

EXPLORING HOW SPIRITUAL FORMATION IS PRACTICED BY CHINESE
CHRISTIAN YOUNG ADULTS IN MAINLAND CHINA

A PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
BY
XIANDE HONG

WINEBRENNER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FINDLAY, OHIO

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid Christian population growth in China, Chinese church leaders should consider about congregations' spirituality and there is an urgent need to develop more and more Christ-like leaders from young adults.

In the past years, most of the Chinese churches focused on attending worship services and evangelizing people, and they did not know how to help congregations to live spiritual life especially young adults.

The purpose of this study was to explore how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults at three selected Christian churches. This study adopted a mixed method, explanatory design to discern the spiritual maturity of Chinese Christian young adults. The survey and the semi-structured interview protocol were used to collect data in this research.

One hundred fifty young adults from three selected Christian churches registered to attend the research and on hundred twenty-nine showed up. Nine new insights and discoveries were found out from the research and the information led to three recommendations to Chinese church leaders, Chinese Christian young adults, and Chinese churches.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The researcher was raised in a Chinese Christian home and accepted Jesus into his heart at the age of six. During the next years of life, both his church and parents nurtured his spiritual development. However, because his father's ministry was in another city far from his hometown, in order to go to high school, he had to leave his parents and live alone at a school dormitory.

When the researcher was in high school, he first began to distance himself from God. His tongue did not give glory to God with the words it said. He made friends with bad guys. Moreover, he began to drink, smoke, and hang out with bad guys; copying the behavior of a worldly man.

In China, the people who are at the age of eighteen will graduate from high school and face an important choice in their life: whether to look for a job or go to a well-known university in order to have a better future. The researcher can never forget what he experienced at the age of eighteen. His spiritual life was already a mess during high school. But the researcher wanted to recover his relationship with God and live a correct spiritual life after attending a college. He expected to go to a college nearby his parents so that they could supervise his spiritual life, at least he could go to church. However, with low grades, he had to choose a college he never expected which was far away from his parents. He regretted that he had not studied harder and the choices that he had made in high school life. Suddenly, he could not express the feeling of disappointment at that moment in any words. He was in college, still thinking he would be a loser in the future

because the negative thinking could not allow him to see any hope in his life. He could not overcome his spiritual life from the mess, and he thought God had already moved far away from him.

On the other side, the influence of his parents caused him to go to church every Sunday as a Sunday Christian. Even though he was still thirsty for God, he wished he could have a deeper relationship with God, the Father. Unfortunately, under the immature church programs he did not get involved in any training program at this time. Despite the lack of help from a person, God proved faithful, and showed that he cares for the researcher so much. By His grace, the researcher was called to be God's servant before he graduated from college.

Today, Chinese Christianity is growing dramatically and young adults are increasingly coming to church. With the researcher's early years of spiritual journey and years of youth ministry experience, he has a burden to see the spiritual formation of Chinese Christian young adults and the relationship Chinese Christian young adults have with God and the faith level of the young adults. In past years, most of the Chinese churches focused on worship service and evangelizing people but lack of caring about congregation's spiritual life particularly young adult's spiritual formation. Today, however, there is an urgent need to deepen Chinese Christian commitment to live a Christ-like life especially during young adulthood in order to prepare for the future leadership of the Chinese church and world missions. It is this burden the researcher feels that compels the aim for this dissertation.

Context of the Problem

China has a long history of Christianity that can be divided into four periods: 7th~10th century (Tang Dynasty), 13th~14th century (Yuan Dynasty), 16th~18th century and early 19th century.

The first recorded Christian mission to China was from Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), which was a golden age of Chinese culture, and Nestorian Christianity was introduced into the city of Chang-an through the Silk Road.¹ One of the big differences in the Nestorians' teaching was in Christ's humanity and divine nature that the human and divine essences of Christ are separate.²

In 635, Emperor Tai-zong of Tang, Li Shi-min, welcomed Christianity and Nestorian's missionary, Alopen, was treated with high respect. Through the financial support from the emperor in 683, the first Christian church was built in China in the capital city of Chang-an. After Xuan-zong became the emperor during 712-756, he was very sympathetic to the church; he ordered the Prince of Ning Guo and four other princes to go to the monastery to build and set up the alters again.³ Moffett stated "as for the church in China, these years between 712 and 781 were years of greater progress than in any other period of the two and a half centuries of the life of this first community of Christians in China."⁴ With the support of the emperor, the mission of Nestorian Christianity got certain achievements.

However, as Wu-zong ascended the throne, Taoism became the main religion and came to persecute other religions especially Christianity. He also destroyed Christian church and Nestorian Christianity began to disappear from China.⁵

The second recorded Christian mission to China was in Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) called Erkeun or Arkaim. Erkeun or Arkaim in Mongol language means "blessed

¹ John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: The Story of a Church on Fire* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 167.

² Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 169-170.

³ *Ibid.*, 292-297.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁵ Ru-lei Xu, *The History of Christianity in China: From the Perspective of Contextualization*, Panel I (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, 1996), 6.

people.” This mission was well established in China because many Mongol tribes and many of the wives of Genghis Khan’s descendants were primarily Christians, so Christianity had a major influence in the Mongol Empire.⁶ Moreover, the Catholic pope sent a missionary, Marco Polo, to Beijing in 1294, and during the Mongol Empire there were lots of Christians not only in Beijing but also in other cities. However, Chinese rebelled against the Mongols, and they attacked the Christians as well. Thus, with the fall of Yuan Dynasty, Christianity disappeared from China again.

The third recorded Christian mission to China was led by Matteo Ricci during 1583~1724.⁷ This period of Christian mission can be called a rapid growth time. At first Ricci learnt Chinese for two years after arriving in China in 1583. During this time of learning, Ricci showed politeness and generosity that gained him a good impression from local officers, allowing him to proclaim the gospel in Cantonese language. According to the article of EBao, it is said that Matteo Ricci is an intelligent man that not only talked about Bible, but also talked about the fall and rise of the State as it related with knowledge of astronomy.⁸ He taught the knowledge of astronomy and instructed Chinese people how to use astroscope to observe atmosphere, therefore, the emperor gave him the name “钦天监” (QinTianJian) like today’s Meteorological Supervisor.⁹ Through the knowledge of astronomy, Matteo Ricci led many scholar-bureaucrats to believe in Jesus Christ. One of the most famous of these people is Xu, Guangqi (1562-1633).¹⁰ According to Wolfgang Franke’s statement, there were 13,000 Christians in Peking in 1663, and by

⁶ Yang Yu, *The Mongols* (Beijing: China History Press, 1998), 32.

⁷ Xin-ping Zhuo, *The History of Christianity Entering China*, accessed February 22, 2010, <http://www.beihaichanyuan.org/fojiao/ysj/2010-02-22/1854.html>.

⁸ Bide Huang, “Christianity in Ming Dynasty” in *EBao*, accessed March 17, 2007, http://www.ebaomonthly.com/ebao/readebao.php?a=20070317_

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Zheng-qing Sun, “Remember the Xu Guangqi’s Death on 350th Anniversary” *The Catholic Church in China* 10 (Beijing: Catholic Church, 1984), 3.

the beginning of the 18th century, there were over 200,000.¹¹ In his mission, Matteo Ricci had realized a serious problem that Confucianism had already taken an important position among Chinese people, and it was very difficult for Christianity to replacing that position.¹² Therefore, Ricci did not interfere with Chinese rites about worshipping ancestors. However, the Roman Pope directly interfered and Chinese rites controversy occurred between the Roman Catholic Pope and Emperor Kangxi. Finally, the Pope ordered all missionaries to return to Europe from China and the emperor Kangxi forbade all Christian work in China.

The beginning of Protestantism history in China was in 1807.¹³ During that time, only a few missionaries entered mainland China and most of them worked nearby in five treaty ports (Guangzhou, Xianmen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai).¹⁴ Songwei Xu explained that 19th century of China is an interlacement period of advance with decline, lightness with darkness, and hope with despair as China suffered a series of natural disasters, economic problems, and defeats at the hands of the Western powers.¹⁵ After the Chinese Rite controversy, Christianity was forbidden in China, but the western countries opened the door of China by force after Opium War happened during July to August in 1840. Meanwhile, they also brought western advanced systems, science and technology, and culture as well as Christianity.¹⁶

¹¹ Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 48.

¹² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹³ Yamanoto Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China* (Tokyo: The Toho Gakkai, 2000), 13.

¹⁴ Shu-cun Jia, "The Attitude of Chinese Society Towards Missionaries During the Boxer Rebellion," *Journal of Xinyang Normal University* 29, no. 5 (2009): 144-147.

¹⁵ Song-wei Xu, "The Historical Significance of the 19th Century Chinese History Study in Retrospect," *Journal of Historical Science* 2 (2000): 12.

¹⁶ Guang-he Li, "Chinese Government with Christianity During the Twice Opium War," *Guangzhou Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2009): 83.

After the “Tianjin Treaty” and “Beijing Treaty”, mission work in China became free and local officials could no longer interfere with mission work. Missionaries had deep impression for the poor who lived in feudalism of China. Missionaries saw not only many babies abandoned in the wild, but also that most women had no medical knowledge, so many babies died when they were born. Therefore, when missionaries proclaimed the gospel, they also helped Chinese people with science, education, medical science, woman’s rights, social welfare and public welfare undertakings. They built “foundling asylums”, “orphanages”, “schools”, and “hospitals” that made a great contribution to woman and children’s rights.¹⁷ Missionaries tried variety of ways to share the gospel and gave many positive helps to Chinese people that made China in civilization and progress. Moreover, with the publication and distribution of Christian literature and Bibles, unlike the first three periods, Christianity spread rapidly and became deeply rooted in China.

In 1884, Sun Yat-sen, a leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party, was baptized a Christian in Hong Kong by an American Congregationalist missionary.¹⁸ Sun Yat-sen who was known as the father of modern China, served as the first president of the Republic of China (1911-1912) and later as the facto ruler (1923-25).¹⁹ During his time, the Nationalist Party enjoyed great prestige and numbers in China. After the establishment of the Communist Party in 1921, the Nationalist-Communist Civil War was

¹⁷ Cong-lin Dong, “Anti-foreignism and Yihetuan,” *Journal of Hebei Normal University* 35, no. 1 (2012): 60-67.

¹⁸ Peter Barry, *Sun Yat-sen and Christianity* 31, no. 162, accessed September 4, 2011, http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_162_05.html.

¹⁹ Yi-Chu Wang, *Sun Yat-sen: Chinese Leader*, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/573697/Sun-Yat-sen>.

launched among Mao Zedong the leader of Communist Party and Chiang Kai-shek the new leader of Nationalist Party in 1927.²⁰

In 1949, the Communist Party won the civil war and the People's Republic of China was established. After the new government, the development of Christianity witnessed a series of twists and turns, but Chinese people were still tolerant of religions until 1966. By 1966, which resulted in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, any religion was interdicted in China. Chinese government began to persecute Christianity that burned and destroyed church buildings and killed many Christians.²¹ People were not permitted to talk about God or Christ. After Mao Zedong's death, Deng Xiaoping became the chairman of the party in 1977.²² Deng as a moderate politician and revolutionary realized the damage caused by the Cultural Revolution launched "Reform and Opening-up Policy" in 1978. With the influence of the "Reform and Opening-up Policy," churches were allowed to reopen in 1979. In 1980, the China Christian Council was formed, and several Theological Seminaries were established to coordinate matters of religion and to train new pastors.²³ Chinese people were becoming re-acquainted with Christianity. Large numbers of Protestant Christians and the structure of Christianity brought new changes. In the past, Chinese Christians mostly were laborers and intellectuals. Seventy percent

²⁰ Sanderson Beck, "Nationalist-Communist Civil War 1928-1937," in *East Asia 1800-1949: Ethics of Civilization*, accessed January 1, 2008, <http://www.san.beck.org/21-4-ChinaCivilWar1927-37.html>.

²¹ K. L. Shipman, "The Empty Cross: The False Doctrine of China's Official Church," *The Voice of the Martyrs*, accessed September 27, 2011, <http://www.persecutionblog.com/2011/09/the-empty-cross-the-false-doctrine-of-chinas-official-church-.html>.

²² CNN, *Reformer with an Iron First: Deng Xiaoping*, accessed May 2, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/china.50/inside.china/profiles/deng.xiaoping/>.

²³ Lynette Wilson, *Rise in Christians Has China's Churches, Government Looking for Help*, accessed March 14, 2012, <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/03/14/rise-in-christians-has-chinas-churches-government-looking-for-help/>.

lived in rural areas, most of whom were old and physically ill people.²⁴ Until 1990, the structure of Protestant Christianity had another new change because the number of mid-aged, young Protestants was increasing.²⁵ After “Reform and Opening-up Policy,” new ideas and thoughts from foreign countries influenced among young people. There was growing sentiment among university students so that they organized large-scale demonstrations and hunger strike, which was called Tiananmen Square indicates an expression of dissatisfaction over corruption and other problems in the government in 1989.²⁶ Professor Fenggang Yang of Purdue University at an interview with Robin Young says many dissidents who lead that movement have become Christians. According to Yang, in 1989 people found the Communist belief system could not really provide the things that they wanted and they began to look for alternatives and Christianity is the alternative for many young people.²⁷

After the Tiananmen Square massacre, large numbers of Chinese intellectuals and students turned to Christ. Moreover, the impact of the policy of freedom of religious belief has increased the population of religious people. China Daily newspaper published an article by Tong Shijun and Liu Zhongyu, professors of Shanghai-based East China Normal University that surveyed Chinese religious people since 2005. It says that 4,500 people who were above 16 years old joined a survey, and 31.4% reported having religious beliefs. In other words, there are more than 300 million religious people in China today. Among them, 200 million people were Buddhists, Taoists, and local folk religions, and 40

²⁴ Wei-hong Luo, *Chinese Christianity of Reformation Time* (Beijing: The Universe Publisher, 2007), 4-6.

²⁵ Zhi-en Zhao, *The Past of Chinese Christianity* (Shanghai: Brothers Publisher, 2001), 3.

²⁶ Ricky C. Leung, *Doing Nanotechnology in Twenty-first Century China* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2008), 54.

²⁷ Robin Young and Jeremy Hobson, *Tiananmen Square, A 'Watershed' for Chinese Conversions to Christianity*, accessed June 4, 2012, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2012/06/04/tiananmen-square-christianity>.

million people were Christians.²⁸ Some unofficial data also shows there are more than 100 million Christians in China today.²⁹

Christianity has spread rapidly during the past decade, and young adults (eighteen to thirty years old) born after 1985 have become a significant group in the Chinese church today. In China like in the United States, as Setran and Kiesling says, young adults at the years between the ages of 18 and 30 faced life challenges of

choosing a college, choosing a life calling and vocation, moving away from home for the first time, buying or renting a home, making independent financial decisions, choosing and maintaining church commitments, forging new friendships and relationships with members of the opposite sex, and embracing the potential for the singleness, engagement, marriage, and parenting.³⁰

Under the Chinese “one-child policy,” which came into effect in 1979, this group of young adults were raised primarily in one-child families; many of them have been over-loved by their parents and grandparents like “little emperors” over the years. After eighteen, most young adults will experience independence from family for the first time in their lives. Some young people will go to university and others will look for jobs. However, the effect of the one-child policy has made many of these young adults selfish and lacking independence. Under the high pressure of study, jobs, and social relationships, this group of young adults cannot find the satisfaction from their life and has a hunger and thirst in spirituality. In order to find a spiritual satisfaction, they will look for the different religious tradition. For many this exploration includes coming to church with their friends.

²⁸ Jiao Wu, “Religious Believers Thrice the Estimate,” *China Daily*, accessed February 7, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-02/07/content_802994.htm.

²⁹ Gui-hua Wu, “How Many Christians in China?” *Chinese National Religious*, accessed April 2, 2012, <http://www.mzb.com.cn/html/report/289230-1.htm>.

³⁰ David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1.

Due to its background of Confucianism and Buddhism, the old generation like their parents does not easily accept the concept of other religions. With the success of experiencing the Olympic Games, more and more foreigners who are Christians have opportunities to share their lives with Chinese people especially with the young people who are studying in a university. The missionaries were surprised that the young people were willing to know more about the culture of Christianity in order to communicate with the people who can speak English well and desire to get a high salary. As a result, these young people are going to know the culture of Christianity and will have a new understanding of Christianity.

Nowadays, this group of Chinese Christian young adults is growing rapidly. Some Chinese church leaders have realized the importance of this group and attempted to help young adults adjust to church life and nurture their faith. However, due to the lack of leaders, Chinese Christian young adults could not get satisfaction of spirituality from the church. They even do not know how to live a spiritual life on the journey of spiritual formation. Most of them are just attending Sunday worship service, and it is all about their spiritual life.

Statement of the Problem

Christianity used to be called “Western Religion” in China due to the influence of history. This influence means that Chinese people would prefer to accept evolution rather than creation because of the historical evolution perspective that was taught in Chinese schools. However, with the Chinese Christians’ hard work in the past, today’s Chinese Christianity is much different from before. The name of “Western Religion” has been gradually forgotten by new generations and the church is becoming indigenous. More and more people, especially young adults, are coming to church and accepting the doctrine of creation.

In China, most of young adults will graduate from high school at the age of eighteen. This special group will face to either go to look for a job or enroll in a university. This period would be their first time to be independent from parents and face a completely different life style, such as environment, religion, culture, and people. After having a job or enrolling in a university, the majority from this group comes to know Christianity through visiting a church with their Christian friends. At the beginning, they come to church just for their curiosity about Christianity and want to see what church looks like. After they make some friends at church they begin to come to church regularly.

Many church leaders are satisfied with regular attendance, but with limited training programs and opportunities for new Christian friends, they could not teach them exactly what Christian spiritual formation is and how to live a spiritual life. Due to the lacking of knowledge of spiritual formation, young adults do not know how to develop spiritual lives day by day and grow into Christlikeness. Some of them even do not know how to pray. Basically, many young adult believers that simply attend the Sunday service and would like to spend more time on entertainment have no intention to live a spiritual life especially to be involved in other church activities and training programs. In other words, this group of young adults does not know the importance of spiritual life for the Christian and never expect to grow in spiritually. They keep their spiritual level at the faith of children, which means immature. Apostle Paul recommended us that the church should, “Be no longer children, but grow up in Christ”:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.³¹

³¹ Eph 4:14-15 [NASB].

According to 1 John 2, faith can be divided three levels: the faith of children, the faith of young men, and the faith of fathers.³² Most young adults in China have a faith centered at the level of children. Nelson has said, “Growth is a sign of health; lack of growth is a signal that something’s wrong.”³³ If faith stops growing, there must be something wrong in it. These young adults need someone to teach and lead them to live spiritually and the church leaders have the responsibility to help these young adults mature into the faith of young men and the faith of fathers.

When the researcher visited one church in China, he met one young adult who is a Sunday school teacher at that church. After hearing that the researcher was a graduate from seminary, she longed to ask a question. She shared that she loves the church, not only because this is the first place to have her spiritual life but also this is the place for the presence of God. However, seven years with Sunday worship service, Wednesday worship service, Bible reading, and limited Bible study could not satisfy her desire for growth in faith. Her deep desire is to know more about Jesus Christ through Bible study and become a godly Sunday school teacher. One thing that surprised the researcher is that she said, “If there was a church that could provide some programs to help her grow in spiritually, she would rather to attend that church.” She kept explaining that it is very hard to be trained for spiritually with a pastor of a congregation of a thousand members.

With the rapid population growth of the Chinese church, it is hoped that young Christians would be the hope of future Chinese churches. The Chinese churches have to take certain cultural issues into consideration in discipleship with young adults in China in order to produce spiritual fruit in their daily life setting and live out the purpose of salvation, which is the Christ-like life, as well. Therefore, the researcher will explore the

³² 1 Jn 2:12-14 [NIV].

³³ Peter K. Nelson, *Spiritual Formation: Ever Forming, Never Formed* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 73.

following question: How could the progress of spiritual formation in Chinese Christian young adults be improved?

Purpose of the Study

In order to recover the relationship with God and become Christlikeness, Chinese Christian young adults should practice the spiritual discipline to promote their spiritual growth.

The purpose of this study is to explore spiritual formation at a selected church in mainland China to find out how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults.

Research Methodology to Study the Problem

This study will address the question of the spiritual formation of Christian young adults who attend a selected Christian church in mainland China to respond to live a Christ-like life.

The qualitative data concerns the stated problems will be contributed by the young adults of Chinese Christian who will participate in research; the researcher will adapt a semi-structured focus group interview as the primary source of data collection for this study to occur with research participants who volunteer to attend.

This study also includes a quantitative survey that the researcher will adapt a questionnaire (the spiritual formation assessment survey) for related local churches to serve as the source of data collection.

Research Questions to Guide the Research Project

In relation to the problem statement, the following questions are designed to guide the research in discerning the spiritual formation of Christian young adults who attend a selected Christian church in mainland China.

Research Question One

How do participants rate their level of spiritual maturity to God?

Research Question Two

What do participants name as practices they engage in to grow toward spiritual maturity?

Research Question Three

How do the participants experience their church's efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity?

Question One examines Chinese Christian young adults' satisfaction of spiritual life and relationship with other congregations. In a way, this question identifies the participants' desires to become Christlikeness and responses to God's love as well. This question also can measure the level of Chinese Christian young adults' faith.

Question Two seeks to acknowledge what spiritual life is for Chinese Christian young adults who already accept Jesus Christ as Savior. In China, lots of Chinese young adults have never heard about God in their childhood. This question identifies what does living of the faith means to the Chinese Christian young adult.

Question Three explores what kinds of spiritual life Chinese Christian young adults have after they have received Jesus Christ. This question identifies the young adults' spirituality and researches young adults' understanding and practicing of spiritual formation.

Significance of the Research Project

Spiritual formation is an ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Christ. It is a lifelong journey of transformation for persons who love and serve as Jesus did. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in

Christ. It entirely focuses on Christ. In other words, spiritual formation focuses on the ordinary progress of one's relationship with God and restoration of image of God in us.

The findings of this study will help Chinese Christian young adults to improve their spirituality and keep a deeper relationship with God.

Furthermore, the findings of this study may also contribute to the improvement of discipleship, not only of the related church leaders such as pastors, elders, deacons, and deaconesses, but also of the other local church leaders such as youth leaders, church superintendents, and discipleship leaders. A serendipitous benefit of this study may provide principles for church leaders in improving their leadership skills, as well.

Assumptions/Limitations in the Research Project

This project has three assumptions. The first assumption of this project is that the participants, Chinese Christian young adults, do not know what spiritual formation is and how to live a spiritual life. The second assumption of this project is that young adults in the Chinese church have only a basic understanding of the Bible knowledge. The third assumption of this project is that churches do not provide different types of training programs to Chinese Christian young adults in order to help them have a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ and live an effectiveness of spiritual life.

The first limitation of this project will only focus on eighteen to thirty age group of Chinese Christian young adults in mainland China. The second limitation of this project will be limited to a selected Chinese Christian church in mainland China. The third limitation of this project will only focus on the spiritual formation of selected participants. Finally, the research consists of a questionnaire, survey, and interviews.

Definitions of Terms

“**Spiritual formation**” is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, and persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world – in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did.³⁴

“**Chinese Church**” has both Three-self Church, which is the registered church and House Church, which is the unregistered assembly in China. The Three-self Church is represented by two entities, the Three-Self (self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing) Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council. The researcher will consider Three-self Church and House Church as one Chinese Church.

Outline of the Research Project

Chapter One: Introduction to the Project

Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Chapter Three: Review of Literature and Other Sources

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Procedures

Chapter Five: Results and Analysis of Data

Chapter Six: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter One begins with an introduction that records the researcher’s personal experience about spiritual suffering in order to point out that the church should offer spiritual care for young adults. The context of the problem provides the historical development of Chinese Christianity, today’s Chinese church under the religions policy, and the new generations understanding about Christianity. The statement of the problem

³⁴ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25.

presents the issues of the spiritual care of the Chinese Christian young adults in China. The research design is noted within this chapter and ends with a brief overview of how this project will be organized.

Chapter Two of this project examines the biblical and theological view of spiritual formation, church history, and personal experience regarding discipleship issues.

Chapter Three provides a literature review of faith development. In youth ministry, understanding the process of faith development may provide insight for the Chinese local churches regarding spiritual growth.

Chapter Four presents the research design in greater detail and any limitations of the process regarding this section will be stated.

Chapter Five describes the results of the surveys and the focus groups with emerging patterns of themes.

Chapter Six concludes with interpreting and summarizing the data, examining future efforts in response to the results, and offering suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Spiritual formation is an ongoing process for Christians.³⁵ *The purpose of this study is to explore spiritual formation at selected churches to find out how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults.* This project assumes that Chinese Christian young adults require spirited disciplines for spiritual growth to reach maturity in order to become Christlikeness. The goal of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological foundation that identifies the essential process in spiritual formation. The term spiritual formation has recently become widely used, but where exactly is spiritual formation taught in Scripture? The term spiritual formation is not a biblical term, but the meaning of the term spiritual formation refers to the Holy Spirit in the context of forming, transforming, or conforming a person's life toward Christlikeness.³⁶

Brief History of Spiritual Formation

The phrase “spiritual formation”, according to Dallas Willard, was just recently rocketed onto the lips and into the ears of Protestant Christians.³⁷ Although

³⁵ Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 24.

³⁶ Richard E. Averbeck, “Worship and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 51.

the phrase “spiritual formation” cannot be found in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament are dealing with spiritual formation.

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body. Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it the springs of life.³⁸

This Scripture reminds believers to keep the words of God in their spiritual life. Spiritual formation is about believers’ spiritual life maturing in relationship with God. Therefore, believers should “Trust in the LORD with all their heart And do not lean on their own understanding. In all believers’ ways acknowledge Him, And He will make their paths straight.”³⁹ In the New Testament, Peter talked about how believers can live a Christ-like life:

For by these he has granted us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.⁴⁰

Keeping one’s heart in the Word of God and manifesting self-control augments conforming the believers’ life toward Christlikeness, and the purpose of our spiritual life is union with Christ. John R. Tyson pointed out, “The heart of the Christian religion is union with Christ; union with Christ is both the means and the goal of Christian spirituality.”⁴¹ According to Bradley P. Holt, the term “spirituality” is not a part of the traditional language so it is unfamiliar to Protestants. But the

³⁷ Dallas Willard, “How It Might Be Done,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2000): 254-258.

³⁸ Prv 4:20-23 [NASB].

³⁹ Prv 3:5-6.

⁴⁰ 2 Pt 1:4-7.

⁴¹ John R. Tyson, ed., *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

development of Christian spirituality has a twenty centuries long history.⁴² In earlier centuries, many Christians used the word *devotion* or *piety* due to the spirituality not rooted in a particular religion. From a Christian perspective, spirituality comes from a biblical word, *spirit*. The term “spirituality” or “spiritual theology” was first used by Roman Catholic theology that was combined by the “mystical theology”, which described the teachings of the mystics, and “ascetical theology”, which discussed the path of ordinary Christian disciplines.⁴³

Holt said, “Only in the past thirty years or so have Protestants used the term spirituality.”⁴⁴ Moreover, using the term “spirituality” could be the starting point of developing the phrase “spiritual formation”.

In 1974, Father William Menninger, a Trappist monk at St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts found an ancient book, *The Cloud of Unknowing* in a library. He discovered that this 14th century book presented contemplative practice, which was used by Catholic monks to be taught to lay people. Menninger began to teach this contemplative practice and his students, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, and other Trappist monks disseminated these teachings. This would be the trace of the roots of the spiritual formation movement.⁴⁵

In 1978, Richard Foster’s book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, influenced the development of the spiritual formation launching spiritual formation into the majority of evangelicalism. In *The Celebration of Discipline*, Foster presents spiritual

⁴² Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 3.

