them for a bit. But it becomes more of a cultural church than it does...so it identifies around more of their culture and the culture becomes foreign to their people. They don't share that ethnicity."

---

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Josh, dated April 2020, the church comprised of about 50% of the church being born overseas and of 18 different nationalities

Josh's pastoral concern remains for the Australian-born 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, which he has observed to eventually lose their sense of belonging when the cultural identity of the church is overtly Chinese. Here, Josh's comments on Chinese church spaces separate the cultural from the language needs:

"I checked out a few different churches on how they do bilingual stuff. It's always done in a somewhat exclusive way. A portion of the meeting is for them; a portion of the meeting is for us. We sing a song in one language. We predominantly preach in one language, and we throw a few words here and there to adhere to a group. *It doesn't make everybody equal*. So, we're trying hard, we've worked hard. What we do is literally everything we do in two languages."

Josh's main criticism of bilingual services is that "it doesn't make everybody equal." Josh's multicultural aim is to provide equal attention to each culture present, and translated songs help aid this goal:

"We sing everything in two languages. We sing *modern stuff* predominantly. We've also embraced a few songs from some Taiwan and Singapore churches that have been first written in Chinese and then translated to English, not just English to Chinese. We use a lot of Hillsong. We translated a lot of Bethel stuff. We've got some stuff out of City Harvest Church in Singapore, Streams of Praise."

Songs in both languages (and more) are helpful to Josh facilitating his vision, primarily as Josh aims to provide contemporary songs to create space for younger congregants:

"I have gone out of my way to try to accommodate them. The Worship Leader gives them some [songs], so they can try to follow along easier. It's more perception than it is reality. That is the problem there. I believe you need to be contemporary. You need to be; well I think older Christians need to be, accommodating and relevant to younger people. They need to be in the church longer than the older people."

Josh is adamant about having all these identities and realities accommodated within the one space, going beyond even English/Chinese, and eventually expanding to further languages within his goals. Based on this goal of creating a multicultural space, Josh and the leadership spend time preparing/selecting translated songs available to achieve this equality in English

and Mandarin. Shan, the church's worship leader, shares her understanding of how translated songs work in their congregation:<sup>62</sup>

“Good words can engage the people to worship God and let them understand, otherwise we see them ‘not worship.’ Sometimes when they sing, they know more about God. For me, it's very important to translate. Especially in my church, most of our congregation is Chinese, so for us...even if I only sing in English, sometimes I can't understand.”

Translated worship songs, especially as the church aims to use "contemporary songs," mean congregants who need English, and Chinese can 投入 *touru* in worship.<sup>63</sup> Shan adds this:

“We find that in this way, we can bring unity, between we have two very different types of congregation members, English and Mandarin people. If we just sing English, for example, some Mandarin people come and just sit there, they'll feel that it is not our business. When we sing together, I just realised at the beginning, when we sing in Mandarin, our English people also sing in Mandarin.”

In this space within 联合 *lianhe*, cultural exchange is commonly sought after. Shan suggests that both groups can learn each other's language,<sup>64</sup> as even the English speakers start learning to sing in Mandarin. In this model, the age of the congregation members does not seem to affect the style of songs chosen, given the pastoral support and teaching.

#### **4.2 Discussion: Song Translation as Mediation of Ecclesial and Cultural Factors**

This article proposed that any determination of the “usefulness” of translated Mandarin songs should be decided or evaluated by the local Mandarin congregations in Sydney, Australia as they navigate their ecclesial and cultural realities. Therefore, what is important is how the songs align with the worship practices in different congregations as they outwork their ecclesial and cultural experience within their congregation space. These congregational sites have a shared commonality as Pentecostal churches reaching the diasporic Chinese community in Australia. This section offers a comparison between the sites.

As the only Australian church site here actively translating songs into Chinese, the Hillsong 华语 *huayu* outworks the theological goal of translation, with a belief that while the origin of the song is English, there are elements of the worship song that can be for the Chinese

<sup>62</sup> Author's Interview with Shan in 联合 *lianhe* Church, 18 May 2019

<sup>63</sup> 投入 *touru* means to engage and to participate within worship

<sup>64</sup> Shan's example is through the "aunties", ladies who recently came from China, in the service learn the English songs simultaneously and present an interesting aspect that is happening.

culture.<sup>65</sup> This team aims to mediate between the megachurch and Chinese population the message, the experience, and the practice that they believe belongs not to just one culture. The team seek an embodied experience of 感动 *gandong*, facilitating the congregation into the Pentecostal worship space.

