The Spiritual Needs of the New Adult Believers at Valencia Chinese Alliance Church in Venezuela

by

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Abstract

The beautiful and rich in natural resources country of Venezuela has attracted scores of immigrants from China in the past decades. However, their dreams for a brighter and better future overseas soon became sour when confronted with the reality of the barriers and challenges of making a living in a seemingly sociopolitical hostile environment. It is against this unique backdrop that the present qualitative research study explored the spiritual needs of eight participants representing the Chinese new believers at the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church. Through the pro-active case study research methodology, the participants were invited to narrate their lived experiences of spiritual needs, described as their deep heartfelt yearnings viewed from the spiritual perspective which relates to that which is perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful, including the vertical aspects of the sacred or transcendent, and the horizontal aspects of relationships for inclusion and distinctness.
After a detailed investigation and systematic analysis of the data, the following ten themes were identified as their spiritual needs emerging from their unique cultural background and the Venezuelan social context: the heartfelt yearning for a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, genuine care and unconditional love, personal and familial wellbeing, fulfilling Chinese traditional duties, seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose, seeking a ‘tutelary God,’ reaching out to others, and pleasing and serving the Lord. In addition, this study revealed that the physical needs of this particular group were closely intertwined with their spiritual needs. And remarkably, their experience of faith in Jesus Christ was the common denominator for a change in their experience of spiritual needs from deep heartfelt longings to the experience of finding meaning, purpose, happiness, and fulfilment in life.
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Chapter One

The Chinese in Venezuela:

Ministry Context and Research Question

1.1. Introduction

A study presented by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada reported that in 2012 there were approximately fifty million overseas Chinese worldwide.\(^1\) Canada alone reported to have admitted 33,024 permanent residents from China in 2012 and 34,126 in 2013,\(^2\) making China “the number one source country for immigration to Canada”\(^3\) in the last two consecutive years. Chinese migration is a phenomenon that can be traced back to ancient times. History Scholar Gungwu Wang explains that early travels abroad fulfilled specific imperial agendas or religious pursuits (mainly Buddhist) dating back to the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD).\(^4\) In addition, trading opportunities was another cause of migration during this early period, primarily to nearby southern kingdoms. However, it was only until the mid nineteenth century that significant numbers of Chinese leaving China began to occur.

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Wang explains that for the first time, in the nineteenth century, these immigrants left China in large numbers making long journeys as far as Canada and the United States, weathering discrimination from European colonists and superior competition in search of economic opportunities, many of them as “coolie workers, replacing slaves for the back-breaking work of opening up frontier lands in various parts of the Americas.”5 Assistant Professor Yow Cheun Hoe further explains that these Chinese masses traveled to find work overseas because China was struggling with an impoverished economy, political instability and social insecurity.6 They were promised opportunities as labor workers in mine fields, plantations, and railways, as far as Australia, North America, Cuba and Peru.7 For the past few decades, Chinese migration overseas has steadily continued to grow due to the fact that China initiated its open door policy and economic reform in 1978.8

The Chinese experience overseas is substantially unique in every region, as Hoe insightfully remarks that “not all Chinese diasporic communities are the same in terms of mentality and orientation, and hence their connections to the ancestral homeland vary in content and volume from one community to another.”9 In light of their long history of immigration; the issues of identity, assimilation, and acculturation are both complex and remarkable for each individual overseas community. As such, their plight, challenges, and

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6 Yow Cheun Hoe, *Guangdong and Chinese Diaspora: The Changing Landscape of Quaoxiang* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 21. Professor Hoe divides the history of emigration into four periods: the first period dates back from ancient times up to the mid 19th century; the second period from the mid 19th century to 1949; the third from 1949-1978 (from the founding of the PRC and the three decades thereafter); the fourth from 1978 up to the present.
7 Hoe, 21-2.
8 Gungwu Wang, 103.
9 Hoe, 1, 2.
needs pertaining to their distinctive conditions abroad, *inter alia*, are worthwhile subjects of scholarly investigation. The Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America have been the focus of extensive academic interest and research in recent decades. However, the stories of smaller Chinese communities located in less developed places such as Africa and South America in general, and Venezuela in particular, have received less attention and study.

It has been the intent of this research to investigate one specific Chinese overseas group and understand their spiritual needs while living as sojourners in the beautiful and yet challenging context of Venezuela. This group is a part of the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church (VCAC)\(^\text{10}\) located in the city of Valencia, the third largest city of Venezuela, a city with a population of nearly 1.4 million people.\(^\text{11}\)

### 1.2. A Contextual Overview of Venezuela

Venezuela is a beautiful tropical country located on the northern coast of South America, facing the Caribbean Sea. Spanish is the official language. According to the Venezuelan “*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas*” (National Institute of Statistics) there are approximately 29 million people in Venezuela\(^\text{12}\) with “European, Amerindian, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern heritage.”\(^\text{13}\) Venezuela is one of the world’s leading exporters

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\(^{10}\) Henceforth I will use the acronym VCAC to refer to Valencia Chinese Alliance Church.


of petroleum. The oil industry is its main source of hard currency revenue as it is reported that the Venezuelan economy “gets 96% of the foreign exchange from the oil income;”\(^{14}\) furthermore, Venezuela boasts of having the cheapest gasoline prices in the world.\(^{15}\)

Mr. Nicolas Maduro has been the president of Venezuela since April 15th, 2013.\(^{16}\) According to the BBC NEWS, Mr. Maduro has been “a lifelong socialist and trade union member and leader... was part of the Constituent Assembly which drafted a new constitution, put in place by Mr Chavez after he came to power in 1999.”\(^{17}\) At the present time, Mr. Maduro’s political actions appear to continue the legacy of Mr. Chavez’s socialist programs as he calls himself “Chavez’s son.”\(^{18}\)

Venezuela has one of the highest violent death rates in the world.\(^{19}\) The “Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia” (Venezuelan Violence Observatory) estimates that year 2013 ended with approximately 24,763 homicides, representing a conservative estimate of 79 murders per 100,000 inhabitants.\(^{20}\) Due to the high crime rate, the constant

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threat of kidnapping, violence, and overall insecurity; people living in Venezuela understand very well the fragility of life and the tangibility of death. During my fourteen years of ministry in this country I have experienced and repeatedly witnessed robbery at gun point, kidnapping, theft, homicides, and general violence, *inter alia*. The overall social-cultural-economical climate of Venezuela is quite unsettling which has detrimental impact on its people, especially on the vulnerable sectors of the country.  

In terms of religion, according to “People of Venezuela,” an official website from the Venezuelan government, it is estimated that more than 90% of the population are Roman Catholics, approximately 8% are Protestants, and the remaining practice other religions or are atheists.  

However, from my own interaction with the people in Venezuela over the years, it seems to me that only a small percentage of those considered Roman Catholics practice their faith according to the Holy Scriptures. Rather, I observe that local religions such as the worship of Maria Lionza, Santería, and other forms of the occult have been Venezuelan’s popular expressions of spirituality in the past few decades.

1.3. The Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela

‘Overseas Chinese’ or ‘Chinese Overseas,’ ‘Diasporic Chinese’ or ‘Chinese


Diaspora’ are common terms referring to the wide range of Chinese people living outside of China including first generation immigrant Chinese nationals, as well as ethnic Chinese, those born abroad who in one way or another regard themselves as ‘Chinese’ by race but are citizens of their birth country. Discussions have been raised with regards to the connotations of the word ‘Diaspora’ as applied to distinct ethnic groups; however, it is beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed analysis. It will suffice to clarify that for the purpose of this research, the Chinese born overseas are regarded as ‘people of Chinese descent’ or ‘ethnic Chinese’ as opposed to the first generation Chinese immigrants who are referred to as ‘overseas Chinese’ or ‘Chinese Diaspora.’

Venezuela is a dreamland of economic opportunities for Chinese immigrants as well as foreigners from other nationalities. There are no official statistic figures about the overseas Chinese population in Venezuela. However, from my accumulated unofficial data collected through some studies and conversations with several Chinese community leaders in the major centers of Venezuela (Caracas, Valencia, and Maracas), I estimate that there are over sixty thousand Chinese immigrants scattered throughout this beautiful and rich in natural resources country.

25 In this study, the term ‘Diaspora’ is being used in the contemporary sense of describing “a community defined not by a core identity but a boundary” as Holden describes it, disregarding the strong sense of nationalism and return. It “is defined relationally, by situation, rather than essence.” Philip Holden, “Interrogating Diaspora: Wang Gungwu’s Pulse,” ARIEL, V. 33.3-4 (July-October 2002), 107: U of T electronic source (accessed on April 8, 2014).
26 Chee-Beng Tan, Chinese Overseas: Comparative Cultural Issues (Aberdeen, HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 1, 2. Professor Tan presents a detailed distinction for the use of each particular term.
28 I estimate that almost 99% of my Chinese friends in Venezuela are illegal immigrants; this observation serves as an important clue to explain the lack of official documented immigration data.
29 “Venezuela: Citizens of Chinese descent; attitudes and treatment by police and general population; the
illegal immigrants. Most of them are from the southern region of China, primarily from the city of Enping\(^{30}\) and its adjacent towns. They come from a relatively less privileged social class (compared to those coming to Canada) which explains their low level of formal education.

Living in Venezuela, they face issues of marginality associated with language barriers, legal barriers, cultural barriers, and educational barriers, to name a few. Generally speaking, the Chinese in Venezuela are slow to integrate into the mainstream society. In addition to their cultural and value differences, it seems to me that the above mentioned Venezuelan social condition is a key contributing factor to the Chinese immigrants’ lack of interest in assimilating into the mainstream culture and their distrust in the local people. However, this does not mean that the Venezuelan social context has no effect on the Chinese immigrants. Without interest in the local culture, most of the overseas Chinese in Venezuela focus their energy to accumulate material wealth. They work an average of ten hours per day from Monday to Saturday, and half day on Sundays in order to earn money. With such long working hours, a large percentage of them have very little ‘spare time’ for leisure, personal learning, or spiritual enrichment. My Chinese friends in Valencia use the common Chinese expression “ku men” (“苦闷” meaning “bitterly boring”) to describe their repetitive lifestyle and unsettling feelings. Overall, I perceive that the majority of the Chinese overseas in Venezuela experience a sense of insecurity and hostility due to the

escalating crime rate, social unrest, corruption, and widespread violence.31

1.4. The Valencia Chinese Alliance Church and my Research Interest

The VCAC began by a united effort of short-term mission teams sent by the Chinese C&MA churches in New York ca.1993, and it was organized in 1996 as the first Chinese church in Valencia. This church has experienced many significant ‘exoduses’ in the past ten years due to the social and political instability, and the escalating crime rate. Many of the more mature believers have moved to other countries. Consequently, almost half of the congregation is composed of new believers with less than six years of taking the ordinance of baptism.32

In 1996 my husband and I were sent as missionaries by “The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada” (C&MA)33 to nurture this congregation, as well as continue the Gospel ministry in the city of Valencia, Venezuela.34 From August 1997 until July 2010, I served alongside my husband as a missionary pastor at VCAC. Due to family issues, my husband and I have concluded our missionary service in July, 2011. Since our return to Canada, we have made numerous short missions’ trips back to Valencia to assist the congregation and continue to make arrangements for short term missions groups to assist this church. At the present time, the Valencia church is self-supporting, self-

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32 In the Christian & Missionary Alliance’s tradition, baptism is considered as an ‘ordination’ rather than a ‘sacrament’ because it is viewed as ordained by Christ; as an outward symbol of the individual’s faith in Jesus’ Christ. For further study please refer to: Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, One-volume edition (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Baker Book House, 1987), 1096.
34 Matthew 28:18-20.
propagating, and self-governing.\textsuperscript{35} It is led by the Board of Deacons which is composed of seven lay leaders. Analogous to the teenage stage, the church is learning to communicate the Gospel message in the community without permanent missionary assistance.

I was involved in the areas of evangelism, church planting, discipleship, and leadership development, \textit{inter alia}. However, engaging the Chinese community in Venezuela with the Gospel requires a great understanding of their social context and cultural background. The communication of the Gospel, the discipleship of believers, and the training of leaders are long and challenging processes in this context. It requires extensive dedication of “ground breaking work” and “bridge building” for a Chinese individual from this background to befriend Christianity and to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Towards this end, as a representative of Christ’s incarnational service, my role often times has required a great amount of personal involvement in their ordinary life activities, such as accompanying them to and translating for them at doctor’s appointments; helping them settle business disputes; walking alongside them in the midst of violence, insecurity, and corruption; and negotiating with kidnappers for the release of a family member, to name a few. These challenges have kept me searching and reflecting theologically for meaningful and relevant practices of ministry.

\textbf{1.5. The Research Question}

During the last few years of my missionary service, I have wrestled with questions such as: What are the unique characteristics of my ministry group? What are the elements

that attract them to the church? What can be effective ways to assist them to grow spiritually as disciples of Jesus Christ? Is the Gospel being communicated appropriately in their ‘cultural language’ to address their spiritual needs? What are their spiritual needs? The reflection on the above questions has led me to consider that in order to spiritually nurture the new Chinese believers in Valencia with the Gospel in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of their spirituality and spiritual needs. Consequently, my research question for this thesis is: **What are the spiritual needs of the adult new believers at Valencia Chinese Alliance Church (VCAC) in Venezuela emerging from their unique cultural background and social context?**

Prior to my missionary service in Venezuela, I was also privileged to have lived and served in Peru (1990-1991) and Costa Rica (1996-1997). The Chinese immigrants living in these countries have similar cultural background and encounter unique challenges particular to the Latin American social-political-cultural-economical context that are comparable to those living in Venezuela. However, I have not found any documented academic research on the spirituality or the spiritual needs of the Chinese Diaspora in South America. It is my desire that the findings in this research become a valuable contribution and resource to a larger missionary community ministering to people groups similar to the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela. Towards this end, I have conducted in-depth open-ended face-to-face interviews with the purpose of inviting the research participants narrate their personal experiences of spiritual needs. For the sake of using culturally appropriate expressions that would resonate with the participants’ experiences, the following
description was used to refer to the phenomenon of ‘spiritual needs:’ ‘the lived experiences of deep heartfelt yearnings related to the ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful.’ A detailed study explaining this proposition is presented in the next chapter. As such, a thorough investigation to obtain a theoretical framework through which this research question was studied has been the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter Two

Spirituality and Spiritual Needs:
A Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

My reflections on the spiritual needs of the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela have led me to hypothesize that the thinking patterns, cultural background, and belief systems of this ministry group, *inter alia*, are determining factors for their spirituality. I also consider that their spirituality coupled with their life experiences are key determining factors to their perception and interpretation of the Gospel. Therefore in my study of the spiritual needs of my research base group, I have endeavoured to establish the theoretical dimensions at work for this research from three perspectives.

In this chapter, I have first presented a theoretical construct of spirituality from the disciplines of religion and psychology in order to attain a description of spirituality and spiritual needs operative for this research; second, I have laid out the cultural dimensions of the Chinese Community in Valencia, Venezuela; and third, I have discussed the Christian dimension of spirituality of the Christian Chinese community at Valencia Chinese Alliance Church. These theoretical dimensions serve as the theoretical foundation to my action-in-ministry research for the understanding of the spiritual needs of the new believers at the Valencia CAC in Venezuela.

2.2. A Theoretical Construct of Spirituality and Spiritual Needs from Psychology and Religion
The subject of spirituality, a topic that used to belong primarily within the realm of religion, has gained increasing academic interest for the past decades in the disciplines of Social Sciences, especially in the discipline of Psychology. Spirituality as a phenomenon of scientific inquiry is a complex, multidimensional and multilevel construct. A considerable amount of theory and research data on religiousness and spirituality amongst psychologist has generated a wide diversity of definitions and approaches for these terms. In order to establish a theoretical construct of spirituality for this research, I have investigated how the concept of spirituality is understood from the social sciences’ perspective, primarily from the writings of clinical psychologist B. Zinnbauer and psychology professor K. Pargament, as well as biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders.

Traditionally, most psychologists have regarded religion and spirituality interchangeably. According to Zinnbauer and Pargament, religious phenomena could be understood from two perspectives: the substantive perspective (by its substance: the sacred) and the functional perspective (purpose in the individual’s life). It can also be approached as “authoritarian religion” in which people demean themselves in relation to a greater power or “humanistic religion” in which God represents and empowers individuals’ strength and self-realization (italics the author’s). Psychology researchers have also emphasized the personal aspects – in contrast to the social aspects – of individuals’ beliefs.

37 Sandra M. Schneiders, “Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” The Santa Clara Lectures, Santa Clara University 6, no.2 (Feb.6, 2000).
38 Zinnbauer & Pargament, 22-3.
39 Ibid., 24.
40 Ibid.
emotions, behavior, and motivations in religiousness. Psychologist William James illustrates this individual aspect in his definition of personal religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine”\textsuperscript{41} (italics the author’s).

In contrast to the above traditional views, current views of religiousness and spirituality are, generally speaking, perceived to be in opposition to each other; resulting in the rise of various forms of spirituality and the decline of traditional religious institutions. Some researchers even remark that “spirituality has replaced religiousness in popular usage.”\textsuperscript{42} An extreme form of tension between the construct of religion and spirituality is the concept that religion is “substantive, static, institutional, objective, belief-based, bad” as opposed to the idea that spirituality is “functional, dynamic, personal, subjective, experience-based, good...”\textsuperscript{43} From this general opposing view, the definitions for religion are more from the perspective of formal beliefs and group practices linked to traditional rituals and institutions; whereas the definitions for spirituality are more from an individualistic perspective of a relationship with a higher power, the sacred, the transcendent or the ultimate.\textsuperscript{44} Zinnbauer et al. explains that some researchers have challenged this generalized negative view of religion as opposed to the positive view of

\textsuperscript{41} William James, “Lecture II Circumscription of the Topic,” from \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, Electronic Text Center, (University of Virginia Library, 1996) 31,32
\textsuperscript{42} Zinnbauer & Pargament, 24.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 24, 25.
spirituality, arguing that this perception is reminiscent of a certain level of prejudice rather than informed analysis. It is within this context that the subject of spirituality is still a theme in process.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned multifaceted context, Zinnbauer and Pargament define spirituality as the individual’s relationship with a higher power, the sacred, universal truth, or his/her search for “existential goals in life, such as meaning, wholeness, inner potential, and interconnections with others.” This definition of spirituality highlights the concepts of ‘existential goals in life,’ ‘higher power,’ ‘universal truth,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘sacred’ which are crucial for the theoretical construct of spirituality operative for this research.

A large number of psychologists agree that spirituality has a developmental trajectory across the lifespan; it is dynamic and evolving in interdependence with his/her “other strands of human development.” As such, spirituality is deeply influenced by the individual’s innate characteristics as well as nurtured by his/her personal, familial, social culture, and global experiences and relationships. In addition, according to Psychology Professor Robert Kegan, there are “two greatest yearnings of human life,” one is the “yearning for inclusion (to be welcomed in, next to, held, connected with, a part of)” and the other is the “yearning for distinctness (to be autonomous, independent, to experience

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45 Ibid., 28-9: for example, an empirical study done by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) shows that the majority of the respondents (74%) consider themselves as both religious and spiritual. These researchers show in this study that only a minority consider themselves as spiritual but not religious, and this minority are the ones who “use spirituality as a means of rejecting religion.”
46 Ibid., 28.
48 Ibid., 33.
my own agency, the self-chosenness of my purposes).” These yearnings viewed from the perspectives of significance, the sacred, and existential life goals, are powerful windows for researching the spiritual needs of the Chinese people in Venezuela. In order to understand the spiritual needs of the participants of this research, it is indispensable to investigate the underlying values, the significant issues, and the things considered as sacred that are fundamental to their yearning for inclusion and/or distinctness.

From the religious perspective, Sandra Schneiders argues that the term spirituality has lost its “explicit reference to the influence of the Holy Spirit and come to refer primarily to the activity of the human spirit.” Schneiders recognizes the fact that the terms spirit and spirituality are being used in a much wider context than they were once assumed by Christianity. Therefore, she proposes a more comprehensive definition of spirituality which encompasses the important aspects of personal experience, of conscious pursuit in a holistic life project, and of a positive pursuit for self-transcendence toward that which is perceived as ultimate. She defines spirituality as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.” Similarly, Professor Luke Timothy Johnson states that spirituality is the believer’s “response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action.”

50 Schneiders, “Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?,” 4.
51 Schneiders, 4.
Based on the above insights and perspectives on spirituality, I have used the following description as my operative understanding of spirituality for the theoretical framework of this research: *spirituality refers to the individual’s intentional response in action to that which is perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful, including the vertical aspect of the sacred or transcendent and the horizontal aspect of relationships for inclusion and distinctness.* Furthermore, I will use the following description as my operative understanding of spiritual needs for the theoretical framework of this research: *spiritual needs refer to the deep heartfelt yearnings of the individual viewed from the spiritual perspective which relates to that which is perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful, including the vertical aspects of the sacred or transcendent, and the horizontal aspects of relationships for inclusion and distinctness.* This description of spiritual needs explains the description of “lived experiences of deep heartfelt yearnings related to the ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful” proposed at the end of Chapter One as the identified phenomenon of spiritual needs for the investigation of the spiritual needs amongst the participants of this research.

2.3. The Contextual Dimension of the Chinese Community in Valencia, Venezuela

Schneiders remarks that for many cultures, religion “is not a separate institution distinguished from parallel institutions such as the political, economic, or educational but that these dimensions of group life are embedded inseparably in the culture as a whole.”\(^\text{53}\) Likewise, some religions are cultural systems that address ultimate reality but does not involve in the belief of a deity, rather “they are organized in particular patterns of creed,

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\(^\text{53}\) Schneiders, 7.
code, and cult.” In addition, bishop and theologian Anthony Russell, in his discussion about the role of sociology in spirituality, insightfully affirms that spirituality “is a cultural phenomenon and needs to be studied within the context of its interrelationship with the society in which it is found.” Indeed, the cultural and contextual dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora in Valencia play a fundamental role in their spirituality. Therefore, it is indispensable to investigate the cultural and social background of this particular group, which includes the traditional Chinese philosophical mindset, the contemporary Chinese cultural factors, and the Venezuelan social context.

2.3.1. The Traditional Chinese Philosophical Schools

In order to understand the traditional cultural background of the Chinese in Valencia, I have referred primarily to the extensive writings of Philosophy Professor Vincent Shen and Philosophy Scholar Wing-Tsit Chan to explore the major traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are considered the three major Chinese philosophical thoughts that have shaped the traditional Chinese mindset as early as the 6th century BC when Daoism began. These schools of philosophy continue to exert their influence in the cultural system and moral values of the Chinese people today.

54 Schneiders, 8.
Professor Shen states that the term *dao* (the way) in Chinese philosophy is “a common term to refer to ultimate reality.”\(^\text{58}\) And more specifically in Confucianism, the concept of ultimate reality moves from heaven (*tian*) to humanness (*ren*) as professor Shen explains,

*...the concept of ultimate reality in Confucianism moves from heaven (*tian*), a residue from ancient Chinese religious beliefs; to humanness (*ren*) in Confucius himself; then to sincerity (*cheng*) in Zisi, Confucius’ grandson; and to heart/mind (*xin*) or principle (*li*) in neo-Confucianism.*\(^\text{59}\)

Philosophy professor Peter K. Woo explains that historically in Chinese tradition up to the pre-Chin period (6\(^{\text{th}}\)-3\(^{\text{rd}}\) Century BC);\(^\text{60}\) *tian* (heaven) was perceived as the ontological ultimate reality which was “thought to be conscious and personal, righteous in retributing goods and punishing evils.”\(^\text{61}\) In addition, philosophy scholar Wing-Tsit Chan explains that up to Confucius’ time (551-479 BC), generally speaking the concept of *tian-ming* was regarded as Mandate of Heaven, decree of God, personal destiny, and course of order. However, in Confucian philosophy *tian* (heaven) was “practically always understood as moral destiny, natural endowment, or moral order.”\(^\text{62}\)

On the one hand Confucius had a high regard for the *tian-ming* (Mandate of Heaven); it was considered as the ultimate reality for human response in spirituality. On


\(^{61}\) Peter Kun-yu Woo, 15.

the other hand, Confucius made humanism the main force in Chinese philosophy as Chan explains,

Confucius emphasized the concept of ren as opposed to the concept of tian. He did not care to talk about spiritual beings or even about life after death. Instead, believing that man “can make the Way (dao) great,” and not that “the Way can make man great,” he concentrated on man.⁶³

As such, Confucius redirected the emphasis from ‘dao’ (way) and ‘tian’ (heaven) to ‘ren’ (humaness) as the metaphysical foundation of ultimate reality. Consequently, the locus of Confucian moral metaphysics resides in human nature; and its ultimate goal is to transform or nurture the person to become ‘junzi’ (the superior man) through moral education. Consequently, the superior man ‘junzi’ is the ideal human being who has fully actualized the Mandate of Heaven.

Confucius advocates the kind of humanism that is not individualistic; rather it is the kind of humanism that upholds the ideals of junzi by extending humanity (ren) to others, “from responsiveness to universalizability.”⁶⁴ Confucius explains his golden rule for humanity (ren) as follows,

A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent. To be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing humanity.⁶⁵

⁶³ Wing-Tsit Chan, 15.
⁶⁵ Wing-Tsit Chan, 31.
From the above mentioned key points, it can be summarized that classical Confucianism affirms the potential goodness of human nature through self-cultivation which leads to an anthropocentric spirituality. It considers that the “sole way to transform human nature” is through moral education. Moral quality is more than just mental knowledge. The cultivation of the self is in relation to other people, beginning with one’s own family. Furthermore, Woo explains that “through interpersonal love and concern the Confucians believe that the whole world would be united in one.” Therefore, filial piety and fraternal deference are considered ultimate virtues from the Mandate of Heaven and exerted on the potential goodness of human nature that could be extended to become universalized. By deduction, spirituality in classical Confucianism is the pursuit of perfect goodness embodied in the image of the sage or the superior man through the nurturing of the heart/mind by self-cultivation of the virtues in relation to other people, beginning with one’s own family.

Neo-Confucianism began as a major revival of Confucianism during the Song dynasty (950-1279 AD) after eight centuries of decline. Three schools of Neo-Confucianism emerged. They further developed the Confucian concepts of nature, the

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67 Peter Kun-yu Woo, 14.


69 Shen explains three schools of Neo-Confucianism emerged: the Realist school, reaching its climax with Zhu Xi (1130-1200 AD); the Idealist school, represented by Lu Xiangshan (1139-1193 AD) and Wang Yangming (1472-1529 AD); and the Naturalist school, represented by thinkers from late Ming to mid-Qing dynasties (i.e.: Dai Zheng 1723-1777 AD). Lecture notes from UofT course EAS241/PHL237 History of
mind/heart, principle, and humanity; and broadened its scope of inquiry from human beings to the cosmos, basing its ideas largely on the classics: the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*\(^{70}\) and the *Book of Changes*.\(^{71}\) In contrast to the Daoists and Buddhists views that external influence corrupts; the schools of Neo-Confucianism affirms the traditional Confucian belief that “human nature is inherently good but as one’s nature comes into contact with external things, good and evil appear.”\(^{72}\) However, an emphasis on human nature was developed, as Woo argues,

*...the Neo-Confucians from Song and Ming Dynasties onward rejected the transcendental and personal God and held human nature to be absolute and eternal. This resulted in the deification of man and the inner moral postulate became the ultimate foundation of all ethical affairs.*\(^{73}\)

According to Philosophy Professor Shun, all the representatives of Neo-Confucianism upheld the doctrine of transforming the physical nature; that the individual himself is responsible for this transformation to be good through self-cultivation, which is “the process of one’s doing something to shape one’s own character out of a reflective concern with the kind of person one is.”\(^{74}\) The difference resided on the method for self-cultivation that each representative proposed.

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Chinese Philosophies by Professor Vincent Shen, Fall 2011.

\(^{70}\) Wing-Tsit Chan, 95-105. *The Doctrine of the Mean* teaches that “what Heaven (*tian*, nature) imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way (*dao*). Cultivating the Way is called education,” 98.

\(^{71}\) Wing-Tsit Chan, 450.

\(^{72}\) Wing-Tsit Chan, 467.

\(^{73}\) Peter Kun-yu Woo, 13.

Professor Shen explains that in **Classical Daoism**, the *dao* (the way) is the “metaphysical concept to denote various levels of metaphysical reality and ultimate reality itself.”\(^{75}\) As the ultimate reality, the *dao* replaced the Pre-Chin concept of *tian* (heaven). In Daoism, *tian* is re-interpreted as nature, as the manifestation of the *dao*. It is clear that both, Confucianism as well as Daoism refers to the concept of *dao*; however, their approaches to the *dao* in relation to the universe and humanity are different. Chan explains that Confucianism refers to the *dao* from the humanistic moral perspective, while in Classical Daoism, the *dao* becomes the central concept receiving a much more fundamental understanding.\(^{76}\) For Laozi (6th Century BC), the founder of Daoism, the *dao* is the cause of all things, so the tendency of the human heart is to gravitate toward liberation from the empirical self and return to the *dao*, as Shen explains that “human beings together with all other things in heaven and earth were but manifestations of the *dao* and had to return to the *dao*.\(^{77}\) To possess the *dao* and not lose it is to attain eternity. Furthermore, for Laozi, everything has nature, not only human beings. He used the term *de* (virtue) to describe the nature of everything. The concept of *de* could be explained as “the *dao* within.” Professor Hansen explains that instead of the Confucian interpretation of ‘ethical virtue;’ *de* in Daoism is better understood as ‘virtuous power.’\(^{78}\) *De* is understood as the creative power inside all things produced by the *dao* that leads all things to return to the *dao*. *De* is that

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\(^{76}\) Wing-Tsit Chan, 136.


which both human beings and natural beings have inherited from the *dao*. From the *dao* emerges the concepts of *wu* (non-being) and *you* (being); *yin* (feminine, negative, receptive) and *yang* (masculine, positive, creative); *fan* (reversal/return); *daoli* (principles of nature), and so forth. These manifestations are the result of the process of transformation and returning, of the dynamic movements of the harmonic relationships between the cosmos and human beings. Laozi calls the ontological manifestation of the *dao* in the non-being as the *wu*, and the ontological manifestation of the *dao* in the being as the *you*. Shen explains Laozi’s being and non-being as follows,

...*you*, as being, signified the moment of manifestation, realization, actuality, fulfillment, and bodies. *Wu*, as non-being, did not represent sheer nothingness; it signified, rather, the moment of dissimulation, possibility, potentiality, transcendence, and functionality 79(bolded represents author’s italics).

