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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
School of Behavioral Health
in conjunction with the
Faculty of Graduate Studies

The Lived Experience of
Chinese American Christians in Family Life

by

Jessica Lynn ChenFeng

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Marital and Family Therapy

June 2014

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this dissertation in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Lived Experience of Chinese American Christians in Family Life

by

Jessica Lynn ChenFeng

Doctor of Philosophy in Marital and Family Therapy

Loma Linda University, June 2014

Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, Chairperson

Thirty-one percent of Chinese Americans affiliate with being Christian, making Christianity the largest religious group for the Chinese in the United States (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012) and Chinese churches are the leading religious institutions among Chinese in America (Yang, 1999b). First generation Chinese American Christian parents have endured much through the immigration experience and put in their best efforts to raise their children in a foreign land where they have experienced discrimination, downward mobility (Zhou, 2009), and acculturative stress.

Second generation Chinese American Christians struggle with conflict with their parents and their ties to Chinese American culture, values and Christian faith (Sam Kim & Park, 2012). This intersection of culture and faith requires further research in the field of marital and family sciences. In the literature reviewed, what is especially lacking is an exploration of how the Christian faith plays a role in impacting intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families.

This dissertation is grounded on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory, which allows for the multiple systemic contexts under which Chinese American Christian families find themselves. Critical Race Theory and Locational

Feminism/Intersectionality are intertwined to deepen understanding of the cultural and faith pieces of their lived experiences.

An interpretative phenomenological approach of analysis is used to develop a more complete understanding of the relational and familial dynamics among Chinese American Christians, how these dynamics show up in and get addressed by the Chinese church communities, and how might this awareness better inform family therapists about the cultural and spiritual ways of pursuing health and wellness in this context.

There are two publishable papers from this study: the first paper tells of the experiences of first and second generation Chinese American Christian family members and their intergenerational family dynamics as experienced in their context; the second paper references findings from the first paper and integrates these with the perspectives of pastors, discussing implications for how faith communities and the mental health field might work together for the wellness of these families and their communities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

From 2000 to 2010, the Asian population grew more than any other race in the United States. Of the Asian American population, Chinese Americans make up the largest Asian group at 23% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The field of marital and family therapy has increasingly pursued research on how to better serve the family and relational health needs of Chinese Americans. Scholarship has also sought to understand the role of religion and spirituality in families' lives and how family therapists can utilize these important resources (Marterella & Brock, 2008). One particular area that has been overlooked, however, is where culture and spirituality come together, particularly for Chinese Americans. For some Asian American groups, the percentage of Christians in America is much higher than in their native countries, as is the case with Chinese Americans. Thirty-one percent of Chinese Americans affiliate with being Christian, making Christianity the largest religious group for the Chinese in the United States (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012).

Chinese Christian churches are the leading religious institutions among Chinese in America. It is estimated that as much as 32% of the Chinese in metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and Chicago are Christian, which is higher than those that affiliate with Buddhism or other religions (Yang, 1999b). These churches have critical roles within the Chinese American communities; families come together not only to worship and find spiritual support, but also to share in community with other Chinese families, find

guidance for family issues, and even to get referrals for services from dental care to car repair.

At the same time, these first and second generation immigrant families are living out life in their church communities with the same challenges that face many Chinese American families: intergenerational conflict, acculturation difficulties, and the strains and stressors of being minority in a dominant American cultural context. In the Chinese culture and context, pursuing emotional/relational health and mental wellness is very different from Western models that encourage talk therapy and the use of psychotropic medication. Thus, these families are often at a loss living in America when they find themselves facing relational conflict and mental health concerns they do not know how to resolve.

The Chinese population in America still tends to see seeking mental health care as being laden with stigma (Kung, 2004; S. Lee et al., 2009). Rather than expect Chinese Americans to seek help the Western way by seeking therapy, how can the field of marital and family therapy learn with Chinese American churches to understand how the emotional, relational and mental health needs are being tended to in their context? How do we first understand the depth and breadth of a culture and faith that is so intertwined into an immigration history, community and family life? It is the purpose of this dissertation to deepen understanding of the intersection of Chinese American culture and Christian faith in the family lives of Chinese American Christians.

Background

Presently, the research that captures the nuanced intersection of Chinese

American culture and Christian faith is limited. The experience of Chinese American Christians is one whose story begins in their country of origin, through immigration, and is in continual flux as these families seek to make sense of their cultural and spiritual selves as a minority group in a dominant American cultural context. To conceptualize these experiences, this dissertation will ground its research on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological theory, which conceptualizes human development as occurring across a life span and between the person and their changing environments and social contexts. This allows us to see the multiple systemic contexts under which Chinese American Christian families find themselves. Because Bronfenbrenner's theory does not address the more specific areas of culture and faith, Critical Race Theory and Locational Feminism/Intersectionality will be intertwined to deepen our understanding of the lived experiences of Chinese American Christian families.

Immigration History

The history of Chinese immigration to America can be understood as taking place in three waves. The first wave was in the mid to late nineteenth century, when Chinese came in large numbers to Hawaii and the west coast as contracted laborers for the plantations, the gold rush, and transcontinental railroads (Takaki, 1989). Many men immigrated with the hope of finding "gold and glory" but were met with unjust treatment and exclusion. Immigration stopped because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which outlawed all Chinese immigration to the United States and disallowed citizenship to any Chinese already in the states. Immigrants from this first wave are considered the

first group of first and second generation Chinese Americans, though they are not the main focus of this study.

The second wave of immigration came about when this act was repealed in 1943 along with post-1965 immigration policies, bringing about a surge in Chinese immigration. Many of these immigrants came from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The last wave can be considered as taking place since the 1980s, and many of the immigrants have come from mainland China, especially since China removed restrictions on emigration (Zhou, 2009). The focus of this dissertation study rests on the second and third wave Chinese immigrants and so “first or second generation” will be referring to these latter groups of Chinese Americans.

The American Dream and Context

Throughout history, immigrants have come to America with the hope of pursuing a brighter and better future for their families and children. Chinese Americans also have their own version of the pursuit of the American Dream, to seek social mobility through hard work, educational achievement, and ethnic entrepreneurship (Zhou, 2009). Parents feel that they have made significant sacrifices so that their children can have a better life and future in America. Often, children know quite well the expectations parents have for them to pursue the highest levels of academic and occupational success, help the family move upward in social class, and to eventually take care of parents once they are old (Zhou, 2009). All of these hopes and dreams shape the daily lives and relationships of Chinese American families.

The Search for Identity and Belonging

As foreigners in a new land, there is an inclination to find community, safety and identity (Takaki, 1989). Even though Chinese immigrants have opportunities to take part in various kinds of ethnic organizations such as cultural clubs, language schools, and other religious groups, there are certain needs that only the Christian church has been able to meet. The Christian church allows immigrants to have not only a sense of social belonging, but also the opportunity to have intimate interactions with others such that spiritual and psychological needs are met; they offer youth programs which support parenting and provide a moral environment within which to raise the second-generation (Yang, 1998).

The Protestant intergenerational transmission of faith is more successful among Asian Americans than other religious practices (Zhai & Stokes, 2009). An explanation of this is that Asian Americans come from a history that is embedded in Confucian values, a value system that can appreciate some of the foundational teachings of Christianity (C. Chen, 2006; Yang, 1998). Asian American values, such as collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, filial piety, and humility have their roots in Confucian ideology and these core six values undergird the lives of Asian American families. Oftentimes these values are not spoken of or taught overtly. Children learn through observation and community that there are societal and familial expectations they must fulfill (B. K. Kim, Li, & Ng, 2005).

Asian American churches also tend to emphasize Christian teachings that are relevant to their culturally traditional values (C. Chen, 2006; Chong, 1998). For example, they are inclined to adopt teachings that emphasize family and community life (Zhai & Stokes, 2009). Christian values place importance on considering others before one's own

interests (Philippians 2; Romans 12, New International Version) as well as taking care of one's own family (1 Timothy 3). This coincides well with many of the Asian American values depicted above, which is why the transmission of Christian faith is successful amongst Asian Americans.

Leaving a home country, immigrating to a foreign land and living as a minority population are good reasons why Chinese American families seek safety and a sense of belonging in their church communities.

The Pain of Familial and Cultural Disconnect

The first generation parents immigrate to the United States with their more traditional Chinese values and mindset, and with great hopes and ideas of what family life will be like in this new land. The second generation children grow up in a drastically different American context with pressures and expectations from home and the larger context that may pull them in different directions (J. Chen, 2011). Naturally, the cultural disconnect and differences between the generations often lead to challenges in family relationships.

The intergenerational strains typically arise from differences in values and ways of living between first generation immigrant parents and their children who are growing up in the United States (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). The acculturation challenges between the generations increases the frequency of intergenerational conflict and there is a correlation between this conflict and the second generation young adults' well-being and adjustment (R. M. Lee, Su, & Yoshida, 2005).

Parents and children also have very different expectations of what it means to communicate. Parents often expect children to listen to them obediently without making challenges or talking back (Desiree Qin, 2008). As a result, children feel frustrated that obedience is demanded while it is difficult to communicate openly. Adolescents have greater distress when their parents adhere rigidly to this hierarchical type of parenting.

Sociologists have laid a good foundation to understand Chinese American immigration, acculturation and intergenerational concerns (e.g., immigration history, understanding the American Dream, Asian American values). Theologians have contributed to the literature in defining Asian American spirituality, Christianity, and the development of Chinese ethnic churches (e.g., Confucian and Asian values, transmission of faith). Family science researchers have begun to recognize issues related to Chinese American culture and mental health, family dynamics, and issues with therapeutic services (Abe-Kim, Takeuchi, & Hwang, 2002; Atkinson & Gim, 1989). In general however, Chinese American families currently receive little attention from researchers within the field of family sciences (Shi-Ruei Sherry Fang et al., 2008). Therefore, this study is meant to be an investigation into the intergenerational relationships within Chinese American Christian communities in regard to cultural and spiritual experiences so that the field of family sciences can better know how to move forward in serving these communities.

Objective

First generation Chinese American Christian parents have endured much through the immigration experience and put in their best efforts to raise their children in a foreign

land where they have experienced discrimination, downward mobility (Zhou, 2009), and acculturative stress. They have found comfort and safety in the Christian faith and the Chinese American church through the validation and support of their cultural values and hopes. At the same time they may not understand conflicts with their children or how to help their family relationships.

As they live in between cultures, second generation Chinese American Christians struggle with conflict with their first generation parents and their ties to Chinese American culture and values and Christian faith (Sam Kim & Park, 2012). This intersection of culture and faith is undoubtedly an area that requires further research. In the literature reviewed, what is lacking is the exploration of how the Christian faith plays a role in impacting intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families.

The purpose of this study is to develop a more complete understanding of the relational and familial dynamics among Chinese American Christians, how these dynamics show up in and get addressed by the Chinese church communities, and how might this awareness better inform family therapists about the cultural and spiritual ways of pursuing health and wellness in this context.

To address these questions, the lived experiences of these family members need to be understood and known. This dissertation will utilize a phenomenological study with four qualitative research questions, each of which touches upon the critical pieces of the Chinese American Christian family system:

Research Question 1: How do first generation Chinese American Christians experience and understand the interaction of culture and faith as they live in their families, church communities, and the larger American society?

Research Question 2: How do second generation Chinese American Christians experience and understand interaction of culture and faith as they live in their families, church communities, and the larger American society?

Research Question 3: What are the relational dynamics and issues between first and second generation Chinese American Christian family members?

Research Question 4: How do the pastors of Chinese American Christian congregations experience and understand the Chinese American Christian intergenerational family in their context as minority pastors for a minority church community in America?

Rationale

To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that have explored the experience of Chinese American Christians in regard to the significant identity issues related to their Chinese American culture and Christian faith. Chinese American Christian family members face distinctive relational challenges with one another and within their communities. An anecdotal example of how second-generation Christians struggle between culture and faith is the confusion they have about what it means to honor one's parents. This is both a Christian principle and a cultural value. Sometimes parents expect children to fulfill parental desires regarding their occupations or their spouse. This can cause relational and internal conflict for both generations. Christian doctrine emphasizes the importance of extending love toward all, regardless of ethnicity or background, as modeled through the life of Jesus Christ. It is not uncommon for parents to threaten disowning their children if their children choose to date or marry a

significant other of another ethnic background (J. Chen, 2012). Under these circumstances, second-generation Christians do not know how to practically reconcile the conflict between following God's plans while honoring their parents. Regardless of which choice is made, guilt or shame may result, whether in relationship to God or to one's parents.

Though many family members face identity-formation struggles and mental health conditions as a result of cultural/spiritual conflicts, the field still has limited understanding in how to reach out to the Chinese American Christian community. Though there may be little openness or awareness on their part on how to seek support from professional mental health services, there is also more that the field can do to understand their social context and the impact of their minority status on wellness.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore and describe the experience of Chinese American Christians and their families, from the perspectives of three groups of individuals: first generation immigrants, second-generation adult children and pastors who lead these church congregations. More specifically, their experiences will be explored in light of their Chinese culture and Christian faith, while trying to understand their intergenerational dynamics, relationship to the church community and larger American society. Hearing their stories and understanding their experiences will move the field of marital and family therapy toward a more contextualized, culturally sensitive position from which to engage with the Chinese American Christian community.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since this study will explore the experiences of Chinese American Christian families, it is important to ground this study on theories that address cultural, and larger context issues. As discussed in the introduction, this research will be grounded on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological theory, which understands human development as occurring across a life span and between the person and their changing environments and social contexts. In addition, Critical Race Theory and Locational Feminism/Intersectionality will be intertwined to capture the elements of Chinese racial and cultural identity and Christian spirituality into our understanding of the lived experiences of Chinese American Christian families.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

Developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory (1977) has contributed much in the behavioral health fields towards establishing a broader systemic, social contextual understanding of human development and psychology. His theory suggests that individuals are not only shaped by their immediate environments, but also by the many layers of systems in which they are embedded.

There are four nested environments described in ecological theory, each of which is contained within the next. The *microsystem*, the innermost environment, describes the relationship between the individual and their most immediate context, such as family, school, or work. The *mesosystem* is made up of the interactions between the various microsystems – interface between work and home, or church and school. The next

system is broader, the *exosystem*, which are the environments which have either direct or indirect impacts on the individuals. These systems may not directly contain the individual but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and thus influence or determine what goes on for the individual. They might include local governments, neighborhoods, or mass media. Lastly is the largest system, the *macrosystem*, which refers to the “overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture” (p. 515) such as legal, political, economic, or educational systems. These systems are the transporters of information, social discourses and ideologies.

Ecological theory assumes that it is not possible to understand a person’s development in isolation apart from their social and historical contexts (Darling, 2007). This theory is able to capture the complexity of the Chinese American Christian family’s experience: a wealth of Chinese history and culture beginning in a homeland, shifting to a new American cultural context and the many changing environments and systems along the way.

Critical Race Theory

Ecological theory establishes how context and systems shape Chinese American Christian families. However, it is also important to understand the reality of the minority Chinese experience living in America. Critical race theory addresses the way that racial identity plays out in the larger context. McDowell and Jeris (2004) summarize the five themes of critical race theory. First, critical race theory exposes how race continues to be a fundamental organizing principle in American society. On one hand, to see race

through a “color-blind” lens denies the real consequences of racism and ignores the reality of discrimination. On the other hand, it is possible to see race from a multicultural perspective without taking into consideration the historical and contextual nuances of racial identity. Critical race theory takes these into account and “challenges the idea that any one of us has a single, stationary identity or that racial groups are monolithic...” (p. 83).

Secondly, critical race theory sees that racism is the normal experience of most people of color in America (Ladson-Billings, 1999). It is not an individual psychological problem, a view that disguises underlying systemic racism. White privilege is so deeply embedded in our societal structures that it has become an “ ‘invisible norm’ against which all other races are measured” (McDowell & Jeris, 2004, p. 83). The experience of racism is very much relevant to the Chinese American reality and these pressures from the larger social context impact family life and relationships.

Thirdly, the goal of critical race theory is social justice. It suggests that theories cannot be neutral or objective, but are a reflection of the interests of the theorist. Race and racism is a social construction of society; they are invented, manipulated or retired as convenient according to the dominant culture.

The fourth theme is that critical race theory sees marginalized ethnic groups as “competently able to communicate and explain the meaning and consequences of racial stratification because they are oppressed, thus experiential knowledge is legitimate and appropriate” (Brown, 2003, p. 294). It is important for these groups to tell their stories, to deconstruct existing narratives and to speak up against the preconceived racial identities that perpetuate racial discrimination.

The last theme is that critical race theory brings together different disciplines in order to understand and analyze the complex ways in which racism exists and seeks to promote social change together (McDowell & Jeris, 2004). Minority populations such as Chinese Americans benefit from researchers recognizing that experiences of discrimination transcend multiple societal systems, and that these realities are critical for knowing about their lived experiences.

Locational Feminism and Intersectionality

It is hard to deny that the stressors coming from the larger society have a significant impact on Chinese American Christian communities. Experiences of racial discrimination and the pressure to live up to societal expectations come from the outside in and also reach the day-to-day experiences of family life.

Feminist theories have developed significantly over the last few decades, becoming integrated with identities of race, age, class, religion, sexual orientation, and many other contextual factors. Locational feminism brings together these identities, deepening feminist thinking by highlighting the “complexity, diversity, and intersectionalities among the social identities of individuals” (Enns, 2010, p. 334). This perspective allows for a fuller comprehension of the Chinese American’s experiences of privilege, opportunity, oppression, and marginalization.

Enns (2010) explains that locational feminism has clear applicability to the work of therapy in that it (1) rejects narrow definitions of “gender issues;” (2) emphasizes that identities are socially constructed and changing; (3) seeks to decenter dominant forms of

knowledge, and (4) acknowledges the messy and complex nature of constructing healthy identities.

The concept of intersectionality in locational feminism allows for each individual to hold multiple identities simultaneously. It was developed by feminist and critical race theorists to describe the meaning and consequences of the multiple categories of societal membership (Cole, 2009). Chinese American Christians have a complex identity that weaves their culture, faith, gendered experiences, educational background, and immigration status into their lived experiences in the United States. The Christian faith upholds the Christian identity as the lens through which all other identities are understood, a foundational principle that is intended to give freedom and fullness of life (Ephesians 2:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 New International Version). It can be confusing for Chinese American Christians live this out and make sense of their complex identities.

Intersectionality theory allows for these multiple contexts to exist together and this research hopes to honor these contexts. Intersectionality “avoids essentializing a single analytical category of identity by attending to other interlocking categories” and also “enables us to... include the impact of context and to pay attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges across various contexts” (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, p. 5). Although much of the literature of intersectionality is applied through the perspective of those experiencing disadvantage, this framework can also provide a lens through which to understand privileged groups (Cole, 2009).

Application of Frameworks to Chinese American Christian

Families

This dissertation study seeks to draw out the voices and stories of the Chinese American Christian community through studying the lived experiences of the first generation, the second generation, and the pastors of their faith communities.

Minority cultures are often studied in somewhat insular ways without grasping the dynamic interplay between the multiple systems in which they live. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory will allow this study to tend to the complex ways in which the Chinese American Christian individual and family is impacted by the systemic layers of Chinese culture, American culture, church life and theology, racism, educational and political systems. For example, the mesosystem of church life and family life will be a prominent system for these families and may influence parenting as they interact with exosystems (ideas from mass media and local Asian American community). Thus the perspectives of both generations as well as that of their pastors is important to better understand the dynamics in between these systems.

This phenomenological study extends the intention of critical race theory by eliciting the narratives of Chinese American Christians. The theory acknowledges the inherent challenges and pressures of minority life in America and validates this reality in their story of how family life is shaped and impacted. Locational feminism and Intersectionality provide an avenue through which the researchers can comprehend the existence of both privilege and marginalization in the Chinese American's experience, in identities of gender, social class, socioeconomic status, education, religion and immigration status.

It is the hope of this researcher to hear the stories and understand these experiences of Chinese culture and Christian faith embedded in a larger American context, through the lens of ecological theory, critical race theory, and locational feminism/Intersectionality, and thus better appreciate how all these concepts are related.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on the cultural and faith lives of Chinese American Christian families is found across the fields of family sciences, sociology, and religion. This review will attend to the current literature on Chinese culture and Christian faith for these families in understanding (1) the significance of the Chinese American church as it is connected to the larger social context (macrosystem) and family life (mesosystem), (2) the dynamics in Chinese American family relationships (microsystem), and (3) the ways in which these families seek support. In all of these systems, both first and second generation Chinese American Christians experience the issues in their own unique ways.