During the translation process, these translators use their bicultural capabilities to evaluate within the worship song and space what is culturally "western" and what is essential to the Chinese culture. For example, Chen uses 信达雅 *xindaya* as a pivotal framework to bring in non-Western concepts and ensure mediation between the various ecclesial and cultural meanings. The process should eventually create a product that is arguably not assimilated into English worship practices, but localised for the specific use at Hills Chinese and, hopefully, the transnational community. This is not new - translation has historically been a challenge for translators throughout the missionary movements as outlined by Fang Lan Hsieh, who notes the importance of balancing the two key aspects of 文理 *wenli*, the poetic nature of Chinese, and 白话 *baihua*, the colloquial language.<sup>66</sup>

However, translation is also demonstrated in different ways at the other two church sites. While understandings may differ for the other two congregations who use the translated song product, the leaders still mediate between ecclesial and cultural experiences. 天国 *tianguo* evaluate the congregational musics accessible to them outside their church (via YouTube, conferences, visits to other churches) to determine what is appropriate to their congregation. shimu's response "because we are a Chinese church" becomes key to songs she accepts into their repertoire, for example via churches of similar ecclesial and cultural *familiarity* such as Joshua Band 约书亚乐团 *yueshuya'yuetuan*. Thus, 天国 *tianguo* holds firmly to their Chinese identity, resisting accommodation to Western culture (a response to their social reality as Chinese living in Sydney). Translated songs in this space are measured by their ability to retain the culture the leaders know and considered locally useful if they contribute to their ecclesial identity as a Chinese congregation. There is no perceived need to share the space with Westerners.

On the other hand, 联合 *Lianhe* resists an identity as a Chinese church and the church aims to be a multicultural and intergenerational space of worship. Translated worship songs are localised such that they become a meeting place for both languages (and more). In both occurrences, the song is screened to the ecclesial vision. If deemed not useful, the community will not use it (or adapt the translations if they have the capacity).

---

<sup>65</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*.

<sup>66</sup> Accounted within Fang Lan Hsieh's work, see Hsieh, *A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody: From Its Missionary Origins to Contemporary Indigenous Productions*.



### Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Here, I have attempted to address the gap of descriptive work that prioritises how local Chinese congregations select, and use translated contemporary songs, and identify the meaning(s) they associate with them. To do this, I first highlighted the unique community of Hills Chinese as a local Chinese congregation within a megachurch and the work of the Hillsong 华语 *huayu* in producing the Mandarin translations which are created at this location. The central focus of the team was articulated as an experiential involvement in worship, or 感动 *gandong*. It also examined two other local Sydney congregations using these songs, identifying the rationale of the worship teams as to how they adopt and adapt translated works.

Each congregational leadership team localises in similar ways and are community or user-focused in considering congregational (or ecclesial realities) as well as cultural accessibility. Using Lim's song typology each congregation navigates the complexity by mediating between the English and Chinese nuances, creating a space of contextualisation as they adopt and adapt songs (and, where possible, actualise them).<sup>67</sup> However, the differences, at least between Hillsong Hills Chinese and Hillsong 华语 *huayu* team, and the other congregations (天国 *tianguo* and 联合 *lianhe*) is the capacity to resource effective translation process.

Lim suggests that the actualisation process of songs within Chinese churches is tricky, as adopted and adapted songs are still dominant within the church repertoire.<sup>68</sup> In fact, perhaps the reality is that the congregational users, at least diasporic ones, prefer the space between adapted and actualised. This ethnography identified the future possibilities for producers such as Hillsong Church to conduct necessary discussions about song translation, and to ask questions such as "should all songs be translated?" The hope is that other language groups at the church would also produce original songs, rather than simply contributing to the saturated demand for English originals. For these pastors, the 崇洋媚外 *chongyangmeiwai* phenomenon of desire for western culture (and music) is something they will continue to face. For this reason, many will continue to mediate between Lim's adapted and actualised song categories.

The concept of localisation was used within this paper to focus on how these communities make translated songs useful.<sup>69</sup> However in this context, localisation still presumes that a foreign practice is being given to the community to localise. This article proposes that agency should be given to translators as they engage in the congregational song process. This

<sup>67</sup> Lim, "Forming Christians through Musicking in China."