Consequently, in Classical Daoism, namelessness and the non-being are constant (eternal) and more desirable than names and being, 80 because the *dao* that could be said is not the constant *dao*; things that can be said are not ultimate. The things that can be said are human construction of ultimate reality, but not ultimate reality itself. Likewise, the name that could be named (conceptualized) is not the constant (when *you* return to the original) name. Daoism emphasizes the purposeful non-activity in order to allow things to follow their natural path. Chan explains that to interfere with nature is to interfere with the *dao*. 81

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80 Wing-Tsit Chan, 139-40.
81 Wing-Tsit Chan, 154.
Shen explains that in Classical Daoism, the perfect man is the “incarnation of the dao.”\textsuperscript{82} Laozi called this perfect man a sage, and Zhuangzi\textsuperscript{83} (399?-295? BC) called this perfect man the supreme man, the marvelous man, the sage, and the authentic man. The sage is the one who can recognize this law of nature and follow it, therefore, there is no credit intrinsic to the sage in following the right path because it is not his invention; he is only allowing himself to respond to this Way of Heaven.\textsuperscript{84} The goal of the perfect man or the sage is to become one with nature, not to interfere with nature “by imposing the way of man,” but rather, to be a companion of nature.\textsuperscript{85} Therefore, spirituality in Classical Daoism has the ultimate goal of realizing one’s infinite freedom in relationship with the cosmos by returning to one’s spiritual self which is ‘the dao in us.’ The goal is to achieve harmony through the transformation from being to non-being; it is to achieve transcendence and vacuity, to be empty of self-centeredness, to have no selfish ambitions and to be devoid of selfish desires. The perfect man is detached from emotions, feelings, desires, and bodily or mundane experiences.\textsuperscript{86} Once this goal is achieved, the person will be in perfect harmony and one with nature, and be able to accomplish everything through ‘non activity’ or \textit{wu-wei}, by doing nothing that will be unnatural. Daoist spirituality appears to be loftier than Confucian spirituality because it relates entirely with the cosmos and is completely detached from selfish desires.

\textsuperscript{82} Vincent Shen, “Daoism (Taoism): Classical (Dao Jia, Tao Chia),” in \textit{Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy}, 211.
\textsuperscript{83} Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu 庄子) developed the second phase of Daoism.
\textsuperscript{84} Wing-Tsit Chan, 174-76.
\textsuperscript{85} Wing-Tsit Chan, 177.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 188.
According to Wing-Tsit Chan, Neo-Daoism was the resurgence of Daoism in the Wei-Jin period (220-420AD) as a syncretistic movement with Daoistic metaphysics and Confucian social and political philosophy. The Neo-Daoists of this period gave the Laozi and the Zhuangzi’s concept of ‘non-being’ a new meaning beyond the simple contrast of being. Chan explains that Wang Bi (226-249AD) and Guo Xiang (d.312AD) are the most outstanding Neo-Daoists. Instead of Laozi’s ‘destiny’ (ming, fate), Wang Bi advocated for ‘principle’ (li, reason) emphasizing the Principle of Nature (Tian-li) instead of destiny decreed by Heaven (Tian-ming). Wang Bi commented on the Hexagrams by stressing that behind all particular objects there is the “over-all principle which unites and commands all particular concepts and events.” Wang Bi proposed the idea of one central and fundamental principle – the ultimate principle – controlling everything. In contrast, Guo Xiang emphasized being, the many and the individual. Professor Chan explains that Guo Xiang “taught contentment in whatever situation one may find himself. Neither free will nor choice has meaning in his system” because everything is determined by the ultimate principle of one’s own nature. Chan explains that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang viewed Confucius as the sage instead of Laozi or Zhuangzi, because the latter “traveled only in the transcendental world and were therefore one-sided;” whereas “Confucius was truly sagely within and kingly without” because he traveled “in both the transcendental and

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87 Wing-Tsit Chan, 316.
88 Ibid., 316.
89 Ibid., 316.
90 Ibid., 316-7.
91 Ibid., 318.
92 Ibid., 317, 8.
mundane worlds.”93 As such, *spirituality in Neo-Daoism is to follow the ultimate principle in self-nature to become “sagely within and kingly without;” being able to travel in both “the transcendental and mundane worlds.”*94 Neo-Daoism seems to have played an important role in influencing Chinese Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Chan argues that the concepts of substance (tì) and function (yòng) definitely originated with Wang Bi which became the “key concepts in Chinese Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.”95

With regards to Buddhism, for the purpose of this research, I have concentrated only on the study of the philosophical teachings of Pure Land Buddhism within the Buddhist philosophical schools, because Pure Land Buddhism appears to bear closer resemblance to the type of Buddhism expressed among the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela. **Pure Land Buddhism** is a popular branch of Buddhism. The Western Pure Land called *Sukhavati* (Sanskrit for ‘Realm of Bliss’) is the place of ultimate rebirth and enlightenment pertaining to Amitabha Buddha. In order to be reborn in the Pure Land, the person needs to first purify his or her mind; “only when the Mind is pure, will the Buddha lands be pure.”96 On this matter, Buddhist Studies professor Heng-ching Shih explains that the Pure Land School presupposes that “all beings are “wicked” (although originally pure);”97 consequently common people are unable to attain Buddhahood through their own efforts. Rather, Shih points out, this school stresses the need for “complete surrender of the self

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93 Ibid., 333.
94 Ibid., 333.
95 Ibid., 323.
and the recognition of Buddha’s grace – an understanding which requires insight into the nature of Buddha Amitabha.”

Therefore the Pure Land School emphasizes faith in the Buddha and the Buddha’s acts of compassion to help the individual achieve enlightenment and Buddhahood. Throughout its development, the Pure Land’s approach for perfecting or purifying the mind has consisted of “the techniques of meditation/visualization (of the Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha…) and of oral recitation of the Buddha’s name…” Faith is expressed in the person’s devotion to Buddha Amitabha, and Amitabha’s pure land through the common practice of ‘nianfo.’ The word ‘nianfo’ is composed of the Chinese word ‘nian’ (念) which means “being mindful of,” “thinking of,” “meditating on,” “calling to mind;” and the Chinese word ‘fo’ (佛) which means Buddha, referring to Buddha Amitabha in the case of Pure Land Buddhism. Traditionally the concept of ‘holding the name’ of Buddha by reciting the Buddha’s name (nianfo) was interpreted from the meditative perspective. In nianfo, the individual is busy focusing on the Buddha. This mind concentration is supposed to prevent the individual from committing transgressions or violating the Buddhist precepts, because in so doing, the person’s mind “becomes empty and still, leading to the emergence of his innate wisdom – the Wisdom of the Buddhas.”

In this sense, the Buddha is a supreme and perfect example for the Buddhist followers. *Therefore to think of, praise, and take refuge in the Buddha is the form of Pure Land spirituality.* Pure Land masters consider that it is better to ask the common people, viewed

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99 Chih-I (Patriarch) and T’ien Ju, *Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters*, xii-xiii.
100 Heng-Ching Shih, “The Syncretism of Ch’ an and Pure Land Buddhism,” 27.
101 Chih-I (Patriarch) and T’ien Ju, *Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters*, viii.
as wicked, in need of grace, and having “dull faculties and defiled, scattered minds” to concentrate on one realm only: the Buddha Amitabha’s realm. Pure Land spirituality is viewed as simple and appealing to those less inclined to philosophical pursuits, and arduous rituals. As such, the Pure Land School seems to advocate a much easier way to attain Buddhahood compared to the other Buddhist philosophical schools which require a much vigorous monastic asceticism, meditation, and extensive study of the Buddhist Scriptures. This form of spirituality is understandably appealing to the common people because of its practicality and simplicity.

2.3.2. The Pragmatic, Metaphorical, and Syncretistic Chinese Mindset

In contrast to the “disinterested pursuit of truth and sheer intellectual curiosity” of Greek philosophy, professor Shen in his article *Chinese Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology* insightfully explains that the Chinese pursuit of knowledge “began as a concern leading not to universal theorization but to universal praxis. It was because of his concern with the destiny of the individual and society that Chinese began to philosophize.” This emphasis on practicality seems to extend to the aspect of spirituality, which originates from the practical interest in the spiritual for the day-to-day concerns and necessities of life rather than for the sheer pursuit of the truth, the ultimate, and the transcendent for their intrinsic worth. Sociology professor Kwai Hang Ng, in his study on Chinese immigrants’ conversion to Christianity in North America, provides a remarkable

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102 Chih-I (Patriarch) and T’ien Ju, *Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters*, 28.
instructive example on Chinese spirituality. Ng explains that the Chinese immigrants’ religiosity is expressed in their need to experience a transcendent power such as a tutelary god that will provide guidance, protection, practical help and blessings in their daily needs and every difficulty they encounter.105 Furthermore, this understanding of the divine as a tutelary god who provides practical help and protection in their daily challenges is “rooted in the immigrants’ own cultural tradition.”106 As such, Ng’s findings reinforce the general notion that the Chinese mindset, as well as spirituality is essentially pragmatic.

Professor Shen also explains that traditional Chinese science is characterized by its “quasi-scientific theories, lacking logical and mathematical structure… rigor of structural organization and logical formulation.”107 And by extension, in the attempt to describe concepts pertaining to ultimate reality, Shen remarks that “image-ideas” instead of “pure ideas” are used as metaphors to express ideas about ultimate reality evoking its richness “without exhausting it.”108 In addition, many concepts related to metaphysics, religion, spirituality and philosophy are all interconnected. As such, it is fair to deduce that the image-idea in metaphysics can also be applied to Chinese spirituality by extension. In other words, concepts pertaining to spirituality are perceived intuitively by the individual through image-idea metaphors of the ultimate and the transcendental without a well defined or concrete system of beliefs. It is interesting to note that in my past experience with the Chinese community in Venezuela, I have observed that when prompted to discuss the

106 Kwai Hang Ng, 204.
108 Ibid., 2:222.
subject of ultimate reality, most of them are unable to articulate systematically their beliefs, or logically explain their spiritual practices. Rather, they tend to express them in stories, images, traditional celebrations, actions of filial piety, and spiritual rituals, to name a few. Therefore, it could be broadly summarized that the Chinese philosophical mindset tends to be pragmatic and metaphorical, which extends into the realm of spirituality.

In addition to the pragmatic and metaphorical mindset, Buddhist professor Shih observes that Chinese people are very tolerant and open-minded to accept a variety of beliefs as an enriching practice and virtuous attitude because they believe in universal truth. Shih explains that the Chinese are more pragmatic than theological; therefore any belief that has practical value could be acceptable. From my empirical interaction with the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela, I observe that very few of them follow one specific traditional philosophical school; rather, the majority has a ‘give and take’ approach to the different philosophical thoughts. Most of them are ordinary people who are more preoccupied with the utilitarian life and lack a clearly articulated worldview. As such, the majority of the Chinese in Venezuela tend to have a syncretistic spirituality that harmonizes some of the philosophical teachings and rituals from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

2.3.3. The Contemporary Chinese Cultural Influence

For over two millenniums, China lived through a long history of feudal economic system governed by imperial dynasties under the traditional philosophical teachings of

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109 Heng-Ching Shih, 9.
110 Heng-Ching Shih, 9-10.
111 Heng-Ching Shih, 9-10.
Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. It was only at the turn of the twentieth century that China became a Republic in 1912, and later on, became the People’s Republic of China in 1949 under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As such, in the past century, China has experienced unprecedented economic, social, political and cultural challenges and changes, primarily due to the transformation process from the feudal imperial system to “state-owned socialist enterprises.” It is beyond the scope of this research to analyze the complex factors involving these challenges and changes. However, to provide a comprehensive perspective for understanding the overseas Chinese of my research study, I have presented a rather brief overview of present day postmodern China with its rapid economic growth in a globalized market under the backdrop of Maoist Communism and its influence on the mindset of the population in rural communities, which are representative of my research study group. For this task, I have referred largely to the work of Chinese Literature Professor Wang Hui, Confucian Philosopher Daniel Bell, Asian Studies Professor Mobo Chang Fan Gao, and the editing work of Philosophy Professors Chung-Ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin, inter alios.

According to Professor Emeritus of Chinese, Theodore Huters, as early as the 1200s, the Chinese humanistic canon, which emphasizes ‘personal moral conduct,’ has

112 Also known as the Communist Party of China (CPC).
been the social standard for those aspiring to a place in government office. \footnote{118} Professor Joseph Adler explains that the humanistic cannon was a synthesis of Neo-Confucianism by 12th-century scholar Zhu Xi, which became the curriculum of Chinese educational system up to the 20th century. \footnote{119} However, this Confucian based curriculum became politicized and oppressive to fulfill imperial agendas, mostly during the Ming and Qing dynasties. \footnote{120} Huters further explains that among Chinese intellectuals, it is considered that the highly educated has the ethical responsibility to influence the welfare of the nation not only intellectually but also morally. \footnote{121}

When the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong, came to power on October 1, 1949, China was struggling from the devastating effects of the Japanese war (1937-1945) and the civil war that followed. The Communist government once in power, immediately implemented political reforms to promote industrial development and the socialization of agriculture, as well as the phasing out of private ownerships. \footnote{122} The economic, social, political and cultural highlights of the CCP under Mao’s leadership (1949-1976) were the “Hundred Flowers Campaign and Anti-Rightist Campaign” (1957), the “Great Leap Forward” (1958-1961), and the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976). The Great Leap Forward in particular attempted to implement agricultural and industrial reforms that would lead the country to economic progress. One of Mao’s main agendas was to impose his communist ideology on China, aiming to penetrate all levels and aspects

\footnote{118} Wang Hui, 10, 11.  
\footnote{119} Joseph Adler, 4, 5.  
\footnote{120} Adler, 5.  
\footnote{121} Wang Hui, 11.  
\footnote{122} Ibid., 13.
of life through the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Consequently, cultural festivities and religious celebrations rooted in the traditional philosophical worldview were regarded as evil elements of the feudal system of the past. Professor Bell argues that these efforts have left present day political China with an overall “moral vacuum.”

After the death of Mao in 1976, China began a process of socialist reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping (1978-1989) through the development of the economy that is still current to this day. Adler insightfully describes that along with economic growth in the 1980s, communist rules and social restrictions were relaxed, while private ownership and travel overseas increased. Furthermore, a new constitution was adopted in 1982 which “recognized freedom of religious belief, although it placed limits on religious practice.”

Overall, amongst the general public of that period, hopes were high for further political reforms until the massacre at Tiananmen Square on June 4th, 1989. Adler cleverly states that “the Tiananmen massacre put the nail in the coffin of Communist ideology among the great majority of people.” Consequently, a renewed interest in Confucianism began in the 1990s after three decades of apparent moral vacuum. However, Bell argues that all along, the CCP’s attempts to eradicate Confucianism failed in many aspects, especially in the Confucian core values and habits such as filial piety. Nevertheless, this revival of the

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123 Daniel A. Bell, 8.
124 Adler, 9.
125 Adler, 9.
126 Ibid., 9.
127 Bell, 10. Bell gives the example that CCP attempted “to replace family ties with ties to the state during the Cultural Revolution” with no avail.
traditional Confucian values has led to the opening of the first Confucius Institute in 2004, and over one hundred campuses have since been opened worldwide.\footnote{Bell, 9.}

Wang Hui claims that in present day postmodern China there is a popular ideology of consumerism and commercialism as the result of market globalization. Furthermore, this marketization in China reflects a dichotomy between capitalism and socialism that has not only been embraced by the general public, but is also considered a political event, as Wang Hui brilliantly describes:

\begin{quote}
In the 1990s Chinese context, the rise of consumerist culture is no longer merely an economic event, it is also a political event because the penetration of such culture into people’s daily lives is carrying out the task of the reproduction of hegemonic ideology. In this process, it is the interaction between popular and official culture that is the main feature of contemporary Chinese ideological hegemony...\footnote{Wang Hui, 171.}
\end{quote}

In addition, Bell affirms that presently in China there is a combination of “economic liberalization” with “tightly political control” which the CCP considers as a necessary transitional stage for reaching the long-term “higher and superior form of socialism.”\footnote{Daniel Bell, 3.} In other words, the Chinese government recognizes the need for scientific and technological development through capitalism in order to reach Karl Marx’s higher form of communism.\footnote{Bell, 4, 5.} Regardless of the accuracy of these analyses, it appears that overall, the economic, social, political, and cultural developments in China are happening at a faster
pace than intellectuals can identify and analyze, particularly due to the uniqueness of these changes in each particular sector or region of the country.

Generally speaking, China is referred to by the international community as a unified homogeneous social economic growing power of the twenty-first century. However, due to its vast size, regional differences, variations, and needs, China is still a very diverse and complex country. For instance, the contrast between the Chinese rural villages with the growing urban centres is monumental as Professor Mobo Gao astutely explains,

_There are many factors contributing to regional differences in China. One primary factor to be taken into consideration is that there are two Chinas: a rural and an urban China. Rural China is not only different from urban China economically, but also politically. What has happened in urban China can never be taken as the same as in rural China, or vice versa._”\(^{132}\)

Professor Yow Cheun Hoe, in his research on the differences between the specific provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, concurs with Gao’s findings that even within the province of Guangdong; the economic, social, political differences can be very significant depending on each county’s proximity to more urban centres and its connections with overseas investments.\(^{133}\) Therefore, as Gao puts it, “any generalization about China as a whole can be argued to be “scientifically” flawed.”\(^{134}\)

Concurrently, Huter remarks that the economic reforms of the early 1980s have done little to advance the deep poverty condition of much of rural China.\(^{135}\) In many rural areas, the traditional system of the ‘clan village’ has remained more or less unchanged.

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\(^{132}\) Mobo Gao, 255.

\(^{133}\) Yow Cheun Hoe, 25.

\(^{134}\) Gao, 255.

\(^{135}\) Wang Hui, 8.
since 1949, and it is still the dominant system for the economy and livelihood of the rural communities, as Gao remarks, “the clan village was their society and anything else was either unreal or beyond their reach.”\textsuperscript{136} A fundamental reason for this phenomena is due to the fact that clan villagers did not have the educational opportunities of the urban “Chinese scholar-gentry class” to be immersed in socialist ideology, rather, they continued in their pragmatic rational ways of life, as Gao clearly states,

\ldots the villagers were not die-hard traditionalists although the burden of tradition still weighs heavily on them. Unlike the urban educated who were once romantic about socialist China, they were not fanatical Maoists. The villagers were rational and pragmatic, although bullied and manipulated from time to time by the local officials.\textsuperscript{137}

In summary, the above presented economic, social, political, and cultural conditions of rural and urban China, along with the influence of traditional philosophical thoughts in tension with socialist ideology, and the globalized marketization with a growing ideology of consumerism and commercialism represent a fundamental piece of the overall contextual puzzle for the understanding of the Chinese Diaspora in my research.

2.3.4. The Venezuelan Economic, Social, Political, and Cultural Context

Having a comprehensive understanding of the Venezuelan context and its impact on the Chinese immigrants’ sense of security and ultimate values is another key piece of the puzzle for the study of their spirituality and spiritual needs of this research group. Since an overview of the Venezuelan context was presented in Chapter One; in this section, I

\textsuperscript{136} Gao, 259, 260. 
\textsuperscript{137} Gao, 256, 257.
have only highlighted the most relevant issues concerning the Venezuelan influence on the Chinese Diaspora.

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, Venezuela is a beautiful tropical country located in South America. Venezuela is rich in natural resources, and a leading exporter of petroleum in the world. It is also the dreamland for Chinese immigrants seeking economic opportunities. Even though Venezuela has the lowest gasoline price worldwide,\(^{138}\) it has one of the highest violent death rates in the world. Due to the escalating crime rate, the constant threat of kidnapping, violence, and overall insecurity; people living in Venezuela are under tremendous amount of pressure and stress. The overall economic, social, cultural, and political climate of Venezuela is increasingly unstable, leading to continuous social unrest as people channel their discontent towards the government through protests and street manifestations in the major cities of the country.\(^{139}\) Furthermore, Professor of Demography Anitza Freittez presents data showing that the number of Venezuelans migrating to other countries is on the rise mainly due to the lack of opportunities and insecurity in this nation.\(^{140}\) Undoubtedly, this context has a striking adverse impact on the outlook of the people living in Venezuela, including the Chinese Diaspora. Generally speaking, the Chinese in Venezuela are slow to integrate into the mainstream society. I suspect there are complex factors for their lack of interest to assimilate into the Venezuelan


culture, possibly due to the unstable social political conditions of the country and the cultural differences between the Chinese and Venezuelan people on the one hand; in addition, the reality of worldwide internet communication and global mobility allows them to keep close ties with their native towns on the other hand, making their integration into the Venezuelan society even less appealing. The majority of the Chinese people in Venezuela are first generation immigrants. Nonetheless, some of them have been in Venezuela for as long as thirty years. However, for the purpose of this research, only the first generation Chinese immigrants are the focus in this study.

Anthropology professor Chee-Beng Tan rightly explains that Chinese living overseas “are generally politically insecure because of their minority status, and so they further seek security in economic success or professional achievement.” Furthermore, Tan argues that political insecurity in turn influence their sense of social and economic security. In many instances, overseas born Chinese are still being treated somewhat alien in their country of birth. Tan’s remarks regarding their feelings of alienation and insecurity rightly describe the general Chinese experience in Venezuela which is intensified by the overall political and social instability. However, in many ways, this context could serve as the catalyst environment for spiritual search in people due to the fact that conflicts often times create imbalance in their sense of security, meaning, and purpose in life.

2.3.5. Reflections on the Contextual Dimension and the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela

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142 Tan, 6.
Overall, the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela resembles Shih’s observations which suggest that Chinese people are very tolerant and open-minded to accept a variety of beliefs as an enriching practice and virtuous attitude.\footnote{Heng-Ching Shih, 9-10.} From my past observations, very few Chinese in Venezuela follow one specific philosophical school; rather, the majority has a ‘give and take’ approach to the different philosophical thoughts. Most of them are ordinary people who are more preoccupied with the utilitarian life and lack a clearly articulated philosophical worldview. Furthermore, they express their values and spirituality in metaphors, concrete ideas, and narratives, without a well defined system of beliefs. As such, the majority of the overseas Chinese in Venezuela appear to have a syncretistic approach to metaphysical realities that harmonizes some of the philosophical teachings and rituals from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

The ultimate values of the Chinese in Venezuela are reflected in their practical concerns of daily life which include their immediate family’s wellbeing and the satisfaction of their daily necessities in the midst of social unrest and insecurity. In their daily pursuits, I perceive a practical anthropocentric orientation towards their immediate ordinary needs of life; however, deep down, when they encounter critical moments, they tend to seek a superior power (ancestors, household deities, or heaven) for help.

Resonant with the Naturalist Neo-Confucian teachings,\footnote{Wing-Tsit Chan, 718.} the Chinese in Venezuela do not reject the value of life; rather, they work very hard and long hours in order to earn as much money as possible, maybe in the hopes of having the material means
to pursue their dreams and desires in life. Providing for their family and fulfilling their family obligations seem to be a high priority in their filial duty. The concept of filial piety seems to occupy a high spiritual value for the Chinese in Venezuela. Filial piety to their parents is expressed in their respect and obedience to them. They try to please and fulfill their parents’ expectations even if they disagree with them and even if they are physically distant from them (parents in China while they live in Venezuela). In some sense, parents are their concrete ultimate reality, parents are their visible source of life, and parents are viewed as the “foundation of life and therefore one’s moral obligation to them should be greater.”  

Ancestral worship is an extension of this filial piety practiced in their spirituality. Filial piety is also extended to siblings and close relatives, therefore, their family connections are very broad and strong. However, a lack of concern for those outside the family circle is also evident.

The lofty Confucian spiritual goal of self-cultivation of the junzi is not so obviously reflected in their daily pursuits possibly due to their challenging social, political, and economic circumstances they encounter in Venezuela. However, the virtue of humanness (ren) as the supreme virtue, as well as sincerity (cheng), righteousness (yi), wisdom (zhi), and honesty (xin), are implicitly and unconsciously embedded in their unspoken values, reflected in their actions and dealings with their family members, relatives, and close friends.

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145 Wing-Tsit Chan, 73.
146 Wing-Tsit Chan, 31.
Buddhist spirituality can be identified in many of the overseas Chinese in Venezuela, especially in the practice of ‘nianfo.’ The concept of grace and devotion to Buddha Amitabha in Pure Land Buddhism is simple and appealing to the Chinese in Venezuela who are less inclined to philosophical pursuits and arduous rituals as mentioned above. Pure Land Buddhism advocates for a much easier way to attain Buddhahood compared to the other Buddhist philosophical schools which require a much vigorous monastic asceticism, meditation, and extensive study of the Buddhist Scriptures. The practical systems of meditation, and the possibility of enlightenment and re-birth in the Pure Land happening anywhere, anytime without rigorous study of scriptures, rituals, or purposeful searching is the type of spirituality that the Chinese in Venezuela can relate to and is evident in some of them. The recitation of ‘namo Amitabha Buddha’ is practiced by some of my Chinese acquaintances in Venezuela.

Among the overseas Chinese in Venezuela, the concept of Heaven ‘tian’ as an image idea is evident although not clearly articulated. There is a sense of transcendence when they refer to heaven ‘tian’ as the ultimate reality which should be revered. Most of them believe in the existence of some supreme being, “the retribution in the other world, and life after death.” Many of the Chinese families that I have visited have small shrines in their household for ancestral worship along with a selection of idols including the Buddha. From a few intimate conversations with my Chinese friends in Venezuela, I have learned that they view tian as higher than their deceased ancestors, and Buddha would be

148 Shih, 38.
149 Shih, 24.
150 Tran Van Doan, Vincent Shen, and George F. Mc Lean, 16.
somewhere in between, although they are not quite sure. This is a good example of their spirituality: they have a sense of some hierarchical powers, but not clearly articulated; therefore they will try to fulfill the ritual obligations for all of them without risking the chance of offending anyone. Syncretism is definitely represented in this spiritual practice which seeks to pay respect to the higher powers and to get their blessings in return.

Daoism appears to be the least represented in their daily pursuits and activities. Classical Daoist spirituality is loftier than Confucian’s spirituality; it relates completely with the cosmos and is completely detached from selfish desires. In contrast, the Chinese immigrants in Venezuela have a common goal which is to seek a better life. A better life for them begins by satisfying their practical and basic needs in life. This goal is clearly reflected in their daily activities as they work long hours, striving to earn more money hoping to improve their living conditions and provide better opportunities for their family. However, the applications of the Hexagrams in Neo-Daoism\textsuperscript{151} serve as a fundamental axiomatic system for decision making in some of the families I have observed. In terms of family planning, investing in business, physical issues, health care, and the like, some Chinese in Venezuela will consult the Hexagrams. This is another example of practical spirituality of the overseas Chinese in Venezuela.

In summary, the overseas Chinese in Venezuela seem to practise a syncretistic spirituality from the traditional Chinese philosophies. They are highly anthropocentric, primarily influenced by Neo-Confucianism in its modern form which is still in continuity with the past. Many of them have a great respect for heaven ‘\textit{tian}’ as the ultimate reality.

\textsuperscript{151} Chan, 316-19.
and devotion to the ancestors expressed in filial piety for parents and the extended family. Pure Land Buddhism is expressed by some in the spiritual practice of ‘nianfo.’ And Neo-Daoism is represented by some in the use of the Hexagrams for decision making. Overall, Confucian philosophical teachings seem to exercise great influence in the spirituality of the Chinese in Venezuela; in particular, Neo-Confucianism. Secondly, Buddhist spirituality can be identified in many of them, especially in the practice of ‘nianfo.’ Daoism appears to be less evident in their day to day expression of spirituality.

2.4. The Christian Dimension of the Chinese Believers at VCAC

Having explored the contextual dimension pertaining to the population of the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela, I turn now specifically to the Christian character of the Chinese believers at VCAC. The believers at VCAC share the common experiences and challenges of the overall overseas Chinese population in Venezuela, such as, having the same Chinese cultural background, having the common experiences of being first generation immigrants from China, encountering common daily challenges in Venezuela. However, as a community of Christians, they belong to a unique symbolic world which includes the self-understanding of being followers of Jesus Christ in such environment. As previously stated, the VCAC began by a united effort of short-term mission teams sent by the Chinese C&MA churches in New York ca.1993.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) began in 1887 in New York by Rev. Albert Benjamin Simpson,\textsuperscript{152} a Canadian Presbyterian pastor who graduated from

\textsuperscript{152} “A.B.Simpson,” The Alliance: Living the Call Together; https://www.cmalliance.org/about/history/simpson (accessed on Mar.10, 2014).
Knox College. His vision was to reach the marginalized people both in New York and around the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{153} The C&MA was born as a movement, as an \textit{alliance} between \textit{Christians} and \textit{Missionaries}. Right from its beginnings, there have been two distinct emphases in the C&MA: the emphasis on the Christian \textit{deeper life} and the emphasis on \textit{missions} – a task that should spring out of the deeper life.\textsuperscript{154} The C&MA in Canada became autonomous from its US partner on January 1, 1981. Together, they have over one thousand C&MA North American missionaries serving in eighty plus countries and territories around the world.\textsuperscript{155} The VCAC is part of this worldwide movement.