The Significance of the Chinese American Church

The Larger Social Context

Sociologist Fenggang Yang visited, interviewed, and observed all the Chinese churches of the Washington DC area in the mid-1990s, researching the social and cultural contexts of Chinese people and their inclinations towards conversion to Christianity (Yang, 1998). In the midst of a larger dominant society where Chinese Americans experience themselves as minority, marginalized, silenced, and foreigners, the Christian church community serves as a place of safety and connection for these immigrant families. A survey of 181 Chinese American adolescents and their parents in Northern California found that both parents and children experience discrimination in their worlds, leading to poorer adjustment, loneliness, anxiety, and somatization (Juang & Alvarez, 2010). To feel accepted and to belong in the church environment provides healing and

more positive outcomes. In addition to having a sense of social belonging, the Christian church allows immigrants the opportunity to have interactions with others, meeting their spiritual and psychological needs (Yang, 1998).

Becoming Christian and going to a Chinese church also means that Chinese American families do not have to lose their cultural identity. A research study of a Chinese Christian church in Houston, Texas discovered that here, Chinese Americans could teach and speak the Chinese language, eat Chinese food, celebrate Chinese festivals, practice Chinese values, and pastors could give sermons with Chinese stories (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). As an immigrant minority, there is a sense of comfort to share in community with others who have a similar family and cultural context. Church is a safe place where Chinese values can be lived out.

In one study of 334 East Asian Americans from both the east and west coasts, Chinese American participants from a Chinese church reported high scores of ethnic identity, a strong positive predictor of psychological well-being. Feeling connected to and supported by an ethnic community improves the overall quality of life (Chae & Foley, 2010). Thus, the Chinese American church plays a significant role in providing many facets of support, including mental health support, to Chinese American families.

Chinese Family Life and the Church

Chinese Americans are drawn to church for multiple reasons. Yang (1998) researched the social and cultural contexts of Chinese people and their conversion to Evangelical Christianity. Even though Chinese immigrants have opportunities to take part in various kinds of ethnic organizations such as cultural clubs, language schools, and

other religious groups, there are certain needs that only the Christian church has been able to meet. The church speaks to Chinese immigrants because of its support of the family unit, parenting interests, and traditional socially conservative values. Buddhism is perceived as being less modern and thus less appealing; the heavy Christian Western influence on Chinese culture has also made Christianity all the more attractive (Yang & Tamney, 2006).

The Christian church allows immigrants to have not only a sense of social belonging, but also the opportunity to have intimate interactions with others such that spiritual and psychological needs are met: they offer youth programs which support parenting and provide a moral environment within which to raise the second-generation (Yang, 1998); they implement effective outreach programs that support families in dealing with day-to-day issues (Yang & Tamney, 2006); they provide social support for the elderly (Zhang & Zhan, 2009). In Chen's (2006) study, Taiwanese immigrants who were not yet Christian wanted to attend church because they were concerned for their children's moral upbringing in the United States. They perceived American schools as being morally lacking, and thus church was one of the few places where they felt supported in these parenting efforts. For the younger generation, church also offers a space to work on family struggles, a shared place for parents and children to communicate concerns to one another.

The Chinese American Church plays a significant role in supporting the identity of the Chinese American family, particularly in reinforcing cultural values in a uniquely Chinese Christian way. The Asian American Values scale provides a general idea of values important to Chinese Americans. Kim, Li and Ng (2005) developed this scale, the

multidimensional Asian American Values Scale (AAVS-M), that assesses six Asian cultural value dimensions: collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, filial piety, and humility. Not only do these core six values undergird the lives of Chinese American families, they are modeled and reinforced in the Chinese church context. Often times these values are not spoken of or taught overtly. Children learn through observation and community that there are societal and familial expectations they must fulfill (J. Chen, 2011).

These churches tend to emphasize Christian teachings that are relevant to their cultural traditional values (C. Chen, 2006; Chong, 1998). For example, they are inclined to adopt teachings that emphasize family and community life (Zhai & Stokes, 2009). Christian values place importance on considering others before one's own interests (Philippians 2; Romans 12) as well as taking care of one's own family (1 Timothy 3), coinciding with many of the Chinese/Asian American values depicted above.

Generally speaking, Christian doctrine also has roots in traditional values that are emphasized in the Jewish culture present during Biblical times. These values include traditional gender roles such as wives being in submission to husbands (Ephesians 5; Colossians 3), and women having specified roles (1 Corinthians 14). These tend to be the traditional gender roles that are also reflected in Chinese American culture, particularly with first generation immigrants.

The teaching of honoring one's parents (Exodus 20; Ephesians 6) is a highly emphasized Christian doctrine, as seen in the study of a Chinese American church (C. Chen, 2006). This directly coincides with the cultural value of filial piety. Christian faith also teaches levels of hierarchy, whether in the home or church setting. This may be in

relation to roles of the wife, husband, or children, as well as with elders and deacons in the church. Regardless of the discussion regarding the appropriate interpretation of these Biblical texts, Chinese Americans typically respond in congruence with models of hierarchy in their societies. In Chinese culture, elders are respected and given much honor and power, where age is often a determiner of hierarchy.

Though there is limited literature, researchers observe and theorize that how Chinese cultural values and Christian faith intersect is what makes the Chinese Christian church a familiar and comfortable place for the Chinese American family. Family and church life are often so intertwined that the church serves as an extended family system (Jeung, 2004). The Chinese American church “reflects the intergenerational family model,” with pastors often seeming like the father figure (Cao, 2005, p. 192). The pastor is the one to whom family members go for support, counsel, and direction in the midst of family crisis.

The First Generation

Even though first generation Chinese parents have opportunities to engage in other ethnic organizations such as cultural clubs and other religious groups, there are certain needs that only the Christian church seems to be able to meet. Parents find support from the church in their efforts to find a moral environment in which to raise their children in a new country (C. Chen, 2006; Yang, 1998). The churches also hold outreach programs that support families in coping with daily life (Yang & Tamney, 2006), which is particularly meaningful for immigrant parents who are adjusting their families to a new society.

The Second Generation

For the second generation, church provides opportunity to work through family issues, where children and parents can together communicate their struggles to one another (C. Chen, 2006). With the intergenerational conflict that is common, it is harder for the second generation to address their concerns with their parents because of Chinese values that suggest it is not respectful or honoring to do so. As the second generation children grow older and enter college or the workplace, it is often here where they have their first experiences being marginalized by the larger society while at the same time are more aware of the existence of racial and ethnic issues. As a result, many find themselves feeling more ease attending predominantly Chinese churches or college campus ministries. These are places of “social belonging, psychological comfort and religious meaning” for the second generation Chinese Americans (Yang, 1999a, p. 104). There is limited research on this phenomenon, though a number of studies reference its occurrence (Jeung, 2002; Sharon Kim, 2006).

Chinese American Christian Family Life and Intergenerational Dynamics

Though there is little literature on the intergenerational dynamics of Chinese American Christian families, a few researchers theorize that Chinese churches provide novel ways of living out family life in how they address the family’s needs and conflicts. For example, Christianity critiques the extremes of generational hierarchy, filial piety, and emotional control. Pastors and leaders in church might encourage more open communication (C. Chen, 2006) and a less controlling way for parents to engage with

children, while at the same time maintaining a collectivist, communal sense of identity. A different set of norms can be established to “conform to,” norms that promote a healthier family life. The church has the ability to challenge the things in Chinese culture that are barriers to seeking support (Cao, 2005). Families see how living out the Christian faith in these Chinese contexts can have positive outcomes for family relationships and see that pastors and Christian churches are dependable and respectable institutions.

There are certainly strengths associated with the values taught and reinforced by the Chinese American families’ participation in church. At the same time, it is often these values that create dissension intergenerationally. Much of the research across disciplines focuses on these issues between first and second generation Chinese family members. The intergenerational strains typically arise from differences in values and ways of living between first generation immigrant parents and their children who are growing up in the United States (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). These issues are often related to acculturation differences (R. M. Lee et al., 2005; Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003), parenting styles and warmth (Juang, Syed, & Takagi, 2007; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009), and differences in cultural expectations (Chung, 2001; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008).

The First Generation

First generation parents immigrate to the United States, having been raised in their countries of origin, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China, where Confucian values have shaped family life and expectations for centuries. Much of the research on

generational differences focuses on why these differences impact parent-child relationships. For example, a regression analysis of 129 Chinese American youth at an employment program in New York City found that parental pressure about education and occupation leads to increased intergenerational conflict (Ma & Yeh, 2005), and a multivariate analysis of 342 Asian American college students reported the Asian value of conforming to norms leads parents to expect their children to date and marry a specific type of person (Chung, 2001). What is largely missing from the research are explorations into the lived experiences of the first generation parents that leads them to persist in holding on to their cultural values.

Research often portrays the difference between first and second generation as an issue of east vs. west, collectivism vs. individualism, and controlling vs. flexible parenting. This way of framing Chinese American families tends to depict the parents in a negative light and misses out on the larger social context and their real struggles in parenting in a new country as a marginalized minority group. Experiences family members have in their social context beyond the family unit have an impact on family life. A short-term longitudinal study of 444 Chinese American families in Northern California found that parents' experience of discrimination influences the way they teach their children about ethnic-racial issues (Benner & Kim, 2009), thus impacting parenting practices.

The Second Generation

There is no question that intergenerational family conflict has a negative bearing on second generation Chinese Americans. In Asian American families, this conflict

persists further into late adolescence and young adulthood, in contrast to European American families, where intergenerational conflict seems to occur earlier. A number of quantitative studies revealed various negative impacts of intergenerational conflict: amongst Asian American young college adults, it correlates with the second generation's well-being and adjustment (R. M. Lee et al., 2005); in studying Chinese American adolescents and their parents, conflict is related to higher adolescent depressive symptoms (Juang et al., 2007); in contrasting Asian and Caucasian American adolescents in the same community, Asian Americans had lower self-esteem, as reported from taking the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, and more interpersonal problems (Rhee et al., 2003); Chinese and Southeast Asian adolescent immigrants with stressful life events were found more prone to violent behavior in the presence of intergenerational conflict (Ngo & Le, 2007); higher intergenerational conflict led to Chinese American youths' indecision about career (Ma & Yeh, 2005); Chinese American youth experienced greater intergenerational conflict than their European American counterparts and thus encounter more behavioral adjustment problems (Wu & Chao, 2005). In this study, Chinese American and European American adolescents completed measures on parental warmth and psychological adjustment; because the Chinese American adolescents' ideals exceeded what they perceived of their parents' warmth, this discrepancy led to more significant adjustment problems.

In one of the few qualitative studies on Chinese American youth, when asked about how they related to their parents, the youth answered with feeling frustrated by their parents' traditional ways in contrast to American parenting, physical distance and lack of affection, and expectations they could never achieve (D. B. Qin, Way, &

Mukherjee, 2008). What this study provides that most other studies, which are quantitative, cannot, is a glimpse into what it feels like to be a second generation Chinese American. These youth felt frustration, but also responded to the conflict in a myriad of ways, from trying to see the benefit of their parents' parenting styles to feeling alienation and disconnect from them. The words they shared of their experience portray the complexity of what life is like for them.

The research on Chinese American intergenerational relationships has found many factors related to the sources of family conflict, yet none of these studies truly captures how these stressors and challenges are experienced and lived out by both the first and second generation. In addition, none of these studies have explored how faith ties into the intergenerational relationships, nor is there an understanding of how the first and second generation continue to engage with one another despite the challenges. What do they do to deal with the conflict? What has been helpful for these families and what continues to be detrimental? Are these different for the two generations?

Support for the Chinese American Christian Family

There is little literature specifically on how and where Chinese American Christian families find support. However, there is much research on help-seeking attitudes of Asian and Chinese Americans in general and it would be beneficial to discuss the attitudes towards mental health of the Christian community.

Culture and Help-Seeking Attitudes

As can be assumed with the values discussed above, in the Chinese cultural

context, the disclosing of personal experience and emotion to outsiders and non-family members brings stigma (Cao, 2005). For Chinese Americans, because emotional and personal problems are not of primary importance, it may make little sense to seek help from others (Kung, 2003). Even in the presence of conflict and intense emotion, cultural norms and expectations make it nearly impossible for these strong feelings to be expressed to family members, especially in the context of therapy. If these families make it into a therapy room, interventions like family sculpting are thought to be very odd and are experienced as very distressing and uncomfortable by many Chinese American families (Soo-Hoo, 2005).

In the early 1990s, the National Institute of Mental Health funded the Chinese American Psychiatric Epidemiological Study, conducted in Los Angeles, surveying over 1,747 Chinese American households. The intention of this study was to examine respondents' perceived barriers to pursuing mental health care. They found significant practical barriers such as treatment costs, knowing how to access care, and language challenges in predicting mental health care use of Chinese Americans (Kung, 2004). It was reported that family and friends are where most Chinese Americans go to for emotional and personal support, where as significantly fewer seek help from outsiders. However, Kung (2003) found that the overwhelming majority (75%) do not discuss emotional challenges with anyone at all. It is important to Chinese Americans to portray a positive health image and there is stigma associated with being affected by mental health needs (Leung, Monit, & Tsui, 2012). Thus traditional forms of mental health care, such as going to couples, family, or individual therapy, are less likely options for these family members. Instead, young Asian Americans, for example, tend to go to their

personal support networks – close friends, significant others, and their religious community (S. Lee et al., 2009)

Atkinson and Gim (1989) found that Asian American students who were more acculturated had increased capacity to recognize their own personal need to pursue psychological help. They concluded that there was a direct correlation between Asian American acculturation level and attitude toward seeking psychological help. In researching a group of Asian American college women, Miville and Constantine (2007) found that it was equally important to consider cultural values as well as personal variables when understanding intentions to seek counseling. Higher levels of adherence to Asian cultural values had a positive relationship to perceived stigma about counseling; it also had a negative relationship to intentions to seek counseling.

A study on 219 Asian American college and graduate students from a private northeast institution collected quantitative data on various measures and found that for these students, seeking professional help was contradictory to the belief systems within which they grew up (Shea & Yeh, 2008). There are clear differences between Asian and Western perspectives of the self and ideas of mental health issues. Historically, Eastern philosophical thought discourages the expression of strong emotion and encourages exercising restraint in order to stay away from public embarrassment and shame. In addition to issues of acculturation, cultural values, and stigma, beliefs regarding environmental and hereditary causes of mental illness also have positive correlation to the probability of Asian Americans pursuing professional help (Wong, Tran, Kim, Van Horn Kerne, & Calfa, 2010).

Spirituality and Help-Seeking Attitudes

The Christian population also has a history of being resistant towards psychological practice and counseling. There are personal beliefs that can be barriers to Christians being open to seeking therapeutic help. Eriksen, Marston, and Korte (2002) clarified five beliefs that are potential obstacles for conservative Christians in the process of therapy: (1) *self* – believing that being concerned about oneself is a form of selfishness and thus considered sin, (2) *truth* – believing that there is one “true” way to God and salvation and that is through the Christian faith and its practices alone, (3) *answers to problems* – believing that the Bible holds all answers that Christians will ever need and in times of hardship, guidance should be sought from biblical sources, (4) *feelings* – believing that the only acceptable emotions are joy and peace, and (5) *social issues* – believing that issues like divorce, homosexuality, and abortion are evil and come from a liberal non-Christian society.

Chinese American Christians generally identify with more conservative theology, and for anyone who holds to these beliefs, it is understandably a challenge to be open to receiving help from a source outside of a Christian spiritual context. There are also hurdles that come from the Christian community regarding attitudes about mental health. This was discussed in Stanford’s (2007) study of Christian congregants who sought counsel from churches. He found that a high percentage, thirty percent, of congregants who looked to the church for support regarding their mental health concerns had negative interactions. These negative interactions included abandonment or lack of involvement by the church, belief that the mental illnesses were demonic activity, or that the mental illnesses were considered a result of a lack of faith or personal sin.

The First Generation

A few studies have begun to compare generational differences in the utilization of mental health services. In a mixed method study involving first generation Chinese women, avoidance of shame and saving face impacted help-seeking behavior. The entire family loses face when the reputation is impacted by the behavior of one member, such as in the seeking of mental health services. Thus, many of the participants believed that rather than seeking help, they would keep their emotional distress to themselves (Tabora & Flaskerud, 1997). One study compared older to younger Korean Americans, finding that older adults are less likely to utilize mental health services than the younger Korean Americans. They were also more likely to believe that depression is a matter of personal weakness and that being mentally ill brings shame to the family (Jang, Chiriboga, & Okazaki, 2009).

The Second Generation

Scales on acculturation, loss of face, and help-seeking attitudes were administered to West Coast Asian American college students and the results of this study showed that attitudes towards mental health were related to cultural factors such as acculturation, loss of face, and ideas about mental health (Leong, Kim, & Gupta, 2011). The younger generation, however, report more positive attitudes towards mental health services, especially Asian American males (Ray-Mazumder, 2001). According to a quantitative study comparing and contrasting younger and older Korean Americans and their attitudes towards mental health services, the younger generation are also more likely to accept

medical conceptualizations of mental health issues, such as depression, as opposed to attributing the cause to something like personal weakness (Jang et al., 2009).

Despite these challenges in seeking mental health support, Chinese Americans are still looking for services. On a study involving both immigrant and U.S. born Chinese Americans, family conflict was the strongest predictor for seeking formal services. Chinese Americans also sought informal services and when doing so, 39% would seek this from their ministers or priests. These informal services, such as the Chinese church, are important resources for these communities (Abe-Kim et al., 2002) and it would be beneficial for formal service agencies to set up partnerships with the informal services (Spencer & Chen, 2004) to support Chinese American families. The family that is Chinese and Christian faces twice the amount of stigma and shame in seeking mental health support, yet they are longing for the support when it comes to dealing with family conflict.

Summary

The sociological literature tells the story of first generation Chinese American Christian parents enduring much through the immigration experience and putting in their best efforts to raise children in a foreign land where they have experienced discrimination, downward mobility (Zhou, 2009), and acculturative stress. Qualitative studies of Chinese American Christians reveal the comfort and safety found in the Christian faith and the Chinese American church. At the same time, countless quantitative studies researching first and second generation family members address the conflict that persists; questions on how to help these family relationships remain.

This intersection of culture and faith is undoubtedly an area that requires further research. In the literature reviewed, what is lacking is the exploration of how the Christian faith plays a role in impacting intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families. There remain questions to be answered: what support is currently existing within the Chinese American Christian communities? If families are not utilizing professional mental health services, how do they navigate and work through family conflicts? If the church is one of the primary places they are finding their support, how and what does the church do to address the intergenerational issues that arise from culture and faith? Because the identity of faith cannot be separated from intergenerational issues, how does this intersection impact the first and second-generation? How is the Chinese church a part of this family dynamic and what is it that family members are seeking? When Chinese American families become Christian, how does this reshape perceptions about mental health? What questions should family researchers be asking in order to best serve the needs of these families? In order to begin addressing these questions, the lived experiences of these family members need to be understood and known.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

With the scarcity of qualitative studies on Chinese Americans, let alone Chinese Americans of the Christian community, interpretative phenomenology, one of the branches of phenomenology, is a fitting methodology as it seeks to examine the lived experiences and understandings of its participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The nuances of culture and faith can be captured through interpretative phenomenology by allowing Chinese American Christian families to tell their stories from their lived realities and share of their perceptions and views.

Phenomenology

As a philosophy, phenomenology is interested in “the way people are geared into their everyday lifeworlds” and “concerned with taken-for-granted aspects of everyday reality” (Daly, 2007, p. 94). This lifeworld was already being lived out before being researched.

As these phenomenological ideas became intertwined with human science and psychological inquiry, researchers began to look at how people make meaning of their worlds and the experience of their everyday lived lives. This is a process that is not about analyzing or explaining, but about directly describing an experience (Daly, 2007). This represents the gap in research on the intergenerational dynamics of Chinese American families. There is no scarcity of studies reporting analysis or explanations of family conflict or reasons for stress. What needs to be known is the direct description and perception of experience for both first and second generation family members. In this

way of doing research, phenomenology is “hospitable, accepting, and receptive in its reflection on ‘the things themselves’ and in its care not to impose order on its subject matter” (Wertz, 2005, p. 175). This approach is of significance to this population of interest in that their family dynamics of culture and faith are unknown and any presuppositions that can be made are only assumptions based on theory, an imposition on what may actually be a different lived experience.

