

ABSTRACT
CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION
OF CHINESE FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
***FENG SHUI* AS A CASE STUDY**

by

Yeow Beng Mah

This is an evaluative study utilizing a quasi-experimental research method around a folk religion and critical contextualization seminar with *feng shui* (Chinese geomancy) as a case study. It demonstrates that Chinese Christians are more exposed to ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices, contextualize ancestral worship better, and are more open towards Chinese medical practices and martial arts than other folk beliefs and practices. People's practice of contextualization is influenced by prior exposure and clarity and definiteness in convictions. The study also indicates that Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization is helpful in contextualizing *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION
OF CHINESE FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
FENG SHUI AS A CASE STUDY

presented by

Yeow Beng Mah

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

December 1, 2004

Date

Internal Reader

December 1, 2004

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Vice President of Educational Development

December 1, 2004

Date

CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION
OF CHINESE FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
FENG SHUI AS A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

By
Yeow Beng Mah
December 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With sincerest gratitude, I want to acknowledge the following people who have walked with me and played a vital part in my dissertation project.

My supervisor: Dr. Eunice Irwin. Your faith in my work and your constant encouragement, even to the point of coming by Singapore to push me on, has certainly contributed to the completion of this research project. Thank you for your keen insight and your untiring reading of the dissertation just to make it better and better. Above all, thank you for extending to my family and me your grace and warm friendship.

My dissertation committee: Dr. Leslie Andrews, Dr. Howard Snyder, and Dr. Terry Muck. Dr. Andrews, you have been a great help and source of guidance and advice for me in both my participation in the D.Min. program as well as the conception of this research project. Dr. Snyder, thank you for your wise input into this dissertation and your encouragement in and out of class, inspiring me to be the kind of teacher God wants me to be. As for Dr. Muck, you have indeed helped hone me to be a sharper minister through your critical and constructive suggestions.

My Research Reflection Team (RRT): Rev. Shinobu Yamazaki, Rev. Chiu Ming Li, my wife—Elaine Mah, Dr. Ng Tjoh Dju, Dr. Seah Kah Heng, Rev. Joshua Tan, Pastor Jimmy Boh, and Mr. Andrew Peh (Ph.D. Cand.). I am indebted to each of you for your insightful contributions and, especially, your availability, encouragement, and support.

The leadership of Singapore Campus Crusade for Christ: Dr. Roland Tan and Mr. Richard Ting. Thank you for your understanding and support in giving me the time and leeway to pursue my studies and my dreams.

Those that made the research seminar possible. Dr. Ho Chiao Ek, Director/Principal of East Asia School of Theology (EAST), I appreciate your passionately welcoming me to the team at EAST and, through the school, offering me all the logistic support necessary for the execution of the research seminar. Ms. Josephine Seow, thanks for helping with the actual legwork to put the research seminar together. Mr. Lew Soon Poh, my buddy in the army, as usual, you have been most magnanimous in providing the much needed grant to run the research seminar. Mr. Isaac Lim, thanks for answering to my every beck and call for statistical help despite your own busy schedule. Dr. Siok Kuan Tambyah, thanks for your helpful suggestions on how I can utilize and report the interviews. My grateful appreciation also goes to all the fifty-five research group and control group participants who selflessly volunteered in the research project.

My family. My mother, Mdm Ng Mee Choo. I am indebted to you, Mom, for your unceasing intercessory prayers for me day in and out. Above all, I am most grateful to my wife, Elaine, who encouraged and supported me through all my five years of studies. Elaine, you have been more than a wife to me: you are my counselor, caregiver, editor, and encourager. As I mentioned to you before, this degree is for you; I would not have done it without you. Of course, I am also most appreciative of my three very adorable, understanding, and supportive sons, Caleb, David, and Barnabas, who all willingly bore with Dad through those many years of madness and rush to meet assignment deadlines.

Finally, all glory goes to God who alone makes this dissertation possible.

¹ I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

³ O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

Psalms 34:1-3 (KJV)

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Background

*Feng shui*¹ (Chinese geomancy that emphasizes physical as well as chronological alignments to achieve well-being and prosperity) is practiced everywhere in East Asia and Southeast Asia and increasingly by those from Asian cultures living in the West (Hwa, “Case Studies” 139-40). In early 2001 Hong Kong billionaire businessman Eric Hotung decided to sell the house he bought for six million dollars from Senator Ted Kennedy in 1997 because he thought that the house “suffer[ed] from bad feng shui” (Trudeau C3). Many commercial enterprises are also not ashamed to identify the use of *feng shui* publicly in their policies and designs. For example, the October 2002 vision statement found on the Web site of Suntec City, a colossal commercial project on reclaimed land in a new section of the city of Singapore, proudly proclaimed its architecture to be *feng shui* inspired:

Suntec City is a fascinating synergy of state-of-the-art technology and meta-physical symbolism. Inspired in particular by the mandala, an ancient [Hindu] philosophical representation of the universe as well as Chinese geomancy or fengshui, its buildings and features are arranged to create harmony and attract good fortune. (Suntec)

Figure 1.1 shows Suntec City as it appears from the ground—just another modern skyscraper. Unless explained, the casual passer-by may not be aware of the amount of effort the owners spent in aligning it according to *feng shui* layout.

¹ Wherever possible, all Chinese words shall follow the current Pinyin system of Romanization. The equivalent older Wade-Giles Romanization, if any, will appear in parenthesis only in the first reference of each word. Quotations that employ the older Wade-Giles Romanization or Cantonese transliterations will not be amended and may, therefore, differ in spelling.



Figure 1.1. Suntec City, Singapore—from an unsuspecting angle.

The Suntec City Web site explains that the water in the “Fountain of Wealth” “flow inwards, instead of outwards, into the centre of the ring. Water being a symbol of wealth and life to the Chinese, this inward flow is a symbolic retention of fortune, bringing prosperity to both occupiers and visitors.” It also mentions the *yin* and *yang* “reflected in the juxtaposition of solid buildings, which reflect positive energy; and free space, which stands for negative force” and the balance between the “silvery green or ‘cool’ colours with spice and earth tones, representing ‘hot’ colours.” Figure 1.2 shows Suntec City’s actual composition of six complexes, simulating the wrist and five fingers of a hand. In the design, the “hand” is grasping the “Fountain of Wealth.”²

² All the explicit allusions to *feng shui*, the *mandala*, *yin* and *yang*, etc., including Figure 1.2, had been removed when the Web site was reaccessed one year later.

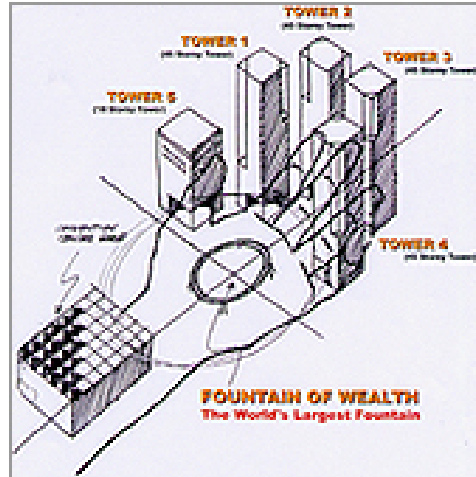


Figure 1.2. Suntec's six complexes grasping the "Fountain of Wealth."

Interest in the four thousand year old tradition of *feng shui* is also picking up quickly in the West. According to Ralph and Lahni DeAmicis' The Geomancer, a *feng shui* Web site, the list of well-known personalities who practice *feng shui* includes celebrities like Donald Trump, Bill Clinton, Madonna, Cher, Brooke Shields, Eric Clapton, Oprah Winfrey, and Julie Andrews. In addition, mega-companies like The Body Shop, British Airways, CBS TV Studios, Motorola, Panasonic, Hyatt Hotels, Kellogg's and Chase Manhattan Bank, to name a few, also admit to using *feng shui* officially for their businesses (DeAmicis and DeAmicis, "The Evolution of Feng Shui"). Apparently, the television, newspapers, magazines, radio, books, and the Internet are all fighting to be the most updated on this latest and hottest new fad.

Whether people are aware of them or not, chances are they might be walking into the very layout and structures erected under the influence of *feng shui*. These may even be public buildings or institutions, and they may even be located in North America or Europe. Although most Christians are not really troubled by *feng shui* and do not believe

in it, they may subscribe to its influence either unintentionally or just so that their cars or houses would have a good resale value. At the same time, since *feng shui* actually straddles evenly between what is quasi-scientific and logical and what is superstitious and religious, many Christians have difficulty arriving at a clear response to it. Besides, most Christians may have to access, live in, or work in places constructed under the advice of *feng shui*.

The challenge that confronts the Singaporean Chinese Christians is responding to such *feng shui* practiced in society. Christians need to know if the practice of *feng shui* is compatible with the Christian faith and whether a Christian can practice *feng shui*.

Although these questions may not be the most urgent dilemma for Christians in Singapore today, the Church, nevertheless, should answer them because of *feng shui*'s popularity and power of persuasion. Just as the gospel needs to be contextualized in a local culture as part of Christian discipleship and the fostering of indigenous leadership, similarly the indigenous church needs to learn to contextualize its culture, beliefs, and practices to formulate its own indigenous theology. To fail to contextualize current folk beliefs and practices, therefore, is to repeat the same mistake that the Church committed when the gospel was first introduced to Singapore during colonial days.

Mistakes of the Past

Almost forty years ago, my uncle was involved in a motorcycle accident and subsequently became deranged. He would wander off to secluded places at strange times without telling anybody. The family was at its wits' end in search of a cure for him. At last, someone suggested that my uncle might have come under the attack of black magic. My parents and relatives were then nominal Christians, who attended church probably

only on Holy Communion Sundays, and they had never thought of first consulting the pastor. Instead, their immediate and logical conclusion was that if the cause of the problem were black magic, then it could be absolved only by one who knew and practiced black magic. In fact, such a worldview that indigenous spiritual problems can only be solved by local means is often reflected in Chinese movies. Sometime ago, one of them portrayed how a Chinese ghost was not bothered by a crucifix but could only be hindered by a Chinese talisman because it was a Chinese ghost and not a Western ghost. Besides, the Chinese also have an ancient axiom that says, “Use a poison to overcome another poison.” The logic is akin to pitting one negative against another so that two negatives produce a positive result.³

In my uncle’s case, the *bomoh* (Malay shaman) lighted incense and took some time to recite some foreign incantations before my uncle. After that, he sent the family home with two bottles of lime juice for my uncle to drink. His parting instruction was that if my uncle remained unwell after that, his problem would not be a spiritual one but a mental one and he had to be quickly referred to the mental hospital. Ironically, my deranged uncle turned out to be spiritually more attuned than the other relatives. He protested against the visit to the *bomoh*, refused to drink the lime juice and complained to the church leaders about what the relatives had made him do when the leaders came for visitation. The church leaders admonished the family members. Later, my uncle was hospitalized in the asylum for a few weeks and gradually recovered. Today, he is well and still fervently attending church.

Non-contextualization. Black magic, which is basically the placement of malicious spells on ordinary objects to harm others contacting it, is a reality and not just a

³ The equivalent English version would be, “Fight fire with fire.”

superstition that my parents' generation constantly faced. To them, however, it was a completely different issue from Christianity, and Christianity had nothing to do with it. Unfortunately, such a perspective came about because one of the usual answers given by the church to such folk beliefs was not to acknowledge its presence but to deny it or suppress it as superstition. Missionaries ignored the folk issues and did not see any necessity for contextualization since they were convinced that such beliefs and practices would fade away as society progressed. As Paul G. Hiebert points out, the consequences were disastrous:

It was reductionist and acultural—it did not take other cultures and religions seriously. It was ethnocentric—it judged other cultures and religions by its own standards and found them wanting, while assuming that its own ways were right. And in the end, it hindered the missionary task. The foreignness of the gospel was a barrier to evangelism, and syncretism was not prevented. Far too often the missionaries ended as policemen enforcing what they believed to be Christian practices on the people. (“Critical Contextualization” 106)

Such a mind-set also encouraged the Church to relegate folk problems to natural causes explainable by science or treatable by medicine. If the Church did not address the issue, and if science could not provide a solution, the only recourse left to the Christian was to turn to practitioners of folk magic. This dualistic response in religion, like the one faced by my relatives, is referred to missiologically as “split-level Christianity.” It is the persistence of a two-tier Christianity where deeply committed Christians faithfully attend church and pray to God for their needs but still feel compelled to approach other religious specialists for healing or divination (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 15).

Today such split-level Christianity may raise its head in the form of Christians following *feng shui* advice on environmental alignments and layouts since the Church, for the most part, remains silent about such issues. Thus, whatever the Church fails to

address in a local culture becomes a nook or a vacuum for folk religious beliefs and practices like *feng shui* to fill. In the end, some Christians would still comply with *feng shui* advice now and then because *feng shui* meets a need that the Church could not meet.

On the other hand, many churches do view folk practices, black magic, amulets, charms, talismans, and the like, seriously as spiritual problems. These groups practice deliverance and healing ministries as part of the conversion and discipleship process. Nevertheless, under what circumstances should such deliverance and healing ministries be practiced becomes the question when one encounters “less than obvious” cases involving magic, the occult, or other spiritual forces. For a Chinese in Singapore today, such “less than obvious” cases where spiritual powers are represented might include ancestral worship, celebration of certain folk festivals, acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicines, *qi gong*—Chinese breathing exercises, *gong fu* (kung fu)—Chinese martial arts, *tai ji*—Chinese physical exercise, *feng shui*, etc. At times, Christians face difficulties in determining whether the issues are ethnic and cultural or religious and spiritual or if they are scientific but enshrouded in mystery.

To be on the safe side, the missionaries and pastors in the past, for the most part, taught the people to view such “gray” issues as religious and spiritual and to remove themselves from the practices. Such stance was not necessarily wrong, but without encouraging any type of contextualization, they also risked removing whatever useful cultural roots, social coping mechanisms, or unproven scientific principles that might be attached to them.

Uncritical contextualization. As colonialism slowly crumbled, Christians woke up to the futility of the Church’s “non-contextualization.” Gradually, the Church began to

talk about “contextualization.”⁴ Although the majority of missions still continued to exercise authority and impose Western styles and structures, some began to encourage autonomy of young churches and the use of indigenous leadership and methods.

Generally, as Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou observe, the proponents for contextualization value cultures highly:

Those who advocated this approach generally had a deep respect for other people and their cultures, and recognized the high value people place on their own cultural heritage. They also recognized that the foreignness of the Christian message was one of the major barriers to its acceptance. Consequently, they stressed the communication of the gospel in indigenous forms and called for little or no cultural dislocation. (21)

As in many discoveries, however, early proponents of contextualization tend to overemphasize it, swinging the practice from one extreme of non-contextualization to the other liberal extreme of “uncritical contextualization.” The latter can lead to many other problems. For example, it can easily overlook the fact that sin is found not only in individuals but also within the institutions of society and in cultural ideologies (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 21). The denial of absolutes and of “truth” also runs against the gospel as a self-evident and divinely affirmed truth. Consequently, as Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou say, “An uncritical incorporation of old beliefs and practices into the life of the church opens the door to syncretism of all kinds as well as to cultural and philosophical relativism, which destroys all truth and authority” (21).

Critical Contextualization as Solution

In the end, the Church cannot be too permissive in its contextualization.

Contextualization needs to be carried out critically, endeavoring to remove unnecessary

⁴ Across history, scholars call the exercise of contextualization by different names with varied definitions. They used terms like accommodation, adaptation, indigenization, inculturation, local theologies, and contextualization. Distinctions of these are explained upon under “Contextualization: Origin and Differing Opinions” in Chapter 2.

cultural trappings and to preserve critical absolutes. Contextualization, according to Hiebert, must not rob the gospel of its prophetic voice:

There is an offense in the foreignness of the culture we bring along with the gospel itself, which we dare not weaken. The gospel must be contextualized, but it also must remain prophetic—standing in judgment on what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons. (“Critical Contextualization” 109)

Borrowing from the experience of Jacob Loewen and John Geertz in contextualization among the Wanana of Panama, Hiebert proposes contextualizing the gospel and theology in local cultural forms critically (109-10). Later on, together with Shaw and Tiénou in Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices,⁵ he addresses the problem of split-level Christianity and the folk beliefs and worldviews occurring in virtually all Christians. The book suggests that while the Church tends to concentrate on things that are other-worldly, supernatural, sacred, and pertaining to faith, and while science helps to explain and solve the problems on the opposite spectrum that are this-worldly, natural, secular, and pertaining to experience, many folk issues in the fuzzy middle zone between the two remain virtually unaddressed. Hiebert coins this phenomenon the “flaw of the excluded middle” (“Flaw” 35-47).

Hiebert then proposes critical contextualization as a method to contextualize such issues that occupy the middle zone. This process can be given to a community of local Christians (a church, perhaps) to follow as a group in order that they might learn, decide, and implement together the gospel in a new and needed way in their culture. The four

⁵ Though Shaw and Tiénou were listed as coauthors together with Hiebert in Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices, the ideas in the book, in actuality, stemmed from the years of missiological thinking and practice of Hiebert. This information was divulged by Tiénou in his talk to a class in Asbury Theological Seminary on 21-22 October 2003. Hiebert was also responsible for formulating the method of Critical Contextualization applied in this research. His idea first appeared in “Critical Contextualization” published by the International Bulletin of Missionary Research in 1987.

steps of critical contextualization are (1) phenomenological analysis (exegesis of the culture)—studying the cultural practices phenomenologically and uncritically, (2) ontological critique (exegesis of the Scripture and the hermeneutical bridge)—studying the Scripture on what it has to say about a practice, (3) evaluative response (critical response)—evaluate the cultural practice in light of the new understanding in the Scripture, and (4) transformative ministries (new contextualized practices)—incorporate new contextualized practices (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 21-29; Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization” 109-10). Unlike traditional missions where upholding orthodoxy easily becomes cultural dominance, Hiebert clarifies that critical contextualization deliberately works against the grain of perceiving missions as a monocultural activity:

Critical contextualization does not operate from a monocultural perspective. Nor is it premised upon the pluralism of incommensurable cultures. It seeks to find metacultural and metatheological frameworks that enable people in one culture to understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with a minimum of distortion. It is based on a critical realist epistemology that sees all human knowledge as a combination of objective and subjective elements, and as partial but increasingly closer approximations of truth. It takes both historical and cultural contexts seriously. And it sees the relationship between form and meaning in symbols such as words and rituals, ranging all the way from an equation of the two to simply arbitrary associations between them. Finally, it sees contextualization as an ongoing process in which the church must constantly engage itself, a process that can lead us to a better understanding of what the Lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God on earth are about. (“Critical Contextualization” 111)

Figure 1.3 is a visual presentation of the rationale and steps of Hiebert’s Critical Contextualization taken from the text of Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Menenses’ Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies (169). It shows how the problems of non-contextualization and uncritical contextualization may best be met through the practice of critical contextualization.

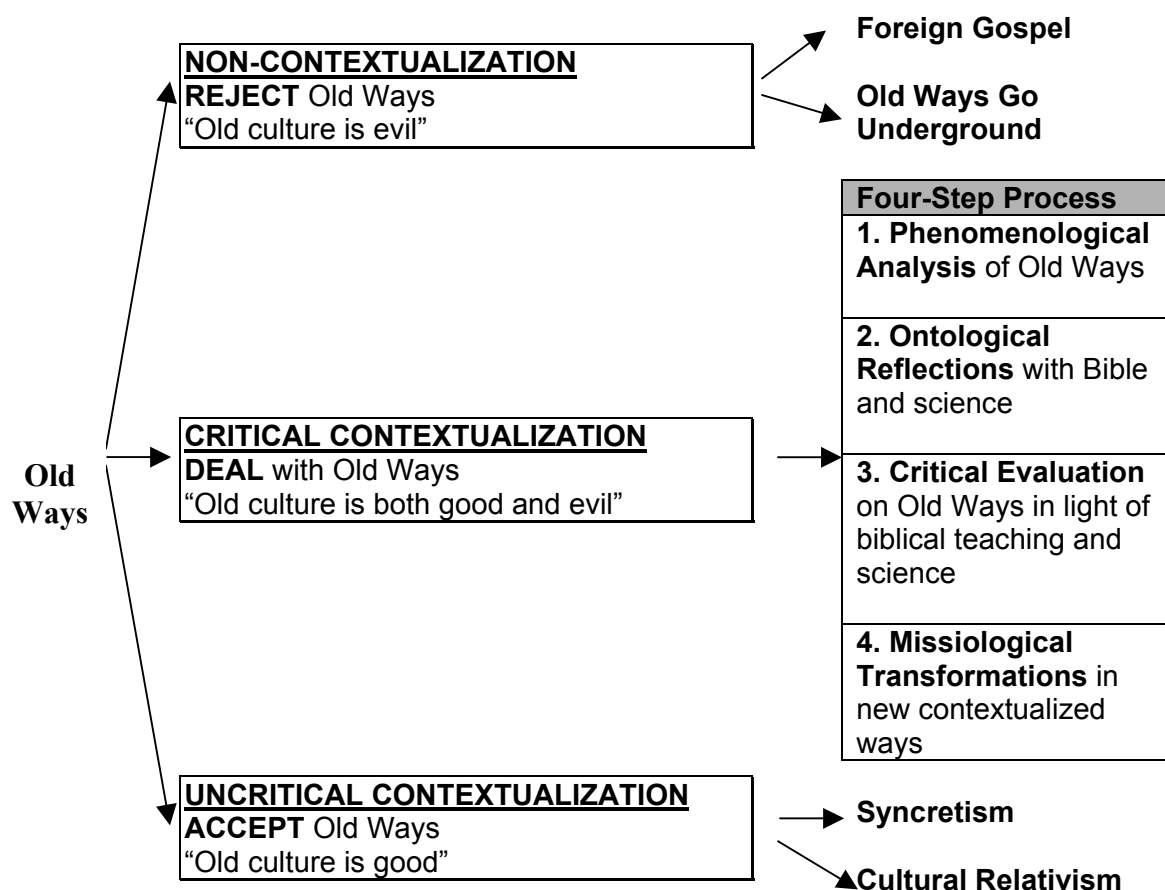


Figure 1.3. Three levels of contextualization.

Biblical/Theological Foundations

Contextualization involves both the communication and “making of sense” of the gospel in another culture as well as the concern for appropriate response of the recipients to gospel in their own culture and context. No mission field operates out of a cultural vacuum. At the same time, all cross-cultural communications necessitate contextualization. When missionaries enter another culture, they have to respond to the traditional beliefs and practices of the local culture not only during evangelism but also all through discipleship, nurture, and church planting. Further, the missionaries must

ensure that in communicating the gospel they are not adulterating it with their own cultural perceptions. Thus in communicating the gospel, contextualization is required in order to understand how the gospel can be adapted to another culture and to discern if helpful common reference points are present or if certain distinctions or differences need to be stressed.

God's Example in Contextualization

The overriding reason why Christians should take another person's culture seriously and contextualize their message is because God takes human culture seriously and contextualizes the message of salvation for people. The best biblical example of contextualization, therefore, is demonstrated by God personally.

Revelation through creation. God does not stop at anything in order to reveal the divine personal attributes to human beings. Romans 1:20 says that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, in their book Contextualization—Meanings, Methods, and Models, recall Genesis 1:27-28 concerning God's creation of humans and the command for them to be fruitful and fill the earth as the beginning of contextualization:

In a real sense, contextualization, culture, and theology all have a simultaneous beginning. Along with the shafts of light that broke through the foliage of Eden on the first morning of human life, the silence was broken by the voice of God.... Since that morning men and women have wrestled, not just with the problems of knowing God and subduing earth, but also with communicating what they have learned about divine will and their own environment. (27)

Old Testament example. In the Old Testament, God contextualized cultural

elements to communicate the gospel. The stream of salvation history in the Bible shows clearly how God carefully unfolds the salvation plan a step at a time by contextualizing the message to cultural means. The Old Testament sacrificial system, for example, utilized the very native and common paraphernalia with which a Middle Eastern wandering herdsman was familiar as a means of pointing to God's salvation: the animals from his fold, the fire from his torch, and the rocks from the field for the altar, etc. The Tabernacle and every artifact associated with it were also constructed from indigenous and native materials. Yet, each one of them carries significant symbolism to represent God's overall love and provision for their ultimate salvation. When God communicated to the people orally through his prophets, anthropomorphisms such as the eye/s of God (Gen. 6:8; Deut. 4:25; Ezra 5:5; Zech. 12:4), face of God, and the hand/s of God (Exod. 7:5) were used so that humans would have a clear idea of God's feelings and attitudes towards them and their behavior.

The Bible. The Bible as the written Word of God is itself the fruit of God's contextualization. It is the written record of God's self-revelation over 1,600 years in many specific cultural contexts (it makes reference to more than seventy cultural groups). In these, God speaks to particular people using particular thought forms, vocabulary, and idioms. The more one studies the sixty-six books of the Bible, the more one will become convinced that the Bible is a special gift designed by God to communicate God's message in a personal way.

The four Gospels. The four Gospels of the New Testament also reflect contextualization. All of them relate the story of the Savior but from different perspectives in order that the same story of Jesus might be contextualized for different

audiences. According to Albert Nolan, the four Gospels seek to be relevant to different people:

The four small books that we call the gospels are not biographies and were never intended to be. Their purpose was to show how Jesus could be relevant to people who lived outside Palestine a generation or two after Jesus' death. (13)

Matthew, as a Jew himself, for example, wrote his Gospel primarily for the Jews. To contextualize the message to his audience, he opened his account by appealing to what the Jews valued most—a creditable genealogy of Jesus. He also quoted liberally from the Old Testament, together with smatterings of Aramaic to emphasize the messianic prophesies of Jesus, his kingship, and divine titles.

On the other hand, Mark wrote his Gospel for the Romans; thus, even for a short gospel like his, he took time to explain Palestinian customs such as handwashing and purification rites in Mark 7:3-4. Unlike Matthew, Aramaic expressions retained in the text were interpreted into Greek (Guthrie 71-72).

Luke, a Gentile, reflects a Hellenistic mind-set. His Gospel was addressed to Theophilus, another Gentile, and it was clearly contextualized for a Gentile audience. It was written in good *koine* Greek with a rich and varied vocabulary enhanced by numerous Semitisms. A strand of universalism pervades the account. For example, the angels' goodwill message was directed to *all* people (Luke 2:14), Simeon foretold that Jesus would be a Light for the *Gentiles* (Luke 2:32), and the Great Commission was directed to *all* nations (Luke 24:47) (Guthrie 102-03).

The Gospel of John was written for the Greeks. Its opening reference to the *Logos* is, in fact, a contextualization of the message of Christ employing Greek thought. As Roman Catholic missiologist Aylward Shorter points out in Toward a Theology of

Inculturation, the term “*Logos*” has “its [original] counterpart in Greek philosophy, particularly among the Stoics where it was presented as the creative word or reason of God, the principle of rationality in the Cosmos” (75-76).

The incarnation. God’s contextualization not only is expressed in the inspiration of the Word; it is also epitomized in his becoming flesh. Though culture and language are imperfect tools for understanding God’s ways, Charles R. Taber believes, nevertheless, that “God has sanctified them by using them fully in the Incarnation of his Son and in the inspiration of the Bible” (“Hermeneutics and Culture” 129-30). The Bible says that God is known through general revelations in creation (Rom. 1:20; cf. Ps. 19:1) and through specific revelation and through God’s Word (2 Pet. 1:20-21); however, God’s personal self-revelation reaches its crescendo in the incarnation of the Son. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [literally tabernacled] among us,” John proclaims. “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Hebrews 1:3a also affirms, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” God was “heard,” “seen,” and “touched” by human hands (1 John 1-3). The incarnated Christ was, therefore, a contextual representation of God. In him, God became one among people: Emmanuel (Matt. 1:22-23).⁶ C. René Padilla captures the idea of contextualization in Christ’s incarnation in the following words:

The incarnation makes clear God’s approach to the revelation of himself and of his purposes: God does not shout his message from the heavens; God becomes present as a man among men. The climax of God’s revelation is Emmanuel. And Emmanuel is Jesus, a first-century Jew! The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God’s intention to make himself known from within the human situation. Because of the very nature of the

⁶ Other scriptural references to the incarnation can be found in Romans 1:3; 8:3; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7 (cf. also Eph. 2:15; Col. 1:21-22; 1 Pet. 3:18; 4:1).

