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SPIRITUALITY AND AGEING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIOSITY OF  
CHINESE OLDER PERSONS IN HONG KONG

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LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2010

SPIRITUALITY AND AGEING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIOSITY OF  
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by  
WONG Yuk Ha

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## ABSTRACT

### Spirituality and Ageing: A Qualitative Study of Religiosity of Chinese Older Persons in Hong Kong

by

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Master of Philosophy

The life expectancy of Chinese people in Hong Kong is increasing and is amongst the longest in the world. However, many people, especially older persons may experience chronic ill-health and, less detectable, many may also be experiencing alienation, loneliness, meaninglessness and fear of death. Spirituality and spiritual care, which focus on the healing of the soul and quest for meaning, are important to many people as they age and face the prospect of death, and therefore they may have existential anxieties. A holistic healthcare approach, which views humans as bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings, stresses the importance of spirituality to people's health and the well-being. However, there is a lack of consensus on the definition/conceptualisation of spirituality in the social gerontology literature. Further, many concepts such as spirituality and religiosity (one important channel of spiritual experiences) may be unclear or ambiguous. Relatively few international studies focus on ageing, spirituality and religiosity in gerontology and very few have been conducted in Hong Kong. This study therefore investigates the concept of spirituality in Hong Kong, in a Chinese context, and explores spiritual experiences and histories among older persons. It attempts to examine how religiosity may inspire spirituality.

This research was based on triangulation of various data sources including a wide review of the academic and professional literature, interviews with key informants (social work, academic and religious experts), and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative data are drawn from three focus group

discussions involving three categories, the *San Jiao* triad, Christianity, and a non-religious group, with a total of sixteen participants; and three individual interviews. The focus group respondents were recruited from a Christian church and a Buddhist elderly home.

This research yielded a number of findings. The focus group discussions corroborate suggestions in the literature that spirituality is interpreted differently by individuals, and it does not only apply to religious persons but to every individual. Spirituality can be related to religion, selfless service, the quality of personhood and the universe; For older persons, a “fractured” relationship with their family and others is often a core factor causing spiritual distress that the individual is unable to invest life with meaning; and religiosity (belief in a god, prayer, reciting religious scriptures, etc.) may inspire different dimensions of spirituality among older persons. The main conclusions drawn from this research were that spirituality is important to older persons regardless of their religious affiliations; it could cater to spiritual needs and experiences among older persons who can help to address spiritual distress throughout the spiritual history. Further, spiritual assessment is central to addressing spiritual needs and spiritual tasks associated with ageing, hence contributing to the need for spiritual care and spiritual narrative to older persons. This dissertation recommends that the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health should emphasize the spiritual dimension. Finally, the dissertation highlights the spiritual concerns in elderly services and recommends caregivers recognize spirituality and provide spiritual care to older persons.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

---

WONG Yuk Ha  
16 September 2010

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

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AMONG CHINESE OLDER PERSONS IN HONG KONG

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## **ABBREVIATION**

FGs	Focus Groups
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Demographically, Hong Kong is one of most rapidly ageing societies in the world. The proportion of older persons in Hong Kong is steadily increasing and is estimated to be one-third of the total population by 2033 (UN Population Division, 2002). Owing to advanced medical technology and pharmaceutical research, the life expectancy of people is lengthening. However, although lifestyle changes may help avoid non-communicable diseases, there is still no cure for many of them which remain expensive to treat and are long lasting. In addition, there is no cure for the process of ageing and death. More people than ever before are suffering from incurable chronic conditions and disabilities.

#### **1.1.1 Ageing: a Global Trend**

There has been a global trend of ageing in almost every country of the world owing to longer life expectancy and declining fertility rates over recent decades. The use of new technologies, medical advances and better social conditions mean that people in the world can not only survive to old age, but they also tend to live longer than before. According to *World population of Aging 1950-2050*, over the next 50 years, global life expectancy at age 60 is expected to increase from 18.8 years in 2000-2005 to 22.2 years in 2045-2050 (UN Population Division, 2002). In Hong Kong, the life expectancy is projected to reach 90 by 2050.

A major cause of demographical ageing is decreasing fertility rates along with lengthening life expectancy; indeed, fertility decline is the primary determinant of an ageing population structure. “The total fertility rate decreased globally by almost

half, from 5.0 to 2.7 children per woman and it is expected to drop to the replacement level of 2.1 by 2050” (UN Population Division, 2002).

In addition, non-communicable diseases, which can be expensive to treat and are long lasting, cannot be cured easily and cause the increase of disability, are becoming more prevalent. More resources may be needed in order to provide a better life for older persons.

### **1.1.2 Ageing: in Hong Kong**

#### *The Proportion of Older Persons*

Hong Kong’s population is ageing dramatically since the 1970s. Different reports from the HK Census and Statistics Department (2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2009a) highlighted the ageing trend in Hong Kong. From *Hong Kong 2006 Population By-census Thematic Report Older Persons*, the ageing trend is shown by reviewing previous population data of older persons. The proportion of older persons aged 65 and over, in the total population has risen continuously from 1950 to 2006. Over the past 45 years, the percentage of 65 years old and above increased from 2.8% in 1961 to 12.4% in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department, 2008a). People born in the 1960s will become older persons during the period 2010-2020 onwards. It is therefore projected that the ageing trend of the population will continue. In addition, the percentage of older persons in the total population is predicted to increase significantly over the next two decades.

Other recent reports also confirm the ageing trend locally. At the end of 2009, the population of older persons aged above 65 was 13% (0.91 million) of the total population in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2009a). It is estimated

that in 2016 and 2033, the percentages will increase to 14% and 27% respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2006).

Moreover, Hong Kong's older persons are living much longer than before. The proportion of the "oldest old" aged 80 and over rose continually over the last decade. It increased from 17.4% in 1996 and 19.6 in 2001 to 23.9% in 2006 among the older persons (Census and Statistics Department, 2008a). At the same time, the data provided in the Elderly Services of Hong Kong stated that in 2005, the population of older persons aged 75 or above was around 0.36 million, about 43% of the elderly population. In 2011, the number will increase to 420,000, which is estimated to be 48% of the elderly population (HKCSS, 2007).

#### *Life Expectancy at Birth*

With improved access to medical technology and an improved standard of living, life expectancy at birth is increasing in Hong Kong. In 2009 the life expectancy at birth was 79.8 years for males and 86.1 years for females (Census and Statistics Department, 2009a). In 2033, the life expectancy at birth for males and females are expected to increase to 82.5 and 88 respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2006; 2007a). In comparison with eleven selected economies including Singapore, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, France, UK, Germany and USA, in 2006 Hong Kong males had the longest life expectancy and Hong Kong females the second longest (Census and Statistics Department, 2007b).

### **1.1.3 The Emergence of Chronic Conditions and Disabilities**

#### *Disabilities*

Although many people now live longer and with fewer contagious diseases, there is still no cure for many non-communicable diseases, though they can be managed and avoided. More people, especially the older persons, are suffering from various aspects of chronic conditions and disabilities. According to the HK Census and Statistics Department's (2008b) *Special Topics Report No.48*, targeting persons with disabilities and chronic diseases, there was 68.5% of disabled persons aged 60 and over in 2006-2007. Additionally, the prevalence rate of disability was higher for older person. In the disability groups of having 'restriction in body movement', 'seeing difficulty' and 'hearing difficulty', at least 75 % of disabled persons among the group were aged 60 and above.

#### *Chronic Diseases*

Moreover, for chronic conditions, in Hong Kong in 2006-2007, there were about 1.15 million people (about 16% of the total population) suffering from chronic diseases. Among them, about 59% were aged 60 and above. It appeared that the prevailing rate of chronic diseases rose with age. The prevalence of chronic diseases for persons aged 60 and above was 59%, significantly higher than that of the other age groups (Census and Statistic Departments, 2008b). Another thematic report from the HK Census and Statistics Department indicates an even higher chronic disease prevalence rate among older persons. In 2008, among all older persons in Hong Kong, 70.4% had chronic diseases (Census and Statistics Department, 2009b). The above statistics indicate that people may indeed be living longer but perhaps experiencing a greater level of suffering owing to chronic diseases and disabilities.

## *Suicide*

More importantly, many of them may be suffering without meaning and have a sense of hopelessness, loneliness, meaninglessness and a fear of death. According to the *Update on Support for Vulnerable Elders* from the Elderly Commission in Hong Kong (2004), the suicide rate of older persons (26.7 %) was higher than the suicide rate of the total population (16.4%). Moreover, its rate was significantly higher than that of the other age groups. The leading factors in suicide among older persons were evaluated and included illnesses, ageing, being classified as mentally ill, having bad relationships with family members, having a bad relationship with a spouse and being disabled. Among these factors, having illnesses was the most significant factor associated with suicide of older persons (Elderly Commission, 2004).

In short, people are apparently living longer than before. At the same time, many are suffering from chronic conditions and disabilities as they are age. Frankl (1984) in *Man's Search for Meaning* stressed that, "Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning". It may be a concluding statement for the suicide cases among older persons in Hong Kong.

### **1.2 The Research Focus**

Based on the literature, it appears that spirituality may become increasingly significant as people grow older. It has significant effects on the later life of older persons. As religion is also one of the important channels for spiritual experiences, it is important to conduct research on spirituality and examine religiosity among Chinese older persons in Hong Kong. Baker and Nussbaum (1997) underlined the importance of spirituality in old age, "Many older adults experience a strong connection between their religious faith and a sense of spirituality". Puchalski (2002)

also highlighted that all persons are seeking meaning a purpose in life. In addition, when one is dying and facing death, this search may be intensified.

However, “the study of spirituality in gerontology is still in its infancy” (Moberg, 2008, p.114). At present, many of the studies are mainly exploratory in nature. Moberg (1961, 1979, 2008), who is considered the earliest gerontologist studying spirituality in later life, in his recent article “Spirituality and Aging: Research and Implications”, suggests that there are only a few studies on spirituality among older persons in Asian countries. Most of the current research studies are from western countries, such as the USA and in Europe, and the majority focuses on Christianity. There is little research on the study of non-Christian religions. Moreover, there is a lack of consensus in the importance and the definition of spirituality owing to the difference of cultures and religions (Moberg, 2008).

On the other hand, religion as a phenomenon and as an institution is possibly as old as humanity itself. In Chinese history, religion has been acknowledged to have existed since the time of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (Kwong, 2000). According to David (1998), religion is one compensating resource to which everyone has access when facing “the problem of helplessness and loss of control in almost every culture”. Religion has been a popular topic for researchers studying different fields of the society nationally, locally or internationally. As it is believed that religion has an important effect on society, international researchers have tried to study extensively the relationship of religion to philosophy, arts, culture, community, politics, ecology, education, social ethics, gender, fertility, human right, literature, and the mass media.

Indeed, reviewing the research conducted to date on religion and other subject fields, it seems there is a relatively limited amount of research on religion and older persons worldwide. The majority of studies appear to focus only on the health aspect of ageing. In addition, fewer studies focus on ageing, spirituality and religiosity compared with other topics in gerontology, both internationally and locally in Hong Kong. Indeed, the concept of religiosity and spirituality are used interchangeably in much of the research undertaken in the different fields. There is a lack of consensus on the definitions or conceptualisation of spirituality among most gerontological literature. Further, the relationship between spirituality and religiosity, which is an important channel of spiritual experience, is unclear and ambiguous.

Critical to the academic value and logic of the research in this study is an understanding of the concepts of spirituality among older persons of Hong Kong within a Chinese context. This includes the spiritual needs and histories, the ways in which religiosity inspires spirituality of older persons, and the recommendations which can be made to help improve existing elderly services in Hong Kong. Understanding how Chinese religiosity might inspire spirituality, and exploring the spiritual needs among Chinese older persons is an area worthy of study and one that could contribute considerably to existing knowledge in the field of gerontology. The importance of research in this field of spirituality in the Chinese context becomes ever more apparent when other researchers note and mourn the lack of research in this area (Moberg, 2008; Shek, 2010).

A major focus of this research will therefore concentrate on the concepts and the descriptors of the spirituality of Chinese older persons, and the spiritual needs related to three major religious groups including a non-religious group, Christianity and the



*San Jiao* triad, ‘三教’, based on a three-fold beliefs in Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The study will investigate what is spirituality and what are the definitions of spirituality to older persons? In a Chinese context, what are the most important things to older persons? What are the spiritual needs of Chinese older persons? What are the sources of love, hope, meaning, connection, strength, comfort and peace among Chinese older persons? To gain a deeper understanding of these issues related to spirituality, a triangulation of data collection will need to be practiced including a wide review of the academic and professional literature to ascertain current research findings on spirituality and its relationship with religiosity; interviews with key informants including social work, academic and religious experts, and the collection and analysis of qualitative data on spirituality of Chinese older persons.

In order to gain a meaningful picture on how Chinese older persons’ spirituality may be inspired by religiosity, it is important to place spirituality issues in the context of Chinese religions. Thus Chapter 3 will examine Chinese religions and their religious characteristics in Hong Kong. Similarly, the qualitative data concentrates on the Chinese context. However, it will examine both Western and Chinese religious groups in Hong Kong to place the spirituality of older persons in a wider context.

#### *Operational Definition: Spirituality and Religiosity*

In order to carry out this research, it is necessary first to define two key concepts, ‘spirituality’ and ‘religiosity’.

‘Spirituality’ is complex and multi-dimensional. There is little consensus on the definition of this term to be found in the review of literature detailed in Chapter 2 (Moberg, 1979; 2008; Kwan, 2005; McSherry, 2006; Shek, 2010). This research will therefore adopt a broad definition which consists of four main themes stressing the essence of human beings, the meaning of life, existential values and the connection with a higher power/God, with others and with the universe. ‘Spirituality’ also regards the process of questing existential values and a journey of finding life meaning. A further discussion on the concept of “spirituality” will be presented in sub-section 2.3 of Chapter 2, in the review of the literature.

‘Religiosity’ has close connections with the terms ‘religion’ and ‘religiousness’. It is related to the ‘practice’ and the ‘content’ of religion, referring to “the knowledge, belief, feelings and practices of persons from religion” (Byrne, 1985). The concept and its relationship with ‘spirituality’ will also be further discussed in sub-section 2.4 of Chapter 2.

### **1.3 Overall Aim of the Research and Research Objectives**

The overall aim of this research is to advance an understanding of Chinese older persons’ spirituality in the context of Chinese community. However, in order to understand spirituality issues, it is necessary to gain an insight into the definition and the conceptualisation of older persons’ spirituality in a Chinese context, and to explore the spiritual experiences and spiritual needs among them. It would be difficult to comprehend how religiosity inspires older persons’ spirituality without knowing the major religions and its religious characteristics in Hong Kong. Given the confusion within literature between the concept of spirituality and religiosity, it is all the more important to try and clarify the relationships between spirituality and

religiosity. Three main research methods will be explored to facilitate this study: an in-depth review of professional and academic literature; the interviews from key informants' and the collection and analysis of qualitative data as detailed in Chapter 4, Research Design and Methodology.

Specifically within the context of gerontology, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Investigate the definitions and conceptualisations of Chinese older persons' spirituality in Hong Kong, in a Chinese context

*Research Question 1: What is spirituality to older persons in Hong Kong?*

2. Explore spiritual experiences and needs among Chinese older persons

*Research Question 2: What are the spiritual needs for older persons in Hong Kong?*

3. Examine how religiosity may inspire Chinese older persons' spirituality

*Research Question 3: How may religiosity inspire spirituality in Chinese older persons?*

4. Formulate recommendations on spirituality issues

*Research Question 4: What are the implications from exploring the spiritual dimension of older persons?*

This research will contribute to the development of the discipline of gerontology and specifically, within spirituality in a number of important ways: firstly, by providing descriptors of spirituality of Chinese older persons; secondly, by

identifying the spiritual needs among Chinese older persons; thirdly, by critically examining Chinese older persons' spirituality in the three major religious groups (non-religious, Christianity and the *San Jiao* triad) in Hong Kong; and fourthly, by highlighting the spiritual concerns in providing elderly services and promoting spiritual care in elderly services. A rich picture of spirituality can emerge, allowing a meaningful comparison among religions in Hong Kong, from which an improved understanding of spirituality issues in gerontology can be derived.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, 'A Review of the Literature', examines existing literature beginning with an investigation of what is meant by the term "spirituality".

## **Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review provides a framework for exploring spirituality, including the main issue surrounding the descriptors of spirituality, and guidelines that are available to assist in assessing the spiritual dimension of human beings. The chapter starts with reviews of existing literature on the social significance of the research topic. This is related to the increasing attention paid to spirituality and spiritual care raised in different fields and the significance of spirituality to health in various empirical research studies. The concepts of spirituality among older persons and their spiritual concerns will be the main parameters of the study.

#### *Preview of Themes and Issues Addressed in Chapter 2*

The first objective of the review to be addressed is the conceptualisation of spirituality. The review shows the concepts of spirituality with reference to three popular models and theories: Frankl's Logotherapy, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development, and the definitions of the term 'spirituality' from different empirical research studies. Other terms related to spirituality will also be introduced. This section is named 'The Concepts of Spirituality'.

This review also examines the relationship between spirituality and religiosity owing to the confusing and ambiguous usage of the two terms among research studies. This section is entitled 'Spirituality and Religiosity'. The section, 'The Conceptual Frameworks of Spirituality', explores the conceptual framework of spirituality from Stroll, MacKinlay, McSherry and White for a better understanding of the components of the spiritual dimension of human beings.

The second theme addressed relates to the guidelines and tools for assessing spiritual needs. This section is called ‘The Guidelines and Tools to Assess Spirituality’. Some quantitative scales and qualitative tools from scholars and health professionals, such as Stoll, MacKinlay, White, and McSherry, will be introduced.

By exploring the above areas of academic literature, a significant contribution will be made. The concepts and descriptors of spirituality, together with the related terminology, will be examined. Similarly, the relationships between spirituality and religiosity will be evaluated. Importantly, the conceptual framework and guidelines assisting in exploration and assessment of spiritual needs will be explored. In effect, the value of studying the aforementioned area of literature will be to provide a meaningful discussion and analysis of spirituality in a structured way, to facilitate a critical understanding as well as provide a clear background for spirituality among Chinese older persons in Hong Kong.

At the end of this major section, it is intended that the reader will be better informed on the critical understanding of key issues in these areas. A clear focus and justification for qualitative research in the field of spirituality among Chinese older persons in Hong Kong will be provided. In the first instance, the starting section is to investigate what the term ‘spirituality’ means. Additionally, its relationship with the term ‘religiosity’, which is often used interchangeably with ‘spirituality’, will be explored to help place the spiritual dimension of older persons in context.

## 2.2 Social Significance of the Topic

Spirituality and spiritual care, which focus on the healing of the soul, are important to people's health and well-being. In 1999, there was a proposed amendment to the definition of health in the 52nd World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization. It suggested that the revised definition of health should emphasise its dynamic and spiritual aspects:

*“Health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”* (Kwan, 2005, p. 83).

A holistic healthcare approach, which views humans as ‘bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings’, stresses the importance of spirituality to the health and the well-beings human beings (Frankl, 1984; Wong, 2005; White, 2006):

*“In 1990, the World Health Organization’s expert committee on palliative care noted the need for spirituality to be recognized as an essential element of the holistic approach”* (White, 2006, p. 87)

### *Increasing Attention to Spirituality in Different Academic Fields*

The study of spirituality has been neglected for many years. Yet over the last two decades, there is an increasing attention to the topic of spirituality among scholars. There are conferences on spirituality. For example, “The 2011 International Conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society” is to be held in the University of Illinois Research Park in Feb 2011 (Religion In Society, 2010). There are also many authors from different fields including nurses, gerontologists, psychologists, and

other health professionals who have stated the need for attentiveness to spirituality and the spiritual concerns of human beings (Byrne, 1985; Burkhardt, 1989; Colliton, 1981; Eggers, 2003; Ellison, 1983; Frankl, 1984; Gerson, 1998; Kwan, 2005; Mattes, 2005; Moberg, 1979, 2008; Wong, 2005; White, 2006). For example, Bracki highlighted the spiritual dimension of health in mental health treatment. If we ignore the spiritual component of health, mental health professionals fail to “focus on the whole person, missing much strength for coping with adversity and loss, as well as a support system important enough to help enhance the quality of life” (Bracki et al., 1990).

In the field of social gerontology, spirituality is becoming a relatively new theme for research. The spiritual dimension of older persons is attracting attention in gerontology journals. For example, since 2006 various academic journals have been re-titled: *The Journal of Religious Gerontology* has been retitled to the *Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Ageing*; and the *Journal of Religion & Psychological Research* has been retitled to the *Journal of Spirituality & Paranormal Studies*. Moreover, there are increasing concerns with spirituality in Hong Kong. For instance, the Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital has established the Nethersole Institute of Continuing Holistic Health Education for promoting holistic health education and spiritual care. There were interdisciplinary conferences on Spirituality and Religion held in 2004 and 2006 for promoting spirituality to the public.

#### *The Importance of Spirituality to Health*

There is an increasing number of studies highlighting the significant effects of spirituality to older persons including physical health, mental health, well-being, and so on. For example, from the White House Paper in 1995, spirituality was agreed to



be one method of treatment to deal with depression in older persons in White House Conference of Ageing (Saltz, 1997). According to Moberg (1962; 1979; 2008), who may be considered the earliest gerontologist studying the spirituality of older persons, there is an increasing number of gerontology research showing the positive relationship of spirituality and the wellness of older persons, including physical health (Koenig, 1986; 1995; 1997; Koenig et al., 2001), psychological health (Morse and Wisocki, 1987; Koenig, 1997), coping with depression (Saltz, 1997; Nelson, 1990), well-being (Hill, 2002; Levin and Chatters, 1998), and longevity (Strawbridge, 2005).

In summary, spirituality, which has previously often been neglected and sometimes apparently misunderstood, is increasingly now seen as a key to attaining holistic health. Its importance to health is becoming widely recognised in different fields. For these reasons, this study is socially significant as it will provide further knowledge regarding how Chinese older persons in Hong Kong define spirituality, what spiritual needs they have, and how religiosity inspires their spiritual dimension of health.

### **2.3 The Concept of Spirituality**

David O. Moberg (2008), one of the earliest gerontologists studying spirituality, stated, “Spirituality is complex, overlaps with religion, infuses all human life, and therefore is difficult to study” (Moberg, 2008, p.95). He concluded that spirituality is far more complex than most other topics, and this has also been a factor in hindering its exploration. MacKinlay (2006) shared a similar conclusion and further explained that “perhaps this is because both the [spiritual] need and the fulfilment of the

[spiritual] need are often not visible” (MacKinlay, 2006, p.21). This section begins with the question: What is spirituality?

### **2.3.1 Models and Theories Related to Spirituality**

To begin with, from the review of the literature, the concept of spirituality is connected to three important models or theories contributing to critical understandings on human beings. They are Frankl’s Logotherapy, Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

#### **2.3.1.1 Frankl’s Logotherapy**

A holistic health approach views humans as unified yet dynamic and multi-dimensional beings (Frankl, 1984; White, 2006; Wong, 2005). It includes the physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions.

Frankl (1984), who many consider as the ‘founder’ of holistic health, stressed the importance of compassionate and spiritual care. He discovered the power of Logotherapy which refers to “healing through meaning”. In his meaning-centred therapy, he maintained that “healing needs to occur at the spiritual level and medical practice must address existential questions of suffering and death” (Frankl, 1984). This therapy was used to help prisoners in Nazi death camps. In Logotherapy, human beings are viewed in a holistic way, “unified and yet multi-dimensional”. This includes the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions. Through having a balanced development of the four dimensions, holistic health can be achieved.

Wong (2005) schematized Frankl's Logotherapy into three dimensions, body-mind- spirit (Fig. 2.1) for the purpose of analysis:

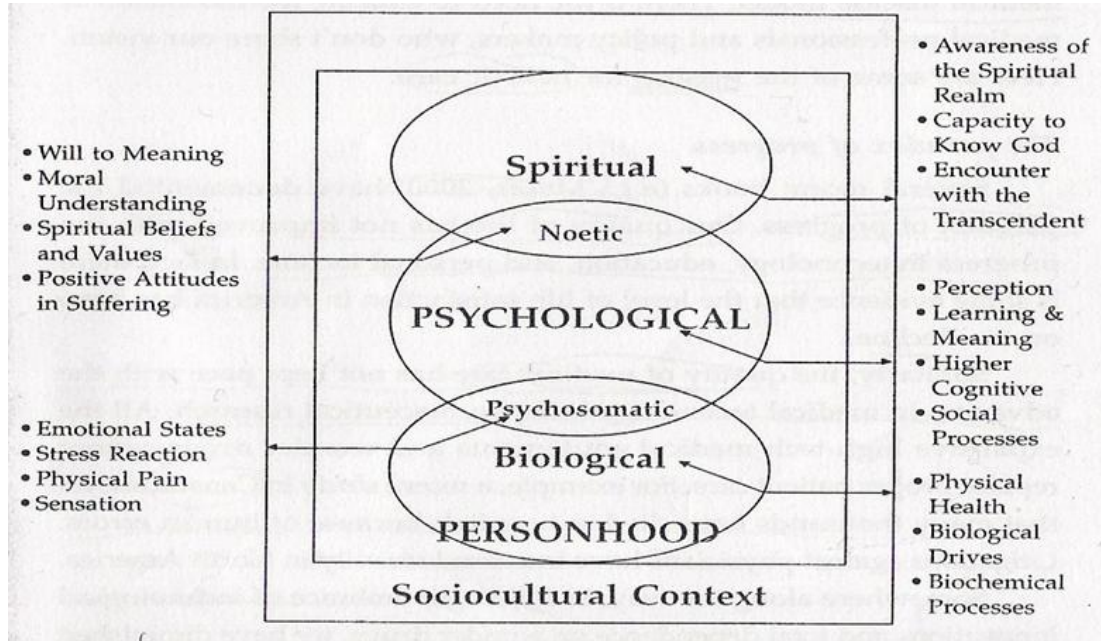


Figure 2.1 Diagram schematized Frankl's logotherapy in three dimensions, body-mind-spirit (Source: Wong, 2005, p. 7)

More recently, White (2006) illustrated Frankl's four dimensions of human beings as the "four elements". These four elements are intimately integrated and contribute to overall health. In this holistic approach, a "state of dynamic harmony" among the four elements is stressed. White further explained that all physical processes occurring within the human body are named the body or the physical element. This is the most easily to recognise. The mind or psychological element includes the intellectual and emotional processes forming personality and mental ability. Our thoughts and feelings would affect health. Regarding the social element, it is believed that a shared culture would affect the individual's health. These three

elements obviously affect health, and the fourth element relating to the spiritual is also becoming increasingly recognised by scholars and health professionals as one of the elements within a human being. It refers to the “hope, connection and meaning” of a person (White, 2006). White also used an example of breathing to illustrate the dynamics of the four elements of health:

*“Physical disease may cause difficulty in breathing, which is exacerbated by social circumstances as well as feeling of anxiety; but the difficulty experience will also be affected...by the individual sense of hope or awareness of support ...how much worse difficulty in breathing will feel if there is no hope for treatment...”* (White, 2006, p. 26)

To achieve holistic health, all dimensions of health need to be clearly understood. It is more likely that the physical, psychological and social dimensions are recognised easily. However the spiritual dimension, which is often ignored and misunderstood, seems less likely to be easily recognised. Hence, Frankl (1984) compassed “spirituality and personal meaning as essential to medicine ministry”. He stated that if we ignore the spiritual dimension, holistic health cannot be achieved. A greater understanding on spirituality is a key to holistic health (Frankl, 1984; White, 2006).

### ***2.3.1.2 Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs***

Yount (2009), in his paper “Transcendence and Ageing: The Secular Insights of Erikson and Maslow”, placed emphasis on the spiritual dimension of older persons

by referring to the views of two leading secular theorists, Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow (Yount, 2009, p. 75), concerning end-of-life issues:

### Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development

Erikson's theory, which provides a chronological view of how we develop as persons, suggests that human personality grows in a series of stages across a typical lifespan. There are eight stages starting from stage of infancy to early childhood, then covering pre-school, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and ending in old age or maturity. Human personality "is affected by the interaction between an individual and others in his or her environment, beginning with the mother, and then proceeding to father, siblings, family, friends, and community" (Yount, 1996, p. 48; 2009, p. 75). In each stage, there is a psycho-crisis of development. The personality of a person can grow to next stage if the crisis is solved positively otherwise a deep-seated personal problem will be caused (Hamachek, 1990, p. 44, cited in Yount, 2009).

The final stage of Erikson's original theory is formed in the eighth stage, the stage of maturity or old age. Older persons reflect on their lives as they are faced with the prospect of death. The positive resolution in this stage is integrity referring to a sense of wholeness and a sense of dignity. It includes:

*"The feeling of well-being, a satisfaction with life, an acceptance of what they have done and who they are, including failures and limitations"*

(Yount, 2009, p. 79)

On the other hand, if the psycho-crisis is not solved, despair will be the negative resolution and the persons will have numerous regrets:

*“Those who cannot resolve this stage appropriately look back at life in self-contempt and desperation. They regret the things still undone and worry that time is running out. They harbour bitterness in the shortness of life and the fact that they cannot start over”* (Yount, 2009, p. 75)

#### *Erikson's Ninth Stage: Gerotranscendence*

Yet it appears that the personality development does not end at the eighth stage. Yount (2009) pointed out there is a ninth stage in Erikson's theory called Gerotranscendence (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). He further explained that Erikson's wife, J. Erikson, revised *The Life Cycle Completed* in 1997. She added a new stage to Erikson's original “Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development” with reference to Lars Tornstam's (1989) ideas of “gerotranscendence”, which refers to “a shift in meta-perspective, from a material and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction” (Yount, 2009, p. 81). In this stage, after achieving ego-integrity, the personal strength of older persons will be challenged by the declining abilities of both their physical and mental health. If older persons can solve this crisis, positive outcomes of the feeling of worth and sense of peace and harmony will result:

*“A successful outcome of this challenge will make it possible to live one's final years to the fullest; in harmony with one's past life and without fear of death”* (Yount, 2009, p. 81).

In short, the positive outcomes of the ninth stage of Erikson's theory unintentionally point out the spiritual dimension of older persons. As older persons grow older and face the decline of physical and mental abilities, they have spiritual concerns on self-worth, sense of peace and harmony in their relationships with others and the environment. These spiritual concerns will be further discussed in the following section, the Conceptual frameworks of Spirituality.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow is considered by many to be one of the founders of humanistic psychology. He developed the now well-known Hierarchy of Needs, which consists of seven levels, to explain how humans move towards fulfilment of self-actualization (Yount, 2009, p. 83). In this theory, there are seven levels of needs starting from deficiency needs to growth needs. For deficiency needs, they include survival, safety, belonging and love, and self-esteem. For growth needs, which expand as people grow old, they include knowing and understanding, aesthetic appreciation, and self-actualization (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004, p. 354, cited in Yount, 2009). If a level of need is met, the person will move to the next level of needs. The needs of people continually move to next level until the level of self-actualisation is achieved. Maslow termed the seventh level as 'peak experience' and it is characterised as:

*"The self-actualized person include such things as acceptance of self and others, spontaneity, openness, democratic relations with others, creativity, positive humour, and independence... appreciate natural events, such as a sunrise, more intensely than others"* (Yount, 2009, p. 83)

### *Maslow's Eighth Level: Transcendent or Spirituals Needs*

Again, Yount (2009) pointed out that Maslow finally refined peak experience in 1968 and added the eighth level of needs named transcendent or spiritual needs. Yet this stage is only given a vague definition as the “spiritual need for broader cosmic identification” (Yount, 2009, p. 84). Yount stated that as Maslow is a secular theorist, he tried to squeeze spiritual reality out of naturalistic humanity. Hence, Maslow said “it is unfortunate that I can no longer be theoretically neat at this [spiritual] level” (Yount, 2009, p. 84).

To recap, both the Erikson’s “Gerotranscendence” and Maslow’s “Transcendent or spiritual needs” perhaps unintentionally outlined the spiritual dimension of human beings as they are growing old. Yet neither the last level of the two theories are included in the most recent educational texts in the description of them (Yount, 2009). Yount commented (2009: 84) that “these concepts have simply not been accepted by mainstream educational psychologists...maybe it is more the case that... [“(gero)transcendence”] is considered irrelevant to secular educational theory”. For various relevant reasons, therefore, it is believed that the concept of spirituality is not widely understood or accepted by the scholars and the public. More scientific studies may be needed to further investigate and explain the spiritual dimension.