Wertz (2005) captures the essence of phenomenology well, saying that:

Phenomenology does not form theories, operationalize variables, deduce or test hypotheses, or use probabilistic calculations... Phenomenology dwells with and openly respects persons’ own points of view and honors the multiperspectivity found in the life-world. Phenomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person–world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known. (p. 175)

Even with what scholarship reveals about Chinese American families, the knowledge has done little to promote an effective mental health support system with cultural humility, a positioning that considers that individuals have multiple identities interconnected with their worldview and cultures (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011). Thus, giving privilege to the lived experience of first and second generation Chinese American Christians over what various disciplines “know” about them could be a fresh way for family science researchers and practitioners to reconsider mental health support systems that come from the stories from within the Chinese American family.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is particularly relevant to this research study because it goes beyond the individual’s experience and tends to a particular group of people in their particular context – Chinese American Christians as minority in America, living out life in their ethnically Chinese American churches.

Method Overview

This study will utilize interpretive phenomenological analysis to understand the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of the Chinese American Christian participants. Data will be drawn from the in-progress study, “Culture and Faith: The Experience of Asian American Christian Families,” which has been approved by the Loma Linda University Institutional Review Board. Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin is listed as the primary investigator and Jessica Chen is a researcher.

Participants and Data Collection

When deciding who should be interviewed in phenomenological inquiry, the researcher should ask “Do you have the experience that I am looking for?” (Englander, 2012, p. 19). Who are the individual(s) who know about this phenomenon of what goes on in the intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families in regard to culture and faith? Certainly, this involves the interviewing of both the first and second generation members of Chinese American families. This is a phenomenon that naturally seeks to know the experience of the family unit made up of both generations. The pastors of Chinese American churches also have an up-close and personal interaction with Chinese American family life. Over the course of weeks, months, and sometimes years, the pastors have become closely acquainted with many Chinese families, seeing them through their joys, sorrows, and changing family dynamics. They have a unique experience of what goes on in these families.

For this study, interviews will be conducted in two phases:

a) the first phase will involve interviewing two samples: first and second generation family members

b) the second phase will involve interviewing pastors

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) do not believe there is a right answer to sample size, but suggest that four to ten interviews would be an appropriate target range. For this study, this number would be applied to each participant group: first generation, second generation, and pastors. In interpretative phenomenological analysis, the emphasis is on quality and less on quantity because its primary focus is the detailed explanation of one's experience.

Phase I

It is anticipated that first and second-generation Chinese American Christians within the southern California Christian communities will make up the sample. Participants will be Chinese American and members/attendees of a Christian church. The first-generation parents will be parents of children who are at least of high school age and they will have immigrated to the United States no earlier than 1975. The second-generation adult children will be between the ages of 18 and 35 and born in the U.S. or immigrated to the U.S. younger than 13 years of age. They will have been raised in a Christian upbringing with at least one parent who is a Christian. In the first phase of the study, I will interview participants, going back and forth between a first generation and a second generation participant. Thus far, one interview of a second-generation Chinese American has been conducted.

Great care will be taken in order to recruit, collect data, and interact with participants in culturally sensitive ways. In order to recruit first-generation parents and second-generation adult children, investigators will use purposive and snowball sampling. Initially, sampling will be done through churches whose members are predominantly Asian or Chinese American. Interested participants can directly contact the student investigator or be referred to the investigator by the pastors or key members of the church community. Criteria in recruiting participants for this study will not include participants being members of the same family. In order to get to the lived experience of these families, in-depth interviews need to be conducted. In Chinese culture, there is already a strong reluctance to disclose information to anyone outside of the family (Cao, 2005). As discussed previously, saving face is a cultural value that dictates much of the behavior and interests of the family members. Parents do not want others to know if their family is not functioning well. Children feel guilt if they speak poorly of their parents to someone outside of the family. It is experienced as though they are being disrespectful and dishonoring of their parents and family name. An interview such as this may be the first time they are having this type of conversation with someone about family issues and there may be a significant level of fear or concern that parents may find out what they are disclosing, even if they are told the interview is confidential. If a first or second generation family members knows that their other family member is also being interviewed, this may significantly impact what they are comfortable disclosing. They may be inclined to speak with positive reframes because of their concern about the family's image, taking away from openly sharing about their experiences.

However, if they are informed that the interview is about intergenerational

Chinese American family relationships in general, and not their family specifically, there is less pressure regarding what is discussed and shared. I will take great care in assuring the participants of the confidentiality so that they feel at ease to share candidly about their experiences.

Appendix A: A Schedule of Questions for Phase I is the interview guide for this semi-structured interview. Some questions include:

- “With immigrant families, there are varying experiences that we have about how connected we stay to our cultural heritage. How would you describe your family’s connection to the Chinese culture?”
- “What are some cultural values that are important to your family?”
- “As you know, we are all very different, even within families who seem to be similar. Have you noticed any differences between yourself and your (parents/children) in terms of Chinese cultural values? Can you explain this to me and how you experience this?”
- “Sometimes parents and children have similar or different ways of understanding and practicing faith. Have you noticed any similarities or differences between you and your parent’s/children’s understanding and practice of Christian faith?”
- “What is your experience as a Chinese American in American society?”

During the interview, I will pay attention to each participant’s energy around the various topics introduced by the questions. As they demonstrate interest or emotion around particular areas, I will use the semi-structured interview process to ask further questions to capture their stories, experiences and perspectives.

Phase II

It is anticipated that pastors from southern California, and perhaps northern California and some parts of the East Coast who have worked amongst East Asian American Christian families will make up the sample for phase II. The pastors will work primarily with Chinese congregation members. Pastors do not have to be officially ordained through a denomination; they will have served among Asian American populations for at least five years. Pastors themselves do not need to be of Asian American descent.

Appendix C: A Schedule of Questions for Phase II is the interview guide for this semi-structured interview. Questions to pastors might include:

- “What has it been like to work with first and/or second-generation Chinese American Christians?”
- “What are some of the challenges you have found in working with these families?”
- “What is helpful in resolving conflict/concerns between parents and children in these families?”
- “Some first/second generation Chinese Americans have shared that _____. What is your experience with this?”
- “How do you think Chinese American Christian families are impacted by their experience in their context (being minority in America, being in an Asian church, etc)?”

Interviewing pastors during this second phase is a way of seeking their expertise of intergenerational family dynamics. Preliminary analysis from the first phase can be

explored with the pastors to see if these themes are congruent with the pastors' experiences and if they have more to share from their perspectives and positions of knowing these families.

Self of the Researcher

I, Jessica ChenFeng, will be the main interviewer for this study. I am a second-generation Taiwanese American Christian female who grew up in the Asian/Chinese American church communities of Southern California. My own personal interest in this topic began years ago when I was working with the youth and families of these churches. What I heard was story after story of young Chinese Americans struggling to connect with their first generation parents and parents feeling at a loss for how to parent without losing their children to another culture. There was so much pain and loss yet at the same time so much longing and hope for connection and closer family relationships. Working alongside pastors and other ministry leaders, I found that many felt ill-equipped or that they did not know how to support these families toward healthier relationships. Often times, leaders knew only how to address these issues from a theological or spiritual standpoint and did not know how to tend to the cultural and relational dynamics.

Over the years there has remained a scarcity of both academic and lay resources in how to best support these families and their communities. It is my personal hope to contribute to the literature in telling about the lived experiences of Chinese American Christians.

Reflexivity and Assumptions

It is important to me as the researcher to be in a process of reflexivity, where I am remaining critically conscious of my own role in the research (Daly, 2007). For this particular study, it is of significance for me as researcher to be an insider of this community. Chinese people are known for their value of *guanxi*, or relationship (Luo, 2011). It means a lot to develop trustworthy relationships, and trust is often given to those whose background is more similar. Thus it is more comfortable for the Chinese family member to be interviewed by someone who is also Chinese from within the Christian community than an outsider where little trust has been established.

It is of utmost importance that I be aware of the cultural positions of the participants and to engage with them with a presence of respect and honor. Most likely, the participants will be sensitive to saving face and will not want to air any dirty laundry of the family. Because they are aware that I am Chinese American, there would be an unspoken understanding that I would understand and uphold these values. To decrease the participants' distress, I can assure the participants regarding the purpose of the study, the confidentiality, and that the research will benefit their communities and families.

Also, in recruiting participants for the first phase, it would be important to go through church leadership as well as through snowball sampling. Since Chinese communities function around *guanxi*, close trusted relationships, and authority, participants are more likely to openly participate if their pastors are on board with the research study or if their friends invite them to join.

As it is important for me to be aware of how I engage with and impact the participants and research process, I also need to know what assumptions I hold that also

impact this process. As a marriage and family therapist and Taiwanese female who has a strong personal interest and doctoral training in issues of social justice and social context, I know that these are the lenses through which I will research, understand and analyze the data. Just as discussed in chapter two, I will have a heightened awareness of the many historical and contextual systems impacting the participants (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory), their minority and racial experiences (Critical Race Theory), and the potential tensions in their complex identities and experience (Locational Feminism and Intersectionality).

Data Creation and Analysis

This particular study is unique in that it is not seeking to understand the lived experience of only one group of participants, but multiple groups that represent the system which makes up the Chinese American family. In the analysis phase of interpretative phenomenology, I will transcribe, read, analyze, and interpret the data throughout the interviewing and data collection process. During phase one of this study, I will go back and forth between interviewing a first generation Chinese American Christian family member, and then a second generation Chinese American Christian family member, and so on and so forth until saturation has occurred. This means that after having repeated conversations and interviews with the participants, I will ask myself if I have a sense of understanding their experiences as fully as possible (Daly, 2007). In this way, as the researcher is gaining new insight throughout the analysis occurring in between interviews, these insights can be applied to the following interviews such that questions can be better shaped to capture the participant's lived experiences.

Transcription and Data Storage

Written notes, contact information, and demographic data of all participants will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim, removing all identifiers from data that could compromise anonymity of participants. The digital recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once the transcriptions have been completed. Responses from demographic sheets will be collated into one spreadsheet and stored in the principal investigator's office in a locked cabinet. The demographic sheets will be shredded. The information collected with the demographic sheet serves as a way of organizing the interview data. Also, some of the demographic information can contribute to analysis; for example, perhaps there are differences in family conflict dependent upon level of educational background. The two investigators are the only individuals who will have access to the tapes and protected confidential information of the participants. Transcriptions will be completed by the student investigator who will maintain confidentiality of all participant information.

Steps of Analysis

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) describe six steps in interpretative phenomenological analysis: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases. This analysis is an iterative process which requires "flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation" (p. 81). For this study on Chinese American Christian families,

these six steps will occur in a recursive fashion during the course of phase one, and then again during the course of phase two.

The different qualitative methodologies share common emphases in that the analysis and interpretation process occur as data collection progresses. Daly (2007) describes this as “the intertwined braid of collection analysis and interpretation that is central to carrying out research that has an emergent and inductive orientation” (p. 219).

This analysis process is meant to be a reflective, engaging the researcher with the participants’ stories; though the focus is on the participants’ experience and their meaning-making of the experiences, the outcome is an account of the researcher’s analysis of the participant’s thinking. Even though the outcome of this process seems to be subjective, it is “dialogical, systematic and rigorous in its application” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).

Step One: Reading and Re-reading

Once I have transcribed an interview, I will assume an attitude reflective of the phenomenological method. It is crucial to read and reread the transcript to get a sense of the whole in order to “understand the meaning of the experience in terms of the standpoint of the [participant] and not in terms of the researcher’s theory about the topic under study” (de Castro, 2003, p. 50). This part of the analysis is about following the participant’s experience through his/her intentionality, rather than inputting the researcher’s own intentionality into the participant’s experience.

In this first step of phenomenological analysis, the goal is not to make any interpretation about the participant’s experience, but rather to attain a sense of the whole

experience of the participant. In order to do this, I might listen to the audio recording of the interview before transcribing. I will also be aware of the parts of the interview that were particularly powerful or impacting to me, and bracket these off for the time being so that I can allow the text/data to speak and not prematurely move towards making connections.

Step Two: Initial Noting

After much reading and immersion in the transcription, the goal of this second step is that I come up with a comprehensive set of notes and comments on the text. I will seek to keep an open mind and jot down notes about anything of interest in the transcript.

Some ways to do this include describing what is important to the participants, and what meaning things have to them. Three types of comments can be helpful: 1) descriptive comments, which is essentially a describing of the participant's spoken content, 2) linguistic comments, which explore the language used by the participant (pronoun use, repetition, metaphor, pauses, etc), and 3) conceptual comments, which moves to a more interrogative and conceptual level, attempting to get at the participants' central understandings.

Step Three: Developing Emergent Themes

During this third step, I will focus mostly on the set of provisional notes from step two, and attempt to map out the "interrelationships, connections, and patterns between exploratory notes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). These themes will be expressed as phrases,

capturing the participants' original words/thoughts as well as my interpretations. As a whole, these themes should encapsulate and show comprehension of the data.

Step Four: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

For this fourth step, I will be mapping how the list of themes in step three come together. The hope is to produce some sort of structure for the themes, such that the most important pieces of the participant's account are captured.

This will be done by typing the themes into a list in chronological order, and then clustering the related themes. During this step, attention will be paid to the contextual and cultural themes through the theoretical lenses discussed in chapter two. For example, might there be themes related to the participant's experience as a minority Chinese American? Or might there be themes about experiences of discrimination or confusion around multiple identities?

Step Five: Moving to the Next Case

In phase I, I will be moving back and forth from interviewing and transcribing a case from a first generation participant, to a case from a second generation participant. As I do this, I will be treating each case on its own terms, trying to remain true to each participant's lived experience.

Steps one through four will be repeated and applied to each transcript of phase I and then once phase I is completed, I will move on to phase II and begin to interview, transcribe and analyze the data of the pastors.

Step Six: Looking for Patterns Across Cases

I will be making adaptations to this last step as suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) in order to integrate a systemic, contextual way of interacting between the various groups of participants of this study. Steps one through five will be applied back and forth between the two generations during phase I. Before moving on to phase II, the interviewing of pastors, I will look at patterns and connections between the emergent themes between first and second generation Chinese American Christian participants. This might include comparing and contrasting their lived experiences and interpretations of those experiences. In what ways do the two generations differ or compare in the way they understand their family issues, church community life, and their experiences as minority in America?

After navigating these six steps in phase I, then I will begin phase II, and apply steps one through five to the interviews of the pastors. At the very end, I will analyze patterns across phase I and II to examine the interconnectedness between family members and pastors' experiences and perspectives.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability

Whereas quantitative researchers use the term validity, qualitative researchers think in terms of trustworthiness and credibility. I will use the following procedures to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this study: triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, and member checks (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009). Through the use of investigator triangulation, I will corroborate evidence and analysis with the principal investigator to have her contribution of different perspectives, questions and

interpretations. In order to clarify researcher bias, I will present any prior preconceptions that would impact the data collection and analysis process. Member checking, or presenting results to participants for their feedback on how the results compare with their experiences, will take place during the second phase of this study. Results from phase one will be presented to the pastors as a way of seeking their expertise of the Chinese American intergenerational family dynamics. Analysis from the first phase will be explored with the pastors to see if themes are congruent with the pastors' experiences and if they have more to share from their perspectives and positions of knowing these families.

In qualitative research, instead of thinking in terms of generalizability, we pursue transferability. "The reader makes links between the analysis..., their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). As the researcher provides a contextualized, rich analysis of the participants' experiences, this allows readers to evaluate whether or not this analysis is transferable to people of other similar contexts.

Limitations

There are a few potential limitations to this phenomenological qualitative study. One limitation is that since this study is recruiting voluntary participants who are mainly English speaking, it may not be able to hear the stories of those whose primary language is Mandarin, Cantonese or Taiwanese. Also, these first and second generation Chinese Americans who volunteer to be interviewed may have "less to be ashamed" about because they are open to talking about their family to a non-family member, thus leaving

out a sample whose relational challenges might be greater. Another limitation is that the participants of this study will most likely come from the Southern California geographic area and thus the results may not be directly transferable to Chinese American Christians in other parts of the United States. Lastly, as a pilot sort of qualitative study, this is only one of hopefully many future studies to be conducted with the Chinese and Asian American Christian populations. It may not capture the breadth of issues within this community, but it will certainly begin to delve into the depths of family life as it relates to Chinese culture and Christian faith.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS

A phenomenological approach has yet to be used in studying culture and faith in the intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families. Quantitative studies have identified the various factors that contribute to intergenerational conflict and dynamics in these families, however none of these studies have been able to capture their felt and lived experiences. Phenomenology is distinct from other qualitative analyses in that it seeks to “preserve what is uniquely human” and provides a coherent sense of the experience of the participants (Fischer, 1984, p. 163). This phenomenological study will contribute to the field of marital and family therapy in two significant ways: give voice and validation to a community whose experiences are hardly known, and provide culturally and contextually rich information for academics, researchers and clinicians to better bridge the gap with the Asian faith community.

Voice and Validation

Numerical data and statistics often speak on behalf of the research participants involved. This phenomenological study allows for the voices of Chinese American family members to be heard and for their experiences to be known. First, this study has the capacity to impact individuals; knowing the experiences of another first or second generation Chinese American family member can support these individuals in “creating and managing their own identities.” They may not realize that other individuals like themselves share the same struggles and complexities (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 16) in the intergenerational dynamics of culture and faith. It is the hope of the researcher that the

findings from this study will first be published in journals read by pastors and therapists connected to the Chinese American Christian community, but beyond that, that a book will eventually be published that is accessible by both first and second generation Chinese American family members. Second, this can encourage Chinese American Christian families who are grappling with similar cultural and faith-related issues. As a whole family unit, they can see and hear about other families who have similar struggles, perhaps issues they would have never heard about through any other venue because of the cultural expectation to save face. This can feel so relieving and lessen the pressure and burden they feel.

Deepening of Our Shared Cultural Understanding

Finally, this phenomenological study has the potential to impact the churches, clinicians, and researchers that engage with and support Chinese American Christian families. A phenomenological study on fifty victims of crime found that it was important to see the holistic picture, which meant understanding the broader situation, and not only the victims themselves. The study was shared with three dozen justice system workers such as judges, lawyers, social workers, insurance investigators, victim counselors, and police officers. The findings were the most helpful to these members of the victims' system in that the analyses "helped to remind them of the meaning of victims' overall experience, beyond the point at which a professional enters the process." They were also able to have a heightened awareness of justice system issues and how this impacted these individuals (Fischer, 1984, p. 171). In the same way, this phenomenological study can help clinicians, family researchers, theologians, pastors and clergy to have a fuller picture

of these families' experiences. It can facilitate greater rapport building and empathy in therapy as well as more effective ministry planning and intervening in churches. With such a study, there is then the potentiality for increased collaboration across multiple fields so that more innovative, culturally and spiritually sensitive practices can be developed to serve Chinese American families.

Conclusion

The issues of culture and faith in the intergenerational family dynamics of Chinese American families are complex and still largely unknown to family researchers and practitioners. Theologians and sociologists have laid a good foundation for understanding the significance of the Christian faith and church life for these families. Marital and family science researchers have begun to recognize the impact and consequences of intergenerational issues and the challenges Chinese Americans face in finding mental health support. There remains, however, little understanding about how these pieces come together in Chinese American Christian families. The first generation and the second generation have their own unique experiences, burdens, and struggles in response to their relationships with one another, their families, and their churches.

So how can the field of marital and family therapy begin understanding how to meet the needs of these families? As proposed in this paper, the best place to start is to ask these family members and the pastors who guide them, about their lived experiences. Once their experiences and the meaning of their experiences are known from their perspectives, researchers and practitioners can then begin to collaborate on mental health

support that is sensitive to culture, faith, and generational relationships in these Chinese American families.

Grasping the meaning of a lived experience is like hearing a melody; a melody is not merely the “interactions among separate notes, but rather a whole of interrelations among notes... to isolate the notes is... to lose the melody-as-heard” (Fischer, 1984, p. 174). This paper has described not only the relevance, but also the need for a phenomenological approach to be used to study culture and faith in the context of intergenerational relationships in Chinese American families. As this is done, these families and their communities will have their experiences known, heard and validated, and thus more effective practices and policies can be implemented to support their needs. With a phenomenological qualitative approach, research does a fuller justice to the human phenomena as lived (Fischer, 1984).

CHAPTER SIX

**INTERGENERATIONAL TENSION, CONNECTEDNESS, AND
SEPARATENESS IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FIRST AND SECOND
GENERATION CHINESE AMERICAN CHRISTIANS**

Publishable Paper One

Jessica ChenFeng and Carmen Knudson-Martin

Abstract

This study looks at the intergenerational relationships in Chinese American Christian families as experienced by the first and second generation family members. To understand these experiences, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was used ($n = 16$) by an insider researcher. The results speak of a shared experience of intergenerational tension and disconnect across both generation's experiences. The way that the participants navigated this tension was further categorized into two general intergenerational relationship types: "intergenerational connectedness" and "intergenerational separateness." Under "intergenerational connectedness" there were two subthemes of (1) mutual acceptance and (2) adaptive pursuit. Under "intergenerational separateness" were two subthemes of (1) clinging to faith and (2) rooted in distinction. Clinical implications for family therapists, limitations and future directions are discussed.