2.4.1. The Doctrinal Beliefs of the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church

The VCAC as a worldwide C&MA member church has the same Statement of Faith shared by all the C&MA churches around the world.\textsuperscript{156} Coming from a traditional conservative Protestant denomination, the Scriptures are fundamental to their self-understanding as a Christian community. The fourth point of their Statement of Faith in reference to the Bible states,

\textit{The Old and New Testaments, inerrant as originally given, were verbally inspired by God and are a complete revelation of His will for the salvation of people. They constitute the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).}\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{153}“Then and Now,” The Alliance: Living the Call Together; \url{http://www.cmalliance.org/about/history} (accessed on Mar.10, 2014).
\textsuperscript{154}Gordon Smith, “Conversion and Sanctification in the Christian and Missionary Alliance,” Section 10-Development in the Alliance View of Sanctification Reading 3, 1992, III. 3; \url{https://online.ambrose.edu/alliancestudies/ahtreadings/ahtr_s103.html} (accessed on March 12, 2014).
\textsuperscript{155}“Our World,” The Alliance: Living the Call Together; \url{http://www.cmalliance.org/region} (accessed on March 12, 2014).
\textsuperscript{156}For a Spanish version of the Statement of Faith please refer to: “Alianza Cristiano y Misionera,” ACyM; \url{http://jesus vive.mx.tripod.com/jesus/id12.html} (accessed on March 11, 2014).
From the above quote, it is evident that the Bible is normative for this Christian community with regards to their Christian values and beliefs which are fundamental to the Christian content of their spirituality. Of equal importance is the believers’ belief in the Trinitarian God of the Bible as it is stated clearly in the first point of their Statement of Faith,

*There is one God (Isaiah 44:6; 45:5-6), who is infinitely perfect (Matthew 5:48; Deuteronomy 32:4), existing eternally in the three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19).*

Based on the Genesis Creation account (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7, 21-23), one of the Christian basic assumptions is that every individual in this world is a spiritual being, created in the image of God. As spiritual beings, every individual has spiritual needs, regardless of age, gender, race, educational background, social status, and the like. Genesis 1 and 2 describe human beings as created beings with the spiritual ability to relate to the Creator. The same Creation account gives light into the horizontal aspect of human relationships as it narrates the Creator’s declaration, “it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Gen.2:18).

Furthermore, Genesis 3 explains that human beings became spiritually disconnection with their Creator when they disobeyed His command by eating the forbidden fruit. This is also clearly explained in the fifth point of the C&MA Statement of Faith which states,

*Humankind, originally created in the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:27), fell through disobedience, incurring thereby both physical and spiritual death. All people are born with a sinful nature, are separated from the life of God, and can be saved only through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.8:8; 1 John 2:2).*

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158 Ibid.
159 All Scriptural quotes in this thesis will use the New Revised Standard Version.
In response to this belief on the disconnected human condition, a fundamental distinctive of the C&MA is its emphasis on worldwide missions.

Theologian Karl Barth remarks that mission is God’s intention and initiative, not just human good will and work. This view resonates with John 3:16 which declares that God loved the world so much that He sent his one and only Son into the world. Romans 5:8 reinforces this teaching by highlighting God’s initiative as it affirms that “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” In addition, mission and theology are the church’s work of faith in response to God’s revelation and direction, as Barth emphasizes,

...the church as a place where God reveals himself in such a way, where He embraces human understanding and action in such a way that in His name and service and therefore under His blessing and in His power it is possible and necessary to act and work.161

According to missiologist David Bosch, Barth’s influence in the theology of mission reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Conference (1952) where the concept of “missio Dei first surfaced clearly.”162 The concept of ‘missio Dei’ refers to God’s mission in the world. It affirms that God is the subject and the initiator of mission in bringing reconciliation and restoration to the human spiritual condition through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ‘Missio Dei’ means that God is a missionary God,

missions is an attribute of God. Theologian Jürgen Moltmann is quoted by Bosch explaining that “it is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.” In his infinite love, God the Father sent his Son and the Holy Spirit into the world; which in turn, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has sent the Church into the world to bear witness of the message of God’s Kingdom, the good news of love and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Therefore mission is, first and foremost, God’s coming into the world, and then God calling the church to be his instrument for that mission. The mission of the church is essentially rooted on this profound concept of the Trinitarian ‘Missio Dei:’ God’s mission to the world. The church exists because of its mission, not vice versa; as Bosch remarks, “to participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.” The C&MA resonates with Barth’s concept of God’s mission and its vision is rooted on Jesus Christ’ Great Commission. From its very beginning, the C&MA understood God’s mission to be its special calling and distinctive as Professor George Pardington explains,

To give salvation to the sinner; to make Christ real to the believer; to present Christ in His fullness through the power of the indwelling Holy Ghost as the complete satisfaction of every need of spirit, mind, and body; to give Christ and the riches of His grace to the heathen world:-this is our special calling and distinctive testimony. In a word, the mission and message of the Christian and Missionary Alliance is to

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163 Bosch, 390.
164 Ibid., 390.
165 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.
166 Ibid., 390.
167 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 390.
168 Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8; and John 17:15-18; 20:19-23 are the three biblical accounts proposed by Leslie Newbigin that rightly summarizes the Great Commission. Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader, compiled and introduced by Paul Weston (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 134.
proclaim neglected Scripture truth and to prosecute neglected Christian work both at home and abroad:— “to give the whole Gospel to the whole world.”  

Without a doubt, the believers at VCAC perceive their existence as the fruit of God’s mission through the ministry of the Christian & Missionary Alliance missionary work which in turn is the foundation of their spirituality, namely, a missionary spirituality.

2.4.2. The Gospel Message and the Spiritual Heritage from the Christian and Missionary Alliance

To present a comprehensive discussion on the contents of the Gospel based on the writings of the New Testament is beyond the scope of this research. Biblical scholar James Dunn in his study on the apostle Paul’s theology insightfully proposes that Paul was the first to use the term ‘gospel/euangelion’ in the New Testament writings to sum up the Christian message. Dunn explains that Paul “coined the usage as a new technical term for his own proclamation…to express the rich newness of the Christian message…” Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I will only focus on the message of the Gospel from the apostle Paul’s perspective as presented in the canonical epistles to the Corinthians.

The Gospel according to Paul was focused on Christ crucified (1 Cor.1:23; 2:2) and Christ the risen Lord (1 Cor.15). According to the apostle Paul, Christ died on people’s behalf because of His love for the world; he was made sin for the world as an expiatory sacrifice (2 Cor.5:14, 21). In Paul’s Gospel, the believer confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord


(1 Cor.8:6; 12:3; 2 Cor.4:5). This message offers forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, freedom, renovation (a new creation), incorporation into a new identity (the body of Christ), the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit for service, salvation, bodily resurrection, eternal life, and glorification. This is a message of entering into a relationship with the triune God. Biblical scholar Michael Gorman explains that this relationship consists of “God’s grace manifested in Christ, centered in the cross, confirmed by the resurrection, made effective by the Spirit and experienced in community.”

Through the Gospel, the believer is washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Cor.6:11). As such, believers have been bought at a price in Christ and owe their existence to God (1 Cor.6:19). Regardless of their earthly social status, they are free in Christ, and at the same time slaves of Christ (1 Cor. 7:23). Believers are to honor God with their bodies, and give account to God for their own lives. Consequently, conversion into Christ implies a change of symbolic worlds from previously acquired cultural social patterns to the new life in Christ which is based on the story of Christ Jesus’ life, death, crucifixion, and resurrection. This change of symbolic world requires constant reflection and conscious determination for choosing new ways of life. Gorman rightly argues that Paul’s Gospel “was announcing a new, divinely established political order… For both Paul and Jesus the good news is a divine intervention that brings salvation by shaking the religious, political, and even cosmic status quo.”

Therefore, in Paul’s spirituality, the Gospel is to be applied and lived out with no favoritism or double standards.

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172 Gorman, 109.
among the believers, regardless of their social status and level of influence. Paul’s spirituality challenges all established conventions with regards to class, status, race, and gender, *inter alia*; the Gospel evaluates and demands all practices to be aligned with the requirements of being a member of the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the source of the spiritual life that Paul proposes; without the Spirit of God, it is impossible to live out the kind of spirituality that is reflected in Paul’s life and teachings (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12-14; 2 Cor.1:21, 22). The Spirit is the representative of God’s presence in each believer’s life, because the Spirit indwells in the individual believer making that person holy; therefore the individual’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, a reason for honoring God, even with one’s own body (1Cor.6:19-20). Furthermore, the Spirit is also the indwelling of God’s presence in the collective sense. Paul told the Corinthian believers that they (collectively) are God’s temple, sacred where the Spirit lives; therefore, the believers are to watch for one another’s wellbeing, instead of harming the church (1 Cor.3:16-17). Likewise, the church is the body of Christ. Indeed, this is an organic image of the essence of the church, and a fundamental basis for its unity and love for one another which is reflected in Paul’s spirituality. Believers are all interconnected, interrelated, and strongly bonded in the Spirit of God. Therefore, the believers’ responsibility and accountability towards the members of the church have an ontological basis which is defined by the very indwelling of the Spirit of God.

The teachings of the C&MA resonate with Paul’s spirituality which is a pro-active response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ’s life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The C&MA emphasizes the full surrender of the self to the lordship of Christ in holy living
through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for active service. Professor Gordon T. Smith eloquently explains the C&MA spiritual heritage as follows,

*Alliance theology emphasizes more fully the positive presence of Christ in our lives rather than viewing the ministry of the Spirit in negative terms as subduing the flesh. Further, spirituality is an active choice of surrender to the word and will of God; this dimension is at the heart of Simpson's notion of sanctification.*

Smith also explains that the C&MA has a Christ-centered spirituality, as he states that it is Christ the “one who by His Spirit enables us to know His life and empowers us to be His servants.”

For the believers at VCAC this is a slow life process of knowing God’s grace, responding to the Spirit’s prompting, and allowing God’s Spirit to transform them by the Word of Christ.

**2.4.3. The Christian Practice of the Believers at VCAC**

The congregation at VCAC is composed of representatives from every social background of the overseas Chinese community in Venezuela as well as some Venezuelans. Those who have been longer in the country are generally speaking wealthier because they have acquired some considerable wealth through commercial activities. The believers who are better established economically are also those who are more involved in the service of the congregation and holding leadership positions. I observe that their leadership positions are not the result of their economic status; rather, their economic status is a reflection of their overall natural abilities, resourcefulness, hard work, and creativity for work and to “make money.” These characteristics in turn are reflected in their church

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173 Gordon Smith, III.2.
174 Smith, III.3.
involvement when they become believers. I consider that overall the Chinese believers in Valencia are modest people who prefer to “mind their own business.” Most of them have only completed primary school. The church is always in need of more Children’s workers or Bible study leaders. I perceive that very few of them (if any) have a superiority complex; however, many of them respond well to suggestions, positive advice and encouragement. Paul’s emphasis on agape love is fundamental for the bonding of the believers in this congregation. They surely live out the encouragement and grace to accept each other’s faults and limitations, and affirm each other’s value which is derived from being a member of the body of Christ. Furthermore, I have been impressed more than once to see many of the believers “flourish” in many spiritual gifts when they are willing to try and receive training. Their overall loving acceptance of each other, regardless of their social status, is a practical expression of their spirituality that has been a powerful witness to outsiders who long to become a part of a loving and accepting community.

Living as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, in deeds and words, in a hostile environment such as Venezuela requires great commitment to the teachings of the Gospel, life surrender and self-sacrifice. This is the result of the believers’ deep conviction that the Biblical teachings are normative for their lives and of their trust in the sovereignty of God. One example of these challenges is the unfair competition in the business realm with stolen merchandise. Many non-Christian merchants would buy and sell stolen merchandise at a much lower cost, while some Christians choose to be in a disadvantageous position and refrain from trading these products out of their Christian ethical principles.
As I have previously mentioned, the Valencia Chinese Alliance church is composed of first generation believers whose previous symbolic world includes ancestral worship and food associated with worship of household deities. The majority of the Chinese believers in Venezuela come from this background. A main obstacle for Chinese people to accept the Gospel is the teaching of monotheism which forbids the worship of other gods, idols, or ancestors. The Chinese believers in Venezuela face the challenge of relating to their unbelieving parents or close relatives during Chinese festivities, such as Chinese New Year, when ancestral worship is part of the rituals. How should they behave? Should they bow in front of the household shrines where ancestral worship is celebrated? Should they eat the chicken, the roast pig, or the oranges that have been presented to the ancestors during the worship ceremony? In order to convert from a syncretistic religious system to the Gospel, the believers at VCAC need to undergo some drastic personal experience of the Holy Spirit’s work with significant theological and contextual interaction and reflection. A change of life’s ultimate values takes place as the result of surrendering one’s life to the Lordship of Christ from previous deities. Often times their experience is related with answered prayers for a practical need and the sense of peace as the result of trusting in God’s sovereign work.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, as the essential pieces of a puzzle, the three fundamental theoretical dimensions of spirituality have been presented to form the theoretical framework that has guided my action-in-ministry research for the understanding of the spiritual needs of the new believers at the Valencia CAC in Venezuela. These three theoretical dimensions are,
first, the construct of spirituality and spiritual needs from the Social Sciences and Religion; second, the cultural and contextual dimensions of the Chinese Community in Venezuela arising from their traditional Chinese philosophical pragmatic and syncretistic mindset, their contemporary communist background, and the Venezuelan social-political-economical context; and third, the Christian dimension rooted on their C&MA tradition and the message of the Gospel.

I will now proceed to present the qualitative research methodology design that was employed to address my research question in the following chapter.
Chapter Three
Research Methodology and Design

3.1. Introduction

Education Psychology Professor John Creswell in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*\(^{175}\) presents five qualitative approaches to inquiry which are: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies.\(^{176}\) These are approaches “with systematic procedures for inquiry”\(^{177}\) that require “rigorous data collection and analysis methods.”\(^{178}\) Moreover, Religious Education Professor William Myers presents three approaches to case study research methodology called “the quantitative research method,” “the ethnographic research method,” and “the pro-active research method.”\(^{179}\) The differences between the above mentioned approaches are based on the foci of the researcher’s central purpose of study.

As stated in Chapter One, my research question for this thesis is: **What are the spiritual needs of the adult new believers at Valencia Chinese Alliance Church (VCAC) in Venezuela emerging from their unique cultural background and social context?** In addition, within the theoretical framework of this research, *spiritual needs refer to the deep heartfelt yearnings of the individual viewed from the spiritual perspective which relates*


\(^{176}\) Creswell, 53.

\(^{177}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 9.

to that which is perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful, including the vertical aspects of the sacred or transcendent, and the horizontal aspects of relationships for inclusion and distinctness. The task of this chapter is to present the qualitative research methodology design employed which was considered to be the most appropriate one for answering this research question.

3.2. Qualitative Research Methodology and Design: A Case Study

Since the intent of this research is to investigate the spiritual needs of a particular group of Chinese believers living in Venezuela, I have conducted a case study using the qualitative “pro-active research method” as described by Professor Myers. In general terms, Creswell explains that a case study research involves the investigation of a specific issue or problem within a “bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time.”\(^{(181)}\) Applied to this thesis, my case study research is the in-depth study of an issue or problem namely, ‘the spiritual needs,’ of a bounded system identified as the new believers at VCAC. Furthermore, Myers remarks that in the case study using the qualitative pro-active research method, “narrative descriptions (case study) emerge in which researcher and participants are named as proactive participants in the study.”\(^{(182)}\) In other words, in the ‘pro-active research method’ of a case study, the participants as well as the researcher are together proactive sources of the data collected. Therefore, data is collected from three main sources: the participants, the setting, and the “subjective material generated by the researcher,”\(^{(183)}\) primarily through “observation, interviewing, journaling,

\(^{(181)}\) Creswell, 73.  
\(^{(182)}\) Myers, 25.  
\(^{(183)}\) Ibid., 26.
and the use of documents.” Consequently, the **qualitative case study using the proactive research method** was the overall methodology employed throughout the Action-in-Ministry process for the investigation of my research question.

### 3.2.1. Recruitment of Research Participants

According to Psychology Scholar Donald Polkinghorne, the number of research subjects needed to generate substantial data in the phenomenological study varies considerably from one research to another. In some cases, one participant was sufficient, while in other cases, researchers collected data from over three hundred individuals. Creswell suggests that five to twenty-five is a recommended size for interviews. Sociology Professor Michael Patton argues that one of the fundamental characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm as opposed to the quantitative research paradigm, is that the qualitative methodology is committed to “getting close to the people being studied through attention to the minutia of daily life, through physical proximity over a period of time,” as well as reporting what has been observed and quoting the participants’ experiences “in their own terms.” The need for this kind of in-depth analysis of each participant’s lived experiences of spiritual needs, as opposed to a quantitative presentation of statistical analysis, prompted me to decide on collecting data from a relatively small sample of eight participants for practical reasons; primarily due to the fact that this was a

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184 Ibid., 25.
186 Creswell, 121.
case study of a particular group bounded in a specific context which required lengthy in-depth open-ended data collection and detailed content analysis of the data collected.

I used the criterion sampling type,\textsuperscript{188} the criterion being that all participants have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon of spiritual needs and are willing to share their experiences. In order to obtain “a full range of variation in the set of descriptions” of spiritual needs as suggested by Polkinghorne,\textsuperscript{189} my research sample included males and females, as well as younger adults and older participants. Only people eighteen years of age and older were considered as adults qualifying to participate. Furthermore, I considered ‘new believers’ all those who have taken the step of baptism within the last five years at the time of the actual interviews. The reason for limiting this research to new believers as opposed to believers with more time in the faith is due to my assumption that they are beginners in their Christian journey and requiring greater spiritual guidance.

The participants were taken from my own existing network of contacts saved from my past service in the congregation as well as updated information from informal conversations with individual church members and church bulletins.\textsuperscript{190} I wrote down the names of those qualifying for this research on pieces of papers and drew eight names randomly from this group. All the participants could only communicate in Cantonese (except for one of them who was also fluent in Spanish); therefore, all the interview documents and consent letters were translated from English into Chinese for their

\textsuperscript{188} Creswell, 128.
\textsuperscript{189} Polkinghorne, 48.
\textsuperscript{190} The church leadership sends out their weekly bulletins to all previous members of the congregation via electronic mail in an effort to maintain close ties with all the brothers and sisters who have moved away from Venezuela. I have been receiving their weekly bulletins via emails since I left the church in 2010.
information.\textsuperscript{191} I had the assistance of a missionary colleague who translated the English version of the documents into the Chinese language.

### 3.2.2. Data Collection

As described above, data was collected from three sources: the participants, the setting, and the subjective field observations from the researcher. For the collection of data from the participants, I have followed the ‘transcendental or psychological phenomenological’ approach of inquiry developed by Psychology Scholar Clark Moustakas, which uses in-depth one-on-one open-ended interviews.\textsuperscript{192} Writings addressing this methodology include those from “Dukes (1984), Tesch (1990), Giorgi (1985, 1994), Polkinghorne (1989), and more recently, Moustakas (1994).”\textsuperscript{193} Professor Creswell explains that this approach focuses on “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{194} Moustakas clarifies that transcendental phenomenology focuses on the activity of the individual’s consciousness; the emphasis is on “the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time.”\textsuperscript{195} Therefore, this approach of data collection allowed my participants to provide fresh, naïve, and open narrative descriptions of their experiences of spiritual needs.\textsuperscript{196} The individual interviews were conducted in the location of each participant’s choice.

\textsuperscript{191} Please refer to Appendices A,B,C for a sample of these documents.
\textsuperscript{193} Creswell, 60.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{195} Clark Moustakas, 34.
\textsuperscript{196} Polkinghorne, 46.
In terms of **data collection from the setting**, I took field notes from public meetings such as worship gatherings and the participants’ daily activity settings such as their homes and working environment.\(^{197}\) For field note-taking, as suggested by Myers, I endeavored to record in detail my observations following each meeting or visitation involving each participant.\(^{198}\) I also collected data from the church weekly bulletins and announcements board.

As the researcher, I **participated in the data collection by recording my subjective field observations** for expressions of spiritual needs as well as personal feelings, thoughts, and insights kept in a personal dated journal or ‘memoing,’\(^{199}\) following each encounter with the participants.

### 3.2.3. Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data collected from the participants, I began by carefully and thoroughly studying the contents of the data collected from each individual participant to “highlight “significant statements,”” sentences or quotes that could provide an understanding of how and in what circumstances the participants experienced the phenomenon.\(^{200}\) Moustakas calls this step **horizontalization or horizontalizing the data**, which consists of “regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value.”\(^{201}\) From the highlighted significant statements, I developed “the

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\(^{197}\) I was privileged to have been invited into their homes and in more than one occasion, share a meal or two with each participant and their family members during the weeks I spent in Venezuela collecting data. These interactions were windows of opportunities to acquire a deeper understanding of the participants’ family life dynamics which further enlightened my understanding of their heartfelt yearnings.

\(^{198}\) Myers, 38.

\(^{199}\) Myers, 63–66. Creswell insightfully calls this process ‘memoing,’ 239.

\(^{200}\) Creswell, 61.

\(^{201}\) Moustakas, 118.
meaning units or invariant horizons”\textsuperscript{202} also called “clusters of meaning”\textsuperscript{203} which are significant statements “clustered into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements”\textsuperscript{204} (italics the author’s). I used these significant statements and themes to write a “description of what the participants experienced (textural description)”\textsuperscript{205} and a “description of the context or setting that influenced how”\textsuperscript{206} (italics the author’s) they experienced the phenomenon (structural description). From these descriptions, I obtained a “composite description that represents the “essence” of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or essence)”\textsuperscript{207} (italics the author’s).

The data collected from the setting was documented in written form and followed Myers’ proposed methodology of analysis with the intent to “provide a continuous historic record of what took place”\textsuperscript{208} and to generate “issues or themes with theoretical implications”\textsuperscript{209} for the study of the spiritual needs of my research group. I also collected data from documents such as their Sunday worship material\textsuperscript{210} for the purpose of using this information to “challenge or to complement those themes that were emerging from interviews, field observations, and other research tools.”\textsuperscript{211}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{202} Moustakas, 118, 122. \\
\textsuperscript{203} Creswell, 235. \\
\textsuperscript{204} Moustakas, 118. \\
\textsuperscript{205} Creswell, 61. \\
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 62. \\
\textsuperscript{208} Myers, 41. \\
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 41. \\
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 43-44. \\
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 46. 
\end{flushleft}
The data collected from the researcher’s participation was analyzed by comparing my written journal entries with the data collected from the setting and the participants, I was able to identify “the emergence of certain ideas and themes” relevant to the study of the spiritual needs of the participants which was integrated into the overall findings from the data collected from the participants’ interviews and the setting.

Through a systematic process of listening and re-listening each recorded interview, reading and re-reading each verbatim transcript, examining line by line each transcript, identifying and listing all the significant statements, initial open coding the statements to form clusters of meanings, classifying them into emerging themes, and comparing them with the data collected from the setting and my subjective field observations exhaustively; a narrative description of the major themes and sub themes of spiritual needs of the participants and their intricate inter relationships with each other and their context was obtained. The NVivo qualitative research data analysis software was partially utilized for the management of the coded data, especially during the latter stages of identifying and examining the emerging overarching themes and sub-themes related to the textural and structural description of the phenomenon.

### 3.3. Action-in-Ministry

The Action-in-Ministry was conducted in Valencia, Venezuela. The VCAC had been informed of my theological studies since I began the Doctor of Ministry program at Toronto School of Theology in 2009. Even though I concluded my missionary service in

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212 Ibid., 65.
Venezuela in 2010, I have kept the leadership of the church informed of the progress of my studies and the research project requirements. As a matter of fact, I have been privileged to have the prayer support from many of them.

Having completed all the requirements for and obtained the approval of my Thesis Proposal by the DMin Thesis Proposal Committee on April 1st, 2013; a research protocol was submitted to the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board office to seek the approval of this research project. The Ethics Approval for my research protocol was granted by the REB on September 13th, 2013. By then, I had already scheduled a three weeks trip to Valencia departing on September 13th, 2013. Therefore, I was able to begin the Action-in-Ministry immediately after the REB’s approval.

The Board of Deacons is the official governing body of the VCAC. Even though there are no stated legal requirements for seeking formal consent from this governing body for the implementation of my research, I invited the Board of Deacons to be my direct accountability mechanism during the process of data collection for the time that I was in Valencia, Venezuela. I presented the Board of Deacons with the informed letter of consent with the Chinese translation on the second day of my arrival in Valencia. As they were already aware of the requirements for my research study through previous informal conversations, a verbal consent was granted soon thereafter, followed by their presentation of the formal signed document a week later.

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214 Please refer to Appendix-D for a copy of the “DMin Thesis Proposal Approval Form.”
215 Please refer to Appendix-E for a copy of the REB’s approval letter.
216 I was blessed that the REB’s approval of my research was granted right on time for me to begin the Action-in-Ministry during that year’s vacation trip (September 13th-29th, 2013) which I had already scheduled.
217 Please refer to the Appendix-C for a copy of the “Informed Letter of Consent for the Board of Deacons of Valencia Chinese Alliance Church.”
Immediately after receiving the verbal consent from the Board of Deacons of the church, I proceeded to contact the eight participants individually and met with each one of them in an informal setting to present the invitation and the informed letter of consent with the Chinese version of the document to them. I read over the Chinese translation of the letter of consent with each participant and asked them whether they had any questions regarding the letter and my research project. As stated in the letter, I explained to them the purpose of this research project and reassured them that the Board of Deacons was informed of this study, but that their names would not be disclosed, that they could turn to them in the event of any discomfort caused by this study or to report any concerns with regards to my study. Furthermore, they were assured that all data collected would be kept confidential and securely stored, that they could withdraw from this study at anytime with no questions asked. I also explained to them that once I have finished documenting the interviews, they would receive a copy of the interview for their review, for their feedback and keepsake. There was no need for them to sign the consent letter as this would have been perceived as distrust in their cultural setting. I waited an average of five to seven days’ for the participants to consider this invitation, at the end of which they all expressed their willingness to participate without further concerns and granted me permission for audio recording the interviews. Then I proceeded to conduct the first round of interviews which took place from September 21st to 25th, 2013. I also collected data through field notes taking, as well as documented my own insights, thoughts, feelings, and comments during my three weeks’ time in Venezuela.

218 Please refer to Appendix-A for the “Informed Letter of Consent for the Research Participant.”
The data collected from the participants were in-depth open-ended one-on-one interviews with the purpose of inviting each participant narrate their own lived experiences of spiritual needs as related to significance, purpose, ultimate realities, and underlying values. I offered each participant to choose the place for the interviews. Some chose to have it inside their own dwellings, some in the front yard of their apartments, some chose to have it in a coffee shop, some chose to have it in my place (where I was staying), some chose to have it inside the church, and most of them did not have a preference allowing me to choose any of the locations stated above. All of the interviews were conducted in private individual conversations except for one elderly couple who chose to have their interviews together. All of the participants were very opened, willing and candid to share their experiences. I decided not to pursue the focus group interviews with the other participants due to the close connection these participants had with each other in order to further honor their privacy.

From my previous interview experiences with some Chinese friends in this community during the time of my missionary service many years ago, I have come to comprehend that the overseas Chinese in Venezuela is not a very self reflective cultural group. Generally speaking, they are not used to articulating or consciously reflecting on their own needs and feelings. And spirituality is not something that is generally discussed or affirmed as relevant or important because of its immaterial nature. Furthermore, I expected that inviting them to identify and describe their “lived experiences of deep heartfelt yearning related to the ultimate, significant, truthful and purposeful” could be a real challenge. Therefore, in order to minimize this challenge, I described the phenomenon
in familiar terms by first giving examples of physical needs such as food, clothing, and shelter; and then giving examples of immaterial needs such as the need for love and friendship; then moving to higher levels of heartfelt yearnings such as meaning, purpose and fulfillment in life.

In order to help the participants ‘warm up’ and get positioned in the interviews, I began each interview with a few background questions such as: “Can you tell me a little bit about yourself such as: where are you from, how long have you been in Venezuela and what is your occupation? What motivated you to move to Venezuela from China?” 

The interviews were recorded with a portable digital audio recorder. They were conducted and audio recorded in Cantonese (with some Spanish and En-ping dialect). I invited the assistance of two proficient bi-lingual Chinese Christian trusted friends in Canada (who do not know the participants to protect their identity) to transcribe the Chinese audio recorded interviews into verbatim scripts. They were informed of the confidential nature of these recordings and promised to keep all the information obtained through the interviews absolutely to themselves and delete any copies of the information after their job was completed. I transcribed the Spanish audio recorded interview of one of the participants and also translated all the recorded interviews into English.

I was able to conduct a second round of one-on-one meetings with all the participants during the month of May 2014, handing them in person the recorded

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219 For the complete interview protocol please refer to Appendix-B.
220 Originally, I had in mind three people to help with the verbatim transcription of the interviews, however, as there were not as many interviews as I thought was necessary, I decided to involve only two people for this job, mainly due the issue of confidentiality in mind.
221 I was blessed to have been able to plan my 2014 yearly holidays again in Venezuela and to conduct the follow-up meetings with the participants and get their feedback on the previous interviews from May 8th to
interviews, giving them some days to review their interviews, and asking them individually for further clarification from their first interviews. I met in person with seven of the participants for the second round of meetings, and met with one participant over the telephone due to his busy work schedule. More data was collected and written down immediately after each conversation. I was also able to further collect new data from the setting and document new insights and observations from this second visit.