⁴³ Bradley P. Holt, Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ Gary E. Gilley, “Spiritual Formation,” in *Think on These Things* 18 (February/March 2012), accessed March 9, 2015, http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/20-christian-living/753-spiritual-formation#_edn1.

formation as attainable through “spiritual disciplines.” The ideas presented by Foster continue to be used today through the works and teachings of others.⁴⁶

Christian spirituality describes the relationship, union, and conformity with God,⁴⁷ and the journey of spiritual formation aims at growth in grace toward Christian maturity.⁴⁸ Spiritual formation is the process of transformation of human being to more Christlikeness. Greenman states that spiritual formation involves “personal spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, confession, fasting, and biblical meditation as well as corporate participation in the congregation’s shared life of worship, fellowship, and teaching.”⁴⁹ Through practicing spiritual disciplines, believers can experience spiritual growth. In the process of spiritual formation, spiritual growth and maturity will be the essential elements and spiritual disciplines could be the basic foundation. In other words, spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth.

On the other hand, Donald S. Whitney said that a man or woman could not come to spiritual maturity except through disciplines and godliness comes through discipline.⁵⁰ According to Whitney, the word “discipline” in the New American Standard Bible is from the Greek word *gumnasia* from which is derived the English word *gymnasium* and *gymnastics*, means “to exercise or discipline.”⁵¹ Paul said,

⁴⁶ Gilley, *Think on These Things*.

⁴⁷ Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 1.

⁴⁸ Mark A. Maddix, “Living the Life: Spiritual Formation Defined,” in *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, ed. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 13.

⁴⁹ Greenman, *Life in the Spirit*, 26.

⁵⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17.

⁵¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 18.

“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness.”⁵² It says that spiritual disciplines as spiritual exercises promote godliness.

The beginning of practicing spiritual disciplines as prayer, psalms, Scripture reading, sermons, singing, and Lord’s Supper is from the first Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, believers are told in Acts.⁵³ Moreover, some Christians practiced the spiritual disciplines through ascetic practices and three early Christian theologians, Tertullian, Origen, and Ephrem, agreed on the importance of ascetic disciplines for Christian life.⁵⁴

With the Great Commission of Jesus Christ that proclaims the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the world, Christianity was spread to Asian countries such as India and China, Africa, and Europe in the early centuries.⁵⁵ However, Christianity had lost ground geographically in Asia and Africa from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries.⁵⁶

Along with the problem of theology, liturgy, sacraments, and spirituality, the Roman Catholic Church did many political maneuvers in the sixteenth century, therefore, most thoughtful Roman Catholics realized that reform was needed. Martin Luther (1483-1546) declared that believers were justified by grace through faith launched the Protestant Reformation. With the corruption of Roman Catholic Church, it was more important to emphasize on justification than spirituality. Holt said, “Luther focused almost exclusively on sin, forgiveness, and the cross, with little

⁵² 1 Tm 4:7 [KJV].

⁵³ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

attention to healing, transformation, or resurrection.”⁵⁷ After the Luther’s Reformation, the Reformed branch of Protestantism leaders renewed the spiritual disciplines of Christian life. Unlike Luther, John Calvin (1509-64) emphasized the spiritual disciplines that how believers could have union with Christ and taught about predestination that one did not need to worry about the final judgment; God had already made the choice.⁵⁸ With the importance of union with God, Calvinism believes God had decided human’s salvation before creation.

In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the Reformed Protestant Christianity began to spread to all over the world and the first Reformed Protestant missionary, Robert Morison, arrived in China in 1807. He not only shared the gospel with the Chinese people but also began to translate the Bible into the Chinese language. During that time Liang Fa(梁发) was his assistant and his disciple. Then Liang became the first Chinese pastor in history. In order to help Chinese people understand the Bible and doctrine of Christianity more easily, Liang Fa wrote a book “QuanShi LiangYan (劝世良言)” (Good Words to Admonish the Age), which talked about creation, original sin, atonement, heaven, hell and the last judgment.⁵⁹ However, “QuanShi LiangYuan” was still lacking a comprehensive coverage of explaining the theology of Bible.

Hong, Xiuquan was one of the people who was greatly influenced by “QuanShi LiangYan”, but he just had the imperfect information of Bible.⁶⁰ On the basis of reconstruction of the orthodox Christianity, Hong, Xiuquan launched “Tai

⁵⁷ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 71.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 73, 74.

⁵⁹ Chia-Hsing Pi, *Quanshi Liangyan*, accessed July 20, 2015, https://www.fhl.net/main/eternal_qa/eternal_qa541512.html.

⁶⁰ Wei-bin Shen, “Hong, Xiuquan and Christianity Order,” *Fudan University of Korean Research*, no.1 (1998): 346.

Ping Rebellion” in 1851 to establish a heavenly kingdom upon earth and replace the corrupted Qing dynasty. The Taiping Rebellion referred to as the Tai Ping Tian Guo in Chinese 太平天国 (太 *Tai*-'Great', 平 *Ping* - 'Peace', 天 *Tian*-'Heaven', 国 *Guo*-'Country or Kingdom') the 'Kingdom of Heavenly Peace', was one of the bloodiest civil wars in history between the Qing dynasty.

With the misunderstanding of orthodox Christianity, Hong created a “Worship God” religious organization, which brought the organizational strength to the movement of the Taiping Rebellion.⁶¹ However, because of his own limitations, the final destination was to build ‘little heaven’ on the ground, and the Taiping rebellion failed in 1856.

During the Taiping rebellion, Hudson Taylor arrived in Shanghai in 1854. Hudson Taylor was one of the most significant missionaries who founded China Inland Mission in 1865 and effectively influenced the development of Chinese Protestant Christianity. The numbers of Christians were growing miraculously under the influence of China Inland Mission. At Hudson Taylor’s death in 1905, there were 205 mission stations with over 800 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christian.⁶²

In 1903, a Chinese spiritual leader, Watchman Nee whose Chinese name was Ni Tuosheng, was born in Fuzhou, China. Actually, his grandfather was a Chinese pastor, and he was dedicated to the Lord before his birth. During his ministry, he followed the Bible and tried to recover the Chinese local church to the early Apostolic Age. Moreover, he also wrote several books, which were based on the Bible to help people to grow spiritually. One of the most important books was “The Spiritual Man”, which was influencing not only Christians from China, but also believers from all

⁶¹ Chun-tao Xia, “The Hakka elites and Taiping Rebellion,” *Southeast Academic Research*, no. 5 (1998): 85.

⁶² Christian Biography Resources, *James Hudson Talor*, accessed September 26, 2015, <http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biorptaylor.html>.

over the world. In this book, he divided human being as the human spirit, soul, and body, and tried to interpret how to become a spiritual man. In short, early Chinese Protestant churches were a little bit focused on just being evangelical, but Ni Tuosheng helped the Chinese church become more focus on spirituality. Therefore, the phrase “spiritual growth” began to be used by Chinese Christians.

However, due to the Chinese circumstance such as the cultural revelation, people could not talk about spiritual things even the word “God”. Therefore, the years in which Chinese Christianity has not used the phrase “spiritual growth” for too long and in recent years Chinese Christian leaders have realized the importance of spiritual growth.

In the lifelong journey of spiritual formation, cooperation with the Holy Spirit, spiritual disciplines will enable Chinese Christian young adults to grow spiritually and grow into spiritual maturity. Moreover, these components of spiritual formation are important in the process of developing a Christ-like character.

Theological Foundation

When a person decides to receive Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior, God justifies him declaring a person not guilty before the bar of divine justice.⁶³ This is the justification coming from God’s grace, and there is no believers’ work. Through believers’ faith in Jesus Christ, God make them righteousness such as Abraham “believed in the LORD; He reckoned to him as righteousness.”⁶⁴ However, reckoned as righteousness by faith in Christ is just the starting point of a lifelong journey in spiritual formation to Christlikeness. As the Apostle Paul says, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and

⁶³ Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 6.

⁶⁴ Rom 15:6 [NASB].

established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”⁶⁵ After one receives Jesus as Savior, one should build faith in Jesus Christ. Then the Holy Spirit lives inside of Christians (Jn. 14:16-17), and they are a new creation in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”⁶⁶ The Christian’s old nature, which is dominated by sin, is replaced with a new nature that is under the influence of God’s Spirit (Rom. 6:1-7:25), and they enter a journey of spiritual formation.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”⁶⁷ Paul also teaches believers that they should grow up into the head of the body, who is Christ. Such “growing up” is the process of spiritual formation.

In China, believers do not use the term “spiritual formation” in Christianity. Actually, there is no exact word to translate the term “spiritual formation” into Chinese character and Chinese people probably understand “spiritual formation” as “spiritual growth.” Therefore, in order to help Chinese people to understand spiritual formation, this researcher will use the term “spiritual growth” in this chapter. Dallas Willard mentioned spiritual formation as the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the heart.⁶⁸ The process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the heart is practicing of the spiritual growth.

Peter said, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may

⁶⁵ Col 2:6-7 [NASB].

⁶⁶ 2 Cor 5:17 [NIV].

⁶⁷ Eph 4:15.

⁶⁸ Dallas Willard, *Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done*, accessed September 12, 2015, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58>.

grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”⁶⁹ Peter began and ended his very practical epistles with an injunction for Christians to grow.

Forming more Christlikeness is specified by Peter:

To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.⁷⁰



Figure 2.1. The Process of Forming Christlikeness

God called believers by His own glory and faith comes from righteousness of God. When believers have faith in Jesus Christ, the knowledge of Jesus Christ will be

⁶⁹ 1 Pt 2:1-3 [NASB].

⁷⁰ 2 Pt 1:1-11.

growing, which is the beginning of the spiritual growth, and God multiplied grace and peace to believers. Believers as partner of divine nature should live out a life of faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. If believers grow in these qualities, their life will be fruitful with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus Christ, they should practice these qualities in their spiritual life toward Christian maturity and forming themselves more Christlikeness.

Spiritual growth includes: growing in the knowledge of God and Savior, Jesus Christ, growing in one's practice of Christ virtues, growing in one's faith in God, and growing in relationship with other people. Spiritual growth is basic to the life of a believer, just as physical growth is basic to the life of any person. Babies are immature physically and mentally, but parents expect them to develop. If they do not, there is a problem.⁷¹ When one is "born again" as a child of God, he (or she) is spiritually immature. As time passes, he (or she) should develop the qualities or abilities, which the Bible says, characterize the mature.⁷² Many Scriptures describe the need to grow and mature spiritually:

Eph. 4:14-15 (NASB), "As a result, we are no longer to be children ... we are to grow in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

2 Pet. 3:18 (NASB), "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

2 Thess. 1:3 (NIV), "your faith is greatly enlarged."

Many problems develop as members fail to grow spiritually: some go back to the world, others cause strife because of ignorance or become stumbling blocks

⁷¹ Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 73.

⁷² David E. Pratte, *Steps to Spiritual Maturity: How We Grow Up in Christ* (1968), accessed April 7, 2015, http://www.gospelway.com/christianlife/steps_maturity.php.

because of irregular attendance of worship service, worldliness, or indifference. Just as a baby needs to do certain things to grow physically, so Christians need certain kinds of activities to grow spiritually. Paul challenged the believers of the Corinthian churches:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?⁷³

Paul confronts a problem that the Corinthians were failing to grow spiritually and remained on a diet of milk. Therefore, Paul describes the people of the Corinthian churches as people who are still worldly-mere infants in Christ. The people who are still worldly can only eat infant's food like milk instead of solid food. However, what does it mean to live on milk and solid food?

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.⁷⁴

Milk means the elementary truths of God's Word, lacking of experience and teaching about righteousness. Solid food is for the mature. The people who eat solid food can be teachers and have their senses trained to distinguish good and evil. The reason the apostle Paul calls the people of the Corinthian church as infants in Christ is that they distinguish themselves ("I follow Paul"; "I follow Apollos") and quarrel with each other. In fact, the Corinthian in church was full of spiritual gifts: "Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be

⁷³ 1 Cor 3:1 [NIV].

⁷⁴ Heb 5:12-14 [NASB].

revealed,”⁷⁵ but they could not overcome their infant spiritually. It is impossible to measure one’s spiritual maturity through the experience of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. They are for empowering believers for kingdom service as part of their spiritual formation. “Progress toward maturity would come only when God’s people humbly accept the fact they weren’t ‘anything’: ‘so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth’ (1 Cor. 3:7).”⁷⁶

Paul described the journey of becoming mature:

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.⁷⁷

Apostle Paul teaches believers about spiritual maturity that speaking the truth in love and growing up in all aspects into Jesus Christ so that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”⁷⁸ This is the level that believers have to reach. In other words, the meaning of maturity in spirituality is to function and relate according to the image of God that created human beings had in the beginning.

Jesus is Son of God, people can say that spiritual maturity is becoming more like Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians, Paul encourages the readers, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”⁷⁹ Jesus Christ is the ultimate example in believers’

⁷⁵ 1 Cor 1:7 [NIV].

⁷⁶ Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 80.

⁷⁷ Eph 4:13-16 [NIV].

⁷⁸ Eph 4:13.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor 11:1.

spiritual formation. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day eternity. Amen.”⁸⁰ As the Scripture proves that after Adam and Eve’s sin, human beings lost their original image, which God created them in His image (Gen. 1:26). But spiritual formation is a daily process that enables believers to grow in closeness with God and to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christlikeness through spiritual formation is the way for the believers’ image to be conformed to the image of God.

Spiritual Formation with the Image of God

The Holy Spirit intends to work in believers, among them, and through them in spiritual formation for transforming them into the image of Christ.⁸¹ With the help of the Holy Spirit, believers are spiritually formed to be like the image of God, which is one of the goals of the new creation in Christ.

God created everything in the beginning and humans were initially created in the image of God. The creation story provides this picture of the foundational truth:

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’⁸²

The Hebrew words for “image” and “likeness” “refer to something that is similar but not identical to the thing it represents or is an ‘image’ of.”⁸³ Every human being is God’s image-bearer, created unique and distinctive from the rest of

⁸⁰ 2 Pt 3:18 [NASB].

⁸¹ Richard E. Averbeck, “Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1, (2008), 30.

⁸² Gn 1:26-28 [NASB].

⁸³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 442.

creation.⁸⁴ Therefore, the image of human beings can reflect image of God. One of the reasons that human beings are created in the image of God is that God wants to have fellowship with human beings. John R. Tyson said, “Human beings are created *imago Dei* speaks of our being created by and for fellowship with God.”⁸⁵ Human beings identity, as beings created image of God, can be reflected the God’s character so that God wants them to be holy: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”⁸⁶ However, because of sin, the image of God in human beings was distorted and they lost holy.

When God created human beings in His image, He gave them authority to rule the world and the first man and woman named all of the animals God created. Robert E. Webber says, “God created us in his image and likeness, to live in union with himself, to be what he created us to be, and to do what he created us to do: take care of the world and make it the place of his glory.”⁸⁷ With the authority to rule the world, God also gave humans the freedom to choose to obey or disobey God. God commanded the first humans, Adam and Eve, that they could eat any fruit in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸⁸ God’s purpose in creation was “he could invite a community of his image bearers in Christ to participate in the eternal love relationship that the Trinity enjoys, thus displaying his glory.”⁸⁹

However, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God so that the intimate relationship with God was seriously broken and humanity has been spiritually

⁸⁴ James R. Estep Jr., “Christian Anthropology: Humanity As the Imago Dei,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 15.

⁸⁵ Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 6.

⁸⁶ Lv 11:45.

⁸⁷ Robert E. Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 16.

⁸⁸ Gn 2:16-17.

⁸⁹ Morrow, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 38.

separated from God. Sin is an unfortunate and inescapable reality⁹⁰ that Adam and Eve shifted from love and friendship to blame and distrust. According to Romans 6-8, because of sin, human beings enter the world unable to fully love God, which means the image of God in human beings was distorted.

Kevin Stirratt's says, "Humanity, no longer reflecting the image of God, was now marred with selfishness and all the destructiveness that goes with it."⁹¹ After the image of God was distorted, human beings, instead of being holy, became selfish and destructiveness. Romans 5 also explains that Adam is the believers' ancestor, through him sin entered the world which is saying that each human being is affected by Adam and Eve's rebellion.

Cornelius Plantinga states, "Shalom is God's design for creation and redemption; sin is blamable human vandalism of these great realities and therefore an affront to their architect and builder."⁹² Human beings peace from God was damaged and changed into fear, distrust, and shame. After the corruption, everything goes from good, to bad, and to total disaster,

then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.'⁹³

Since God is absolutely holy and righteous, He was deeply grieved and pained by the wickedness of the people he created in his own image and likeness.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 21.

⁹¹ Kevin Stirratt, *So This is Faith: Becoming an Authentic Disciple of Christ* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2007), 19.

⁹² Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 16.

⁹³ Gn 6:5-7.

After the image of God was distorted, human beings became the slaves of sin and were controlled by sinful nature. Apostle Paul described, “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.”⁹⁵ Sin resides in the human will, and controls their good intentions to make them away from God. Sin absolutely distorted the fellowship between God and human beings.

God wants to renew the image of humanity to reflect the image of God and to have fellowship with humanity. God made a wonderful plan only that can be done by Him for the redemption work right after the fall of humanity. Whitney says, “I commented on our relationship to the first man, Adam, and that we, like him, rebel against God, and there is nothing we can do to stop us from sinning and rebelling—no work, no ascetic practice, no self-discipline, no religious practice that can restore communion with God.”⁹⁶ How hard they try, humanity cannot recover the relationship with God. Therefore, God fulfilled this wonderful plan through His son, Jesus Christ. Foster pointed out the “goal of the Christian life could be summarized as our being formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷

Only God Himself who is holy and perfect can restore the fellowship between God and humanity. Foster said, “One man, Jesus, the second Adam, God incarnate, does for us, however, what we cannot do for ourselves. In the flesh, God reverses Adam’s rebellion and establishes a relationship with God by being our sacrifice for

⁹⁴ Averbeck, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 53.

⁹⁵ Rom 7:19-21.

⁹⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 112.

⁹⁷ Richard J. Foster, “Becoming Like Christ,” in *Christianity Today*, February 5, 1996.

sin, by overcoming evil, and by being a model by which we are to live.”⁹⁸ God became humanity as Jesus Christ came into this world and achieve the union between God and sinful humanity. The apostle Paul describes the “Grand Reversal”:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The Last enemy that will be abolished is death. For he has put all things in subjection under his fee.⁹⁹

Jesus Christ has overcome death and justified the people who believe in him by grace. For as in Adam the image of God in humanity was distorted, so also in Christ the image was restored. Webber says, “Because of the incarnation, our humanity is lifted up into God, God’s image within us is restored, and human nature is healed.”¹⁰⁰ Jesus’ death and resurrection can set believers free from sin and gave them a new life. As a person receive Jesus Christ through faith, Jesus Christ comes into that person’s life and begins to make him or her new which means the image of God begins to be restored. Jesus Christ lives in believers’ and unites them to God. God both gifts them in spiritual union with himself (spirituality) and teaches them to live a spiritual life.¹⁰¹ Regarding spirituality, Philip Sheldrake says, “Spirituality is the whole human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, and within the community of believer.”¹⁰² Moreover, Webber provides a clarification in his definition, “The spiritual life was

⁹⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 112.

⁹⁹ 1 Cor 15:20-27.

¹⁰⁰ Webber, *The Divine Embrace*, 173.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰² Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 35.

not a mere standing before God but was the direct result of baptism into Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, NIV), and a continuous living in the world in the pattern of death and resurrection.”¹⁰³

Spirituality is about relationship with God in our spiritual journey and spiritual life is a participation in God’s divine purpose through Jesus Christ. Tyson also believed that “Christian Spirituality is rooted in Jesus Christ; virtually anything that can be said of Christian Spirituality relates – directly or indirectly – to Jesus Christ ... Jesus Christ reveals God, reconciles people to God, and exercises God’s spiritual reign in the lives of those who belong to God.”¹⁰⁴ Jesus Christ is only the mediator between God and human beings, and humanity can come to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus said, “Abide in Me and I in him.”¹⁰⁵ When human beings abide in Jesus Christ, they can have union and fellowship with God. Ebner described, “To be in Christ is to enjoy a vibrant, vital, organic relationship with Him, so that His life flows into us and we share His very life. This is a relationship characterized by faith, love, worship, and obedience.”¹⁰⁶ Now, humanity has an opportunity to recover the image of God through faith, love, worship, and obedience in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ and live a Christlikeness life, believers can restore the image of God. Therefore, believers need a Christ-centered spiritual formation to become Christlike.

Sanctification

What is the relationship between spiritual formation and sanctification and how they are related in Christian life? Leclerc said, “Spiritual formation is none other

¹⁰³ Webber, *The Divine Embrace*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 19, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Jn 15:4a.

¹⁰⁶ Gwen Ebner, *Formed Holy in His Image: Spirit, Soul, & Body* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2011), 32.

than growing in holiness through the processes of sanctification.”¹⁰⁷ Spiritual formation can be considered sanctification. Spiritual formation is ongoing process to Christlikeness that growing into holiness and sanctification traditionally refers to the process of the believer being made holy. Therefore, sanctification is achieved through Christian spiritual formation, whereby people are transformed into the character of Christ. “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.”¹⁰⁸ God wants His people to be holy and to live a holy life on the process of spiritual formation and sanctification.

Alex Tang summarized, “sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit with the willing participation of believers to restore the fallen image of God and develop habits of living that are pleasing to God. The scope of sanctification includes not only personal salvation but also God’s redemptive purposes for his creation.”¹⁰⁹ Sanctification is the restoration of the image of God among fallen human beings. God restored his image in humanity through Jesus Christ and believers are invited to be more like Christ. Kapic stated, “Holiness by faith is our justification, whereas holiness of life is our sanctification.”¹¹⁰ Justification is the act of God’s grace that believers can be called holy by faith, and holiness in humans is the restoration of God’s image in us. In other words, after believers were saved by faith, God makes them holy, and they have to live a life of holiness, which is an aid in sanctification. “Our call to

¹⁰⁷ Diane Leclerc, “Being Whole Holiness and Sanctification as a Wesleyan Paradigm for Spiritual Formation,” 48.

¹⁰⁸ Lv 11:44.

¹⁰⁹ Alex Tang, *The Nature of Spiritual Formation* (Feb 2010), accessed September 20, 2015, http://www.kairos2.com/SF_Nature.of.htm.

¹¹⁰ Kelly M. Kapic, “Evangelical Holiness: Assumptions in John Owen’s Theology of Christian Spirituality,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 113.

salvation and sanctification is paramount to any talk about the specifics of our life.”¹¹¹ Sanctification is God’s will for believers (1 Thess. 4:3), but every saved person is deeply affected by the power of sin in the life of holiness. Therefore, Nelson says, “As it is on a long road trip, the journey with Jesus takes many turns, and we can’t envision what awaits us around the bend. In particular, we don’t foresee where the clash with sin and temptation may take us.”¹¹²

Christian believers are involved in conflict every day, and this struggle stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is not over until one reaches heaven. John pointed out, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”¹¹³ Believers still sin, but through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers are provided for victory over sin.¹¹⁴ Now believers are no longer in bondage to the power of sin, but through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their life they can have a holy life. Alex Tang clarified, “Sanctification occurs when the Holy Spirit infuses grace for the control of sin, and it is an ongoing process leading to perfection in this life.”¹¹⁵ Through progressive sanctification, which has to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word of God, believers’ spiritual life will grow into mature.

Progressive sanctification is not setting believers apart from the world, but sent them into the world: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be

¹¹¹ George Hillman, “Calling and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 198.

¹¹² Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 2.

¹¹³ 1 Jn 1:10.

¹¹⁴ Gal 5:16-25; Eph 4:22-24.

¹¹⁵ Alex Tang, *The Nature of Spiritual Formation*.

sanctified in truth.”¹¹⁶ Believers are sanctified by truth, which means more like Christ and sent by God to the world. Moreover, the believers should follow Jesus Christ and separate from the world in their life. Apostle Paul emphasized, “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”¹¹⁷

The term sanctification is the Christian life that is participating Jesus’ death, resurrection, and rising to the new life. The whole sanctifying work of God in believers’ lives can be described as a diagram below:

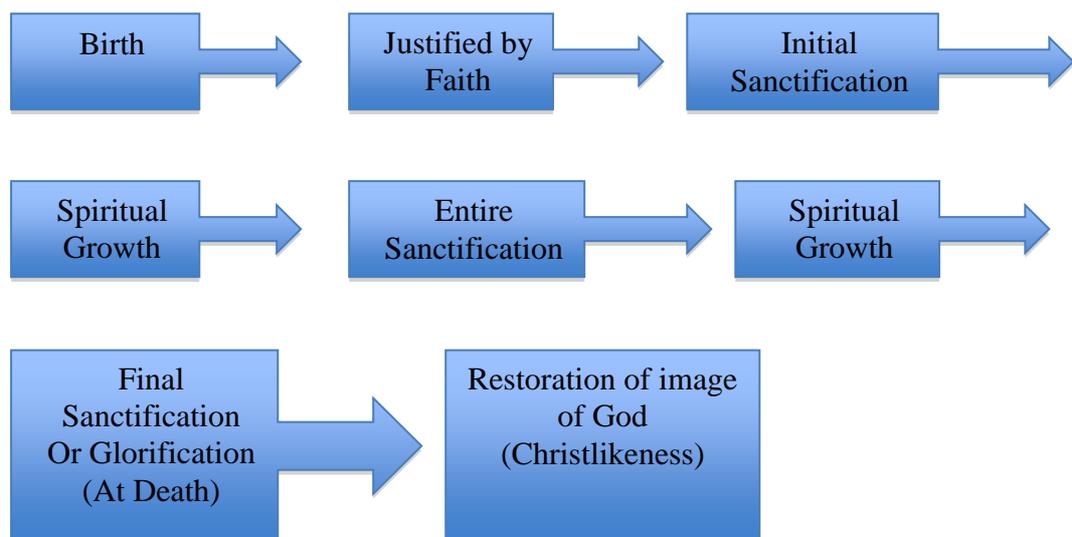


Figure 2.2. Order of Salvation

The diagram tells that each person is given prevenient grace at birth that that one has a choice as to whether cooperate with this grace or not. Through faith the person can be justified by God grace. Then he or she will experience a conversion through the help of the Holy Spirit that enters the process of sanctification, which is

¹¹⁶ Jn 17:18-19.

¹¹⁷ Rom 6:5-7.

called initial sanctification. One will be justified and made holy by grace of God after the conversion and begins to have a spiritual life. Through practicing the spiritual discipline, one may experience entire sanctification. Afterwards, spiritual growth again follows and through sustained entire devotion until the person dies, he or she will experience final sanctification.¹¹⁸ Sanctification is God forming believers spiritually into the likeness of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹ Believers' sanctification is a major concern of God,¹²⁰ and God's eternal plan is conforming every Christian to be like Christ just Paul says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."¹²¹

Spiritual Growth Experience in China

From the researcher's personal experience, the researcher believes that discipleship training and spiritual disciplines are the most important elements to a believer's spiritual formation.

In researcher's perspective, many people are coming to belief in Jesus Christ in China, but believers lack the skills of spiritual growth. Most of them thought the pastor's sermon could help them to grow in spirituality mostly. Therefore, some Christians are attending several churches in one Sunday or different churches on each Sunday so these people have no particular local church. However, they do not know this would be harmful to their spiritual growth. As Christians, they should have regular attendance at a local church and a particular pastor to be their spiritual leader. Probably believers can grow in knowledge about Bible, but without having spiritual

¹¹⁸ Leclerc, *Spiritual Formation*, 57, 58.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹²⁰ 1 Thes 4:4; Ti 2:11-14.

¹²¹ Rom 8:29.

discipline of regular attendance at a local church, they cannot grow spiritually. In their own church, nevertheless believers can have their regular worship services, Bible study, prayer meeting and pastors can mentor them as well whenever they have spiritual struggles. Therefore, the local church can play a significant role in helping believers to grow spiritually.

The researcher's home church Qingdao First Church was founded in April 1994. The numbers were continuing to grow until it reached around 400 members in 2001. They had regular worship services, varieties of fellowship and activities at church, but they did not provide effective discipleship training and spiritual disciplines for the membership during that time. The spirituality of the members was poor which resulted in each fellowship meeting at church looking like a social gathering that was lacking God's Word. Moreover, most of the members were old, and young adults did not have the passion for coming to church because they thought the Christian life was boring.