From 2000 to 2010, the Asian population grew more than any other race in the United States. Of the Asian American population, Chinese Americans make up the largest Asian group at 23% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The field of marital and family therapy has increasingly pursued research on how to better serve the family and relational health needs of Chinese Americans (Atwood & Conway, 2004; Benner & Kim, 2009; Shi-Ruei S. Fang & Wark, 1998; Hung Hisu & Ng, 2002; Lim et al., 2009). Scholarship has also sought to understand the role of religion and spirituality in families' lives and how family therapists can utilize these important resources (Marterella & Brock, 2008). One particular area that has been overlooked, however, is where culture and spirituality come together, particularly for Chinese Americans.

Christianity is the largest religious group for the Chinese in the United States, with 31 percent of Chinese Americans identifying with being Christian (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012), a higher percentage than those who affiliate with Buddhism or other religions (Yang, 1999b). These churches have critical roles within the Chinese American communities; they provide cultural support, family connection (Cao, 2005), and spiritual and psychological support (Yang, 1998).

Christian first and second generation Chinese American immigrant families face many of the same challenges as other Asian immigrants: intergenerational conflict, acculturation difficulties (C. Chen, 2006; Chung, 2001; Lim et al., 2009), and the strains and stressors of being minority in a dominant American cultural context (S. Lee et al., 2009; Min & Yang Sao, 2005; Park, 2008). These families have found support in the Christian church community, yet it remains unclear how Christian faith plays a role in impacting intergenerational relationships of Chinese American families.

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of the intersection of Chinese American culture and Christian faith in the family dynamics of first and second generation Chinese American Christians; the hope is to develop awareness about how to better inform family therapists of the cultural, generational, and spiritual ways of pursuing health and wellness in this context. This interpretative phenomenological study is conducted with a social constructionist lens, taking the perspective that reality is constructed in context through interaction (Gergen, 2009). Social interactions create and reshape identity, interactions with family, culture, and the larger society (Zajacova, 2002).

Researching Intergenerational Dynamics

For this study, the first generation refers to parents who immigrated from China and Taiwan; the second generation includes children who were born and raised in the American context. Much of the research across disciplines focuses on the issues between first and second generation Chinese family members. The intergenerational strains typically arise from differences in values and ways of living between first generation immigrant parents and their children who are growing up in the United States (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). These issues are often related to acculturation differences (R. M. Lee et al., 2005; Rhee et al., 2003), parenting styles and warmth (Juang et al., 2007; Lim et al., 2009), and differences in cultural expectations (Chung, 2001; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008).

The First Generation

First generation parents immigrate to the United States, having been raised in their countries of origin, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China, where Confucian

values have shaped family life and expectations for centuries. Much of the research on generational differences focuses on why these differences impact parent-child relationships. For example, a regression analysis of 129 Chinese American youth at an employment program in New York City found that parental pressure about education and occupation leads to increased intergenerational conflict (Ma & Yeh, 2005), and a multivariate analysis of 342 Asian American college students reported the Asian value of conforming to norms leads parents to expect their children to date and marry a specific type of person (Chung, 2001).

Research often portrays the difference between first and second generation as an issue of east vs. west, collectivism vs. individualism, and controlling vs. flexible parenting. This way of framing Chinese American families tends to depict the parents in a negative light and misses out on the larger social context and their real struggles in parenting in a new country as a marginalized minority group. Experiences family members have in their social context beyond the family unit have an impact on family life. A short-term longitudinal study of 444 Chinese American families in Northern California found that parents' experience of discrimination influences the way they teach their children about ethnic-racial issues (Benner & Kim, 2009), thus impacting parenting practices. However, little research focuses on lived experiences of these first generation parents.

The Second Generation

There is no question that intergenerational family conflict has a negative bearing on second generation Chinese Americans. A number of quantitative studies revealed various negative impacts of intergenerational conflict on them; amongst Asian American

young college adults, it correlates with the second generation's well-being and adjustment (R. M. Lee et al., 2005) and appears related to higher adolescent depressive symptoms (Juang et al., 2007). When contrasting Asian and Caucasian American adolescents in the same community, Asian Americans had lower self-esteem and more interpersonal problems (Rhee et al., 2003). Because of intergenerational conflict, Chinese American youth were more prone to violent behavior (Ngo & Le, 2007), were indecisive about career (Ma & Yeh, 2005), and encountered more behavioral adjustment problems (Wu & Chao, 2005).

In one of the few qualitative studies on Chinese American youth, when asked about how they related to their parents, the youth answered with feeling frustrated by their parents' traditional ways in contrast to American parenting, physical distance and lack of affection, and expectations they could never achieve (D. B. Qin et al., 2008). What this study provides that most other studies, which are quantitative, cannot, is a glimpse into what it feels like to be a second generation Chinese American. These youth felt frustration, but also responded to the conflict in a myriad of ways, from trying to see the benefit of their parents' parenting styles to feeling alienation and disconnect from them. While these studies focus on youth and college student experiences, little research addresses the intergenerational relationships of second generation adults with their first generation parents.

The Christian Church Context

A few researchers theorize that Chinese churches in America provide novel ways of living out family life in how they address the family's needs and conflicts (C. Chen,

2006). Christianity critiques the extremes of generational hierarchy, filial piety, and emotional control. Pastors and leaders in church tend to encourage more open communication (C. Chen, 2006) and a less controlling way for parents to engage with children, while at the same time maintaining a collectivist, communal sense of identity. The church has the ability to challenge aspects of the Chinese culture that may be barriers to seeking support (Cao, 2005).

At the same time, being plugged into the Christian church changes the problems and challenges faced by these families (C. Chen, 2006), and it is in this intersection that little is understood about Chinese American Christian family life. None of the above studies have explored how faith ties into the intergenerational relationships, nor is there an understanding of how the first and second generation continue to engage with one another despite the challenges. What do they do to deal with the conflict? What has been helpful for these families and what continues to be detrimental? Are these different for the two generations?

Method

Interpretative phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009) enabled us to capture the nuances of culture, faith, and family as Chinese American Christian participants their stories and shared their perceptions and views. This methodology is concerned with the particular: the details of how a particular phenomenon is understood from the perspective of distinct people in their unique context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Procedure

First and second generation Chinese American Christians in southern California

were recruited for this study. First generation parents self-identified as Christian and were parents of children who were at least of high school age. These parents had to have immigrated to the United States no earlier than 1975. Second generation adult children needed to be between 18 and 35 years old, born in the United States or immigrated to the United States younger than 13 years of age, and raised in a Christian upbringing with at least one parent who is a Christian.

I did not interview first and second generation participants of the same family. In Chinese culture, there is already a strong reluctance to disclose information to anyone outside of the family (Cao, 2005). An interview such as this may be the first time they are having this type of conversation with someone about family issues and there may be a significant level of concern that their family may find out what they are disclosing, even if they are told the interview is confidential.

Along these lines, great care was taken to recruit, collect data, and interact with participants in culturally sensitive ways. I used purposive and snowball sampling, connecting with pastors or key members of Asian or Chinese American churches in the greater Los Angeles area of Southern California. I connected with interested participants to set up a time for the in-person interview. The interviews lasted from 50 to 75 minutes and were audio recorded. A semi-structured interview guideline was followed and these questions can be viewed in table one.

Self of the Researcher

As the primary researcher of this study, I consider myself an insider, as I was born and raised in Southern California, and grew up in a close-knit Taiwanese American Evangelical church community with my family of three generations. Because of my

relationship with the Asian American faith communities of Southern California, I had the privileged access to these participants and their stories.

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is your ethnic background?
 2. What is your occupational background?
 3. When did your family immigrate to the United States?
 4. Are you a Christian? What is your denomination? How long have you been Christian?
 5. What is your involvement with your church/faith?
 6. Every family has a unique story about how they became Christian. What is your family's story? What is your family's current involvement with church/Christian faith?
 - a. Could you share about your experience growing up in your church?
 7. With immigrant families, there are varying experiences that we have about how connected we stay to our cultural heritage. How would you describe your family's connection to the Chinese culture?
 - a. What are some cultural values that are important to your family?
 8. As you know, we are all very different, even within families who seem to be similar. Have you noticed any differences between yourself and your (parents/children) in terms of Chinese cultural values? Can you explain this to me and how you experience this?
 9. Sometimes parents and children have similar or different ways of understanding and practicing faith. Have you noticed any similarities or differences between you and your parent's/children's understanding and practice of Christian faith?
 10. Could you share more about your relationship with your parents/children when it comes to issues of faith and culture?
 11. Is there anything else you would like for us to know that would help us understand what it is like to be Christian and Chinese in your family?
 12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about issues that we did not ask?
-

Participants

In interpretative phenomenology, there is no right answer to sample size, as the primary concern is grasping a detailed account of each individual's experience. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggest that a sample size of four to ten interviews is a good

range within which to conduct the depth of analysis to capture the experiences of participants. The recruitment for this study resulted in sixteen participants: eight first generation parents and eight second generation adult children. There were an equal number of both male and female participants in each generation.

First generation parents' ages ranged from 49 to 59 and second generation adult children's ages ranged from 29 to 34. The individuals identified as being Chinese and Taiwanese in ethnicity, with family history in Taiwan, Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Korea. The second generation participants happened to all fall in the late twenties to early thirties age range, most likely due to the networks in which I recruited participants. This allowed for a unique perspective in that these participants were able to look back on their younger years in relationship to their parents and now have a reflective perspective.

Analysis

In carrying out this research, the interpretation and analysis was largely influenced by my training as a systemic thinker with a social constructionist lens. Thus throughout this research process, I tended to the cultural and larger context issues to understand ways in which the participants' realities are constructed; I looked not only at their current experiences, but also to how immigration and being minority in America impacted the construction of their identities.

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed, read, analyzed, and interpreted following the six steps described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009): (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for

patterns across cases. These steps occurred in a recursive fashion during the course of on-going interviewing and interpretation. To expand my lens, I consulted with colleagues and professors along the way. After each interview, I jotted down notes to capture what I sensed from participants' experiences and stories. It was from these initial impressions that I became sensitized to the themes revolving around experiences of tension.

Results: Navigating Intergenerational Tension

The results from this interpretative phenomenological analysis are two-fold: there is (1) a shared reality of tension and disconnection that spans the experiences of both generations and then (2) there are four ways that the participants have responded to this tension. The four ways fall under two categories of experience: intergenerational connectedness or intergenerational separateness. Each of these categories has two more sub-themes that capture the experiences of the participants. All of the names used are pseudonyms and not the real names of participants.

Tension and Disconnection

One of the most salient themes that surfaced is a feeling of disconnection that the other generation does not or cannot understand my/our experience because of their contextual influences. Each generation feels that their parents or children are very different from them because they were raised in a different context, have different values, and perceive the world differently. These differences are part of an ever-present tension that is their day-to-day reality – the tension that no matter what we do, we still live with a generational loss because of how immigration has impacted us. Consequently, there is

lack of understanding and acceptance between the generations and a sense of not being known/understood by their other-generation family member.

First Generation Parents

First generation parents describe a sense of relational disconnect. Some of them experience their being born in a Chinese country and their children being born in the United States as being a primary reason for the disconnect. Kelly, who was born in Taiwan, is a 55-year-old first generation Taiwanese mother who raised her son in the Midwest through the challenges of a divorce. Co-parenting with her son's father was very difficult, and she expresses sadness about her current lack of connection with her adult son:

I also reach out to [son], but he doesn't want me to reach out to him, and I just feel that the more I pursue, the more I push him away. And my generation is hardest because we still have that traditional foundation in us and we want to instill that into the next generation, but the next generation they grew up here, it's American here. They will not understand where we came from. So it's kind of sad, it feels like you lost that culture because you want to give it to your children but they will never understand.

The experience that their children will “never understand” carries such a sense of loss; as much as she wishes she could be connected to her son, Kelly feels that he would never understand or grasp a significant piece of who she is.

Brian, a 52-year-old married Chinese father of two teenagers, initially brought their children to church because of a summer children's program at a local Chinese church. He expresses being proud of the many challenges he overcame as an immigrant and speaks of how his children will never grasp what it was like for him, and he will never be able to understand their experiences growing up in America. His experiences

are so different from those of his children, he believes they will never be able to understand one another:

They have their own challenges. We all have different challenges. Their challenge is they have to study, go to college, and they have to deal with their new environments. For example, two days ago, my son told me he had a classmate who got caught for selling drugs. In my growing up, we didn't have that kind of a problem. But it looks like in his environment, it's very commonplace.

It is almost as though Brian is saying that this is something he must accept, that his children cannot grasp the depth of his struggles to survive and that he can't understand theirs:

My challenge is very different from theirs. My challenge is surviving: how to survive in a brand new society, as a newcomer, you have to overcome a lot of barriers...So that's what I'm saying, they have their own, I have my own. But our experiences are different... I struggled and I didn't give up...I tell them that, they will listen but do they understand it? No. It's just like I don't understand what they are doing every day in school.

Second Generation Adult Children

Second generation speak of not being understood by their parents; the different values and ways of being in America are hard for their parents to accept. This came up in response to the second generation's choice of spouse, career, where they wanted to go for college, church, as well as how they were being more "American" and expressive, which was different from their parents' expectations. Twenty-eight year-old Helen's experience is representative. She was born in Taiwan but immigrated to the United States at age eleven. She is facing conflict with her parents because they are having a hard time accepting her non-Taiwanese fiancé. Helen is aware of her parents' social context as being largely influenced by their Taiwanese/Chinese community in the United States and abroad. These influences make it hard for them to accept the choices she makes:

They weren't very supportive of my fiancé because he's not Taiwanese and he doesn't speak Chinese... they would always make snide comments like "if we just kept you in Taiwan or did this or that, you'd be getting married to a Taiwanese person"... And they constantly compare my pending nuptials with other people who they know in Taiwan who married other Taiwanese people. And it's a rather unfair comparison because I don't live in Taiwan... I think it's just very uncomfortable for them to open up their home to someone of a different culture even if they're Asian. So the fact that they live here in Monterey Park and stay here in Monterey Park shows that they really need that, it's the only place they can feel comfortable. It's a very big cultural problem.

There is a lot of hurt and disconnect in the relationship with her parents because they cannot embrace and accept the things that are important to her. Her parents' context includes mostly Taiwanese people who reinforce the beliefs they have about who Helen should marry. While Helen tries hard to understand their perspective, there remains ongoing tension and concern about whether or not the relationship with her parents can ever change.

These experiences of generational disconnect persisted throughout the interviews and the following themes are how both generations have navigated this tension. Two general experiences became apparent: participants that were connected to their family members, and those that led more separate lives.

Intergenerational Connectedness

The term "connectedness" reflects the participants' experience of having active and engaging relationships with the other-generation family member(s). The majority of the participants fall under this category, and all of the second generation describe connectedness with their first generation parents.

The connected participants respond to the experience of tension with (1) mutual acceptance and (2) adaptive pursuit. What is apparent is that their Christian faith is

foundational to their understanding of identity and it informs the ways they engage with their families.

Mutual Acceptance

This group of participants has relationships where both generations are mutually working towards connecting with one another. They appear at peace with the intergenerational disconnect in that this had become something they accepted about each other. They can talk about the cultural and spiritual differences, but are not in distress, not bothered by these differences. They can accept that the other-generation has different ways of being, different values, and this was okay. In addition, they are proactive to keep engaging, growing and connecting with the other generation, caring very much about living out their Christian faith.

First Generation

The one first-generation participant under this theme is Jennifer. Jennifer is 56 years old, married, and the mother of three adult children in their twenties. When asked about raising children as being Taiwanese and Christian in America, she shares of the emphasis on Christian faith as being more central than Taiwanese culture. This is the way she accepts their differences because in the larger scheme of things, these differences are not significant because it is their shared faith that matters.

Everything that we do, God is the center. I think that becomes more important than anything else...Because I always tell [children], as long as you are walking in God's way, that's all we ask. It's not what I want, but what God wants for you. For their marriage, for their future spouse, it's always the same thing. It's never like, "I want this, I don't want you to marry this, I don't want you to do that." It was never like; it was more like, "What is it that God wants for you?" And so I

made the point for them to know in the end that's what takes place. It's not what we want. And they know that, I think my kids they know that.

For these participants, God's presence is a shared reality in their family life; even in the generational or cultural differences, faith connects. Jennifer emphasizes how she and her children continue to grow with one another, changing parts of who they are to better connect:

I want to change too because I know I have a quick temper. I want to be different I don't want to be like that...I like everything neat, in order. And sometimes that doesn't happen. One time I came home from work and I opened the door and [younger son] said "Mom is home!" and he ran into his room and he was trying to tidy up his room and so I will always remember that day... I don't want to come home and have my kids behave like that... those are little lessons here and there that help me as a mom to learn that what I was doing is not right and I need to change. I tell them "Okay, if you think that I'm getting too much, come and give me a hug." And then [younger son] actually did, he came and hugged me and said, "Mom I think you need a hug." You know, little things like, we communicate and I tell them what I need to be reminded...

Second Generation

Five second generation participants demonstrate mutual acceptance in their dynamics with parents. Though they now make the effort to better understand their parents' perspectives, are able to let go of their past frustrations, each speaks of challenges over the years with their parents. For example, Sarah, a 34-year-old stay at home mother, used to have conflicts with her parents when she was a high school and college student because "they were very strict" and her conflict with them was with their disciplinary style. Timothy, a 33-year-old husband and father, "had many many disagreements with [his] mom" when he was trying to individuate and find a new church to attend. The stories reflect their parents' proactive mutual engagement with growth and

change which bettered their relationships and instills hope for raising their own families with a Christian identity.

Joshua's story captures the experiences of mutual acceptance. He is a 28-year-old clinical psychology resident who used to have many fights with his father because the father would "blow up" when he felt disrespected by Joshua. He shares about the tension at home growing up because his father identified strongly with Chinese values, which Joshua refers to as "hierarchical patriarchy, whatever you call it, Asian culture." He recalls a significant moment in his relationship with his father:

A huge turning point...was this incident where we were eating in front of the TV and [father] accidentally ate my mom's share of the food... And my mom got hurt and [father]... demanded that I give up my share to mom... that thought was so ridiculous to me...because quite frankly he didn't own up to anything...I was like "What?! Really? You're not even going to apologize!?"... When I had that incredulous kind of look, he hit me. I don't think I had been slapped in the face before. So he's furious, he sends me to my room... shortly after he came up...and I was ready to hear the two hour lecture, but he apologized. He said he was sorry and he was out of line and that was unheard of. He has never apologized...And I think I just started crying... it was this kind of redemptive moment where I realized how far he's come...

Though the process of acceptance unfolded over many years, Joshua is able to see and receive his father's efforts to grow, and likewise responds with acceptance and growth himself. As a result, he is able to see the strengths he has inherited from both his parents and is grateful for how this impacts his relationships:

I was able to learn and really embody the best qualities from both of them. I think from my dad, he's definitely the visionary, so he's someone who dreams, is able to take risk, he definitely values hard work, punctuality...With my mom... she's very relational, patient, very compassionate, listens very well... And I think also just my relationship with my mom, how I treat my mom and how what I learned about relationship with a female figure has really impacted how I treat my current fiancé and just girls in general...

Adaptive Pursuit

The participants in this category experience less mutuality in connecting with their other-generation family members. They are the ones who persist in trying to understand, making adaptations in their relationship and self to maintain the relationship. It is not as easy to connect around Christian faith; it is something they practice more on their own rather than together. One first generation mother and three second generation adult children fall under this category.

First Generation

Michelle is 58 years old, divorced, and has a daughter who is married with a young infant. She immigrated to the United States for graduate education. Michelle feels that her daughter gets easily upset or withdrawn sometimes so she tries to learn how to better engage with her daughter and son-in-law to maintain their relationship. This happens when Michelle tries to share faith-related encouragements to them:

With faith sometimes I get so excited I feel like I got this new revelation but now I learn that I really need to gauge their spiritual life, condition and what stage they are in, whether they are ready for it or not. I'm learning that because if I share something prematurely, it will only frustrate them. They will feel pressured and so I try to stay away... and just pray for them more.

