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**THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE ACCULTURATION AND IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT YOUTH**

Lynn Chyi-Ing Liao

Honours Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2004

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Masters of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University

2007

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## Abstract

Immigration is a life-altering experience that significantly contributes a context for identity formation, a critical and salient task during the years of late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Religion as a influential factor in the lives of youth has often been overlooked and considering the transnational quality of Christianity, it may have an important role to play in the acculturation and identity development of immigrant youth.

In this qualitative study, I chose to interview Chinese immigrant youth aged 18-23, who are recent immigrants and self-identify as Christian. The central idea of this exploratory inquiry is that each individual interprets experiences of acculturation and identity formation differently and converts them into personally meaningful stories. Using the narrative method, I illustrated the impact of Christianity on the lives of Chinese immigrant youth, their acculturation process, and their identity formation.

There were three particularly salient aspects of identity in their stories: ideology, occupation, and the negotiation of their bicultural identity. Participants' self-reflection and integration of Christian values and beliefs were vastly different depending on whether they were raised as a Christian from birth or if they had converted at an older age. Youth also spoke concretely about identity formation as their purpose in life, in which future goals need to align with Christian values. Lastly, the majority of youth strongly identified with their Chinese ethnic identity rather than being Canadian or any combination of Chinese-Canadian. Being Canadian was viewed as adopting Western characteristics and forfeiting their Chinese heritage. There is a reciprocal interplay between Christian faith and these three aspects of identity that were evident in the stories.

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*“To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.”*

- St. Thomas Aquinas

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## Introduction

In the face of rising immigration in Canada, especially from non-European countries, it is imperative that researchers begin to investigate the process of immigration and acculturation for youth. For policy-makers and service providers, research concerning newcomers is relevant for the promotion of healthy communities. The number of newcomer youth residing in Canada especially in urban centres has grown notably (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). Although Canada encourages immigration, there are still many barriers and challenges that immigrant families face in their relocation. Minority groups often experience acculturative stress including challenges such as social/personal isolation, negative attitudes, and threatened or actual violence (Health Canada, 1999).

Immigrating to a new country presents a life-changing experience that contributes to a powerful context for identity formation (Berry, Phinney, Kwak, & Sam, 2006). Minority groups tend to feel conflicting desires and expectations – the fear of acquiring undesirable aspects of the host culture and also wanting to obtain characteristics for success (Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). These conflicts may contribute significantly to a person's identity development, as two cultures come together to create a unique identity for immigrants. For immigrants, the potential for conflict is particularly high during adolescence, as issues of separation, individuation, and identity become prominent tasks (Baptiste, 1993). In addition, both individual and group identity formations are seen as taking place primarily during adolescence and early adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Examining the immigration experiences of youth can shed light on how identity formation may be different for adolescents who

have moved to Canada in comparison to Canadian-born youth. Understanding the immigrant experience is important in terms of developing government policies and creating systems that promote the healthy acculturation and psychological adjustment of adolescents.

As an individual who immigrated to Canada at a young age, the integration of immigrant youth in our society, development of multicultural identities, and overall adolescent well-being are particularly fascinating to me personally and as an academic researcher. Through the ecological perspective that is promoted in community psychology, I have come to acknowledge the diverse social demands that are inevitable for many immigrant families. Culturally, immigrant youth often have to manage a balancing act between their culture of origin and the new host culture. Conversely, immigrant parents may have a difficult time watching their children forfeit some of their original values for ones that exist in the host country. Rather than focusing on individual immigrants and their abilities to blend into Canadian society, it is equally important to create societal structures that are appropriate and supportive. Youth respond in different ways to the varying pressures from different aspects of their lives, including peers, youth culture, school, and parents. I am interested in examining the ways youth's adaptation strategies have played a role in their overall identity and more specifically, how they negotiate their bicultural identity.

One of the first communities my family joined when we arrived in Canada was a church congregation consisting of many Chinese immigrants from various regions of the world. Attending church served as a venue to meet other individuals from similar ethnic background, make connections to employment, social and

recreation opportunities, as well as nurture our spiritual needs. My parents, my sister, and I were all able to build a strong social network, find community resources, and participate in recreation, thus facilitating our adjustment and acculturation to our new home. Most of all, however, being part of a faith community allowed us to nurture our emotional and spiritual needs which played an important role in our ability to overcome challenges and maintaining our overall well-being individually and as a family. Religion and spirituality continue to be an on-going curiosity of mine, however it only has a very small part in psychological research, despite the significant role that they play in the lives of many people. A discourse on cultural issues exists within community psychology (e.g., Vega, 1992; Trickett, 1994; Trickett, 1996), with a small recent concentration on religion and culture. The literature on religion is further elaborated upon as part of the relevancy of community psychology in this research. As a young adult myself, I have had the opportunity to reflect upon my identity development over the years. Therefore I am particularly interested in examining the role of faith in the formation of identity within the context of immigration and acculturation.

The experiences of immigrant youth remain an untapped area of research that is important for the healthy development of adolescents. Youth face vastly different challenges than adults in terms of development, adaptation, and their construction of reality. Much of the immigrant research has focused on adults and elementary school-aged children, whereas the exploration of youth and immigrant issues has only recently gained momentum. A review of the literature by Anisef and Kilbride (2003)

confirmed that researchers have not given substantial attention to newcomer youth, aged 16-24.

One of the major developmental tasks of this age group includes identity development. For immigrant youth, however, the task of identity development is confounded by dual sources of identity due to the different cultures of their home and peer groups. For older youth, language issues become prominent in school, but also the lack of recognition for previous learning-experience might act as a barrier. Furthermore, there are conflicts in values beyond those characteristic of many adolescents, mostly between family and peer groups (Anisef, Kilbride & Khattar, 2003). Immigrant adolescents may experience inconsistencies between their host culture and culture of origin, in addition to the typical adolescent value conflicts. To this end, ethnic identity or cultural identity plays a key role in the personal identity of immigrant youth as well, where developing bicultural competence is important for integration. Kroger (2000) identified many factors that influence identity development during adolescence. These influential factors range from familial and peer relationships to broader community contexts such as neighbourhoods and schools, as well as larger societal structures including religion, government, or cultural norms.

Identifying with language and cultural behaviour codes, including religious rituals, contributes to sense of identity, security, and self-esteem (Health Canada, 1999). Religion, as an inseparable component of culture will be the focus in this study. Religion is one of society's most pervasive institutions that continues to exert influence in people's lives. Religion plays a unique role in the lives of youth where

expressions of faith and spirituality are manifested differently than that of adults (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003). For adolescents who are in critical development stages, religion may play an important role in how they form their identity. Furthermore, youths' engagement with faith has an impact on their acculturation to Canadian society as well as their psychological adjustment. The role of religion and spirituality in the lives of youth and in particular, identity development, recently emerged in the field of psychology (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Moreover, the impact of religion on adolescent identity development has been neglected in psychology. Youth engagement with religion and spirituality may be a strength that communities can build upon to create environments where immigrant youth can flourish and develop into healthy adults.

To explore the religious influences in adolescent identity development further, I will outline in the following review issues concerning immigrant youth, adolescent identity development, and the relevance of religion to both these topics.

#### *Immigrant Youth and Acculturation*

In a study conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) Kunz and Hanvey (2000) found that the majority of children and youth immigrating to Canada within the last decade came from Asia, the Pacific region, Africa, and the Middle East. Most immigrant children and youth live in Ontario, British Columbia, or Quebec because of the large establishment of immigrants in the major cities of those provinces and the opportunities for work and recreation. Despite the opportunities, immigrant youth are still more likely to live in lower-income households. Kunz and Hanvey (2000) found that over one-third of immigrants who

have been in Canada for less than 10 years live in households with incomes under \$20,000. Individuals who live in poverty are marginalized in our communities and the disproportionate likelihood of immigrants living in poverty is one indicator that our system is not yet conducive to the well-being of newcomers. The socio-economic status of immigrant families is a determinant of overall health, which also encompasses their integration into Canada. The CCSD report presented some important trends for policy-makers, social agencies, communities, and researchers to consider when building a system that facilitates a smooth acculturation process for newcomers to Canada.

There are different ways to investigate the acculturation of newcomers to a new country, making the integration of immigrant youth into Canadian society a multifaceted issue. According to Berry (1999), integration is the most beneficial acculturation strategy for immigrants and should be encouraged in the general public attitudes, government policies, and supports within the community. In his theory of acculturation, Berry (1999, 2001) describes four different acculturation strategies for immigrants: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. It was important to frame the proposed study with an acculturation model because I examined the impact of religion on this process. Understanding this model is also necessary for the current literature on ethnic identity and immigration and its application to the acculturation profiles (Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) in the analysis portion of the report. The two principles are: cultural maintenance, which is the extent that individuals value and wish to maintain their cultural identity, and contact-participation, which is the extent to which individuals value and seek out

contact with those outside their own group and wish to participate in the daily life of the larger society.

The two principles of cultural maintenance and contact-participation can be divided into a matrix, resulting in the four strategies from the perspectives of ethnocultural groups.

Table 1

<u>Berry's Acculturation Model</u>	High cultural maintenance	Low cultural maintenance
High contact-participation	Integration	Assimilation
Low contact-participation	Separation	Marginalization

Individuals who do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage and seek daily interaction with other cultures represent the assimilation strategy. In contrast, immigrants who place a value on maintaining their original culture and wish to avoid interaction with other groups exemplify the separation state. When there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture and engaging in daily interactions with other groups, it is described as integration. Lastly, marginalization is characterized by individuals who have little interest or possibility in cultural maintenance or having relations with others. Generally, separation and marginalization are considered to be the least ideal strategies because of the exclusivity from community, while assimilation allows for individuals to be included in such a way that they do not maintain their cultures of origin.

In Canada, part of the identity that we are trying to promote as a nation is one that embraces our multicultural heritage. The integration strategy described by Berry



(1999) adheres to Canadian values and policies that recognize the strengths of multiculturalism and as an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future. It is to our communities' advantage to promote an acculturation process that is positive for newcomer adolescents, who are at a critical developmental stage and will undoubtedly have an impact on our nation's future.

Adolescents inevitably face barriers and challenges when they arrive in their host country. The studies regarding the adjustment and adaptation of immigrant youth, especially in the school system, have yielded conflicting results. Beiser, Hou, Hyman, and Tousignant (1988) conducted a study of new immigrant children in Canada, comparing new immigrant families to native-born Canadian families. Their findings supported the idea that immigrant children are at least as healthy as native-born children and often out-perform them in school, despite the fact that immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty than native-born Canadian families. Beiser et al. reasoned that poverty may mean different things for new immigrants and native-born Canadians. Poverty is seen as a transitory and inevitable phase of resettlement for immigrants rather than the end stage of a cycle of disadvantage and despair for native-born Canadian families. The findings of this study are consistent with many other studies that support the "immigrant paradox", where immigrant adolescents adapt equally well as their national peers and sometimes even better, although this initial advantage tends to deteriorate over time (Phinney, Berry, Sam & Vedder, 2006). Despite this paradox, youth acculturate through different routes into Canadian society, where some may still end up marginalized and neglected in society. The acculturation process has a bearing on the formation of ethnic identity and ultimately,

their ego identity. I will discuss the role of ethnic identity in adolescent identity development further in the identity development section.

In the study by the Canadian Council on Social Development (Kunz & Hanvey, 2000), language emerged as the primary barrier for immigrant youth. The language barrier impacted social networking, academic performance, employment rates, and many other aspects of the lives of adolescents. The participants also reported that their sense of belonging to the country was weak because of perceptions such as speaking with an accent or not being born in Canada. Some of the negative perceptions that youth had about Canada included the consumer culture and unrestrained pursuit of wealth and status symbols. The stereotype of Canadians being Anglo-Saxon, compounded with the negative media depictions of immigrant ethnicities and racism in the schools, are some of the factors youth identified as having a negative influence on their acculturation.

Similar findings were apparent in an American study (Shields & Behrman, 2004), where immigrant children and families were faced with challenges of living in poverty, language isolation, discrimination, and lack of resources in their communities. Visible minority youth may encounter significant challenges coping with the school system where they perform poorly in class and/or suffer from behavioural problems. Some of these problems result from school policies, discriminatory attitudes of teachers and the organizational structure of schools where achievement or success among minority youth is not encouraged. The youth unemployment rate in Canada is also reaching critical proportions where newcomer youth are a disproportionately large representation of this population.

The acclimatization, adaptation, and integration of immigrants require a significant commitment to assistance from the various organizations serving these newcomers. The Canadian Council for Refugees advocates four spheres of integration to assist immigrant youth in becoming fully integrated into their communities: economic, social, cultural, and political (Anisef et al., 2003). My study provided an alternative way of understanding the immigrant youth experience and adjustment, with specific attention to social and cultural integration.

Across several aspects of adaptation to Canada, youth in the CCSD study mentioned religion or attending religious services as part of their integration (Kunz & Hanvey, 2000). Recent immigrants who have been in Canada for less than ten years attached greater importance to religion, with almost three-quarters reporting that religion or spirituality plays an important role in their lives. Many immigrant families were able to meet and build social networks with people of their ethnic group through churches and other religious sites. Attending religious services was also a part of adolescents' efforts to maintain their culture, heritage, and language. Moreover, the church provides an accessible gateway to dealing with mental health issues in a culturally accepted format for Chinese immigrants.

Reaching out for mental health assistance has been highly stigmatized in East Asian cultures and is perceived a resource for families who are "dysfunctional". For Chinese families, it is more acceptable to approach a church leader or attend a church support group because of its association with spirituality and the Church rather than to acknowledge mental health challenges (Nguyen, 2006). By investing in a faith

community, Chinese immigrant youth and their families may be able to seek and receive the necessary means to maintain positive development and well-being.

Youth engagement in religion and spirituality may be essential to their identity development, especially throughout the adolescent years. Fostering a sense of being accepted and understood will allow immigrant youth to develop self-confidence and self-worth while they are negotiating their identity and lives. Nyugen (2006) describes five stages involved in the formation of cultural identity for immigrant youth: 1) just-arrived, 2) realization, 3) putting-aside-one's-own-culture stage, 4) value-clash, and 5) integrating multicultural values. These stages characterize the periods of an adolescent's life, from the initial settlement into a host country to the process of forming a cultural identity in the context of adolescent development, and finally, the healthy integrated self. The final stage is characterized by a degree of deep self-understanding, self-acceptance, and acceptance of others despite cultural differences. This stage is a relatively peaceful one in which youth stop comparing themselves to the dominant cultural group and begin to perceive themselves as unique individuals who are part of a multicultural community. The last stage also parallels the strategy of *integration* in the theory of intercultural relations based on Berry's (1999) principles: *cultural maintenance* and *contact-participation*. Integration is perceived as the desired strategy that represents a healthy balance of maintaining one's cultural integrity, while seeking to contribute as a valued member to a larger social network or broader community.

The culture within a church community may also facilitate the acculturation process and, in turn, influence the identities of adolescents. In a case study of a

Chinese Protestant church in the U.S. Yang (2000) found it was made up of congregants who were ethnically Chinese from diverse countries. The church's mission concentrated on saving souls in contrast to other churches that have focus on social services or political activism. The diverse needs of the church membership led to the creation of separate homogenous fellowship groups. The question of identity in this case study was specific to religious identity, however, it was apparent that for most congregants, their Christian religious identity superseded their Chinese ethnic identity.

In addition, Yang found that although Christian identity at times created tensions with the community's Chinese ethnic identity, it also served to ease tensions between Chinese and American identities. Moreover, the church leaders embodied a multiethnic vision by encouraging non-Chinese to their church. The attitudes held within the church community can shape how immigrant families perceive and also react to their new country. It will be important for researchers to examine the characteristics of Chinese ethnic churches in the Canadian context and how they may play a role in the formation of identities for immigrant youth. The mission and values of a church may provide a framework in which adolescents experience their new surroundings and construct their stories.

The process of immigration and adaptation into Canadian society can be considered as a major transitional phase, where adolescents must adapt to their new surroundings and also communicate who they are in their new community. This process is particularly important to adolescents' development as cognitive demands are higher in order to make sense of new experiences (Azmitia, 2002). As a result of

this rise in cognitive demand, youth's construction of meaning may be heightened during Nyugen's (2006) five stages of forming cultural identity.

### *Adolescent Identity Development and Religion*

According to Phinney, Lochner, and Murphy (1990), numerous researchers from a broad range of fields have suggested that minority status in society involves risk for a variety of psychological disorders. Ethnic identity has been primarily studied in children; however, Phinney et al. (1990) argue that the adolescents' developmental challenges, including their higher involvement in school and community lead to more complex psychological issues related to ethnicity than in children.

Psychological adjustment, with particular attention to the concept of the self is part and parcel of the promotion of immigrant youth well-being. When the population of interest is of a different culture than mainstream Canada, it is essential to consider the role of group identity and how it may be differentiated from individual identity or ego identity. Ego identity is based on the work of Erikson (1968) and refers to the personal identity of an individual, whereas ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belongingness or attachment to an ethnic group (Phinney et al., 1990). Ethnic identity is an essential factor in the self-concept of minority youth as well as a factor that mediates the relation between minority status and adjustment.

The concept of identity is seen across many different streams of research and has been conceived in multiple forms. As a result, identity is defined in different ways for various groups of people. Tsang (2003) points out the discrepancy between the concept of identity in mainstream developmental literature and cross-cultural

literature. Tsang also notes the tendency for researchers to emphasize ethnicity in identity literature when the groups are other than European or Caucasian groups. Conversely, the concept of personal identity is the main focus in literature involving Caucasian/European groups. This trend promotes a Eurocentric view that implies that ethnicity only belongs to non-European/Caucasian people, where European/Caucasian people are represented as individuals with unique traits but non-European/Caucasian people are primarily understood as members of ethnic groups with common characteristics.

Tsang's 2003 study of identity aimed to enrich the conceptual understanding of ethnic identity by exploring alternate ways that individuals negotiate their ethnic identity and cultural orientation, aside from assuming that their ethnic identity is determined by ethnic group membership. The current study pushes the conceptual understanding of identity one step further by not limiting it to a defined and specified component of identity. Rather than focusing on the ethnic identities of immigrant Chinese youth, I am assuming that the individual identities of Chinese immigrant youth are also worthwhile examining. While concentrating on the ego identity, interpretation of the findings would be less accurate if ethnicity were completely overlooked, given that the acculturation experience of these individuals is a major factor in this study.

According to Wright's (1982) interpretation of Erikson's developmental theory, adolescence is a period of life in which ideological experimentation replaces and encompasses the moralities of childhood and this search for a satisfying ideology is the task that alerts an individual to his or her sense of identity. As youth begin to

change physically, they also begin to face changes in social and economic expectations; these changes result in one looking both inward and outward in asking the question “who am I?” (Wright, 1982).