From 2001, the researcher's home church has concentrated on discipleship training and spiritual disciplines that required each member of the church to attend. The discipleship training is a two-year program that divided into four levels. Meanwhile, the church has encouraged all of the members to attend different kinds of fellowships at church such as prayer fellowship, Bible reading fellowship, and Wednesday small group. In addition, the church has required each member to have daily devotion and Bible reading in the morning.

With the discipleship training and spiritual disciplines, all of the members' spirituality has been growing fast. Most of the people who finished the two-year discipleship training programs became leaders at church and in their jobs. At the same time, the number of young adults has been increasing. It is surprising to realize that

many church leaders are from young adults groups. With the growing faith of young adults, the church has started to have contemporary Sunday worship and some of the fellowship activities have been led by the young adults groups. Older generations have supported and prayed for young adults. In 2005, around half of the church members were young adults among the 200 members. One of the big differences before 2001 and afterward was the amount of offerings. Although there are only around 200 members, the offerings are twice what they were with 400 members before 2001. Moreover, many young adults leaders have been cultivated from Qingdao First Church, nine seminarians from the researcher's home church have a desire to become pastors in the future. Some of them already became pastors after 2005.

In the book of the "*Celebration of Discipline*", Richard J. Foster introduces an excellent job of describing the inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study), the outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, and service), and the corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration) of the Christian faith.¹²² Foster offers a wealth of examples and practical advice on how to put these disciplines into practice in the Christian's spiritual life and these disciplines are greatly helpful in the process of spiritual formation. The researcher has practiced spiritual disciplines through meditation, prayer, Bible reading, fasting, worship, regular community life, attending discipleship class, and fellowship with other people. Among these spiritual disciplines, discipleship classes have provided big benefits in the researcher's spiritual journey.

¹²² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 15-201.

Biblical Foundation

Discipleship training and spiritual disciplines are significant for churches to help its members to grow spirituality and equip them to become Christlike. From the researcher's ministry experience, he thought the discipleship training and spiritual disciplines could be separated in detail as meditation, prayer, Bible reading, fasting, worship, community, teaching, and fellowship.

During the practice of spiritual discipline and the process of spiritual formation, believers have to ask help from the Holy Spirit. Eugene Peterson writes: "Spiritual formation is primarily what the Spirit does, forming the resurrection life of Christ in believers."¹²³ Although believers cannot see the Holy Spirit, God sent the Holy Spirit as a gift to them and help them to transform into the Christlikeness. Jesus explained the coming of the Holy Spirit:

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."¹²⁴

After Jesus' resurrection, He promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to believers. Peter also said, "Repent, and each of believers be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins; and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁵ As believers receive Jesus as their Savior, they will participate in the life of Christ through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them. Greenman says, "Participation in the life of Christ, by the Spirit, reproduces the character of Christ in his

¹²³ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 237.

¹²⁴ Acts 1:4-5.

¹²⁵ Acts 2:38.

followers.”¹²⁶ The Holy Spirit works in believers’ spiritual lives to lead them to reproduce the characters of Christ. In addition, Averbek says that: “He (the Holy Spirit) is the empowering presence of God who works to transform believers into the image of Christ according to the will of the Father.”¹²⁷ In a word, without the work of the Holy Spirit believers can never become Christlikeness. Paul described the teaching impact of the Holy Spirit:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.¹²⁸

God reveals himself through his creation, in history, in the Bible, and through Jesus Christ. Moreover, God reveals himself through the Spirit. Believers have received the Holy Spirit freely who knows the depths of God. Through the help of the Holy Spirit believers can know the thought of God and directly connect them with God. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit works to transform believers and help them to bear the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”¹²⁹ God wants to bring the Christ’s characters to believers through the Holy Spirit. Gordon D. Fee delineated the role of the Holy Spirit:

He acts as a divine personal agent in myriad ways. The Spirit searches all things (1 Cor. 2:10), knows the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:11), teaches the content of the gospel to believers (1 Cor. 2:13), dwells among or within believers (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14), accomplishes all things (1 Cor. 12:11), gives life to those who believe (2 Cor. 3:6), cries out from within our hearts (Gal. 4:6), leads us in the ways of God (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), bears witness

¹²⁶ Greenman, *Life in the Spirit*, 26.

¹²⁷ Averbek, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 60.

¹²⁸ 1 Cor 2:10-13.

¹²⁹ Gal 5:22-23 [NIV].

with our own spirits (Rom. 8:16), has desires that are in opposition to the flesh (Gal. 5:17), helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26), intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27), works all things together for our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28), strengthens believers (Eph. 3:16) and is grieved by our sinfulness (Eph. 4:30).¹³⁰

The work that the Holy Spirit does in believers' lives in order to help believers to bear the fruit of the Spirit and bring about Christ's character in them. The Holy Spirit works in moments of crisis or suffering and gives them strength.¹³¹ The Holy Spirit also works in believer's lives to lead them to spiritual growth. Simon Chan states, "The Christian story is not primarily about how God in Jesus came to rescue sinners from some impending disaster. It is about God's work of initiating us into a fellowship and making us true conversational partners with the Father and the Son through the Spirit and, hence, with each other (1 Jn 1:1-4)."¹³² The work of the Holy Spirit is the foundational essence and helps believers to grow spiritually in their ongoing faith journey.

Meditation

The word "meditation" rooted in the Bible means listening about God's Word and reflecting how the Word of God relates to believers. In the book of Joshua says, "This book of the law shall not depart from our mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."¹³³ God asks believers to meditate on His Word day and night so we will obey it. David

¹³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, "On Getting the Spirit Back into Spirituality," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 41.

¹³¹ Eph 3:16 [NIV].

¹³² Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 78.

¹³³ Jo 1:8 [NASB].

encouraged believers, “I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.”¹³⁴ The psalmist also mentions meditate several times.

Foster defined, “Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ.”¹³⁵ In other words, meditation simply means to hear and obey the voice of God. There many stories of such persons as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah ... and Isaiah were carefully heard the voice of God, then obeyed and acted through God’s guidance. Foster concluded:

Meditation is a more passive Discipline. It is characterized more by reflecting than by studying, more by listening than by thinking, more by releasing than by grabbing. In the Discipline of meditation we are not so much acting as we are opening ourselves to be acted upon. We invite the Holy Spirit to come and work within us—teaching, cleansing, comforting, rebuking. We also surround ourselves with the strong light of Christ to protect us from any influence not of God.

In light of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of meditation is more close to reflecting, listening, and releasing rather than studying, thinking, and grabbing. However, there is no exact word “meditation” in Chinese, and meaning of “meditation” in Chinese is more close to thinking. Moreover, the believers in China are lack of meditating the Word of God. They know how to pray and read Bible, but they are not familiar with meditating the Word of God.

In order to help members to practice the meditation, the researcher’s church used to make a weekly meditation booklet and give it to members every Sunday with bulletin. In the front page, there was a guidance of practicing the meditation. The members would practice the meditation individually, and then two members as one group would share their meditation everyday that what they heard from the Word of God and how are they going to obey it. They could share their meditation either face

¹³⁴ Ps 119:15, 16.

¹³⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 274.

to face or through phone. The researcher thinks it is a good idea that helps members to practice the spiritual discipline and grow spiritually together.

Prayer

Prayer is one of the best ways to connect with God, and prayer has a significant impact on one's spiritual growth. Prayer is one of the privileges for Christians that practice the presence of God. The Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus."¹³⁶

Setran and Kiesling say, "Prayer and praise promote postures of humble receptivity, a continual recognition that they are not standing on their own but are rather sustained 'by his powerful word' (Heb. 1:3, NASB)."¹³⁷ Prayer is not asking believer's will from God, it aligns believer's desires with His purpose.

Stirratt suggested that connect with God through prayer.¹³⁸ Pray not only whenever believers need help, but also at any moment in their life. Prayer is the way to experience the presence of God through communication.

Apostle Paul taught believers that they have to "pray without ceasing" (1Thess. 5:17, NASB). Whatever believers' situation is in darkness or desperation, they cannot stop praying. "To pray to God in any and every circumstance is to remember and to invoke God's presence now, and to seek God's mercy and loving-kindness afresh."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Phil 4:6-7.

¹³⁷ David P. Setran and Christ A. Kiesling, 105.

¹³⁸ Stirratt, *So This is Faith*, 56.

¹³⁹ Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 21.

Prayer should become part of believer's life. "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."¹⁴⁰ "The LORD has heard my supplication, The LORD receives my prayer."¹⁴¹ God is always listening to believer's prayer. Prayer is also one of the best ways to build believer's faith in Christ that influences believer's spiritual growth. The Bible tells believers, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life" (Jude 1:20-21, NASB). God invites believers to enter into relationship through their prayer. Prayer transforms and reforms believers in the journey of spiritual formation.

The researcher's church has morning-prayer meeting, Friday night prayer meeting, and small group prayer meetings everyday. Prayer is believers' spiritual breathing that they cannot have spiritual life without prayer. The researcher used to attend all of these prayer meetings every week to keep his spiritual journey with Jesus Christ.

Bible Reading

If a child stops growing physically, parents will know there is something wrong and take the child to a doctor. In order to cure their child, the parents could do whatever she could do. However, believers seldom care about their spiritual growth. If branches do not abide in the vine, branches cannot get nutrition so that they cannot bear fruit. Believers cannot grow without staying connected to Jesus and they can do nothing without Jesus. Jesus explained spiritual formation as abiding, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so

¹⁴⁰ 1 Pt 4:7.

¹⁴¹ Ps 6:9.

neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”¹⁴²

How can believers stay connected to Jesus? Read the Bible. “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me.”¹⁴³ The Scripture is a vital presupposition for spiritual formation.¹⁴⁴

Whitney concludes that:

No spiritual Disciplines is more important than the intake of God’s Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we’ve all broken it. There we learn how Christ died as a sinless, will Substitute for breakers of God’s Law and how we must repent and believe in Him to be right with God. In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord. We find in Scripture how to live in a way that is pleasing to God as well as best and most fulfilling for ourselves.¹⁴⁵

A. The Scriptures were written to guide believers in spiritual growth. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”¹⁴⁶

B. The Scriptures were written to help believers learn and grow in faith. “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Jn 15:4-5.

¹⁴³ Jn 5:39.

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Morrow, “Introducing Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Tm 3:16.

¹⁴⁷ Rom 15:4.

C. The Scriptures were written to lead believers from darkness. “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”¹⁴⁸

D. The Scriptures were written to provide believers nutrition which is their daily bread. “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”¹⁴⁹

E. The Scriptures were written to protect believers from sin. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to God’s Word. With all one’s heart God has sought ones; Do not let one wander from God’s commandments. God’s Word one have treasured in one’s heart, that one may not sin against God.”¹⁵⁰ Keep Bible verses in mind to fight sin.

God has spoken, once and for all, through his Word. David Clark attests, “Those who refuse to acknowledge the Bible’s authority will not experience spiritual transformation by the Spirit and through the Word.”¹⁵¹ The Scriptures reading is essential to believers’ spiritual growth and should become a key part of their daily activity. The Scriptures will help believers live a life with God in the journey of spiritual Formation. The researcher also read Bible everyday for daily spiritual bread.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Pt 1:19.

¹⁴⁹ Mt 4:4.

¹⁵⁰ Ps 119:9-11.

¹⁵¹ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 65.

Fasting

Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline in believers' life and one of the best ways of getting closer to God. Fasting is not a requirement for believers to practice, but Jesus Christ expected his disciples to fast. He told them,

whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.¹⁵²

Fasting is an action for sake spiritual purposes that voluntarily going without food. In the Old Testament and New Testament, there are also many examples of fasting such as Moses wrote the Ten Commandments with fasting (Ex. 34:28) and Jesus also practiced fasting for 40 days in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. According to John Wesley, there are seven reason, purposes, and objectives of fasting:¹⁵³

1. First, men and women who are experiencing deep emotions of mind, who are affected with any intense passion, such as sorrow or fear, are often swallowed up with them, and even forget to eat their food.
2. A person experiences deep affliction because they are overwhelmed with sorrow for sin, and a strong apprehension of the wrath of God.
3. Many of those who now fear God are deeply aware how often they have sinned against him, by the abuse of food.
4. Some people have insisted on; namely, the punishing of themselves for having abused the good gifts of God.
5. Fasting is a help to prayer; especially when we set apart larger portions of time for private prayer.

¹⁵² Mt 6:16-18.

¹⁵³ John Wesley, *When You Fast*, accessed September 26, 2015, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/jw-001fasting.htm>.

6. When God's anger is moved, to seek him by fasting and prayer; but even from the heathens.
7. Fasting is a means not only of turning away the wrath of God, but also of obtaining whatever blessings we are in need of.

John Wesley reflected that the fifth is the most important reason for fasting, which is a help to prayer. The purpose of fasting is not on the food, but believers can have deeper spiritual communication with God through prayer. In other words, the practice of fasting helps believers get in touch with their truest desires. Foster pointed out, "Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes."¹⁵⁴ Fasting not only means abstaining from food, but also abstaining from our life habits. Thus, through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform believers' life so that they can experience spiritual growth. Foster stated, "More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ."¹⁵⁵

At the researcher's church, they have group fasting and read the whole Bible one time during New Year holiday. Due to church members being very busy all the year except on New Year's time; therefore, the purpose of fasting, at this time, is church wants to provide opportunity for them to think about Jesus Christ and have a new start with Jesus Christ at the beginning of the year when they have time. It is a big challenge for members whether decided to have vocation with family or fast their worldly desire to come to God. The researcher practiced fasting and read the whole Bible one time during this time. Moreover, the researcher also practiced fasting individually for his spiritual needs on his journey of spiritual formation.

¹⁵⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

Worship

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.¹⁵⁶

Worship is the action of glorifying God and glorifying God is a way of knowing the divine life.¹⁵⁷ Jesus taught believers that God the Father seeks worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24).

The true worship can glorify and praise God but the false worship leads to dire consequences. For instance, God rejected Cain’s sacrifices for the false worship (Gen. 4:5). Because of the false worship of the molten calf fashioned by Aaron, three thousand people died in one day (Ex. 32). The kingdom of Israel was divided because of the idolatry and false worship of the nation (1 Kings 11:31-33). The fall of Jerusalem was directly attributable to false worship of the nation (Jer. 1:16; 16:11; 22:9). Today, worship also becomes believers’ habits of religion’s action rather than praising and glorifying God. Nevertheless, misdirected worship caused suffering and punishment from God. Satan still seeks those who will worship him not God (Mt. 4:9). The apostle Paul pointed out, “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25, NASB).

True worship is God-centered worship. Worship does not focus on the worshiper, but it begins with God. He has first loved human beings, made himself known to them, and through his son, reached out to reconcile them with himself. In

¹⁵⁶ Neh 8:5-6.

¹⁵⁷ Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 35.

worship, believers should focus on God through the Word of God, because “The Word of God is the presence of Christ coming to us. It is the presence of God made known through the written word (Holy Scripture) and the living Word (Christ) both mediated through the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of individual believers and the believing community. Through the encounter with the Word of God the spiritual life is nurtured.”¹⁵⁸ Averbeck says, “from early Genesis (e.g., Gen. 4:26b, ‘At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD’) to the end of Revelation (‘the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple,’ Rev. 21:22b), worship is at the core of spiritual life.”¹⁵⁹

Moreover, worship does not happen only on Sunday at church, but believers should worship God at everywhere and anytime. Abraham is remembered in the Bible as the father of faith. According to Genesis 12, God called Abraham from his home to journey to the promised land (Gen. 12:1). When Abraham arrived the promised land, he built an altar to worship God (Gen. 12:7). Then he proceeded from there to another place, he built an altar to worship God (Gen. 12:8). In Gen. 13:4, Abraham built another altar in Bethel to worship God. After Lot took the properties and separated from him, Abraham built an altar to the LORD (Gen. 13:18). Abraham worshiped God had no exact place or time, so believers also could learn from the father of the faith, Abraham, that worship God in their life. Coming to church and worshiping God with other believers are very essential, but individual worship at their work, school and family is also significant in believers’ spiritual journey.

The researcher was born in a Christian family. As a pastor’s kid, he is not allowed to absent from the worship during his childhood. During his childhood, there

¹⁵⁸ Hugh T. McElrath and Bill J. Leonard, “Spirituality and Worship,” in *Becoming Christian: Dimensions of Spiritual Formation*, ed. Bill J. Leonard (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 47.

¹⁵⁹ Averbeck, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 51.

was no Sunday school at church and all his friends were non-Christians. Therefore, the researcher wanted to play with his friends and he could not understand the reason that he had to attend church every Sunday until he met Jesus Christ personally. Now, the researcher knows the importance of worship that the purpose of God created human beings is for worshiping Him.

Community

“It is not good for the man to be alone,”¹⁶⁰ solitude is not good in the eyes of God that he created human beings as a community. God gave believers community not only among humanity but also with the trinity of God. However, with the fall of humanity the origin of community was broken. Gordon Johnston says, “The primeval history (Gen. 1-11) is a story about the origin of community as the blessing of God, as well as about the tragic demise of community that comes from sin and wickedness.”¹⁶¹ God started the history of humanity from community, but because of sin, now he is working for restoration of community between God and humanity through redemption. Community is an essential element of spiritual formation.

Fred Fullerton points out, “We’ve been called of God and invited into a journey of faith with brothers and sisters in Christ.”¹⁶² Believing Jesus Christ as Savior is an individual action, but the journey of spiritual formation needs community to accompany believers. James C. Wilhoit also says, “Both the individual aspects of

¹⁶⁰ Gn 2:18.

¹⁶¹ Gordon Johnston, “Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 75.

¹⁶² Fred Fullerton, “Building the Body: The Church as a Means of Grace,” in *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, ed. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 94.

our faith and its communal reality need to be part of our spiritual formation.”¹⁶³

Community as a place of forgiveness and celebration¹⁶⁴ plays an important role in the journey of practicing a lifelong process of growth toward wholeness in Christ. “The Christian community is a spiritual organism in which sincere followers of Jesus Christ can grow and thrive.”¹⁶⁵

Church as an important embodiment of community can represent a community. Maddix says, “Christian faith is often practiced void of the community.”¹⁶⁶ In their spiritual life, believers may have worship, fellowship, and discipleship programs at church to grow spiritually. According to Setran and Kiesling, teaching (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*), worship (*leitourgia*), and outreach (*diakonia*), are the communal life of faith at the early church.¹⁶⁷

Teaching

“Emerging adults must be taught the actual language and stories of the Bible and the creeds, not just pious moral platitudes or contemporary glosses on biblical themes.”¹⁶⁸ I would like to say this teaching is a discipleship. “Being a disciple,” or “discipleship,” is another word for Christian spirituality and focuses on the transformation of the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁹ When Jesus taught his disciples, he put them into difficult situations, gave them a mission to

¹⁶³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 117.

¹⁶⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 93.

¹⁶⁵ Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 133.

¹⁶⁶ Maddix, *Spiritual Formation*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 95.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁶⁹ Maddix, *Spiritual Formation*, 11.

complete and slept with them. The term discipleship is from the Greek word *mathetes*, translated “disciple.”¹⁷⁰ On the way to mature discipleship, a person needs a mentor (community) to guide him or her in becoming a follower of Christ just as Jesus nurtured his followers as his true disciples through his entire life and cultivated his disciples spiritually through the teachings.

God uses discipleship programs to aid in bringing believers to maturity.¹⁷¹ Jesus teaches believers that “therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”¹⁷² Making disciples is believers’ commission from Jesus Christ, and through discipleship programs believers will teach them the whole counsel of Scripture and the doctrines of the faith. Setran and Kiesling say, “The church has a responsibility to teach the whole counsel of Scripture and the particular doctrines of the faith.”¹⁷³ In order to bring the people spiritual maturity, teaching is one of the essential elements in Christian community.

Fellowship

In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image and the fellowship is a key purpose for their creation.¹⁷⁴ In his creation, God brought the fellowship not only humanity with God, but also humanity with each other. However, due to the sin of humanity the fellowship was broken and this fellowship needs to be restored.

According to Darrell L. Bock, “Spiritual formation means that God is in the business

¹⁷⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 104.

¹⁷¹ Bock, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 105.

¹⁷² Mt 28:19-20 [NIV].

¹⁷³ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 96.

¹⁷⁴ Bock, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 103.

of forming us into his likeness so that we can have deeper fellowship with him and reflect the virtues of righteousness in our lives.”¹⁷⁵

Today, God also wants His people to have fellowship with each other in his given community and the believer’s spirituality can be formed through fellowship at church. To give weight to the importance of fellowship, Setran and Kiesling offer six aspects of significances of fellowship in the local church. One of the significances of fellowship tells that fellowship can “provide a place of love, support, and healing”.¹⁷⁶ Everyone wants to be involved in a loving community, be supported in believing, praying, and helping what they are doing and be received healing from suffering.

The English word, “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is derived from the root “*koinos*,” which means “to hold something in common.”¹⁷⁷ People can share the common life in Christ at Christian fellowship. Through the reciprocal fellowship believers can:¹⁷⁸

- Show hospitality to one another (1 Pe5. 4:9)
- Accept on another (Rom. 15:7)
- Be subject to one another (Eph. 5:21)
- Bear with one another (Eph. 4:2)
- Forgive one another (Col. 3:13)
- Confess your sins to one another (Jas. 5:16)
- Pray for one another (Jas. 5:16)
- Encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:18)
- Confront one another (Col. 3:16)
- Stir up one another (Heb. 10:24)
- Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32)
- Honor one another (Rom. 12:10)
- Bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2)
- Love one another (Rom. 13:8)

¹⁷⁵ Bock, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 103.

¹⁷⁶ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 103.

¹⁷⁷ Bob Gilliam, *The Importance of Fellowship in a New Testament Church*, accessed May 26, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-importance-fellowship-new-testament-church>

¹⁷⁸ Nelson, *Spiritual Formation*, 138-139.

All these caring for “one another” passages are based on the unconditional love that Jesus commended.¹⁷⁹ Nouwen says, “When we eat and drink together, in the circle of God’s love, we actually become the body of Christ.”¹⁸⁰ It tells believers that as they are involved in a Christian fellowship, they as the body of Christ can be called one family in Christ. Believers cannot only share their commonality in Christ but also love one another so that fellowship can help believers to grow spiritually.

God does not want his people to live this world alone, but gives them community. He has never stopped to work reforming believers’ lives into the image of Christ. God not only gives believers community to pray and worship him, but also learn to serve and love one another. At the life long journey of spiritual formation, Christian community is an essential element of spiritual growth to believers.

Summary

God has a heart for believers to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), which is the ultimate purpose of God’s saving work. Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ by practicing spiritual disciplines to grow spiritually. In this process, God will work in believers through the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ that brings about Christ’s character in them.

Meditation, prayer, Bible reading, fasting, worship, regular community life, attending discipleship class, and fellowship with other people can be called acts of piety that focus on believers’ spiritual practice. In addition to act of piety, John Wesley taught that acts of mercy are also essential to believers’ spiritual practice. Acts of mercy include ministries of compassion, mission, and financial giving.

¹⁷⁹ Jn 13:34.

¹⁸⁰ Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird, *Spiritual Formation*, 98.

Ministries of compassion can outreach the people who meet physical needs, mission can reach the people who meet spiritual needs and financial giving to the church and other nonprofit organizations meets the physical and spiritual needs of people. On the journey of restoring the image of God in believer's life, Chinese Christian young adults should practice both acts of piety and acts of mercy live a Christ-like life. In light of the Holy Spirit, they should focus on the spiritual growth and ordinary progress of relationship with God.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The years from 18 to 25 are full of transitions like single to partners, school to work world, and parents paying bill to paying one's own bills. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to answer, "How is spiritual formation practiced by Chinese Christian young adults?"

This review of the literature relating to socialization processes in Chinese culture is divided into three major themes. Section one reviews the literature relating to the context of the Chinese culture. This section will present the context of Chinese culture in mainland China. This section includes a brief history of modern history in China with a special focus of the past and current Chinese culture that may relate to personal growth in spiritual formation. Section two examines what is the value of Chinese young adults under the current social environment in which Chinese young adults live. Section three focuses on the literature regarding developmental theories of spiritual formation. Section three will give weight on the literature regarding spiritual formation in young adults and adults from developmental theories. This section also addresses the social cognitive theory in learning theory, psychosocial theory, and faith developmental theory.

The Context of the Chinese Culture

China, the third largest country in the world is one of the oldest and complex cultures in the world as well. The culture of China has been influenced by China's long history and by its diverse ethnic groups, with customs and traditions that may differ greatly between towns, cities, and provinces. Despite all of its regional diversity, China is dominated by its own philosophy and cultural thought from thousands of years ago.

Some Chinese people think that human life has no value.¹⁸¹ They do not value the individual or see people as “fearfully and wonderfully made” in the image of God. On the other hand, Chinese tradition believes in a process of de-creation in which a myriad of gods, individual spirits, and humankind emerge from “the one.” Life is a series of manipulation and appeasement of the gods, who are capricious and unpredictable. Life depends on fate. A person's goal is to be set free from the physical bondage of the world and to return to the unity of spirit.¹⁸² Accordingly, the culture from the traditional Chinese philosophy plays a significant role in the lives of many Chinese.

The study of the history of Chinese philosophy will benefit the understanding of Chinese Christian young adults. Chinese philosophy is the intellectual tradition of the Chinese culture from the early-recorded history to the present day.¹⁸³ It is apparent that the Chinese culture is very complex, full of contradictions and paradoxes. It is the desire of this researcher to offer some basic understanding and appreciation of the actual practice of traditional Chinese philosophy. As Christian ministers have come to

¹⁸¹ Darrow L. Miller, *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: Youth With A Mission Publishing, 2001), 68.

¹⁸² Miller, *Discipling Nations*, 80.

¹⁸³ Cristian Violatti, “Ancient Chinese Philosophy,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, June 17, 2015, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.ancient.eu/Chinese_Philosophy/.

realize how personal philosophy of culture plays a role in the manifestation of spiritual problems, one of the goals for this research is the realization of the significance of personal philosophy as it impacts the individual.

Traditional Philosophy of China

Professor Tang Yi-jie (February 1927 – September 2014) was a philosophy professor of Peking University. He has been described as China’s top scholar on Chinese studies and philosophy.¹⁸⁴ This researcher will explain traditional Chinese philosophy based on Professor Tang Yi-jie’s study.¹⁸⁵

According to Tang, the traditional philosophical ideas embodied the problems of the true, the good, and the beautiful in three propositions, which have been influencing Chinese thinking and long discussed by ancient Chinese philosophers. These are “the integration of heaven with man,” “the integration of knowledge with practice,” and “the integration of feeling with scenery”.

“The integration of heaven with man” inquires into the unity of the world. In traditional Chinese philosophy, “heaven” and “man” are the basic and most important concepts. The “relationships between heaven and man” were the most important discussion questions and it has been explained by different theories in traditional Chinese philosophy. Most scholars believed that “heaven” and “man” could communicate and relate to each other. “Man” is the heart of heaven and earth so that heaven and earth would have no vitality, rationality, or morality without “man”. Therefore, the integration of heaven and man refers to the relationship between man

¹⁸⁴ Chris Luo, “China’s Top Philosophy Scholar and ‘Sinology master’ Tang Yijie dies at 87,” *South China Morning Post*, September 10, 2014, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1589251/renowned-chinese-philosophy-scholar-died-beijing>.

¹⁸⁵ Tang Yi-jie, “Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and Chinese Culture,” *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life Series III: Asia*, vol. 3, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series03/III-3/contents.htm>.

and the universe. Man is considered the center of the whole universe and should constantly improve oneself to reflect the prevalence of changes in the universe.

“The integration of knowledge and practice” is the problem of an ethical and moral norm. According to traditional Chinese philosophy, unity of “knowledge” and “practice” are the prerequisite to the “good”. Ethically, knowledge and practice cannot be separated into two ends that knowledge should be integrated with practice. The summary of relationship between knowledge and practice made by the ancient Chinese philosophers states that knowledge is the purpose of practice and practice is the work of knowledge; knowledge is the beginning of practice and practice is the end result of knowledge.

