

2012

"Faith is Life": a qualitative study of christian faith and Chinese immigrant families

Yaxin Lu

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations



Part of the [Human Ecology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lu, Yaxin, ""Faith is Life": a qualitative study of christian faith and Chinese immigrant families" (2012). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 2077.

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2077

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

“FAITH IS LIFE”:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND
CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The School of Human Ecology

by
Yaxin Lu
B.S., Jilin University, China, 1988
M.S., Louisiana State University, 2009
December 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 (NIV)

I sincerely give my thanks to the participants for their time, patience, and their inspirations. Their beautiful stories formed the foundation of the project, while their deep insights encouraged me and the other Chinese immigrants to pursuing meaning in life. May their experiences become valuable sources and inspiration for those who struggle with their physical and spiritual life, and become blessings to many people.

For my major professor, Dr. Loren Marks, you are a blessing in my life. Your generosity opened the door of opportunity for your students; your profound knowledge paved a path for the success of them; your wisdom brightened the future of many people. Thank you for your time, patience, and wise advice. Thank you for your understanding, consideration, and encouragement. Your continuous support is my strength for my study throughout these years. I express my deep appreciation for having you as my mentor, my colleague, and friend.

Thanks go to my committee members: Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner, Dr. Cassandra Chaney, Dr. Bin Li, and Dr. Pamela Monroe. Thank you for your time and contributions to this project. Thank you for your helpful advice and continuous support. I appreciate all of you for the opportunity of my way to my goal.

I extend my thanks to Dr. Overstreet, and Ms. Melinda Mooney for their support and help during my study in the School of Human Ecology. Thanks also go to my colleagues and friends who supported me spiritually throughout these years.

For Dr. Katie Cherry, thank you for the opportunity to learn from you about quantitative research methodology. Thank you for your financial support for my last semester study at LSU, and the chance to improve my research skills. I appreciate for your generosity and support at a very important point in my life.

To my parents Wenhai Lu and Guilan Qin, my parents-in-law Wanlin Liu and Cuizhi Li, I truly appreciate for their hard work to raise their children. I am so grateful for their sacrificial love and support for their children. Thanks to my two sisters and a brother and their families for their physical, emotional, and financial support.

Finally, I dedicate this piece to my husband Baozhu, my two daughters Mary, Nancy, and my son Matthew. Thank you for your love. I would not be able to complete this project without your support and encouragement. You are my comfort when I am in depression; you are my strength when I am weak; you make my life meaningful. You are my joy, I love you!

Thank God for His kindness, His mercy, and His forever love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Research on Religion and Family.....	1
Research on Religion and Immigrant Family.....	4
Human Ecological Theory and Sacred Theory.....	5
Definitions.....	9
Research Questions.....	9
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Religious Beliefs and Marriage/Parenting.....	11
Religious Practices and Marriage/Parenting.....	15
Religious Community and Marriage/Parenting.....	19
Chinese Immigrants and Religious Conversion.....	22
Summary of Review of Literature	29
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	31
Qualitative Methods and Family Research.....	31
Sample	34
Procedures	35
Analysis	36
Qualitative Validity	37
Reflexivity	38
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS	40

Theme I. Conversion to Christianity	40
Subtheme 1. The Process of Conversion	40
Subtheme 2. The Challenge of Conversion	44
Subtheme 3. The Change of Ideology	47
Theme II. Faith Practice: to Learn and to Change	49
Subtheme 1. Prayer.....	50
Subtheme 2. Bible Teaching.....	64
Subtheme 3. Sunday Worship: The Holy Day	76
Theme III. Faith and Parenting.....	79
Subtheme 1. Set A Good Example.....	79
Subtheme 2. Raise Children Through Faith.....	82
Subtheme 3. Challenges.....	87
Subtheme 4. Expectations.....	91
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS	94
Summary and Discussion of the Findings.....	95
Limitations.....	98
Implications.....	99
Conclusion	102
REFERENCES.....	104
APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT.....	119
APPENDIX B. STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT	120
APPENDIX C. DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY.....	122
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON FAITH AND FAMILY LIFE.....	123
APPENDIX E. DEMOGRAPHIC FORM.....	125

VITA.....	127
-----------	-----

ABSTRACT

Research on religion and family in the United States has increased in the last two decades. With the increasing immigrant population, studies on minorities including Chinese immigrant families are also important. Religious faith has significant influences on some Chinese immigrant families. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between Christianity and Chinese immigrant families. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-two highly religious Chinese Christian couples in the Southern United States. Twenty-two open-ended questions were asked to understand their conversion processes and how the Christian faith influences the participants' marriage and family life. Most of the participants held advanced graduate degrees. Their ages ranged from 28 to 66, and the number of children ranged from one to four. Grounded theory methods including open coding and axial coding were applied to analyze the data. Three major themes emerged and were identified in the interview data: 1) Conversion to Christianity, 2) Faith practice: to learn and to change, and 3) Faith and parenting. Several subthemes are also addressed, and supporting qualitative data is presented in connection with each theme. Implications for theory, practice, and research related to Chinese immigrant families in the United States are discussed.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States has been, from its roots, a nation of immigrants. Since the 1965 U.S. immigration reform, the immigrant population has grown steadily. At present, there are 38.5 million immigrants in the U.S., which represent 12.5% of the total U.S. population, and Asian Americans comprise 28% of overall U.S. immigration (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In the year 2006, about 1.6 million foreign born from China, including Hong Kong but not Taiwan resided in the United States. This population comprised 4.1 percent of all immigrants (Migration Information Source, 2008). Chinese immigrants, including those from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and Southeast Asian countries, typically came to the U.S. to seek better opportunities (Yang, 1999).

Increased opportunities are not without challenges, however. During the process of acculturation and assimilation to the American mainstream culture, immigrant families typically experience challenges and stressors that “exist at the community or society level (e.g., immigration policies and discrimination), the family level (e.g., change and conflict within intergenerational and marital relationships), and the individual level (e.g., depression, isolation, identity development)” (Bush, Bohon, & Kim, 2005, p. 131). For some, religious faith plays a very important role in the individuals and families' adaptation, both culturally and existentially (Bush et al., 2005; Yang, 1999; Zhang, 2006). We now take a closer look at religion in a family context.

Research on Religion and Family

According to the American Religious Identification Survey (2001), 80% of the U.S. population self-reports as Christian. Religion has played a vital role in the progress of human civilization vis-à-vis history, politics, literature, philosophy, science, and morality (Huston,

2003). On the other hand, Karl Marx, the founder of modern communism, who had tremendous influence on modern Chinese thought and upon the Chinese people, stated that religion promoted “a heartless world” and that it was “the opium of the people” (Marx & Engels, 1964, pp. 43-44). At present, many Chinese still regard religion as superstition because, from birth, they received an education grounded in Marxist atheism. Following the enactment of Economic Reform and the Open Door Policy in 1979, Christianity has spread very quickly in China (Hunter & Chan, 1993). For Chinese immigrants in the U.S., the social and cultural changes in their original country as well as in the United States facilitate a reconsideration of their ideology, their values, and their beliefs.

The importance of religion and family as a topic. The influence between religion and family is reciprocal. The relationship between religion and family is considered a topic of interest throughout the world and across cultures. Houseknecht and Pankhurst (2000) explain:

In the process of economic and political change that many societies experience as disruption and disorganization, family and religion are important sources of stability and order, even as they adapt to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves. It is to family and religion that one should go to find the processes that are working out the morality for the new age and the lifestyles for the new era (p. 27).

The existing literature on religion and family indicates that religious beliefs, practices, and communities are interrelated with various aspects of marriage and family life (Christiano, 2000; Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Pargament, 1997). Further, Koenig, McCullough and Larson (2001)’s *Handbook of Religion and Health* catalogs the relationships between religiosity and a variety of mental and physical health outcomes, based on more than 1,200 empirical studies and 400 reviews. The cumulative findings indicate that religious involvement is generally correlated with “well-being, happiness and life satisfaction, purpose and meaning in

life, higher self-esteem, greater marital stability and satisfaction...for the vast majority of people, the apparent benefit of devout religious belief and practice probably outweigh the risks” (p. 228).

Two additional meta-analyses have been done by Mahoney: (a) a review of 94 studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001), and (b) a recent review of 184 studies from 1999-2009 that examined the role of religion in marital and parent-child relationships (Mahoney, 2010). According to Mahoney (2010), 57 quantitative studies and 23 qualitative studies during 1999-2009 addressed couples’ relationships, and 80 quantitative and 24 qualitative studies dealt with parent-child relationships. Mahoney further explained:

Most of the 137 quantitative studies involved large U.S. national (52%) or community (34%) samples, so findings were not biased relative to the religious makeup of the United States; only 9% of studies involved non-U.S. of the studies, 77% (79% of marital and 76% of parent-youth) used one or two items to measure religious variables (e.g., affiliation, attendance, self-rated importance, biblical conservatism). Further, there was heavy reliance on the self-report of one family member rather than multiple family members for both religious and family variables. Direct observation of family interactions was limited to two studies on marital and eight on parent-youth dyads (p.806).

A main concern with these quantitative studies is the threat to the construct validity regarding the measurement. Specifically, how valid is a one or two item measure in capturing a phenomenon as complex as religiosity (Marks, 2006)? Further, it also may not be appropriate to study families when involving only one family member (Patton, 1996). To complement the limitations of quantitative research on religion and family, qualitative research which focuses on meanings and processes is needed. Additionally, research with more diversity of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious tradition is currently lacking (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, 2010).

Qualitative research on family and religion: An emerging area. Slife and Williams (1995) argue that “human beings require human science methods” (p. 199). To study religious faith in the lived experience of many individuals and families, some qualitative studies have provided answers to “how and why” questions. Dollahite and Marks’ “Faith and Family” project has involved in-depth interviews with more than 200 families from a diversity of ethnicities (50.5% were minorities) and religious affiliations (Marks & Dollahite, 2011). Through qualitative interviews, the project has explored how and why religious faith influences participants’ marriage and family life, and has produced more than 40 publications. The present study is part of the project but focuses on Chinese immigrants in the United States and Protestant Christianity in particular.

Research on Religion and Immigrant Family

Immigrants in the United States have a significant impact on social institutions, as well as on America’s economy, politics, and public policy (Bush et al., 2005). With the continuous increase of immigrants in the United States, it is vital to consider this population and their experiences with acculturation to mainstream American culture (Booth, Crouter, & Landale, 1997). Research on the topic of religious faith and Asian Americans has been conducted (Alumkal, 2003; Ecklund & Park, 2005; Zhai & Strokes, 2009), including work with Korean Americans (Chong, 1998; Ecklund, 2006; Hurh & Kim, 1990; Kim & Kim, 2001; Kwon, Ebaugh, & Hagan, 1997; Min, 1992), Vietnamese Americans (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1998), and Chinese Americans (Cao, 2005; Chen, 2002; Wang & Yang, 2006; Yang, 1998, 1999, 2005; Zhang, 2006). Examined topics have related to religious conversion, adaptation and assimilation, immigrant churches in the United States, religious faith and children (Zhou, 1997), adjustment during adolescence (Thompson & Gurney, 2003), and

marriage and parenting (Chen, 2006; Ing, 1998). However, little research has examined the relationship between religious faith and Chinese immigrant marriage and families, especially through qualitative research methodology. This is a gap in the existing literature that the present paper will strive to fill.

Human Ecological Theory and Sacred Theory

This paper integrates of Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) and Sacred Theory (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012) to explore how Christian faith shapes the participants' life style and their marital and parent-child relationships. Relevant elements of both theories are briefly overviewed next.

In his Human Ecological Theory, Bronfenbrenner (1995) approaches two propositions of the bioecological paradigm:

Proposition 1

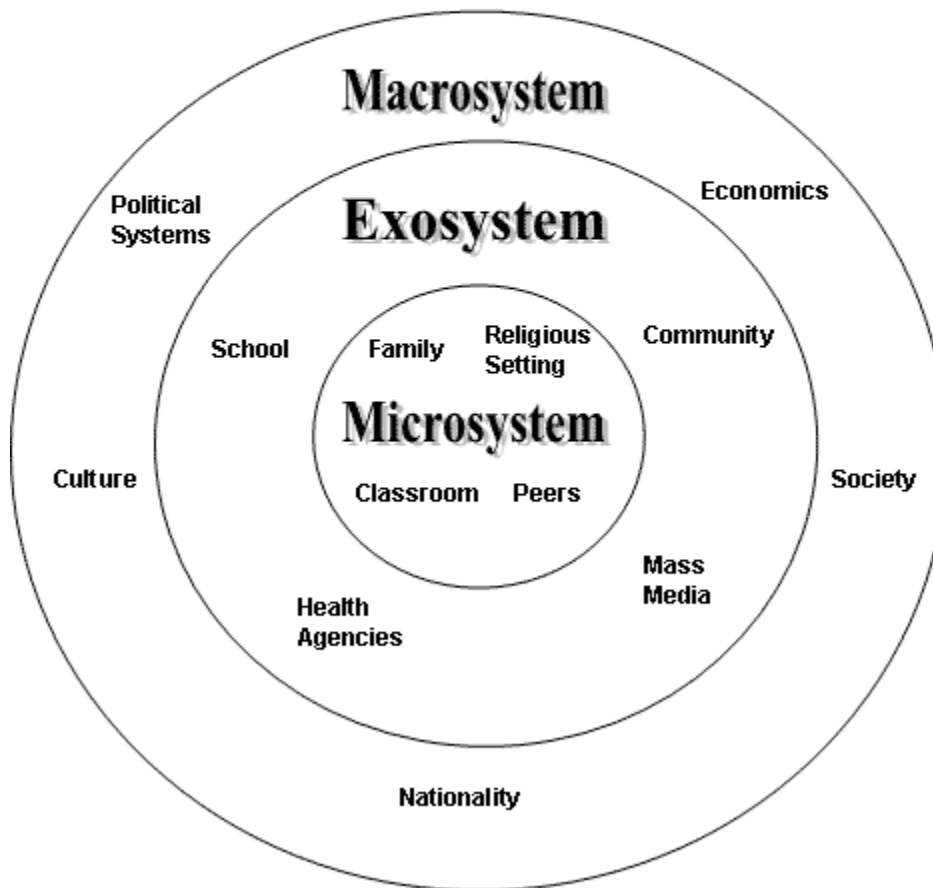
...Throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes (p. 620).

Proposition 2

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the biopsychological characteristics of the developing person; of the environment, both immediate and more remote, in which the processes are taking place; and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration (p. 621).

The Ecological Model of Human Behaviour

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979)



The PPCT (process-person-context-time) model captures the essence of the human ecological theory. In Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, proximal processes as mechanisms of development are defined the key factor in human development (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Individuals' roles are also important in changing their context. The change can be relatively passive, moderately active, or highly active. The context includes four interrelated systems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, and (d) macrosystem. From significant others in the immediate environment (microsystem) to social and cultural influences (macrosystem), individual development is influenced differently. Finally, time is also very important in the

PPCT model. Individuals experience developmental changes due to environmental changes across personal, familial, and historical time (Bronfenbrenner 1995; see also Hareven, 2000).

We now turn to a brief overview of Sacred Theory.

Sacred Theory, proposed by Burr, Marks, and Day (2012), builds up on previous research and examines how perceptions of “the sacred” influence families in positive and negative ways. In their related theoretical work, Pargament and Mahoney (2005) define religion as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred,” and posit that “what makes religion distinctive is the involvement of a sacred dimension in the search for significance” (p. 181). A better theory may lead to better practice. The development of sacred theory is an effort to integrate these ideas. The foundational proposition of the theory is that “the Sacred matters,” and that for many, it matters profoundly. The perception of the sacred in marriage and family life is very important to the individual and a family as a whole, because these perceptions influence human behavior (Burr et al., 2012; James, 1902).

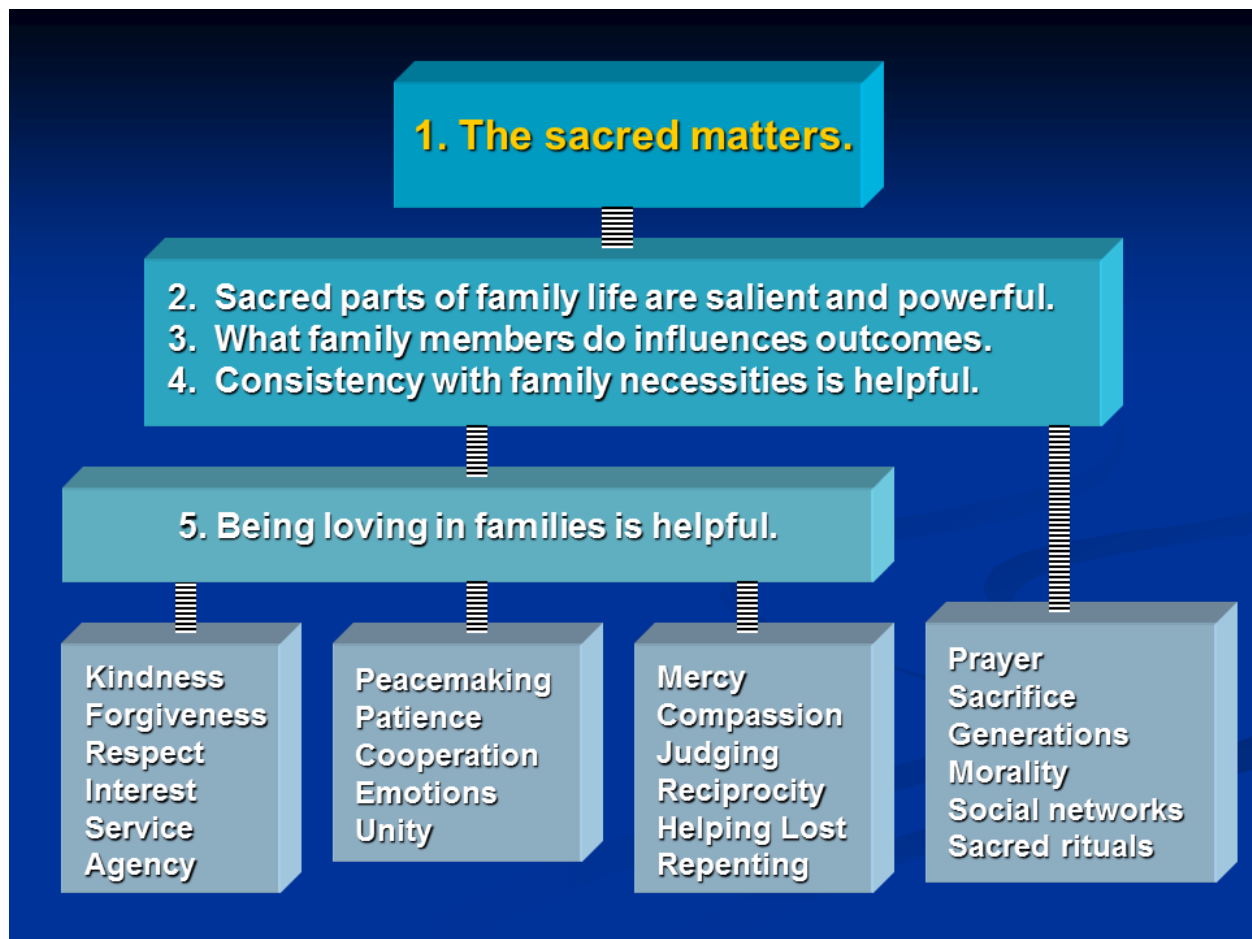
The main ideas of sacred theory are:

Proposition #1: Experiencing parts of the human experience as sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence.

Proposition #2: Experiencing parts of family life as sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence in families.

Proposition #3: It is variation in what people do as a result of their ideals and beliefs about the sacred that determines whether the sacred is helpful or harmful in families, and it is not the mere presence of religion in general or global religiosity that makes the difference.

Proposition #4: The more behavior is consistent with widely shared goals in families the more it tends to be helpful, and the more it is inconsistent with these goals the more it tends to be harmful (pp. 13-16).



The concepts of loving, kindness, forgiveness, respect, patience, mercy, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, sacrifice, sanctification, morality, and sacred rituals are principles of concern in sacred theory. These tested principles seem to have influence on the formation of strong marriages and families. Burr, Marks, and Day (2012) predict that sacred theory may prove to be more valuable and helpful than many of the existing theories in helping families find successes and avoid failure, and in helping educators and practitioners help families.

Definitions

The following table provides conceptual definitions of key terms for purposes of the scope of the dissertation. The definitions are not intended to be comprehensive, only to clearly establish the parameters of the present study.

Terms	Conceptualization
Chinese Immigrant Family	Chinese immigrant family including those from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and Southeast Asian countries who came to the U.S. (Yang, 1999).
Religion	Comprised of three dimensions: religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious community (Dollahite et al., 2004).
Spiritual Beliefs	“personal, internal beliefs, framings, meanings and perspectives” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413).
Religious Practices	“outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or less overtly sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413)
Religious Community	“support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or a less formal religious group” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413).
Faith	The belief and action of blending of all three dimensions of religion into lived experience.

Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between Christianity and marriage and family life in Chinese immigrant families. Many Chinese immigrants in the U.S. have encountered significant challenges, including a cultural clash and a conflict over religion and worldview. However, the highly religious Chinese couples in this study have a somewhat

unique experience with the intersection of religious faith, American culture, and their personal and family lives in that they are all devout converts to Christianity. The study examines the following questions, using detailed qualitative interviews and narratives.

- 1) What strengths and challenges associated with religious conversion and involvement are apparent in these Chinese Christian families?
- 2) How has Christian religious involvement influenced the participants' marital and parent-child relationships?

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Religiosity has been defined in several ways across the extant research on religion and family. For the purpose of the study, a three-dimensional conceptualization of religion is utilized (Dollahite et al., 2004). These three dimensions include: “(a) *religious beliefs* (personal, internal beliefs, meanings, perspectives), (b) *religious practices* (outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or a less overly sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded), and (c) *religious communities* (support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or a less formal religious group)” (p. 413). Although religious beliefs, practices, and communities overlap, these three dimensions offer a framework to organize and synthesize previous research findings. In this section, the relationships between each of these three dimensions of religion, and respectively marriage and parent-child relationships are discussed. Also, Chinese Christian immigrant families will be discussed, where relevant research is available.

Religious Beliefs and Marriage/Parenting

Religious beliefs and marriage. Many quantitative studies have shown that religiosity is a significant predictor of marital stability in the United States. Specifically, shared religious beliefs and practices have significant positive associations with marital stability (Abbott, Berry, & Meredith, 1990; Call & Heaton, 1997; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993), and also seem to promote marital adjustment (Wilson & Filsinger, 1986) and marital commitment (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Marks, Dollahite, & Freeman, 2012).

Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2001), in their meta-analytic review of religion and marriage found that religiosity and religious homogamy between couples have consistently been associated with not only with marital stability but also with marital satisfaction

and commitment. In a mixed-method of quantitative and qualitative study on religiosity and marital satisfaction of Chinese-American couples, Ing (1998) found that a strong positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. However, most pre-2000 studies only “focused on ‘distal’ religious variables,” or were “from a distance”—as a result, more “close” and “proximal” studies of religion and marriage are needed (Mahoney et al., 1999, p. 322). Mahoney and her colleagues, as well as several qualitative researchers, have studied the meaning behind these religion and marriages correlations over the past decade (Mahoney, 2010).

Meanings of marriage. To examine the meaning of marriage more closely, Mahoney et al. (1999) used two scales of “perceived sacred qualities of marriage scale” and “manifestation of God scale” to assess “sanctification of marriage” (p. 322). They found that joint religious activities between couples and greater perceptions of marriage as “sacred” were associated with greater marital satisfaction, more perceived personal benefits, and less marital conflicts. Recent qualitative literature also suggests that spouses’ perceptions of divine involvement in their marriages relates to marital satisfaction (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006), as well as to higher marital commitment (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). Similarly, Marks (2005) conducted a qualitative study on how religion influences marriage, and reported that spiritual beliefs impacted marriage through anti-divorce beliefs, similar worldviews provided by shared religious beliefs, and a belief in God as a marital support (see also Marks, 2004; 2006). Two additional qualitative studies of enduring and lasting marriages reported that religious faith, especially when shared, is an important resource in strong marriages (Mackey & O’Brien, 2005; Robinson & Blanton, 2001).

The importance of shared faith in marriage. Existing empirical research has found that religious homogamy is a significant factor in marital relationships (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993); it

is “highly important” and related to “greater stability” of marriages in the United States (Christiano, 2000, p. 51). Same-faith marriage has been associated with better marital satisfaction and adjustment (Wilson & Musick, 1996), and mixed-faith marriages generally report more conflicts and less stability than shared-faith marriages (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Heaton and Pratt (1990) studied the influence of three types of religious homogamy—namely, denominational affiliation, church attendance, and belief in the Bible. They concluded that religious homogamy was correlated with marital satisfaction and stability. Indeed, for most denominations that have been studied, the divorce rate among inter-faith marriages is higher than same-faith marriages—and among some it is significantly higher. For example, among Mormons, the divorce rate in one study for marriages outside the faith was *three times* as high as it was for same-faith marriages (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Other studies have similarly found that congruence in religiosity seems to be an important factor in marital satisfaction (Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

There are, however, variations in the findings. A longitudinal study by Booth, Johnson, Branaman and Sica (1995) with a large sample over 12 years found that the relationship between reported religiosity and marital quality is not strong. Moreover, Sullivan (2001) conducted studies with both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs and found that religiosity is related to couples’ attitude toward marriage, and that religiosity has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction, but only for marriages with mentally healthy husbands. Overall, regarding religiosity and individual mental health, there are some mixed results, with predominantly positive, some negative, and some no relationship findings (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001).