<sup>68</sup> Lim, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ingalls, Reigersberg, and Sherinian, "Introduction: Music as Local and Global Positioning: How Congregational Music-Making Produces the Local in Christian Communities Worldwide."

resonates with Lim's music contextualisation model.<sup>70</sup> Chen, for instance, is clear in her goal that translations should not be the end of the process. The song should be an inspiration to see more original Mandarin songs actualised, perhaps in the likes of the Mandarin popular song market adapting a more distinctively Chinese sound.<sup>71</sup>

Through an ethnomusicological lens, local context is important especially as the focus of translated worship songs should be on the recipient culture (in this case the Chinese communities transnationally). It is undeniable that the global distribution of congregational music is still very driven by the West, namely in the US (where, for example, Hillsong Music holds popular demand), and the push for Chinese localisation reflects the very real fear of worship music as neo-colonisation.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the responses seen within Chinese Australian churches, especially in 天国 *tianguo*'s determination of an acceptable level of "western-ness," is not surprising given the church's desire to maintain their cultural/ecclesial identity. The accounts provided of these congregational sites highlight the tensions in narrative. Can a song be considered global without the participation of non-Western worshippers? Can a translated worship song from Australia truly be considered a global sound when even local diasporic congregations within the same country do not use it? These are the realities that the Hills Chinese translators and community/congregation leaders (and I as both a researcher and a practitioner) face on a weekly basis as we determine what is suitable for local use. The translators and the local congregation leaders, and eventually the transnational community, should eventually be free to answer such questions.

I hope this study leads to further research in these spaces, eventually moving away from the insistently global nature of the study of worship song (especially with producers like Hillsong), and instead facilitating study into the translations of songs and the impact upon the users. This kind of attention within the industry should lead towards adapted and actualised Chinese musicking. Translations, as noted by the team members, is not the end. The hope is that further study of the Australian "global" worship music scene can include contemporary music that is not purely English, but also highlight and appreciate its non-Western and other contemporary musics (including Chinese styles).

---

<sup>70</sup> Lim, "Forming Christians through Musicking in China."

<sup>71</sup> Such as the music produced by pop stars such as Wang Leehom. See Boxi Chen, "The Expression of Chineseness and Americanness in Chinese Popular Music: A Comparison of ABC Pop Stars Wang Leehom and Vanness Wu," *Asian Music* 43, no. 2 (2012): 71–87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/amu.2012.0026>.

<sup>72</sup> Stallsmith discusses this in his review of the Ethnodoxology movement. Glenn Stallsmith, "Worship from the Nations: A Response to Scott Aniol," *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith* 3, no. 1 (2015): 21–36.

**References:**

- "About Hillsong Church | Hillsong Church." Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://hillsong.com/about/>.
- Albrecht, Daniel E. *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Barz, Gregory F., and Timothy J. Cooley. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Chen, Boxi. "The Expression of Chineseness and Americanness in Chinese Popular Music: A Comparison of ABC Pop Stars Wang Leehom and Vanness Wu." *Asian Music* 43, no. 2 (2012): 71–87. <https://doi.org/10.1353/amu.2012.0026>.
- Chupungco, Anscar J. *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Edwards, Jesse. "Inside Hillsong Church's Hit-Making Music Machine." *Rolling Stone Australia*, 2020. <https://au.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/inside-hillsong-church-hit-making-music-machine-6661/>.
- Evans, Mark. "Creating the Hillsong Sound: How One Church Changed Australian Christian Music." Edited by Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner. *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3_4).
- Evans, Mark. "Hillsong Abroad: Tracing the Songlines of Contemporary Pentecostal Music." In *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, Kindle Edition. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015.
- Evans, Mark. *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church*. London: Equinox Publishing, 2006.
- Fiddes, Paul. "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds?" In *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, edited by Pete Ward, 13–35. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Haight, Roger, and James Nieman. "On the Dynamic Relation between Ecclesiology and Congregational Studies." *Theological Studies* 70, no. 3 (2009): 577–99.
- Hermans, Theo. "Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, no. 3 (2003): 380–89.
- Hillsong United. *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*. Digital. Zion. Sydney, Australia: Hillsong Music/Sparrow Records, 2013.
- Hillsong Worship. *Christ Is Enough*. Glorious Ruins. Australia: Hillsong Music Australia, Capitol, Sparrow, 2013.
- . *Worthy Is the Lamb*. You Are My World. Australia: Hillsong Music Australia, 2001.
- The Christian Beat. "Hillsong Worship Offers Refreshing Masterclass With 'Awake,'" October 12, 2019. <https://www.thechristianbeat.org/hillsong-worship-review/>.
- Hsieh, Fang-Lan. *A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody: From Its Missionary Origins to Contemporary Indigenous Productions*. New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009.
- Ingalls, Monique, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner. "Prelude: Performing Theology, Forming Identity and Shaping Experience: Christian Congregational Music in Europe and North America." In *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience*, 1–14. Routledge, 2016.
- Ingalls, Monique, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Zoe C. Sherinian. "Introduction: Music as Local and Global Positioning: How Congregational Music-Making Produces the Local