“The integration of feeling and scenery” involves the creation and appreciation of artistic works. Tang, Yijie said, “Once feeling is integrated with scenery, witty expressions are readily available. Feeling is generated from amid scenery and scenery is generated from amid feeling.”¹⁸⁶ Therefore, the creator of artistic and literary works must be one who has spiritual and ideal realm and his works must “integrate feeling with scenery.”

The three integrations, which are “heaven is integrated with man,” “knowledge is integrated with practice,” and “feeling is integrated with scenery” cannot be separated and one who has attained such an ideal realm is a saint. Therefore, in the realm of creation one reaches a situation in which the true, the good, and the beautiful are integrated; there lies the meaning of life and the man’s highest ideal.

¹⁸⁶ Tang Yi-jie, “On the Unity of Man and Heaven,” in *Man and Nature: The Chinese Tradition and the Future*, ed. Tang Yijie, Li Zhen, and George F. McLean (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 21.

However, Jesus expressed about the true, the good, and the beautiful in his teaching. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”¹⁸⁷ Only Jesus who is the only Son of God is the truth in the world. “No one is good, except God alone.”¹⁸⁸ Because of sin, everything in the world cannot be good in eyes of God, but God alone. Moreover, most of time people will determine beauty from looking at physical appearance, but God looks at the heart in all people and things. Jesus said, “In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”¹⁸⁹ Because of sin human beings cannot reach the situation of the true, good, and beautiful except through Jesus Christ.

The Study of the History of Philosophy

The study of the history of philosophy has its general and particular significance. Yijie gives three aspects on the study of the history of philosophy.¹⁹⁰

First, while the study of the history of philosophy necessarily requires the study of the historical function of philosophers and philosophical school, the ultimate value of such a study is to reveal the necessary logic that determined the specific development of certain philosophical thinking in history.

Second, the history of philosophy is one of the struggles between materialism and idealism; and man’s knowledge of the world has been developing in the struggle between materialism and idealism.

Third, the study of philosophies of the past was the only way to temper one’s theoretical thinking.

¹⁸⁷ Jn 14:6 [NIV].

¹⁸⁸ Lk 18:19b [NIV].

¹⁸⁹ Mt 23:28 [NIV].

¹⁹⁰ Tang, *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life Series*, 17.

Therefore, the study of the history of philosophy is the development of man's knowledge and the laws governing the development of theoretic thinking as well. In recent years, more and more people are working on the study of the history of Chinese philosophy have brought new progress.

Major Schools of Thought

The history of Chinese philosophy traditionally has been influenced by the three most prevalent philosophical ideologies in terms of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (Taoism).

Confucianism is a philosophy based on the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. It originated about 500 BC. From the 100's BC to the AD 1900's, Confucianism was the most important single force in Chinese life. For many people, Confucianism is considered as a religion, rather than a culture but in many ways it influenced Chinese education, government, and the individual's personal behavior and duty to society.¹⁹¹

Generally, Confucianism emphasizes self-restraint, good relationship with others, and mutuality to promote social harmony. Confucius was mainly interested in how to bring about societal order and harmony. He believed that mankind would be in harmony with the universe if everyone understood their rank in society and were taught the proper behaviors of their rank.¹⁹²

Moreover, Confucianism has embedded in people's behavior and business culture in China. Even nowadays many Chinese business people attach great importance to cultivating, maintaining, and develop personal relationship (*guanxi*)

¹⁹¹ Melvin W. Wong, *Chinese Culture and Psychological Disorders in Pastoral Ministry: An Introduction to the Core Issues* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 15.

¹⁹² Lexi Heugly, *Chinese Cuisine*, accessed February 13, 2016, <https://prezi.com/Wcrvieaqkiuu/chinese-cuisine/>.

before doing business, because Chinese people prefer to do business with those whom they know well.¹⁹³ Eating and drinking is one of the most effective ways to build personal relationship in business or with friends in life. In a word, Chinese people believe “no relationship, no business”.

Many times, Jesus ate as a symbolic gesture of welcoming those into his circle of fellowship. For instance, Jesus Christ ate at Zacchaeus’ house, ate at a Pharisee’s house, and ate at the home of Martha and Mary. As this researcher started church planting in Iowa City, IA, he used the same approach to reach Chinese people in Iowa City, and the ministry tells that it works well with people when this researcher invited people to have a meal individually in order to develop a new and deeper relationship with them.

Confucianism has not only influenced spiritual and political life in China, but also in other Asian countries such as Korea and Japan. Confucianism is a way of life taught by Confucius and one of the main teachings of Confucius is keeping the value of filial piety. According to Chinese tradition, filial piety was the primary duty of all Chinese people. Paul Briens defined, “the term filial piety¹⁹⁴ refers to the extreme respect that Chinese children are supposed to show their parents. It involves many different things including taking care of the parents, burying them properly after death, bringing honor to the family, and having a male heir to carry on the family name.” The main features of filial piety are the love and appreciation for parents. When the parents get old, the children will take care of the parents in return in obligation to the parents providing the basic necessities of life for the children.

¹⁹³ Anthony Goh and Matthew Sullivan, *The Most Misunderstood Business Concept in China*, accessed February 18, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-misunderstood-business-concept-in-china-2011-2>.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Briens, “Examples of Filial Piety,” in *Reading About the World*, vol 1, 3rd ed., ed, Paul Briens et al. (New York: Harcourt Brace Custom Publishing, 1999), 1.

Although China society has gone through much political turmoil, and it has gone through dramatic changes, Chinese people still continue to retain filial piety as the core of the Chinese culture. Today, one could be considered as an unfilial son by the whole society if he or she does not give honor or respect his or her parents in China. Tradition says, filial piety is taken as the utmost honor that parents can receive during their lifetime.

On the other side, filial piety was still a value based on maintaining the specific family hierarchy of Chinese society and obedience to parents. From a practical point of view, it may be compared with the practice of going to church in a strictly Christian family. For example, parents ask or recommend their child to go to church and the child follow the parents' words to show their obedience. In many cases, a child who follows parents to attend the Sunday service may be a ritualistic act. Whether the child is a true believer or not, is another matter.

Buddhism,¹⁹⁵ originated in India, was introduced to China during the first century. After Buddhism entered China during the Han dynasty, it was first attached to Chinese culture. When metaphysics became popular in the Wei and Jin dynasties, Buddhism was also attached to metaphysics.

Two great schools of Buddhism were popular in the last Han and early Wei dynasties. One was Theravada, which emphasized Zen practice. Theravada is closer to the original Indian form of Buddhism. Another branch was Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism spread north through Tibet. This school emphasized that the fundamental principle of life was to make spirit revert to its virginal truth or reality and that life would then conform to the dao (the way of nature), which was influenced by idea of Laozi (Lao Tzu) and Zhuangzi.

¹⁹⁵ Tang, *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life Series III: Asia*, vol. 3.

Although Buddhism gave an impetus to the further development of Chinese culture and thought, the clash between Buddhist culture and traditional Chinese culture still existed.

After the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhism was gradually accepted by Chinese culture and it had completely united with traditional Chinese culture by the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279). During the Sui (AD581-618) and Tang (AD618-907) dynasties, there appeared a number of Buddhist sects that were Tian Tai, Hua Yan, and Chan Zong, and they concerned theory, practice, and the nature of the mind, which was originally important in traditional Chinese philosophy.

After Buddhism was introduced into China, it has been developing in the direction of Chinese culture. For several centuries, Buddhists and Daoists borrowed ideas, terminology, disciplines, cosmologies, institutional structures, literary genres, and soteric models from each other.¹⁹⁶ Chan Zong, the sect of Buddhism that destroyed important features of Buddhism as a religion. He advocated that the Buddha and reading Buddhist classics were not necessary. As long as people honor father and king, they can finally be perfect sages.

Buddhism teaches that everyone remains within the cycle of death and rebirth. Since person remains within this cycle of life, he or she can never be completely free from pain and suffering. Therefore, only good deeds can help people to get more positive outcome.

Good works is also very important in Christianity, and the Bible mentions about good works several times. However, unlike Buddhism, Christian practice of good works is not for securing an outcome in the future or other purpose, but as a response to the kingdom that has already begun. A Christian receives eternal life not

¹⁹⁶ Dan Lusthaus, "Buddhist Philosophy, Chinese," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed December 12, 2015, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/buddhist-philosophy-chinese>.

because of good work, but because of God's grace. Therefore, the people who received Jesus Christ as their Savior will imitate Jesus Christ to practice good works.

Taoism, is one of three main religions in China, developed one hundred percent from inside China. Confucianism says that people can live a good life only in a well-disciplined society that stresses attention to ceremony, duty, morality, and public service. In contrast, Taoism (Doism) emphasizes the relationship between people and nature, the focus is on living harmoniously, which is where the concept of Yin Yang originates.

Yin (passive energy) and Yang (active energy) represent two primal opposite forces in the universe: the dark and the light, the female and the male, the cold and the warm. The Yin Yang theory plays a significant role on Chinese culture which forms the foundation of feng shui (风水). The interaction of these two feng shui forces creates the essence of life around people. One cannot exist without the other, as in their seeming opposition, they deeply support and nourish each other. Creating a home that will reflect the feng shui Ying Yang balance is very important because a home needs a balanced feng shui energy in order to support people's well-being. Many Chinese still passionately practice feng shui in mainland China as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In actuality, before moving in a new house or office, a house owner or businessman will ask a Taoist master to subject the site to a thorough spiritual examination, determining whether the house or space is truly in harmony with nature and the supernatural. In feng shui, generally "success" is considered as financial accomplishment. To put it succinctly, feng shui is a superstitious belief about how things should ideally be arranged to achieve happiness, good health, and financial success. However, instead of success Jesus is more care about human being's spirit of love and humility. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about

the Beatitudes, which means “happiness”. The Beatitudes are eight blessings that consists of two phrases: the condition and the result.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.
 Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted.
 Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth.
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.
 Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.
 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God.
 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God.
 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹⁹⁷

Jesus did not say blessed are those who are successful or have good life in this world, but blessed those who are insulted, persecuted because of him. The blessings of Jesus Christ are not about money, but eternal things such as kingdom of heaven, and being called children of God.

Additionally, Taoism as a religion was also influenced by Chinese folk religion and has a significant influence on Chinese culture. In folk religion, most of the gods are human beings who displayed exceptional powers during their lifetimes. In Taoist temples, the Chinese worship more than 1,000 gods. One of the most popular gods many Chinese worship is Guan Di, who was considered as the protector of business people, lived as a general during the AD 200's. Nowadays, it is not surprising to find a Guan Di in restaurant, entertainment places, and shopping areas in mainland China. In a word, Guan Di Idol is a god and a sign of bringing financial success to many Chinese.

¹⁹⁷ Mt 5:3-10 [NIV].

Socialization Processes

Introduction

Young adults' personalities are formed by socialization. Loretta F. Kasper defined socialization as:

We all enter this world as potentially social beings. When we are born, we are essentially helpless and must depend upon others to fulfill out most basic physiological needs. As we grow and mature, we experience an ongoing process of social interaction which enables us to develop the skills we will need to participate in human society. This ongoing process is called socialization.¹⁹⁸

Human beings learn how to think, behave, and act through the process of socialization. Socialization refers to the process of human beings' learning, especially after the birth, and determined by many factors. Family will be the most important agent that influences the child's socialization after the birth, but as the child advances to preschool age, programs or schools begin to exert influence.

The family plays a significance role in shaping a child's attitudes and behaviors patterns. As infants, they completely need parent's or family member's help to survive. In the family, they can learn about the values, relationships, norms, and identity.

A family provides the child behavior patterns and initial relationships, the school provides academic knowledge and social skills through the child's interactions with teachers, and other students. Peer groups also give a chance to develop many of the social skills. According to C. Barbour, N. H. Barbour, and P. A. Scully peer groups help children learn how to negotiate and relate to others. They learn from peers how to cooperate and socialize according to group norms and group-sanctioned

¹⁹⁸ Loretta F. Kasper, *Socialization and Culture*, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://kccesl.tripod.com/hypertextstudy/printtext.html>.

modes of behavior.¹⁹⁹ The peer group not only can influence what the child knows, values, and learns, but is also important in development of self-concept.

In fact, the family, school, and peer group are the most important agents in a child's socialization. Moreover, mass media, and culture are active socialization agents. Amy Driscoll and Nancy G. Nagel conclude that for the first eight years, family, school, and peers play a role in the following aspects of a child's socialization:

- The development of trust
- The development of independence
- The tendency to take initiative
- The sense of competence and ambition
- Decisions about who one is
- Relationships with others
- Decisions about future generations
- Reflections on one's life²⁰⁰

This researcher believes the process of socialization plays significant roles on the process of spiritual formation such as how Christians trust in God and reflect in their spiritual journey.

Chinese Young Adults' Social Value

China has a long history and culture tradition. In order to understand the socialization of Chinese young adults also requires the knowledge of Chinese history and culture. History is so important to Chinese people that lots of TV dramas are showing history series. C. J. Shane is a journalist, book author, teacher, and artist. She taught English more than 10 years in different places of China. In 2013, she published a book, "Voices of New China" to help the readers understand the Chinese history briefly, and introduce differences between Chinese culture and Western culture.

¹⁹⁹ C. Barbour, N. H. Barbour, and P. A. Scully, *Peer Group Influence*, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.education.com/reference/article/peer-group-influence/>.

²⁰⁰ Amy Driscoll and Nancy G. Nagel, *Family Socialization*, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.education.com/reference/article/family-socialization/>.

According to C. J. Shane, “History is of deep of importance in Chinese culture, and the Chinese people have a deep historical memory.”²⁰¹ Therefore, Chinese history affected the values and concerns of Chinese young adults especially the Culture Revolution and Open-up policy.

After Japan surrendered in 1945, China still had two parties, which were the Nationalists party and Communists party. Nationalists party was all over in 1949, the People’s Republic of China was established in October of 1949 by the Communists party. Moreover, only a landlord had the land before 1949. Following the establishment of New China, Zedong Mao, who was the chairman of Communists party, did land reform and each farmer owned the land.

Chinese people were full of hope, and they thought their lives would be getting better and better. Shane said, “The first years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China were exciting and inspiring to the vast majority of the Chinese people. There was a strong sense of mission to overturn the class system, to build the socialist nation, and to free the Chinese peasants from poverty and ignorance.”²⁰²

However, in 1958, Chinese Communist Party leader Zedong Mao initiated the Great Leap Forward, and nearly 40 million people died in the famine during the years of 1959-1961.²⁰³ In the 1960s, Mao found his position in government had weakened after the failure of his Great Leap Forward. In order to reassert his authority over the Chinese government, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and China

²⁰¹ C. J. Shane, *Voices of New China: Chinese Young Adults Talk About Their Lives* (Tucson, AZ: Rope’s End Publishing, 2013), 10.

²⁰² Shane, *Voices of New China*, 16.

²⁰³ Chu Yi, “How Many People Died During the Great Leap Forward?” *China Science Daily*, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://news.sciencenet.cn/sbhtmlnews/2011/8/247261.html>.

descended into chaos. The Culture Revolution continued until the death of Mao in 1976.²⁰⁴

In 1978, Xiaoping Deng became the leader of the Communist and launched “Reform and Opening up Policy”. The significant role of reform and opening up policy is a liberation of the mind. Under the leadership of the general designer; Deng Xiaoping, a guideline of “emancipating the mind, seeking truth from facts, setting wits to work and uniting as one to move forward” was defined and a historical decision was made to shift the work focus of the Communist party of China and the state economic construction and to recognize reform and opening up.²⁰⁵

Before the “reform and opening up policy”, Chinese young adults under the planned command economic systems are basically the same condition that points to the value of life is “Anatman” and “selflessness”, which means national interests above all else, and personal interests obey collective interests. This value direction played positive roles in China’s socialist construction. After the reform and open up policy, the value of young adult’s was changing to become more individualistic. They began to pursue the personal values and build a self-value system.²⁰⁶ When it comes to moral and spiritual values, the Chinese people will say Cultural Revolution destroyed the spiritual values of a nation and “me first” attitudes have taken over.²⁰⁷

Therefore, Chinese people care and see themselves first even in the context of a group or community. For instance, as a group in a company, most of time Chinese

²⁰⁴ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 20-21.

²⁰⁵ Pei-jun Shi, Wei-hua Fang, Wen-jie Dong, Ning Li, Wei Xu, and Shi Chen, “Chinese Paradigm of Catastrophe Risk Governance,” in *Integrated Risk Governance: Science Plan and Case Studies of Large-scale Disasters*, ed. Pei-jun Shi, Carlo Jaeger, and Qian Ye (New York: Springer, 2013), 194.

²⁰⁶ Yan-bo Zeng, “The Development and Formation of the Contemporary Chinese Young Adult’s Value,” *The Research on Zedong Mao and Xiaoping Deng’s Theory*, vol. 6 (2007): 39.

²⁰⁷ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 25.

people are just concerned about personal results, income, and increase of position rather than the benefits of their team.

After the “open-up policy”, the lives of Chinese people were getting better in that not only the basic needs were satisfied, but also Chinese people had more freedom to choose their life direction and what they want. Therefore, if people talk about Chinese economics or Chinese society today, most of the Chinese people may have a positive thought on it for life is getting better, and they can enjoy their freedom.

However, after the “open-up policy”, Chinese young adults not only became individualistic, but also trend to become more materialistic. According to Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ research among 4,000 Chinese young adults in 1988, it shows that around one fourth of young adults thought money was more important than personal dreams. In 1990, the data shows that only 36.2% of young adults thought money was more important than dreams. However, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences did the same research in 1996, and more than 50% young adults thought money was more important.²⁰⁸

Moreover, understanding of the word “freedom” is totally different between Chinese people and the West. In China, xiao (filial piety), which is a virtue and primary duty of respect for one’s father, elders, and ancestors is a central value in traditional Chinese culture, and obeying the orders of their parents is the practicing of their filial piety. For example, no matter if one has a boyfriend or girlfriend, marriages used to be arranged by parents in ancient China even in some places of China today. Although they do not like this marriage, the children cannot disobey their parents’ order. Moreover, no matter whether their children like or not, parents always force

²⁰⁸ Yan-bo Zeng, “The Development and Formation of the Contemporary Chinese Young Adult’s Value,” 40.

their children to attend arts school to learn kinds of skills such as playing instruments. Parents also choose major and university for their children.

Under the Chinese culture, Chinese people think the freedom means the option to choose one's career or spouse without interference from family rather than political freedom.²⁰⁹ Chinese President Jinping Xi stated, "Freedom and order must be upheld side by side in both cyberspace and the physical world. Freedom is the purpose of order, and order the guarantee of freedom."²¹⁰ In Xi's opinion, order is more important than freedom. Since Xi became the present of China, he has been focus on combating corrupt officials and social corruption to keep the order of society. If the freedom destroys social order, the freedom might be restricted by government. Compared to 1970s, Chinese people have vastly more freedom today. However, at the level of public expression, organization and action, there are still severe restrictions on personal freedom. But the freedom from the perspective of the West means the right to act, speak, or think without any restraint, even the political thing and to do what they want to do. Therefore, these social values are very different from the West.

Nevertheless, influenced by the leadership of Deng, Chinese society has been dramatically changed and Chinese young adults have freedom to choose their religion. However, Communism strongly influenced Chinese young adults since elementary school and most of Chinese young adults would say they were atheist, that they would not believe in any gods, and that material comforts is their first pursuit. Today, with the rapid development of the economy, Chinese people are not satisfied by only material comforts. To them, spiritual comforts such as having real joy,

²⁰⁹ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 26.

²¹⁰ Ishaan Tharoor, "What China's Xi Jinping Thinks about Freedom," *The Washington Post*, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/23/what-chinas-xi-jinping-thinks-about-freedom/>

happiness and being loved, and that Chinese people have been seeking God throughout the history for this purpose.

God wants human beings to know Him and to have relationship with Him. Therefore, The people who love God and obey the words of God, Holy Spirit will help them to know God. The Bible says, “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him though he be not far from every one of us.”²¹¹ Chinese young adults should personally trust and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and then the spiritual journey with God will begin. John said, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”²¹² Material comforts are limited and will be ended at the human being’s last breath in this world, but God assures human beings that if they trust Jesus as their Savior, He can give them eternal life.

Impact of Only Child

Because of high population growth, China was experiencing great economic hardship and a collapsing environment before one-child policy.²¹³ With the rise of Deng Xiaoping, one-child policy was implemented to curb population growth. Over thirty years have passed since one-child police was implemented in 1979.²¹⁴ Under the One-Child Policy, 90% of all urban children and over 60% of rural children have no brother or sisters today.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Acts 17:27 [KJV].

²¹² 1 Jn 5:13 [KJV].

²¹³ Kristine Sudbeck, “The Effects of China’s One-Child Policy: The Significance for Chinese Women,” *Nebraska Anthropologist* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2012), 45.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

China has been traditionally dominated by males because sons have been highly valued for thousands of years. Sons are valued as the only laborers of the family and they can carry on the family name to continue the family line. Therefore, Chinese couples have preferred sons to daughters for a long time. In order to have sons, Chinese families have utilized sex-selection abortion, infanticide, abandonment of children, undocumented children, sterilization, and an increase in fertility drugs for having a son.²¹⁶ According to Sudbeck, Chinese families desired to have a son so they chose female-selective abortions, but in rural areas families practiced female-infanticide. Not only are many Chinese girls left in orphanages, boys with disabilities or illness may also be abandoned.²¹⁷ Some parents do not choose abandonment, but leave them as undocumented children. “Undocumented children” means they have no any identity under Chinese government because parents did not register their birth in the government. Therefore, parents can still use the childbearing permit to try to conceive a boy as their lawful child.

When the parents go to register for their child, the government will ask one of parents to have sterilization to avoid having a second birth. But some couples want to have more children, so they choose to immigrate to other nations where they are allowed to have reproductive choices. Another way to have more children under the one-child policy is to have multiple births within one pregnancy, because the birth of multiples such as twins or triplets are considered as one pregnancy.²¹⁸ Therefore, some couples use fertility drugs to increase the chances of multiple births.

²¹⁵ Xue-feng Chen, “The Social Impact of China’s One-Child Policy,” *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* 8, no. 1, (2003): 74.

²¹⁶ Sudbeck, *Nebraska Anthropologist*, 47.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

However, after China's one-child policy, many changes also occurred within Chinese society that the population growth was controlled and the preference for sons in China has been challenged. Kristine Sudbeck stated, "While China's One-Child Policy was first implemented to curb such high population growth within the country, I purport that it has inadvertently transformed the social structure within this society to allow for Chinese women to experience greater gender equality."²¹⁹

Therefore, single daughters are now experiencing greater parental investment and consequently greater gender equality within modern Chinese society.

As family is important to the socialization of children, it plays an important role in the development of children's intellect and personality. Children develop morals, values, and behavior patterns through socialization, and their immediate families are often the main social agents that influence their development.²²⁰

A broad range of behaviors such as children's respect, obedience, loyalty, material provision, and physical care by parents are the concepts of Confucianism that have been practiced by Chinese people for thousands of years. However, there are negative effects on one-child policy that parents treated their children as "little emperors" that they become "selfish, spoiled, unsociable, maladjusted, narrow-minded, self-centered, conceited, fragile, and cowardly."²²¹

The One-child policy has brought many urban families' financial well-being. Parents of only children are now encouraging their children to get high education and have a successful career.²²²

²¹⁹ Sudbeck, *Nebraska Anthropologist*, 44.

²²⁰ L. Steinberg, S. M. Dornbusch, and B. Brown, "Ethnic Differences in Adolescent Achievement: An Ecological Perspective," *American Psychologist* 45, (1992): 913-920.

²²¹ N. Z. Wang, *The Socialization of the Only Child in China*, Paper presented at the Conference on Child Socialization and Mental Health, Honolulu, HI, August 1984.

Yang draws a clear summary about the difference between only and non-only children. He concluded, “only and non-only children tend to show developmental differences in two aspects, only children were better in physical condition and intelligence.... Only children were worse in virtues and behavioral habits than non-only children.”²²³

At present, young adults who were the only children will be facing the filial duties on elder care. As the only-child generation reaches midlife, a married couple of two only children might have to care for four elderly parents, one or more grandparents, and one or more children, with no siblings to assist them.

Nevertheless, young adults born after the one-child policy implementation experience differing patterns of socialization and they may also have the double pressure of work and parental care obligations. One-child policy has effectively curbed the growth of population and increased financial well-being of their families in urban China. However, being the only child, they may feel strongly obligated to parental care. Moreover, one-child policy brought out the worst in virtues and behavioral habits that they receive plenty of love from parents and grandparents, and never learned the sense of sharing and caring that develops among siblings.

When these young adults come to church, their spiritual growth will depend on what kinds of family background in which they grew up. For instance, if they were growing up as a “little emperor”, they would prefer to be loved but be lacking in practicing love to others. But if they were practicing interdependence when they were growing up, their spiritual life would be growing fast.

²²² E. N. Chow and S. M. Zhao, “The Impact of One-Child Policy on Parent-Child Relations in the People’s Republic of China,” *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 16: 35-62.

²²³ Z. Yang, “The Existing Problems in Character and Virtue and Reasons Why of the Only Children,” *Gender and Society* 4 (1983): 83-89.

Education

Beside financial well-being, Confucianism urges parents to expect good education from their child.²²⁴ They think education is the only way to provide a good life for their child, and it is an investment in the parent's future as well. Moreover, most of Chinese parents did not receive good education when they were young because of impoverishment and it became a pity in their life. So the parents want to fulfill this pity through their children and they expect their children to study hard to enter a good university.

When this researcher was in middle school in 1997, he had to be in school at least eight hours a day, five days a week, and he also had to go to school on Saturday for tutoring, which was enforced by teacher. When this researcher entered the high school in 2000, he never had weekends off but only had a half-day break on Sunday afternoon. He had to go to school at seven-thirty in the morning and finished the last class at nine-thirty in the evening, which means he had to be in school at least twelve to fourteen hours a day, five days a week, and one-half days on the weekend. It was a heavy stress both psychically and materially.

This kind of pressure still exists in the current Chinese education system, and many students want to escape from the school, they want to be free from this kind of stress. However, parents will not allow their children to do so, instead they will tell their children, "Just keep it and do not give up. After you enter the university everything will be fine and you will find a good job, then you can have a freedom to choose whatever you want to do." However, this is not true. Even they graduate from a good university, it is difficult to find a job. Entering a university is most students' dream, because they used to be told if they have a background of good university they

²²⁴ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 36.

can find a good job. When they would enter the dream of the university, they would realize the reality that graduate from a good university may not give them a good job, and they could feel the strong stress of social competitiveness.

Therefore, some students choose suicide for escaping from this stress.

According to *China Daily* reported in 2007, the researchers in Peking University found that 20.4 percent of more than 140,000 high school students had considered committing suicide at some point and 6.5 percent of the students had made concrete plans to kill themselves. In 2003, more than 250,000 committed suicide and two million attempted suicides.²²⁵

In China, parents try their best to earn lots of money just for their children's education and marriage. All the expectation of parents is that they want their children to receive a good education, to have a stable job, and have a successful marriage. Along with the stress of study, children who were born after the one child policy will also have a burden to find a good job and support family. As I mentioned, as the only-child generation get married, they have to care for four elderly parents, one or more grandparents, and one or more children, with no siblings to assist them. Parents have spent all their savings to support their children, and children must be filial and repay their parents. They should take care of their parents by themselves and if one sends their parents to a retirement home, they will be considered as unfilial children to the whole society.

Probably some western people may not hear about filial piety. When this researcher was in the United States for the first time, he was surprised that most of American university students have their part time job to support themselves not only living expenses but also tuition fees. They would not rely on their parents anymore,

²²⁵ Shan-shan Wang, "Suicide the Major Cause of Death Among Young People," *China Daily*, March 27, 2007, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/27/content_836869.htm.

and parents also would plan their own life after retirement and would not give any burden to their children no matter if they went to retirement home or living themselves. Their relationship with their children is just like close friends, and there is no concept of filial piety. Therefore, young adults in United States began to separate from their parents after entering university and do not need to concern about their parents' future. American's social and family's education system make American young adults more independent and mature than Chinese young adults.