Gospel, we know this Gospel only as a message contextualized in culture. (“Contextualization” 286)

Jesus’ life. As God’s means of contextualization, Jesus did not perceive his task as a one-way mission to save the world from a sinful culture. While he, as one who transmits the gospel, made known the gospel in cultural context, he also allowed the people as receivers of the gospel hermeneutically to interpret and understand the gospel from their cultural perspectives. He, therefore, came not predominantly as a rabbi or a messiah, but first meekly as a learner, a participant, and a citizen. By being born into a particular culture, he demonstrated learning how to be a Jew from infancy. As a Jew, he practiced the Jewish culture and honored God along Hebrew religious traditions and culture. Clemens Sedmak interprets all these as Jesus actually doing local theology:

The first aspect of the local life of Jesus, the Christ, is Jesus’ situatedness in a particular local culture. Jesus was rooted in a local culture, expressing himself in the local language, using local experiences and local images in his parables. He was a member of his cultural community. Jesus shared the hopes and fears of his people. It can be argued that Jesus had a home and local roots. (23)

Sedmak argues from the Bible that the silence over Jesus’ twenty years from the time he was twelve to the beginning of his public ministry only indicates that “Jesus’ life during that period was locally rooted and unspectacular” (24). He goes on to show that “Jesus was a Jew. He was born into Judaism, subject to the law of Moses, and lived within the limits of the law” (24); for example, in Mark 1:44, he asked the healed leper to show himself to the priests and offer for his cleansing “what Moses prescribed.” The movement he founded stood in the tradition of the Old Testament prophetic movement. Jesus used important Jewish sources in his ministry (e.g., Matt. 11:10) (24).

Jesus’ ministry. In his ministry, Jesus could have talked of lofty heavenly visions

like those recorded by John at the island of Patmos, but he chose to contextualize and present the kingdom of God in the daily language that his audience understood. Thus, he explained the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven in terms of simple life analogies: farming a field (Matt. 13:24), a mustard seed growing (Matt. 13:31), yeast rising (Matt. 13:33), treasure found (Matt. 13:44). Jesus also adapted his message to local and foreign cultures. To a learned Nicodemus, he was able to engage in an intellectual discussion on the meaning of being born again (John 3). To the woman at the well, he surmounted cultural differences to confront her as a Jew extending the love of God to a Samaritan (John 4).

Use of humans. Before and after the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God continues to use humans as the chief agents to share the Good News. By using humans as agents, God is contextualizing in the most personal and direct way. In fact, besides people, God contends to have no other alternatives or contingencies. God could have revealed the gospel through other means in creation but chose to give humans the privilege to be gospel messengers despite their frailty and faithlessness. God continues to use humans because God sees them as one of the best and one of the primary means to contextualize the gospel.

Interestingly, even the angels do not have the privilege of bringing people to Christ directly. All the records of angels in the Bible reveal that none of them was a direct agent for sharing the Good News or a witness to the conversion of souls. For example, in Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch needed someone to tell him the gospel while he was in the desert. God could have sent an angel to explain to him the Scriptures he was reading, but instead the angel was sent to direct Philip to go all the way into the desert to witness to

him. Similarly, in Acts 10, the angel could have easily conveyed the gospel forthrightly to Cornelius, but instead he directed Cornelius to look out for Simon so that Simon might preach the Good News to him.

Biblical Examples in Contextualization

The Church started at both the center and periphery of Judaism. The founding members were mainly Jews who continued to go to the Temple, practice circumcision, observe food laws, keep the Sabbath, and evangelize only the Jews (Acts 2-8; 11:19). Early adjustments included transferring the Sabbath day of worship to Sunday observance in order to celebrate the priority of the resurrection day. All these were culturally tolerable as long as the believers were Jewish.

The Council of Jerusalem. Peter realized in his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 that God's agenda was never for Christianity to be confined only to the Jews. As can be seen in the contention between Paul and Peter in Galatians 2:11-16 and the minutes of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), the early Church constantly faced challenges to engage in contextualization. Hesselgrave and Rommen observed that often contextualization was not a matter of choice but no choice:

It became apparent that the contextualizing activity of the New Testament believers was not simply a matter of a voluntary or spontaneous response to cultural differences, but rather a matter of God's pushing them to destroy the barrier between Jews and the Gentile world. (8-9)

Acts 15 is a prime instance of a debate in contextualization as the gospel spread outside its original culture. The argument arose because some "believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5) insisted on circumcision as part of the salvation process (Acts 15:1, 5). From the Jewish perspective, this demand seemed reasonable. The Church was expanding exponentially across cultures, and the Jews felt threatened that the

ethnic quality and traditional distinctives of Christianity would be compromised. Possibly, the Church was already experiencing a growing problem with regards to the rite of circumcision⁷ and Jewish-Gentile fellowships, particularly concerning partaking of common meals (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). The Council began with Peter pointing to God's vision of the Gentile mission followed by Paul and Barnabas' testimony of the "miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them" (Acts 15:12). James then quoted the Old Testament in Amos 9:11-12 confirming God's desire for all Gentiles to bear his name (Acts 15:16-18). Towards the end, the leaders decided upon the nonnegotiables of which Gentile Christians (especially in their local contexts) should be wary, namely, abstaining from food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, meat of strangled animals, and blood. They then appropriately closed the case by appointing representatives to relay the instructions for transformation to the entire Church.

Paul's message to the Athenians. Another good example of contextualization in evangelism can be found in Paul's message to the Athenians (Acts 17:16-34). Having analyzed the polytheism of the Greeks, Paul critically evaluated its form and meaning to uncover common platforms for the gospel as well as to expose inadequacies in the Greek's religion in the light of the gospel truth. He not only uncovered their common desire for knowledge (Acts 17: 22) and worship of God (Acts 17:23) but also the Greeks' error of confining God to human-made temples (Acts 17:24) and human-made rituals (Acts 17:25). He then effectively introduced the gospel from this common platform and alleged discrepancy (Acts 17:26 ff.).

Styles of worship. Finally, contextualization is evidenced in the styles of Jewish

⁷ Circumcision seemed to be the most contentious issue in the earliest document in the New Testament—the epistle of Galatians.

and Christian worship. Though Christianity sprang up as a splinter group from Judaism, its converts nevertheless brought and contextualized their Jewish worship style to fit their needs. In Acts, first, the physical Temple ceased to have any significance for the Christian. Second, even the synagogue worship was gradually replaced by house churches.

Basis for Contextualization: Incarnational Mission

The theological foundation for contextualization begins with Christ's example in his incarnation and his sending all his followers in like manner that the Father has sent him (John 17:18); "[a]s the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). After securing salvation for the world, the incarnated Christ commissioned all who would believe and follow him to likewise "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). Clearly Jesus intends his people's mission in the world to be modeled after his own, which was an incarnational and contextualized one.

Philippians 2:5-8 describes how Christ gave up his heavenly position to "make himself nothing" and then condescended to identify with human beings in all ways. Christ first performed a detachment from heaven and then a solidarity with those to whom he came to minister. According to Todd H. Speidell, the premise for a theology of incarnational mission (and for contextualized mission as well) lies in the notion that "because God revealed who he is in Christ, we therefore ought to be who we are in Christ, not merely by emulating this example but by participating in the vicarious obedience of the humiliated one, Jesus Christ" (141).

Hispanic urban missionary Jude Tiersma reiterates that the contextualized and incarnational mission "is significant because the gospel does not exist in a vacuum but

must be incarnated, ‘fleshed out’ anew in each context” (10). After all, the best form of mission is for witnesses to become fleshly representations of Christ and the gospel to the nonbelieving world. According to Tiersma, the contextualized and incarnational mission means identification:

When we speak of incarnational mission, we speak of a theology on the way, of accompaniment ... of walking alongside. It is a theology of those who are not from the periphery but, knowing that Christ died “outside the gate,” have chosen to identify with, to walk alongside, those the world has cast aside as unimportant.... [W]e choose to undergo the physical and emotional experiences of our neighbors, identifying with them in their struggles and joys. (9)

Theological Assumptions and Foundations for Critical Contextualization

Since this research project applies Hiebert’s four steps of critical contextualization, the theological assumptions and foundations for the method should be clear. Critical contextualization works from the following theological assumptions and biblical bases: (1) The Bible is the Word of God and has bearing for all people; (2) God works through culture; (3) Cultures are diverse and reflect different perceptions of God’s truth; and, (4) The Church needs to theologize as a hermeneutical community. My own diagram, Figure 1.4, visually illustrates the theological assumptions and biblical bases of Hiebert’s four steps in critical contextualization.

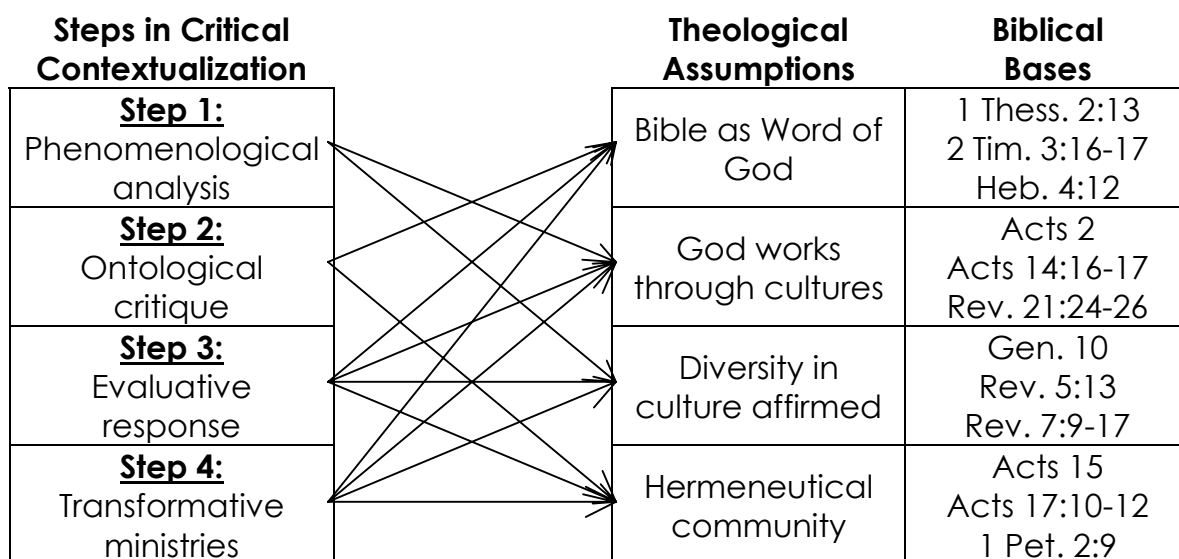


Figure 1.4. Theological assumptions and biblical bases for the four steps of critical contextualization.

The Bible as the Word of God. The assumption is that the Bible has universal meanings and applications for people of all tribes and nations irrespective of their cultures. Therefore, the gospel is to be spread to everyone not just because of Jesus' command but because the whole Scripture, from beginning to end, is a story that seeks to include all peoples. After all, God's original intention in the covenant with Abraham was to bless all people through blessing Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3).

Critical contextualization works from the premise that the Bible is the Christian's main source of revelation from God (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is a reliable source helpful for discerning what is right and wrong (Heb. 4:12).

"Contextualized practices like contextualized theologies must be biblically based. This may seem obvious, but we must constantly remind ourselves that the standards against which all practices are measured is biblical revelation" (Hiebert, "Critical

Contextualization” 110). This centrality of the Bible is emphasized in Hiebert’s critical contextualization. Step 2 actually is an investigation in the Bible while step 3 evaluates what the Bible teaches concerning a particular issue, together with how the folk religion deals with the issue (studied in step 1: the phenomenological analysis). Step 4 then becomes possible because it recognizes how the Bible is capable of transforming lives in the present situation.

God works through culture. Although cultures may be flawed, God uses them.

Revelation 21:24-26 speaks of the day in which nations will present their glory and honor to God:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

Respected New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall thinks that this “glory and honor of the nations,” presented to God as part of God’s glorification, is possibly the expression of human cultures:

Certainly, while it is sin-denying, Christianity is not world-denying. The New Testament attitude to cultural values is a positive one. It anticipates the prominent place of “culture” (in some form) in the Kingdom to come by speaking of a city, the nations, and the great throng from every tribe and tongue. Contrary to traditional evangelical eschatology, the God revealed by the New Testament writers surely has in mind the conservation and transformation of human culture and human society in the world to come. (31)

According to Donald McGavran, Christians need to recognize “that the cultures of humankind are rich beyond description, wonderfully adapted to the multifarious conditions under which humans live, and have much to contribute to global progress and happiness” (1). As far as McGavran is concerned, anthropologists may be right in

observing that cultures are the creation of human societies, families, kindreds, clans, tribes, and classes of people who live together long enough to develop a distinctive language and way of life. Nevertheless, Christians also believe that God has a part in forming and transforming cultures (10). By creating humans in his image, God gives them guidance, and by providing them free will and dominion over all things, humanity's creativity was fostered. Finally, God also helps humans craft culture through his general revelation in the world and an internal conscience.

The step of phenomenological analysis basically approaches the study of a specific folk issue objectively, with the benefit of an open mind to investigate the form and meaning involved. Its purpose is to get to know the folk practice and not to judge it immediately. Ninian Smart calls it "informed empathy" where one suspends one's own beliefs and judgment while studying another religion (5). Other terms used to describe phenomenological analysis are *epoche* and "bracketing" (21). The step of transforming ministries also takes culture seriously believing that culture can work together with the Bible to transform lives.

Diversity in culture. God allows for people to develop diverse cultures (Gen. 10). Different cultures have the capacity to make significant contributions to knowing God and, therefore, should be contextualized appropriately. God intends for people to live in diverse cultures to have the potential through those cultures to reflect the manifold wisdom and glory of God. Every culture has to work out how its theology is to be expressed. This issue of a contextualized gospel in every culture was one of the emphases in Padilla's Mission between the Times:

The truly indigenous church is the one that through death and resurrection with Christ embodies the gospel within its own culture. It adopts a way of

being, thinking, and acting in which its own cultural patterns are transformed and fulfilled by the gospel. In a sense, it is the cultural embodiment of Christ, the means through which Christ is formed within a given culture. The task of the church is not the extension of a culture Christianity throughout the world but the incarnation of the gospel in each culture. (108)

“Culture Christianity” here refers to the misconception of equating Christianity to one particular culture (15-18).

Diversity in culture also means that every culture will have its own cultural perspective of its faith. If each culture reflects the gospel differently, it can serve as a mirror for another to reveal blind spots in each other’s theology (Padilla, Mission 89). In that sense, the input of nonindigenous missionaries who chose to share and be incarnated in a local culture will certainly and always benefit that cultural community (Bevans 19-21). Ultimately, each diverse culture will contribute to the rest of the world not only toward creating a more wholesome theology and understanding of God but also in devising a more sensitive response to God. This diversity in culture is similarly taken seriously in steps 1, 3, and 4 of critical contextualization.

A hermeneutical community. God designed for humans to live in cultural communities and in Christian communities. Everyone responds to God utilizing his or her cultural and community identity and never as an individual. The priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9) means that the Holy Spirit is working through all believers as a corporate body. R. Paul Stevens astutely shows that this priesthood is a *corporate* priesthood and not an *individual* priesthood (176). In his words, “*there is no such thing as an individual* [original emphasis] member.... [T]he individual Christian is an oxymoron” (63).

Hiebert, therefore, is careful to point out that critical contextualization needs to be

done and expressed by the life of the whole church and not just among the clergy or leaders. “Interpretation and application of Scripture in everyday life are not just personal matters. Ultimately the church as a whole must act as a hermeneutical community” (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 385). The role of the pastor-teacher is, then, to help them “translate the biblical message into the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions” of the culture (Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization” 109).

Contextualization needs to be initiated upward from the people. According to Per Frostin, “[I]ts main source [of theory and practice] (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the *social sciences* [original emphasis], and its main interlocutor the *poor* [original emphasis] or the *culturally marginalized* [original emphasis]” (6). Ultimately, the people themselves need to make the decision and enforce the decision themselves (Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization” 109-10). They may choose to keep some old customs, reject others explicitly, modify some others, substitute symbols and rites borrowed from another culture, adopt rites drawn from its Christian heritage, or even create new symbols and rituals to express their own indigenous Christian faith (110). All these come to fruition in the fourth step of transformational ministries:

The final step in critical contextualization is ministries that transform individuals and churches, and help individuals and congregations to move from where they are to where God wants them to be. Christian faith is not simply an intellectual exercise in search of truth, nor is it primarily positive feelings of worship to Christ. It must go beyond knowledge of biblical truths to their application in the lives people live. It is the process of hearing and applying the unchanging truths of the gospel to life issues in specific contexts. It is to follow Christ as Lord in every area of life. (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 387-88)

Finally, contextualization of a local theology should be initiated by the local people at their own time. After all, the indigenes are the one who would understand the

hidden meanings and associations of their old customs (Bevans 14). In that sense, contextualization means the people of God acting upon what they know to be truth according to the Scriptures and appropriate for their particular situation and culture. As seen in Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem was really the early Church coming together to theologize their faith in light of the various experiences particular only to their context (e.g., Peter's experience with Cornelius and Paul and Barnabas' ministry to the Gentiles). As Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou say, "People can only move from where they are by a process of transformation.... The leaders must begin where the people are, and lead them step by step toward God's ways" (388). Thus, the fourth step of transformative ministries is a process that works from within the people. It may be slow and halting, but it will be at the people's timing.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research project was to determine the existing level of exposure, contextualization, and conviction of Christians concerning various Chinese folk beliefs and practices. It also sought to show that when Christians are sensitized to the need to deal with folk beliefs and practices and when they learn skills to contextualize them critically, they can develop clear convictions to deal with these beliefs and practices. They demonstrate abilities to distinguish what particular aspects of certain folk beliefs or practices are contradictory to the Christian conviction and which aspects possess cultural, scientific, and/or historical benefits that are still worth retaining or contextualizing in their life or faith. Specifically, this project targeted Chinese Christians⁸ living in Singapore and their relationship with Chinese folk beliefs and practices, in particular *feng*

⁸ Chinese Christians in Singapore consist of those who speak Chinese (Mandarin or dialect) and those (younger ones) who speak English. The participants in this research study are predominantly English speaking.

shui. This research project was a study on contextualization of Chinese folk *beliefs and practices* and not the theories or debates about folk religions per se.⁹

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following principal terms are defined.

Worldview

Darrell Whiteman in his lecture on “Worldview” defines worldview as the central assumptions, premises, and concepts more or less widely shared by members of a culture or subculture. It consists of politics, education, religion, social organization, economics, and the esthetic. Worldview provides a basis for the society’s mental map of reality. What is passed down to a new generation will always seem to be the absolute. People, therefore, interpret life experiences in terms of their worldviews. Worldviews are the most encompassing frameworks of thought that relate belief systems to one another. They are reinforced by the deepest feelings, and anyone who challenges them challenges the very foundation of people’s lives.

Folk Religions

Unlike formal or world religions, folk religions usually have no creed, no Scripture, no formal meeting place, no founder, and no organization. They are usually indigenous religions and are also called popular religions. They are extremely diverse and can seldom be generalized. Long periods of syncretism can also create a kind of folk religion out of formal religions. For example, the Roman Catholicism practiced in a number of places in Latin America has a higher degree of folk dimension than orthodox Roman Catholicism because it has drawn heavily upon indigenous beliefs and traditions.

⁹ See “Definition of Terms” on the distinction between “Folk Religions” and “Folk Beliefs and Practices.”

In Chinese religions, Daoism (Taoism), in particular, has been so immersed in folk life that its purest form is seldom understood or practiced by the laity. Similarly, the conflation of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism has produced a kind of Chinese folk religion that is a synergy of all three but never a pure form of any. This is the kind of Chinese folk religion practiced by most Chinese in Singapore today.

Folk Beliefs and Practices

Folk beliefs and practices refer to the popular beliefs and practices that continue in the everyday lives of the common people. Folk religions produce folk beliefs and practices, but folk beliefs and practices are not necessarily folk religions since they may develop from disconnected fragments of prior worldviews and may encompass even nonreligious folk sciences as well. Folk beliefs and practices are usually human centered and are more concerned with the existential problems of everyday life and less with ultimate realities (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 77). Folk beliefs and practices can usually coexist as an underlying subversive cultural stratum alongside formal or world religions leading to a split-level religion, or split-level Christianity, as many Christian scholars have called it.

Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices

Chinese folk beliefs and practices refer to beliefs and practices arising from a Chinese worldview. Although Chinese worldviews might possess different degrees of influences from Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism, most of them are not specifically aligned to a particular religion. Some common Chinese folk beliefs and practices practiced by Singaporean Chinese today include *feng shui* (geomancy), Chinese traditional medical practices (e.g., acupuncture, foot reflexology, herbal medication,

Chinese chiropractics), ancestral veneration or worship, various kinds of fortune telling (e.g., palm reading, face reading), *gong fu* (martial arts), *qi gong* (breathing exercise), *tai ji* (physical exercise), and traditional Chinese festivals (e.g., Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival, Lantern Festival).

Feng Shui

Feng shui (pronounced as “ferng shwee” in Mandarin and “fung shway” in Cantonese) literally means “wind” and “water” respectively in Chinese. It is an ancient practice of aligning or siting a burial place, building, house, or even the arrangement, layout, and placement of a home, office, or any object or furniture in order to create harmony and thus enhance one’s health, wealth, and happiness. It is often also referred to as Chinese geomancy.

The Excluded Middle Zone

The Enlightenment has brought about a worldview that dichotomizes the cosmos into the supernatural or spiritual and the natural or earthly. Tragically, Christianity has been influenced by this dualistic worldview so that the Church usually ministers to the high religion aspect of life while (Western) science is used to explain and solve all other natural problems in life. Folk beliefs and practices, however, are concerned with existential needs in life that occur in a middle zone between the supernatural high religion (e.g., Christianity or other world religion) and the natural world explainable by science. This middle zone is usually excluded and not dealt with effectively by either the high religion or science. The struggle to meet the needs of the middle zone becomes the reason for the coexistence of folk beliefs and practices alongside formal religions like Christianity leading to split-level Christianity. Figure 1.5 illustrates this “flaw of the

excluded middle” zone with a corresponding lack of certainty about where to look for explanations or answers. The result is an incomplete conversion of common people whose life issues fall primarily within the excluded middle zone.

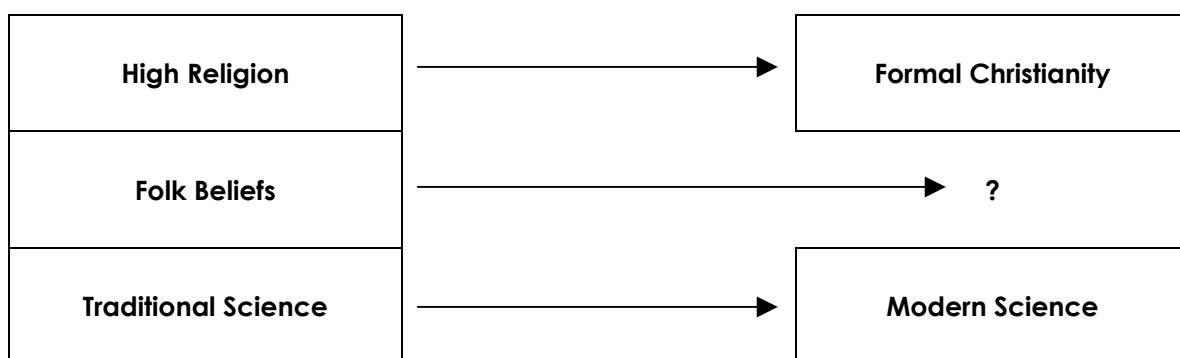


Figure 1.5. The excluded middle zone.

Split-Level Christianity

Filipino Jaime Bulatao aptly defines split-level Christianity as “the co-existence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behaviour systems which are inconsistent with each other” (17). Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou describe it as a schizophrenic practice of Christianity where deeply committed Christians, for example, might be faithfully attending church services and praying to God in times of need but yet concurrently resorting to visiting shamans or mediums for guidance, deliverance, or healing (15). Sidney G. Williamson catalogued evidence of such a phenomenon as early as 1965:

Most Christians live on two unreconciled levels. They are members of a church and ascribe to a statement of faith. But below the system of conscious beliefs are deeply embedded traditions and customs implying quite a different interpretation of the universe and the world of spirit from the Christian interpretation. In the crises of life and rites of passage the

Church is an alien thing. (158)

Kofi Abrefa Busia describes similar situations in Ghana:

As one watches the daily lives and activities of the people and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvest and installation of traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian churches are still alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with social institutions. (qtd. in Pobee 2)

In a way, split-level Christianity is a subversive form of syncretism—the mixing of different beliefs and practices in ways that distort the truth and power of the gospel (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 13, 19). According to Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, it not only is a persistent phenomenon around the world but is detrimental to the Church in that “it has sapped the vitality of churches and limited Christianity to a segment of people’s lives” (15).

Syncretism

According to Robert J. Schreiter, syncretism “has to do with the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity” (144). Conversely, syncretism in Christianity refers to the mixing of different beliefs and practices with Christianity in ways that distort the truth and power of the gospel (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 13).

Contextualization

Contextualization can refer to the missionary’s ultimate goal of communicating and presenting the message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms. According to Eunice L. Irwin, it also refers to Christians searching out the message of God within their indigenous context, under the influence of and responding to the biblical context. Its

purpose is to understand and interpret the meaning of that message and to live out or apply its truth in terms of Christians' own local (church and culture) situation. Stephen B. Bevans suggests contextualization involves the balancing of cultural identity, social change, and popular religiosity with elements of Scripture, tradition, social location, and particular location (26). In his opinion, "*contextualization* [original emphasis] might be considered the best way of describing the process that has also been called inculturation, indigenization, or incarnation of the gospel" (26).

Critical Contextualization

Critical contextualization in this study refers specifically to a well-established methodology for doing contextualization developed by Hiebert ("Critical Contextualization"). It comprises the four steps of phenomenological analysis, ontological critique, evaluative response, and transformative ministries. In phenomenological analysis, the missionaries function as participant observers, becoming culture brokers to communicate the gospel between cultural contexts. Ontological critique is a Scripture and objective reality assessment of the indigenous culture as well as the missionary's personal cultural biases. Evaluative analysis allows the indigenes to participate in the final decision in evaluating their customs in light of their new biblical understandings. The final step of transformative ministries provides the local church the opportunity to find a practical way to go through the process of transforming its culture.

Research Questions

The research questions sought the current status of Chinese Christians in Singapore with regards to their knowledge, experience, existing contextualization responses, current beliefs, and convictions concerning *feng shui* and other common

Chinese folk beliefs and practices. In addition, this particular research project sought to verify how a proper understanding of folk religion and critical contextualization could help Christians toward contextualizing folk beliefs in their culture.