When asked how she came to realize when her daughter gets frustrated, Michelle shares about being perceptive to their reactions and so she adapts herself to keep peace:

[Their response is] either a blank look or sometimes they will get excited too if I share the right thing at the right level at the right timing. But sometimes they don't understand something they will start arguing with me because it's not time yet.

Michelle is not aware of how her daughter may make efforts to stay connected with her; she feels as though she does a lot of the pursuing. At the same time, she believes her

daughter appreciates being connected and leans on her mother. By continuing to pursue and adapt, she hopes that her daughter will grow in her Christian faith identity:

Through the years I felt like I learned, I had more grace to learn more, to have a closer relationship with God along the way. Whatever I learned, I would pass it on to [daughter]. So I think she picks it up, she does depend on me a lot too, in her faith life. I really hope that she can have a personal relationship with God herself.

Second Generation

Three second generation participants are adaptive in pursuing the relationships with their parents. Each sounds as though they wish for more connection and understanding from their parents, and are active and intentional in working towards this, even though they view it as mostly a unilateral effort. Thirty-one year-old Ryan shares that “a lot of conflict comes from not understanding each other” and this has made it hard for him to open up and share with his family. He reflects on a personal faith being the way by which he is “growing and changing,” whereas he sees his parents as “risk adverse” and “don’t want to change.” Angie struggled with feeling like a “bad daughter” when deciding which college to attend because her father wanted her to attend the most prestigious college even though she did not want to. Though she does not experience him as having grown a lot in his faith, she has reframed and adapted her understanding of his behavior, trying to see his good intentions for her.

Helen, whose story was initially introduced in the first theme of “tension and disconnection,” persists in trying to better understand her first generation Taiwanese parents, even though they have a hard time accepting her fiancé. She makes the effort to learn what matters to them, what their fears might be and to engage in connecting

behaviors. Though there is hurt, she calls on her Christian faith to adapt her own perspective to see them in another light:

But I try to see them as loving and nurturing and so I try to give them the chance, the chance to love me, but with that chance, you become very vulnerable to being hurt by their words.

Helen says she has learned that “it takes a lot of time... for them to get used to the idea” and though her parents may not be 100% on board, there has been much change, largely due to Helen’s effort and desire to relate to her parents in a way that is connecting.

Intergenerational Separateness

The participants under this second category of intergenerational separateness do not relate to their other-generation family member as regularly or intentionally. These participants are all first generation parents. Separateness does not mean that the parents do not want connection; on the contrary, “intergenerational separateness” is the only thing they know how to do, and it is their way of maintaining the relationships with the children.

Clinging to Faith

This sub-theme includes two mothers and it was not their choice to experience intergenerational separateness. They both long for deeper connection with their sons, but wonder at times if they are good enough mothers, and they struggle with regret. Kelly, who was introduced earlier, feels pushed away and that her son will never understand her. She feels sad about being disconnected from him, and so she holds on to her faith:

I love my son way too much. I totally worship him. So I have to remind myself that my faith, my relationship with God is number one... I also read the Bible verse that really helps, that his love is unconditional for me. His love is greater

than everything so if I can be content with that first, then I don't look for another human being to fulfill me... So my faith is continually working and continually growing... it's up and down. Sometimes I feel like I'm so spiritual... but sometime I don't feel it. But I'm sure that's normal. At the end of the day I feel I'm blessed.

Like Kelly, Tina responds to the pain of generational tension and disconnection by clinging to her faith. She is a 59-year-old first generation married Taiwanese mother with a powerful conversion story after she immigrated to the United States. She experienced her family of origin as lacking in love and suffered many kinds of abuse; Taiwanese culture was constricting and rigid to her, and a relationship with her Christian parents-in-law brought her freedom. The wounds of her upbringing were healed as she adopting a Christian identity. Raising their two sons had many challenges related to language barriers and acculturation gaps, and at the time of the interview, she was not as connected to her sons as she wishes she could be:

Well this one thing that, I kind of regret it, or I feel that it's kind of sad, like incomplete in my relationship with my kids. I didn't participate, or I don't know if I should participate or not, I feel like I didn't participate much in their life in general. Therefore, there's not much communication, they don't call me that often, they don't check on me...

Even though her relationship with her sons is not as connected as she wishes, Tina speaks of her faith in God as having been a source of strength for her as well as something she hopes to share with her sons in the future:

After I became a Christian, after I was married for a few years, there were dark days, I felt like I wanted to leave this family or just give up, but I know I am not on my own, I belong to God. That's why I cannot make that kind of decision because God is the center. And I just hope my kids and grandkids in the future they will receive God's mercy... I really hope that I can participate in their lives... communicate, share the faith... it's great to be a Christian, and I'm really thankful for that... I didn't foresee it when I was young, but now when I look back, I see God was guiding and orchestrating for me.

Rooted in Distinction

It is interesting to note that all four first generation fathers described strong awareness that their first generation Chinese immigrant experience is drastically different from their second generation child's. Whereas intergenerational separateness is painful for the mothers "clinging to faith," these fathers suggest that separateness is simply the way that it is between parents and children and speak of little emotional impact. They view their roles within a certain parameter and express no need or desire to go beyond this structure because they cannot be in control of what takes place in their children's lives.

Brian, who was introduced earlier, accepts that his son will never understand his experience. He does not speak of the need to get his son to understand and does not try to understand his son's experience. Frank, a 49-year-old father, and a more recent immigrant from Taiwan, was baptized as a Christian just two months before this interview took place. Christian friends supported him and his wife through a difficult time in their marriage and he expresses gratitude about this, seeing that "church is a good place." While he hopes for his children to experience this transformation, he describes their decision in a way that does not appear to have an impact on him:

Yes, my wife and I go to church every week but not the kids. I think it's up to them to decide... I will let them to figure it out after 18 years old. Maybe they can choose to be or not to be a Christian.

Steve, a 59-year-old father of two young adult children, speaks matter-of-factly about his traditional fatherly role as simply the way that it is. Whereas the "clinging to faith" mothers referenced feeling regret or guilt in their role as mothers, Steve sounds secure in his way of parenting, even though he sees "Caucasian people" doing it very

differently. He is comfortable with his “distinctness” as a traditional Chinese father and the larger American society or his children’s engagement does not influence this:

I am [a] very traditional father, so when they got some need... it is not like the Caucasian people, they have a very good intimate relationship with the parents and children. They hug all the time or when they come home or something... I play my role, I support them, and share their life in school and we tell them what kind of experience we have in the past to tell them how to do kind of, or how to handle the situation. . . If there is nothing, [son] is not going to call us. He communicates what he wants and needs.

Steve believes that they may not be able to help their adult children deal with challenges because the children are growing up in a “Caucasian” world.

Charles, a 55-year-old architect, is very clear that his role as father is to instruct, teach, and guide; then his college-aged children are free to be on their own:

When I was their age, I make a lot of decision by myself. So I try to encourage them to make their own decision. I think we parents have to give them the rules, the values, then they need to make it their own decision.

These fathers are proud of their own adaptation to life in the United States. They are aware of how quickly things change for them, and expect their children will have to go through their own set of growth experiences in a shifting American context as minority.

Discussion

This phenomenological study captured the lived experiences of first and second generation Chinese American Christians, telling their stories of how they have struggled in intergenerational tension and disconnect and the ways they responded in their experiences of connectedness and separateness. To the best of my knowledge, there is no other study that has done this, and these are stories the field of marriage and family therapy could know more about to best serve these communities. Four overarching

observations of the results struck me: (a) the maintenance of family in spite of strong themes of disconnection, (b) how Christianity served as the new primary culture, (c) generational differences in experience and response to disconnection, and (d) the gender differences of first generation parents.

Even in the midst of both generations describing the ways they felt different and disconnected with one another, these Chinese American Christian family members did not cut off from one another but did what they could to safeguard their family units. The generational culture gap and contextual differences creating disconnect was not enough to break family ties; instead both generations were willing to persist in family maintenance. This is a different finding from Qin's (2009) study on Chinese immigrant families with no identified religious affiliation, where intergenerational estrangement and alienation grew over time. Chinese Christian churches hold programs that support devotion to the family (C. Chen, 2006) and perhaps the connection to a church community contributes to the families' efforts to preserve their relationships. Even for the "separate" parents, separateness was their way of maintaining their relationship with their children.

Many participants emphasized that living out their Christian identity was of primary importance; it superseded adhering to Chinese cultural values. Being a Christian not only gave them tools to resolve family issues, i.e., a resource center; rather, being Christian changed something fundamental and served as their new primary culture. Because of the new Christian culture, parents could take a one-down position away from Chinese hierarchical dynamics to connect with their children; more significantly, children could also take initiative to connect with their parents rather than be culturally typical

passive and compliant children. The “church offers a new model of parent-child relations” (C. Chen, 2006), p. 592) and this study contributes to the research by showing that both generations value living out their Christian identity in their relationships with one another.

The two generations had different ways of responding to the intergenerational tension. Some first generation mothers were actively engaged in connecting with their children, despite differences. Other mothers described feeling sad about the disconnection from their children and relied on their Christian faith for comfort. The fathers expressed that tension is expected and they need to let the children learn on their own as minority in America. What surprised me was that first generation parents described experiencing intergenerational separateness more than the second generation, as all of the second generation described feeling connected with their parents. Whereas other studies tell of younger-aged second generation experiences of intergenerational conflict, stress, and depression (R. M. Lee et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2009; Su Yeong, Gonzales, Stroh, & Wang, 2006), this study is one of the first to highlight what seems to be a second generation that is actively engaged and willing to adapt in order to build connecting relationships with their parents. At the same time, this raises some questions around whether the second generation felt as though they needed to present themselves as “good children” who were connected to their parents.

Lastly, the differences between first generation mothers and fathers are noteworthy. All four fathers were “rooted in role distinction” in being more separate from their children and comfortable with allowing their children room to adjust and grow, whereas mothers were more emotionally impacted by the children, being very connected, or wishing they could be. Among the few studies involving the parenting perspective of

Chinese fathers (Chuang & Su, 2009; Yuwen & Chen, 2013), one had similar findings in that Asian American mothers were more other-oriented than the fathers. It may be that mothers and fathers play different roles in children's self-identity formation (Koh, Shao, & Wang, 2009), an area requiring further research.

Clinical Implications

The experiences of Chinese American Christians in this study help us to consider what could be significant to integrate into clinical work with such families. The findings suggest that intergenerational tension is normal and present in the experiences of first and second generation Chinese American Christians. Some might feel shame if they are experiencing anything other than joy and peace (Eriksen et al., 2002), but they need to know that the therapist sees their challenges and feelings of disconnect as absolutely understandable given the weight of what they have gone through in changing contexts. From the stories shared, it is possible that these families might seek therapy when the second generation children are in their teenage through young adult years, when the intensity of intergenerational conflict is heightened.

Clinicians can support these families by:

- Affirming the ways they maintain family relationships: what are they already doing that leads to intergenerational connectedness? What peers at church or in other support systems encourage the first/second generation family member to persist/be adaptive in the midst of family conflict? Who in their community could be a resource in helping each generation to understand the other?

- Exploring their Christian identity: what does it mean to be Christian and Chinese? What Christian values support them in their role as a parent/child?
- Validating the unique experiences and responses of both generations: understanding the hopes, dreams and challenges of parents' immigration; how much does the second generation know about these stories and how does it impact them? What has been difficult for the second generation in growing up bi-culturally?
- Tending to the gendered ideas, expectations, and influences of mothering and fathering: what parenting roles do mom and dad play at home? How have these been beneficial or not to building up the family?

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is that because participants volunteered on their own, it is probable that these participants had levels of family conflict they felt comfortable sharing about with the researcher. The value of saving face is a weighty one in the Chinese culture and thus it can be assumed that those with more severe family conflicts would not have volunteered to share their experiences openly.

Another limitation is that because this study focused on Chinese American Christian families, it cannot speak to Chinese American families of other religions. It is possible that there are beliefs and values within the Christian faith that have shaped these experiences that might be different for Chinese Americans of other spiritual practices.

One of the questions this study raises is the gendered experiences of both first generation parents and second generation children. What might be the gendered

perspective for why all the fathers were “rooted in role distinction” and more secure in their roles as fathers in contrast to the mothers’ experiences? Future studies might look at if the Christian faith changes how mothers of fathers parent in comparison to traditional Chinese parenting and what role the church communities have in shaping this.

It would also be beneficial for future studies to look at the intergenerational changes over time; this study was not able to capture the experiences of the two generations over the course of various life and developmental stages. Previous studies of second generation children and college students (Chung, 2001; Ma & Yeh, 2005) reveal intergenerational tension from those age perspectives, while the second generation adults in this study are somewhat older and appear to have come to a more reflective, grateful viewpoint towards their parents.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that in the midst of intergenerational tension and disconnect, there remains hope for future connection as the second generation grows older. It is my hope that the systems around these families - churches and mental health communities – better connect with one another to create a stronger support network around these families so that more of the future generation will have an experience like George:

My parents and I, at this point in our lives, are pretty similar in a lot of the things we do and how we do them... our family and also my parents and their family and how they make decisions...we're trying to be influenced by our faith and some of that clashes with culture potentially...So there's a culture to appreciate and that shapes a lot of what we do day to day and then a faith that we're actively pursuing being remolded by... some of the things in our culture fit really well and some don't fit really well...it's nice to think about these things because there's a lot of

gratitude that I have, ought to have and ought to remember because God's been really good to our family...helping us all navigate it together.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

First Generation Participants

Name, age, gender	Year of Immigration	Ethnicity	Church Demographic	Marital Status/Children	Christian background	Education/Occupation
Jennifer, 56 y.o. F	1980, from Taiwan and Brazil	Asian/Taiwanese	Taiwanese ethnic church	Married with three adult children in their twenties	Fourth generation Christian from family in Taiwan	Master's in Religion/Research Coordinator
Tina 59 y.o. F	1977 from Taiwan	Taiwanese	Pan-Asian church	Married with two adult children	Became Christian while in school in the U.S.	College degree from Taiwan/Bookkeeping
Kelly 55 y.o. F	1977 from Taiwan	Taiwanese	Pan-Asian church	Divorced with one young adult child	Became Christian through family members post-immigration	Associate's degree
Michelle 58 y.o. F	1980 from Taiwan	Asian Chinese	Chinese house church	Divorced with adult daughter	Christian upbringing in Taiwan and conversion in the U.S. while in graduate school	Bachelors's and MBA/Accounting
Brian 52 y.o. M	1982 from Korea	Chinese with upbringing in Korea	Taiwanese Chinese ethnic church	Married with two teenage children	Conversion post-immigration through children attending church events in community	Master's/Insurance
Steve 59 y.o. M	2002 from Taiwan	Chinese from Taiwan	Chinese Ethnic church	Married with two young adult children	Recent convert through wife	Electrical Engineer

Charles 55 y.o. M	1988 from Taiwan	Taiwanese	Chinese Ethnic church	Married with two young adult children	Became Christian post-immigration through friends in graduate school	Architect
Frank 49 y.o. M	2004 from Taiwan	Taiwanese	Chinese Ethnic church	Married with two teenage children	Recent convert post immigration	Double Master's degree Newspaper Editor
Sarah 34 y.o. F	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from Taiwan & Shanghai	Chinese Ethnic church with Mandarin and English congregations	Married with two toddler children	One parent's family was Christian in Taiwan; other parent became a Christian through spouse	Bachelor's degree/homemaker
Angie 28 y.o. F	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from Hong Kong	Multiethnic, mostly Caucasian church	Married; none	One parent became a Christian in graduate school in the U.S.; story of other parent unknown	Marriage and Family Therapist
Helen 28 y.o. F	Taiwan born, immigrated at age 12	Taiwanese American	Multiethnic, mostly Caucasian nondenominat ional church	Engaged	Went to Christian school in Taiwan and rest of family became Christian	Physician
Christine 29 y.o. F	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from Canton & Hong Kong	Multiethnic nondenominat ional church	Single	Both parents are Christian with family history of being Christian in Hong Kong	Mental Health Therapist

George 30 y.o. M	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from Taiwan	Multiethnic urban church	Married; infant child	One parent's family was Christian in Taiwan; other parent's faith developed in the states	Student pursuing master's degree/ background in ministry/nonprofit work
Ryan 31 y.o. male	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from Beijing and Hong Kong	Pan-Asian, majority Korean American church	Single; none	Catholic influence from Hong Kong in one parent's family; other parent became Christian with spouse in U.S.	Bachelor's in Economics/Administrative work
Timothy 33 y.o. male	U.S. Born	Chinese American; parents from China and Taiwan	Pan-Asian, multigenerational church	Married with toddler child	Both parents had Christian influence from Taiwan/China and was raised in a Chinese church in America	Actuary
Joshua 28 y.o. male	U.S. Born	Taiwanese American	Korean American church	Engaged	Parents were raised in Christian context in Taiwan	Clinical psychology

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CHAPTER SEVEN
PASTORS OF FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION
CHINESE AMERICAN CHRISTIANS:
CONTEXT AND CONNECTEDNESS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Publishable Paper Two

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Abstract

This study is the second part of a two-part study; part one examined the intergenerational relationships of first and second generation Christian Chinese Americans, and this paper, part two is looking at the experiences of pastors who work with the first and second generation. To understand these experiences, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was used ($n = 9$). The results suggest that the nine pastors had four types of experiences marked by the level of contextualization in the lens by which they understood church members' family issues, and the way they viewed their role within the larger system around them: there were (1) singular-lensed and independent pastor(s), (2) semi-contextual and seeking pastor(s), (3) contextual and emerging pastors, and (4) contextually competent and holistic pastors. Implications are discussed for churches wanting to create more open, holistic communities as well as for mental health practitioners seeking to bridge faith communities with mental health resources.

Chinese Americans make up the largest Asian group in the United States at 23% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The percentage of Christians among the Chinese in America is higher than the percentage of Christians in their native countries; 31% of Chinese Americans affiliate with being Christian, thus making Christianity the largest religious group for the Chinese in the United States (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012). As much as 32% of the Chinese in large metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and Chicago are Christian, which is a greater percentage than those connected to Buddhism or other religions (Yang, 1999b), making the Christian church an important religious institution to these communities.

I am one of these Chinese American Christians who grew up in the greater Los Angeles area. More specifically, I am a second generation Taiwanese American female and also a marriage and family therapist. My interest in becoming a therapist spawned out of my years in ministry at a Taiwanese American immigrant church, when I encountered the support needed by both first and second generation family members because of the mounting challenges they faced in family life: with marriage, parenting, cultural differences, and spirituality. I found myself and my peers in ministry perpetually being faced with congregation members' stories of pain, hurt, frustration connected to their experiences coming from minority immigrant families.

Though we know challenges and conflict exists in the intergenerational dynamics in these families related to issues of acculturation differences (R. M. Lee et al., 2005; Rhee et al., 2003), parenting styles and warmth (Juang et al., 2007; Lim et al., 2009), and differences in cultural expectations (Chung, 2001; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008), Chinese Americans primarily go to family and friends for emotional and personal support, with

very few going to outsiders for help (Kung, 2004). Actually, the overwhelming majority (75%) do not discuss emotional challenges with anyone at all (Kung, 2003).

However, in the Chinese American church which “reflects the intergenerational family model” (Cao, 2005, p. 192), the pastor is the one to whom family members go for support, counsel, and direction in the midst of family crisis. This study, which is the second part of a larger study about the intersection of faith and family among first and second generation Christian Chinese Americans, came about because in my desire to connect the Chinese American Christian community as a mental health practitioner, I found very few resources addressing the unique needs of our communities. It seemed of primary importance to hear the stories and experiences of the pastors of these congregations, as they are often the “father” figures of these faith communities, which have become very much like an extended family system (Jeung, 2004).

This paper captures the pastors’ experiences and reflections as they have worked with the Chinese American Christian whose stories are told in the first part of the study. In the first part of the study, first and second generation Chinese American Christians were interviewed and what surfaced was that intergenerational tension was experienced; the first generation felt disconnected from their children because the children would never be able to understand their experiences of immigration and the second generation wished their parents would accept their different values, interests, and ways of existing biculturally. They responded to this experience of intergeneration tension in various ways.

As these pastors are the trusted confidants for these Chinese American Christian families, they would be the ones to have the most “expert” perspective on leading their

communities towards emotional, relational and mental wellness. This qualitative study is a result of my conversations with these pastors about what they have experienced as shepherds of Chinese American Christians, what they have seen as being helpful, and what reflections they have for any sort of bridging or intersection between faith communities and mental health support systems.