In short, going to a good university is the most Chinese students' dream and they think it is the best way to repay their parents. However, they have lots of stress on their academic study and unknown future. Despite this stress they have, in order to get a higher income job, students will try their best to prepare themselves to become future elite members of society.²²⁶

Employment

In China, there is a large working-age population, the average educational level of the people is relatively low, resulting in a very prominent problem of unemployment. Shane said that for peasant families in the impoverished countryside, life is an ongoing struggle. It shows that a child who does not pass the exams to advance in his or her education must go to work. Many of children leave school at age 15, if not before, and become part of China's huge *liudong renkou*, or "moving population" (often translated as "floating population") of migrant workers.²²⁷ According to Shane, the majority of the young adult group usually takes off for one of China's major cities, or to the factory cities in southern China. The work shift is more than twelve hours a day with frequent additional work hours, but they get low pay. If they are

²²⁶ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 39.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

especially resourceful, they will open their own small business in one of China's mega-cities.²²⁸ For some migrant workers, if they are married, they often leave behind their child or children to be raised by grandparents in order to survive, support the family, and have a better life.²²⁹ To gain knowledge on modern Chinese families, the Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China in 2010 gives a brief introduction in terms of family structure.

Table 3.1. Structure of Children's Families, By Child's Sex and Migrant Status, 2010

Number of rural left-behind children 其中：农村留守儿童（百万人）	Total number of Children (millions) 儿童人口推算数（百万人）	Female 女性 %	Male 男性 %	National 全国 %	
-	278.91	100	100	100	Total（合计）
-	194.46	69.5	69.9	69.7	Living with both parents 和父母双方居住
61.03	84.5	30.5	30.1	30.3	Not living with both parents 不和父母双方居住
10.29	14.42	5.1	5.3	5.2	Living with father 和父亲居住
22.21	29.91	10.9	10.6	10.7	Living with mother 和母亲居住
19.94	22.57	8.2	8.0	8.1	Living with grandparents 和祖父母一起住
2.06	3.04	0.9	1.2	1.1	Living alone 单独居住

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census²³⁰

Table 3.1 shows that large-scale migration is the key factor behind variation in the structure of children's families. Based on long-form data from the 2010 Census, it is estimated that 30% of the child population, or 84.5 million children, did not live

²²⁸ Shane, *Voices of New China*, 41-42.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²³⁰ UNICEF, "What Census Data Tell Us About Children in China: Facts and Figures 2013," accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.unicef.cn/en/uploadfile/2013/1216/20131216111141945.pdf>.

with both parents. While some children did not live with both parents due to primarily reasons such as divorce or parental death, migration was the most common reason for children not living with both parents. Children affected by migration include left-behind children with one parent or both parents working away from home, migrant children who migrated with one parent, and children who attended school or worked outside of their hometown and away from their families. The 61.03 million rural left-behind children accounted for the vast majority of children not living with both parents. Half of the rural left-behind children (47%) did not live with either parent, as both parents had migrated from home. Some 70% of these children lived with grandparents, while most of the remainder lived with other relatives. 36% of rural left-behind children had migrant fathers and lived with only their mothers, while 17% of left-behind children had migrant mothers and lived with only their fathers.²³¹

If the children are lucky that they have a chance to study, he or she will study hard to go to a university to earn a degree, and to begin the process of seeking secure employment. However, the secure full-time jobs in their chosen fields are rare. Shane describes that for generations who have seen education as a sure ticket to social mobility, the failure of the Chinese economy to provide jobs for all educated people is viewed as a potential source of social instability.²³² Finding a good job is young adults' big concern even if it is not what they really like. In this situation, if they cannot get satisfied in their spirituality, with the problem of unemployment and overly-stressful society, young adults sometimes considered suicide is the best way to liberate from the stressful society.

²³¹ *Left-behind children* refer to children who live in their original domicile, but do not live together with their parents, as either one parent or both parents have migrated. *Rural left-behind children* refer to left-behind children whose household registration locations are in rural areas.

²³² Shane, *Voices of New China*, 44.

All in all, in the process of socialization, the social value of the young adult is changing. Young adults who were born in good families as only child are becoming more selfish, spoiled, unsociable, maladjusted, narrow-minded, self-centered, conceited, fragile, and cowardly. Young adults who were born in peasant families in the impoverished countryside, are trying to escape from being poor and have a better life in a city. However, all the young adults are full of the pressures and fears, the pressure of modern life, daily rush, busyness, fear of unemployment, unknown future, and big percentages of young adults have considered suicide.

This researcher thinks these young adults lack love and cannot get any hope from the stressful society. However, they can experience the peace and real rest from Jesus, Savior of human beings. David said in Psalm 23,

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.²³³

Chinese young adults should get rid of their pressures and fears, and take a rest in the love of God. God will refresh their soul and guide their lives. Through practicing the spiritual formation from daily life, Chinese Christian young adults will receive the real peace, experience the love of God, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Developmental Theories Related to Spiritual Formation

Theories of development explain how the individual changes over time. We can benefit from looking at the most useful theories of development. In this research,

²³³ Ps 23 [NIV].

there are three general ways of looking at development: social learning, psychosocial, and faith development theories. Together, these theories may help to illuminate how the various forms of development connect with young adults' spirituality. In this current research, participants who are between eighteen to twenty five years of age will be studied. Attention will be given to the young adulthood life-span development.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory has become the most influential theory of learning and development. Bandura's social learning theory not only fits in children but also in adults, too. From social behavior perspective, in this learning theory, Bandura states behavior is learned from the environment through observational learning (or modeling). This type of learning can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviors. He describes the child adopts the behavior and attitudes of a role model in order to possess the desirable attributes of that model.²³⁴ Observational learning refers to imitation and modeling. Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.²³⁵

As an illustration, Bandura expounds that the child acquires behavioral traits of parent through indirect, or vicarious, reinforcement – a process by which the child's observation of the parent being reinforced for certain behaviors or behavioral

²³⁴ Albert Bandura, "The Role of Modelling Processes in Personality Development," in *Readings in Child Behavior and Development*, ed. Celia Stendler Lavatelli (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), 334-344.

²³⁵ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, INC., 1977), 22.

traits increases the likelihood that the child will behave in similar ways.²³⁶ Christian leadership involves influencing others. People want to be able to influence others to do God's will, it requires a certain level of expertise in order to be effective. This means that the leader should clearly know the learning process, and how to bring permanent learning. In spiritual journey, Christian must learn to pray, study, serve, love others, admit sin and other spiritual disciplines. Holy Spirit will cause the new learners to desire to live a spiritual life, but the leader should demonstrate and explain how these things are done. People will learn through observing other's behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. In similar fashion, people are surrounded by many influential models, such as the family, religious peer group, community, and working place. These could be the major socializations of agencies, people may pattern other's thought, feelings, values, and behavior after observing them in daily life. As a Christian and a leader, it is important to be good models because modeling plays a significant role of one's development, including spiritual development.

Psychosocial Development Theory

Erik Erikson's is one of the best-known theories of personality in psychology. It describes a theory of psychosocial development that looks at development, the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan and how the achievements and failures of earlier stages influence later stages. Erikson focused on how people's sense of identity develops. One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of ego identity.²³⁷ Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that people develop through social interaction. According to Erikson, people's ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and information they acquire in their

²³⁶ Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 23-55.

²³⁷ Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 35.

daily interactions with others. As they face each new stage of development, they face a new challenge that can help further develop or hinder the development of identity. These involve establishing a sense of trust in others, a growing trust in themselves and what they can do.

Erikson's insightful theory helps to tell us it is not only helpful for child development but also for adults too. He was largely concerned with how personality and behavior is influenced after birth and provided a basis for understanding and facilitating development of self and others. Though the participants in the research are not at Erikson's fifth stage, it is necessary to explain a little bit because the focus on finding identity or what Erikson regarded as determining what one could give fidelity to seems especially pertinent to spirituality. Erikson's fifth stage is typically found during adolescence usually begins around the ages of twelve and continues to eighteen, the transition from childhood to adulthood is important. At this point, the child has to learn the roles he or she will occupy as an adult. The child is becoming more independent, and begins to look at the future in terms of career, relationship, families, and housing as the individual wants to belong to a society and fit in as a person. It is during this stage the adolescent will re-examine his identity and make a strong effort to answer "Who am I?". Adolescents attempt to establish their own identities and see themselves as separate from their parents.

In Erikson's sixth stage, intimacy versus isolation, a young adult (roughly eighteen to forty years old) develops skills and abilities to achieve relationships with family, friends, mating partners, and work connections to build his or her social life. If one masters the skills and tasks well, then the giving and receiving of physical and emotional connection, support, love, comfort, trust, and all the other elements he or she experienced would help one typically associate with healthy adult relationships.

In contrast, if one were unable to be intimate with people, then he or she would feel excluded from the usual life experiences of dating, mating, and mutually loving relationships. The particular signs are characterized by feelings of loneliness, alienation, and social withdrawal or non-participation. How does this psychosocial theory relate to young adult spirituality? Traditionally, generations affect each other. A parent obviously affects the child's psychosocial development, but in turn the parent's psychosocial development is affected by their experiences. The cruelty of the Cultural Revolution, its resulting political and social upheaval have wounded many Chinese souls. People who experienced the Cultural Revolution, their disillusionment and grief have caused many to be reluctant to trust people and authority. In light of such cultural experience, suspicion, and self-isolation describe general characteristics of the collective psyche of Chinese people who have suffered through those traumatic political movements.²³⁸ In similar fashion, Chinese children would be affected by their parents or grandparents based on their family education and the whole of society.

Psychologically, conflicts and problems surface from the acculturation stress and can cause even more internal crises. As much, ministry to people in this critical time becomes strategically important. The church as a community can create an open, safe, and supportive environment where both truth and trust are extended because unconditional love and acceptance are desirable for a Christian community.

Faith Developmental Theory

This researcher will use James W. Fowler's stages of faith model as a framework to understand growth toward spiritual maturity. Fowler described the faith development in terms of six structurally distinct faith stages namely, Intuitive-

²³⁸ Lai Fan Wong, "From Atheists to Evangelicals: The Christian Conversion Experiences of Mainland Chinese Intellectuals in the United States of America" (Diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2006), 37.

Projective Faith, Mythic-Literal Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, Universalizing Faith (and one pre-stage, stage 0) through which one may pass as he or she experiences faith development.²³⁹ According to Fowler, faith is defined as a process of becoming, hence, it is continually growing through stages that are hierarchical, sequential, and invariant.²⁴⁰ With each new level of development, people have new capacities for relating to and trusting one another along with new potentials for a relationship with God. Put another way, each stage is progressively more complex in nature than in a previous stage, however, it does not show that these are to be seen as better or having more value. For instance, stage 4 is more mature or better than stage 3. But somehow someone with Stage 4 faith does not mean he or she is more virtuous or faithful than someone with Stage 3 faith, even one sixty years old person can remain with Stage 3 permanently. As a result, this researcher will specifically give a focus on Stage 3 and 4 since the participants of the current research are both in these stages according to their age range. Here is a basic description of Stage 3 and 4 faith:

Stage 3, *Synthetic-Conventional Faith*²⁴¹ is typically found in adolescence through adulthood, which generally begins about the age of 13 and goes until 18. However, some people stay at this stage for their entire life. This stage correlates with Piaget's "formal operational thinking" stage. Adolescents and adults at this stage are able to think abstractly, and start to have an ability to see things from someone else's perspective. It is a time when a person is typically concerned about forming an identity, and is deeply concerned about the evaluations from significant people in his

²³⁹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), IV.

²⁴⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 16-23.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 151-173.

or her life. Concurrently, unlike the previous stage, people at this stage claim their faith as their own instead of just being what their family does. However, their understanding of faith is still essentially a reflection of parental faith, but has widened to include the influence of others. In one sense, whether families are passing on faith or not, one absorbs a spiritual perspective through the family. Additionally, one of the marks of this stage is that people tend to compose the image of God as extensions of interpersonal relationships.²⁴² God is often considered as friend, companion, and personal reality, in relationship to one is known deeply and valued.

Stage 4, *Individuative-Reflective Faith*²⁴³ is typically found in early twenties, thirties, and forties. It comes most naturally in young adulthood. This stage correlates with Piaget's "full formal operational thinking" stage. People at this stage thought the life experiences they have encountered changes those illusions thoughts to realistic thoughts. Typically, life situations, experiences, and perspectives, had during Stage 4 may cause a person to examine his or her religious and spiritual identity and beliefs.²⁴⁴ Cognitively, one can reason abstractly and think in hypothetical terms. The power of reason and critical analysis comes to his or her forefront, and this often is the case as a person's quest for understanding is related to his or her spiritual self as well. Put another way, people start to question their own assumptions around the faith tradition and start to question the authority structures of their faith. It comes with the burden of reflection upon the self as separate from the groups and the shared world that defines one's life. Hence apologetics or reasons for believing in Jesus become critical at this stage.

²⁴² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 155-173.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 174-182.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-179.

Moreover, with regard to the feature of Stage 4, it is marked by a double development stage. Many people do not complete this transition, but get caught between three and four. As an illustration, Fowler explains:

By virtue of college experience, travel or of being moved from one community to another, many persons undergo the relativization of their inherited world views and value systems; they come face to face with the relativity of their perspectives and those of others to their life experience; but they fail to interrupt their reliance on external sources of authority and may even strengthen their reliance upon them in order to cope with this relativity.²⁴⁵

He goes on to describe that when the transition occurs in the late thirties or early forties it often brings greater struggles then, because they have already built an adult life structure. Their relationships have to be reset in light of the stage change. In this stage, stories, symbols, myths, and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may become the major ways to insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previous faith.²⁴⁶

In brief, specifically understanding the stages of faith development offers an important framework for Christian ministers to open an eye on their congregations' spiritual formation. It also provides a self-awareness in self-preparation for those responsible for pastoral care in ministries.

Summary

Theories of development may explain how the individual changes through the lifespan years and help to illuminate how the various forms of development connect with young adult's spirituality. Understanding Chinese culture and young adults' socialization would be more important to explore the spiritual formation of Chinese Christian young adults.

²⁴⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 179.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

Chinese culture has 5,000 years long history and mainly influenced by the thought of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism for more than 2,000 years. These philosophical systems also cannot be ignored in the process of socialization. Under the influence of these thoughts, Chinese young adults would like to pursue the good life, good deed, and good luck, nevertheless some Chinese people thought the Bible is against Chinese culture.

For instance, practicing filial piety (xiao) is the most important practical ethic in Chinese culture. However, because the Bible does not allow people to worship ancestors, it is considered extremely unfilial. Moreover, the Bible says, “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”²⁴⁷ The truth is that God not only asked His people to honor and respect their parents, but also promised that He would bless these people who practice filial piety. If people misunderstood the teaching of the Bible and just interpret the Word of God out of context, it may cause people to consider the Bible is against the Chinese culture. In the journey of spiritual formation, Chinese Christian young adults not have to only honor the Chinese culture, but Chinese Christian young adults should be careful as they interpret the Word of God.

In addition, under the current social environment, all Chinese young adults are full of the pressures, fears, the pressure of modern life, daily rush, busyness, fear of unemployment, and unknown future. Due to these factors, large percentages of young adults have considered suicide. Therefore, having a successful spiritual life is significant to take culture norms and values into consideration in Chinese Christian young adults’ ministry.

²⁴⁷ Mt 10:37 [NIV].

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction and Purpose

For several years, the researcher has had the privilege of being an assistant and youth pastor of a loving, growing fellowship of believers in mainland China. Being a youth pastor, this researcher has always been concerned for the spiritual life and growth of the young generation of the church, but it seemed as though there was not a clear method for assessing the current level of spirituality among the young believers. In a congregation with around one hundred young people there are people with different cultural, religious, social, economic, and spiritual diversity. It is the researcher's goal to explore how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults at three selected Christian churches from the congregations in mainland China. This researcher chose a mixed method design for this exploration, utilizing the survey and focus groups. In addition, "spiritual maturity", "spiritual life", and "spiritual growth" are all pointing to the "spiritual formation" of the believer. Finally, the primary source of information produced from this research will be descriptive statistics.

Research Questions

The following three questions will guide this research in exploring how spiritual formation is practiced in the participants' current settings.

Research Question One

How do participants rate their level of spiritual maturity to God?

Research Question Two

What do participants name as practices they engage in to grow toward spiritual maturity?

Research Question Three

How do the participants experience their church's efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity?

Population and Participants

Invitations to this research will be given to the entire Chinese Christian young adults congregation who regularly attend the three selected Christian churches at least twice or three times monthly in mainland China. The participants for this research will be 18-30 year olds drawn from three congregations. All those selected will have been born and raised in mainland China. At the time of this research, that number will average approximately fifty young adults from each of the three selected Christian churches in mainland China.

This research will use convenience sampling. Convenience sampling “enables the researcher to work with those who are available or volunteer or can be easily recruited and are willing to participate in the research study.”²⁴⁸ After selecting three Chinese Christian churches based on the presence of young adults in the congregations, the researcher will gain official approval from their governing boards. Consent forms will be sent to each church before placing a written announcement. A written announcement of this research will be posted in the Sunday bulletin starting

²⁴⁸ Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 230.

on the second Sunday of November 2016 and to insert registration forms in the bulletins. The announcement will remain for three weeks to give the young adults time to consider participation. On the second Sunday when the written announcement appears, the researcher also will make a personal promotion of this research during the announcement time to encourage participation.

The open invitation will provide the means with which to obtain a sufficient population from the congregations. The findings of this research will be based on the responses of those who have an agreement to join this project and complete the designed survey. At the same time, due to the small sample of each of the three selected churches, the findings of this research will not represent all Christian churches and Chinese Christian young adults in mainland China.

Design of the Study

This research will adopt a mixed method, explanatory design to discern the spiritual maturity of Chinese Christian young adults. These participants attend the three selected Christian churches in mainland China by obtaining quantitative results from a survey. Approximately 150 young adults currently attending the three churches will complete the survey. From this sample, twelve young adults will be purposefully selected via meeting the following four criteria: (1) completed the whole questionnaire the researcher designed; (2) attended the church for two or three years at the same Christian Chinese church; (3) baptized member of the congregation; and (4) completed discipleship training program to explore those qualitative results in more depth.

At the beginning of the first session, a survey will be conducted to collect quantitative data on the participants' spiritual condition. One week after this session, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview session with Focus Group One,

Two, and Three. The purpose of the interviews is to “allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the research”²⁴⁹. The qualitative data gathered from the three focus groups will allow the researcher to gain insight into participants’ perspectives that are not expressed through the survey. Consequently, the data will provide the researcher with a broader and deeper picture in understanding how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults and how it is promoted by various churches in mainland China.

Instrumentation

This research is a mixed method, explanatory design that explores spiritual maturity of participants at three selected Chinese Christian churches in mainland China. The instruments used for this research will be constructed specially for the purpose of this research. Two instruments will be used to collect data in this research. The first one is the survey, and the second one is the semi-structured interview protocol along with the focus groups on spiritual formation.

The survey will be comprised of two sections. The first section will contain questions with fixed answers to ascertain the participants’ demographic information. The second section will contain series of questions using a 1-5 Likert scale for the participants to provide an objective assessment of their personal level of spiritual maturity. Some questions ask about a participant’s relationship to God; practices engaged to grow toward spiritual maturity; and experience in the church’s efforts to develop spiritual maturity at the three selected Chinese Christian churches in mainland China. In this researcher’s opinion, George Barna’s set of about 20 survey

²⁴⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 103.

questions may be the best model to adopt to assess a person's love for God and love for other people that may give a rating of spiritual maturity and satisfaction with others in the church. However, since this research focuses on the experiences of Chinese young adults in mainland China, some questions will need to be modified to fit within the Chinese cultural context.

The second instrument will be the semi-structured interview protocol on spiritual formation. The interview will include a few open-ended questions that the researcher will use to conduct the three focus group interview sessions through Chinese Wechat. The responses will be recorded, transcribed, and coded. They will be then interpreted with the findings from three focus group interview sessions.

Interviews are one of two most common sources of data collection in qualitative research.²⁵⁰ Surveys, questionnaires, and interviews are commonly used formats of policymakers, program planners, and researchers to gather data “about people's ideas, feeling, plans and beliefs”.²⁵¹ This is particularly true when the object is to collect this information from those directly involved in the research and it is most common for an exploratory design.

Those who teach qualitative research suggest that the interview should be opened with a set of biographical questions that are designed simply to allow the person to share the descriptive details of his or her life. It is so important for the questionnaire to be designed to allow the interviewees to “tell their own story in their own terms.”²⁵² The interviewer is required to keep a very low profile and be as

²⁵⁰ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 20.

²⁵¹ Arlene Fink and Jacqueline Kosecoff, *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 13; and Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 20.

²⁵² Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 34.

nondirective as possible. The questions should be as open-ended as possible to allow people the freedom to share their own views and perceptions about the subject being discussed. Irving Seidman gives an excellent answer response in his book on qualitative research:

Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. Every whole story, Aristotle tells us, has a beginning, a middle, and an end (Butcher, 1902). In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, a middle, and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience.²⁵³

The semi-structured interview also allows the researcher flexibility to explore or probe deeper answers whenever needed in order to gain a better understanding of the spiritual formation of participants and to answer research question number three with more insight. In developing the interview questions, the researcher will reflect on his own knowledge and experience in addressing spiritual needs to Chinese Christian young adults during his pastoring time in mainland China.

Data Collection

During this research, the researcher will entrust two persons who have been a small group leader for at least three years at each of the three selected Christian churches to conduct the survey. To insure consistency and care in implementation, the researcher will write out for the survey coordinator the instructions he or she will read when handing out the survey. The collection of data will be conducted after a regular Sunday worship service at the three selected Chinese Christian churches in mainland China. At the beginning of the first session, after a brief welcome for the participants,

²⁵³ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 7.

the trustees will explain the purpose of this research, significance of the survey, and finally read the statement of researcher to the participants:

Hello. My name is Xiande Hong. I attend school at Winebrenner Theological Seminary in Findlay, Ohio. Due to some reasons I am not able to come back to do this research on my own. Hereby, I entrust a person here today to give you a survey for a project I am working on. I am interested in the spiritual formation of Chinese Christian young adults in mainland China. The person I have entrusted is going to give you a paper with series of questions. Please circle only one answer below each question. This is not a test so do not worry about trying to get the questions right. Just be honest and do your best to answer all the questions as accurately as you can. Please do not put your name on this paper. I will be the only person to see your paper but I will not know whose paper it is because there will be no names on any of the papers. So, please answer these questions as honestly as you can and do not worry about anyone seeing what you answered. After you are finished, please fold your paper and put it inside the envelope that you receive along with the paper. You do not have to participate in this survey and you can stop taking the survey if you begin to feel uncomfortable with the questions. If you are willing to participate, please read and sign the consent form before filling out the survey. The consent form gives me permission to use your answers for my project. The trustee is going to pass out the survey now and everyone will need to remain quiet while the surveys are being answered. Are there any questions?

After answering questions from the participants, a standardized, clearly printed survey both in Chinese and English will be placed in each participant's folder, with an identifying number on both the survey and folder. The trustees will go through the procedure by giving instructions on how to make their answers on the scale, and announce that they could ask questions at any time during the survey. Completed surveys will be returned via a collection box. The whole process may take about ten to fifteen minutes.

To collect the qualitative data for this research, the researcher will conduct three focus group interviews at the three selected Chinese Christian churches in mainland China. The researcher will conduct the whole process of interviews via Chinese Wechat. The researcher will intend to study three Chinese Christian young adults from each of the three selected Chinese Christian churches. In case some might change their mind, the research will approach four Chinese Christian young adults

from each of the three selected Chinese Christian churches. The interview participants will be selected after prayerful consideration. The interviewees selected will be selected according to those who best fit the list of criteria and demonstrate a willingness to participate in the present discussion.

A list of criteria is developed to determine the best candidates for interview. The criteria are established in order to provide the most helpful insights into the present research. The candidates selected will meet each of the following criteria:

1. Completed the whole questionnaire the researcher designed
2. Attended the church for two or three years at the same Christian Chinese church
3. Baptized member of the congregation
4. Completed discipleship training program.

Upon collecting the survey, the researcher will contact all the volunteers for interview by e-mail within three days after finishing survey and confirm with them the time and the method to communicate. The interviewees will be informed of the purpose of these interviews, their relationship to the questions administered, that the tapes will be erased once the information is transcribed, and the fact that no attempt will be made to identify individual participants. The demographic data solicited (i.e., degree, gender, marriage status, age, and years since becoming a Christian.) will be used for statistical purposes and not for identification. During the interview portions, the researcher/interviewer will not interpret or assist the interviewees in understanding the questions asked. The interviewer could repeat the questions verbatim as often as needed without commenting. The interviewees will be instructed to answer questions based on their best understanding of the questions asked in interview portions.

Three focus group interviews will take place the following week on separate time frames, on a Sunday morning and Friday evening in one of the classrooms at the same time at each of the three select Chinese Christian churches in mainland China. Three focus groups interviews will help the researcher discern the overall experiences of spiritual formation of participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study was designed primarily to explore how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults at three selected Christian churches from congregations in Mainland China. Statistical analysis as a research tool has helped the researcher interpret the observed phenomena. The statistical test employed in this study was a mixed method design for this exploration, utilizing the survey and focus groups to express the participants' level of spiritual maturity to God, practices engage in growth toward spiritual maturity, and church's efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity.

This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data collected from participants at three selected Christian churches from congregations in Mainland China. Frequency and percentage divisions were used to observe significance in this study. It begins with the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study and will conclude with a descriptive presentation of the data collected and analyzed.

Participants

One hundred fifty young adults from three selected Christian churches in Mainland China registered after the initial announcement in December 2016. Among those who agreed to participate in the research through survey and focus groups, one hundred twenty-nine and another five were considered valid based on the following four criteria: (1) completed the whole questionnaire the researcher designed, (2) attended the

church for two or three years at the same Christian Chinese church, (3) baptized member of the congregation, and (4) completed discipleship training program.

The Demographic Characteristics of The Participants

This section deals with five demographic characteristics of the participants, namely, age, gender, highest level of education, marriage status, and time being a Christian.

Table 5.1. Age Distribution of Participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18	n=7	5.4%
19	n=4	3.1%
20	n=3	2.3%
21	n=1	0.8%
22	n=3	2.3%
23	n=3	2.3%
24	n=5	3.9%
25	n=5	3.9%
26	n=6	4.7%
27	n=15	11.6%
28	n=16	12.4%
29	n=13	10.1%
30	n=48	37.2%
Total	n=129	100%

Table 5.1 shows that the age of the participants is varied. The percentage of the age of the participants was as follows: 18 years old (5.4%), 19 years old (3.1%), 20 years old (2.3%), 21 years old (0.8%), 22 years old (2.3%), 23 years old (2.3%), 24 years old (3.9%), 25 years old (3.9%), 26 years old (4.7%), 27 years old (11.6%), 28 years old (12.4%), 29 years old (10.1%), 30 years old (37.2%). All of these participants are the members of young adult groups at three selected Christian churches in Mainland China.