Research Question #1

What are Singaporean Chinese Christians'¹⁰ knowledge and experiences of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

Research Question #2

How much contextualization (consciously or unconsciously) are Singaporean Chinese Christians already practicing in *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

Research Question #3

What are Singaporean Chinese Christians' beliefs and convictions of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

Research Question #4

How beneficial is an understanding of folk religion and a knowledge of the use of critical contextualization, like the one proposed by Hiebert, to Christians in their response to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

Description of Project

The project began with the assumption that many Christians, particularly those brought up under the influence of Western Enlightenment, have failed to deal properly with the folk religion that is part of their culture. This phenomenon was especially evident in a non-Western society like Singapore.

¹⁰ The participants in the research study were mainly English-speaking Chinese Christians. They may not fully represent the views of Chinese-speaking Christians.

The project was a quasi-experimental study whereby the subjects self-selected themselves for participation. It centered around a six-session seminar entitled “Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study.” The six sessions are as follows:

Session #1: Introduction to Folk Religion, Beliefs and Practices (see Appendix A),

Session #2: Folk Religion and Contextualization (see Appendix B),

Session #3: Critical Contextualization and Worldview (see Appendix C),

Session #4: Phenomenological Analysis of *Feng Shui* (see Appendix D),

Session #5: Ontological Critique of and Evaluative Response to *Feng Shui* (see Appendix E), and

Session #6: Transformative Ministries (see Appendix F).

Each session was approximately two hours long. The seminar helped Christians make an appropriate response to *feng shui* using Hiebert’s critical contextualization as a method of contextualization. Sessions 1 to 3 were conducted mainly in lecture style with opportunities for both small group and whole class discussions. Sessions 4 to 6 switched to a consultation mode to allow the participants corporately to generate a contextualized response to *feng shui*. The seminar was not purely instructional; part of its purpose was to create a body of believers involving in contextualizing a specific local belief and practice.

The seminar assumed that different participants would bring to the seminar different levels of understanding and practices of contextualization. Its goal was to show that a heightened understanding of folk religion and contextualization as a result of the seminar would produce a corresponding increase in sensitivity with regards to one’s understanding and practice of contextualization. It also assumed that if Christians knew

how to apply critical contextualization to the issue of *feng shui*, they would then be able to apply the same principles in formulating responses to other folk beliefs and practices as well.

Methodology

This project was an evaluative study in the quasi-experimental mode, which utilized a pre-seminar and post-seminar survey and interview, an end-of-class case study, and a post-seminar report for evaluation. The project began with an invitation to three hundred people to participate (see Appendix G). These were personal friends and contacts that had been receiving regular news and updates concerning my ministry and needs. The invitation asked for sixty volunteers: thirty of these would be chosen to be the research group to participate in both the seminar, the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire, and post-seminar survey and interview while the remainder thirty would form the control group who would participate only in the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire. The number of research group participants was deliberately constrained to a small number to facilitate discussion during the seminar. As of the deadline, only twenty-five responses were received, and they were all selected to form the research group (see Appendix H for cover letter).

By the time the seminar was conducted, the number of participants in the research group swelled to thirty-three. The seminar was conducted within two weekends to minimize the possibility of people joining between sessions or becoming absent for some sessions. All research group participants in the seminar took part in an identical pre-seminar and post-seminar survey (see Appendixes I and J). The survey asked for the demographics and missiological training backgrounds of the participants and the

participants' personal knowledge, experience, contextualization, beliefs, and convictions of *feng shui* and other common Chinese folk beliefs and practices. The survey used a five-point Likert scale to provide quantitative scores.

An additional pre-seminar written interview (see Appendix K) and post-seminar oral interview (see Appendix L) were conducted with each of the research group participant to gather qualitative changes in the participants. These questions similarly tested for changes in contextualization understanding and practices as well as beliefs, convictions, and behaviors with regards to *feng shui*. An end-of-class *feng shui* case study (see Appendix M) was also used to gauge "improvements" in the participants' awareness of contextualization. Finally, the participants were also required to submit a short one-paragraph monthly report (see Appendix N) via e-mail on encounters with folk beliefs and their corresponding responses to them for two months after the seminar. This report assisted in measuring the behavioral changes as a result of the seminar over a specified time. In the end, only twenty-seven of the thirty-three participants fulfilled all the above requirements.

The completed pre-seminar surveys of the six research group participants who could not fulfill all the requirements were subsequently added to the control group to form a total of twenty-eight control group participants. The control group (see Appendix O for cover letter) was comprised of volunteers who could only participate in the pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) and the pre-seminar written interview questions (see Appendix K). The purpose of the control group was to gauge if the response of the research group was normative.

Overall, this project showed how Christians who were sensitized to folk beliefs

and practices and critical contextualization could better contextualize their culture with their Christian faith. It also showed why critical contextualization was an important component for Christian nurture, discipleship, and leadership development.

Population and Sample

The primary population for this survey was Singaporean Chinese Christians. The actual sample was drawn from some three hundred people who were acquainted with me and who would, therefore, more likely respond to the project. They represented Singaporean Chinese Christians from different church backgrounds and affiliations, of either gender who were 16 years and older, have completed at least a high school education, have been Christians for at least one year, and could communicate fluently in English. All participants in the research project had to be able to communicate in English since the seminar was conducted in English and all the instruments were answered in English.¹¹ Altogether fifty-five self-selected volunteers formed the purposeful sample and participated in the project. Of these, twenty-seven formed the research group and the remaining twenty-eight made up the control group.

Variables

The independent variable was the *content* of the six-session Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization Seminar (i.e., the teaching concerning folk religion, critical contextualization as well as the exercise of critical contextualization). Although the seminar utilized resources from several scholarly sources, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou's Understanding Folk Religion as well as Hiebert's article on "Critical Contextualization"

¹¹ Most Singaporeans are effectively bilingual today, and conducting this research solely in English cut down the energy expended in translation. Inevitably, the sample is delimited to mainly English-speaking Singaporean Chinese Christians who are culturally different from Chinese-speaking Singaporean Chinese Christians.

were the main references. The instructional method consisted of lectures, audiovisual aids, and small group as well as class discussions. The method of instruction, however, was not reckoned as another independent variable since I was the only instructor and a consistent style was maintained throughout the seminar. Since folk beliefs and practices are so diverse and complex, the exercise on critical contextualization focused only on one representative issue: *feng shui*.

The dependent variable was the change in the participants' understanding and practice of contextualization as well as their beliefs, convictions, and behaviors with regards to *feng shui*. This change was reflected in the difference in responses between the pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys and interviews as well as the two monthly reports on encounters with folk beliefs and practices after the seminar. The intervening variables were the prior exposures of the participants to the various folk beliefs, their Christian maturity and training, the unique learning styles of the participants, and their proficiency in the English language.¹²

Instrumentation

The research made use of four instruments. The first was a researcher-designed survey consisting of twenty-nine questions in the pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) and twenty-three questions in the post-seminar survey (see Appendix J). It was used to measure the changes in the people's understanding and behavior as a result of the seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization. A prototype questionnaire survey was field

¹² To reduce the complexity of the research, only non-categorical items like the number of years as Christian, and the number of missiological courses exposed to, were statistically used to measure for correlations with the dependent variables.

tested with my Research Reflection Team (RRT)¹³ and some selected Asian Christian friends residing in Wilmore, Kentucky. The participants in the prototype questionnaire were given a synopsis on the intention of the questionnaire. They were requested to answer all the questions and to log in the amount of time they took to complete the survey. They were also told to offer specific suggestions if certain questions needed to be rephrased, added, or deleted.

The second and third instruments were the *feng shui* pre-seminar written interview and post-seminar oral interview questions (see Appendixes K and L), as well as *feng shui* case study questions (see Appendix M). A prototype of these were also constructed and sent together with the prototype survey to the same group of people for comments for improvement. The fourth instrument basically was the monthly feedback from the participants in which they provided a paragraph-long descriptive account of any encounter with folk beliefs and practices (see Appendix N).

Data Collection

The pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) as well as pre-seminar written interview questions (see Appendix K) were sent to all participants (in the research group) four weeks before the seminar by post and e-mail. Completed surveys and written interviews were returned by either pre-stamped return envelopes, e-mails, or by hand by the first day of the seminar. All participants could participate in the seminar only after submission of the survey and interview responses.

The post-seminar survey (see Appendix J) and the end-of-class *feng shui* case

¹³ The RRT was comprised of people who were in touch with my ministry. Its purpose was to help me in my Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program and ensure that it was contributing to the local institution. This team is a requirement of the D.Min. program at Asbury Theological Seminary (Asbury Theological Seminary 74).

study (see Appendix M) were distributed to all participants at the end of the seminar. The participants were requested to hand them in together with their monthly feedback reports (see Appendix N). The post-seminar oral interviews (see Appendix L) were conducted individually from the end of the seminar to the last submission of the monthly reports two months later. Monthly reminders were sent to all participants to ensure the two post-seminar monthly reports were submitted.

The control group received the pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) as well as pre-seminar written interview (see Appendix K) by e-mail and post at the same time as the research group (i.e., four weeks before the seminar). They also returned it by e-mail or in an enclosed, self-addressed envelope. Subjects whose responses were not forthcoming were reminded by personal e-mail and telephone calls.

No respondent codes were necessary from the research group since the participants also took part in face-to-face interviews. No codings were needed of the control group since they only participated in one survey and written interview.

Delimitations and Generalizability

Curriculum for the six-session “Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization Seminar” depended largely on the contents of Hiebert’s article on “Critical Contextualization” and the book Understanding Folk Religion (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou). A seminar was the chosen format (independent variable) for this particular study. Since this study was not about teaching or instruction, no attempt was made to consider how other formats of presentation or methods of instruction affected the participants’ knowledge of, attitude towards, and practice of folk religious beliefs or practices.

Although the survey could be adapted for use on Chinese Christians throughout

the world, the questionnaire had been particularly skewed to address difficult issues that confront the contemporary Singapore Chinese Christian in particular. Besides, the composition, the population sample was also biased towards those who self-volunteered, thus affecting the generalizability of the results. Those who volunteered were mainly English-speaking Chinese Christians. These people are usually more educated and Westernized young professionals (“yuppies”) who differ significantly from the older and more conservative Chinese-speaking (dialect or Mandarin) Christians. Inevitably, the sample cannot represent the Singaporean Chinese Christians at large.

Though the project attempts to compare the responses from people of different genders, different age groups, different educational levels, different language mediums, different birth orders, such diversity was limited since the population sample consisted of volunteers from my prayer supporters. To simplify the complexity of this research, only non-categorical items like the “number of years as Christian” and the total number of missiological training (derived by adding all the missiological courses¹⁴ to which they were exposed) were analyzed for correlations with contextualization practice and convictions.

The critical contextualization practiced in the seminar concentrated mainly on the case study of *feng shui*. Since critical contextualization focuses on principles, the participants would be able to generalize them to contextualize other folk beliefs and practices.

Overview

Chapter 2 covers the precedents in literature on folk religion, *feng shui*, and

¹⁴ Missiological courses refer to courses on culture and the gospel (e.g., cross-cultural evangelism, folk religions, comparative religions, world religions, contextual theology).

contextualization. Chapter 3 then elaborates on the research design. Chapter 4 covers the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of the research findings with implications and applications.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

The key areas of study in this project include folk religions in general, Chinese folk beliefs and practices, with a focus on *feng shui*, and the theory of contextualization. These areas are covered in five sections. The first section starts with the precedents in literature concerning folk religion, beliefs, and practices. The second section deals with the Chinese people, worldview, religion, beliefs, and practices while the third section narrows in on the particular folk belief and practice of *feng shui*. The fourth section touches on contextualization, focusing on the history of the church's practice of contextualization and the different ways of contextualization. The last section wraps up with the contextualization of *feng shui*.

Folk Religions/Beliefs/Practices

Folk religions developed as a result of existential problems of everyday life and less with ultimate realities. Consequently, folk religions emphasize power and success more than truth and logical consistency (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 75-76). Edward G. Newing says that folk beliefs permeate the life and culture of the society that espouses them (14) so that the whole range of social relationships has religious meaning (16). They have a holistic view of the world. Everything is interconnected so that every activity from birth to death and beyond is interpreted as belonging to a religious whole. The whole of life is a religious phenomenon (31). Persons living under such a system live their lives in a relationship of expanding ripples of community both within the seen and unseen worlds (32).

Newing also thinks that most folk belief systems contain a concept of some kind

of a Supreme Being (38) although David Burnett in World of the Spirits thinks that such a concept can be very hazy (30). According to Burnett, the Supreme Being usually has neither temples nor priests and is regarded as too exalted to be concerned with the affairs of human beings (30). While the Supreme Being is distant from the daily life of the people, lesser gods and spirits are believed to be very immanent and connected to daily living (37). Adherents, therefore, live in a world inhabited by an infinite variety of spiritual beings and will not hesitate to interpret every happening as the work of spiritual forces (Newing 32-33). Hiebert in his article on “Spiritual Warfare and Worldview” observes that, at times, these spirits might be aligned according to ethnicity and territory (4). Folk religionists also believe in good as well as bad spirits. They have a constant fear of wicked spirits, magic, or spells. They also believe in the existence of the spirits of the dead after death and that these have a relationship with the living. In some places, death is nearly always regarded as the result of witchcraft (Newing 40). This belief in the unseen spirits on earth means that usually they will have mediators between the seen and the unseen world (16).

Folk religions stress the distinction between what is sacred and what is profane (Newing 34). They have sacred sites (usually peculiar trees, land, or rock formations), which are hallowed by tradition as places where the divine manifests itself (16, 41). Folk beliefs are usually expressed in terms of taboos with regards to certain things that should or should not be said, touched, visited, done, etc. (16, 41). Conversely, they also believe in sacred actions and words, which can be predictive or potent especially if they proceed from sacred persons (43-44).

Newing also writes that the belief systems and values may be articulated in the

proverbs, myths, legends, fables, laws, songs and music, rituals, art and sculpture, and customs transmitted in the society (16). The myths, for example, reflect folk religions' tendency towards verbal obliqueness (35). Burnett suggests that such myths are used to explain how the original contiguity of divinity and people was spoiled (World of the Spirits 31). Finally, folk religionists tend to perceive time as cyclical rather than linear. They believe in a certain rhythmical cycle in which the individual and community have to adjust and harmonize (Newing 36).

The Chinese: People, Worldview, Religions, Beliefs, and Practices

Despite the many dialects spoken by Chinese, their ethnic and cultural unity are preserved in their sharing in only one common writing. Written Chinese represents meanings rather than sounds and, therefore, does not reflect the speech of its author. Even though some dialects sound completely different and foreign to one another, they all share the same grammar and writing:

The disjunction between written and spoken Chinese means that a newspaper published in Beijing can be read in Shanghai or Guangzhou, although the residents of the three cities would not understand each other's speech. It also means that there can be no specifically Cantonese Chinese or Hunanese literature because the local speech of a region cannot be directly or easily represented in writing. ("Han Chinese")

Ever since Mandarin (originally the dialect spoken around Beijing) was adopted as the *lingua franca*, it has further united the Chinese people.

To a large extent, Chinese throughout the world all share in the worldview and religious beliefs and practices that are discussed in this chapter; however, the degree of retention depends largely on the individual's connection to a larger society of Chinese folks and to his or her absorption of other foreign cultures. Thus, a Chinese from a homogenous Chinese culture like China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan would probably be more

“Chinese” than a Chinese raised in a pluralistic environment like Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia, Australia, North America, or Europe. Conversely, the overseas-born second generation Chinese (outside China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) may be even less “Chinese” when compared to the earlier two groups.

The Chinese People

The Chinese are the most populous and dispersed people in the world. They can be found in every inhabitable continent and in virtually every country in the world. Besides China, large proportions of Chinese can be found in Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. The Chinese civilization has been in existence for more than four thousand years. In the words of Burnett, they “represent what is clearly the longest surviving and richest of civilizations” (Clash 89). The “Chinese people” does not refer to residents of China but specifically to the Han Chinese, spread around the world, and who, in China, constitute approximately 94 percent of the population. Chinese have been identifying themselves as Han people probably ever since the golden days of the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) because of its illustriousness. The term “Han” denotes “man” or “true hero,” but it has since also come to connote and become synonymous with “Chinese.”

According to Burnett, “the origins of the Han Chinese are still undetermined. It is unlikely that they were of one original race, but consisted of many separate centers of civilization” (Clash 89). Julia Ching concurs with this observation and writes, “Archaeologists have begun to speak of Chinese civilization as having had very possibly multiple origins. Perhaps it is more accurate to call this civilization the composite of many regional cultures, each with its special features” (17).

The Chinese Worldview

The ancient Chinese worldview is naturalistic in orientation. The universe is perceived to be ordered under certain regularities, which Western philosophy calls “laws.” Nevertheless, according to Laurence G. Thompson, it differs from the Western philosophy in the absence of the assumption of a lawgiver (1). Three conspicuous features of this regularity in the form of cyclical process, growth and decline, and bipolarity of nature¹ come to be expressed in the fundamental concepts of *yin* and *yang*. Chinese thinking also includes a Supreme Ruler in Heaven, referred to as *shang di* or popularly, later on, by the less personal term, *tian* (Heaven). Thompson states that “from shang ti or t’ien come [sic] blessings and punishments. But there is no hint that he is the Creator of the universe or the Cause of its functioning” (3).

The trinitarian interaction among heaven, earth, and human is most central in the Chinese worldview. Rev. E. J. Eitel wrote in 1873 about the Chinese naturalistic worldview:

[The Chinese] look upon nature not as a dead inanimate fabric, but as a living breathing organism. They see a golden chain of spiritual life running through every form of existence and binding together, as in one living body, everything that subsists on heaven above or on earth below. (qtd. in Bloomfield 16)

Such a worldview produces a “gestalt cosmology” where humans need to subject themselves to the will of heaven while living in harmony with nature and all that is around them. Thompson explains that the Chinese religion is actually a mysticism more concerned with identification and harmony with nature than a relationship with a heavenly deity:

¹ This bipolarity does not mean simply opposites but opposites that are necessary and complementary.

[The Chinese religion is an] identification with the *tao*, or nature itself, and not with God, beyond or outside of nature. The Chinese religion, while giving to Heaven power to punish people's misbehavior, defined this misbehavior as actions inimical to the harmonious workings of the universe. The Chinese religion conspicuously lacked the central concept of the ever-brooding presence of almighty God continuously attending to the sins and virtues of every individual, swift to save or damn, requiring submission, belief, faith, and adoration. (7)

In addition, significance is also given to the continuance of personality and relationship of the dead to the living. Such a relationship, together with the concept of filial piety, produced the distinguished ancestral cult of the Chinese society, and also explains for the use of *feng shui* for siting burial grounds.

Relationship between Chinese Folk Religion, Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism

At about the sixth century BC, Chinese primal folk beliefs and practices were systematized into Confucianism and Daoism. Buddhism became popular from the fourth century AD onwards. It gradually interacted with Chinese thought to form a particularly Chinese expression. Over the centuries, the ancient Chinese worldview gradually came under the influence of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. At times, the synthesis of the three religions was intentional:

During the Ming dynasty there came a major synthesis of the three great religions through religious thinkers such as Lin Chao-en (1517-98). He sought to harmonize the three religions into one by drawing upon the best elements of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. The synthesis was so effectual that no Chinese would think it strange to be concurrently Buddhist, Confucianist, and Taoist. (Burnett, Clash 91)

In the perception of the Chinese, none of these religions is really a body of ideas into which an unbeliever can be converted but more a way of life that could only be practiced within traditional Chinese society. Most Chinese today, therefore, are actually followers of a conglomeration of all three religions or of Daoism with Confucian values. They should, perhaps, be more accurately termed Chinese religionists. Except for adepts,

priests, monks, and occasional laypeople who specialize in any of the three high religions, not many Chinese people profess to be a pure Daoist, Confucian, or Buddhist. Even if considered individually, the three religions are bound to evidence syncretism among each other as a result of mutual integration and influences. This latitude towards syncretism is probably due to a preference for inclusive (and pragmatic) harmony as opposed to exclusive dogmatisms in Middle Eastern monotheisms like Christianity and Islam (Ching 12).

The integration of the two indigenous Chinese religions, Confucianism and Daoism, in particular, into the Chinese worldview is so thorough that today differentiation of what original folk Chinese beliefs are and which beliefs are borrowed from which religion becomes virtually impossible. Because Daoism emphasizes the world of spirits and Confucianism emphasizes worldly moral conduct, their harmonious coexistence has been likened to the *yin* and *yang* of Chinese beliefs. Since Confucianism is a humanistic religion (or perhaps more a philosophy) having to do more with rituals, its value and worldview tend to reside within the Chinese society not as a religion but as an ideology and worldview. Joseph A. Adler points out that the five recognized religions in the People's Republic of China currently are Buddhism, Daoism, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, and Islam. Popular folk religion is regarded as "superstition" while Confucianism is termed an ideology (123).

Though Daoism does have a philosophical side to it, on a popular level, its magical and spiritual aspects satisfy the people's primal quest for magic and divination and encourage Chinese folk shamanism and divination techniques. Unlike Confucianism, Daoism is also a religion of salvation with pantheons of deities and immortals. It seeks to

guide believers to a better afterlife. In the words of Ching, “It is often assumed that many Chinese are Confucians in action, and Taoists in contemplation” (85). Daoism has traditionally been labeled as the folk religion of the Chinese. Although, to be precise, Chinese folk religion, with its independent roots in Chinese ancient primal beliefs together with the complex integrations from Buddhism and Confucianism, encompasses more than Daoism (215). Nevertheless, in Ching’s definition, Daoism is “probably the most visible heir to ancient Chinese religion” (116).

Daoism’s existence side by side with Confucianism for over close to 2,500 years means that both religions often borrow and share similar terminologies and concepts. In addition, the powerful syncretism imposed by Buddhism on both Daoism and Confucianism for the past thousand years should also not be overlooked. Missionary Keith W. Hinton observes a similar composite belief in the Singaporean Chinese: “In fact, the religion of the Singaporean Chinese Religionists is an ancient, rather animistic folk religion infused, to a small degree, by a selection of often modified beliefs and practices from the so-called high religions” (31). Figure 2.1 is Hinton’s depiction of the connection between Chinese folk religion and Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in the Chinese (31).

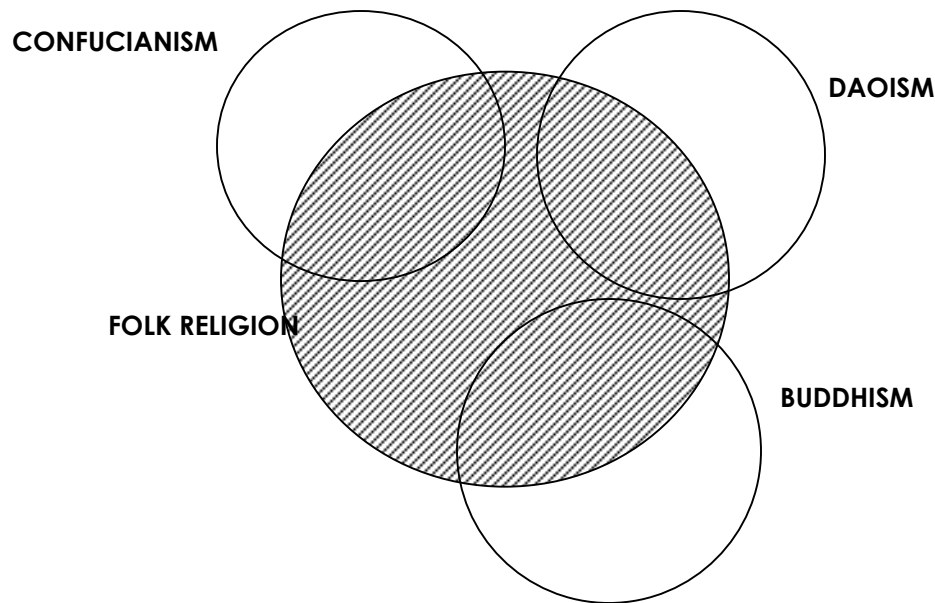


Figure 2.1. The Chinese folk religion.

Feng Shui

Feng shui is practiced according to the Chinese worldview that heaven, earth, and human each plays a part in the fortune of a person's circumstances. The will of "heaven" is bestowed by heaven (God) and cannot be manipulated by humans. The "human" aspect is that which is within a person's control through personal efforts such as hard work, a positive attitude, and a determined outlook. According to Vincent Koh, author of several *feng shui* books and lecturer for the Certificate of Performance in *feng shui* course run by the Department of Industrial Services at the government-owned Singapore Polytechnic, humans can control the third component—"earth" through the practice of *feng shui*:

It is not possible to control the energy of the entire universe at large. However, the art of Feng Shui enables us to design our personal environment according to the same universal principles of energy flow by which planets and galaxies move. It gives us a way of improving our circumstances by paying close attention to specific areas controlled by Heaven, Earth and humans and designing our buildings and environment to provide the best alignment possible.... Earthly luck is within our control

and comes from the environment. It gets strengthened when the Feng Shui of one's surroundings is auspicious. The good fortune of Earthly luck can be harnessed through the powerful and positive positioning of our physical environment on Earth. (3)

Underlying *feng shui* is the principle of living in harmony with one's environment so that the positive *qi* or energy surrounding a person can work for, rather than against, him or her. Robert Todd Carroll, in The Skeptic's Dictionary, gives *feng shui* the following definition:

Feng Shui (pronounced “phung schway” and meaning literally “*wind water*”) is part of an ancient Chinese philosophy of nature. Feng Shui is often identified as a form of geomancy, divination by geographic features, but it is mainly concerned with understanding the relationships between nature and ourselves so that we might live in harmony within our environment.

Origin of *Feng Shui*

Originally, *feng shui* referred primarily to the selection of burial sites. According to Dr. Stephen L. Field of Trinity University, “In its earliest form, fengshui was indeed utilized to orient the homes of the dead rather than the homes of the living.” It proceeds from the belief that a good burial site in harmony with the surroundings will not only profit the departed one but will also bring blessing to the descendents. The term *feng shui* was not used until after the fourth century AD. According to Field's research, however, the actual practice of *feng shui* goes back even earlier:

The earliest textual reference to the practice of site selection occurs in various similar passages on oracle bones dating from the middle of the Shang dynasty (1766-1046 B.C.E.). Royal diviners (fortune-tellers) queried Shang Di, the High God, by interpreting cracks appearing in heated animal bones.

By and by, as noted by Field, *feng shui* began to be practiced for the houses of the living as well:

The earliest textual reference to the actual practice of geomancy comes from the Book of Odes, the oldest anthology of poetry in the Chinese tradition. In a cycle of poems praising the exploits of the illustrious ancestors of the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 B.C.E.) the hero Gong Liu appears. Chief Liu led an exodus of his people to the fertile lands of Bin in the year 1796 B.C.E., according to tradition. The poem recounts the founding of his new domain, and this excerpt shows him conducting a geophysical survey.

Liu was measuring the shadow of the gnomon (sundial) to determine the cardinal directions. Sunshine and shade are the original meanings of the well-known terms YANG & YIN. With this information, he could determine which side of the hills and vales received the most sunshine during the winter, as well as the proximity of these sunny dells to sources of water.

The first *feng shui* masters were astrologer-meteorologists who observed and noted how people and nature interacted and changed in predictable cycles. How *feng shui* works has been cloistered information for centuries. The 168 Feng Shui Advisors, in the Web site article, “What is Feng Shui?” disclose that the art of practicing *feng shui* is guardedly passed down the generations through very selective protégés and specific lineages. Though *feng shui* has been widely presumed to have originated from Daoism, such a claim is hard to be determined according to Hans Küng and Julia Ching (154). The citations quoted earlier demonstrate that *feng shui* was already in practice during the *Shang* Dynasty (1766-1046 BC). It thus clearly predates Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, the three religions with the greatest historical impact on China. Daoism and Confucianism were conceived in China in the sixth century BC. Although Buddhism started at about the same time in India, it was introduced to China only sometime before the first century AD (Ching 53, 87, 124-25). *Feng shui* cannot be attributed to any particular faith but is really a product of the ancient Chinese religious worldview under the influence of all the three Eastern faiths.