This study also benefited from the framework of ethnic identity developed by Phinney et al. (1990), which incorporates Erikson’s (1968) theory of ego identity development with Berry’s theory of acculturation. Marcia (1994) expanded Erikson’s concept by forming a model for categorizing individuals into stages of identity development. An individual’s identity status is determined by the extent to which they had explored identity issues and made a decision or commitment. The two advanced identity statuses are 1) an *achieved identity* characterized by a commitment that has followed an exploration of relevant issues, and 2) *moratorium*, an ongoing search without a commitment. The two less mature statuses are 1) a *foreclosed identity* characterized by commitment without exploration, and 2) *identity diffusion*, the absence of both search and commitment. Phinney’s (1990) stages of ethnic identity development are aligned with Marcia’s (1994) model such that individuals experience three-stage progression. The unexamined ethnic identity stage can be as a result of lack of interest in identity (diffused) or commitment to absorbed ethnic attitudes from parents (foreclosed). The second stage is similar to the moratorium status, characterized by an exploration of one’s own ethnicity. The end stage is a committed ethnic identity that is achieved through the period of exploration. An understanding of this ethnic identity development model assisted me in breaking down the stories in the analysis and linking them to Berry et al.’s (2006) acculturation profiles. According to Phinney et al. (1990), the failure to achieve a satisfying identity



can have negative psychological implications for all adolescents, not only those from minority groups. In fact, Waterman's (1984) extensive review showed a strong link between ego identity and effective psychological functioning. Thus, providing adolescents with supports that encourage positive identity development can bolster psychological well-being and overall health. Understanding the impact of faith as a determinant of health may be one of many ways to encourage the positive development of identity in immigrant adolescents and promote their overall psychological well-being.

Berry et al. (2006) further developed this theory of ethnic identity in a large cross-cultural comparative study. One of the assumptions this study reiterates is that acculturation and ethnic identity are conceptually and empirically related, thus affecting the overall identity development of immigrant youth. Furthermore, both the changes that result from the contact between cultural groups and the sense of attachment a person has to a particular group have impacts on psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (Sam, Vedder, Ward, & Horenczyk, 2006). For adolescents, the development of these identities is part of the larger developmental task of identity formation. Marcia (1994) asserted that if a person is unable to resolve cultural identity issues, identity diffusion may ensue as a result. By examining the successes and the factors associated with healthy identity development, investigators are better positioned to assist in the promotion of policies and practices that support the psychological development and well-being of youth.

Berry et al. (2006) described four possible profiles based on a combination of Phinney's ethnic identity stages (1990) and the acculturation model. Individuals

exhibiting the integration profile are comfortably balanced between their two cultures, including speaking both languages frequently and having peer contacts from both their own group and the national group. The *integration profile* is aligned with Berry's (2001) integration style of acculturation and also considered to be the most beneficial for adolescents in terms of psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation. The *ethnic profile* is described as having an orientation toward one's own ethnic group, few contacts from the national group, and little involvement with the larger society. The *national profile* is represented by people who do not retain their ethnic culture, have few ethnic peer contacts, and predominantly speak the national language. Lastly, the *diffuse profile* encompasses the high usage of ethnic language with low proficiency in the national language and few national peer contacts but also a low ethnic identity. These individuals show a lack of commitment to a direction or purpose in their lives and are uncertain about their place in society, typically endorsing assimilation, marginalization, and separation over integration.

Acculturation demands are an additional task for new immigrant youth who are also dealing with developmental needs. There are many institutions in the community and society in general, that interact with the needs and demands of adolescents. In this study, I have focused on Christianity because of its position as a mainstream religion in Canada and its efforts in the development of ethnic churches.

Research in the area of youth and religion has only recently emerged and many of the studies are based in the United States. A survey conducted by the Gallup organization in 1992 found that 76 % of adolescents believed in a personal God and that 74% prayed occasionally (Gallup, 1992). A review of the literature by

researchers involved in the National Study of Youth and Religion has shown that religion touches various aspects of adolescents' lives, although the authors did not differentiate between American-born individuals and immigrant youth (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003). These aspects include individual attitudes and values, moral development, gender role development, familial or intergenerational influence, peer networks, community engagement, as well as political involvement. However, the report focused on adolescents in general and did not differentiate between American-born individuals and immigrant youth. The interdependence and reciprocity of all these different components reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological metaphor, where the individual, micro, meso, and macro levels interact with one another. The ecological metaphor represents a way of analyzing a person in context, including the social, political, and environmental climate. This interaction presents a complex illustration of people's realities, which are constructed in unique ways.

With the search for an adequate ideology, it is not surprising that theology can be the core of a new ideology, however, this needs to be more than a doctrine on God and offer a worldview for youth (Wright, 1982). According to Smith (2003), religion as an overarching institution in society provides a source of moral order for youth. The impacts of religion appear on cultural and societal levels but manifest on an individual level through a sense of what is wrong and right, just and unjust, or good and bad. Cultural moral orders orient consciousness and motivate action (Hunter, 2000). It is useful to draw from Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development in terms of understanding how youth values and beliefs are established. Fowler theorized 6 stages of faith development that could be applied to any religion. These stages of may

be interpreted in a hierarchical fashion, because the concept is built on assumptions of maturation and conversion. For this research, however, Fowler's stages are more useful and appropriate if conceptualized as a spectrum rather than a hierarchical ladder. Religion provides adolescents with a solid foundation of standards and imperatives to guide decision-making and behaviours. Youth who are involved with faith communities are provided with moral directives, spiritual experiences, and role models that contribute to their moral development (Smith, 2003).

Development of skills and competencies is another area in the lives of adolescents where religion has an influence. Increasing competence in skills and knowledge can contribute to the enhancement of their overall well-being and improving their life circumstances. Smith identified community and leadership skills, coping skills, and cultural capital as three competencies in youth that religion can help to promote and build upon. Smith defines cultural capital in this context as consisting of "*unevenly distributed socially distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices that are embodied as implicit practical knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and objectified in particular cultural objects and credentials*" (p. 24). For example, biblical literacy may contribute to a deeper understanding of the Western historical context and traditions for adolescents.

Cultural capital is different from social capital, which emphasizes personal interactions and refers to a broader network. Participation in a religious congregation also can influence this larger network of social and organizational ties. The building of social capital, dense networks, and extra-community links can surround youth with access to trusting adults, resources and opportunities, as well as connections to

positive experiences on a global level (Smith, 2003). On a relational level, social and organizational ties affect structures that determine the opportunities and challenges that young people face, thus having substantial impacts on their lives.

According to Regnerus et al. (2003), most of the research regarding religion has focused on adults with only a few articles about the religious influences on adolescent health. Though sparse, some of the studies on adolescent health have included the relevance of religion to healthy lifestyle behaviours (Wallace & Forman, 1998), self-esteem (Varon & Riley, 1999), academic success (Muller & Ellison, 2001), and gender role development (Canter & Ageton, 1984, Lottes & Kurlioff, 1992). The significance of youth religious engagement in these different elements warrants an examination into the role religion might play in personal identity. Erikson (1968) described an identity process that involved turning outward to find one's place within society, rather than turning inward in a form of self-reference. Thus, identity development is negotiated and shaped by how adolescents experience ideas, traditions, events, and people. Adams and Marshall (1996) have argued that all societies provide institutions and settings in which early adolescents can learn to imitate roles and identify with others, which is essential for identity-formation. In a recent report, Smith and Faris (2002) found that religion was associated in American youth with positive self-esteem, pride in self, positive self-worth, and other positive feelings about themselves. Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1999) discuss the relationship between community service and religiousness in American youth in attempt to demonstrate how religion is related to their identity development. Smith and Faris (2002) and Youniss et al. (1999) have recognized the importance of religion

for youth in promoting engagement with their communities and healthy identity development.

### *The Role of Narratives*

Immigrant youth may have similar adolescent developmental issues as other adolescents, but, they also present another host of issues that pertain to their immigration, adaptation, and integration. As an exploratory study, it may be most useful to hear about these experiences in the form of a story. My intention is to illustrate the role of Christianity in the lives of Chinese immigrant adolescents, as well as to demonstrate how it might have been incorporated into their sense of self. Many US studies have used mainly quantitative methods to assess religiosity (Smith, 2003), which tend to measure factors of religion that are not necessarily religious in nature. In theorizing religious effects among youth, Smith (2003) asserted that the traditional reductionist approach in sociology has tended to explain religious effects using nonreligious explanations such as sense of belonging, social networking, and other psychological or social factors.

The International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth (2006) developed measures to answer questions related to the acculturation experience and ethnic identity development. But I believe that the exploratory nature of studying religion and immigrant identities would be better served by a qualitative approach such as narrative, which has been used by many researchers to examine identity. By emphasizing identity issues in culturally anchored research, community researchers are able to enrich our understanding of (1) diversity; (2) experiences of marginalized groups; and (c) the integration of context, individual differences, and health-related

outcomes (Keys, McMahon, Sanchez, London, & Abdul-Adil, 2004). Furthermore, the centrality of identity in my thesis enhances the understanding of immigrant adjustment such that the findings can be relevant and applicable to the promotion of youth well-being. With health promotion being an overarching theme as explained below, the purpose of this research project is action-oriented from a strengths-based perspective. Keys et al. (2004) underline the possibilities to build on strengths that culture embodies through the exploration of identity development.

Research that is truly culturally anchored can benefit from both etic or emic approaches. In attempting to understand the cultural context of research, researchers will encounter the issue of between-group and within-group designs. A between-group design or an etic approach involves the comparison of two or more cultural groups. In contrast, a within-group design or an emic framework focuses on studying one cultural group, in more depth, on its own terms (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001). An emic approach seeks to understand the “why” in culturally-based research and subgroups within the culture can be understood more clearly. An emic approach to this project does not allow for cross-cultural comparisons, but it allows for deeper understanding in an exploratory study that may be useful for future cross-cultural comparisons.

Considering the participatory nature of this study and my background, I thought it would be more appropriate to follow an emic framework, where the stories and analyses will be meaningful for Chinese Christian immigrant youth. Although my background does not qualify me as an insider entirely, there are elements of my

experience as a Chinese immigrant growing up in Canada that allowed for a certain degree of validation and a more enhanced understanding.

The faith component of this study revolves around Smith's (2003) framework, which is based on the underlying assumption that there are religious elements that contribute to the lives of immigrant youth. Due to the lack of understanding in religion within the social sciences, spirituality, and its manifestations in people's lives, I believe that a qualitative approach was more appropriate, because it permitted elements to emerge that have not necessarily been identified in previous research that have used other methods. Thus, specifically, I used narrative methodology to frame this research project as an alternative way of investigating religion and spirituality. Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) advocate the use of narratives in faith-based settings, because this method is aligned with the storytelling tradition that is vital to the survival and development of spiritually-based communities. Using a narrative format, youth had the opportunity to convey their experiences with immigration, religion and spirituality, and sense of identity.

Rappaport (1995) aligned the principles of narrative with the process of empowerment. Narrative provides a venue for voices, which are often unheard, to be expressed and used as a form of data. A qualitative understanding of narratives is mainly concerned with the meaning, context, and construction of stories that may have an impact on the lives of people. While simultaneously providing meaningful data for research purposes, the narrative approach also creates a setting in which individuals' stories are respected and heard, which is congruent with the goals of empowerment. Ultimately, I hoped that empowering immigrant youth to discover



their own power and capacities would enable them to overcome challenges by building on their strengths.

### *The Relevance of Community Psychology*

The areas of faith, immigration, youth, and identity have been explored by researchers in various disciplines and from multiple perspectives. As a researcher who has been educated in a community psychology graduate program, I emphasize certain elements of this study that are of particular importance and relevance are emphasized. Community psychology is a branch of applied psychology that is centred on progressive social values and is research-based and action-oriented. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) describe community psychology that emphasizes people in context as an alternative to more traditional streams of applied psychology. Community psychology encompasses a holistic view of a person and analyzes issues within the context of micro-systems.

Problems or issues in community psychology are often defined in a way that reduces the likelihood of victim-blaming; researchers focus on the strengths of people and assets within communities rather than focusing on individual or community “deficits” or weaknesses. The current research encompasses this value by seeking the strengths of youth engagement in faith and also how religious communities can be collaborators in the fostering of healthy communities. Ideally, community psychologists seek to create synergetic partnerships with community members when conducting research. This collaborative effort is pursued by many researchers through the use of participatory research that values the knowledge and experiences of community members in making decisions and setting goals (Dalton et al., 2001).

Given that my research is strengths-based, it is also appropriately linked to the promotion of well-being and health for immigrant youth. In community psychology, individual wellness refers to physical and psychological aspects, including the social-emotional coping skills needed to maintain health. Dalton et al. (2001) support a definition of health which encompasses “personal well-being, development of identity, and attainment of personal goals such academic achievement or pursuit of spiritual meaning” (p. 14). Simultaneously, this pursuit for individual wellness is balanced with the sense of community, which refers to a perception of belongingness and mutual commitment that links individuals in a collective way (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In this study, the sense of community is evident in both the local Christian church congregation and also, in the larger sense, through the transnational Christian movement.

Considering the ecological framework in which individuals are situated, respect for human diversity is important for the promotion of inclusiveness. To demonstrate this value, community psychologists acknowledge and appreciate the vast range of characteristics that humans possess including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, age, and other identities. Recognizing diversity places it at the forefront, which is demonstrated in studies that concentrate on understanding specific populations and searching for existing strengths and resources (Dalton et al, 2001). Consequently, I designed this study to be culturally appropriate with the aid of the representatives from the Chinese Christian youth population in Toronto who were to advise me in an ongoing evaluation of the goals, methods, findings, and expected outcomes of the research.

The need to develop cultural awareness and competency as community researchers is vital, as most of the research is grounded in working with communities first hand. Some other community-based and applied streams of research have already pinpointed this gap and begun to address it in different ways. For example, social workers have begun to acknowledge the significance of incorporating cultural-competency training as part of their programs (Spears, 2004). Other professional areas of psychology such as clinical and counselling have also initiated a shift towards multicultural perspectives (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

If community psychologists claim inclusion as one of their core values, then it is imperative that community psychologists take culture seriously. Cultural awareness should include religion, since culture and religion are inextricably intertwined for many peoples and difficult to separate. In the past few years, many authors have been attempting to infuse religion and spirituality into community psychology (Pargament, 1986; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Hill, 2000; Pargament & Maton, 2000; Walsh-Bowers, 2000; Sarason, 2001; Moore, Kloos, & Rasmussen, 2001). Inclusiveness is not as simple as responding to culture in the research domain, but is also intricately linked to the empowering of marginalized groups. The empowering of the groups, who, for one reason or another, do not have equal rights and access to resources, should be the ultimate goal for community psychologists.

Individuals can be empowered on an individual and a collective level; this process of empowerment should be built into any research project that values the goals of action and sustainability. The participatory process in a research project is

aligned with the concept of empowerment and/or citizen participation. The choice of the narrative method for this study embraces the value of citizen participation, which refers to the ability of an individual or community to meaningfully engage in making decisions that affect their lives (Dalton et al., 2001). The narrative process allows for the community members to voice their experiences in a personally meaningful way that they have constructed. I had hoped that engaging community members throughout the research process also would build trust and a strong rapport, which would ultimately influence the depth of the stories, the accuracy of the analysis, and possibilities for action. The community investment in a project is especially important for the action component of a participatory-action research study, which is the true goal of community psychology research.

Although the scope of this study is narrow, I attempted to contribute to the understanding of Chinese immigrant youth experiences in a more applied sense so as to build awareness and educate the small community with whom I worked. Instigating action and empowering communities to seek social change based on the findings of the research are values that differentiate community psychology from more traditional research. For groups with minority status in society, it may be beneficial for their experiences to be validated through research. By involving immigrant youth throughout the whole research process, I hoped to increase their awareness of surrounding social circumstances and their role as social change agents.

To summarize, in this research project I attempted to contribute to the literature that supports the importance of religious and spiritual influence during adolescent development. In particular, I was interested in the identities of Chinese

immigrant youth by examining the relationship between their faith and acculturation into Canadian society. The research questions can be summarized in terms of three distinct but interrelated questions:

- 1) What kind of impact does Christian faith have on the acculturation of Chinese immigrant youth?
- 2) How does faith influence adolescent identity development in Chinese immigrant youth?
- 3) How are all three aspects, youth acculturation, identity, and Christian faith related?

Steinberg and Lerner (2004) advocate a vision of collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in promoting a society that fosters the healthy development of adolescents. This project is intended to contribute to the larger body of literature on adolescent well-being by promoting smoother transitions into adulthood and healthy integration into Canadian society. Although the current study is only applicable to the small sample with whom I worked, it yielded ideas and hypotheses for future research. Furthermore, this research provided some insights conducive to collaboration between community psychologists and faith-based organizations to promote the well-being of youth.

## Methodology

### *General Approach*

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the role of Christianity in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth with specific attention as to how it may influence their cultural integration into Canadian society and their identity development. Ultimately, the larger purpose of the study was to provide some insights for community psychologists interested in collaborating with spiritual or religious communities to create an environment that will foster positive growth and identity development in adolescents. In this respect, it was important to examine Chinese immigrant youth in context and how Christianity becomes incorporated into their identity during their adolescent years. I supported the community-based nature of this research by the use of a participatory action-oriented research framework, which entailed engaging the Chinese Christian immigrant population in the research process. This engagement not only enriched the research process, but also paved the way for this study to lead to action.

Because of time and resource limitations, it was not feasible for the project to achieve action as intended in participatory action research (PAR). The concept behind PAR is an amalgamation of two traditions. Based on a combination of Paulo Freire's work with oppressed peoples in developing countries and Lewin's (1946) action research, Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, and Lord (1998) describe PAR as "a research approach that consists of the maximum participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the problem under study, in the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of taking action and making change (p. 885)".

According to Lewin (1946), key stakeholders should be involved at all stages of planning and the implementation of action.

I intended to engage participants and others in the community through the influence of the RAG members, but the research was delayed by participant recruitment difficulties and the limited availability of individuals during the summer months. Instigating action as part of the study requires that participants have a vested interest from the beginning. As discussed in previous sections, the narrative method was chosen for this study because of its goal to elicit personally meaningful stories from the participants and empower them by providing a venue for their voice. By acknowledging the experiences of the participants, I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of faith and acculturation for some Chinese immigrant youth, but also I hope to inspire this small community to build upon their strengths to overcome adaptation and developmental challenges they may face.