Figure 5.1. Age Group Distribution According to Percentage

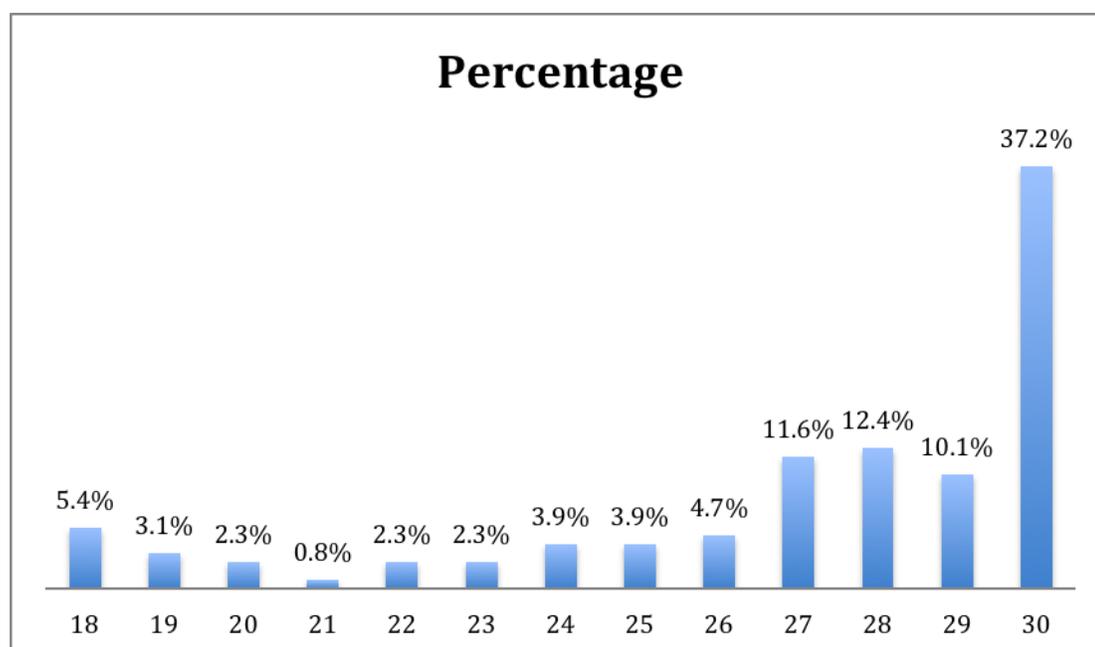


Figure 5.1 shows that the percentage of the age of the participants can be divided into three different groups: the first age group is the lowest age group from eighteen to twenty six (each percentage of age is less than 10%), the second is from twenty-seven to twenty-nine (each percentage around 11%), and the third is the largest age group is thirty (37.2%). There is no exact reason why the age 18 to 26 has such a small percentage, but most of them are in college or are just starting their first job experience. Probably they

are busy for their study or work and they want to prove their ability that they are the best without any help including from God. Therefore, the percentage of the first age group is much smaller than other groups. Compare with the first group, the percentage of second group is increased. This group of people might experience kinds of difficulties at work and struggling with marriage. From one point, people who face difficulties, it is easy for them to come to church and pray to God. Additionally, due to lots of singles in young adults' group, some singles come to church for a boyfriend or a girlfriend, because many people acknowledge that people are attending church are nice. These people come to church for their personal purpose at first, but from their church attendances they may meet Jesus Christ as their personal savior. As a result, the third group may have the largest age group and the most of people who are in the third group might have stable work and are married, have children already.

In short, it was considered from the research that the people who have experienced kinds of difficulties and had a stable life, they are more eager to have a spiritual life.

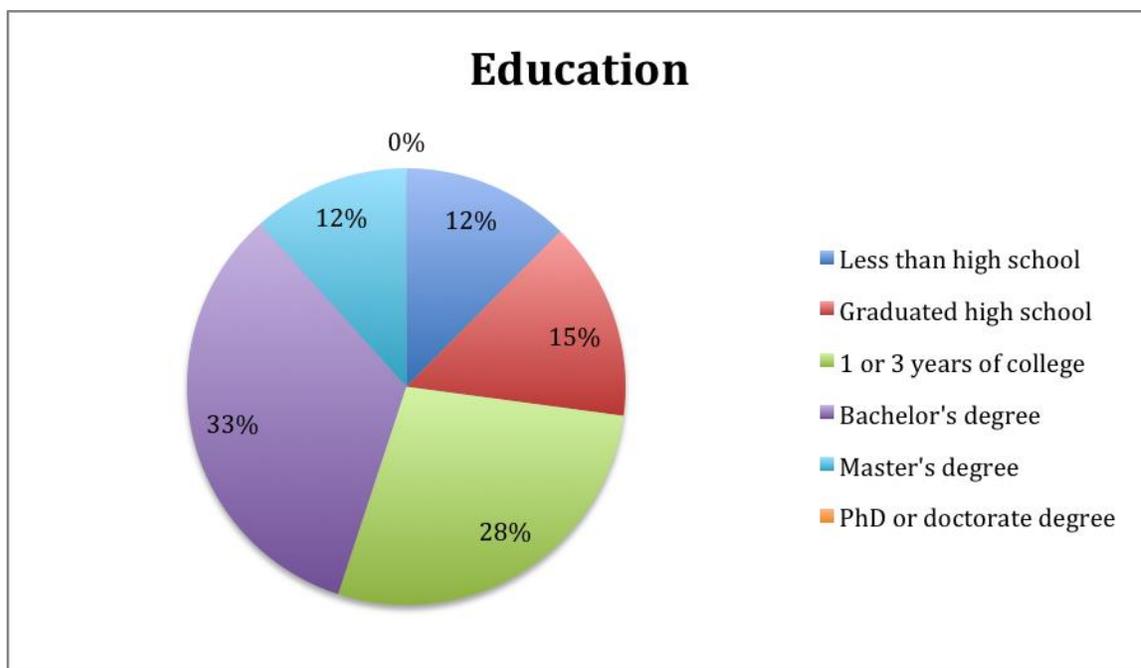
Table 5.2. Gender Distributions of Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Males	n=57	44.2%
Females	n=72	55.8%
Total	n=129	100%

From Table 5.2, fifty five (55.8%) percent of the participants who took the survey were female and forty four (44.2%) percent were male. Leon Podles says, "While men

still run most churches, women outnumber them in the pew in Europe, in America, and in Australia.”²⁵⁴ Like western world, the number of women’s attendance of church is larger than men in China and men attend church activities because of mother, wife, or girlfriend.

Figure 5.2. Education of Participants (N=129)



From the Figure 5.2, the largest percentage of participants have bachelor’s degree with thirty-three (33%) percent. Twenty-eight (28%) percent of participants graduated from one or three years college, fifteen (15%) percent of participants graduated from high school, twelve (12%) percent have no degree, another twelve (12%) percent have master’s degree, and there are no doctorate degree participants.

²⁵⁴ Leon Podles, “The Church Impotent,” *Crisis Magazine*, February, 1999.

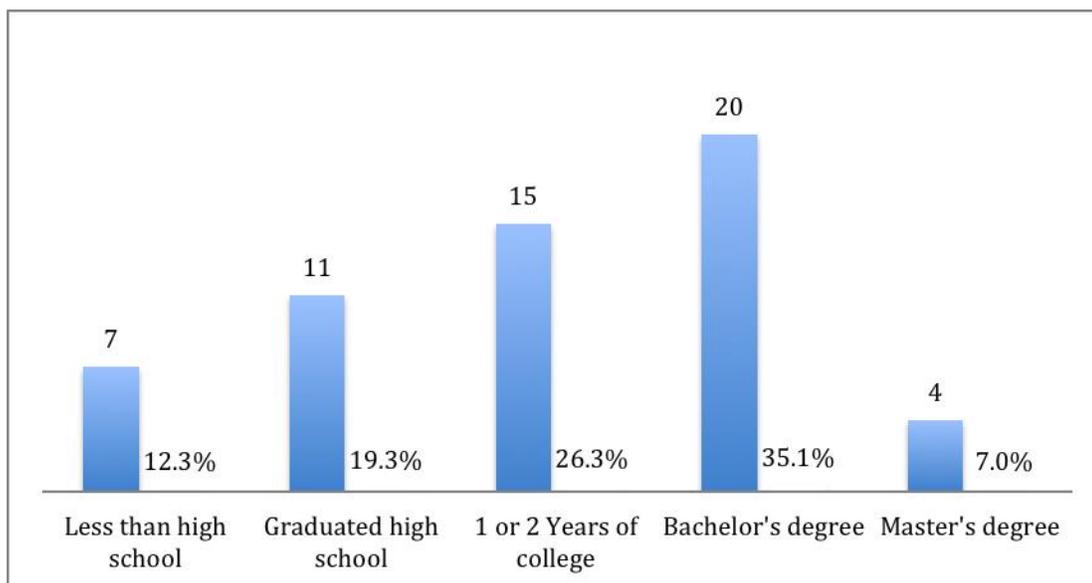
Figure 5.3. Education Frequency of Male Participants (N=57)

Figure 5.3 shows the male's education as follows: The percentage of less than high school is twelve (12.3%) percent, the percentage of graduated high school is nineteen (19.3%) percent, the percentage of one or two years of college twenty-six (26.3%) percent, the percentage of bachelor's degree is thirty-five (35.1%) percent, and the percentage of master's degree is seven (7.0%) percent.

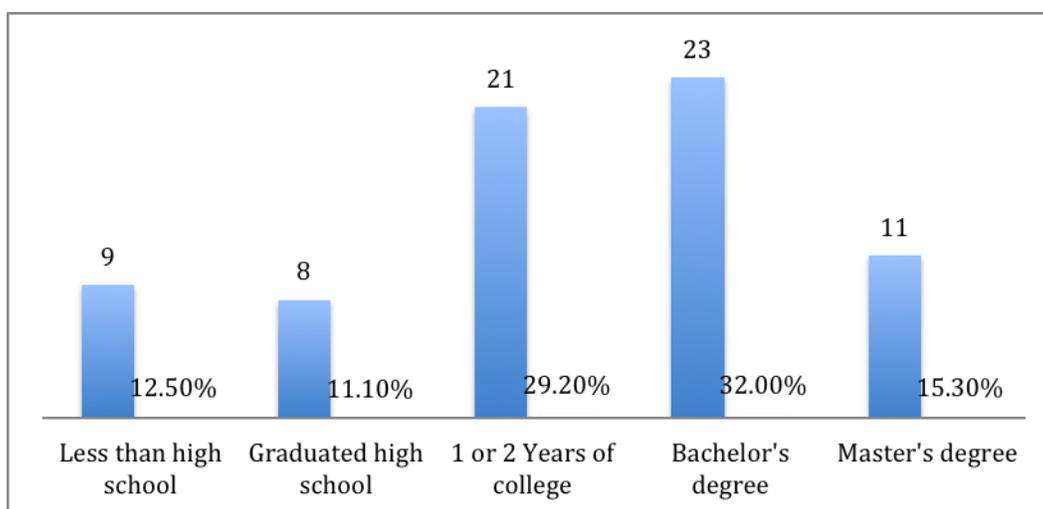
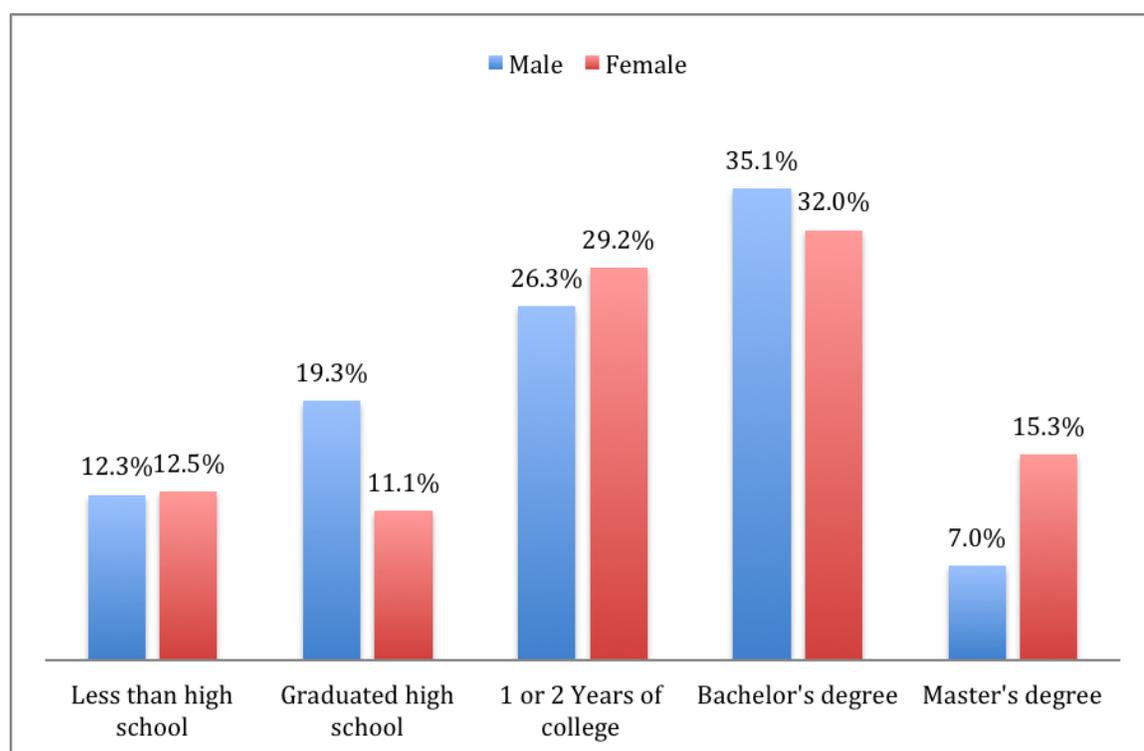
Figure 5.4. Education Frequency of Female Participants (N=72)

Figure 5.4 shows female's education as follows: The percentage of less than high school is twelve (12.5%) percent, the percentage of graduated high school is eleven (11.1%) percent, the percentage of one or two years of college is twenty-nine (29.2%) percent, the percentage of bachelor's degree is thirty-two (32.0%) percent, and the percentage of master's degree fifteen (15.3%) percent.

Figure 5.5. Educational Level of Participants



According to Figure 5.5, comparing male with female's education, female's education is higher than male. The percentage of female who have master's degree is fifteen (15.3%) percent, but male who have master's degree is only seven (7%).

Until few years ago, male's status is higher than female. Most of families wanted to have son instead of daughter and tried their best to give their son the best education.

However, the Figure 5.4 shows that female's status is changing that many females also received high education even more than male.

Furthermore, until few years ago most of Christian's were old and physically ill people, but college and higher educated people tended to be antagonistic to Christian faith. From the Figure 5.4, it is easy to find out that the situation is changing. The largest percentage of participants was who have college and a Bachelor's degree.

Table 5.3. Marriage Status of Participants (N=129)

Marriage	Frequency	Percentage
Single	n=80	62%
Married	n=49	38%
Total	n=129	100%

Table 5.3 reveals that single participants are sixty-two (62%) percent and the married participants are thirty-eight (38%) percent. The numbers of single participants are almost two times more than married participants, which means the age of marriage is delayed. It might be caused by higher education and high pressure of finance. Young people waiting until they finish school and have a stable income to support their future family.

Additionally, these people who have not get married, most of them are having high pressure of marriage in China especially the females who are afraid of becoming "leftover women". From Mary Kay Magistad's report, the woman who unmarried at 27, she could be called "leftover woman" and most of these are the intelligent and educated

women.²⁵⁵ From Chinese tradition, most of educated woman is looking for the man who has the same or higher degree than hers. At church, there is another condition is that man must be a Christian. Therefore, man and woman are hard to get matched.

Princeton University sociologist Robert Wuthnow contends that single people more rarely go to church than married people in America.²⁵⁶ Churches are attended more by families and single young adults feel stigmatized or marginalized. However, in China the opposite trend seems to function in society – single people are pulled toward church in part from the familial piety that encourages them to find a spouse in the church.

Table 5.4. How long have you been a Christian? (N=129)

How long	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	n=12	9.3%
2~3 Years	n=18	14.0%
4~5 Years	n=34	26.4%
6~7 Years	n=9	7.0%
8~9 Years	n=14	10.9%
10 Years and above	n=42	32.6%
Total	n=129	100%

Table 5.4 tells that there are six categories ranging from less than one year to 10 years and above being a Christian. The highest percentage of thirty-two (32.6%) percent

²⁵⁵ May Kay Magistad, *China's 'Leftover Women', Unmarried at 27*, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21320560>.

²⁵⁶ Bob Abernethy, "Robert Wuthnow Extended Interview," in *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, accessed April 13, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2002/04/26/april-26-2002-robert-wuthnow-extended-interview/11605/>.

is the 10 years and above. The category with the second highest percentage is four-five years old with twenty-six (26.4%) percent. The category with third highest percentage is two-three years old with fourteen (14.0%) percent followed by eight-nine years with ten (10.9%) percent. The two categories with the lowest percentage are the less than one year with nine (9.3%) percent and six-seven years with seven (7.0%) percent. Most of participants are not newcomer, but they have been being Christian for more than two years.

Exploring Spiritual Maturity of Participants

How do participants rate their level of spiritual maturity to God? The survey contains ten questions and the purpose of these questions are measuring the participants' level of faith in Jesus Christ such as how much they trust in Jesus Christ, how close their relationship with God, their scarification to God.

Table 5.5. Survey Question #1 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you believe that God sent Jesus to die for humanity in order to save us?	129		0.8%	3.8%	17.1%	78.3%

This finding is consistent with what was expected since the researcher chooses participants that are Christians. Most of the participants of this survey, they all believe God sent Jesus to die for humanity to save us. Moreover, most of the participants (more than 90%) are having confidence (answering “very often” and “always”) on this question.

Table 5.6. Survey Question #2 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you feel confident of your adoption as God's son/daughter i.e. rarely question his acceptance of you?	129	3.1%	4.7%	10.9%	18.6%	62.8%

According to Table 5.6, although most participants have the confidence on Jesus death for humanity, when talking about God's adoption, most of the participants (81.4%) answered "very often" and "always", which is a 14% decrease from the previous question. Moreover, few participants (3.1%) answered "never", which means they have a general idea about Jesus' death of humanity, but they are unclear about the relationship between Jesus' death for humanity with God adoption. Or have not "felt" it as the questions suggests.

Table 5.7. Survey Question #3 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often
Do you feel God is close to you?	129	2.3%	3.1%	29.5%	34.9%
		30.2%			

For this question, which is more likely a personal questioning about relationship with God only thirty (30.2%) percent answered "always". From the Table 5.5 and Table 5.6, there are seventy-eight (78.3%) percent and sixty-two (62.8%) percent answered "always". It indicates that they believe in Jesus Christ but they may not practice spiritual disciplines regularly.

Table 5.8. Survey Question #4 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you study God's Word?	129	3.9%	10.9%	48.8%	30.2%	6.2%

The percentage of answered “sometimes” is forty-eight (48.8%) percent, which means almost half of the participants study God’s Word sometimes. Study God’s Word is one of the parts of practicing spiritual disciplines, but there were 63.6% of participants do not study God’s Word regularly.

Table 5.9. Survey Question #5 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you seek God first?	129	1.5%	10.9%	42.6%	31.0%	14.0%

Most of participants answered “very often”, thirty-one (31.0%) percent and “sometimes”, forty-two (42.6%) percent. The participants who answer “always” is fourteen (14.0%) percent followed by “rarely” with ten (10.9%) percent, and “never” is one (1.5%) percent.

This question measures how much believers trust and rely on Jesus Christ. As a mature Christian, he or she should put his or her life priority on seeking God’s kingdom first as the life difficulties and troubles are coming. From the Table 5.9, most of participants do not always seek God first that only fourteen (14.0%) percent choose to “always” seek God first and others are trying to resolve the problems themselves instead of seek God first.

Table 5.10. Survey Question #6 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
How often do you desire to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ?	129		1.6%	8.5%	43.4%	46.5%

No one answered “never” and most of participants answered “very often” and “always”, which means all they have a desire to grow into Christlikeness. The highest percentage of forty-six (46.5%) percent is “always” and the second highest percentage of forty-three (43.4%) percent is “very often”. Then followed “sometimes” with eight (8.5%) percent, “rarely” with one (1.6%) percent, and no one chose never.

God created us as His image, but because of sin God’s image in humanity was broken. We should recover the image of God through growing into Christlikeness. As a mature Christian, he/she should always desire to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Table 5.11. Survey Question #7 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
How frequently do you practice forgiveness with others?	129		5.4%	45.0%	45.7%	3.9%

The percentage of participants who answered “very often” is forty-five (45.7%) percent and “sometimes” is forty-five (45%) percent. Three (3.9%) percent of participants answered “always”, five (5.4%) percent of participants answered rarely, and no one answered never. Therefore, as believers all of them are having a heart of forgiveness.

Matthew 18:21, Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Practicing the forgiveness is the teaching of Jesus Christ and he has forgiven our sin on the cross.

Table 5.12. Survey Question #8 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you believe that your money is completely at God’s disposal and not your own?	129	1.6%	8.4%	23.3%	34.9%	31.8%

Money is the most important thing for most of Chinese people in their lives. Money is one of best tools to measure participant’s spiritual maturity. Believers who have spiritual maturity would always believe money is from God and he is the master of our money.

From this question, thirty-one (31.8%) percent of participants “always” believe their money is completely at God’s disposal. Thirty-four (34.9%) percent answered “very often”, twenty-three (23.3%) percent answered “sometimes”, eight (8.4%) percent answered “rarely”, and one (1.6%) percent answered “never”.

Table 5.13. Survey Question #9 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Do you submit to leadership at church?	129	0.8%	1.6%	13.2%	40.3%	44.2%

“Obey your leaders and submit to them.”²⁵⁷ As mature believers, it is important to submit to leadership at church unless there are doctrinal errors. Table 5.13 shows that less than one (0.8%) percent of participants answer “never”, one (1.6%) percent answer “rarely”, and thirteen (13.2%) percent answer “sometimes” that submit to leadership at church. Nonetheless, the participants who answered “very often” and “always” are eighty-four (84.5%) percent.

Table 5.14. Survey Question #10 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Are you willing to go wherever the Lord leads or sends?	129	0.8%	5.4%	39.6%	30.2%	24.0%

Obeying God guidance is not easy because it will not always come with good thing. Sometimes, we have to give up the precious things in our lives, which is our sacrifice. Twenty-four (24.0%) percent participants responded that they are “always ready” to obey God guidance that they can go wherever the Lord leads or sends. Thirty (30.2%) percent of participants responses “very often”, thirty-nine (39.6%) percent of participants responses “sometimes”, five (5.4%) percent of participants responses “rarely”, and less than one (0.8%) percent of participants response “never” thought about it.

Spiritual Formation Practice

What do participants name as practices they engage in to grow toward spiritual maturity?

²⁵⁷ Heb 13:17a [ESV].

From this question, the researcher can discover the most popular spiritual disciplines for Chinese Christian young adults the percentage of participants practicing spiritual disciplines for spiritual growth.

Nine questions were used to explore the practices the participants engage in to grow toward spiritual maturity and were divided into two subgroups. The first group explored the participants' spiritual practices engaged in general (Table 5.8). The second group explored the participants' actual practices engaged in to grow toward spiritual maturity in detail (Table 5.8, Table 5.9, Table 5.10, Table 5.11, and Table 5.12).

Table 5.15. Survey Question #11 (N=129)

Practices	Frequency	Percentage
Devotional Time	n=88	68.2%
Small Group	n=106	82.2%
Prayer	n=118	91.5%
Fasting	n=33	25.6%
Scripture Reading	n=112	86.8%
Tithe	n=73	56.6%
Forgiveness	n=85	65.9%
Sharing Good News	n=77	59.7%
Sunday Service	n=106	82.2%
Total	n=129	100%

Prayer has the largest percentage of participants with ninety-one (91.5%) percent to engage to grow toward spiritual maturity. Then follows Scripture reading with eighty-six (86.8%) percent, small group and Sunday service both with eight-two (82.2%) percent, devotional time with sixty-eight (68.2%) percent, forgiveness with sixty-five (65.9%) percent, sharing good news with fifty-nine (59.7%) percent, and tithe with fifty-six (56.6%) percent. Fasting has the lowest percentage of participants with twenty-five (25.6%) that most of participants do not practice their spiritual formation through fasting. Balancing these practices are very important and these practices are lifelong processes for believers.

Table 5.16. Survey Question #12 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you have devotional time with God?	129	5.4%	10.1%	11.6%	45.8%	27.1%	

From the Table 5.15, sixty-eight (68.2%) percent of participants answered they are using devotional time to engaged to grow toward spiritual maturity in general. However, only twenty-seven (27.1%) percent of participants answered that they were having devotional time “daily”, forty-five (45.8%) percent of participants answered “weekly”, eleven (11.6%) percent of participants answered “monthly”, ten (10.1%) percent of participants answered “yearly”, and five (5.4%) percent of participants “never” had devotional time.

Devotion is one the most important part in Christian’s journey of spiritual maturity and every Christian should have devotional time every day. From the research, only small percentage of participants has devotional time everyday, which means most of

them do not have daily devotional time and do not know the importance of daily devotion or they have no idea about devotion.

Table 5.17. Survey Question #13 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you attend small group?	129	1.6%	1.6%	8.4%	88.4%		

Small group is an important part of healthy church life. From the survey, few participants (1.6%) had “never” attended small group. Furthermore, few participants (1.6%) attended small group “yearly”, some participants (8.4%) attended small group “monthly”, and a majority of the participants (88.4%) attended small group “weekly”, which is incredibly high percentage.

Chinese young adults would love to gather with their friends frequently. If one person converts to become a Christian, he or she automatically become estranged from his or her old friends who are still not a Christian. Therefore, they would love to meet with Christian friends at a small group.

Table 5.18. Survey Question #14 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you pray to God?	129		0.8%	1.6%	14.0%	46.4%	37.2%

Prayer is one of the important means of communicating subjectively as disciples nurture their relationship with God. Thirty-seven (37.2%) percent of participants stated they pray “anytime”. Forty-six (46.4%) percent of participants stated pray “daily”,

fourteen (14.0%) percent stated “weekly”, one (1.6) percent stated “monthly”, and less than one (0.8%) percent stated “yearly”.

Paul said, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Prayer is not optional for the Christian, but we should put prayer a top priority. We have to pray anytime no matter where we are or what we are doing.

Table 5.19. Survey Question #15 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you fast?	129	59.7%	26.4%	8.5%	5.4%		

Fasting is one of the disciplines for growing into maturity. Fifty-nine (59.7%) percent responded that they “never” had fasting. Twenty-six (26.4%) percent of participant practice the fasting “yearly”, eight (8.5%) percent practice “monthly”, " five (5.4%) percent was “weekly”.

Chinese food is famous all over the world and there is plenty of delicious food around people in China every day. Chinese people especially young adults have low self-control on delicious food. Therefore, this may be one of the most important reasons why there are more than half of participants (59.7%) answered they “never” fast.

Table 5.20. Survey Question #16 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you read Bible?	129	2.2%	0.8%	7.8%	38.0%	51.2%	

The Bible is the Word of God and God communicates objectively with us through the Bible. Reading the Bible is important to our spiritual life and the Word of God make our spiritual lives more powerfully.

From the research, fifty-one (51.2%) percent of participants responded that they read the Bible “daily”, thirty-eight (38.0%) percent responded “weekly”, seven (7.8%) percent answered reading the Bible “monthly”, “yearly” were less than one (0.8%) percent, and there are still two (2.2%) percent of participants “never” reading the Bible.

Table 5.21. Survey Question #17 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Anytime
How often do you attend church Sunday service?	129	0.8%	0.8%	5.4%	93.0%		

God created the heavens and the earth in six days and took a Sabbath day. Christians also have to work hard during the weekdays and come to church for worshipping God on Sunday.

It is a positive number that ninety-three (93.0%) percent of participants are “weekly” attending Sunday worship service. Five (5.4%) percent attend “monthly”, “yearly” and “never” attend Sunday worship service both are less than one (0.8%) percent.

From Chinese culture, whatever Chinese people believe in they have a fear about god and they worship that god devoutly. In a way, it is a good point for if one becomes a Christian, she or he will worship God devoutly, too. Moreover, in most of cases, he or she will be told about importance of keep Sabbath day at church or from church friends. Therefore, because of fear and wanted to be blessed by God they would try themselves to

attend Sunday worship. This may be the reason why most of participants (93%) attended Sunday service.