Religious Beliefs and Parent-Child Relationship. As a “personal religious community,” parents have a salient influence on their children’s religious faith (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Schwartz, 2006), and sometimes the influences are reciprocal (Garland, 2002). From the interviews of 110 families of 32 Christian congregations, Garland (2002) found that children and their parents shape the faith behaviors of each other and that many parents report “a sense of responsibility” to guide their children toward faith (p. 80). Religion influences parents regarding how to view their roles as parents (Marks & Dollahite, 2001; Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). Parents’ shared religious faith is typically moderately beneficial for healthy child development, while parents’ religious heterogamy is negatively correlated with children’s well-being (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin 2007; Petts & Knoester, 2007).

Based on a review of previous research Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks (2006) indicate that both parents yield influence but that the mother often has the fundamental influence in children’s religiosity. For example, mothers are more likely than fathers to transmit their religious beliefs to their adolescent children (Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999). Even so, research on religion and the father/child relationship has shown that fathers’ religious beliefs correlate with higher levels of parental involvement and commitment to children (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Palkovitz, Marks, Appleby, & Holmes, 2003), and increased paternal involvement (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 1999, 2002). Similarly, using national survey data from 810 fathers, King (2003) examined religiousness in connection with eight aspects of father involvement among both married and divorced fathers and concluded that religious fathers strive to have consistent contact with children and have a better quality relationship with their children.

In a qualitative study of fathering, Marks and Palkovitz (2007) found that religious faith often motivates and animates positive relationships between fathers and children.

Research has also addressed authoritarian parenting styles, more prevalently found in Conservative Protestant families (Mahoney, 2010). In Mahoney's religion and family studies (1999 to 2009), the findings indicate that: (1) Conservative Protestant parents emphasize children's obedience and more often spank young children; (2) highly religious attendance predicts parental affection, father's involvement, and a positive parent-child relationship; (3) highly religious single mothers may adopt a more authoritative parental style; (4) higher parental religious attendance shapes adolescents' spiritual life and motivates an authoritative parenting style and enhances positive relationships between parents and adolescents. Another study of religious discord indicates that poorer relationships were reported when parents are more religious than their teen kids. However, the relationship quality is not lower when the adolescents are more religious than their parents (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009).

In summary, strong religious beliefs (especially when shared) tend to be significant predictors of stability, satisfaction, and quality in marriage. Religious belief is also an important dimension for the parent-child relationship. Internal beliefs are often expressed through external practices. We now turn from the first dimension of religious beliefs to the second dimension of religious practices.

Religious Practices and Marriage/Parenting

Religious practices and marriage. Religious practices have been correlated with aspects of the marital relationship as well. Couples' joint religious activities (e.g., praying for each other, attending church together, reporting a spiritual connection with each other, and praying together) all appear to enhance marital quality (Mahoney et al., 1999). Some religious

practices reportedly help couples prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). In terms of religious practices, prayer and forgiveness are frequently measured in the empirical research, as addressed next.

Prayer. Religious practices such as prayer and high levels of religious participation are closely related to happiness (Christiano, 2000). Research also indicates that prayer is positively related to forgiveness and relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2008), and that prayer reportedly plays a “causal role in promoting gratitude” (Lambert et al, 2009, p. 146). Based on qualitative work, Marks (2005) reported the importance of prayer as a religious practice that influences marriage, and in later work suggested that prayer is important in coping and prevention, in addition to intervention (Marks, 2008). In another qualitative study, Butler, Gardner, and Bird (1998) investigated effects of prayer on couple interaction during conflict, and their findings suggest that prayer may be a significant “softening” event for religious couples to solve their conflicts. They found that “prayer: 1) invokes and experience of relationship with Deity; 2) de-escalates hostile emotions and reduces emotional reactivity; 3) enhances relationship and partner orientation and behavior; 4) facilitates empathy and unbiased perspective; 5) increases self-change focus; and 6) encourages couple responsibility for reconciliation and problem solving” (pp. 451-478). A large-scale, longitudinal research quantitative project is underway to examine prayer as a marital intervention but long-term findings are not yet available (Beach et al., 2008).

Forgiveness. Religiosity may be related to marital satisfaction and stability, in part, through practices of prayer and forgiveness (Dollahite et al., 2004; Jose & Alfons, 2007; McMinn et al, 2008). McCullough and Worthington (1999) suggested that a better understanding of forgiveness would help us to understand both religion and personality better. Forgiveness

helps to heal and improve broken relationships (Wuthnow, 2000). Burr, Marks, and Day (2012) in their book *Sacred Matters* discussed the importance of forgiveness in family life. They stated that “forgiveness helps families find successes and avoid failures, and the lack of forgiveness is damaging in families” (p. 36; see also Enright, 2001). Forgiveness seems to be a process rather than an event, and the sacred aspects of forgiveness are also important.

Religious teachings. In addition to prayer and forgiveness, applied religious teachings about forgiveness and fidelity also have significant influences on marriages, for instance to protect the couples from extramarital affairs (Marks, 2005). Religious teachings and practices provide guidance for family members in their daily life (Mahoney, 2005). Putting certain religious teachings into practice contributed to the prevention and resolution of couple conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Lambert and Dollahite (2006) also found that Scripture teachings have great influences on some participants, and provide models that helped them to resolve their marital conflicts.

After interviewing 76 highly religious married couples, Marks (2005) concluded that while religious involvement is positively related to marital stability and satisfaction, heavy religious involvement may also be a significant challenge and may even become a factor in marital conflict, even in same-faith marriages, due to the perpetual conflict between mainstream culture and faith-based practices and the strain on the limited resources of time, money, and energy (Marks, 2004). Religious practices are also important to parent-child relationships as discussed next.

Religious practices and parent-child relationship. Generative spirituality, according to Boyatzis, Dollahite and Marks (2006), is focused on “encouraging significant, sustained, and sacred consideration of the needs of the next generation” (p. 305). Social cognitive theory

suggests that children learn at home through their parents' modeling from an early age (Bandura, 1989). Several studies address the importance of parents' role modeling in shaping children's religious faith and also in fostering positive parent-child relationships (Bao et al., 1999; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002; Mahoney, 2005; Oman & Thoresen, 2005). Other studies have also found that parents influence children's perceptions of God and "God images" directly or indirectly regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or religious affiliation (Dickie et al., 1997; Marks, Dollahite, & Freeman, 2012).

Pearce and Thornton (2007) found that family behaviors and practices have a close relationship with early religious experiences of early adulthood:

We found strong and consistent relationships between mother's religious service attendance and children's attendance and importance of religion and the range of family ideologies. ... greater participation in most religious congregations results in being more antipremarital sex, anticonhabitation, antiabortion, promarriage, antidivorce, and probreadwinner-housewife family organization (p. 1240).

Family worship was a strong predictor of marital satisfaction and youth positive outcome, but not when the worship was "compulsory" (Lee, Rice, & Gillespie, 1997, p. 380).

Several studies address how religious faith shapes a meaningful role of fathering (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Dollahite, 1998; Furrow, 1998; Latshaw, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002; Palkovitz & Palm, 1998). Dollahite (1998) declares "religion is not merely another social force acting on fathers from the outside, but...a set of personal beliefs, practices, values, commitments, and relationships that help fathers from within" (p. 11). In a qualitative study, Marks (2004) reported that "practicing what you preach" in religious parenting is of central importance. Marks also noted that conflict and costs are also significant in connection with family rituals and practices, for example: "(a) bigotry and prejudice from outsiders; (b) money (participants donated an average of 10% of their incomes); (c) time (required for personal,

family, and faith community practices); (d) effort, preparation, and organization; (e) recurring scheduling conflicts between outside entries (e.g., school, work, social activities, athletic or extracurricular participation) and sacred days; (f) constant conflict between sociocultural norms and religious ideals” (p. 221).

In summary, religious practices such as prayer, forgiveness, and religious teaching seem to have a generally positive relationship with healthy marriage. Religious practices also seem to have measurable influences on children and on parent-child relationships.

Religious Community and Marriage/Parenting

Religious community and marriage. Church as a social support network is an important resource in marriage and family life (Krause, Ellison, Shaw, Marcum, & Boardman, 2001; Marks & Dollahite, 2001). Faith communities serve as an important resource in guiding and shaping church members’ beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors (Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, & Fenwick, 2004).

Faith community as an important individual level resource. Research has found that church involvement positively relates to church goers’ psychological, emotional, and spiritual state (Chaney, 2008), and frequent churchgoers have a larger non-kin network, enjoy more personal connection with others, and benefit from more social and emotional support, as well as more instrumental support including money, goods, and services (Ellison & George, 1994). Church members provide encouragement, advice, companionship, and emotional support (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). Further, based on data from a nationally representative sample of 20,000⁺, Hummer, Roger, Nam and Ellison (1999) found a 7.6 year increase in life expectancy between those who never attend and those who attend more than once a week. Through a study of the role of church and family support in the lives of older African Americans

whose ages ranged from 65 to 104, Walls (1992) concluded that church support contributed to their feelings of well-being, and that the religious community became an extended family network to the participants in their study.

Faith community as a benefit to marriage. Religious congregations typically provide couples with at least some positive marital examples that may influence the quality of the couples' marital relationships, whether through example, role modeling, or mentorship (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008). Shared church attendance is a significant predictor of marital happiness and stability (Larson & Goltz, 1989; Myers, 2006). Worship hymns, congregational prayers, and clergy's messages may help to solve personal and marital problems through indirect means (Krause, 2007), and clergy can be a valuable source of marital counseling and guidance (Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Regular religious attendance is inversely associated with domestic violence (Ellison & Anderson, 2000), marital infidelity (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007), and positively associated with marital stability (Call & Heaton, 1997). In their qualitative study, Marks and Dollahite (2001) found that religious communities offered social, emotional, spiritual, financial, and temporal support in times of need. However, they also found that faith communities often involve conflict and that the challenges related to religious community were reported more frequently than challenges with the other two dimensions combined (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). The same study noted that because the faith community is often like family, that it was especially hurtful when the faith community failed the participants or let them down—profoundly more than when other (less personal) institutions failed them (Dollahite, Marks, & Olson, 1998, 2002).

Another variation is that couples in which one spouse attended church but the other one did not attend were more likely to divorce than those in which neither spouse attended church

(Marks et al., 2008). The husband's religious involvement itself may become a source of conflict— in one study, when the husband attended religious services more often than his wife, the risk of divorce rose (Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009). Future research should pay heightened attention to similarities/dissimilarities in levels of religious involvement and commitment between husbands and wives. Faith community and parent-child relationship will be discussed next.

Religious community and parent-child relationship. Research indicates that, religious communities provide several valuable resources for parents raising children, especially when the couple shares their religious commitments. One study identifies family-level faith community involvement as “a noteworthy asset for healthy child development” (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2007, p. 33; Dollahite et al., 2002; Marks & Palkovitz, 2007). Children and adolescents learn values and model behaviors from their families and church communities, and often form their personal identities in faith communities (Stonehouse, 2006). Religious community is regarded as “the vessel” for child and adolescent's spiritual growth (Crawford, Wright, & Masten, 2006; Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartain, 2006). Research indicates that there is a positive relationship between adolescents' religious involvement and several positive moral and psychological behaviors, including “help[ing] them in knowing right from wrong, making good decisions, providing a sense of hope and purpose in life, motivating them to be moral and altruistic, and helping them get through hard circumstances” (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 138). A qualitative study of 74 highly religious families reported that the importance and influence of loving and serving others in the faith community was a primary theme as participants discussed the influence of religion in family life (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Religious communities encourage positive changes of parents and children, and therefore enhance better parent-child

relationships (Garland, 2002). However, as addressed previously, faith community may also add stress and strain to families when one spouse was over involved in church service or belonged to a different faith community. Further, intergenerational relationships may also be damaged or strained when conversions take place (Marks, 2005).

In summary, religious community often provides support to both marriage and family life. The relationship is not without risk, however, with disappointment, spousal difference, and intergenerational conflict sometimes reported (Marks & Chaney, 2006). Having discussed three dimensions of religion in connection with U.S. family life, we now focus on Chinese Christian immigrant families.

Chinese Immigrants and Religious Conversion

In this section, the following topics are reviewed: (a) China's religious and philosophical background; (b) Chinese immigrants in the U. S.; and (c) conversion to Christianity.

In traditional Chinese culture, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are regarded as the central religions or value systems, while Christianity is considered foreign and superstitions (Hunter & Chan, 1993). Since the enactment of the Economic Reform and the Open Door Policy in 1979, Christianity in China has spread quickly, along with the social and cultural changes and modernization processes (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Yang, 1998). However, many first-generation Chinese immigrants in the United States may face special stresses in assimilating the United States mainstream culture. To meet their spiritual, social, and psychological needs, many non-religious Chinese have become Christians and some Chinese Buddhists have converted to Christianity after immigrating to the United States (Chen, 2006; Zhang, 2006). Religious organizations play a vital role in converting Chinese to Christianity in general, and to evangelical Protestantism in particular, after their immigration to the United States (Zhang, 2006).

China's religious and philosophical background. Confucianism emphasizes morals and ethics, filial piety, and respect for elders and ancestors. This spiritual philosophy has been a part of Chinese culture more than 2000 years and is still valued by many modern Chinese. The influence of Confucianism is so salient, that Chinese values are often regarded as Confucian values (Smith, 1994). Confucianism and Christianity share many social and moral values. For instance, the core principle of Confucianism “ren-ai”, which is “love” in English, is similar to Jesus’ new command of love in the Bible (Yang, 1999). The virtue “filial piety” in Confucianism means children should respect their parents and elders, which is similar to the commandment “honor your father and your mother....” in the Bible (Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2). Many Chinese Christians believe that Confucianism is complemented by Christian beliefs. In other words, Confucian moral ideals can be best fulfilled through Christianity (Yang, 1999). “Confucianism is a system of moral values, whereas Christianity provides transcendent beliefs and spiritual guidance” (Yang, 1999, p. 154).

Like Confucianism, Chinese Taoism is also an important part of Chinese thought throughout Chinese history. Smith (1994) explains that *Tao* means *path* or *way* which has three senses: first, “Tao is the way of ultimate reality;” second, “Tao is the way of the universe, the norm, the rhythm, and the driving power in all nature;” third, *Tao* refers to “the way of human life” (p. 126). *Tai Chi* derives from Taoist thought and a great deal of people in modern China practice *Tai chi* to pursue physical, spiritual, and emotional health. Chinese Christians reject religious Daoism but selectively accept some notions of Daoist philosophy. The notion *Dao* in *Dao De Jing* (Daoist Bible) is similar to the notion of *Logos* in Greek, which is also appears in the book John in the Bible as the *Word*. A Chinese pastor, who was a famous student leader in 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest, asserts that the *Dao* is the same as the *Dao (Word)* in the Bible,

and *Dao De Jing* would help Chinese people to understand God and Christ. However, many Chinese Christians regard the Daoist rituals, spirits, and monastic system as superstitious and incorrect.

A third important Chinese spiritual philosophy is Buddhism which, like Confucianism, has ancient roots (more than 2000 years). Buddhist doctrine addresses the suffering of human beings and their frustrations. The cause of suffering is held to be desire. Buddhism teaches that human beings need to overcome desires and work toward individual spiritual fulfillment through progressive practices. The pathways of the spiritual fulfillment are “right knowledge, right aspiration, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right absorption” (Smith, 1994, pp. 74-75). Several of the doctrines of Buddhist are the same as the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments (e.g., Do not kill; Do not steal; Do not lie). However, there are significant doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Chinese Christians generally reject Buddhism without reservation (Yang, 1999). Yang (1999) lists ten contradicts between Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhists worship many gods, and they believe soul transmigrates according to cause-consequence retribution. The purpose and meanings of life are quite different from Christianity.

Upon its introduction, in China, Christianity was considered as a strange and a foreign religion by most Chinese people. It has been hard for Christianity to merge into China because “the Chinese have regarded Christian missions as an integral part of Western imperialism and Christian religion as spiritual opium and [a] means to conquer the Chinese nation” (Yang, 1999, p. vii). When China lost the Opium War in 1840 to Britain, the permission of Christian missions in China was a condition of unequal treaties that foreign countries made with China (Whyte, 1988).

Christianity began to spread in China. However, Christians were often persecuted because Christianity was perceived as “an alien implant” (Hunter & Chan, 2003, p. xiv). By 1949, there were still only about one million Chinese Protestants in China, less than 1% of the total population. Christianity was regarded as a Western power and influence, and most preferred a Marxist atheist ideology (Whyte, 1988). During the Cultural Revolution, religious institutions were closed and thousands of Christians were persecuted. All religions were to be eliminated from China (Hunter & Chan, 1993). In 1979 and the early 1980s, with the economy reform and open door policy, Christianity began to grow more quickly in China than other religions (Hunter & Chan, 1993), and Chinese cultural traditions and value systems were “interrupted, [and] even collapsed” (Yang, 1998, p. 251). Many Chinese were eager to examine Christianity and some eventually converted to Christianity to pursue a different life and ideology.

Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Acculturation is the process of adjusting to a new culture or society which involves potential changes in identity, values, behaviors, attitudes, interactions, and relationships (Bush et al., 2005). Acculturation is a stressful process for Chinese immigrants in the United States. One study reports that racial discrimination influences Chinese Americans’ health status at multiple levels (Gee, 2002). Racial microaggressions refer to “daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271), including Asian Americans (Nadal, 2011). Chinese immigrants experienced socioeconomic changes due to immigration, language barriers, racism, and challenges to social support systems (Yeh, Kim, Pituc, & Atkins, 2008). Next, I will discuss the challenges that Chinese immigrant families have experienced during the process of acculturation

in the United States, including identity problems, language barriers, relationships problems, and lack of resources.

Identity problems. Some Chinese immigrants in the United States struggle for their identity. Many may feel “ambiguous loss” (Boss, 1999) as a result of leaving their home country and not being fully accepted by the host country. Many experience a sense of “not belonging” and the pain of social isolation in the new environment (Bush et al., 2005, p. 316). This is one major stress that often places immigrant families at increased risk (Bush et al., 2005). Through studying Asian-America families, Ishii-Kuntz (2004) comments that “ethnic identity and psychological adjustment are important issues for all... Asian Americans” (p. 375).

Language barriers. Language plays an important role in immigrant families’ structure and parent-child relationship quality (Ishii-Kuntz, 2004). For many Chinese immigrants in the United States, the inability to read and speak English is a major barrier and another major stressor. The ability to speak English is related to the level of functioning in everyday life in U.S. society—including individuals’ employment opportunities and social life (Bush et al., 2005). The insufficiency of English language ability may lead not only to experiences of discrimination but also to conflict in intergenerational relationships, due to the reality that children often acquire new language skills more rapidly than parent and grandparent generations.

Challenges in family relationships. Compared to their parents, immigrant children often acculturate to U.S. mainstream culture more quickly. The conflicts are not restricted to communication but also involve the values and practices of the two quite different culture systems. The acculturation differences may influence nuclear family as well as extended family relationships (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Bush et al., 2005). The stress and change related to

migration and acculturation may also raise or exacerbate marital conflict. Marital conflict may also arise when the wives gain more independence or status (Bush et al., 2005).

Lack of resources. The lack of socio-economic resources and social network resources both influence immigrant family relationships (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). It is difficult for Chinese immigrants to access mental illness services (Chung, 2010). For Chinese immigrant elders, lack of resources, acculturation stress, language problems, and social isolation usually bring depression to them (Wu, Chi, Plassman & Guo, 2010). Chinese immigrants often cling to Chinese Christian churches for assistance in meeting their physical needs as well as psychological and spiritual needs (Yang, 1998, 1999). Chinese immigrant religious communities become an important resource for recent immigrants to learn English, find jobs, seek legal and medical services, and to meet other practical needs (Zhang, 2006).

Berry (2007) discussed several types of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. In this study, integration means when Chinese immigrants become an integral part of the United States while maintaining Chinese traditional culture. The integration strategy brings cultural diversity as well as positive psychological and sociocultural outcomes (Berry, 2007). Chinese Christian churches play an important role in this integration process.

Conversion to Christianity. Yang (1998) analyzed the importance of social and cultural contexts both in China and United States as an ecological factor in Chinese conversion to Christianity in the United States. Through qualitative interviews, Yang (2005) investigated Christianity is rapid growth in China, even under communist rule. Since the “economic reforms and open-door” policies in 1979, churches have been allowed to open. Official churches have been controlled by Chinese government, yet house churches, evangelists, and foreign

missionaries have been active in many areas of the country (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Yang, 2005). There are many people in China willing to learn about Christianity, and some of them eventually convert to Christianity (Yang, 2005). Many Chinese students and scholars from the People's Republic of China have converted to Christianity in the U. S., especially after 1989 the student-led democracy movement (Wang & Yang, 2006; Yang, 2005).

In a micro-level study of Chinese immigrants' conversion, Zhang (2006) described the extensive resources devoted to evangelism through his ethnographic fieldwork that may be an important influence in Chinese immigrants' conversion. He found that church's children's and youth programs usually attracted non-Christian parents who converted after their children. The fellowship groups and cell groups also have attracted non-believers or "gospel friends." In addition, evangelistic conferences and camps as well as Christian books, periodicals, and audio and video materials play a significant role for native Chinese and Chinese immigrants to find rational meanings in evangelism and to eventually convert to Christianity (Zhang, 2006).

In a study of Chinese conversion to Christianity in the United States, Wong (2007) found that conversion was heavily influenced by: (1) The immigrants' interactions with highly welcoming Christians; (2) Extensive contact with church communities; (3) Identity change; (4) The experience of psychological distress and crisis; (5) New freedom to search for meaning in life; and (6) Personal encounters with God. Research has shown that conversion to Christianity helps immigrants to form new identities (Yang, 1999; Zhai & Stokes, 2009). The Bible teachings, for instance, being an "alien" on the earth but a "citizen" of heaven may help both immigrant parents and their children to find new identities through and in their faith (Zhai & Stokes, 2009).

Chinese faith communities play a vital role in conversion and also provide new and adapted models of parenting and family life (Chen, 2006). Fenggang Yang (1999) posits that both traditional marriage and family life are highly valued in the Chinese culture, and the values match well with the beliefs of conservative Christianity. These shared philosophical values, as well as the strong cultural pull and network of other immigrant Chinese families, usually make a Chinese faith community more attractive to Chinese immigrants than other faith community options. Chinese immigrant parents usually rely on the Chinese Christian church for meaningful and attractive youth activities, in an effort to keep immigrant youth away from potentially undesired effects of American society that are viewed as damaging to traditional marital and family values (Cao, 2005; Chen, 2006).

Summary of Review of Literature

In conclusion, previous research indicates that religious beliefs and practices typically have a positive relationship with marital satisfaction and stability. Interfaith marriages generally have more conflict and instability than same-faith marriages. High church involvement correlates with marital quality particularly when shared, and religious community is often a positive resource for marriage and family life. Conversely, there are some costs and challenges regarding religious faith, including over involvement, disappointment, and conflict.

Chinese immigrants are an important part of the U.S. population and it is reported that Christians comprise approximately 25% to 32% of the Chinese population in the U.S. (Chen, 2006). Therefore, religious beliefs, practices, and communities are a significant consideration when studying Chinese immigrants' families and marriages. However, very little is known about the relationship between religiosity and marriage for Chinese immigrant families, especially the meanings and process of religious faith in the lives of Chinese Christians in the United States.

The current study intends to investigate the relationships between religion, marriage, and family life using an in-depth qualitative approach.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Religion is a sensitive topic for many Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Most data on religion and Chinese immigrant population have been drawn from sociological point of view, and focus on religious conversion. “Close at hand” research on religion and Chinese immigrant marriage and family life is rare, especially research that examines meanings and processes. In the present study, qualitative methods were applied to focus on descriptions of lived experiences, the processes, and the meanings of marriage and family relationships among Chinese immigrants (Daly, 1992a; Gilgun, 2005). These experiences, processes, and meanings are exceptionally difficult to capture and convey with quantitative methods (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992).

Qualitative Methods and Family Research

Qualitative methods. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative research is “about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings, as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations” (p. 11). Qualitative research is concerned with processes, meanings, and understanding rather than outcomes or products (Daly, 1992a). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. That is, the researcher physically goes to the people, settings, or sites to observe or record behavior in its natural setting to get first hand data (Patton, 2002). Gilgun (1997) explained that qualitative approaches include grounded theory and analytic induction, ethnomethodology, feminist theory, critical theory, family therapy research, and textual analysis (narrative analysis, cultural studies, and ethnography).

Inductive and grounded theory methods involve developing concepts and constructing theories that are generalized from the specific data. These approaches serve as the basis of most qualitative research (Gilgun, 1997), and will be used in the present study.

Objectivity. In qualitative research, objectivity “means openness, a willingness to listen and to ‘give voice’ to respondents, and hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do, and representing these as accurately as possible” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). Even so, Slife and Williams (1995) posit that “it seems unlikely that at any stage the research process is objective” (p. 194). Triangulation is the one way to promote objectivity (Trochim, 2001, p. 20).