### *Narrative Method*

The narrative method gained momentum in psychology over the last two decades. It has become one of the most in-depth ways to examine identity development, because it intrinsically involves context and, at the same time, it allows the researcher to examine how the individual may be constructing her or his reality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The narrative viewpoint for this study is aligned with Gergen and Gergen's (1984) constructionist approach, which is commonly used within health psychology (Crossley, 2000). The constructionist perspective assumes that narratives are shaped by the social and cultural context in

which the narrator lives (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). By conducting a narrative analysis, I tried to understand both the social world and the narrator's part in it.

Narrative is an area worth noting for community psychologists since it provides an alternative channel for youth to be able to express how they make sense of their world. Community psychology's value-based framework aligns well with the narrative method in several ways. Narrative embodies the value of citizen participation and empowerment, which is defined as "*a process in which individuals take part in decision making in the institutions, programs, and environments that affect them*" (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger, & Wandersman, 1984, p. 339). This definition of citizen participation is grounded in the concept of empowerment, since it is a transition where people and groups acquire control over matters that affect their lives. Empowerment is a main goal in community psychology research and can be facilitated and encouraged through the narrative approach by valuing people's experiences. In this study, I was mainly concerned with understanding the meaning that participants placed on the narratives for their lives. Rappaport (1995) has argued that community research and practice would benefit from a narrative approach, because it links the process to practice and listens to the voices of the individuals of interest. Not only does this method provide meaningful data for research purposes; it also creates a setting in which individuals' stories are respected and heard, which is congruent with the goals of empowerment.

Furthermore, the connection between the immigrant youth narrative and how it is integrated into their identity can produce new insights for enhancing the well-being of these individuals. Ultimately, faith may be one significant piece of an



immigrant's life that facilitates acculturation and the formation of identity. The findings of this research showcase some of the strengths faith-based communities embody in terms of providing an environment that will encourage positive identity development and successful integration into Canadian society for newcomers.

#### *Preparation and Entry Phase*

The preliminary work and entry process in this study was particularly important in the recruitment of participants, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. As part of a participatory approach, my challenge was to find the appropriate gatekeepers who were able to introduce me to the religious communities. As part of the preparatory work, I contacted several Chinese Christian churches in the Toronto area to gauge interest levels in the research project. A youth pastor or congregant of the church was ideal as he or she is familiar with the church community, and I reasoned that the level of trust might be increased if I were introduced through someone who is already a part of the community. A youth pastor from the Toronto Chinese Baptist Church showed interest immediately. I met with her to explain the proposed study and the role of the church members in the research. She requested a summary of the proposed research for her own information, since she planned to ask a few individuals she thought might be interested in the research. In early November 2006, I was asked to make an announcement at this church's regular Sunday English service about the proposed research. As a result, I was able to make numerous important contacts, including the Sunday school instructor for the university group, some individual youth, and the executive director for a Chinese

immigrant youth network. Many of these contacts showed interest in the research and were enthusiastic about being able to participate.

In this preliminary phase, I learned that most of the youth congregants go to the English service, although the church provides service in Mandarin and Cantonese. With the help of the gatekeepers, I was able to clarify the characteristics of the youth groups and identify the university fellowship as a possible pool of participants. After speaking with many of the individuals in the university fellowship, an apparent trend emerged. Some of the recently arrived individuals were born in Canada or lived here for a few years in their childhood. Youth were immediately concerned with the definition of an immigrant, which may be an interesting observation in terms of their identity. For the purposes of this study, I considered these individuals immigrants, because they were raised in a non-Canadian environment for the majority of the lives and have only recently moved back to Canada. Although they may not seem to exhibit the language difficulties other immigrants may have, the issues of social and cultural integration still apply. This group of immigrants, however, may have significantly different experiences similar to that of *satellite children*, a term which refers to individuals whose parent(s) have returned to their country of origin after immigration while the children remain. These peculiarities of this group may have been apparent because of the university age group I chose. Many of these individuals and their families would have been part of the sovereignty transfer of Hong Kong to China. Thus, the political upheaval may have been a motive to relocate for a few years. Also, the participants' childhood years in Canada could have led them to

choose a university in Canada, as many indicated that they had positive memories of Canada.

Through my on-going discussion with the gatekeepers, I also connected with the Toronto chapter of the Breakthrough Overseas Mission (BOM), a Chinese Christian youth network, for recruitment purposes. One of BOM's mission as an organization involves reaching out to the Chinese immigrant youth population in Canada. BOM's membership consists of several hundred Chinese Christian youth, many of whom are immigrants living in the Toronto area.

In preliminary conversations with key individuals from the church, I learned that many Chinese immigrant youth in Toronto are more comfortable speaking about personal issues in their mother tongue, which is likely to be Mandarin or Cantonese. Although I am comfortable speaking Mandarin, I would have likely needed the services of a translator and was prepared to provide one at the request of a participant. Although all of the participants chose to speak English, three participants attempted to describe concepts in Chinese during the interview, which indicated that they were not completely comfortable using the English language for the purposes of the interview. This minor language barrier might have detracted from the stories of these individuals and might have resulted in my misunderstanding them.

As part of the entry phase, I also familiarized myself with the practices and norms of the church by attending a service and participating in a Sunday school class. I was introduced to the congregants through the youth pastor, who helped to promote the research project within the church. After meeting the broader church community,

I focused on establishing rapport with the youths by keeping them updated through electronic mail and encouraging them to engage in the research on various levels.

My role as a researcher was transparent from the beginning with the church community and other involved parties, as I clearly outlined the details of the research to the youth and other congregants who were interested in order to build knowledge and understanding. By establishing trusting relationships with the youth and cultivating interest, I was able to form a group of three individuals, who worked closely as my Research Advisory Group (RAG) for the duration of the research. The RAG's purpose included: 1) assisting in the refinement of the interview guide; 2) recruiting and identifying potential participants; 3) providing feedback during the analysis; 4) helping me understand current issues related to Chinese immigrant youth; and 5) serving as a liaison to other youth.

### *Participants*

The participatory nature of this research required the youth to have a good understanding of my role as a researcher in their community as well as what the study attempted to explore. I and/or a member of the research advisory group initially identified and approached potential participants individually. The selection criteria required youth in their late adolescence to early emerging adulthood who were willing to convey their stories by reflecting upon their experiences retrospectively. The recruitment procedure became extremely difficult, since the availability of the participants was very limited throughout the summer months. The nature of being young immigrants meant that many of the participants returned to their home countries for visits during the summer. I continually searched for community contacts

who would have access to the population of interest, including Christian high schools, other churches, and university Christian fellowships. I also asked participants to recommend peers or pass on information about the research to relevant persons.

Because of the exploratory nature of the research, it was important to select information-rich participants. More specifically, I used purposeful sampling in order to ensure that there would be diverse and rich content for analysis. This type of sampling involved specific criteria to assure high-quality data (Patton, 1990). I selected participants who were: 1) between the ages of 18 – 23; 2) identified as a Chinese immigrant who has come to Canada in the last five years; and 3) identified as being Christian. I sent all participants a copy of an interview guide and informed consent form, so they were able to voice any concerns or questions prior to committing to an interview. I encouraged the participants to read through the interview guide and use the exercises to prepare them for the interview. Exercises were included in the interview as part of integrating the RAG's ideas and suggestions to help participants visualize past memories and construct their stories. I emphasized that the interview was not formal, but rather a conversation between two individuals. To ease into the interview, I offered participants a sit-down meal at a restaurant of their preference prior to the interview's start. Five of the participants took advantage of this pre-interview period, although one chose to have it post-interview.

Chinese Christian youth in their later adolescent years and early emerging adulthood stage were the main participants in this study, as developmentally, these youth had more time to reflect upon their transition to Canada, experiences as a recent immigrant, and development throughout the years. This developmental assumption is

consistent with McLean (2005), who asserts that, although the construction of identity and the meaning of past experiences are lifelong processes, youth are particularly sensitive to identity work and meaning-making in their late adolescence. Thus, youth may be better able to articulate their narratives with a deeper understanding of their identity formation and the research demands.

Originally I assumed that there would be large enough population base to sample from Greater Toronto Area, however, the recruitment proved more difficult than expected and the process expanded beyond the Greater Toronto Area. The original expected number of participants was between 8 - 10, and, after much delay, I interviewed 8 participants, 5 female and 3 male. The participants ranged in age from 18 – 22.

### *Interviews*

It was important to me that each individual have the opportunity to tell her or his story and include details that she or he believed to be important. I developed an interview guide with the RAG's assistance, which was sent out to all who indicated their interest in participating. The guide was developed in a format that could facilitate adolescents to construct a narrative concerning their experience as an immigrant, their acculturation into Canadian society, and their faith engagement. The first draft of the guide was a collection of questions arranged in a timeline from prior to the immigration to the present time and the future. After examination of this initial set of questions, some were reworded or rephrased by the RAG such that it would elicit the most informative responses from the youth. These questions were randomly organized at the end of the guide. In addition, I revised the interview guide three

times using RAG's feedback, through group meetings and email correspondence. The timeline was eliminated for the sake of allowing participants to construct their stories with the least amount of influence from me as researcher. Since the emphasis was on creating a narrative, I included my own narrative at the beginning to give participants a sense of who I am as the researcher and the nature of my project. RAG suggested visualization exercises to help participants bring back memories that could be used to construct their story. RAG was concerned with the abstractness of the questions and the tendency for the youth to respond with socially desirable answers. The final version of the interview guide [see Appendix A] included all of the above suggestions and addressed the concerns of the RAG, and I repeatedly assured participants that there were no right or wrong answers.

The purpose of the interview guide was reflection rather than direction. I aimed to give participants a sense of my narrative, examine possible questions, and rearrange them in a way that made sense for their story. Ultimately, the guide elicited three aspects: 1) participants' experience of immigrating to Canada; 2) their experience with faith and their religious community; and 3) their sense of identity. The interview guide was not meant to structure the participants' narrative, but rather I intended to use it as a tool to maintain a balance between allowing individuals to construct a free-flowing story and responding to the research questions. In conducting the interviews, I informed participants that I would utilize an informal conversational strategy (Patton, 1990), which is intended to make the participant feel comfortable and at the same time, allow them the opportunity to tell their story. I arranged one-on-one interviews with each participant in a time and place that was convenient and

comfortable for the youth, such as their home, church, or other private locations within their community.

The interviews ranged from 1 – 1.5 hours long and were audiotape-recorded with the permission of the participants. During the interview, I took notes in order to request clarification or elaboration from participants without interrupting their story. Following the interview, I wrote reflective notes, transcribed the interview, and sent a copy of the transcript to the participants for verification and correction before any of the data was used. I highlighted specific quotes in the interview that might be used in the final report so that participants had the opportunity to change or omit anything with which they did not feel comfortable.

The reflective notes were particularly important for my analysis, because findings are impacted by the interactions between researchers and participants. In this case, my questions and responses inevitably shaped the stories produced by the youth, as they were placed in the context of our conversation or interview. McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) emphasize the co-authorship of a narrative that is inherent in the interview process and researcher-participant relationship. Keys et al. (2004) also assert the need for researchers to understand and address their own identity issues through which they are able to assess and support strong positive identities. Thus, an analysis of my own reflections and thoughts of the interview helped to clarify and support my interpretations.

### *Ethical Considerations*

In this study, there were minor concerns over voluntary participation. Some of these youth were contacted through their pastors or other influential leaders within



their social circle, who may have persuaded youth to participate. Two of these youths came across as anxious and insecure prior to and during the interviews. Generally, these participants were uncertain of whether or not their stories were appropriate, relevant, or important to the study. After I continuously prompted them to speak about issues that were important to them and conveyed an accepting stance, the youth became more comfortable with telling their story. Youth were not coerced or manipulated into participating as evidenced by the few occasions where some refused to be interviewed. Youth were also offered a meal at a restaurant of their choice in exchange for their participation, however, this was not merely an incentive for the participants but also a strategy I used to create a rapport and decrease anxiety. Some participants chose only to do the interview and one participant even insisted on paying for his own meal. Another participant indicated that his sole interest was in the research and refused compensation for the participation. In one instance, a potential participant whose sole motive for participation was dependent on the compensation was turned away, since I felt there was room for high manipulation, which would not benefit either party.

The confidentiality of the participants was preserved to the best of my ability by changing names in the stories. It was compromised in the sense that 5 of the 8 of the participants came from the same youth fellowship at one church. Thus, stories may contain identifiers that allow individuals in that group to potentially identify their peers. However, all of the participants have frequent interaction with each other and have said to me that they have spoken to their peers who participated in an interview with me. The countries of origin were not changed in participants' stories as it was a

vital component of a person's experience with faith, identity development, and acculturation. It also proved to distinguish some participants from other participants, in terms of acculturation, faith, and identity development. While it is one thing to confide in peers who are also disclosing personal information, participants were also informed that members of the RAG would be reading the results and have access to their transcripts under supervision. The RAG included their peers as well as leaders within their community who would not be divulging their private lives and were thus, in a less vulnerable position than those of the participants. Names of the RAG members were disclosed to participants so they were able to sign the informed consent with complete awareness. This knowledge did not seem to impede participants from revealing details of their experiences and youth remained candid in their storytelling.

### *Data Analysis*

Researchers in various disciplines have developed many methods for reading, analysing, and interpreting narratives. Since the immigrant experience and identity development of adolescents are continually changing phenomena, I used a narrative analysis model developed by Lieblich et al. (1998) that is based on two dimensions of narratives: holistic versus categorical and content versus form. For this study, I chose a holistic perspective over categorical as the unit of analysis. Since my goal was to explore the development of adolescents through their lens, it was important to consider the life- story of a person as a whole rather than dissected in sections.

The second dimension involves a distinction between the content and form of a story. The content-oriented approach in this study was focused on understanding the

meaning of a story, how it was conveyed, what individual traits or motives were displayed, or what certain images symbolize. The content approach was on the opposite end of reading the story for form, which tends to examine the structure of the plot, the sequencing of events, its relation to the time axis, its complexity and coherence, the feelings evoked, the style of the narrative, and the choice of metaphors or words (Lieblich et al., 1998). Though the form approach can be useful for uncovering deeper layers of stories, reading for content helped to clarify the connections to the participants' acculturation strategies and identity statuses. Examples of holistic-content analysis are Lieblich's (1993) study of a young Jewish immigrant and Josselson's (1987) study based on Marcia's (1966) typology of identity statuses. In order to avoid the tendency to interpret content as evidence for prior theories, I followed Riessman's (1993) technique of starting from the inside with the meanings encoded in the form of the story and expanding outward by identifying the underlying propositions that make the story sensible.

The holistic-content method is an interpretive method involving multiple readings of the transcribed interviews. This method has been commonly used in analysis of identity and moral development in girls (Rogers, Brown, & Tappan, 1994). However, it also can be useful in organizing data with regards to research questions involving multiple dimensions. The steps of holistic-content analysis described by Lieblich et al. (1998) begin with reading the transcript several times until a pattern emerges, followed by a transcription of the tape-recorded narrative. I followed the transcribing process with the documentation of my initial and global impression of the particular case. These first impressions also included exceptions to

the general impression as well as unusual features of the story, and any episodes or issues that produced disharmony in the story. The significance of the patterns that emerged depended on the entire story and its context.

Following the readings, I decided on special foci of the story or themes that I wanted to follow, as it evolved from the beginning to the end. A special focus was often distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature, and the number of details the individual provides about it (Lieblich et al., 1998). At this stage, I paid attention to the construction of the participants' stories and how faith, immigration, and identities are interwoven in the stories. I marked the various themes using coloured highlighters for organizational purposes. By following each theme throughout the story, I noted the conclusions while keeping track of where a theme appeared for the first and last times, the transitions between themes, the context for each one, and their relative salience in the text. I also paid attention to instances that seemed to contradict the theme in terms of content, mood, or evaluation by the narrator. While some common themes appeared across the stories, the 8 stories in this study had vast differences and unique contributions to the research topic.

As part of the analysis process, I took field notes during the entry process as well as immediately after the interview sessions. I recorded the responses and reactions of the church members, interactions with the congregants and adolescents, as well as some initial feelings and impressions. The interview field notes contained my thoughts and reflections during the interview, including how my responses and interactions with the participants may have shaped their stories. These notes not only served as reminders during the analysis process; I also acknowledge them as an

ingrained part of my interpretation of the stories. These notes are interwoven into my overview of each participant's story with some made more explicit where I found it necessary. Furthermore, I kept a research journal throughout the entire project where I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and insights throughout the study. I included material from the research journal in the final report as a complement to the audit trail, analysis, and interpretation.

### *Feedback and Youth Action*

In addition to the participants having an opportunity to alter or omit their interview data, they also received a written summary of the main findings.

The approach employed in this research was ultimately intended to empower and engage youth in action. One of the main purposes of this study was based on my concerns about the welfare of immigrant youth. Furthermore, I thought that this study might reveal some of the ways that community psychologists can begin to partner with faith-based institutions and work together towards the common goal of building healthy communities and promoting well-being.

Due to time and resource restrictions, it was unfeasible to implement action and include it in the thesis document. The limited availability of the youth during the summer months and the time restrictions on this project did not make it possible to hold a group forum in which to discuss the findings. I had hoped to receive feedback from the 3 members of the advisory group who were given a copy of the draft results, however, because of project delays, the RAG became less available for feedback. RAG members were asked for their feedback on the data, and I received one set of thorough comments through electronic mail. These comments have been used to

enhance the data analysis by comparing them to my reflective notes and interpretation of the stories. I have also sent summaries of the research findings to members of the RAG, participants, and others who have been involved with the project. For the participants, I hope that this process of feedback will inspire them to discuss the findings at their fellowship meetings or with their pastor at church. For the youth pastors, group organizers, and other parties who may play more of a leadership role in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth, it is my hope that they will consider these findings in the services that they provide and help facilitate the ideas of the youth.

I will encourage them to take leadership in organizing a forum on this topic, where they could facilitate youth engagement and action. I have made myself available for these forums. In addition, I will be open to assisting youth who may be interested in developing an action project as a follow-up of this research study, to promote the integration and well-being of immigrant youth. However, these outcomes will not be included in this report. For this reason, I consider this project an action-oriented project rather than a true participatory-action research study. By acknowledging their own experiences and potential to provide support to other youth who may be in similar life circumstances, youth can be empowered as agents of social change. Engagement of youth in our communities is not only beneficial for our future; it is also a positive way to embrace diversity and the multicultural contexts that we live in and to integrate the strengths of the immigrant population.

## Findings

I present the findings in a coherent, holistic form that follows the narrative method used. The order of the participants was presented randomly on purpose to maintain the confidentiality of participants, since many of the youth knew each other and likely spoke about the research. It is difficult to separate the findings according to the research questions, as the responses to these questions were woven throughout their stories. Each individual had a unique story. Though there are some commonalities, each story provided different insights that contributed to the findings.

The characteristics of the participants are shown in the table below to help illustrate this small group of Chinese immigrant youth. Following the table will be a collective interpretation of the stories collected.