3.4. Concerning My Role as the Researcher

As indicated in previous chapters, I have served as the missionary pastor of the VCAC from September 1997 to July 2010. During those years of missionary service, at one point or another, I have spiritually mentored or related to the participants on a personal level, especially during the last years of my service in Venezuela. However, my official responsibilities as well as authority over the decision making process of this congregation concluded more than three years ago, when I left the church in 2010. This means that I had officially terminated my service in this church by the time I began the Action-in-Ministry process, while keeping a friendly and respectful ‘long-distance’ relationship with this congregation and the leadership of the church, represented by the Board of Deacons.

I was aware that some participants might have linked my past pastoral role to my on-site researcher’s role (during the process of data collection) leading them to perceive a power differential relationship which in turn, could limit their freedom to decline from my invitation to the study or express their experiences of spiritual needs freely during the interview. However, by the same token, I was also aware that respect, trust and leadership

28th, 2014.
authority arising from our relationship could have only been earned and maintained when they were reciprocated with equal respect and trust; as such, nothing was taken for granted during this process. Therefore, I endeavored to reassure to the participants of my research intentions when I presented to each one of them the invitation to this study during the first meeting. I emphasized that there were no ‘right or wrong answers’ to their expressions of spiritual needs and clearly explained that the decision to participate in this study or not was voluntary and confidential as outlined in the “Informed Letter of Consent,”222 which was presented to each one of them during this meeting. In addition, as stated in the informed letter, they could request the Board of Deacons to advocate for them in the event of any suspicion of any questionable practice related to my research due to the fact that the Board of Deacons was invited to be the gatekeeper for the Action-in-Ministry process. I also reassured them that their decision to participate or not would have no bearing on their relationship with the church or access to its services. Furthermore, I emphasized that the data collected would be kept confidential and protected for as long as it was necessary until the completion of this study, as well as, they could freely withdraw from this research study at anytime, as stated in the informed consent letter, with no questions asked.

3.5. Validity Check

It is fundamental that the findings of this research reflect an accurate description of the lived experiences of the participants’ spiritual needs in order to be considered a valid, trusted, and valuable contribution for a better understanding of this particular people’s group; as Polkinghorne cleverly remarks that an idea has to be “well-grounded and well-

222 Please refer to Appendix-A for the “Informed Letter of Consent for the Research Participant.”
supported” in order to gain someone’s “confidence in it.”

Therefore, in my efforts to increase the accuracy of the data processing process and the validity of the reports to reflect the expressions of spiritual needs of the participants; I set some validation strategies throughout this investigative process.

In order to ascertain the accuracy of the verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews and the translation of the interviews, I invited the assistance of two English speaking Chinese Christian trusted friends who are proficient in both languages to transcribe the scripts and later on, to check my English translation of the interviews for accuracy. Furthermore, during the process of data collection and analysis, I gave the respective copy of the interview to each participant and solicited their reviews so “that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account,” as Creswell remarks.

I asked the participants to review their interviews and participate in providing further feedbacks to my analysis and processing of the information collected incumbent to their input, always being careful of not creating ethical issues or breaking confidentiality with the information from other participants.

Following Colaizzi’s procedural guidelines for data analysis, I have repeated the steps of data analysis from extracting significant statements to formulating clusters of

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223 Polkinghorne, 57.
224 One of the translators was also a descendant from the En-ping region who grew up listening to this dialect at home.
225 Creswell, 208.
226 Paul F. Colaizzi, “Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Views It.” In Existential Phenomenological
themes, to re-examining the original interviews in order to increase the accuracy and validity of the overarching themes to ensure that they indeed reflect the original meaning of the interview protocols expressed by each participant.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a detailed description of the qualitative pro-active case study research methodology and design by which my Action-in-Ministry was conducted to investigate the spiritual needs of the new believers at VCAC. In addition, I have outlined the necessary steps taken to recruit my research participants, indicated the three sources for data collection, and highlighted the procedure for processing and analyzing the data collected. In particular, Moustakas’ qualitative phenomenological research methodology was used to investigate the participants’ lived experiences of spiritual needs.

Having laid out the foundational theoretical frameworks operative in this study in Chapter Two, and presented the research methodology employed for this research in this chapter; I will continue onto Chapter Four to present a report of the data collected, the analysis of the data, and the interpretation of the results arising from this analysis.
Chapter Four

Reporting on the Research

4.1. Introduction

Beyond the repetitive and meticulous analysis of the hard copies and soft copies of pages and pages of words, sounds, and images; were remarkable stories of profound human longings and heartfelt yearnings filled with life changing intense emotions and struggles, which I was given the privilege to share with during this enlightening journey of understanding the spiritual needs of the participants of this research. Therefore, in this chapter, I have endeavored to present a description of the analysis of the data collected and an interpretation of the results of the Action-in-Ministry process.

Each participant received the interview protocol questionnaire\(^{227}\) a few days prior to their interview with the intention of giving them some time to reflect on the questions and prepare for the interview. The first interview with each participant lasted anywhere from one to two hours in length. The data collected from these interviews amounts to nearly four hundred minutes of audio recorded material and a total of over one hundred pages of English translated verbatim scripts.

4.2. Meet the Participants

Of the eight participants, four are female and four are male. The youngest female participant was in the age range of eighteen to thirty years old and the oldest female participant was near the age of retirement. Likewise, the youngest male participant was in

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\(^{227}\) Please refer to Appendix-B for a copy of the interview questionnaire.
the age range of eighteen to thirty years old and the oldest male participant was passed the age of retirement. The median age of the female participants was forty-four years of age, and the median age of the male participants was forty-five years of age. Five of the participants were married and three of them were single. All of them are first generation Christians who have made a profession of their Christian faith and have received the ordinance of baptism within the last five years at the time of the first round of interviews. I must mention that to my surprise, the participants of this research study were evenly spread out to represent all the age groups listed in the interview protocol, as well as having male and female representation for each age group.

In terms of ethnic background, all of them were born in China; five of them were born in or near the town of En-Ping, and three were born in Hong Kong with En-Ping ancestry ties. They all immigrated to Venezuela several years ago. Some of them have lived in Venezuela for over 30 years, and the most recent immigrant amongst the participants has been in Venezuelan for over seven years. In terms of occupation, all of them were self-employed small business owners in either the field of food services, or retail business; except for one, who was a full-time student. As mentioned in previous chapters, all of the participants of this research came from a less privileged socio-economical Chinese family background. Two of the participants moved to Venezuela before completing their secondary education, and have not pursued any further studies in Venezuela. One participant had the chance to study for a few years upon arrival in Venezuela; and one participant is still a full-time student in Venezuela.
In terms of religious experiences, all of the participants grew up in the Chinese ancestral worship tradition where household deity worship and incense burning offered to their deceased ancestors were familiar practices. Seven people out of the eight participants have never ‘opened’ a Bible or have had the Christian faith explained to them prior to their involvement at the VCAC. Interestingly, the one exception studied in a Catholic school during her childhood years. And only two of the participants have had some kind of church experience back in Hong Kong during their formative years. All of the participants came to befriend the Gospel and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of the VCAC.

The female participants were generally speaking more descriptive of their experiences and appeared to have a greater awareness of their emotions. They seemed to be more skillful in articulating their inner feelings and thoughts. In contrast, the male participants were generally speaking more concise in narrating their experiences. Nevertheless, all the participants shared their experiences, thoughts and feelings with great openness during the interviews. I felt an extraordinary sense of connection to these people as I listened and reflected on their stories. In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant, special pseudonyms have been assigned to each one of them and only personal information that I considered useful and relevant to explain and validate the findings of the research has been presented in this document. In several narratives, I have chosen not to mention the pseudonym of the participant due to the personal nature of the information quoted to further protect their identity. The following table presents a general description of each participant:
Table 1: General Description of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Years in Venezuela</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-45 yrs old</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>13 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-30 yrs old</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>7 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46-60 yrs old</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>19 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-30 yrs old</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46-60 yrs old</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>13 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-45 yrs old</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>13 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61 and older</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Over 30 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61 and older</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Over 30 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Report on the Analysis of the Data

In the initial open coding of the interviews, over two hundred significant statements were identified and coded accordingly. Layers of expressions of spiritual needs were unfolded throughout this process. On the superficial level, six of the eight participants
expressed one common outstanding pursuit they had or still have in life which was to make money and become very wealthy. The other two participants were younger and were hoping to pursue careers of their dreams, not necessarily connected with the pursuit of accumulating large amounts of money. On the surface, these pursuits did not appear to relate directly with the concept of spiritual needs as presented in Chapter Two; however, as I dug deeper and looked more intently into their stories, searching for “invariant horizons or meaning units,” it became apparent that their pursuit of money or ideal careers were evidently the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of a much larger world of deep heartfelt longings or spiritual needs. Corroborated with the field notes taken during the process of data collection, indeed, their money making activities or studies occupied almost all of their waking hours, energy and dedication.

Apart from their making money activities or pursuing a meaningful career, the interviews revealed two other significant subjects occupying the participants’ attention; these were activities related to their immediate families, and activities related to their Christian faith and church involvement. Money, family, and faith related activities provided important clues for understanding the participants’ stories of deepest heartfelt longings. In addition, the social, political, and economical instability of their living environment which was presented in previous chapters, had a tremendous impact on their heartfelt yearnings as well. Consequently, these four powerful factors were seemingly the canopy under which 48 meaning units or invariant horizons were identified and clustered.

\[228\] Moustakas, 122.
into 10 themes of spiritual needs perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful.

The following is the list of these identified themes:\(^229\)

- **A Better and Brighter Future**  
  (I.e., to have a better life, to control my own future)
- **Self Worth**  
  (I.e., to prove myself, be treated as equals, to be respected)
- **Happiness and Fulfillment**  
  (I.e., to be content, to experience change in life)
- **Receive Genuine Care and Unconditional Love**  
  (I.e., to find someone fill my emptiness, to have someone to depend and lean on)
- **Personal and Familial Wellbeing**  
  (I.e., to have peace, safety, and protection, to experience harmony in the family)
- **Fulfilling Chinese Traditional Duties**  
  (I.e., to care for and repay my parents, to honor the deceased ancestors, to provide for the extended family)
- **Seeking the Ultimate or Divine for Meaning and Purpose**  
  (I.e., seeking the thing that is deep in my heart, to find answers to the problem of evil in the world)
- **Seeking a Tutelary God**  
  (I.e., to have God’s protection and guidance, to count with God’s help and provision)
- **Reaching Out to Others**  
  (I.e., to do something to change the world, to help people in practical ways)
- **Pleasing and Serving the Lord**  
  (I.e., to do good deeds and be useful to God, to follow and obey God’s word)

These themes represent the salient deep heartfelt yearnings of the participants identified in the analysis of the data collected, viewed from the spiritual perspective which relates to that which is perceived as ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful, including the vertical aspects of the sacred or transcendent, and the horizontal aspects of relationships.

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\(^229\) For the complete list of invariant horizons and themes please refer to Appendix – F.
for inclusion and distinctness. I will now proceed to unpack the layers of meaning and experiences embedded in each of the themes listed above.

4.3.1 A Better and Brighter Future

As mentioned above, one of the prominent expressed pursuits of the participants was to make money or pursue their ideal career. However, underneath these seemingly mundane dreams, the participants expressed five areas of heartfelt yearnings that were deeply implanted in their view of money (and a good career): the ability to become independent and find their own means to make a living, become wealthy, have better opportunities in life, to be able to do the things they like, to have a better future free of worries, and to be in control and manipulate their own future or fate. These longings represent the heartfelt yearning for a better and brighter future which was the participants’ common reason for migrating to Venezuela in the first place, except for the two youngest participants who were too young to choose back then. The latter moved to Venezuela following their parents’ wishes, which was also to seek better opportunities in life.

Carlos vividly explains his reason for moving to Venezuela as follows, “...it is because my family is very poor... my dream was... I mean... hoped like the other people, to have a better life... making money... for the needs of life, I sailed across the ocean to Venezuela...” Frank simply explained that he did not have any specific pursuit in life back then, it was only money, as he remarked, “back then, I did not have any specific pursuit in life... I mean, I wanted to make money... when you have money; you have what you need to make your life smoother...” Eva goes further to claim that all the Chinese have this intention by moving abroad, as she cleverly asserted, “I mean... their whole purpose of
going abroad is for money, whoever comes out of China wants to make more money... we are all like this, I myself... I was so poor; I wanted to make more money too…”

Furthermore, Amy explained her view of money back in the days when she traveled to Venezuela, “I can earn more money... so that my future can be better... I mean, I thought back then that money could change a person’s fate (命運)... change the fate of a person’s family...” The two younger participants were still trying to figure out their future. They were not quite sure what career path to take. Nevertheless, they seemed very hopeful and had big dreams for a better and brighter future while expressing their worries or apprehension for the possible hurdles ahead, as Doris eagerly said, “... so, why can’t I continue fighting, having a purpose in life, a goal, a career... (The Lord) has made me understand that life is not easy... that you have to fight in life...”

I must clarify that not all participants had the same degree of desire for becoming wealthy. Furthermore, individual participants had different standards for wealth and comfort, as Gina openly shared,

...honestly, money... I really like it... but sometimes I consider that, I mean, we don’t have to be like the other people who work so hard... pursue it with such intensity... I am the kind of person who comparatively... if I have a little bit (I) am easy to be satisfied... of course, it is important that we will not have to endure hunger... or have to abstain from using something... as long as I feel lucky that I can have a house to live...

Likewise, Henry’s perspective was similar to Gina’s, as he reflected, “... well, I can be satisfied very easily in life... as long as you can solve your livelihood... then, this is ok...”

However, regardless of their standard of wealth, they all longed for a better future, a comfortable life free from worries.
The older participants appeared to be more philosophical in their view of their future, having journeyed through the ups and downs of life, having experienced countless robberies, looting of their business, and fraud, to highlight a few; they were still longing to have a stable future for retirement; while the middle age participants seemed to have mixed feelings about their future, aware of their past struggles and yet keeping their hopes high in spite of Venezuela’s challenging living context, they still longed for a better future to come true. Money was generally perceived by the participants to be the channel by which they could achieve this goal for a better and brighter future in life.

4.3.2 Self Worth

Self worthiness was another heartfelt longing deeply embedded in the participants pursuits. This yearning appeared to be camouflaged in the participants’ actions and feelings, being recognizable in their pursuits to proof themselves, to become independent, to be able to accomplish and finish whatever they were doing, to be valued and treated with dignity regardless of economic or social background, to be accepted and treated as equals, to be respected and trusted, to be able to communicate, to connect, and to be understood.

In sharing about his views on the meaning of life, Frank candidly explained his expectation towards himself in comparison to other people uncovering his heartfelt yearning to affirm his own self worth, as follows,

...I just try to have this hope, that what others have, I too can have... just this simple... even if I have a second hand (vehicle)... is not a problem... as long as it can function for its purpose... as long as I can have work, I can also have this... it is enough... this is my attitude, so, whatever others have, I hope I can also have it... this is it...
Furthermore, Frank’s desire for respect and to be treated with dignity was manifest in his expressed high regards for trust, camaraderie and rapport in his work place, as he illustrated his relationship with previous bosses as follows,

…everything I did, I would do it very seriously… this is why all my bosses, everyone of them really appreciated me very much… furthermore, in every restaurant that I worked, the person that stayed the longest was me…I stayed longer than any other worker in (a famous restaurant), I worked for 8 years… not everyone can do this… I mean, I gave them this trust in my work… I mean, everything has a price, today, when you are an employee, your employer gets to know you… you have your own talents, you have your own way of doing things… if your performance is good, your employer will want to keep you…I mean, there is a bigger relationship that can be built between the employer and the employee… it is like… it becomes like friends… it takes away the attitude that you are my employee, you have to do what I tell you…but to others (colleagues), there is a distance… a difference… I mean, everyday, I accompanied my boss to do anything, we would go out for meals… we did things together… we would go in and out just like friends… but to others, it was not the same… this is why the bosses respected me very much…”

For the majority of the participants, their initial experiences in Venezuela was very disenchanted, quite different from the wonderful picture they had envisioned before leaving their home country, as Brian’s experience illustrates, “…from what I originally imagined? It was as different as the sky is from the earth… well, it was really different, such a huge gap… as huge as the sky is from the earth… it was not what I imagined it would be…” Likewise, Eva’s first impression of Venezuela was far from what she depicted, as she vividly recalled, “…back then, I felt… if it was as easy as taking a bus, I would have gone back (to my country)… but I did not have money, so I had no choice but to remain… because I did not know how to communicate, and I mean, I lost all my friends…”
One of the main factors for the participants’ disappointing feelings was due to the fact that their sense of self-worth was being confronted as they felt marginalized in a foreign context. Amy colorfully articulates this struggle as she remarked,

...my first experience in Venezuela was very miserable (好惨)... living in this place was very miserable (好惨) because I was like a third or fourth class citizen here... I felt deaf and mute... deaf because I could not understand what others were saying and mute because I could not speak (Spanish)... often times when people ‘bullied’ me... I got mad, first at myself because I didn’t know... second, I got angry at the other person... well, my trick was to pretend to be fooling around (傻子)... and just laugh...

In the face of adversities and discrimination, the majority of the participants experienced, *inter alia*, intense feelings of disappointment, rejection, undervalued, misunderstood, and helplessness. These experiences in turn intensified their longing to be respected, to be treated with dignity, to be treated as equals, to prove themselves, and to validate their own self-worth.

### 4.3.3 Happiness and Fulfillment

The longing to be happy and find fulfillment in life were clearly expressed in the participants desire to do things that would make them happy, experience change in life, find entertainment, experience new adventures, to be content, and to experience breakthrough in life, *inter alia*. Eva distinctly explained her longing for happiness, as she remarked, “...joy is when I do something I can feel happy about... maybe people will think I am a bit crazy, but at least I can feel happy...” And one of her biggest wishes was to be able to improve her skills, to do something more special, not the repetitive activities of her
daily routine; something that will give her a sense of fulfillment and experience breakthrough in life, as she explained,

...special desire in my life... very special... hopefully I can do many other things... for example not the things that I ordinarily do daily in my work... try out other things... some work that is more special... sometimes I ask myself... how come that person is so smart, how come I cannot do that?... for example, in the church, they ask me to help translate... it is obvious that I can do it...

Similar to Eva’s dream to experience fulfillment in life, Brian expressed his desire to explore and learn from a wide variety of topics for the sheer pleasure of satisfying his curiosity which makes him feel enlightened, as he explained,

...When I have free time? The possibilities are huge... ha, ha, ha... like Chinese philosophy, history, very wide, I am very curious, I will... not just books, but I listen... search out people who will discuss about these topics... find out what is the Chinese philosophy, Buddhism, Daoism, this and that...

For Gina, one of her biggest dream was to be able to experience new adventures for a change, to have fun and entertainment, to do the things that would make her happy, as she wishfully remarked, “the happiest thing is to go traveling, of course this would be great... if I can have the chance to go out... it will help me relax and refresh my emotions (心情 have good mood)...” In particular, Gina emphasized numerous times the sense of boredom in her life experiences and her deep heartfelt yearning for happiness accompanied with a sense of fulfillment in life. To be able to relax, not to be stressed out, and be in good mood was very important to her as she thoughtfully commented,

...I mean... my work is sometimes boring, but I consider that if I can do something that afterwards will make me feel happy, and will lift up my spirit... I will say, ‘Lord... please help me to have a good spirit’... the thing I like to do the most is to be able to accomplish doing the thing that I want to do, if I can finish it, then I will be very happy...
It was evident that all the participants longed to experience personal fulfillment and happiness, it was deeply embedded in their being, for some they had specific things they wanted to do, if they could only spare the time and the resources, they would pursue those things that they thought would make them happy; for others, it was simply the deep inner longing of experiencing fulfillment accompanied with a sense of satisfaction or contentment that really mattered, as Doris shared, “…I have never asked my family big things such as... I need a car or a house… or that I want to live by myself… I just want to be happy, to be worry free, to have food, and that’s it... I am someone who only wants to be happy... I can be content with a simple chocolate…”

Henry shared Doris’ simple desire for satisfaction and fulfillment. However, he had a much deeper and profound understanding of the meaning of fulfillment as someone who had journeyed longer in life; he calmly expressed his insights as follows,

...well, I can be satisfied very easily in life... pursuing wealth... well, when I was young... I did have this desire... but little by little, I consider that this is also a ‘passing cloud’ (過眼雲煙)²³⁰ ... you did not bring anything to this world, and when you leave, you will not be able to take anything, right? So, why all this anxious striving... as long as you are satisfied... you can solve your livelihood... then, this should be ok...

Interestingly, due to their real life conditions, such as working hours and resources available; it appeared that realizing their dreams of traveling or learning for fun was still a farfetched goal. Nevertheless, their stories also revealed that to a certain degree, they found

²³⁰ ‘Passing cloud’ (過眼雲煙) is a Chinese expression referring to something short lived, ephemeral, or fleeting.
happiness and fulfillment without engaging in the activities that they thought were necessary. I have explained this insight more thoroughly in the interpretation section.

4.3.4 Receive Genuine Care and Unconditional Love

To receive and experience unconditional love, to have someone to depend and lean on, to be connected with loved ones, to have meaningful, lasting, and genuine friendships, to find someone to fill their emptiness, and to be respected and appreciated by others were the participants’ expressed heartfelt yearnings. As they were all struggling to make ends meet (except for Doris whose needs were provided for) in a very unstable environment; feelings of loneliness, deep sadness, emptiness, anxiety, abandonment, and lack of support, were amongst some of their most intense emotions.

One of the participants was betrayed by her business partner, leaving her with a negative working capital. She experienced firsthand the cruel feeling of being double-crossed by one of her most trusted friends and relatives as she described,

...actually... this person was quite close... we were partners in business... and they tricked me and kept my money... secondly, he was a close friend, we were partners, he did not have money to start with... I told him, it is ok, we can work now, when you have (money) you can pay me back...she (his wife) began to gossip...they asked me to withdraw (from the business)...I was very mad... mad that I was cheated on...gossips... and lies...they set me up...

She felt miserable in this ordeal because she truly treasured the genuine care and true friendship she thought she had. She was dumbfounded when unexpectedly her partner asked her to withdraw from the business. However, in the midst of her ordeal, she also found other friends who were willing to help her start all over again, people who were willing to lend her a large amount of money. But due to the fact that she highly valued
genuine friendship, she also experienced unspeakable amount of pressure while owing her friends’ money, as she graphically narrated,

...wow... that was very miserable (慘)... I felt I owed so much money...I did not know when I will be able to go back to zero, never mind making money... I mean it is not the money, it is the help from my friends, it is the debt of trust or true friendship (人情 human affection) from these people ... I was pressured psychologically by it... wow, I saw them even in my dreams...

She experienced the bitterness of betrayal as well as the sweetness of having friends who were kind and helpful to her in the midst of despair. Through it all, she stated plainly that her deepest heartfelt longing was to have people who genuinely cared for her, as she clearly pointed out, “I need people to really care about me.”

Even though Doris did not have the pressure to fend for herself, she also expressed her deep longing for support and unconditional love. She experienced great separation anxiety when her grandmother moved away while she was still very young. Even as a young adult, she could still feel a deep longing to be able to connect with her grandmother who was her primary care giver during her infancy, as she related, “...I have dreamt about her... I have missed her so much...I haven’t seen her for too long... I mean, I have not seen her face... I have not talked to her... only over the phone...but I want to feel her, touch her, hug her, something like this...” For Doris, her grandmother was the first person from whom she could consciously remember having received unconditional love and care. Her grandmother had given her the experience of genuine care and love at the early stages of her life; this explained her deep longing for her grandmother.

Another participant experienced marriage conflicts which intensified her feelings of loneliness, misery, psychological torture, broken dreams, and abandonment, to name a
few. She perceived herself to be the main bread winner in her family; often times she felt unable to count on her spouse to take care of their children and provide for the family. She felt tortured and tormented by the fact that she had to work and take care of the children all by herself. This intensified her longing for genuine care and unconditional love from someone close to her, as she confided with me,

...when my marriage was in crisis...I took my children and kicked him (her husband) out of the house... I was unwilling to forgive him...I mean... for one entire year...I took care of the kids... going through the torture of paying tuition fees, taking them to school and picking them up... this kind of torture...out of nothing I would cry...I mean, the thing a woman wants the most is to have a husband to love her, that's it...

For the majority of the male participants, their heartfelt longing for genuine care and unconditional love was manifest in their desire to be respected, supported and appreciated by family members and close friends. One of the participants was experiencing conflicts with one of his children; he was deeply bothered and visibly agitated during the interview as he described his child’s disregard for his authority and leadership, frustrated that his child did not respond to his care and love with the same love and appreciation, as he expressed,

“...I told (my child)... you don't need this home... you have ‘feathers and wings’...why didn’t you answer my phone call... I was so concerned ... the security is so bad... you do not see my challenge... I tell you... you cannot understand the heart of your parents... you lied to me...”

Furthermore, he felt unsupported and lonely because those around him appeared to be insensitive to his needs. As the head of the family, he felt tremendous pressure to make
ends meet; he worked very hard and made sacrifices, but felt a lack of sympathy and cooperation from loved ones, as he thoughtfully related,

...last night, I was asking, what is the meaning of life (做人)? I was thinking about this until 4am... I need to work so hard... you have to work so hard... I mean, I don’t have to get so much pressure... sometimes, it is really maddening... there is always the pressure to meet the quota... but we have a lot of expenses... lots of expenses... the business, the house, the kids... if I stop working, let’s not say three mouths, four... actually five mouths will also have to stop (no food)... so I cannot stop... if I stop, where will the money come from...

Likewise, another male participant who was also experiencing conflicts in his marriage expressed his longing for harmony, understanding, and support from his spouse as he felt tremendous pressure to provide for the family while meeting the expectations of his spouse.

4.3.5 Personal and Familial Wellbeing

As depicted in Chapter Two, the Venezuelan social, political, and economical context weighs a dreadful burden on its people. Personal and family wellbeing was the palpable expressed concern of all the participants. To be able to enjoy peace of mind, good health, safety, protection, security, and happiness for self and family, as well as, harmony in family relationships were the identified invariant horizons of the participants’ deep heartfelt longings related to personal and familial wellbeing.

Without hesitation, Carlos answered that if he was granted three wishes from the Lord, his first wish would be to ask for ‘peace (平安) in life.’ For Carlos, peace meant external tranquility, good health free from physical illness, and a life free from worries, as he explained, “peace is... I mean... the big enjoyment in life... well, peace is... when you don’t have pain, hurt, and have good health...” Peace also involved security in the midst
of social unrest. Carlos felt great pressure because he perceived the Venezuelan society to be volatile as he shared, “say in Venezuela, the security is so bad... the only solution is to be careful...the security is bad...also a lot of pressure in my thoughts...” In the midst of the insecurity, Carlos expressed his love and concern for the wellbeing of his family and hoped to provide for the needs of his children so that they will have a better future, as he explained,

...I mean... I always want, hope that my family will be harmonious, and that my kids... will be happy... to provide a good place for them to live... I mean, so that the kids will not feel a great pressure... my hope is always that my kids will have a good education...

Similarly, Eva also wished for peace (平安) and good health for herself and everybody else. For Eva, peace meant that she could enjoy safety and not feel vexed (煩) by the circumstances she was constantly facing, as she hopefully envisioned, “well, I hope that at least when I walk down the street, I will not have to worry about people robbing me... I mean something like this…” Eva had been robbed on the street a couple of times and her store has been broken into several times as well. This explains her anxiety over the insecurity of her immediate surroundings. The need to feel protected and safe is monumental in this high crime rate country. Frank also asked for peace and physical health, claiming that these were the two priorities for every Chinese living in Venezuela, as he thoughtfully analyzed,

...each Chinese in Venezuela also wants to keep their own body and hearts at peace... as well as good physical health...these are the two key things: peace and good health...they want to keep their peace and good health, these are the priority...I mean, living in Venezuela for the majority of the people is to have a good body and peace, without good health, even if you can make a lot of money, it
is useless... the majority of the people in Venezuela... they want/ask for these things...

Similar to Carlos and Eva’s understanding of the word ‘peace (平安),’ Frank explained his view of peace to mean social stability. This external peace was necessary in order to have a worry free life, as he acutely illustrated,

Peace (平安) is like going to work, that nothing bad will happen such as robbery... for example... peace like our bodies... that everyday will be without troubles... that every day we will be able to function normally... peacefully... not feeling sorry, like having bad things happening to you that you will have to regret... or that every day is not smooth... every Chinese here... they have a rough life (粗)... I mean... their language... their behavior... because their work... it is comparatively very hot... they have very bad temper... (sigh) it is necessary to have peace... because everyone knows that if anything happens... everybody knows that you will have to spend a lot of money... in terms of medical care, it is very expensive... therefore... everyone hopes to have physical and mental peace...

Strong feelings of vulnerability and fear for the safety of family members were some of Frank’s intense concerns related to his personal and his family’s wellbeing. He expressed his longing for the wellbeing of his family by sharing his difficulty and lack of control in protecting them against the constant threat of kidnapping, robberies, and general misfortune.

I must highlight that unlike Canada, there is no public health care system in Venezuela. Only private health care insurance is available at a very high premium rate. Under these circumstances, health care expenses can become a detrimental financial burden if a person suffers from any kind of chronic illnesses. Therefore, the deep heartfelt yearning for personal and family wellbeing is intensified by the insecurity, the lack of protection, and absence of health care benefits in Venezuela. Brian shared openly during a
Sunday church gathering how thankful he was to God for protecting him from a potential car accident, reflecting clearly his deep heartfelt longing for overall wellbeing.