Triangulation. The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. According to O’Donoghue and Punch (2003), triangulation is a “method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data” (p.78). Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation: *data triangulation*, *investigator triangulation*, *theory triangulation*, and *methodological triangulation*. Patton (1996) suggests that researchers seek to achieve triangulation of data. In this study, data triangulation method is employed. I had three “triangulated” data sources: the perspectives of the wife, the perspectives of the husband, as well as my first hand observations and field notes as a researcher. Using three sources allow us to understand marriage and family life from multiple perspectives rather than relying on a single informant (Handel, 1996).

Generalizability. In qualitative research, generalizability is not a major purpose. Qualitative researchers usually use proto typical cases or a purposive sample instead of large random sample. The goal is to make contributions to theory, policies, programs, and interventions (Gilgun, 2005). In this sense, rough generalizations can be made to similar populations (Johnson, 1999). But this can only be done tentatively and by implication because the depth, not the breadth, of acquired knowledge is focal (Marks’ personal communication, 2011).

Grounded and inductive theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the purpose of grounded theory is to “build rather than test theory” (p. 13). More specifically, the aim is to build a “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (p. 12). The procedures of data analysis are to “identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory” (p. 13). Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal and transactional relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, and then test or prove it (Creswell, 2009). Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are the techniques and procedures to examine and interpret data, and finally core concepts and themes emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These concepts and themes are, where possible, integrated to form a micro-level or mid-level theory (Burr et al., 2012).

Qualitative research on families. Some qualitative researchers have posited that there is a natural fit between qualitative methods and the study of families. Qualitative methods are suitable to understand the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of family members (Daly, 1992a). Qualitative methods “give us windows” to study family process, family members’ experiences, and family relationships (Daly, 1992a, p. 4).

One qualitative tool that can serve as a helpful window is a narrative approach where family members are encouraged to share meaningful family experiences through stories (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; Marks & Dollahite, 2011). Family stories illustrate “a family principle, define their identity as a family unit, or in some other way describe or underscore the meaning of family life” (Garland, 2002, p. 81). In the following pages, I will discuss how the above elements and qualitative methods will be applied in the present study.

Sample

The sample consists of 22 Chinese Christian couples with at least one child. Only four couples have one child, and the rest of the couples have two or more children (which is significant in contrast to “One Family, One Child” policy in China). The husbands’ ages range from 28 to 66 (mean age = 48), and the wives’ ages range from 28 to 65 (mean age = 45). Most of the participants in this study held advanced graduate degrees (18 had Ph.D. degrees, 16 had M.S. degrees, 8 had Bachelor’s degrees, and 2 are Technical School graduates). Among the 22 couples, two couples came from Hong Kong, eight from Taiwan, and twelve from mainland China. Interviews were conducted in Metropolitan areas of Louisiana and Texas, however, many of them moved to Louisiana from other states of the USA, and six more families moved to other continental States within one year after their interviews. In short, this was a highly mobile sample.

For the current study, a purposive sample, highly religious, married couples with one or more children, was recruited. “Highly religious” couples are operationally defined as couples where: 1) the pastor of the couples’ church referred them as ideal participants in a study on highly religious families, and 2) both the wife and the husband self-identified as “highly religious” (Marks, 2004). These couples are likely to perceive their faith as meaningful and to have a desire to share rich narratives and insights regarding faith and marriage and family life. Thus, we may better understand the meanings and motivations that underlie why some Chinese immigrants tend to be drawn to and involved in Christian religion. The purposive sample does not allow generalization. However, the findings may offer relevant insights that relate to similar populations (Johnson, 1999).

Procedures

Recruitment of participants for this study commenced with recommendations of a senior pastor of a Chinese Christian church as well as snowball sampling strategy. Only one recommended couple did not participate (they reported they did not “feel comfortable”). Therefore, among 17 potential participant couples, 16 couples were interviewed (a 94% response rate) during July, 2006 and March, 2008. The following six interviews were conducted during November, 2009 and August, 2010 including two samples from Houston area.

The purpose of the study was described to the participants, and an informed consent form was acquired (Appendix A). The participants completed a demographic summary (Appendix B) which included their age, educational level, age and gender of children, and the percentage of their income that they contribute to their church (many left this blank). Participants are also asked to record the hours per week they devote to faith-related activities. Where possible, interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes, but several in the participants’ church, and two in researcher’s home.

The husband and the wife were interviewed together. This approach, as discussed by Lambert and Dollahite (2006), allows couples to remind and correct each other in order to obtain richer data. Moreover, the bias of one family member may be balanced or checked by another family member (Daly, 1992b). Also, as in Marks et al. (2008), the wives and husbands were encouraged to “each respond to every question and to comment on or add to the other’s response” (p. 175). In most of the cases, both the wife and the husband actively responded to each question.

To understand the meanings and the processes of marriage and family life, intensive interviewing is usually “the method of choice” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.19). Consistent with

this view, I conducted intensive qualitative interviews that were semi-structured and open-ended. The participants were asked twenty-two questions (Appendix C) about how their faith interacts with their marriage and family life. The first 10 questions address the relationship between faith and marriage, and the second part of the interview schedule addresses: (1) religious practice and community and family life, (2) religious beliefs and family life, (3) faith and parent-child relationships, (4) faith and surrounding culture, and (5) challenges of faith and family life. Because this study is part of a larger research project on the same topic, the interview questions were already tested and verified through interviews with more than 200 families. Interviews lasted about 90-120 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded. I transcribed all the interviews and double-checked them for accuracy. The processes of transcription lasted 8 hours to 20 hours per interview. A professional third party proofread each interview and discussed some concepts in translation from Chinese to English. Copies of the transcripts were also given to the participants as a member check. All participant names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect identity.

Analysis

A blend of analytic induction method and grounded theory methods (including open coding and axial coding) has been used in the analysis of data (Gilgun, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory means that theory emerges from the data as data collection and data analysis are completed. Therefore, coded data are “likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide” to developing new theory and ideas, as opposed to the traditional model of testing pre-existing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.12).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding is the first analytic step where the data are closely examined line-by-line. Concepts are identified based on the words and phrases

in the interview data. After open coding, axial coding that connects larger with categories to their subcategories will be performed. During the first step, I also make a Numeric Content Analysis of the Open Coding concepts in each interview (i.e., Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008). The high frequency concepts and the salient concepts have been recorded. A list of core concepts from the interviews is narrowed down. Core themes are identified, less salient themes are eliminated, and in some cases, similar themes are combined.

Each interview has been sent back to the participants for a check of accuracy and to offer an opportunity for any necessary supplementation. I have examined the interview transcripts again and again to make sure that final, reported themes are supported by sufficient data.

Qualitative Validity

Validity. “Validity can be defined as the best available approximation to the truth of a given proposition, inference, or conclusion” (Trochim, 2001, p. 20). Guba and Lincoln proposed four criteria for evaluating qualitative research: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Trochim, 2001). After explanation and application of these four criteria, in the present study, a statement regarding researcher reflexivity is also presented.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the congruency of the researcher’s interpretation of participant statements and the perspective of the participant. Although bias is likely inevitable, the researcher should strive to reflect the participant’s perspectives rather than their own biases (Gilgun, 2005). This effort is reflected in the question, “Are my interpretations faithful to what my informants are telling me?” (Gilgun, 1992, p. 28). Strategies to improve credibility include: *persistent observation* (Dienhart, 1998), which involves maintaining the researchers’ first-hand involvement throughout the interview process; *peer debriefing* (Schwandt, 2001), which means researchers’ colleagues or friends, who familiar with qualitative research procedures, examine

the researchers' work for excessive biases or partialities; and *member checking* (Schwandt, 2001), which means the researcher takes back his/her work to participants to check whether or not the data and/or the interpretation of the data is a valid and accurate representation of the participants' initial thoughts.

Transferability. Transferability is a qualitative parallel to generalizability, or the degree the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to the other contexts or settings (Trochim, 2001). Transferability in qualitative research is implicitly determined by the reader, not explicitly by the researcher (Marks' personal communication, 2011). Phrased differently, the degree and scope to which the results of a qualitative study can be generalized to broader contexts, depends on the reader, not the researcher.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the consistency and accuracy of the measurements (Trochim, 2001). In the current study, the same interview schedule of twenty-two questions regarding religion and family were used to keep the same structure across interviews and families.

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others (Trochim, 2001). Strategies for enhancing confirmability are checking and rechecking the data, describing negative instances or counter examples, conducting a data audit, and reporting reflexivity as a researcher (Daly, 2007; Trochim, 2001).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity relates primarily concerns to how personal biases influence how qualitative (and quantitative) researchers inquire and interpret. Qualitative researchers should pay attention to their own position relating to cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of their own perspective and voice, as well as to the perspective and voices of the participants

(Patton, 2002). Reflexivity is a way to minimize or at least acknowledge a researcher's distortion and bias. Ideally, this disclosure provides a "check" on the researcher, and motivates her to more carefully acknowledge "truths," particularly those her biases might make her averse to. Reflexivity promotes examining of values and expectations that may influence both the conducting of and the results of a study (Daly, 2007). Attention to subjectivity may be especially critical in a qualitative study where data is presented in words because the researcher's experiences influence his/her work of interpreting data and reporting results, especially when the researcher is an "insider" or a member of the group they study (Marks & Dollahite, 2001).

In presenting this study, it is important that the reader understand that I am an insider and a member of the group. I am an immigrant Chinese woman. Furthermore, I am married and both my husband and I are highly involved Christians. We have three children, and we converted Christianity after we came to the U.S. Therefore, my personal values, beliefs, and experiences may influence my research. Also, because of my own positive experiences, I acknowledge a predisposition to view religion as primarily valuable and salutary for Chinese immigrant families.

In order to counter and balance my (positive) insider's bias in collecting and interpreting the data and reporting results, I included questions regarding negative, stressful, and challenging aspects of both faith and family life in the questionnaire, and these data will be reported as well. This effort to present both positive and negative elements of the religion and family connection should add complexity, richness, and balance to the study.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Research on religious faith and family life has increased significantly over the last two decades. Findings generally indicate that religion has moderate to substantial influence on individual, marital and family life in the United States.

Chinese immigrants are an important part of the U.S. population, and religious faith matters to some Chinese immigrants. In this section, I examine how Christian faith influences participants' marriages and family lives. The strengths and challenges associated with religious conversion and involvement are also examined.

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to better understand the lived experiences, the processes, and the meanings of the interface between faith and family life. More than a dozen themes emerged during data analysis; however, I chose to present the three major themes: (1) conversion to Christianity, (2) faith practice, and (3) faith and parenting. Each theme is accompanied by supportive and illustrative qualitative data.

Theme I. Conversion to Christianity

Chinese immigrants in the United States often have unique experiences in the journey of their faith. About 78% of the participants were converted after they came to the United States. Among the participants, eight couples converted before they got married, and 14 couples converted after they got married. Many of the participants spontaneously addressed the process of their conversion in my first wave interviews (from July, 2006 to March, 2008). In the second wave interviews (from November, 2009 to August, 2010) I explicitly asked for stories about participants' conversions. The related emergent subthemes are: 1) the process of conversion, 2) the challenge of conversion, and 3) the change of ideology.

Subtheme 1. The Process of Conversion

The motivation and process of the conversion were different among the participants. In

terms of cultural background and context, it is vital to note that God and religion are not common conversation topics in China. One couple from mainland China reported that no one talked about God to them when they were in China. For both of them, their first conversations about God occurred on foreign soil.

Xi (W = Wife¹): There were some people who talked about God to us when we first went abroad....

I: Did you know God when you were in China?

Xi (W): I heard something but not clearly, and nobody talked about God to me. I went abroad in 1994, and was baptized in 1996. There were always people preaching to us, and there were Bible study groups. We accepted God together, but he was baptized in 2000.

I: Were there any obstacles during your conversion?

Cao (H = Husband): In 1993, I went to Sweden, someone preached Gospel to me in the subway. “How are you today?” I said “Good.” “Have you ever heard about God?” “No.” He gave me an English version Bible. I was alone (My wife didn’t come with me), so I had some time to read the Bible from then on. When I read the New Testament, I felt it was good—the words in the Bible. Morality in China collapsed, and there were so many things unfair in China. The one who did badly had good fortune and the one who did well had bad fortune. I struggled with why people turned like this?! You would be treated unfair and would be criticized when you told the truth. I was upset about this. When I read the Bible, I felt comfortable and found a theoretical support that we should be honest.... Some people came to God when they had some difficulties, it was not the case for us, and we came to God when everything was smooth with us. I felt that God had so much grace on us

Like Cao, during the process of modernization in China many Chinese people were disappointed with the moral crisis and corruption, as well as with the increasingly materialistic milieu in modern China. However, most Chinese have had little exposure to Christianity, their thinking has been dominated by the atheist education and ideology of Communism. When some Chinese came to the U.S., they had more increased opportunity to doubt, to explore, and to convert. Some students and scholars sought for “more,” and eventually found a home in Christianity after they came to the U. S. (Wang & Yang, 2006). As reported previously, both Xi and Cao were influenced by the words in the Bible. Another husband, Qin from

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout chapter 4, ‘W’= Wife and ‘H’ = Husband.

Taiwan, explained:

I came to believe in God after I read the four Gospel books of the Bible. I thought it over for a long time and I thought a lot. I read the Bible for my children...and I thought about the Bible verses and explained the Bible verses to them. The Bible...gradually became my life style.

People strive to pursue what they perceive as having meaning and value in their lives (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Xie, Xia, and Zhou (2004) in their study of Chinese immigrant families investigated participants' experiences about transitions to new roles, identities, and to finding meaning in life through faith. The above examples illustrate through faith, Xi, Cao, and Qin found new, faith-based meaning in their lives. Similarly, Ming and Hu stated how they found meaning in faith and chose to go to a Chinese Christian church for the sake of their kids.

Ming (H): We came to know God after we came to the USA. Pastor Tian of Chinese Christian church preached us as students about God's words very eagerly. I think it is [easy] to know God freely in USA. First, we went to both Chinese and American church. Later, we chose to go to Chinese church for it was good to rear children in the good language environment.... We both were baptized on Thanksgiving in 1995.
Hu (W): Because Pastor Tian usually came to our house, I wanted to have a try to go to church after I rejected it for a long time.... I felt good that people in church took care of each other. Pastor Tian's devotion moved me deeply. I changed my mind. I thought that people need faith wherever they go.... Church has a great influence to children on how they grow in the right pathway from a young age. When they grow up and leave us, they have a [moral] standard about how to be a human being.

From Ming and Hu's report, we see that the influence of a pastor can promote conversion. Other participants reported that they came to know God and convert primarily through a Bible study group.

Li (W): An American lady invited me to attend their Bible study. My neighbor also told me about the Gospel. A Chinese girl whose father is a minister brought me to Sunday worship.... My daughter liked to go to the Bible study group very much; she was looking forward to go every time. So I read the Bible and went to study the Bible each time. There was a brother who said to me that you should go to worship God on Sunday, it's not enough to read the Bible only. Later I went to an American church. Half a year later, Fan [my husband] went to the Bible study and Sunday worship too.

Another couple, Shen and Shi, shared:

Shen (H): I was not a Christian when I first met my wife. However, I accepted Jesus as my Savior before we got married. Religious beliefs and values, therefore, did not influence how we met, but they certainly had influence on our marriage decision.

Shi (W): I grew up in a Christian family and I have been a Christian since childhood. Shen and I were college classmates. I brought him to church when we were in college after which he came to America for graduate study. I first introduced him to a campus Bible study group. It was in the Bible study group that he eventually accepted the Christian faith.

In Shen and Shi's case, with the influence of a close relationship, and through Bible study group, the husband Shen came to believe in God. The Christian faith reportedly influenced their marriage decision, and has continued to influence the couple during their 42 years of marriage. Like Li and many other converts, Shen was introduced to Christianity through a Bible study group.

Zhou, a mother of two, also converted to Christianity, and shared her story during her interview:

I did not know God before I came to the U.S. I knew there is [a] God, but I didn't know where He is. When I was in China, my family worshiped our ancestors and burned sacrificial paper; I didn't join them. I locked myself in my room and felt they were doing wrong. It is true that they should respect their elders when their elders are alive [but I do not worship my dead ancestors]. [For me], believing [came] from listening. I was in a seeker's class for a long time. I doubted about the virgin pregnancy and Jesus' resurrection.... I could not accept [them] rationally. From pastor's sermons and books, I realized that the virgin pregnancy and [Jesus'] resurrection were not difficult [for] God. [When] I just came here from China, I had bitterness in my heart. Something bothered me and I could not endure [it]. I knew I needed God during the seeker's class. I needed God to share my burden. I accepted God under that situation. I experienced God and I had peace in my heart, which [a] non-believer could not understand. I was set free when I delivered myself to God. I had no bitterness any more, I did not hate anymore.

Conversion is a complex and challenging process in one's spiritual journey. Zhou first knew God after she came to the U.S. It was difficult for her to accept the new faith because she doubted the "truth" in the Bible. After a long time of seeking, Zhou eventually overcame the challenge, "accepted" and "experienced" God.

Mei's conversion was comparatively simple. She reflected:

We are the first immigrant generation. We have many stresses. When I attended the seminar of Pastor Tang, I thought, “This is very good and I need it very much.” My thought was simple, “I accept [this] as long as I know this is good. I will act it out [to] know this is good.” Someone doesn’t act it out, although he (she) knows very much (about faith in their mind)—the faith is dead because they only care about themselves, without love in their heart. [You must live it out].

For Chinese immigrants in the U.S., conversion is impacted by the social and cultural contexts in both China and the U.S. The participants expressed that their conversions were influenced by sources including clergy, church members, and their spouses. Gospel Camps, the Bible, religious related books, and Christian media also had reported influence on participants’ conversions; however, the experiences of conversion were different among the participants. For some, there were significant challenges associated with the process of conversion. It is to these challenges that we now turn.

Subtheme 2. The Challenge of Conversion

Many of the participants experienced struggles and challenges during the process of their conversion. For example, a wife, Jia, shared how she converted to Christianity by overcoming ideological challenges:

I had prejudice [against] Christianity because we received our education in China. I thought this [Christianity] was too far away from us. [I thought that] the purpose that the pastor preaches was just for offerings. I could not believe. After one or two times, I didn’t want to go to church anymore. Later, a friend of mine gave me audio cassettes of Pastor Stephen Tong’s sermons. I thought it was reasonable after I had listened to them. I studied philosophy and philosophy tends to ask why.... I started to read the Bible from then on. I admired the Bible’s teaching, but I could not believe the miracles. Jesus’ teaching is simple and deep: It is [so] simple that everyone can understand; and it is deep if you dig into it.... There was one time Pastor Tong preached at a Gospel Camp in Singapore. When Pastor called, Ban [my husband] went to the front part because he wanted to believe [but] I could not believe. I stayed alone and I resisted it in my heart because I could not understand.... However, there was a voice in my heart speaking to me consistently, “You don’t want to go? Do you want to be alone all the rest of your life?” I could not sit still and I went to the front, too. I started to believe from that moment. When I submitted myself [to God], I was full of joy that came from heaven into my heart. I had a feeling of returning home.

Jia's conversion was a long struggle. For some participants like Jia, the atheist education they received in mainland China was an initial barrier to their religious conversion. Christians comprise approximately 25% to 32% of the Chinese population in the U.S. compared to about 7.25% in China (Chen, 2006). That means the majority of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. (about 70%) still retain their original spiritual beliefs or atheist status. For some participants, conversion was reportedly a long struggle, perhaps due to their atheist educational roots when they were in China.

Hu, a wife initially refused to convert because of her experience with a Christian aunt. She and her husband, Ming shared:

Hu (W): In China, my aunt was a missionary. Before she graduated from [the] biology department of Fudan University in Shanghai, she was introduced to church. She thought the faith from the church was good and she changed her worldview and ideology. Then she went to Seminary after she graduated and wanted to be a pastor or missionary. After the Communist took over of China in 1949, she left Shanghai to evacuate, but she still kept her faith. She hoped to preach to us little kids when we were young. Due to the social environment, we didn't want to listen to her. Her family regarded her as abnormal, because she refused to find a job after she graduated.

Ming (H): Her aunt was very religious.

Hu (W): I thought she was abnormal and too "strong" when I was young. So I strongly disliked and rejected Christianity. When we came to the USA, someone invited us to go to church, but we were not interested in it. Pastor Tian came to our house.....

Ming (H): Pastor Tian was her aunt's teacher. Her aunt was invited back ... after the Cultural Revolution.

Hu (W): Because Pastor Tian usually came to our house, I wanted to have a try to go to church after I rejected [it] for a long time. After a while, I noticed that people in the church were normal. Their thoughts, their attitudes to each other, and their spirit of devotion were much better than people in China, and they didn't ask for rewards. I felt good...people in church took care of each other. Pastor Tian's devotion moved me deeply.... I changed my mind.

Due to Hu's aunt's "abnormal and too 'strong'" ideological behavior toward Christian faith, Hu "strongly disliked and rejected Christianity" when she came to the U.S. With the influence of her pastor, and after she had noticed that "people in the church were normal," and "they took care of each other..." Hu changed her mind and embraced a Christian ideology.

In China, under the control of Chinese Communist Party, Christianity was regarded as a Western power and influence, and most Chinese preferred a Marxist atheist ideology (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Yang, 1999). During the Cultural Revolution, religious institutions were closed and thousands of Christians were persecuted. After 1979, with the Economic Reform and Open Door policy, Christianity began to grow in China (Hunter & Chan, 1993; Yang, 1999). Many Chinese immigrants who grew up under the communist regime not only faced the new challenge of acculturation in the U.S., but also the new challenge of ideology. Similar struggles and feelings were also reported by the participants during their conversion processes. The transition from an atheist to a Christian worldview was reportedly difficult for participants, due in large measure to their atheist education from a young age in China.

Zhou, a wife from mainland China, explained her doubt about her new faith at the commencement of her conversion process:

We were very cautious at the beginning. We knew nothing about faith, we were curious about church, about what they do. After a while, I noticed they had no other intention. They preached Gospel and hoped someone [would] accept [the] Christian faith because of love. They had no bad intention. I was cautious when pastor and his wife visited us, and we were cautious in talking because we did not know what they wanted us to do. Later, we went to church and Bible study group, and gradually understood that the church is to show God's love according to the Bible.... [Now], we have God to rely on in this world and we have hope of eternal life.

At the beginning, Zhou and her husband doubted, and were "cautious" because they "knew nothing about faith." Zhou's struggle with the new faith was presented previously, in which she stated, "I doubted about the virgin pregnancy and Jesus' resurrection.... I could not accept [them] rationally." In her second excerpt, Zhou mentioned the word "cautious" several times. However, she and her husband were also "curious" to find out more about church and what people do in church. Finally, after they "understood that the church is to show God's love," they reported that they found "the true God" and "hope of eternal life." For Zhou, her change in

environment seemed to facilitate changes in her ideology, her worldview, and her attitude toward life. This seemed true for many participants.

Subtheme 3. The Change of Ideology

Religion has been defined as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament, 1997, p. 34). Conversion means the change of ideology, the values, and the attitude toward life. From atheist to theist or after they “found the true God,” many participants reportedly found new meaning and purpose in their life. When the participants were asked to define faith,” one couple responded,

Cao (H): Looking up to God in faith. This is not only faith, this is life. Believe in Jesus, you should reflect His life. If you accept Him honestly, godly life will be show in you. Faith is very important. I hope life will go on and on. Be patient, may God bless us and our future. It is wonderful to leave this world and go to heaven to be with God. I don’t know if I can go or not. How will it be when I meet God someday?

Xi (W): I have hope. I believe in God. Nobody can help me [but Him].

Cao (H): Look up to God. Someone else could notice your change.

The husband, Cao, brought up the notion “faith is life,” which is significantly different from the ideology of non-believers. Cao and his wife Xi said that to have faith is to reflect God’s life.

Another couple similarly mentioned their belief that “faith is life”:

Lei (H): Faith is the principle [that directs] all aspects of our life. We believe God will lead us, protect us, and give us grace. Before, we did not care about others, and now we know how to be human and to love others because we have faith. We will look up to God when we have difficulties.

Zhou (W): Faith is living, Faith is life. What we believe is living, not just to keep doctrines. This is our experience.

Lei (H): Faith tells us how to live our life....

Lei and Zhou reported that “faith is living,” “faith is life,” not just “doctrines.” They reported that faith is the guiding principle of their life.

A husband, Ban, responded:

The core of our belief is the relationship between you and God Jesus Christ. Firstly, Jesus is your savior who died for you. Secondly, He is your Lord of your life who

governs all your life. We are his servant. And thirdly, He is a brother of us. We have a deep and close relationship. This is a relationship of life, our personal relationship with Christ the Lord. This is a life connection.

In a study of Christian conversion, Lee (2008) stated “Conversion is more than an association with a particular church or religion, but is concerned with a transformed identity primarily linked with one’s relationship with God” (p. 239). Ban similarly stated that “the core of our belief is the relationship between you and God.” Ban regarded faith as “a life connection” with God, “a relationship of life” which includes both relationships with God and relationships with others.

Almost all the participants mentioned that a fundamental element of their faith was the belief that “God is love.” Some participants expressed the belief that if one has a good relationship with God, s/he will have a good relationship with spouse and others.