**Table 2**

Participant	Age	Years in Canada*	Childhood Years in Canada*	Years as a Christian*	Education	Other countries of residence
Sally	19	1-2	5	From birth	University	Hong Kong England
Oliver	19	1-2	3	From an early age	University	Hong Kong
Grace	19	1-2	3	From birth	University	Hong Kong England
Max	18	1	4	From birth	University	Hong Kong
Amy	21	3-4	4	From birth	University	Hong Kong
Peter	22	4-5	0	5-7	University	Mainland China United States
Karie	19	4	0	2-3	University	Mainland China
Holly	22	4-5	0	From birth	University	Mainland China

\*Approximate # of years, estimated using dates, school grades, and ages given in stories

I summarized each of the 8 stories with quotes and included the perceptive evaluations of both the participant and the researcher, as participants often commented on their own experiences. In order to assure anonymity, I used a pseudonym for each participant.

*Sally [Age 19, University student]*

Sally was raised as a Christian from early on and moved to Canada with her mom and sister when she was 8, while her father stayed back in Hong Kong to work. During her younger years, religion did not have a large impact because she did not perceive it as something personal, but rather as a family activity. Although relocating to a new country was a challenge, Sally's young age helped her to adapt quickly. They continued to go to church in Canada, but although she was able to learn English quickly, the use of Biblical language was still a challenge. While she continued to go to church, she had a difficult time fitting in and even thought about leaving the church, however, she did not want to disappoint her mother.

*"I found it was harder for me to connect to people from my Sunday school at church. Most of them were born here, like white-washed, and by the end of it, I felt kind of like them, but I'm not sure why it was very hard to connect. Maybe it was my personality because I'm more of the quiet type. I didn't feel the connection, and obviously, I wasn't motivated to seek God because I was so young. Church was again like back home, more of a family thing."*

Sally has positive memories of her peers at school during her 5 years in Canada, however, her church community remained distant and irrelevant to her life. At the age of 12, her family moved back to Hong Kong to reunite with her father. She was placed in a Christian high school, where she made the decision to explore her faith beyond what she felt was a familial obligation.



*“When I was 8 before I went to Canada, I actually got baptized but it was my parents’ decision. At 12, I decided it was time I actually take up this faith for my own instead of having to comply with my parents. I knew Christianity was the right way, but I didn’t feel like I was connected to it in anyway. It was the right thing to do...maybe because of the way I was brought up, like morality and everything is in my head. I still had a lot of doubts, but after talking to my parents and teachers, it’s just to signify being dead to yourself and living in Christ. So, I got baptized.”*

The role of faith became clear to Sally when she was sent to an English boarding school:

*“When I turned 15 or 16, I think that’s when God really moved in me. I guess that was the first time when I really learned to reach out to God and really started to look for that personal relationship. It was all because my parents decided to send me to England to boarding. The reason why I said it’s God reaching out to me and me really seeking God is because I truly believe that he put me in the environment there and he took away all my Christian support – teachers, friends, even my parents.”*

Sally felt abandoned in England and had difficulty fitting in, however in retrospect, Sally saw this experience as a trial that was a vital part of her spiritual journey:

*“I decided either you go along with the trend and act like everyone else there or you stand up for yourself and you find out your purpose of living and live according to your own way. I knew for sure the way those people were living wasn’t the way I wanted, so I guess the only way out for me was to find myself...so I began reading my Bible for the very first time. I knew I was growing (spiritually), but I had to force myself to think because I still had a lot of doubts like, why did God put me here when I would have much better church support back home, my parents, and my Christian friends? But I knew that God put me through such miserable conditions to teach me, to mould me into the person He wanted me to be.”*

While she was in England, Sally attended a small Chinese church, where she served as

the church pianist. She really wanted to become involved because she did not want to make her spiritual journey by herself. She did not join the English fellowships because

she did not feel she belonged with people who were born and raised there. She also

met a woman who has inspired her spiritually through sharing her story of strength.

*“If you ask me what a woman of God is, I would say her just because she’s so strong. For the 3 years I was there, she went through a lot and she was very open about sharing it with us. Her husband and her were the couple that took care of us, the boarders, because we don’t actually live there and we don’t have parents or relatives. Her husband got diagnosed with cancer and shortly after, he died. It’s just really amazing to see someone like her live through that and be able to glorify God. Through her, I can really see how real God is.”*

When Sally made the decision to come back to Canada for university, she felt comforted by her previous experience here and was excited to come back. Although she feels like she belongs here, she still identifies with being Chinese rather than Canadian.

*“It’s interesting because I spent exactly half of my life in Hong Kong and half of my life in other places. I would describe my personality as more Chinese than Canadian. I’m very traditional and reserved. Like, I believe in the whole respect your parents and you should never ditch your home country. Just little things that could be a culture, like manners, politeness, and courtesy. I would say I relate to people older than me in different ways than people here. But I can see the difference between me and my friends in Hong Kong. They’re more study-oriented because Hong Kong is such a competitive place. Also, all my relatives are in Hong Kong.”*

She has since joined a Chinese fellowship on campus and is more determined to grow spiritually. With the guidance of her mentor, she is continually seeking her calling in God and her purpose in life. Her long-term goals are to serve God with whatever expertise she gains.

Sally’s story is similar to many of the participants in that she was raised in a Christian family and had strong support throughout most of her life. She is unique in that, she has spent half of her life in her home country and half of her life in other countries. She has both positive and negative experiences as a newcomer in a country,

and her faith is intertwined in these experiences. The core of her story revolves around her experience in boarding school, where she sees her identity and faith come together as a result of acculturating into her new host country. This experience, perceived as a “trial” by Sally, can be considered a turning point in her life, where faith, immigration, and identity become critical in her life. As one of the RAG members commented, Sally’s faith development at this point should be seen as a renewal rather than a change that is directly related to her life changes and search for identity. This theme of turning points and renewal of faith is also prevalent through the other stories, with some more obvious and significant than others.

Sally also speaks at length about a woman during her turning point who became a spiritual inspiration. Sally was the first participant to speak at length about key figures in her story. This description of a key figure in her life prompted me to quickly identify and probe for key figures in the following interviews. It is evident in some of the stories, that inspirational figures in the lives of the youth have acted as role models and motivators for spiritual endeavours.

Culturally, Sally still identifies strongly with her Chinese ethnic identity, which she attributed to personality traits and values, exemplifying the integration of ethnicity with personal identity development. She is perceptive in pointing out that despite the fact that she has spent half her life in Western countries, her behaviour and attitudes would still portray her Chinese identity. Sally may be asserting her strong relation to her ethnic identity because of her assumptions of being Canadian as being “white-washed”, which is a term used to describe total assimilation into the host culture with an intent to leave one’s heritage behind. During the interview, I could

understand Sally's perception of the Canadian identity and, although I did not agree, I chose not to impose my opinions, since my perceptions may be more of an ideal rather than a reality.

*Oliver [Age 19, University student]*

Oliver's story begins with his family's move to Canada when he was 4. While his mother was Catholic, his family did not attend church because his father was an atheist. While they were in Canada, however, his parents became close with a pastor who helped them with the hardships of relocating and this experience convinced his whole family to convert to Christianity.

After a few years, Oliver and his family moved back to Hong Kong where he spent the rest of his childhood. Although he continued attending church and fellowship, Oliver did not feel that religion had much of an impact on him, and he did not act like a Christian.

*"I compromised a lot in school, I swear, and I didn't do good deeds like Jesus talked about in the Bible. I think it's common for all Christians who grew up in Christian families, because they believe in Jesus because their parents do and they don't know why they believe in Jesus themselves. If you ask me to talk about my Christian life in Hong Kong, it was just a ritual that I go to church every Sunday, but it doesn't really mean a lot to me."*

At the age of 17, Oliver decided to move back to Canada for educational purposes. Oliver experienced loneliness and isolation for the first year he was in Canada. In the following quotation, he speaks about dealing with an identity crisis after arriving in Canada:

*"You have to start over again. I had my friends network and everything established, but when I came here, I had to start over again...at the beginning, it's lost, I think it's because of the identity crisis – because nobody knows me. So I start thinking about who I really am and I'm kind of, like, in the ocean floating looking for lifesavers. I might have caught on to something like music"*

*or sports that I was good at but they didn't really help me much. In the end, I caught on to religion, Christianity."*

In coping with his identity crisis and the isolation, he turned to the Bible. At the time, his misunderstanding of the Bible led him to become overly judgmental and critical of himself and others. His legalistic outlook made him even more miserable and was a barrier to making new friends.

*"I was very unhappy and it was maybe because I didn't have friends and I guess it had to do a lot with me reading the Bible for two hours everyday and not understanding the things it talks about - when I tried to apply those principles, when I tried to live up to the standards of the Bible, which is very hard. When I met new people, I just observed them for half an hour and I could point out 10 things they didn't do. If I was like that to people I didn't know and I'm a perfectionist myself, you can imagine how hard I was on myself."*

Eventually Oliver came to realize the true meaning of salvation and grace one day:

*"I don't remember how it happened, but I think it goes along with what Jesus said in the Bible about the spirit being like wind – it goes at its own will and nobody can tell where it comes from and where it goes. I understood that Christians are not any different from sinners except they accepted Jesus' grace and are willing not to sin anymore. After I understood the meaning of grace, I was free to move on – I started to make new friends and go to the school fellowship."*

Since this turning point, Christianity has had a personal impact on Oliver's development. He speaks about his values, which he perceives as being influenced deeply by Christianity and at the same time, he generalizes some of his values across all East Asian groups.

*"My values are very based on Christianity. One thing that is different between Christians and non-Christians in Canada is sex. Even when I came into campus, in the orientation package, they provide you with condoms. On my floor, there were condom representatives! But for Christians how we see it is...even for Hong Kong people, we were totally blown away, like whoa, free condoms, but what's the problem here? Even for Asians, for instance, they can't accept this, because they don't agree with pre-marital sex. I guess for*

*Asians, in general, they don't believe this. I think especially for Christians, we see it differently and even same-sex marriage all these things, we see it differently."*

Although all of Oliver's friends are Chinese, he feels as though he is part of a subculture that is in between Canadian and Chinese.

*"I think I identify with both [Canadian and Chinese] but not entirely. Instead of a Chinese culture or a Canadian culture, there's a culture in between. It's a lot like friends of mine have similar background, they lived here when they were young, went back to Hong Kong, and came back here for university. Or some other people that came to Canada when they're 9 or 10, so they're exposed to Canadian culture and Hong Kong culture to the same extent, so these are the friends that I usually hang out with."*

Oliver distinctly describes this group that he belongs to as different from other Chinese immigrants:

*"I don't go along with people that are totally fobbish. People use it as a negative word but I have no negative meaning, it just means people who come here to study and they plan to go back to Hong Kong right away after they graduate. So they just come here for academics, for the degree and they don't like to be involved in the Canadian culture."*

However, he values diversity and sees Christianity's potential role in opening the gateways to meeting people of other ethnicities.

*"I know a friend of mine from a Chinese church that has many different races. She has a black pastor and so there are a lot of black people and a lot of white people and brown and Chinese. I think if you meet Christians from other races, it will definitely help you...it will act as a door or entrance to approach other races and help you to find other groups. But if your church is exclusively Chinese and Cantonese speaking, then you only stick to the Hong Kong group. Maybe the church can do more that way."*

Oliver plans to continue his spiritual journey and change his personality for the better. He is also searching for his career role that will allow him to serve God.

As one of the most enthusiastic participants, it was clear that Oliver found the research topic relatable and was able to reconstruct the integration of his identity,

faith, and acculturation in his life. Like Sally, Oliver spent a few years of his childhood in Canada, however, he was raised in Hong Kong for most of his life. In contrast to Sally, Oliver had a challenging transition period when he moved to Canada in his late adolescence, however, there are similarities in how faith became an anchor during acculturation challenges.

Oliver experienced a turning point in his faith journey, which coincides with his relocation to Canada and the challenges that follow. Oliver describes resolving an “identity crisis” that becomes a critical task as soon as he arrived in Canada. In both Sally’s and Oliver’s story, they turned to Christianity during their times of adaptation, and engaged with their faith in such a way that allowed them to grow developmentally and spiritually. However, Oliver’s misunderstanding of the Bible at first inhibited his social integration. Only after he resolved this spiritual conundrum, did he become comfortable and confident with himself.

In Oliver’s story, there seems to be uncertainty in whether his values are based in his faith or his cultural background. He is convinced that his values are Christian-based, yet he generalizes some of his values across all East Asian groups. Perhaps for Oliver, his faith and his ethnicity have commonalities and consistencies that have allowed him to validate his identity.

Oliver describes a marginal culture that is neither Canadian nor Chinese but a combination of both, and it is interesting that he sees himself as distinctly different from other newcomers who are not invested in adapting to Canadian society. Although he has not made friends with people outside of his cultural group, he sees the value in diversity and envisions the church’s role as a facilitator of bridging

cultures. Oliver has learned to maintain his Chinese heritage and adopt values from his host country, which may be indicative of his progress to integration.

*Grace [Age 19, University student]*

Grace moved from Hong Kong to Canada when she was 3 with her mom and sister while her father remained. She has been attending church since she was young but only her mother was Christian. Grace's family returned to Hong Kong after a few years. Although she was raised a Christian, she did not realize her personal relationship with Christ until grade 7.

*"In grade 7, we were at a gospel camp and they were singing some worship songs. I was really touched by the lyrics, it says, God is waiting for you, and I was really touched. I suddenly could see myself as a sinner, which I didn't feel before that point. I could see something really bright and pure, so I was touched and I accepted God. The next 7 days after the gospel camp, I was praying to God every night and crying so much, it's like all the sins are being washed out."*

In grade 9, she made the decision to go to a Christian boarding school in England because she wanted to improve her English and experience a different way of life. Having no social circle in England, she became more dependent on God, and this situation was the beginning of her spiritual journey.

*"I didn't have any relatives in England so I was more dependent on God. I started to have closer relationship with God, and He helped me a lot in many aspects of my life. So I began to have a spiritual life."*

She later decided to continue her education in Canada, because she wanted to pursue employment here afterwards. She entered a Christian high school in late adolescence, where she learned the true meaning of committing to God – this experience changed her perceptions and the way she related to other people.

*"One of the worship nights, I committed my life to God, even though I've been believing in God for ages, but I didn't really commit my life until that point."*



*Things started to change, like actually the way I think, the way I deal with people and stuff.”*

Her gradual spiritual journey has changed the way she perceives things and what she values. It also affects her behaviour and decision-making.

*“I was a really self-protective person because I went away from home quite young and I was on my own. I wasn’t willing to open up my heart to friends, but after committing my life to God, I felt like God would protect me.”*

*“I used to mentally measure how much I am giving to a person and how much this person is giving back to me but now, I don’t really care about it...when I’m giving, I’m just giving. I care more about relationships now than before. Before, I cared more about academics, because I think it’s what I can control.”*

*“When I make decisions whether small or big, like when I applied for university, I prayed about it and I asked which university do you want me to go to? I include God in my planning.”*

*“When someone really needs you, you take care of them first. You might be really busy with your own stuff, but you just stop doing what you’re doing and help them first.”*

Due to the large Chinese population in her community, Grace has found it easier to settle with a group of people who have similar cultural background.

Although she feels as if she belongs in Canada, it still does not feel completely like home yet. Culturally, she mainly identifies with being Chinese for various reasons.

*“I feel quite comfortable here. I’m not sure if I would say it’s my home country, because although I feel I fit in, it’s not my home country yet. I think I’m mostly Chinese, because I feel more comfortable speaking Chinese, I like Chinese food, I prefer Chinese entertainment, and most of my friends are Chinese. We have more things in common and it’s easier to communicate.”*

She is now in university and continues to grow spiritually with the support of her fellowship community on campus. Her future goals are to go on a mission trip to China to work with children in poverty and to find a career that allows her to serve God.

Grace's story is similar to Sally's in that they have spent an equal amount of time in both Hong Kong and Western countries. Both individuals did not have a difficult time settling in Canada when they moved during their late adolescence. In addition, although they identify with being Chinese over Canadian, they can see the differences between them and other Chinese newcomers who have stayed in China most of their lives.

Grace's turning point is unlike Sally's and Oliver's in that there was not one significant event in her life where she realized the importance of faith in her life. In fact, there are many turning points for Grace. However, it was noted in my post-interview notes that Grace was not as descriptive as the prior participants in having examined her faith or identity development. The feedback from the RAG confirmed this, as there was doubt as to whether she had processed the "*cultural immersion experience*". Furthermore, although many of her faith renewals are aligned with her relocation to a new country, Grace did not necessarily piece together the connection between her developments with her acculturation experiences. Grace speaks vividly about her spiritual experience at gospel camp, when her faith first became something personal for her. However, she also speaks about several points in her life where she has new understandings and realizations about her faith. She speaks about her spiritual development in stages and also expresses that her personal development has followed her spiritual growth. In response to the question: How did that experience (at gospel camp) change you? Grace replied:

*"That didn't really change me, well, that changed me as in I know that there's a God who loves me, but that didn't change my lifestyle yet. It's like a process*

*when I went to England and then Canada...it's like a slow process of changing going on, but it wasn't like in grade 7, there was a 100% change. It's not like that. God has affected my personality. He does that slowly in a gradual process and at each stage, he tells me different things like, let's say my friend isn't very smart and I got annoyed teaching her something. God would tell me, you're being too proud of yourself, you have to deal with it. At each stage, God helps you with different things."*

For Grace, personal and spiritual growth are intertwined. She is able to clearly point out the ways that she has changed over the years and how her faith has played a role in her development. She also implies that there are certain events in her life that are exceptionally memorable for her spiritual growth, such as relocating to England and Canada. Grace also speaks about academic performance in many of her examples, whether it is as a stressor, motivator, or change in her life. This unexpected theme is prevalent throughout all of the participants in varying degrees. Many of the participants spoke about school or academics to a certain extent despite that there were no questions directly focused on this area of life.

*Max [Age 18, University student]*

Max was born in Canada but moved to Hong Kong when he was 4 with his family. He entered local schools, where he did poorly because he was not able to catch up with the language. In high school, he switched to an international school taught in English. During this time, his family started going to a Cantonese-speaking church but the older he grew and the more he was immersed in the English language at school, the less relevant and applicable the Cantonese services at his church became. His family eventually transferred to an English-speaking church. Spiritually, Max admired his older sister and followed her footsteps as a Christian.