Table 5.22. Survey Question #18 (N=129)

Questions	n	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you tithe?	129	10.0%	14.0%	32.6%	24.8%	18.6%

1=Never

2=Almost never

3=3-5 times a year

4=Almost once a month

5=Once a month

Ten (10.0%) percent had never tithe, fourteen (14.0%) almost had “never” tithe. Thirty-two (32.6%) percent of participants stated that they do tithe “three to five times a year”, twenty-four (24.8%) percent stated “almost once a month”, and eighteen (18.6%) percent of participants stated that they have regular tithe of at least “once a month”.

Jesus said, “you cannot serve both God and money.”²⁵⁸ For most of Chinese, they always put money in their priority and money is everything in their life. The largest percentage, thirty-two (32.6%) percent of participants answered they do the tithe “three to five times a year”, which indicates they love money so that it a little bit hard for them to do tithe once a month. However, God asks us to do tithe at Malachi, they cannot disobey God’s Word so they only do the tithe “three to five times a year”. Therefore, it is hard to say the tithe comes from their heart that they love to give but may from the fear of God.

²⁵⁸ Mt 6:24b [ESV].

Table 5.23. Survey Question #19 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
How often have you forgiven people who hurt you?	129	0.0%	3.9%	47.3%	37.2%	11.6%

All the participants answered they practice forgiveness. Eleven (11.6%) percent of participants can “always” forgive people who hurt them, thirty-seven (37.2%) percent can forgive “very often”, forty-seven (47.3%) percent can forgive “sometimes”, and three (3.9%) percent “rarely” forgive people who hurt them.

The largest group, forty-seven (47.3%) percent, of participants responded that they had forgiven people “sometimes”. Therefore, whether they can forgive or not it depends on how deeply be hurt. However, no matter how deeply we hurt God, He had forgiven us already and asked His only son Jesus Christ died for us. Practicing the forgiveness is practicing the God’s love.

Table 5.24. Survey Question #20 (N=129)

Questions	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
How often do you share the Good news with non-believers?	129	2.3%	16.3%	45.0%	27.9%	8.5%

Making disciples in all the nations is the Great Commission from Christ for all of his disciples. Every Christian has a responsibility to participant in this Great Commission.

Table 5.24 reveals that how deeply participants have responded to the Great Commission. Eight (8.5%) percent responded that they share the gospel “always”. Twenty-seven (27.9%) percent shared the gospel “very often”, forty-five (45.0%) percent

shared the gospel “sometimes”, sixteen (16.3%) percent shared the gospel “rarely”, and two (2.3%) percent had “never” shared the gospel.

Church Life

How do the participants experience their church’s efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity?

From this survey, the researcher will figure out how participants were satisfied with their church life such as prayer meeting, small group discipleship training class, Sunday worship service, and short-term mission trip. The answers also can help local churches to know how they offer better programs to improve congregation’s spiritual life.

Five assessments were used to seek the participants’ satisfaction on their church’s efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity (Table 5.13).

Table 5.25. Survey Question #21 (N=129)

Questions	n	Dissatisfied	Not participate in	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Regular Basics Prayer Meeting	129	2.3%	42.6%	34.9%	20.2%

Twenty (20.2%) percent of participants responded that they were “very satisfied” with the church’s prayer meeting, thirty-four (34.9%) percent were “satisfied”, forty-two (42.6%) percent were “not participate in”, and two (2.3%) percent were “dissatisfied”.

The researcher speculates that the meaning of “satisfied” is participants just join the prayer meeting as religious habits and they seldom experience the power of prayer meeting. The meaning of “very satisfied” is participants always experience the work of Holy Spirit in their life and they are expecting to attend this prayer meeting. The participants who answered “not participated in”, their spiritual growth could very slow.

Some participants did not participated in the prayer meeting because of busy work, but some of them just do not want to participant. Nevertheless, most of people who did not come to the prayer meeting, they might think the prayer meeting is a burden of their life and it is unnecessary to their spiritual life.

Table 5.26. Survey Question #22 (N=129)

Questions	n	Dissatisfied	Not participate in	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Participation in Small Group	129	3.1%	4.7%	60.4%	31.8%

According to the data, thirty-one (31.8%) percent of participants were “very satisfied” with their small group and sixty (60.4%) percent were “satisfied” with the small group. Only three (3.1%) percent of participants were “dissatisfied” with the small group and four (4.7%) percent were “not participate in” small group.

From the survey, ninety-two (92.2%) percent of participants, which is really high percentage of participants who are satisfied with their small group. It may indicate that satisfaction decides the number of participants. The more satisfied people, the more participants of small group. Since the participants are satisfied with their small groups, they would not look for other social gatherings, and they can spiritually grow through the small group.

Table 5.27. Survey Question #23 (N=129)

Questions	n	Dissatisfied	Not participate in	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Discipleship Training Class	129	3.1%	28.7%	41.8%	26.4%

Church has responsibility to take care of all the young adults and make disciple among them. Twenty-six (26.4%) percent of participants responded “very satisfied” and forty-one (41.8%) percent responded “satisfied” with the discipleship training class. Only three (3.1%) percent responded that they were “dissatisfied” with the discipleship training class, and twenty-eight (28.7%) percent did “not participate in” this training class.

The participants who did not participate in training class, they may think no time to participant in or it is unnecessary to participant in as a Christian or church attendance. However, the researcher believes the discipleship training class is necessary and very important to grow toward spiritual maturity and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all Christians should attend the discipleship training class and church leaders should encourage all believers participate in discipleship training class.

Table 5.28. Survey Question #24 (N=129)

Questions	n	Dissatisfied	Not participate in	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Sunday Worship Service	129	2.3%	3.1%	52.7%	41.9%

The church should try their best to prepare the Sunday worship service and provide the best worship service for the believer. Both worship and sermon are extremely important that all the worshipers can glorify His name and experience His grace through the worship service.

Forty-one (41.9%) percent of participants were “very satisfied” and fifty-two (52.7%) percent of participants were “satisfied” with the Sunday worship service. Two (2.3%) percent stated that they were “dissatisfied” with the Sunday worship service, and three (3.1%) percent did “not participate in” Sunday worship service.

Most of Chinese Christians have devout heart to worship God and they desire to seek God. They also believe pastors are the servants of God and they respect pastors so much. As a result, this may be the answer why most of participants were satisfy with the Sunday worship service and whatever pastors preach at the pulpit, the congregations believe the words are directly from God.

Table 5.29. Survey Question #25 (N=129)

Questions	n	Dissatisfied	Not participate in	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Short-term Mission Trip	129	6.2%	63.6%	17.0%	13.2%

The short-term mission trip can help Christians to open their eyes to see the needs of gospel and meet the importance of mission. They can receive God's calling through short-term mission trip to become missionaries.

Thirteen (13.2%) percent of participants were "very satisfied", seventeen (17.0%) percent were "satisfied", and six (6.2%) percent were "dissatisfied" with the short-term mission trip. However, there were large group, sixty-three (63.6%) percent of participants had "not participated in" the mission trip. The Church should place an emphasis on the importance of mission and organize short-term mission trip regularly so that encourage every young adult can go to the short-term mission trip.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in order to gather information from participants' situations, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences regarding Spiritual Formation. The interview with all four participants who: (1) completed the whole questionnaire the researcher designed, (2) attended the church for two or three years at the same Christian Chinese church, (3) were baptized as a member of the congregation, and (4) completed the discipleship training program were instrumental in answering some questions to get their thought pattern on some additional questions related to the participants' survey.

Five main questions with sub questions were sent by an e-mail message to three senior pastors of three selected Christian Chinese Churches in Mainland China to answer prior to the focus group interview.

The interview with all four interviewees took place at the same time on Sunday, January 8, 2017, at selected three Christian Chinese churches in Mainland China. There are four interviewees answered the following five questions. Interviewee One is a male, 22-years-old,²⁵⁹ Interviewee Two is a female, 28-years-old,²⁶⁰ Interviewee Three is a female, 26-years-old,²⁶¹ and Interviewee Four is a male, 29-years-old.²⁶²

Interview Question One

“What makes prayer meeting meaningful or what keeps you from participating more regularly?” (1) When does your church have prayer meeting? (2) How does prayer help in your spiritual growth? Describe a typical experience that includes prayer. (3) In

²⁵⁹ Interviewee One, interviewed by assistant Pastor A, Mainland China, January 8, 2017.

²⁶⁰ Interviewee Two, interviewed by assistant Pastor A, Mainland China, January 8, 2017.

²⁶¹ Interviewee Three, interviewed by assistant Pastor B, Mainland China, January 8, 2017.

²⁶² Interviewee Four, interviewed by assistant Pastor C, Mainland China, January 8, 2017.

your opinion, why do some people choose not to pray? (4) Why is it important for Christians to pray? (5) What has been most helpful to you learning to practice prayer?"

Interviewee One – Many times laziness keeps me from participating prayer meeting more regularly. Prayer meeting holds at 5:30 – 6:30 am from Monday to Saturday. Through praying, I have got strength and power from God as I have gone through difficulties, troubles, struggling, and hopelessness. Because of praying, I may face problems positively and conquered the temptations from Satan. Meanwhile, it helps me have a closer relationship and deeper communication with Father, God. In my opinion, people do not choose to pray they may be not confident with praying because they have not got answers from God for a period of time or they do not know God's purposes. One of ways to intimate God is to pray. Praying may help Christians get power from God, set free from sins, and have peace. Praying always makes me confident with everything in life.

Interviewee Two – Laziness and the needs of work keep me from participating prayer meeting more regularly. Church prayer meeting holds 5:30 – 6:30 am from Monday to Saturday. Praying makes me have change on my mind, willing to intimate God, and follow His will like my attitude. For instance, I easily get angry as I had hard time with my clients through phone talking. Afterward, I realized that this is not what God wants me to do as a Christian. With continuous praying, I subsequently started to have a change. As long as my phone is ringing, I felt there is a voice reminds me, "Hey, Hey, you are a Christian." Now I almost not get angry with anyone. Praise the Lord. In my opinion, people do not choose to pray because they think praying is useless and their laziness, or not trust in God. One year after I was baptized, I learned praying is same with our breathing. Praying makes me joyful, peaceful, and faithful. Learning to practice prayer makes me gentle.

Interviewee Three – The presence of the Holy Spirit and one heart from brothers and sisters make prayer meeting meaningful. Wednesday evening, after service we have prayer meeting from 7:30 – 8:30 pm. I had a very hard time with one of brothers in Christ. By praying to God, God changed our hearts to confess and forgive each other as I was willing to be humble. Now we love each other and our relationship is getting stronger in Christ. In my view, people do not choose to pray because they are too busy with their life or can't find a time to concentrate on praying. Praying is one of the ways to intimate God. Christians can't build a close relationship with God without praying. Therefore, Christians may not learn God more. Praying helps me stay calm, understand God's will, and have wisdom to have a good relationship with others.

Interviewee Four – My church does not have regular prayer meeting. Personally, praying helps me to focus on God, submit the leadership to Him. By praying to God, I learned God's will, exam myself, and become humble. As God answered

my prayer, I praise him, I thank God; Even God did not answer my prayer, I thank God for practicing my faithfulness and being patient. In my view, there are three reasons why some people do not choose to pray: (1) they may not experience get answers from God, (2) they may not know how to pray, and (3) they may not know the importance of prayer. “Why it is important for Christians to pray?” God wants his people to pray to have a relationship with him. Praying may help believers union with God, get power from God, and grow toward spiritual maturity. Praying can bring changes to me. Learning to practice prayer brings me into peace.

Interviewee One and Two both answered that laziness keeps them from participating prayer meeting. Interviewee Two also answered the needs of work keeps her from participating prayer meeting. Table 5.18 shows forty six (46.4%) percent of participants answered they pray “daily”, thirty seven (37.2%) percent answered “anytime”, and the remainder of participants (16.4%) answered “weekly”, “monthly”, and “yearly”. As believers, we should pray every moment but laziness and work may be the most common reasons keep people from not praying or not attending prayer meeting.

Another point the researcher found out from the interview is that two churches from the three selected churches have regular prayer meeting and the other one has no regular prayer meeting.

Prayer plays an important role in these interviewees’ spiritual growth. Interviewee One answered that prayer helps him to have a closer relationship and deeper communication with God. Praying always make him confident with everything in life. Interviewee Two answered praying makes me have change on my mind, willing to intimate God and follow His will like my attitude. From praying, she has experienced joy, inner peace, and faithfulness. Interviewee three answered praying helps her to recover the relationship with her friend. Praying helps her stay calm, understand God’s will, and have wisdom to have a good relationship with others. Interview four answered he learned

God's will, exam myself, and become humble through praying. Praying not only can give him peace, but also can change his life grow toward spiritual maturity.

All the interviewees know the importance of praying and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit through praying.

Interview Question Two

When do you study the Word of God? Where? (1) What does it mean to you when you study the Word of God? (2) How does the Word of God help in your spiritual growth? Does the Word of God bring any change to you? Describe a typical experience that includes the Word of God. (3) In your opinion, why do some people choose not to study the Word of God? (4) Why is it important for Christians to study the Word of God? (5) What has been most helpful in learning to study and apply the Word of God to your life?

Interviewee One – I usually study the Word of God before I go to bed at home. Studying the Word of God means reflecting what I have done today, bringing everything to God, and praying for tomorrow. The Word of God always proves that as I am weak God is strong. God's Words always reveals a direction as I need help, do not know where to go, or what to do. In my opinion, some people do not choose to study the Word of God because they may not realize how significant the Word of God to them or the Word of God did not bring any change to them. The Word of God can provide me the power and confidence to recognize the temptations from Satan. The most helpful in learning to study and apply the Word of God to my life is to learn God's purposes on me.

Interviewee Two – I study the Word of God during my Bible study class at the church. Studying the Word of God means that having a desire wants to get closer to God and seek God's will. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and learn not on your own understanding; in your ways acknowledge him, and he will make our paths straight (NIV Proverbs 3:5-6)." I learned that God is the one in control. He made everything possible in my life as long as I trust in Him with all my heart. Some people do not choose to study the Word of God because they have not realized the importance of it or their laziness. Psalms 23 has been the most helpful in learning to study and apply the Word of God to my life.

Interviewee Three – Every morning or evening, I study the Word of God as I am free at home or in my office. For me, praying means having a relationship with

God and a new life. Many times, God's Word comforts me, shows direction, gives me wisdom, and helps me to know who I am better. I was a low self-esteem person but pretended I am strong in order to protect myself. Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." God's Word gave me a big comfort. How great our God is! He loves me so much, he is taking great delight in me, rejoicing over me with singing. What a great love for me. I feel the love from my heart, no need to pretend I am alone, I am weak. I started to behave who I am allow God to work on my according to his image and will. Personally, I think people do not choose to study the Word of God because of their laziness. I strongly believe that the Word of God is important for Christians for God's words have power and are promises to His people. God's words also are the evidences of grace and blessings from Him. It also makes Christians have hope and be faithful. The most helpful in learning to study and apply the Word of God to my life is to trust in God.

Interviewee Four – I study the Word of God anytime, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening at home or in the office. Studying the Word of God means someone has a desire to study God, to acknowledge his wisdom, and reflect on oneself. Sometimes, God reveals himself and His Words via circumstances, brothers, and sisters around me. His Word always tells me the direction. Some people do not choose to study the Word of God, they may not know how to start or have no guidance. Why it is important for Christians to study the Word of God? Like human beings can't survive without bread, Christians can't live without the Word of God – spiritual bread.

Interviewee One, Three, and Four answered they studied the Word of God everyday; and Interviewee Two studied the Word of God during the Bible study. Nonetheless, all of them understand "study the Word of God" as knowing who God is and getting directions of life from the Word of God.

From the interviewees' opinions, the reasons why people do not choose study the Word of God are laziness and they do not know the importance of the Word of God. These four interviewees believe that it is important to study "the Word of God" which like spiritual bread that can provide the power, hope, and faithful to their lives. Moreover, these interviewees found out the Word of God helps them to understand the purpose of God, makes them rest in God, and trusts in God more in their lives.

Interview Question Three

Name three major hindrances to growth in your spiritual journey? (1) What are you going to do about these hindrances? (2) Respond to the following statement: “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.”

Interviewee One – Three major hindrances to growth in my spiritual journey are: worldly temptations, laziness, and unknown future. What I am going to do about these hindrances? Through praying. I strongly agree with the statement “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.” I believe that the troubles I have are from God in order to make me strong through reflecting on my mistakes I have taken and weaknesses.

Interviewee Two – Three major hindrances to growth in my spiritual journey are: half-heartedness, no peace in heart, and laziness. I am going to deal with these hindrances via praying anytime, reading Scripture regularly, and being witness for God, sharing good news to non-believers. Yes, I agree with the statement “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.” I learned that the more I do not want to face problems, the more God wants me to learned from those problems.

Interviewee Three – The major hindrances to growth in my spiritual journey are worldly thinking and worldly needs. I get used to this worldly thinking. I will particularly pray on this may God change me. I agree with the statement, “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.” It is good to be suffering in order to learn Your laws. Many times I believe that the sufferings I have experienced are the lessons from God in order to discipline me spiritually. On the other side, I guess suffering could be a way to learn to trust in God. Each level in our life has different assignments.

Interviewee Four – Three major hindrances to growth in my spiritual journey are: self-centered, laziness, and circumstances. In order to overcome these three hindrances, I will stand firm on the Word of God to trust in and know him. I believe as long as I overcome the troubles and difficulties, there will be growth.

The most common hindrances to growth in these four interviewees’ spiritual journey are laziness and others can be summarized as worldly temptations, unknown future, self-centered, and circumstances. To overcome the hindrances, these interviewees tried to pray to God, read Scripture regularly, and stood firm on the Word of God.

Moreover, Interviewee Two also would share the gospel to non-believers to deal with spiritual hindrances.

All the interviewees agreed with the statement of “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.” They also believe God disciplines them spiritually through troubles and God gives them lessons from the troubles that these troubles can make them strong and trust in God.

Interview Question Four

“Are there other practices that you have engaged in that have helped you to grow spiritually and what do they mean to you (for example – fasting, tithing, visiting the sick)?”

Interviewee One – Tithing always reminds me all money I get and I have are all from God. He is the owner and provider. The money I made is to serve God better.

Interviewee Two– Meditation helps me to grow spiritually. Personally, meditation means focusing on a passage in the Bible and led by the Holy Spirit. Talking to God for direction and bring tomorrow to God. In a word, becoming Christ-like Christian, being a witness on the earth.

Interviewee Three – Church discipleship training helps me a lot to grow spiritually. It helps me have well-disciplined spiritual life.

About this interview question, all of interviewees have different answers that interviewee One said tithing fosters spiritual growth due to tithing always is a reminder that only God is the owner and provider. Interviewee Two thought meditation helps nurture spiritual growth. From meditation, talking to God and relying on God that enhance becoming a Christ-like Christian and being a witness in the world. Interviewee Three answered church discipleship training helps to augment spiritual growth. From discipleship training, spiritual disciplines were also developed.

Interview Question Five

“Please give one or two suggestions that you would like to give to the local congregation that might help them in growing people toward spiritual maturity.”

Interviewee One – Participating service regularly to encounter the presence of God to get closer to God.

Interviewee Two - No suggestions to the local congregation.

Interviewee Three - In future, I hope our ministers get closer to congregations and read their needs.

Interviewee Four – To have regular Scripture Reading, and have fellowship to share faith stories to encourage each other.

Interviewees suggested that congregations should participate service regularly, read Scripture regularly, and share testimonies to encourage each other. Moreover, there is another desire to interviewees that they hope to have closer relationship with ministers and minister can read their spiritual needs.

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings emerge based on the data analysis discussed above. They are listed here only in a summary form and will be further discussed in the next chapter.

1. The number of Women’s attending church is larger than men in China and men attend church activities because of mother, wife, or girlfriend.
2. In China, single people are pulled toward church in part from the familial piety that encourages them to find a spouse in the church.
3. Mature Christians always desire to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
4. It is hard for Chinese Christian young adults to practice fasting.
5. Small Group is one of the best tools to evangelize nonbelievers.

6. Chinese Christian young adults practice prayer well towards the spiritual growth.
7. Churches are lacking an adequate amount of leaders.
8. Church leaders have a need to improve the discipleship training programs.
9. Chinese church has a weak practice in mission.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this chapter is to present a summary of the project, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for Chinese Christian young adults' spiritual formation that have resulted from the research in this project.

Summary

Chinese Christianity is growing dramatically and young adults are increasingly coming to church today. With the rapid population growth of the Chinese church, it is hoped that young Christians would be the hope of future Chinese churches.

Christianity used to be called “Western Religion” in China due to the influence of history. This influence means that Chinese people would prefer to accept evolution rather than creation because of the historical evolution perspective that was taught in Chinese schools. However, with the Chinese Christians' hard work in the past, today's Chinese Christianity is much different from before. The name of “Western Religion” has been gradually forgotten by new generations and the church is becoming indigenous. More and more people, especially young adults, are coming to church and accepting the doctrine of creation.

In China, most young adults will graduate from high school at the age of eighteen. This special group will either go look for a job or enroll in a university. This period will be their first time to be independent from parents and face a completely

different life style, such as environment, religion, culture, and people. After having a job or enrolling in a university, the majority from this group comes to know Christianity through visiting a church with their Christian friends. At the beginning, they come to church just for their curiosity about Christianity and want to see what church looks like. After they make some friends at church they begin to come to church regularly.

Throughout 200 years of Protestant Christian history in China, Chinese Protestant Christianity has experienced many kinds of difficulties that has formed a unique system such as the house church and Three-Self Church instead of denominations today. Hence, Chinese Christians have different experiences of spiritual formation than Christians from other countries. Chinese churches have to take certain cultural issues into consideration in discipleship with young adults in China in order to produce spiritual fruit in their daily life setting and to live out the purpose of salvation, which is the Christ-like life.

Spiritual formation is an ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Christ. It is a lifelong journey of transformation for persons who love and serve as Jesus did. In past years, most of the Chinese churches focused on attending worship services and evangelizing people but lacked caring about a congregation's spiritual life, particularly young adult's spiritual formation. Today, however, there is an urgent need to deepen Chinese Christian commitment to live a Christ-like life especially during young adulthood in order to prepare for the future leadership of the Chinese church and world missions.

With the researcher's early years of spiritual journey and years of ministry experience with young adults, he has a burden to see the spiritual formation of Chinese Christian young adults, the relationship Chinese Christian young adults have

with God, and the faith level of Chinese Christian young adults. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore: “How is spiritual formation practiced by Chinese Christian young adults?”

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Chapter Two of this project provides a biblical and theological foundation that identifies the essential process in spiritual formation for Chinese Christian young adults.

God created everything in the beginning and humans were initially created in the image of God. He gave them authority to rule the world, and the first man and woman named all of the animals God created. With the authority to rule the world, God also gave humans the freedom to choose to obey or disobey God. God commanded the first humans, Adam and Eve; that they could eat any fruit in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God so that the intimate relationship with God was seriously broken and humanity has been spiritually separated from God. Because of sin, Adam and Eve shifted from love and friendship to blame and distrust. According to Romans 6-8, because of sin, human beings enter the world unable to fully love God, which means the image of God in human beings was distorted.

Because of sin the image of God in human beings was distorted and human beings became the slaves of sin. Sin absolutely disconnected the fellowship between God and human beings. God wants to renew the image of humanity to reflect the image of God and to have fellowship with humanity. God made a wonderful plan that can only be done by Him for the redemption work right after the fall of humanity. Only God himself who is holy and perfect can restore the fellowship between God and humanity. Jesus' death and resurrection can set believers free from sin and give

them a new life where he or she begins to be spiritually formed. Jesus Christ has overcome death and justified the people who believe in him by grace. For as in Adam the image of God in humanity was distorted, so also in Christ the image was restored. Spiritual formation is a process of transformation of human beings to demonstrate more Christlikeness. Through living a Christ-like life, believers can restore the image of God in them.

Literature Review

The researcher divided literature review into three major themes relating to socialization processes in Chinese culture. The first review was related to the context of the Chinese culture. China is dominated by its own philosophy and cultural thought from thousands of years ago and the history of Chinese philosophy traditionally has been influenced by the three most prevalent philosophical ideologies in terms of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (Taoism).

Confucianism is a philosophy based on the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, and it influenced Chinese education, government, and the personal behavior. Confucianism emphasizes self-restraint, good relationship with others, and mutuality to promote social harmony. After Buddhism was introduced into China during the first century, it has been developing in the direction of Chinese culture, and completely united with traditional Chinese culture by the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279).

Taoism is a religion that originated, and developed in China. Taoism emphasized the relationship between Yin (passive energy) and Yang (active energy). The Yin Yang theory plays a significant role on Chinese culture which forms the foundation of feng shui (风水), which is a superstitious belief about how things should ideally be arranged to achieve happiness, good health, and financial success.

However, many Chinese still passionately practice feng shui in mainland China. Taoism also influenced Chinese folk religion. In Taoist temples, the Chinese are worshipping more than 1,000 gods and these gods are human beings who displayed exceptional powers during their lifetimes. It is easy to see these gods everywhere in China such as Guan Di.

The second review examined what is the value of Chinese young adults under the current social environment in which Chinese young adults live. In order to understand the socialization of Chinese young adults also requires the knowledge of Chinese history and culture. Chinese history affected the values and concerns of Chinese young adults especially the Culture Revolution and Open-up Policy. Under the influence of the “Open-up Policy”, the lives of Chinese people were getting better; in the meantime, the “Open-up Policy” brought many harm and stress to Chinese young adults.

The third review focused on the developmental theories of spiritual formation such as the social cognitive theory in learning theory, psychosocial theory, and faith developmental theory. From social behavior perspective, in this learning theory, Bandura states behavior is learned from the environment through observational learning (or modeling). Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.²⁶³

Erik Erikson’s is one of the best-known theories of personality in psychology. According to Erikson, people’s ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and information they acquire in their daily interactions with others. As

²⁶³ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 22.

they face each new stage of development, they face a new challenge that can help further develop or hinder the development of identity.²⁶⁴

Fowler described the faith development in terms of six structurally distinct faith stages namely, Intuitive-Projective Faith, Mythic-Literal Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, Universalizing Faith.²⁶⁵ According to Fowler, faith is defined as a process of becoming; hence, it is continually growing through stages that are hierarchical, sequential, and invariant.²⁶⁶

Together, these three theories may help to illuminate how the various forms of development connect with young adults' spirituality.

The Research

This study addressed three main questions to guide the research in discerning the spiritual formation of Christian young adults who attend a selected Christian church in mainland China.

The first question is how do participants rate their level of spiritual maturity to God? The second question is about what participants name as practices they engage in to grow toward spiritual maturity? The third question is how the participants experience their church's efforts to grow them toward spiritual maturity?

Findings

One hundred twenty-nine young adults from three selected Christian churches in Mainland China participate in the research. In order to collect data, the researcher used the survey and the semi-structured interview protocol. From the result of data analysis, the researcher discovered the following findings:

²⁶⁴ Erik Erikson, 35.

²⁶⁵ James W. Fowler, IV.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 16-23.

1. The number of females attending church is larger than the number of males in China. Males attend church activities primarily because of the persuasion of a mother, wife, or girlfriend.

In demographics, the population of males is larger than females in China. According to People's Daily Overseas Edition, Xunwen Peng said the proportion of male and female who were born after 1980 is 136:100.²⁶⁷ However, the population of men and women at Church is totally opposite. According to this research's gender distributions of participants, the percentage of males and females are 44.2% and 55.8% respectively. There are several reasons that make it hard to get males into the church.

A. Most Chinese men who in this survey think money, degree, position, and marriage can represent their success and these things become their life pursuit. Moreover, they believe their futures rely upon their efforts and hard work, so in order to get affirmed from society they work hard for their pursuit. Therefore, they put their business first in their life and think it is a waste of time to come to church.

B. It is hard to make friends or have business without a smoking and drinking in China. Most of business would be talked about with drink and they normally got drunk. However, the church does not allow people to drink and smoke. Therefore, most males decline to attend church, even if they have never been to one before.