When asked “which of your religious beliefs have the most influence on your family life?” Cui, a husband and father of four who emigrated from Hong Kong, responded:

I think, “Love one another.” God’s commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” It’s not easy to love one another. It’s easy to say but difficult to do.... [This] is our big challenge. We don’t [always] like to care about others. [But] our Christianity is a religion of love.

For Cui, the golden rule of “love God” and “love one another” is the most influential and most challenging belief for his family life. In the book *Sacred Matters*, the authors posit a general principle that the amount family members *wisely* love God influences family processes and outcomes positively (Burr et al., 2012). According to Burr et al., authentically “loving God” should be manifest in “sincere behavior and action” (p. 174). However, loving God *unwisely* can be destructive when it is misunderstood or misapplied in practice. This will be discussed later.

To live for God, not for themselves, was the articulated purpose of many participants' lives. Yi, a husband, reported:

We should do everything according to God's teaching. God said Jesus is the head of the family. I let Jesus be the head of our family. For example, love your wife as yourself, I try my best to do it, although I do not do 100%. God's words will influence all my life. In fact, God's words have great influence on us; [they are] the compass of our life.

In summary, the motivation and process of conversion were different among the participants. Some reportedly experienced challenges during conversion process. However, after these Chinese immigrants' conversions, they also reportedly experienced a change in worldview—they found deeper purpose and meaning in life, and their marriage and family life also changed. The change was gradual and participants mentioned the ongoing need “to learn and to change.” We now turn to the related theme of faith practice.

Theme II. Faith Practice: to Learn and to Change

Dollahite, Marks, and Goodman (2004) have identified three dimensions of religious beliefs, religious practices, and faith community. The relationship between the first dimension of religious beliefs and Chinese immigrant Christian marriage has been discussed in Lu, Marks, and Baumgartner (2011), and the influence of the third dimension of faith community on Chinese immigrant Christian families has been submitted as an article to a peer reviewed journal (Lu, Marks, & Apavaloiae, in press). In this study, the relationship between the second dimension of religious practice and Chinese immigrant Christian families is examined.

Religious practices refer to “outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or a less overtly sacred practices or abstinence that is religiously grounded” (Dollahite et al., 2004, p. 413). Literature indicates that religious practices can influence marriage, children, and parent-child relationships (Marks et al., 2011). As we more closely examine why, how, and process questions relating to religious practices' influences

on Chinese immigrant Christian families, three major themes are presented: prayer, Bible teaching, and Sunday worship. Through prayer, scripture study, and Sunday worship, the participants reportedly learned and changed according to God's teaching. One participant, Qin offered his insights about the relationship of faith and life:

As a Christian, faith and life should be the same. We are learning and changing, changing and learning all the time. We try to understand the Bible gradually, we have this faith, and we meditate [on] God's words all the time. I spend much time to read the Bible and [in] meditation. I read the Bible and pray regularly. I also listen to other's opinions and explanations of the Bible. I continuously try to meditate, to learn, and to change.

Subtheme 1. Prayer

The participants reportedly expressed the importance of prayer in their faith life. "We know God is speaking to us when we read the Bible and pray," one participant stated. Here, two related subthemes are presented: 1) prayer: a way of communication, and 2) prayer: a way of coping.

Prayer: A way of communication. According to the participants, prayer is the most important faith practice to maintain a good relationship with God and others. Research indicates that religion is reported to be significant personal and marital resource for many religious persons both in everyday life and with marital and family difficulties (Butler, Scout, & Gardner, 2002; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Marks, et al., 2005). Next, prayer will be addressed and illustrated at personal, marital and family levels.

Personal: Prayer is "the best way for my spiritual growth." Proposition 1 in the book *Sacred Matters* reads, "Experiencing parts of the human experience as sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence" (Burr et al., 2012, p. 14).

Some participants saw prayer as a source of personal connection with God. Bob, a husband, said that it is completely different before and after he came to believe Jesus: "I pray to

God for everything.” Another husband, Qin from Taiwan, stated he comes back to his home from another city every weekend, and during the long distance drive he communicates to God through meditation and prayer. He said:

Another important thing is to pray for one another. I pray for myself and our family when I have a long drive. Prayer is a way of communication with God. Look up to the Lord, be close to God; and God will guard us.

He further explained his struggle to change, to submit and obey God:

Our family backgrounds are different. I change myself gradually. I will do what God wants me to do. I will change if God wants me to change. [I will] obey and submit to God. Sometimes I react when I can't help myself. I will go to the yard to calm down, according to God's will to suppress myself to the bottom. Now I spend plenty of time on driving, so I think over and over how to do something to improve my family and marriage. I left Taiwan and came to U.S.A. for my family. It's difficult to change my temper right away. I also have my own ideas and opinions. I try to suppress my old self and improve myself to meet God's standard. Before, I [thought I was] higher than Him, now I try to let Him be higher than me.

The participants frequently expressed that the “old self” or “sin” is their greatest internal obstacle to live “God's spiritual life.” It is reportedly a process for the participants “to learn and to change,” and “to suppress [the] old self to meet God's standard.” From their collective view, one way for them to overcome this challenge is to pray. A couple from mainland China shared:

Xi (W): It's very important to have a good relationship with God. If we have a good relationship with God, we will not disobey God's will. Because we fear God, we will not do what God does not like us to do. We will pray that we try our best to follow God's words.

Cao (H): If we have a good relationship with God, we will have a good relationship with each other. It will be easy. If we don't have a close relationship with God, we will have some quarrels.

Xi (W): A good relationship with God means God-centered and a bad relationship with God means self-centered, which means [you] always think about self and neglect the others.

Many participants emphasized the importance of having a good relationship with God. Like Cao said, if both he and his wife have a good relationship with God, they will have a good

relationship with each other, and also with others. Cao also explained the importance of attending prayer meeting at his church: “This is the best [path] way for my spiritual growth, and is also a big challenge.” He further stated:

There were several times I wanted to give up [going to prayer meeting], but God provided a way for me. God sacrificed for us, I do not dare to withdraw. I usually pray [to be] able to go to prayer meeting. It is 45 miles from my workplace to church. I was very tired, and I could only eat dinner after the prayer meeting. Sometimes there is traffic. I know this is an invisible fight: Satan [wants to] prevent me from going to prayer meeting. If I do not go...I will begin to look [at] other people in a picky, [negative] way. My temper will come back again.

Reportedly, God is Cao’s strength in his spiritual battle to “not deviate from God’s true path.”

Forty-five miles distance for prayer meeting is a challenge for Cao both physically and spiritually. He further shared that there are only two nights in a week, Monday and Tuesday, which he could stay at home with his family. He goes to Wednesday’s prayer meeting, Thursday’s Bible study at local university, and then Friday’s fellowship, but he said he had joy in his heart despite being out three nights.

Prayer, which was viewed by many participants as a personal connection with God, was often the fundamental practice mentioned in the participants’ lives. Research indicates that one’s relationship with God is associated with how one relates to others, including one’s spouse (Simpson et al., 2008). This connection leads us to our next topic.

Marital: “Through prayer we examine the relationship between us and with God.”

Proposition 2 in the book *Sacred Matters* states: “*Experiencing parts of family life as sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence in families*” (Burr et al., 2012, p. 16).

Prayer is not only a way of communicating with God, but also a good way of communicating with each other when couples pray together. A wife, Yan, reflected:

I think, for me, praying together is very important, even though...we don't do it as much as I want to.... When we were dating, we actually started to pray together, sometimes even on the phone. We both lived in a dorm then. But we actually started praying together. That was something very important to me because we experienced this closeness, not just to God, but with each other. Sometimes you just know what each other are thinking while you are praying together. Sometimes it is hard to express yourself, but somehow when you are praying together, [he will] just express something that may not have come up before. [As a result], I've found [out] something about his struggle, or his inner thoughts, just by praying together. So, I think, to me, that is maybe the most special [practice], being able to pray together, because we just have this closeness that I think cannot be [achieved] in any other way.

As Yan posits, through praying together, the couple experienced closeness “not just to God, but with each other.” Yan might know her husband in a deeper way, because some deeper thoughts might come up just during their praying together—a resulting in deeper spiritual connection with God and with each other. The following narratives illustrate how prayer helped the participating couples deal with their marital relationships through spiritual connection.

A husband, Lin (H): Prayer is very important. Most of the time [in a disagreement], you want to change the other side, it's not good [to pray] just for our own will. You should pray for your spouse [and] for God's will ... [and to] love God more and more. Put God at the first place. I pray for her a lot for her physical strength, I hope that she can undertake the burden, she is very busy recently, but she serves in our church as usual. [I pray for her].

A wife, Liu (W): I have been praying for him for many years. In my prayer I ask God to draw him close to God. I can see God is working on him gradually, not immediately. I can see that he is changing, love is changing him. I think God wants me to learn to be patient and to continue to pray for him.

Both Lin and Liu reported praying for their spouses' spiritual relationship with God. Li emphasized praying for “God's will” not for “our own will.” One research study indicates that prayer for the partner was correlated with relationship satisfaction (Beach et al., 2008). Another qualitative study found that shared religious faith as well as shared level of religious faith is

important in many quality marital relationships (Lu, Marks, & Baumgartner, 2011). A participant, Zhou, a wife, stated:

I believe the words in the Bible. Marriage is established by God. If both the husband and wife have the same faith and same level of faith, if they both have a good relationship with God, they will have a good marital and family relationship.

The power of prayer in marital and family relationships has been examined by both quantitative and qualitative research (e.g., Beach et al., 2008; Marks, 2008). Prayer seems to help many couples to be close to God. The relationship involving God is like a triangle—the three parts being the husband, the wife and God at the apex. If both the husband and wife have a close relationship with God, the couple is more likely to have a close relationship with each other (Butler & Harper, 1994; Lu et al., 2011). A couple from mainland China similarly expressed the importance of the husband and wife praying together.

Jia (W): Prayer is very important in a marriage. On the one hand, we pray for each other, on the other hand, we would see our own insufficiencies through prayer, especially when we had conflicts with each other.

Ban (H): It is very important for a husband and wife to pray together.

A couple from Taiwan, shared,

Qiu (H): We serve God together at church. We have been serving God at the Chinese Christian Church for many years. We have different gifts that God gives us; we serve at different position[s], supporting each other. We pray together every night; through prayer we examine the relationship between us and the relationship with God.

Zhu (W): We have the same faith. When we prayed together, God's words entered our heart. Through the pastor's preaching and fellowship, the Holy Spirit lets us know our insufficien[cies]. We may not always [be] right, and we saw our weaknesses.

Both of these couples mentioned they would see their own insufficiencies through prayer. They reportedly integrate their faith in their daily life through “praying for each other” and “praying together every night.” Through the couples’ self-examination, their marital relationship has been transformed. In spite of personal reflection, notice that Qiu and Zhu repeatedly used “we” and

“our” in the narratives, implying a non-adversarial “oneness” of their spiritual life. The unifying effect of prayer extended from the marital level to the familial.

Familial: “Our whole family prays together.” Family prayer can be an important religious practice. As mentioned earlier, this is not only a communication with God but also provides indirect communication among family members, often promoting more positive family relationships. Previous research findings indicate that family rituals correlate with family satisfaction, and the meaning of the ritual is typically more important than the ritual itself (Dollahite, Marks, & Olson, 1998; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Mahoney et al., 2001). However it is a challenge for some families to pray together. One participant, Wen, a wife, stated:

We do have family Bible study— [we] read the Bible together, and we do pray. There are a lot of families they really don’t pray at home, they only pray at church. I think praying at home helps our faith grows as a family.

Family worship may help family members to practice faith in everyday life, and also may enhance marital and family relationships (Lee et al., 1997). Another family, Zhang’s, practices family worship every night.

Zhang (H): My wife usually reminded me of reading the Bible and praying. Now, we have family worship every night ... [and] our whole family prays together.

A wife, Zhu, shared a faith-related activity that is a top priority in their family life, reflecting her family’s meaning of “faith is life.” By reading the Bible and praying together every night, Zhu and her husband strived to pass their Christian faith on to their children. Zhu said:

The Bible’s teaching is ... that the whole family serves God together. We read the Bible and pray because we have this faith. We taught our children in such a way. We hoped that they [would] go to church. [Even] how we celebrated holidays, became [sacred] traditions of our family. [For example], we have testimonies at church on Thanksgiving Day Our family’s life is based on our church. [At home], we read the Bible story and prayed together every night.

Another wife, Xin, cited:

The most important [thing] is the peace of a family. There is a Chinese old saying: Harmony at home is the key to prosperity. It's very important to pray for each other and to remind each other [to pray]. Husband and wife are the closest partners, which stay together every day. Prayer is very important, extremely important. We pray for each other.

Chinese traditional Confucian ideals share some Christian beliefs: both emphasize family relationships. For many participants, the whole family praying together is a very important faith practice. Family prayer seems to improve the family's cohesion, and also benefits the family members' spiritual development. Prayer seems to provide possible pathways to personal, marital, and familial harmony and peace. Next, we will examine how prayer served the participants as a coping resource.

Prayer: A way of coping. Religious coping is defined as “a search for significance in times of stress in ways related to the sacred” (Pargment, 1997, p. 32). Pargment, Koenig, and Perez (2000) identified five functions of religious coping: meaning, control, comfort, intimacy, and life transformation. In a qualitative study of religion and health among African Americans, Marks et al. (2005) found that: “(1) nonreligious persons are more likely to use unhealthy coping strategies, especially alcohol and drug abuse; (2) religious persons have quantitatively and qualitatively superior social support networks via their ‘church family’ and (3) prayer is a meaningful and valuable coping resource” (p. 467). The participants in the present study also regarded prayer as an important way of coping with stressful situations and relationship problems.

Coping with stress. One husband offered this view about stressful situations: “When something bad happens, it is with God's permission. [If we turn to God], the marital relationship will be better than before. Husband and wife will understand each other better.” This framing of crisis as an opportunity may help the couples to adopt a positive attitude toward stressful

situations (Boss, 2002). This couple strives to find meaning and closeness when “something bad happens.”

For many, religion is regarded as central to the meaning making system throughout one’s life, particularly during stressful situations (Park, 2005). In addition, Church congregations can also provide spiritual support and comfort through prayer. A couple who came from China to Canada years ago, shared:

Bing (H): Even now, the pastor from Taiwan and minister from Canada frequently call us, [and] pray for us.

Na (W): They pray in God’s words which usually touch my heart and set my heart free.

For the couples in this study, their way of religious coping is reportedly different from their coping before conversion. A wife, Zhou, said:

[When we had] no faith, when we had something happened, we would use man’s methods and the world’s attitudes. We have faith [now], and ...we think of God and pray to God first, no matter what happened.

Several participants had experienced being laid off their jobs and prayed to God for help, including Zhou’s family:

Zhou (W): We were not sad and said we would go back to China. Several times we [also] wanted to go to Canada. We prayed to God, “God, you have authority, wherever you bring us, we will go; if you want us stay here, please prepare a job for us.” Sometimes it is easy to say, but not easy to do. I can understand [when] someone is weak when something has happened to them.... [However, we believe] the Bible’s words: “There is a time to be born, there is a time to die, and there is a time for everything.” God is in charge. He will not delay.

For Zhou and her husband, their way of coping with stress was to “put their faith in God,” “pray to God,” and “ask for God’s will.” The sense of a God who is in control helped them stand firm in difficult times. Another husband, Yi, stated:

Thank God, we have no great storms [right now]. [However], there was a time when I was laid off. I had peace in my heart because of God’s words. At that time, I still served

at our church. Sisters and brothers in our church didn't know that at all, because I had joy and peace in my heart.

In a large scale study, Krause (2010) found that individuals who have a strong sense of God-mediated control are more likely to find a sense of meaning in life and be more optimistic qualities that correlate positively with individuals' reports of well-being. Faith is a very important coping and resilient resource for many—particularly for highly religious people who view religion as most important aspect of their lives (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011; Marks, 2004). Another participant, Cui, a husband, reported:

I have many examples [of coping through prayer]. If something happened that I could not undertake, I would kneel down to pray to God, and then I would have great peace in my heart. My eldest daughter was very nervous and afraid when she was in medical school. Our whole family would kneel down and pray for her whenever she had an exam. She felt great peace in her heart. God let us have this dependence. In the year of 1985, I was laid off, my children were young, and we had a mortgage to pay for our house. I was so sad at first. [However], because we have faith, we could calm down. God said I am your stone, your energy. Two weeks later, I found a better job. I think God is faithful. Once I was almost died in a car accident [but I was spared]. I have many such stories that let us see God's hand in our life.

The above participants' examples offered the same message: God is dependable, is comfort, and the source of peace in the participants' stressful times. Although Zhou, Yi, and Cui had all experienced the hard time of being laid off, they reported that God was their strength to pass through the difficult times. Lu, a husband shared "When I pray to God, I believe there is one God and I can get help from Him. My only way [to help] is to pray to God if I have something difficult. I cannot do anything else." A wife, Zhang, did not blame God and ask God, "Why?" Instead, she prayed to God for help. She said, "No matter what happened, it is God's will." Zhang, a wife, explained:

When I was a student [in college], my father died accidentally in 2002. I couldn't sustain it, [it seemed too much]. Half a year later, my sister had an accident. I prayed to God to support her, I wouldn't [have been able] to lose her. My classes were difficult and I had

to work. I couldn't suffer anymore. So, I prayed to God, "You never abandon your children; you must provide me a way out." My prayer helped me to pass that period of difficult time. Later, my sister recovered, she admitted that she did something wrong. She recovered her faith in God. God controls everything, maybe God led my sister to believe in Him through this accident. If there were no God in my heart, I could have lost my faith. No matter what happened, it is God's will.

A couple from mainland China first believed God because of the adversity of losing their first child.

Zhen (W): When we lost our first child, I believe it was God's almightiness that helped us to pass through [that trial]. In fact, in our daily life, we need peace and watch from God. We believe everything [that has] happened, no matter good or bad, is in God's hands. We deliver our burden to God.

Lin (H): God's words and God's people helped us deal with the difficult time.

For these participants, prayer is an expression of their faith in God. To believe God is in control also reportedly contributed to the participants' well-being. Later in Zhen and Lin's interview, the wife concluded:

The journey of my faith is the process of my gradually growing up. We experienced pleasure, bitterness, and doubt. But we finally experienced that only [when we] come back to God do we have peace and meaning in our life.

Another couple experienced a stressful time when they found out that the ultrasound of the baby and the mother's blood pressure were abnormal:

Zheng (W): Thanks to God. Brothers and sisters gave us big encouragement and [Sun's] faith was encouragement to me. We prayed together all the time. God held us. We will never forget it.

Sun (H): If we had not believed in God, it would have been terrible.

Another family had a similar experience,

Wu (H): When we had our son, the ultrasound showed that there was a shadow at his heart. It seemed abnormal. But we did not think and worry about it. A child is God's gift. The doctor suggested [we] do a special test, and we didn't do it. Because we know God has His own will, we had peace in our heart. God Himself helped and comforted her. I comforted her too. God's grace is sufficient for us. Because we believe [we are] in God's hand, He will give His children the best, we had peace in our heart.

Both the couples expressed that their religious faith helped them to pass through their difficult times. In the first narrative, the wife Zheng said “we prayed together all the time.” She also shared that the congregational spiritual support was her family’s coping resource. In the later example, Wu believed what “God gives is the best.” He again mentioned God is in control in their lives.

The biggest issue and the challenge time for another participant, Wan, was when she found out that she was pregnant because they didn’t have insurance and they could not afford a pregnancy or child.

Wan (W): I remember when I was pregnant, I heard a sermon on-line saying how God provides [for] all your needs according to your belief in Jesus Christ. I remember that morning, I was praying. I don’t know where the money is going to come from, but God gives me the baby, and He is going to provide the way for it. I remember [my husband] saying, “God is not going to give us a baby and abandon it. We’re going to get through this....” But anyway, we can see how God answered our prayers in providing for us, and even though it was not answered before she was born...But God was showing us a few months after she was born that everything was taken care of. She is our miracle baby. God answered our prayers.

These examples show that prayer helped participants cope and find meaning in difficult times. Some reported that their perceptions and experiences of stressful situations were different from their pre-conversion days. As one participant stated, “[Now], prayer is my only way.”

In sum, many participants in this study reportedly believed: (a) God is in *control*: “everything that has happened, no matter good or bad, is in God’s hands”; (b) God provides *comfort*: “we have great peace in my heart,” and (c) God gives *hope*: “we can see how God answered our prayers in providing for us.” In addition, the participants reported that prayer is also a way of coping for relationship problems, discussed next.

Coping for relationship problems. The participants stated:

“There are differences among the Christian families.”

“Not everything is good after conversion.”

“There are Christians who quarreled and got divorced. We should think how to adjust through our faith. We [should] pray and seek God’s guidance on how to do better.”

Research shows that there is 31% divorce rate among Christians who have active Church attendance (weekly basis) in the United States (Wright, Zozula, & Wilcox, 2012). Compared to more than 50% divorce rate overall in the U.S., this difference is significant—although far from perfect. Religious practices of prayer and forgiveness are reported to have positive correlation with marital satisfaction and stability (Dollahite et al., 2004; Fincham et al., 2008). The following narratives highlighted how prayer helped participant couples to cope with problems in their marital relationships.

A husband, Sun, stated:

Prayer is very helpful. When we have conflicts and arguments, prayer can calm us down. God leads us through prayer to recognize our sin and to improve our marriage.

Another wife echoed:

Liu (W): When we had some disagreements, we prayed together, confessed our sins before God, and learned to forgive each other.

We have mentioned earlier that “sin” or “self-centeredness” was reported as a major obstacle that hinders one’s relationships, from marital, family to community. The following participant narratives similarly expressed that prayer helps to confess their own sins, to forgive each other, and to improve their marital relationships—in short, to be less self-centered and more relational.

Xi (W): When we got angry we tended to do something to hurt the other person. But small things would influence [our] direction. I would pray to ask God’s mercy: “Please let me be able to love the other side,” even when I got hurt. [This has helped].

According to Cao and Xi, God saved them from divorce:

Cao (H): We did (mention divorce), not only just once or twice [either].

Xi (W): Many times. I was very angry and pain. We live a hard life in America, we have too many stresses. On the other hand, how you view your faith is very important. Satan

is also fierce, as well as the world's lure, and all kinds of pressures we must face. Therefore, we should put God at the first place so that we could cope with all the pressures. I would pray to God, [and] cry to God, and ask for strength. My experience is that God will answer your prayer, as long as you pray according to God's will.

Cao and Xi reported that religious faith helped them to cope with internal challenge of their sin, the external challenge of "the world's lure," and the stressors and pressures that face new immigrants in the U.S. (Lu et al., under review). The wife, Xi, posited that to pray according to God's will was the prerequisite for God answering one's prayer. Another couple, Li and Yang, similarly expressed that it was God who saved their marriage from brokenness.

Li (H): Our marriage was saved by God. We don't know where we would be now if we had not known God. We would have already divorced. This is the most important thing that we should thank God for. God saved our marriage.

Yang (W): I tried all kinds of my own ways, to complain and to blame. Sometimes [the pain and hurt] hid in my heart and sometimes it burst out [However, after our conversion, our faith in God] became the foundation of our marriage. We didn't understand the meaning of marriage before, and after we believed in God, we actually understood the meaning of marriage. The more we know God, the more we understand the meaning of marriage. As I grow up in spirit, I submit myself before God. This is a very important [key] to make the marriage stable. Considering many broken marriages, they don't deal with their own problems [and faults], but leave the conflicts [and blame] to the other side. Blaming another [person] is sin. On the contrary, we should confess our own sins before God, and carry our own cross, which is very important for building a stable marriage, and then the marriage is on the proper way.... God lets me know my own faults.... We may have conflicts later, but how we deal with it will be different from before, because our character has been transformed.

Religion shapes individuals' ideology, life style, well-being, and a sense of meaning in life

(Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Wong, 2007). The wife, Yang, stated that they actually

understood the meaning of marriage only after their conversion: "the more we know God, the

more we understand the meaning of marriage." Yang's husband Li expressed his way of solving marital conflict:

As for me, I must come to God directly by praying and confessing my sins, asking God to make me have more mercy and forgiveness. This is very helpful to us when we have conflicts.... The problem is communication between us, speaking without salt seasoning. We have no conflict about our belief but [we argue over] everyday life. Communication

and the way of expression sometimes come from worldly flesh. Basically it's the problem of our life, we should ask God to help us solve.

Prayer and forgiveness seem to provide pathways to the participants' stable and happy marriage.

They still have conflicts; however, the way they deal with them was reportedly different from the way they did before they converted, and the conflicts diminished. "To confess our own sins before God" was the key to solve marital conflict according to Li. Like many participants, Li mentioned that good communication is an important factor in a strong marriage. Li's wife, Mei, wanted to write a book about her 20 years of miserable marriage, but after her husband's conversion, their marital relationship was transformed by their new faith. Now the way they solve their conflicts is different. They reflected:

Qin (H): My way [to resolve conflict] is prayer. I ask God to suppress myself, my anger. I still pray to God if I can't help myself.

Mei (W): We have a big difference in our individual characters. He is irritable, I am tender; he is organized, I am not. Qin is always very busy, so sometimes he didn't know ... [about] the situation of our family and children's development; his situation and mine. We had many conflicts before, but because of God's teaching, I would remember [God's] words, I would pray. I would have grieved before, I would have been frightened by his loud voice. I had always cried. Qin didn't listen to my explanation. Now he has changed his temper, and our conflicts are less and less. It was God who changed him. I couldn't change him for 20 years since we have married.