Literature Review

Help-Seeking Among Chinese Americans and Christians

In the Chinese cultural context, the disclosing of personal experience and emotion to outsiders and non-family members brings stigma (Cao, 2005). For Chinese Americans, because emotional and personal problems are not of primary importance, it may make little sense to seek help from others (Kung, 2003). Even in the presence of conflict and intense emotion, cultural norms and expectations make it nearly impossible for these strong feelings to be expressed to family members, especially in the context of therapy. If these families make it into a therapy room, interventions like family sculpting are thought to be very odd and are experienced as very distressing and uncomfortable by many Chinese American families (Soo-Hoo, 2005).

In the early 1990s, the National Institute of Mental Health funded the Chinese American Psychiatric Epidemiological Study, conducted in Los Angeles, surveying over 1,747 Chinese American households. The intention of this study was to examine respondents' perceived barriers to pursuing mental health care. They found significant practical barriers such as treatment costs, knowing how to access care, and language challenges in predicting mental health care use of Chinese Americans (Kung, 2004). It

was reported that family and friends are where most Chinese Americans go to for emotional and personal support, where as significantly fewer seek help from outsiders. However, as mentioned earlier, the overwhelming majority (75%) do not discuss emotional challenges with anyone at all (Kung, 2003). It is important to Chinese Americans to portray a positive health image and there is stigma associated with being affected by mental health needs (Leung et al., 2012). Thus traditional forms of mental health care, such as going to couples, family, or individual therapy, are less likely options for these family members. Instead, young Asian Americans, for example, tend to go to their personal support networks – close friends, significant others, and their religious community (S. Lee et al., 2009).

Chinese American Christians generally identify with more conservative theology, and for anyone who holds to these beliefs, it is understandably a challenge to be open to receiving help from a source outside of a Christian spiritual context. There are also hurdles that come from the Christian community regarding attitudes about mental health. This was discussed in Stanford's (2007) study of Christian congregants who sought counsel from churches. He found that a high percentage, 30%, of congregants who looked to the church for support regarding their mental health concerns had negative interactions. These negative interactions included abandonment or lack of involvement by the church, belief that the mental illnesses were demonic activity, or that the mental illnesses were considered a result of a lack of faith or personal sin.

The Christian Church and Clergy as Support

So rather than going outside to the mental health community, Chinese American

Christians stay inside, in their church communities. The Christian church is central to the family lives of Chinese American Christians. As foreigners in a new land, there is an inclination to find community, safety and identity (Takaki, 1989) and so even though Chinese immigrants have opportunities to take part in various kinds of ethnic organizations such as cultural clubs, language schools, and other religious groups, there are certain needs that only the Christian church has been able to meet. The Christian church has allowed immigrants to have not only a sense of social belonging, but also the opportunity to have meaningful family connections such that spiritual and psychological needs are met: they offer youth programs which support parenting and provide a moral environment within which to raise the second-generation (Yang, 1998); they implement effective outreach programs that support families in dealing with day-to-day issues (Yang & Tamney, 2006); they provide social support for the elderly (Zhang & Zhan, 2009).

When Chinese Americans face family conflict, however, this was the strongest predictor for seeking formal services. They also sought informal services and when doing so, 39% would seek it from their ministers or priests. These informal services, such as the Chinese church, are important resources for these communities (Abe-Kim et al., 2002) and it would be beneficial for formal service agencies to set up partnerships with the informal services (Spencer & Chen, 2004) to support Chinese American families. The family that is Chinese and Christian faces twice the amount of stigma and shame in seeking mental health support, yet they are longing for it especially when it comes to dealing with family conflict.

From the literature, we know that it is less likely for Chinese Americans to seek help the Western way by going to therapy. At the same time, we also know they are most

likely to go to their pastors for support, especially in dealing with family tension. Is there something different that the mental health community can be doing to provide relational and mental health support to the Chinese American Christian communities that is more contextually relevant to their world view and needs? That is the gap in literature that this study seeks to explore. In the first and second generation's experience of intergenerational tension, their hope has been to move towards wholeness; as the cultural disconnects and differences are tended to, their family relationships can become more connecting and complete. Through this study, I sought to answer these questions by exploring the pastors' experience of how they have served to move Chinese American Christians towards intergenerational familial wholeness and health.

Method

Even with what scholarship reveals about Chinese American families, the knowledge has done little to promote an effective mental health support system with cultural humility, a positioning that considers that individuals have multiple identities interconnected with their worldview and cultures (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011). Giving privilege to the lived experience of pastors of Chinese American Christians over what various disciplines "know" about them could be a fresh way for researchers and practitioners to reconsider mental health support systems that come from the stories within the Chinese American Christian community.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is particularly relevant to this research study because it tends to a particular group of people in their particular context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) – pastors serving the first and second generation Chinese

American Christians living as immigrant families and minority in America.

Interpretative phenomenology is different from other phenomenological approaches in that it is idiographic: concerned with the particular rather than the general (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In addition, this exploratory study is critical because to the best of my knowledge, there are no studies telling of the experiences of pastors working with Chinese American Christians, asking for their views on what intergenerational wholeness might look like. Without their perspective, a crucial piece of understanding how to care for Chinese American Christians has been missing.

What we know from the first part of the study is both first and second generation family members experience levels of intergenerational tension or difference. They navigated these experiences of tension in various ways and they either experienced their intergenerational relationships with “connectedness” or “separateness:” the “connected” participants had active and engaging relationships with their other-generation family members and the participants experiencing separateness did not share about having regular intentional communication with their other-generation family member and led more separate lives. The ways they navigated the tension ranged from accepting the generational differences and proactively working on interpersonal growth and personal change, to being rooted firmly in their perceived roles (true for the first generation fathers) and letting the children figure things out on their own.

The intergenerational issues that they brought up – feeling like the children would never understand their immigrant experiences, parents not accepting the choices of career or spouse, feeling disconnected from one another – are issues with which pastors commonly work. The hope in interviewing the pastors was to hear how they engage with

family members around these issues, what sort of counseling/support they provide, and how they perceive intergenerational wholeness is to be and how to move towards this. They could provide insight into how these families navigate their tensions, and what “works” from both Chinese culture and Christian faith perspectives.

Procedure

Pastors of first and second generation Chinese American Christians within the southern California Christian communities were recruited for this study. I used purposive and snowball sampling, connecting with pastors through my network of colleagues and churches in the Southern California region. The main inclusion criteria was that the pastors had to have served for at least five years ministering to Chinese American Christians, but did not necessarily have to be Chinese American themselves. Interested participants were contacted to set up a time for the in-person interview. The interviews lasted about an hour and were audio recorded. I began with a general semi-structured interview guideline, and as analysis took place in between the interviews, questions were added as new insight was gained along the way. In interpretative phenomenology, participants are selected because they “ ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Participants

This study resulted in nine participants: one female and eight male pastors. In the Chinese Christian community, the majority of pastors are male, as this is reflective of the more patriarchal values as well as conservative theologies about church leadership. The

pastors' ages ranged from 32 to 67 and they identified as being Chinese, Chinese Filipino, Taiwanese, and Japanese in ethnicity. At the time of the study, participants were pastors of various church congregations in the Los Angeles Area with Baptist, Evangelical, Presbyterian, or non-denominational traditions. Their experience in working with Chinese American families ranged from 8 to 35 years. In interpretative phenomenology, there is no right answer to what size a sample should be (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), but rather, the question of concern is whether the quality of analysis has given a "detailed account of individual experience." For a study like this, four to ten interviews is a recommended range of interviews so that successful analysis can take place (Smith, et al).

Analysis

These nine interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed, read, analyzed, and interpreted throughout the interviewing and data collection process, which took place between February and April 2014.

The six steps of interpretative phenomenological analysis are (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases. Throughout this iterative process requiring flexible thinking and creativity, the results and curiosities raised by the first study with first and second generation Chinese American Christians informed the questions and topics discussed with the pastors (Smith et al., 2009). After each interview, I took notes on my initial impressions and reflected

on possible issues I had not considered so I could adapt the questions in subsequent interviews.

In transcribing and analyzing each interview, I noticed there were clear differences in pastor's perspectives and position within the community. As I honed in on the differences, what surfaced was their varied ways of viewing church members' experiences of intergenerational tension and how they supported them towards resolution; I began to hear similarity or variation in the contextualization of their views for the church members and also for themselves. Having a less contextualized view meant seeing members' from fewer lenses and seeing themselves more independently; having a more contextualized view meant seeing members' through a host of perspectives and seeing themselves interconnected to larger systems.

Results

Though the pastors I interviewed had a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and theological perspectives, the nuances and variation in their experiences came through two observable areas: the level of contextualization in the lens by which they understood their congregation members' family issues, and how they saw their roles as pastors within the larger system around them.

Taking into consideration these two areas in the data, four themes of pastoral experiences surfaced: there were (1) singular-lensed and independent pastor(s), (2) semi-contextual and seeking pastor(s), (3) contextual and emerging pastors, and (4) contextually competent and holistic pastors. The first part of the descriptor (singular-lensed, semi-contextual, contextual, contextually competent) refers to the lens by which

they understand the family issues, and the second descriptor refers to how they see themselves within the larger system (independent, seeking, emerging, holistic). All of the names of the pastors presented here are pseudonyms.

Singular-Lensed and Independent Pastor(s)

There was one participant whose experience reflected this first theme. Oscar is a 33-year-old second generation Taiwanese American who identifies himself as the shepherd of the English speaking ministry at the Taiwanese American church at which he serves. Oscar's experience as the pastor or shepherd is distinctly different from the experiences of the other pastoral participants. I describe him as being "singular-lensed" because he understands the congregation members' family issues as mainly through a biblical lens.

Oscar was the fifth pastor I had interviewed and I had not encountered the questions he raised from the previous four pastoral participants. When I asked him what it has been like to work with the second generation Chinese American Christians, he responded with:

Would you say the question is focused on it being Chinese American or does that really matter? I mean for one, I've never in all my ministry looked at people based on culture. So it's never really occurred to me that problems that they face are distinctly because of that. I mean I guess there are stereotypical things about Asian parents that come in, but I guess I've always looked at them as sin that is consistent across any culture...

Oscar's perspective is that the problems people face are not specific to their cultural backgrounds. Though there are cultural elements to individuals' experiences and behaviors, this is not the primary way he understands people. One of the challenges Oscar faces in ministry is the relational conflict that first generation parents have amongst

themselves in their Chinese congregation which impact the second generation youth because rather than communicating with each other about their conflicts, they are leaving the church. When speaking of the first generation parents, he says:

If I were to tie it into culture I guess it would be that, this whole saving face, not saying things to people, not working it out, but just talking behind their back and leaving, rather than facing it and talking about it with one another.

Though Oscar does not look at people based on culture, when he does see the cultural connections, culture is more of a deficit, and these cultural values like “saving face” conflict with the biblical truths of being open, honest, and communicative that he is trying to teach the youth. Culture is seen as having sin, which is universal, and the way this is lived out by the Chinese parents is no different for Oscar from one culture to the next:

So culture has never really been anything that's majorly different to me. It just seems like people are people, parents are sinful just like everybody else, and everything you find in this culture you'll find in this culture.

One of his greatest challenges has been the lack of spiritual support parents provide in their children's lives. His desire is to disciple the youth one-on-one and to impart biblical truth, yet the parents are more concerned about their children's academic interests and so they may not allow more time spent doing “church things.” It is disheartening for Oscar because there is little support for the youth's spiritual growth:

I'm trying to think, I want to say never, never have I ever had a parent come to me and ask me to really help their child spiritually, to love God more, to hunger for his word more. I don't think I've ever had a parent ask me that specifically.

Oscar does not feel like he is on the same page with much of the church leadership and though it may sound like he lacks support and is alone in his efforts, this is not how he feels. When asked if he wishes he had more support, he shared:

I'm kind of a fighter I guess. So I guess the underdog mentality. I've never felt like, well not never, it's rare that I feel alone, I mean God plus one is my mentality. I try to be careful with that I don't want to in my own mind to treat [first-generation church leaders] as the enemy because they're not. I kind of remind myself of that all the time but at the same time, when I know that God's truth is the side that I'm standing on...

Because of the difficulties he has faced in working alongside the first generation church leaders and parents, he is often shepherding the youth on his own without much support. That is why he is an “independent pastor.” Oscar has minimal connection with other churches, pastors, or support systems outside of his church:

I don't know much about other churches, I don't spend time thinking about them...I'm not personally against outside support but I do lean very much against outsourcing the responsibilities that I consider the responsibilities of shepherds. And in my mind the most important thing to do is to train shepherds to be able to rightly handle the Word of God and love people and do the hard work of walking with them in their challenges.

Oscar's greatest care is that he is leading others through the Word of God, and that is why he does not feel he lacks anything because it is in the Word.

Semi-Contextual and Seeking Pastor(s)

There was also one pastor in this theme of being semi-contextual and seeking in that he desired to know more about how to find support for himself and the church members. He was semi-contextual in seeing things not only with a biblical lens, but also saw the value of understanding with a cultural lens; Chinese cultural values were important in the lives of members and were evident in ministry work. He did not see himself as the main source of support for his congregants, but was seeking resources to better understand and serve his community.

Pastor Shirong is a 58-year-old first generation Taiwanese male pastor of a Taiwanese congregation. He has been in ministry as a pastor for 19 years and the church at which he pastors is a Taiwanese American church with three congregations: Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English speaking. Most of the church members are first generation Chinese immigrants with a portion of their children making up the members of the English speaking congregation. When there are issues between the first and second generation, he sees the generational differences with a cultural lens:

First generation will be more like towards the unity and with harmony. And second generation will be more focused on more right and wrong, clearly, have more confrontational style and so it's probably different from first generation focusing on the harmony.

Shirong describes this difference as being related to cultural differences, as the second generation is raised in an American educational context, very different from the Eastern context in which the parents grew up. At the same time, he sees his primary role as being the one who helps his members follow biblical truth and grow spiritually mature:

I believe that if you can follow biblical truth, it is always helpful, both husband and wife, spiritually mature and I believe they follow Bible principles, it should bring the harmony and love to each other. As a pastor that's the focus.

He counsels his members with biblical truth, yet at the same time sees the cultural strengths and weaknesses that impact the families' relationships. There are some circumstances where he wishes he had more support and training. There was a recent experience when he felt inadequately connected to resources to help a family:

I do wish that I can have the opportunity to have this continuing education in [mental health]. And also cooperate with community clinic to help. I think last week I was thinking maybe I should also do some research for myself to try to see if I do something and that will change the situation with this family...

Pastor Shirong is “seeking” support – he sees where there is a limitation to his expertise and wishes he could be better connected to resources that can help his congregants. He expressed the desire to better understand the mental health system and also reflected on the possibility of providing family ministry classes to equip the members with family conflict resolution skills.

In his role as the pastor in relation to the larger system around him, he is the main spiritual leader in the lives of the church members. He did not speak of any program or other leaders who work together to support the relational and emotional health of the church. When I asked if he had any support from his pastor friends and colleagues, he shared:

No, usually we don't talk about this. We probably talk about more theological things, but not about...counseling. In seminary I think we have classes but just one or two not many. So when I went into the ministry I found that it's not enough.

So for Pastor Shirong, Chinese cultural issues impact the lives of the members, and though he tries his best to counsel them with biblical and cultural understanding, he wishes he had more support from the mental health system.

Contextual and Emerging Pastors

Three pastors shared experiences fitting this third theme of being “contextual and emerging.” They are contextual because they see the multiple layers of influence on their congregation members’ (in addition to a biblical and cultural lens) family lives and are functioning as pioneers in each of their particular church communities. They are pioneers because they have not seen or experienced a model for how to have a holistic church community but they are each contributing to their communities spearheading the way,

adapting to whatever contextual needs arise and hoping that it will best serve their members. Mark is a 1.5 generation, 36-year-old Chinese Filipino pastor who planted a church in recent years to intentionally serve the second generation Asian Americans who grew up in more ethnically Chinese churches. Fifty-nine year-old John is a first generation Chinese American, came to the United States from abroad to attend seminary, and now pastors a Cantonese speaking congregation which is connected to a larger Chinese church.

I will focus more extensively on the example of Pastor Charles. Charles is a 32-year-old, 1.5 generation Chinese American male who has been working in ministry for eight years with Chinese American families. He serves as the pastor of the English ministry within a Chinese church, which also has Mandarin and Cantonese speaking congregations. Many of the Chinese speaking church members are recent immigrants and blue-collar workers. He works primarily with the English speaking youth but spends much of his time connecting with their parents. Charles is a “contextual” pastor because understands the families’ issues with a cultural, family systemic, and developmental lens. One of the first things he shared in the interview is this awareness of Chinese cultural values:

In general there's a lot of tradition, a lot of cultural, Chinese cultural values that you need to work through and sometimes have to be very careful especially working with first generation. I work a lot with our youth parents and so their mentality is very different from what the youth think because they're primarily overseas born and they were raised a certain way and so their values of church are a little bit different.

He is sensitive and gracious to the first generation parents’ overseas cultural influences, particularly knowing that they came here for stability, security and for their children’s

education. Charles takes into consideration their journey of spiritual development and knows that it

takes a little time for them to grow spiritually, to understand that faith is a holistic thing... many of [the parents] are really young in the faith, so they themselves are processing a lot of this. They're leaning on what they knew before, a different parenting overseas-born parenting style.

The first generation parents come to Charles with a lot of frustration in their parenting experiences and Charles tries to come alongside them to let them know that the church is here to be a support for their families. He educates the parents about developmental issues for teenagers, encouraging them to be persistent in their care as parents. With a relational perspective, he also shares his experiences growing up with his own parents, letting the parents know that things can grow and change over time:

One thing is they're frustrated because they're trying their best but there's no response, the teenagers are just simply not taking in what they say. And so there's a frustration that I usually encourage them that, "You gotta keep up with being their parents, even though [the children] don't like it...they may not feel it now but later, these things come back to them, they know that you care about them."

He supports the families with a family systems lens, exploring how parents' own upbringing impacts their current parent challenges; the overseas born parents were mostly raised in a "very conditional, behaviorally driven" environment, and so Charles encourages them with examples from Scripture about God's unconditional fatherly love.

The senior pastor of the church is particularly supportive of mental health awareness, largely because his wife is a counselor. The leadership is on the same page and works well together in collaborating as they support both generations. Charles is "emerging" because he is innovative in the ways he attempts to bridge generations: he holds "coffee hour" for parents to meet with him on a regular basis and holds learning

workshops to train parents on parenting issues. With the systems he has access to, he is empowering the congregants.

While Charles is grateful for the resources in the larger system around him, they are continually in flux and growth, and he wishes he had more training in the area of counseling because “a good portion of [his] time is spent doing it but it’s not necessarily represented in the units you take in seminary.” He expressed wanting to know more about things like mental illness and medication use, and would want to receive training in these areas.

Contextually Competent and Holistic Pastors

Four pastors were in this last group described as being “contextually competent” and “holistic.” They sounded very clear-minded in addressing the multiple contexts of their church members, and they were holistic in that they saw themselves as one piece of an integrated comprehensive network of support.

They came from church systems that were multi-generational and multi-ethnic (but still mostly Asian and Chinese) congregations. The churches they represent are generally larger in size and have been around longer such that layers of church support and programs have been established. When discussing how they understand the congregation members’ struggles, they had a more contextualized view of how they saw human suffering and sin. They spoke with ease, awareness, and competence, and described a leadership community where they were well connected with colleagues, lay leaders, and community resources. It was clear to them where and how to get support for the church members and additionally, a culture of openness, vulnerability and support-

seeking was integrated into the life of the church community; the pastor saw him/herself as one person within a larger system of support. For example, Pastor Joanne, the one female pastor interviewed, shared about working with the support of crisis agencies and law enforcement. Her greatest challenge when working with a previous Chinese American church was the prevalent abuse, “dads physical hitting wives and children, sexual abuse in Chinese families...gambling...” She expressed familiarity with reporting abuse when necessary as well as interacting with law enforcement when they became involved.

Fifty-nine year-old Pastor Liang has been serving at his church for 28 years and is now the senior pastor. The church is a multigenerational church with English, Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking congregations. His doctorate in psychology contributes to shaping his contextual competence: he views the members’ family issues through cultural, gendered, developmental, biological, and spiritual lens. Here he sees how cultural, gendered, and developmental pieces interact:

Chinese culture tends to be very patriarchal, so there's a lot of that kind of stuff too. Although some Chinese women are very strong too...And then parent/child relationships issues. A lot of cross cultural, cross generational issues because of the traditional from Asia, values and culture of the parents versus the kids are born here, very westernized. There are some kinds of those conflicts we have to mediate sometimes and help the parents understand, growing up, the developmental stages of adolescence. Parenting styles and also to be careful of child abuse because this is not Taiwan or China or Singapore...We try to educate them on how to discipline in appropriate ways. How to affirm and how to love... I have to explain what individuation means...They're going to stretch their wings, they're going to push their agenda, push the envelope, and test the limits, so parents begin to understand they're not abnormal. This is normal.