### **2.3.2 The Definitions of Spirituality in Various Studies**

There are many different concepts, themes, descriptions used in the literature that deal with the spiritual dimension. The term ‘spirituality’ can be found in some of the recent publications in the literature of subjects such as gerontology, healthcare, psychology, and, of course, theology.



### 2.3.2.1 *The Origin of the Word ‘Spirit’*

The origin of the term ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ is related to the breath, air, and the wind. According to McSherry (2006), the origin of the word ‘spirit’ is the Latin ‘spiritus’ which “generates images of life, breath, wind and air”. It is related to “the unique spirit of an individual” (McSherry, 2006, p. 45). The spirit is the life strength, the essence and the energy of a human being:

*“It is this force that develops in an individual the ability to transcend the natural laws and orders of this life, allowing access to a mysterious or transcendent dimension. The ‘spirit’ drives and motivates individuals to find meaning and purpose, allowing expression in all aspects and experiences of life, especially in times of crisis and need”* (McSherry, 2006, p. 45)

White (2006) cites the explanation in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: the word ‘spirit’ is linked to the breath and inspiration. It is vital to human life, and is distinctive from, yet connected to “the physical and intellectual” inseparably (White, 2006, p. 82). It is defined as:

*“The animating or vital principal in man and animals; that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life”* (White, 2006, p. 82)

From the original meaning of ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’, the spirit is important and vital to human beings. However, it seems that it is easily omitted or neglected in different aspects of life. Some people may not even admit to its existence.

### 2.3.2.2 *The Nature of Spirituality*

A review of literature written by authors from many disciplines, including gerontologists, health professionals, and psychologists (Moberg, 1962; 1979; 2008; Hamer, 2004; Piedmont, 1999, Yount, 2009; MacKinlay, 2006; White, 2006; McSherry, 2006, Atchley, 2009; Shek, 2010), suggested that the nature of spirituality is that:

- a. *Every Person is Spiritual*
- b. *Spirituality Varies Within and Between Cultures*
- c. *Spirituality is Unique to Every Individual*
- d. *Spirituality is Related to Everyday Life Experiences*
- e. *Spirituality is Shaped and Developed During the Life Journey*

Next this review looks at these issues in sequence:

#### a) *Every Person is Spiritual*

A number of researchers studying spirituality concluded that every person is spiritual (for example, Moberg, 1962; 1979; 2008; Hamer, 2004; Piedmont, 1999, Yount, 2009; MacKinlay, 2006; White, 2006; McSherry, 2006). There is arguably some proof in biological sciences supporting this conclusion. For example, Hamer (2004), a molecular biologist and behavioural geneticist, conducted research to investigate the relationship between genes and spirituality. In his findings, there is evidence supporting his theory that spirituality is the product of “the genetic structure of humanity in ‘VMAT2’, and other genes yet unidentified”. In this sense, spirituality

is the “innate capacities present to some degree in every person” (Moberg, 2008, p. 101).

The Spiritual Transcendence Scale, which is used to measure an individual’s ability to “stand outside of his/her immediate sense of time and place and to view life from a larger, more objective perspective” (Piedmont, 1999), consists of three sub-scales: ‘Prayer Fulfilment’, ‘Universality’ and ‘Connectedness’. Its design is supported by evidence that our ‘spiritual quest’ is impelled by the consciousness rooted in the brain and genes (Moberg, 2008):

*“Piedmont’s (1999) Spiritual Transcendence Scale is based upon evidence of ‘needs hard-wired into our genetic makeup’ and ‘a substantial genetic component to one’s religious beliefs and behaviours” (Piedmont, 1999, cited in Moberg, 2008, p. 101)*

From the definition in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, spirituality is held to be “an innate potential in every person” (White, 2006, p. 85). This implies that spirituality exists from our birth. The scripture of the Judeo-Christian Bible also shares this concept, saying that “In the beginning, God, who is eternally existent, created humans, both males and females, in his image” (Genesis 1:27), Jesus explained that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), and “All races and tribes of people come from the same ancestry” (Acts 17:24–28) (Moberg, 2008, p. 100). This explanation suggests that human beings are created by God and are born with spirit within them. Therefore, spirituality does not only apply to the religious person but to every individual irrespective of religious affiliation (McSherry, 2006, p. 44) and whether

they recognise it or not, and whether they identify with a religion or not (Moberg, 2008, p. 100).

*b) Spirituality Varies Within and Between Cultures*

Moberg (2008) conducted a survey on the gerontological literature in his 2008 article, “Spirituality and Aging: Research and Implications”. He commented that the perception and definitions of spirituality vary widely within and between cultures (Moberg, 2008, p. 98). The definitions of spirituality to Japanese and Americans are different. He cites Takahashi and Idle’s (2003) cross-national research to show that Japanese’s definition of spirituality is negatively related to religion (Moberg, 2008). On the other hand, Americans tend to relate “spirituality with religion and faith”. In addition, they believed that “they currently were spiritual, had been so in the past, and wanted to become more spiritual in the future” (2008, p. 99). Moberg also used a quality of life study of the World Health Organization by Tazaki (2005) to show a similar concept of spirituality among Japanese people. Spirituality is “based upon a person’s relationship with others, inner strength, and inner peace with little attention to faith in any specific religion” (Moberg, 2008, p. 99). It appears that places having different cultures may have different definitions of spirituality.

*c) Spirituality is Unique to Every Individual*

Every person has a different ‘spirituality’ (Moberg, 2008, p. 100). It is unique and interpreted differently by every individual (White, 2006; MacKinlay, 2006; McSherry, 2006). Yount (2009) stated that spirituality is a subjective and internal experience of individuals which connotes personal experiences and individual

practices. He further explained that this “inner experience of individual is broader than any particular religious practices” (Yount, 2009; Moberg, 2008).

Moreover, the unique nature of spirituality explains why spirituality may be interpreted as either a religious or a secular concept:

*“That is the reason why the majority of people-group has developed a religious system based ultimately upon how its faith defines, verbalizes, applies, modifies, adapts, organizes, and ritualizes spirituality”* (Moberg, 2008, p. 100)

As we define spirituality subjectively, we can interpret it in relation to God or deity, or self. It could be illustrated by a recent radio talk show’s signing-off statement, “May the God of your choice bless you” (Yount, 2009). The term ‘God’ is of course a subjective word in this statement. It means that the self is at the centre, and the choice of ‘God’ is totally interpreted and decided by the self. In turn, ‘God’ is interpreted differently by individuals. The term ‘God’ can also refer to a religious ‘God’ or a secular ‘God’, such as wealth, health, self, fame and so on.

*d) Spirituality is Related to Everyday Life and Experiences*

Spirituality is related to every aspect of life (White, 2006; Moberg, 2008; McSherry, 2006). It can be something in daily life to which we may never attach spiritual significance (McSherry, 2006). Moberg (2008) described spirituality as related to almost everything in daily life:

*“It is so central and integral to human existence that spirituality is explicitly or implicitly involved and directly or indirectly implicated in almost*

*everything that people are and do. It also overlaps considerably with art, music, literature, philosophies of life, worldviews, and human responses of emotions, ethics, morality, aesthetic appreciation, and religion” (Moberg, 2008, p. 104).*

*e) Spirituality is Shaped and Developed During the Life Journey*

It seems that some life events and experiences may intensify spirituality. White (2006), for example, suggested that certain life events such as birth, illness, health, and death could stimulate spirituality. This stimulation would raise our awareness and interest about spirituality. Sometimes it may provoke difficulties yet at other times, it may “heighten awareness of the value of life, [and give] a sense of wonder or renewed purpose” (White, 2006, p. 86). Kwan (2005) termed the hardships and conflicts experienced in a life journey the ‘boundary situations’. These situations may dispirit or may intensify and shape our spirituality.

McSherry (2006) stressed that not only the boundary situations, but also the more positive, joyful and happy experiences could stimulate our spirituality. It is during this journey that a person’s spirituality is said to be shaped and developed. McSherry quoted several authors such as Carson (1989) and Erikson (1963) who supported the view that “spirituality changes and evolves across a lifespan” (McSherry, 2006, p. 52). It indicated that spirituality grows and develops during the life journey. Moreover, spirituality is always in “a state of flux”. The author highlighted that “it is the spirit’s ability to adjust and change to situations, either religious or secular, which will ultimately shape an individual’s spirituality” (McSherry, 2006, p. 52).

### **2.3.2.3 Spirituality: Broad Concepts**

Owing to the personal, subjective and dynamic nature of spirituality, it appears to be difficult to find an agreed definition. There is little consensus on the definition of spirituality found in the literature reviewed (Moberg, 1962; 1979;2008; Hamer, 2004; Piedmont, 1999, Yount, 2009; MacKinlay, 2006; White, 2006; McSherry, 2006, Atchley, 2009; Shek, 2010). However, from the above discussion of the concepts and the nature of spirituality, some of the main themes of spirituality may be incorporated to derive as a broad definition of spirituality (Wilmer 1997; Moberg, 1962, 1979, 2008). These include the “essence of human beings”, “meaning”, “existential concerns”, and “connection”. These will be discussed in sequence:

#### ***Essence of Human Beings***

The “essence” refers to the spirituality that is at “the core of each person’s being” (MacKinlay, 2006) and “an innate potential within all human beings” (White, 2006) that makes people “aware that things are not just physical or financial” (Wilmer, 1997). Mattes (2005) stressed that spirituality is “the component of our humanness” that draws and attracts us out of ourselves by recognising the things lying beyond us (Mattes, 2005, pp. 56-57).

#### ***Meaning***

Spirituality is “an essential dimension which brings meaning to life” (MacKinlay, 2006; Burkhardt, 1989) and “hope” (Kwan, 2005). It is “something that helps you function as a human being” (Wilmer, 1997), and “the power within a person’s life” (Renetzky, 1979) that bring us meaning, purpose and fulfilment (Wilmer, 1997; Renetzky, 1979; Murray and Zentner 1988) and “the will to live”

(Renetzky, 1979). Furthermore, it is derived from everyday tasks and rituals (McSherry, 2006), and the belief that relates to the world (Soeken & Carson, 1987). Mattes (2005) provides a more detailed description on “meaning”:

*“It [spirituality] becomes a companion to the very human process of making meaning out of one’s lived experiences thus enabling a person to have a greater awareness of the gifts one’s life has bestowed, the values one holds, and the insight into one’s own motivations” (Mattes, 2005, pp. 56-57)*

Kimble (2001) wrote a paper stressing the need for a new holistic paradigm on the spiritual dimension of ageing. He quoted Viktor Frankl’s ‘dimensional ontology’ to define spirituality. Spirituality is “the timeless and universal search for meaning and the desire for wholeness and awareness of the presence of the numinous”. Also, the spiritual (geistig) is “the energy within a person that strives for meaning and purpose” (Kimble, 2001). He stated that to build up a “thickness” of spiritual resources could help older persons overcome the challenges and problems of ageing.

### ***Existential Concerns***

Spirituality may be related to “the personal quest” (Bloomfield, 1978; Ellison, 1983; Legere, 1984; MacKinlay, 2006); the belief in “self” (Renetzky, 1979; Kwan, 2005); for understanding the answers to “ultimate questions about life” (Murray and Zentner 1988; Clark, 1987; Conrad, 1985; Mattes, 2005; Ho, 2010; MacKinlay, 2006; Burkhardt, 1989); and those attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people’s lives (White, 2006). It is also a “formative process” as it assists us in gaining a “greater understanding of our existence” (McSherry, 2006) and “who we are” (Mattes, 2005) as unique individuals.



According to Palapathwala's (2005, 2006) definition of spirituality from the Buddhist-Christian view, spirituality is "our transcendental awareness about the 'more' in us which seeks progression in and through our quest for our 'where from' and 'where to'" (Palapathwala, 2006, p. 156). Palapathwala stated that the quest for "where from" is the basic wonderment of ourselves for having been born to the world. That helps us to know that old age and death is the "natural end" and the quest of "where to" is the basic search for answers to old age and death. It may help us to overcome "angst and fear of being". The writer further defined that the dimension of self, the "more" in us, that raised the transcendental awareness of the quest is called 'spiritual'. Our search for the quest is 'the experience which forms the basis for what is known as "spirituality"' (Palapathwala, 2006, p. 156). So under this spiritual meaning of life, we could find the meaning of life if only through a progressive quest for "where from' and "where to". Through this process, the recognition of the "more" in us could be increased.

### ***Connection***

Finally, spirituality also concerns the connection with a higher power or God, and with others. Moberg quoted a study by Nelson-Becker (2003) to further explore the definition of spirituality for older persons. Nelson-Becker found that "spirituality is a feeling in the heart with unique descriptions of connection with God, relationship with other people, communication with nature, and choice" (Moberg, 2008, p. 105).

With respect to the connection with a higher power, spirituality is about the "belief in a power beyond self" (Renetzky, 1979) that is centred in "God, the sacred

or transcendent” (Renetzky, 1979; MacKinlay, 2006; Burkhardt, 1989; Kwan, 2005; Byrne, 1985; Moberg, 1979; Ho, 2010) and religious beliefs (Kwan, 2005) or a set of rituals (Mattes, 2005). In addition, the connection with a higher power is also considered as a process and a sacred journey (Mische, 1982).

Regarding the connection with others, spirituality is about the “relationship with other people” (Renetzky, 1979; Byrne, 1985; Moberg, 1979), “the universe” (White, 2006; Murray and Zentner 1988; Byrne, 1985; Moberg, 1979; Kwan, 2005), and the experience of the natural world, art or music (White, 2006). This relationship is derived from “a deep love for others and for himself” and blessing others for “a happy and fulfilled life” (Ho, 2010).

In short, in a broader definition of spirituality is that it is essential to human beings. It is related to everything in life that is linked to meaning, existential concerns, fulfilment, and connections with God, others, self and the universe. It involves a process of questing meaning and life purpose; a journey of transcendence and finding love. It has a strong connection with religion yet religion is not the only means of spirituality.

#### ***2.3.2.4 Spirituality: Narrow Definitions***

According to Labun (1988, as cited in McSherry, 2006), spirituality is “expressed and shaped by the accepted practices and beliefs of a particular culture”. It is the best description for narrow definitions of spirituality. Christian spirituality and Secular spirituality are examples of narrow definitions.

### *Christian Spirituality*

Christian spirituality is based upon the teachings of the Judeo-Christian Bible. From these scriptures, spirituality is an innate human characteristic. In addition, that innate capacity is created by God. In Gen. 1:27, it is written that “humanity is created in God’s image” (Peace, 2001, p. 658, cited in Yount, 2009). To be a Christian, the meaning and purpose of life is to be concerned with “the totality of life” (Moberg, 2008, p. 107). Moreover the life and behaviour of Christians is directed by “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit” (Yount, 2009). The relationship between God and the disciple is extremely important in Christianity. According to Yount (2009), God-awareness is important. It refers to “the expansion of our union with God through Christ”, and “the embracement of the work of the Holy Spirit making us more like Christ within us”. Disciples are taught to “love God with all of one’s heart, soul, strength, and mind and its ideal of loving one’s neighbour, not only oneself (Luke 10:27–28)” (Peace, 2001, p. 658, cited in Yount, 2009).

### *Secular Spirituality*

From a secular perspective, spirituality is also an innate human characteristic. It is focused on self-awareness. The purpose of life is to expand “personal human qualities”. For secularists, there is no connection with God or a higher power because they believe that humans are the ones who created a variety of gods. Instead, they are connected to nonphysical realities in the world (Yount, 2009).

In short, the narrow definitions of spirituality reflect the cultural and religious differences. It is worth studying spirituality in different cultures and religions for further understanding of how spirituality is shaped and affected by different religions and cultures.

#### **2.3.2.5 *Interim Conclusion: Spirituality***

To summarise, the literature indicates that individuals interpret spirituality in different ways. The personal identities, different life events and experiences of a person may affect the interpretation and the concerns of spirituality. There are new insights on understanding spirituality from the literature reviewed. First, the broad definitions of spirituality may be helpful in understanding individuals' spirituality by setting the themes of the spiritual dimension. The themes of spirituality can be concluded as the meaning of life, existential value, connection— including connection to higher power/God, connection with others, and connection with the universe (Kwan, 2005; MacKinlay, 2006). These themes will also be discussed in Chapter 4, the Research Design and Methodology. Second, it is important to avoid applying our own definitions of spirituality to others and avoid judging other's spirituality because of the unique and personal nature of spirituality itself (McSherry, 2006). Third, one of the best ways of understanding spirituality for individuals may be through understanding everyday life situations and the experiences of a person that bring meaning, connection and fulfilment to them.

#### **2.3.3 Other Terms Related to Spirituality**

The literature also indicates that there are numerous other terms related to spirituality in use. These may make the concept of spirituality more complex yet they are also important to further understanding the concept of spirituality. The following provides a brief introduction of the terms.

### **2.3.3.1 *The Spiritual Dimension***

According to MacKinlay's (2006) book *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life*, the domain of the spiritual dimension is the soul. However, the term 'soul' has seldom been mentioned during the latter decades of the twentieth century. In recent decades, the word 'spiritual' began to be more widely used in society and is not only confined to religious use. There has been a "continuing search for what makes a difference in recovery from illness and healing" (MacKinlay 2001; 2006, p. 11). After that, the attention to spiritual dimension and spirituality has been raised. However, this description of spiritual dimension is not detailed.

Burkhardt (1989) in his article, "Spirituality: An analysis of the concept", defined the spiritual dimension in a more comprehensive way. It is stated that the spiritual dimension is "a unifying force within individuals integrating and transcending all other dimensions, meaning in life, a common bond between individuals, including God, and individual perceptions of faith" (Burkhardt, 1989, p. 70). MacKinlay (2006), studying the spiritual dimension of older persons, has a similar description of the spiritual dimension supporting Burkhardt's (1989) definition. In addition, the existential values of the spiritual dimension are stressed. It is suggested that the questions asked by older persons in the process of dying are all linked to the spiritual dimension. They include "the search for life meaning", for "hope", "issues of guilt", "the need for forgiveness and reconciliation", "physical and existential pain". It also consists of "finding core meaning in life, response to meaning, and relationship with God and/or others" (MacKinlay, 2006).

### **2.3.3.2 *Spiritual Growth***

From the literature, it is evident that the descriptions of this concept are derived mainly from the Christian perspective. For example, Adams (2009) described spiritual growth as the process of “recognizing and realizing God’s unique purpose in one’s life” (Adams, 2009, p.131). It focuses on the ongoing development of the purpose for individuals.

When a person’s spirituality reaches the highest level, it may be considered that spiritual maturity has been attained. Steele’s (2001) suggested that spiritual maturity exists when a person is fully developed in spirit and conforms to Christ’s image. A spiritually mature person is full of love towards God and others; has a renewed mind through study; expresses spiritual depth by faith, hope and love; and commits to God through prayer, meditation, worship, ministry and service to community (Steele, 2001, p. 660).

### **2.3.3.3 *Spiritual Well-being***

David (1998) quoted the operational definition of spiritual well-being from The National Interfaith Coalition on Ageing (NICA) of the National Council on the Ageing. Spiritual well-being was defined as “the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that natures and celebrates wholeness’ (David, 1998). It stressed that spirituality gives meaning to all of life instead of to just one dimension. It indicated wholeness instead of fragmentation.

Moberg (1962, 2008) and McSherry (2006) stated the ways of attaining spiritual well-being. McSherry stated that achieving harmonious interconnectedness,

peace and acceptance within all dimensions of existence and making progress through experiences of life are important for experiencing spiritual well-being. The person is also required to discover the meaning and the purpose in life by being “introspective and reflective” (McSherry, 2006, p. 59). Moberg suggested that spiritual well-being cannot be captured directly by efforts alone. Instead, if a person can forget about himself/herself and only focus on the meaning of transcendence, he/she can attain spiritual well-being. It can help the person battle against the negative sense of suffering (Moberg, 2008, p. 107).

#### **2.3.3.4 *Spiritual Needs***

“Spiritual needs” is one of the increasingly used terms for studying spirituality. McSherry (2006), in the book, *Making Sense of Spirituality in Health Care Practice: An Interactive Approach*, quoted Stallwood and Stoll’s (1975, cited in McSherry, 2006) and Colliton’s (1981, cited in McSherry, 2006) descriptions to explain the conception of spiritual needs. Stallwood and Stoll suggested that spiritual needs originate from the religious domain. They are related to a belief in God or a deity. The description of spiritual needs is as follows:

*“Any factors necessary to establish and maintain a person’s dynamic personal relationship with God (as defined by that individual)...and out of that relationship to experience forgiveness..., love..., hope..., trust...meaning and purpose in life”* (McSherry, 2006, p. 53)

On the other hand, Colliton (1981) suggested that spiritual needs are the “requirement” attaching the centre of one’s being to where “the search for personal meaning takes place” (McSherry, 2006, p. 53). It stressed the importance of

spirituality that spiritual needs may originate from any dimension of human existence, such as the physiological, psychological or sociological dimensions. It is important to note that there are dynamic relationships between the spiritual dimension and all the other dimensions. It is also important to avoid confusing spiritual needs with other existential needs. McSherry (2006) used the following example to illustrate Colliton's idea:

*“An individual may express a need for a harmonious relationship, after having experienced a marital breakdown. The more psychologically oriented may see this as a psychological need, when in reality the individual is expressing a desire to explore issues that are fundamental, unique and central to their existence – spiritual in nature, originating from the psychosocial dimensions. Likewise, it would be a grave misconception and error to infer that an atheist or an agnostic does not have spiritual needs because they do not share a belief in a God or deity”.* (McSherry, 2006, p. 55)

MacKinlay (2006), in her book *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life*, provides a simplified definition on the relationship among spiritual needs and the other dimensions of existence. It is stated that spiritual needs is the “conscious or unconscious strivings that arise from the influence of the human spirit on the bio-psychosocial natures” (MacKinlay, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Moreover, McSherry (2006) stressed the uniqueness of spiritual needs. It is suggested that a religious person may develop spiritual needs within a religious framework, such as “a substantive belief in a God or deity” and “follow the teachings and ideologies of that particular religion”. On the other hand, a



non-religious person may find meaning, purpose and value in life by “investing energy in relationships, work, hobbies, etc” (McSherry, 2006, p. 59). In this sense, spiritual needs vary among religions and cultures of individuals.

Unfortunately, although the above definitions have the advantage of brevity, they lack clarity. For example, it is difficult to think of the exact needs that human have in the spiritual dimension. It appears that it is all-inclusive and seems unhelpful in understanding what counts as spiritual needs and what do not. Koenig (1994) suggested fourteen spiritual needs belonging to human beings which may be helpful in the understanding of the concept of spirituality. In addition, they may be considered a basis for assessment tools of spirituality (MacKinlay, 2006). The fourteen spiritual needs are: the need for “meaning, purpose and hope”, “support in dealing with loss”, “continuity”, “validation and support of religious behaviours”, “personal dignity and sense of worthiness”, “unconditional love”, the need to “transcend circumstances”, “engage in religious behaviours”, “express anger and doubt”, “feel that God is on their side”, “love and serve others”, “be thankful”, “forgive and be forgiven”, and “prepare for death” (Koenig, 1994, p. 283).

Furthermore, a conceptual framework of spiritual needs may be helpful in developing a clearer understanding of the concept. It will be also discussed in sub-section 2.5.

#### **2.3.3.5 *Boundary Situations***

As noted the term “boundary situations” is used in the literature to describe different kinds of suffering we may have in lifetime. It is also one the important terms for studying spirituality because boundary situations may intensify one’s

spirituality as concluded in sub-section 2.3.2.2 *The Nature of Spirituality*. Kwan (2005) in the article, “The Relevance of a Ritual Approach to Holistic Health for Spiritual Care Ministry” defined boundary situations as “the limits”:

*“We may have illness, guilt, depression, failure, inabilities, alienation, meaninglessness, death and loneliness in life. When we are facing these situations, we may be either distressed or transcendent. Boundary situations can detonate the quest for spiritual well-being and holistic health”* (Kwan, 2005, p.85).

#### **2.3.3.6 *Spiritual Distress***

Burnard (1987) described spiritual distress as “the result of total inability to invest life with meaning. It can be demotivating, painful and can cause anguish to the sufferer” (Burnard, 1987, p. 377). It suggested that it may be dispiriting and dysfunctional if people lose the meaning in life totally.

Furthermore, McSherry quoted Labun’s (1988, cited in McSherry, 2006) identification of spiritual distress, stresses that there are seven human experiences demonstrating spiritual distress. They include spiritual pain, alienation, anxiety, guilt, anger, loss and despair (McSherry, 2006, p. 59).

Burkhardt (1989) outlined a similar explanation of spiritual distress from a survey of the literature. It was suggested that spiritual distress is “a disruption in the life principle that pervades a person’s entire being and that integrates and transcends one’s biological and social nature” (1989, p. 70).

### **2.3.3.7 *Spiritual Capital***

The term “spiritual capital” is to some extent derived from the discipline of economics and its discussion of concepts such as human capital and social capital. According to the Metanexus Institute (cited in Ho, 2010), the terminology of “spiritual capital” is created and has been used by economists and scholars over recent decades. In a broad sense, it refers to “that aspect of social capital linked with religion and/or spirituality”. It appears as a subset of social capital in the past because it has been found that religion has been the largest generator of social capital in the United States. It contributes over 50% of social capital in the country. However, it seems that this broad concept of spiritual capital equates spirituality with religion. It appears to be over-simplifying the concept of spirituality and omits the non-religious realm of spirituality.

### **2.3.3.8 *The Medium of Spirituality***

From the literature, it is evident that religion is considered an important medium of spirituality. Religion is closely related to spirituality and is sometimes seen as equivalent to spirituality. The relationship between spirituality and religiosity will be further discussed in sub-section 2.4.

Other than formal, often state-institutionalised and institutionalised religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc, there are various other mediums of spirituality. Bailey (1997, 2005) described these mediums of spirituality as “other personal fulfilment in alternative spiritualities”. They can be activities incorporating beliefs such as yoga, *feng shui*, Zen or other adaptations of religions. There are

numerous adaptations of Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam, Scientology, Satanism, Wicca, Mother Earth or Gaia plus many kinds of spiritual “treatments” such as higher states of consciousness, guided imagery, dream therapy, spirit guides, meditation techniques, and repetitive mantras. There are also “other outlets of a vast array of new religious movements”, “pseudo religious” ends of pleasure; and even wealth, sex, fame, posterity, or power (Bailey, 1997, 2005).

Ho (2010) suggested that many things in daily life may bring enlightenment to human beings, such as songs, music, poetry, stories, drama, films and the natural world. From these various mediums of spirituality, the complexity of spirituality is highlighted. These mediums of spirituality also underline the view that human beings are spiritual beings and may unintentionally invent various methods for spiritual fulfilment.

## **2.4 Spirituality and Religiosity**

From the review of literature, the terms “religion”, “religiosity” and “religiousness” occur frequently in the literature related to spirituality. Some use the terms interchangeably with the term “spirituality”; others differentiate between the terms. The meanings of the three terms seem to be very similar yet there is a degree of difference between them. The following will try to differentiate the three terms and, at the same time, examine the relationships between spirituality and religiosity.

### **2.4.1 A Review of the Literature Related to Religion and Gerontology**

Research related to religion and social gerontology includes an increasingly discussion on religion and ageing (Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988; Clements, 1989; Levin, 1994, Koenig, 1995). Clements (1989) for example, focused on the

“lifestyle” derived from religion leading to physical, mental and social well-being in old age. He also focused on the religious factors in ageing, adjustment and health from a global perspective. From Clement’s view, different religious beliefs affected the lifestyle and health of older persons:

*“Religion itself is not a pure phenomenon that remains untouched by cultures within which it flourishes. The interrelationship between religion and culture, is however, a subject that is far beyond the scope of present study to explicate and illuminate, yet this relationship is reality that one must keep in mind...”*(Clements, 1989, p. 2)

Levin (1994) used a social gerontology perspective to review theoretical viewpoints which has guided empirical research into exploring religion and health among ageing people in the USA. He believed that religion and health become ever more interrelated as people age. He focused on an investigation into the “epidemiological effects” of religious experience: “hope for disabled persons, health, and the life stress paradigm and the relationship of religious commitment and health” (Levin, 1994, P. 125). “Psychologists generally recognise that one task of identity formation in late adolescence and early adulthood is finding a sense of purpose and direction in life and feeling satisfied about it” (Richards, 1991). Religious socialisation appears to play an important role in the establishment and development of religious identity in particular and identity formation in general (GAP, 1968)” (Levin, 1994, p. 140).

Koenig (1988, 1995) focused on the measurement of religion, mental and physical health and how religious beliefs and ritual affect the mental and the physical

health of aged persons. In Koenig's book (1995), he combined numbers of researches of religious belief, behaviour, experience, attitudes and commitment on the effect of physical health including hypertension, heart disease and stroke; and mental health including life satisfaction, anxiety, depression and chronic mentally of community-dwelling elderly and the clinical population.

Religion has been a well-established topic for researchers studying different fields nationally, locally and internationally. As it is believed that religion has an important effect on society, international researchers have tried to extensively study the relationships of religion to philosophy, the arts, culture, community, politics, ecology, education, social ethics, gender, fertility, human rights, literature, and the mass media.

In fact, comparing the research conducted on religion and connections with other fields or subjects, there are only a limited number of studies which cover religion and older persons worldwide. Moreover, the majority of them focus only on the health aspect of ageing and consequently, they are not sufficient in generating ideas to achieve a good quality of life in preparation for the global trend of an ageing population.

#### *Previous Studies on Religion in Hong Kong*

Most local research studies on religion in Hong Kong focus on the political (Lau, 1995), social (Watson, 1985; Chan, 1995), economic (Kam, 1991; Berger, 1990) and cultural (Faure, 1986) aspects. To date, there are only a limited number of studies on religion and social gerontology in Hong Kong.

In 1995, there was a large scale sociological investigation on the “Indicators of Social Development” by The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. A number of aspects relating to religion have been studied including the population of different religious groups in Hong Kong, the gender characteristics, age distribution, marriage status, education level, social and economic status and also people’s expectations towards the politics of Hong Kong, and their opinions on politics and public welfare. It is important for the prediction of future development of different religious groups and their political orientation (Cheng & Wong, 1997). Although this study provided a wide range of information, including data on education services provided by the religious groups in Hong Kong, aspects related to older persons such as social services for elderly and social support are hardly covered.

#### **2.4.2 Religion, Religiosity and Religiousness**

##### *Two Perspectives Defining Religions*

According to Chan (2002), there are two main perspectives for defining religion: the substantive definition and the functional definition. The first perspective is from the substantive definition, which believes that, intrinsically, religion is focused on the supernatural substance. It is something that we use in order to build up rules that are all-inclusive. It is also a consecrated universe that keeps the constant in a frequently changed situation (Berger, 1969).

The other perspective is from the functional definition which believes that religion provides meanings and objectives towards life, and explanations for doubts and puzzles from pain and sadness. It focuses on the function that religion serves in society. In other words, anything in society can become religion (Dobbelaere and

Lauwer, 1973). For example, J. Milton Yinger defined religion as “a belief and system that social groups can use to cope with the final questions of life” (Chan, 2002, p. 6). By applying belief and faith, one will not give up when facing death.

In short, the substantive definition may exclude all social phenomena which do not have specified characteristics such as supernatural elements. The functional definition may include all things providing meanings and objectives. It is problematic to define religion in these two perspectives (Chan, 2002). In the case of the former, the defining criteria of substantive definition cannot include all kinds of religion. For the latter, the functional definition may include all social phenomena as religion, such as the idol worship and communism. Therefore, the boundary of religion is becoming less clear. Until now, in the studies of religion, both the two perspectives have been accepted and used (Wuthnow, 1988).

## **Religion**

Religion can be an important “resource” for human beings. According to David (1998), from a historical perspective, religion is the one “compensating resource” in almost every culture. It is suggested that almost everyone has access to religion when people are faced with “the problem of helplessness and loss of control” (David, 1998).

Religion is described as “a social institution” that gathers people and forms them into a system. It refers to “a social institution in which a group of people participate rather than an individual search for meaning... in which takes the collective spiritual experience of people and forms them into a system” (Steiger and Lipson, 1985).



Religion also refers to “a belief system”; it is “a product of rational mind to do with the conceptualisation of spiritual experience” (Legere, 1984). Moberg (2008) quotes a study by Nelson-Becker (2003) which defined religion for older persons. Nelson-Becker found that older persons described religion as “beliefs with unique descriptors that include heritage, basic principles, a way of thinking, and duty” (Moberg, 2008, p. 101).

MacKinlay (2006) defined religion by emphasising its function. It is stated that “religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one’s relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community” (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 13).