One of the female participants shared repeatedly her longing to provide for her children. It was evident that she loved her children dearly and longed to nurture them and provide a safe place for her children so that they will be happy; so much so that she was willing to stay with her husband (in spite of her discontent), because she believed that this arrangement was for the best interest of her children, as she honestly shared,

…but my children, they were there… they could see… my son frequently told me that he wanted to have a father… he asked me whether he could call so and so ‘dad’… that was when I felt my heart breaking… this is the reason why… I wanted to give my son his real father… I really hated him…

Her desire for her children’s wellbeing was also expressed in her willingness to spend sacrificially a large amount of money in order to register them for a retreat as she related,

I still remember when I paid the fees (for the retreat)… it was quite a large amount of money for me… but I thought, if I die, so be it… when I come back, if I have to cheat, steal, whatever (jokingly)… then I will gain back that money… I hoped to have a time to quiet down… and very important that my kids were very happy… we all enjoyed it…

Likewise, another participant regarded family affection and harmony very important for her general wellbeing and that of her family as she commented,

…the most important, I consider is family affection (亲情)... I really like… a family... I like it when we all can communicate together and we can relate with each other in harmony... and not... even if we have a discussion, not to be angry for too long... to me, this is the most important...

Furthermore, she perceived that her faith was very important for her overall wellbeing, therefore, she longed for her children to be able to follow the Lord, as she remarked,
I really hope, I wish that my children... I am getting old... so for sure one day I will not be here... I really... hope that there will be someone to take care of them in the future... so this is my biggest hope... so I constantly ask God... ‘ah... I hope that you can help them that one day they will believe, become your children... and also hope that they will... that you will help them so that there will be someone to care for them...' something like this... this is my biggest desire...

Likewise, Henry’s heart desire for the wellbeing of his children included his hope that, they too will one day follow the Lord just like him, as he explained, “I hope that our children will in the future, like us, following us... also trust in God, no other thing.”

Therefore, longing for personal and family wellbeing was manifest in the participants’ heartfelt yearning to experience good health and external peace, protection and safety from misfortunes and crimes, harmony in family relationships, and believe in God for them and their family members.

4.3.6 Fulfilling Chinese Traditional Duties

As reported at the beginning of this chapter, all of the participants grew up within the Chinese traditional culture where ancestral worship, worship of household deities, and incense burning offered to their deceased ancestors were familiar practices. Whether it was through the practice of traditional ancestral worship or submission to their parents, many of the participants expressed deep feelings of great significance in following one or more of these traditional practices at one point in their lives.

One of the youngest participants expressed her yearning to repay her parents for the sacrifices they have made and continue to make for her with a sense of duty arising in the context of filial piety, as she gratefully expressed, “...I can, I mean... return... not the word return... but share with my family... those who fought for me, now is my turn to fight for...
them... because, at the end, I am the one who has to take care of them... it is I...” Likewise, Brian, as the only son in the family, was fulfilling the obligation to shoulder a major load in his mother’s business even though he appeared visibly disengaged in that working environment when I visited him during the data collection process. He confirmed my impressions when he shared his dislike for the type of work he had to do in order to help his mother.

One of the crucial reasons that led Frank to Venezuela was to fulfill the wishes of his parents out of filial piety because he was the oldest son, as he explained, “…in my household, my dad is the oldest... every elder (the head of the household) also hopes that the oldest (son) can lead the house in making money (open ways for a better life)…” And sure enough, after Frank settled in Venezuela, he was instrumental in helping younger siblings follow his steps in moving to Venezuela as well. In like manner, another participant who was the oldest child in her family, also left her home country at the wish of her parents as she explained, “…it was not by my own will (to leave her country)... it was planned by my family... I did not have the opportunity to follow my own plans... no...” In addition, this participant took up the role of bread winner to provide for her younger siblings so that they could have better opportunities, as she revealed, “…when we made some money, we sent money back to HK for my other brother so he can study...” When asked about the most important thing for her in life, without hesitation, she answered, “…the most important is family love and affection (親情)...”

Another participant also expressed her high regards for family love and affection (親情) when she shared her longings for the wellbeing of her family members. Her
commitment to filial piety was expressed in her expectations on her children. She hoped that her children will one day take care of her when she is unable to take care of herself, as she repeatedly shared,

...because I am getting advanced in years... so, I mean, if I have someone who is the closest... the care is better... so if you have any problem... for example, like me, with my children... if I have any problem... I hope that they will... you are getting advanced in years... so you cannot... you can do it now, so it is not so important, but one day when you really cannot work, or when you really cannot... say... when you need someone to take care of you... in that time... even in your departure (death)... it will be better if you can have someone who is the closest to you to care for you... this is what I think...

Filial piety was experienced by all participants, primarily in their yearning to obey and submit to parents’ wishes, to care for and repay their parents, as well as caring and providing for extended family members (family affection). Filial piety was also manifest in the participants’ yearning to honor and respect their deceased ancestors through ancestral worship. Impressively, five of the participants were regularly engaged in the practice of household deity worship prior to their conversion to Christianity as a form of following family traditions to seek protection, blessings, and peace of mind.

One participant’s story in particular, enlightened my understanding of this Chinese traditional practice, as she vividly portrayed,

...and I was superstitious... our whole family was superstitious... because we all worshiped idols, we worship the Chinese idols, ‘Guanyin’ (觀音), 231 everything, even stones... I mean... we were very devoted and would worship everything...

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231 “Guanyin” is a popular Chinese Buddhist deity revered as the embodiment of divine benevolence with origins from India whose original name was Avalokitesvara. For more information please refer to: Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, Guanyin, Images of Asia series (New York: Oxford University Press), 2004.
When asked for the reason of such devotion, she explained, “well, it was to seek protection... the people who worship idols like to say: ‘may all go well,’ ‘may you prosper,’ ‘may all go well with you and get rich,’ well, all the best wishes...” Besides worshiping household deities, this participant also practiced ancestral worship to show her deep respect and longing for her deceased father and brothers, as she explained, “the gods that I worshiped were my own father and my brothers...” She experienced the tragic death of her father and two brothers in a short period of time leaving her devastated with sorrow and pain, and a host of questions related to her traditional beliefs and the meaning of life, as she bitterly pondered,

... I mean... we were very devoted and would worship everything... I thought to myself... my father was such a devoted man, when the temple of the village was breaking apart... my father used the money from the raising of the cattle to repair the temple... why is it that we could not get the blessing? Why? The only thing I knew to do was to complain and grumble...

The unexpected death of her close relatives did not match with her traditional belief system, shaking the core foundation of these beliefs. This experience was catalyst that caused her to further seek meaning and ultimate answers in life.

4.3.7 *Seeking the Ultimate or Divine for Meaning and Purpose*

In unique ways, each participant expressed their experiences of deep heartfelt longing for meaning and purpose in life. Even though this spiritual search for the ultimate or divine was not as constant as their daily money making pursuits; it was evident that when confronted with extreme life challenges, their yearning for answers, meaning and purpose by seeking the ultimate or divine was very much alive and real, hidden deep down in their hearts.
In the case of the participant who experienced the heartbreaking experience of losing her father and two brothers within a short period of time; she struggled to make sense of this ordeal, as she disappointedly questioned her traditional belief of the good karma’s principle,

... Why is life like this? Isn’t it that you should have good reward for doing good? My dad and mom have such a good heart... why is it that such a tragedy could happen in my family? ...I had a lot of questions and complains, I was grumbling... like people say, I was grumbling against heaven and the earth (怨天怨地)... I used to take deep sighs (嘆氣)...with not reason... my heart felt like empty... it was very empty... I did not have that sense of security... my heart was hurting and at the same time angry...I mean... for me, for my family, this was such a huge blow (打擊)... 

In the face of misfortune and unexpected life tragic turns, this participant experienced intense feelings of anger, disappointment, emptiness, bitterness, loneliness, insecurity, and almost nervous breakdown, *inter alia*. Her belief of the good karma principle did not seem to match with the tragedies of her father’s and brothers’ death. She needed to find a logical explanation to the dramatic experiences she was enduring. I must also remark that it was under these circumstances that she began to pay attention to the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Her experience of the divine was quite inspiring, as she eagerly shared with contagious amazement,

...I heard the pastor preach... wow... interesting... his sermons made sense (有道理), they were quite positive... it teaches people to be good... from then on... I found the thing that is deep in my heart... I did not have any kind of entertainment... the most I would do was to stay in my house and read books about philosophy... and books about self improvement... so I felt that going to church was actually enjoyable... now that I have believed in Jesus... I know that I can go to heaven... I have not really given much thought as to how heaven looks like... I just feel that God, this Jesus... he really has the Holy Spirit... our Christian religion... why is it good? It is good because it has the Holy Spirit with you... when you are angry or
cranky… there is an unexpected voice (out of nowhere) that asks you… ‘Why do you act like this without reason?’ This is very strange… this is very amazing… I mentioned earlier the difference between Christ and the idols… believe in Jesus is a higher level… it can change your life, your livelihood… one day out of nowhere, – I am not the kind of person who usually laughs and expresses herself spontaneously – I felt an inner sweetness coming out… it was the ‘joy’ that the church talks about… I did not know if this was joy… it felt so silly… but inside my heart… there was this ‘sweetness’ that was overflowing… this kind of joy that money cannot buy… I mean, before, when I worked two jobs, I made a lot of money… but I did not experience this joy… I mean, when I was worshiping idols, the feeling was very fake…

This participant described her experience of listening to the proclamation of the Gospel to be illuminating and positive. Even though she did not find all the answers, she found the answers to her struggles and understood that her suffering was part of a bigger plan in her life. She also experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in her life that brought sweet comfort and unimaginable joy, the sweet feeling that she has never experienced before, and that, in her own words, money could not buy. She also experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit to be her constant guide and the inner force to help her change.

For the older participants, life was perceived with much calmness and almost a sense of acceptance. Nevertheless, the need to find meaning and purpose was very much latent in their heartfelt longings, expressed in repeated references to appreciating things that were ultimately meaningful, journeying into retirement, making final arrangements, and even thoughts of death. For example, a participant explained that the things that attracted her to church were the singing of hymns and the messages because they made sense to her, as she remarked,

*I felt… ‘Ah! the hymns… they are very pleasant (nice to the hearing)… so, I liked very much the hymns in the church… and also, back then, the pastor’s preaching…*
I felt, ‘ah! They are very good...’ many things about life... ‘Ah! They make so much sense (有道理)...’

Similar to the experience of the previous participant, she also found great meaning in listening to the preaching of the Bible. Even though she worshiped idols prior to her conversion to Christianity, she was not very superstitious as she explained, “…if you ask me whether I was like the other people who really liked or was very superstitious (devoted) about worshiping idols, well, I was not... well, it was like just following the tradition to do this thing...” However, in her experience of listening to the biblical teachings she found answers to very important spiritual needs that had to do with immediate heartfelt yearnings as well as concerns related to her eternal destiny, as she cleverly compared her view of life (and death) before and after her believe in Jesus,

...wow, to be a human being... it is like... before, when I worshiped idols, we believed in reincarnation... right? So, I thought... reincarnation?! Actually this is not very good... if I come back again the second time, I will not want to be a human being... this is not very worthwhile... but after believing in God, the greatest meaning is that, ah!... I come here (to church)... then I feel my emotions (心情) get better, not like before... not having to see life... without having to think of the issue of where to go in the future... so, I get a better outlook... also, will not be afraid to look for a place, that we will not have money to purchase a place to bury myself... right?!... or what to do? in summary, there are lots of questions... what to do if I get a serious illness... what should I do?... but now, I don’t think so much about these things... just hope that God... I say... I always say... if he allows me to have any problem...if I have problems, just let me depart (from this world) soon, it doesn’t matter, this is it... it will be best if I can go up to our Heavenly Father... right?!... Whenever I think about these things... I am not so worried... I mean... I will relax a bit more... (let go a bit)... ultimately, my view of life is different... I think hey... ultimately we have to depart... then, we don’t have to think too much... so often times, I too, like to come here (church) and sing hymns... because I really like the hymns, and also eh... also to listen to the messages... I feel... this is very good... I mean, I know that in life, I mean there are some things that we do not need to be so uptight to do certain things... we can let go of that a little bit... and also, do things that we feel has meaning...
Prior to her experience with Christianity, her outlook of life was quite pessimistic as she shared her view of reincarnation, she did not find life very meaningful or worth living. She experienced fear for the unknown and uncertainty for her future as she shared, “back then, it was different... why? The people say if you do a lot of bad things, they will throw you down (in hell)... and if you do a lot of good things, you will go upwards...” However, after her experience of conversion to Christ, she felt positive improvement in her emotions as she understood the Biblical teachings regarding her future and assurance of life with her Heavenly Father after her departure from this world. The Scriptures were also instrumental in giving her a positive perspective of her work and life as she repeatedly mentioned,

...when I do things, I would be very uptight... say, ‘I need to finish this and that...’ but later on... I... comparatively, I will say, ‘well, if I cannot finish, leave it for another day...’ so, in this way, little by little, I felt that... no matter what I was doing, I was not so tense... so, as I listened more and more (the Scriptures), later on... I felt, ‘ah! Pretty good...’ so, this answered (開解) my heart’s questions... and I felt a lot lighter...

Henry related that his experience with the ultimate and divine began through his neighbors, a Christian couple who invited him to church. He was experiencing a number of serious physical illnesses and problems in his business; therefore, he decided to try the church, as he calmly related,

...many supermarkets in the entire country was looted... yes... so... so, about 6 years ago, they (the doctors) discovered that there were some concerns in my eyes... also, in my organs... there was a blocked vein... so back then... Mr. X and his wife invited us to attend the church... so, I... in view of everything... I followed them to attend, to see and to listen (what was this about)... so... from that time on... I mean, afterwards... when Rev. and his wife went to my business to pray for me... I mean... this made me feel more at peace... I felt that coming to church... yes... listen to the teachings/truth (道理)... yes... to see about the problems of life...
It was the critical life experiences such as life threatening illnesses and business difficulties that led Henry to try out the Christian faith in the hopes of finding meaning or purpose from the divine for his immediate challenges. He felt enlightened by the preaching of the Scriptures which he considered truthful to answer his quest for meaning in life and helped him feel more at peace.

One of the participants witnessed her brother’s struggle with evil spirits, as she narrated, “...he was... we Chinese call it that he was under a curse/spell... so when he was under a curse/spell... so I called him up (by phone) and told him to come here... and then another pastor came... so the pastor told him that he was under a curse/spell...” It was through this evident spiritual need that she experienced the reality of the divine, Jesus’ power to deliver her brother from spiritual bondage, as she continued her story,

...so if you want to depart from these things (evil spirits), you need to believe in Jesus, in simple words... you need to follow a bigger boss to get rid of this one... I mean, so you can be clean from these things...later on... he (her brother) was ok (delivered from the curse)... so, this is a very real example... so you will truly believe...”

Brian had a unique experience of seeking the divine or ultimate for meaning and purpose. As a younger participant, he became a Christian in his late teen years; therefore, his life experiences were less extensive compared to the older participants. Nevertheless, in the interview, Brian showed great spiritual depth searching for meaning and purpose, and for the divine, as he philosophized about metaphysical issues as follows,

...Is there a God? when I went to church, I heard that there is a true God... so I began to reflect... the universe is so big, there are so many galaxies, and they all exist with such order... definitely, there is a very wise being who has designed this... I mean... someone who has designed all this, and it is not by chance or coincidence that these things could have come to be... in the macro sense, we can talk about the
universe... from the micro sense we can see, us, human beings, our composition is so amazing... and we, only human beings have reasoning, whereas animals do not have... this is so similar to what the Bible describes, something that I have not heard from other religions... many other aspects... for example, I know there is the spiritual world, this world has black and white... is classified by right and wrong... so, if in this world there is the spiritual realm... and there are evil spirits, then there must be good spirits too... there must be positive and negative in this world... something like this... so, if I know that the negative exists, I also know that the positive also exists, therefore, I believe in God...

Moreover, Brian repeatedly expressed his deep concern for the problem of evil/sin (罪惡) in this world. Brian shared that his greatest wish was to make evil/sin disappear from this world. When asked about his reason for feeling this way, and the moment he started feeling this need, he answered thoughtfully that maybe this desire to change the world was dormant before believing in Jesus, as he explained,

*I sensed that in this world there is a lot of evil/sin... why do people behave like this? Or why do people do things this way? But I still did not think of changing... but I knew... I could feel this (problem)... I felt that there were a lot of things that were incorrect, but I did not feel that there was a need for change, that I had to help... not yet... it was when I began to read the Bible... when I opened the Bible, I did not know before, maybe they were dormant inside... but when I discovered the Bible, it became the standard of my views... when I believed in Jesus... I started to have this feeling...*

The exposure to the Scriptures awakened Brian to perceive evil/sin as a “bigger than life” problem. This awareness led him to an intense yearning of God to provide the meaning and solutions to the spiritual problems in this world.

Frank’s spiritual pursuit for the divine was also a progressive journey from experiencing the unknown spiritual world to trying to find meaning to these experiences. He used to follow the Chinese rituals of household deity worship as a tradition. However, there were real longings for meaning and truth that were not met in this familiar tradition.
Interestingly, his initial encounter with the spiritual realm happened many years ago, way back in China, as he spiritedly recounted,

*I know people... when they die, they will depart from here... it is true... I have had an experience... I also asked the pastor whether there are souls or not (in this world)... I was still in China, did not come to Venezuela yet... there was one time... it was at night time... there was this voice very loud... it was screaming very loud... everyone could hear it... my grandmother was a 'medium,' she will consult with the spirits... when the person died... it was her sister... not real sister, but very good friends that have experienced many things together... when I ran upstairs, she passed away... I mean, the spirit, the soul, they were made by the Lord... I mean, it is very amazing... I knew about these things... I believed they were there... I mean, every one of my relatives or friends... before (believing in Jesus)... when I had to go to the funeral home, I will be very scared... because I did not have God there... it was very scary...*

Frank’s experience with the spiritual world gave him a sense of fear for the dead and fear of the unknown. His early encounter with the spiritual realm convinced him of its reality; however, he did not have further understanding or explanation for its presence. It was his curiosity about the Christian faith and the desire to find meaning about the spiritual realm that led him to the church. Similar to the previous participants, he found the answers of his pursuit for meaning and purpose in life when he became familiar with the teachings of the Bible. Frank’s initial quest for meaning and understanding of the spiritual realm was answered when he received light from the Scriptures.

4.3.8 *Seeking a Tutelary God*²²²

The yearning to experience comfort in the heart, protection from everyday life’s dangers, provision for daily needs, help in times of trouble, guidance when facing

²²²Professor Ng explains the concept of ‘tutelary God’ as the individual’s need to experience a transcendent power that will provide guidance, protection, practical help and blessings in their daily needs and every difficulty they encounter. Kwai Hang Ng, 203-204.
challenges, continuous mercy, and even eternal rest were the expressed spiritual needs of
the participants in seeking a tutelary God. This longing for a tutelary God was heightened
when confronted with the increased insecurity in their living surroundings, as Brian shared
in a simple fashion his experience of God’s protection from the dangers of robbers and
corrupt authorities when he accidentally got a flat tire on the highway while driving home
from a long day of work.

Carlos expressed the need for a tutelary God, as he plainly stated, “I mean...
believing in the Lord will bring comfort in the heart/soul… I mean good health, peace…”
Analogous to Carlos’ desire, Henry shared his spiritual longing for security, protection,
guidance, and eternal life from God, as he wishfully detailed,

_I hope that God will, I mean, will watch over (看管) us, and maybe our family...
that if we encounter difficulties, eh... pray, I mean consult with God to see what we
can do to solve the problem... also... whatever we have in our heart, I mean,
desires, we can ask God... so, I hope that we, I mean... the Bible says that we can
ask for everlasting life... right? This is the matter...

Gina shared her unique experience of God’s answer to her prayers for protection
which became a defining reason for her trust and believe in Jesus, as she described,

_I have experienced when I had a surgery... I prayed, Lord, if you could help me, I
will make my decision to believe in you... like this... so, when I had the surgery...
even though it was just a very minor thing, but... they injected a few needles... and
even after the effects of the medication, I felt, ‘hey?!, it does not hurt...’ then, after
this, therefore... I... my view of God is that often times, I can feel that He is often
times helping me...

Clearly, her experience of God’s immediate presence and protection in such a pressing
need was instrumental to her faith in the Lord. To experience the Lord as the personal,
caring, and powerful God during times of special needs was the significant turning point
in her spiritual journey. This was also the experience of another participant. She encountered a difficulty in processing her legal identification document. With the high level of corruption in almost all levels of government, processing legal documents can proof to be a time consuming and very challenging endeavor. It was under these circumstances that she turned to God for help, as she shared her experience,

...right now I don’t doubt about Him... before, I asked God, ‘why did I accept you?’ Because I have not seen Him with my own eyes... is He really real? But now, I don’t doubt... He has shown me that He really exists... I prayed and asked God to forgive me... then two days later... the good news came that my document was ready... it was incredible... really, a big miracle happened...

Eva’s need of a tutelary God was intensified during times of great turmoil, as she explained,

...usually when I am in difficulties... then it will be more intense... when I have to face difficulties... when we are comfortable, we don’t feel it so much... but when your environment is in turmoil... you will have a stronger feeling for those needs... for example... when the circumstances are adverse... when I had arthritis... inflammation in my fingers... I could not write anything... it was impossible to even bend my fingers... then I thought to myself... maybe I will never be able to write again in this life... I will never be able to bend my fingers again... so I started to pray and then little by little... I was able to bend my fingers...

It was obvious that Eva’s search for God’s help and provision heightened when she felt the urgency and gravity of her physical condition. Moreover, her experience of God’s power to answer her prayers increased her faith and dependence on this tutelary God.

Frank’s longing for God’s protection and guidance was clearly attested in his daily struggles, as he vividly described his experience of God’s presence as follows,

...if I make a little less (money), I will be in trouble ... God has really helped me a lot... I mean... sometimes I pray... I get God’s help... and every time, I am able to
go over the hurdle (過關)... God is amazing... He is really able to bear my burden... I mean, I understand that God comprehends (理解) me...

Frank also experienced God’s wonderful power to help him quit smoking and gambling, as he witnessed, “before, I used to smoke... after I believed in Jesus, I stopped gambling and stopped smoking...” Frank experienced the reality of a tutelary God who was the strength that sustained him spiritually and was his ever present help in times of trouble.

Amy’s heartfelt longing for a tutelary God was manifest in her constant struggle to balance her multiple responsibilities of caring for her family, work, and church activities, as she candidly described,

...people like me, with so much in my plate... with so much suffering... with such a tight schedule... how can I pursue so much... aspire so high... I mean, how can this be so good? ...but step by step ...I want to get closer to God... I know that oh... sometimes, when I feel the pressure... I want to give up, but the Lord has mercy on me... my favorite thing... when I go to the ladies prayer meeting... people ask me... ‘Hey, what is your prayer request?’ ...I tell them or my favorite phrase is... ‘May the Lord have mercy on me... May the Lord provide...’ they tell me... ‘Don’t you have enough!?’ honestly... everything is money... the house is money, the kids’ education needs money, the business needs money... if the Lord provides, then it is money... actually the Lord really has provided... so each time when I need help, I ask God to provide... to have mercy on me...

It was clear that Amy felt greatly pressured to fulfill all her obligations as she juggled from one responsibility to another. In the midst of such lifestyle, she yearned to lay her burden under the merciful tutelary protection of the Lord. It is important to highlight that, in addition to the lack of employment insurance and lack of public health care; there are very few good public schools in Venezuela. And the overall standard of the public school system is quite deficient; therefore, the majority of parents, whenever possible, will take the necessary sacrificial measures to put their children in private schools. As such, the
participants’ experiences of insecurity, vulnerability, and pressure to work hard and save money for the rainy days, *inter alia*, are truly unimaginable experiences for many of us who live in Canada.

4.3.9  **Reaching Out to Others**

It was illuminating to learn that reaching out to others was one of the heartfelt yearnings of my participants. They found great purpose, significance, and even ultimate value in life by pursuing activities beyond themselves, such as doing something that would bring justice and change the world into a better place, being accountable for the spiritual wellbeing of other believers, helping people in practical ways, sacrificing for the benefit of others, helping others know God’s word and witnessing about Jesus.

Brian fervently expressed his longing to change the world, to make it a better place, and to deal with the problem of widespread sin/evil (罪惡) in the world, as he earnestly shared his burden,

...I want to... I mean change this world... I feel... I want to... I feel this world is filled with a lot of evil... I want to change this world so that more people... I mean... to have more justice... I will wish that evil/sin (罪惡) will disappear from this world... if there is no evil/sin, and then all the problems will be solved...

Quite inspiring, Brian indicated his desire of investing his energy and life time (if given the chance) to make this world a better place with whatever means he could, as he reflected, “...if I am capable... I mean, in terms of material help, also in terms of spiritual help... to be able to help people... for example, if someone has a problem, I can help with a solution, explain to the person...” Furthermore, Brian had a strong conviction that Christ’s teachings
had universal claims for humankind, and he longed to be a role model to inspire others and lead them to follow Christ, as he explained,

…the best is… to be able to influence others… I mean, when you do things, your way of living… it all should… when people see that you are a Christian, they can tell that you are different from the general people, that there is a difference… that your ethics and behavior are loftier than others… that you treat others according to what the Bible teaches… this (the Bible) should be my standard for living…

Likewise, Carlos shared in simple words his wish and desire to reach out to others as he said, “I hope the people, more will believe in the Lord… I mean, the Lord is almighty, he is the real God…so believe in the Lord is good…” Frank also shared his experiences of witnessing to his friends by helping them understand the differences between Christianity and Chinese traditional beliefs as he described, “I explain to my friends the differences between Christianity and our Chinese traditions… well, they have a lot of complains… to a point that I was not able to continue… I mean, they kept attacking…” Regardless of the outcome, it was obvious that Frank tried very hard to reach out to his friends by sharing the life and meaning he had found in Jesus Christ.

With almost bubbling enthusiasm, Amy revealed her generous investment on a cake mixer so that she can prepare snacks for others, as she colorfully recounted,

*I am very frugal even to this day… so, this year, because I have to prepare snacks for the church, I have learned to make cakes… I really have invested in a cake mixer… this is a very generous investment… if it was before… I will never buy something like this… I will use chopsticks to mix the cake… (laughing)… of course, because I am quite stingy, but now, I think (to myself), don’t be so uptight, God will provide… so with this faith, with the ‘brave’ word on my chest, I ask God to provide… so I bought a cake mixing machine… sometimes I will look at the bulletin and check whose birthday is approaching, so I make a cake for them… and they get very happy and sometimes… I make some salted fish and I give them some, and they get really excited and encourage me and tell me that I have changed a lot…*
Having learned Amy’s view of money, I could truly attest to the extent of her generosity in this investment. And more than once, she has gone out of her way to help someone who was drifting away from life, or who needed a helping hand. These are all signs of her heartfelt longing to reach out to others because she saw great value and meaning in doing such things to the point of momentarily setting aside her own interests and comfort.

Doris expressed her dream to use her career to save lives, as she shared, “I love to save people’s lives... well, God gave us life... I mean, we should not die just like this... I want to be a medical doctor because I want to save lives…” Similarly, one of the reasons Eva wanted to improve herself (to find happiness and fulfillment) was for the purpose of helping others in their needs, as she explained,

...when people don’t understand, you can help them understand (translate for them)... or some people need to go see the doctor, but don’t know how to communicate, then I can go and help them see the doctor... so when you tell them it is like this... then they will understand... if I had time, I will do volunteer work...

Overall, the participants revealed many positive experiences and rewarding feelings in their efforts to reach out to others such as encouragement, fulfillment, meaning, purpose, hope and excitement. However, on the other hand, they also revealed experiencing feelings of anxiety, fear of rejection, some kind of laziness, and even apprehension from the challenges that were involved when they tried to step out of their comfort zone in order to reach out to others.

4.3.10 Pleasing and Serving the Lord

The heartfelt longing of reaching out to others was closely intertwined with the participants’ yearning to please and serve the Lord. The desire to please the Lord and to
serve Him were expressed in the participants’ yearning to follow and obey God’s word, to do good deeds, to live a perfect or sinless life, and to trust more in the Lord.

Doris’ desire to reach out to others in saving lives was deeply rooted in her strong belief that life was from God as she clearly declared, “I love to save people’s lives... well, God gave us life... I mean, we should not die just like this...” Therefore, her understanding of God’s sovereignty over human life was the directive for her career plans because she desired to please and serve God.

Eva became aware of her bad temper and felt the need to change after her conversion to Christianity. Amazingly, she experienced Jesus’ power to improve her temper, as she portrayed,

...this Jesus at least can change your life... I mean, I think, eh... life before, when I was very mad and wanted to throw a temper tantrum... I felt a power that will deter me from doing so... as a result you will say something else... ha, ha... it was clear that I wanted to yell at that person, when I was about to say it, instead... even when I wanted to scold at that person... I will say 'please’... ha, ha... this is a very amazing experience...

Evidently, Eva’s desire to change was due to the fact that she wanted to follow and obey God’s word. She also repeatedly asked the Lord for wisdom because she wanted to use her gifts to serve Him.

Similarly, it was not until Brian became familiar with the Scriptures that he began to experience this deep spiritual need to please the Lord and to act upon the teachings of Jesus Christ which directly confronted his own sins, as he eagerly explained,

...right now... what dreams? Well... the best is if I can follow what Jesus teaches us to do... if I can do what Jesus tells us to do... this is the best... I always need God to forgive us... to forgive us... yes, I feel this is my heartfelt need...from anywhere... this is the strongest heartfelt need that I have experienced so far... it
is the need to be forgiven by God… because we make mistakes quite often… so I feel that this is our strongest need… I mean, that we can be set free…

His keen awareness of evil/sin intensified his heartfelt longing for God’s forgiveness as well as his deep heartfelt need to be perfect, the longing to live a life in accordance to God’s teachings, as he explained, “I think my greatest need… I feel that all the things I do is never perfect or totally adequate… I need God’s constant help… help me change… I mean, this is my spiritual need…” Furthermore, when asked the reason for his deep desire to help other people believe in Jesus, Brian explained his conviction that one day we will all have to give account of our lives to the Lord, as he said, “well, it is like the Bible says, in the future, we will have to give accounts of our lives to Him… this is why…”

Due to his work schedule, often times Frank could not attend Sunday worship; however, Frank revealed his deep longing to draw close to God and worship Him, as he shared his heartfelt needs,

...on Sundays, I have not gone to worship... He (God) too understands that I have attended less... but He knows that my heart is still there (in worship), but He also wants me to make a living... and wants me to work... but I have not dropped out... but I have not... let’s say... given up my faith... I mean I hold on to the belief... the belief in Christ... He understands me... so I comfort myself in this way... because sometimes, I want to attend... really, I mean... it is very comfortable... this is my sincere feeling...