*"Just talking a bit about my testimony, what basically happened is, my sister became a Christian when she was 16 and she started going to fellowship. She*

*grew quite a lot in Christ. I always looked up to her and starting to think, that would be cool if I would be like that one day, but I never took initiative to really go there. So what happened was, she invited me to one of the camps that her youth group organized. It moved me a lot but after that, it was just going back to my normal life. It felt like everything was the same again. When my sister invited me the next summer again, it was then that I accepted Christ. During one of the worship services, my sister came up to me and started praying for me. It was the prayer that I really wanted to pray. It was the one that really hit hard for me and it was then that I accepted him into my life.”*

Max began to attend a youth group regularly, trying to emulate his sister's commitment. Shortly after, his sister moved away from the Christian life and left Max feeling betrayed and angry. However, this experience also pushed Max to grow independently on his own and pursue a personal relationship with Christ.

*“When she became a Christian, I saw her life transformed and she was doing a lot for God. This is what I longed for, this is what I would like to have for myself. It seemed like she was kind of perfect or the ideal Christian life that I would want to live. When she fell away...for me, it really hit me hard. I was thinking, what happened to the person I really looked up to? I started looking at her through glasses I guess, thinking ok, she's a non-Christian so she's kind of a devil-worshipper kind of thing. I was in a dark period wearing those glasses for so long, not talking to my sister about it and our relationship went pretty cold. And that was really a struggle for me, because in one way, I grew myself in God, I grew independently in God and in another way, just looking at my sister seeing her as a problem.”*

Eventually Max rekindled his relationship with his sister through understanding what it meant to be Christian. At the same time, he developed a close relationship with his youth pastor and together they went on mission trips to serve in China.

Max made his own decision to come back to Canada for university. Being independent of his family for the first time made him anxious yet excited as well. During orientation week, he found out about a Chinese campus fellowship and soon

connected with this small community. Although he attends church regularly, his fellowship is primarily responsible for his spiritual development.

*“For the first few days, I didn’t really know lot of people, I felt kind of lonely. I was planning on checking out other fellowships on campus to see which one I fit into and I saw flyer for an orientation dinner so I went to the fellowship. The next week, they had a retreat and I thought, this would be a great idea for me to go to a retreat to really know what this fellowship is about. Throughout this past year, I’ve been with this fellowship and it really helped me a lot. This year’s theme is morally connecting, connecting with God personally but also connecting as a community. So, the biggest way they helped me is...they fostered a community for me to be in where I can grow independently, where I can grow with Christ but in my own direction, grow deeper in my identity in Christ. In terms of church, a whole bunch of us students go there and sometimes after the service, we tend to leave and go for a meal. I don’t think I’m really attaching that well to the church. In terms of spiritual growth, the aspect that really helped me most is my fellowships - having friends in the fellowships and having a mentor to really challenge you to have a personal relationship with God, challenge you in all kinds of different aspects.”*

Having this Christian community is different from what he experienced in Hong Kong, where he was not surrounded by Christian peers. Retrospectively, Max is able to see how that overcoming that challenge played an integral part in his spiritual and personal development.

*“In Hong Kong, being the only Christian in my high school, it was always kind of hard for me, because one of my other friends in my fellowship went to the same high school as I did. They usually went to a Christian high school and fit in with a whole bunch of people. But come to think about it, I am actually glad I was put in a high school where there were not that many Christians, because it really pushed me into a stage of development where I had to grow independently with God. A lot of times when you’re in a Christian community already, the easy thing is just to follow everyone and do what they do, while not having your very own character and identity. But being constantly challenged in a school where there are very little Christians, none that I could really talk to or know, I think that really helped me grow a lot.”*

He also compares himself to Canadian-born-Chinese (CBC) individuals, where his immigration has formed his spiritual development in a different way.

*“I have been open to a lot of things in Hong Kong and also coming back independently, having my own view points on a lot of things, whereas generally a lot of CBCs here just attach to the church, grow up in the church, and are never really challenged in a spiritual way.”*

Although Max was born in Canada and English is his first language, he is still more comfortable identifying as a Chinese individual. This is one of the reasons he chose to join a Chinese fellowship group, even though they are English-speaking.

*“Back in Hong Kong, I would tell people I’m Canadian just because I was born here and I take pride in that, but here, everyone calls themselves Canadian so sometimes, I just say I’m from Hong Kong, because I guess a lot of times there’s just the need to be different, maybe to be special.”*

*“A lot of times, we want diversity, but the thing is, being in this fellowship really gave me a place where I feel most comfortable, I guess. I would like to be more diverse but a lot of times, being able to speak those few words of Cantonese just helps me quite a bit and kind of see that we have a common ground. Now actually, my fellowship is getting more diverse – there’s another fellowship which we sometimes join in with...it’s getting more diversity. I guess the point of a Chinese fellowship is just for people to feel comfortable as being Chinese to come in here and it’s the name...I’m not sure. I think I’m a bit more comfortable with Chinese people...eating cheap Chinese food down in Chinatown. English is my first language but Cantonese is also a language where I can really communicate with, so I guess having people who I know I can speak words of Cantonese really does help. I guess I feel the need to use the language sometimes even though, CBCs might not be able to speak it that well. I just use it, so it seems like I’m more from Hong Kong.”*

Based on Max’s explanation of cultural identification, it sounds as if he is trying to maintain his ethnic identity in the Torontonion mosaic by associating with Chinese peers and speaking Chinese. The effort to maintain one’s Chinese heritage and place acculturating as a peripheral priority may be natural for immigrant youth due to the disturbance in cultural identity during the transition. As the predominant religion, maintaining their Christian faith can act as a constant in adolescents’ lives if they have been raised as Christians. Max repeatedly spoke about his identity in Christ

and when asked to explain, he presented another example of how faith has played a role in his personal identity.

*“My identity in Christ revolves around the word, service. How I came to Christ, a big part of accepting Him into my life was basically through the servant’s prayer. God showed his love for me, and I have to spread it out to other people, and the way I do it is through service. That’s one of the things about my identity. I would say that my character is very different...I would say my character is kind of like...sometimes living by faith. One of the best examples I would like to use is John the Baptist, because the thing he does is he dreams really big. He paves the road for Jesus, but his visions are really great and while dreaming big, he has great faith. This year, I plan on going back to China, but I don’t know how to finance it and my parents are like, how are you going to finance it? I don’t know and I’m scared about it, but I’ll pray about it and trust in it. If God wants you to do it, then do it. I guess mainly my identity is trying to just trying to do what God intended me to do. The things I stand for might be different...maybe the word single-minded or stubborn and standing for values, things like that.”*

Max sees his immigration to Canada as part of his spiritual journey and feels there is an underlying purpose aside from education. His attitude has led him to find his identity in serving others rather than finding a career. He puts his faith in God in providing him the resources to find a fulfilling role in the future.

In Max’s story, it is clear that the acculturation process and adjustment period is integrated into the spiritual development for these youth. The absence or removal of Christian peers, familial support, and a Christian environment represent momentous challenges for the youth. These changes often occur when relocating and in Max’s case, he attributed his independent growth in Christianity to his lack of Christian peer support in Hong Kong. For youth, overcoming these challenges is perceived as an opportunity to embark on their own spiritual journey and build resilience. Since identity development is a critical task during adolescence, their

personal identity and spiritual development often crosses paths and become intertwined.

Max is different all the other participants in that he is Canadian-born, however through his story, he has identified as a Chinese immigrant rather than a CBC individual. This is evident through his repeated self-comparisons with the CBC group. Although Max does not have a language barrier, he is still more comfortable with Chinese peers. At the same time, he speaks Cantonese as a way of preserving his Chinese identity. Interestingly, he identified as Canadian with a certain pride while he lived in Hong Kong. He indicated in his story that perhaps his ethnic identification is directed by a need to feel different and belong to a subgroup within the larger community. This subculture encompasses a unique type of immigrant who has relocated several times and whose identity seems to be waver between two cultures, described in Oliver's story as an in-between culture. The next story also illustrates a special subculture of immigrant youth.

*Amy (Age 21, University student)*

Amy moved from Hong Kong to Canada in grade six. She was admitted into a private Christian school and, although adapting came naturally at her age, she spoke about having difficulty fitting in, even though she spoke English without an accent.

During this time, she also remembers spiritual growth in overcoming the challenges of adapting to a new country.

*“Back in grade six, I was pretty lonely and feeling difficult in trying to get accepted and stuff, so I think it helped me grow more in terms of my faith, because there's more to life than that, God is always there. So he's somebody you can always depend on, and so when you know, He just cares about you. It also helped me learn how to socialize and meet new people.”*



After 4 years, Amy returned to Hong Kong where she finished high school and chose to come to university in Canada. Her move to university symbolized for Amy a new independence and challenge to her beliefs that contributed to her spiritual development. For participants who were raised in a Christian family, there is often this transition, from a family obligation to a personal understanding.

*“Since I grew up in a Christian family, [religion] was more like a family belief rather than something personal. There was a lot to learn. And I think that when I left my family for university, that’s when things got shaken up...with people asking questions and sometimes I wouldn’t know the answer. Questions like, if there’s a God, why is there suffering or why is there so much violence in the old testament when God is supposed to be peaceful? Now, I have to go find the answers, so university was a really important time for me in terms of spiritual growth.”*

After arriving, she easily found her own niche, a subculture of Chinese Canadian, some of which belong to a campus fellowship with her.

*“After coming to university, you start finding your niche, like that unique subculture of Chinese Canadians who have been to different places. That just happened naturally, because it is so multicultural here at school, that you can pretty much find your own niche that you share the same identity and same feelings for similar things. I thought of going to a Chinese Christian fellowship in the first year and so, I met pretty much Chinese Christians and that became my identity – Chinese Canadian Christian.”*

She attributes much of the change in her identity to her university years. It is interesting that she attributes changes in her development to her transition to university rather than to her immigration to Canada. She also implies her identity changed from being grounded in academic performance to religion.

*“I think university was definitely a huge time for spiritual growth, also personal growth. I learnt a lot about myself in terms of how I felt about people of other faiths, how to share with them how I feel in a civil and gentle way and not arguing...and really finding about identity as a Christian and as God’s children sort of thing, finding identity in Christ. I used to be a lot about school, and my identity was about doing well up in Asia, but coming here, it’s kind of hard to get good grades, so I was like oh no, who am I now? I think*

*that forced me to look more into what my identity was in Christ...when I was in that fellowship I sort of became a leader, so I think that was a big part of my identity. I think that being clear to my non-believer friends, that I am Christian and that I hold certain values that might be different from theirs – I think that the identity of being a Christian got really strong once they're really enforced like that. ”*

Amy also speaks about her change in ethnic identification when she relocates. She associates the change to her maturity in age, however, she also implies that identifying with being Chinese is strengthened because of the multicultural environment. Ethnic identity for Chinese immigrant youth appears to be associated with various factors, however, the affiliation with predominantly Chinese peers is the most frequent and emphasized reason.

*“In Hong Kong, I thought of myself as an international Canadian student who lived in Hong Kong and can speak both Cantonese and English, and there's a feeling of superiority in that. I think the older I get, the more I want to identify with being Chinese, because that's my roots. I think that being in Toronto, it's so multicultural, that although it helps you to become more aware of where you came from, you're not forced to be part of the Canadian culture. I'm not sure what that is...sort of Western. I would consider myself first as Chinese and then as Canadian, because most of my friends are Chinese, which is strange because I'm in Canada, I should really make more multicultural friends. That's what Canada is, right? I think it's just more convenient, because you can just make friends with your own culture and your own subculture.”*

Similar to other participants, Amy's faith has affected her personal development. Amy indicates that her identity is wrapped around finding a career that fulfills both her spiritual and personal needs. As one of the older participants, she has a clear vision of where her career is headed and how her faith has been worked into her decisions and planning.

*“I think being Christian affects the way you live. For example, in terms of social justice...I think maybe if I wasn't Christian I would just care about my own life and things won't matter outside of my own life. It helps me to see*

*what's important in life. Some people need something like religion, and for me, it helped to open my eyes."*

The RAG perceived the above quote as significant because of Amy's "*realization that faith is not a life-jacket to prevent one from sinking into the deluge of life but rather a way to perceive the world*". Currently, she describes herself as having reached a point where she is looking for a career path that supports who is she or who she wants to be as a Christian.

*"Towards the end of third year, I think the next item in the [identity] crisis is about who I am going to be in the future, what I'm going to do. So I think in third year, there were a couple of events that led me to wanting to be involved in public health and really pushed me into wanting to make a change and being someone who is...I don't know, at some point in my life, influence policy and make changes in that way and just really be moved by the whole social justice. So that's the identity I'm most involved with right now. So I'm looking for schools to equip myself so that I can carry out what I feel is who I am or will be. I guess that's where I've arrived."*

Amy notes two significant events that have contributed to her spiritual growth.

The first event happens earlier in her life, when her immigration to Canada presents challenges of social isolation and cultural adaptation. The second event is her move to Canada for university. In the second case, she attributes spiritual and personal growth to her maturity in age whereas, in the first case, she uses her faith as a way of coping with acculturative stressors.

Amy speaks about her change in ethnic identity, from perceiving herself as a Canadian living abroad to a Chinese individual from Hong Kong. Similar to Max, she also implies that there is a desire to belong to a subculture that is different from the larger community. In Hong Kong, this subculture was the international youth who spoke both English and Chinese, but in a pluralistic environment like Toronto, it seems that asserting her Chinese identity is more important.

As one of the older participants, she is able to speak about how specific aspects of faith have impacted her career decision and planning for the future. This is consistent with other participants, who may not be certain about their future plans; however they have a need to fulfil both personal and spiritual needs in their career. Although Amy places her Canadian identity second, she perceives this identity as reflective of multiculturalism and views religion as a way to foster diversity. She expresses a need to embrace diversity as a way of fully integrating into Canadian society, however she notes that it is an easier route to befriend those who have a common language and cultural background.

*Peter [Age 22, University student]*

In contrast to the last five participants, Peter was not raised a Christian. In fact, since Peter is from Mainland China, he was not familiar with religion until grade 5. He was sent to a boarding school, where he learned about Christianity from foreign teachers. He only had minimal knowledge from what he had heard, however, this was enough to intrigue him to find out more. In grade 9, he decided to go on an exchange to the United States.

*“At that time, there were not many churches and there weren’t many places you could find out about Christianity in China, all I knew was the name of Jesus Christ and he’s the son of God. When I was in grade 9, I went on a high school exchange program to the States.”*

At first, he was placed with a single-parent family, where he felt neglected. He did not feel as if he was really being immersed in American culture, since the family was fairly inactive. He eventually switched host families and ended up with a retired couple, who was closer to Peter’s perception of an American family.

*“They are a very regular American family, like I mean, they go to church on Sunday. So I would go to church with them on Sunday and that was actually one of the things I found would be the ideal family in American. I was really happy with [my new placement]. Although I go to church with them, I didn’t understand a lot of things because my English ability was low.”*

Although there was a language barrier, Peter managed to survive with the help of teachers and peers. The language difficulties were more pronounced in church and he would resort to using a Chinese Bible.

*“I can really communicate well with my friends, but then at church it was a different story. It was pretty hard to understand, and also for me it was pretty hard to understand sermons and those kinds of things. So the Chinese Bible was very helpful.”*

At first, Peter went to church every Sunday because he wanted to be immersed in American culture and he admired his host family but he continued to study the Bible when he returned to China. When he finished high school, Peter chose to come to Canada for university. Peter immediately noticed a difference between Toronto and his experience in the States.

*“When I got to the residence, I was so surprised because the whole floor...about 80% of them were Chinese and most of them spoke Mandarin. I expected to live with a lot of Canadians. I know it’s very cultural diverse in Toronto, but I expected to come here with people who speak English. I was happy too, because it was easier for me to make friends with Chinese people because there’s less of a cultural gap.”*

Peter expressed that he still had a strong feeling that he lacked something in his life and decided to go back to church. Initially he found a nearby church that was not specific in ethnicity but since his friends went to a Chinese Christian church, he started going there regularly. Surprisingly, church was where he was able to learn most about Canada and practice English. After a year, Peter found that church became more of a social activity rather than a spiritual one. He also described a

cultural discrepancy between Chinese from Mainland China and Chinese from Hong Kong or Taiwan. Feeling uncomfortable at times, he started wondering if he should stop attending church.

*“Gradually after about a year, I found I would seek less spiritually, but I would spend more time and energy just to make friends. So going to church became more like a social thing for me. So then I started thinking that maybe I should stop a little. Also, because most of the people who go to church here, the Chinese people here are from Hong Kong with a few from Taiwan. I would say there are very few from Mainland China. Sometimes when we’d eat together, some of them would speak Cantonese to each other and I don’t understand that and when we’d go out to eat, it was always Cantonese food. After awhile, I got tired of it. At school, outside of those Cantonese friends, I also have Mandarin friends, like Mainlander friends. All of them don’t have religion and they are new immigrants. I think their education in Chinese really influenced them a lot. Not only do they not have religion, they act like they’re against it. So sometimes when I talk about religion with them some of them disrespect it. For while I try to distance myself from people who try to challenge my faith but some of them are very good friends and nice people. I think they just don’t believe it and keep asking me questions. Although I was really seeking spiritually and I go to church regularly, I grew up as a person who did not have religion so I don’t understand much about Christianity.”*

Peter’s peer group from Mainland China did not seem to understand his interest and commitment to Christianity. Eventually, he started to doubt himself as well. He stopped discussing religion with them, because he felt they were unsupportive of him. Eventually, Peter stopped going to church and he found that he was surprisingly comfortable with that, however, he was still growing spiritually on his own.

*“I used to think that if I missed Sunday service for 2 weeks, I was doing something wrong. But I didn’t go to church for one semester and I was surprised to find out that I was okay with it. I was still trying to understand the faith, but I didn’t think going to church was that important. The important thing is to understand and learn it. It’s similar to going there just to meet your friends.”*

Although Peter considered himself Christian, he still did not feel as if he completely fit into the Christian community. Christianity has influenced his views and opinions, however, since his identity does not fully align with beliefs, he experiences contradictions and conflict. He described many examples in his story.

*“Sometimes I find that at church, some of the things that people say, I can’t really agree with. A lot of Christians are very against Communism, when I talk about politics with my friends from Mainland, they all think I’m against Communism. They all think I’m too close to the US or I believe too much in democracy. When I discuss politics like Communism with my Christian friends, it seems that some of them are so against it. It makes me feel bad about coming from China. I don’t know how to describe it. It’s like you’re wrong, not because of what you do but it’s more like, because of who you are. It makes me frustrated and I find myself not belonging to mainstream Christians.”*

*“I try to avoid talking about controversial issues with Christian friends, because I’m afraid that we’d hurt each others’ feelings. I just feel like they’re trying to prove that Mainland is wrong. I feel sometimes people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other foreigners mix Chinese communism and Chinese people. They think that all the Chinese coming from Mainland are Communist, so they would talk to us in a way like, ‘I’m trying to teach you, you don’t know’. But sometimes I think a lot of the things that the Communist party does in China is wrong too, but I don’t think anybody wants to be treated in a way such that when they talk to you, they think you are the devil. With my Christian friends, when you start talking about Communism, they think it’s so evil. It distances me from them. It makes me feel like they think they are superior and this was an issue in China for many years. It is generally considered that Hong Kong and Taiwanese are superior compared to Mainlanders. I don’t feel that’s true. So, sometimes I cannot agree with some of the little issues that mainstream Christians believe. Also, it has something to do with the cultural gap between the Mainlanders and people from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Sometimes, it makes me wonder, maybe I’m not the Christian that they think I am or maybe I’m just different.”*

Although Peter has strong connections to his Chinese identity, he also takes pride in living in Canada. He sees the importance of integrating into society, however, he is uncertain of how to do this.