Religion can be further classified into intrinsic and extrinsic religion. Eggers (2003) in a paper “Older Adult Spirituality: What Is It? A Factor Analysis of Three Related Instruments” quoted Allport and Ross’s (1967) description of intrinsic and extrinsic religion. This states that “[religion] extrinsically motivate[s] person to *use* his religion, whereas [it] intrinsically motivate[s] [person] to *live* his religion” (Eggers, 2003, p. 7)

## **Religiosity**

The term “religiosity” is often used to describe the “content” and the “practice” of religion. It refers to “the knowledge, belief, feelings and practices of persons from religion” (Byrne, 1985). Moberg (2008) suggested that religiosity is “the membership and participation in the organisational structures, beliefs, rituals, and

other activities related to a religious faith like Judaism, Hinduism, Islam or Christianity”.

Religiosity can be divided into “organisational religiosity” and “non-organisational religiosity”. Levin (1997) in his article, “Religious Research in Gerontology, 1980-1994: A Systematic Review”, reviewed religious research in gerontological literature from 1980 to 1994. He suggested that “organisational religiosity” refers to an institutional form of religious involvement such as church attendance, whereas “non-organizational religiosity” concerns the private religious behaviours such as private prayer, Bible study and watching religious TV and religious attitudes (Levin, 1997, p. 19).

### **Religiousness**

The term “religiousness” concerns the degree of participation or adherence in a particular religion or religions. It is defined as “the degree of participation in or adherence to the beliefs and practices and knowledge of a particular religion” (Byrne, 1985; Burkhardt, 1989). Moberg (1967, 2008) defined religiousness as an adherence to “a prescribed set of beliefs and practices associated with a creed, denomination, or sect”.

### *The Measurement of Religiousness*

Whilst it remains difficult to quantify a “concept”, there has nevertheless been some attempt to measure religiousness in research on religion and health, religious affiliations, religious attendance, and the multi-dimensional measure of religion including rituals and symbols and organisational climate, architecture, measurement of subjective religiosity. Levin (1994, p. 119) includes the following measurements:

(a) Religious Affiliations (self-declared affiliation)

This is the most commonly used measure of religion in research on religion and health. The connection and affiliation to religion is a measurement of religiousness.

(b) Religious Attendance

This refers to the frequency of religious attendance and is the second most commonly used measure of religious involvement. Levin (1994, p. 128) notes that “it is documented that religious attendance is positively associated with health status across a board range of health outcomes”.

(c) Social Support

This measured by the self-report of quantity and quality of contact with all members of the religious institutions.

(d) Rituals and Symbols

The frequency of attending religious rituals and symbols is counted.

(e) Organizational Climate

An assessment of the ways in which the organisational cultural and structure of religious institutions affect the members.

(f) Architecture

This refers to the aspect of religious symbolism. Religious architecture is a physical structure of religious building which creates particular images and

conveys complex and meaningful systems of ideas, belief, values and feeling. It is also a determinant of the climate of a worship service and affects how people behave, feel and think. This may be because beyond the superficial appearance of the physical structure, there is often a deeper level of a symbolic system of religious ideas (Levin, 1994, p. 137).

(g) Measure of Subjective Religiosity

This assesses on individual's ratings of the important centrality of religion and belief in particular religion teachings. They are the subjective, attitudinal indicators of religious involvement (Levin, 1994, p. 138).

## **2.4.2 The Relationship between Spirituality and Religiosity**

### *Ambiguous Conceptual Boundary between Spirituality and Religiosity*

Religiosity is an important part of spirituality. It is highly related to spirituality. The terms sometimes overlap with each other and are used interchangeably (Eggers, 2003). Moberg commented that “religion and spirituality are easily confused because they overlap and the boundaries between them are permeable” (Moberg, 2008). He stated that they are so complex that “some authorities consider religion the broader concept, while others like Stifoss-Hanssen (1999) make it subsidiary to spirituality” (Moberg, 2008, p. 101).

The concepts of spirituality and religiosity seem to equate with each other and with some areas of health, such as nursing. White (2006) quoted Kreidler’s (1978) review of nursing literature, noting that there was strong link between the two concepts. In addition, the term “religion” was used to equate with “spirituality” in many cases. Moreover, MacKinlay (2006) quoted Weaver, Flannelly and Flannelly’s

(2001) review of research on religious and spiritual variables in two gerontological nursing journals from 1991 to 1997. It was found that over half of the studies only measured religious behaviours such as frequency of church attendance, not spirituality (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 15). MacKinlay commented that solely measuring religious behaviours cannot generate useful findings because it can neither produce the reasons why a person attended church in the first place, nor provide what attendance means for the person. (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 15)

Ribaudo and Takahashi (2008) in the article, “Temporal Trends in Spirituality Research: A Meta-Analysis of Journal Abstracts between 1944 and 2003”, commented that, among many empirical studies, some of studies distinguished spirituality and religiosity clearly, such as MacDonald (2000), Takahashi et al. (1999), Pargament (1999) and Stifoss-Hanssen (1999). Others, however, used the two terms indifferently, such as Martself & Mickley (1998) and Zainuddin (1993). The authors explained that the “ambiguous conceptual boundary” between spirituality and religiosity may be due to the cultural differences in understanding these concepts (Ribaudo and Takahashi, 2008, pp. 19-20). Nelson-Becker’s (2003) study on older persons, comparing African-Americans with European-Americans, supported the idea of cultural differences between the two concepts. It was found that older African-Americans tended to connect spirituality with religion, while their European-American counterparts were more likely to separate them (Moberg, 2008, p. 101).

The above literature suggests that the conceptual boundary between spirituality and religiosity is unclear. However, Moberg (1979; 2008) found that after the 1970s, there was a “gradual change as conceptual, analytical, empirical, theoretical, and

clinical investigations of spirituality emerged” (Moberg, 2008, p. 102). It is stated that researchers and scholars began to realise “spirituality was not identical with religion”. There were increasing studies which measured aspects of spirituality as distinct from, and along with, religion. The following will attempt to distinguish the relationship between spirituality and religiosity.

Based on the literature review, the relationship between spirituality and religiosity appears to be:

*Spirituality and Religiosity are Interrelated but Not the Same*

Eggers (2003) suggested that the two concepts are strongly related, but they can exist without each other. He quoted scholars such as Chandler, Holden & Kolander (1992) and Moberg (1967) and stressed that religiosity may not guarantee a sense of spirituality. Moreover, “religion can be an outward manifestation of the inner spiritual life, but spirituality can exist without religion”, and vice versa (Eggers, 2003, p. 5). Ho (2010) highlights the need to distinguish between spirituality and religiosity. He stresses that spirituality is compatible with, and yet transcends, the world’s religions. He believed that “a religious person follows his religion with devoutness, but he may or may not be spiritual. If he is a bigot, he cannot be spiritual, no matter how religious he is” (Ho, 2010, p. 11).

Moberg (2008) suggested that spirituality and religiosity overlap with each other, but they are not the same. He explained that the two concepts significantly overlap in everyday life but there is a distinctive difference between them. Yount (2009) differentiated the two concepts from their nature, suggesting that religiosity is more objective and external, relating to “doctrines and institutions”; spirituality is more

subjective and internal concerning personal experiences and individual practices. Hence, some authors believe spirituality is a broader concept than religiosity (e.g. Ochs, 1983; Moberg, 2008; Yount, 2009; Ho, 2010; Eggers, 2003).

#### *Religiosity is One Way of Expressing Spirituality*

Some authors feel that religiosity is one way of expressing spirituality. Kwan (2005) suggested that whatever differences among different religions, they all provide channels for attaining spirituality (Kwan, 2005). White highlighted that religiosity is not the only channel of spirituality, but that “for some people this provides an important way of expressing their spirituality, but it is certainly not the only way and not for everyone” (White, 2006, p. 101). On the other hand, Burkhardt (1989) highlighted the ‘dispiriting’ or the negative side of religiosity. It is suggested religiosity can be an expression of spirituality, yet “some religious beliefs and practices can also be dispiriting for a person”.

#### *Religiosity is one of the Components of Spirituality*

From reviewing the empirical studies in the literature, it appears that religiosity is a component of spirituality. Eggers (2003) found that intrinsic religiosity contributes to a dominant component of spirituality, provides a framework for understanding life and ultimately provides meaning and purpose for many, especially for older persons (Eggers, 2003, p. 23). Also, the review of Allport’s (1966) *The Older Adult Spirituality Scale*, indicates that ‘The intrinsic religious aspect of spirituality’, and ‘Extrinsic Religiosity’ contribute to two of the six main themes of the scale (Eggers, 2003, p. 23).

MacKinlay's (2006) diagram, "*Ways of mediating the spiritual dimension*", (Figure 2.2) clearly shows that religiosity is one of the components of spirituality.

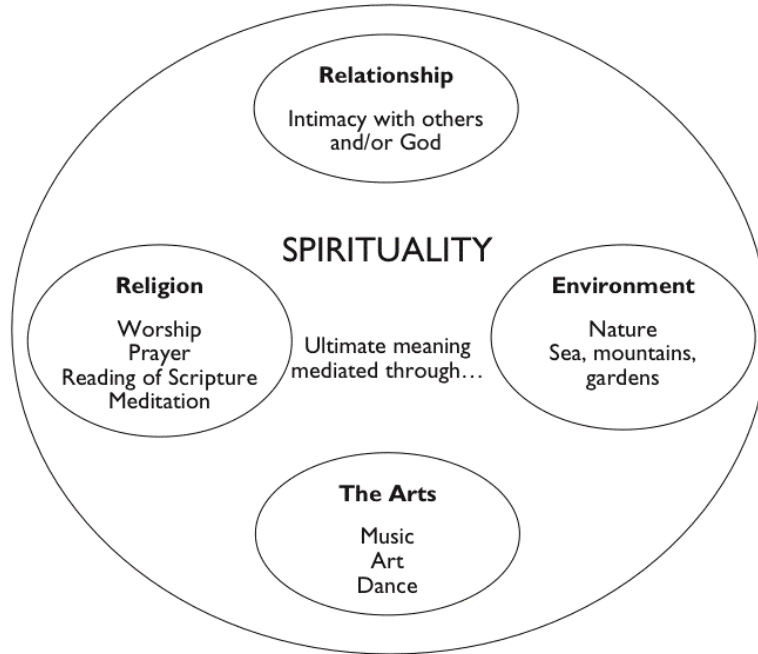


Figure 2.2 Ways of mediating the spiritual dimension (Source: MacKinlay, 2006, p. 13)

This diagram indicates that spirituality can be worked out in a variety of ways including 'Religion', 'Relationship', 'Environment' and 'The Arts'. Religiosity which is "a way that humans relate to the sacred, to otherness" is one of the components mediating spirituality (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 13).

## 2.5 The Conceptual Frameworks of Spirituality

As spirituality is multi-dimensional and complex, this section introduces the conceptual framework of spirituality from Stroll (1989), White (2006), McSherry (2006) and MacKinlay (2006) for a better understanding of the components of the spiritual dimension of human beings.



### 2.5.1 Stoll's Two-Dimensional Model of Spirituality

Stoll's (1989) model of spirituality can be used to show the relationship between the spiritual dimension and the other aspects of our lives (Figure 2.3). The vertical line shows an individual's connection with "the mystical-transcendental domain". In this relationship, a belief in a higher power or God may be the values or principles guiding the person's life (McSherry, 2006, p. 86).

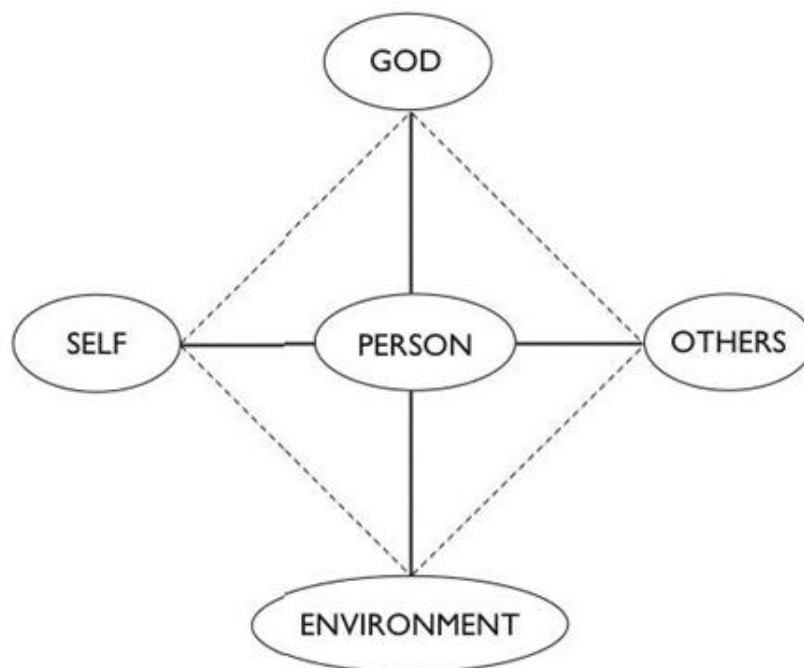


Figure 2.3 Stoll's two-dimensional model of spirituality (Source: Stoll, 1989, p. 8)

The horizontal line shows the relationship between self and others. "Person" in the inner circle is used to describe the person and the relationship with both vertical and horizontal dimensions (McSherry, 2006, p. 86). There are "interrelatedness and interconnectedness" of all the dimensions, indicated by the use of dashed lines. In addition, this model suggests that human beings have three spiritual needs including the need for love, forgiveness and trust. Stoll stressed that "spirituality is developed

throughout life and the dimension may come into focus during times of health and illness” (McSherry, 2006, p. 86).

The model shows clearly the spiritual dimension and other aspects of our lives. It also highlights the spiritual needs of human beings. Unfortunately, this model may not apply to the spirituality of all persons. For example, in the vertical dimension, “the mystical-transcendental domain”, the connection between “God” and “Person” is stressed. It does not, however, explain and connect “Person” with “Environment”. It seems that the model may not necessarily apply to a non-religious person owing to an over-emphasis on the connection to “God” and understating the connection to “Environment”.

### **2.5.2 White’s ‘Dimensions of Spirituality’**

White’s (2006) ‘*Dimensions of Spirituality*’ (Figure 2.4) is a three-dimensional diagram which stresses the multi-dimensionality of spirituality. It integrates different dimensions of life including the human spirit, transcendent/divine being and the self. The horizontal line represents the human spirit including our “connection and relationship with other people and with the world around us”. The vertical line describes the sense of “reaching out to transcendent meanings and/or a divine being for some people”. The third dimension is “personal inward exploration” such as the search for “personal uniqueness and integration, another element referred to in writing about spirituality” (White, 2006, p. 92)

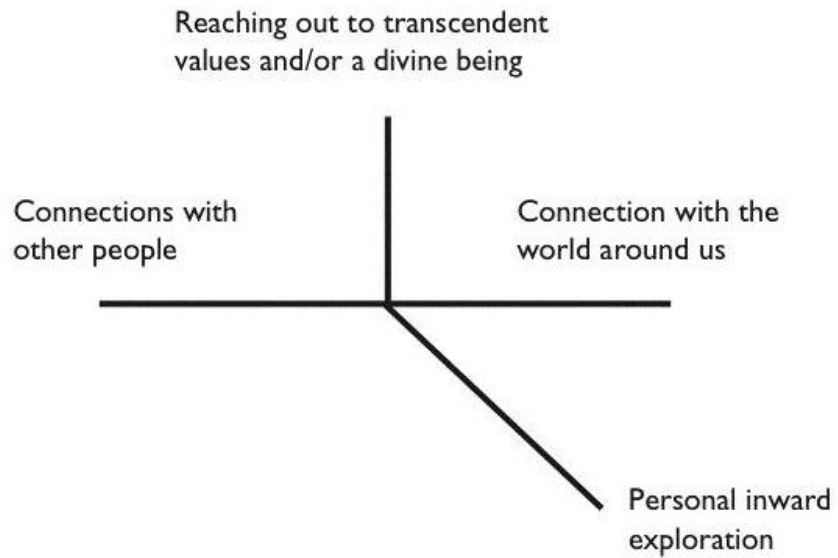


Figure 2.4 Dimensions of spirituality (Source: White, 2006, p.92)

This multi-dimensional model provides an all-rounded framework to explore the concept of spirituality. It includes the main themes of a broad definition of spirituality discussed in former sub-section 2.3. Referring to sub-section 2.3.2.3, the theme ‘connection’ is showed in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the model. The third dimension shows the ‘existential concerns’ of human beings. Importantly, the ‘meaning of life’ is derived from the ‘connection’ and the ‘existential concerns’ aspects of beings. This model also shows that spirituality is ‘the essence of human beings’. The model can be applied to all persons including religious and non-religious persons.

### 2.5.3 McSherry's the Analogy of Spirituality

McSherry's (2006) '*Analogy of Spirituality*' (Fig. 2.5) shows the complexity of spirituality.

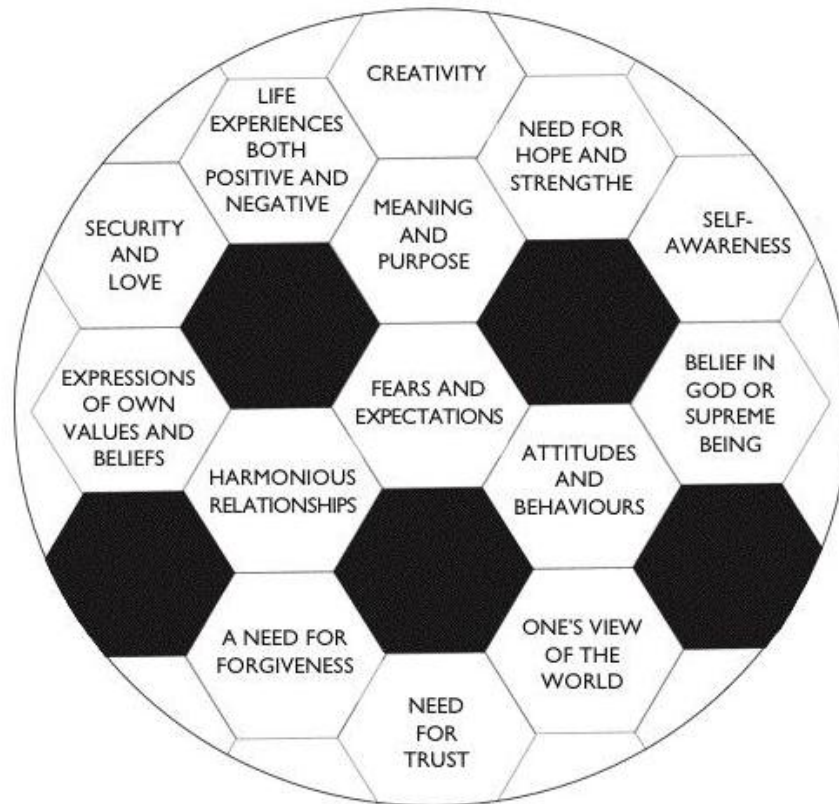


Figure 2.5 The analogy of spirituality as a football shows the complexity of the concept involving many dimensions (Source: McSherry, 2006, p. 52)

It is suggested that spirituality consists of many components. The patches in the 'football' represent the components of spirituality; they can also be regarded as the spiritual needs. All the patches are stitched next to each other and together they make 'the football'. This illustrates that all the components of spirituality are stitched together to make a person. McSherry illustrated that all of the components of spirituality are equally important and they are closely related to each other.

“The synthetic patches each represent a different aspect of spirituality. Each aspect is attached and interrelated to the next because they are stitched tightly together. All the patches share the same importance and cannot function in isolation” (McSherry, 2006, p. 52)

#### 2.5.4 MacKinlay’s Generic Model of Spiritual Tasks and Process of Ageing

MacKinlay’s (2006) ‘Generic model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing’ (Figure 2.6) is derived from interviews with independent older persons, conducted by MacKinlay and her colleagues. It is helpful to study the spiritual tasks of older persons in the process of ageing and there are some notable characteristics in this model.

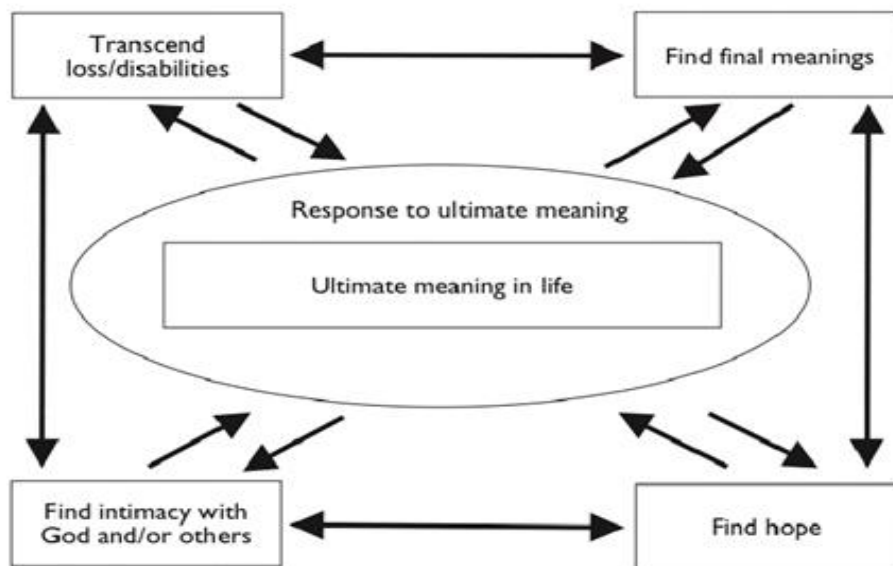


Figure 2.6 A generic model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing (Source: MacKinlay, 2006, p. 23)

First, there are two basic assumptions in the model. It is believed that all humans have a spiritual dimension. It is also suggested that there are certain

common tasks that, when applied, every individual faces in relation to spirituality (MacKinlay, 2006, pp. 21-23). But there are variations in how people will work out their spiritual dimension and spiritual tasks. These variations not only exist in persons of different religions or the non-religious, but they also exist among members of the same religious faith and the same religious denomination. In terms of the spiritual dimension there are cultural and religious variations among the people.

Second, this model is a dynamic interactive approach. It stressed that the core, 'Ultimate meaning' will influence the response to 'Meaning' and 'Hope', 'intimacy with God/others'. In turn, the 'Loss' may affect the 'Ultimate meaning'. In addition, this model stressed the continuing process of spiritual tasks. It is established and consistent with Erikson et al.'s (1986) stages of psychosocial development which suggested that "one stage may weave back on another" (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 22). MacKinlay developed the process of spiritual development which is facilitated across the life journey and is influenced by "the developmental and situational crises". Hence, the individual is always in the process of 'becoming' (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 22).

Third, it identifies that the core of spiritual tasks is to find the individual's ultimate meaning of life. Other than the core, there are four important aspects of spiritual dimension including 'Transcendence', 'Meaning', 'Hope' and 'Intimacy'. 'Transcendence' is concerned with a person moving from self-centeredness to self-transcendence. 'Meaning' refers to meaning formed from provisional life meanings to final meanings. 'Hope' relates to the strength, power and support for a person facing boundary situations. 'Intimacy' is concerned with the intimate and

harmony relationship with God and/or others (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 23). It suggests that the core, the ultimate meaning of individuals, is closely related to the four important spiritual tasks; they are interrelated to and are interacting with each other.

In summary, this generic model provides a basic model for spirituality in later life. It also highlights that all persons are spiritual even though some of them may not be conscious about their spiritual dimension. In addition, there are spiritual variations among individuals. This model will be valuable to this current research for providing a basis towards understanding the spirituality of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong.

## **2.6 Guidelines and Tools to Assess Spirituality**

In the literature, there are some scales and tools for measuring spirituality. According to Moberg (2008), there are some scales related to spirituality. For instance, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) (Paloutzian and Ellison, 1982), the Faith Maturity Scale (Benson, Donahue and Erickson, 1993), Spiritual Experience Index (Genia, 1997), Spiritual Transcendence Index (Seidlitz et al., 2002), Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999), Logoplex (Piedmont, 2004), Religious Maturity Scale (Leak and Fish, 1999), Spiritual History Scale (Hays et al., 2003), Spiritual Assessment Scale (O'Brien, 2003), Means-Ends Spirituality Questionnaire (Ryan and Fiorito, 2003), and Older Adult Spirituality Scale (Eggers, 2003), the multi-dimensional National Institute on Ageing/Fetzer Scale for the Measurement of Religiousness and Spirituality (Idler et al., 2003) are the examples of scales related to spirituality quantitatively. However, given the constraints of word count and as the scales may not be directly used in this research, they will not be covered in detail in this literature review.

On the other hand, there are guidelines and tools for assessing spirituality qualitatively. They may be helpful in conducting this research in studying Chinese older persons' spirituality. The guidelines and tools will be introduced in sequence.

### **2.6.1 Stoll's Spiritual History Guide**

Stoll (1979), who may be considered the 'designer' of the earliest spiritual assessment, constructed a spiritual history guide for assessing spirituality. He suggested four areas of spiritual concerns which include:

- a) The person's concept of God or deity – "Is religion or God significant to you?" (p. 1572);
- b) The person's source of strength and hope – "Who is the most important person to you?" (p. 1575);
- c) The significance of religious practices and rituals to the person – "Are there any religious practices that are important to you?" (p. 1576); and
- d) The person's perceived relationship between their spiritual beliefs and health status – "What has bothered you most about being sick?" (pp. 1576 - 1577).

### **2.6.2 Anandarajah and Hight's Acronym HOPE**

Anandarajah and Hight (2001) constructed guidelines for assessing spirituality entitled the Acronym HOPE. Four main themes were identified and based on them, questions for spirituality assessment can be set:

*H: sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, peace, love and connection*

*O: Organised religion*



*P: Personal spirituality and practices*

*E: Effects on medical care and end-of-life issues (McSherry, 2006, p. 105)*

### **2.6.3 Kivnik's Life Strength Interview Guide**

Kivnik's (1993) Life Strength Interview Guide was designed with reference to Erikson's original theory (1986). It is used to explore the psychosocial profile of individuals by examining eight ego strengths including "hope & faith", "wilfulness, independence, and control", "purposefulness, pleasure, & imagination", "competence & hard work", "values and sense of self", "love and relationship", "care and productivity", and "wisdom and perspective" (Takahaski, 2006). There are about six to eight questions for the life strengths at each developmental stage, totalling sixty-three questions.

### **2.6.4 White's Suggested Questions for Spiritual Assessment**

White (2006) reviewed the publications of several authors, including Stoll (1979), Highfield (1992), Georgesen and Dungan (1996), and Post-White et al (1996), and in conclusion, drew from them some suggested questions for spiritual assessment grouped under three themes. They are "Meaning and purpose", "Security and hope" and "Religion/spirituality". The questions will be introduced as below:

a) Meaning and purpose

*"What are some of the things that give you a sense of purpose? ·Do you have a specific aim that is important to you at the moment? ·Do you believe in any kind of existence after this life? ·Has your illness changed your attitude to the future? ·What bothers you most about being ill?"*

b) Security and hope

*“What are your sources of strength and hope? · Who do you turn to when you need help? In what ways do they help? · What inner resources do you draw upon? · Where do you go for comfort or support? Who or what do you depend on when things go wrong?”*

c) Religion/spirituality

*“Do you consider yourself to be religious or spiritual? · How does this affect you? Has being ill changed this? · Is prayer helpful to you? Can you talk about how? · Is there anything we can do to support your spiritual/religious practice?”* (White, 2006, p. 121)

To conclude, the guidelines mentioned above provide useful references for setting questions in assessing spirituality qualitatively. Both Stoll’s Spiritual History Guide and the Acronym HOPE provide important themes for setting questions in this current research, whereas Kivnik’s Life Strength Interview Guide and White’s Suggested Questions for Spiritual Assessment will be a basis for questions to be asked in this qualitative study. Although Kivnik’s Life Strength Interview Guide is originally designed for exploring psychosocial profiles, the questions suggested in this guide appear to be useful in this research. Some of these questions will be extracted and grouped under the main themes of spirituality and will form the guided questions. The Guided Questions in this current research will be further discussed in Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology.

## **2.7 Emerging Issues and the Need for Empirical Research**

The study of relevant spirituality literature revealed that spirituality is a complex and dynamic topic. To begin with, there is no clear consensus on the definition of spirituality (Moberg, 1979; 2008; Kwan, 2005; McSherry, 2006; Shek, 2010). One definition was produced covering the main themes of spirituality, stressing the essence of human beings, meaning of life, existential values and the connection with higher power/God, with others and with the universe. Similarly, although there are summaries about the nature and definition of spirituality, there are also a number of terms used together with spirituality, which make the concept of spirituality even more complicated. They include spiritual dimension, spiritual well-being, spiritual growth, spiritual needs, spiritual distress and spiritual capital. Moreover, the relationship between religiosity and spirituality is unclear and ambiguous because some literature equates spirituality with religiosity, whereas others tried to differentiate between the two concepts. In fact, spirituality is a broader concept. Religiosity is one of the most important channels and one of the components of spirituality. Yet, in what ways religiosity inspires spirituality still needs to be investigated.

The review of literature highlighted various cultural and religious differences in spirituality and the views on it (Moberg, 1979; 2008; McSherry, 2006). In addition, it is generally agreed to be subjective and personal to individuals (White, 2006; MacKinlay, 2006; Yount, 2009). There is also a need to study spirituality other than Christianity and Western societies. With the increasing attention on the spirituality of older persons, many scholars are now recommending more further studies in a non-Christianity and non-Western context (for example, Levin, 1997; Moberg, 2008; Ribudo and Takahashi, 2008; Shek, 2010). To accommodate this new direction of

studying spirituality in older persons, the concept as well as the relationship between spirituality and religiosity requires practical assessment strategy. The main strategy highlighted by the literature was by understanding the life events and experiences that affects the spirituality of older persons. The models concerning the spiritual needs and spiritual tasks of ageing of older persons will be helpful in understanding older persons' spirituality. There was concern that it may not have available for reference and guidelines on how to explore older persons' experiences on spirituality and the ways that religiosity affect their spirituality. Guidelines and tools on assessing spirituality were reviewed. Meaningful guidelines were identified as a necessary prerequisite to assessing spirituality for older persons in a Chinese context.

A crucial issue for the development of spirituality studies of older persons in non-Western and non-Christianity contexts is that recommendations on the future direction need to be based on scientific research. The spirituality of Chinese older persons in Asian countries with traditional religions is worth studying using valid and reliable methods and data collection. Unfortunately, there is little empirical data on this area, spirituality of Asian countries and Chinese traditional religions (Levin, 1997; Moberg, 2008; Ribudo and Takahashi, 2008; Shek, 2010).

To arrive at a deeper understanding on spirituality of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong and how religiosity may inspire spirituality in a Chinese context, empirical research will therefore be conducted by using valid methods of data collection and analysis. Specifically, such research will attempt to find out the definition of spirituality; the spiritual needs of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong in relation to its unique culture; how religiosity affects their spirituality. The next chapter of this thesis will detail the research design and methodology used to capture

the qualitative data, including details on the research strategy to be adopted, sample selection, data collection and data analysis techniques. Before that, a case study of religions and the religious characteristics in Hong Kong will be introduced.

## **Chapter Three: A Case Study of Religions and Religious Characteristics in Hong Kong**

This section will provide background information on the different religions in Hong Kong today. Some statistics on religions will be provided and also the characteristics of the major religions will be introduced, including: the traditional Chinese religions of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and the *San Jiao* introduced in Chapter 1; and the Western religions of Christianity including Protestantism and Catholicism.

### **3.1 The Importance of Studying Religions and the Older Persons in HK**

In Hong Kong, the major religious groups include the “non-religious” group referred to as ‘self-declared, with no religious affiliation’; the *San Jiao* triad, a mixed belief in Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism; and Christianity including the Protestant and Catholic churches (HK Information Services Department, 2008). Kwong (2002) suggested that the local conflicts among religious groups are not serious. However, studying the distribution of religious adherents by population is still of interest for policy planning. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, religion has an influential effect on people, especially the older persons. Kwong further explained that, for example, the Christian groups have tended to monopolize many of the social functions of religious groups in Hong Kong. During the colonial period, the Christian groups enjoyed “disproportionate privileges” in the social establishment of Hong Kong. They have been the providers of local education and social services, have had involvement in leadership of some national functions and ceremonies, and have even held seats on the Legislative Council (Kwong, 2002). It also appears that the social services to which the older persons are able to access in

daily life is strongly related to the religious groups in Hong Kong. Some groups, such as the Buddhists, are extensively involved in schools and the provision of some social services today. The traditional Chinese religions, the *San Jiao* triad, the threefold religions of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, having had a long history in Hong Kong, also have great relevance for the lifestyle, behaviour and way of thinking of many of the traditional Chinese (Kwong, 2002). This is particularly the case for the older persons, as discussed in sub-section 2.4.1. In various local and international studies it has been shown that religions have positive effects on the physical, mental and psychological health of the older persons.