Qi and Feng Shui

Qi is a foundational belief of *feng shui*:

Qi rides the feng (wind) and scatters, but is retained when encountering shui (water). The ancients collected it to prevent its dissipation and guided it to assure its retention. Thus it was called fengshui. According to the laws of fengshui, the site which attracts water is optimum, followed by the site which catches wind. (Field)

In short, *feng shui*, as *wind* and *water*, is merely shorthand for an environmental policy of hindering the wind and hoarding the waters.

Contrary to the claims by some *feng shui* defenders, the *qi* in *feng shui* does not refer to anything like electromagnetic fields (Bramble, “Back to School—Part 2”) or etheric energy (“Back to School—Part 1”), which may have physical influences on a person. This *qi* is one that can affect the *fate* and *luck* (which are definitely out of the control of electromagnetic fields) of a person. Others like Marcia Montenegro in “Yin and Yang” thinks that *qi* is similar to other forces mentioned in other cultures:

Chi/qi has parallels to *ki* in Japan and to *prana* (the divine breath in Hindu thinking) in India, an energy upon which all things depend for health and life. Known generally as the universal life force, this energy is also known as “bioenergy,” “vital energy,” “vital force,” or, most commonly in the United States, the “life force.” Manipulating and balancing the universal life force is the basis of most alternative healing methods.

Divination and Feng Shui

As a divination tool, the *yi jing* plays a critical role in *feng shui*. Since it is based on the concept that all things are undergoing constant change, it completes *feng shui* by indicating the changes in life. *Feng shui* itself indicates the changes in directions and their influence. Thus, as the *feng shui* masters in the 168 Feng Shui Advisors advise their clients via the Internet, “Timing is key in both Yi Jing and in Feng Shui.... What might work this year, may not work the next” (“Glimpse”).

Besides the *yi jing*, the *ba gua* is one of *feng shui*'s most basic tools according to Ralph and Lahni DeAmicis in “What Is Feng Shui?” It symbolizes the “eight main life aspirations” (see Figure 2.2, noticing the eight three-lined Trigrams in the inner circle). It is used together with the “four cardinal Directions and the four inter-cardinal Directions of the compass (Lo Pan)” to identify where the particular aspirational locations lie in one's home or workplace.

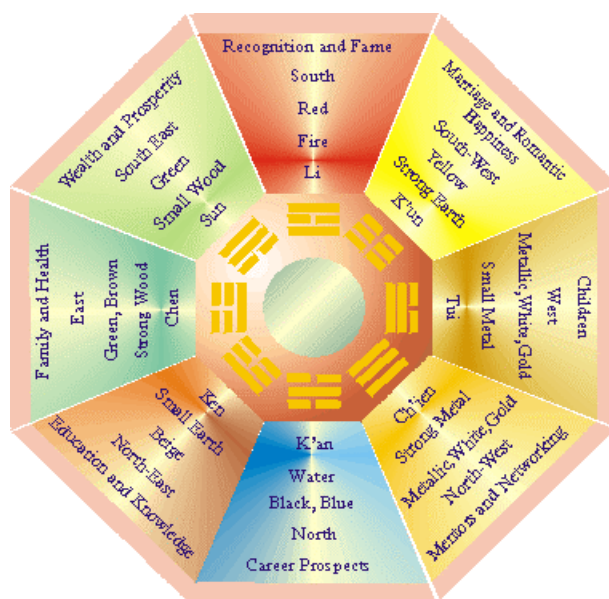


Figure 2.2. The *ba gua* and the eight aspirations.

The *luo pan* (lo pan) is a compass pointing south with a series of concentric circles numbering from five to thirty-five, depending on its complexity. These circles contain markings for factors like the trigrams, the cyclical signs called “celestial stems” (*tian kan*) and “terrestrial branches” (*ti zhi*), planets, stars, constellations, various arrangements of the five elements of wood, fire, metal, water, and earth (Thompson 21-

22). Figure 2.3 is a picture of the *luo pan* or *feng shui* compass.

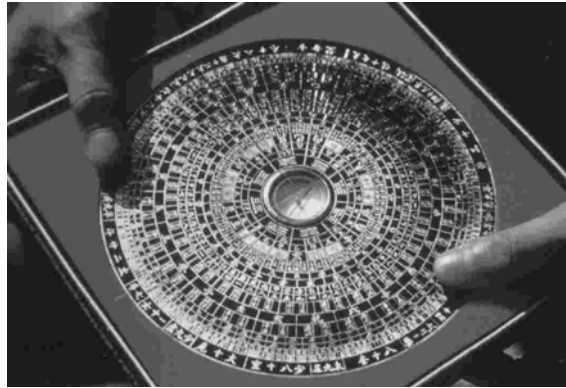


Figure 2.3. The *luo pan* or *feng shui* compass.

By giving their birth dates and times, people are able to determine from the *tong shu* (Almanac) the specific elements to which they belong and their respective *ba gua* number. These, together with a superimposed layout of the *ba gua*, information of timing from the *yi jing*, the magnetic orientation from the *luo pan*, and a physical site observation and feel of the flow of the *qi*, whether it is *sheng* (benevolent) *qi* or *sha* (malevolent) *qi*, by an experienced *feng shui* master will yield appropriate consultation for auspicious and harmonious sitings for both the living and the dead. Having considered all these factors, the *feng shui* master's job is to try to stimulate positive *sheng qi* flow to the location to create good *feng shui*, where needed.

Contextualization

More often than not, history shows that the Church failed drastically in its effort at contextualization. For example, curbing the accommodation methods of the Jesuits in China stalled the Church for more than three hundred years in contextualizing the gospel.

Nevertheless, from the twentieth century onwards, missiologists and theologians began to expound seriously on issues of what they called accommodation, indigenization, inculturation, and finally contextualization. All these terminologies and how they are perceived today are discussed later.

Brief History of Attempts at Contextualization

As delineated in Chapter 1, the manifestations of contextualization are as old as the creation. The Bible and the Incarnation are both superb examples of God's initiative at contextualization. As Speidell says, "If the divine power of heaven had preserved its dignity by not coming into contact with diseased humanity on earth, then our sickness would not have received its cure and we would not have been healed" (140).

Contextualization is definitely an initiative that originates from God.

Early Church (AD 100-500). Chapter 1 noted how the Church in the New Testament, too, struggled with contextualization. Jaroslav Pelikan shows how later on the early Christian apologists sought to contextualize the gospel by scrutinizing for non-Jewish prophecies of Christ, anticipations of the doctrine of Christ, and "types" foreshadowing redemptive deaths from the Gentile philosophies and literature of its day (35).

Though the Church is inherently mission oriented, mission has not always been its perpetual preoccupation. According to Ruth A. Tucker, often times it also became entangled with distractions such as dogmas, theology, development of liturgies, crusades, schism, and reformation (21-24). As such, the examples of contextualization are not

consistently and evenly distributed throughout the history of the Church.² To begin with, drastic contextualization was not really and always necessarily practiced in the first five hundred years because evangelization was mainly carried out within the Roman Empire, a relatively homogeneous geopolitical matrix (Hesselgrave and Rommen 12). Even then, as Stephen C. Neill attests, the Church spoke mainly Greek and Latin while the village people were, as yet, largely untouched (35).

One of the earliest records of an attempt at contextualization is that contained in the instructions from Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury for the evangelization of pagan Anglo-Saxon England dated 18 July AD 601.³ In it, Gregory the Great instructs Augustine:

[T]he temples of the idols in that country should on no account be destroyed. He [Augustus] is to destroy the idols, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up, and relics enclosed in them. For if these temples are well built, they are to be purified from devil-worship, and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that its temples are not destroyed, may abandon idolatry and resort to these places as before, and may come to know and adore the true God. (qtd. in Bede 30)

The document went on to talk about exchanging pagan festivals and rituals for Christian ones. This was the first major recorded attempt at contextualizing the Christian faith to the culture by accommodation. Roman Catholic missiologist Shorter criticizes its forcible appropriation of Anglo-Saxon religious institutions and substitution of religious meaning with the barest physical or seasonal continuity together with its failure to dialogue and evangelize from within (141). Gregory the Great, however, should be credited for his

² The periodization of the history of the Church in mission under this section will, therefore, be demarcated from the perspective of the type and intensity of contextualization that is practiced in evangelism.

³ The letter was not addressed directly to Augustine but to the abbot Mellitus who was to join Augustine at Britain.

sensitivity to the fact that the people would need to take some time to understand fully and absorb the Christian faith. Thus, he reminds Augustine, “For it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb to a mountain top climbs gradually step by step and not in one leap” (qtd. in Bede 30).

Dark Ages (AD 500-1100). With the ceding of large portions of Christian land in Africa and the Middle East to the Muslims during the Dark Ages (approximately from AD 500-1000), Christianity became confined to Europe and came to be viewed as a European religion (Neill 56). After the time of Charlemagne (AD 742-814), the spread of Christianity to the barbaric north was usually not done contextually but by military force and political campaigns. In the words of Kenneth Scott Latourette, “The narrative is a repetition, with variations of campaigns resulting in outward submission and followed by the peaceful efforts of missionaries, of revolts, of fresh campaigns, of more or less sullen acquiescence, of fresh revolts, and of eventual victory” (History of the Expansion 103). Perhaps the only good example of contextualization from this period was that by Cyril (AD 825-69) and Methodius (AD 826-85) from the Eastern Church. They created the Glagolitic Script from the Greek alphabet. This became the written form for the vernacular Slavic language so that the liturgies and Bible were subsequently translated into Slavic. The language is still preserved in the liturgical tongue of the Russians, Serbs, Ukrainians, and Bulgars today (Shorter 144).

Early European expansion (1100-1700). With the exception of the legendary outreach to India by the Apostle Thomas in the first century, Frumentius’ founding of the Ethiopian church in AD 341, and the Nestorian mission to China in AD 635, the first fourteen hundred years of church missions was largely confined to Europe and the area

around the Mediterranean (Neill 44-47, 81-83, 112).

The Crusades against the Muslims (AD 1095-1291) exposed Europe to more advanced technologies and more extensive knowledge of science and the world around them. The curiosity of discovery coupled with the need for expansion led the European Christian powers to discover and then colonize new territories in Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania (Neill 85-120). Missions made itself present in these places by tagging closely, often too intimately, to the colonial powers. Superiority in technology and military prowess led the colonizers together with the missionaries to despise other civilizations as less cultured and civilized. Early missionaries to non-European countries usually practiced non-contextualization. They accepted uncritically the doctrine of *tabula rasa*—the view that the non-Christian life and systems has nothing on which the missionary can build and that everything must simply be leveled to the ground before anything Christian can be established (133). In fact, Neill comments that the Spanish and Portuguese approach to Central and South America was one marked by “conquest, settlement, and evangelization” (143).

Only after encountering the noble civilizations of the Far East did the Jesuits, under the leadership and inspiration of Francis Xavier, seek to practice contextualization by accommodation. French scholar Claude Maître appropriately commends Xavier’s foresight:

He had understood that, if this proud, intelligent, logical people, with its passion for disputation, was ever to be won, it would be necessary to send missionaries of the highest quality, flexible enough to adapt themselves to the customs of the country to the limit of what was permitted by their faith, but strong enough in character to fashion their conduct according to the most rigid requirements of the faith which they taught. (qtd. in Neill 134)

The premise for accommodation is that “while the Gospel must transform and refine and

recreate, it need not necessarily reject as worthless everything that has come before” (133).

In China, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) pursued this accommodation principle and sought to find traditional Chinese nuances like *shang di* (shang ti)—High Ruler—and *tian* (t’ien)—Heaven—to represent Christian terms and to be as inclusive as possible with regards to Chinese rites and customs. Latourette describes his work as follows:

Ricci, after prolonged study, took the moderate position, deciding that the rites in honor of Confucius and family had only a civil significance and that Christians could engage in them in so far as the laws of the Empire required. He would trust the Chinese Christians to decide eventually what they could and could not do, and he hoped that the Catholic practices concerning burial and honoring the dead would gradually supplant those of the older China. (History of Christian Missions 134)

Accommodation was practiced chiefly by the Jesuits. Outside China, accommodation was attempted by other Jesuits like Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) and Roberto Nobili (1577-1656) in Japan and India respectively. According to Hiebert, historically the Franciscans, “logger-heads” to the Jesuits, would look upon accommodation as selling out the gospel (“Critical Contextualization” 104). The controversial Chinese Rites debate became long drawn and virtually inconclusive despite several resolutions (Lowe 37-60). In his assessment, Lowe points out that one of the key reasons for the controversy over Chinese rites has to do with the social location of the people with whom the missionary worked. Ricci and the Jesuits worked mostly with the *literati* scholars who understood Chinese rites not in terms of idol worship; whereas, others working with the masses observed the people linking the rites to idolatry and spiritism (52). Partly because of the controversy and the suppression of the Jesuit Order on 21 July 1773, the experimentation on contextual accommodation suffered a premature end:

By 1704, the Vatican ruled decisively against the Society of Jesus, prohibiting the Chinese Rites and ordering the suppression of recent Bible translations. Henceforth, religious services were to be held strictly in Latin. Just as bad, the papal envoys who declared the new regulations also made high claims for the political role of the Vatican, a foreign presence that could not be tolerated by the Chinese emperors.... In 1724, the Chinese government responded to these accumulated insults by proscribing the Christian faith. As the Catholic Church became ostentatiously a foreign body, it invited persecution on a scale that eliminated most of the Jesuits' successes by the end of the eighteenth century. (Jenkins 33)

On the Latin American front, evangelism was often tied more to cultural domination. The indigenes who were supposedly given over to colonists for protection and instruction in Christian faith under the *encomienda* system were cruelly and inhumanely abused instead. John A. Mackay writes somewhat sarcastically that the *encomienda* system was “the most original form of evangelistic organization known to history” (43). It was conceived by the Spanish colonizers giving “landlord evangelists,” called *encomenderos*, “the most absolute power over the indigenous race” (44). Mackay explains the abuse:

In return for their Christianizing zeal the *encomenderos* had the right to employ the services of the Indians and to exact tribute from them. The latter thus became the virtual slaves of their “evangelists.” Slavery was born as an economic expedient in order to fulfill a religious task. But what had been permitted as a spiritual instrument very quickly became a commercial end. The indigenous race fell under the yoke of serfdom, from which in some South American lands it has not yet emerged. (44)

Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566) championed hard on behalf of the Amerindians and spoke boldly against the unjust oppression of the colonists. Their efforts paid off only after their lifetime when Pope Gregory XV set up the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* in 1622, the precursor of the modern *Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*. The *Propaganda*, as it was called in short, dealt a deathblow to Spanish and Portuguese domination of mission

under the old *Padroado* system where Spain and Portugal were assigned exclusive patronage over different regions for the purpose of evangelization. In countering the violence of the colonizing powers, the *Propaganda* insisted on evangelization by peaceful means and respect for the indigenes' way of life or culture. Such an attitude is evident in the 1659 circular to Vicars Apostolic in the foreign missions:

Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the peoples, to change their manners, customs, and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy, or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them, but only the faith, which does not despise or destroy the manners and customs of any people, always supposing that they are not evil, but rather wishes to see them preserved unharmed. It is the nature of men to love and treasure above everything else their own country and that which belongs to it; in consequence there is no stronger cause for alienation and hate than an attack on local customs, especially when these go back to a venerable antiquity. This is more especially the case, when an attempt is made to introduce the customs of another people in the place of those which have been abolished. Do not draw invidious contrasts between the customs of the peoples and those of Europe; do your utmost to adapt yourselves to them. (Collectanea 103)

The *Propaganda* tried to make a distinction between aspects of culture that belong to the sphere of religion and morality and those that do not; however, as noted by Shorter, trying to impose a Western dualistic Enlightenment definition on the naturalistic or monistic primal worldviews of the non-Western cultures is both futile as well as frustrating:

In practice, non-Christian religions are cultural systems that underlie and permeate whole cultural traditions. The dualism of sacred and secular, which was coming into vogue in Europe after the Wars and Religion, was not applicable to the indigenous cultures encountered by the missionaries. More seriously, however, there was often disagreement in practice as to what did or did not oppose Catholic religion and morality, and this was the case in the celebrated controversy over the "Chinese rites." (156)

In the end, despite its foresight, the *Propaganda* was unable to prevent the cultural

domination of Latin America by Spain and Portugal. As Shorter shows, the result of this domination was syncretism or parallelism at the popular level (156). Thus, for the most part of the colonization by European Christian powers from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century, mission was not carried out with any notion of contextualization at all.

Colonialism (1700-1950). Later on, more European powers began to use colonialism as a mode for expansion. Concurrently, the Protestants also became strong enough to tack on the colonial powers for cross-cultural missions. Like the Roman Catholics, they were also aware of the difficulty in preaching the gospel across cultures. As Karl Müller records of the early Pietist missionaries from Halle, they constantly wrestled with the same old question: “How can we proclaim to another [culture], that which has taken possession of our hearts?” (301). Unlike the Roman Catholics, however, they were notably quick to translate Scriptures into indigenous languages.

Despite compassionate hearts and sacrificial spirits, bent on saving the heathens, their perspective of mission, too, was often tainted by the Enlightenment and the colonial spirit of cultural dominance. In the end, they also failed to practice contextualization in the sharing of the gospel. For example, Wilbert R. Shenk notes how the New England Puritans concluded that the Indian converts could only be Christians if they were “civilized.” The missionaries felt compassion and responsibility for their converts and sought to gather their converts into churches, attempting to transform Christian Indians into English Puritans (“Changing Role” 34).

Later, though foresighted missiologists like Venn and Anderson called for indigenization, the missionaries still functioned as colonial patrons. Many missionaries during the Colonial Era lived in private secluded compounds where they practiced their

own Western Christian cultures. They often kept themselves apart from national Christians and remained in charge of most things in the church (Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections 54). At times, in sharing the gospel, they tended to stress only biblically defined needs like divine judgment of sin, repentance, and eternal salvation from Western frame of references but were insensitive towards the culture, worldview, and struggles of the local people. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism's paper reports the following concerning missionaries in China:

Many Western missionaries, in their zeal "to get on with the job" of evangelization, often failed to gain a deeper understanding of the various levels of the living dynamics of the gospel, and thus were insensitive to Chinese cultural and social barriers to the Christian message. Many, knowingly or unknowingly, bore a sense of European cultural superiority, characterized by a disdain for Chinese culture, which blinded them from seeing the Chinese people in the complexity of their cultural and social modes of existence. They made judgments on the Chinese people from the context of a Western cultural and social framework. This contributed enormously to tension between the guardians of Chinese culture and the Christian community.

Hiebert describes how "they introduced Western medicine, education, worship styles, architecture, and even dress. They translated the Bible literally, assuming that meanings were tied to forms. They measured communication by what they said, not by what people heard" (Anthropological Reflections 54). Such was also the kind of mission that characterized Singapore during colonial days. Mission was so dominated by education and social gospel that upon examining the situation in Singapore, Dr. Wade C. Barclay of the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions in America sent back the following report:

They [the schools] dominate the total mission situation and tend to draw into themselves the time and energy as administrators and teachers of all the missionaries and pastors. The large majority of pastors of churches are also teaching in schools with the result that church work is done on marginal time. (qtd. in Haines 82)

Thus, contextualization continues to be an issue needing to be done as long as the gospel needs to be made known across cultures.

Churches from the south (1950 onwards). Recovery from World War II brought about a surge in missions from the West. At the same time, throughout the twentieth century, country after country broke the fetters of colonialism, and the spirit of nationalism was in the air. The same story was repeated in the Church as missions were transformed into indigenous churches. The churches in the “south” (i.e., the Third World countries or traditionally mission-receiving countries) began to outgrow the Western churches.

According to Philip Jenkins, much of the growth in the Church in the south can be attributed to the churches’ elastic ability to adapt to local circumstances (56). The growing churches in the south can be classified under two groups. The first comprises the European-oriented churches that were able to adapt and incorporate native ways successfully (57-60). The second is made up of new churches that seceded from established denominations in Protestantism, especially among the Pentecostals (60-72). Thus, despite the mistakes of the past, contextualization continues to take place in what were once the mission fields by God’s providential grace.

Jenkins even predicts that the change in population growth patterns in different parts of the world will lead to the south having more Christians than the north (the traditional mission-sending Western countries) (79-94), and these Christians will be more committed in their beliefs and practice, too (94). The twenty-first century may well see a reversal of mission roles as the West becomes increasingly secular and as evangelicalism becomes a dominant force in the south (204-09).

How Colonialism Curbs Contextualization

Hiebert in his seminal article in 1987 on “Critical Contextualization” suggests that the failure of the Church to effectively carry out contextualization during the colonial days developed as a result of the Western colonial sense of cultural superiority, the emergence of the theory of cultural evolution, and the rise of science (104-05).

Cultural superiority. Colonizers saw themselves ethnocentrically, as superior to those in colonized states in virtually all aspects from military prowess to government, to economic might, culture, and civilization. The Western Church in tagging along closely behind the colonial powers displayed an obnoxious attitude towards other religions and culture. Many missionaries actually equated Christianity to civilization and, later, even to commerce (Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization” 104).

Theory of cultural evolution and the rise of science. Closely linked to colonialism was the hype of cultural evolution. This theory, developed by Edward B. Tylor in England and Lewis Henry Morgan in the United States in the nineteenth century, was widely endorsed by anthropologists until the beginning of the twentieth century (qtd. in Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 18). It applies Darwin’s evolution of the species to culture and perceives culture as evolving from lower simple forms to higher complex ones. Building on James G. Frazer, Tylor argues that animistic beliefs were products of primitive and prelogical minds. Cultural evolutionists believed that over time animistic beliefs would evolve into world religions with the result that as human investigation became more rational and empirical, religions would gradually be replaced by science (qtd. in Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 18). Figure 2.4, adapted from Understanding Folk Religion by Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou (17), diagrams such an upward progression as

posited by cultural evolution.

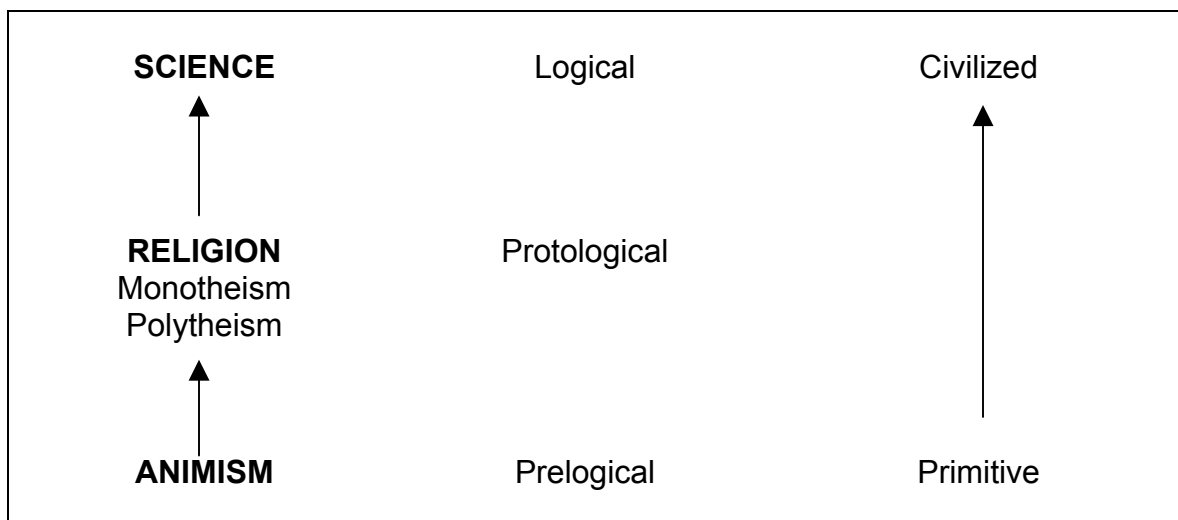


Figure 2.4. The evolutionary theory of religion.

The Western missionaries cannot really be faulted for going along with colonialism and operating by the evolutionary theory of religion. After all, they, too, were people of their time. They believed in progress and assumed the superiority of Western civilization. As Taber points out, they were truly very sincere when they talked of *civilizing* the pagans and *Christianizing* the natives:

The superiority of Western civilization as the culmination of human development, the attribution of that superiority to the prolonged dominance of Christianity, the duty of Christians to share civilization and the gospel with the “benighted heathen”—these were the chief intellectual currency of their lives. (*The World* 71)

Western missionaries also expended efforts developing Christian apologetics for encountering other religions like Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Unfortunately, in so doing, they were dealing with only a few intellectuals in the higher strata of Asian societies. They failed to realize that on the popular level the majority of ordinary folks knew little of the orthodox beliefs and practices of their own religions. The missionaries

mistakenly perceived the old animistic beliefs and practices that were critical to the masses as primitive. Their notion of cultural evolution led them to think, “All more backward civilizations and cultures will ultimately need to catch up with us.”

Contextualization: Origin and Differing Opinions

The term “contextualization” together with specific meanings, methods, and models only surfaced within relatively recent conciliar circles. It first appeared in the ecumenical document, The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-77), by the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches (WCC). It was originally rooted in a dissatisfaction with traditional models of theological education. Generally, the document sees contextualization as the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one’s own situation:

It means all that is implied in the familiar term “indigenization” and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess peculiarity of Third World contexts. Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of a traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World....

False contextualization yields to uncritical accommodation, a form of culture faith. Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God’s Word and His world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.

It is therefore clear that contextualization is a dynamic not a static process. It recognizes the continually changing nature of every human situation and of the possibility for change, thus opening the way for the future. (20-21)

According to its originators, contextualization involves a new point of departure and a new approach to theologizing and to theological education: praxis or involvement in the struggle for justice within the existential situation in which men and women find themselves today (Hesselgrave and Rommen 32). Therefore, contextualization was

certainly a concept that went beyond the clichés of its day like Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's *indigenization*, which defines autonomy in churches as self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating (Shenk, "Henry Venn 1796-1873" 541-47; Beaver 548-53). In any case, some missiologists have qualms with the term *indigenization* because of its association with the old colonial policy of replacing British personnel in colonial government with local leadership (Schreiter 5). The term *contextualization* also extends beyond the Roman Catholic notion of *accommodation*, which Louis J. Luzbetak defines as "the respectful, prudent, scientifically and theologically sound adjustment of the Church to the native culture in attitude, outward behavior, and practical apostolic approach" (341).

The use of the word "contextualization" was initially opposed by evangelicals. James O. Buswell, III did not think the former clichés of "indigenous," "indigeniety," and "indigenization" outmoded but instead better understood than the word "contextualization" and its associated terms (93-94). On the other hand, Bruce C. E. Fleming thinks that the word "contextualization" carries with it too many liberal presuppositions together with misunderstanding and confusion and should not be used again (60-67). Nevertheless, neither of the above two proposals was pursued by many missiologists. Roman Catholic missiologist Shorter also does not react favorably to the term "contextualization." Though, he agrees that the term "contextualization" extends the meaning of "indigenization," he believes that it is less precise in meaning. Instead, he continues to favor the term "inculturation," which was introduced by the Roman Catholics. He defines inculturation as "the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures" and, more fully, "the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian

message and a culture or cultures” (11).