*“It is so much easier for people to build friendships if they have the same cultural background. I don’t have really close friendships with people from*

*other cultural backgrounds, because I myself still don't understand Western culture as well as people who grow up here. I think it (the large Chinese population in the community) has two sides, good and bad. It's good because as soon as I arrived here I had so many friends. I didn't even have to have a period of being lonely. However, having so many Chinese friends and not many Canadian friends would make it harder for you to understand Canadian society. I think it's definitely okay to hang out with Chinese all the time, but I also think it's important to learn about Canadian society."*

Overall, however, Peter has learned much about Western society through Christianity.

He continues to grow in his faith, although he has distinguished his spiritual seeking from being religious.

Peter is different from the previous participants in that he did not have the supportive Christian environment that all the other participants lived in. The absence of parental figures in his story is congruent with Peter's faith development. Peter's spiritual journey was predominantly self-initiated, and he pursued a spiritual life despite the anti-religious sentiment that surrounded him. Currently, he seems to have two peer groups that are pulling him in opposite directions. This conflict seems to be creating self-doubt and distance between Peter and these two communities.

It is evident that Peter's personal identity is strongly associated with where he originates, but not necessarily with the Chinese community as a whole, because there is significant cultural difference between individuals from Mainland and individuals from Hong Kong or Taiwan. There is some perceived discrimination, as he expresses that many of his Christian friends assert their superiority over Mainlanders and strongly oppose Communism. Peter perceives their opposition as aggressive and accusatory. In this way, he feels it is unfair that he is being judged, not based on his behaviour but rather his ethnic identity. In contrast, his peer group from Mainland China constantly challenges his beliefs.



Despite the conflict between what seems like two different halves of Peter, he is in the process of shaping his personal development through adapting both sets of worldviews to create a unique identity for himself. Peter's story is particularly interesting because how he views himself is constantly being contested by how his two distinct groups of peers view him. This dilemma is perhaps more relatable for me, as a person who identifies with being Canadian but is frequently viewed as foreign by others.

*Karie [Age 19, University student]*

Karie arrived in Canada with her family from Mainland China when she was 15. Like Peter, Karie and her family had virtually no knowledge of Christianity or religion because of the censorship in Mainland China. They came to know about Christianity after meeting a Chinese family here. Her parents started going to worship nights and Karie followed, although she was sceptical.

*"I was really sceptical about the whole religion thing in the first 2 or 3 years of me being in Canada because a lot of things they say, they seem really hard to believe. Like how you have to accept someone that you've never met before and take him as your saviour and how you have to do everything the Bible says, and how if you don't believe in this you're going to hell, even though sometimes you might be good people. Just because they don't accept Jesus Christ, they're going to hell. It was hard for me to believe. Also, I went to the youth group at church, and I met this girl and she was a little arrogant. She really took pride in the fact that she was Christian and it made me feel that she was a little arrogant, that she somehow looks down on me, because I don't believe in what she believes. That gave me a bad impression of Christian people, like they're this really exclusive group who try to convert you into something you are not originally."*

Her family had a very difficult time during their initial settlement period, and shortly after, her parents separated and Karie went to live with her father. Although

she was far from her mother, they maintained a close connection and she considers her mother as a spiritual inspiration for herself.

*“After she [my mother] moved away, she really started to believe in things and I think she got baptized right before she left. Before she was committed, she didn’t have any jobs, her English wasn’t very good, and I think she was a little depressed at time. I don’t know how to say it, I guess it wasn’t a really good period of time for her. She had a hard time, just getting the motivation together to do things, like look for jobs, because of her bad English and all that. Even in China, she was not really an outspoken person and after she came to Canada, she became even more reserved because she does not speak English. But after she became Christian, I think it really changed her because she had something to believe in, like she used the Bible as a guideline to do things in her life. She got a job, she moved to a new place, she got a car. It just seemed to be getting better for her – she became more confident. She became more open to communicate with me and she taught me a lot of really good things, like how to deal with people, and she told me a lot of things that are in the Bible, like how to do kind things, not because you want praises but because you know God is watching and you want to please Him. Seeing her get better, like getting her life back on track with the help of God and church, it really inspired me.”*

However, Karie was still sceptical at this point in her life. Since she was living with her father who did not attend church and very few of her peers attended church, she also did not attend church. Eventually, her father relocated when Karie moved to university. When her father eventually converted to Christianity, it came as a surprise to Karie, but inspired her to begin pursuing her own faith journey.

*“Last Christmas, we got a phone call and my dad was like, ‘so I’m Christian now’. How does that happen? I think moving away gave him time to be on his own, time to think about it. Before, he didn’t have much time and energy because he was either right with my mom and working and eventually, raising me on his own. He probably didn’t have the time or the motivation to focus on religion. I think religion is something you have to reflect constantly on yourself and really meditate on it. It’s not something that can be taught. It’s more like you become inspired, so it takes time to understand. Moving to live on his own made him focus more on himself. It was really weird because even though he’s my dad, I don’t really feel like I know him. He doesn’t really talk about himself very much. After he became a Christian, even his voice on the phone sounds different. Both my parents are converted Christian, so I really see the difference between before and after. Before, they’d be really irrational*

*people, sometimes blinded by their desire for money. They were really goal-driven people and they don't really show their emotional side. Afterwards, they're more open and they're more caring and understanding in general, and confident. I remember so clearly when we first came here, my dad was like, you have to do everything better than everybody else because you're Chinese. If you don't, you're not going to survive. I think he didn't have confidence because he's Chinese basically. He thought of himself as lower than other people. It's so weird. I think that becoming Christian was really good for his self-confidence and when I saw the changes in him, I got inspired, and I'm like, well maybe I should do the same."*

One of the most important experiences that contributed to both her spiritual and personal growth was a job for a Christian organization working with individuals with developmental challenges. Immersed in a Christian environment and tackling a challenging position, Karie is able to reflect upon this experience as both a spiritual and personal journey in which her faith and her personal identity shaped each other.

*"I had an interview with a group home and I didn't really feel like I could get it. I was in math. Who would want a math person to work in a group home? I don't know anything about taking care of people, I can't even take care of myself. I was really surprised when I got an offer from them, and because that was the only job I had, I accepted it. But the next day, some insurance company called. and I wanted to interview for that position, but my advisor was like, no you can't reject your offer, it's an obligation. I was really mad and I thought my life was going to be ruined. I called my mom, because I usually rely on her for spiritual counselling or big decisions. She told me to go ahead and accept the group home offer. She said something about how it's more important to learn new things when you are young. It doesn't matter what your major is, just learn new things and build new skills rather than going straight for the money. She said something about how it could be God's plan for me, because God had a plan for everyone. She said just to have faith and go into the job see what happens, it's like God's giving you a chance to learn things. So I took the job. Because the community life was Christian-based, we had worship nights and we went to church on Sundays. There was a lot of love in the community. In that community, I see a lot of people who really believe in what they do. I think forgiveness is a big part of the job and also a big part of Christianity too. It's really nice to see people who prefer stuff that they truly believe in, and it really inspired me to be a better person. After that, I'd always try to help people as much as possible. I've grown so much over those four months, even my employer saw tremendous growth in my personality. Now, I'm more confident, less selfish, and go out of my way to help other people."*

For Karie, the experience of working in a challenging helping profession helped her to realize the potential in herself. This positive experience was associated with the concept of experiences as part of a divine being's plan. This was the turning point in Karie's story that really propelled her spiritual growth. The sole belief in a divine being was a significant step in her life.

*“Now, I do believe that God has a plan for everybody and that there exists a God. I think that's a really big step, to believe in something that's not tangible and not generally accepted by everyone. Most of my friends are not religious, so I'm in a different situation from some other people. Say a Canadian grew up in a neighbourhood where everybody goes to church or their parents go to church, or their grandparents go to church, or their friends' parents go to church – it's different. For me, I had to do something that nobody around me does and nobody around me believes in. I think that's a really big step. Then I got this job randomly and it just helped me to become a better person. I started to think that my work was really important to the community that I worked in, so that was how I entered into Christianity, because I started working there. That has been the most important step I think.”*

Faith conversion and identity development have evidently been entwined in her process of acculturation. Although a little unsure of her responses, Karie attempts to describe her balance between being Chinese and being Canadian. She is able to reflect upon her past efforts to fit in and her newfound confidence in her identity.

*“There were not Asians in the small town I lived in, so I was sort of forced to speak English all the time, so I learned to speak it better. I got to know a lot more about Canadian culture so I fit in better. Once you get in better, you get to know them more and it gets even better. It's hard to get things started but after that, it's all good. I guess that little Asian part is still with me because now that I'm in university, I feel like I'm back in fob (Chinese newcomers) land again. Although rock is cool, I still like more Asian songs, just part of me. And I think learning to accept that as part of you is really important, because, believe me, I tried everything to fit in. I would pretend that I liked things that other people liked. I would push myself to do things that normally I wouldn't do, like I used to drink a lot at parties. I think that right now is a good time where I'm most comfortable with myself and I'm not Ms. Popular, or in perfect shape, or get all A grades anymore, but I have friends who I feel really understand me and who I can rely on. I do enjoy spending time with*

*them and I'm able to express myself more openly. I can dress anyway I want, not just preppy American style just because everyone else is doing it. I'm totally comfortable with who I am. I am an immigrant. That's just part of me."*

Similar to Peter, Karie and her family were raised in a geographical area where religion is denounced and had virtually no knowledge of Christianity before coming to Canada. Karie is different from all the other immigrant youth in that her entire family immigrated to Canada during her mid-adolescence. She also lived in smaller cities, where the lack of a Chinese community forced her assimilate into the host culture.

Since moving to university, Karie has found a new niche for herself, one that is balanced between her Canadian and Chinese identity. Karie exhibits predominantly the integration profile, which Berry et al. (2006) describe as individuals who have relatively high involvement in both their ethnic and national cultures. These adolescents strongly endorse integration, use a balance of their ethnic and national languages, and had peer contacts from both their own group and the wider community.

*"I watch a lot of Asian shows, and I get more enthusiastic when I talk about it with other people who know what I'm talking about, but I don't see that as a difficulty forming bonds between me and other cultures. My roommates are two white Russian guys and they can't be more different from me. I feel we have really good relationships, a normal friendly connection. We talk about stuff like co-op jobs, boyfriends, girlfriends, school, and interesting things that I can't talk about with Chinese people. I don't know, Chinese people play card games and you can have fun with them, but if you talk to them about psychology or philosophy, they're like, why would you care? They tend not to think about religion and spiritual stuff. They think it's lame because they come from a Communist country. They've been brainwashed by the government, I don't know if that's for sure or not, but that's definitely what I've noticed. So I don't see why hanging out with Chinese people would be better, because you can talk about different things with different kinds of people."*

Her conversion to Christianity was also part of her acculturation process and has been slowly integrated into her daily life. It has taken her a few years, however, she has acknowledged significant progress in her spiritual development. She now describes being Christian as, “...*getting to know God and Jesus Christ. And the second step would be to really believe in and rely on your faith in different issues in your life, like just to integrate it into your life.*” She continues to pursue these two tasks through her fellowship at school and using the Bible as guidance in her life.

*Holly (Age 22, University student)*

Holly had moved from a small town in China to the city when she was 8., where she learned Mandarin quickly and integrated quickly. She had a difficult time in school so Holly was excited to have a new life when her parents confirmed that they were moving to Canada. She thought she'd be able to learn English and adapt to the new culture quickly but this was not the case when she arrived. After a couple of years, her parents moved back to China, leaving Holly and her younger brothers in Canada.

Holly spoke extensively about struggles in school that left her feeling inferior and depressed back in China, while she thought the education system in Canada was less demanding and more supportive in helping her to pursue extracurricular activities. Although she felt happier in Canada, she had trouble making friends and coming across opportunities to speak English. As part of the new freedom to explore activities outside of academics, Holly was also able to put more time into her spiritual development.

*“When I came here, I got more chances to know about God. I go to church, not just for the Sunday worship but I also go to the Sunday school. I think*

*Sunday school is pretty good, that they teach me about lots of things like, how to read the Bible so I think that I understand my religion better. I learned that I need to be thankful.”*

Holly relies on her faith and more specifically, prayer to help her overcome challenges that she faces in her life. Coming from a Christian background, finding a youth group at church was one of the first tasks she attended when she arrived. At first, she joined the English youth group, however she was unable to surpass the language barrier so she soon switched to a Chinese-speaking youth group.

*“One of the reasons that I was in a Christian English fellowship was to try to improve my English anyway I can. I don’t feel very comfortable although they are welcoming. They are able to talk all the time, but all I was able to do was listening. I feel like I was not participating, I feel like an outsider. I’m not confident in my English so I changed to the Chinese one.”*

She describes a difference in her religious understanding since she has moved to Canada, thus she continues to go to church.

*“When I was in China, I just go with my parents. Go to church, that’s all. I go to church because my parents went there, so I go with my parents. But after I come here, I learned why I should go to church. But I think, the reason I go to church now has changed because I go to church by myself, even though my parents not here. I think I just learn about Christianity more here than in China.”*

Holly considers Christianity to be a big influence in her life, however she is uncertain about the specifics. She explains that being raised in a Christian environment all her life makes it hard to identify what impacts to attribute to religion. Despite this, Holly considers Christianity to be very important and continues to seek spiritual understanding. At the same time, she is looking to improve her English and integrate into the community better.

Holly’s story was unique in that she did not speak about religious doubts or questioning that occurred as part of the faith development. She sees significance in

her willingness to continue as going to church despite the fact that in her newfound independence, she has the choice not to attend. Holly does not speak in detail about aspects of her life or identity other than her role in school and the challenges she faces as a student.

It is interesting that she finds it difficult for her to identify aspects of herself or areas in her life that have been influenced by her faith, as a result of her upbringing in a Christian home. Most of the other participants who were raised as Christians their entire lives also had some difficulty in expressing the influences of faith, however after some self-reflection and probing from the interviewer, they were able to describe how Christianity has impacted the way they make decisions, plan, behave, and perceive. This difficulty to reflect on values was vastly different from the few converted individuals, who were quick to point out and elaborate on their perception of Christian influences in their lives and society.

#### *Collective Overview of the Stories*

Most of the participants in this study had relocated to Western countries, such as Canada, the United States, and England, a number of times prior to making the move to Canada on their own. Reasons for moving back and forth ranged from familial obligations to education to employment opportunities. Furthermore, some of the participants lived in Canada for a short period during their younger years, so their move to this nation can be viewed as a return. These peculiar characteristics in my sample were somewhat expected, considering the age range. As evident in stories, academia is an integral part of the lives of Chinese youth, thus making all of my participants university students. As university students paying international fees, one



might assume that youth might be from wealthier families who indulged their children at a young age in schools abroad, due to assumptions of higher quality education or as a sign of prestige. Conversely, having lived in Canada during childhood years may have prompted youth to choose a university in Canada for the sake of familiarity or a sense of loyalty. Despite this unexpected characteristic, participants still spoke about different challenges that they faced as newcomers and adolescents in transition to university. Some of them gave a more detailed description of a past immigration experience in their lives that appeared to be far more difficult than their current one in Canada. Although unexpected, moving around still proved to be a challenge for the youth and they were able to describe how their faith had an impact on their acculturation.

Faith appears to play an important role in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth in both their identity development and acculturation process. This is manifested in their values, how they relate to others, their perception of their role in life, and how they plan for the future.

Most of the youth were raised as Christians from a young age and received support from their family and peers to pursue spiritual growth. Youth in this case found it very difficult to imagine life without religion and also had a more difficult time expressing what aspects of their personal identity and life were influenced by religion. Conversely, there were two participants who were raised in Mainland China, where religion is condemned and censored by the government. These two participants were able to offer explanations for the differences they experience as Christians and non-Christians, including comments on the impacts of religion on society and culture.

For all the youth interviewed, there was at least one significant event or time in their life that was particularly memorable as a period of personal and spiritual growth. These turning points typically involved a significant change in their lives where they were faced with challenges. Participants described how they were able to use their faith in overcoming challenges and using the Bible as a resource for guidance during times of hardship. The turning points for many of the participants also coincided with relocation to a different country, where they were forced to leave their social supports and become more reliant on themselves. For youth who were raised in a Christian environment, their turning points seem to describe a newfound respect for religion, where it becomes a personal endeavour to seek understanding rather than a familial obligation. Youth who became Christian later on in life described the events that led up to their conversion, typically involving role models and inspiring stories.

Although 7 of the participants spent some time and for 2, nearly half their lives in Western countries, 7 of them still strongly identified with being Chinese more than Canadian. Surprisingly, it is the young woman who did not spend any time in Western countries prior to her Canadian immigration who identifies as a Chinese-Canadian. Ethnic identity was defined by many things, but mainly through their language of preference and their peers. A host of other reasons were also mentioned, including food preference, pop culture, interests, and personality traits. For five of the participants, their responses were sometimes inconsistent. Participants were quick to respond that they were definitely more Chinese but at the same time, they would describe their absorption of Western culture and distinguish themselves from non-

immigrant peers from their home country. Two of the participants spoke about switching ethnic identification depending on where they were, such that they felt Canadian when they were in their home country and Chinese when they were in Canada. This identity change was attributed to the need to be unique or different in the community, by one of the participants.

Ethnic identification is often contradictory in the participants' stories. There seems to be a divergence between wanting to maintain their Chinese heritage and at the same time, realizing that they have absorbed some Western values and cultural norms. Western is a more appropriate term than Canadian, as many of these participants have lived in other Western countries prior to Canada, such as England or the United States. These responses may suggest that participants are describing a subculture that is neither new Canadians nor Chinese immigrants. Instead, this marginal group encompasses individuals who have spent much of their childhood moving back and forth between the West and the East.

All of the participants found that they were in communities where there was a large Chinese population. Participants explained that meeting new people and building relationships were easier with other individuals of similar cultural backgrounds, due to the established assumptions in a culture and the increased chance of commonalities. Though the youth have opportunities to meet peers outside of their Chinese community, they found it difficult to have a meaningful relationship. This finding was true of seven of the participants with the exception of Karie, who found it valuable to have friends from within and outside of her ethnic group. Four of the participants have disclosed that they value the diverse scene that Canada provides but

perhaps, are not motivated to build meaningful relationships outside of the Chinese community because of the language and cultural challenges that are involved.