Religions are quite heavily involved in the social establishments and social services for many groups; and in the way of thinking, lifestyle, and health of the older persons (Kwong, 2002). They are widely held to be very important for achieving a good quality of life for the older persons especially as they age. Hence, conducting research on the religions and the older persons may, to an extent, generate new strategies for attaining better quality of life for them.

### **3.2 Religions in Hong Kong: a Statistical View**

It seems that there is a lack of detailed official statistics from the Hong Kong SAR government on religious affiliations. To a large extent, this is because information on religions has not been included in the Census and by-Census surveys to date. It appears that the majority of religious statistics in Hong Kong come from the social sector and religious organizations (Kwong, 2002). However, the researcher found that, although detailed religious information is not directly collected in the Censuses and by-Censuses, religious data and information has been published by the HK Information Services Department, for example, in *Hong Kong*

2008 in the series of *Hong Kong Yearbooks* (HK Information Services Department, 2008), and *Hong Kong: The Facts* (HK Information Services Department, 2009).

According to *Hong Kong 2008* (HK Information Services Department, 2008), with respect to Chinese religions, there are about 14.5% and 14% of the total population who are followers of Buddhism and Taoism respectively. With regard to Western religions, in Christianity including the “Protestant community” and the “Roman Catholic community”, there are about 0.67 million followers, or about 10% of Hong Kong’s total population. In addition, there are other “minority” religions including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism and so on, among which most adherents are from the non-Chinese community, and they account for about 3.9% of the total population in Hong Kong. This implies that over half of the total population in Hong Kong is not affiliated to any religion and is therefore grouped under the category “non-religious” for the purposes of this current research.

In short, looking at the population according to the size of adherents, the dominant groups include the non-religious, the Buddhists, the Taoists, and the Christians respectively.

### **3.2.1 Religions among the Older Persons in Hong Kong**

There are limited religious statistics which illustrate age differences of adherents to be found in the review of the current literature, so an older version of statistics is adopted to briefly show the patterns of religious characteristics among older persons in Hong Kong. Cheng & Wong’s (1997) study on the Indicators of Social Development in Hong Kong note that the mainstream religious groups in Hong Kong includes the *San Jiao* triad, a three-fold religion of Taoism, Buddhism,



and Confucianism; Protestants and Catholics; followed by Islam and other religions. Among the mainstream religious groups, most of the followers are Chinese. Of the total population of Hong Kong, 27% of them are in the *San Jiao* triad and 13% of people are Christians (including both Protestants and Catholics groups). However, approximately 60% of people in Hong Kong are thought to be non-religious, which refers to those who are self-declared as not having any religious affiliation. It is important to note however that in the age group of 65 and above, fewer are non-religious: 43% of this group are non-religious, 42% are the followers of the *San Jiao* triad, and 10% are Christians, including Protestants and Catholics. The percentage of religious adherents among the older persons appears to be higher than that of the population as a whole in Hong Kong (Cheng & Wong, 1997).

### **3.3 Different Religions and Religious Characteristics in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is basically a city of religious freedom. It is noted that a variety of religions including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity coexist peacefully. A number of minority religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism, also coexist comfortably in this society.

#### **3.3.1 Traditional Chinese Religions**

Buddhism and Taoism are the main traditional Chinese religions in Hong Kong. Confucianism is considered an important belief and code in Chinese culture (HK Information Services Department, 2009). These religions and beliefs, such as Taoism, believe in more than one god and in a variety of deities, and are considered a form of polytheism. They have an influential effect on culture, the way of thinking and the lifestyle of many Chinese older persons. Moreover, Kwong (2002) suggested that the mixture and the interaction among Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

form religious characteristics which are unique to Chinese people. He (2002) regards this threefold of religions among Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism as the so-called *San Jiao*. The chapter now briefly reviews these religions individually and as a combination.

### **3.3.1.1 Buddhism**

Buddhism is one of the mainstream Asian religions existing in Hong Kong although it originated in the Southern parts of Asia. Buddhism suggests that every person must come across suffering yet people can escape from suffering through the ‘four seals’ (Harvey, 1990; MacKinlay, 2006; Gethin, 1998; Juergensmeyer, 2006). These include “dukkha”, recognizing suffering as a “universal” component of human being; “anatta”, referring to the self as “no-self” (Scotton, 1998, p. 264); “annicca”, concerning the concept that nothing lasts; and “nibbana”, meaning that people can be released from suffering by giving up an attachment to the material world (Scotton, 1998, p. 264). The major beliefs of Buddhism provide three perspectives for escaping from suffering: first, by transcending the illusion of the material world and achieving “Buddhahood” (Shek, 2010; Juergensmeyer, 2006); second, by transcending from self-centeredness (Juergensmeyer, 2006); and third, by pursuing the place of “ultimate happiness” (Gethin, 1998). Therefore, some Buddhism practices have evolved, including the reciting of Buddhist scriptures, transcendental meditation, referring to concentration on thinking of the teachings of Buddha, pursuing goodness and avoiding killing (Harvey, 1990; Mollier, 2008).

In Hong Kong, the followers of Buddhism pay respect to “Sakamuni Buddha, Kwun Yum (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) and other Buddhas and Bodhisattva”

(HK Information Services Department, 2009, p. 1; Lip, 1986, p. 77). There are a number of Buddhist temples in Hong Kong which are well-known locally and internationally, such as the Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island consisting of the Tian Tan Buddha, and the Chi Nin Nunnery.

### **3.3.1.2 Taoism**

Taoism is an “indigenous” Chinese religion having a long history of over two thousand years (HK Information Services Department, 2008, p. 362). The belief of Taoism includes: firstly, pursuing *Tao* (logos) referring to the integration with the law of nature (*Tao*) (Shek, 2010); secondly, taking no action contrary to nature (*wu-wei*) (Yip, 2004; Oldstone-Moore, 2003); and thirdly, pursuing immortality and becoming a deity (Blofeld, 2000). To follow the Taoist beliefs, a variety of practices are commonly adopted to restore and maintain one’s health and attain longevity, including *qi gong*, *tai chi*, martial arts, Chinese medicine, herbal healing, food therapy and transcendental meditation (Chui, Donoghue, and Chenoweth, 2005; Mollier, 2008, Pregadio, 2008). In addition, Taoists also follow the Taoist scriptures and doctrine, such as *Daodejing*, and to practice moral values and maintain purity of the mind (HK Information Services Department, 2009; Ho, 2010).

Taoists tend to worship numerous gods and deities. Taoist gods can be divided broadly into the Prior Heavens and the Posterior Heavens. The Prior Heavens are the patron spirits such as Senior Lord Taishang, Jade Emperor and Doumu, the Mother of Dipper (Burkhardt, 1959; Lip, 1986; Oldstone-Moore, 2003; HK Information Services Department, 2009). In the Posterior Heavens, which refer to the “heroes” who demonstrated great virtues and feats in saving mankind, the main examples are

Lui Cho, Kwan Ti and Che Kung (Burkhardt, 1959; Lip, 1986; HK Information Services Department, 2009). Moreover, as Hong Kong was originally a fishing village, many deities connected to the sea and the weather are worshipped by Taoists locally. The most popular and well-known one is Tin Hau, the Queen of Heaven and the protector of seafarers (Burkhardt, 1959; Lip, 1986). There are other leading deities such as Kwan Tai, Pak Tai and Hung Shing. As in Buddhism, there are several notable Taoist temples, such as the elaborate Wong Tai Sin Temple, Che Kung Temple and Man Mo Temple (Lip, 1986; HK Information Services Department, 2009).

### **3.3.1.3 Confucianism**

Confucianism is generally held to be “a belief in the teachings of Confucius and the subsequent *ru* school of thoughts” (HK Information Services Department, 2008, p.363; Oldstone-Moore, 2002), and it is sometimes seen more as a code of conduct than a religion (Oldstone-Moore, 2002). The major beliefs of Confucianism are “based on moral code for human relationship with an emphasis on the importance of tradition and rites” (HK Information Services Department, 2008, p. 363). The moral code includes respecting *tian*, the universe, worshipping the ancestors, filial piety, honesty, righteousness, kindness, and so on. Confucians also admit to the existence of gods and ghosts (Oldstone-Moore, 2002). The practices in Confucianism include the worship of Confucius, the universe and ancestors; filial piety and having a high standard of moral conduct and quality of personhood (Oldstone-Moore, 2002; Chui, Donoghue, and Chenoweth, 2005). Furthermore some believed that the philosophy of equilibrium between *yin* and *yang* and *feng shui*, referring to the conjunction of the “five phases” of metal, wood, water, fire and

earth, are basically derived from one of the important Confucians ancient books in the *Six Classics*, namely the *Books of Changes* (Yip, 2004; Chui, Donoghue, and Chenoweth, 2005; Shek, 2010).

#### *Interim Conclusion: Traditional Chinese Religions*

In summary, the traditional Chinese religions have their own beliefs, different gods and deities, and different practices. However, these beliefs and practices are deeply rooted into the Chinese culture and are sometimes intermixed.

From the observation of the researcher and the researcher's experience of local people in Hong Kong, it appears that, to a large extent, many Chinese people believe in more than one traditional religion or aspects of several, often at the same time. For example, many Chinese people undertake rituals of ancestral worship at home (Confucianism). In addition, when it is the Ching Ming festival, it is a norm for many Chinese people to worship the ancestors (Confucianism). When it is the birthday of the Buddha, people may go to worship, for example, at the Po Lin Monastery (Buddhism). When it is the Chinese New Year, many go to the Wong Tai Sin Temple or the Che Kung Temple on New Year's Eve (Taoism). They queue outside the temple and compete to offer the first worship and receive the greatest blessing. Therefore, it appears that the practices and beliefs of *San Jiao* are deeply rooted and embedded in the culture and perhaps the daily lives of many Chinese people. Some of them may classify these practices as religious, whilst others may think these practices are merely cultural or social rites with no connection to religion. Therefore it may be difficult for some Chinese people to classify to which of the traditional religions they are actually affiliated and even whether they are "religious" or not.

### **3.3.2 Western Religions: Christianity**

Christianity is another mainstream religion in Hong Kong and includes the major Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches. In general the beliefs of Christianity are: first, God is the creator of everything; second, sins existing in human beings disconnect them from God; third, Jesus Christ sacrificed his life in order to purify human sins; fourth, people confess the salvation of Jesus and are then reconnected to God and given eternal life (Moberg, 2008; MacKinlay, 2006; Yount, 2009). Moreover, Christians are taught from the Biblical scriptures “to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, strength, and mind and its ideal of loving one’s neighbour, not only oneself (Luke 10:27–28)” (Moberg, 2008, p. 107). The practices of Christianity include worship, prayer, Bible study, meditation, Sunday services, singing psalms and other spiritual strategies (MacKinlay, 2006).

In Hong Kong, there are a total of 53 parishes with 41 churches, 31 chapels and 28 halls for the Roman Catholics and 1400 congregations with more than 50 denominations among the Protestants (HK Information Services Department, 2009). Both the Roman Catholics and the Protestants have long been deeply involved in the community and have contributed to the well-being and social development of society since the early days of Hong Kong, and, regionally, for some hundreds of years in neighbouring Macau and southern China. Various Christian denominations contribute to education, including schools and kindergartens; medical and social services including hospitals, clinics, social and family service centres, hostels, homes for the aged, rehabilitation service centres, many self-help clubs and associations, as well as a wide range of youth services. Caritas and the Catholic Board of Education are famous organizations for the Roman Catholic churches while the YMCA, YWCA,

United Christian Medical Service, Christian Family Service Centre, and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, are well-known organizations among the Protestants denominations (HK Information Services Department, 2008; HK Information Services Department, 2009).

### **3.3.3 Other Religions**

Other religions in Hong Kong include Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism. The followers of these religions are mainly non-Chinese and include many groups from the Middle East and South Asia, such as Pakistanis, Indians, Malaysians, Jews, Indonesians, and so on. As this current research mainly focuses on Chinese people, these other religions in Hong Kong will not be discussed in detail.

To sum up, religions in Hong Kong are closely related to the culture, way of thinking, lifestyles, and also the social establishments, social welfare and services of the society (Kwong, 2002; The Information Services Department, 2008, 2009). This thesis focuses on the three major groups in Hong Kong, according to a clarification of religious adherence, including the “non-religious” majority, the *San Jiao* triad and the Christians group. They are the three major groups which this current study will investigate.

## **Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction to Research Design and Methodology**

This research study has a number of interrelated objectives (Chapter 1) set within the broad context of spirituality of the older persons within a Chinese community:

1. To investigate the definitions and conceptualizations of the spirituality of the Chinese older persons in Hong Kong
2. To explore the spiritual experiences and spiritual needs among the Chinese older persons
3. To examine how religiosity may inspire the spirituality of Chinese older persons
4. To formulate recommendations on spirituality issues

This research provided an opportunity to study the definition of spirituality, spiritual experience and spirituality needs, and in what way religiosity may inspire spirituality among the older persons. The importance of spirituality was acknowledged by The World Health Organization's expert committee on palliative care when it noted "the need for spirituality to be recognized as an essential element of the holistic approach" (White, 2006, p. 87). The opportunity to gain a variety of perspectives on the views of the Chinese older persons may contribute significantly not only to the study of spirituality in general, but also to gain a richer understanding of the spiritual needs and particular issues for the older persons.



Chapter 2 identified a gap in existing research in that there was ample evidence on the need for spirituality studies in a non-Western context with a non-Christian religion, and on how religiosity may inspire spirituality. The literature review provided important background for the research objectives. This research took us one step further though the collection of data and analysis of empirical data obtained from the Chinese older persons in Hong Kong. More importantly, this research was based on the triangulation of various data sources (Fig. 4.1) including a wide review of academic and professional literature, interviews with key informants (social workers, academic professionals and religious experts), and the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

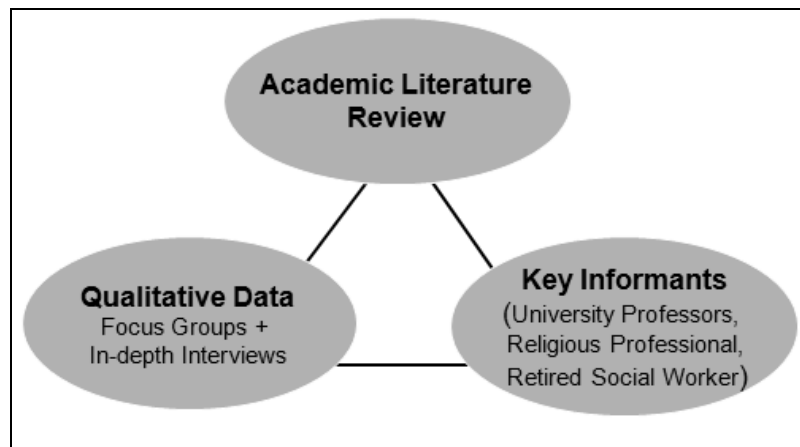


Fig. 4.1 Triangulation of various data sources in this study

The qualitative data were drawn from three focus group discussions (FGDs) involving three main religious groups: the *San Jiao* triad referring to the threefold religion of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist; the Christian group; and the non-religious group. This provides a total of 16 participants and 3 individual interviews. The respondents were recruited from a Christian church and a Buddhist elderly home.

This section will provide details on the research design adopted to address the research objectives together with the methods of collecting data and data analysis, including sites and sample selection and analysis approach.

## **4.2 Research Design**

The empirical research in this study is an exploratory but in-depth study using a qualitative method among the older persons within the Chinese community in Hong Kong. With the aim of studying the concept of spirituality and the spiritual experience among Chinese older persons, this research is primarily qualitative in nature as it can help to identify and describe meanings, variation, patterns, and processes of subjective experience (Agern, 1998). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research is appropriate to study “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Moreover, it involves “the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational; historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

In this research, the focus, in term of Chinese older persons was on the three main religious groups in Hong Kong, including the *San Jiao* triad referring to the threefold religion of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist, the Christian group, and the non-religious group. To facilitate an in-depth study of spirituality issues that promotes focus, and to gain a richer understand of Chinese older persons in a

complex setting of a variety of religions in Hong Kong, a case study approach was adopted. Referring to Cohen and Manion (1995), a case study is to “observe the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a class, a school or a community” (p. 106). Furthermore, its purpose is to “reveal the properties of the class to which the instance being studied belongs” (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 44). In this sense, a case study is related to an observation and investigation of a particular population in a particular context. The case study approach, therefore, should facilitate this research to reveal the spirituality of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong by exploring a specific aspect within one Chinese community.

### **4.3 Data Collection: Site and Sample Selection**

This study is aimed at understanding what the concept of spirituality means among the older persons in a Chinese community, what spiritual experience and needs do they have, and also how religiosity may inspire spirituality in the older persons. To understand the nature of spiritual issues requires in-depth qualitative data hence the main focus of this research design was to gather such data.

#### *Site Selection*

This study used purposive sampling to identify sites which would provide respondents for collecting the qualitative data. The criteria for selection included: first, organizations affiliated to the mainstream religions of Chinese people in Hong Kong; second, organizations that provide a pool of either religious or non-religious Chinese older persons; and third, organizations that are willing to participate in this study and to help recruit respondents within the organization. The rationale behind selection is that religious organizations may provide a pool of religious respondents that guarantee a higher possibility to recruit religious Chinese older persons. Also,

respondents recruited from the same organization may generate better group interaction as the respondents may know each other. However, the risk of bias is acknowledged in the selection of respondents from the same organization and who may be known to each other and share common attitudes.

Invitation letters were sent to two religious organizations and the respondents were recruited through them. Appendix I contains the sample invitation letter sent to the religious organizations to recruit respondents. The first organization was a Christian church, namely the Kowloon Methodist Church, where the Christian group respondents were recruited. The respondents were the members of a fellowship for older persons, with a membership of about one hundred. They hold fellowship meetings once a month in the church. The second organization was a Buddhist elderly home, the Miu Fat Monastery Elderly Home, where the *San Jiao* triad and the non-religious group were recruited. The respondents were the clients living in the elderly home. This elderly home has been built next to the Miu Fat Monastery in Tuen Mun and provides about a hundred beds. The clients of this elderly home could join the religious activities of the monastery nearby if they choose to do so.

### *Sample Selection*

According to social gerontology, there are four perspectives in defining ageing: chronological ageing, biological ageing, psychological ageing, and social ageing (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2002). Chronological ageing, “the definition of ageing on the basis of a person’s years from birth” (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2002, p. 4), was selected. Therefore, “the older persons” referred to in this study were defined as males or females aged 60 or above. Although 65 years old is used to define “the older persons” in the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department for different statistics

data and for many social policies in Hong Kong, such as the Senior Citizen's Card and Normal Old Age Allowance (Social Welfare Department, 2005), many "selected services for the older persons are also provided for persons aged 60-64" (HK Census and Statistic Department, 2006, p. 3). In addition, in the two organizations selected for this research, the admission age for members is open to those aged 60 and above. Hence, "the older persons" in this study referred to those of the population aged 60 and over for both sexes.

Purposive sampling was used to select Chinese older persons of different religions in Hong Kong. Three major groups were chosen based on previous research studies related to religions in Hong Kong (Kwong, 2000; Chan, 2002; Ng, 2002) and also with reference to the discussion in Chapter 3, A Case Study of Religions and Religious Characteristics in Hong Kong. The three major groups were the *San Jiao* triad, the western religion of Christianity, and the non- religious group. In this study, the religions to which the respondents were affiliated were not measured objectively by instruments. Instead, they were in the form of self-declared affiliations. As in purposive sampling, the sample is not chosen randomly. Therefore, this research cannot claim to be representative across the wider community of the older persons in Hong Kong. However this study may provide in-depth and qualitative insights on the spirituality issues of the older persons.

The respondents who provided the qualitative data in this study consists of nineteen people aged 60 and above. Of the respondents from the Christian group, five were female respondents aged from 60 to 72 and one female respondent for an individual interview aged 67. In the *San Jiao* triad, for the focus groups there was one male and five female respondents, aged from 60 to 102, and one female

respondent aged 66 for an individual interview. With respect to the non-religious group, there were two male and three female respondents aged from 60 to 84 for the focus group, and a male aged 70 for an individual interview. Table 4.1 and Table. 4.2 show the profile of respondents for the focus groups and individual interviews respectively.

Table 4.1 Profile of respondents in the focus groups (FGs)

Group	Non-religious group (N)	<i>San Jiao</i> triad (B)	Christian group (C)
Age (mean age)	60-84 (66.2)	60-102 (84.5)	60-72 (64)
Sex	M: 2 F: 3	M:1 F: 5	F: 5
Years of self-declared religious affiliation (mean)	--	28 years	30 years

Table 4.2 Profile of respondents in the individual interviews

Group	Non-religious group (I2)	<i>San Jiao</i> triad (I3)	Christian group (I1)
Age	70	66	67
Sex	M	F	F
Years of self-declared religious affiliation	--	25years	45 years

#### **4.4 Data Collection Techniques**

The qualitative data were gathered by using two data collection techniques including focus groups and individual interviews, together with the Researcher Interview Guide for both focus groups and individual interviews. Focus groups were to be the main method of data collection; a total of three focus groups with 17 participants (Fig. 4.2) and 3 individual interviews (Fig. 4.3). As the topic of spirituality is a less familiar term in Chinese culture, the usage of focus group aimed to encourage the respondents to discuss and “brain storm” the concept related to spirituality. In contrast, the individual interviews aimed to gain more in-depth information related to spiritual experience and religiosity. For example, the respondents were asked spiritual experience in the second part of the research, using both focus group discussions and individual interviews could encourage more comprehensive findings. The group interaction and “brain storming” environment of focus group discussions encouraged the diversification of spiritual experience. The individual interview allowing higher privacy encouraged more in-depth and personal spiritual experience and live stories. This provided the opportunity to have in-depth discussions of spirituality issues with various Chinese older persons. Moreover, to keep the discussions in focus with the research objectives, the Researcher Interview Guide was prepared to guide the different themes of discussion. The guided questions were open-ended which allowed for a range of innovative and meaningful responses (Patton, 1990).

##### **4.4.1 Focus Groups**

Focus groups can be defined as “planned meetings of groups of people, who possess certain characteristics that provide data of a qualitative nature usually

through series of focused discussions” (Phillips, 1998, p. 32). In this study, older persons with the same category of religious affiliation were recruited and grouped together for focused discussion on spirituality issues. In each focus group, 5-6 people were chosen.

In order to explore their views on spirituality and their spiritual experience, the questions for each group were mainly focused on their individual perceptions on spirituality and their practice of religions (religiosity) relating to spirituality. Through the focus group discussions (FGDs), the concept of spirituality, the spiritual experience and spiritual needs, and also how the respondents’ practices of religion (religiosity) related to their spirituality were explored. Moreover, the answers collected may give new insights for providing spiritual care to the older persons in Hong Kong.

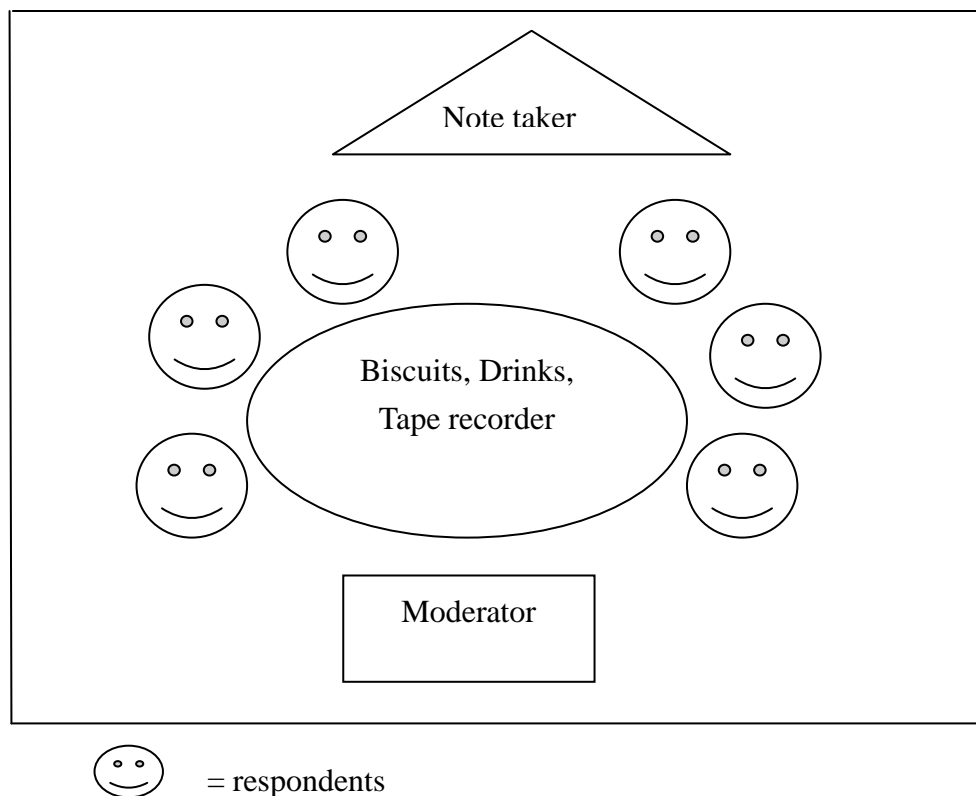
There are several advantages for using focus group discussions (FDGs) in this study. First, FGDs may create a less formal atmosphere in which older persons will feel less stress and can “break the ice” easily in “a group interaction process” (Phillips, 1998, p. 36). Second, they may help to gain a “deeper understanding” for the respondents’ views and allow “wider discussion” (Phillips, 1998, p. 32) because they allow respondents to express their feelings and opinions, and at the same time, interact with the other respondents. Third, FGDs provide opportunities for observing interactions on discussion topics among the respondents (Berg, 2004). Fourth, they could help to ‘figure out what the key issues, ideas, and concerns are from multiple respondents at once’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 196). However there are also a number of limitations to using focus group discussions, including the inability to obtain detailed personal behavioural data and detailed personal information in a



public setting, and the need for trained and skilful moderator for valid and high quality data (Phillips, 1998). Transcription skills are also required.

With respect to Phillips's (1998) suggestions on conceptual and practical considerations on focus group discussions, the focus groups in this research study were led by a moderator who moderated the flow of the discussion, kept the discussion focused on the key topics of the guided questions, and encouraged the respondents to participate. Moreover, there was an observer/note-taker who also assisted in the recording process for the focus groups. The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed in addition to the written notes from the observer. Fig. 4.2 shows the setting of the focus groups in this study with reference to Phillips's (1998) suggestions.

Fig. 4.2 Focus Groups setting in this study



#### **4.4.2 Individual Interviews**

As there are some constraints to what can be gained from focus group discussions, individual interviews were carried out as a triangulation of data sources. An individual interview provides the opportunity for in-depth interview “to collect detailed, richly textured, person-centered information from one or more individuals” (Punch, 1998, p. 176). It allows individuals to share their perceptions of spirituality and their personal spiritual experience freely in a private setting. In this study, there was one individual interview for each of the religious categories selected. There were three individual interviews in total with the aim of comparing and contrasting the results with the findings from the focus groups discussions.

#### **4.4.3 Researcher Interview Guide**

The Researcher Interview Guide in this study was developed by the researcher with reference to several scholars introduced in sub-section 2.6, Guidelines and Tools to Assess Spirituality. Kivnik’s (1993) Life Strength Interview Guide and White’s (2006) Suggested Questions for Spiritual Assessment provides fundamental questions for assessing the spirituality of the older persons. Moreover the questions are grouped under main themes with reference to Stoll’s (1979) Spiritual History Guide and Anandarajah and Hight’s (2001) Acronym HOPE.

The Researcher Interview Guide consisted of three parts:

Part one: the investigation of “the concept of spirituality” by asking the respondents to describe their definition of spirituality directly, and indirectly, by asking what makes an experience spiritual. Through the descriptors of spirituality

provided by the respondents in the three groups, new insights on the definition and conceptualization of spirituality among the Chinese older persons may be found.

Part two: the exploration of “spiritual experience and spiritual needs” of the older persons. Questions were grouped under different themes including “Source of Meaning”, “Source of Joy/Inner Peace”, “Source of Love/Relationship with others”, “Source of Hope/Existential Values”, and “Faith/Religious Beliefs/Relationship with God”. By asking questions related to the main themes of spirituality, the spiritual needs among Chinese older persons can be explored.

Part three: the examination of “how religiosity inspires spirituality” in older persons. The questions asked will be related to the religiosity of the respondents in daily life and how, if at all, religiosity provides meaning to them when they face boundary situations.

The Researcher Interview Guide was used in both the focus group discussions and the individual interviews in this study. Its use helped the researcher to guide the flow of the focus group discussions and the individual interviews by asking the major questions within particular themes. The researcher could then ask follow up questions and invite the respondents to share their experiences or the perceptions on particular themes in details. Appendix II contains the Guided Questions of this study in both the Chinese and English versions.

#### **4.5 Data Collection Procedures**

This research was based on the triangulation of various data sources (Fig. 4.1) including a wide review of academic and professional literature, interviews with key

informants (social work, academic and religious experts), and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. In addition, a pilot study was conducted before the collection of qualitative data. There were several stages in the data collection process. Fig. 4.3 provides a brief summary of data collection and analysis process.

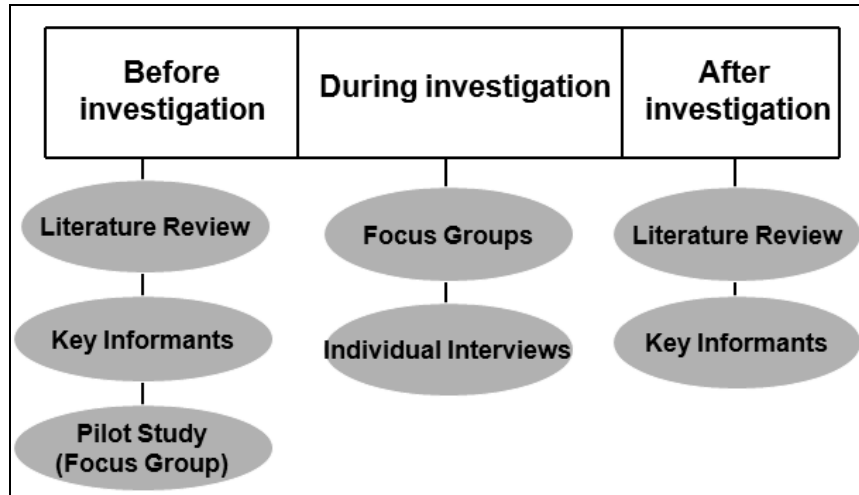


Fig. 4.3 A brief summary of data collection and analysis process in this study

### **Stage 1: Identifying the Categories of Religions and the Respondents**

#### *Review of the Literature*

The initial stage of data collection was to identify the focus of this study and what kind of respondents need to be included in this research. After a wide review of the academic and professional literature, the importance of spirituality in later life was identified and the focus of exploring spiritual aspect of older persons in a Chinese context was proposed. As religiosity is generally felt to be strongly related to spirituality, purposive sampling was used to select respondents from the main stream religions for Chinese people in Hong Kong.

### *Key Informants*

After the literature review, the researcher interviewed several key informants including three academic professionals, one religious expert, two social workers and three religious representatives. They provided suggestions for the focus of this study and the arrangement of the focus groups and individual interviews.

The academic professionals are university professors who have professional knowledge in religious study and traditional Chinese religions respectively. One of them has written publications related to Chinese spirituality and the scriptures of Chinese ancestors. Moreover, the researcher interviewed a religious expert in Christianity, who is a pastor working in a religious radio broadcasting channel for Mainland Chinese. All of these key informants provided advice on sources of religious statistics in Hong Kong, information of Chinese traditional religions and information of Christianity in the Chinese community. After the individual interviews, the three categories of religions in this study were identified. In addition, one of the focus groups in this study, the *San Jiao* triad, which represents a threefold religion of Chinese traditional religions (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism), was also identified.

One of the social workers interviewed is a professional counsellor who provided information on spirituality in the discipline of psychology and counselling, and information of some programs promoting spirituality for the older persons in Hong Kong. Another is a retired, experienced social worker who is currently the leader of an elderly group in one social centre. He recommended a site visit to an elderly religious group and the techniques of inviting older persons to share their personal experiences.