In spite of his inability to attend Sunday worship, Frank’s simple faith and dependence on God for strength was a powerful force to sustain him spiritually. Aware of his spiritual need, he expressed a deep longing to grow spiritually, to know God more, to learn from the Bible, as he reflected,
I tell brother ‘E’ that my spiritual life is very poor... I acknowledge... I mean, for the Bible studies, sometimes I go, sometimes I don’t go... so my spiritual life... I want to improve... I have tried to read it (the Bible)... but could not continue... there are too many things that I cannot comprehend... but I like to attend the Bible study... it helps me understand more...

Another participant’s longing to please the Lord and serve Him was also deeply established in her understanding of the Bible. As she became more and more aware of God’s standards for her life, she experienced many changes due to the fact that she wanted to please God even in her business practice, as she eloquently narrated,

...I mean, when you really understand the Bible, when you have read more and understand more, you will know... Well the feeling... the thoughts is to do bad things... want to... for example, a simple example, I am a sales person... there are these stolen merchandise... this means it is illegal... if I were not a Christian, I will for sure sell this merchandise, why? You can make much more money... one dollar can become 10 dollars... I have ambitions... I have a business... but now that I am a believer, will I buy this? Well, the temptation is big... but then I think, no... I will not do it... I am not that desperate... I don’t need this...

Obviously this participant’s example graphically illustrated the enormous temptation she faced to purchase stolen goods; however, her yearning to please the Lord was stronger, therefore, she was willing to give up this opportunity to make ‘quick money’ for the sake of obeying Jesus’ teachings. The degree of challenge in making this choice was intensified when her colleagues made fun of her as she bravely explained her actions to them as follows, “...when people tell me, hey, there is this cheap merchandise... or they tell me... hey... don’t be stupid... then I say... no... don’t worry... this is no good... they ask, ‘you have too much cash?’ I say, no... and laugh...” Truly, she had a strong faith in God and a strong desire to please the Lord. Furthermore, she also shared that if the one teasing her
was a good friend; she will witness to them and discourage her friends to such practices, as she courageously related,

…if I am a good friend with the person, I will discourage him/her from buying it: ‘better not… if you sell this, someone will also come to your store and steal things from you to resell it… this is a vicious cycle… no matter if you believe in Buddha, or the Bible, or Jesus, they all teach you not to do this…’ so, I don’t sell stolen goods, but I keep asking God to provide for me… ask God to provide and to have mercy… this is my favorite prayer…

Her ability to remain true to her beliefs was in part grounded on her trust in God’s provision and merciful care.

Whether they were very articulate or very plain, all the participants shared a deep desire to please the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly. This longing was seemingly the result of their understanding of the Scripture, God’s requirements for their lives, and the conviction of God’s sovereign rule in the world. Notably, their experiences attested that these were not lip services, rather true commitments that required certain degree of discomfort and sacrifice due to the tension between following their old accustomed ways (prior to conversion) versus the way of Jesus. Whenever they succeeded in pleasing the Lord, they felt a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. However, the opposite was also true, that whenever they were not able to satisfy this longing, they felt a sense of regret or discouragement, acknowledging their weak faith.
After a meticulous investigation through layers and layers of information, imaginative variation, reflection and systematic analysis\(^{233}\) of the data collected; I have endeavored to provide a composite textural-structural description\(^{234}\) of what and how the participants have experienced spiritual needs under the ten themes listed above. These themes and descriptions do not in any way claim to be exhaustive of the studied phenomenon. They represent only a glimpse of the participants’ conscious awareness of their experiences, and restricted by the participants’ ability and desire to articulate their thoughts and feelings of these experiences; as well as my own ability as the researcher to participate in the collection and analysis the overall data. As such, these descriptions can only represent the lived experiences of the phenomenon of spiritual needs emerging at the particular time of the study and from the unique social and cultural vintage point of the participants,\(^{235}\) captured and presented through the researcher’s lenses.

### 4.4. Interpretation of the Results

The deep heartfelt yearnings for *a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, genuine care and unconditional love, personal and familial wellbeing, fulfilling Chinese traditional duties, seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose, seeking a ‘tutelary God,’ reaching out to others, and pleasing and serving the Lord* are all interconnected longings that represent the participants’ spiritual needs perceived from the perspective which relates to the ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful; including the vertical aspect of the sacred or transcendent and the horizontal

\(^{233}\) Moustakas, 135.  
\(^{234}\) Moustakas, 121, 122.  
\(^{235}\) Ibid, 100.
aspect of relationships for inclusion and distinctness. However, how are they interconnected? How do these needs impact and dictate the participants’ actions, decisions, and relationships? The following is my attempt to decipher and interpret the intricate and multilevel interconnections of these identified deep heartfelt needs.

### 4.4.1 Interconnections between Physical Needs and Spiritual Needs

First of all, it was truly enlightening to see how closely and almost inseparably intertwined the physical needs of the participants appeared to be with the deeper spiritual needs of the participants. Initially, I observed that almost none of the participants were really clear, familiar, or consciously aware of their own needs in general, and of their spiritual needs in particular. This did not mean they did not have spiritual needs, it simply meant that they were not consciously in tune with them, or did not identify them as such.

As discussed in Chapter Two, professor Shen explains that traditional Chinese science is characterized by its “quasi-scientific theories, lacking logical and mathematical structure… rigor of structural organization and logical formulation.”\(^{236}\) And by extension, in the attempt to describe concepts pertaining to ultimate reality, Shen remarks that “image-ideas” instead of “pure ideas” are used as metaphors to express ideas about ultimate reality evoking its richness “without exhausting it.”\(^{237}\) As such, spirituality is expressed intuitively by the ordinary Chinese through more concrete-ideas as metaphors, lacking an articulated system of beliefs or a logical formulation of their spiritual practices. This characteristic was indicative of the participants in this research who appeared to be primarily preoccupied

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\(^{237}\) Shen, EP, 2:222.
with the utilitarian and practical aspects of life, and lacked a logically articulated belief system and logical formulation of their own needs. Their initial interest in the spiritual realm carried an emphasis on the practical day to day concerns and necessities of life rather than on the sheer pursuit of the truth, the ultimate, and the transcendent for their intrinsic worth.  

For example, six out of the eight participants expressed their initial single-minded life pursuit of money which was precipitated by their self identification with humble beginnings. Many of them perceived money as almost ‘almighty,’ promising the ability to fulfill not only their physical needs for food, clothing, shelter, children’s education, medication, doctors fees, and protection for the ‘rainy days,’ inter alia; but furthermore, they perceived that money was able to meet their deepest heartfelt longings for a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, personal and familial wellbeing, and even meaning and purpose in life;  

...since I was little... my brother taught me that no matter what, if your finances are good, everything... you can control a lot of things... even control a person, if you can control your finances, then you can control the person... so I felt that money can give me security and the material things that I needed...

In their pursuit of money, two out of the four male participants became entangled with gambling, and three out of the four female participants also witnessed and suffered the consequences of gambling addiction from the ‘significant man’ in their lives (husband,  

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238 Ibid., 2:217.  
239 Evidently, these needs emerged from the analysis of the data; they were not identified as such by the participants.
brother, or father). These men became addicted to gambling because it appeared to provide a shortcut for fast money. It is worth mentioning that another clue to the cause of this addiction could be the lack of meaningful entertainment built into their regular life-style, an important point for ministry reflection that is further discussed in Chapter Five.

Arguably, not only the Chinese people ‘like’ money; greed and love for money is a common theme in our western world, glamorized by the media and the entertainment industry. However, my participants appeared to have an outstanding regards for money. Why? Professor Mobo Gao insightfully explains\(^\text{240}\) that China is still a very diverse and complex country. Most of my research participants migrated from poor rural areas where the recent Chinese economic developments have done little to advance the deep poverty condition of much of rural China.\(^\text{241}\) In addition, Professor Bell argues that Mao’s efforts to uproot the traditional philosophical worldview, perceived as an evil part of the feudal system, have left present day political China with an overall “moral vacuum.”\(^\text{242}\) I interpret that their firsthand experience with poverty, coupled with this apparent moral vacuum, and the growing ideology of consumerism and commercialism in the globalized marketization context, are important contributing factors that have shaped the materialistic and utilitarian mindset of many Chinese, especially those seeking better opportunities overseas, including the participants of this research. This in part could explain the high regards for money by most of my participants.

\(^{240}\) Mobo Gao, 255.
\(^{241}\) Wang Hui, 8.
\(^{242}\) Daniel A. Bell, 8.
4.4.2 Hardships Leading to Awareness of Deeper Spiritual Needs

However, it was awe inspiring also to hear from the participants, many of whom at one point or another were involved with gambling, to express their changed view of money, from being almost ‘almighty’ to being inadequate. After experiencing failures or just some hard realities of life, they appeared to have realized that money was more like an illusion, unreliable and unable to deliver all the promises they believed it would, as one of them affirmed, “...I won a lot of money... this kind of money (from gambling) is like smoke or a passing cloud... if you win it easily... you will also spend it quickly...”

Another participant explained her view of money as follows,

...people from mainland china... they say... ‘with money, I will be happy...’ I corrected her... ‘no, you are wrong... money does not represent happiness... lots of rich people commit suicide, why? Don’t they have money, why do they commit suicide? Some people die with millions in their banks, I could use that (money) in many lives and not be able to spend it all... right? So, you need to evaluate...’ I mean... we have psychological needs also, not just physical needs... so, you need to differentiate it... so I always remind them... (they think) money is bigger than the sky... I tell them, sometimes, ‘if you let money block your sight... you will not be able to see other things... really...there are a lot of things that money cannot buy... yes...’ I told her that in this world the best is the care from family (亲情)..." 

When I asked this participant the reason for such a different view of money, she declared astonishingly, “because I had once made (lots of money) and then I lost it all... hahaha...”

Even though she still valued money as an important necessity, her experience of accumulating wealth and losing it all enlightened her with a broader perspective of what was ultimately significant. Furthermore, she perceived that money could damage or jeopardize the very things that they thought money could provide; very important things such as genuine friendship, family affection, and true love, to name a few.
Other participants had similar experiences, when confronted with real life struggles; they came to the realization that money was inadequate to meet their needs and deepest heartfelt longings. Through their difficult experiences they became more aware of deeper heartfelt needs beyond the material realm. This realization in turn caused an imbalance in their value system that motivated them to seek further answers. Interestingly, the data collected revealed that it was only until they began to interact with the Biblical teachings, the message of the Gospel that they began to consciously reflect on those deep spiritual needs.

4.4.3 Spiritual Needs from the Horizontal Aspect of Relationships for Distinctness

It became apparent that the needs for a better and brighter future, self worth, and happiness and fulfilment were noticeable deep heartfelt longings that emerged in the analysis of the data as the core spiritual needs regardless of their living context. These appeared to be the fundamental spiritual longings of the participants primarily from the horizontal dimension for distinctness. Psychologist Robert Kegan ingeniously affirms that there are “two greatest yearnings in human experience.” 243 And the yearning for distinctness is one of them, the other being the yearning for inclusion. Kegan insightfully explains the yearning for distinctness as “the yearning to be independent or autonomous, to experience one’s distinctness, the self-chosenness of one’s directions, one’s individual integrity.” 244 Indisputably, the participants’ migration to Venezuela was primarily motivated by the need to find their own means for independence and by the prospect to

243 Kegan, 107.
244 Kegan, 107.
find a better and brighter future. This was in line with their desire to be in control of their own self-chosenness of their paths and the desire to proof and affirm their own integrity and self-worthiness. In addition, they dreamed of experiencing change in life that would make them happy, to experience breakthrough in life, to experience new adventures that could give them a sense of happiness and fulfilment in their inner beings. I consider that these three heartfelt needs represent the participants’ core yearnings for affirmation as distinct individuals, with autonomy and independent volition and power, in need of recognition as unique individuals in distinction to other human beings.

4.4.4 Spiritual Needs from the Horizontal Aspect of Relationships for Inclusion

The yearning for inclusion is the other greatest yearning of human experience proposed by Kegan, and described as follows, “the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied.” Through the careful analysis of the participants’ narratives, the deep desire to receive genuine care and unconditional love, and the desire to reach out to others were the two outstanding deep heartfelt longings that emerged on the horizontal level of relationships for inclusion with other human beings.

On the one hand, they expressed a deep longing to be connected with others, to experience meaningful and lasting relationships, to receive and experience unconditional love, to be cared for, to have someone to depend on, as well as to find respect and appreciation from loved ones. These needs for inclusion placed the participants on the receiving end of a relationship. However, on the other hand, the participants also expressed their deep desire to reach out to others. To me, this was an illuminating and refreshing

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245 Ibid.
revelation, that in spite of the unstable Venezuelan context, the participants desired to do something beyond themselves; to reach out to others pro-actively and sacrificially in order to help those in need through practical ways.

Furthermore, I perceive that the participants’ longing to reach out to others sacrificially was correlated with the participants’ degree of understanding and commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Those who expressed a deeper knowledge of Biblical teachings were also the ones who tried to reach out to others in lasting and meaningful ways, desiring to witness to others about God, and to be accountable for the spiritual wellbeing of other believers.

4.4.5 **Interconnections between Personal & Familial Wellbeing and Seeking a Tutelary God**

Under the strenuous and unstable Venezuelan context mentioned above, physical needs such as the need for daily provisions to make ends meet, protection from physical harm, good health, and the like; intensified the participants’ yearning for **personal and familial wellbeing**, which in turn precipitated their need of **seeking a tutelary god**.

Most of the participants considered good health and peace as one of their priorities, something that they will ask God for if they were granted three wishes. I was greatly enlightened to discover that most of them conceptualized peace differently from the New Testament’s sense of spiritual reconciliation and peace with God and with other human beings.\(^{246}\) Rather, they understood peace (平安) as safety and freedom from physical harm, conflicts, and trouble, as described above under **personal and familial wellbeing**. This

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\(^{246}\) Ephesians 2:13-18.
perception of peace is typical of the Chinese understanding of ‘staying safe wherever you go’ (出入平安) type of external safety. This view of peace illustrates the Chinese practical anthropocentric orientation in life which focuses on the practical concerns of daily living including their immediate family’s wellbeing and the satisfaction of their daily necessities. However, as the participants felt threatened and unsafe, they sought the help from a transcendent power identified as a tutelary god.

Professor Kai Ng’s research reveals that Chinese spirituality, especially for immigrants, is expressed in their need to experience a transcendent power such as a tutelary god that will provide guidance, protection, practical help and blessings in their daily needs and every difficulty they encounter.\(^{247}\) For the participants of this study, personal and familial wellbeing was closely related to their pursuit of happiness. However, their living context was a constant threat to these highly valued pursuits, propelling them to look upwards, seeking a tutelary god for protection, guidance, provision, and peace and comfort for the soul.

I must admit that I had great difficulty deciding on how to categorize the spiritual need of personal and familial wellbeing because it appeared to be more like a physical need. As much as it is deeply related to physical safety and material provisions, this yearning rises above mere physical needs to the spiritual longing for assurance of wellness and peace of mind for self and loved ones. Consequently, I decided to place this spiritual need under the need for seeking a tutelary god.

\(^{247}\) Ng, 203.
4.4.6 Interconnection between Fulfilling Chinese Traditional Duties and Seeking the Ultimate or Divine for Meaning & Purpose

The fulfillment of Chinese traditional duties was considered a fundamental spiritual pursuit by the participants, mainly through the practice of filial piety, ancestral worship, and worship of household deities. This spiritual need could be included in the horizontal aspect of yearning for inclusion, as it pertains to a crucial part of the Chinese culture and it is deeply embedded in the identity of my participants. However, it is also a spiritual yearning that moves beyond the horizontal level, reaching the vertical aspect of the ultimate or transcendent for inclusion, because it also involves the practice of household deities worship and ancestral worship.

Providing for their household and fulfilling family obligations, especially by the eldest son, was a high priority of filial piety expressed by my participants. Filial piety was also extended to siblings and close relatives, therefore, their family connections was very broad and strong. All of the participants moved to Venezuela because they already had some relatives in Venezuela to help them get started. Once they were established financially, they helped other relatives to move to Venezuela, as well as sent money back home to family members. Indeed, money played a vital role in achieving this duty. Furthermore, besides seeking better financial opportunities, they had the unspoken duty to bring honor to the family and close relatives.

Professor Wing-Tsit Chan knowledgeably explains that parents are viewed as the “foundation of life and therefore one’s moral obligation to them should be greater.”248 In

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248 Wing-Tsit Chan, 73.
this sense, parents are the concrete ultimate reality; parents are their visible source of life. Ancestral worship is an extension of this filial piety practiced by Chinese as part of their spirituality. Those participants of my research who at some time worshipped household gods and/or ancestors explained that they did so out of respect and in the hopes to receive the protection, blessings and prosperity for the family.

However, the participants’ experiences with life tragedies or misfortunes caused them to question their traditional values and belief systems of blessings and prosperity such as the ‘good karma’ principle. They were also confronted with life challenges beyond their control which prompted them to further look for answers and purpose. In doing so, one of their tendencies was to seek the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose. This phenomenon illustrates Shen’s acute observations; that Chinese pursuit of knowledge “began as a concern leading not to universal theorization but to universal praxis. It was because of his concern with the destiny of the individual and society that Chinese began to philosophize.”

Strikingly, there was one apparent exception to this pursuit of knowledge for ‘universal praxis.’ One of the youngest participants showed a natural inclination to search for meaning in life and philosophize about the universe. He was also one of the few participants who appeared to have a keen inquisitive mind, had a deeper interest in Biblical teachings, had a strong desire to serve God, felt a great sensitivity to the problem of sin/evil, and the need to do something about it, *inter alia*. He appeared to be less attached to Chinese

traditional practices, maybe due to the fact that he migrated to Venezuela in his early teen years and became a believer in his late teen years.

4.4.7 Interconnections between the Horizontal and Vertical Spiritual Needs

First of all, I observed that the horizontal heartfelt yearnings for distinctness (a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment) were intimately connected to the horizontal heartfelt yearnings for inclusion (receive genuine care and unconditional love, reaching out to others). Kegan perceptively indicates that there is a striking tension in the relationship between these two great yearnings of human experience.250 In my analysis of the participants’ experiences of these yearnings from the horizontal perspective, this apparent tension was not necessarily negative or mutually exclusive; rather, the longing for and fulfillment of certain needs produced mixed effects on other needs. For example, the longing to reach out to others could be perceived as challenging in the sense that the participants obviously needed to sacrifice something; however, in doing so, many of them experienced happiness and fulfillment, expressed by inner joy and spiritual satisfaction. Another example is that when the participants experienced genuine care and unconditional love; they also felt affirmed as worthy human beings (self worth), which in turn made them feel very happy (happiness and fulfillment).

Secondly, the spiritual needs related to the vertical aspects of the sacred were also tightly interconnected to the spiritual needs from the horizontal aspect of relationships. For example, the participants’ longing to please and serve the Lord, a seemingly spiritual

250 Kegan, 107.
yearning for inclusion with the divine, appeared to motivate and intensify the participants’ desire to reaching out to others, which could in turn met their need of self worth and further impact the participants’ need for meaning and purpose in life. Furthermore, as the participants engaged in seeking the divine for meaning and purpose, they experienced enlightenment that affected their yearning for a better and brighter future, and so forth.

Thirdly, the spiritual needs from the vertical aspects of the sacred or ultimate (seeking a tutelary god, fulfilling Chinese traditional duties, seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose, receive genuine care and unconditional love, pleasing and serving the Lord) were also interconnected and mutually engaging. For example, in seeking personal and familial wellbeing, the participants sought for a tutelary god and engaged in fulfilling Chinese traditional duties. These in turn prompted them to seek the ultimate and divine for meaning and purpose. The participants experienced great inner joy, inner peace, and meaning and enlightenment in this pursuit. In addition, the experience of seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose led the participants to experience genuine care and unconditional love, which in turn led the participants to desire to please and serve the Lord, which in turn intensified their desire to reach out to others. It was fascinating to identify that when the participants began to seek the divine for meaning and purpose, they, in turn, experienced the reality of Jesus Christ. And when they experienced the Lord, their other spiritual needs also were affected.

251 The need for genuine care and unconditional love pertained to both the horizontal and the vertical aspects for inclusion. It was evident that apart from longing to receive GCUL from other human beings, the participants longed for and experienced great comfort, grace and unconditional love from the Lord Jesus Christ.
4.4.8 Interconnections between Spiritual Needs and the Experience of Jesus Christ

It was indeed amazing to discern an impressive difference in the participants’ experiences of spiritual needs before and after their experience of and belief in Jesus Christ. First of all, I observed that before the participants became familiar with the Biblical teachings, their general experience of spiritual needs were mixed with feelings from high hopes and expectations, trust and reliance on self, good intensions, and focused efforts; to disappointment, misery, emptiness, bitterness, sadness, regret, helplessness, and unfulfilled longings, to name a few. While feeling these emotions, some of them experienced addiction to gambling, broken relationships, betrayal from friend and relatives, and other challenges in life that prompted them to seek the ultimate or divine for purpose and meaning in life. However, after they believed in the message of the Gospel, the participants shared a common experience of joy, encouragement, better emotions, dependence on the Lord, hope for their struggles, enlightenment, and improved relationships, to name a few.

I also noticed a refocusing of their life pursuits arising from their personal experience of Christ. For example, most of the participants immigrated to Venezuela with the hopes of finding better opportunities to improve their living standards and provide a better future for their immediate family members as well as extended family members back in China. These pursuits seemed to have been a significant component of their value system and worldview, as one of them candidly shared, “…back then, I did not have any specific pursuit in life... I mean, I wanted to make money... when you have money; you have what you need to make your life smoother...” However, as they became believers of Jesus Christ, their single minded pursuit of money was slightly redirected to include loftier values and
pursuits such as pleasing God and serving others. Their life changes were truly awe inspiring, evoking great respect from their own peers, as many of them quit gambling, improved family relations, and forsook the chance to earn ‘fast money’ through illegal transactions, *inter alia*.

In addition, I noticed that those who expressed a deeper knowledge of the Bible and had a greater experience of Christ’s presence in their daily challenges were also the ones who showed a deeper desire to **please and serve the Lord** and to **reach out to others**. This phenomenon was common to all participants in varying degrees. They also experienced certain degree of fulfillment in all of their other spiritual needs such as a **better outlook for their future**, **happiness and fulfillment**, **self worth**, **personal and familial wellbeing** which was not necessarily connected with the accumulation of material wealth, as one of the participants eloquently manifested, “…I experienced this sweetness inside me... this kind of joy that money cannot buy... I mean, before, when I worked two jobs, I made a lot of money, but I did not experience this joy... I mean, when I was worshipping idols, the feeling was very fake...”

The following **“Diagram of Interconnections and Relationships of Spiritual Needs”** (Table 2) is my attempt to illustrate the intricate interconnections and relationships of the spiritual needs of the participants as described in the above section.
Table 2: Diagram of Interconnections and Relationships of Spiritual Needs

- The Triune God
  - Seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning & purpose
- Fulfilling Chinese Traditional Duties
- Seeking a Tutelary God
- Personal & Familial Wellbeing
- Genuine Care & Unconditional Love
- A Better & Brighter future
- Self Worth
- Happiness & Fulfillment

Self

Immediate Family

Others

Please & Serve The Lord

Reaching Out To Others
Table 2 is not an exhaustive reflection of the findings in this chapter. It is limited by its two-dimensional basic geometric shapes; however, it can provide a quick visual overview with the following remarks:

There are four circles representing four different units of beings. The blue circle represents the individual ‘self’ as the centre of all relationships. It is from the individual’s vintage point of view that the interviews were conducted. Immediately connected to the ‘self’ is the green circle representing the immediate family of the individual. The outer pink circle represents the friends and other people who in one way or another have interacted with the individual self. These three circles are connected horizontally to illustrate the individual’s heartfelt yearnings from the horizontal perspective of relationships for inclusion or distinctness. The forth orange circle represents the Triune God, place above the other three circles to illustrate the individual’s spiritual needs perceived from the horizontal perspective of the individual’s relationship with the divine or ultimate.

There are ten squares representing the ten identified themes of spiritual needs of the participants. The black arrows represent the interconnections of the self with each spiritual need and the interconnections between the spiritual needs. The red arrows represent the effects of the individual’s experience of Jesus Christ, having a ripple effect on his other spiritual needs.

The ‘self’ is portrayed as closely connected to the horizontal spiritual needs for distinction such as **a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment.** The self is also connected to his immediate family and others by the horizontal spiritual needs for inclusion such as **personal and familial wellbeing, genuine care and**
unconditional love, and reaching out to others. The dissatisfaction of their vertical needs for fulfilling Chinese traditional duties and seeking a tutelary God caused the participants to seek further to the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose leading them to encounter the Lord Jesus Christ (except for one participant who experienced direct longing for the ultimate or divine). As a result of their conversion, they experienced the need to please and serve the Lord. They also experienced the fulfillment, to some degree, of all of their other spiritual needs as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a detailed investigation and systematic analysis of the data collected from the eight participants. The following ten themes were identified as the spiritual needs of the participants emerging from their unique cultural background and social context: the heartfelt yearning for a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, genuine care and unconditional love, personal and familial wellbeing, fulfilling Chinese traditional duties, seeking the ultimate or divine for meaning and purpose, seeking a ‘tutelary God,’ reaching out to others, and pleasing and serving the Lord. I have endeavored to provide a composite textural-structural description\(^\text{252}\) of what and how the participants have experienced spiritual needs under the ten themes listed above. I have also attempted to decipher and interpret the intricate multilevel interconnections of these spiritual needs from the horizontal and vertical perspectives as well as from the two great yearnings for inclusion and distinctness. Furthermore, observations were presented of the participants’ experiences of spiritual needs before and

\(^\text{252}\) Moustakas, 121, 122.
after their experience of and conversion to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. In the following chapter, I have attempted to present the major findings with the implications for theology and practice in ministry.
Chapter Five

Major Findings and Significance

For Theology and Practice

5.1. Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, I did not find any documented academic research with regards to the spirituality and spiritual needs of the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela; therefore, it is my intention that the findings in this study will become a valuable contribution and resource to a larger community of spiritual leaders ministering to people groups similar to the unique population represented in this research. In addition, on the denominational level, it is my desire that these insights will stimulate church leaders working with similar people’s group to further engage in theological reflection, as well as identify and develop effective strategies of discipleship for new believers that address their spirituality and spiritual needs. And ultimately, it is my heartfelt longing and prayer that through this humble contribution, people similar to those who participated in this research study will be the main recipients of the benefits from these findings. In this chapter, I present the major findings of this investigation with the implications for theology and practice in ministry.

5.2. Major Findings of this Study

Ten remarkable themes were identified as the spiritual needs of the participants perceived from the perspective which relates to the ultimate, significant, truthful, and purposeful; including the vertical aspect of the sacred or transcendent and the horizontal
aspect of relationships for inclusion and distinctness. Through the analysis and interpretation of these needs and their interconnections, the following are the main insights that I have uncovered.

5.2.1 Attending to the Physical Needs in order to Engage with the Spiritual Needs

As identified in Chapter Four, I observed that the physical needs of the participants were neatly intertwined and almost inseparable from their spiritual needs. I also observed that most participants became aware of their inner longings while attending to their physical needs. Even though they did not classify or identify their needs as physical and spiritual needs, there was a progression of awareness from the physical to the spiritual. Furthermore, it was apparent that the horizontal needs for inclusion and distinctness were more prominent than the vertical needs related to the transcendent.

The participants in general had a high regards for money, material wealth, physical health, peace and safety. These appeared to be their forthright expressed values. However, buried underneath these seemingly valued prizes, were layers of deeper and greater longings that the participants treasured. These dreamed treasures were their spiritual needs, the heartfelt longings of their souls identified as the need for genuine care and unconditional love, happiness and fulfillment, self-worth, personal and familial wellbeing, a better and brighter future, finding meaning and purpose in life, fulfilling traditional duties, reaching out to others, seeking a tutelary god, and pleasing and serving the Lord. I observed that the participants became more aware of these deeper levels of heartfelt longings when they encountered road blocks while pursuing the
fulfillment of their physical needs. This significant finding has great implications for ministry that are presented in the next section.

5.2.2 Age and Gender Factors in the Experience of Spiritual Needs

The analysis of the data showed some unique characteristics pertaining to the younger participants (18-30 years old), the middle age participants (31-60 years old), and the older participants (61-older). Interestingly, the younger participants’ overall pursuit of material wealth was relatively less intense than the other two groups. This could be explained by the fact that they were still living under their parents’ protection and did not have to worry about paying all their expenses, even though they had to help in the family business. In addition, the younger participants also appeared to have less attachment to Chinese traditional values and less experience in ancestral worship as they migrated to Venezuela during their formative years, studied for a number of years under the Venezuelan culture, and became believers during their teen years. However, the younger participants appeared to have been more receptive and reflective about spiritual concerns such as searching for meaning and purpose in life. They were also more engaged in personal interests other than work and were more outspoken and connected with their dreams and ideals.

In contrast, the middle age participants appeared to be the ‘down to earth’ group. They were the typical pragmatic anthropocentric Chinese with a syncretistic approach to metaphysical realities, harmonizing from the three major Chinese philosophical teachings and traditional rituals, seeking to pay respect to the higher powers, hoping to get their blessings in return. As such, they had stronger ties with families in China, valued and
practiced Chinese traditions. They moved to Venezuela as young adults with the primary mission to ‘make money.’ In their pursuits, they experienced hardships that led them to encounter the Lord. They shared great life experiences as the main financial providers in their households. Their experiences of the Lord took a longer path than that of the younger participants. They seemed to have a greater challenge to attend church related activities due to work obligations. Nevertheless, their life journeys were full of challenging and awe inspiring stories.