The predominant use of their ethnic language and recruiting the majority of their peer contacts from the Chinese community are described by Berry et al. (2006) as the *ethnic profile*. This is, coincidentally, the second most preferred acculturative strategy according to immigrant youth. The ethnic profile would encompass most of the participants interviewed in this study, although some of them showed different acculturative strategies in other circumstances or would prefer the current situation to be different. The only participant who exhibited characteristics associated with the *integration profile* was Karie, who did not view her Chinese background as a barrier to building meaningful relationships with peers outside of her ethnic group. She was able to recognize the differences in her interaction with her ethnic group and others outside of this group, valuing both equally.

The participants' stories do not explicitly speak about the integration of Christianity and their ethnic identity, however, in Oliver's story there were similarities and associations perceived between the East Asian culture and Christianity. It could also be the case that for the majority of the participants, their ethnic identity did not conflict with their religion of choice so they were not as aware of the integration. This is vastly different in Peter's story where we see a discrepancy between his religious beliefs and his ethnic identity, or more specifically, his identification with Mainland China. This discrepancy was only apparent in both conversion stories, showing the significant cultural difference between those who come from Hong Kong or Taiwan and those who comes from Mainland China. In

Peter's case, it was a challenge to amalgamate his ethnic identity and spiritual beliefs to create a unique personal identity.

Identity for many of the youth was described as having a sense of purpose in life. At this age, seven of the participants were preoccupied with university and their future careers. These participants typically spoke about their finding their identity in Christ and their purpose in life to serve God. Individuals spoke about their goals for the future as part of their purpose in life, and included Christianity as part of their decision making and planning. Decisions about their career included finding a job that was meaningful rather than lucrative, that allowed them to combine their skills and faith.

An unexpected theme that was prevalent across the eight participants was the importance of school and academic success in their lives. This theme was pervasive throughout their entire lives, from prior to immigration to the present day. Although I asked the participants questions about their faith, immigration, and identity, it was evident that their role as students and academic achievement were integral parts of their stories. All of the participants are currently university students, after having chosen to immigrate for educational purposes. All but one of the participants made the transition on their own, while their families remained; however, a few had parental support for the first few months in Canada.

All of the participants spoke about the differences in the educational system in their home country compared to Canada. Many felt that the attitudes were far more competitive, and typically saw this as a difference between more traditionally Chinese peers and their own attitudes. Youth also noticed the positive difference in the style of

teaching and academic atmosphere; all participants stated that they found the lessons here more applicable and schools more supportive of extracurricular activities. The change in attitude is typically described throughout participants' stories, where they strongly identified with their role as students prior to their immigration to Canada and/or turning point events. The most common change described by youth after their turning point event was this shift in attitude from prioritizing academic performance to their purpose in life as Christians.

All the participants spoke about the multicultural environment they currently live with a positive attitude, though they did not necessarily feel that they were comfortable with developing meaningful relationships with people outside of their ethnic group. Having a large Chinese population in a community seems to be a helpful factor in the initial stages of settlement but in some cases, it also appears to be a deterrent to integration as described by Berry et al. (1999). Some participants showed a desire to build relationships outside of the Chinese community, however, they found that the convenience of having no language barriers and common cultural knowledge far more conducive to building a social network.

Some participants described and envisioned a role for religion that embraces the strength of multiculturalism. Youth spoke about instances of Chinese churches or fellowships that have collaborated with other non-Chinese Christian groups for worship or celebration events. Participants expressed that they saw a potential for bringing different ethnicities together under the umbrella of Christianity.

Chinese-based faith communities provide an approachable niche for newcomers who are looking to gain a strong foothold before branching out to explore. The youth

indicated that successful integration into their communities may be dependent on how actively their church or fellowship is fostering diversity. This finding points to a potential role for faith-based organizations to foster diversity. Fostering diversity and providing opportunities for bridging cultures can be two components of facilitating integration and positive identity development.

## Discussion

### *Overall Reflections*

As each participant brought new insights, experiences, and perceptions, I began to see group similarities and build theories around the data gathered. During the first interview, there were no expectations, however, as the interviews continued, I began to probe for specific factors such as inspirational figures or turning points in their lives. My own interests and pre-conceptions likely led participants to focus at length on certain aspects of their stories.

Participants were overwhelmingly open during their interviews. Apprehensive individuals were vocal about their concerns and became less nervous throughout the interview process. Volunteering to speak for such a long period of time about one's self seemed to be a daunting task, as most participants did not think they had anything valuable to contribute. There were many instances during and after the interviews, of participants looking for reassurance that their responses were appropriate and useful for the research. This uncertainty was persistent, although I emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that I was trying to understand the impact of faith and immigration through their eyes. One of the reasons participants reacted in this manner might be related to the lack of societal value attributed to experiences of youth and in particular, minority youth. Youth are often considered inexperienced and in need of direction from adults.

Tensions within the Chinese community were another unexpected result in the stories. These tensions extended to their religious community, since Chinese ethnic churches often hold Mandarin and Cantonese services, attracting a diverse group. One



large difference was that most of the participants from Mainland China were not raised as Christians whereas individuals from Hong Kong and Taiwan grew up in Christian families. The conflicts between non-religious and religious individuals in the Chinese community was also interesting, as it was presented as a dilemma for group and personal identity by two of the participants. Based on the stories, I believe that converting to Christianity impacts the integration and identity formation in a different way than those who have known Christianity their whole lives. These tensions within the Chinese community and spiritual development might be an area worth further examination, including comparative studies between Chinese Christian converts and those who are raised Christian.

My reflective notes post-interviews and on-going research journal contributed to how I interpreted the stories and helped to connect aspects to various theories and concepts. These notes were useful in keeping the interviews and analysis on track with the research and ultimately fulfill the purpose of the study. There were three goals of this study: 1) to provide opportunities for Chinese immigrant youth to voice their stories of immigration and faith; 2) to illustrate the role of Christianity in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth and their identity development; and 3) to illustrate some of the strengths in faith-based communities for immigrant youth. In order to create a forum for participants to tell their stories in such a way that I was able to analyze, I formed three research questions around the topic. However, the three questions can be summarized in this one general question that is more useful to understand my findings: How is being a Christian and an immigrant incorporated into the identities of these Chinese youth?

According to Erikson (1980), the two main tasks of identity formation in late adolescence are: 1) occupation – “how will I make my way into the world”; and 2) ideology – “what do I believe in”. This is perhaps why faith is integrated as a vital component of the identity commitment process, because all individuals are raised with a set of at least implicit values and beliefs, whether they are religious or not.

For immigrant youth who are raised in a Christian environment from a young age, it is perhaps easier to make sense of their values and beliefs in a culture that is predominantly Christian. Their devotion or commitment to God or Christ becomes increasingly intense as they approach late adolescence, where it becomes crystallized in their identities. However, this acceptance of Christian values and beliefs do not seem to be questioned or examined by youth, resulting in a prolonged *synthetic-conventional* stage of faith (Fowler, 1981). Progression in faith may be different if individuals have been relocated to a culture that emphasized a different dominant culture. It is certainly the case for youth who converted to Christianity when they arrive in Canada, whose belief systems were challenged by the people and culture around them. The two converted individuals interviewed in this study told stories that indicated they had moved beyond unexamined acceptance of Christianity. Coming from a culture where anti-religious sentiment is promoted, their spiritual journeys were highlighted by doubts, questions, scepticism, and challenge. For the two converted individuals, becoming Christian seems to be a way of adapting to their host culture. In Peter’s case, he speaks about his perceptions of Christianity as an ingrained part of the Western culture, which has enhanced his understanding of Canadian politics and issues. In Karie’s situation, she has found that Christianity has

become an increasing presence in her life despite her scepticism at first. After both her parents converted and perhaps as a way of adapting to the Canadian culture, Karie is beginning to observe the relevancy and utility of faith in her life.

Participants spoke about their search for purpose in the lives as part of their identity development. The overwhelming significance of faith in their perception of purpose was mostly concerned with future career plans. The focus on career goals is expected as all the participants are university students and career planning would be a part of that role. Many of them were striving to find a career or purpose that would align with their Christian belief system. Some youth spoke extensively about the religious considerations that they have put into deciding or shaping a future career. Others spoke about various future endeavours that were also Christian-oriented in order to deepen their experience and understanding of Christianity.

For immigrant youth, there is a third primary concern in identity formation that is related to how they perceive themselves in their host country. This concern involves their ethnic identity and the strategies they use to adapt to their host community. Most of the participants identify with being Chinese considerably more than Canadian. Many of their characteristics exemplify what Berry et al. (2006) describe as the ethnic profile, where individuals show “*a clear orientation toward their own ethnic group, with high ethnic identity, ethnic language proficiency and usage, and ethnic peers contacts.* (p.103)” Conversely, youth who were categorized under the ethnic profile supported the separation attitude and scored low on assimilation, national identity, and contacts with the national group. Berry et al. (2006) describes this group as representative of “*young people who are largely*

*embedded within their own cultural milieu and show little involvement with the larger society* (p. 103)”. This kind of attitude may lead to youth perceiving themselves as outsiders and, as a result, to remaining isolated from the broader community and developing an identity that excludes their host culture. There was only one participant who exhibited Berry et al.’s (2006) *integration* profile, which is a healthy balance of both ethnic and national involvement. Though most participants could be grouped as having an *ethnic* profile, some endorsed the concept of integration throughout their interview. They spoke about their desires to make more national contacts, become more fluent in English, and generally understand Canadian society better. It seems, however, that participants may be lacking the confidence or opportunities to fully achieve integration. Integration is considered the preferred outcome for immigrants in Western societies in terms of adaptation, and Berry, Kim, Mindy, and Mok (1987) found that individuals favouring integration experienced the least stress whereas those choosing separation experienced the most. Others, such as Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980), have shown that bicultural involvement contributes to positive adjustment. Thus, it is possible that promoting integration among immigrant youth may be key in establishing positive identity.

There are some ways that faith-based communities can help to facilitate the acculturation process for immigrant youth. As evident in these stories, faith plays an incredibly important and influential role in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth. Youth have shown how Christianity impacts their identity development in that their belief system and purpose in life is wrapped up in their faith. Thus, it follows that

facilitating the integration of immigrant youth can also be effectively achieved by making it meaningful for youth through a faith-based approach.

### *Faith and Identity Development*

Faith was an essential part of participants' lives, as they were able to describe in detail their journey for spiritual understanding and how Christianity has impacted their growth. For all participants, there were one or more periods in their lives which mark changes in their spiritual development. The participants described one of the reasons for the emphasis on faith during those periods: The hardships and challenges they faced during that time typically involved the removal of social supports, and reliance on God was the most familiar alternative in terms of coping with isolation and adapting to a new environment. These periods can be conceived as a spiritual transformation or awakening, as youth describe their realization of Christianity as part of their lives.

This spiritual awakening or transformation can be aligned with the stages of faith that were developed by Fowler (1981) based on the works of developmental theorists, such as Erikson, Kohlberg, and Piaget. These stages of faith development are characterized by six main phases, with only three described by the youth in this study. It is important to note that I am not referring to Fowler's stages in a manner that compares or devalues one stage over another. This type of hierarchical positioning of the stages can lead participants and others reading the summarized version of this report to evaluate and compare themselves against others. I envision Fowler's stages in a spectrum such that persons in each stage can achieve fulfillment and genuine faith. The stories of participants who were raised in a Christian

environment tended to include characteristics of the second and third stages, known as *mythic-literal faith* and *synthetic-conventional faith*. In Oliver's story, he describes his literal interpretations of the Bible and how this affected his perception of moral rules and attitudes. Oliver created overly demanding and judgmental stipulations for himself and others around him, which led to a degrading sense of self. Oliver described his transition to the synthetic-conventional faith, where he is able to view religious stories symbolically and accept beliefs with little examination of these beliefs. Most of the youth interviewed described what Fowler summarized as the *synthetic-conventional faith* phase, where faith must synthesize values with different aspects of life in order to provide a basis for identity and worldview. However, this stage can still be considered "conformist", as Fowler explains: "*while beliefs and values are deeply felt, they typically are tacitly held...there has not been occasion to step outside them to reflect on or examine them explicitly or systematically*" (p. 173).

The experience of significant changes in a person's life such as immigration or relocation typically precipitates the breakdown of the third stage and facilitates the transition into the fourth phase of *individuated-reflective faith*. The fourth phase begins a radical shift from dependence on others' spiritual beliefs to development of one's own; it involves examination of self, background, and life-guiding values. This phase was confirmed in a number of the stories, where being removed from their original sources of Christian support propelled youth to develop their own spiritual path. Fowler maintains that in order to genuinely move to the *individuated-reflective* stage, "*there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority*" (p.179). On the surface, there appear to be many examples throughout the stories,

such as Max's story, in which he was able to develop his own path after his role model moved away from Christianity and his youth group obtained new leadership. Sally also described a similar search for identity and tensions of individuality versus being defined by a group in her story of adapting to boarding school life. However, being moved from a Christian environment to another predominantly Christian culture allowed youth to maintain their conventional belief system with minimal reflection and examination of their own ideologies. Fowler asserted that "*many religious groups reinforce a conventionally held and maintained faith system, sanctifying one's remaining in the dependence on external authority and derivative group identity of the third stage*" (p.178). The RAG's sentiments also reflected the maintenance of the *synthetic-conventional stage*, as they conveyed concern when youth exhibited "zealousness without enough substance".

Another interesting finding is the experience of converted Christians for whom faith became a part of their lives during mid to late adolescence. These individuals began their stories at the *individuating-reflective faith* stage by noting their doubts and ongoing questioning of their values and beliefs. Values and beliefs must become explicit in that they are chosen and critically supported commitments (Fowler, 1981). The presence of the *individuating-reflective* stage is likely because these youth come from an environment with radically different values that carry an anti-religious sentiment. So, for these converted youth, their worldview is drastically affected as they immigrate from a non-Christian culture to a culture that is founded in Christianity. In contrast to others who were raised as Christians from a young age, youth who became Christian in adolescence were able to step outside of the faith and

note the impacts of Christianity on themselves, people around them, and society as a whole. Coming from a sceptical outlook on religion prompted individuals to compare the two distinct socio-political worldviews and also, inappropriately attribute other perceived differences to religion.

The consistency of a Christian worldview for those who were raised in a Christian family may be a mediating factor in how well youth adjust to their host culture. In this case, most of the participants did not discuss in detail the clashes between the two cultures, in values and beliefs. Any cultural discrepancies that were described typically involved language preference, food, entertainment, and youth culture. Being able to become part of a Chinese Christian community may minimize or protect against the acculturative stress and social isolation that many other immigrants experience. Although Canadian society is committed to religious pluralism, Christianity is the dominant religion and pervasive in many spheres. Relocating to a predominantly Christian environment allows youth to remain in the *synthetic-conventional* stage of faith, requiring minimal reflection and reassessment of one's belief system.

Contrary to youth who were raised Christian, the stories of the participants who were converts revealed more fundamental differences in cultural values, norms, and systems. In Peter's case, he associated being Western with being Christian, despite the evidence that North America is made up of immigrants from all over the world who adhere to various religious systems. It seems that relocating to a culture that is not in line with the original belief system drives youth to transition into the



*individuated-reflective* stage of faith, where youth are able to choose beliefs, values, and relationships that are important to their identity.

### *Purpose as Identity*

Speaking with youth about identity generally turned the conversation into career planning or future goals they want to achieve. This is likely the case, as occupation is one of the two primary concerns of late adolescent development. Also, being university students may place youth in a role where they need to plan for a future career that matches the field they are currently studying. Most of the participants were still uncertain of what occupations they were interested in and even their current education did not narrow options for them. However, youth were vocal in how Christian values would impact their decisions.

Many of the participants ended their stories with a desire to develop spiritually and find a career or future purpose that is aligned with their faith. Some spoke about the discrepancy between individuals who were looking for lucrative opportunities rather than meaningful ones. Others spoke about the concept of social justice and searching for work that would allow them to enact and promote social justice. Youth also spoke about achieving future endeavours such as going on a mission trip to China or joining a Christian drama group to widen their spiritual experiences and deepen their understanding of Christianity. Youth showed a proactive approach to integrating these two aspects of their identity; youth perceived the combination of faith as their purpose or meaning in life.

### *Acculturation and Identity Development*

Contrary to the assumption that there is an initial period of settlement for immigrants that is characterized by language barriers, culture shock, and/or loneliness, many of the participants spoke about their move to Canada as very positive experience. Most of the participants I recruited that fit within my criteria were university students who had already had prior relocation experiences to Western countries, primarily England, United States, and Canada. For the participants who spent time in Canada during their childhood, their recent immigration may feel like a return to a familiar base rather than unknown territory, as the participants typically spoke of positive childhood memories in Canada. Positive memories may facilitate a smoother transition for youth, as it may help decrease anxiety level. Certainly, the absence of a language barrier helps significantly with integration into any community (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000). Having positive expectations and familiarity might also allow individuals to be more prepared and have a more positive outlook.

Other participants who relocated to another country for educational pursuits at a later age described the hardships during the first immigration but did not describe the challenges that they faced moving to Canada in detail. Some participants noted that their negative experiences in immigrating to Canada have been minimal and adapting to community has been quick. This adaptation to the community is not necessarily integration. However, one of the reasons why youth might not experience the hardships that are expected is because they have acquired coping mechanisms and

strategies from their previous experiences. Thus, youth are able to employ strategies that have been successful in the past to their current adaptation.

Another reason youth might not experience acculturative stress is because of their status as students. Many students stated that the main concerns in their lives are school, faith, and their peers. The university community can be closed off from the rest of the community, especially if students live on campus and only associate with peers from the university. Most participants are preoccupied with school and future career possibilities, and referred to their university fellowship peer group as their source of main support. Being enclosed in a university community may eliminate many of the barriers and challenges other immigrants would face, due to the sense of community that is cultivated in a school environment (Bateman, 2002). In addition, youth are placed in the familiar role of a student and have a clear purpose.