The religious representatives are the leaders or the organizers of the religious units for older persons. They provided information of the elderly groups, such as the operations and the regular activities of the groups, and background information of the older persons within the units. They suggested that they may not understand the spiritual terms as it is not a familiar topic in Chinese culture and therefore it would be better to ask about spirituality indirectly. Also, they gave suggestions regarding the setting and the techniques to talk with the older persons, such as speaking in a louder voice and avoid embarrassing them. The respondents of the pilot study, focus groups and individual interviews were recruited from these three units.

## **Stage 2: Conducting a Pilot Study**

### *Pilot Study (Focus Group)*

The pilot focus group was conducted in March 2009. The use of a pilot study was highly desirable as a learning and testing experience (Weiss, 1994). The pilot focus group provided the researcher with an initial picture of the concept of spirituality among the older persons. The Researcher Interview Guide was also used in the pilot study. It helped the researcher discover some unclear wordings of questions and highlight some key questions for assessing the spiritual needs of the older persons. In short, after the pilot study, the researcher revised the wordings of the Researcher Interview Guide to make it more understandable and precise. Some further guided questions were added to create more in-depth and high quality discussions.

### **Stage 3: Collecting Qualitative Data**

Data collection of qualitative data began in July 2009 and was completed by March 2010. In July 2009, the researcher conducted site visits to several religious organizations including churches, a Buddhist elderly home and a Taoist elderly home. Invitation letters were sent to some organizations fitting the criteria of site selection in September 2009. The focus groups and individual interviews were conducted between November 2009 and March 2010, including three focus groups and three individual interviews. The discussions and the interviews took place in the Kowloon Methodist Church and Miu Fat Monastery Elderly Home as these were the places where the respondents were familiar with and it would make them feel more comfortable and relaxed.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis**

To help focus the qualitative data onto the research objectives and also to facilitate easier data analysis, the guided questions were grouped under key themes. These themes assisted the researcher to guide the discussions and keep the interviews focused, and could also become the aids for analyzing the transcripts. All the focus groups and individual interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed and note records were also collected by the observer.

##### **4.6.1 Data Processing and Open Coding**

Data analysis requires a process of data management and data digestion. According to Jorgensen, data analysis is a process of “breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable pieces, the researcher sorts and sifts them, search for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this process is to

“assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion” (Seidel, 1998, pp. 3-4).

Wolcott (1994) also provided a framework for data analysis which includes a cycling process of “description, analysis and interpretation”. Fig. 4.4 is a diagram of the qualitative analysis process in this current study, which shows the opportunity for feedback and interpretation within the overall process.

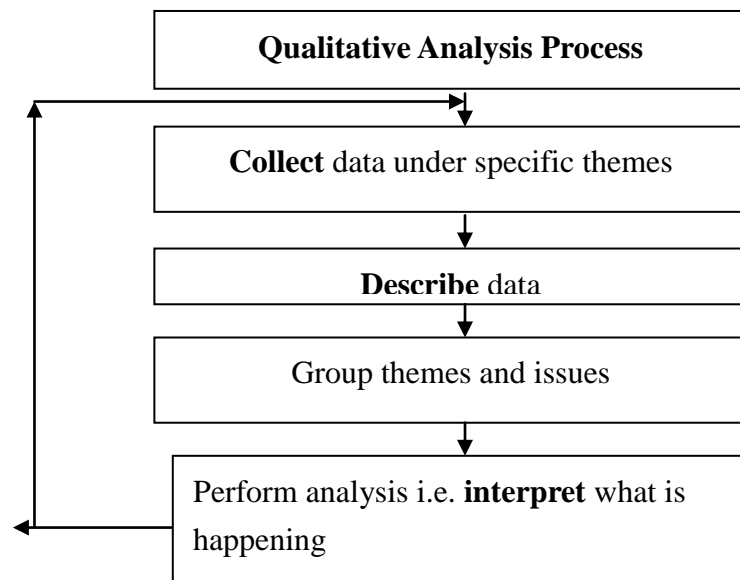


Fig. 4.4 Qualitative data analysis for this study (Source: Biggam, 2008, p. 235)

In this study, a thematic coding analysis method was employed. The analysis process started with the researcher reading the transcript several times. It allowed the researcher to build up a whole picture and themes from the respondents’ “stories”. A preliminary list of themes, categories and codes were developed using open coding. Fig. 4.5 shows an example of the open coding of this study.



Example:	Codes
“God loves me and teaches me to love others. I make cards for the elderly in the church and show my caring to them. I have sent 130 cards in this year. It makes me feel happy; I pray and talk to God. God always listen to me and saved my life when I was terribly sick..” (C1)	faith source of love connection with others love others action feeling/ happiness religious action connection with God faith boundary situation

Fig. 4.5 Example of the open coding used in this study

The researcher sorted and grouped the codes under different themes and formed three main parts:

Part 1: the descriptors of spirituality

Part 2: the content of spiritual needs including sources of love, sources of hope, meaning of life, sources of joy and inner peace, sources of connection; the content of spiritual experience

Part 3: the content of religiosity including religious practices and religious beliefs; the codes of religiosity in relation to different dimensions of spirituality

***Finalized Coding List***

By repeating the cycling process of “description, analysis and interpretation” (Biggam, 2008, p. 235), some new categories related to spirituality of older person were found. The coding list was finalized as:

Part 1: the descriptors of spirituality can be classified into four categories

Religious context

- i. Christian God
- ii. Buddhist gods

Quality of personhood

- i. Confucian teaching
- ii. social norms

Selfless service

- i. Contribution

The Universe

- i. sacred animals in Chinese culture
- ii. Christianity God's creation

Part 2a: Spiritual needs

- A. Existential values
  - i. source of joy and inner peace
  - ii. source of hope
- B. meaning of life
- C. source of love
- D. source of religious connection

Part 2b: Spiritual experience

- A. boundary situations
- B. spiritual distress
- C. transcendence

Part 3a: Religiosity

- A. organizational religiosity
- B. non-organizational religiosity

- i. private religious behaviour,
- ii. religious attitudes and beliefs

Part 3b: effects of religiosity to different dimensions of spirituality

- A. Reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being
- B. connection to the other people
- C. connection to the world around us
- D. personal inward exploration

#### **4.6.2 Data Quality and Triangulation**

According to Stake (2000), triangulation is “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation...triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (Stake, 2000, pp. 443-444). As noted in this study, there was triangulation of data sources (fig. 4.1) including the academic literature, interviews with key informants, focus group discussions and individual interviews.

To further triangulate and as a formal check of the qualitative data, one of the key informants was invited to independently code and interpret part of the transcript. Following comparison between the researcher’s coding and that of the key informant’s coding, it was found that they had both coded similarly. After that, the key informant was invited to comment on the entire coding list developed by the researcher to increase the reliability and validity of the research. This was a reassuring step in checking the reliability of such data and its interpretation, and helped to reduce the risk of individual interviewer or coder bias.

In summary, this chapter has provided the rationale for the research design, the process and techniques for data collection and analysis. More importantly, the researcher has attempted to conduct a valid and reliable study by triangulating various data sources through the use of open coding and undertook an independent analysis and comment on the coding list from a key informant. The next chapter, Results from Qualitative Data, presents the findings obtained from these methods.

## **Chapter Five: Results of Qualitative Data**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the results of the qualitative data described in Chapter 4 Research Design Methodology. The research focused on three groups of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong: the non-religious group; the *San Jiao* triad group; and the Christian group. The qualitative findings are approached in a structured way, theme by theme, including the “definition of spirituality”, “spiritual tasks associated with ageing and spiritual experience”, “religiosity” and “how religiosity may inspire spirituality”; these are grouped under the specific research questions posed in Chapter 1. The collection of qualitative data for this research was based on a broad concept of spirituality among older persons in a Chinese context in Hong Kong. Chapter 3, a case study of religions and religious characteristics in Hong Kong, provided a profile of various different religions in Hong Kong and detailed in a Chinese context.

### **5.2 Research Question 1: “What is Spirituality?”**

Here the results are discussed by the three groups:

#### The “Non-religious” Group

In the Focus Group (FG), not all participants were familiar with the concept of spirituality. There was a division of opinion within the “non-religious” group as two of the five respondents replied that they were not familiar with the term “spirituality”. One of them answered, “I have seldom heard of this term”. Another said, “I have heard this term several times, but I do not know how to explain what this term means.” One respondent related the term to “sacred animals” such as fish

and turtles as they have longer lives. One respondent defined it as “Buddhist worship”. One responded that it was related to voluntary work and helping others as they provided sources of hope and energy. In the individual interview, the respondent thought that spirituality is something non-material, related to love and care.

Of the six respondents in the “non-religious” group, two could not define what spirituality was. Only four tried to provide a definition of spirituality. Among these four respondents, one respondent related spirituality to the quality of personhood, “love and care”. One related it as selfless service, “like helping others”. One viewed it as “the sacred animals” recognised in Chinese culture. One believed it is in a religious context, Buddhist worship.

#### The *San Jiao* Triad Group

In the FG, two of the six respondents expressed unfamiliarity with the term. One of them responded, “I do not know,” and another replied that, “I am uncivilised. I have no idea,” and shook head to show the inability to define this term. One respondent related it to something “non-human”, such as soul and spirit. One held an opposite view that it was concerned “about wisdom, prescience, interaction, benevolence and righteousness”, and was not related to the soul. Two believed that it was related to contribution to society. One thought it was about voluntary work and helping others, and another viewed it as contribution in “the duties of the temple”. In the individual interview, the respondent viewed spirituality as “the journey to Buddhahood”.

Of the seven respondents in the *San Jiao* triad, only five respondents provided definitions of spirituality. One related it to “soul and spirit”. One denied it was about supernatural things but more about the quality of personhood. Two believed that it referred to a religious context, in which one regarded it as “the journey to Buddhahood” and another thought it was “the contribution to temple duties”. One suggested that it was about the contribution to society.

#### The Christian Group

In the FG, all five respondents related spirituality to a religious context. Three defined it as “the connection and communication to God”. One viewed it as relating to the Holy Spirit, “When I am weak, the Holy Spirit talks to me and I can feel it.” One believed it was related to “the creatures of God”, such as fresh air and green plants. In the individual interview, the respondent thought that spirituality is a state of feeling with “peace, no worries and no demands”.

Five of the six respondents in the Christian group defined spirituality in a religious context, relating it to the connection and communication with the Christian God. One added that it was related to the creatures of God. One considered it to be related to “peaceful feeling, no worries and no demands”.

All the respondents of the three groups were asked similar questions on the definition of spirituality. Their replies suggested that neither the “non-religious” nor the *San Jiao* triad groups had consistent ideas on the concept or definition of spirituality. Only the Christian group offered a more consistent view on spirituality, which was related to their religious context, the communication and connection with God and His creation. However, some respondents in the “non-religious” group and the *San Jiao* triad provided somewhat similar suggestions that it was related to the

quality of personhood, one's contribution to society and the "journey to Buddhahood". Fig 5.1 shows a diagram presenting the definition of spirituality among the Chinese older persons in this study.

From the qualitative data, some respondents had an idea of what spirituality was but some were not familiar with the term "spirituality. They interpreted spirituality differently. The literature review similarly highlighted the nature of spirituality in that it is seen as a subjective and internal experience of individuals which connotes personal experiences and individual practices (Yount, 2009; Moberg, 2008). Therefore, it is unique and interpreted differently by every individual (White, 2006; MacKinlay, 2006; McSherry, 2006; Yount, 2009; Moberg, 2008). McSherry (2006) and Moberg (2008) further added that spirituality does "not only apply to the religious person but to every individual irrespective of religious affiliation" (McSherry, 2006, pp. 44), and "whether they recognise it or not, and whether they identify with a religion or not" (Moberg, 2008, p.100).

The definition of spirituality from the qualitative data could be classified into to four categories: "the quality of personhood", "selfless service", "the universe" and "religious context". The following section elaborates on these categories in greater detail.



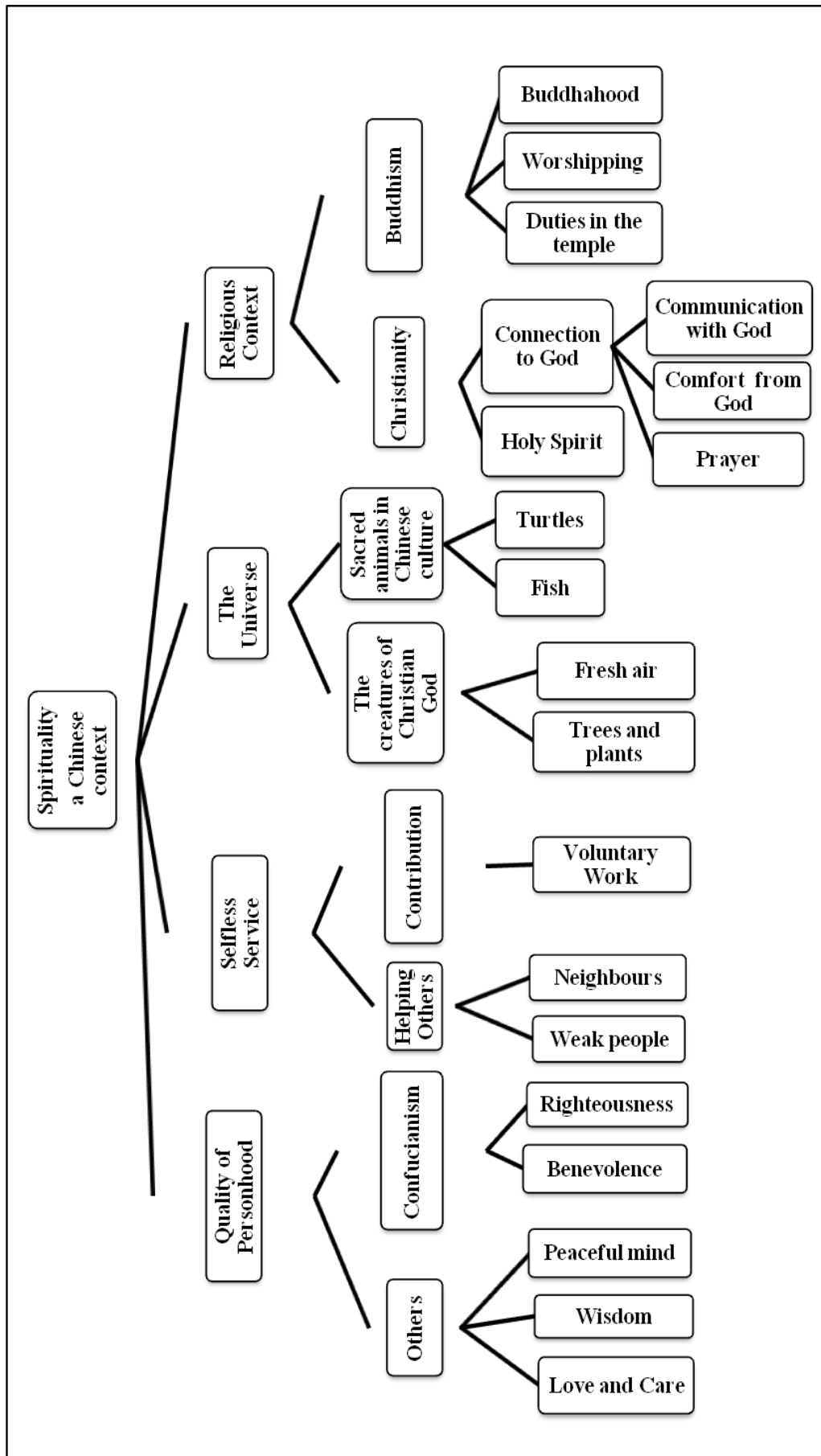


Fig. 5.1 The definition of “Spirituality” among Chinese older persons in this research

### 5.2.1 The Quality of Personhood

Some respondents explained the concept of spirituality in terms of “the quality of personhood”. The “quality of personhood” included, first, the teachings of Confucius which are deep rooted in Chinese culture. This promotes a high standard of moral codes in people’s lives (Oldstone-Moore, 2002), such as “righteousness” and “benevolence”. These qualities of personhood emphasised on the importance of “tradition and rites” for human relationship as under the teachings of Confucius (HK Information Services Department, 2008).

#### *Confucian Teaching*

*“...the meaning of spirituality...um...it’s about wisdom, prescience, interaction... benevolence and righteousness; but I don’t think it is related to soul” (B3, aged 60, woman)*

Second, there were other norms in Chinese culture which the respondents thought referred to spirituality, such as “wisdom and prescience”, “peaceful mind, no worries and no demand” and “love and care”:

#### *Wisdom and Prescience*

*“...the meaning of spirituality...um...it’s about wisdom, prescience, interaction... benevolence and righteousness but I don’t think it is related to soul” (B3, aged 60, woman)*

### *Peaceful Mind, No Worries and No Demand*

*“ ...it’s about feelings, emotions, no worries, being peaceful, having no demands... when I am with those I love every day, my wife and my children, I feel peace in my mind and I have no worries about anything” (I1, aged 67, woman)*

### *Love and Care*

*“...spirituality is not about things in the material world. It is related to non-material things, like love and care. By having love and care, I have a peaceful mind and happiness.” (I2, aged 70, man)*

In essence, either following the teachings of Confucius or practicing social norms, are held to promote higher levels of morality and quality of personhood. The respondents tried to relate moral goodness in Chinese culture to the concept of spirituality.

## **5.2.2 Selfless Service**

Some respondents viewed selfless service as spirituality. It included contribution like “doing voluntary work”, and “helping others”, such as neighbours and weak people:

### *Doing Voluntary Work and Helping Others*

*“...the most important thing in my life is the ability to help others. I am so proud of being able to do voluntary work. I find myself being useful. I am happy and I find that I am full of energy and hope when I help others... such as helping the people who are weaker than me, or the people who sleep next*

*to me...this may be a kind of spiritual enlightenment to me... ” (N2, aged 84, woman)*

### *Helping Others*

*“...health and having ability to show considerate for others are important to me. For example, in this elderly home, I help other people sleeping next to me. I find myself useful. It is important to me.” (B3, aged 60, woman)*

It appears that the respondents reflected the Taoist belief that people could become gods or deities by contributing to the lives of others and practicing the highest standard of moral goodness. The Taoist gods such as Kwan Ti and Che Kung are the famous examples. They are Taoist gods in the Posterior Heavens having great virtues and feats in saving mankind. Owing to their contribution to mankind, they became Taoist gods. People built temples to respect and worship them (Burkhardt, 1959; Lip, 1986; HK Information Services Department, 2009).

### **5.2.3 The Universe**

In Chinese culture, the term “the universe” refers to a concept of harmonious relationships with the universe, *tian*. This term was chosen in this study to represent the natural environment in a Chinese context. One respondent viewed “scared animals in Chinese culture” as spiritual and related to spirituality:

*“Some fish and turtles are spiritual. They are old and big. When I look at them, I feel they are something sacred. They have some kind of spirit inside. So they have longer lives.” (N1, aged 60, woman)*

One respondent considered “the creation of the Christian God” that formed “the universe” as something spiritual:

*“God’s creation is so spiritual. When I went hiking, I felt the fresh air and the green plants. It seems that they were talking to me and giving me power. It was a very nice experience.”* (C3, aged 60, woman)

In this sense, the former description related to how the universe is viewed in Chinese culture. It is likely that the belief in Taoism of “pursuing immortality” (Blofeld, 2000) is deep rooted in Chinese culture therefore the respondent viewed longevity as spiritual. In the latter description, the concept of spirituality was defined in relation to Christianity. In Judeo-Christian teaching, God is a spirit (Yount, 2009) hence the respondent believed that the creation of the Christian God is spiritual.

#### **5.2.4 Religious Context**

##### *Christianity*

Some respondents viewed spirituality in a religious context. Some of them, mainly from the Christian group, suggested spirituality was the connection to God, such as “communication with and comfort from God”, and “prayer”, and about the “Holy Spirit”:

*“It’s about communication and comfort. God is important to me. God controls everything. I pray and ask for directions from God. When I was not a Christian, I lacked a sense of security.”* (C2, aged 63, woman)

*“It’s about the communication with God. If one has a good relationship with God, one will be more spiritual.” (C4, aged 63, woman)*

*“It’s about the connection between God and the disciples. I pray and listen to God. I talk to God everyday...” (C1, aged 72, woman)*

*“It’s about the Holy Spirit. When I am weak, I can feel that the Holy Spirit talks to me and gives me advice.” (C5, aged 62, woman)*

The literature review highlighted the definition of Christian spirituality in sub-section 2.3.2.4. It appeared to be supported by the views of the respondents. It suggested that the meaning and purpose of life of a Christian was to concern “the totality of life” (Moberg, 2008) and, the life and behaviour of Christians were believed to be directed by “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit” (Yount, 2009). Therefore, the respondents offered a Christian view of spirituality as the connection to God, such as “communication with and comfort from God”, and “prayer”, and about the “Holy Spirit”.

### *Buddhism*

Some respondents, who were mainly in the *San Jiao* triad group, viewed spirituality as related to “a journey of Buddhahood”, “Buddhist worship” and “contribution to the temple”:

### *Buddhahood*

*“If one can transcend the illusion of the material world and let go, he/she is spiritual and becomes Buddha.” (I3, age 66, woman)*

### *Buddhist Worship*

*“It is something good, something related to the worship of Buddha...” (N5, aged, age 63, woman)*

### *Contribution to the Temple*

*“...can be a voluntary worker for the Buddhist temple...If I am healthy, I can help with voluntary work for the temple. I want to make a contribution to the Buddha and the temple” (B5, aged 102, woman)*

*“...have ability to work for the temple and help others...I think having an ability to do voluntary work and make a contribution to the temple is important to me” (B6, aged 90, woman)*

The replies from the respondents reflected the teachings and beliefs of Buddhism, which suggested the journey of “Buddhahood” is an important task for the Buddhists (Shek, 2010; Juergensmeyer, 2006). Besides, they suggested other ways of gaining experience in Buddhism, such as “Buddha worship” and “contribution to the temple”, as relating to spirituality.

In summary, this section provided an overview of the definitions and lack of definitions of spirituality among the older Chinese respondents in this research. Some of them derived the meaning of spirituality from religion, and some defined it from traditional Chinese values, social norms, and selfless service. The next section, covering spiritual needs and spiritual experience, provides more detailed responses and insights into spirituality.

### **5.3 Research Question 2: “What are the Spiritual Needs of Chinese Older Persons?”**

This section explores the spiritual needs, including the meaning of life, existential values (sources of joy and hope), connection with others, connection to a higher power; and the spiritual experiences, including boundary situations, transcendence and spiritual distress of Chinese older persons.

#### **5.3.1 Spiritual Tasks Associated with Ageing**

To assess the spiritual needs of Chinese older persons, sources of meaning, joy, hope, love, and religious connection were explored. As spiritual needs vary among religions and cultures of individuals (McSherry, 2006), the results of spiritual needs were presented group by group. Understanding the spiritual needs of older persons would help to recognise the spiritual tasks of older persons in later life. MacKinlay’s (2006) generic model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing was introduced in sub-section 2.5.4 and reproduced in Fig 2.6 below for convenience. It was adopted to present the results of the three groups.

Figure 2.6 presents a dynamic model suggesting older persons find meaning, hope, intimacy, and transcending loss/disabilities as their spiritual tasks in later life. All these four aspects are interrelated, and are also dynamic with the ultimate meaning in life and the responses to ultimate meaning.



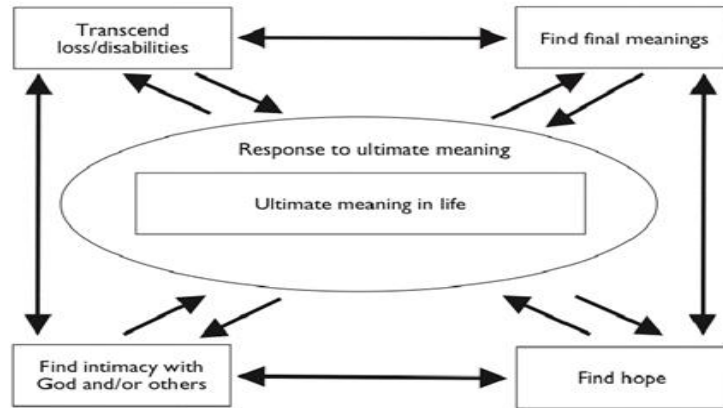


Figure 2.6 A generic model of spiritual tasks and the process of ageing (Source: MacKinlay, 2006, p. 23)

### 5.3.1.1 *The “Non-religious” Group*

The results of spiritual needs of the non-religious group are presented in Fig. 5.2, the Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for non-religious group. Family was a core element for the spirituality of the respondents in this group. The sources of meaning for the respondents were (a) family and self-achievement. The sources of hope were from (b) filial children and health. Their sources of intimacy were from (c) family. They generally transcended loss and disabilities by (d) trusting themselves and practicing social norms. The ultimate meaning in life could be to restore health and have filial children along with them in later life. The responses to this ultimate meaning were to do physical exercise, to behave well in daily life by practicing social norms in Chinese culture, and to keep contact with children.

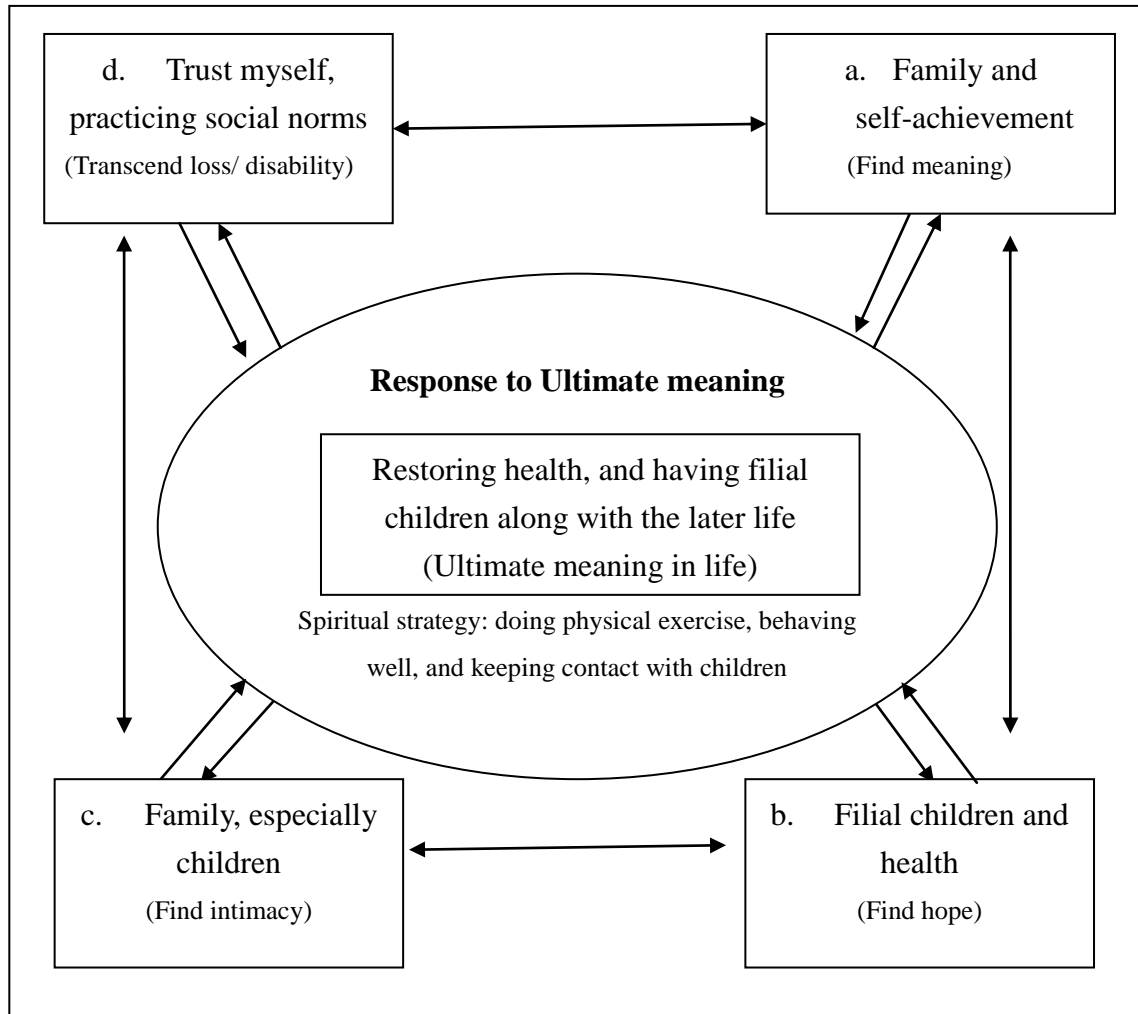


Fig. 5.2 Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for non-religious group

a. Meaning of Life

In the non-religious group, the meaning of life for the respondents mainly focused on family (N2, N4, and N5) and self-achievement (I2). Two of them responded that family was their most important thing and one said filial children were important to her:

*“My family is important to me but because of sickness, they sent me to this elderly home. I miss them very much. I can see them only once a week. I really miss them.”* (N4, aged 64, male)

*“I cannot see my future without my children. I tried my best to raise them and now have nothing left. They are the most important things in my remaining life.”* (N2 aged 84, female)

*“I hope my children will look after me and give me money.”* (N5, aged 63, female)

One respondent’s (I2, aged 70, male) life meaning was to broaden his horizons by travelling. He thought that it may be a compensation for what he was not able to do when he was young.

b. Hope

The sources of hope for the six respondents were family (N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, and I2) and health (N1, N2). The respondents viewed filial piety of children and for their family members to have good lives as the main sources of hope:

*“...I raised the children and did not ask for any reward, I hope that my children show filial obedience to me and have a good relationship with me.”*  
(N2, aged 84, female)

*“I have the chance to look after my grandchildren and I have a happy family life. It helps me not to worry about the future.”* (N5, aged 63, female)

*“I am a brother to my siblings. I hope my little brothers and sisters could have good lives. Some of them are in Hong Kong and we sometimes talk on*

*the phone.*” (N3, aged 60, male)

*“I hope my children will look after me and give me protection as I am getting old...”* (I2, aged 70, male)

Two respondents viewed health as important as having filial children for their future:

*“I looked after my daughter. I hope that she could have achievement and earn money...I hope I can go travelling with my family whatever place we go...I am worried about the behaviour of my children and my health situation. I need to do more exercise.”* (N1, aged 60, female)

*“I hope that I could have a healthy body and that my children are obedient. I am not worried about anything...”* (N2, aged 84, female)

c. Intimacy

The sources of love and connection for the respondents were mainly focused on family (N1, N3, N5, and I2), including daughter, son, and grandmother:

*“I love my daughter so much. I looked after her. She is independent, filial and obedient.”* (N1, aged 60, female)

*“My grandmother was important to me. She raised me and looked after me when I was young”* (N3, aged 60, male)

*“My children are important to me. I spent my life to raise them and earn money for them.” (N5, aged 63, female)*

*“My son is important to me. He looks after me and talks to me. He sometimes asks for my opinion. He respects me.” (I2, aged 70, male)*

d. Transcendence

When facing loss and disabilities, the respondents in the non-religious group transcended difficulties by trusting themselves (N2, N3, N4, and I2) and practicing social norms (N3):

*“Don’t be too superstitious; trust myself and try not to cheat and curse; be responsible for myself and to others, behave well.” (N2, aged 84, female)*

*“I do not think Buddhism is good. I have some knowledge about Christianity too. None of the religions are good. I only trust myself.” (N3, aged 60, male)*

One respondent (N1, aged 60, female) responded she may go to the temple to ask for blessings if she was faced with something bad. She thought that going to the temple might not equate to being a religious adherent because it was only a traditional ritual in Chinese culture just like ancestral worship and *feng shui*. She saw something “good” in Chinese culture but it may not equal to religious affiliation.

In summary, the family formed a core element of spirituality in the non-religious group. The ultimate meaning in life for this group could be restoring

health and having filial children along with the later life. Therefore, responding to this ultimate meaning the respondents tried first, to do more physical exercises to restore health and maintain muscles flexibility (N1 and N2); second, to behave well and do something good (N1 and N2) as these may bring goodness and blessing to people in traditional Chinese culture; third, to keep contact with children, such as by phones in order to maintain good relationships with them (N1, N2, N3, N5 and I2). Although the respondents were not religiously affiliated, their respondents reflected the Taoist belief, such as pursuing immortality (Blofeld, 2000) by restoring and maintaining health and attaining longevity (Chui, Donoghue, and Chenoweth, 2005; Mollier, 2008, Pregadio, 2008), and following the Taoist scriptures and doctrine, such as *Daodejing*, to practice moral values (Ho, 2010).