According to Hesselgrave and Rommen, many conservative evangelicals were, however, enamored with the word “contextualization” though they rejected the meaning prescribed by the Theological Education Fund (TEF). Although they all agreed to the need for sensitivity to context and a fidelity to Scripture, they did not exactly have a consensus on definitional nuances (33). For example, African theologian Byang H. Kato says, “[W]e understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation” (1217). New Zealander Bruce J. Nicholls defines contextualization as “the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations” (647). On the other hand, George W. Peters thinks that contextualization goes beyond application to the implication of God’s Word:

Contextualization properly applied means to discover *the legitimate implications* [original emphasis] of the gospel in a given situation. It goes deeper than application. Application I can make or need not make without doing injustice to the text. Implication is *demanded* [original emphasis] by a proper exegesis of the text. (“Issues” 169)

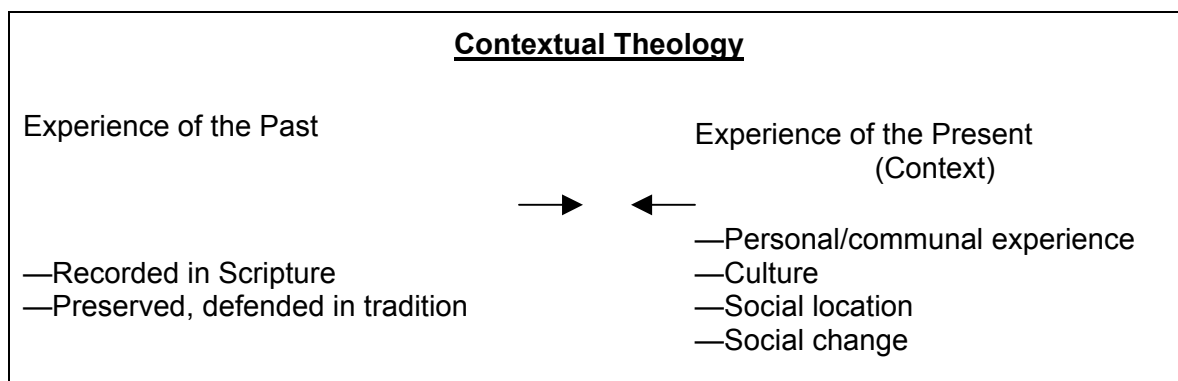
Hesselgrave and Rommen emphasize contextualization from the perspective of evangelism. They appropriately warn of the two potential hazards that must be assiduously avoided in contextualization:

(1) the perception of the communicator’s own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel, and (2) a syncretistic inclusion of elements from the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of the message upon which the integrity of the gospel depends. (1)

While Hesselgrave and Rommen may seem to emphasize a condescending bringing of the gospel only from the perspective of the missionary, another Roman Catholic theologian Schreier speaks of it from the perspective of those receiving the gospel. He,

therefore, terms it “local theology,” which he defines as “the dynamic interaction among gospel, church, and culture” (22).

Perhaps, Bevans has the most comprehensive definition on contextualization. He speaks in terms of the contextualizing of theology (i.e., of how a people makes sense of their Christian faith under their own context). Bevans defines contextual theology as doing theology that firstly takes into account the faith experience of the *past* as recorded in the Scripture and kept alive in tradition. Second, it takes into account the experience of the present, the *context*, which includes a person’s or group’s personal life experiences, culture, one’s social location, and the reality of social change (5-6). Figure 2.5 illustrates this definition of contextual theology. Bevans thinks that the term *contextualization* is definitely much more appropriate than *indigenization* or *inculturation* or *incarnation* (26).



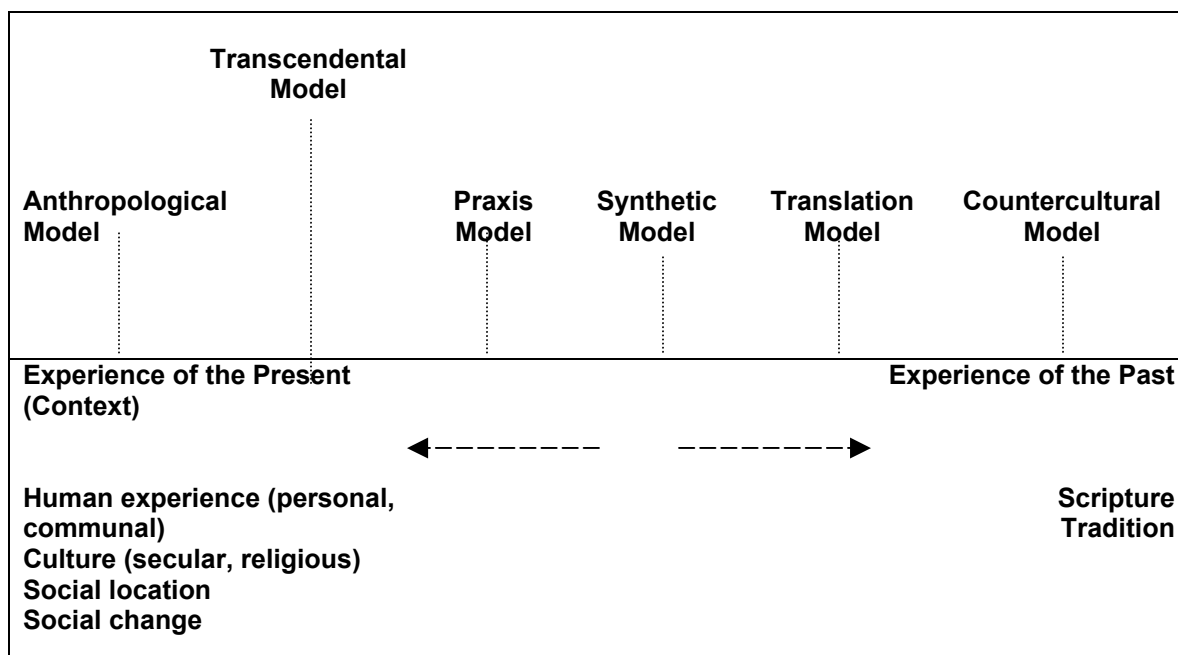
Source: Bevans 7.

Figure 2.5. Illustration on definition of contextual theology.

Models of Contextualization

Bevans then analyzes the different practices of contextualization and classifies them as different models. In his analysis, the various models can be classified according

to the six elements of Scripture, tradition, experience, culture, social location, and social change. The most conservative model is what he terms the countercultural model, which though recognizing the importance of culture, distrusts its sanctity and revelational power. Next in the continuum is the translation model, which, while taking culture and cultural change into account, emphasizes fidelity to Scriptures. The synthetic model that tries to incorporate and thus balance all six ingredients of Scripture, tradition, experience, culture, social location, and social change is next. Then comes the praxis model that emphasizes social change, followed by the transcendental model that focuses not on the content but on the person who is articulating the contextualization. On the other end of the continuum, and the most radical of all, is the anthropological model that emphasizes cultural identity more than Scripture or tradition. As Bevans says, “Each model, therefore, presents a different way of theologizing that takes a particular context seriously, and so each represents a distinct theological starting point and distinct theological presuppositions” (31). The relative position of all these models can be represented in a single continuum as illustrated in Figure 2.6.



Source: Bevens 32.

Figure 2.6. A map of models of contextual theology.

According to Bevens' layout of models, Hiebert's critical contextualization with its inclusive emphasis on ontological analysis from the Bible as well as science and openness to considering phenomenological analysis from the culture might find its place somewhere near Bevens' description of a synthetic model. Nevertheless, as Bevens admits, the above models are mere classifications. In real life, although each model is distinct, it can be used in conjunction with others. No one model can be used exclusively (32), no one model is a completely adequate way of doing theology, and no model is exhaustive or applicable to all situations of faith (33).

Identification of the presence of different models of contextualization demonstrates that no one model is perfect. Each model is motivated under different situations and is suitable for different environments at different times. More importantly,

openness to considering the views of other models of contextualization can provide a multifaceted and more holistic appreciation of the way God works and speaks.

Contextualizing *Feng Shui*

Clinton E. Arnold observes that “[m]any people are beginning to question the dominant role that the naturalistic worldview has had on the way we think about every area of life” (28). As a result, atheism and agnosticism are on the way out while Eastern naturalistic worldview, with its mysticisms and religions, begins taking root in Western societies. Harvard Professor Diana Eck reports her observation of this paradigm shift in the West. No longer is divine being viewed as transcendent but completely immanent while the body becomes an important object not only for understanding oneself but also for finding god. Arnold also points out that the Eastern naturalistic worldview traditionally does not have a concept of sin like the Christian’s nor does it have any notion that “there are evil spirits bent on instigating moral evil and perpetrating misery and destruction in a variety of forms” (29).

Arnold’s and Eck’s descriptions fit well with *feng shui*. Like many other Chinese concepts, *feng shui* is often looked upon by Chinese as nonreligious and just a human effort to get along with the earth. In their analysis of belief systems, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou observe that all cultures utilize an organic as well as a mechanical metaphor to analyze the phenomena in their world. The “[o]rganic explanations see the world in terms of living beings in relationship with one another” (45). For example, many traditional religionists interpret diseases to be caused by evil spirits that are alive and can be angered or offended while Christians talk of their relationship to God in organic terms, referring to him as “shepherd,” “father,” etc. (45-46).

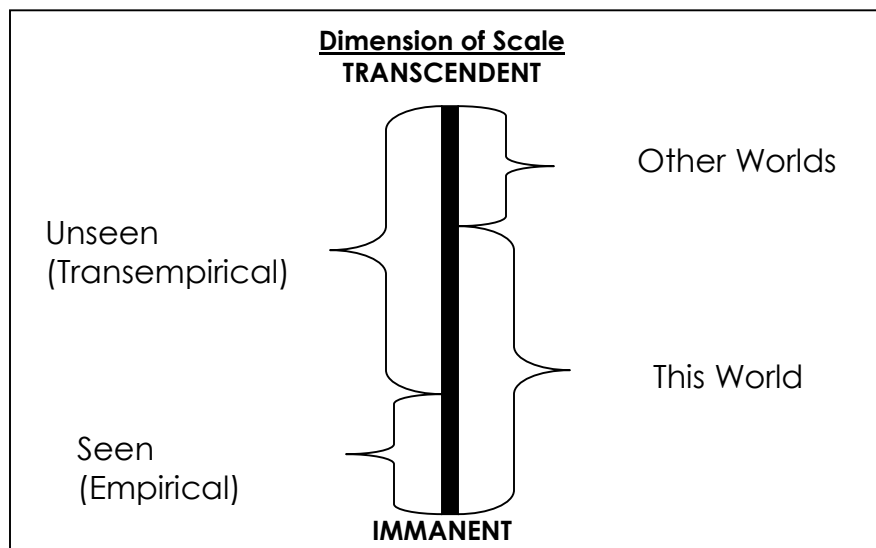
While the organic metaphor describes phenomena in terms of a living being, the mechanical metaphor explains them like machines. While morality is attached to cause and effect in the organic metaphor, the mechanical metaphor is essentially deterministic, perceiving all things to be controlled by impersonal laws that can be manipulated. It is, therefore, amoral. Figure 2.7 shows Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou's comparison between the two metaphors (45-46).

ORGANIC	MECHANICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like a living being • Life processes • Relational • Ethical in nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like a machine • Impersonal force • Controlling, formulaic • Amoral in nature

Source: Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 46.

Figure 2.7. Comparison between organic and mechanical metaphors.

In addition to the organic and mechanical metaphors that demarcate phenomena on a horizontal level, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou also posit a vertical demarcation according to immanence and transcendence (see Figure 2.8).



Source: Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 47.

Figure 2.8. Transcendence-immanence and this world-other world matrix.

According to Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, superimposing the horizontal metaphors of organic and mechanical with the vertical immanence-transcendence produces a grid or matrix that becomes helpful for comparing belief systems (see Figure 2.9):

On the bottom is the empirical world of human senses; on the top, the cosmic realms beyond human experience; in between, the unseen or transempirical realities of this world. These three levels emerge out of the intersection of two distinctions: this world (earth, universe) and other worlds (heavens, hells), and seen (empirical) and unseen (transempirical). (47)

Organic Analogy Based on concepts of living beings relating to other living beings. Stresses life, personality, relationships, functions, health, disease, choice, etc. Relationships are essentially moral in character.	Mechanical Analogy Based on concepts of impersonal objects controlled by forces. Stresses impersonal, mechanistic, and deterministic nature of events. Forces are essentially amoral in character.
Unseen or Supernatural Beyond immediate sense experience. Above natural explanation. Knowledge of this based on inference or on supernatural experiences.	<div> High Religion Based on Cosmic Beings: cosmic gods Angels Demons Spirits of other worlds </div> <div> High Religion Based on Cosmic Forces: Kismet Fate Brahman and karma Impersonal cosmic forces </div> <div> Folk or Low Religion Local gods and goddesses Ancestors and ghosts Spirits Demons and evil spirits Dead saints </div> <div> Magic and Astrology Mana Astrological forces Charms, amulets, and magical rites Evil eye, evil tongue </div>
Seen or Empirical Directly observable by the senses. Knowledge based on experimentation and observation.	<div> Folk Social Science Interaction of living beings such as humans, possibly animals and plants </div> <div> Folk Natural Science Interaction of natural objects based on natural forces </div>

Other Worldly
 Sees entities and events occurring in other worlds and in other times.

This Worldly
 Sees entities and events as occurring in this world and universe.

Source: Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 49.

Figure 2.9. Framework for the analysis of religious systems.

Feng shui may belong to the category of impersonal powers in a Chinese worldview that traditionally has not received much emphasis from the Church (see Figure 2.10; Hiebert, Shaw, Tiénou 50). Accordingly, *feng shui* fits in the mechanical “gray” middle zone. In fact, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou think that “[t]here are no moral implications in the practice of feng shui” (139). Since Christian missions have often stressed the organic aspects of a personal worldview with a personal God and spirits that

are personal and a personal savior, mechanical phenomena like *feng shui* have not really been challenged. No wonder *feng shui* is a “gray” area for Chinese Christians. It probably is an ignored area in Chinese contextualization, whether it is biblical or unbiblical.

Folk Chinese Belief Systems	
ORGANIC	MECHANICAL
Jade Emperor (<i>Tian</i>) Gods and goddess	Ming (Fate) Yin and yang Dao
Earth gods Sages Mythological figures Spirits and ghosts Ancestors Animal spirits (totems)	Five elements Magic Feng Shui Divination Palmistry Luck
People Animals and plants	Acupuncture Matter

Source: Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 50.

Figure 2.10. Possible differentiation of Chinese folk beliefs according to organic-mechanical and immanence-transcendence matrix.

The church history of Singapore shows that the missionaries and churches have traditionally leaned on education and social services to gain a beachhead in their ministries. Although somewhat lopsided, these have had their advantages. Many political as well as community leaders in the country today are nurtured and influenced by such Christian schools. The Church in Singapore today is increasingly having a powerful as well as influential role of ministry in the schools. At the same time, the humane, medical, as well as educational institutions established by Christians have helped the Church to

gain trust and credibility before the public. As a result, the Church is not perceived as a self-serving religious institution but one that “does what it preaches.”

The weakness of cultivating scientific institutions at the expense of a more contextual approach that is sensitive to local worldviews and cultural needs, however, is that many folk beliefs and practices remain unchallenged. The Church ends up making dualistic Enlightened Western Christians of the people instead of Singaporean Chinese Christians. The Christians are well instructed regarding organic personal relationships with God in the Church. They are also trained to segregate scientifically based mechanical beliefs. Nevertheless, they have been conditioned to leave these mechanical metaphors with the schools, hospitals, and laboratories, and they seldom mix them with their Christian beliefs. In the process, the Church loses its voice to speak to the scientifically unproven mechanical belief systems found commonly in the “gray” areas of folk practices like *feng shui*.

One possible Christian response to *feng shui* is, therefore, to emphasize God at work through the created order. Christians can stress that even the impersonal, scientific forces of change are sustained and controlled by God. Bevans talks of two basic theological orientations that are of relevance to contextual theology. One approach is redemption centered while another is creation centered. Perhaps, the latter creation-centered approach will more adequately address the Asian naturalistic worldview:

A creation-centered orientation sees the world as sacramental: the world is the place where God reveals Godself; revelation does not happen in set-apart, particularly holy places, in strange unworldly circumstances, or in words that are spoken in a stilted voice. It comes in daily life, in ordinary words, through ordinary people.... Creation-centered theology approaches life with an analogical, not a dialectical, spirit or imagination, and sees a continuity between human existence and divine reality.

It is not that the world is perfect and sinless. Creation-centered theology

certainly acknowledges the reality and ugliness of sin. But sin is sin precisely because it is an aberration in such a beautiful world, an attempt to “get out of life what God has not put into it.” And the only way that sin can adequately be exterminated is by confrontation with the power of good. (21)

In contrast, Bevans observes that a redemption-centered theology “is characterized by the conviction that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total replacement” (21). It tends to perceive the world as distorting and rebelling against God’s reality rather than being a vehicle for God’s presence (22). Ultimately, a creation-centered approach makes a person also more attuned to the contributions from culture and the world:

If one were to opt for a more creation-centered approach, one would approach the context more positively. In a creation-centered approach, human experience, current events, and culture would be areas of God’s activity and therefore sources of theology. (22)

In fact, Luís Wesley de Souza reveals that John Wesley’s famous *quadrilateral* method of doing theology may actually be a *pentalateral* that includes creation in addition to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. In the process, de Souza also stresses the importance of Protestants, especially, to rediscover the emphasis on the theology of creation (138-52). After all, Christians need to remind themselves that God has a high view of the created world. The first two chapters of the Bible describe in detail God’s exquisite work in creation. It is certainly a divine masterpiece, and one of which God is proud, too. God admires and owns the creation. At least seven times the Bible says that God feels good about it (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Jesus, too, displayed a special concern and affection for the nature around him. According to Marshall, Jesus displayed high regards for the creation:

Jesus was evidently interested in the natural world around him and was a

keen observer of the rural scene from which he drew many of his illustrations. He displayed considerable artistic power in the use of words, so that his parables and metaphorical sayings stand out for their literary power and effect. He had a positive attitude towards the world around him, so that life in the world was a joy for him. (29-30)

A number of publications by Christian writers and scientists are now available on the topic of creation.⁴ Evangelicals appear to be gradually gaining appreciation for such a creation-centered dimension, yet they continue to struggle with its implications in cross-cultural contextualizations. As long as evangelicals continue to stress only a redemption theology, they may just miss the very elements that can answer and possibly contextualize the many “gray” areas related to natural creation like *feng shui*. Ultimately, the Church needs to have a balanced view that God is as interested in saving the creation as in saving people, and God has a *holistic* message of salvation contained in both the salvation of people and creation.

According to Charles Ringma, Professor of Missions and Evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, in fundamental Western thinking ideas, one’s spiritual relationship is only between “God and me.” Nevertheless, God wants to empower a person through others as well (e.g., through discipleship). The Old Testament points to a triangulation of relationships between God, people, and the land (see diagram on the left in Figure 2.11). The Old Testament, therefore, emphasizes the relationship not just between God and people but the land as well. It brings into play the economic dimension of life and shows that God is not just concerned about souls of people but also

⁴ These works include, for example, Loren Wilkinson’s Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources, Edwin R. Squiers’ The Environmental Crisis: The Ethical Dilemma, Dale and Sandy Larson’s While Creation Waits: A Christian Response to the Environmental Challenge, John Houghton’s Global Warming: The Complete Briefing, Calvin DeWitt’s Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues, Stan L. LaQuire’s The Best Preaching on Earth: Sermons on Caring for Creation, Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon’s Decoding The Church: Mapping The DNA of Christ’s Body (in particular, chapters 7-9.).

with the sustenance of life.

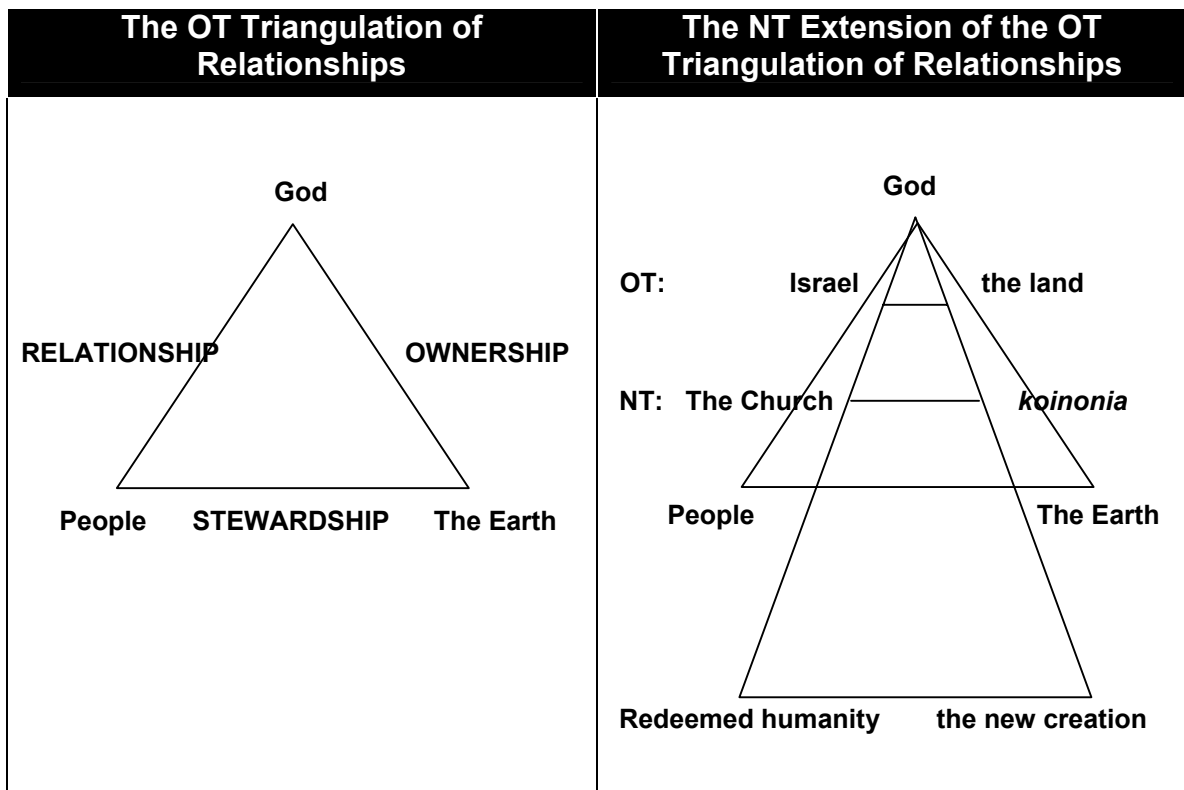


Figure 2.11. The OT triangulation of relationships and NT extension of it.

In the New Testament, the Greek notion of *koinonia*, which involves participation and economic sharing, was used instead of the land. Like the Old Testament, the emphasis in the New Testament is not just in one's personal, private relationship with God alone but in the context of an economy (*koinonia*) of the community and the world that is around the person (see the diagram on the right in Figure 2.11). Thus, the New Testament, too, calls the redeemed people of God to share the same grace with others beyond the Church. More than that, such an understanding of a personal salvation within the salvation of a *koinonia* and land implies that God's full salvation ultimately involves

not just a redeemed people but a new creation. The full salvation of God can only be more adequately perceived with the bifocal lens of redemption as well as creation theologies. Incidentally, the only two mandates of God—the Earthkeeping Mandate (Gen. 1:28) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) also stressed such a holistic bifocal perspective.

An issue like *feng shui* certainly needs to be contextualized with a theologically and cosmologically balanced approach like that intended in critical contextualization. As part of the preparation for the research project's seminar and consultation on contextualizing *feng shui*, I made a pilot attempt at applying the four steps of critical contextualization as proposed by Hiebert to contextualizing *feng shui* (see Appendix P). The information from the pilot attempt was shared with the participants in the seminar group as it worked out contextualization together as a hermeneutical community.

Conclusion

The dynamic interplay between indigenous cultures and the Christian faith suggests that contextualization is necessary for all cross-cultural communication of the gospel. The Chinese society is heir to an ancient and complex belief system. Its popular beliefs and practices are closely and mutually integrated with Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Chinese Christians struggle with traditional folk beliefs and practices because what is cultural and what is religious are hard to separate in many of these beliefs and practices. At the same time, many other beliefs and practices seem to have scientific bases but are presented in spiritual terminologies or contaminated by religious rituals.

Feng shui, which today is fast gaining popularity not only among Chinese but even in the West, is probably one such controversial issue. The response of the Chinese

Christian to issues such as *feng shui* will depend on how they contextualize them into their faith and practices. Folk beliefs like *feng shui* when contextualized critically with the Christian gospel can lead to breakthroughs in theological thinking such as a critical and closer connection between creation and redemption theologies. Such an exercise may also help recover indigenous strengths or benefits in folk beliefs and practices that have been overlooked by Western Christianity.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The type of split-level Christianity at work currently in Singapore is not so much that of committed Christians visiting spirit mediums yet attending church. Instead, it is likely to be in more subtle forms over less dubious issues. For example, it could be in the form of a fervent Christian attending and serving in church yet glancing at the horoscopes once in a while out of part curiosity and part belief. It may also be in the form of a Christian being very concerned over the significance of auspicious and inauspicious numbers, folk sacred and profane places, taboos, or who participates in *qi gong*, *gong fu*, *tai ji*, or subscribes uncritically to *feng shui* recommendations for the layout of a house or an office.

One of the chief struggles for Singaporean Christians today is with beliefs and practices that appeal to their cultural background and worldview; however, these may have been transmitted through the generations embellished in religious traditions and spiritual symbolisms. A proper part of discipleship is for Christians to be trained in understanding the background of folk religion at work in every person and to apply critical contextualization to beliefs and practices that are especially unclear or indistinct.

The purpose of this project was to find out the existing level of exposure, contextualization practice, as well as convictions that Singaporean Chinese Christians have of the folk beliefs and practices. It also sought to confirm the hypothesis that Christians who are sensitized to the need of dealing with folk beliefs and practices and who know how to contextualize them critically can develop clearer convictions to distinguish and deal with them.

Research Questions

This research began with the assumption that many Christians, raised under the influence of Western Enlightenment, have failed to deal properly with the folk religion they inherit from their culture. Depending on the exposure to and upbringing of Christians in Chinese folk beliefs and practices, and their training in cross-cultural communications and missiology, Christians from similar denominational and cultural backgrounds might even have differing convictions, knowledge, and involvement in *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices. Conversely, although many Christians have general ideas towards certain folk beliefs and practices, they probably might not know how to analyze them critically, extract useful and valuable concepts from these folk beliefs and practices, or contextualize the Christian message in them.

Four research questions were posited. The first research question asked how much Singaporean Chinese Christians¹ know about and participate in *feng shui* and other common Chinese folk beliefs and practices and, if so, how frequently these are being practiced. The second research question identified the existing level of understanding that Singaporean Chinese Christians have of *feng shui* and other common Chinese folk beliefs and practices and how the Christians are contextualizing these beliefs and practices with Christianity. The third research question sought to determine the attitude or convictions that Singaporean Chinese Christians have towards *feng shui* and other common Chinese folk beliefs. The fourth research question assessed how beneficial an understanding of folk religion and a knowledge on the use of critical contextualization is to Christians in their responses to *feng shui* and Chinese folk beliefs and practices.

¹ The research group turned out to comprise mainly of English-speaking Chinese Christians whose response to folk beliefs and practices might differ from Chinese-speaking (Mandarin or dialect) Christians.

Research Question #1

What are Singaporean Chinese Christians' knowledge and experiences of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

This research question helps to establish the relationship between prior knowledge and exposure to folk beliefs and practices and its effect on one's ability to contextualize. It seeks to determine Singaporean Chinese Christians' exposure to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices in terms of their theoretical knowledge as well as past and present personal experiences. Theoretical background knowledge of folk beliefs and practices might be received through literature, listening to the testimonies or personal accounts of others who have practiced them (secondhand experiences), or pastoral advice from Christian leaders and teachers.

Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, refers to actual participation in the practices and firsthand observations of others who carry out the practices (firsthand experiences). The hypothesis here is that prior involvement in *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices before conversion influence involvement after conversion while present involvement might indicate areas that are acceptable to the Christians, whether contextualized or not. This research question is helpful because it explores if a person was approaching contextualization of *feng shui*, for example, as an *emic* participant or as an *etic* observer.²

Research Question #2

How much contextualization (consciously or unconsciously) are Singaporean Chinese Christians already practicing in *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and

² Anthropologists distinguish the viewpoints of their research using the terms *emic* view and *etic* view. The *emic* view refers to the mental categories and assumptions of the local people while the *etic* view refers to the technical and professional views of the outside observer (Ferraro 50).

practices?

Many Christians might not be aware that they are already practicing contextualization in their day-to-day dealings with existential folk and cultural issues. This question assesses the existing ability of Singaporean Chinese Christians in contextualizing *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices. The ability to contextualize an issue depends first on knowledge and experience of the folk issue to be contextualized. This aspect is dealt in the preceding research question.

The actual practice of contextualization also depends on an appreciation of how culture works as well as the place of worldviews. This appreciation has to be balanced with a proper grounding in the Scriptures and application of Christian theology. This research question seeks to determine how Christians view their folk beliefs and practices in relation to their Christian beliefs and convictions. It also seeks to find out how Christians are able to adapt to or preserve certain non-Christian beliefs without compromising their Christian beliefs.

Research Question #3

What are Singaporean Chinese Christians' beliefs and convictions of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

Ultimately, knowledge of a folk belief and practice, appreciation of one's worldview and culture, an understanding of contextualizing skills and methodology, and a sound grounding in Scriptures and Christian theology would not manifest any behavioral change unless these first produce changes in beliefs and conviction in a person. As an ancient saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." Knowledge and experience certainly contribute towards changes in beliefs and

convictions; however, beliefs and convictions are also complexly developed over time, through tests of life. They are also influenced by future aspirations, past experiences, as well as present situations and needs. In the case of *feng shui*, it depends on many factors such as the knowledge and experience that one has of *feng shui*, attitudes toward Chinese folk religion in general, a person's Christian maturity, Christian discipleship and secular education, and exposure to missiological training on subjects like contextualization.

This research question, therefore, takes the project a step further than the earlier two research questions in an effort to gauge the internal, driving conviction that motivates external changes in the behavior of a person. The answer to this research question measures the perception of Christians towards *feng shui* and Chinese folk beliefs and practices, whether they see them as generally religious, cultural, superstitious, logical, or scientific. It also locates the participants' practices of contextualization along the different levels of contextualization as diagramed in Figure 1.3 (p. 11). Some may tend more toward the extreme of non-contextualization while others toward the opposite of uncritical contextualization. Here, how one responds to contextualization may correspond to the emphasis and priority the person places on the gospel, Christian tradition, experience, culture, social location, and the social changes in that culture (Bevans 7). Thus, Christians with a cautious appreciation of culture or who do not see a need for social change but have a high dogmatic regard for Scriptures and tradition may tend more towards non-contextualization. Conversely, Christians who are highly sympathetic to cultural and social changes but have more flexible views on the application of Scripture and traditions may be more inclined to uncritical contextualization.

Research Question #4

How beneficial is an understanding of folk religion and a knowledge on the use of critical contextualization, like the one proposed by Hiebert, to Christians in their response to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

This fourth research question is the *raison d'être* of this research project. It assesses how much those who have gone through the seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization are helped from their existing level of contextualization practice (derived from their individual Christian tradition, denominational framework, past personal experiences, etc.) to an ability to contextualize *feng shui* critically. Since Hiebert's critical contextualization is a generic principle and not a specific or contextual method, by implication, participants in the seminar should evidence a better ability at contextualizing other Chinese folk beliefs and practices as well.

Population and Sample

The primary population for this survey was Singapore Chinese Christians. Since this was such a large group, it was narrowed to some three hundred people who were acquainted with me and who would, therefore, be more likely to respond to the project. These were people who had been receiving my personal newsletters about once every four months. They knew my personal education and ministry plans and about the dissertation project. This group of people shared the following common backgrounds: they represented Singaporean Chinese Christians of either gender who were 16 years and older, had completed at least a high school education, had been Christians for at least one year, and could communicate fluently in English.

The three hundred people were invited to participate in the research by post and e-

mail on 10 January 2004 (see Appendix G). The criteria of an English-speaking Chinese Singaporean 16 years or older who has been a Christian for at least one year were stipulated in the invitations to ensure that the self-selected volunteers were aware of them as requirements before they volunteered. Although the topic of *feng shui* was attractive enough to stimulate participation, it was boosted further by the offer of free materials and free meals for all participants.

Those who responded and volunteered for the research project formed the sample group. Originally, I had hoped that thirty of those who responded could be randomly selected to form the research group. Another thirty would form the control group. The former would participate in the folk religion and critical contextualization seminar together with all the pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys, interviews, and reports while the latter merely took the pre-seminar survey and interview to validate the responses of the former.

Despite many personal phone calls to encourage participation, only twenty-five people signed up for the research by the stipulated deadline on 30 January 2004. Naturally, all twenty-five were selected to form the research group; however, the number of volunteers who signed up swelled to thirty-three by the time the first seminar commenced on 28 February 2004. The seminar was conducted in English, and all the instruments for the project were written in English and completed in English. Of the thirty-three research group volunteers, only twenty-seven sat through both days of the seminar and submitted all the required responses for the research. Three did not attend, two could not attend on the second day due to sickness and work respectively, and one failed to submit all the post-seminar responses despite repeated reminders. Subsequently,

all the pre-seminar surveys of these six individuals were added to the control group.

Meanwhile, twenty-two other volunteers who knew they were unable to commit as research group members volunteered themselves only as control group members (who would only participate in the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire). These twenty-two participants together with the six relegated from the research group provided a total of twenty-eight useable control group responses. The control group too fell short of the target of thirty because one response came in too late for compilation while another was not completed according to instruction (see Table 3.1 for the summary of all responses).

Table 3.1. Summary of Responses to Participation in the Research Study

	Research Group	Control Group	TOTAL
<u>Ideal</u>	30 ^a	30 ^a	60
Volunteered	33 ^b	22 ^c	55
Actual	27 ^d	28 ^e	55

^a To be randomly selected from a total of 60 volunteers.

^b Only 25 volunteers responded by the cut-off date of 30 January 2004. All 25 were automatically selected to form the research group. Another 8 volunteers were recruited by 28 February 2004 (the first day of the seminar), increasing the research group to 33 people.

^c 22 others volunteered only as control group members.

^d 6 volunteers could not fulfill all requirements as research group members; therefore, only 27 useable research group responses were available.

^e The completed pre-seminar surveys and questionnaires of the 6 who could not fulfill all the requirements for the research group were added to the control group to make a total of 28 control group responses.

Instrumentation

The research made use of four instruments.

Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar Surveys on *Feng Shui* and Other Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices

The first instrument was a researcher-designed survey on *feng shui* and four other

common Chinese folk beliefs and practices (see Appendixes I [Pre-Seminar] and J [Post-Seminar]). The four other folk beliefs and practices surveyed were ancestral worship, Chinese medical practices (including acupuncture, Chinese chiropractics, foot reflexology, Chinese diagnosis using *qi*, *yin* and *yang*, the five elements, etc., and Chinese herbs), Chinese martial arts (e.g., *gong fu* and *tai ji quan*), and *qi gong*. These were chosen because they were popular and common folk beliefs and practices that Singaporeans would encounter and with which they were familiar. A simple definition for each of the five folk practices was given at the beginning of the survey to ensure that the researcher and the participants shared a common understanding of the different terms. The intention here was to assess and compare the responses to all five folk beliefs and practices, in particular *feng shui*. Second, the overall response to all five common Chinese folk beliefs and practices could be taken as representative of the collective general response of the participants to all Chinese folk beliefs and practices.

The pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) was divided into two parts, namely Part A—Background Information, and Part B—Survey. Part A—Background Information consisted of two sections. Section A1—General Information, asked for information such as the name, contact information, and missiological training background of the participants, in particular knowledge of world religions, understanding folk religions, beliefs and practices, and methods of contextualization. The name and contact information were needed since all participants would be contacted again for the post-interview. The missiological training background information as well as the number of years as Christians were used to measure for correlations with the participants' practice of contextualization and convictions concerning folk beliefs and practices. Other

questions like education level, age, first language, and birth order were not used to measure for statistical correlations but were useful in determining the composition of the sample.

Section A2—Exposure to Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices asked the participants to rank from one to five, in terms of intensity, concerning their past knowledge and experiences of the five common folk beliefs and practices. The scores were calibrated such that a higher score indicated a higher level of background exposure to a particular folk belief and practice. All the background information from both Section A1 and Section A2 enabled me to know in advance what kind of people would be participating in the seminar and contextualization exercise.

The actual survey (Part B) was also comprised of two sections. It too utilized a five-point Likert scale to provide quantitative scores with one short statement asking for brief descriptive elaborations (statement 1.1.3). Section B1—Understanding and Practice of Contextualization, was comprised of thirteen statements to measure the participants' level of understanding and practices of contextualization in responding to the five different folk beliefs and practices. Here, understanding does not refer to understanding what contextualization is but to the factors involved—Scripture and Christian faith as well as the particular folk belief and practice—in order for contextualization to take place. Practice in contextualization refers to the ability to contextualize folk beliefs and practices critically in light of the Bible and Christian teachings. Seven of the statements measured “understanding” and six measured “practices.” The breakdown of the specific statements measuring the understanding and practice of contextualization is shown in Table 3.2 (the number following each statement is the corresponding statement number

on the survey). The measurement for understanding and practice of contextualization is such that a higher score indicates a higher degree of contextualization practiced.

Table 3.2. Breakdown of Types of Statements in Survey Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization

STATEMENT TYPE	STATEMENT (STATEMENT NUMBER)
Understanding and knowledge of folk belief and practice and Bible necessary for contextualization	I can explain what it is about, e.g., background, history, current practices, etc. (1.2)
	I understand my cultural worldview and how this practice relates to it. (1.3)
	I understand the original intention and motivation behind this practice. (1.6)
	I understand how this practice benefits my particular culture. (1.7)
	I know what the Bible says about the different aspects of this practice. (1.9)
	I research secular literature about this practice. (1.11)
	I research Christian literature that responds to this practice. (1.12)
Practices and skills of contextualization	I have been sufficiently trained to contextualize this issue. (1.1)
	I continue to find out more about it so that I can help others who are struggling with it. (1.4)
	I am clear which aspects of it are incompatible and which are compatible with my faith. (1.5)
	I am aware what aspects of the Christian faith can fill the needs met by this practice. (1.8)
	I can differentiate the cultural, scientific, and religious aspects of this practice. (1.10)
	I substitute the function played by this practice with some other practices that are compatible to Christianity (e.g., instead of burning joss sticks before ancestors, some Christians place flowers as a form of respect). Name any examples of your own: (1.13)

Section B2 of the survey measured the beliefs and convictions that a person has of the folk beliefs and practices. Beliefs and convictions are determined by a person's understanding and practice of contextualization (measured in Section B1). The scores in

Section B2 measure “openness/closedness” in a person’s conviction but not whether a person has a right or wrong belief and conviction. A higher score merely indicates more openness in beliefs and convictions but not necessarily a better ability at contextualization.

The post-seminar survey (see Appendix J) asked only for the name and date that the survey was taken under Part A. Since all other background information remained the same as those in the pre-seminar survey, they were not asked again. The survey (Part B) was identical to that in the pre-seminar survey to allow comparison to be made between the pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys. The difference between the pre-seminar and post-seminar scores in Section B1 provided a quantitative measurement of how the seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization had helped the participants in terms of their knowledge and practices of contextualization.

Comparison between the pre-seminar and post-seminar scores in Section B2 measured the changes in beliefs and convictions as a result of the participants undergoing the seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization. Unlike Section B1, the comparison in Section B2 was not to look for an improvement in the scores (since a higher score here merely indicated a higher level of tolerance in beliefs and convictions). Instead, the comparison for this section focused only on the *degree of variance* in scores irrespective of whether it increased or decreased. In other words, a greater change in beliefs and convictions (whether towards more tolerance or less tolerance) indicates a greater impact on beliefs and convictions as a result of the contextualization seminar while little or no change indicates little or no impact as a result.

Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar Interviews on *Feng Shui*

Since improvement in ability to contextualize beliefs and practices is more a qualitative than a quantitative measurement, a second instrument in the form of an interview was added (see Appendixes K and L). The pre-seminar written interview and post-seminar oral interview used the same seven same core questions that asked for the participants' responses to *feng shui* in terms of the following: (1) awareness of the practice of *feng shui*, (2) understanding and practice of contextualization, and (3) beliefs, convictions, and behavior. In comparison to the survey, the second section of the interview added the dimensions of awareness of *feng shui* practice.

Besides the seven core questions, the post-seminar oral interview (see Appendix L) has the following additional question to evaluate the seminar: "How has the seminar on 'Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study' helped you in contextualizing *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?" Answers to this question provided descriptive comments on the usefulness of the seminar.

The main difference between the pre-seminar written interview (see Appendix K) and post-seminar oral interview (see Appendix L) was chiefly in the format of administration. Since getting Singaporeans to meet for two separate, successive, face-to-face interviews within a short time was difficult, the pre-seminar interview was both posted and e-mailed to the participants to provide only written responses. The post-seminar interview was carried out by a personal, face-to-face oral interview. Participants were first shown what they had written in the pre-seminar interview and then asked to comment on how they would answer differently now that they had gone through the seminar.

Comparison between the pre-seminar interviews and post-seminar interviews on the seven core questions provided qualitative indications on how a proper training in folk religion and critical contextualization helped Christians contextualize folk beliefs and practices like *feng shui* in their culture.

End-of-Class Case Study on *Feng Shui*

The third instrument to measure change in the participants was the end-of-class case study on *feng shui* in which the participants had to respond to four questions pertaining to contextualization of *feng shui* (see Appendix M). This instrument demonstrated the extent to which the participants were able to practice critical contextualization in responding to a *feng shui* dilemma as a result of the seminar.

Post-Seminar Monthly Feedback Reports

In order to measure long-term behavioral changes in the participants, a fourth instrument was used. It called for a short, one-paragraph monthly descriptive report about encounters that the participants had with folk beliefs and practices, as well as their corresponding responses to them. These were collected at the end of each month. Participants completed them for two months in order to process behavioral change over that period.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity, the pre-seminar survey (see Appendix I) was distributed to nine Asian friends residing in Wilmore, Kentucky, for a pilot test. A pilot test for the post-seminar survey was not necessary since its content was a subset of that in the pre-seminar survey. The amount of time needed to complete the survey was noted, the grammatical errors pointed out, suggestions were given on style, formatting, and whether

certain questions should be rephrased, removed, and/or added. All suggestions were followed up and corrected. Concurrently, the pre-seminar interview questions (see Appendix K) as well as the end-of-class case study on *feng shui* with its questions (see Appendix M) were also distributed for comments.

One major change as a result of the pilot test was the reduction of the survey from analyzing responses to ten Chinese folk beliefs and practices to just *feng shui*, ancestral worship, Chinese medical practices, Chinese martial arts, and *qi gong*. The reason was that the survey was too time consuming and not all statements provided could apply to all ten practices all the time. To simplify the survey, acupuncture and foot reflexology were placed under Chinese medical practices and *tai ji* was placed under *gong fu* and renamed as Chinese martial arts. Fortune telling, although popular in Singapore, was removed because, in comparison to other practices, Christians generally understand that they are not compatible with their faith. Traditional Chinese festivals were also removed because the many diverse festivals complicated the survey. A proper assessment could only be done by getting participants to respond to each specific festival separately, something that could easily become another project by itself.

The validity of the control group was substantiated by the fact that it was drawn from exactly the same pool of people as the research group; thus, they shared common backgrounds and met the common criteria laid. The random selection of volunteers into the research and control groups also ensured no bias in the selection.

Data Collection

All participants in both the research group as well as control group were assured during the invitation to participate that all information given would be treated with the

strictest confidentiality.

The pre-seminar survey and pre-seminar written interview instruments were sent to all participants in the research group by post and e-mail four weeks before the seminar. The participants submitted their responses either through the enclosed, stamped return envelope or by e-mail at least one week before the seminar. Responses not received were followed up with personal e-mail and telephone reminders. The participants had been told that receipt of their survey and interview responses was their “ticket” to participation in the seminar.

The post-seminar survey was administered and collected immediately at the end of the seminar, ensuring that every survey was completed. To facilitate identification, the research group pre-seminar survey was printed on yellow paper, the post-seminar survey was printed on green paper, while the control group survey was printed on blue paper.

The post-seminar oral interviews were conducted individually and orally with all twenty-seven participants in the research group. They were conducted between the end of the seminar and the submission of the last e-mail report two months later. The interviews were carried out by personal appointments at different settings such as food courts, homes, church, and the participant’s workplace. Each interview took about forty-five minutes. Permission was obtained from all interviewees to audiotape every interview to preserve all contents. The post-seminar interviews together with the pre-seminar questionnaire responses were transcribed into ninety-eight pages of information, and the tapes were erased after that. The end-of-class *feng shui* case study was also collected from each participant during the oral interview.

The participants were given the option of submitting their two end-of-the-month,

paragraph-long reports on encounters with folk beliefs and practices either via e-mail or pre-paid envelopes. Those who failed to respond were reminded by e-mails and telephone calls.

The control group received the pre-seminar survey and written interview by post and e-mail at the same time as the research group. They were also requested to complete and send in the survey and written interview either by the prestamped return envelope or by e-mail one week before the seminar. Responses not received were similarly followed up with e-mail and telephone reminders.

No respondent codes were necessary since all the participants in the seminar also took part in face-to-face interviews. In fact, updated information on the participants' addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses were requested as part of the survey to ensure accessibility for post-seminar interviews and reports. No codes were also needed for the control group since they only participated in a pre-seminar survey and interview. Confidentiality and security of all information were provided and pseudonyms were used in place of the participants' actual names for all research findings and reports. All personal information given by the participants were used only for the purpose of the research.

Variables

The independent variable was the *content* of the seminar entitled "Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study." I conducted the seminar, which consisted of the following sessions:

- Session #1: Introduction to Folk Religion, Beliefs and Practices (see Appendix A),
- Session #2: Folk Religion and Contextualization (see Appendix B),

Session #3: Critical Contextualization and Worldview (see Appendix C),

Session #4: Phenomenological Analysis of *Feng Shui* (see Appendix D),

Session #5: Evaluative Response to and Ontological Critique of *Feng Shui* (see Appendix E), and

Session #6: Transformative Ministries (see Appendix F).

Each session was approximately two hours long, and the entire seminar was conducted in two weekends. Sessions 1, 2, and 3 in particular were conducted in lecture style with visual aids. Many opportunities were also given for both small group and whole class discussions. Since folk beliefs and practices are so diverse and complex, the exercise on critical contextualization focused only on one representative issue. *Feng shui* was chosen as the case study because of its popularity in Singapore and the dilemma it poses to Singaporean Christians.

The resources on *feng shui* were derived from *feng shui* Internet Web sites, *feng shui* literature, as well as discussions with *feng shui* practitioners. The resources for folk religions and critical contextualization were mainly Hiebert's article on "Critical Contextualization" and Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou's Understanding Folk Religion.

Besides class notes, additional materials on Chinese worldview, *feng shui*, and relevant Bible passages in relation to Chinese worldview and *feng shui* were given to the participants as take-home readings in between sessions. These additional materials were helpful for the participants in preparing together a contextualized response to *feng shui* when the seminar switched to a consultation mode from Sessions 4 to 6.

To prevent pedagogical and communicational constraints from hindering the success of this research, I conducted a trial seminar of all six sessions with my Research

Reflection Team (RRT) in Singapore prior to the actual seminar. The method of instruction was not reckoned as another independent variable since the same style was maintained throughout the seminar.

The dependent variable was the change in the participants' understanding and practice of contextualization as well as their beliefs, convictions, and behaviors with regards to *feng shui*. This change was reflected in the change in responses between the pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys and interviews as well as the two monthly reports on encounters with folk beliefs and practices after the seminar. The surveys measured the change on a five-point Likert scale while the interviews measured the qualitative changes. The end-of-class case study and contextualization exercise during the seminar assessed the ability of the participants to contextualize *feng shui* after the seminar while the two monthly reports submitted by the participants after the seminar measured the behavioral changes in the participants over time after going through the seminar.

The intervening variables are the *background exposure* of the participants to Chinese folk beliefs and practices, the participants' maturity in Christ, past exposures to missiological training,³ Christian background, gender, and individual learning styles. To reduce the complexity of the research, only the number of years as a Christian and the amount of missiological courses taken were statistically analyzed. Potentially, physical age as well as the particular composition of the seminar group are also intervening variables. Additionally, the specific exposures that the individual received during the two months after the seminar might also affect the submitted reports. In addition to exposure to deeper levels of folk practices or missiological training, such intervening variables

³ Missiological training refers to training on culture and the gospel (e.g., cross-cultural evangelism, folk religions, comparative religions, world religions, contextual theology).

could also be in the form of changes in physical health, stress in life, or the kind of activities in which one engaged during the two months.

Control

To ensure this project was not greatly affected by age, educational background, and Christian maturity, the criteria of Singaporean Chinese Christians who were at least 16 years of age, were conversant in English, had at least a secondary school education, and had been Christians for at least one year, were imposed. These conditions were made known to all who were invited to participate in the research during the invitation phase. A double-check measure was implemented by requesting this information on the front page (i.e., Section A1) of the pre-seminar survey.

The seminar was restricted to about thirty people in order to encourage discussion within the group. More importantly, the main purpose of the seminar was not instructional but consultational (i.e., supervised practice and discussions). Sessions 4-6 actually encouraged every participant to contribute to the discussion on contextualization of *feng shui*.

The twenty-eight control group volunteers participated only in the pre-seminar surveys on *feng shui* and other common Chinese folk beliefs and practices and the pre-seminar written interviews on *feng shui*. These were the same surveys as those taken by the research group. The control group did not work on the post-seminar surveys and interviews since the questions were exactly the same and the time lapse between pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys was only two weeks. The purpose of the control group was to gauge if the responses of the research group were normative.

Data Analysis

The statistical procedure employed in analyzing the quantitative pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys was the *t*-test and analysis of variance.⁴ According to Walter R. Borg and Meredith Gall, the *t*-test determines “whether two means, proportions, or correlation coefficients differ significantly from each other” while the analyses of variance “determine whether mean scores on one or more factors differ significantly from each other, and whether the various factors interact significantly with each other” (428). Analyzing this data provided a quantitative measurement on whether participants had made progress in terms of their knowledge and practice of contextualization as well as the accompanying changes in opinions of *feng shui* and Chinese folk beliefs and practices in general.

The qualitative improvement in ability to contextualize *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices was measured by comparing the responses of the participants between the pre-seminar and post-seminar interviews. The end-of-class *feng shui* case study indicated the level of contextualization that the participants were capable of doing by the end of the seminar, while the post-seminar monthly reports tracked behavioral changes over time.

⁴ A glossary of all pertinent statistical terms can be found in Appendix V.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter begins with an overview on the general demographics of both the research group and the control group. It then reports on the reliability¹ of the pre- and post-seminar statistical surveys followed by the confirmation on normality of the research group. The major part of this chapter consists of the findings of the research organized and reported according to the four research questions posited. Explanations relating to specific items in the survey, or minor findings, are given immediately within the chapter. Chapter 5 raises significant questions relating to the findings and evaluates and interprets them together with the major findings.

Of the four instruments deployed in the study, the pre- and post-seminar surveys (see Appendixes I and J) produce quantitative statistics while the pre-seminar questionnaire (see Appendix K) and post-seminar interview (see Appendix L), the end-of-class *feng shui* case study (see Appendix M), and the two monthly post-seminar feedback reports (see Appendix N) provide qualitative substantiations for the findings. All quantitative statistics were analyzed using the SPSS [Statistical Package for Social Sciences] program. The method of analysis for the qualitative interview was successive approximation.² Prior to the analysis, the pre-seminar questionnaires and post-seminar oral interviews were transcribed into ninety-eight pages of information. Analysis was carried out by looking for recurring nuances, counting the frequencies of their occurrences, identifying phrases for relationships (e.g., cause and effect), and clustering

¹ See Appendix V for statistical glossary.

² W. Laurence Neuman's *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* describes successive approximation as a method that "involves repeated iterations or cycling through steps, moving toward a final analysis. Over time, or after several iterations, a researcher moves from vague ideas and concrete details in the data toward a comprehensive analysis with generalization" (451).

the information from all the interviews into broad themes. Similarly, the end-of-class *feng shui* case study and monthly feedback reports were analyzed for reactions to encounters with *feng shui* and other folk practices by looking for key words indicating the practice of contextualization.

Demographics

The overall demographics for both the research group and the control group as gleaned from Section A1 of the pre-seminar survey are reflected in Tables 4.1 to 4.8.

Table 4.1. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of GENDER

GENDER	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n _r	%	n _c	%	n _o	%
Male	14	52	18	64	32	58
Female	13	48	10	36	23	42
Total	27	100	28	100	55	100

Table 4.1 shows that the research group had an almost equal proportion of males and females. The control group had a higher number of males with a ratio of 1.8 males to 1 female. The research group participants tended to be younger in family position and came from larger families. They averaged 3.78th position in families averaging 4.93 people compared to those in the control group who averaged 3.11th position in families averaging 4.70 people. In terms of age, all participants fell within the range of 21 to 60 years old even though the research was open to those who were as young as 16 years old. The majority of the participants were between 31 to 50 years old (89 percent in the

research group and 86 percent in the control group respectively). Overall, the research group skewed more towards the higher age range (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of AGE RANGE

AGE RANGE	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n_r	%	n_c	%	n_o	%
21-30	2	7	2	7	4	7
31-40	13	48	15	54	28	51
41-50	11	41	9	32	20	36
51-60	1	4	2	7	3	5
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

In terms of language used, almost all participants studied English as a first language even though the majority of Singaporeans are bilingual (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of FIRST LANGUAGE USED³

FIRST LANGUAGE	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n_r	%	n_c	%	n_o	%
English	25	93	27	96	52	95
Chinese	1	4	1	4	2	4
English/Chinese	1	4	0	0	1	2
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

Table 4.4 describes the participants in terms of their educational background. The control group had a higher percentage of people with tertiary degrees (79 percent

³ The first language refers to the primary language medium that a Singaporean uses in school. It does not necessary mean that the particular person is most fluent in that language, is a native speaker of the language, or uses it as the main language for communication at home.

compared to 70 percent in the research group). It even had two participants with doctoral degrees.

Table 4.4. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of EDUCATION LEVEL

EDUCATION LEVEL	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n _r	%	n _c	%	n _o	%
“O” Level	1	4	1	4	2	4
“A” Level	0	0	1	4	1	2
Diploma	6	22	4	14	10	18
Advanced Diploma	1	4	0	0	1	2
Bachelor	6	22	8	29	14	25
Masters	13	48	12	43	25	45
Doctorate	0	0	2	7	2	4
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

Note: “O” Level refers to the highest level passed at secondary school; “A” level refers to the highest level passed at post-secondary school or pre-university; Diploma and Advanced Diploma refer to those who passed the non-degree tertiary programs at one of the polytechnics.