Since six of these participants had relocated at least once, if not multiple times, prior to their solo immigration to Canada, it is likely that this is a special subculture of Chinese immigrants who have unique identities that do not fit completely into Chinese or Canadian. Seven of the participants asserted that they identified with being Chinese over being Canadian and attributed this to their place of birth, peer group, language preference, and familiarity with the culture. This is not surprising, as youth generally believed that one's country of birth determined your identity for life (CCSD, 2000). Another main factor that determined ethnic identity was based on a person's ability to integrate (CCSD, 2000), which includes language fluency, peers, cultural norms, and values. Participants felt that there was a difference between them and Canadian-born Chinese as well as Chinese peers who still lived in

their home country. Participants also referred to another group of immigrant youth that they distinguished themselves from – these individuals were described as more traditionally Chinese and had intentions of moving back after obtaining their education. Participants admitted to preferring various aspects of Canadian culture as well as adopting some Western views, however, they still identified with being Chinese. Furthermore, participants were more likely to take the easy route, such as creating a social network with other Chinese peers and speaking Chinese although they revealed desires to speak English more often and build relationships with non-Chinese peers.

One reason for these contradictions in ethnic identification might be due simply to the recent immigration, where individuals have only been here a short time and are unlikely to identify with their new host culture. This pattern could also be indicative of the *diffuse* profile, described by Berry et al. (2006) as “a *contradictory pattern that suggest young people are uncertain about their place in society, perhaps wanting to be part of the larger society but lacking the skills and ability to make contacts*” (p.104). However, even participants who were born in Canada or raised for lives in Western countries, primarily identified as Chinese. This stronger sense of ethnic identification could be associated with the stereotypical idea that Canadians are thought of as individuals of white Anglo-Saxon decent (CCSD, 2000).

Racial stereotyping is another pervasive structure that is a barrier to full integration for Chinese immigrant youth. The effect of racial stereotyping may be particularly evident for East Asian minorities living in Western societies, as Lee (2003) explains: “*Asian Americans live under the burden of racial stereotypes that*

*structure their experiences and identities...The two most powerful and persistent stereotypes of Asian Americans are those of the foreigner and the model minority. The foreigner stereotype casts Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners regardless of the length of time they or their families have been in the United States” (p.41).* This stereotype informs the way both Chinese immigrant youth as well as non-immigrant youth view Chinese immigrant youth. Thus, despite embracing Canada’s diverse scene and having opportunities to integrate, being viewed as outsiders might make it difficult for immigrant youth to identify with the mainstream culture.

Another reason for the lack of integration may be the developmental tasks that youth experience as part of their growth. The tensions of identity formation throughout late adolescence depend on finding a balance between individuality and belonging to a group. Erikson (1980) asserted that identity “connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (p. 109). The majority of the youth in this study were in their late adolescent phase and were perhaps still in a state of *crisis*, which Erikson (1980) described as a period of decision-making where alternatives and roles are still being explored and tried. Youth may not have committed to a self-identity yet and even older youth may not have settled on a self-definition, as the recent immigration may have delayed this process. Phinney, Lochner, and Murphy (1990) argued that for minority youth, establishing their ethnic identity is pivotal to their personal identity. This integration of ethnic and personal identity was evident in the stories, as youth were placed in an environment where they are constantly encountering other cultures, while struggling to maintain their own. Being in a country where your cultural

background is not dominant may change one's perception of the self and how that is incorporated into identity formation.

Immigrating at a critical age such as late adolescence may extend or disturb identity development such that identity is not achieved or their sense of belonging is uprooted. A number of studies have shown that failing to achieve a satisfying identity can have negative psychological implications for all adolescents (Phinney et al., 1990). It is particularly important then that youth institutions and agencies take this into consideration when working with immigrant youth.

Though all eight of the youth have chosen to attend a Chinese Christian church or fellowship, some have described the significance of collaborating with other non-ethnic based Christian groups. The cultural gaps that may keep youth from developing meaningful relationships with peers outside of the Chinese community are less daunting when individuals gather to worship. Having a common ground to build on may be key to facilitating the integration of immigrant youth.

Engaging in a meaningful ritual such as worship may allow people to bond on a different level where they can begin to appreciate each other's differences. Many of the youth maintained that the majority of their Chinese immigrant friends, including themselves, feel it is difficult to developing significant relationships with peers outside of their ethnic group. Some attributed the lack of peers outside of the ethnic group to the unspoken understanding that exists between people from a Chinese background that needs to be explained to individuals from outside the community.

The participants generally espoused a preference for integration although most had not achieved outcome nor did they describe efforts to connect with their host

culture. This preference shows that they have adopted the Canadian value of multiculturalism and embraced the pluralistic communities they live in. It is evident that youth would like to achieve integration, however, they need to have opportunities that will allow them to build meaningful relationships. Integration is also the preferred strategy in Canada and researchers have shown the benefits of integration over the other styles of acculturation. Phinney, Berry, Sam, and Vedder (2006) concluded from their cross-cultural project that adolescents with the integration profile exhibited the most positive psychological and sociocultural adaptation. As a vital part of youth's lives, faith-based communities can play a central role in the integration of immigrant youth and in turn, foster positive identity development.

Faith leaders and organizations can take a more active role by embracing multiculturalism, encouraging tolerance, and finding common ground among different cultures. For immigrants who are marginalized or isolated from the mainstream culture, communicating the importance of their contributions to their community through their faith can be more inspiring and accepted. However, it should be noted that these youth may be well-adjusted as they are, since they represent a group of immigrants who are fluent in English, motivated, and view themselves as part of a unique subgroup that lies between more traditional Chinese immigrants and Canadian born Chinese. They may have adopted the necessary Canadian values and attitudes that are needed for healthy adjustment. Integration has been measured by language use, peer contacts, and attitude towards acculturation. However, perhaps it would be more useful to study integration by the acceptance and adoption of the host culture.

### *Limitations and Strengths*

On the whole, the strategy I used to set up the interview guide and the interview was conducive to storytelling. The narrative method was explained to both the RAG and participants, such that they could gain an understanding for what I was attempting to achieve. The task of telling a story was fairly daunting for the participants, however, most participants spoke for 1.5 hours. During the first interview, I asked questions for clarification throughout the participant's story, however I realized afterwards that by interrupting the participant resulted in many tangents to the story. This strategy may have skewed the stories towards topics I wanted to focus on rather than what was important to the participant. In order to decrease my influence in the construction of the story, I allowed participants to tell their stories without interruption and only asked questions after they indicated they were finished. Each participant's story was also presented in a narrative format, where I summarized their characteristics and stories in a temporal manner, using quotes to illustrate the conclusions. This method of presentation is aligned with the holistic concept of the narrative method and prevented quotes from being used out of context. Furthermore, maintaining the data in its original story form helped to illustrate the uniqueness of each individual and highlighted their significant contributions.

Due to the nature of qualitative studies, the results of this study are only transferable within the contexts of this participant group. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as whether or not the findings and conclusions are applicable to other circumstances. In order to demonstrate the transferability of this research, I



have described the context of the study and the characteristics of the participants at length, including numerous quotes to illustrate the findings. The youth were all university students, and six of the eight participants had a high command of the English language. Seven of the participants had made their own decisions to immigrate to Canada, while six of them had lived in Western countries prior to their immigration. This group of immigrant youth were fully involved in their relocation, which is different with immigrant children whose parents make the decision or refugees who are forced to relocate for their safety and well-being. In this respect, the concept of immigrant in this study is restricted to the circumstances of these youth, which only represents a small proportion of the immigrant experience. However, many within this group of youth had vast relocation experiences in different Western countries, thus they were able to compare different experiences and provide unique accounts.

Of the eight participants, six were raised in Christian families from a young age. Some of the participants implied that it was difficult to describe how Christianity has influenced or impacted their lives and identity. Many participants found it difficult to answer questions that required them to imagine their lives without Christianity. Thus, the impacts of Christianity were drawn from my interpretations of the conversations. While I intended to involve my RAG in the analysis and interpretation of the results, this project was delayed several months longer than originally planned and members of the RAG are no longer available for consultation and/or have lost interest. Having some discussion surrounding the stories would have been invaluable to establishing credibility for this research as individuals in the RAG

were chosen for their insider perception and knowledge of this group of Chinese immigrants. In light of this, I included post-interview and analysis notes that show my train of thought, responses, and biases that show confirmability. Included in these notes are ideas and thoughts that I gathered from informal meetings with the youth and other key figures that helped me gain access to this community.

Another pressure that may have skewed the interviews is related to the possible need for youth to portray themselves as exemplary Christian individuals. Prior to the interviews, the RAG were concerned with the tendency for this group of youth to respond with socially-desirable answers. While recruiting, I stressed the religion factor in the study, as I wanted individuals who were active Christians. This emphasis may have insinuated to youth that they are required to be ideal practicing Christians. Also, some participants were concerned with whether they would be good participants for the study in terms of their degree of religious involvement. Concerned youth often made comments such as, "*I'm not sure I'm right for your research because I'm not completely Christian all the time*" or "*I'm not very Christian, I just joined the fellowship recently*". These comments may indicate that youth felt judged, which might have played a role in their stories. Another criterion that is used to evaluate qualitative research is authenticity, which Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe as the ethical and ideological issues that arise in research associated with issues of social justice. As a whole, creating the RAG was one way to empower members of the community to understand better both their own and others' lives. Ultimately, working with this group of influencing people within the community was to engage key players that would have the means and power to disseminate the findings of this

research and in turn, engage Chinese immigrant youth in understanding and using their own experiences to create environments and programs that promote overall well-being and integration. Although the interest of the RAG has waned, I plan on encouraging them to discuss the research as leaders of their respective groups.

### *Community Psychology and Research Contributions*

The willingness of the participants to be open and trusting resulted in these eight in-depth and unique stories. Youth were surprisingly comfortable in speaking about the negative and positive experiences in their lives, along with mistakes they have made, lessons learned, and accomplishments. These stories can contribute on multiple levels. With a general community psychology orientation to this research, I incorporated aspects that encompass the individual, community, and broader society.

On the individual level, I focused on the identity development of Chinese immigrant youth, based on the assumptions that developing a positive identity can contribute to a person's overall well-being. The participants spoke about their identities in various forms, however, it was most prominent that identity for the youth in this age group surrounded their career plans and/or future goals. Youth also spoke about their identity in Christ and how relocating and having to adjust to a new environment impacts the process of identity development.

At the community level, I worked with Christian churches to solicit their support for this research and to build relationships that would ensure a participatory project. Faith-based organizations are often a strong presence in their communities and hold the trust of their congregations. Thus, it might be effective to develop and implement preventative strategies and/or advocate for issues that concern their

community. In this project, youth attributed their spiritual development and understanding to their fellowships on campus, whereas attending church was more of a weekly ritual that is part and parcel of being Christian. Based on the stories of these participants, churches need to develop ways to actively engage Chinese immigrant youth such that they are able to connect meaningfully to the church leaders and congregation. Youth also spoke about their appreciation for diversity and their desire to integrate into their new community, but the challenges that stand in their way. Organizations have the capacity to facilitate immigrants in maintaining a balance between their ethnic culture and their national culture. As youth hinted in their stories, collaborating with diverse churches or hiring diverse church leaders helps to break down barriers between cultural groups and encourage cross-cultural relations.

This research can also be useful for other community agencies or government policies that address immigrant settlement and integration. It provides a deeper understanding of the role that faith plays in the lives of youth and how it is part of identity formation. Furthermore, this information can be used for future exploration of how to facilitate the integration and positive identity development for Chinese immigrant youth through faith. Already, this small study has unravelled some of the complexities within the Chinese community and what some of the pressures and challenges are for this group. For communities to increase cultural awareness and agencies to be culturally competent, it is important to understand the intricacies of a specific culture and the subgroups within it. The well-being of Chinese immigrant youth and their capacity to meaningfully contribute to their communities lies in the hands of the immigrants and the host culture. The qualitative approach was chosen for

this specific purpose, to develop a deeper understanding of Chinese immigrant youth, Christianity in their lives, and identities.

In another light, this study also enabled Chinese immigrants to speak about their experiences and have them acknowledged as valuable. My sense from meeting with these youth and other key figures in their lives was that asking these questions was interesting and useful for their community. Despite the fact that this project is coming to an end, I will encourage participants and others who have been involved in this research to pursue any action steps they may want to take. Summarized versions of this report will be given to churches, agencies, leaders, and participants who were involved. It is my hope that these individuals will discuss these issues with their respective campus fellowships and peer groups, to generate discussion and ideas about promoting cultural understanding and full integration of newcomers.

## Appendix A

### The Impact of Christian Faith on the Acculturation and Identity Development of Chinese Immigrant Youth

#### Interview Preparation Guide

Dear Participant,

Thanks for your willingness to participate in an interview. Your experience and your stories will be valuable for my research and I hope that it will also engage other youth in their community. First, I would like to give you a bit of background to the research and of myself, as the researcher.

As a psychology student, I have always been interested in youth and the overall well-being of children. In particular, I am interested in the social factors that influence children, their development, and identity. As an immigrant to Canada myself, I noticed that my friends who were born in Canada perceived things differently and were treated differently by various people. As I grew older, I also noticed that other immigrants seemed to fit in differently than one another. Even my sister and I acculturated differently.

One of the first social groups that my family joined was a church, introduced to us by a friend of ours. I had the opportunity to make friends at school and other extracurricular activities, however this was more difficult for my parents, especially my mother who stayed at home. Thus, their social life revolved around friends they met at the church. The church congregation proved to be more than their social support, but also their connection to various resources. The woman who played the piano at the church became my piano teacher for the next 8 years and made it possible for my family to afford piano lessons. As I grew up and entered high school, my family became busier and we stopped going to church. It was in high school when I started wondering about other religions and before long, I was much too preoccupied with living to participate in anything spiritual. However, I noticed that some of my peers were very involved with their church youth groups and other faith-based activities, making me wonder what it was that kept them engaged.

When I entered university, my curiosity about religion resurfaced and it became one of my majors in university in addition to psychology. The two disciplines were almost polar opposites in that psychology was science-based and religion was humanities-based. They were presented to me as opposites and it was not until I started taking community psychology where I realized the infusion of spirituality and faith was possible and necessary if we are to truly understand human experience. At the same time, my areas of interest in psychology became focused on preventing the maltreatment of children and promotion family well-being. My undergraduate thesis entailed interviewing youth in early adolescence who had participated in a community prevention initiative called *Better Beginnings Better Futures*. I also used a

narrative approach to explore their identity development and I am following through with this methodology in the current project, however I am now interested in the impact of faith and identity development in the later years of adolescence.

My experience in the community agencies and training in community psychology has led me to believe that collaboration throughout the community will yield the most effective and sustainable solutions for any issue. I see faith-based agencies as some of the most influential and important agencies that are often neglected in efforts of youth work, prevention, and promotion of health. Furthermore, there has been a lack of research in understanding the role of faith, especially within the adolescent ages. The influence of religion plays a large role in the development of person identity and ethnic identity for immigrants. I chose to focus on Chinese youth because that is my background and I am hoping some of these stories will resonate with me. Thus, my research focuses on understanding the role of faith in the lives of youth, with hopes that it will contribute and stimulate interest in this area and ultimately, be able to provide insights for the engagement of faith-based organizations in health promotion.

### Warm-Up

If you were an animal, what would you be and why?

### Visualization Exercise

The first exercise is a visualization activity and should take between 10 - 20 minutes. It is recommended that you set aside some time alone in a quiet place. Take a few deep breaths, and take yourself back to your home, where you were raised.

Remember your feelings when you found out you were going to immigrate to Canada. Think about how you felt as you were making plans for the move, packing your things, saying goodbye to friends and/or family.

Now, think about your arrival in Canada. What were your feelings as you stepped off the airplane? What were some of your first impressions as you looked around you? Was there a person greeting you at the airport? What were their reactions? Were you on your own?

Remember your first home was, moving into it, and settling into your neighbourhood.

Remember the first friend you made.

Remember your first day at school or work.

Imagine a time when you had to overcome a challenge. What were your feelings when you encountered the challenge? How did you feel after you had overcome it?

Imagine a time when you were surprised since your arrival to Canada.

Think of a time when you have engaged in a spiritual activity, routine, or ritual? How did you feel? What makes it different from other activities that you participate in?

Visualize the changes that have taken place in the time since you moved to Canada, changes in your surroundings, changes in yourself?

Imagine your life 10 years from now. What do you see? What kind of person are you? What do you do? Picture the people around you. Picture the surroundings around you. Are you different or similar?

### Your Narrative

Please take some time to construct your experience of faith, immigration, and how you

have become the person you are today into a story. A story is defined as an experience or series of events constructed in a manner such that it is placed sequentially along a timeline.

How would you describe yourself at the beginning of your story? How would you describe yourself at the end of your story? Is the description of yourself different from the beginning and how?

If you were to envision your story as a journey, where do you see yourself presently in your journey?

### Questions for Reflection

Below are a list of questions that you can take some time to reflect upon prior to the interview. The interview will be an informal conversation and will not necessarily include or follow these questions in order. These questions are not exhaustive and if you have any other details to add, please feel free to speak about them in the interview. These questions are not intended to structure your story, please feel free to omit any questions that you feel are irrelevant and add other details that are more important to your story. The questions are not meant to be restrictive; please note that I am interested in your narrative so please feel free to construct your story in the way you feel it is best told. The interview will be between 1.5 – 2 hours. You may be asked to elaborate on certain points or parts of your story.

1. Please tell me about yourself. (school, friends, family, hobbies, etc.)
2. How does being Christian affect who you are?
3. Tell me about where you immigrated from or where you were raised. (country/city, describe culture, friends, family, school, activities, etc.)
4. When did you immigrate to Canada and why?
5. What are your values?



6. What experiences have made you who you are today? Please describe in detail.
7. Do you identify with being Chinese or Canadian or both equally? How? (friends you associate with, cultural practices, language, values, traditions, principles. etc.) Why do you think this is? What other groups and/or communities do you identify with?
8. What spiritual activities were you involved in prior to immigration? How important was it to you?
9. What does it mean to be Christian for you?
10. How do you think your spiritual engagement (church, fellowship, etc.) has influenced your immigration to Canada?
11. What were your expectations of Canada?
12. How did you get involved with Christianity?
13. Please describe some of the struggles or challenges with your move to Canada? How did you overcome them? How did you meet these challenges?
14. How do you think other people would describe you?
15. Have you changed since you have immigrated to Canada? Please describe.
16. What are some of positive memories about your immigration here?
17. Please describe any spiritual experiences that have had an impact on your identity.
18. What were your first impressions of Canada? Did these meet your expectations?
19. What is your motivation behind participating in religious activities?
20. Describe the role that Christianity has played in your immigration and resettlement here in Canada; how has this influenced who you are today?
21. How well do you think you fit into Canadian society? What factors have helped and what has not?

If you have any questions or concerns prior to the interview, please feel free to contact Lynn Liao, [lynnskee81@yahoo.ca](mailto:lynnskee81@yahoo.ca) or 519-729-6826. Thanks for your willingness to participate in this research. There will be an informed consent form that you will need to sign. Also, if you feel more comfortable with a translator, please contact Lynn to arrange this. You may bring your own translator or one will be provided for you. All translators will need to sign an oath of confidentiality.

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