#### **5.3.1.2 The San Jiao Triad Group**

The results of the spiritual needs of the *San Jiao* triad are presented in Fig. 5.3, the Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for *San Jiao* triad. Religion, contribution to society and family were the core elements for the spirituality of the respondents in this group. The sources of meaning of the respondents were (a) family, contribution to others and to the Buddha. The sources of hope were from (b) helping others, health, and Buddhism. Their sources of intimacy were from (c) family and the Buddha. They generally transcended loss and disabilities by (d) committing to the Buddhist teachings. The ultimate meaning in life were to be healthy and able to contribute to the Buddha and others. The responses to this ultimate meaning included practicing *Tai chi* and physical exercise, reciting Buddhist scriptures, meditation, practicing moral goodness.

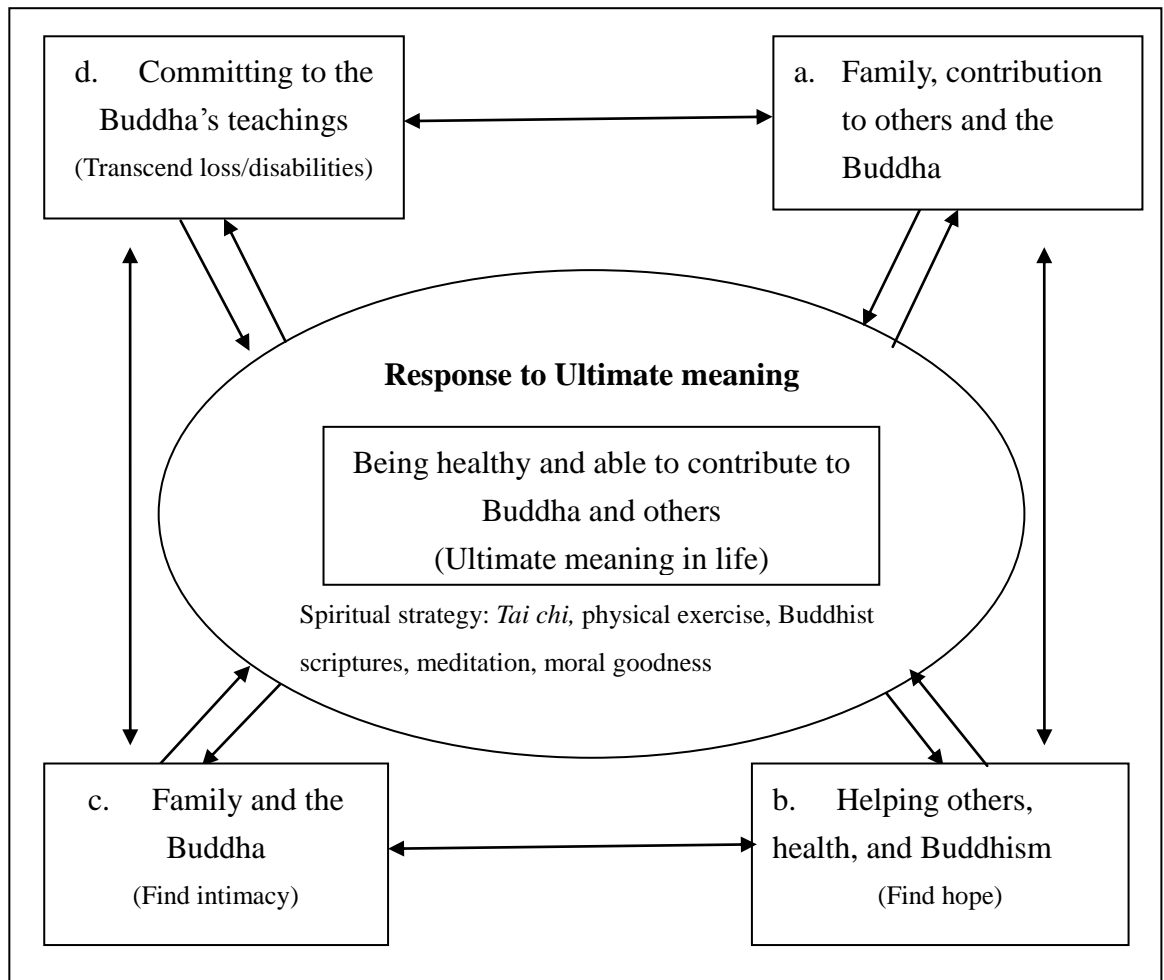


Fig. 5.3 Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for *San Jiao* triad group

a. Meaning of Life

In *San Jiao* triad group, the meaning of life of the respondents mainly focused on family (B2 and B4), contribution to others (B3 and B6) and to the Buddha (B3, B5, B6, I3). Two responded that family was their most important thing with emphasis on their “children and grandchildren”, and one said “I am getting old and not able to work any more. I will look after my grandchildren” (B2, aged 84, male). One said she treasured “having a chance to gather with her children” (B4, aged 72, female). Two answered that helping others provided important meaning for them and one said:

*“Health and having the ability to show consideration for others are important to me. For example, in this elderly home, I help other people sleeping next to me. I can find myself useful. It is important to me.”* (B3, aged 60, female)

Two of the respondents viewed the contributions to Buddha as their sources of meaning:

*“Being a Buddhist is the whole of my life. I will continue my duty as a Buddhist nun.”* (B3, aged 60, female)

*“I will spend my life contributing to the Buddha, more meditation and reciting Buddha’s scriptures.”* (I3, aged 66, female)

Two of them emphasised the importance of health for contributing to the Buddha:

*“If I am healthy, I can help with voluntary work for the temple. I want to make a contribution to the Buddhists and the temple.”* (B5, aged 102, female)

*“I think having the ability (being healthy) to do voluntary work and making a contribution to the temple is important to me.”* (B6, aged 90, female)



b. Hope

The sources of hope for respondents in the *San Jiao* triad were health (B1, B2, B4 and B6), helping others (B2 and B5), and Buddhism (B3 and I3). The respondents viewed health as their main source of hope:

*“I am proud of my good body. It is nimble, energetic, strong and powerful; (does stretching activities immediately, cheerfully), I enjoy doing physical activities...”* (B1, aged 99, female)

*“I hope everyone can be healed from sickness and illness. Suffering from illness is a very painful experience but I am sick, I do not have many wishes.”* (B2, aged 84, male)

*“I do not ask for wealth as I cannot bring it along with me when I die. I hope I can have good health and be healed from the sickness of painful bones and eyes.”* (B6, aged 90, female)

Three of them viewed helping others and committing to Buddhism as the most important things to them:

*“I hope I can help other old, disabled people; for me, I hope I can be healthy and will not be a burden on others.”* (B2, aged 84, male)

*“I contributed to the lives of others but I did not ask for gratitude. I hope everyone can be healthy and that there will be a peaceful world with fewer disasters. I enjoy reading Buddhist scriptures and taking the duties of a*

*Buddhist nun. Reading Buddhist scriptures can bring me a sense of hope.”*

(B3, aged 60, female)

*“Reciting Buddha’s scriptures and meditation gives me a peaceful mind. I am not worried about anything. I am full of hope.”* (I3, aged 66, female)

c. Intimacy

The sources of love and connection for the respondents were mainly focused on the family (B1, B3, B4, B5 and I3) and the Buddha (B3). One said her children were the most important. Four responded that their parents were important. Among them, two emphasised their mother had a close relationship with them:

*“I love my mother so much. I visit her grave every year.”* (B4, aged 72, female)

*“My mother is important. She is sick. I need to look after her and care for her.”* (I3, aged 66, female)

One responded that the Buddha (B3) was her source of love and connection as “it makes me learn more about life and it gives me spiritual support”. (B3, aged 60, female).

d. Transcendence

When facing loss and disabilities, the respondents of the *San Jiao* triad transcend difficulties by committing to the Buddhist teachings (B2, B3, B4, B6 and I3). They were taught to let go, forgive and behave well:

*“Being humble and self-evaluation are important to me. I learn to not ask for reward and gratitude. Buddhism teaches me to behave myself and not to cheat”* (B2, aged 84, male)

*“Buddhism teaches me to be a morally good person, to be considerate and to forgive others. It is good for teaching the youth.”* (B4, aged 72, female)

*“I know that doing morally good things will bring health to me. Buddhism teaches me to be a gentle person and respect others.”* (B6, aged 90, female)

*“If I can transcend the illusion of the material world, I can become close to the Buddha (Buddhahood). I learn to forgive others and myself.”* (I3, aged 66, female)

In summary, for respondents of the *San Jiao* triad group, contribution to society and family were core elements for spirituality. The ultimate meaning in life for this group could be to be healthy and be able to contribute to the Buddha and others. Responding to this ultimate meaning the respondents tried first, to do *Tai chi* and physical exercises (B1 and B4) for maintaining physical health; second, to recite and chant Buddhist scriptures (B3 and I3), and meditate for gaining wisdom in Buddhism; third, to do moral goodness (B2, B3, B4, B6 and I3) as to follow the Taoist (HK Information Services Department, 2009; Ho, 2010) and the Confucius scriptures (Oldstone-Moore, 2002).

### 5.3.1.3 The Christian Group

The results of the spiritual needs of the Christian group are presented in Fig. 5.4, the Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for the Christian group. Faith in the Christian God contributed to the core element for the spirituality of the respondents in this group.

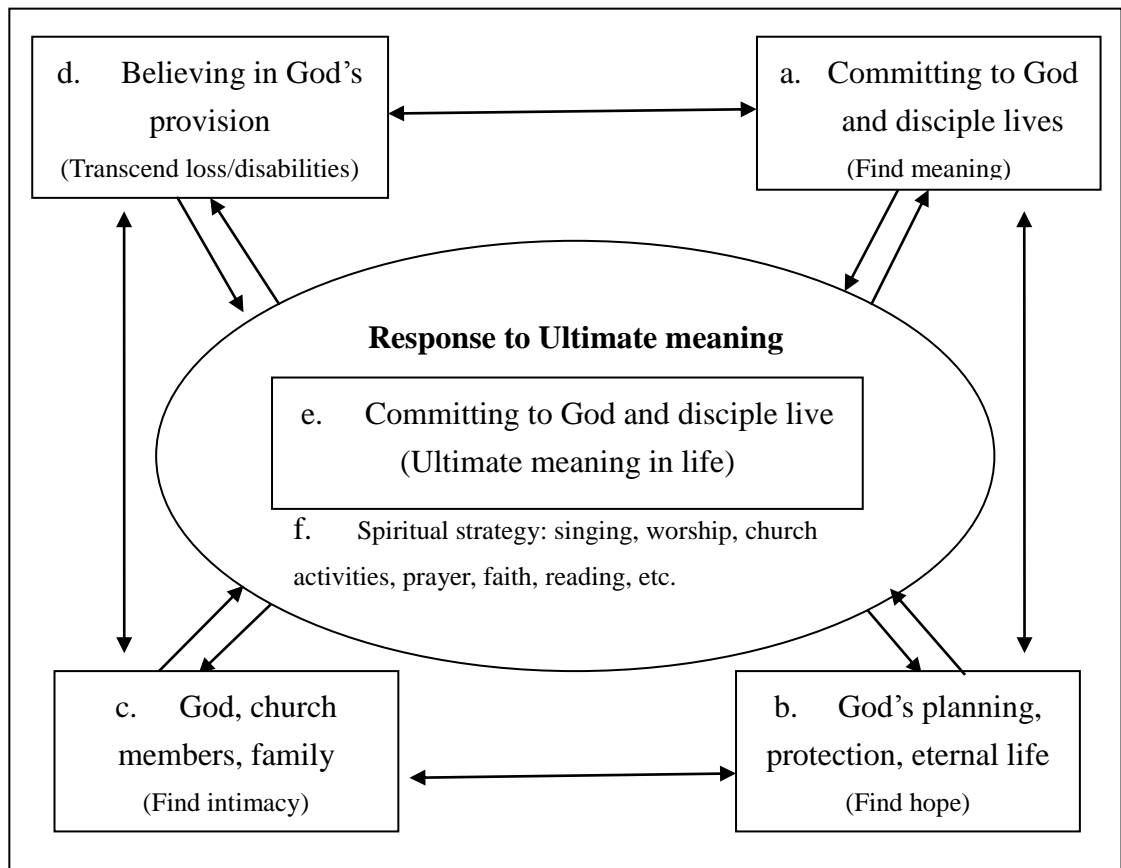


Fig. 5.4 Model of spiritual tasks and process of ageing for Christian group

The sources of meaning of the respondents were (a) committing to God and having disciplined lives. The sources of hope were from (b) God's planning, protection, and eternal life. Their sources of intimacy were from (c) God, church members and family. They generally transcended loss and disabilities by (d) believing in God's provision. The ultimate meaning in life was to commit to God

and to practice disciplined lives. Their response to this ultimate meaning included singing psalms, worship, church activities, prayer, faith and reading the Bible and so on.

a. Meaning of Life

For the respondents in the Christian group, the meaning of life was to commit to God and practice disciplined lives (C1, C2, C3, C5 and I1) such as “completing God’s mission”, “preaching”, “attending church activities”, “showing love to others”, “letting family members know about God” and “preaching to family members”:

*Attending Church Activities*

*“I am a retired person. I spend all my time on church activities, such as singing psalms, caring about others. God changes my life.” (C2, aged 63, female)*

*Completing God’s Mission and Preaching*

*“I am retired. I spend all my time on God’s mission because I owe God a lot. I commit to missionary and preaching work. I want to have a chance to be a preacher; I will be well-planned for my death and prepare my dying words.” (C1, aged 72, female)*

*Letting Family Members Know About God*

*“I try to let my children have a good relationship with God and am becoming more familiar with the love from God. For me, I will spend more time on reading and studying the Bible” (C4, aged 63, female)*

b. Hope

The sources of hope in the Christian group were believing in God's planning and protection (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5 and I1), and eternal life (C2 and I1). The respondents viewed God as their main source of hope:

*God's Planning and Protection*

*"When I am alone, I feel bored and down. Then I will think of God and his support...I rely on God and do not feel lonely any more... I do not know the future yet God promises to go along with me. I am comforted. So when I feel lonely again, I sing psalms to praise God."* (C5, aged 62, female)

*"In the past, I was afraid of darkness and loneliness. I prayed and trusted in God's protection. Now I am not afraid of the darkness."* (C3, aged 60, female)

*Eternal Life*

*"I am happy that I can rely on Jesus Christ. I always have solutions under his blessing. Sometimes, I face trouble and I do not feel happy, but I pray and patiently wait for the directions from God ...Eternal life gives me a sense of hope. I worry about my daughter but I trust in my God. I pray and I feel more comfortable and peaceful."* (I1, aged 67, female)

Some responded that the eternity of God and eternal life brought sources of hope, which enabled them to face death positively:

*“My hope comes from God because I know I will be separated from my family. Only the eternal God gives me faith. I am getting old. Sometimes, I am afraid of death and separation from family members. After I joined many Christian funerals, sang psalms and listened to the message about eternal life there, I am not afraid of death any more. I know where I will go after death. I know I have eternal life.”* (C2, aged 63, female)

*“When I die, I will go to Heaven, a peaceful place. I am not worried about death.”* (C3, aged 60, female)

c. Intimacy

The sources of love and connection of the respondents were mainly focused on God (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5 and I1), church members (C1, C3, C4 and I1), and family (C4). All of the respondents said God was the most important to them, and some of them had intimacy with “brothers and sisters” because of God’s love:

*“God loves me and teaches me to love others. I make cards for the elderly in the church and show my caring towards them. I have sent 130 cards in this year. It makes me feel happy; I pray and talk to God. God always listens to me and he saved my life when I was terribly sick.”* (C1, aged 72, female)

*“When I face trouble, I talk to the pastor and seek help from brothers and sisters. I pray and rely on God’s direction. It gives me power to face problems. I trust that God must help me; God loves me and I have love to love the others; I feel peaceful.”* (I1, aged 67, female)

*“I enjoy the life in my church. I spend time with church members on the missions. I am broad-minded. I learn to rely on God.” (C5, aged 62, female)*

*“Church life gives me great support. I attend reading class twice a month. Brothers and sisters share freely and support each other. It is a great time for me.” (C3, aged 60, female)*

*“I felt the love from my brothers and sisters in the church. I recognise that many people care about me. It is so sweet.” (C4, aged 63, female)*

Other than love from God and church members, two emphasised that their family was also a source of love:

*“I am proud of my good relationship with my son. I help him with his delivery work. And my son is filial to me. He respects me and I care about him... I hope that I will be physically flexible, conscious and healthy in later life. So that I can help him more...When I am upset, I think of the happy events in the past and I pray to God. Then I become happy again.” (C4, aged 63, female)*

*“Family relationship is important to me. I love my children very much. Having good relationships with them is meaningful for me.” (I1, aged 67, female)*

d. Transcendence

When facing loss and disabilities, the respondents in the Christian group



transcend the difficulties by believing in God's provision and protection (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5 and I1). This helped them to face difficulties, loneliness and the prospect of death:

#### *God's Provision*

*"I am happy God has given me talents and abilities. When I am down, my friends may not understand me. I pray and talk to God."* (C1, aged 72, female)

#### *Loneliness*

*"When I am alone, I feel bored and down. Then I will think of God and his support and I do not feel lonely any more."* (C5, aged 62, female)

#### *Divorce*

*"When I divorced, I became single mother. I was unhappy. I prayed, sang psalms and read the Bible with my daughters every night. I was comforted and gained the power to overcome problems...God is important to me. He controls everything. I pray and ask for God's directions. When I was not a Christian, I lacked a sense of security."* (C2, aged 63, female)

#### *Darkness*

*"In the past, I was afraid of darkness and loneliness. I prayed and trusted in the protection from God. Now, I am not afraid of darkness."* (C3, aged 60, female)

### *Positive Attitude on Death*

*God gives me a life promise of eternal life. I know where I will go when I die.*

*I am not afraid of death. I have hope and know about eternal life. It makes me become important and optimistic (I1, aged 67, female)*

In summary, for the Christian group, faith in God, including God's planning, protection and eternal life, was the core element for spirituality. The ultimate meaning in life for this group could be committing to God such as having faith, relying on God and completing God's mission; and practicing disciplined lives, such as love for others and preaching. Responding to this ultimate meaning, the respondents tried first, to practice religious activities (C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5) such as church activities, reading the Bible and Sunday services and worship for gaining wisdom in God; second, to spend time on God's mission and preaching (C1, C2 and C4); third, learn to sing psalms and poems, and pray for developing disciple lives (C2, C3, C5 and I1).

#### **5.3.1.4 Interim Conclusion: Spiritual Tasks Associated with Ageing**

In exploring spiritual needs, the spiritual tasks associated with ageing among the respondents were identified. The replies from the non-religious group suggested, more likely, a "secular" vision of spiritual tasks associated with ageing, emphasising health and intimacy with family. The responses from the *San Jiao* triad seemed to reflect a traditional Chinese religious older persons' version of spiritual tasks associated with ageing, focusing on health and the ability to contribute to the Buddha and others. The answers from the Christian group appeared to show a typical Christian version of spiritual tasks associated with ageing, concentrating on the commitment to God and the practice of disciplined lives. These findings indicate

rather different views of spirituality and the importance of faith among the three groups of respondents.

### **5.3.2 Spiritual Experience**

The assessment of spiritual needs could help further the understanding of the spiritual experience among the older persons. By exploring their spiritual needs, the boundary situations that the respondents faced were identified.

Boundary situations refer to different kinds of suffering people may have in a lifetime (Kwan, 2005). It is an important concept for understanding spirituality. In this research, the boundary situations which the respondents came across with included illness (N4, I2 and B4), separation from family members (N4 and B1), the death of a spouse (C5), alienation and loneliness (B6), a car accident (C5), divorce (C1) and fear of death (C2 and I1). Kwan noted that if we are facing boundary situations, we could be in distress; also, we may transcend the experience (Kwan, 2005). The following presents the distress and transcendent experience of the respondents.

#### **5.3.2.1 *Spiritual Distress***

Spiritual distress could be described as “the result of total inability to invest life with meaning. It can be demotivating, painful and can cause anguish to the sufferer” (Burnard, 1987, p. 377). In this study, the respondents who were suffering from spiritual distress were mainly facing illness (I2 and B4), separation from family members (N4, and B1), and alienation and loneliness (B1 and B6). McSherry suggested that a person may face spiritual distress if his/her spiritual needs were not met (McSherry, 2006). The following presents three cases.

#### **A. Illness and Separation from Family (N4)**

N4 (aged 64, male) felt himself under a worsening health situation. He was suffering from diabetes, cancer, loss of sight and disability. Because of sickness, his family had sent him to an elderly home:

*“My family is important to me but because of sickness, they sent me to this elderly home. I miss them very much. I can see them only once a week. I really miss them...”*

Owing to the separation from his family, he was depressed. He lost the source of meaning and source of intimacy from his family. He thought that he could not find his future without his family. He tried to commit suicide:

*“I have lost my family. I am losing the relationship with and love from my family. I worry about my children. I do not feel happy any more. I do not have any wishes. I have no hope any more...I tried to kill myself...”*

He was non-religious. In the elderly home, he learnt some Buddhist scriptures and several times when he was very depressed and could not sleep, he tried to chant the Buddhist scriptures. However, this was less likely to be helpful to him, seemingly because of his lack of knowledge or experience of this religion:

*“I am not familiar with Buddhism and the Buddhist scriptures. It is too difficult for me. When I could not sleep well or felt unhappy, I tried to chant Buddhist scriptures. It sometimes helps me to stay calm, yet, cannot give me*

*a positive emotion and sense of happiness...*

He thought that it was a tragedy for older persons to be sent to an old people's home. He wanted to pass his voice to the younger generation and the government:

*"I hope that the younger generation would stop sending older persons to elderly homes. These are not an ideal place for older persons as you (the younger generation) think. There, people cannot have family members and relatives in elderly home. The roommates and neighbours here can never replace family members. I hope the government would understand it and consider it..."*

N4 faced the boundary situations of illness and separation from family. He lost his ability to look after himself because of sickness. More importantly, his family sent him to the elderly home; this made him lose his core sources of meaning, love and hope in his life (i.e. his family). It appeared that N4 was suffering from spiritual distress, in that he was unable to invest life with meaning any more. He was depressed and frustrated and had even attempted to end his life.

## **B. Separation from Family and Alienation (B1)**

B1 (aged 99, female) had been a Buddhist for 56 years. She thought herself healthy. She was a sporty and energetic older person, who was proud of her muscle flexibility and strong bones. She liked to do physical exercises very much. She was a religious person who chanted and recited Buddhist scriptures every morning. She sometimes participated in voluntary work helping others. She emphasised that her children were the most important to her, yet they had all migrated to foreign

countries. B1 was very disappointed and lost her core sources of meaning and love because she loved her children:

*“I love my children. But, they’ve all gone. I am alone in Hong Kong. They are in foreign countries. I miss them. But, I am not able to contact them. I have no hope any more. I am alone...I want to die... I think I am useless. My children are in other places... I feel unhappy without my family. I am trapped in the elderly home...”*

She further responded that religiosity could help her to let go and forgive others. Yet, it was less likely to help her invest hope and meaning in life:

*“The teaching of Buddhism could sometimes help me to forgive others and eliminate the sense of anger in daily life...I am too old. I cannot remember things. I like them very much. I want my children only. Nothing can give a sense of hope for future. I am waiting to die...”*

B1 faced the separation from family and alienation. Her children had left her and she was unable to contact them. Also, she lived in the elderly home where she thought she was trapped and had lost her freedom. She displayed her feelings with sadness, and with an emphasis on being alienated, because of losing the sources of meaning and intimacy in her life. Although she had been a Buddhist for 56 years, this appeared to be less helpful for her to reinvest life with meaning. In turn, she was under spiritual distress.

### C. Alienation and Loneliness (B6)

B6 (aged 90, female) had a good health status. She had been a Buddhist for 60 years. She chanted and recited Buddhism scriptures and practiced Buddha worship every day. She felt thankful that the government looks after older persons in Hong Kong:

*“I want to thank the Hong Kong government. Only the government looks after older persons. The younger generation leaves the older persons alone after sending them to the elderly home. Only the Hong Kong government cares about the older persons.”*

She was single, having no children and relatives. Since she had lost the ability to look after herself, she moved in to the elderly home. After living in the elderly home it appeared that she had lost her sources of intimacy:

*“I enjoy cooking but I am losing my abilities. I cannot recognise the roads... I do not have any children and relatives. I am alone. I have no friends after I left to go into the elderly home. I cannot do anything but am just waiting for the end here...”*

When asked how her religious belief could affect her daily life, she responded there was meaning derived from religion. However, it seemed that this could not help her to think of the future positively:

*“I know that doing morally good things will bring health to me. Buddhism teaches me to be a gentle person and respect others... Yet, I have no*

*connection with others... I want to go to heaven earlier...*”

B6 had a connection with religion. It was likely that religion could provide life principles for her to practice in daily life (i.e. being a gentle person and respect others). Yet she seemed to lack sources of intimacy as she did not have children and relatives; also, she had lost her friends after living in the elderly home. It appeared to make her feel a sense of loss in life. Therefore she emphasised that, “*I cannot do anything but am just waiting for the end here...*” and, “*I want to go to heaven earlier*”.

In essence, it was more likely that “fractured” relationship with family and others contributed to one of the core factors causing spiritual distress for older persons in this research. Under spiritual distress, the individual was unable to invest life with meaning (Burnard, 1987; Burkhardt, 1989; McSherry, 2006). It could be dispiriting and dysfunctional if people totally lose meaning in life (Burnard, 1987). Furthermore, McSherry (2006) quoting Labun’s (1988) identification of spiritual distress, stressing that there are seven human experiences demonstrating spiritual distress, including spiritual pain, alienation, anxiety, guilt, anger, loss and despair (McSherry, 2006, p. 59). The respondents in this research showed similar experiences under spiritual distress, such as frustration, depression, disappointment, sense of loss and despair.

#### **5.3.2.2 Transcendence**

In this research, there were respondents who had experienced a car accident (C5), divorce (C1), the death of spouse (C5) and fear of death (C2 and I1), yet



transcended from boundary situations and could reinvest life with meaning through religion. The following presented their cases.

#### **A. The Death of a Spouse and a Car Accident (C5)**

C5 (aged 62, female) had a fair health status. She had been a Christian for 32 years, she prayed and read the Bible every day, and attended Sunday services and fellowships. She faced a difficult time in life when her husband died. She was very upset and could not stop herself from crying:

*“When my husband passed away, I raised my children all by myself. I was very upset. I cried all day...I often cried... I could not escape from the sadness and could not stop my tears. I was afraid that my daughter would know I was upset but I just could not stop my tears because I was so lonely. I hid myself in the toilet and kitchen when I wanted to cry...”*

She responded that, at the time, faith, religious practices and church members helped her to transcend that hard period in her life:

*“... I went to church. The people in the church supported me. I learnt some Christian songs in the church. Once, I could not stop my tears. I hid in the kitchen again. I sang psalms and poems. The poem reminded me that even though I do not know the future, God promises to go along with me. I relied on God and did not feel lonely any more. I was comforted. So, when I felt lonely again, I sang psalms and poems. I have faced very difficult times and I succeeded in overcoming them. I rely on God and I have the courage and*

*energy to step over the difficulties. God saved my life and gave me energy when I faced trouble...*

She shared another hard time in her life, a car accident. She nearly died. At the time she was in a coma, religion gave her strength and she woke up finally:

*“In 2005, I had a car accident and was seriously hurt. Before going into the emergency room, my mother prayed for me and asked for blessing. I remembered that there were psalms coming out from my mind. My mother handed over my life to God and he saved and protected me. I felt that God’s Holy Spirit supported me and I woke up. So I deeply trust in and rely on God...”*

She replied that she had found her new meaning in life from religion. Her life purpose was to commit to God and let her family know about God’s love:

*“When I was not a Christian, my husband and money were important to me. Now, I am a Christian. God is the most important as I can rely on him. When I am alone, I feel bored and down. Then I will think of God and his support. When I am worried about my family, I pray to my God. Only God can help me because God saved my life and gave me energy when I faced troubles...In my remaining life, I will spend time to learn singing psalms and using computers so that I can serve my Lord. My son, my mother and my grandson are still important to me. I hope they can be happy and healthy. I will try to let them know that God loves them.”*

C5 lost her source of love and meaning when her husband died. She was filled with sorrow and sadness. The love of church members and faith in God's protection helped her to transcend the difficult time. More importantly, her religious belief provided her with meaning and purpose in life. She planned for her later life with purpose by committing to God.

## **B. Fear of Death (I1)**

I1 (aged 67, female) had been a Christian for 45 years. She prayed, read the Bible and meditated twice a day; she also attended Sunday services and fellowship every week. She shared the fact that she was afraid of death and being separated from family. Faith in God and eternal life gave her confidence and she was positive about death:

*“...I am getting old. Sometimes, I am afraid of death and the separation from family members. I am afraid of talking about death. I feel especially uncomfortable and anxious after attending funeral ceremonies held in the traditional Chinese style. I have had nightmares after attending those kinds of ceremonies... After I believed in God, I participated in a choir. I joined many Christian funerals. In the ceremonies, I sang psalms and listened to the message about eternal life. I know where I will go after death. I know about eternal life... I am not afraid of death any more. God gives me a life promise of eternal life. My hope comes from God because I know I will be separated from my family after I die... Only the eternal God gives me faith. I am not afraid of death. I have hope and I know about eternity. It makes me feel*

*important and optimistic... ”*

She said that in her remaining life, she wanted to have a good relationship with her children and let them know about God. She would rely on God:

*“My family relationships are important to me. I love my children very much. Having a good relationship with them is meaningful to me... I hope all my family members can become Christian. I can share the good news from God with them... I am happy that I can rely on Jesus Christ. I always have solutions under his blessing. I do not feel happy when I face trouble but I pray and wait patiently for the directions from God... Eternal life gives me a sense of hope. I am worried about my daughter but I trust in my God. I pray and I feel more comfortable and peaceful. I pray and rely on the direction of God. It gives me the power to face problems. I trust that God will help me; God loves me and I have love to love others. I feel peaceful...”*

Il was afraid of death and unwilling to be separated from her family when she was getting old. It appeared that her religious beliefs gave her a strong sense of hope. She knew where she will go after death, therefore she accepted death and wanted to share this good news with her family. She became full of hope and peace. She showed she was not afraid of difficulties as she could rely on God.

### **C. Divorce**

C1 (aged 72, female) responded that her health status was fair. She had been a Christian for 54 years. She prayed, read the Bible every day, and attended Church and fellowships every week. She explained that at the time she was divorced from

her husband, she became a single mother. Her religion helped her to overcome difficult times:

*“When I divorced, I became a single mother. I was unhappy. I prayed, sang psalms and read the Bible with my daughters every night. I was comforted and gained the power to overcome problems...When I am alone, I feel lonely and sad. When I think of God, I know God is with me. I do not feel lonely any more.”*

She further responded that she had experienced God’s love; hence, she learnt to love others:

*“God loves me and teaches me to love others. I make cards for the older persons in the church to show my care for them. I have sent 130 cards this year. It makes me feel happy. I pray and talk to God. God always listens to me and he saved my life when I was terribly sick.”*

She rediscovered her meaning and life purpose from Christianity:

*“Without God, all things are meaningless; with God, everything is meaningful’. I am retired... I spend all my time on God’s mission because I owe God a lot. I am committed to missionary and preaching work. I want to have a chance to be a preacher...I am happy that I still have the ability and energy to do all these missions... I hope I can lead my family members to believe in God. If I earn the world but lose my life, it would be meaningless to me. So my eyes focus on God and his missions.”*

C1 faced a difficult time when she was divorced from her husband. God's love and her faith in God helped her to pass through her hardest years. In addition, she rediscovered new meanings and purpose in life by showing God's love to others and committing to missionary work.

In the review of the literature, McSherry (2006) suggested that "if the spiritual needs of an older person are met, the person will have meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life" (McSherry, 2006, p. 59). Also, older persons could overcome the challenges and problems of ageing by building up a "thickness" of spiritual resources (Kimble, 2001). In this research, the respondents transcended from boundary situations, and derived new meaning and purposes in life from religion. They responded that they derived a sense of hope (C2, C5, and I1), peace (C2, C5, and I1), comfort (C1, C5), strength in facing difficulties (C1, C5), and happiness (I1).

### ***5.3.2.3 Interim Conclusion: Spiritual Experience***

In summary, the qualitative data suggest that, older persons who had experienced a "fractured" relationship with family and others, alienation and loneliness, were more likely to form the boundary situations faced in later life which caused spiritual distress. Some respondents had been able to transcend their boundary situations. It appeared that many of the respondents were likely to transcend the difficulties with help from their religious affiliations. It seemed that religiosity could provide spiritual strength and spiritual enlightenment to the respondents and helped them to transcend their human limitations.