C. Men have strong self-esteem or self-pride. However, the Bible teaches that humanity is a creature and sinner. Only Jesus Christ is Savior, and humanity must repent and believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Instead of receiving God's love, men easily focus on sin and find it hard to confess they are sinners.

²⁶⁷ Xunwen Peng, "The Marriage of 30 Millions of 'leftover woman'," in *Chinese Daily Overseas Edition*, February 13, 2017, accessed June 02, 2017, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2017-02/13/content_1749450.htm.

Actually, there are more than these three reasons that it is hard to make men to come to church. However, most men come to church because the influence of their mother, wife, or girlfriend.

2. In China, single people are pulled toward church in part from the familial piety that encourages them to find a spouse in the church.

Young adults in this research refer the age group from eighteen to thirty including both single and married people. From the survey 62% of young adults have not married yet, which means the number of single young adults is larger than married young adults.

According to Chinese Daily Overseas Edition, it is not only hard for males to find a spouse, it is projected that there could be 30 million males who cannot find a spouse in the next 30 years.²⁶⁸ However, it is easier for males to find a spouse in the church than it is for females to find a spouse in the church. Therefore, some men who are not Christian only come to church in order to find a spouse. This researcher has some friends who came to church with this purpose at first, but all of them eventually received Jesus Christ and became church leaders many years ago.

Nevertheless, although it is hard for men to find a spouse in China, there are lots of women who have not yet married and are still in the church. Some of the reason may be:

A. Females want to find a spouse with the same education level. But from this research, a female's education level is often higher than that of the available men in the church.

B. Most Christian females want to find a spouse who does not drink and smoke, but it is difficult to find a man with these qualifications.

²⁶⁸ Xunwen Peng, "The Marriage of 30 Millions of 'leftover woman'" in *Chinese Daily Overseas Edition*, February 13, 2017, accessed June 02, 2017, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2017-02/13/content_1749450.htm.

C. Christian women would like for their spouses to be Christians. However, although the population of men is larger than women in China, the population of men is smaller than women at church, leaving more women without spouses.

3. Chinese Christian young adults have a desire to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

From the research, 46.5% of participants chose “always” and 43.4% chose “very often” when asked about their desire to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Most participants want to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ, because Christlikeness is the way for the believers’ image to be conformed to the image of God.

As the theological review in chapter two suggests the meaning of maturity in spirituality is to function and relate according to the image of God that created human beings had in the beginning. After Adam and Eve’s sin, the image was broken (Gen. 1:26). Spiritual formation is a daily process that enables believers to grow in closeness with God and to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The researcher found from the survey that Chinese Christian young adults have a desire to grow into Christlikeness, but they do not know the right way. Spiritual formation is the ongoing process to grow in Christlikeness, but some people may have no idea about it and laziness is always a big barrier to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

4. It is hard for Chinese Christian young adults to practice fasting.

Fasting is an action for the sake of spiritual purposes by involves voluntarily going without food. Although believers want to experience spiritual growth and fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline in believers’ life, there are more than half of participants of this research that have never practiced fasting.

Probably they have a desire to fast, but because of work they have not practiced it. They may think they only have strength to work after eating, or they have to work all day long and have no time to practice it. Moreover, there is plenty of delicious food around people in China every day, especially roadside food attracting people. Most Chinese people regard food as their prime want and Chinese people, especially young adults, have low self-control on delicious food. They may practice fasting one or two meals, but it is hard for them to practice several days.

5. Small Group is one of the best tools to evangelize non-believers.

From this research, the percentage of small group attendance is really high; that more than 88% of participants answered they attend small group weekly and more than 90% of participants were satisfied with their small group. However, the purpose of small groups is to not only focus on fellowship, but also focus on evangelism. When each member of small group has a same goal of evangelism, the small group will become healthy that they will not talk about worldly concern, but more about how to evangelize non-believers.

If one asks a Chinese non-believer to come to church, he or she may hesitate because they have never been to the church and do not have any idea about church. But if one asks them to come to their house or small group, they may find it easier to accept.

Regarding the survey question of “how often do you share the good news with non-believers”, eight (8.5%) percent responded that they share the gospel “always”, twenty-seven (27.9%) percent shared the gospel “very often”, and forty-five (45.0%) percent shared the gospel “sometimes”, which means sharing the gospel has not become their part of life.

Sharing the good news to make disciples is the most important in Christian life that it is the Great Commission from Jesus Christ. Every Christian must have a burden to evangelize non-believers, but it is hard for them to do alone. Therefore, the small group is one of the best tools to evangelize non-believers. Small group members can be the co-workers of evangelism.

Since small group members have a same purpose, they can choose to pray for non-believers for several weeks. Then they make a chance to reach these non-believers and invite them to small group. Because all of the small group members have prayed for these non-believers for several weeks, these members will know about these non-believers a little bit and also can avoid an embarrassing situation. Therefore, if these non-believers come to small group, they can realize all of the people know about them so that they will have warm feeling.

After the non-believers attend small group, all of members should focus on these non-believers that not only continue to pray for them, but also serve them during their life. From the small group, these non-believers get to know about Jesus Christ, then ask them to come to church, and invite them to attend the Bible study. During these process, small group members should always encourage them and cheer them. If a non-believer accepts Jesus Christ, the small group members can celebrate this joyful time together, which means they always walk together so that they will not get tired and feel alone.

Evangelizing non-believers through small group is much easier and more effective than any other method. Therefore, the researcher thinks the small group is one of the best tools to evangelize non-believers.

6. Chinese Christian young adults practice prayer well towards the spiritual growth.

The biblical review in chapter two mentioned that prayer is one of the best ways to connect with God and has a significant impact on one's spiritual growth. Prayer should become part of believer's life because prayer transforms and reforms believers in the journey of spiritual formation.

The research found that in order to grow toward spiritual maturity, Chinese Christian young adults reported that prayer has the largest percentage of participants than any other spiritual discipline. They know the importance of practicing prayer everyday and attending prayer meeting regularly. However, some young adults do not pray and could not attend prayer meeting regularly due to laziness and the time demands of work. For these young adults who do not pray and could not attend prayer meeting regularly, prayer becomes burdensome in their spiritual lives, which means it is an area of guilt because they do not pray enough.

Therefore, since prayer is already part of the practice of many of these young believers, church pastors should think about how they can teach prayer as the vehicle for revitalization, evangelism, social justice, and spiritual growth to encourage young adults to know what might become the center of a believer's prayer life beyond asking for personal needs.

7. Churches are lacking an adequate amount of leaders.

With this rapid growth of Chinese Christian population, the lack of leaders in Chinese church becomes a serious problem. From this research interview, one of the interviewees asked that he or she hopes the ministers get closer to congregations and understand their needs, which means church leaders could not provide sufficient care to their congregations. It is true that there are lots of churches, which have thousands of congregations in China with two or three pastors and the churches, which have

hundreds of congregations with only one pastor. Therefore, most of Chinese churches are large – with few pastors to care for the people, especially young adults.

In response to lack of leaders in Chinese church, in researcher's opinion, Chinese churches should cultivate leaders from their own church congregations. Not everyone is called to be a full-time minister, but they might become a leader through their spiritual gifts such as worship leader, small group leader, or mission team leader.

Chinese Christian young adults have desire to grow into Christlikeness and they are practicing through spiritual discipline to grow into likeness of Jesus Christ. However, for becoming a church leader they should be well trained through discipleship training. Small group is also one of the best tools to provide a training ground for leaders, which was part of the brilliance of the Wesleyan movement. Leaders were developed through lay people leading class meetings, mentoring, and understanding of spiritual gifts.

8. Church leaders have a need to improve the discipleship training programs.

To the researcher's knowledge, most Chinese churches have Bible study class, but the churches that have discipleship training programs are very few.

Differences between discipleship training program and Bible study are discipleship training program not only teaches people the knowledge of the Bible, but also teaches people to think, act, relate, and love theologically when encountering knowledge from outside of the Bible. Bible study could move beyond just what the Word said in teaching about the background of the Bible, interpretation and other knowledge of Bible, and begin to focus more relationships and practically living out the faith.

Through Bible study one may not become a leader, but through discipleship training program, one can be trained as a good leader. One of the interviewees answered at this research interview that church discipleship training helps her or he a lot to grow spiritually.

Therefore, the researcher's finding of lacking leaders in Chinese church, therefore, churches should improve their discipleship training program and develop more and more leaders from their congregations to serve the church.

9. Chinese church has a weak practice in mission.

The Protestant Christian church first came into China since 1807 with Robert Morison. Uncountable numbers of missionaries have been to China for mission. Among these people, lots of missionaries died from persecution, and they never compromised in the face of death. With the hard work of missionaries, the Chinese church has been brought unbelievable growth and development today. Now, it is time for Chinese churches to wake up and do missions towards the whole world.

However, the researcher's findings suggest that Chinese churches lack in practicing mission that 63% of participants have not participated in the short-term mission trip. Some people might have no time to participate and other people might not realize the important of mission work. Nevertheless, Christians have a burden to share the gospel to our neighbors, but this is not all that Christians should make disciples of all nations. Chinese Christians not only share the good news to our neighbors, but have to go and join the mission work.

In the book of *Tradecraft*, it is said, "our vision is for the church to make disciples who are equipped for mission everywhere."²⁶⁹ Chinese church should focus on equipping God's people to be on God's mission. However, Chinese Christians

²⁶⁹ Larry E. McCrary, Caleb Crider, Wade Stephens, and Rodney Calfee, *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publisher, 2013), 197.

even may not know the importance of mission and have no idea about mission. Therefore, churches have responsibility to teach about mission to their congregations and practice mission with congregation such as a short-term mission trip. For long-term strategy, it is better that Chinese churches give the mission mind to Christian young adults through practice in mission and cultivate missionaries among these people.

Conclusions

Mulholland defined that spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, and persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world – in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did.²⁷⁰ The term spiritual formation is not a biblical term but just recently rocketed onto the lips and into the ears of Protestant Christians especially in China. Moreover, there is no exact Chinese word to translate spiritual formation that sometimes the researcher used spiritual growth in this research instead of spiritual formation.

After humanity sinned the image of God was distorted and the relation with God was destroyed. However, God made his own plan that Jesus Christ died on the cross for human beings' sin to restore the relationship and image of God in humanity. God called believers by his own glory and faith comes from the righteousness of God. When believers have faith in Jesus Christ, the knowledge of Jesus Christ becomes the beginning of spiritual growth, and God multiplies grace and peace to believers. Chinese Christian young adults as believers require spiritual disciplines for spiritual growth to reach maturity in order to become Christlike.

²⁷⁰ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., 25.

In the lifelong journey of spiritual formation, cooperation with the Holy Spirit and spiritual disciplines will enable Chinese Christian young adults to grow spiritually and grow into spiritual maturity. This research project addressed issues that relate to primary question on how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults. The responses to the researcher's survey and interview questions revealed that most of Chinese Christian young adults have desire to grow spiritually and practice for spiritual formation in their own way. However, it is not evident that all Chinese Christian young adults are practicing spiritual disciplines well especially finding balance in practicing spiritual disciplines. Though, they need sufficient knowledge on spiritual formation and church leaders have to guide them on spiritual growth.

Most Chinese Christian young adults engage in growth toward spiritual maturity through prayer, Bible reading, small group gathering, and attending worship service. These disciplines are sufficient for their spiritual growth, but they lack any practicing of devotion, fasting, tithing, forgiveness, and sharing the good news. On the survey from 129 participants, the researcher discovered 68.2% of them have devotional time, 25.6% of them practice fasting, 56.6% of them participant tithe, 65.9% of them practicing forgiveness, and 59.7% of them sharing good news. Although Chinese Christian young adults have a desire to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ, because of laziness and the demands of work, it is just becoming their desire without action.

Therefore, the researcher recommends Chinese Christian young adults to overcome their laziness and distraction to move their desire to action. From the devotion, believers can know the will of God in their lives and hear the voice of God. Therefore, believers should overcome their laziness and busyness and have devotional time everyday.

Fasting is gradually ignored in modern society as a spiritual discipline. It is important to note that fasting not only means abstaining from food, but also abstaining from certain life habits. Therefore, it is necessary for every Christian to practice fasting in their spiritual journey for having deeper spiritual communication with God.

Most people start to get uncomfortable when talk about money as a Christian especially tithe. Therefore, Jesus Christ taught that, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”²⁷¹ Tithe is one of the best way to expresses our heart that God is more important than money in our life. The researcher recommends all Chinese Christians young adults to practice tithe regularly.

Forgiveness is a teaching of Jesus Christ, and he forgives us through his death. The Bible said, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”²⁷² As his follower, believers have to practice forgiveness in action.

The heart of God is for saving lost soul. Jesus came to this world is for saving the people who separated from the love of God. As believers, we have to know the desire of God and share the gospel to non-believers. If we were enjoying our walk with Christ in our spiritual life, we would love to be engaged in sharing this joy with others.

Furthermore, the percentage of men and women is unbalanced that women’s group is larger than men’s in Chinese church. It is difficult for men coming to church

²⁷¹ Mat 6:4 [ESV].

²⁷² Col 3:12-13.

rather than women, and most of men come to church because of women such as girlfriend, wife, and mother. Therefore, women who want to find a spouse in the church find it very challenging; and the main reasons are the lower educational level of men and lack of men in the church.

The researcher concludes that Chinese churches play really important role in the journey of spiritual formation for Chinese Christian young adults. Although there are positive results from the research for Chinese Christian young adults, they need help from church to guide them to develop another level of spiritual growth either from church activities or discipleship training program.

Recommendations

The research for this project has provided this researcher a wonderful opportunity to know about the level of Chinese Christian young adults' spirituality. In general, Chinese Christian young adults are practicing spiritual disciplines well on the journey of spiritual formation in their own way, but they also need to develop in some particular areas of spiritual life. Therefore, the researcher has some recommendations for Chinese Christian young adults and Chinese churches:

1) The recommendation to focus on evangelism through small group gathering

The first recommendation of this research concerns small group gathering. This research confirmed that there is huge percentage of small group attendance among Chinese Christian young adults. Their purpose of attending small group is for having fellowship with others in Jesus Christ and they may satisfy with their current small group. However, they never think evangelizing non-believers through small group and multiplying their small group. "The gospel is about relationships."²⁷³ The

²⁷³ Larry E. McCrary, Caleb Crider, Wade Stephens, and Rodney Calfee, *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*, 85.

small group is not only for having fellowship, but should be the tool of evangelism from relationships.

The researcher also suggests that it is much better to have small group in someone's house and the place can be changed to each members from the small group. It may be hard to ask members of the small group to gather at their house at first, so no matter what the house size is small group leaders should open their house for small group gathering first. After the member's faith start growing, they will be happy to open their house to the small group. If the small group always gathers only at one particular family, it will bring big burden to the hosting family, but if some members can share their house it will be much better. From having small group in someone's house, it also may be easy to evangelize the people who do not want to go to church.

If someone asks their family member to go to church, they may reject it. But if someone has the small group in their house, his or her family member will meet the church members at their house. Although the family member does not attend small group, they will at least give greeting to the church members who visit their house. Therefore, the relationship between family members and church members will begin, and the family members will attend the small group in their house gradually.

Small groups may consider attending a small church where people find it easy to know each other through sharing prayer request and praying for each other. They can practice all of the spiritual disciplines well in the help of small group members - encourage each other, supervise each other, and pray for each other. It is much better to practice spiritual formation with small group members rather than alone.

2) The recommendation to Chinese Christian young adults

Paul challenged the believers of the Corinthian churches:
 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not

solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?²⁷⁴

Paul confronts a problem that the Corinthians were failing to grow spiritually and remained on a diet of milk. The people who are still worldly can only eat infant's food like milk and they also need to be served by others. Milk means the elementary truths of God's Word, lacking of experience and teaching about righteousness. However, in the journey of spiritual formation all Christians are asked to grow in spiritual maturity and eat solid food.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.²⁷⁵

Solid food is for the mature. The people who eat solid food can be teachers and have their senses trained to distinguish good and evil. Therefore, Chinese Christian young adults who want to grow into likeness of Jesus Christ, may also have to become leaders of church to serve others who still eat infant food.

Although there are lots of young adults in the Chinese church, many churches are served by old generations and young adults just attend church service. With the growth in population of Chinese Christian young adults, they should come out to lead and serve their church in every area such as choir, worship team, and any other department. Chinese Christian young adults are the hope of Chinese church.

Therefore, there are three things that the researcher wants to recommend Chinese Christian young adults:

²⁷⁴ 1 Cor 3:1 [NIV].

²⁷⁵ Heb 5:12-14 [NASB].

First, Chinese Christian young adults must have a strong confidence on faith about their salvation. If they experienced the real grace from God from salvation, they would have heart for living for the kingdom of God that they would love to serve at church voluntary. With the confidence of faith, Chinese Christian young adult should also be equipped by the knowledge of the Word of God. Serving church without the spiritual growth, they may feel tired or boring so that there is a big possibility that they would leave the church.

Second, Chinese Christian young adults should practice the Christian life through serving at church that turn from self-centered life to God-centered life. They will experience the God through serving at church and it may help them grow into the close relationship with God.

Third, Chinese Christian young adults have to be equipped by the worldview of Christianity and learn how to serve the church in their spiritual journey. The service must be for the kingdom of God rather any other purpose. At the same time, it must be linked with personal change and spiritual growth.

3) The recommendation to the Chinese church

The recommendations to the Chinese church is developing their discipleship training program to cultivate more and more leaders from Chinese Christian young adults. Chinese Christian young adults try best to practice spiritual disciplines, but they also need help and guidance from the church in the journey of spiritual formation. The discipleship training program is the good way to teach them about theological knowledge of spirituality that they cannot learn from the Bible and give them guidance that how to live better spiritual lives.

The purpose of discipleship training program is cultivating disciples and helping them to become better leaders in the church. These leaders are not pastors that

they cannot preach on the pulpit, but they can help pastors to serve congregations by leading the following ministries: small groups, Bible studies, evangelism work, visitation, church management, and other needs except preaching. It will help Chinese churches to resolve the problem of lack of leaders, and these works can help pastors to reduce their stress so that they can have more time to focus on the sermon and discipleship training.

In closing, Chinese Christian young adults are having a desire to grow in to likeness of Jesus Christ and practicing spiritual disciplines well in their own way. However, their spiritual growth is very slow due to the laziness and other problems. To resolve this problem, Chinese Christian young adults can practice spiritual formation with small group members. Moreover, the Chinese church can help young adults to grow spiritually and train them to become the leaders of churches to serve Chinese church.

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Appendix A

研究课题: 国内大陆中国基督教教会里 18 至 30 岁之间年轻人的属灵状态
在签署同意书之前请认真仔细阅读以下内容。该课题经由 Winebrenner 神学研究院批准通过。

课题研究目的:

该课题旨于寻求国内大陆中国基督教教会里 18 至 30 岁之间年轻人的属灵状态，找出国内中国年轻基督徒是如何操练他们的属灵生活的。

你需要做什么:

在剪短的自我介绍之后，你将会被邀请回答一份关于属灵生活的问卷调查，之后其中的一部分人会被邀请参加面对面的提问，届时你可以自由阐述你的看法和想法。时间长短将取决于你。

机密性:

所有人的名字及相关个人信息都不会在研究报告中体现。你将拥有一个代码，所有关于你的代码都以这个代码来表达。你的个人信息及代码资料将封存在研究者的书房里，在该研究结束之后，这些信息将被销毁。

风险和机遇:

你可能会担心个人信息泄露，该研究将保证所有信息的机密性。可能有些问题回答起来有点难度，但是能够尽全力认真的回答所有的问题是很重要的。参加这一研究课题调查将会保证信息的机密性且不会使你有任何隐私方面的泄露。这是一个让你畅所欲言的机会，同时也将成为给自己提供一个自我监察属灵生活的机会。

之一研究是自愿参与的，你不会因不参与而得到损失和惩罚。

你可以随时终止参与这一课题研究。

问卷调查时间：10-15 分钟

面谈时间：30-70 分钟 就属灵生活和操练阐述个人看法和经历。

如果你有任何疑问请咨询：

洪贤德, hongx@findlay.edu 电话: 319-512-2370

尼斯里博士, jnissley@winebrenner.edu, Office: 419-434-4247, Cell: 419-672-1772

同意书:

本人已经仔细阅读以上信息。本人自愿参与以上课题研究。

志愿者:

日期:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
(English Translation)

PROPOSED RESEARCH TITLE: SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF CHINESE YOUNG ADULTS AGE 18-30 AT THREE SELECTED CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN MAINLAND CHINA

Please read this consent letter carefully before you decide to participate in this study. This research has been approved by the Winebrenner Theological Seminary Institutional Review Board.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to explore spiritual formation of Chinese young adults (age 18-30) at three selected Chinese Christian churches in mainland China to find out how spiritual formation is practiced by Chinese Christian young adults.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number, and no personally identifiable information will be connected to the reporting of responses or analysis of data. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in the principle researcher's study room. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There will be no costs or penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a Christian Chinese young adult.

Risks and Benefits:

You might worry about the confidentiality of the information you will share in the interview. Some of the questions might be difficult to answer, however it is important for you to answer all of them and to be the best of your ability. Participation in this study will involve no loss of privacy and your records will be handled confidentially. Additionally, this study provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own spiritual journey as a Christian.

For survey (Questionnaire):

What you will be asked to do in the study:

Following the brief self-introduction, the entrustees of researcher will pass you a survey paper with questions; you are free to answer some questions, all questions, or no question.

Time required:

10 – 15 minutes

For interview (focus groups by individual interview):

What you will be asked to do in the study:

Following the brief self-introduction, the researcher will interview you by questions face to face or on telephone via Chinese Wechat. You are free to share your own experience or thoughts after you received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior with assigned topics.

Time required:

30-70 minutes

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Xiande Hong, hongx@findlay.edu 319-512-2370

Dr. John Nissley, Doctor of Ministry Director, jnissley@winebrenner.edu,

Office: 419-434-4247, Cell: 419-672-1772

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL FORMATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Appendix B

Spiritual Formation Assessment Survey

Thank you so much for your time to participate in this survey. Please take a few minutes and complete this survey. The results of this survey will be used for a doctoral dissertation investigation on "Spiritual Formation of Chinese Christian Young Adults in Mainland China". This survey is confidential. Your name will never appear on the results or any written materials. Please be frank in your responses.

Please circle one response for the following questions.

Demographic Information

A. What is your age?

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

B. What is your gender?

Male Female

C. What is your highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school Graduated high school 1 or 2 years of college
Bachelor's degree PhD or Doctorate degree

D. What is your marriage status?

Single Married

E. Where were you raised?

Rural area Town City

F. How long you have been being a Christian?

Less than one year 2-3years 4-5years 6-7years 8-9years 10years and above

G. How long have you been a member of current church?

Less than 1 year 1year 2-3years 4-5years 6-9years 10 years above

The level of spiritual maturity to God

Please rank 1 to 5 of the following question;)

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Sometimes

4 = Very often

5 = Always

1. Do you feel God is close to you? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you feel that God loves you? 1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you study God's Word? 1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you seek God first? 1 2 3 4 5
5. How often do you own up to your sins and confess guilt with God?
1 2 3 4 5
6. Do you submit to leadership at church? 1 2 3 4 5
7. Are you willing to go wherever the Lord leads or sends? 1 2 3 4 5
8. Do you understand and believe in Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human?
1 2 3 4 5
9. How frequently do you practice forgiveness with others? 1 2 3 4 5
10. How often do you desire to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ?
1 2 3 4 5
11. Do you feel confident of your adoption as God's son/daughter i.e. rarely, question His acceptance of you? 1 2 3 4 5
12. Do you believe that your money is completely at God's disposal and not your own?
1 2 3 4 5
13. Are you able to thank God for life experiences, seeing how God has used them to uniquely shape you into who you are? 1 2 3 4 5
14. Do you believe that God sent Jesus to die for humanity in order to save us?
1 2 3 4 5
15. Do you love your church? 1 2 3 4 5

Practices engaged to grow toward spiritual maturity

16. Which of the following are parts of your faith practices?

Please check all of the following answers that apply.

Devotional time with God Small group Prayer Fasting
 Scripture reading Worship Confessing Baptism
 Thanks offering Tithe Singing hymns Forgiveness
 Sharing Good News The Lord's Supper Scripture memory
 Sunday service

Please circle one response for each of the following questions:

17. How often do you have devotional time with God?

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

18. How often do you attend small group?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily
19. How often do you pray to God?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily Anytime
20. How often do you read Bible?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily
21. How often do you fast?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily
22. How often do you worship?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily Anytime
23. How often do you confess?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily Anytime
24. How often do you attend church Sunday service?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily
25. How often do you engage in outreach?
 Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily
26. How often do you tithe?
 Never Almost never 3-5 times a year
 Almost once a month Once a month
27. How often do you sing hymns or worship songs in private?
 Never Rarely Sometimes Very often Always
28. How often have you forgiven people who hurt you?
 Never Rarely Sometimes Very often Always
29. How often do you share the Good News with non-believers?
 Never Rarely Sometimes Very often Always
30. How often do you participate the Lords' Supper?
 Never Almost never 3-5 times a year
 Almost once a moth Once a month
31. How often do you memorize Bible verses?
 Never Almost never Once or twice a month
 Once or twice a week Every day
32. Are there other practices that have been meaningful that have not been mentioned?

Experience church efforts to grow toward spiritual maturity
 How satisfied were you with the church's teaching and offering of practices that promote spiritual maturity? Please rank 1 to 3 of the following question.

- 1 = Dissatisfied
- 2 = Not participate in
- 3 = Somewhat satisfied
- 4 = Very satisfied

- 33. The regular basics prayer meeting: 1 2 3 4
- 34. The camps of spiritual retreat: 1 2 3 4
- 35. The participation in small group: 1 2 3 4
- 36. The observing of the Lord's Supper: 1 2 3 4
- 37. The sermons on the significance of baptism: 1 2 3 4
- 38. The discipleship training class: 1 2 3 4
- 39. The sermons on the importance of forgiveness: 1 2 3 4
- 40. The sermons on the importance of confessing: 1 2 3 4
- 41. The opportunity to share Good News with non-believers: 1 2 3 4
- 42. Worship: 1 2 3 4
- 43. The teaching on the importance of the tithe: 1 2 3 4
- 44. The Sunday worship service: 1 2 3 4
- 45. The regular basis Bible study: 1 2 3 4
- 46. The short-term mission trip: 1 2 3 4
- 47. The observing of the Washing of the Saints' Feet: 1 2 3 4
- 48. The teaching of love of the Cross: 1 2 3 4

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Questions

Gender _____ Age _____ Date _____

1. How often do you participate in church prayer meeting?

When does your church have prayer meeting?

How does prayer help in your spiritual growth? Describe a typical experience that includes prayer.

In your opinion, why do some people choose not to pray?

Why is it important for Christians to pray?

How often does your church provide opportunities for you to practice pray?

2. Explain your understanding of baptism and its significance.

In your opinion, what are some reasons you believe people do not get baptized?

What does baptism mean to you? Is baptism important for you?

If so, how does baptism help in your spiritual journey?

If not, explain why.

3. When do you study the Word of God? Where?

What does it mean to you when you study the Word of God?

How does the Word of God help in your spiritual growth? Does the Word of God bring any change to you? Describe a typical experience that includes the Word of God.

In your opinion, why do some people choose not to study the Word of God?

Why is it important for Christians to study the Word of God?

How often does your church provide opportunities for you to study the Word of God?

4. Name three major hindrances to growth in your spiritual journey?

What are you going to do about these hindrances?

React to the following statement: “The troubles I have are just the troubles I most need in order to grow.”

5. How often do you confess?

Describe your understanding of confessing and forgiveness?

What do confessing and forgiveness mean to you? Are they important to you to grow toward spiritual maturity?

How do they help in your life?

How often does your church provide opportunities for you to practice confessing and forgiveness?

6. Are there other practices that you have engaged in that have helped you to grow spiritually?

Please give one or two suggestions that you would like to give to the local congregation.

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