Additionally, Pastor Liang encourages a biological awareness which contributes to reducing stigma about taking medication:

That's another thing I try to normalize for the people because more often, the more Chinese say "I'm not crazy" I say "No you're not, but there are biological things, there is biochemistry in your brain and it's not your fault that you feel down all the time. And if you have family history... sometimes taking medication can help you stabilize, you can sleep better, eat better, function better. There's nothing wrong with that."

He is also aware of religious and spiritual influences that have cultural connections and he brings this to light with biblical understanding:

Traditionally, Chinese families have been converted so they... might come from a non-Christian background, ancestor worship, Buddhist, Taoist kind of thing. So a number of superstitions, a number of idol worshipping kinds of stuff, fear of bad luck and the demonic and so on. Those things need to be addressed and sometimes they get pulled into their Christian beliefs especially younger Christians so we need to be patient with that... That's why I take my preaching ministry very seriously... ground them in the Word...But it takes time to be transformed, renewing of their minds.

Discussion

In this interpretative phenomenological study, I heard the experiences and perspectives of the pastors of first and second generation Chinese American Christians and how they make meaning of what the families go through, and how these families are to best find support in their Chinese American contexts. It appears that the level of contextualization in the lens with which they viewed members' issues correlated to how they saw themselves within the larger system of support: the more singular-lensed pastor had less of a support system and saw himself as the primary support-giver, and the pastors with multiple contextual lenses saw themselves as one part of a multi-layered support community; there were manifold ways of connecting their church members to support.

There seemed to be a few factors that impacted the variation in pastors' experiences. For example, the pastors of churches with a greater first generation population seemed more limited in their contextual awareness, while pastors of churches with more ethnic and generational diversity held multiple perspectives in understanding their congregants. For the former, it could be that their congregation is more homogenous and thus it may not be so easy to see the many layers impacting the members' experiences whereas with more diversity in a congregation, pastors are almost forced to face multiple perspectives and realities and thus develop various lenses for understanding the challenges that arise.

Also, the pastors with fewer connections and support systems were part of much smaller church congregations compared to the pastors who had layered networks of support; these pastors had much larger congregations that had also planted other churches. This is congruent with what researchers found studying pastoral knowledge and attitudes on mental health: clergy from smallest churches would have the fewest resources and have higher demands than clergy from larger churches (Bledsoe, Setterlund, Adams, Fok-Trela, & Connolly, 2013).

The idea of connectedness was prevalent across both the first and second studies; how connected first generation parents are with second generation children, how connected the pastors are to their communities. Vogelsang (1996), a church consultant, suggests that a healthy organization "is connected rather than isolated from the larger community" but when the pastor overfunctions, doing everything for everyone, things "stay the same" making it difficult for growth (Vogelsang, 1996). It is a healthy thing for pastors and their churches to move towards greater connection to their communities. In

the following implications section, I will discuss what this might look like for the Christian community as well as for the mental health community.

Implications

For the Christian Community

The recommendations in this section are directed mainly at pastors or ministry leaders who are wondering how to create more openness and connection to holistic wellness in their faith communities. Three suggestions are: (1) to debunk myths about mental health, (2) consider the influence of the pastor, and (3) create layers of support within the church community.

Debunk Myths About Mental Health

The contextually competent pastors all stated how important it is to actively discuss any myths or misconceptions about mental health. They were all aware of the ways that Chinese Americans are concerned about feeling shame. Pastor Kevin suggests having people who have had positive experiences of getting mental health support to have more of a voice and influence in the community so seeking help is de-stigmatized.

It is important to use language that makes sense to the church community. Pastor David shared “I had to redefine what mental health stood for. It doesn't mean you're crazy or being committed to an asylum or something. So I try to say we're all dysfunctional and that's because we're all sinful. That's the language that the church knows. We're sinful, and that's what counseling's for, it's to address your sin. And we're all sinful, we're all broken, and sometimes we need help, the Bible says, there's victory in

a host of counselors. And sometimes we need counseling and it's not a bad thing, it's a positive thing.”

Consider the Influence of the Pastor

The contextually competent holistic pastors also emphasized how much influence the pastors and leadership have over the congregation. Pastor Joanne mentioned normalizing going to therapy by using a known pastor as an example – “Here’s a pastor who goes to therapy not because there’s anything chronically wrong, or illegal in his family, but because he needs an outlet and he trusts the therapist and you all trust him, this is not a shameful thing...” Pastor Liang said that “it’s very important, the preaching from the pulpit” because if the pastor is open in sharing that he has seen a psychologist for help, then the congregation will not be afraid to go seek help. The pastor is the respected authority in the Chinese church community and so sermon topics and how the pastor speaks about mental wellness impacts what the members perceive. If the pastor normalizes family dysfunction and brokenness rather than perpetuating stigma, the congregation will grow more and more open to the ideas of seeking help. As Pastor David shared, “if a pastor supports a certain position or way of doing something, then the congregation slowly starts to adopt it.” “Unless there's a sort of an overt blessing towards [mental health]...and so the voices of leadership is very very important and what they say” (Pastor Kevin).

Create Layers of Support

What is apparent in church communities with a more holistic view on wellness is

the multiple layers of support present within and outside of the community. Pastor Liang described “different layers of helping, so there’s a safety net of caring, starting from lay people, their friends, their leaders to pastors and to professionals if need be.” Certainly this takes time, but rather than the pastor be the main source of care and support and perhaps feeling burnt out, it is helpful to create a culture where relational support is available at all levels and between people.

For the Mental Health Community

These recommendations are for those in the mental health community that have a heart for bridging Chinese American churches with mental health resources. The two recommendations come from very strongly expressed sentiments from the pastors regarding what is of most importance to the Chinese American Christian community: (1) explicit integration of biblical principles and (2) more written literature as a resource.

Integration of Biblical Principles

All nine pastors emphasized the importance of Scripture and its significance to the Chinese American Christian. Much of the reluctance to move towards “psychological” things is the perception that it is secular and devoid of Christian truth. Pastor Liang shared that “Many of the Chinese folks will not accept it when you come from the part of psychology or secular psychology or secular marriage and family therapy. They do not hold in high esteem, the authority figures in our field. Who cares about Sigmund Freud? But they care if it comes from the Bible, so it's very important to be biblical in your approach of all of those things... And thank God most Chinese Christians take the Bible

seriously so when we start with the Bible, they'll listen more and if we start with psychology they will not.”

“For many Chinese Christians, because they hold strongly to the truth and authority of Scripture, if they can be convinced or persuaded that counseling and mental health is a spiritual activity...that would increase the openness and acceptance of mental health” (Pastor Kevin).

Written Literature as a Resource

This recommendation is one I had not previously considered but two pastors thought this could have significant impact on the community. Bledsoe et al. (2013) found that the majority of their participants had learned about mental health through self-study and research. Pastor Oscar and Pastor Mark both shared about how much they have read on their own about topics of family conflict and counseling. Pastor Oscar follows various Christian blogs and Pastor Mark reads many books and online resources. Pastor Mark suggested that this would be beneficial to the community as many Chinese Christians value intellectual knowledge would want to gain this knowledge in the safety of a private space. If there were more culturally spiritually relevant and accessible literature, individuals and communities could shift in their openness to mental health issues.

Conclusion

This qualitative study serves as an exploratory study into the faith communities of Chinese American Christians from the perspectives of the pastors that shepherd them. Future research should look into the layers and variables that create these range of

experiences and levels of openness to mental health support, variables such as generational status of congregants, acculturation levels, pastor's theology, support systems in the church, sermon topics, members' experience of mental health, diversity, age and history of the church. It would also be interesting to see if there is a connection between pastors' connectedness to community with the members' intergenerational connectedness and tension. Additionally, though there are very few female pastors in the Chinese American community, it is interesting to note the access the female pastor had into the intimate places of these families' lives that was not reported by her male counterparts. This is something to look into for future studies.

Though there is much to look forward to in terms of creating healthier Chinese American Christian families and communities, this study highlights the amazing journey that Chinese American Christians have walked through in their immigration and faith histories. As they have celebrated and faced the challenges of culture, there remains the hope of continuing to better integrate this culture with their Christian faith to grow their families towards wholeness and a life lived fully in the United States.

Table 1

Pastor Information and Themes

Pastor/Gender/ Position	Age/Generational Status/Ethnicity	Years in Ministry	Church demographic	Training
Kevin, male Associate Pastor	50, 2 nd , Chinese	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multiethnic with 90% Asian •1st through 4th generation •English-speaking 	Master's in Divinity Doctorate in Ministry
David, male Senior Pastor	67, 3 rd , Japanese	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •50% Chinese & 50% Japanese •1st through 5th generation •English-speaking 	Seminary courses
Shirong, male Senior Pastor	58, 1 st , Taiwanese	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Taiwanese Church •1st through 3rd generation •English, Mandarin, & Taiwanese speaking 	Master's in Divinity
Liang, male Senior Pastor	59, 1 st , Chinese	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multi-generational Chinese church with English, Mandarin & Cantonese congregations •English congregation more multi-ethnic 	Seminary courses Doctorate in Mental Health field
Oscar, male English Ministry Shepherd	33, 2 nd , Taiwanese	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Taiwanese Church •1st through 3rd generation •English, Mandarin, & Taiwanese speaking 	Seminary courses

Charles, male Assistant English Minister	32, 1.5, Chinese	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chinese church with English, Cantonese, & Mandarin congregations •1st through 2nd generation 	Master's in Divinity
Mark, male Senior Pastor	36, 1.5, Chinese Filipino	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chinese & Caucasian •2nd generation and beyond 	Master's in Divinity
John, male Associate Pastor	59, 1 st , Chinese	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chinese church with English, Cantonese, and Mandarin congregations •1st through 3rd generation 	Master's in Divinity Pursuing Doctorate in Theology
Joanne, female Senior Associate Pastor	36, 1.5, Chinese	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multiethnic with 90% Asian •1st through 4th generation •English-speaking 	Master's in Divinity



Singular-Lensed & Independent



Semi-Contextual & Seeking



Contextual & Emergent



Contextually Competent & Holistic

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CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Review of Purpose and Research Questions

In this dissertation study, I sought out to develop a more complete understanding of the intergenerational familial dynamics among Chinese American Christians, how these dynamics show up in and get addressed by the Chinese church communities, and how might this awareness better inform family therapists about the cultural and spiritual ways of pursuing health and wellness in this context. The integration of these issues – looking at the Chinese culture and Christian faith – as they play out in family life has yet to be addressed in the field of marital and family therapy, and this study attempted to do so to fill in this gap in the literature. As an insider of this community, I have seen many families live through family conflict and pain and end up going through their struggles in isolation apart from church or mental health support. I hope that this dissertation study has been faithful in telling their stories so that as mental health communities and faith communities, we can collaborate together to create stronger connections in between the generations, and in our church and community systems.

The four research questions addressed were:

Research Question 1: How do first generation Chinese American Christians experience and understand the interaction of culture and faith as they live in their families, church communities, and the larger American society?

Research Question 2: How do second generation Chinese American Christians experience and understand interaction of culture and faith as they live in their families, church communities, and the larger American society?

Research Question 3: What are the relational dynamics and issues between first and second generation Chinese American Christian family members?

Research Question 4: How do the pastors of Chinese American Christian congregations experience and understand the Chinese American Christian intergenerational family in their context as minority pastors for a minority church community in America?

The first paper, chapter five (*Intergenerational Tension, Connectedness, and Separateness in the Lived Experience of First and Second Generation Christian Chinese Americans*) responded to research questions one through three, and the second paper, chapter six (*Pastors of First and Second Generation Christian Chinese Americans: Context and Connection Make a Difference*) responded to the fourth research question.

Discussion

Paper One

What we know now is that first and second generation Chinese American Christians live with intergenerational tension in their relational dynamics and have navigated this tension in different ways. Though the literature talks about intergenerational conflict, this study captured the lived experience, which felt more like an ever-present intergenerational tension that was their day-to-day reality. Through life's developmental stages, there might have been explicit arguments about various issues, but overall there was a deep awareness that the intergenerational differences made it difficult to ever fully know one another's experiences.

In the results, there were four observations that struck me: (a) the maintenance of family in spite of strong themes of disconnection, (b) how Christianity served as the new primary culture, (c) generational differences in experience and response to disconnection, and (d) the gender differences of first generation parents.

Maintenance of Family

Even in the midst of both generations describing the ways they felt different and disconnected with one another, the Chinese American Christian family members did not cut off from one another but did what they could to safeguard their family units. This was particularly surprising to me because so much of the literature speaks about intergenerational conflict; Qin's (2009) study on Chinese immigrant families who had no identified religious affiliation, found that intergenerational estrangement and alienation grew over time between parents and their teenage children. It seems that when the second generation are in their teenage and young adult years, intergenerational conflict is more prevalent; this dissertation study's unique finding is that as they move into their late twenties and early thirties, there is a maintaining of family that comes through the efforts of both generations.

One possible reason for this is the support these families find through church. Chinese Christian churches hold programs that support devotion to the family (C. Chen, 2006) and perhaps when both generations are connected to the church, hearing sermons about family and having peers who are close to their families, it is more likely that they do the same.

Christian Culture

Many participants emphasized that living out their Christian identity was of primary importance; it superseded adhering to Chinese cultural values. Being a Christian not only gave them tools to resolve family issues, and church was not merely a resource center; rather, being Christian changed something fundamental and served as their new primary culture. The new Christian culture gives family members a freedom outside of the roles they knew from Chinese culture: parents did not have to remain in an authoritative position but could take a one-down position away from Chinese hierarchical dynamics to connect with their children. Children also did not have to remain passive and compliant; they could take initiative to connect with their parents to engage with and shape the relationship. The “church offers a new model of parent-child relations” (C. Chen, 2006) and this study contributes to the research by showing that both generations value living out their Christian identity in their relationships with one another.

Generational Differences

The two generations had different ways of responding to the intergenerational tension. Some first generation mothers were actively engaged in connecting with their children, despite differences. Other mothers described feeling sad about the disconnection from their children and relied on their Christian faith for comfort. This may have correlation to mothers’ acculturation level and level of education. One study found that mothers reported larger acculturation gaps and uncertainty in relation to their sons and mothers with more formal education reported having less of an acculturation gap with their children (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003). The two mothers who felt

disconnected from their children had only sons, whereas the two mothers in the “intergenerationally connected” had either only a daughter or both sons and daughter. Also, the connected mothers had higher levels of education than the separated mothers. If these factors impact experiences of acculturation and intergenerational relationships, then it would be important to explore how acculturation gaps can be addressed in the church community.

What surprised me was that first generation parents described experiencing intergenerational separateness more than the second generation, as all of them described feeling connected with their parents. Whereas other studies tell of younger-aged second generation experiences of intergenerational conflict, stress, and depression (R. M. Lee et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2009; Su Yeong et al., 2006), this study is one of the first to highlight a second generation that is actively engaged and willing to adapt in order to build connecting relationships with their parents.

The second generation participants all fell into categories of “intergenerationally connected.” Since the participants volunteered, they identified as Christian, and perhaps it was important to them to honor their parents, both a Christian and Chinese principle. These results about the second generation adults are encouraging because they tell a story of U.S. born children who went through struggles in their adolescence and teenage years with their parents, but navigated through this and have the desire to stay connected to their parents.

Gender Differences

Lastly, the differences between first generation mothers and fathers are

noteworthy. All four fathers were “rooted in role distinction” in being more separate from their children and comfortable with allowing their children room to adjust and grow, whereas mothers were more emotionally impacted by the children, being very connected, or wishing they could be. The fathers expressed that tension is expected and they needed to let the children learn on their own as minority in America. The four fathers shared having distinct understandings of their roles as fathers – they fulfilled their roles to provide, to teach, impart truth, but were not trying to pursue their children nor did they reveal experiencing regret or questioning how they have done as fathers.

There are few studies exploring the experiences of fathers. Costigan and Dokis (2006) found that immigrant Chinese fathers “were more oriented to the host culture whereas mothers were more oriented toward the ethnic Chinese culture.” Though the fathers in this study did not speak directly about this, they reflected an experience that accepted their parenting roles in the new host country of the United States. Among the few studies involving the parenting perspective of Chinese fathers (Chuang & Su, 2009; Yuwen & Chen, 2013), another had similar findings in that Asian American mothers were more other-oriented than the fathers. It may be that mothers and fathers play different roles in children’s self-identity formation (Koh et al., 2009).

Paper Two

The nine pastors interviewed had four types of experiences marked by the level of contextualization in the lens by which they understood church members’ family issues, and the way they viewed their role within the larger system around them. What was most interesting was that pastors who had less of a contextual lens were also less connected to

other pastors or resources outside of the church; pastors with a more contextual lens were more integrated with their colleagues, the larger faith community and outside network of resources. Yamada, Lee, and Kim (2012) found that there was a need to see if there was a link between Chinese pastors' psychological conceptualization of mental illness to inclination to refer out to mental health support. This dissertation study addresses this question in finding that pastors with a more contextualized (including a psychological lens) conceptualization of family issues are more likely to be connected to mental health resources and refer their members.

There seemed to be a few factors that impacted the variation in pastors' experiences. For example, the pastors of churches with a greater first generation population seemed more limited in their contextual awareness, while pastors of churches with more ethnic and generational diversity held multiple perspectives in understanding their congregants. For the former, it could be that their congregation is more homogenous and thus it may not be so easy to see the many layers impacting the members' experiences whereas with more diversity in a congregation, pastors are almost forced to face multiple perspectives and realities and thus develop various lenses for understanding the challenges that arise.

Also, the pastors with fewer connections and support systems were part of much smaller church congregations compared to the pastors who had layered networks of support; these pastors had much larger congregations that had also planted other churches. This is congruent with what researchers found studying pastoral knowledge and attitudes on mental health: clergy from smallest churches would have the fewest resources and higher demands than clergy from larger churches (Bledsoe et al., 2013).

Integrating the Findings

These two studies are linked by the notions of context and connectedness: how connected first generation parents are with second generation children, how connected the pastors are to their communities. For the field of marriage and family therapy, this is relevant because for families and church communities with lower levels of contextual support and connectedness, there may be a greater need for mental health support. From the stories shared, it is possible that these families might seek therapy when the second generation children are in their teenage through young adult years, when the intensity of intergenerational conflict is heightened. On one hand, individual family members may seek therapy when they feel isolated from their families or have little support from their church communities. On the other hand, though members of the larger churches might be connected to their church, they may be referred to therapy by their pastor because of family issues.

Vogelsang (1996), a church consultant, suggests that a healthy organization “is connected rather than isolated from the larger community” but when the pastor overfunctions, doing everything for everyone, things “stays the same” making it difficult for growth (pg. 5). It is a healthy thing for pastors and their churches to move towards greater connection to their communities, just as it is healthy for family members to build ways to connect to one another. In the following section, I will discuss how marriage and family therapists can work with Chinese American Christian families to build connection at home, as well as ways for the faith and mental health communities to better support one another.

Implications and Recommendations

For Marriage and Family Therapists

There is yet to be a study on working clinically with Chinese American Christians and how to do this in the context of their family and church systems. The results of this dissertation study suggest that clinicians can support these families by deepening connection in their family relationships and broadening their social support networks.

Family Relationships

- Affirming the ways they maintain family relationships: what are they already doing that leads to intergenerational connectedness?
- Normalizing experiences of tension: educating family about acculturation and generational gaps
- Exploring their identities: what does it mean to be Christian and Chinese? What Christian values support them in their role as a parent/child? Are there areas of tension between Christian and Chinese values?
- Validating the unique experiences and responses of both generations: understanding the hopes, dreams and challenges of parents' immigration; how much does the second generation know about these stories and how does it impact them? What has been difficult for the second generation in growing up bi-culturally?
- Tending to the gendered ideas, expectations, and influences of mothering and fathering: what parenting roles do mom and dad play at home? How have these been beneficial or not to building up the family?

Social Support Networks

- Connecting family members with friends and family that will support them:
What peers at church or other support systems encourage the first/second generation family member to persist/be adaptive in the midst of family conflict?
Who in their community could be a resource in helping each generation to understand the other?
- Exploring support in church community: Is there a pastor or church leader that is supportive of therapy and can help reduce feelings of shame about seeking help?

So for the family therapists, it is crucial to open up the families' systems within and outside the family. The goal would be to facilitate the individual or family's growth towards greater integration of their Chinese and Christian identities at home with the support of their church and social networks.