Qin (H): God will give you grace upon grace if you submit to Him. [I believe it is] very simple: Obey and submit to God. He will ... change you gradually.

The above narratives illustrate the power of prayer. According to the Mei (W), she and her husband had many differences and conflicts before her husband came to believe in God. Her husband Qin had a bad temper and it was difficult for him to change. Qin confessed, earlier in his interview, that even his mom could not change him. However Qin changed after he came to believe in God. Qin specifically believes that he must "obey and submit to God" and that as Qin does God will "change you gradually."

The following story echoed that "the couple that prays together, stays together":

Cui (H): Marriage is very holy, established by God. We should respect marriage. Sometimes we have difficulties and quarrels, and we have some conflicts and arguments. Because we have faith, which is the basis of our marriage, we can resolve the problem. We pray together. When we kneel down together before God, many conflicts can be resolved.

For many participants, prayer is an efficient way to cope with stress as well as to deal with marital conflict. In addition to prayer, Bible teaching was also reported very important practice to the participants' marriage and family life, as discussed next.

Subtheme 2. Bible Teaching

Ways Bible teaching reportedly changed the participants' marriages and family relationships will be presented in the following subthemes: 1) changing the perception of marriage—"marriage is oneness"; 2) transformation of marriage—"do not let the sun go down while you are still angry"; and 3) the challenges of practicing what you preach.

Changing perception of marriage: "Marriage is oneness." One perception that reportedly changed after the participants' conversions was that "marriage is oneness," according to the Bible. A wife, Shi, described her 42 years of marriage:

The Bible teaches us "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). In this "one flesh," or oneness, the boundaries between "you" and "I" should be fused together, and there shouldn't be the distinction of "yours" and "mine" between a husband and a wife.

In his book-length work, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in American Today*, Cherlin (2009) identified two contradictory cultural models in the United States. On one hand, most Americans reported that they strongly support and value marriage; on the other hand, people strive to pursue personal growth and fulfillment, and they embrace "expressive individualism." Cherlin argues that the prevalence of the latter value has contributed to the high divorce rate today in the U.S. In contrast, Shi (W) emphasizes oneness rather than

individual needs. It should be “you” and “I” fused together, according to Shi. Several participants offered the same idea.

Zheng (W): There are straightforward teachings about husband and wife in the Bible. For example, both leave the parents and become one. The husband should love his wife and the wife should submit to her husband. Many chapters of the Bible mention it. This gives us rules about the relationship between husband and wife. We are trying our best to do as God’s teaches ... God has His own standard.

A couple, Ban and Jia, also shared,

Ban (H): Husband and wife is oneness. In Genesis of the Bible, God made woman from a rib of man’s body, which was called bone of bones and flesh of flesh. A marriage unites a man and a woman. If you regard your spouse as a part of your body, you will treasure her more and will not regard her as an outsider. This is a very important belief.

Zheng mentioned the Bible’s rule in a marital relationship: husband should love his wife and wife should submit to her husband. Ban’s view of “oneness” in the marital relationship was held by many couples, and helped them approach their relationships in a positive way. A husband, Ming, similarly commented:

As Christians, we practice one husband and one wife in a family. When they get married, they have a vow, no matter rich or poor, no matter ill or healthy, they stay together no matter what happened. After conversion, we know we are the oneness, and we are more harmonious than before.... We take responsibility in our marriage.

Ming’s and his wife’s willingness to take responsibility in their marriage has likely contributed to their stable and happy marriage. Another participant concluded, “The Bible says God created us; the man and the woman get married and became oneness not only in flesh, but also in spirit.” This belief seemed to influence the participants’ marital relationships by enhancing their commitment.

Transformation of marriage: “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

For many participants, a relationship change followed the perception change. One participant stated that a couple should forgive and understand each other: “Do not let the sun go down while

you are still angry.” This Bible verse, Ephesians 4:26, was mentioned frequently by participants, including a couple who had 42 years of marriage. They further asserted, “The Bible’s teaching always reminded us to deal with our family relationships.”

The following narrative illustrates the supportive role of the Bible’s teaching in another marriage:

Xi (W): I think there are many teachings in the Bible about marriage, which are the rules we must abide by.

Cao (H): When we had quarrels during our stay in Germany, she usually stayed [in the] bedroom reading the Bible and praying. We had some difficulties in marriage before our conversion, but we changed a lot after our conversion. Now, we are doing well in our marriage and other aspects. God watches over us in our family.

Xi (W): Sometimes [people] hurt each other, or do not know how to go on. If we have faith, we look for God’s will and learn from the other Christians. This is the big difference. There are explicit teachings about marriage in the Bible. *I looked in the Bible for everything about marriage.*

For the participants in this study, Bible teaching is regarded as the guidance and the governance for marital and family relationships, and also as a coping strategy to solve their marital problems.

For many couples, there was reportedly a big change before and after their conversion. Xi (W) stated that she “*looked in the Bible for everything about marriage.*” A couple from Taiwan

similarly commented:

Qin (H): In first Corinthians chapter 13, I usually think of the verses about the truth of love: “Love never fails” and “Love is patient.” This encouraged me a lot. And there are many teachings about marriage in the Bible.

Mei (W): God emphasizes unity. The two that come from different families join together; they have different opinion[s]. Man and woman have different opinion[s], so they will have some friction, which is normal in a marriage. This will be good if the friction makes the two parts understand each other better. The Bible reminds us not to let the sun go down while you are still angry. You should talk about it if you have some disagreements. You should not mind what he may have said or may have done before. I think this is very important in a marriage.

Qin (H): Since we believe Him, His Word is the truth, it is the principle of our family life. He teaches us how to live our life. We follow God step by step. I am simple, our family follows God, we will have weakness and we may make mistakes, [but] we will come back through reading the Bible, and we will find answers from the Bible. This

helps my family, myself, my wife, and my children. I will look [to] the Bible if I have something I don't understand. The Bible is the basis, the principle of our life.

"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry," Mei (W) mentioned, citing a Bible verse that other couples also mentioned. She offered three principles in a good marital relationship: first, good communication between the couple is very important; second, conflict provides an opportunity for the couple to understand each other better; third, in marriage, one must forgive and forget. Like Xi, Qin (H) mentioned that the Bible is "the principle of our family life." He continued to share that he came to believe God after he had read the four Gospels in the New Testament. Qin concluded, "The Bible reminds me of [God's will] and gradually became my life style." The Bible also motivated Qin to teach his children directly with the Bible verses which will be addressed in detail in the theme "Faith and Parenting."

The Bible teaching reportedly helped the participants keep their marital relationships stable. The following couple illustrates the importance of studying and applying the Bible teaching as a faith practice in their marriage.

Zhu (W): Sometimes there are conflicts in a marriage, but we have faith, we go to church, and then we would stand firm by God's words through the Bible's teaching.... We would not make small things severe. God has grace; God's words remind us of our incompleteness. There is testimony in a marriage that we are all weak; we are all sinners. I learned something from marriage and I began to grow up. I have had new experiences with the Bible's teachings. When we understand God's will, God will also help us solve problems.

Qiu (H): A bad example is that the world's customs may influence us, such as more and more affairs out of marriage, and divorce. Because we believe in God, these ideas will not function on our body, heart, and spirit. We know that these are not God's pleasure.

For Zhu (W) and Qiu (H) and other participants, the Bible's teaching helps to solve marital conflicts and helps them to not deviate from God's way. A wife, Zhan, shared how the Bible's teachings kept her and her husband together.

Chapter thirteen of the book 1st Corinthians has had great influence on me. I just married him when I came to the United States. At the beginning, we had many conflicts and I

posted Bible verses to the wall: “Love is patient, love is not self-seeking” and “Do not let the Sun go down while you are still angry.” I would reconcile with him after we quarreled. We might have departed from him if I had not these beliefs.

In their article *The Threefold Cord: Marital Commitment in Religious Couples*, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) posit that perceiving God in their marriage contributes to a couple’s marital commitment. Zhan’s story illustrated the Bible verse “a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, KJV). Again, she mentioned her belief, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” This belief reminded Zhan to “reconcile” after quarreling. Another couple offered their insights that God’s teaching is very helpful for them to deal with their marital relationships:

Li (H): God’s words help us come out of ourselves. We do not concentrate on ourselves. Sometimes we are the same as old selves, but God’s will is to let us come out of ourselves, to think about something from the other’s point of view. So, God’s words are helpful to our marriage.

Yang (W): We should look up marital problems from God’s will, not from our point [of view].

“God’s will” and “God’s words” helped many couples to deal with their marital conflicts and even reportedly saved some marriages from divorce. The above couple continued to share how the Bible’s teaching helped them to deal with conflicts after their conversion:

Yang (W): We had big conflicts, but it is most important for me to come to God. We had conflicts after we have believed in God, but [our Christian] belief is really helpful. This is a process that has very close relationship with my spiritual growth. God let us know gradually what the problem was. I tried all kinds of my own ways, to complain and to blame, to hide anger in my heart, and sometimes to burst out. God gave me much help. The most important lesson I learned is to come to God directly and ask God why we had these problems, and God lets me know the faults of mine and where the key problems were....

Li (H): As for me, there are two ways: Firstly come to God directly by praying and confessing my sins.... Secondly it is the Bible’s teaching: Listen quickly, speak slowly and anger slowly. Anything that comes from worldly flesh is not pleased by God. The Bible says: “In your anger do not sin” “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” and we should care for a wife’s weakness and so forth. The problem is communication between us....

Several couples mentioned that communication is a central problem in their marital relationships; however, they learned from the Bible's teaching how to better deal with relationships in diverse contexts including family, workplace, and community settings.

Lei (H) and Zhou (W) stated that their marital relationship is much better than before with the help of the God's teaching.

Lei (H): I think marriage is established by God. We learned how to deal with marital relationship from the Bible—God's words. We are trying to do according to the Bible's teaching, for example, how to love her husband as a wife and how to love his wife as a husband. When we two have conflicts, we look for God's words. We are better than before.

Zhou (W): Much better I think. The belief that Jesus died for us has great influence on us. The Bible talks about the marital relationship. The husband should love wife, would die for his wife. Lei is doing well; he would like to give up himself. He took good care of me when I was weak.

Lei (H): ... We have God's words, and our marriage is more stable.

The Bible's teaching reportedly changed participants' perceptions about marriage and marital relationship. Both in China and America, divorce is regarded as normal. Lei (H) later claimed that "with their marital vow based on God's words," Lei and Zhou's marital relationship is much better than before: "our marriage is more stable."

Jia, a wife talked about the importance of the belief of "equally yoked" in a marriage.

Jia (W): To me, the most important belief in a marriage is that you should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. After our conversion, what we think and talk every day is the same. If one is a believer and the other one is not, they go in different ways; how would they go together and have a common [walk]?

For Jia and her husband, because they have the same faith, they have a common walk, a common way. In the following narrative from later in their interview, Jia used "we" six times as she described their harmonious spiritual life.

We understand well about God's teachings. Life should be better and better. We do not mean materially but spiritually. We should be joyful more and more in our life. Sometimes we misunderstood the Bible's teaching, with too much service at church [one

can] neglect one's family life ... [but] God will bless you If we know God's teaching and like to obey; it should be better in a marriage.

The idea Jia offered here is that if the couple understand and obey God's teaching, they will have a better marital relationship. However, Jia also mentioned the challenge balancing one's church service and family life.

The Bible teaching reportedly influenced the participants' marriage and family life in a predominantly positive way. They changed their perceptions about marriage and gained better strategies to resolve marital conflicts. The Bible was often a coping resource in the participants' difficult times; however, there were also challenges in applying Bible teaching, addressed next.

When the Bible is misunderstood or misinterpreted. Challenges reportedly arise when the Bible teaching is misinterpreted or misapplied; for example, the headship issue. Many couples I interviewed offered the insight that it would be harmful if the teaching that "the husband is the head of the family" was misinterpreted. Wu, a husband from Hong Kong, stated: "Our pastor taught us that it was male chauvinism if the husband requires the wife to obey him in everything no matter what it is. It is misunderstanding of the Bible verse." Zhu, a wife from Taiwan said, "We should not choose a special sentence to defend ourselves. This is misapplied if a husband suppresses his wife with this just for his own benefit and authority.... They have both responsibility and obligation." She later explained her struggle with this biblical passage:

The head of the woman is the man in the Bible. I struggled for a while. If [my husband] is right, I will submit to him. [But] why should I submit to him if he is wrong? I couldn't understand and disagreed. Then I asked a pastor, he did not answer me. Later, I found the pastor was wise because there are so many things that we could not realize by human reason. Although there are things that you disagree or are difficult for you to obey reasonably, we should do them according to God's Words. We have God's blessing if we do what God wants us to do. You establish your husband in [a supportive] way. After being established, he may do better in leading the whole family in other aspects... the relationship of our family will be better, which is also God's blessing. God's blessing will be upon you as soon as you submit: [the husband first to God, and the wife to the husband.]

Like Zhu and some other participants, Hu (W) struggled to understand and apply the biblical headship teaching. She addressed the process of her perception change:

Now in China, they promote the equality of man and woman. Everybody wants to be the head of a family. I do not like what the Bible says, husband is the head of the wife, and the wife should submit to her husband. (Woman is usually stronger than man in China). I was not used to it at the beginning, I thought it over and realized that no matter a big family or a small family, from up to down, there will be the need of an order about who is the head, and who is the helper in a family. [I have moved] from reluctant to accept the belief. Now I think this is very important.

With the influence of Chinese culture, Hu did not want to embrace the belief of man's headship at the beginning. Later, she realized that there was a need of order in a family and accepted the teaching. Another wife, Xin, mentioned the importance of the Bible teaching about headship in a family, and wanted to pass this belief on to her daughter:

The Bible teaches us that the husband is your head As a wife it's not easy to accept. I told my daughter, who has obtained her Ph.D., and is searching for a job, "Do not compete with her husband." Our belief on marriage is that the husband is your head. It's also surely that the husband should love the wife, this will benefit marriage.... Some [couples] are very smart and capable, but they rely on their own understanding, and they divorced. The Bible's teaching is very useful and has great influence on marriage.

Xin later offered the idea that headship issue, if misapplied, is a factor that has contributed to the divorce rate in Christian community.

A husband, Ming, mentioned another misunderstanding of the Bible that may lead to divorce:

Some people misunderstand the Bible. We should not separate [God's words] and get extreme. Husband loves his wife and the wife submits the husband, which are reciprocal. We would not emphasize either one [while ignoring the other]. Read the Bible and properly understand the Bible holistically. This is our life long lesson.... We should read the Bible and understand the Bible properly.

Ming emphasized God's word, and its proper interpretation. The example Qiu and Ming offered resonates with an idea of Burr, Marks, and Day (2012) that loving God *unwisely* can be

destructive to a family. The faith then may become a kind of spiritual abuse and turn to “toxic faith” (cf. Arterburen & Felton, 2001). It is harmful when some of the Bible teachings such as male headship or loving God are misunderstood or misapplied. Ming concluded, “If one could not love his parents, his wife and his children, he probably could not do God’s work well.” An additional challenge is practicing what you preach.

Challenge on practice what you preach. Most of the participants expressed their struggle of practicing God’s teaching in their daily lives. Zhan (W) said, “The greatest obstacle to me is [that] faith and life [are often] apart. Why cannot we [better] practice our faith in our daily life?” A couple from mainland China similarly discussed their struggle to live “God’s spiritual life”:

Li (H): [M]y spiritual life is not mature enough. My old life is the [greatest] obstacle of our marriage—it’s not good. [The] old life, flesh, and sins are not pleased by God. To let [my] old self die and to live God’s spiritual life is the biggest challenge to me.
Yang (W): I think [my biggest challenge is having] faith in God and in him [Li]. To be the best marriage, we should have God’s character. Sometimes I have said negative words to hurt [Li], which shows a lack of faith and love.

Qin, a husband, also expressed his struggle:

It’s difficult to change my temper right away. I also have my own ideas and opinions. I try to suppress my old self and improve myself to meet God’s standard. Before, [I thought] I was higher than Him. Now I am trying to let Him be higher than me.

Li and Qin regard the “old self” (pre-conversion self) as a big challenge in their marital and family life. Qin tries to “suppress” and “improve” himself to “meet God’s standard.” Although the change is “difficult,” he is trying to “improve my family and marriage,” and to “meet God’s standard.”

The participants also mentioned another challenge – paying tithing (or one one-tenth of their income) to their church as they practice their faith. Only half of the participants disclosed church as they the percentage of their income they donated to their church (the mean

contribution was 9.09% from the participants' reports) but many mentioned the accompanying struggle. A couple from mainland China shared their experience of struggling with a one-tenth offering:

Xi (W): It was [a challenge] at the beginning. This is a process. God's grace is sufficient.... If I offer one tenth, God still gives me nine tenths. God's grace is abundant.

Cao (H): It is [a challenge for me]. It was budget[ing at first]. My salary was low at the beginning with four family members and a newly purchased house. I tried to do it according to God's words. We had ... no wealth (but no lack) [either]. I become more and more bold. My faith has been becoming stronger and stronger.

Xi (W): [It was] a challenge for him, but not for me after I got a job.

Cao (H): [At first], I had to support the whole family, [now she has been blessed with a job too].

Xi mentioned several times that it was God's grace for her to get the job, and emphasized that this blessing occurred after they began paying a 10% tithe. A husband named Fan also mentioned a gradual process for spiritual growth as did Xi's husband Cao.

Fan (H): Serving God may improve one's spiritual life. For example, it was difficult for me to offer (10%) when I just believed God at the beginning. After a while, when I served God, it became an ordinary thing, I know this is something I should do. God's blessing will follow. It's good for young person [to sacrifice], they have the chance to serve God and stay close to God. [By giving], they will grow up quickly in the spiritual life.

Many participants regarded church offering as a challenge, but also referenced God's accompanying blessing. Mei and Qin are an example,

Mei (W): I think religion is not just going to church on Sundays and service at church.

Qin (H): For example ... [many] Americans are very generous [with their] church offerings. I think God gives them much more. For offering money to God [and] not to someone [else], God's blessings [to them will be] huge in the future. [If] you[r] offering [is] lesser, God give you less.

Mei (W): I am not reluctant to [give an] offering, it's [a] budget [issue].

Qin (H): If we go ahead following God, God's blessing will follow us. Don't ask God to give you first. That's impossible, you give out and God will bless you.

Making a one-tenth offering was a challenging practice for the participants; however, many participants viewed it as an action that elicited God's blessing "when you give out and God will

bless you” (see also, Marks, Dollahite, & Dew, 2009). There is another kind of challenge that comes from the world as the participants practice to walk on God’s words.

Challenges from external world. From the participants’ perspectives, the primary external challenges to their marriages and personal spiritual development came from what they called “the world’s lure.” The world’s lure (or “the world’s attraction,”) was more specifically defined by participants as the American cultural emphasis on “materialism and individualism.” For the participants, these challenges reportedly hampered their spiritual development, and sometimes harmed their marital relationships.

Pan (H) shared his struggle: “[The greatest obstacle is] the pressure of trying to be like others, to buy a new house, buy a new car....” To pursue “the world’s lure” or succumbing to excessive materialism was a significant obstacle for some participants to faithfully practicing what they preach. Pan’s wife, Wan, addressed a related issue that is a common struggle for many American marriages and families:

We have to be careful about technology— computer and TV time. We have to be careful of those. There were times when we were just doing our own thing, especially now with all this technology. I think that can hinder our relationship. It takes time that we could spend together, [or spend] praying together.

The surrounding world, according to Wan (W) and others, often interferes with their relationship with God and with their family relationships. Hu (W) discussed her challenge that comes from the outsiders:

[In terms of challenges and sacrifices], our whole Sunday is at church instead of doing something else, as well as our money for financial offering. Some people may consider us stupid for our devotion of time and money. Our purpose is not to gain the whole world. It is enough if we have a job and economic resources. When we came to the USA, some people helped us, but we could not reward them. So now we help the new-comers, we return the reward to the new-comers. Now we live a better life than before, we are able to help the new comers. *The Bible says that giving is better blessed than*

receiving. We do not think we lose anything. [When we give], we have peace in our hearts. We are joyful when we do this and happy to see others receive.

The Bible's teaching reminds Hu of the meaning and value of altruism.

Stark and Finke (2000) have stated that "when religious people give time and money, they must be fully aware of the costs because they value these things as much or more than anyone else" (p. 51). Hu and her husband were joyful and happy to devote their time and money. However, the question of how to balance church service and giving with family life is also a challenge to some participants. Zhen (W) said:

It's harmful when you only yourself serve God and neglect your family. When you go to church daily, regarding church as your home and don't treat your home as home, [this is not good].

Jia (W), from mainland China shared:

Challenges [at church are as common as challenges at my] job, teaching children, as well as the relationships with church brothers and sisters; the service challenge is always there. However, when you look up to God, you are reminded that you can pass through, whenever you encounter difficulties. God is faithful; sometimes He lets us learn to be patient, to do according to His way and will. We both are learning. We both are impatient. We know God will lead us and that God has His own way to solve our problems, but sometimes we don't have enough patience, so we do according to our own will. We are learning during this process. This is always a challenge to us.

Jia (W) mentioned several challenges they had to face, but the lesson Jia learned was how to look up to God and trust in God, because the challenges are always there. In the trajectory of participants' spiritual development, the "old self" was seen as a major obstacle to both personal spiritual development and to a good marital relationship. Postmodern American cultural influences also served as external challenges which also had big influences on the participants' personal and family life. Cao (H) emphasized the importance of faith and practice congruence:

This is an evil era, we should hold on to God firmly. We should not judge others, we should put our hope in God, do according to God's will, and try to please God. We should ask God's grace but neglect [never] God's warning. If you do not fear God, and

do not listen to God, and do wrong things, God is [still] righteousness. If you don't listen to God ... you will be charged for the consequence.

Although challenges are inevitable, God's teaching is a guide for the participants in their everyday life that helps them to prevent and resolve marital conflicts, to cope with stressful situations, and to deal with family relationships. According to the participants, Sunday worship is another important faith practice that has had great influence in their families, as discussed next.

Subtheme 3. Sunday Worship: The Holy Day

Krause (2007) found that worship hymns, congregational prayers, and clergy's messages may help to solve or at least alleviate marital problems through indirect means. In the current study pastors' sermons, special lessons on marriage and family, and Sunday school programs were reported as supportive resources for the participants' marriage and family life. Many couples, including the following, said that they go to church on Sunday regularly, and try not to do secular things on Sunday. Why? They explained,

Lin (H): This will make our marriage stronger.

Zhen (W): We have the same restriction. [We honor God on Sunday worship].

A couple from mainland China responded:

Wang (W): There were many sermons about marriage and family given by some preachers in our church. The quality of marriage and our marital relationship improved gradually. We have improved our recognition of our family. The wife of Pastor Zheng came to our church this year and gave us many examples about family....

Liang (H): These practices/traditions stabilized our marriage and improved our understanding with each other. Through special preachers' sermons and summer family Bible study, we know how to solve the conflicts between us, and how to stabilize our marriage. We've learned how to improve the intimate [and spiritual] relationship between the husband and the wife.

Through pastor's sermons and special messages, Wang and Liang reportedly made improvements in their marital relationship and also stabilized their family life. They also learned how to solve marital conflicts, and how to improve the level of intimacy in their marriage. In the

following excerpt, a husband Huang from another family emphasized the importance of Sunday worship for his family,

A good tradition [we have is] that we go to church every Sunday.... There are great influences on children [there at church]. My elder daughter is 18 years old and has attended college, I talked to her seriously.... She observes you and looks at what your attitude is, whether you go to church firmly or not. Some of her friends are church members, some of her high school classmates are non-believers. We firmly go to church on Sunday for Sunday school and Sunday morning worship. It is what we must do as a Christian. This is very good that you have a goal in your life and go to church. She tests you and observes you, about whether your faith [is real] and what your attitude is towards your faith.

In previous research, family level church involvement is identified as an important resource not only for marriage but also for child development and parent-child relationships (Bartkowski et al., 2007; Garland, 2002). Most participants in the present study viewed Sunday morning worship as a necessary and very important part of their family life. One couple reported that they go to church on Sunday regularly, just as they come home after work each day; it is the way they live. Another husband, Qin, chose to come back to lead his family in spiritual faith every Sunday, even though this required 10-12 hours of driving (one way):

There is an example, I work at Texas, I drive 10-12 hours one way, I could choose to come back every two or three weeks, but I choose to come back every week, Mei advised me every two weeks, but I said this is not God's will. This is a challenge, I must experience this trial, and it's related to the following blessing. If I didn't choose like this, our family would be fragile. I have considered this. *Only through this trial can I submit to God completely.* God sometimes lets me think His Words, and see His importance by some special situation. Let us [truly] regard Him as the Lord in our heart. If we are too comfortable, we will adjust the importance of God in our heart, we say it's important but the love in our heart will be different from before. [I want to show my willingness to obey.]

"Only through this trial can I submit to God completely," said Qin, who views his family's spiritual life as more important than physical life. His faith supports him to overcome this big

challenge of “10-12 hours one way driving,” and made his marriage and family life more stable.