Another characteristic was that both the research group and the control group had a high percentage of people who were in Christian ministry, in particular, with Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). Naturally, I expect more support for my research project from fellow CCC staff members and more interest in my research topic from church ministry workers and pastors. Besides, the control group had a higher percentage of professionals in the form of an accountant, two lawyers, and three managers. One possible reason is that these professionals, though willing to help and participate in the project, might not be able to take time to participate in the two seminars (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n_r	%	n_c	%	n_o	%
Accountant	0	0	1	4	1	2
CCC Full Time Staff	9	33	7	25	16	29
Church Ministry Staff / Pastor	4	15	3	11	7	13
Engineering	3	11	4	14	7	13
Full Time Student	1	4	0	0	1	2
Homemaker	1	4	1	4	2	4
Lawyer	0	0	2	7	2	4
Management	0	0	3	11	3	5
Professor / Teacher	3	11	3	11	6	11
Sales / Marketing	3	11	3	11	6	11
Self-Employed	2	7	0	0	2	4
Unemployed / Retired	1	4	1	4	2	4
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

Table 4.6 describes the participants' Christian experience and participation in terms of their denominational affiliation. The sample population comprises of more Methodist because a sizeable number of the participants were from my church. The number of Brethren was unusually high because most of the CCC staff members who participated happened to be from Brethren churches. Overall, the control group had a wider representation from different denominations.

Table 4.6. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

DENOMINATION AFFILIATION	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n _r	%	n _c	%	n _o	%
Anglican	0	0	1	4	1	2
Assembly of God	0	0	2	7	2	4
Baptist	2	7	1	4	3	5
Bible-Presbyterian	0	0	1	4	1	2
Brethren	5	19	6	21	11	20
Evangelical Free	0	0	1	4	1	2
Independent	1	4	3	11	4	7
Lutheran	0	0	2	7	2	4
Methodist	16	59	9	32	25	45
Presbyterian	3	11	2	7	5	9
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

The high percentage of people who did not have ministry involvement in church could be attributed to the fact that a number of CCC staff members were recent returnees from overseas assignments who were yet to be involved in their local churches (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

CHURCH INVOLVEMENT	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n_r	%	n_c	%	n_o	%
No Ministry Position	10	37	12	43	22	40
Church Board / Deacon	6	22	4	14	10	18
Church Ministry Staff / Pastor	3	11	3	11	6	11
General Helper	0	0	1	4	1	2
Missionary	0	0	1	4	1	2
Music and Worship	2	7	3	11	5	9
Small Group Leader / Sunday School Teacher	6	22	4	14	10	18
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

Missiological courses in the survey refer to courses that deal with the gospel and culture. The exposure to missiological courses is calculated from the participants' indication of their exposure to the following courses: (1) folk religions, (2) comparative religions, (3) world religions, (4) cross-cultural evangelism, (5) contextual theology, and (6) any other courses that the participant listed. Table 4.8 indicates the total number of courses taken by each participant. The participants demonstrated a high level of exposure to missiological courses. On the average, a research group participant had been exposed to 1.74 missiological courses while a control group participant had been exposed to 1.82 courses.

**Table 4.8. Breakdown of Participants in Terms of EXPOSURE TO
MISSIOLOGICAL COURSES**

EXPOSURE TO MISSIOLOGICAL COURSES	Research Group		Control Group		Overall	
	n_r	%	n_c	%	n_o	%
0 Course	10	37	9	32	19	35
1 Course	3	11	2	7	5	9
2 Courses	5	19	8	29	13	24
3 Courses	4	15	5	18	9	16
4 Courses	3	11	2	7	5	9
5 Courses	2	7	2	7	4	7
TOTAL	27	100	28	100	55	100

In terms of faith, all participants had been Christians for more than twenty years (23.11 for the research group and 24.39 for the control group respectively). Taken together with their occupations, church involvement and exposure to missiological courses, I assume that generally, all participants in this research project were mature Christians with substantial exposure to and involvement in Christian ministry. The research group was older in age and consisted of people who were more involved in church; whereas, the control group seemed to be stronger in terms of number of years the participants had been Christians. In addition, the control group seemed to be better educated, occupied more prestigious occupations, and had slightly more exposure to missiological courses.

Reliability

Reliability tests were conducted on each of the three scales of the survey on common Chinese folk beliefs and practices:

(1) Section A2: Exposure to Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices (also abbreviated as A2: Exposure),

(2) Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization⁴ (abbreviated as B1: Contextualization), and

(3) Section B2: Beliefs and Convictions (abbreviated as B2: Convictions).

The sections consist of six, thirteen, and ten statements or items, respectively. The participants provided their responses according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Very Negative” (1) to “Very Positive” (5) for Sections A2, B1, and B2. All the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients (α) on internal consistency taken during pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys for all the scales were above 0.7 and, therefore, acceptable (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Cronbach’s Alphas (α) and Pearson’s Correlations (r) for All Scales and Key Intervening Variables

		N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Number of Years as Christian	135	23.11	6.73	(NA)						
2	Exposure to Missiological Courses	135	1.74	1.67	0.52***	(NA)					
3	Exposure to Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices (A2)	135	2.40	0.90	0.13	0.16	(0.76)				
4	Pre-Seminar Understanding and Practices of Contextualization (B1)	135	2.67	0.93	0.45***	0.39***	0.44***	(0.94)			
5	Pre-Seminar Beliefs and Convictions (B2)	135	2.39	0.80	0.04	0.03	0.18*	-0.03	(0.88)		
6	Post-Seminar Understanding and Practices of Contextualization (B1)	135	3.08	0.93	0.24*	0.16*	0.53***	0.56***	-0.25**	(0.95)	
7	Post-Seminar Beliefs and Convictions (B2)	135	2.26	0.85	0.15*	0.15*	0.24**	0.19*	0.66***	-0.07	(0.90)

Note. Cronbach’s alphas are in the parentheses. All Pearson Correlation Coefficients with $p < .05$ are highlighted.

*** $p < .001$.

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

⁴ This refers to contextualization in general. It includes, but is not necessarily confined to, Hiebert’s critical contextualization.

Confirming Research Group to Be Normative

Though the demographics between the research group and the control group differ in a number of categories, the analysis of variance conducted on all the scales between the research group and control group shows no significant difference at all ($p < .05$; see Appendix Q). Therefore, the research group is normative (i.e., normal and not peculiar).

Findings Based on Research Questions

The findings based on each of the four research questions took into account first the analysis of the quantitative survey, followed by the analysis of the qualitative written and oral interviews, responses to the end-of-class *feng shui* case study, and the two monthly feedback reports. All names reported for the analysis of the interviews, case study responses, and monthly feedback reports are pseudonyms. The profile of each of the twenty-seven participants in the research group, listed according to their pseudonyms, can be found in Appendix R. The following is a report on the findings of the research according to the four research questions.

Research Question #1

What are the Singaporean Chinese Christians' knowledge and experiences of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

The answer to this research question derives mainly from the participants' responses to the six statements under Section A2. Two hypotheses are implicated in this research question. The first is that Chinese Christians are already well exposed to many of their folk beliefs and practices in terms of their theoretical knowledge as well as past and present personal experiences.

Statistical analysis (I). Analysis of variance on A2: Exposure shows significant

variance among four of the six items (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10 *F*-Ratio of Significantly Variant Items between All Five Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices under Section A2: Exposure to Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices

Item	<i>F</i> -Ratio	<i>P</i> < .05
A. I practiced it before I became a Christian.	5.19	.001
B. I practiced it as a Christian.	2.91	.024
C. I am still practicing it.	12.03	.000
F. I have listened to personal accounts and experiences of those who practice it.	2.74	.032

To the statement A2 A, “I practiced it before I became a Christian,” multiple comparisons between and among the five folk beliefs and practices tested show that both ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices are significantly at variance with *feng shui* (mean difference = 1.41, $p = .004$ and mean difference = 1.22, $p = .020$, respectively) and *qi gong* (mean difference = 1.30, $p = .011$ and mean difference = 1.11, $p = .043$, respectively). In other words, before conversion, significantly more Singaporean Chinese Christians practiced ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices than practiced *feng shui* or *qi gong*.

In statement B, “I practiced it as a Christian,” Chinese medical practices scored significantly higher than ancestral worship (mean difference = 0.93, $p = .044$) and *feng shui* (mean difference = 0.93, $p = .044$). Thus, while Christians could put away ancestral worship and *feng shui* after conversion, many still held on to Chinese medical practices. This observation is further confirmed by the next statement C, “I am still practicing it,” in

which Chinese medical practices stood out as the only significant variant score from all the rest: ancestral worship (mean difference = 1.15, $p = .000$), *feng shui* (mean difference = 1.19, $p = .000$), martial arts (mean difference = 0.96, $p = .000$), and *qi gong* (mean difference = 1.19, $p = .000$).

To statement F, “I have listened to personal accounts and experiences of those who practice it,” multiple comparisons show that ancestral worship scores significantly higher than martial arts (mean difference = 1.00, $p = .046$). Most Chinese Christians in Singapore are first generation converts from families that practiced ancestral worship. Even if they do not have many firsthand experiences of ancestral worship, they would probably have heard of the way it is practiced in the course of interactions with relatives, neighbors, friends, and even public media. In comparison, martial arts is probably more *observed* (from movies, documentaries, and performances) and *read* about (from mass media and books) than *heard* by word of mouth. The latter occurs less in martial arts because oral transmission on its practice is usually given only to trusted disciples to guard against plagiarism.

Qualitative analysis (I). Unlike the written survey, the written and oral interviews focused only on the practice of *feng shui*. When asked to estimate the number of Christians and non-Christians who practiced *feng shui*, very few participants were able to give confident estimates. In fact, the estimates ranged from less than 3 percent to 50 percent for Christians who practiced *feng shui* and 5 percent to 95 percent for non-Christians who practiced. Evidently, the figures given were arbitrary and nobody really knew or agreed on the extent to which *feng shui* is practiced by Christians and in society. Nevertheless, when told to provide a rough description on how much *feng shui* is

practiced by Christians, seven respondents said that *feng shui* was practiced “rarely” or “not so commonly” by Christians while six others estimated that it was practiced by “some” Christians. The response to the question on *feng shui*’s practice by non-Christian was more unanimous: fifteen people actually said that *feng shui* was practiced by a “large” number of non-Christians, yet when asked to describe what *feng shui* is, as many as eleven participants indicated that they did not know or were not sure how to describe it. The common theme that emerged from this segment of the interview was *feng shui*’s association to businesses and business people. Nine people indicated that *feng shui* was usually practiced by business people and associated with businesses and shops. Probably the people were referring more to the explicitness than the prevalence in which *feng shui* is practiced in businesses and by business people. Unlike *feng shui* practiced by an individual or privately in one’s own home, *feng shui* practiced in businesses tends to be more conspicuous to visitors, clients, and employees.

All the above indicate that most participants disagreed concerning or were unaware of the degree to which *feng shui* is practiced in society. The only common observation among most interviewees was *feng shui*’s association to businesses. This inability to describe *feng shui* more elaborately suggests a general lack of knowledge of and exposure to *feng shui*.

Additionally, none of the participants had any personal experience participating in *feng shui*. Almost all participants claimed that they knew of some non-Christians who practiced *feng shui*; however, only four respondents (Lorraine, Tom, Ulysses, and Winnie) personally knew of Christians who practice *feng shui*. Lorraine described these Christian practitioners as follows:

I know personally of quite a few Christians who practice *feng shui* but these guys are usually very young people. These are usually people in the twenties and are business people. They may not have shop fronts. I know about their practices through personal conversations. In their career aspects, and in terms of arrangement in houses, they will consult *feng shui* Masters.

Seven respondents believed that the Christians involved in *feng shui* tended to be nominal or young and immature Christians who did not know the Scriptures well. Among them, Tom, who also claimed to have heard of many Christians who practiced *feng shui*, observed that these were “probably Christians who are not devout—just pew warmers and Christians who attend church occasionally.”

Summary of findings (I) on research question #1. Thus far, the research shows that the hypothesis that Chinese Christians in Singapore are generally well exposed to different Chinese folk beliefs and practices is not fully founded except in ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices. The probable reason is that most Singaporean Chinese Christians are converted from ancestral worship backgrounds. Many grow up with Chinese medicine and medical practices and may continue practicing them even after conversion. As far as *feng shui* is concerned, none of the participants has any personal experience participating in it. Most are not even aware of how much it is being practiced. In short, the majority of Chinese Christians are not very knowledgeable and exposed to *feng shui*.

Statistical analysis (II). The second hypothesis for this research question is that prior involvement in and exposure to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices before conversion help the Christian contextualize these practices better after conversion. In other words, the scores for A2: Exposure should predict the scores for B1: Contextualization. The findings of the research confirm this hypothesis. A2: Exposure

not only positively correlates with pre-seminar B1: Contextualization ($r = .44, p < .001$) and B2: Convictions ($r = .18, p < .05$), it continues to show correlations even after the seminar to Post B1: Contextualization ($r = .53, p < .001$) and Post B2: Convictions ($r = .24, p < .01$; see Table 4.9 p. 116).

Also, other related intervening variables like the number of years a person has been a Christian also positively correlates to the number of missiological courses to which the person is exposed ($r = .52, p < .001$). This finding suggests that the longer a person has been a Christian, the more exposure such a person will have in missiological training. Conversely, the number of years a person has been a Christian and the exposure to missiological courses also very significantly correlate with B1: Contextualization ($r = .45, p < .001$ and $r = .39, p < .001$, respectively) and continue to influence significantly both the Post-seminar B1: Contextualization ($r = .24, p < .05$ and $r = .16, p < .05$, respectively) and even the Post-seminar B2: Convictions ($r = .15, p < .05$ and $r = .15, p < .05$, respectively).

Qualitative analysis (II). Analyzing the participants' responses to the first background question, "How common [sic] do you think *feng shui* is practiced in Singapore: (a) by professed Christians? (b) by non-Christians?" and their corresponding answers to the next three questions on understanding and practice of contextualization ("Describe *feng shui*. How is it related to the Chinese worldview and culture, the *yi jing*, *qi*, the five elements, etc.," "What is the Bible's response to *feng shui*," and "How do you think Christians should respond to *feng shui*?") in the written interview on the pre-seminar survey also indicates how knowledge on the practice of *feng shui* influences one's contextualization of *feng shui*.

Generally, the participants with more accurate knowledge of the practice of *feng shui* and with more exposure to missiological training and more years behind them as Christians also demonstrated more sensitivity at contextualizing *feng shui*. For example, Gerlynn, Maggie, Peter, and Zachary all gave very perceptive responses that a “fair amount” of Christians practiced *feng shui* and “large amount” of non-Christians practiced *feng shui*. The number of missiological courses to which they have been exposed range from three to five (see Appendix R). Except for Zachary, all of them have been Christians for at least thirty years. Simultaneously, they demonstrated a good understanding of *feng shui* and a sensible reading of the Bible on *feng shui*. Zachary thought that *feng shui* “harken[s] back to Taoist belief of preserving harmony in the five basic elements so as to produce positive results and/or balance in nature.” Nevertheless, he did not think the Bible has only a negative response to *feng shui*:

True harmony is found only in Christ, the fallen natural world is always subject to the consequence of the original sin and its continuing effects through our sinful ways. Beauty, balance, and harmony in nature and mankind are part of God’s created order and it is within mankind’s cultural mandate to preserve it.

Similarly, Peter viewed *feng shui* as “the quasi-science of seeking a balance of the flow of ‘energies’ within and without one’s life, a balance of all the foundational elements that constitute life (in the Chinese worldview).” In his opinion, the Bible has “no direct response [to *feng shui*] though the biblical concept of *shalom* may be applied.” Peter meant that *feng shui*’s concept of living in harmony with nature falls in line with the biblical idea of salvation as *shalom* between God and humans and even the creation (see “Critical Contextualization of *feng shui*” in Appendix P.). Both Zachary and Peter did not condemn *feng shui* hastily but were objective in highlighting possible commonalities in

aspirations between *feng shui* and Christianity that have potential for contextualization.

Summary of findings (II) on research question #1. Both the statistical and qualitative analyses support the hypothesis that prior exposure positively relates to better ability at contextualization. Exposure leads to appropriate knowledge about one's own faith and the particular issue one is learning to contextualize. Even intervening variables like the number of years a person has been a Christian and the person's exposure to missiological training also influence the way that person practices contextualization.

Research Question #2

How much contextualization (consciously or unconsciously) are Singaporean Chinese Christians already practicing in *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

The statistics on Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization in the pre-seminar survey as well as the participants' written responses to the three questions under "Understanding and Practice of Contextualization" in the pre-seminar written interview provide the source of analysis for this question. The hypothesis is that Christians already practice certain level of contextualization on their folk beliefs and practices, regardless of their training.

Statistical analysis. The analysis of variance on B1: Contextualization shows no significant variances among all its items except for items 9 and 13 (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. *F*-Ratio of Significantly Variant Items between All Five Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices under Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization

Item	<i>F</i> -Ratio	<i>P</i>
B1.9 I know what the Bible says about the different aspects of this practice.	3.329	.012
B1.13 I substitute the function played by this practice with some other practices that are compatible to Christianity.	5.843	.000

To the statement B1.9, “I know what the Bible says about the different aspects of this practice,” multiple comparisons between and among the five folk beliefs and practices show that ancestral worship is significantly at variance with Chinese medical practices (mean difference = 0.85, $p = .045$) and martial arts (mean difference = 0.93, $p = .023$). In other words, Christians are generally clearer on biblical teaching and responses to ancestral worship. They are less able to respond biblically to issues like Chinese medical practices and martial arts, even though these practices are common among them even after conversion. If biblical responses here equates to Hiebert’s ontological critique (step 2) in critical contextualization, then this finding indicates that Chinese Christians find doing ontological critique on Chinese medical practices and martial arts more difficult than on ancestral worship.

To the statement B1.13, “I substitute the function played by this practice with some other practices that are compatible to Christianity,” multiple comparisons between the folk beliefs and practices show that ancestral worship is significantly at variance with *feng shui* (mean difference = 1.58, $p = .000$) and *qi gong* (mean difference = 1.23, $p = .004$). Unlike the earlier statement (B 1.9), which deals with biblical response, this statement relates to a particular practice of contextualization. The finding shows that

Christians could contextualize the practice of ancestral worship with functional substitutes more readily than they do on *feng shui* and *qi gong*. If the use of functional substitutes evidences the presence of transformational ministries (step 4) in Hiebert's critical contextualization, then this finding shows that Chinese Christians find applying transformation ministries to *feng shui* and *qi gong* more difficult than to ancestral worship.

Thus, not only in the area of biblical response (ontological critique), but also in praxis (transformational ministries), the Chinese Christians are more able to contextualize ancestral worship than other issues.

Qualitative analysis. The lack of ability to contextualize *feng shui* was also reflected in the qualitative interviews. In the pre-seminar interview, eleven respondents were not able to give a definition for *feng shui* while six were not sure of the Bible's response to *feng shui*. For many, their responses betrayed little attempt at contextualization with an accompanying haste to reject *feng shui* completely from the start. The more vehement comments include Xerxes' "Reject it as witchcraft" and Albert's conservative warfare caveat:

Flee from it. Resist it. Don't even bother to read about it and try to understand it unless it's for a classroom learning experience. One shouldn't embark on learning such topics without any form of spiritual accountability to the Church's leadership and spiritual covering from godly leadership.

Summary of findings on research question #2. The contextualization being practiced differs according to the type of folk belief and practice. For example, the long history that Chinese Christians have had with ancestral worship and the fact that most Chinese Christians are recent converts from ancestral worship both make ancestral

worship a well discussed and locally contextualized issue in the Church today. The Chinese Christian's greatest challenge seems to be with the biblical response to or ontological critique (step 2 of critical contextualization) of Chinese medical practices and martial arts, which are still being practiced by many Christians. As for *feng shui* and *qi gong*, most Christians would avoid or reject them rather than attempt any contextualization of them. In other words, few transformational ministries (step 4 of critical contextualization) are attempted on *feng shui* and *qi gong*. The hypothesis that Christians are already practicing some level of contextualization is definitely supported in ancestral worship. This hypothesis does not stand as far as Chinese medical practice and martial arts are concerned because Christians are still unsure of how to critique them ontologically. The hypothesis also does not stand in the case of *feng shui* and *qi gong* because little transformational ministry is attempted on them.

Research Question #3

What are Singaporean Chinese Christians' beliefs and conviction of *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

The answer to this research question can be derived from the participants' responses to section B2: Beliefs and Convictions of the pre-seminar survey as well their answers to the last three questions on the pre-seminar written interview under the section "Beliefs, Convictions, and Behavior." Besides analyzing the level of conviction of the participants, this research question also seeks to confirm a corollary hypothesis that conviction does influence the practice of contextualization (i.e., some correlation between B2: Convictions and B1: Contextualization).

Statistical analysis. The analysis of variance for the five beliefs and practices for

section B2 in the pre-seminar survey shows significant score deviations in many items (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. *F*-Ratio of Significantly Variant Items between All Five Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices under Section B2: Beliefs and Convictions

Item	<i>F</i> -Ratio	<i>p</i> < .05
B2.1 A Christian can practice it.	19.70	.000
B2.2 It does not contradict or threaten my Christian faith.	15.80	.000
B2.3 It is not religious.	17.61	.000
B2.4 I do not discourage non-Christians from practicing it.	13.71	.000
B2.5 It is just an Oriental science, quasi-science, or worldview.	8.46	.000
B2.6 It accomplishes what it is supposed to do most of the time.	9.91	.000
B2.9 I intend to (continue to) practice this.	7.86	.000
B2.10 It needs to be preserved and must not be lost.	13.02	.000

The variances mean that, for the most part, the participants' conviction concerning the five folk practices differ significantly. The analysis of the multiple variances, too, confirms that the participants tend to be more open in responding to Chinese medical practices (with an overall mean score of 3.21) than ancestral worship (mean difference = 1.34, $p = .000$), *feng shui* (mean difference = 1.34, $p = .000$), martial arts (mean difference = 0.47, $p = .042$), and *qi gong* (mean difference = 0.98, $p = .000$). Martial arts, too, has significant variance with all other scales except for Chinese medical practices (mean difference = -0.47, $p = .042$), which it favors significantly lower. In comparison to other folk practices, martial arts is significantly higher than ancestral worship (mean difference = 0.87, $p = .000$), *feng shui* (mean difference = 0.87, $p = .000$),

and *qi gong* (mean difference = 0.51, $p = .023$). Thus, as far as B2: Convictions is concerned, Chinese medical practices followed by martial arts significantly outsourced all other practices. Figure 4.1 offers a more vivid picture.

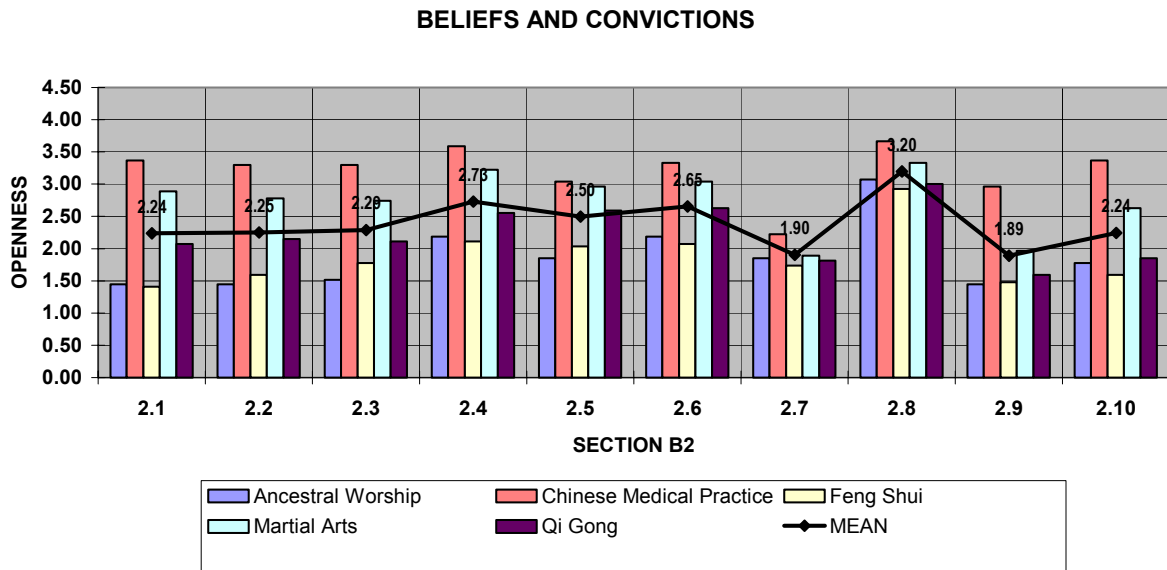


Figure 4.1. Pre-seminar survey scores on section B2: beliefs and convictions.

The higher variances in Chinese medical practices and martial arts suggest that Christians are more “open” toward them in comparison to other folk beliefs and practices. Chinese medical practices and martial arts also scored more than 2.9 and 2.0 respectively in nine of the ten statements in this section (the exception being statement number 2.7: “I lose significant attachments to my culture when I do not practice this”). Reading back into these nine statements, Christians generally believe that they can practice Chinese medicine and martial arts without contradicting their Christian faith, that these practices are not religious, that they are cultural and need to be preserved.

One other significant observation is that participants consistently scored the highest on statement 2.8, “It is cultural,” for all five folk beliefs and practices (mean = 3.20, SD = 1.11). Thus, regardless of their view on the religiosity of every one of the five folk beliefs and practices, most participants would not deny that all five folk beliefs and practices were cultural to them. Such a deduction may seem to fly in the face of the very low score attributed to statement 2.7: “I lose significant attachments to my culture when I do not practice this.” A possible resolution for this conflict is that the people saw the practices as cultural in characteristic but not vital or indispensable to their culture.

In terms of correlation between B1: Convictions and B2: Contextualization in both the pre-seminar and post-seminar, no significant relationships were found (i.e., $p > .05$). In fact, the Pearson’s coefficients between the Pre B1 and Pre B2 ($r = -.03$) and Post B1 and Post B2 ($r = -.07$) are near to zero, suggesting an unstable relationship (see Table 4.9). Therefore, the level of openness or closedness in a person’s beliefs and conviction does not necessarily influence contextualization practices.

Qualitative analysis. Unlike Chinese medical practices and martial arts, a number of people connected *feng shui* to a religious practice with close ties to Daoism. For example, Jerry thought that Daoism is foundational to *feng shui*’s evolution:

The evolution of beliefs from ancestral worship, juxtaposed over the religious beliefs of the Tao, which find their expression in the worship of inanimate, results in the belief [referring to *feng shui*] that some objects have powers beyond what the naked eye, or rational thought can comprehend.

Zoe concurred with the above and said that *feng shui* has to do with spiritual forces that are not Christian. In her opinion, *feng shui* “has its basis in spiritual matters that are not of God.” As in the perception of other folk beliefs and practices, a few participants saw

connection between *feng shui* and the Chinese culture. For example, Winnie saw it as astrology related to the Chinese culture while Kim thought that it “is not a religion, but a practice that may be related to the Chinese culture.” The interview thus confirms that Christians perceive *feng shui* as both cultural and religious.

The interview also shows varied correlation between a person’s beliefs, conviction, and behavior and his or her subsequent relationship to a particular folk belief and practice. For example, when Zoe said, “[S]ince I think *feng shui* has something to do with spirits I would not want to be engaged in its practice.” Rose did not claim to know a lot about *feng shui*, but her conviction is that *feng shui* is “a way of men [sic] trying to ‘play God’” and “[a]nything that does not trust God is sin.” Not surprisingly, Rose’s response to the question if she would seek *feng shui* advice was, “Advice? What for? I’ll always seek advice from God personally through prayer, his word, Godly Christian friends/church leaders.” The above two examples demonstrate how clear negative conviction can lead to clear decision of no involvement in and complete abstinence from contextualization.