For the Christian Community

I was amazed and touched by the heart and wisdom of the pastors. They shared illuminating insight about how to best bridge the Christian community with the mental health community so that Chinese American Christian families could be best supported. The recommendations in this section are directed mainly at pastors or ministry leaders who are wondering how to create more openness and connection to holistic wellness in their faith communities. Four suggestions are: (1) to debunk myths about mental health, (2) consider the influence of the pastor, (3) create layers of support within the church community, and (4) integrate awareness about cultural issues.

Debunk Myths About Mental Health

The contextually competent pastors all stated how important it is to proactively discuss any myths or misconceptions about mental health. They were all aware of the ways that Chinese Americans are concerned about feeling shame and the history of not wanting to air dirty family laundry. One way is to invite proponents of mental health in the community to share their experiences and viewpoints. Pastor Kevin suggested having people who have had positive experiences of getting mental health support to have more of a voice and influence in the community so seeking help is de-stigmatized.

It is important to use language that makes sense to the church community so the ideas of mental health are not so foreign. Pastor David shared “I had to redefine what mental health stood for. It doesn't mean you're crazy or being committed to an asylum or something. So I try to say we're all dysfunctional and that's because we're all sinful. That's the language that the church knows. We're sinful, and that's what counseling's for, it's to address your sin. And we're all sinful, we're all broken, and sometimes we need help, the Bible says, there's victory in a host of counselors. And sometimes we need counseling and it's not a bad thing, it's a positive thing.” Pastor David described needing counseling as it connects with our human sin and used Scripture to demonstrate how to build a bridge between Christian language and psychological ideas.

Consider the Influence of the Pastor

The contextually competent holistic pastors also emphasized how much influence the pastors and leadership have over the congregation. Chinese churches still function with traditional hierarchical structures, so the people look up to and deeply respect the

pastors. Pastor Joanne mentioned normalizing going to therapy by using a known pastor as an example – “Here’s a pastor who goes to therapy not because there’s anything chronically wrong, or illegal in his family, but because he needs an outlet and he trusts the therapist and you all trust him, this is not a shameful thing...” Pastor Liang said that “it’s very important, the preaching from the pulpit” because if the pastor is open in sharing that he has seen a psychologist for help, then the congregation will not be afraid to go seek help. Since pastors are the respected authority in the Chinese church community, their sermon topics and how they speak about mental wellness strongly impacts what the members believe and perceive. If the pastor normalizes family dysfunction and brokenness rather than perpetuating stigma, the congregation will grow more and more open to the ideas of seeking help. As Pastor David shared, “if a pastor supports a certain position or way of doing something, then the congregation slowly starts to adopt it.” “Unless there's a sort of an overt blessing towards [mental health]...and so the voices of leadership is very very important and what they say” (Pastor Kevin).

Pastors can consider attending trainings or taking courses to deepen their understanding of mental health so that they become more comfortable integrating this into their sermons and interactions with the church.

Create Layers of Support

What is apparent in church communities with a more holistic view on wellness is the multiple layers of support present within and outside of the community. In one larger church, the group of pastors was trained in reporting child abuse, knew crisis protocol, and knew when and how to refer to the appropriate resources. In addition to the pastors’

roles, these churches have Sunday School programs about family relationships or conflict resolution, or they have mental health clinicians coming in to lead seminars on various topics. They also believe that every church member is meant to care for his brother or sister, and so small group gatherings provide support at the lay level.

Pastor Liang described “different layers of helping, so there’s a safety net of caring, starting from lay people, their friends, their leaders to pastors and to professionals if need be.” Certainly this takes time, but rather than the pastor be the main source of care and support and perhaps feeling burnt out, it is helpful to create a culture where relational support is available at all levels and between people.

Integrate Cultural Awareness

The participants shared tensions and conflicts that were very much cultural issues: children not understanding their parents’ Chinese immigrant experiences, parents not accepting children’s Western values and choices of career or spouse, and feeling disconnected from one another because of an acculturation gap. In addition to church being a place where families can speak the Chinese language, eat Chinese food, celebrate cultural festivals and practice Chinese values (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001), it could also provide education and awareness about the “normal” things to expect in first/second generation Chinese family life. This could be done through workshops, even integrated into sermons and Sunday school. In connecting what families are experiencing at home to community at life at church can bring greater integration across the two spheres.

For the Mental Health Community

These recommendations are for those in the mental health community that have a heart for bridging Chinese American churches with mental health resources. Several pastors expressed strong sentiments about how important these recommendations are: (1) explicit integration of biblical principles and (2) more written literature as a resource.

Integrate Biblical Principles

For this recommendation, all nine pastors emphasized the importance of Scripture and its significance to the Chinese American Christian. Much of the reluctance to move towards “psychological” things is the perception that it is secular and devoid of Christian truth. Pastor Liang shared that “Many of the Chinese folks will not accept it when you come from the part of psychology or secular psychology or secular marriage and family therapy. They do not hold in high esteem, the authority figures in our field. Who cares about Sigmund Freud? But they care if it comes from the Bible, so it's very important to be biblical in your approach of all of those things... And thank God most Chinese Christians take the Bible seriously so when we start with the Bible, they'll listen more and if we start with psychology they will not.”

“For many Chinese Christians, because they hold strongly to the truth and authority of Scripture, if they can be convinced or persuaded that counseling and mental health is a spiritual activity...that would increase the openness and acceptance of mental health” (Pastor Kevin).

When therapists are advertising their services, it may be beneficial to mention one’s Christian background or training. If therapists facilitate groups, trainings or

seminars at churches, it is important to integrate Scripture into the presentations and to communicate with the church leadership to inform them that the therapist sees the importance of integrating biblical principles into their clinical work.

Write More Literature

I was struck by the practicality of this recommendation, one I had not previously considered. Two of the younger pastors thought this could have significant impact on the community, both for the church members as well as for pastors seeking support and education. Bledsoe et al. (2013) found that the majority of their pastoral participants had learned about mental health through self-study and research. Pastor Oscar and Pastor Mark both shared about how much they have read on their own about topics of family conflict and counseling. Pastor Oscar follows various Christian blogs and Pastor Mark reads many books and online resources. Pastor Mark suggested that this would be beneficial to the community as many Chinese Christians value intellectual knowledge would want to gain this knowledge in the safety of a private space. If there were more culturally spiritually relevant and accessible literature, individuals and communities could shift in their openness to mental health issues.

Therapists could consider contributing to or creating blogs that address the integration of Christian faith, Chinese culture, and mental health. My own personal hope is to publish the papers from this study and eventually write a book accessible to pastors and lay people.

Researcher Reflections

As an insider to the Chinese Christian community, I was not sure what I would find in this interpretative phenomenological study. I came into the study assuming that I might find much more contention and cut-off in the intergenerational relationships than I actually found. Both generations' desire to be connected to one another surprised me, and the number of pastors who had considerable knowledge, expertise, and connections to mental health support also surprised me.

The big take-away for me was that for the Chinese American Christian families, Christian faith needs to inform psychology. From the first and second generation talking about Christian culture being first, to the pastors encouraging integration of biblical principles, this became clear to me. It gives me more awareness on how to continue networking within the community of Chinese churches of Los Angeles county.

Limitations and Future Directions

Because participants of the study self-volunteered, most likely they were comfortable sharing about their family issues with the researcher. This could mean that they had milder family conflicts or were people more willing to connect with others. Consequently, the experiences of Chinese American Christians with greater family issues may have been missed, since the value of saving face is significant in the Chinese culture and those with more severe family conflicts would not have volunteered to share their experiences openly.

Additionally, because first generation parents had to be able to speak English for the interview, the experiences of Mandarin, Cantonese, or Taiwanese-only speaking

parents was missed – parents who are English-speaking have one less barrier in communicating with their children, potentially allowing for more connectedness. Future studies could involve Chinese-speaking participants.

Because this study focused on Chinese American Christian families, it cannot speak to Chinese American families of other religions. It is possible that there are beliefs and values within the Christian faith that have shaped these experiences that might be different for Chinese Americans of other spiritual practices.

Because this study did not interview members of the same family, it is not known how the children of these parents experience their relationships and vice versa. Would experiences of connectedness and separateness be similar across the generations with one nuclear family? It would also be beneficial for future studies to look at the intergenerational changes over time; this study was not able to capture the experiences of the two generations over the course of various life and developmental stages. Previous studies of second generation children and college students (Chung, 2001; Ma & Yeh, 2005) reveal intergenerational tension from those age perspectives, while the second generation adults in this study are somewhat older and appear to have come to a more reflective, grateful viewpoint towards their parents. A longitudinal study could be beneficial, following teenagers into young adulthood and older adulthood to see how the nature of the relationships with parents shifts over time.

One of the questions this study raises is the gendered experiences of both first generation parents and second generation children. What might be the gendered perspective for why all the fathers were “rooted in role distinction” and more secure in their roles as fathers in contrast to the mothers’ experiences? It is not known how the

differences in the mothers and fathers' experiences impact the children, whether the children feel as connected or separate as their parents; this can be an emphasis of future studies. Though this study did not focus explicitly on gendered experiences, this result stands out and is worth pursuing in future studies. Future studies might look at if the Christian faith changes how mothers or fathers parent in comparison to traditional Chinese parenting and what role the church communities have in shaping this. It would be interesting to see if having a Christian faith changes the way mothers and fathers parent in Chinese American families, or if there is a difference in impact on sons and daughters.

In interviewing the pastors, I learned that quite a number of Chinese American Christians go to counseling; future research can explore their experiences in therapy and perhaps study the experiences of therapists who work with these families.

Conclusion

This interpretative phenomenological qualitative study serves as an exploratory study into the families and faith communities of Chinese American Christians from the perspectives of first generation parents, second generation adult children, and the pastors that shepherd them. Whereas the majority of studies on Chinese American families do not address religion, this study adds to the existing literature by highlighting the significance of the Christian faith and community and the nuanced ways that Christian faith intersects with Chinese culture in these families and church contexts. In gathering the expertise of the community's pastors, this research contributes to our field of

marriage and family therapy by offering culturally and spiritually relevant ways of connecting individuals, families, churches, therapists, and mental health communities.

As Chinese American Christians have celebrated and faced the challenges of culture, there remains the hope of continuing to better integrate this culture with their Christian faith to grow their families towards life lived fully in the United States.

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APPENDIX A

SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS FOR PHASE I

This is a study that will help us to better understand the family dynamics within Chinese American Christian families. We will ask you a series of questions that are worded in such a way to help you think out loud about some issues. There are no right or wrong answers—we are interested in learning how you think: your opinions, experiences, and your unique ideas. I will ask you some questions that invite you to think aloud about a wide variety of ideas that come to mind about these issues. I am interested in hearing all of your thoughts about these complex questions. Please take your time answering these questions.

We will start with a few brief questions that will help us understand you a bit better:

13. What is your ethnic background?
14. What is your occupational background?
15. When did your family immigrate to the United States?
16. Are you a Christian? What is your denomination? How long have you been Christian?
17. What is your involvement with your church/faith?
18. Every family has a unique story about how they became Christian. What is your family's story? What is your family's current involvement with church/Christian faith?
 - a. Could you share about your experience growing up in your church?

19. With immigrant families, there are varying experiences that we have about how connected we stay to our cultural heritage. How would you describe your family's connection to the Chinese culture?
 - a. What are some cultural values that are important to your family?
20. As you know, we are all very different, even within families who seem to be similar. Have you noticed any differences between yourself and your (parents/children) in terms of Chinese cultural values? Can you explain this to me and how you experience this?
21. Sometimes parents and children have similar or different ways of understanding and practicing faith. Have you noticed any similarities or differences between you and your parent's/children's understanding and practice of Christian faith?
22. Could you share more about your relationship with your parents/children when it comes to issues of faith and culture?
23. What is your experience as a Chinese American in American society?
24. Is there anything else you would like for us to know that would help us understand what it is like to be Christian and Chinese in your family?
25. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about issues that we did not ask?
26. Do you know of anyone individuals who might be interested in participating in this study? If so, you can pass along my contact information to them and let them know to contact me and I can share more information about the study with them.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FOR PHASE I
CULTURE AND FAITH: THE EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE AMERICAN
CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

(Please write your initials and the date at the bottom of each page)

Purpose and Procedures

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled “Culture and faith: the experience of Asian American Christian families.”

This purpose of this study is to help family educators and therapists better understand the relationships and experiences of Asian American Christian families. This study is being conducted by Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin and Ms. Jessica Chen of Loma Linda University, Department of Counseling and Family Science in the hope of making a significant contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the role of faith and culture within Asian American families. People have a variety of responses to religious influences in their lives. By learning how you, as a Chinese American, think about your religious faith and your family relationships, the researchers hope to have a better understanding of the Chinese American experience as Christians. The findings from this study will be used for education and clinical training, in addition to contributing to the academic dissertation preparation for doctoral student, Jessica Chen.

If you would like to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person individual interview with Ms. Chen that will last between 60 – 90 minutes. Your consent

is required to record your responses during the interview. The conversation will be tape recorded and transcribed into a written document. The tapes will then be destroyed. All references to names, places, people, and in some cases, occupation, will be changed or removed in order to decrease the likelihood that you could be identified based on your comments. Your interview will be added to a group of other interviews and analyzed collectively. Study findings will be used for professional training and future scholarly publications.

Risks

Although unlikely, the participant in the study may experience feelings of sadness or frustration during or after the interview due to discussion of personal experiences and challenges.

Benefits

There is no monetary reimbursement or other incentive offered for participation in this study. It is anticipated however, that participation in the study will help family life educators and mental health professionals to better understand the experiences of Asian American Christians. You might find it interesting and helpful to talk to a nonjudgmental interviewer about your private experiences. You may experience a sense of well-being in the knowledge that your participation will provide the basis for the creation of effective interventions and programs that include best practice models for Chinese American Christian individuals, families, and church communities.

Participants Rights

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study, declining to provide your consent will not in any way be considered disrespectful or unacceptable behavior. Should you decline to be interviewed there are no negative consequences and no ill will on the part of the investigators.

Confidentiality

The investigators will not tell anyone that you have participated in this study.

Additionally, all personal information you share during your participation in the study will be held in strict confidence. Identifying material such as names, places, occupation, or anything that will allow people to know of your identity will not be used in presentations or publications of study results. The tape transcriptions and all materials associated with this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Loma Linda University, Department of Counseling and Family Science.

Costs

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

Reimbursement

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

Impartial Third Party Contact

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-4647 for information and assistance.

Counseling Resources

1. Behavioral Health Institute
1686 Barton Road
Redlands CA 92318
909-558-9552
2. SPARE Counseling Center
1215 W. Imperial Hwy, Suite 223
Brea, CA 92821
714-345-4938
3. Asian American Christian Counseling Services
Main Office
2550 West Main Street Suite 202
Alhambra, CA 91801
(626) 457-2900
Torrance Office
22330 Hawthorne Blvd. Suite 208
Torrance, CA 90505
(800) 970-1112

Informed Consent Statement

I have read the contents of the consent form. I hereby give voluntary consent to be interviewed. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators or institution from their responsibilities. I may call Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, at (909) 558-4547 ext. 47002 or Jessica Chen at (626) 422-8441 if I have additional questions or concerns.

The interviewer(s) will review this consent with you at the time of the interview and will answer any questions you may have about your participation. If, after you sign this consent and discuss the study with Dr. Knudson-Martin or Ms. Chen, you choose not to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study. You will not be viewed as uncooperative, disrespectful, or rude. It is important to do what will be best for you.

Print your name here

Sign your name here

Date

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study. I have provided the participant with a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Investigator

Phone Number

Date

APPENDIX C

SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS FOR PHASE II

This is a study that will help us to better understand the family dynamics within Chinese American Christian families. I will ask you a series of questions that are worded in such a way to help you think out loud about some issues. I have interviewed with some first and second generation Chinese American Christians and would appreciate any of your thoughts as I share some of the findings from these interviews. There are no right or wrong answers—I am interested in learning how you think: your opinions, experiences, and your unique ideas. Please take your time answering these questions.

We will start with a few brief questions that will help us understand you a bit better:

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. How long have you served as a pastor to Chinese church congregations?
3. Could you describe the church at which you currently serve?
4. Where did you receive your training to become a pastor?
5. What has it been like to work with first and/or second-generation Chinese American Christians?
6. What are some of the challenges you have found in working with these families?
7. What is helpful in resolving conflict/concerns between parents and children in these families?
8. Some families share that _____ is a common experience. What are your thoughts about this?

9. Some first/second generation Chinese Americans have shared that _____. What is your experience with this?
10. How do you think Chinese American Christian families are impacted by their experience in their context (being minority in America, being in an Asian church, etc)?
11. Is there anything else you would like for us to know that would help us understand what it is like to be a pastor of Chinese churches?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about issues that we did not ask?

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT FOR PHASE II
CULTURE AND FAITH: THE EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE AMERICAN
CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

(Please write your initials and the date at the bottom of each page)

Purpose and Procedures

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled “Culture and faith: the experience of Asian American Christian families.”

This purpose of this study is to help family educators and therapists better understand the relationships and experiences of Asian American Christian families. This study is being conducted by Dr. Barbara Couden Hernandez and Ms. Jessica Chen of Loma Linda University, Department of Counseling and Family Science in the hope of making a significant contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the role of faith and culture within Asian American families. People have a variety of responses to religious influences in their lives. By learning how you, as an Asian American, think about your religious faith and your family relationships, the researchers hope to have a better understanding of the Asian American experience as Christians. The findings from this study will be used for education and clinical training, in addition to contributing to the academic dissertation preparation for doctoral student, Jessica Chen.

If you would like to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual in-person or telephone interview with Ms. Chen that will last between 60 – 90

minutes. Your consent is required to record your responses during the interview. The conversation will be tape recorded and transcribed into a written document. The tapes will then be destroyed. All references to names, places, people, and in some cases, occupation, will be changed or removed in order to decrease the likelihood that you could be identified based on your comments. Your interview will be added to a group of other interviews and analyzed collectively. Study findings will be used for professional training and future scholarly publications.

Risks

Although unlikely, the participant in the study may experience feelings of sadness or frustration during or after the interview due to discussion of personal experiences and challenges.

Benefits

There is no monetary reimbursement or other incentive offered for participation in this study. It is anticipated however, that participation in the study will help family life educators and mental health professionals to better understand the experiences of Asian American Christians. You might find it interesting and helpful to talk to a nonjudgmental interviewer about your private experiences. You may experience a sense of well-being in the knowledge that your participation will provide the basis for the creation of effective interventions and programs that include best practice models for Asian American Christian individuals, families, and church communities.

Participants Rights

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study, declining to provide your consent will not in any way be considered disrespectful or unacceptable behavior. Should you decline to be interviewed there are no negative consequences and no ill will on the part of the investigators.

Confidentiality

The investigators will not tell anyone that you have participated in this study.

Additionally, all personal information you share during your participation in the study will be held in strict confidence. Identifying material such as names, places, occupation, or anything that will allow people to know of your identity will not be used in presentations or publications of study results. The tape transcriptions and all materials associated with this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Loma Linda University, Department of Counseling and Family Science.

Costs

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

Reimbursement

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

Impartial Third Party Contact

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-4647 for information and assistance.

Counseling Resources

1. Behavioral Health Institute
1686 Barton Road
Redlands CA 92318
909-558-9552

2. SPARE Counseling Center
1215 W. Imperial Hwy, Suite 223
Brea, CA 92821
714-345-4938

3. Asian American Christian Counseling Services
Main Office
2550 West Main Street Suite 202
Alhambra, CA 91801
(626) 457-2900
Torrance Office
22330 Hawthorne Blvd. Suite 208
Torrance, CA 90505
(800) 970-1112

Informed Consent Statement

I have read the contents of the consent form. I hereby give voluntary consent to be interviewed. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators or institution from their responsibilities. I may call Dr. Barbara Hernandez, at (909) 558-4000 ext. 47041 or Jessica Chen at (626) 422-8441 if I have additional questions or concerns.

The interviewer(s) will review this consent with you at the time of the interview and will answer any questions you may have about your participation. If, after you sign this consent and discuss the study with Dr. Hernandez or Ms. Chen, you choose not to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study. You will not be viewed as uncooperative, disrespectful, or rude. It is important to do what will be best for you.

Print your name here

Sign your name here

Date

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study. I have provided the participant with a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Investigator

Phone Number

Date

APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Name	Gender	Age

Ethnicity

Church currently attending/denomination

Year of Immigration to the U.S. and from what country

Occupation

Educational Background

Family Members	
Name/Relationship	Age