“God’s blessings followed” Qin believed. Hu [W] similarly explained:

To myself, if I go to church regularly, I will not be dragged [down] by secularity. In church or Bible study group, we care about each other, we update ourselves. Kids are also influenced by peers. My son was baptized together with his friends. He makes a big progress. We let our daughter decide by herself whether she wanted to be baptized after her 13th birthday. We did not want to force her because she is old enough to make her own decision.... She decided to be baptized and this is her blessing. We have peace in our heart.

Church attendance and involvement reportedly related to the participants’ spiritual life.

Hu reported that her church life keeps her away from secular life and refreshes her spiritually.

She also found joy in watching her children “find their spiritual home.” Lei and Zhou also

emphasized Sunday worship and shared how church involvement changed their marital and parent-child relationships:

Zhou (W): We bring our kids to church. We want them to know God. As parents, we bring our kids to God. Our examples as parents are important; they see us through our speaking and behavior. We say we should love others as we love ourselves. [If we say it], then, we should do it. We want them to go to Sunday school and Bible study, it is very important.

Lei (H): Sunday worship is very important. We worship God, praise God, bring our requests to God, and [draw] near God. Bible study is also important to our spiritual growth. We learn how to deal with marital relationship from God’s words and we changed our idea about educating children.

Zhou (W): We had a special topic on family once in our Bible study group. Pastor preaches lots of such information. Sunday worship is especially important, it is part of [our] faith life, and we cannot miss it. We learn from pastor’s messages, and gradually change ourselves. The change is not abrupt but a process.

Several couples expressed the importance of setting good examples as parents. Through Sunday worship and scripture study, they not only learned how to deal with marital challenges, they also learned how to raise their children through faith. Ultimately, they wanted their children to have a good relationship with God as well. This hope is captured in more texture and detail in the next theme.

Theme III. Faith and Parenting

Previous research indicates that parents often significantly influence their children's religious faith (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Garland, 2002). However, religious faith can also influence parents' perceptions of their role as a parent (Wilcox, 2004). Shared religious involvement by parents correlates positively with child's healthy development and parent-child relationships (Bartkowski et al., 2007; Mahoney, 2005; Marks et al., 2011).

The participants in this study shared their insights, perspectives, feelings and experiences about faith and parenting. They expressed how they changed their views about the role of parents after conversion, how they expected their children to follow their faith in Christ, and the challenges they faced regarding parenting through faith. In connection with faith and parenting, I will address four subthemes under the theme of faith and parenting: 1) set a good example, 2) raise children through faith, 3) challenges, and 4) expectations.

Subtheme 1. Set A Good Example

From a social learning perspective, family is the immediate environment for child development. Children learn from their parents' modeling at an early age (Bandura, 1989). Research indicates that parents have great influence on their children's spiritual development as well (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Palkovitz, 2002). The participants in this study believed that it was very important for their children to follow their faith. When asked, "As parents, how do you share your faith with your children?", many participants responded: "By our own example." Cao (H) and Xi (W) said,

Cao (H): Parents are the best teachers for their kids. Kids like to imitate parents. Parents have a big influence on kids about how to be a human. If I said to them "Do not lie," then I should not lie. Kids will learn from the model of parents. If we have a good relationship, kids will feel safe; they will not fight each other. They would get along well. Faith is beneficial to both marriage and family.

Xi (W): We previously put kids first at our family. However, [marriage is central, because] if husband and wife have a good relationship, kids will realize it. It's good to them.

Many Chinese families put their children first in their family relationships, and neglect the marital relationship. Good marital relationships are important for child development and a good parent-child relationship (Wilcox et al., 2011). Another couple stated:

Yan (H): Walk with God. [We try] to do what God wants us to. That's beautiful, to follow Jesus.... I think parents should give good examples.

Liu (W): It's the most important. I read the Bible, pray, and share about morning worship with him (our son).

Yan (H): I sometimes pray together with him, I encourage him to obey God, and to obey his parents.

Liu (W): We cannot control his future, he has freedom of belief in the relationship between himself and God. If he does not believe, I will not force him to believe, but I will pray for him earnestly.

Yan (H): I will not force him, but belief is very important to him, because [he is beginning to know there] is a real and living God.

On one hand, Yan and Liu expect their son to follow their faith; on the other hand, they give him freedom to form his own "belief in the relationship between himself and God." The way they preach to their son is "to set good examples." Wan (W), another participant, similarly stated that children learn through observations, primarily in immediate family, but also through observing and interacting with other families:

I think it is very important, how we parent our child, and the values with which we parent, even the way in which we relate to each other [as parents]. I think she (our daughter) is going to watch, and that is going to affect her so much when she has her own family. We don't take any classes, but I think we observed when we were younger. I see my parents' relationship, and they have affected me so much, in what to do and also what not to do. Because there is no class—well, people offer seminars and things—but I think the best lesson is just observing other families. When I grew up, I'd see a lot of families.

In Bronfenbrenner's human ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), individual development is influenced heavily by significant others in the immediate environment, especially

family. Wan (W) continued to explain how her family of origin influenced her and how important it is for her as a parent to positively influence her children.

I think parents play an important role in preparing us for life skills relating to other areas.... [As a parent], I see so much that I'm starting to become more and more like my mom, which is scary, you know? Sometimes, as a parent, you think, "I will never become like her because she was way too strict on things." But I'm becoming more and more like her.... I mean, I'm glad, because my parents are very close to each other. We have a very good relationship, a close relationship, we can talk. Even though, in our Chinese culture, usually, it is...

Pan (H): ...not very common.

Wan (W): Yeah, usually, the husband and wife are very distant sometimes. I think, as the years progress, you'll see a lot of older Chinese couples, they don't sleep in the same room. They just don't have that open communication. It is just the culture, I think.

Whether the issue is faith, communication, or another area of life, Wan posited that children will learn through their observation, so it is vital that parents to set good examples before them.

Zhou (W) expressed a similar idea:

It is very important for parents to set good examples, for example reading the Bible, prayer, and Sunday worship. Our faith to God and our everyday spiritual life will influence kids. [If they see, they believe.]

Zhou later emphasized the spiritual influence she and her husband strive to have on their children:

We bring our kids to church. We want them to know God. As parents, we bring our kids to God. Our examples as parents are important; they see us through our speaking and action. We say we should love others as if love ourselves. Then, we should do it. We want them to go to Sunday school and Bible study, it is very important.

Ming (H) shared his experience about how he influences his children by practicing the Bible's teachings in his daily life:

We bring our kids to church and Sunday school. We read the Bible to them when they were young. This summer, my father was ill. I went back to China to take care of him. I have this responsibility to take care of my parents just like the teachings in the Bible: *honor your parents*. [Through example], my children... learn and know how to treat their parents later. We should respect our parents, and we need to be patient with marital

relationships, friendship, and parent-child relationships. As a Christian family, we do not just... preach the Gospel, we should practice faith in our daily life because we know God.

The participants in this study expected their children to follow their Christian faith. However, the best way they reported of sharing their religious beliefs with their children was through their own examples. They bring their children to church and Sunday school, and they read the Bible and pray with them. Even so, the most important sacred practice is to live the Christian faith, because “this is real, [this is] living God.” This core belief in practicing what you preach profoundly influenced the parents, as they raised their children, which is the next subtheme I addressed.

Subtheme 2. Raise Children Through Faith

The desire to raise children through and in the Christian faith is a common theme participants shared. One participant, Shen emphasized the golden rule, “to love God and love others.” He and his wife Shi try to follow this principle and also try to teach their son to follow this commandment.

Shen (H): We tried to bring up our son in Christian ways when he was young. Although we ourselves were sometimes struggling and growing in our own spiritual lives, we praise God that he has grown up to be a God-loving Christian. He was baptized when he was twelve years old. He was enthusiastic in witnessing to his friends (including our governor-elect Bobby Jindal) about Jesus. He wrote a book on Christian beliefs and how to deal with medical school for pre-Med students when he was doing his medical residency, which is the busiest period of time during the training phase of a physician’s career. He pursued and obtained a Master’s degree in religion after he obtained his M.D. degree. [His faith is his life].

Due in part to parents’ good examples, Shen and Shi’s son became a “God-loving Christian,” as they hoped. Their son achieved progress both in academics (he obtained a M.D. degree plus a Master’s degree in religion) and in spiritual life (he was baptized and eager to share his faith with others). Another father of two asserted that faith was central to how they teach their children

“because this is the pillar in our life, [and] it certainly is the pillar of our teaching children.” Qin and Mei commented:

Qin (H): I think the growth of the spiritual lives of a family must [involve] the whole family growing together. Our whole family must grow together if we want to give testimony to God.... *God tells us through the Bible, the way we raise our children is through faith.*

Mei (W): Qin is really following the Bible, he looks up the Bible, and he uses the Bible verses more than me. I tell my children what is good also just like the Bible’s teaching. Qin shares with Jason and Jenny directly using the Bible verses or those obtained after his meditation. We had big conflicts before, [but God’s words] made me think and change, we learned how to use Bible verses to teach our children. Now we don’t quarrel, our family is harmonious.

The husband, Qin came to believe in God after he has read the Bible, which later significantly changed his life style and the way he teaches his children. The Bible becomes his resource and the guidance of their family life. Qin commented “*the way we raise our children is through faith,*” and he teaches his children “directly with the Bible verses.” His wife, Mei further explained the importance of teaching children through the standard of the Bible:

Sin is desire, never to be satisfied. Qin said sin is a choice. We have changed a lot in teaching our children. I taught them with the book of the world before, now I teach them with the standard of the Bible. Qin spends plenty of time on the Bible verses which he uses to teach our children instead of the father’s authority— “you must do what I said, don’t ask for a reason.” We learned much more after we believed in Jesus.... Sometimes children are growing from their mistakes, making a mistake doesn’t mean failure; they should be given chances to attempt and make mistakes. I am the first teacher of Jason, I taught him very well, but there was no faith in my teaching.... Now we teach our children with the principle of the Bible.

Mei (W) compared her ways of raising children before and after her conversion. Before her conversion, she taught her children with “the world’s way” and was full of “mother’s love,” but she was reportedly vulnerable and was not confident in her ability, or her children’s to face the temptation of the outside world. After her conversion, she taught her children with the principles of the Bible, which became their inner strength and resource during their growing up years.

Some participants, including Mei (W) shared that if God is in their children's hearts, parents do not need to worry about their children's future. They will be less vulnerable to external temptations when they have strong religious faith and love of God in their heart. Qin continued on this topic:

We let them [learn through] the verses and metaphors of the Bible and don't use our own ideas.... Now I was urged to read and think about the Bible rather than just read it like reading a book before. Now we more live by it. We improve the recognition of the Bible as a couple and as a family by meditating on His Words more deeply.... [During] my driving time, I pray for Mei, Jenny, Jason.... God gives us freedom to choose, but we usually misapply it. We choose Satan's (or the old self's) will and forget God's will. Jesus prayed at Gethsemane: "Don't do as my will, but as your will. I will do what you want me to do. I would even die if you want me to die." This is what we should learn.

To read, to think, and to live on God's words and His will, not on one's own will is the purpose of Qin's life. It is also the way he strives to parent his children. Qin practiced his faith by reading the Bible, meditation, and praying. He taught his children not just to read but to understand the Bible more deeply by meditation.

A couple, Fan and Xin from Taiwan, shared a story about their daughter who could not hear when she was young. They had many difficulties in raising their children; however, through faith in God, they are full of gratitude. They said:

Fan (H): God has His perfect arrangement. It's impossible for those who rely on themselves [to understand his grace]. What God gives is the best, more than we wanted.
Xin (W): Thank God. We see God's guidance, He is watching over us through these last 30 years. We pray for our children. We are busy working every day, but I like to pray for many things quietly after I come back home. I like to do this.
Fan (H): We should teach our children God's words while they are growing up. The blessings will follow.

Another couple expressed the same priority in raising their children:

Zhang (H): We often think of the Bible's words, "Bring your children to God when they are young so that they will not walk in the wrong way." No matter where they learn knowledge, from school or from any other kind of source, the most important is to learn how to be an upright person. That would be harmful to the society if they have much

knowledge but not an upright personal character. Children's personal character is the most important. Only when they walk in the right way can they do the right things.

Therefore, no matter how busy we are, we would take them to church on Sunday.

Han (W): First, walk in the right way. Second is to learn knowledge and arts.

Zhang (H): Those who have more ability but less good character will be dangerous to the society.

The priority for Zhang and Han is to bring their children to God. Like many couples in this study, they value their children's spiritual growth much more than knowledge alone. The couple regarded a good character of a child as much more important than the knowledge she/he obtained, indeed they viewed knowledge without morality as dangerous. The "right way" is "God's way" in raising their children according to Zhang and Han. Qiu, a father of two adult children, likewise explained:

Thank God, our older son seeks the meaning of life and makes decisions before God. He makes decisions and does literally according to the Bible's teaching... his standard was higher than ours when he was looking for a job. He went to mainland China twice when he was in college. He went to Guizhou to teach English and helped ministers there. This is what we should thank God that we have such kind of children. This is God's grace. They have their own decisions when they left home; we can do little to them [then but pray and love]. Thanks God!

Like the two couples Fan and Xin, and Zhang and Han, Qiu (H) gives another example of why bringing a child to God at an early age is important for the child's later life.

Smith and Denton (2005) have found that parents can profoundly influence their adolescents: "The most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents" (p. 56). This seemed to hold in the present study as well. A child's ideology is formed gradually during her growing up years, and the children's religious faith formed at a young age is a prominent factor in some cases the prominent factor, which will influence their later life (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). A mother named Xin similarly commented on the importance of raising children through faith:

Put God first. We regard [a practicing] as the head of our family. It's easy for children to believe in God if they grow up in Christian family. It's easy for them to be children of God. *We should help our children to form a personality of deifying and loving God.* We see the mystery and beauty of the creation of God through the children whom God gives us.

Wan, a mother, said she desired deeply that her children would know God personally through prayer. She said of her baby daughter:

Maybe she doesn't understand, she babbles, but I pray with her during mealtime and like I said before, sometimes it is hard for me, having [her and trying] to pray or to read. These past few weeks, I've been, when she is playing, I hold her, and I pray. That's my prayer time. I just want her to see that [a true] Christian life is just not on Sundays. It is throughout the whole week. I think that will be a challenge... I think that is very important to them when they develop their own faith—to know it is not just about going to church on Sunday, and that is it. Throughout the week, it is part of our lives.

Wan (W) and her husband Pan went on:

Wan (W): It is very, very important (to follow our faith). Not only in following in going to church, but really, really knowing God personally, so she can know God personally, and not just [have it be] some practice that she follows, a ritual or a habit that she does just because [it is what] Mom and Dad do, but because she really knows God personally, too.

Pan (H): She has to make her own decisions for herself.

Wan (W): Yeah, a chance to own it. I've seen a lot of parents...we see a lot of children, even from Christian families, who once they have grown up and go to college, it seems that the church is not part of their lives anymore. God is not part of their lives. It seems like their lives just suddenly...you know, they used to go to church and do all those things when they were under their parents' roof, but once they are out there, it seems like they don't want to have anything to do with it. We are just wondering, "where does it fail? When was the point that they decided, I don't want to have anything to do with this anymore?" I think that's what we've thought was very important, that our lives have to be really good examples for her, that she can see, that religion is really part of our life. That we live it, not just like, okay it is something that we just ritually, habitually do.

Pan (H): We want to practice what we preach.

Wan (W): Yeah, so she doesn't see us as hypocrites.

The above narratives all illustrate the importance of parents "setting good examples," and "practicing what we preach." Several participants defined faith as "life," not just "a ritual and a habit." As I addressed in theme II, prayer, Bible teaching, and Sunday worship are important faith practices for the participants. However, belief-behavior congruence appears to be the most

important faith practice. Jia, a mother shared how she taught her son about the worldview and ideology by practicing her faith and the Bible:

When he was young, we brought him to church. We read the Bible to him and prayed for him. We taught him according to the Bible's teaching. Kids often will rebel at a certain age. We taught him to read the Bible and pray. I pray for him every day. Now he realized how different the godly people's life is from that of godless people. He is clear that he should follow God. Godless people have no direction. When we visited China this summer, we saw people who were busy every day to pursue worldly things. They don't know how to live their life. What would they do if they *were* wealthy? They could not bring anything when they leave this world. He knows this. Now, we are assured about him.

The participants in this study value their faith and expect their children to follow their faith, and to know God personally. They try to lead their children to come to God by teaching their children according to God's words. The top priority in their raising children is not academic achievement, but faith in God. The participants reported that if their children know and follow God, they will rest assured about their children's future. There are, however, significant challenges as they are raising their children through faith. It is to this topic that we now turn.

Subtheme 3. Challenges

In theme II, I addressed the challenge of practicing what you preach or belief-behavior congruence. Other internal and external challenges may influence the participants' personal spiritual development as well as marital and family relationships. The participants experienced and reported similar challenges as they taught their children. Faith practice is a major challenge for Mu (W) who said, "I think faith must be practiced in our daily life, to let her (our daughter) feel the love of God." Her husband Lu admitted:

I am not a good doer, I hope my children know God gradually and truly, and have a good and intimate relationship with God.... I hope someday she will know our insufficiencies; the love of her parents is not perfect. God's love is greater than ours. I'll do my best to let her establish good relationship with God. One thing that I hope to do, but I didn't do, is to pray with her together.

The challenge Lu mentioned was that he expected his daughter to have a good relationship with God. However, he as a parent did not feel that he set a good example. Another couple mentioned both internal and external challenges they encountered:

Zhen (W): In the United States, we have not encountered any challenge from society because of our believing in God. Most of the challenges are from us ourselves. Would you like to put more of your time and energy on God's work and give up some world's enjoyment? Would you like to put down yourself and to believe in God's almightiness?
Lin (H): There are many challenges. For example, the school includes books in the reading program [that we do not approve of]. Our elder boy knows that he can't read such books. We explain to our kids, they don't have to do the same thing as other children.

Like Lu (H), Zhen (W) stated that their primary challenge is from themselves—the internal challenge of their insufficiencies. Zhen's husband Lin did mention an external challenge they experienced: undesirable media or peer influences. Lin later added, "We make sure that they don't read bad books, or watch bad TV programs." His wife, Zhen, explained:

We will not let them watch TV, movies, or read books that obviously do not agree with the Bible. But sometimes it's difficult to balance and control [these choices], we ask God to guide us.

Another couple also mentioned external challenges that come from "the world."

Huang (H): We have too much temptation and many choices to choose.

Wei (W): Internet and TV.

Huang (H): As to the other books she reads, we will have choices for her. We talked with her about the internet more than one time. We also pray to God and ask for God's mercy. We told her the serious effects.

Mei, a mom of two children, including a teen boy, shared the temptations that come from the world and that may distract the kids:

My love is giving, is a very great love of a mother, but it cannot endure the temptation of the outside world which is not simple, mixed with good and bad. They have no choice, they don't know what's good what's bad, the devil Satan may have many ways to tempt them, like music, friends, TV, media, etc., which made them distracted, something not good emerge in their heart. Now we teach our children with the principle of the Bible.

Participants viewed the world's attractions as dangerous. Zhu, a mother of two boys shared her experience:

When they were young, they wanted to buy a game. Later, I read a piece of news that this game was not good, don't let children play it. They didn't listen to us. Later during our family vacation, when we watched TV at night in the hotel, there was a movie which told a story about two brothers who [became so] fascinated with this game that they fell into the game. At the end, they killed their parents. This was a real story that happened in America. When we came back home, they threw away the game without our speaking even one word. We thank God for that.

Zhu explained the world's temptation as the external challenge may be detrimental to child development. In addition, transitions in one's life course usually bring challenges, or even depression. After raising their children, Zhu experienced another challenge which she called the empty nest. Her current challenge is not saying too much to her adult sons. She said:

Our children are old enough, so we don't conduct their ideas, it's better to pray for them. This is our challenge. For example, when they made girlfriends, [I learned that] you shouldn't make them listen to you, even if you have your opinion. Our younger son's girl friend is five years older than him. I worried about him when I heard this. We may discuss with him why we have concerns; we talked to them about what we thought about it, and then prayed for them because they are grown up. May God bless them.

Zhu's faith is her coping resource with this kind of challenge. Zhu and her husband Qiu reported that they had to learn to step back, to put their children in God's hand, to pray for them, and ask God to lead them. Zhu and Qiu expressed the idea of ownership of children and money—emphasizing that these (children and “their money”) are God's:

Qiu (H): I think it's [important not to assume too much] ownership of our children. When they left home, we need not call them every day; we will rest assured, if they follow God.

Zhu (W): Not only children, but also with money, we are [not the ones with] ownership. We would not waste money; we will spend money on the right way. This idea is very important that the money is not ours. This is God's money, and we will use it wisely. [Our children are God's as well].

In the following story, a mother named Xin shared her difficulty when her daughter lost her hearing:

We usually say that we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all other things will be given to us as well. Everything will become easy if we seize God's promises. But in parenting children, I was in depression when my elder daughter lost her hearing at the age of four. Someone said to me that God gave such child to you because God thought you could undertake it, and would show God's glory through her. I wouldn't like to send her to deaf school, so after evaluation, she went to a gifted program in a regular school. She was very smart; she could read books such as Dr. Seuss...when she was four years old. She was very happy when she came back from school. We were told that she would drop behind in second grade, or by fourth grade...but that day never came. She obtained good grades all the time. Thanks to God, although she could not hear, God gave her the ability of good understanding. The principal said she had read all the books in the library when she graduated from elementary school. Thanks to God. When I asked her if school was difficult, she said not at all, all of the answers were in the text book. So, she was the supreme one that went to Harvard University when she graduated from high school. Because she couldn't hear, the university provided her a special service: Someone would tape the lectures on the computer especially for her. I worried about her, but she obtained good academic records. She got her Ph.D. I worried about her marriage, but God prepared a man for her, and both her mother-in-law and father-in-law are very good persons. As to the influence of belief, we really see God's glory when we do according to God's words and are led by God. People around her are very kind to her. She has the personality of liking to study, besides the ability of good understanding, given by God. She loves God, loves others.... We didn't teach her [God did]. Maybe God wants to use her and gave her the ability of good understanding so that she could be a good tool of God.

Xin (W) put her faith in God's words: "everything will become easy if we seize God's promises." Her daughter, though deaf, has achieved great success: a Ph.D. from Harvard University, a good job, and a good husband. But most important in her parents' eyes is that "she loves God" and "loves others." Even though there were stresses to the couple, Xin and her husband were successful in raising their child through their faith in Christ.

The participants all experienced challenges during raising their children. The parents' primary internal challenge is their sin or insufficiencies, and the primary external challenge is the

world's attraction. However, they all report that their religious faith is their coping resource. Sometimes, like Xin's daughter, they accomplished miracles through continued faith. In all cases, however, a faithful life was the hope and expectation.

Subtheme 4. Expectations

All participants in the study expressed their expectations that their children will follow their religious faith. A mother, Wen, shared:

We have a son who is a non-believer. We have continued to pray for him. We did not bring him to church when he was young. He went to college, received an education of evolution.... This is a rational debate which is very difficult. We do not give up hope. We continue to share, and continue to pray.

Because Wen and her husband were late converts, they did not raise their son in church. Even so, Wen and her husband emphasized the importance of their children following the Christian faith,

Wen (W): As parents we want both of them (two kids) to follow our faith. You don't want to separate with kids. You don't want your kids to suffer. You have faith. You [want them to] have guidance in their life journey. If not, you are alone in the open stormy sea that is very dangerous and you will suffer. You get lost. My son's wife also is a non-believer. We just wish they have faith in their life. We don't want them get lost. Although they are very successful in education, beautiful, handsome, lots of friends, good health, happy— but life is not always rosy like that. Parents care about children, you want them live a life [that meaningful], not just an indulgent one.

Ping (H): I think it's important about our son. We have to be patient. I don't think we can force people, so you just be supportive and help them in the way that they see [that faith is] better for them, more beneficial for them. So our son and his new wife had an issue, we suggested them to go to Christian counselor. They did go.... [We must] give them time.

Wen (W) and Ping (H) wanted their children to accept God in their life. The couple wanted God to be their son's supportive resource in his marriage; his help in solving his marital problems. A couple Xi and Cao emphasized spiritual life other than academic achievement for their children,

Xi (W): Now I emphasize their godliness instead of their academic achievements, which is not the most important. Care and love are the most important. American education emphasizes care and share. For example, they teach kids to line up or to think of the others. Their academic achievements are not the most important.

Cao (H): I think how to be is more important than what to do. You are doing very well, win the first place, but you will not glory God if you fell.

Xi (W): If we do not prepare a good foundation of faith to kids, that will be difficult for us to control them because they are more influenced by their peers and this world.

Cao (H): I share my serving at church with them.

Xi (W): They will not listen to you if you could not practice what you teach. They will follow you if they see your model.

Again the couple expects their children to follow God. They emphasized the importance of children forming a personality founded in faith, and for parents to set a good example in faith practice. Xi (W) said their children have freedom to make their own decision, but they as parents have responsibility to bring their children to God. Another couple Li and Yang offered a similar account:

Li (H): Because we know what God wants us to be, we have a goal that we want to be a person that pleases God. We hope our children to be the same and to please God. When they grow up, they will *glorify God and benefit others*. This is our central and only [prayer]. We hope our children will not limit [their love and concern] to their own family. We don't want them to become a person that nobody cares for except his/her spouse and children. In this case, he does not act out God's love; he does not benefit others. We will live a life *not only for ourselves to live better, but also for others to live a better life*. Our lives impact many people...to help others to know God, and have good relationship with God.