The older participants appeared to have a more detached perspective to material wealth. They seemed to have accepted their life path, they viewed life with more calmness, and they were planning for retirement. However, health related issues appeared to have been one of their greatest concerns. In addition, personal and familial wellbeing was another highlighted concern, especially the future of their children, including their spiritual salvation. However, it was illuminating to observe that they expressed great peace and inner sense of trust in God as they shared thoughts of death without showing fearful emotions. Their experience of Jesus Christ’s reality through some physical illnesses was the determining factor for their tangible trust in the Lord.

Generally speaking, the male participants seemed to connect their experiences of spiritual needs directly to their work experiences and performance. They also seemed to have stronger spiritual needs related to the yearning for distinctness on the horizontal level. In contrast, the female participants appeared to link their experiences of spiritual needs directly to their relationships with their children, immediate family, and friends. The need for genuine care and unconditional love as a need for inclusion resonated louder with the
female participants. And lastly, the male participants seemed to have stronger challenges with issues of gambling addiction than the female participants.

5.2.3 **Lifestyle Lacking Constructive Entertainment for the Soul**

The data collected revealed that gambling addiction was one common challenge many participants experienced personally or through close relatives. One of the key reasons gambling was so attractive, was the apparent reward of fast money it promised to deliver. However, I have also identified another important reason for the participants’ involvement in gambling, this reason was the lack of constructive entertainment built into the lives of those who got entangled in it. One of the participants described his first impression of his Chinese acquaintances when he arrived in Venezuela as follows,

...*I mean, if I start with the Chinese life-style here, then I will say that they have only three places in their routine... their life is repetitive in three places, their store... the market to purchase goods... and then they go back to their house... that’s it... there is not much... the people don’t have much entertainment...*

Evidently, he observed that his Chinese friends had a monotonous daily routine with long working hours resulting in a very boring and stressful lifestyle. This observation is further attested by another participant’s experience as he sadly shared,

...*yes... so, I came (to Venezuela) and became very busy... I could say... well, let me explain, my life here at the beginning working in the kitchen of Chinese restaurants was very empty... I would rather go gambling... and I drank a lot... I mean, I can say that when I came to Venezuela... for the first time... the first time... I made friends with some gamblers... and as I gambled along the way... I became*

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253 Many recent studies further enlighten us with possible causes for gambling addiction. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss these presentations. I will limit my findings to the observations from the analysis of the data collected from this study. The following links are samples of these studies for further investigation: Ferris Jabr, “How the Brain Gets Addicted to Gambling.” *Scientific American*, October 15, 2013, [http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-brain-gets-addicted-to-gambling/?page=2](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-brain-gets-addicted-to-gambling/?page=2) (accessed on December 14, 2014). “Gambling addiction linked to brain reward system.” *BBC NEWS Health*, 18 October 14, [http://www.bbc.com/news/health-29659416](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-29659416) (accessed on December 14, 2014).
addicted to gambling... so, I would pursue this... because it seemed that it could be
a shortcut for making more money faster...

Even though some participants did not participate in gambling, they also lacked
meaningful recreational activities that affected their emotions and inner health, as one of
them vividly illustrated,

...the thing I hate the most is people who gamble... so when I was not happy and
felt lonely, my pastime was to drink alcohol... after drinking and smoking... of
course, alcohol and cigarettes go together... when it was time to go to work and I
saw my face in the mirror, I realized that I looked like a ‘ghost’... I asked myself,
‘why am I mistreating myself?’... but I continued... whenever I have some spare
time, I felt like this, I will put some music, and felt sad, then I will start drinking,
just like this... alcohol is bitter... or it was because I was bitter/suffering²⁵⁴ ... then
I just drank, there was no purpose, or reason... I was just bored, and aimless, so it
was a way to enjoy this loneliness...

I must underscore that the above testimony was an extreme case. Only three out of the eight
participants shared their personal experiences related to either gambling or other unhealthy
pastime. However, before their encounter with the Gospel, all of the participants lacked
some kind of constructive entertainment or recreational activities that would nurture their
inner beings and address their feelings of emptiness, loneliness, or boredom, inter alia.

My informed hypothesis for the reason of this lack of entertainment is mainly
twofold. On the one hand, my participants had very long working hours, leaving them
physically tired and emotionally exhausted, with very little time and energy to invest in
meaningful recreational activities. Generally speaking, organized recreational activities are

²⁵⁴ The word ‘suffering’ in Chinese ‘痛苦’ has the same Chinese character for the word ‘bitter’ (苦).
less accessible in the Venezuelan context (compared to Canada), requiring certain command of the Spanish language which was a significant barrier for most of my participants, and free time to spare. Consequently, it appeared that for most participants, constructive entertainment or recreational activities were luxurious pursuits seemingly beyond their regular reach. On the other hand, the lack of previous education, training, or exposure to significant recreational interests built into their lives, such as the ability to play musical instruments, playing sports, painting or other forms of arts, to name a few, was the disadvantage from their upbringing which limited their ability to appreciate and engage in meaningful entertainment to nurture their inner being. It also appeared that before their exposure to Christianity, they simply did not see the value to invest their time or energy in recreational activities which were not considered as directly useful ‘money making’ activities. This twofold reason was most prominent amongst the middle age and older participants.

The lack of constructive entertainment and meaningful recreational activities woven into their regular routine was a significant factor for their monotonous lifestyle that accentuated inner feelings of emptiness, boredom, aimlessness, and loneliness, to name a few. Furthermore, some participants tried unhealthy forms of entertainment that could not address their deep heartfelt longings. This finding strongly confirms the tangible reality of spiritual needs in my participants, as well as the urgency for theological reflection, and meaningful spiritual response.
5.2.4 *Life Struggles as Catalysts for Re-evaluating Preconceived Values & Beliefs and Seeking the Transcendent*

It was evident that all eight participants faced very undesirable and uncomfortable life-challenging situations at certain moments in their lives. As much as these experiences appeared to have been very unpleasant for the participants; I noticed that these life struggles were not completely negative or destructive to those who experienced them. Rather, these life experiences were crucial for revealing to the participants deeper levels of meaning and values in life. These painful and shocking experiences forced the participants to re-evaluate their preconceived ideas of what was valuable or not. For example, one of the participants experienced the betrayal of a trusted business partner making her lose all her investments. She shared that this unwanted experience contributed to her realization that money was not reliable; and that there was something ultimately more important than money. Another participant experienced the unexpected tragic loss of her beloved father and brother causing her to question her traditional beliefs.

Besides causing the participants to question their preconceived values and belief system, these challenging experiences also served as catalyst for **seeking the divine or transcendent for meaning and purpose**. This was illustrated by the older participant who experienced a serious illness as well as business problems, leading him to look deeper and seek further into the spiritual realm of the transcendent. I perceived that these life experiences created an imbalance within their already familiar values and belief systems causing the participants to re-evaluate their preconceived worldviews and leading them to further seek answers for meaning and purpose in life.
5.2.5 Engaging with Biblical Teachings and Personal Experience of Jesus Christ as Foundational for Conversion to Christianity

As presented above, the life inconsistencies that the participants experienced were crucial to trigger their re-evaluation of preconceived values and beliefs leading them to further seek answers for meaning and purpose in life. I observed that these experiences were the preparation ground for the participants’ initial personal experience of Jesus Christ and the Biblical teachings. This openness to seek answers, meaning and purpose in life was the backdrop of their conversion to Christianity. Furthermore, the analysis of the data shows that the key factor for their conversion to Christianity was their exposure to Biblical teachings corroborated with a personal experience of the presence and reality of Jesus Christ as the powerful and gracious tutelary God.

All the eight participants shared a common experience in their conversion process which was, on the one hand, the experience of recognizing the truth through the learning of the Scriptures; and on the other hand, the confirmation of that truth through a personal experience with the reality of Jesus Christ. For the majority of the participants, their conversion experience was a progressive process. In this process, there was a combination of hearing and reflecting on the Gospel message, and a personal experience of the reality of that message by acting upon it, especially through the answers of prayers presented for personal needs. For example, one participant shared that prior to going to church, her life seemed aimless, boring, and constantly feeling very uptight. However, when she heard the preaching of the Gospel for the first time, she felt that it made sense and it gradually helped her have better emotions as she vividly recalled,
...I liked very much the hymns in the church... and also, back then, the pastor’s preaching... I felt, ‘ahhh! They are very good...’ many things about life... ‘ahhh! They have much truth (有道理)...’ well, in listening, I felt that... I mean... I felt that emotionally (心情), it was very good... I mean, for everything, I did not feel very uptight or very tense... so, as I listened more and more, later on... I felt, ‘ah... pretty good...’ so, this unlocked (開解) my (heart’s questions) and I felt a lot lighter...

Similarly, other participants expressed their positive response to the proclamation of the Scriptures as ‘making sense’ or ‘having much truth,’ as one of them eloquently narrated, “I heard the pastor preach... wow, interesting... his sermons made sense, they are quite positive... it teaches people to be good (towards the positive side)... from then on... I found the thing that is deep in my heart...” The experience of identifying the thing that was ‘deep in her heart,’ the thing that ‘made sense’ and that could answer their heartfelt need for meaning and purpose in life was the cognitive aspect of their conversion. This remarkable experience of cognitive enlightenment was accompanied and reinforced by a personal experience of its reality in their daily experiences as they acted upon the Biblical teachings. Furthermore, they also experienced God’s presence comforting them and assisting them. Every participant had their own unique experience in this regards. For example, one of them was anxious about a surgery she had to undertake. With nowhere to turn for comfort, protection, and assurance; she decided to try out Jesus’ promises of help through a simple prayer. And the answer to her prayer became the turning point of her faith in Jesus Christ. Likewise, a young participant struggled with legal documentation issues which caused her to test her faith and proof the promises from Jesus’ teachings. Two other participants were witnesses of disturbing spiritual forces interrupting the daily lives of loved ones. Through prayers in Jesus’ names, their loved ones experienced relief from
those spiritual forces. These were all tangible personal life experiences of Jesus Christ that the participants witnessed which became the foundation of their conversion into the Christian faith.

There was one particular young participant who had a uniquely strong tendency for cognitive learning which made his conversion experience slightly different from the others. Prior to his exposure to Christianity, he shared that he had already perceived the presence of sin/evil in this world. However, it was only when he began to study the Bible that he realized his own problem with sin and the need to address the problem of evil in his own life and in the world. His personal experience of Jesus Christ was through the cognitive logical reasoning process of becoming convinced of what he perceived as truthful through the study of the Bible. His preoccupation with ultimate meaning, purpose, significance and the truth covered a much broader spectrum that extended a desire to change the world. His expressed dreams and ideals were not so much centered on self interests as much as doing something to improve the entire world. In this sense, I did not observe in his conversion experience a dramatic personal experience of God’s intervention in his life for a particular life struggle or answer to a particular prayer for help. He did not seem to fit into the general category of the pragmatic utilitarian Chinese presented in previous chapters.

5.3. Significance for Theology and Practice

As I wrestled with the findings related to the identified spiritual needs of my participants, it was evident that I had more questions than answers. After a careful consideration, the following theological reflections are presented for practical reasons, as
these weighed heavier on direct and relevant ministry applications to address the spiritual needs of people groups similar to my participants.

5.3.1 The Gospel Message Addressing Physical Needs and Possessions

The investigation of the spiritual needs of my participants revealed that they had a very high regards for money, material wealth, and physical health. Even though their life critical experiences enlightened them with the realization that money was not ‘almighty,’ I perceived their struggle to meet their physical needs and accumulate material wealth for the ‘rainy days’ was unequivocally a great concern, especially in the social-political unstable Venezuelan context. In the interviews, they expressed important values such as family affection, genuine care, peace, security, reaching out to others, and pleasing and serving God, *inter alia*; nevertheless, their daily routine and actions showed that they invested most of their time and energy to earn money. Evidently, to the participants, money represented security, a better and brighter future, control, and social status, to name a few. As such, the data showed that their physical needs and material possessions were closely connected to the deeper spiritual needs identified in this study.

How then do the Scriptures address the issues related to their physical needs and material wealth? First of all, it is important to affirm the legitimacy of physical needs from the Biblical perspective as it is attested throughout the Bible from the Creation account in the book of Genesis to the New Testament narratives and teachings.\(^{255}\) However, with Jesus’ inauguration of God’s kingdom in His incarnation, the message of the Gospel has

\(^{255}\) For example, Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 men (not counting the children and women) addresses the immediate physical needs of the crowd (Matt.14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-15).
been framed in the eschatological perspective, as professor Fee insightfully explains that believers are to be “truly eschatological people”\textsuperscript{256} who live between the beginning and the consummation of the end; as such, Fee continues, “we are called to life in the kingdom, which means life under His lordship, freely accepted and forgiven, but committed to the ethics of the new age, and to seeing them worked out in our own lives and world in this present age”\textsuperscript{257} (italics the author’s). Life under God’s lordship is grounded on the relationship with the triune God, which consists of “God’s grace manifested in Christ, centered in the cross, confirmed by the resurrection, made effective by the Spirit and experienced in community.”\textsuperscript{258} This implies a change of symbolic worlds from previously acquired cultural social patterns, values and belief systems to the new identity in Christ’s eschatological age. Consequently, possessions are reassessed in light of the values of God’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{259} Christian ethics professor Sondra Wheeler, in her analysis of Luke 12:22-34, cleverly argues that the believer’s treatment of possessions should be a result of their trust and dependence in their relationship with God rather than reliance on themselves.\textsuperscript{260} Based on this relationship, Wheeler continues,

\begin{quote}
Jesus commands his disciples “do not be anxious” and provides three arguments for the inappropriateness of anxiety. It is \textit{inadequate} because it springs from an inadequate understanding of human life (v.23); it is \textit{unnecessary} because God who feeds the birds will feed them (v.24); and it is \textit{ineffective} because no one can add anything to his life by it (v.25)”\textsuperscript{261} (bolded to represent the author’s italics).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{256} Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, \textit{How to Read the Bible for all its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible} (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 120.
\textsuperscript{257} Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 121.
\textsuperscript{258} Gorman, 113.
\textsuperscript{259} Space is not sufficient to present a comprehensive investigation of the Biblical perspective on money and possessions. Only a brief overview of some key teachings from Jesus in this matter has been presented.
\textsuperscript{261} Wheeler, 63.
In other words, believers are mistaken when they anxiously focus on possessions neglecting the facts that their human existence has greater purpose than just satisfying their physical needs; that God is their provider who knows their needs and who is in control of everything, including their present and future; and that they are powerless to ultimately care for and control their own lives. Furthermore, Jesus calls his disciples to assess possessions in light of their mortal existence, God’s authority over human eternity, and kingdom priorities, as Wheeler eloquently declares, “beyond the assurance that God will provide what God’s children need, there is the claim that what they need is not finally the things that all pursue, but God’s own reign, to which all these are added almost incidentally” (italics the author’s). Thus, Jesus’ declaration to the tempter when experiencing hunger, recalling the Old Testament instruction, that “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,” is still the powerful directive for believers today. This means that above all else, man’s existence has higher purpose revealed from God’s word than simply satisfying their physical needs.

This understanding of possessions from the Biblical perspective has direct impact on the daily decisions and actions of believers. In order to spiritually engage with the people represented in this study, first, it is obviously important to attend to their physical needs. In doing so, we are affirming the legitimacy of these needs and concerns, conveying the reality of God’s presence and care for their everyday needs. After all, God is the tutelary God who invites humankind to His lordship and tutelage. On the other hand, the message

263 Wheeler, 71.
264 Matthew 4:4.
of the Gospel must clearly emphasize the trust and dependence aspect of their relationship with the Heavenly Father by grace through Christ Jesus’ cross, made effective by the Holy Spirit and to be experienced in the community of the body of Christ. This means their existence and purpose has kingdom relevance beyond themselves. As such, the message must clearly explain Christ’s teachings about the eschatological perspective of their earthly existence as they adopt the broader worldview of God’s kingdom. Hence, greed and anxiety over possessions are the result of wrong priorities and wrong focus arising from lack of faith in God who is the “source and measure and guarantor of life.”265 This faith is centered on the proper understanding of human existence according to Jesus’ Gospel in the context of God’s kingdom, as Wheeler insightfully explains, “It is faith in God’s providence, yes, but even more it is faith in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom as the proper point of orientation for a human life.”266 This understanding is the compelling answer to the deep spiritual longing for a tutelary God.

5.3.2 The Gospel Message Addressing Spiritual Needs from the Horizontal Perspective

It has already been established in Chapter Four that money was insufficient and inadequate to address the participants’ heartfelt longings, in particular the spiritual needs from the horizontal perspective, such as a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, genuine care and unconditional love, personal and familial wellbeing. Conversely, can the Gospel message truly address these spiritual needs?

265 Wheeler, 71.
266 Wheeler, 64.
The understanding of the believer’s life from the vintage point of their relationship with the triune God and His kingdom has powerful implications for their earthly existence beyond possessions because it reaches all aspects of life, for the present and the future. When understood properly, it engenders great joy, assurance, and inner peace in those who truly act upon the Gospel because they have positioned themselves under the providence, guidance, and lordship of God their Heavenly Father and the eschatological age. Under this kingdom perspective, life gains eternal dimension and believers are promised an incomparable future. Additionally, the Gospel is the message of unmerited unconditional love for forgiveness, reconciliation, renovation, incorporation into a new identity (the body of Christ) empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit for life and service, and bodily resurrection; all of this offered freely to undeserved human beings who humbly believe and receive this message.

The Gospel understood from the above perspective is bountifully sufficient and adequate to address the participants’ heartfelt longings for a better and brighter future, self worth, happiness and fulfillment, genuine care and unconditional love, and personal and familial wellbeing, inter alia. As observed in the interviews, to some degree, the participants experienced certain level of satisfaction for these needs after they believed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, while engaging with people similar to this research group, it is crucial to emphasize that God’s gift of entering into His kingdom is offered without reservation or favoritism. Every individual is invited to receive this grace regardless of

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267 In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 the Apostle Paul explains that the believers’ present sufferings are small and short lived compared to the future eternal glory.

268 Please refer to the Gospel Message section presented in Chapter Two for a detailed study.
their social status, cultural background, race, gender, and the like. There needs to be a sensitivity to convey the message that a believer’s **self worth** is redefined not on the basis of their accomplishments or background, rather on their relationship with their Heavenly Father, who orchestrated their redemption by sacrificing His only Son, showing His matchless unconditional love on the cross. This sensitivity addresses both, the deep yearning for distinctness as each individual believer is attributed unequal worth and promised eternal life as the result of their relationship with the Father who is unchanging and eternal; as well as the deep yearning for inclusion as the believer enters into this relationship of divine measureless love and the body of Christ. In addition, they are promised the gift of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to be the source of their strength and direction.

### 5.3.3 Understanding the Need to Fulfill Chinese Traditional Duties and the Gospel Message

The interviews showed that all of the participants grew up in the Chinese traditional culture, whereby fulfilling traditional duties was the one ‘religious/spiritual’ duty the participants could consciously identify with. Whether it was through the practice of traditional ancestral worship or submission to their parents, many of the participants expressed deep feelings of great significance in following one or more of these traditional practices at one point in their lives.\(^\text{269}\) These traditional practices are deeply embedded in the long history and the culture of the Chinese people based on the three major Chinese

\(^{269}\) The data collected confirmed the characteristics presented on the reflections for the Chinese Diaspora in Chapter Two.
philosophical thoughts and rituals. This could in part explain the failure of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to completely eradicate the core values of Confucianism and traditional practices such as filial piety during the Cultural Revolution. For some participants, these traditions were not just personal religious practices; rather, they were part of their collective Chinese identity prior to their conversion to Christianity.

As explained in Chapter Four, filial piety was experienced primarily in the participants’ yearning to obey and submit to parents’ wishes, to care for and repay their parents, as well as caring and providing for extended family members (family affection). Filial piety was also manifest in some participants’ yearning to honor and respect their deceased ancestors through ancestral worship, and worship household gods to seek protection, blessings, and peace of mind. These practices carried the belief of “retribution in the other world, and life after death.” A few participants also expressed their strong believe in the concept of ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’ from the Chinese philosophical idea of ‘tian-ming’ (Mandate from Heaven). Overall, these represented the key values for understanding the participants’ need to fulfill Chinese traditional duties.

How does the message of the Gospel respond to this need? In order to address this important heartfelt need, it is necessary to clearly distinguish the values laid on these traditional customs. From the analysis of the data collected, I have identified three core practices and values. First of all, there was the yearning to respect, submit, and care for

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270 Bell, 10. Bell gives the example that CCP attempted “to replace family ties with ties to the state during the Cultural Revolution” with no avail.

their living parents and immediate family members. Second, there was the yearning to honor, care for, and seek the blessings of the deceased ancestors through ancestral worship. And thirdly, there was the yearning to receive the blessings and protection of the gods through household deity worship.

The fifth commandment of the Decalogue\textsuperscript{272} to honor, respect and obey one’s parents has been consistently reaffirmed in the New Testament by the Lord Jesus Christ and many of the Epistles.\textsuperscript{273} The Scripture also teaches the important value of loving and caring for family members, especially for the elderly.\textsuperscript{274} This means that parents and family affection is highly valued in God’s kingdom and addresses the first Chinese traditional concern of filial piety to living parents and immediate family members. However, from the Biblical perspective, parents are not deemed to be the tangible ultimate reality as it is in Confucianism; as such, Christians are not to worship their deceased parents or ancestors. Henceforth, the tension in the two remaining traditional Chinese practices of ancestral and household deity worship with the Biblical teachings.

Once again, the Decalogue is clear on the prohibition to worshipping idols of any form; believers are to only worship the triune God. Jesus rebuked the tempter by confirming this prohibition.\textsuperscript{275} The Apostle Paul ascertains that idols are nothing; however, believers are warned to flee from the worship of idols because of its dangers,\textsuperscript{276} as Gorman insightfully explains that for Paul, idolatry (even though idols are not gods) “is part of the

\textsuperscript{272} Exodus 20:12.
\textsuperscript{273} For example Matthew 15:3-6; Ephesians 6:1-3.
\textsuperscript{274} For example 1Timothy 5.
\textsuperscript{275} Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 4:10.
\textsuperscript{276} 1 Corinthians 10:14-21.
great cosmic battle against the worship of the one true God.”277 One of the participants in my research expressed her great struggle with this particular Biblical teaching during her initial experience of the Gospel, as she vividly portrayed,

...I was struggling... especially, where the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the only true God... back then I was appalled (反感) about this teaching... 'What do you mean the only true God? How about our China? We have also gods... we have ‘Guanyin,’ we have eh... we have... 'Wong-Tai-Sin'278... eh... we have ‘Buddha’... in short... in China we have lots of gods... especially, back in my own town, we worshiped even stones... and the gods of the temples, a lot, a lot... so many that you cannot count them all... back then... I was appalled, it really turned me off to hear about this teaching... but this ‘appalling’ attitude did not stop me from going to church... I continued to go, I just did not like this... I really had a 'protesting / rejecting' (抗拒) attitude... I just did not like this particular saying... I really had an issue with this saying...

Evidently, this is one of the hard sayings in the Bible that clashes directly with the Chinese traditional practice of ancestral and household deity worship. This could be a significant challenge when engaging the Gospel with the people similar to my research study group due to the fact that the Scripture teaches monotheism contrary to the Chinese syncretistic anthropocentric approach to religious beliefs. Nevertheless, it was also remarkable to learn that the above participant continued to attend the church and eventually experienced the reality of Jesus Christ in her life leading her to follow Jesus as she eventually declared,

*I feel that Christ is even higher than Buddhism... it is one level higher, I mean, it is even more superior than the other holy books that I believed... many people say that we Christians are narrow minded... eh... that we are exclusivists, because we don’t include them in our teaching... they say this because they do not understand the Bible... I was like this also...*

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277 Gorman, 262.
278 Wong-Tai-Sin (黃大仙) is the name of another famous Chinese deity.
Indisputably, to engage in open conversation on this delicate topic can raise many harsh feelings, emotions, and even rejection. However, the interviews revealed that each participant had an extraordinary personal experience of the Holy Spirit convincing them of the truthfulness of the Gospel and the reality of Jesus Christ. Their experiences also led them to change their allegiance from worshipping traditional Chinese deities to surrendering their lives to the gracious Lordship of the triune God. Therefore, this knowledge and personal experience of God’s reality is fundamental in order to engage the Gospel with those who are deeply rooted in the Chinese traditions of ancestral and household deity worship.

5.3.4 The Need for Meaning and Purpose and the Gospel Message

The need to seek the divine or transcendent for meaning and purpose was a fundamental spiritual need identified from the vertical perspective of the transcendent or sacred. Although this need did not appear on the surface from the participants’ daily activities; however, when confronted with hardships, it emerged unequivocally forcing the participants to search deeper and look higher in order to continue striving in life.

Psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl insightfully claims that “man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a “secondary rationalization” of instinctual drives.”279 According to Frankl, this human pursuit of true meaning in life is the “self-transcendence of human existence” that is to be discovered in the world, either directed “to

something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter.” In other words, human beings need something or someone other than themselves to live for, and even to die for. From the vertical perspective of the sacred or transcendent, this search for meaning and purpose could be interpreted as a way of expressing our spiritual longing directed towards God and for eternity, as Dr. Ware discerningly describes,

*Each of us has a capacity for the “something more,” and we sometimes come to points in our lives when we particularly yearn for that something. Saint Augustine’s comment made in his Confessions is often quoted because it is so true: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.”*

From the Biblical perspective, this search for ‘the something more’ can be interpreted as the human expression of their God given yearning for the transcendent that ultimately can find its satisfaction or perfect match in God alone. In his search for meaning, the writer of Ecclesiastes desperately cries out, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” Remarkably, after applying all his energy to find meaning through the pursuit of wisdom, pleasure, projects, riches, and power, *inter alia*, the preacher concludes that those pursuits are ultimately meaningless because they are ephemeral and lacking; the only thing worth pursuing is rather to fear and obey God. This perspective is due to his observation that God has “set eternity in the human heart,” in other words;

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280 Frankl, 115.
281 Ibid. 105.
283 Ecclesiastes 1:2.
285 Ecclesiastes 3:11.
God has implanted in the human soul a capacity for eternal things, a concern about the future, a desire to understand “from the beginning to the end, and have a sense of something which transcends our immediate situation.”\textsuperscript{286} This understanding resonates with St. Augustine’s insightful confession that ‘God has made us for Himself, and our heart is restless until it finds rests in the Almighty,’ because nothing or nobody else is sufficient to fill this void. This means that ultimately human beings cannot settle for temporary things. They need something that is not only ‘other than themselves,’ but rather something or someone who is as big as eternity itself, which can be no other than God Himself.

In his theory, Frankl proposes that “we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering.”\textsuperscript{287} Interestingly, from the experiences of the participants, I observed that they found meaning and purpose after they experienced the truthfulness of the Scriptures and the presence of God in tangible ways in their lives. To some extent, this amazing experience resonates with Frankl’s second way of discovering meaning. The participants also expressed their heartfelt yearning of pleasing and serving the Lord as well as reaching out to others. They found great meaning and purpose in expressing their devotion to God and blessing others with their efforts, these actions align with Frankl’s first way of discovering meaning. However, I noticed that the participants’ experience of God took precedence and was the sustaining force for doing something for others and pleasing the Lord in the long run.

\textsuperscript{287} Frankl, 115.
As indicated earlier, the participants’ lack of constructive entertainment or recreational activities for their souls had an adverse impact on their emotions and overall sense of inner wellbeing. Interestingly, in the interviews, they revealed that after experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose in the Gospel, their emotions and general sense of wellbeing improved. Those participants who were addicted to gambling were able to quit this habit attributing their success to God’s help. And all of them experienced inner refreshment as they began to learn and practice the Biblical teachings. Many of them shared their joy and a renewed sense of purpose and fulfillment in attending the church, relating to other believers, and reaching out to others. For most of the participants, the participation in church fellowship activities such as sharing their life experiences, eating together, encouraging and praying for one another; ladies Bible study group (for the female participants); men Bible study group (for the male participants); Sunday worship singing; and the listening of the preaching of the Bible were identified as constructive and soul enriching experiences. Therefore, in engaging the people represented in this research study it is fundamental to facilitate effective ways to help them discover meaning and purpose through their experiences of Biblical teachings and the reality of the Almighty, as well as providing meaningful soul enriching activities in community.

5.3.5 Critical Experiences as Catalysts for Spiritual Enlightenment

Critical real life experiences were crucial for the participants’ awakening to a deeper spiritual realm. For example, at certain points in their life journey, their assessment of money and other highly valued objects was challenged (and eventually changed) when they were confronted with undesirable critical life experiences. In a few cases, these
experiences were cognitive confrontation with previously adopted assumptions and belief systems, or disturbing cognitive awareness of the presence of sin/evil in the world; however, more often than not, these were painful and regrettable experiences that forced them to pause from their regular routines in order to question their life patterns, values and belief systems. As such, these critical life experiences served as catalysts for spiritual enlightenment. These unpleasant experiences in of themselves did not offer the answers to their quest or automatically led them to enlightenment; however, they disabled the participants to settle for the status quo. As they continued to search for higher meaning, their search led them to encounter the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this sense, unwanted life hardships had a positive catalyst spiritual effect on the participants who experienced them.

Strikingly, Feldmeier in analyzing the spiritual developmental theorists observes that they all assess the importance of pain and struggle for spiritual growth, as he clearly remarks, “each theorist maintains that without facing pain, struggle, and doubt, either there will be no growth or it will be maladapted.”288 This finding resonates with the participants’ experiences of hardships and struggles, with the difference that their spiritual development resulted in a change from traditional values and belief systems into a new previously uncharted symbolic world. This revelation offers powerful insights for ministering to the people represented in this study.