- in Christian Communities Worldwide.” In *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide*, 1–31. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.
- Joshua Band. “Asia for JESUS 約書亞樂團 - 專輯 (Joshua Band - Discography),” March 28, 2020. [https://www.joshua.com.tw/web/?menu=album&menu\\_id=27](https://www.joshua.com.tw/web/?menu=album&menu_id=27).
- Joshua Band 约书亚乐团. *基督是我满足 / Christ Is Enough*. 点燃 Set a Fire. Taiwan, 2015.
- . *恩典之洋 endianzhiyang (即使我仍会软弱) Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*. 点燃 Set a Fire. Taiwan: Hillsong Music, 2015.
- . *神羔羊配得 shengaoyang'peide / Worthy Is the Lamb*. 抓住永恒 Eternity. Taiwan, 2002.
- Joshua Band 约书亚乐团, and Hillsong Worship. *Love on the Line/ 奋不顾身的爱 bugushendeai*. 何等荣美的名. Taiwan: Hillsong Music, 2017.
- Kim, Bryan SK, Bradley R. Brenner, Christopher TH Liang, and Penelope A. Asay. “A Qualitative Study of Adaptation Experiences of 1.5-Generation Asian Americans.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2003): 156.
- Lim, Swee Hong. “Forming Christians through Musicking in China.” *Religions* 8, no. 4 (2017): 50.
- Martí, Gerardo. “The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment.” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2017): 377–86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx059>.
- Miller, Donald E., and Tetsunao Yamamori. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley, CA: Univ of California Press, 2007.
- Murphy, Aryel, Brooke Ligertwood, and Scott Ligertwood. *Love on the Line*. OPEN HEAVEN/River Wild. Sydney, Australia: Hillsong Music, 2015.
- Porter, Mark. “The Developing Field of Christian Congregational Music Studies.” *Ecclesial Practices* 1, no. 2 (2014): 149–66.
- Riches, Tanya, and Tom Wagner. “The Evolution of Hillsong Music: From Australian Pentecostal Congregation into Global Brand.” *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012): 17–36.
- Riches, Tanya, and Tom Wagner. *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*. Cham: Springer, 2017.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.
- Sanneh, Lamin O. *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.
- Stallsmith, Glenn. “Worship from the Nations: A Response to Scott Aniol.” *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith* 3, no. 1 (2015): 21–36.
- Stock, Jonathan PJ, and Chou Chiener. “Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives.” In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second., 108–24. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Sun, Irene Ai-Ling. “The Canaan Hymns: Songs from the House Church Christians in China.” In *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, Kindle Edition., 2679–2875. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012.
- Wagner, Tom. “Branding, Music, and Religion: Standardization and Adaptation in the Experience of the Hillsong Sound.” *Religion as Brands: New Perspectives on the Marketization of Religion and Spirituality*. Edited by Jean-Claude Usunier and Jörg Stolz. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, 59–73.

- Wong, Connie Oi-Yan. "Singing the Gospel Chinese Style:" Praise and Worship" Music in the Asian Pacific." PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006.
- Yong, Amos. "Improvisation, Indigenization, and Inspiration: Theological Reflections on the Sound and Spirit of Global Renewal." In *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, Kindle edition. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015.
- Yong, Amos. *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*. InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Yong, Amos. "Whither Asian American Evangelical Theology ? What Asian, Which American, Whose Evangelion?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (2008): 22–37.
- Zschech, Darlene. *Shout to the Lord*. Shout to the Lord. Sydney, Australia: Integrity/Hosanna! Music, 1996.