Yang (W): We are studying. Some worldly ways are that they want children to be a doctor to earn big money. We know God's teaching, so we don't guide them to [pursue money]. We try to let them know God's words and they know God loves them. They will know how to live their life.

Li (H): Some Chinese parents hope their children will do things that they themselves could not achieve. They hope their children achieve their own ideals. We don't do that.... If they do their best to be good to society, we will be very thankful.

Li and Yang expect their children to grow up to be a person who will "glorify God and benefit others." Like other participants, they pray that their children will have a good relationship with God. They hope the purpose of their kids' life is to please God and serve others, rather than to

earn big money or something else. They hope their kids will live out God's words and God's love.

There is a plaque in Ban and Jia's house "My family and I will serve Jehovah." The husband regarded the relationship between him and his son as both the father and son, but also as brothers in Christ. Ban and Jia emphasized that the whole family serves God together,

Jia (W): We teach our son according to the Bible's teaching.

Ban (H): The Bible is the only guidance.

Jia (W): We talk to our son that it is ok as long as you do your best in your academy. We don't expect him to go to a famous university. He decides what subject he wants to study. But one thing which we also usually pray for him is that he should grow up in Christ, he should be thankful and also does not marry with a non-believer.

Ban (H): Faith gives us guidance, we have a direction. Moreover, we are not perfect. We could not teach our kid just to depend on ourselves, [he must] rely on God. We know God has His wonderful plan for our child. We do our best and take our responsibilities, and God will help us with the rest.

When asked "How important to you is it that your child(ren) follow in your faith?" Jia and Ban expressed that their "greatest hope" for their son is a lifelong relationship with God. They responded:

Jia (W): Top important. The greatest hope as parents is that our child will follow God with all his life. [If he does], we don't worry about him. No matter what happens, he knows how to look up to God and to honor God. God will lead him on his way, this is the most important.

Ban (H): Right, we emphasize this to him, no matter what he does; *the relationship with God is the most important and forever important.*

In sum, all the participants interviewed expressed their expectations that their children will put faith in God and follow God all their lives. As parents they reported to have responsibility to lead their children to come to God. As Ban concluded "the relationship with God is the most important and forever important."

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The influence of religion on family is multidimensional and complex. As a part of the American Families of Faith project, this study adds diversity and depth to the current research on the interface between religion and family by examining Chinese immigrant families in the U.S.

In her meta-analysis of religion and family research article, Mahoney (2010) reported that most of the quantitative studies (about 77%) used one or two items to measure religious variables. This may raise an issue regarding the construct validity of “religion”. Further, to investigate the interface between religion and family “from a distance” does not fully facilitate an understanding of the complex phenomenon of the influences of religion on individual and family; consequently more “proximal” and “close” to home studies on these topics are needed (Mahoney et al., 1999, p. 322; see also, Burr et al., 2012). In the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Smith and Denton (2005) posit:

To get beyond the surface descriptions that surveys provide, to get to the important experiences, feelings, contradictions, processes, and complex layers of meaning in most people’s lives requires using other methods, such as directly observing and talking with people at length (p. 118).

In this study, qualitative methods including “Talking with people at length” are employed to better understand the meanings, processes, and the lived experiences of the participants. Highly religious couples were recruited in order to know the *real* meaning of *how* and *why* questions about the relationship between Christianity and participants’ marriages and family life. Much of the extant empirical research on family life has focused on pathologies, divorce, problems, and failures. In the American Families of Faith Project, the focus has been a strengths-based perspective on marriage and family life. Using this approach, we can learn why some marriages are “happy” and “stable.” The present study strives to examine both “highly religious” and “strong” marriages among Chinese immigrant population.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

In connection with theme I in the present study, *Conversion to Christianity*, Yang (1998) argues that the ecological, social, and cultural contexts in both China and the United States contribute to Chinese immigrants' conversion to Christianity. Many of the participants expressed that they did not believe in Christianity when they were in China due to the dominant atheist ideology. For the first generation of Chinese immigrants, challenges and difficulties are inherent in the transition. Conversion to Christianity adds an additional layer of change.

To some extent, Chinese Christian Communities in the United States provide help with Chinese immigrants' physical, material, psychological and spiritual needs. Consistent with several studies about Chinese immigrant conversion to Christianity, the findings of the current study suggest that the motivations and processes of the participants' conversion are influenced by the following factors: 1) the disappointment of moral collapse and spiritual vacuum during the modernization process of China; 2) the change of identity and contingent needs; 3) interactions with highly welcoming Christians; 4) the assets and various programs in Christian Church communities; and 5) the pursuit of God and theistic meaning in life (cf. Wong, 2007; Yang, 1999). The clergy, congregation, spouse, and even the children may be influential. The Bible, religious related books, and Christian media have varied influence on the participants' conversion. Special meetings (e.g. the Gospel camp, revival camp, and couple's retreat) and Bible study groups also provide ways for the participants' conversion.

For some participants, conversion was a smooth process; for the other participants, however, it was a struggle process. Some participants experienced a long term struggle. They doubted, they were cautious, and even resisted conversion.

In connection with theme II *Faith Practice*, Burr, Marks, and Day (2012) stated that sacred experiences can have powerful influence in individual and family life. The participants in this study expressed that faith practice (e.g. prayer, Bible study, and Sunday worship) not only facilitated their personal spiritual development but also benefitted and enhanced their marital and family relationships, though new challenges were encountered as well—including conflicts with the participants’ non-Christian parents.

Some participants viewed prayer as personal communication with God, which drew them close to God and helped them overcome internal and external challenges. Prayer also reportedly enhanced communication among family members. Namely, when families and couples prayed together, family prayer seemed to further improve participant family members’ spiritual growth and family cohesion. During the process, the children also learned and formed their ideology. In addition, prayer was reported as a coping resource in dealing with relationship problems as well as various stressful situations. Consistent with several previous studies, the participants in the present study expressed that prayer helped them to see their own weaknesses and to forgive others; to prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflicts; to deal with everyday challenges and profound loss; and to reconcile and enhance marital relationships (Butler et al., 1998; Fincham et al., 2008; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Marks, 2005, 2008).

The participants in the present study reported that the Bible teachings changed their perception of marriage as well as their marital relationships themselves. A new view of “marriage is oneness,” a “we” not “me” perspective seemed to contribute to marital commitment. The Bible was reportedly viewed by some as a reference book for marriage, and in some cases marital relationships were reportedly transformed by biblical influence and application. However, there were also challenges reported when the Bible was misunderstood, misapplied or

misinterpreted. The “male headship” issue was reported as a problem in the Chinese Christian community.

Another central challenge related to Bible teaching was “to practice what you preach.” The internal obstacle of the “old self” and the external challenge of “the world’s lure” were perceived threats for the participants. Indeed, congruence between faith and practice was emphasized by the participants throughout and across the interviews.

Sunday church activities including worship, pastors’ sermons, special lessons on marriage and family, and Sunday school programs were reported by the participants as supportive resources for their marriage and family life. Consistent with the findings of Bartkowski et al. (2007) and Garland (2002), the findings of the current study also suggest that family level Church attendance and involvement seem to change the participants’ marital and parent-child relationships in a positive way. Sunday was regarded as a holy day by the participants and church was a top priority in the participants’ daily choices.

In connection with theme III, *Faith and Parenting*, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Human Ecological Theory suggests that individual development is profoundly influenced by the immediate environment, especially the family. Children learn primarily and foremost from their parents at home through observations and interactions. The participants also reported that the ideal way to raise their children is through an example of lived faith. Teaching through word was also mentioned; some participants shared that they teach their child directly with Bible verses.

Challenges the participants mentioned in this theme were similar to the challenges in connection with theme II. The internal obstacle of “old self” frustrated some participants and hindered them from setting good examples for their children. Some participants reported unique stresses associated with raising their children; however, the participants reported to have hope

and expectations that their children would remain rooted in their Christian faith. Indeed, recurring reported expectations for their children were: a) they expect their children to follow their Christian faith; b) they expect their children to live a faithful life which will “glorify God and benefit others,” and c) they expect their children to have a lifelong relationship with God. As one participant concluded, “The relationship with God is the most important and forever important.”

Limitations

Qualitative research provides rich data to assist in answering why and how questions, and to address processes. However, unlike the random and representative samples employed in some quantitative research, the sample of the study is purposive and limited to highly religious Chinese Christian couples in a limited area of the United States. Therefore, the results and findings may not be generalized. The participants in this study were well-educated, middle-class couples, and most of them have two or more children (an uncommon characteristic among native Chinese given the one-child policy). Thus, future research should explore the influence of religiosity in other types of Chinese families, such as low-income or working-class couples.

Another limitation of the study’s sample is that it is better to include children’s perspectives to better understand parent-child relationships but only parents were interviewed. Also, it is likely that participants emphasized positive aspects of religion on marriage because of their strong beliefs. The researcher tried to moderate and counterbalance this tendency by asking explicit questions relating to challenges and undesirable outcomes as well.

An additional limitation (and strength) is that the wives and husbands were interviewed together. As a result, in some interviews the husband or the wife (or both) may have avoided sensitive topics in the presence of their spouses. Joint interviewing of couples, however, offers

several strengths as well. Most prominent, perhaps, is that this approach may enhance validity and reliability of the study due to the triangulation of multiple informants' perspectives as well as the researcher's observations of the couple's interactions. Additionally, this format has been found to be useful in obtaining data with more richness and depth because spouses can encourage, remind, and supplement one another (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006, 2008; Marks et al., 2008). As with any study, the perceived limitations of the study are often strengths from another vantage. As an insider, the researcher may have an advantage in accessing the sample, obtaining the participants' trust, and in obtaining a richer data. Also, as an insider, the researcher may have an advantage in better understanding and interpreting the data. Disadvantages may include the researcher's close and highly subjective "insider's" perspective constraining objectivity.

Implications

The findings of the study suggest implications regarding the interface of Christian faith and Chinese immigrant families in the following areas: a) for theory, b) for practice, and c) for research.

Implications for theory. Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory developed into the Process–Person–Context–Time model (PPCT model), which later became the essence of his theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). To study the complex interface between religion and immigrant families, the components of the PPCT model should be more fully considered. The experience of Chinese immigrants' conversion to Christianity is a process, no matter how long or short. Their faith development is also a gradual process, a process where participants were challenged "to learn and to change." The contexts in both China and the United States, the timing, as well as the persons' role are all important factors in the individual and family development.

Burr and colleagues' (2012) volume *Sacred Matters* proposes a new conceptual framework (sacred theory), in which the authors address when, how, and why sacred matters are helpful and harmful in families. They also delineate why sacred matters make a difference in family processes and outcomes. Church community is a very important resource for these immigrant Chinese in the United States. Christian faith is regarded as a helpful asset for the participants' marriage and family life as they cope with various stressors. However, after conversion, different belief systems and cultural elements crash and often generate a "wedge" between generations.

In terms of the influence of religion on marriage and family life, Dollahite, Marks, and Goodman (2004) suggest three dimensional influences of spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and faith community. The interface between the dimension of spiritual beliefs and Chinese immigrant families has been addressed in the article: "*The Compass of Our Life*": *A Qualitative Study of Marriage and Faith Among Chinese Immigrants* (Lu et al., 2011). The dimension of faith community is addressed in *Chinese Immigrant Families and Christian Faith Community: A Qualitative Study* (Lu et al., in press). The present study focuses on the third dimension of religious practices and Chinese immigrant families. To fully understand the interface between religion and family, all three dimensional influences should be fully considered.

Implications for practice. The trajectory of Chinese immigrants' conversion to Christianity is likely unique in some ways. When working with Chinese immigrant families, pastoral and secular counselors should exercise cultural sensitivity. Clinical professionals should consider faith factor when working with Chinese immigrant individuals and families.

Marks (2008) and some other researchers (e.g., Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002) also suggest prayer as an effective tool in conflict resolution and problem solving through

intervention and prevention. Similarly, prayer was reported as a major faith practice and coping resource by most of the sample.

In terms of faith and parenting, the findings of this study suggest that it is important to set good examples as parents—not only for the children but for adults' self-image. For these religious immigrant parents, belief and behavior congruence was a salient concern.

In another article that examined immigrant experiences, Trask et al. (2009) stated:

In China, education is given the topmost priority. Most parents, if possible, would give anything in exchange for a better education for their children. The side effect is that the children often have to endure the pressures of trying to excel academically to meet their parents' high expectations (p. 63).

The participants in the present study expressed different experiences and expectations in raising their children. They practiced raising their children through faith and their top priority was and is to lead their children to God. They expect their children to live a life to “glorify God and benefit others,” and they expect their children to have a good, lifelong relationship with God. The different world views and values held by these immigrant converts seem to result in different idealized child development outcomes.

Of the three parenting styles identified by research (Baumrind, 1967): authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting style, authoritative parenting style is most likely to produce positive child developmental outcomes (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000; Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). The participants in this study seemed to adopt more authoritative parenting style (versus the authoritarian style more commonly attributed to traditional native Chinese parents) (Chao, 1994; 2001). The authoritative style is consistent with the principles of the Christian faith (Wilcox, 2004). Family scholars should continue to examine how faith influences individuals and families in positive and negative ways, and provide helpful strategies for building strong marriages and families.

Implications for research. Burr, Marks, and Day (2012) examined several limitations in existing literature on the topic of religion and family. Some of their recommendations were underscored by the findings and limitations of the present study. These include: 1) examining specific and proximal aspects; 2) examining both helpful and harmful or challenging aspects; 3) exploring the role of contextual factors; and 4) allowing for greater religious and cultural diversity.

The current study investigates the proximal aspects—hows, whys, processes, and the meanings of religion and family behind observable phenomena. It also focuses on highly religious couples who view religion as both meaningful and as a compass for their lives. Future research should continue to study the strength-based interface of religion and family to see why and how religion matters and serve as a resource in individual and family life, but future research should also consider the negative and challenging influences of religion on family relationships. The role of religion on immigrant families remains largely unexplored. With the increasing immigrant population in the United States, research on the interface of religion and immigrant families becomes increasingly relevant and important.

Conclusion

Filling a gap in previous research, this study contributes to the literature by examining the process and deep meaning of why faith matters to a specific type of families. It adds voices to the findings indicating that religious involvement generally correlates with more stable and satisfying marriages. Religion is also a prominent factor in some Chinese immigrants' individual lives. Warner (2001) posited that “to the extent that we can come to see others differently, we can undergo a fundamental change, a change in our being, a change of our emotions and attitudes, a change of heart” (p. 46). The experiences of the participants in this study

demonstrated that faith can serve as a pathway in the transformation process at personal, marital, and familial levels. Beyond country, race, ethnicity, gender, and age boundaries, religious faith or in other words a sense of relationship with God is, for some, a substantial transformative force. For such as these, faith is not merely an affiliation, not only an identity change, not just a help of adaptation or assimilation to American mainstream culture, but, according to the participants themselves, *“Faith is Life.”*

REFERENCES

- Abbott, D. A., Berry, M., & Meredith, W. H. (1990). Religious belief and practice: A potential asset in helping families. *Family Relations*, 39, 443-448.
- Alumkal, A. W. (2003). *Asian American evangelical churches: Race, ethnicity, and assimilation in the second generation*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.
- Arterburen, S., & Felton, J. (2001). *Toxic faith: Experiencing healing from painful spiritual abuse*. Shaw: Waterbrook Press.
- Aunola, K., Stattin, H., & Nurmi, J. E. (2000). Parenting styles and adolescents and achievement strategies. *Journal of Adolescence*, 23, 205-222.
- Bacallao, M. L., & Smokowski, P. R. (2007). The costs of getting ahead: Mexican family system changes after immigration. *Family Relations*, 56, 52-66.
- Bahr, H. M., & Chadwick, B.A. (1985). Religion and family in Middletown, USA. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47, 407-414.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory. *Annals of Child development*, 6, 1-60.
- Bankston, C. L., & Zhou, M. (1995). Religious participation, ethnic identity and the adaptation of Vietnamese adolescents in an immigrant community. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36, 523-534.
- Bao, W., Whitbeck, L. B., Hoyt, D. R., & Conger, R. D. (1999). Perceived parental acceptance as a moderator of religious transmission among adolescent boys and girls. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 362-372.
- Bartkowski, J. P., & Xu, X. (2000). Distant patriarchs or expressive dads? The discourse and practice of fathering in conservative Protestant families. *Sociological Quarterly*, 41, 465-485.
- Bartkowski, J. P., Xu, X., & Levin, M. L. (2007). Religion and child development: Evidence from the early childhood longitudinal study. *Social Science Research* 37, 18-36.
- Baumrind, D. (1967). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behavior. *Child Development*, 37(4), 887-907.
- Beach, S. R. H., Fincham, F. D., Hurt, T. R., McNair, L. M., & Stanley, S. M. (2008). Prayer and marital intervention: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27, 641-669.

- Berry, J. W. (2007). Acculturation strategies and adaptation. In J. E. Lansford, K. Deater-Deckard, and M.H. Bornstein (Eds.), *Immigrant families in contemporary society* (pp. 69-82). NY: Guilford.
- Booth, A., Crouter, A., & Landale, N. (Eds.) (1997). *In Immigration and the family: Research and policy on U.S. immigrants*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., Branaman, A., & Sica, A. (1995). Belief and behavior: Does religion matter in today's marriage? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 661-671.
- Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous loss*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Boss, P. (2002). *Family stress management: A contextual approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Boyatzis, C. J., Dollahite, D., & Marks, L. (2006). The family as a context for religious and spiritual development in children and youth. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. Wagener, & P. Benson (Eds.), *Handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 297-309). Sage Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). Developmental ecology through space and time: A future perspective. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 619-647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The bioecological theory of human development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development* (pp. 3-15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bush, K. R., Bohon, S. A., & Kim, H. H., (2005). Adaptation among immigrant families: resources and barriers. In Patrick C. McKenry and Sharon J. Price (Eds.) *Families and change: Coping with stressful events and transitions* (3rd ed.)(pp. 307-332). New York: Sage.
- Burdette, A. M., Ellison, C. G., Sherkat, D. E., & Gore, K. A. (2007). Are there religious variations in marital infidelity? *Journal of Family Issues*, 28 (12), 1553-1581.
- Burr, W. R., Marks, L. D., & Day, R. (2012). *Sacred matters: Religion and spirituality in families*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Butler, M. H., Gardner, B. C., & Bird, M. H. (1998). Not just a time-out: Change dynamics of prayer for religious couples in conflict situations. *Family Process*, 37, 451-478.

- Butler, M. H., & Harper, J. M. (1994). The divine triangle: God in the marital system of religious couples. *Family Process*, 33, 277-286.
- Butler, M. H., Stout, J. A., & Gardner, B. C. (2002). Prayer as a conflict resolution ritual: Clinical implications of religious couples' report of relationship softening, healing perspective, and change responsibility. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30, 19-37.
- Call, V. A., & Heaton T. B. (1997). Religious influence on marital stability. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 382-392.
- Cao, N. (2005). The church as a surrogate family for working class immigrant Chinese youth: an ethnography of segmented assimilation. *Sociology of Religion*, 66(2): 183-201.
- Chao, R. K. (1994). Beyond parental control and authoritarian parenting style: Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training. *Child Development*, 65, 1111-1119.
- Chao, R. K. (2001). Extending research on the consequences of parenting style for Chinese Americans and European Americans. *Child Development*, 72, 1832-1843.
- Chaney, C. (2008). The benefits of church involvement for African-Americans: The perspectives of congregants, church staff, and the church pastor. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 10, 1-23.
- Chen, C. (2002). The religious varieties of ethnic presence: A comparison between a Taiwanese immigrant Buddhist temple and an Evangelical Christian church. *Sociology of Religion*, 63, 215-238.
- Chen, C. (2006). From filial piety to religious piety: Evangelical Christianity reconstructing Taiwanese immigrant families in the United States. *International Migration Review* 40, 573-602.
- Cherlin, A. (2009). *The Marriage-Go-Round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Chong, K. H. (1998). What it means to be Christian: The role of religion in the construction of ethnic identity and boundary among second generation Korean Americans. *Sociology of Religion*, 59(3), 259-286.
- Christiansen, S., & Palkovitz, R. (1998). Exploring Erikson's psychosocial theory of development: Generativity and its relationship to paternal intimacy, identity and involvement in child care. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 7, 133-156.
- Christiano, K. (2000). Religion and the family in modern American culture. In S. Houseknecht, and J. Pankhurst (Eds.). *Family, religion, and social change in diverse societies*. New York: Oxford.

- Chung, I. (2010). Changes in the sociocultural reality of Chinese immigrants: Challenges and opportunities in help-seeking behavior. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 56(4), 436-447. doi:10.1177/0020764009105647
- Cochran, J. K., Chamlin, M. B., Beeghley, L., & Fenwick, M. (2004). Religion, religiosity, and nonmarital sexual conduct: An application of reference group theory. *Sociological Inquiry* 74(1):102-127.
- Crawford, E., Wright, M. O. D., & Masten, A. S. (2006). Resilience and spirituality in youth. In P. L. Benson, E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, & L. Wagener (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 355–370). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Inc.
- Curtis, K. T., & Ellison, C. G. (2002). Religious heterogamy and marital conflict. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(4), 551-576.
- Daly, K. (1992a). The fit between qualitative research and characteristics of families. In J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly, & G. Handel (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in family research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Daly, K. (1992b). Parenthood as problematic: Insider interviews with couples seeking to adopt. In J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly, & G. Handel (Eds.). *Qualitative methods in family research* (pp. 103-125). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Daly, K. J. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Dickie, J. R., Eshleman, A. K., Merasco, D. M., Sherpard, A., Vander Wilt, M., & Johnson, M. (1997). Parent-child relationships and children's images of God. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36(1), 25-43.
- Dienhart, A. (1998). *Reshaping fatherhood: The social construction of shared parenting*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Dollahite, D. C. (1998). Fathering, faith, and spirituality. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 7(1), 3-15.
- Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2009). A conceptual model of family and religious processes in a highly religious families. *Review of Religious Research*, 50 (4), 373-391.

- Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & Goodman, M. (2004). Religiosity and families: Relational and spiritual linkages in a diverse and dynamic cultural context. In M. J. Coleman & L.H. Ganong (Eds.). *The handbook of contemporary families: Considering the past, contemplating the future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & Olson, M. M. (1998). Faithful fathering in trying times: Religious beliefs and practices of Latter-day Saint fathers of children with special needs. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 7, 71-93.
- Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., & Olson, M. M. (2002). Fathering, faith, and family therapy: Generative narrative therapy with religious fathers. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 13, 263-294.
- Dudley, M. G., & Kosinski, F. A., Jr. (1990). Religiosity and marital satisfaction: A research note. *Review of Religious Research*, 32, 78-86.
- Ecklund, E. H. (2006). *Korean American evangelicals: New models for civic life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ecklund, E. H., & Park, J. Z. (2005). Asian American community participation and religion: Civil "model minorities?" *The Journal of Asian American Studies*, 8, 1-21.
- Ellison, C. G., & Anderson, K. L. (2000). Religious involvement and domestic violence among U.S. couples. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, 269-286.
- Ellison, C. G., & George, L. K. (1994). Religious involvement, social ties, and social support in a southeastern community. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33, 46-61.
- Enright, R. D., (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice: A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: APA Life Tools.
- Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., Lambert, N., Stillman, T., & Braithwaite, S. (2008). Spiritual behaviors and relationship satisfaction: A critical analysis of the role of prayer. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27(4), 362-388.
- Furrow, J. L. (1998). The ideal father: Religious narratives and the role of fatherhood. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 7, 17 - 32.
- Garland, D. R. (2002). Faith narratives of congregants and their families. *Review of Religious Research*. 4(1), 69-92.
- Gee, G. C. (2002). A multilevel analysis of the relationship between institutional and individual racial discrimination and health status. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(4), 615-623.

- Gilgun, J. (1992). Definitions, methodologies, and methods in qualitative family research. In J. Gilgun, K. Daly, & G. Handel (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in family research* (pp. 22–40). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gilgun, J. F. (1997). Case study designs. In R. Grinnell (Ed.), *Social work research and evaluation* (5th ed.) (pp. 298-312). Itasca, IL: Peacock.
- Gilgun, J. F. (1999). Methodological pluralism and qualitative family research. In S. Steinmetz, M. Sussman, & G. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of marriage and the family* (2nd ed., pp. 219-261). New York: Plenum.
- Gilgun, J. F. (2005). Deductive qualitative analysis and family theory building. In V. Bengtson, Acock, K. Allen, P. Dilworth-Anderson, & D. Klein (Eds.). *Sourcebook of family theory and research: An interactive approach* (pp. 83-84). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gilgun, J. F., Daly, K., & Handel, G. (1992). *Qualitative methods in family research* (pp. 103-125). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Goodman, M. A., & Dollahite, D. C. (2006). How religious couples perceive the influence of God in their marriage. *Review of Religious Research*, 48, 141-155.
- Gunnoe, M. L., & Moore, K. A. (2002). Predictors of religiosity among youth aged 17–22: A longitudinal study of the national survey of children. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(4), 613-622.
- Hackney, C. H., & Sanders, G. S. (2003). Religiosity and mental health: A meta-analysis of recent studies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42(1), 43-55.
- Handel, G. (1996). Family worlds and qualitative family research. *Marriage and Family Review*, 24, 335-348.
- Hareven, T. K. (2000). *Families, history, and social change*. New York : Westview.
- Heaton, T. B., & Pratt, E. L. (1990). The effects of religious homogamy on marital satisfaction and stability. *Journal of Family Issues*, 11, 191-207.
- Houseknecht S. K., & Pankhurst J. G. (2000). Introduction: The religion-family linkage and social change--A neglected area of study. In S. Houseknecht, and J. Pankhurst (Eds.). *Family, religion, and social change in diverse societies*. New York: Oxford.
- Hummer, R. A., Rogers, R. G., Nam, C. B., & Ellison, C. G. (1999). Religious involvement and U.S. adult mortality. *Demography*, 36,273–285.
- Hunter, A., & Chan, K. K. (1993). *Protestantism in contemporary China*. Cambridge University Press.