This supports what was seen in the literature review, which also highlighted the importance of spirituality to older persons. For instance, in the 1995 White House Paper, spirituality was agreed to be one form of treatment to deal with depression among older persons in a White House Conference of Ageing (Saltz, 1997). Yet, it does not always seem to work and although some respondents perceived themselves to be religious, they could not transcend their difficult times. Ho (2010) mentions that spirituality is compatible with, and yet transcends, the world's religions. He suggested that "a religious person follows his religion with devoutness, but he may or may not be spiritual. If he is a bigot, he cannot be spiritual, no matter how religious he is" (Ho, 2010, p.11). It could be helpful to understand why some religious respondents could reinvest life with meaning from religion, yet some others were totally unable to find life meaning and hope for the future. The next section further examines how religiosity may inspire spirituality.

#### **5.4 Research Question 3: "How Religiosity May Inspire Spirituality?"**

This section attempts to further understanding of the respondents' religiosity, and to examine the meanings and outcomes which may be derived from religiosity. The following presents the results from discussions with the respondents.

##### **5.4.1 Religiosity**

Religiosity refers to "the knowledge, belief, feelings and the practices of persons from religion" (Byrne, 1985). It could be divided into organisational religiosity and non-organisational religiosity including private religious behaviour, religious attitudes and beliefs (Levin, 1997). The religiosity mentioned by the respondents, was summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 A summary of Religiosity noted by respondents

	Religiosity responses
Organizational Religiosity	Buddhist nun duty (B3)
	Buddhist Worship (N4 and B4)
	Church attendance and activities (C2, C1, C3, C4, C5, and I1)
	Missionary and preaching work (C1)
Non-organisational Religiosity: private religious behaviours	Recited Buddhist scriptures (I3, B2, B3, B4, N1 and N4)
	Followed Buddhist teaching: helped others with voluntary duties and not ask for reward (B2, B3, B5 and B6), practiced morally goodness (B4 and B6)
	Buddhist meditation (I3 and B3)
	Ancestral worship (N2)
	Prayer (C1, C2, C3 C4, C5 and I1)
	Sang psalms (C1, C2, and C5)
	Loved others (C1 and C2)
	Preached to family members (C1, C4, and I1)
Read the Bible(C1 and C4)	
Non-organisational Religiosity: religious attitudes and beliefs	Buddhahood (I3)
	Reliance on the Buddha (B1, B3, and N1)
	The support from the Holy Spirit (C5)
	Eternal life (C2,C3, and I1)
	Reliance on God (C2, C5, and I1)
	Faith in God: God changes my life (C1); God gives me talents and abilities(C2); God is with me (C2, C4 and C5); God's support (C5); God's protection (C3)

a. Organisational Religiosity

Organisational religiosity refers to an institutional form of religious involvement (Levin, 1997, p. 19). In this research, the organisational religiosity mentioned by the respondents included taking up the duty of a Buddhist nun (B3), Buddha worship (N4 and B4), church attendance and activities (C2, C1, C3, C4, C5, and I1), and committing to missionary and preaching work (C1).



b. Non-organisational Religiosity

Non-organisational religiosity concerns private religious behaviours, and religious attitudes and beliefs (Levin, 1997, p. 19). The private religious behaviours respondents noted included reciting Buddhist scriptures (I3, B2, B3, B4, N1 and N4), Buddhist meditation (I3 and B3), ancestral worship (N2), and following the Buddhist teachings such as “helping others with voluntary duties and not ask for gratitude” (B2, B3, B5 and B6), and practicing moral goodness (B4 and B6), prayer (C1, C2, C3 C4, C5 and I1), singing psalms (C1, C2, and C5), showing love to others (C1 and C2), preaching to family members (C1, C4, and I1), and Bible reading (C1 and C4).

The religious attitudes and beliefs noted by respondents included Buddhahood (I3) and to rely on the Buddha (B1, B3, and N1), to rely on God (C2, C5, and I1), the support from the Holy Spirit (C5), eternal life (C2, C3, and I1), faith in God including “God changes my life” (C1), “God gives me talents and abilities” (C2), “God is with me” (C2, C4 and C5), God’s support (C5) and God’s protection (C3).

In summary, among the religiosity aspects mentioned, non-organisational religiosity seemed to be more predominant for most respondents. There were fifty mentions for non-organisational religiosity, whilst only ten for organisational religiosity. The review of the literature suggested that, with reference to the “multidimensional disengagement” perspective, there would be a “concomitant” decline in organisational religiosity because it may be offset by the increase of non-organisational religiosity as older persons age (Levin, 1997, p. 17). This view appeared to be supported by the findings from the qualitative data.

### 5.4.2 The Meanings and Functions Derived from Religiosity

The respondents were asked similar questions about what forms of religiosity, if any, they practice and what these forms of religiosity mean to them. From the qualitative data, some religious behaviours and beliefs produced meanings and functions for some of the respondents, included worshipping the Buddha, church attendance and activities, Buddhist meditation, reciting Buddhist scriptures, following the Buddhist teachings, singing psalms, prayer, Bible reading, Buddhahood, to rely on the Buddha, faith in God, to rely on God, and eternal life. Table 5.2 presented the meaning and functions derived from the religiosity of the respondents.

Table 5.2 The meanings and functions derived from the religiosity of the respondents

Buddha worship:	Peaceful mind (B4, N5) and open-mindedness (N5)
Church attendance and activities:	Happiness (C1), support and love from church members (C3, C4, C5, I1), open-mindedness (C3), acceptance when facing bad situations (C3, C5)
Buddhist meditation:	Sense of hope (B3, I3)
Following the Buddhist teachings:	Forgiveness (B4), love others (B4, B6), bring health to myself (B6)
Reciting Buddhist scriptures:	Peaceful mind (I3, B3, B4, N4), hope (I3, B3), open-mindedness (B3), good for my health (N1), calmness (N4), sleep well with no nightmares (B2, N4), feel satisfied and happy (B3)
Singing psalms:	Comforted (C1, C5), strength facing difficulties (C1, C5), less loneliness (C5), positive when facing death (C2), acceptance when facing bad situations (C1, C5), improve relationships with family members (C1, C3)
Prayer:	Comforted (C1, I1), strength when facing difficulties (C1, C3, C5, I1), happiness (C2, C4), directions from

	God (I1), peace (C3, I1), transcendence (C3), sense of hope (C5, I1), find positive meaning and purpose in the midst of suffering (C1, C3, I1),
Bible reading:	Comfort and strength when facing difficulties (C1), rediscovering meaning and purpose of life (C1)
Reliance on the Buddha:	Learn more about life, open-mindedness (B3), spiritual support (B3), bring goodness and blessings to the family (N1), happiness (B1), peaceful mind (B1, I3), forgiveness (B1), transcendence (B1), calm (B3), optimistic (B3), releases fluctuating emotion (B3), sense of hope (I3)
Buddhahood:	Forgive others and myself (I3)
Faith in God:	Happiness (C2), comforted (C5), sense of hope (C5), strength (C3, C5), courage (C3, C4), transcendence (C1, C3), find positive meaning and purpose in the midst of suffering (C1, C3, I1), improving self-esteem (C1, C2)
Reliance on God	Strength when facing difficulties (C5), do not feel lonely (C5), have solutions under his blessing (I1), hope (C2), source of love (I1), peaceful (I1), acceptance when facing bad situations (C3, C5)
Eternal life	Acceptance of death (C2, C3, I1), strength (C2), hope (C2, I1), feel important and optimistic, positive thinking (I1)

**a. Organisational Religiosity**

In organisational religiosity, worshipping the Buddha and church attendance and activities provided the most meanings and functions for the respondents.

**i. Buddha Worship**

In organisational religiosity, Buddha worship provided the respondents with a peaceful mind (B4, N5) and open-mindedness (N5) :

*“I went to the temple and undertook Buddha worship. It made me feels peaceful and open-minded...”* (N5, aged 63, female)

*“Reading scriptures and attending Buddhist ceremonies give me a peaceful mind...”* (B4, aged 72, female)

ii. Church Attendance and Activities

For some respondents, church attendance and activities provided a sense of happiness (C1), support and love from church members (C3, C4, C5, and I1), open-mindedness (C3) and acceptance when facing bad situations (C3, C5):

*“I am proud of joining the Methodist Church and knowing lots of powerful brothers and sisters...Church life gives me great support. I attend Bible reading class twice a month. Brothers and sisters share freely and support each other. It is a great time for me...”* (C3, aged 60, female)

*“I feel love from my brother and sisters in my church. I recognise that many people care about me. It is so sweet...”* (C4, aged 63, female)

**b. Non-organisational Religiosity: Private Religious Behaviours**

In non-organisational religiosity, various private religious behaviours which provided meaning and functions to respondents included Buddhist meditation, reciting Buddhist scriptures, following the Buddhist teachings, singing psalms, prayer and Bible reading.

i. Buddhist Meditation

Two respondents answered that Buddhist meditation provided them with a sense of hope (B3, I3):

*“Reciting the Buddha’s scriptures and meditation gives me a peaceful mind.*

*I am not worried about anything. I am full of hope...” (I3, aged 66, female)*

ii. Reciting Buddhist Scriptures

Two respondents expressed the view that reciting Buddhist scriptures would bring forgiveness (B4), love to others (B4, B6), and bring health to the self (B6):

*“Buddhism teaches me to be a morally good person, to be considerate and to forgive others. It is good for teaching the youth.” (B4, aged 72, female)*

*“Doing morally good things will bring health to me; Buddhism teaches me to be a gentle person and respect others” (B6, aged 90, female)*

iii. Following the Buddhist Teachings

Some respondents expressed that following the Buddhist teachings gave them a peaceful mind (I3, B3, B4, and N4), a sense of hope (I3, B3), calmness (N4), open-mindedness (B3), good health (N1), sleeping well with no nightmares (B2, N4), and being satisfied and happy (B3):

*“I feel satisfied and happy after reading Buddhist scriptures. They make me learn a lot about life. I get a peaceful mind and learn not to be stubborn... become more open-minded.” (B3, aged 60, female)*

*“When I am sick and in pain, I can sleep well if I recite Buddhist scriptures. They make me feel calm and peaceful... then I can sleep well again.”* (N4, aged 64, male)

*“Sometimes I recite Buddhist scriptures. I feel it is good for my health.”* (N1, aged 60, female)

iv. Singing Psalms

Some respondents remarked that singing psalms gave them comfort (C1, C5), strength in facing difficulties (C1, C5), acceptance when facing bad situations (C1, C5), improvement of relationship with family members (C1, C3), helped them face death positively (C2), and they did not feel lonely any more (C5):

*“I was unhappy. I prayed, sang psalms and read the Bible with my daughters every night. I was comforted and got the power to overcome the hardest years.”* (C1, aged 72, female)

*“...I often cried. I sang psalms and poems... I rely on God and do not feel lonely any more...So, when I feel lonely again, I sing the psalms.”* (C5, aged 62, female)

v. Prayer

Some respondents thought that prayer gave them comfort (C1, I1), strength in facing difficulties (C1, C3, C5, I1), happiness (C2, C4), direction from God (I1), a sense of peace (C3, I1), sense of hope (C5, I1), positive meaning and purpose in the

midst of suffering (C1, C3, I1), and helped them to transcend their limitations (C3):

*“I pray and talk to God. God always listens to me and he saved my life when I was terribly sick.”* (C1, aged 72, female)

*“I am worried about my daughter but I trust in my God. I pray and I feel more comfortable and peaceful...When I face trouble... I pray and rely on God’s direction. It gives me power to face the problems...I feel peaceful...”*  
(I1, aged 67, female)

vi. Bible Reading

One respondent viewed that Bible reading brought comfort and strength in facing difficulties, rediscovering meaning and purpose of life (C1):

*“When I divorced, I became a single mother... I read the Bible with my daughters every night...I was comforted and gained the power to overcome problems... So, my eyes focus on God and his missions...I spend all my time on God’s mission because I owe God a lot. I am committed to missionary and preaching work...”* (C1, aged 72, female)

c. **Non-organisational Religiosity: Religious Attitudes and Beliefs**

In religious attitudes and beliefs, reliance on the Buddha, Buddhahood, faith in God, reliance on God and eternal life brought meaning and functions to the respondents.

i. Reliance on the Buddha

In religious attitudes and beliefs, some respondents thought that to rely on the Buddha could bring spiritual support (B3), goodness and blessings to the family (N1), happiness (B1), peace of mind (B1, I3), forgiveness (B1), calmness (B3), optimism (B3), hope (I3), let them learn more about life and to transcend (B1), become open-minded (B3), and help them to release fluctuating emotions (B3):

*“I rely on the Buddha. It leads me to be calm and optimistic to solve problems in my daily life. It releases my fluctuating emotions and helps me become open-minded.”* (B3, aged 60, female)

*“Buddhism gives me a sense of happiness and peace of mind. When I get angry, it gives me power to forgive others. I am not afraid of sickness because I believe in the Buddha.”* (B1, aged 99, female)

ii. Buddhahood

One respondent noted that Buddhahood taught her to forgive others and herself (I3):

*“If I can transcend the illusion of the material world, I can become close to the Buddha. I take a step on the journey of Buddhahood. I learn to forgive others and myself.”* (I3, aged 66, female)

iii. Faith in God

Some respondents believed that faith in God brought them happiness (C2), comfort (C5), a sense of hope (C5), strength (C3, C5), courage (C3, C4), and helped



them to transcend (C1, C3), to find positive meanings and purpose from suffering (C1, C3, and I1), and to improve self-esteem (C1, C2):

*“When I am alone, I feel lonely and sad but when I think of God, I know God is with me. I do not feel lonely any more...”* (C1, aged 72, female)

*“I trust my Lord. My Lord goes along with me and takes care of me...”* (C2, aged 63, female)

*“Even though I do not know the future, God promises to go along with me. I am comforted... God saved my life and gives me energy when I face trouble...”* (C5, aged 62, female)

*“God is always with me. I am without fear.”* (C4, aged 63, female)

iv. Reliance on God

Some respondents believed that to rely on God could bring them strength in facing difficulties (C5), helped them not to feel lonely (C5), have solutions under His blessing (I1), hope (C2), a source of love (I1), peaceful (I1), acceptance when facing bad situations (C3, C5):

*“After my husband passed away, I relied on God. I knew that I needed to be humble. I cannot control life. I need guidance from God...I have courage and energy to step over the difficulties... I rely on God and do not feel lonely any more...”* (C5, aged 62, female)

*“I am happy that I can rely on Jesus Christ. I always have solutions under his blessing...I rely on direction from God. It gives me power to face problems...” (I1, aged 67, female)*

v. Eternal Life

Some respondents viewed that eternal life brought acceptance of death (C2, C3, and I1), strength (C2), sense of hope (C2, I1), made them feel important and optimistic, and gave them positive thinking (I1):

*“Only the eternal God gives me faith. I am getting old. Sometimes, I am afraid of death and being separated from my family members. After I joined many Christian funerals, sang psalms and listened to the message about eternal life there, I am not afraid of death any more. I know where I will go after death. I know about eternal life.” (C2, aged 63, female)*

*“Eternal life gives me a sense of hope...God gives me a life promise, the eternal life. I know where I will go when I die. I am not afraid of death. I have hope and know about the eternity. It makes me become important and optimistic” (I1, aged 67, female)*

In essence, it appeared that religiosity provided meaning and functions to many respondents, which helped them to overcome difficulties, illness, sadness, loneliness, and provided them with strength, love, hope, meaning and connections.

### 5.4.3 Inspirations of Religiosity on Dimensions of Spirituality

In order to detail in what ways religiosity may inspire spirituality, White's (2006) *Dimensions of Spirituality* introduced in sub-section 2.5.2, reproduced below for convenience, was adapted to present the inspirations of Christian and *San Jiao* religiosity on dimensions of spirituality in this research.

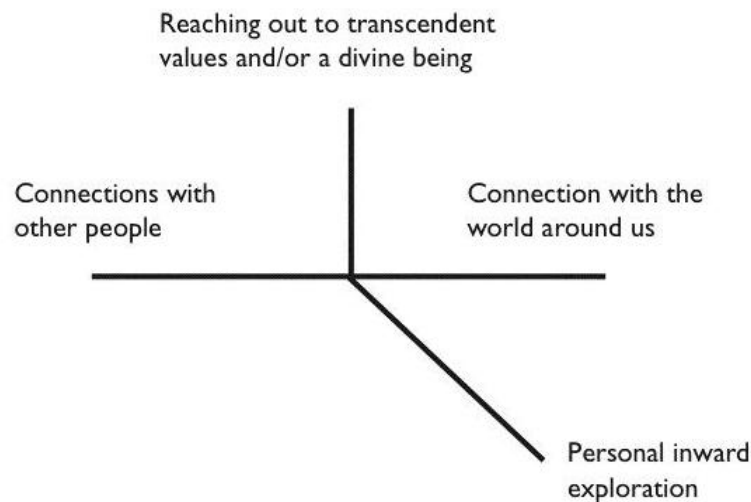


Figure 2.4 Dimensions of spirituality (Source: White, 2006, p.92)

Fig. 2.4 is a multi-dimensional diagram showing three dimensions of spirituality. It integrates different dimensions of life including the human spirit, transcendent/divine being and the self. The horizontal line represents the human spirit including “connections with other people” and “connection with the world around us”. The vertical line describes “reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being” represents transcendence and/or the connections to a higher power. The third dimension, “personal inward exploration”, refers to the existential values of the self, such as searching for “personal uniqueness and integration” (White, 2006, p.92).

The analysis of the respondents' discussions on the meanings and functions derived from religiosity suggested that religiosity appeared to inspire the respondents in different dimensions of spirituality including "Reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being", "Connection with other people and to the world around us", and "Personal inward exploration" (Fig. 5.5).

The horizontal dimension represents the human spirit. In connections with other people, the respondents were more likely to be inspired by religiosity with source of love from others, forgiving and showing love to others, receiving support and love from church members, improving relationships with family members, asking for goodness and blessings for the family. In connection with the world around us, it was unlikely that religiosity inspired the respondents in this dimension of spirituality.

The vertical dimension refers to transcendence and the connection to a higher power. With respect to reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being, it appeared that the respondents were inspired by religiosity with a sense of hope, source of love, direction from God, the solutions under God's blessing, acceptance in facing bad situations, strength when facing difficulties, spiritual support, courage in spite of fear, comfort, face death positively, acceptance of death and thinking positively.

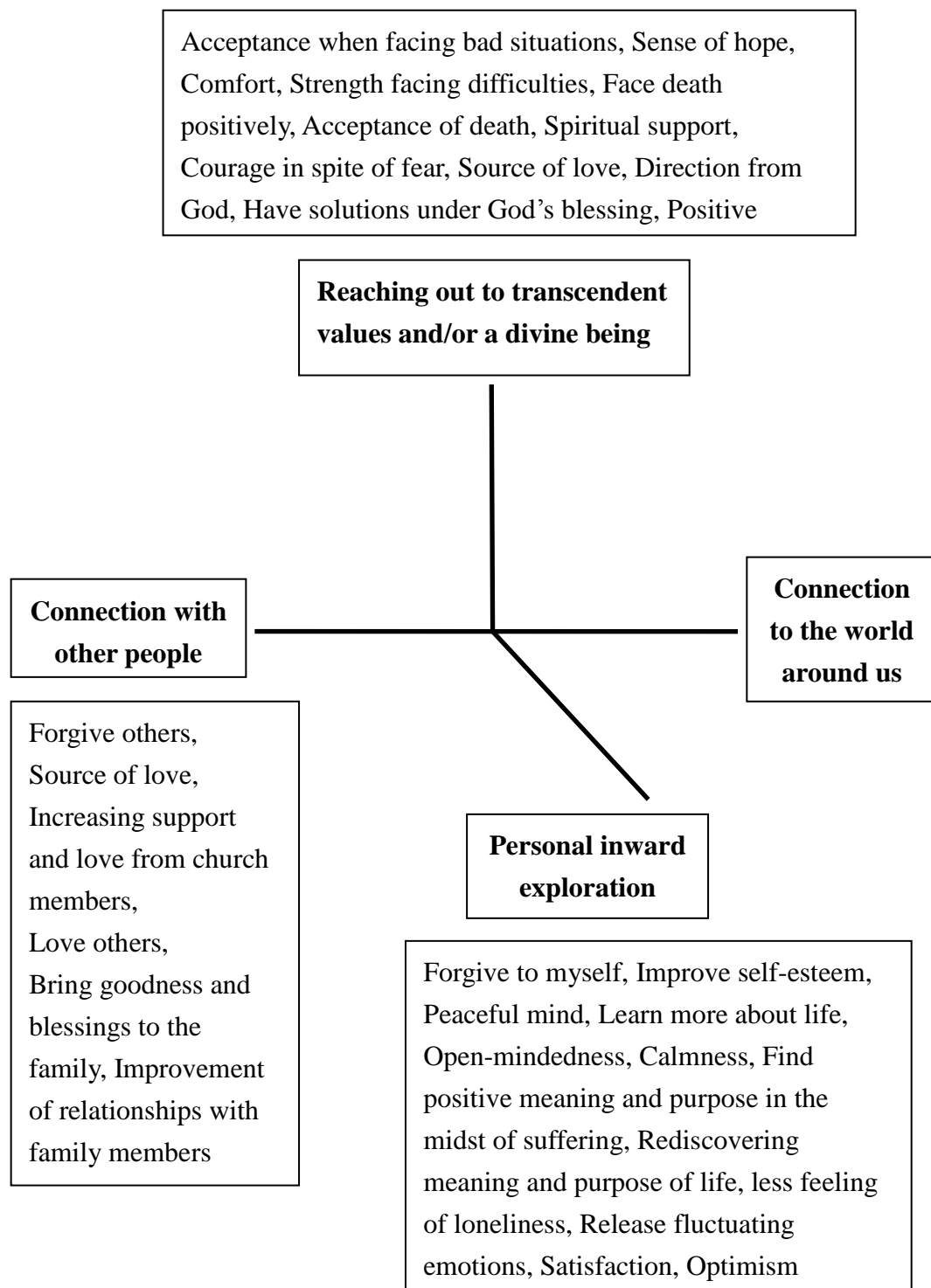


Fig 5.5 Inspirations of Christian and *San Jiao* religiosity on dimensions of spirituality of Chinese older persons

The three dimensions concern the existential values of the self. In “personal inwards explorations”, the respondents were inspired by religiosity to forgive themselves, to improve self-esteem, to have peaceful minds, be open-minded, calm, optimistic, satisfied and be less loneliness; to learn more about life, to find positive meaning and purpose in the midst of suffering, rediscovering meaning and purpose of life, and to release fluctuating emotions.

In summary, the religiosity of the respondents appeared to inspire dimensions of spirituality by providing sources of love, strength, hope, forgiveness, peace and meaning. This enabled them to maintain connection with other people, to reach out the transcendent values and to explore personal uniqueness and existential values, therefore it helped them to accept, transcend, and face difficult situations positively.

This chapter presented the definitions of spirituality, grouped into four categories: the quality of personhood, selfless service, the universe and religious context. Spiritual needs were explored with respect to identifying the spiritual tasks associated with ageing of the non-religious group, the *San Jiao* triad group and the Christian group; recognising their spiritual experience including boundary situations, spiritual distress and transcendence. The religiosity of the respondents was explored to examine its meanings and functions to the respondents, and to investigate in detail in what ways religiosity may inspire different dimensions of spirituality. The next chapter, Discussion and Conclusions, provides some overall conclusions, implications and recommendations of the research.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusions**

The overall aim of this research was to advance an understanding of spirituality, particularly in relation to older persons. The specific research objectives were, within the Chinese community:

1. To investigate the definitions and conceptualisations of the spirituality of the Chinese older persons in Hong Kong
2. To explore the spiritual experiences and spiritual needs among the Chinese older persons
3. To examine how religiosity may inspire the spirituality of Chinese older persons
4. To formulate recommendations on spirituality issues

This chapter presents a discussion of the research and draws conclusions from the study. It provides a discussion of the implications for policy recommendations and considers the limitations of the research and indicates directions for further study.

### **6.1 Discussions**

#### **6.1.1 Chinese Spirituality**

##### *Descriptors of Spirituality in a Chinese Context*

This research discovers some descriptors of spirituality in a Chinese context. They were grouped in four categories, including quality of personhood, the universe, selfless service and religious context. They appear to be mainly based on Chinese culture, social norms and different religious teachings. The characteristics of Chinese

culture were examined in relation to religions and religious characteristics in Hong Kong in Chapter 3. Traditional Chinese religions and norms which are related to Chinese spirituality in this research included the teachings of Confucius- achieving a high standard of morality (Oldstone-Moore, 2002), and emphasized the importance of “tradition and rites” for human relationships (HK Information Services Department, 2008); the belief in Taoism - people can become gods or deities by contributing to others and practicing the highest standard of moral goodness (Burkhardt, 1959; Lip, 1986; HK Information Services Department, 2009), by “pursuing immortality” and gaining longevity (Blofeld, 2000); following the teachings of Buddhism - the journey to “Buddhahood” - as an important task for the Buddhists (Shek, 2010; Juergensmeyer, 2006), and commitment to Buddhism. With respect to the teaching of Christianity, spirituality appears more related to “the totality of life” (Moberg, 2008), and is to be directed by “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit” (Yount, 2009). As these descriptors are mainly based on cultural and religious factors, it may also be reference descriptors for other people sharing similar cultural and religious background in Hong Kong. Yet, future research in quantitative method with larger sample size and rigor control in other variables is necessarily needed for generalizing purpose.

#### *Other Descriptors of Chinese Spirituality*

With reference to prior research noted by Shek (2010), some beliefs and popular practices in Chinese culture, such as worship of ancestors, *feng shui*, *yin* and *yang*, and the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and ground, etc., were also suggested as the important Chinese cultural and religious elements related to spirituality. However, they were not seen as related to spirituality implicitly to the older persons in this research. There are two insights from this difference to prior research. First,



this suggests the need for further study investigating the meanings derived from these popular practices and beliefs with respect to Chinese older persons' spirituality. Second, it appears to be possible that these popular religious practices and beliefs exist theoretically or in people's daily lives; however, they may not provide any spiritual inspirations to them. It also needs future research for future understanding.

#### *Enriching Descriptors for Chinese Spirituality Measures*

The exploration of the definitions of spirituality in a Chinese context may help to enrich the content of Chinese spirituality, which may itself assist in the development of instruments for assessing the spirituality of Chinese people. Shek (2010) noted that many of the assessments and instruments which are currently used to assess Chinese people's spirituality are "imported" scales or measures being directly "translated from Western measures" (Shek, 2010, pp. 356-357). They may not fit Chinese people as the Western measures were originally designed based on western cultural background. Shek highlighted the need of "indigenous" study to develop "indigenous" measures on Chinese spirituality. The descriptors in this research may assist in enriching the basis for developing indigenous assessing measures for Chinese spirituality.

#### **6.1.2 Family Bonding and Faith in Old Age**

Spirituality appears to be significant in old age owing to dying and the prospect of death. The literature highlighted the importance of spirituality in old age. It suggested that all people are seeking meaning and purpose in life. In addition, when one is dying and facing death, this search may be intensified (Puchalski, 2002). Also, many older persons experience a "strong connection between their religious faith and a sense of spirituality" (Baker and Nussbaum, 1997).

### *Spiritual Needs*

In this research, spiritual needs of older persons were examined by identifying their sources of meaning, hope, joy, love, and connection to a higher power. These spiritual needs being the main focus of investigation appeared important to people, especially for older persons. The sources of meaning can help generate motivation in life and may lead to a sense of fulfilment (McSherry, 2006, p. 56). More importantly, the search for meaning takes “on a new sense of urgency and importance” in later life (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 231). The sources of love and intimacy could be gained from contact and involvement with others. It may reduce one’s sense of loneliness and isolation, and increase sense of security (McSherry, 2006, p. 56). The connection to a higher power appears to be an important part of spirituality for some individuals who believe in God or a higher power. For the non-religious, the “higher power” may be themselves or moral goodness (McSherry, 2006, p. 57), as the “higher power” is defined by the people themselves. The sources of hope and joy are also important to older persons as they are related to their existential concerns. It is believed that “personal beliefs, values and attitudes can bring hope in people, the future or from a religious perspective, such as life everlasting, enabling individuals to draw strength from their convictions and commitment” (McSherry, 2006, p. 57). Also, in psychology, hope and hopelessness is “an important predictor of suicidal ideation” (Shek, 2010, p. 353).

### *Family Bonding and Intimacy in Later Life*

This research adopted MacKinlay’s (2006) model and tried to contribute to the current knowledge base by discovering spiritual tasks associated with ageing for older persons in the context of the Chinese community. According to the qualitative

data, family bonding appeared to be important for meeting the spiritual needs of Chinese older persons. It may be explained by the traditional value of familism in Chinese culture that “family is the foundation of the country” and “people respect family and put family as the first priority”. Hence, when approaching to the end of life, it is more likely for older persons to ask for the championship of family members in later life.

More importantly, we may understand the importance of family bonding to older persons with the spiritual needs of love and intimacy in later life. It is because the source of love and intimacy could bring meaning of life, existential values and strength to older persons. Also, it may reduce one’s sense of loneliness and isolation, and increase sense of security (McSherry, 2006, p. 56). Family bonding for non-religious older persons is their main sources of meaning, intimacy. Importantly, they viewed having filial children along with the end of life as their ultimate meaning. In *San Jiao* triad group, family bonding is likewise one of the important elements for meeting their spiritual needs, which contribute to the sources of meaning and intimacy. For Christian older persons, family bonding contributed to their sources of intimacy. Hence, if someone loses family bonds in life, he/she does not only lose a loved person, but also may lose the source of love, meaning, hope and connection.

Intimacy is important to Chinese older persons irrespective of their religious affiliations. Having relationships appears to be an important task to older persons in later life. Older persons without religious beliefs tended to views their relationship with family member as the most important thing in life. Moreover, when comparing non-religious and *San Jiao* triad older persons which were in institutionalized

environment, the non-religious group is more unlikely to find other things which can replace the intimacy with family members, for example, one said, “the roommates here [the elderly home] can never replace my family members... I miss them very much...” (N4). In contrast, older persons with religious affiliations seem to gain intimacies not only from their family, but also in a religious context, e.g. the Buddha. It appears that they could often find supports and loves, other than from family, in a religious context.

#### *Faith and Transcendence Loss/Disabilities in Later Life*

MacKinlay (2006) suggested that transcendence is process of moving from “self-centredness to other-centredness”. It could be an important task for older persons to not only focus on the limitedness they face, but also to discover what they can do in later life (MacKinlay, 2006). To transcend loss and disabilities, the non-religious tended to trust themselves and practice moral goodness with the aim of having blessing and goodness in life from traditional Chinese culture. The *San Jiao* triad older persons appear to transcend loss and disabilities by committing to Buddhist teachings. Christian older persons are more likely to transcend by believing in God’s provision. These findings indicate rather different views of spirituality and of the importance of faith among the three groups of older persons. In comparing the three groups of Chinese older persons, the non-religious older persons tried to focus on their ability to practice morality and selfless service to others. In addition to helping them cope with loss or disabilities, this is likely to help them by providing them with meaning and hope, as it appears to them to be good to have the ability and will to do something morally good. Although they are not religious, there is some kind of faith behind their behaviours and their thought that “doing good things would bring goodness and blessing to them”. By contrast, older

persons who have religious affiliations appeared more likely to transcend by faith in their religions such as committing to the Buddhist teachings and believing in God's provision. These aspects of faith help them to transcend loss and disability as they believed in the 'protection' by a higher power. In turn, faith, either in the blessings in traditional culture or the 'protection' from a higher power, is an important element to help Chinese older persons to transcend loss and disabilities in later life.

### **6.1.3 Spiritual Strength in Later Life**

#### *Spiritual Distress in Later Life*

In this research, some human limitations and life events, such as emigration of children, changing living location from home to an elderly home, losing contact with family members, the death of a spouse, and other factors, may often cause spiritual distress to older persons. They may face loneliness, alienation and depression owing to the loss of intimacy and meaning from family members and an inability to find new intimacies and meanings in other things and people. Furthermore, fear of death, darkness and illness are also mentioned quite frequently by the older respondents. Some of them noted their wish to recover from illness yet they know that it would be unlikely to happen. Therefore, it appears to bring them a sense of insecurity and hopelessness.