How can spiritual leaders assist and engage the people represented in this study to spiritual enlightenment through their critical life experiences? Feldmeier rightly affirms

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that “while all spiritual progress is at God’s initiative, one must become disposed in order to progress.”\textsuperscript{289} As difficult as this might be for our understanding (and our liking), unwanted and painful life experiences can become a camouflaged gift from God.\textsuperscript{290} Therefore, the spiritual leader must be watchful for opportunities to respond to the spiritual needs initiated by those experiences and be readily available to administer God’s grace. This includes the Biblical perspective to address their values and belief system, and the Gospel message of hope, love, forgiveness, and peace from the incarnate Christ to those who are seeking answers to their plight.

In addition, Frankl enlightens us by suggesting that the third way by which people can discover meaning is through the attitude they take toward unavoidable suffering.\textsuperscript{291} Surely, the spiritual leader plays an active role in directing the individual who is experiencing struggles to adopt a redemptive attitude towards their unpleasant experiences in light of the Biblical teachings of the cross.\textsuperscript{292} This attitude is indispensable for receiving the Biblical perspective and answering their deep spiritual longings unearthed by those unpleasant experiences.

### 5.3.6 The Divine Factor for Fulfilling Spiritual Needs

The participants’ narratives revealed the unmistakable divine hallmark woven beautifully with their unique experiences of deep heartfelt longings. Regardless of the different circumstances of their experiences, and in spite of the participants’ limitations

\textsuperscript{289} Feldmeier, 78.
\textsuperscript{290} Romans 8:28 affirms that all things, including the unpleasant and regrettable things, can work for the good of those who love God. It is worth highlighting that it does not claim unpleasant things as good in on themselves, but can serve for the good of those who love God.
\textsuperscript{291} Frankl, 147.
\textsuperscript{292} Romans 5:3-8.
and naiveté, their experiences recounted the palpable divine intervention of self disclosure to meet their deep heartfelt longings. It was amazing to identify the invisible divine hand orchestrating opportunities for the participants to experience the reality of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives and to confirm the trustworthiness of the Gospel message, often times through answered prayers, improved emotions, and inner peace and joy, to name a few.

According to the Apostle Paul, it is the Spirit of God who can ultimately enlighten the believer in spiritual matters related to the divine and enable spiritual growth. As such, divine intervention is irreplaceable and indispensable. My reflection from the participants’ spiritual experiences was that it took some time for them to allow the message of the Gospel to germinate and for God’s Spirit to confirm this message in their lives. Human activity can only play an assisting role in this process. In order to minister to people represented in this study, the spiritual leader needs to be diligent in cultivating and nurturing the message of the Gospel in the believer’s heart, as the Apostle Paul brilliantly remarks that the ministers are those who plant the seed and water the soil; however, it is only God who makes the seed grow.

What does it mean to plant the seed and water the soil for the spiritual leader? Evidently, there are still many unknowns in need of further investigation in order to better address the spiritual needs of people similar to my research group. Dr. Corinne Ware insightfully presents four spirituality types from the study of ‘spiritual typology’ proposed

293 Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.
294 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.
by Urban T. Holmes, and the ‘psychological types’ proposed by Carl Jung. From this typology she develops a very practical tool for measuring the different kinds of spiritualities manifested in different people as they attempt to relate to the transcendent. How much influence do these factors play in the individual’s experience of spiritual needs? What other factors are involved? These unknowns would require further data collection and investigation on subjects such as personality types, spirituality types, learning styles, age and gender factors on spiritual development, and measuring tools for assessing the participants’ spirituality, *inter alia*. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a thorough study on these subjects. I must conclude this point by highlighting that the participants’ stories revealed that their conversion to Christ and church participation were profound experiences for their souls that changed their symbolic world and affected their perception of all their other heartfelt longings.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavored to present the major findings of this research study. The findings revealed that attending to the physical needs of the participants was indispensable in order to engage them with their spiritual needs; that age and gender were significant factors in their experiences of spiritual needs; that their lifestyle lacking constructive entertainment for their soul had negative impact on the participants; that their life struggles were catalysts for re-evaluating preconceived values and beliefs; and that

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298 Ware, 2.
their experience with Biblical teachings and personal experience of Jesus Christ were foundational for their conversion to Christianity.

Secondly, after a careful consideration of the findings, the following reflections were presented as they appeared to have greater significance for theology and practice in addressing the spiritual needs of people groups similar to my participants. As such, the findings revealed that it was of crucial importance to reflect on the contents of the Gospel message and its sufficiency for addressing the issues related to the physical needs, the value of possessions, the spiritual needs from the horizontal perspective, the need to fulfill Chinese traditional duties, as well as the need of seeking the sacred or transcendent for meaning and purpose in life. In all these matters, the reflection showed that the Biblical teachings were bountifully sufficient to address these issues. Furthermore, this reflection confirmed the Biblical perspective that critical life experiences such as suffered and struggles can be profitable as catalysts for spiritual enlightenment. And finally, the reflections revealed the irreplaceable and indispensable divine intervention through the Holy Spirit’s presence to confirm the trustworthiness of the Gospel message, inter alia. Evidently, these reflections are limited to the scope of the present research question. Further investigation is required to address the many questions uncovered by these reflections which will require a complete new research study.
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Appendices

APPENDIX – A

INFORMED LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Research Project: *The Spiritual Needs of the adult new believers at the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church in Venezuela*

Researcher: Rosa Leung

Dear

I am registered in the program of Doctor of Ministry at the Toronto School of Theology in Toronto, Canada. As part of this program, I am required to execute a qualitative research study. This is an informed letter of consent to invite you to participate in this project to investigate the spiritual needs of the adult new believers at the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church in Venezuela. The main goal of this research is to describe your experiences of spiritual needs.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Having served for over a decade as a missionary, I have come to realize that engaging the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela, people like you, with the Gospel requires great understanding and theological reflection of your unique expression of spirituality. I have asked myself how can the Gospel respond to the spiritual needs and assist the life journey of people like you? Therefore, this research study is a response to my own quest for a deeper understanding of your spiritual needs in order to better assist you and people like you in your spiritual journey as disciples of Jesus Christ through the Gospel.

PARTICIPATION

Participants are to be believers of Jesus Christ, have experienced spiritual needs, have been baptized within the last five years, and are eighteen years of age or older. You have been selected to be a part of this research because you meet all these requirements. This informed letter of consent is for you to keep and review. Your decision to participate in this study or not is voluntary and confidential. In this sense, please be assured that your decision will have no bearing on your relationship with the church or access to its services. You are free to decline to participate or withdrawn from this research at any time. Whatever you decide will be thoroughly respected and no questions asked. Your decision will in no way affect your relationship with me, the researcher, or any other person involved in this research. In the event that you decide to withdraw during this research...
project, all the data collected from you will be destroyed and deleted from the research study for your protection.

DURATION AND PROCEDURES
If you decide to participate, you will be invited to an in-depth, open ended, individual interview to express and describe your experiences spiritual needs. This interview will last between 60 to 120 minutes and will be audio recorded for further data analysis. I will provide you with a report or an abstract of this interview once I have transcribed the recordings accordingly. I foresee that this process might take approximately one to two months’ time. I will also collect data by manual field note-taking from public meetings such as church gatherings and from your daily activity settings. I will invite the help of one to two trusted friends who have never been in Venezuela and who do not know you to help me transcribe and translate your interview. Please be assured that they will not know your name because your identity will be concealed with special codes first. They are also expected to maintain confidentiality of the information collected.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA COLLECTION
The data collected from the interview and field note-taking will be only used for the purpose of this research. Your name and identity will be kept confidential. Special codes will be used to conceal your identity and that of all the participants. I will be the sole possessor of the key to the special codes. The audio recordings will be kept in encrypted USB memory device(s) and stored in my house. And verbatim transcripts, and all hard copies of data collected will be kept under lock in a secure place and destroyed after I have successfully fulfilled all the requirements and obtained the approval leading to graduation. Only group data of the research findings will be disclosed. This means that the data obtained will be analyzed and classified in themes from you and the other participants as a group and not individually. For the presentation and discussion of the qualitative data, in the event that I need to include illustrative quotes from your interview material, I will not mention your name or age, or specific descriptions about your appearance. In terms of age I will only refer to the general descriptions such as younger adult, middle age adult, or older adult.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS
I foresee that this research study should have a minimal possible risk to you. Should you desire to speak to someone regarding these feelings, you can contact a member of the Board of Deacons whom you trust for counseling and assistance.
It is my hope that the findings of this research will become a resource for spiritual mentors who serve in communities similar to the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church. I also hope that the findings will benefit other missionaries in developing useful tools of ministry for enhancing the spiritual journey of believers in similar contexts.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a participant, you are welcome to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 1-416-946-3273.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS
Please feel free to ask any questions or raise any concerns on any aspects of this study that is unclear to you. It is important that you take the necessary time to think over this research study and feel comfortable and ready to participate.

VERBAL CONSENT
Your recorded verbal consent is necessary for participating in this research study. Please respond to the following question: “Having read and understood the contents of this informed letter of consent, are you willing to participate in this research study?”

Date/Time of your consent: _________________________________

(This copy of informed consent is for you to keep and review)
Name of Research Subject: _________________________________
Signature of Researcher: _________________________________
Rosa Y.C. Leung, Tel.: 1-905-237-4273
(Please scroll down to see the Chinese translation of this document in the next page)

The following is the Chinese translation of Appendix A:

附錄-A

研究參與者同意書

研究方案：委內瑞拉華戀社華人宣道會成年初信者的屬靈需要

研究者：梁黃毓珠

親愛的
我現報讀加拿大多倫多神學學院教牧學博士課程，作為課程的一部分，我需要進行一個定性研究調查。這是一份邀請你參與這委內瑞拉華人宣教社華人宣道會成年初信者屬靈需要調查研究的同意書，這研究的目的是描述你在屬靈需要的經驗。

背景和目的
作為一個事奉了十多年的宣教士，我認識到從事於像你們這樣散居於委內瑞拉的華人的福音工作是需要對你們屬靈獨特的表達有深刻的認識和神學反省。我曾問自己福音是如何回應和幫助像你們一樣的人在屬靈上的需要和人生的旅程，因此這份研究是我自己對你們屬靈需要作深入認識的探索，以致在你們因福音而作耶穌基督的門徒的屬靈旅程上更好地幫助你們和像你一樣的人。

參加者
參加者必需是耶穌基督的信徒，曾經歷屬靈的需要，在過去五年之內接受洗禮，年齡在十八歲或以上。因為你達到上述要求而被選為這研究的對象。這份同意書是給你作為保存和復查之用，你的參與是完全出於自願，期間你可自由拒絕參與和退出這研究，你的決定是會得到完全尊重和絕不會要求任何交代，你的決定也絕對不會影響我、研究者和其他參與這研究的人的關係。
若在研究計劃的過程中你決定退出，為了保護你的緣故，所有從你收集得來的資料會在這研究中毀滅和刪除。

時間和過程
若你決定參與，你會被邀請進行一個深入、沒有限制、和個人的會面，會面是表達和描述你屬靈需要的經歷，這會面需時約60-120分鐘，過程會被錄音以便作日後分析。我會在抄寫錄音記錄後為你提供一份會面報告或摘要，估計這過程需要大約一至兩個月的時間。

資料收集後的保密
從會面收集得來的資料將只是為了這個研究之用，你的姓名和身份會絕對保密，你和其他參與這研究的有關人士的身份會用特別的代碼來隱藏。所有錄音會加密處理，所有對話抄本和資料搜集的硬復本會鎖於一個安全的地方直至我成功完成所有要求並獲得畢業批准後就會被毀滅。
只有這研究的集體性資料才會被公開，這意味從你和其他參加者得來的資料會被用作群體性而不是個別性的分析和主題分類。

潜在風險和好處
我預料這研究計劃會帶給你的風險可能性極少，若果你希望對某些人提出這感覺，你可以聯絡一位你信靠的執事給予輔導和幫忙。
我希望這份研究的發現可以成為那些在類似華奬社華人宣道會的社區中作屬靈導師的一項資源，我亦希望這發現能幫助在類似情況下堅固信徒屬靈旅程的宣教士發展有用的事奉工具。
若你有任何關注或疑問關於你作為參加者的權利，歡迎聯絡 Office of Research Ethics <ethics.review@utoronto.ca >或 1-416-946-3273。

歡迎提問
請自由發問任何問題或提出任何方面的關注（涉及這研究）對你來說是不清晰的，你能用一些時間去考慮這研究調查和感到自在並預備好參與是非常重要的。

口頭同意
參與這研究計劃需要你的口頭同意記錄，請回答以下問題：

當閱讀和明白這封同意書信的內容後，你是否願意參與這研究計劃？

你的同意日期/時間：
(這份同意書的副本是給你保存和復核)

研究專題的名稱：

研究者簽名：

Rosa Y.C. Leung，電話：1-905-237-4273
APPENDIX – B

IN-DEPTH OPEN-ENDED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL PROJECT:
The lived experiences of “deep heartfelt yearnings related to ultimate significance, purpose and values” emerging from the unique cultural background and social context of the adult new believers at Valencia Chinese Alliance Church (VCAC) in Venezuela

For the purpose of this research study, spiritual needs refer to the deep heartfelt yearnings of the individual viewed from the spiritual perspective which relates to ultimate significance, purpose, and values, including the vertical aspects of the sacred or transcendent, and the horizontal aspects of relationships for inclusion and distinctness.

This is an in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face interview questionnaire. Open ended probes will be used to obtain clarifications and invite further description when required by the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/time:</th>
<th>Place:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Gender:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baptismal Date:
Educational level completed:

Age Group (please circle one):
18 – 30 yrs old  31 - 45 yrs old  46 – 60 yrs old  61 yrs old and up

The Interview:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself such as: where are you from, how long have you been in Venezuela and what is your occupation?
2. What motivated you to move to Venezuela from China? Why did you move to Venezuela?
3. Please describe what your experience was like when you first arrived in Venezuela.
4. How different (if any) was this experience from your original expectations and dreams before you came to Venezuela?
5. Have you ever experienced deep heartfelt yearnings related to ultimate significance, purpose, and of priceless value in your life? Can you share about these experiences?

6. What feelings or thoughts came to your mind as you were experiencing these deep longings and wishes?

7. Can you give a few examples of circumstances that made you experience these deep heartfelt yearnings related to ultimate significance, purpose and priceless values?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share about these experiences?

The following is the Chinese translation of Appendix B:

附錄-B

會面協議計劃:

從委內瑞拉華僑社華人宣道會(VCAC)成年初信者獨有文化的社會背景浮現出「與終極意義、目的和價值有關的內心深處渴求」的真實經驗。

為著這研究的目的，屬靈需要是指個人的內心深處的渴求，這渴求從屬靈的角度是關於最終意義、目的和價值，包括神聖的或超越的垂直層面、和相同、相異關係的橫向層面。

這是一份深入、無限制、面對面的問卷，無限制的討論是當研究員要求去澄清和請求更進一步描述一些觀點時採用的。

日期/時間：

地點：

姓名：

性別：

受洗禮日期：

完成教育程度：

年齡(請圈上合適的)：

18-30 歲

31-45 歲

46-60 歲

61 歲或以上

會面：
1. 你可否告訴我一些關於你自己的資料，如：你從那裏來？在委內瑞拉多久和你的職業？

2. 甚麼原因推動你從中國來到委內瑞拉？你為甚麼搬來委內瑞拉？

3. 請形容一下你初到委內瑞拉的經驗。

4. 這經驗和你未前來委內瑞拉時原有的夢想和期望有甚麼分別（若有的話）？

5. 你是否曾經有關於你的生命最終意義、目的和價值的內心深處渴求？你可否分享一下這些經歷？

6. 當你經歷這些內心深處的渴望時，你有什麼感覺和念頭呢？

7. 你可否分享一些實例是令你體會這關於你生命最終意義、目的和價值的內心深處渴求？

8. 還有甚麼有關這體驗你想分享嗎？
APPENDIX – C

INFORMED LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE BOARD OF DEACONS OF VALENCIA CHINESE ALLIANCE CHURCH

Research Project: The Spiritual Needs of the adult new believers at the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church in Venezuela
Researcher: Rosa Leung

Dear Members of the Board of Deacons of the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church,

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I am registered in the program of Doctor of Ministry at the Toronto School of Theology in Toronto, Canada. As part of this program, I am required to conduct a qualitative research study. This is an informed letter of consent to seek your support and consent for the collection of data in your midst to investigate the spiritual needs of the adult new believers at the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church in Venezuela.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE
Having served for over a decade as a missionary, I have come to realize that engaging the Chinese Diaspora in Venezuela, people like you, with the Gospel requires great understanding and theological reflection of your unique expression of spirituality. In particular, I have asked myself how can the Gospel respond to the spiritual needs of the adult new believers and assist them in their life journey? Therefore, this research study is a response to my own quest for a deeper understanding of the spiritual needs of the new believers in order to better assist them in their spiritual journey as disciples of Jesus Christ through the Gospel.

DATA COLLECTION
I will collect data from a small group of adult new believers through one-on-one interviews as well as a focus group interview. In addition, I will collect data from your church’s Sunday worship materials and from field note-taking from church gatherings for a period no longer than three consecutive Sundays.
I will invite a sample of seven to ten baptized congregants from your church who are believers of Jesus Christ, have experienced spiritual needs, have been baptized within the last five years, and are eighteen years of age or older to participate in the interviews. I will contact them directly and there is no need for the Board’s involvement in disclosing
personal contact information or helping me contact the participants. I will present to each one of the participants an informed letter of consent (please refer to the sample letter attached to this letter) for them to review and keep. Their participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. They are free to decline to participate or withdrawn from this research at any time. Whatever they decide will be thoroughly respected and no questions asked. Their decision will in no way affect their relationship with me, the researcher, or any other person involved in this research. In the event that they decide to withdraw during this research project, all the data collected from them will be destroyed and deleted from the research study for their protection.

DURATION AND PROCEDURES
The interviews will last between 60 to 120 minutes and will be audio recorded for further data analysis. I will provide to each participant with a report or an abstract of their interview once I have transcribed the recordings accordingly. I foresee that this process might take approximately one to two months’ time. 

I will also collect data from the setting through manual field note-taking from church gatherings and the participants’ daily setting.

I will invite the help of one to two trusted friends who have never been in Venezuela and who do not know the participants to help me transcribe and translate the audio recorded interviews. They will not know the names of the participants because special codes will be used to conceal the identity of the participants first. They are also expected to maintain confidentiality of the information collected.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA COLLECTION
The data collected from the interviews and field note-taking will be only used for the purpose of this research. The name and identity of the participants will be kept confidential. Special codes will be used to conceal the identity of all the participants. The audio recordings will be kept in encrypted USB memory device(s) stored in my house, and verbatim transcripts, and all hard copies of data collected will be kept under lock in a secure place and destroyed after I have successfully fulfilled all the requirements and obtained the approval leading to graduation. Only group data of the research findings will be disclosed. This means that the data obtained will be analyzed and classified in themes from the participants as a group and not individually. For the presentation and discussion of the qualitative data, whenever I need to include illustrative quotes from the participants’ interview material, I will not mention their name or age, or specific descriptions about their appearance. In terms of age, I will only refer to the general descriptions such as younger adult, middle age adult, or older adult. Each name will be assigned a designated code; real names will
not be disclosed to protect their identity. I will be the sole possessor of the key for the designated codes.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS**

I foresee that this research study should have a minimal possible risk of harm to the participants. Should they desire to speak to someone regarding any feelings of discomfort arising from this research, I have suggested that they should contact a trusted member of the Board of Deacons of their choice (one of you) for counseling and assistance. It is my hope that the findings of this research will become a resource for spiritual mentors who serve in communities similar to the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church. I also hope that the findings will benefit other missionaries in developing useful tools of ministry for enhancing the spiritual journey of believers in similar contexts. If you have any concerns or questions regarding the rights of the participants, you are welcome to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 1-416-946-3273.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Please feel free to ask any questions or raise any concerns on any aspects of this study that is unclear to you. It is important that you take the necessary time to think over this research study and feel comfortable and ready to offer your support and consent to my presence in the VCAC for the collection of data in this research.

**PARTICIPATION AND WRITTEN CONSENT**

I am inviting you, members of the Board of Deacons, as the governing body of the Valencia Chinese Alliance Church to be my direct accountability mechanism during my presence in your midst for data collection. Your written consent to my presence in the VCAC for data collection as described in this letter is necessary for this research study. Please print your respond to the following question:

“**Having read and understood the contents of this informed letter of consent, is the Board of Deacons willing to consent to my presence in the VCAC for the collection of data for this research as specified in this letter?**”

Date/Time of your consent: _________________________________

Names and Signatures of Representatives of the Board of Deacons:

Chairperson  ________________________________

______________________________
Vice-Chairperson ___________________________

_________________________

Signature of Researcher: _____________________________

Rosa Y.C. Leung, Tel.: 1-905-237-4273

(This copy of informed consent is for the Board of Deacons to keep and review, I will keep a photocopy of this letter to document the Board’s consent for my records)

(Please scroll down to see the Chinese translation of this document in the next page)

The following is the Chinese translation of Appendix C:

附錄-C

華戀社華人宣道會同意書

研究計劃：委內瑞拉華戀社華人宣道會成年初信者之屬靈需要

研究者：梁黃毓珠

親愛的華戀社華人宣道會執事會成員：

奉主耶穌基督的名願恩惠和平安臨到你們！

我現報讀加拿大多倫多神學學院牧學博士課程，作為課程的一部份，我需要進行一個定性研究調查。這是一封在你們中間對委內瑞拉華戀社華人宣道會成年初信者之屬靈需要進行資料收集尋求你們支持和同意的書信。

背景和目的

作為一個事奉了十多年的宣教士，我認識到從事於像你們這樣散居於委內瑞拉的華人的福音工作是需要對你們屬靈獨特的表達有深刻的認識和神學反省。我曾經特別地問自己福音是如何回應成年初信者的屬靈需要和在他們的人生旅程上如何幫助他們？因此這研究是我自己對初信者的屬靈需要作深入認識的探索，以致在他們因福音而作耶穌基督的門徒的屬靈旅程上更好地幫助他們。

資料收集

我將會從一個成年初信組別中值著一對一的會面和一個焦點小組會面中收集資料，此外，我也會從你們主日崇拜的資料和連續三星期的教會聚會實地記錄中收集資料。我會從教會裏邀請七至十位耶穌基督的信徒，曾經經歷屬靈上的需要，並在過去五年之內接受洗禮和年齡在十八歲或以上的會眾參與訪問。我會發給每一位參加者一封同
意書（樣本可參閱這信的附頁）作為保存和複查之用。他們的參與是完全出於自願，期間他們可自由拒絕參與和退出這研究，他們的決定是會得到完全尊重和絕不會要求任何交代，他們的決定也絕對不會影響我、研究者和其他參與這研究的人與他們的關係。
若在研究計劃的過程中他們決定退出，為了保護他們的緣故，所有從他們收集得來的資料會在這研究中毀滅和刪除。

時間和過程
這會面需時約 60-120 分鐘，過程會被錄音以便作日後分析，我會在抄寫錄音記錄後為他們提供一份會面報告或摘要，我估計這過程需要大約一至兩個月的時間。教會聚會實地的記錄將會以手寫的記錄和/或錄影（在適合情況）進行。

資料收集後的保密
從會面和實地記錄收集得來的資料只是為這研究之用，參加者的姓名和身份會絕對保密，所有參加者的身份會用特別的代碼來隱藏。所有錄音會加密處理，所有對話的抄本和資料搜集的硬復本會鎖於一個安全的地方直至我成功完成所有要求並獲得畢業批準後就會被毀滅。
只有這研究的集體性資料才會被公開，這意味從參加者得來的資料會被用作群體性而不是個別性的分析和主題分類。

潛在風險和好處
我預料這研究計劃會帶給參加者的風險可能性極少，若果他們希望對一些人提出他們因這研究而帶來任何不安的感受，我會建議他們聯絡一位他們自行選擇的執事會成員尋求輔導和幫忙。我希望這發現能幫助在類似情況下堅固信徒屬靈旅程的宣教士發展有用的事奉工具。
若你有任何關注或疑問關於參加者的權利，歡迎聯絡 Office of Research Ethics <ethics.review@utoronto.ca>或 1-416-946-3273。

歡迎提問
請自由發問任何問題或題出任何方面的關注（涉及這研究）對你們來說是不清晰的，你們能用一些時間去考慮這研究調查和感到自在並預備好支持和同意我在華戀社華人宣道會出現為這研究收集資料是非常重要的。

參與和書面同意
我現在邀請你們，執事會的成員，作為華戀社華人宣道會的管理組織成為我在你們中間收集資料的直接負責機制，你們對我在華戀社華人宣道會中作這信內所描述的資料收集的書面同意對這研究是必需的，請填寫你對以下問題的回應：
「當閱讀和明白這封同意書的內容後，執事會是否同意我在華戀社華人宣道會中進行在這書信中提出的研究作資料收集？」
你們的同意日期/時間：
姓名和執事會代表簽署：
主席
副主席
研究者簽名：
Rosa Y.C. Leung，電話: 1-905-237-4273
(這份同意書的副本是給執事會保存和復核，我會保存這執事會的同意書的影印本作為我的記錄)
APPENDIX – D:

COPY OF THE “DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROPOSAL APPROVAL FORM”

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 29353
September 13, 2013

Dr. Joseph Schner
REGIS COLLEGE
Pastor Rosa Y. C. Leung
REGIS COLLEGE

Dear Dr. Schner and Pastor Rosa Y. C. Leung,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “The spiritual needs of the new believers at Valencia Chinese Alliance church in Venezuela”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: September 13, 2013
Expiry Date: September 12, 2014
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurtry Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3222 ● Fax: +1 416 946-5799 ● ethics.review@utoronto.ca ● http://www.research.utoronto.ca/re-searchers-administrators/ethics/
APPENDIX – E

COPY OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
DMin Thesis Proposal Approval Form

Important Note: Please return the completed and signed form to the AD Office.

Student’s Name: Rosa Lorenzo College: Knox
Student Number: 997804418.

Thesis Proposal Title: The Spiritual Needs of the Adult Evangelical Church in Venezuela

Thesis Proposal Approved: Yes or No.

Student qualified to go on to the thesis writing stage of the program: Yes or No.

Examiners’ Name: Andrew Irving
Examiners’ Name: Bruno Kueni
Examiners’ Name: Caryn Stens (LLC)
Examiners’ Name: Ric Gerberth (M.B.A.)

Signature: [Signature]
Signature: [Signature]
Signature: [Signature]
Signature: [Signature]

Date: April 1, 2013

Distribution: AD Office Student’s College Student

April 1, 2013
APPENDIX – F

COMPLETE LIST OF INVARIANT HORIZONS AND THEMES

A BETTER AND BRIGHTER FUTURE (5)
1. To find my own means to feed myself, to meet all my needs, to make my own living and take care of myself
2. To make money, to become wealthy, to have my own business
3. To have a better life (good place to live), better opportunities, comfortable life, do the things I like, have a good future, a good career
4. To be satisfied and have no worries
5. To be in control of my own future and fate

SELF WORTH (6)
6. To prove myself, to become independent, to be able to accomplish and finish whatever I am doing
7. To be valued regardless of cultural/social/economical background, to be treated with dignity
8. To be treated as equals, to be accepted and respected
9. To be understood, able to communicate and connect with others
10. To inspire trust
11. To be in charge

HAPPINESS AND FULFILMENT (5)
12. To be able to do the things that makes me happy
13. To experience change in life
14. To have entertainment (not so boring), to experience new adventures and fun in life,
15. To be content
16. To experience breakthrough in life, to do something more special in life (not a repetitive lifestyle), to change and improve, to learn more things

RECEIVE GENUINE CARE AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE (6)
17. To receive and experience unconditional love
18. To have someone to depend and lean on
19. To be connected with loved ones
20. To have meaningful, lasting, genuine friendships
21. To find someone fill my emptiness
22. To be respected and appreciated by others (family members and friends)

PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL WELLBEING (4)
23. To have peace (be able to manage health issues: enjoy good health and have health care)
24. To have safety, have protection and security
25. To experience harmony in family
26. To have happy children (provide for and protect the family, nurture them with love, better future for them, they will also trust and follow the Lord)

FULFILLING CHINESE TRADITIONAL DUTIES (5)

27. To care for and repay to parents
28. To obey and submit to parents’ wishes
29. To provide for extended family, especially the oldest caring for the younger family members (family affection-親情)
30. To show honor and respect for the deceased ancestors through ancestral worship
31. To worship household gods following family traditions in seeking protection and blessings for family

SEEKING THE ULTIMATE OR DIVINE FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE (5)

32. Longing for meaning and answers to the tragedies and challenges of life
33. Longing to find answers to the problem of evil in the world
34. Seeking the thing that is deep in my heart
35. Seeking to experience inner peace and joy
36. Longing to know more about the true God and grow spiritually

SEEKING A TUTELARY GOD (4)

37. To find comfort for the soul
38. Longing to have God’s protection and guidance, consult with God to solve the problem
39. To count with God’s help, provision, that God will watch over us
40. To experience God’s mercy and have everlasting life

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS (4)

41. To do something to change the world (bring justice, influence others, dealing with the problem of sin)
42. Being accountable for the spiritual wellbeing of other believers
43. To help people in practical ways (to do something special to serve others, willing to sacrifice for the benefit others, to make others happy)
44. To witness to others (teach them about God’s Word, help them believe in Jesus)

PLEASING AND SERVING THE LORD (4)

45. To follow and obey God’s word
46. To do good deeds and be useful to God
47. To be perfect according to God’s standards following Jesus’ teachings and live a sinless life
48. Longing to trust more in the Lord