- Hurh, W. M., & Kim, K. C. (1990). Religious participation of Korean immigrants in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 19-34.
- Huston, J. (2003). *Major world religions: From their origins to the present*. RoutledgeCurzon: New York.
- Ing, D. S. F. (1998). *The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in Protestant Chinese-American couples*. Ph.D. dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, Alameda.
- Ishii-Kuntz, M. (2004). Asian American families: Diverse history, contemporary trends, and the future. In M. Coleman and L. H. Ganong (Eds.), *Handbook of contemporary families: Considering the past, contemplating the future* (pp.369-384). Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- Jackson, B. R. & Bergeman, C. S. (2011). How does religiosity enhance well-being? The role of control. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 3(2), 149-161.
- James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green.
- Johnson, R. B. (1999). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118, 282-292.
- Jose, O. A., & Alfons, V. (2007). Religiosity and forgiveness among first-married and remarried adults. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10, 379-394.
- Kaslow, F., & Robinson, J. A. (1996). Long-term satisfying marriages: Perceptions of contributing factors. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 24, 154-170.
- Kim, K. C., & Kim, S. (2001). Ethnic role of Korean immigrant churches in the United States. In H. Y. Kwon & K. C. Kim (Eds.), *Korean Americans and their religions: Pilgrims and missionaries from a different shore*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- King, V. (2003). The influence of religion on fathers' relationships with their children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 382-295.
- King, P. E., Furrow, J. L., & Roth, N. H. (2002). The influence of family and peers on adolescent religiousness. *The Journal for Psychology and Christianity* 21(2): 109-120.
- Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, D. B. (Eds.) (2001). *Handbook of religion and health*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Krause, N. M. (2007). Social involvement in religious institutions and God-mediated control beliefs: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 46(4), 519-537.

- Krause, N. (2010). "God-mediated control and change in self-rated health." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20:267-287.
- Krause, N., Ellison, C. G., Shaw, B. A., Marcum, J. P., & Boardman, J. D. (2001). Church-based social support and religious coping. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, 637-656.
- Kwon, V. H., Ebaugh, H. R., & Hagan, J. (1997). The structure and function of cell group ministry in a Korean Christian church. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 247-256.
- Lambert, N. M., & Dollahite, D. C. (2006). How religiosity helps couples prevent, resolve, and overcome marital conflict. *Family Relations*, 55, 439-449.
- Lambert, N. M., & Dollahite, D. C. (2008). The threefold cord: Marital commitment in religious couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29, 592-614.
- Lambert, N.M., Fincham, F. D., Braithwaite, S. R., Graham, S. M., & Beach, S. R. H. (2009). Can prayer increase gratitude?, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 1(3), 139-149.
- Larson, L. E., & Goltz, J. W. (1989). Religious participation and marital commitment. *Review of Religious Research*, 30, 387-400.
- Latshaw, J. S. (1998). The centrality of faith in fathers' role construction: The faithful father and the *Axis Mundi* paradigm. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 7(1), 53-70.
- Lee, E-K O. (2007). Religion and spirituality as predictors of well-being among Chinese American and Korean American older adults. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 19, 77-100.
- Lee, P. C. (2008). Christian conversion stories of African American women: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27, 238-252.
- Lee, J. W., Rice, G. T., & Gillespie, V. B. (1997). Family worship patterns and their correlation with adolescent behavior and beliefs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 372-381.
- Lehrer, E. L., & Chiswick, C. U. (1993). Religion as a determinant of marital stability. *Demography*, 30, 385-403.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observations and analysis* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lu, Y., Marks, L. D., Nesteruk, O., Goodman, M., & Apavaloaie, L. (revised and resubmitted). Faith, conversion, and challenge: A Qualitative study of Chinese immigrant Christian marriages. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*.

- Lu, Y., & Marks, L., & Apavaloiae, L. (in press). Chinese immigrant families and Christian faith community: A qualitative study. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal*.
- Lu, Y., Marks, L. D. & Baumgartner, J. (2011). "The compass of our life": A qualitative study of marriage and faith among Chinese immigrants. *Marriage and Family Review*, 47, 125-148.
- Mackey, R. A., & O'Brien, B. A. (2005). The significance of religion in lasting marriages. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 18, 35-63.
- Mahoney, A. (2005). Religion and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(4), 689-706.
- Mahoney, A. (2010). Religion in families, 1999-2009: A relational spirituality framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 805-827.
- Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Jewell, T., Swank, A. B., Scott, E., Emery, E., et al. (1999). Marriage and the spiritual realm: The role of proximal and distal religious constructs in marital functioning. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13, 321-338.
- Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Tarakeshwar, N., & Swank, A. B. (2001). Religion in the home in the 1980s and 1990s: A meta-analytic review and conceptual analysis of links between religion, marriage, and parenting. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 559-596.
- Marks, L. D. (2004). Sacred practices in highly religious families: Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim perspectives. *Family Process*, 43, 217-231.
- Marks, L. D. (2005). How does religion influence marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon and Muslim perspectives. *Marriage & Family Review*, 38, 85-111.
- Marks, L. D. (2006). Religion and family relational health: An overview and conceptual model. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 45, 603-617.
- Marks, L. D. (2008). Prayer and marital intervention: Asking for divine help... or professional trouble? *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27, 678-669.
- Marks, L. D., & Chaney, C. (2006). Faith communities and African-American families: Why the black church matters. In S. D. Ambrose (Ed.). *Religion and psychology*. (pp. 277-294). Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2001). Religion, relationships, and responsible fathering in Latter-day Saint families of children with special needs. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18, 625-650.
- Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2011). Mining the meanings from psychology of religion's correlation mountain. *Journal of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 3, 181-193.

- Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., & Dew, J. (2009). Enhancing cultural competence in financial counseling and planning: Understanding why families make religious contributions. *Financial Counseling and Planning*, 20, 14-26.
- Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., & Freeman, J. J. (2012). Faith and prayer in family life. In A. J. Hawkins, D. C. Dollahite, & T. W. Draper (Eds.), *Successful marriages and families: Proclamation principles and research perspectives* (pp. 185-195). Provo, UT: BYU Studies Press.
- Marks, L. D., Hopkins, K., Chaney, C., Monroe, P., Nesteruk, O., & Sasser, D. (2008). "Together, we're strong": A qualitative study of happy, enduring African-American marriages. *Family Relations*, 57, 172-185.
- Marks, L. D., Nesteruk, O., Swanson, M., Garrison, M. E. B., & Davis, T. (2005). Religion and health among African Americans: A qualitative examination. *Research on Aging*, 27, 447-474.
- Marks, L. D., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Fathers as spiritual guides. In S. E. Brotherson & J. M. White (Eds.), *Why fathers count* (pp. 209-223). Harriman, TN: Men's Studies.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1964). *On religion*. New York: Schocken Books. Undated Scholars Press Reprint.
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1999). Religion and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality*, 67, 1141-1164
- McMinn, M. R., Fervida, H., Louwerse, K. A. Pop, J. L., Thompson, R. D., Trihub, B. L., & McLeod-Harrison, S. (2008). Forgiveness and prayer. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27, 101-109.
- Miller, W. R., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). *Spirituality, religion, and health: An emerging research field*. American Psychologist.
- Min, P. G. (1992). The structure and social functions of Korean immigrant churches in the United States. *International Migration Review*, 26, 1370-1394.
- Murray-Swank, A., Mahoney, A., & Pargament, K. I. (2006). Sanctification of parenting: Links to corporal punishment and parental warmth among Biblically conservative and liberal mothers. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 16, 271-287.
- Myers, S. M. (2006). Religious homogamy and marital quality: Historical and generational patterns, 1980-1997. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 292-304.

- Nadal, K. L. (2011). The racial and ethnic microaggressions scale (REMS): Construction, reliability, and validity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 470-480. doi:10.1037/a0025 93
- Numrich, P. D. (2007). Immigrant American religions and the family: New diversity and conservatism. In D. S. Browning & D. A. Clairmont (Eds.). *American religions and the family: How faith traditions cope with modernization and democracy*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- O'Donoghue, T., & Punch K. (2003). *Qualitative educational research in action: Doing and reflecting*. London: Routledge.
- Oman, D., & Thoresen, C. (2005). Religion and health. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 435–459). New York: Guilford.
- Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved fathering and child development: Advancing our understanding of good fathering. In C. Tamis-LaMonda & N. Cabrerra (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement* (pp. 119-140). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Palkovitz, R., Marks, L., Appleby, D., & Holmes, E. K. (2003). Parenting and adult development: contexts, processes and products of intergenerational relationships. In L. Kuczynski, (Ed.), *Dynamics in parent-child relations* (pp. 307-323). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Palkovitz, R., & Palm, G. (1998). Fatherhood and faith in formation: The developmental effects of fathering on religiosity, morals & values. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 7, 33-51.
- Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: Development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56, 519-543.
- Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. M. (2005). Sacred matters: Sanctification as a vital topic for the psychology of religion. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 15(3), 179-198.
- Park, C. L. (2005). Religion as a meaning-making framework in coping with life stress. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(4), 707-729.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif. Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (1996). Preface: A look at the mosaic of qualitative family research. *Marriage and Family Review*, 24, xvii-xxiii.

- Pearce, L. D., & Thornton, A. (2007). Religious identity and family ideologies in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(5), 1227-1243.
- Petts, R. J., & Knoester, C. (2007). Parents' religious heterogamy and children's well-being. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 46(3), 373-389.
- Querido, J. G., Warner, T. D., & Eyberg, S. M. (2002). Parenting styles and child behavior in African American families of preschool children. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 31, 272-277.
- Robinson, L. C., & Blanton, P. W. (2001). Marital strengths in enduring marriages. *Family Relations*, 42, 38-45.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed). Sage Publications Inc.
- Schwartz, K. D. (2006). Transformation in parent and friend faith support prediction adolescents' religious faith. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 16(4), 311-326.
- Simpson, D. B., Newman, J. L., & Fuqua, D. R. (2008). Understanding the role of relational factors in Christian spirituality. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 36(2), 124-134.
- Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's behind the research?: Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, C. (2003). Theorizing religious effects among American adolescents. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42(1), 17-30.
- Smith, C. (with Denton, M. L.) (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford.
- Smith, H. (1994). *World's religions: A guide to our wisdom traditions*. Harper San Francisco.
- Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Stokes, C. E., & Regnerus, M. D. (2009). When faith divides family: Religious discord and adolescent reports of parent-child relations. *Social Science Research*, 38, 155-167.
- Stonehouse, C. (2006). After a child's first dance with God: Accompanying children on a protestant spiritual journey. In K. M. Yust, A. N. Johnson, S. E. Sasso, & E. C. Roehlkepartain (Eds.), *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions* (pp. 95-107). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage publications, CA.

- Sue, D., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286. doi:10.103770003-066X.624.271
- Sullivan, K. T. (2001). Understanding the relationship between religiosity and marriage: An investigation of the immediate and longitudinal effects of religiosity on newlywed couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 610-626.
- Taylor, R. J., Lincoln, K. D., & Chatters, L. M. (2005). Supportive relationships with church members among African Americans. *Family Relations*, 54, 501-511.
- Thompson, N. E., & Gurney, A. G. (2003). "He is everything": Religion's role in the lives of immigrant youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 100, 75-90.
- Trask, B. S., Brady, L. T., Qiu, W., & Radnai-Griffin, D. (2009). Understanding the immigration experience through a lifecourse lens: Four personal stories. In R. L. Dalla, J. Deferain, J. Johnson, & D. A. Abbott (Eds.), *Strengths and challenges of new immigrant families: Implications for research, education, policy, and service* (pp. 53-69). Lexington books.
- Trochim, W. (2001). *The research methods knowledge base*. New York: Atomic Dog.
- Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development, *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 1(4), 198-210.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). Selected social characteristics in the United States: 2009 Data set: 2009 American community survey 1-year estimates
Survey: American Community Survey
- Vaaler, M. L., Ellison, C. G., & Powers, D. A. (2009). Religious influences on the risk of marital dissolution, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(4), 917-934.
- Walls, C. T. (1992). The role of church and family support in the lives of older African Americans. In L. Burton (Ed.). *Family and aging*. Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. Amityville, New York.
- Wang, Y., & Yang, F. (2006). More than evangelical and ethnic: The ecological factor in Chinese conversion to Christianity in the United States. *Sociology of Religion* 67(2):179-192.
- Warner, C. T. (2001). *Bonds that make us free: Healing our relationships, coming to ourselves*. The Arbing Institute, Incorporated.
- Whyte, B. (1988). *Unfinished encounter – China and Christianity*. London: Collins Fount Paperbacks.

- Wong, L. (2007). From atheists to evangelicals: The Christian conversion experiences of Mainland Chinese intellectuals in the United States of America. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol 68(1-A), 2007, pp. 219. [Dissertation]
- Wilcox, B. (1999). Emerging attitudes about gender roles and fatherhood. In Don E. Eberly (Ed.), *The faith factor in fatherhood* (pp. 219-240). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Wilcox, B. (2002). Religion, convention, and paternal involvement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 780-792.
- Wilcox, W. B. (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilcox, W.B. et al, (2011). *Why Marriage Matters (3rd eds.)*. Institute for American Values, New York
- Wilcox, W. B., & Wolfinger, N. H. (2008). Living and loving “decent”: Religion and relationship quality among urban parents. *Social Science Research*, 37, 828-843.
- Wilson J., & Musick, M. (1996). Religion and marital dependency. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35, 30-40.
- Wilson, M. R., & Filsinger, E. E. (1986). Religiosity and marital adjustment: Multidimensional interrelationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48, 147-151.
- Wright, B. R. E., Zozula, C. & Wilcox, W. B. (2012). Bad News about the Good News: The Construction of the Christian-Failure Narrative. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 14, 1-19.
- Wu, B., Chi, I., Plassman, B. L., & Guo, M. (2010). Depressive symptoms and health problems among Chinese immigrant elders in the US and Chinese elders in China. *Aging & Mental Health*, 14(6), 695-704. doi:10.1080/13607860802427994
- Wuthnow, R. (2000). How religious groups promote forgiving: A national study, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39(2), 125-139.
- Xie, X., Xia, Y., & Zhou, Z. (2004). Strengths and stress in Chinese immigrant families: A qualitative study. *Great Plains Research*, 14, 203-218.
- Yang, F. (1998). Chinese conversion to evangelical Christianity: The importance of social and cultural contexts. *Sociology of Religion*, 59, 237-257.
- Yang, F. (1999). *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, assimilation, and adhesive identities*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

- Yang, F. (2005). Lost in the market, saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in urban China. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 44(4), 423-441.
- Yeh, C. J., Kim, A. B., Pituc, S. T., & Atkins, M. (2008). Poverty, loss, and resilience: The story of Chinese immigrant youth. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(1), 34-48.
doi:10.1037/0022-0167.55.1.34
- Yust, K. M., Johnson, A. N., Sasso, S. E., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2006). Traditional wisdom: Creating space for religious reflection on child and adolescent spirituality. In K. M. Yust, A. N. Johnson, S. E. Sasso, & E. C. Roehlkepartain (Eds.), *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions* (pp. 1-14). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zhai, J. E., & Stokes, S. E. (2009). Ethnic, family, and social contextual influences on Asian American adolescents' religiosity. *Sociological Spectrum*, 29, 201-226.
- Zhang, X. (2006). How religious organizations influence Chinese conversion to evangelical Protestantism in the United States. *Sociology of Religion*, 67, 149-159.
- Zhou, M. (1997). Growing up American: the challenge confronting immigrant children and children of immigrants. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 23, 63-95.
- Zhou, M., & Bankston, C. L. (1998). *Growing up American: How Vietnamese children adapt to life in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT

IRB #: 2768 LSU Proposal #: 18940 Revised: 03/24/2004

LSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) for 578-8692 FAX 6792
HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT PROTECTION Office: 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall

APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM INSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT

Unless they are qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Instructions: Complete this form.

Exemption Applicant: If it appears that your study qualifies for exemption send:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form,
- (B) a brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts A & B),
- (C) copies of all instruments to be used. If this proposal is part of a grant proposal include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) the consent form that you will use in the study

to: ONE screening committee member (listed at the end of this form) in the most closely related department/discipline or to IRB office.

If exemption seems likely, submit it. If not, submit regular IRB application. Help is available from Dr. Robert Mathews, 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu or any screening committee member.

Principal Investigator Loren Marks Student? Y(N)

Ph: 8-2405 E-mail lorenm@lsu.edu Dept/Unit HUEC (FCCS Division)

If Student, name supervising professor _____ Ph: _____

Mailing Address _____ Ph _____

Project Title Faith and Families

Agency expected to fund project Grants will be submitted to B, RSE, NSF, CoR, and Louisville Institute

Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) Religious Two-Parent Families

Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted.

PI Signature Loren D. Marks Date 10/13/04 (no per signatures)

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted _____ Category/Paragraph _____

Reviewer Mathews Signature Robert Mathews Date 9/8/05

APPENDIX B. STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of the Research

I am being asked to participate in a study that examines families and religion. My participation in the study will take 60-90 minutes. I understand that the interviewer will audio record my interview and that she or he will later analyze the interview data.

Rights of Participation

Everything I provide the researcher with will remain anonymous and confidential. If any information from my interview is used in any form, this information will not be accompanied by my name or any other identifying information. I have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) I am uncomfortable answering or request that the tape recorder be turned off for certain responses. I also may end my interview at any time by telling the researcher that I do not want to participate any longer.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks for participating in this study. However, this research will help family scholars and professionals better understand the relationships between families, stress, coping, and religion.

Contacts

I have had time to address any questions or concerns I have with the researcher. If have additional or future questions or concerns, I may contact Dr. Loren Marks at lorenm@lsu.edu or (225) 578-2405.

Participation Assurance

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.

Consent Signature

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

Please sign and date above if you agree to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C. DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Name:_____

Age:_____ Circle One: Male Female

Faith Affiliation:_____

Number and Gender of Children (i.e., 1 girl, 2 boys):_____

Child(ren's) Age(s):_____

Educational Level (High School, College, etc.):_____

- 1) *If you feel comfortable responding, approximately what percentage of your income do you spend or donate in direct and indirect ways that involve your faith community?*

- 2) *Approximately how many hours a week do you spend in faith-related activities?(including worship services, faith-related meetings, prayer and meditation, scripture study, family worship, youth or children's organizations, service to other congregational members, etc.)*

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON FAITH AND FAMILY LIFE

Faith and Marriage (Married Couple)

I'd like to ask some questions about links between your faith and your marriage or between your relationship with God and with one another. I am also interested in personal experiences that illustrate your ideas.

1. Did your religious beliefs and values influence how you met and decided to marry?
2. What are some of your *deepest spiritual beliefs* relating to marriage? Can you give an example of how these beliefs have influenced your marriage?
3. Which faith *practices/traditions* hold special meaning for you *as a couple*?
4. How do these practices/traditions influence your marriage? (EXAMPLE?)
5. How has your *relationship with God* influenced your marriage?
6. Have you influenced each other's initial or ongoing involvement with your faith?
7. All couples have some conflict. Are there ways that your religious beliefs or practices *help avoid or reduce marital conflict*? (EXAMPLE?)
8. What do your non-religious friends or family members think you give up because of your faith?
9. Do you feel there are any religious beliefs or practices that, if *misunderstood or misapplied*, can be harmful to marriage? If so, what are they?
10. What are the *greatest obstacles* (external/internal) to your marriage being all you and God want it to be? (EXAMPLE?)

The second part of the interview asks about connections between your faith and your family life; that is between your relationships with God and with family members. I would also enjoy any personal experiences that might illustrate the influence of your faith in your family life.

I. Religious Practice and Community and Family Life

1. Which *faith practices/traditions* hold special meaning for you as a family?
2. Can you recall a particular time when these practices/traditions really helped your family?
3. Is your religious congregation important to your family? Your Marriage?

II. Religious Beliefs and Family Life

4. Which of your religious beliefs have the most influence on your family life?
5. How *central* is your religion to how you parent your children?
6. Can you think of a time when you believe God *directly influenced* your family in some way?

III. Faith and Parent-Child Relationships

TO PARENTS:

7. As parents, how do you *share your faith* with your children?
8. How *important* to you is it that your child(ren) *follow in your faith*?

IV. Faith and Surrounding Culture

9. Do your religious beliefs influence what you *let in or keep out* of your family life?
10. What challenges arise from being a religious family in the surrounding culture? How do you *respond to these challenges*? (EXAMPLE?)

V. Challenges of Faith and Family Life

11. Has your family experienced any *major stressors or challenges* that your faith has helped you deal with? Is your conversion a challenge to you and your family (explain your conversion process)?
12. Is there anything else about your faith and your family life you consider important or interesting to mention?

APPENDIX E. DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Name	Age	Number of Children	Ages of Children	Educational Level	Income Donated	Time spent hours	Time/Interview
Shen	66	1	37	PH.D.	12.50%	10	1/15/2008
Shi	65			PH.D.			
Cui	58	4	30,29,23,17	M.S.	N/A	15	12/9/2007
Guo	57			B.S.			
Yi	54	2	19, 17	M.S.	N/A	N/A	1/6/2008
Xie	52			M.S.			
Fan	61	2	30, 27	M.S.	N/A	N/A	3/22/2008
Xin	57			B.A.			
Lu	39	1	7	M.S.	0.50%	5	1/20/2008
Zhan	37			graduate student			
Pan	28	1	7 months	B.A.	10%	40	7/13/2006
Wan	28			B.A.			
Sun	34	1	9 months	PH.D.	N/A	N/A	9/16/2007
Zheng	33			M.S.			
Wu	33	2	3 yrs,7mon	PH.D.	10%	12	9/15/2007
Bai	33			M.S.		10	
Liang	40	1	15	M.S.	5%	9	9/23/2007
Wang	43			M.S.			
Yan	44	2	12, 3	PH.D.	N/A	N/A	9/30/2007
Liu	38			M.S.			
Li	42	2	9, 6	PH.D.	10%	20	10/14/2007
Yang	43			PH.D.		10	
Huang	44	2	18, 2	PH.D.	N/A	N/A	10/20/2007
Wei	44			Technical school			
Lin	45	2	9, 6	PH.D.	12%	25	11/5/2007
Zhen	42			M.S.		15	
Qiu	54	2	26, 24	PH.D.	10%	8	11/11/2007
Zhu	54			B.A.			
Zhang	46	2	11, 9	PH.D.	N/A	N/A	11/18/2007
Han	45			Technical school			
Qin	51	2	21, 13	PH.D.	N/A	30	12/2/2007
Mei	44			B.A.			
Cao	44	2	14, 10	Ph.D.	10%	20	11/28/2009

(Table continued)

Xi	39			M.A.	10%	8	
Bing	45	1	8	Ph.D.	N/A	N/A	4/2/2010
Na	42			B.A.	N/A	N/A	
Ping		2	29, 21	Ph.D.	N/A	N/A	4/6/2010
Wen	55			M.A.	N/A	20	
Lei	46	2	13, 6	M.A.	N/A	10	2/16/2010
Zhou	42			B.A.	N/A	9	
Ban	45	1	15	Ph.D.	10%	20	8/3/2010
Jia	42			M.A.	N/A	N/A	
Ming	51	2	18, 12	Ph.D.	N/A	10	8/5/2010
Hu	49			M.A.	N/A	10	

VITA

Yaxin Lu was born and raised in Changchun, Jinlin Province, of P. R. of China. She married to Baozhu Liu, and they have three children, Mary, who was born in Qingdao, China; Nancy, who was born in Tsucuba, Japan; and a son Matthew, who was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, U.S.A.

She received her bachelor degree in international law from Jilin University. After graduation, she went to Qingdao and worked for an import and export company for ten years. She went to Japan with her husband who was a visiting scholar, and stayed there for two years, then came to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, U.S.A. In 2007, she began her master's program in the field of family science with special focus on religion and family in the School of Human Ecology at Louisiana State University. Yaxin started her Ph.D. right after she had received her Master's degree on the same special field, and graduated in December, 2012.

During Yaxin's study at LSU, she worked as a graduate research assistant from School of Human Ecology and Psychology Department. She was awarded the Alvin and Lillie Harper Graduate Fellowship, Edith Spring Arnold Scholarship, and Clara Tucker Graduate Scholarship from 2009 to 2011. In 2012, she received Student/New Professionals Session Outstanding Paper Award from Religion and Family Life Section at 74th NCFR Annual Conference.