#### *The Inspirations of Religiosity to Different Dimensions of Spirituality*

The literature highlighted the importance of religion in that it is one compensating resource to which everyone has potential access when they feel helplessness and loss of control (David, 1998). Yet, it did not provide an answer on how religions may help people in their feelings of helplessness and loss of control. Some scholars have tried to understand more about religions by measuring religious

behaviours such as frequency of church attendance. MacKinlay (2006) commented that “solely measuring religious behaviours cannot generate useful findings because it can neither produce the reasons why a person attended church in the first place, nor provide what attendance means for the person” (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 15). Hence, this research tried not only to find the religiosity of Chinese older persons, but also the meanings and functions, as well as the inspirations, derived from their religiosity.

#### *Non-organizational Religiosity and the Disengagement Theory*

In this research, religiosity was divided into organizational religiosity and non-organizational religiosity: private religious behaviours, and religious attitudes and beliefs. Among the kinds of religiosity mentioned, it seems that non-organizational religiosity is more predominant for Chinese older persons. There were fifty mentions of non-organizational religiosity, whilst only ten of organizational religiosity. This could be explained by disengagement theory in social gerontology. This suggested that as older persons are experiencing a decline in energy levels, they may reduce their social involvements and activities (MacKinlay, 2006). Therefore, “the practice of mysticism, where solitude, meditation and contemplative prayer are practised, may be become the norm” for older persons (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 231). Also, Levin (1997) quoted the “multidimensional disengagement” perspective. There would be a “concomitant” decline in organizational religiosity because it may be offset by the increase of non-organizational religiosity as older persons’ age (Levin, 1997, p. 17). These views appeared to be supported by the findings concerning the religiosity of Chinese older persons.

The religiosity of Chinese older persons mainly stemmed from beliefs and the practices of Christianity and Buddhism in this research: church attendance and activities, singing psalms, prayer, Bible reading, faith in God, to rely on God, and eternal life; worshipping the Buddha, Buddhist meditation, reciting Buddhist scriptures, following the Buddhist teachings, Buddhahood, to rely on the Buddha. They appear to provide meanings and functions which inspired different dimensions of spirituality. With respect to White's (2006) Dimensions of Spirituality, dimensions of spirituality for human beings could include human spirit; connections to other people and connection to the world around us; transcendent values and/or connections to divine being, and personal inward exploration. It appears that religiosity mentioned in this research could inspire spirituality of Chinese older persons in the connections to other people, reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being, and personal inwards exploration.

With respect to connections with other people, religiosity appears more likely to inspire Chinese older persons by providing sources of love, teaching them to forgive and love others, giving them support and love from church members, helping them to improve relationships with family members, and giving a sense of goodness and blessings to their family. In the dimension of reaching out to transcendent values and/or a divine being, it appeared that religiosity provided many older participants with a sense of hope, sources of love, direction from God, the solutions under God's blessing, acceptance of facing bad situations, strength when facing difficulties, spiritual support, courage in spite of fear, comfort, facing death positively, acceptance of death and thinking positively. In personal inward explorations, the religiosity mentioned seems to help many Chinese older persons to forgive themselves, to improve their self-esteem, to have peaceful minds, be

open-minded, calm, optimistic, satisfied and experience less loneliness. It also helps them to learn more about life, to find positive meaning and purpose in the midst of suffering, to rediscover meaning and purpose in life, and to release fluctuating emotions.

### *Spirituality as a Source of Strength*

Kimble (2001) stressed that to build up a “thickness” of spiritual resources could help older persons overcome the challenges and problems of ageing. In this research, some of the older participants transcended spiritual distress with religions. It appears that their religions and religious beliefs provided them with the spiritual strength and spiritual enlightenment to overcome their difficult time and give them new sources of meaning, intimacy and hope. For instance, calmness and sleeping well at night after Buddhist mediation and listening to religious music, prayer and psalms singing for giving courage in spite of fear of darkness, death acceptance and positive facing dying and the prospect of death with faith in eternal life, new intimacies and connections developed from religious attendance are the examples of spiritual strength from religiosity. Coleman (2010) in his latest article also noted the role of religion as spiritual strength in life such as providing “meanings to situations, sources of social support for managing problems”, “calling on God’s help in the search for right solution” (Coleman, 2010, p.168). It seems that religion can be a “thick” spiritual resource to older persons in later life, especially when they are facing difficulties.

Other than religions, there could be other sources of spiritual strength. From MacKinlay’s (2006) Ways of mediating the spiritual dimension (Figure 2.2), spirituality could also be mediated by “The Arts” - such as music, art and dance, etc.,



and “Environment” - such as nature, sea, mountain, etc. Therefore, a new insight is found from the research. It could be important for caregivers to help older persons to develop a “thickness” of spiritual resources from different sources in later life. This could perhaps be called spiritual care. Sub-section 6.3, Policy Recommendations will further discuss spiritual care to older persons.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### **6.2.1 Recommendation for Theory**

The literature highlighted the importance of spirituality as one of the dimensions of the health of human beings, especially for older persons. It stressed the holistic health approach of viewing humans as ‘bio-psycho-social- spiritual beings’ (Frankl, 1984; Wong, 2005; White, 2006) and an increasing number of research studies show the positive relationships between spirituality and the wellness of health among people such as physical health (Koenig, 1986; 1995; 1997; Koenig et al, 2001), psychological health (Morse and Wisocki, 1987; Koenig, 1997), coping with depression (Saltz, 1997; Nelson, 1990), well-being (Hill, 2002; Levin and Chatters, 1998), and longevity (Strawbridge, 2005). Moreover, it is also noted that spirituality is the essence of human beings and everyone is spiritual, so that spirituality does not only apply to religious people but to all individuals irrespective of religious affiliation (McSherry, 2006, p. 44), and whether they recognise it or not, and whether they identify with a religion or not (Moberg, 2008, p. 100). Therefore, it is recommended that the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health should emphasize the spiritual dimension. It is suggested that the definition of health should not only focus on physical, mental, and social well-being, but also emphasize spiritual well-being (Kwan, 2005, p. 83). Following this recommendation would have two benefits. First, this definition views humans in a holistic way. It could help

to promote a holistic approach to health care provision which not only focuses on physical, psychological and social dimensions of health, but also on the spiritual dimension of health. Second, an official definition of health including a spiritual dimension would highlight the spiritual aspect of human beings, which is often misunderstood, overlooked or omitted. It may help to remind individuals, care-givers, researchers and even government and NGOs of the existence and the importance of spiritual aspects of human beings. These include the meaning and purpose of life, existential concerns, the importance of intimacy and connection to higher power.

### **6.2.2 Policy Recommendation: Spiritual Care in Services for Older Persons**

The findings of the research highlight the importance to older persons of building a “thickness” of spiritual resources. It is also suggested that in exploring spiritual needs of older persons it is necessary to identify spiritual tasks associated with ageing, and the spiritual experience, such as spiritual distress and boundary situations; and the inspirations of religiosity to older persons’ spirituality. Therefore, this study recommends that caregivers among the elderly services in Hong Kong should recognise spirituality of older persons and try to provide spiritual care to them. Kimble (2001) suggested that to build up a “thickness” of spiritual resources could help older persons overcome the challenges and problems of ageing (Kimble, 2001). It would therefore appear important to care-givers to provide spiritual care and help older persons to develop spiritual resources in later life, by identifying older persons’ spiritual needs and practicing spiritual narrative. This recommendation is diagrammatically presented in Fig. 6.1, A suggested spiritual care model for elderly services in Hong Kong.

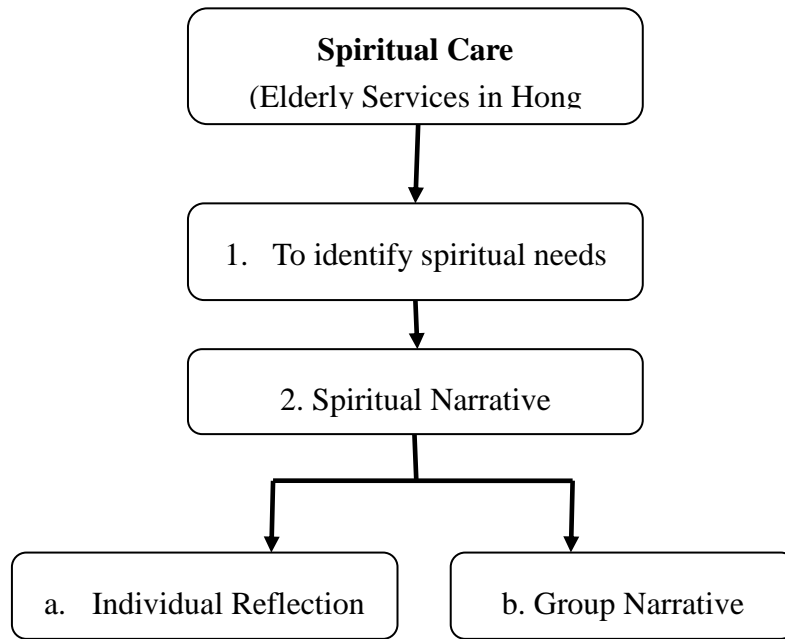


Fig. 6.1 A suggested spiritual care model for elderly services in Hong Kong

Fig. 6.1 has been developed based on the concept of spiritual dimensions from MacKinlay's (2006) generic model of spiritual tasks and the process of ageing and White's (2006) dimensions of spirituality. It tries to show the flow of spiritual care which the care-givers of elderly services in Hong Kong could adopt in providing care to older persons. Firstly, care-givers can identify the spiritual needs of older persons. Some assessment instruments such as the spiritual scales mentioned in the literature review (sub-section 2.6) or qualitative tools (e.g. Appendix IIa) could potentially be used. The assessment could basically identify the sources of meaning, love, hope, joy, and strength of older persons. It could then help in understanding the spiritual experience and spiritual tasks associated with ageing for older persons, just as in the qualitative findings in this research. Next, after a basic exploration of the spiritual dimensions of older persons, a spiritual narrative could be adopted to further identify whether older persons are experiencing spiritual distress, the boundary situations they may face, and to provide suggestions or

activities of spiritual strategies. There could be in-depth sharing about spirituality and spiritual experience between the older person and the care-giver in an 'individual reflection', and some activities and sharing sections among older persons in a 'group narrative'. Additionally, spiritual strategies such as music, prayer, meditation and so on could be adopted in individual reflection and group narrative.

### *Spiritual Care to Older Persons*

Spiritual care appears to be important for older persons, especially for those who are more frail and possibly placed in an elderly home (MacKinlay, 2006). MacKinlay highlighted that older persons in later life, to a large extent, face 'continuing disability and loss of control, significant losses or isolation' as some of them are sent to elderly homes. Therefore, spiritual care for older persons mainly focuses on helping them to establish new relationships, to transcend loss and disabilities, and to complete the task of finding meaning in later life. More importantly, the care must also help them with 'preparing for dying and death' (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 20). Therefore, it is suggested to develop ways to assess the spiritual needs of older persons and assist them to 'effectively' meet their spiritual needs (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 49).

#### *1. Identify Spiritual Needs and Spiritual Tasks of Ageing*

McSherry (2006) suggested that one of the best ways of understanding individuals' spiritual needs is to understand their everyday life situations and their experiences which bring them meaning, connection and hope (McSherry, 2006). Therefore, it is important to assess older persons' spiritual needs by identifying their sources of meaning, love, joy, hope and strength:

*“The assessment of spiritual needs is important... The focus of questions will be on where people find meaning in their lives, asking what brings purpose and meaning to life, what interests do they have and what interests did they have earlier in life? Based on where they find meaning, how do they respond to that meaning? Perhaps it is through relationship[s], perhaps they have recently lost an important relationship...perhaps people find meaning through music, through art, through dancing, perhaps through reading or gardening.”* (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 230)

Moreover, it is suggested that “recognising spirituality as a broad concept linked to meaning is particularly helpful for centres or organizations that do not have a particular religious framework or community” (White, 2006, p.101). The spiritual needs related to meaning and purpose, connection and hope appear to require “more open and acceptable entry points to begin discussing spirituality” (White, 2006, p.101), especially perhaps for Chinese older persons who are more likely than some other cultures to be less familiar with the spiritual issues. It seems to bring an important reminder that it could be important for care-givers not to equate spirituality with a religion context under the broad definition of spirituality. Otherwise, the spiritual needs such as life meaning, hope, intimacy, of the non-religious older persons may be omitted (White, 2006). They may not express their spiritual dimension in a religious way; however, they may pursue their spiritual quest in, for example, sport, poetry, art and music, justice, health, and ecology (White, 2006, p. 103)

## 2. *Spiritual Narrative*

Spiritual narrative is the narrative about one's spiritual journey. Atchley (2009) defined this as:

*“...an individual narrative about her or his spiritual life and its development, including its ups and downs. This narrative usually includes a history of experience, actions, and insights connected with a search for spiritual meaning. It is an intentional process of seeking spiritual experiences, using spiritual values and insights to inform life choices...”* (Atchley, 2009, p. 2)

In turn, spiritual narrative could be a more detailed reflection about boundary situations, spiritual experiences, things and events that connect to the sources of love, hope, meaning and strength; or even about religiosity and its inspirations to their spirituality. Spiritual narrative could operate in an individual and/or a group basis. On an individual basis, it would be more private and detailed reflection on spirituality. The care-giver may talk with the older person on a one-on-one basis, listen to his/her spiritual experience, life stories, and assist him/her in identifying the spiritual tasks associated with ageing, as well as, the losses and difficulties. More importantly, the care-giver could recommend spiritual strategies and assist older persons in finding hope, meaning, intimacy, transcending loss as the spiritual tasks in later life (MacKinlay, 2006; McSherry, 2006; White, 2006). It would be valuable if care-givers could help older persons to develop their own “spiritual portfolios” recording their spiritual ups and downs, or recognize spiritual tasks and needs. Therefore, older persons may review their spiritual tasks and spiritual journeys and try to develop and achieve the tasks as one of their targets and purposes in life.

On the other hand, collectively, group narrative could provide opportunities for establishing new relationships among older persons through group interactions and sharing. It seems potentially better to have small groups instead of large ones for group narrative (MacKinlay, 2006). With respect to the settings of the focus group discussions (FGDs) in this research, it may be a good practice to arrange older persons with the same or similar religious backgrounds in the same group. They may share similar religious beliefs or ideologies that could promote a better group interaction for spiritual narrative. Some tasks activities could be organized, such as sharing of life meaning, the proudest things in life; listening to old songs; writing a letter to the one they love; having Bible readings or other scriptures reading groups, or, if necessary, writing a will and dying words. It is more likely that a relaxed, informal and comfortable environment in a group may allow some sensitive topics to be touched and accessed more openly. Yet, it may actually need considerable preparation, training and sensitivity among care-givers; and well-developed relationships among the older persons and the care-givers.

The topics for spiritual narrative could include life-meaning, connections, hope, spiritual experience, transcendence, religiosity, etc. MacKinlay (2006) highlighted twenty-four suggested spiritual behaviours that the care-givers could do with older persons in practising spiritual care. These could provide a reference for operating a group narrative or an individual reflection. They include:

*“praying with a patient, assisting a person to find meaning in suffering and death, listening to a patient, supporting a person in their hope of life after death, developing a trusting relationship with a patient, reading the Bible or other religious material, calling the chaplain or minister, facilitating*

*reminiscence, assisting an elderly person to find meaning in life, caring with integrity for an elderly person, assisting a person in the process of dying, facilitating relationship with an elderly person, assisting an elderly person to worship according to their faith, assisting an elderly person who is fearful of their future, supporting a person in their feeling of being loved by others/God, assisting a person to deal with feelings of guilt, caring for a person who feels hopeless, referral of a person who needs forgiveness, facilitating reconciliation among family members, facilitating reconciliation with God, assisting a person to achieve a sense of self-acceptance, honouring a person's integrity, assisting a person to deal with anger, assisting a person to deal with grief"* (MacKinlay, 2006, pp. 36-37).

In essence, this section provides recommendations from the literature review and the conclusions of this study. In theory, it is recommended that the definition of health from the World Health Organization (WHO) should be expanded to emphasize the spiritual dimension. In policy terms, it could aim at helping the improvement of existing services for older persons and their families in Hong Kong by suggesting the practice of spiritual care. A spiritual care model for elderly services in Hong Kong has been recommended (Fig. 6.1).

### **6.3 Limitations to the Current Research and Recommendations for Further Study**

There are naturally some limitations in this research. Firstly, this research is an exploratory study with qualitative methods and having a limited number of respondents and participants. Hence, the definitions of spirituality for Chinese older persons, the spiritual tasks associated with ageing and the inspiration of religiosity to



difference dimensions of spirituality may not be generalisable to the older public. Quantitative research with larger samples, whilst usually more descriptive than explanatory, could have greater representativeness to generalise the suggested diagrams and could be a topic for further study.

Second, purposive sampling was used to choose sites and respondents in this research. As a result, the proportions of women and men are not balanced, also, the health status, the living environment of the respondents are not those of a random sample. Moreover, as most of the respondents were recruited via organizations, the proportion of institutionalised living older persons and non-institutionalised/ community dwelling older persons are not balanced.

Third, this research attempts to explore Chinese spirituality among older persons. It aims to discover the descriptors of Chinese spirituality and the cultural and religious elements related to it. The major demographic data of the respondents, such as income, education level, gender, mobility, etc, were collected. Also, the living environment of the respondents were not controlled and imbalance. It may have potential problem that the findings of the research may be affected by these demographic data and biased. One method to tackle this problem was to avoid making conclusion on comparison of the findings from the respondents having different living environments. Although some of the findings cannot be compared owing to difference in living environment, this research may still provide reference descriptors relating to Chinese spirituality. Future research may be done with reference to the descriptors in this research, with adding rigor factors controlling in demographic variables.

Furthermore, some aspects of religiosity such as ancestral worship, *feng shui*, did not provide meanings to older persons in the research. It is recommended to carry out research on the discussions and the meaning derived from religiosity and different dimensions of spirituality in Hong Kong, especially those features deriving from traditional Chinese beliefs.

Other than recommendations based on the limitations of the research, a wider research agenda could be devised on the broader realm of spirituality, for example, the definitions of spirituality from the care-givers perspective in a Chinese context, the assessment of spiritual care in elderly services in Hong Kong, the practical issues relating to spiritual care in Hong Kong, and quantitative research on the inspiration of religiosity to spirituality of older persons. It could also extend the research among other religious groups and perhaps among other Asian belief groups, such as from South Asia, living in Hong Kong, as these communities increasingly include growing numbers of older persons. This would add cross-cultural depth to future studies.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Frankl (1984) in *Man's Search for Meaning* stressed that, "Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning". As people age, the personal strength of older persons may be challenged by the declining abilities of both their physical and mental health in later life (Yount, 2009). Spirituality may become increasingly significant as people grow older and the search of spirituality is intensified as people facing dying and the prospect of death (Puchalski, 2002; Coleman, 2010). Older persons tend to search for meaning of life as they are approaching to the end of life. Some called this process of questing meanings and existential values as "spirituality". Indeed, "spirituality" is a complex concept. There

is little consensus on the definition of this term (Moberg, 1979; 2008; Kwan, 2005; McSherry, 2006; Shek, 2010; Coleman, 2010). Moberg (2008) noted that spirituality is far more complex than most other topics, and this has also been a factor in hindering its exploration.

### *Spirituality Varies Within and Between Cultures*

The literature suggested that the definitions of spirituality “vary widely within and between cultures and religions” (Moberg, 2008, p. 98; McSherry, 2006; Shek, 2010). It outlined studies of the spirituality of Japanese and American older persons. The definitions of spirituality to Japanese and Americans are different. With respect to the Japanese older persons, it appeared that they defined spirituality as being negatively related to religion. Their views of spirituality were “based upon a person’s relationship with others, inner strength, and inner peace with little attention to faith in any specific religion” (Moberg, 2008, p.99). In contrast, Americans tended to relate spirituality to “religion and faith”, and believed that they themselves “were currently spiritual, had been so in the past, and wanted to become more spiritual in the future” (Moberg, 2008, p. 99). Comparing to Chinese spirituality in this research, spirituality seems to be related to religions and faith. Additionally, it is also related to traditional Chinese culture and social norms such as attaining higher level of moral values. It may need more research in cross-cultural basis for further understanding the cultural and religious differences among countries and ethnic groups.

### *Spiritual Quest and Spiritual Strength in Later life*

In spiritual dimension of ageing, it is important to develop and enrich spiritual resources of older persons. Kimble (2001) quoted Viktor Frankl’s ‘dimensional

ontology' to define spirituality. Spirituality is "the timeless and universal search for meaning and the desire for wholeness and awareness of the presence of the numinous". Also, the spiritual (geistig) is "the energy within a person that strives for meaning and purpose" (Kimble, 2001). He stated that to build up a "thickness" of spiritual resources could help older persons overcome the challenges and problems of ageing. In this spiritual journey, "the personal quest" of meanings and existential values are important to older persons, especially they are facing declining in abilities, dying and the prospect of death (Bloomfield, 1978; Ellison, 1983; Legere, 1984; MacKinlay, 2006; Murray and Zentner 1988; Clark, 1987; Conrad, 1985; Mattes, 2005; Ho, 2010; MacKinlay, 2006; Burkhardt, 1989; McSherry, 2006; Mattes, 2005; Palapathwala, 2006; Coleman, 2010).

Importantly, older persons may often questing for the answer of 'where from' and 'where to'" (Palapathwala, 2006, p. 156). It is the basic search for answers to old age and death. It may help us to overcome "angst and fear of being". He noted that our search for the quest is 'the experience which forms the basis for what is known as "spirituality"' (Palapathwala, 2006, p. 156).

There are strong relationships between spirituality and religiosity but they are not equal with each other. Rather, religiosity is an important channel of spirituality, which may inspire different dimensions of spirituality and provide people with spiritual resources. The religiosity of Chinese older persons appeared to assist in building up the "thickness" of spiritual resources by providing sources of love, strength, hope, forgiveness, peace and meaning. This inspired dimensions of their spirituality by enabling them to maintain connections with other people, reach out to the transcendent values and explore personal uniqueness and existential values;

therefore, it helped the Chinese older persons to accept, transcend, and face difficult situations positively.

### *The Stimulation of Spirituality*

The literature suggested that spirituality is related to everyday life experiences and is shaped and developed during the life journey. White (2006), for example, suggested that certain life events such as birth, ill, health, and death could stimulate spirituality. This stimulation would raise our awareness and interest about spirituality. Sometimes it may provoke difficulties yet at other times, it may “heighten awareness of the value of life, [and give] a sense of wonder or renewed purpose” (White, 2006, p. 86). McSherry (2006) stressed that not only the boundary situations, but also the more positive, joyful and happy experiences could stimulate our spirituality. It is during this journey that a person’s spirituality is said to be shaped and developed. Also, spirituality is related to every aspect of life (White, 2006; Moberg, 2008; McSherry, 2006). It can be something in daily life to which we may never attach spiritual significance (McSherry, 2006). Moberg (2008) described spirituality as related to almost everything in daily life. The personal identities, different life events and experiences of a person may also affect the interpretation and the concerns of spirituality. Hence, it is important to avoid applying our own definitions of spirituality to others and avoid judging other’s spirituality because of the unique and personal nature of spirituality itself (McSherry, 2006). One of the best ways of understanding spirituality for individuals may be through understanding everyday life situations and the experiences of a person that bring meaning, connection and fulfilment to them.

### *Contribution of the study*

This study tries to contribute to the topic of spirituality and ageing in several ways. First, it attempts to introduce and summarise the concept of spirituality from an extensive review of academic literature with related theories, different definitions of spirituality in previous studies, conceptual frameworks and related terminologies. Second, this study adopted a broad concept of spirituality which provides main themes for understanding Chinese spirituality in this research. Four main categories of Chinese spirituality were developed including, “quality of personhood”, “selfless service”, “the universe” and “religious context”. Also, the cultural and religious elements which contribute to the descriptors of Chinese spirituality were identified. Third, the research findings of descriptors of Chinese spirituality may also assist in enriching “indigenous” measures of Chinese spirituality. Fourth, the guided questions used in this research for exploring the descriptors of Chinese spirituality, the spiritual needs and spiritual tasks associated with ageing could be a reference for further research in spirituality and ageing.

To conclude, this study has highlighted the spiritual dimensions of Chinese older persons in Hong Kong. It attempts to develop definitions of spirituality of older persons in a Chinese context, to apply MacKinlay’s (2006) generic model of spiritual tasks and the process of ageing among three main religious groups in Hong Kong- the non-religious group, the *San Jiao* triad and the Christian group; to clarify the relationships between religiosity and spirituality, and the inspirations of religiosity to spirituality by adopting White’s (2006) dimensions of spirituality. More important, this study recommends the emphasis of spirituality in the official definitions of health such as those of the WHO, the practice of spiritual care in elderly services of Hong Kong, and some suggestions for further study of spirituality.

## Appendix I: Invitation Letter

Dear Sir / Madam,

### Invitation Letter

I am writing to invite the clients of your centre to participate in a research study related to older persons in Hong Kong. I would like to ask for your permission and assistance in conducting this research in your centre.

My name is Wong Yuk Ha, a research postgraduate student undertaking an MPhil in Social Sciences (Year 2), at Lingnan University. My research is on “Spirituality and Ageing: A Case Study of Religiosity of Chinese Older Persons in Hong Kong”. Information from this research project will increase the understanding of spirituality of older persons and will help scholars, health and welfare providers, caregivers and individuals in the future to understand the spirituality and spiritual aspect of health of older persons in Hong Kong.

During this research study, participants will be invited to join in a focus group discussion, a group of 4-6 older persons. They will be invited to share what they understand by spirituality and any spiritual experience according to the guided questions (which will follow the “Research Interview Guide” in the attachment). Their involvement will require about 90 minutes of participants’ time. After the research is completed, I will forward to you by mail a summary of my findings and the implications I have drawn from the study in conjunction of my review of the academic literature on the topic.

It would be grateful if you would be willing to allow members of your centre to participate in this study. It could be an enjoyable experience for participants. I would appreciate it if you might subsequently be able to introduce me to any religious older persons in order to see if they would be able to participate in my research. All can be assured the results will be wholly anonymous and will not identify individual participants.

I would be delighted to come to meet you whenever you are available. In particular, I will be able to further explain the focus group discussion. If you have any questions about this study or require further information, I would be available all the time to provide more information for you, in person or by telephone (my number is 90358418). Do please feel free to contact my chief supervisor Prof. David Phillips

(26167179) and my co-supervisor, Prof. Siu Oi-ling, (26167170) if you need more information. Thank you for your kind help.

Yours faithfully,

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Wong Yuk Ha  
MPhil (Social Sciences) Yr.2

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Prof. David Phillips  
Chair Professor and Chief Supervisor



## Appendix IIa: Researcher Interview Guide (English Version)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of participants in group: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. 1. Focus group

- 4-6 older persons (60+) with the same category of religion

Three types of religious groups

- i. Christianity
- ii. Buddhism, Taoists or Confucians, e.g. Ancestor Worship
- iii. Non- religious

Discussion Time: around 90 minutes

### 2. Individual Interview

- older person aged 60 or above

Three types of religious groups

- i. Christianity
- ii. Buddhism, Taoists or Confucians, e.g. Ancestor Worship
- iii. Non- religious

Interview Time: around 45 minutes

### Sitting Plan

#### Greeting:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you very much for your help. I am an MPhil student of Lingnan University. My name is Creamy, he is \_\_\_\_\_ . I'm doing a survey of spirituality and ageing of older persons. It aims to study the spirituality issues among Chinese older persons of different religions. Your answers will be very much valuable as they can provide grounds for the spiritual aspect of older person. The information you provided will only be used for academic purpose and highly confidential.

In a while, we will be asking you all some questions, and you are welcome to discuss and share your experience freely.

Please feel free to enjoy the pastries and drinks on the table

#### **Focus group Topics**

##### **Part A: Concepts of Spirituality**

1. What do you define the concept of spirituality?

## **Part B: Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Needs**

### **1. Meaning of life**

#### **Past**

- What have you worked hard at your life?
- What is it that you've always wanted to learn, but never quite gotten around to?
- What has been the most meaningful about your life so far?

#### **Now**

- What do you want to do, most of all, with the rest of your life (if you were able)?
- What is there about yourself and your life that you want to make sure people remember?
- Do you have a philosophy of life that has guided the way you live your life?

### **2. Joy and Inner peace**

- What kinds of things do you enjoy doing? What kind of activities give you pleasure?
- What have you done, in your life that makes you proudest? And least proud??
- When you face problem, do you feel joy anymore? Why?
- Are you satisfied with your life? What are the things that make you have that feeling?

### **3. Relationship with others/ Love**

- Who is important to you in your life today (Where do they live)?
- Who do you count on these days? Who counts on you? How do you show you're caring?
- How will you feel about being alone ?
- Who or what do you especially care about?

### **4. Hope**

- If you are given a wish, what is you hope/wish?
- What is it in your life that gives you hope? What is that hope?
- What strategies have you used for coping with fear?
- What will be the problems or worries in the rest of your life? What strategies will you use to cope with them?

**5. Religious beliefs/ faith/ Relationship with God**

- What about religion is most important to you, and if at all, how do you like to express your religious beliefs?
- How do religious beliefs affect your life?

**Part C: In what way religiosity inspires Spirituality**

- What religious beliefs, rituals and practices do you have?
- In troubled times, how do your religious practices help you?
- What do you tell yourself or think about when you are afraid and you need to believe that things will be all right?
- What is it in your religious affiliation attracting you?

## Appendix IIb: Researcher Interview Guide (Chinese Version)

題目: 「心靈與老年化」

日期: \_\_\_\_\_ 時間: \_\_\_\_\_ 地點: \_\_\_\_\_

導向討論人數: \_\_\_\_\_

### 研究形式:

#### 1. 導向小組討論

- 4-6 位有相同宗教類別的 60 歲或以上長者為一組

宗教群體類別:

基督教  
中國宗教(佛教、道教、儒教)  
無宗教

討論時間: 約 90 分鐘

#### 2. 個人訪問

- 60 歲或以上長者

宗教群體類別:

基督教  
中國宗教(佛教、道教、儒教)  
無宗教

訪問時間: 約 45 分鐘

### 坐位圖

### 簡介:

早晨/午安。多謝你們的參加這個討論小組。

我們是嶺南大學的研究生。我是王小姐，他是\_\_\_\_\_。我們正在做一個有關長者心靈健康的研究，希望了解宗教信仰怎樣令長者心靈滿足。

為了方便記錄，我們討論將會錄音，你們提供的資料將會保密，並只會用作學術用途。

等等我地會問一些問題，歡迎各位自由發表意見，請隨意享用枱上的茶點。

### 導向小組討論題目

#### 一. 了解靈性的定義

1. 你們認為靈性是什麼?

#### 二. 了解靈性狀況/需求

##### 1. 人生意義

回故:

- 在過去的生活,你曾經很努力地做著什麼事情?
- 有什麼事情是你一直想做,卻沒有機會實現?

▫ 什麼是你在過去生活中覺得最有意義的?

展望：

▫ 在你餘下/將來的生活中，你最想做什麼?

▫ 有什麼關於你和你的人生，是你最希望別人記得的呢?

▫ 你有沒有一些信念或人生道理成為你生活、待人處事的指標?

## **2. 喜樂/內心平安**

▫ 你最喜歡做什麼事情? 有什麼事情能令你感到愉快?

▫ 在你的人生中，有什麼事最令你自豪? 什麼令你最不感自豪?

▫ 你滿意你的生活嗎?有什麼事情令你有這種感覺?

## **3. 與別人的關係/愛**

▫ 誰人是你現在生活中最重要的人?

▫ 在你的生活中，誰是你的依靠者? 誰人依靠著你? 你會怎樣表達你對人的關心?

▫ 當你只有一個人的時候，你會有什麼感覺?

▫ 有什麼人或事是你特別在意的?

## **4. 盼望/希望**

▫ 如果給你一個願望，你的願望會是什麼?

▫ 在你生命中，什麼東西帶給你有希望?

▫ 在生活中，你會以什麼方法面對恐懼?

▫ 在你餘下/未來的日子中，有什麼是你令你感到困難/擔心的? 你會以什麼方法面對這困難/擔心?

## **5. 宗教信念/與神的關係**

▫ 宗教對你有什麼重要? 你會怎麼表達你的宗教信仰?

▫ 宗教信仰怎樣影響你的日常生活?

## **三. 了解宗教如何使人靈性滿足**

▫ 你有什麼宗教信念、宗教活動/儀式?

▫ 在你遇到困難的時候，你的宗教怎樣給你幫助?

▫ 當你感到害怕的時候，你會各自己說什麼或想著什麼事情以令自己感到安心?

▫ 你的宗教信仰有什麼吸引你的地方?

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