On the other hand, others, though equally convicted that *feng shui* contravened their faith, might seek to be objective with *feng shui*, scrutinizing for areas where they could practice contextualization. For example, Susan viewed *feng shui* as “trusting in human ability to control our fortune and environment—therefore it is idolatry.” She also thought that “*feng shui* is very materialistic and selfish.... It believes that ‘God’ can be manipulated. It is therefore contrary to the [Christian] theology of a personal God.” Despite such conservative conviction, her suggestion on how Christians should respond to *feng shui* revealed a very balanced view on contextualization:

Christians should respect the desire to live in harmony with environment. It revealed that it is faith misplaced, that as it involves supernatural/spiritual realm, that it is not therefore an inane or empty power. Christians in turn need to be encouraged to love God's creation and also to trust him all our days, to cultivate a fear of God rather than misfortune/unknown.

Similarly, though Zachary thought that "*feng shui* is rooted in greed, covetousness, materialism, and selfish desire," he was objective in understanding that *feng shui* too could be abused by people. He, therefore, tried to uncover where *feng shui* might fall in line with biblical teachings in its original intention and where its form and function might be pragmatic:

My focus is on the form and function as some *feng shui* "advice" is nothing more than ensuring physical or environmental "beauty" (i.e., pleasing to all five senses).... At the same time, truth and beauty are God's gift given to his creation; *feng shui*'s advice to consider harmony, beauty, and balance in how we can arrange our environment is duly noted; not only is this perspective not condemned in Scripture but it reflects the beauty of our Lord.

The opportunity to point out the desire for all people to desire success in life is an opening for the Gospel and contextualization by believers; especially among the Chinese, there is a deep rootedness to things divine and we need to tap such desire for the Gospel's sake (note the ancient Emperors and their Temple of Heaven ceremony to recognize the God of Heaven for which they are to submit to).

The above examples demonstrate that people of similar conviction may still react differently as far as contextualization is concerned. It confirms the statistical findings that conviction does not have a fixed influence on contextualization.

Summary of findings on research question #3. In terms of conviction, the research shows that the respondents were generally more open towards Chinese medical practices and martial arts than *qi gong*, *feng shui*, or ancestral worship. Despite the difference in these conviction, the respondents generally perceived all the five folk beliefs and practices as cultural, though not indispensable to the Chinese culture. The

research also shows that no support for the hypothesis of a direct correlation between openness/closedness in conviction and contextualization can be found.

Research Question #4

How beneficial is an understanding of folk religion and a knowledge on the use of critical contextualization, like the one proposed by Hiebert, to Christians in their response to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

As mentioned, this fourth research question is the chief query of this research project. The hypothesis is that those who have gone through the seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization will see a subsequent increase in their ability to contextualize *feng shui* and, by implication, other Chinese folk beliefs and practices as well. Consequently, a change in conviction should also be evidenced. To answer this research question, the pre-seminar B1 and B2 scores need to be compared with the post-seminar B1 and B2 scores. The qualitative analysis needs to compare the pre-seminar written interview to the post-seminar oral interview. Here, the end-of-class *feng shui* case study as well as two monthly feedback reports also help detect changes in contextualization practice and conviction over time.

Statistical analysis. The *t*-test on the overall scores between the post-seminar and pre-seminar scores for B1: Contextualization and B2: Convictions are tabulated in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13. *T*-test between Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar B1, Contextualization, and B2, Convictions

Folk Beliefs & Practices	Scales	n	Pre-Seminar		Post-Seminar		<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
			Mea	SD	Me	SD		
All Five Chinese Folk Practices	B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization	135	2	0.93	3	0.93	-5.48	.00 **
	B2: Beliefs and Convictions	135	2.39	0.80	2.26	0.85	2.28	.024*
<i>Feng Shui</i>	Practice of Contextualization	27	2.69	0.92	3.78	0.53	-6.61	.000***
	Beliefs	27	1.87	0.58	1.83	0.56	0.36	.72
Ancestral Worship	B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization	27	3.02	0.87	3.47	0.83	-2.53	.018*
	B2: Beliefs and Convictions	27	1.88	0.71	1.89	0.65	-0.09	.927
Chinese Medical Practices	B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization	27	2.67	0.93	2.78	0.86	-0.87	.395
	B2: Beliefs and Convictions	27	3.21	0.63	3.04	0.90	1.41	.171
Martial Arts	B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization	27	2.54	0.92	2.67	0.89	-0.93	.360
	B2: Beliefs and Convictions	27	2.74	0.46	2.50	0.70	3.36	.026*
<i>Qi Gong</i>	B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization	27	2.46	0.92	2.72	0.53	-1.70	.101
	B2: Beliefs and Convictions	27	2.24	0.63	2.01	0.76	1.56	.132

*** $p < .001$.

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

Since *feng shui* was the particular case study used for the seminar, I am keen on marked changes in contextualization of and conviction concerning *feng shui* as compared to the other Chinese folk beliefs and practices that received less emphasis during the seminar. The *t*-test shows a dramatic increase in ability to contextualize *feng shui* from a pre-seminar mean of 2.69 and SD equaling 0.92 to post-seminar mean of 3.78 and SD equaling 0.53 ($p = 0.000$). The improvement in contextualization score is more vividly represented in the bar chart in Figure 4.2.

FENG SHUI PRE-SEMINAR VS POST SEMINAR
SECTION B1: UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

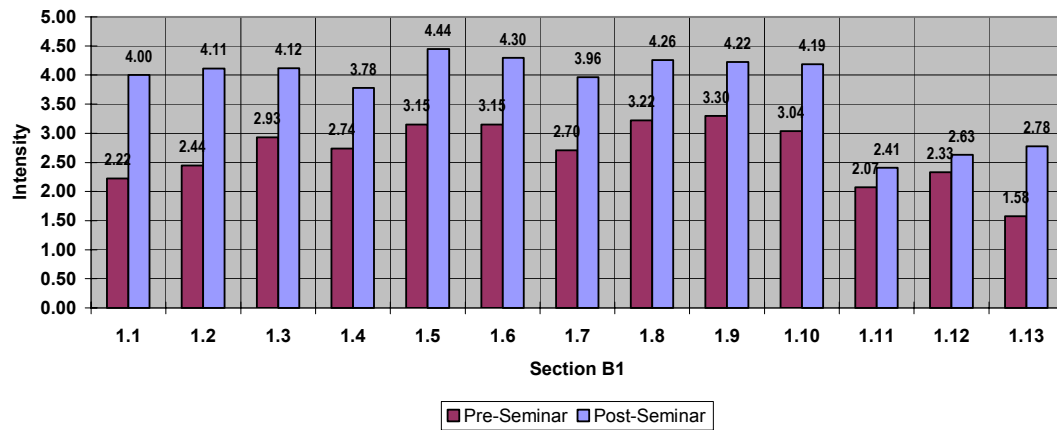


Figure 4.2. Comparison between pre-seminar and post-seminar B1: contextualization on *feng shui*.

Not only was the jump large and very significant, the standard deviation also decreased remarkably; however, no significant change was measured in B1: Contextualization in all the other folk beliefs except ancestral worship (pre-seminar mean = 3.02, SD = 0.87; post-seminar mean = 3.47, SD = 0.83; $p = 0.018$; see Figure 4.3).

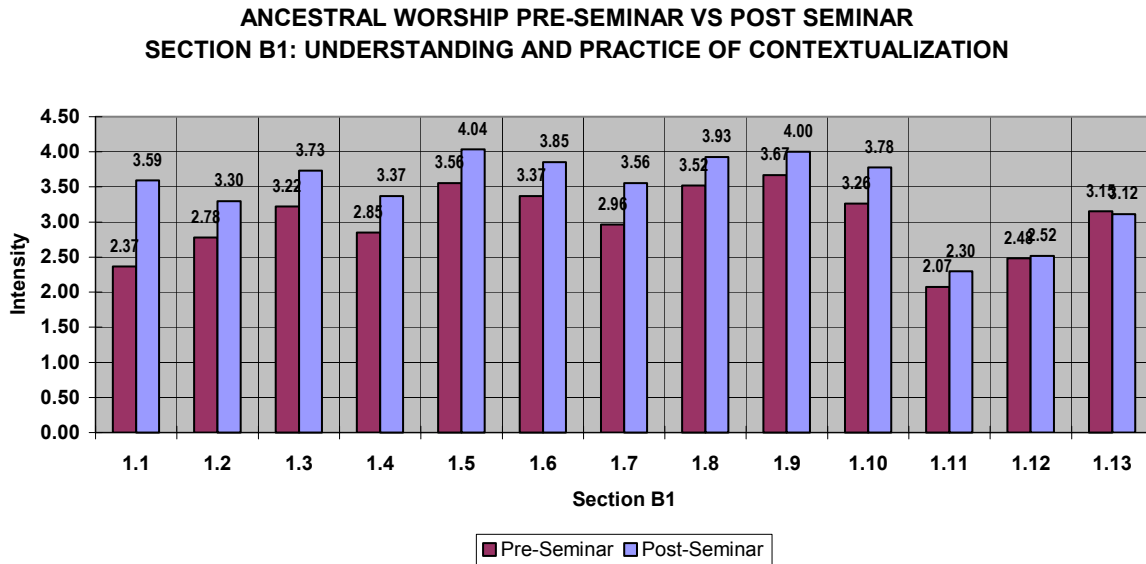


Figure 4.3. Comparison between pre-seminar and post-seminar B1: contextualization on ancestral worship.

Interestingly, post B2: Convictions in *feng shui* experienced no significant change ($p = .72$). No significant change in conviction was also observed in all the other practices except for martial arts (from a pre-seminar mean of 2.74 to a post-seminar mean of 2.50; $p = 0.026$). Figure 4.4 shows the significant overall reduction in “openness” of conviction in martial arts.

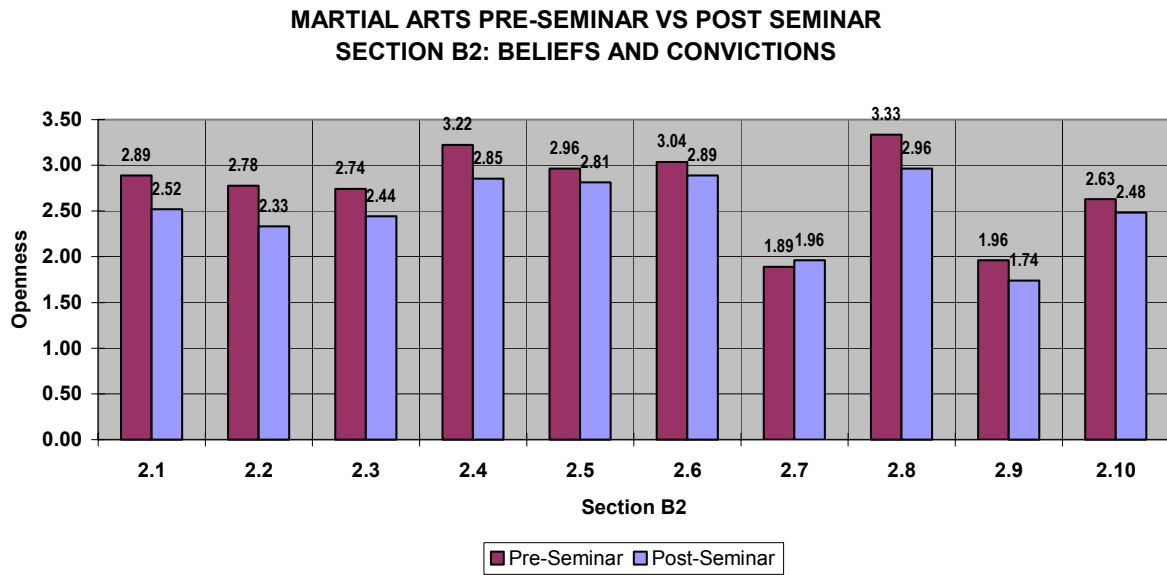


Figure 4.4. Comparison between pre-seminar and post-seminar B2: conviction on martial arts.

When the scores for all the five folk beliefs were added together and taken as a whole to represent the participants' responses towards all folk beliefs and practices, significant positive changes were observed between the pre-seminar and post-seminar B1: Contextualization ($p < .001$) and B2: Convictions ($p < .05$). Thus, the changes in contextualization in *feng shui* and ancestral worship and the change in conviction in martial arts were significant even to influence the combined total of all five folk beliefs and practices. Overall, the seminar has increased the participants' understanding and practices of contextualization of folk beliefs and practices. It also made them generally more "conservative" in their beliefs and conviction. This finding confirms my hypothesis that the seminar had a significant impact on the participants' practice of contextualization and conviction.

Qualitative analysis: interviews. Comparison between the pre-seminar written interviews and the post-seminar oral interviews shows a marked difference in the

responses of the participants as a result of attending the seminar. Virtually all participants interviewed testified of changes that can be grouped under the categories of awareness, understanding of folk religions, contextualization, and conviction (these roughly correspond respectively to “exposure” in section A2, “understanding” and “practice” in section B1, and “convictions” in section B2 of the survey instrument). Awareness refers to more informed knowledge on the prevalence of *feng shui* being practiced in the society; understanding of folk religions refers to more objective appreciation on folk religions; contextualization refers to the ability to contextualize an issue critically; conviction refers to clarity of belief.

(1) Awareness. Nine people explicitly mentioned an improvement in awareness as a result of participating in the seminar. Among them, Brian testified of the “shock” he received when he realized the prevalence of *feng shui* practice in a modern society like Singapore:

I think it is quite eye opening for me to know that the Fountain of Wealth at Suntec City has to do with *feng shui*. I also did not know that the people also consulted *feng shui* on the relocation of the Merlion [the tourist icon of Singapore], and also the *ba gua* in the coin. That caused me to be aware that people are doing such things, even government, though they may not publicly announce it. But they have influenced our lives. They [*feng shui* practices] are closer to life than we realize.

Maggie disclosed how the seminar stimulated her mind and made her become aware that many Christians might already have been practicing logical aspects of *feng shui* without realizing their relationship to it: “There were many occasions after the seminar when my mind was stimulated.... We have been practicing *feng shui* unknowingly.”

(2) Understanding and knowledge. Many like Susan found the seminar helpful

in expanding their knowledge of *feng shui*:

I think the seminar was very helpful for me. For example, the historical roots of *feng shui* like using *feng shui* as a means for locating burial sites: that was very new, the whole explanation of the five elements, even the instruments they use like the *luo pan*. I have seen them but I do not know how they are interrelated. There are a lot of elements more to *feng shui* than the *yin yang*. The other thing is the hexagram and how they came up with different interpretations based on different directions, elements and the cosmic timing. So, all these were very new. So, in terms of *feng shui* understanding, I think there was definitely a wider understanding.

Ulysses concurs with the above comment:

I gained a better understanding of what *feng shui* is all about, how it originated as a science and later came to include other cultural and religious aspects. It has become a religion of its own. It has become a religion because people put their faith in it.

The seminar helped me to be more objective in viewing Chinese cultural practices. Some practices are quite acceptable. Previously, I would shun them outright. Now I see the necessity to study and look into more detail on what make up a practice: which are the areas we can accept and which are the areas we should reject.

Though Fred found the seminar helpful in making him more objective and in bringing light to his conviction, he questioned “if we need to know so much.”

(3) Contextualization. The feedback given by the participants during the post-seminar interview also support the statistical findings demonstrating very significant improvements in the participants’ ability to contextualize issues. Tom thought that the seminar on contextualization had helped him better respond to issues like *feng shui*:

The four steps of contextualization is a new tool. It helps me see whether something is biblically based.... It helps me see how I can look at certain practices and what aspects can be accepted and what aspects to be rejected. Previously, I will wholesale reject the issue.

Brian’s heightened sensitivity to contextualization is evident in his perception of the need for studying the phenomenology and history of religion together with the study of the Bible in order to become better witnesses:

We need to understand how it [*feng shui*] came about and what it means to people today. We need to seek to understand why people believe in it today. Only then are we in a good position to talk to them. Also, we need to study the Bible and see what the Bible has to say about different aspects in this practice. We should not throw everything out but to see [sic] what are things we can agree upon as a meeting point to talk to non-Christians or Christians who are practicing it.

For Isaac and Nick, the four steps on critical contextualization were clearly demonstrated when the participants practiced it on the issue of *Qing Ming* (see Appendix C and note the footnote):

I also learned the technique on the four steps of Critical Contextualization. I think this is a very useful tool for contextualization for *feng shui* and other things like *Qing Ming*. It shows me what a Christian response should be like when approached by the question of how we should respond to *feng shui*.... Formerly, I would outlaw any Chinese beliefs that would contravene Christian beliefs. Now, this lecture taught me that there is a technique of contextualization. I see the importance of how we can address the issue in the Christian context. I will think through it and check the Bible.

Formerly, I would not know what to do with them, I would tell them they are not right. Now, if I have the time, I will have a more complete analysis of the whole practice, if possible, and give a more constructive response rather than a forthright “No.” Certain elements of the practice is still acceptable, especially those that are non-religious whereas those that really contravene the worship of God, I will still say a “No.” [Overall,] I will not be as forthright as I used to be.

Thus, rather than outright rejection, Isaac is now able to see deliberate contextualization as a necessary process in encountering folk practices.

Nick, too, testified that practicing the four steps of critical contextualization on *Qing Ming* during the seminar changed his conviction about *Qing Ming*:

It is more important to have the skill of contextualization than to have someone do it for you. The exercise on contextualization of *Qing Ming* was very good.... I have not visited my [deceased] grandmother in the columbarium for a long time. After the seminar, I asked my mom to go along to visit her.

In the past, I never practiced *Qing Ming* because I find that it is very religious and it is not Christian to practice that. But after that, I realized we

also have a Christian way of celebrating *Qing Ming*. I begin to see an even greater need to establish a Chinese Christian way of celebrating festivals like *Qing Ming*. The common way is that we stop doing it. I realized that it is actually very bad to stop doing it. It is like you lost your filial piety totally. All the more, I feel that we should promote it and even discuss it, like a session on the differences in practices between a Chinese-Chinese [religionist] and a Chinese-Christian.

Nick's statement above lends credence to the earlier answer given for the significant statistical change in the contextualization of ancestral worship as a result of the seminar.

Better ability to contextualize will also lead to more sensitivity at sharing the gospel. For example, learning contextualization has emboldened Harry to confront gray issues like *feng shui*, which in the past he would be too quick to brush aside:

Formerly my Christian view is "No," as a straight answer. Now, when I encounter a friend who practices *feng shui*, I will ask, "Do you think this is related to religion or not?" If the person's answer is that *feng shui* is has to do with seeking certain spiritual element, then I will tell the person that that is not the origin of *feng shui*. I will then seek to explain to him how *feng shui* has evolved.

In the past, I did not know much and I dared not talk much. My response was: if you practice it, it has nothing to do with me. Now, I am confident to explain that originally *feng shui* was not superstitious but today it has been integrated with spiritual elements.

Rather than being laid back and not doing anything, Kim thought that the seminar has helped her become more proactive in responding to folk issues like *feng shui* even though she had not fully grasped the four steps of contextualization:

This seminar helps me to know more and not to be passive. Not that I desire to know more, but it is good to know more to help others.... It interests me to know more. It makes me more sympathetic towards a *feng shui* practitioner though I have not grasped the four steps of contextualization.

Kim was not the only one who did not feel confident concerning contextualization.

Uncertainties over the practice of contextualization were registered in such remarks as "I am not sure if it [the seminar] has helped in contextualization" and "I find that I have yet

to know more. I cannot quote exactly a verse to say it is related to *feng shui*.” These comments suggest the importance and need of attaching a strong hermeneutical method to Hiebert’s contextual method of engaging folk beliefs and practices.

(4) Beliefs and convictions. At least four participants (Dionnie, Evelyn, Gerlynn, and Yvonne) claimed that their conviction remained the same and that they personally did not perceive much changes in their behavior even though they had gained more knowledge. Evelyn, for example, said, “At least I know that certain Bible verses talk of water, wind, etc. I am clearer from a Christian perspective. But there are not very much changes in [my] behavior.” Though Gerlynn claimed that she basically “still had the same conviction over *feng shui*,” she thought that the seminar had set her on a course where her conviction were and would be challenged: “The *feng shui* case study helps me see that *feng shui* is not a clear cut issue. It can be a dilemma to the Christian. My conviction will really be challenged.” Despite her earlier denial, Gerlynn’s comment indeed pointed to a number of areas in which her conviction was challenged, and perhaps, changed:

The appreciation of harmony with nature. It is something good and new that I have learned.... I also learned that we need to deal with the “excluded middle.” Very often, it is true that we neglect that part. That is why folk religion has some appeal. We must really work on contextualization; otherwise, we will always be so disconnected.... It [the seminar] gives me a greater appreciation of Chinese worldview and the symbols they use, e.g., *ba gua*.

Others like Charlie and Lorraine claimed that the seminar had helped clarify or deepen their conviction. For Charlie, the seminar helped him develop a clearer conviction against *feng shui*: “The seminar makes me more not wanting to listen to *feng shui* advice in case I am influenced by them.” As for Lorraine, she became so convinced of where *feng shui* was coming from that she had since spoken to a few people on the Christian’s

response to *feng shui*:

[I] gained new knowledge, which gives me a deeper conviction of the fact that *feng shui* is not biblical. It helps me to be able to explain at least to my Christian friends what it is and how it is related even though people may claim the goodness of it and so-called, the effectiveness of it. After the seminar itself, altogether, I have explained to three to five people about *feng shui*.

Findings from the end-of-class *feng shui* case study. At the end of the seminar, the participants were given an opportunity to work on a *feng shui* case study individually (see Appendix K). Twenty-one case studies were completed and collected (see Appendix S for summary). The responses show that the participants were confident in offering advice on a particular *feng shui* dilemma. At least seven participants mentioned that they would encourage James (fictitious figure in the case study) to pray and seek God's direction on the purchase of the house. Eight responses specifically mentioned that James should be allowed to make the decision based on his own sense of comfort and peace. Another eight said that if James decided to buy the house, he should cleanse it and rededicate it to God.

Brian, Evelyn, and Zachary's comments were notable in that they even included helping James with the contextualization of *feng shui* as part of their advice. In my opinion, Brian's advice is contextualization par excellence, demonstrating sensitivity to all key elements: James (the person involved), the Bible, and the context (*feng shui*):

I will explain to him the origin of *feng shui* and why I think people are practicing *feng shui*. This is to help him understand what *feng shui* really is about before we talk about what the Bible has to say about that. I will point him to the fact that we are to entrust our well being in the Lord and not in *feng shui*. However, if he still feels uncomfortable about buying the house (perhaps he is still immature as a Christian), I will advise him not to because this may give Satan a chance to shipwreck his faith, for "whatever is not from faith is sin" [Rom. 14:23].

Zachary stressed the importance of making Christianity relevant:

God also wants believers to use both his [sic] spiritual discernment and mental acumen to critically contextualize the reality of Christ's power and victory in the culture we're in. We are challenged to make relevant Christianity (perceived as Western) in a Chinese culture with its spiritually acute (in an animistic sense) and naturalistic worldview combined with its pragmatic bent.

For many, the ultimate dictum determining whether to follow a *feng shui* suggestion rests on the meaning of being a sensitive witness. In other words, before deciding on a particular practice, the Christian needs to ask, "Does it reinforce belief in *feng shui* (or whatever particular folk belief)? Do we end up giving breath (support) to the folk belief? Will it help or affect the Christian stand and witness? Do non-Christians understand or will they misunderstand? Are non-Christians getting the right message? Will I stumble a weaker brother in Christ?" After all, the above questions point to the very basic principle of sensitivity to weaker brothers and sisters as promoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8.

Just as important is another suggestion by Kim that anyone who attempts contextualization must also train the spotlight on themselves to check if their personal motives in engaging a particular folk issue is right. Her advice for James was, "Commit the decision to God.... Ask James: does he really need to move house? What intention? Can he consider spending his money in a more fruitful way?" This same warning was repeated by Dionnie: "Ask him to search himself before the Lord to see whether he has placed the Lord above all else or he is in control of his assets, business, etc."

The responses to the *feng shui* case study, therefore, provide confirmation that the seminar has made the participants into more sensitive and critical "contextualizers."

Findings from monthly feedback reports. The monthly report is made up of

four sections: (1) date of incident, (2) description of incident, (3) the participant's involvement in the incident, and (4) the participant's spontaneous reaction (they were to indicate if any contextualization was done). The two monthly feedback reports tracked for evidences of long-term behavioral change with regards to contextualization resulting from the seminar.

Thirty-four reports were received. They were compiled in Appendix T. The reports were analyzed for keywords to determine which of the four steps of critical contextualization were attempted (see Appendix U for the summary, analysis, and explanation).

None of the reports indicate an encounter in which a participant was able to carry out *all* the four steps of critical contextualization. The above is understandable since the encounters reported were short incidents (none of them longer than a day). Second, unless time is set aside to contextualize an issue deliberately, as in the seminar associated with this research project, spontaneous contextualization in real life is usually carried out in fragmented forms (i.e., randomly and not covering all the four steps, much like that in Appendix U). Third, a person's contextualization of a particular issue is built upon his or her past encounters and contextualization of similar issues and church tradition and instructions. Thus, for the present issue, the person may have no necessity to revisit steps that he or she has successfully undertaken previously. Fourth, the respondents probably did not mention all the steps because they were not told to do so and because only a brief report was expected of them.

In case# FR 19, Rose performed phenomenological analysis and jumped to transformational ministries; her report is as follows:

- (1) Date of incident: March 26, 2004.
- (2) Description of incident: *Qing Ming* festival—family visit to our parents' graveyards.
- (3) My involvement in the incident: My family members brought a lot of food—*pau* [buns], *tau sa pau* [bean buns], fruits together with wine and Chinese tea and joss stick/incense, paper money; they [Rose was the only Christian] offered these at my parents' grave sites.
- (4) My spontaneous reaction: The meaning of the Chinese word *shao mu* was to clean the gravesites. I brought a mini-broom and dust pan to sweep the grave (my mother's grave—burial ground; my father—cremation, therefore ashes in vases); pulled out the wild grasses and literally cleaned up the grave before they placed all the food/fruits/drinks as offerings at the gravesite. I arranged the chrysanthemum flowers/orchids on the two vases at the gravesites. That's my simple way of showing love and respect to my deceased parents.

In all likelihood, Rose might have carried out step two—ontological critique—and step three—evaluative response, but she did not report them. Possibly she might have already worked out the two steps through past encounters.

Brian and Victor are the only two others who seemed to have experienced opportunities to walk through at least three of the four steps in critical contextualization.

Brian shared his experience as follows:

- (1) Date of incident: June 1, 2004.
- (2) Description of incident: I saw a lot of people walking round and round my estate carrying candles in their hands.
- (3) My involvement in the incident: I was observing from the windows of my apartment.
- (4) My spontaneous reaction: My initial response was to brush it off as superstition. Then I remembered the next day is *Vesak* Day; so it might be related. I decided to go read up something about *Vesak* Day (I always knew it only as a public holiday). I found out it's a day to celebrate the birth and enlightenment of Buddha—maybe that's why they carry candles. Kind of remind [sic] me of the Festival of Lights in the Bible. I thought of reading up about *Vesak* Day because I want to be prepared to discuss with people just in case I have the opportunity.

Though Victor's experience failed to incorporate phenomenological analysis, he demonstrated how he was able to cope with spontaneous dilemmas presented by folk

issues:

- (1) Date of incident: March 2004.
- (2) Description of incident: House moving.
- (3) My involvement in the incident: Pray and bless the house before moving in.
- (4) My spontaneous reaction: _____ asked me before she moved to her new house what was one of the things she needed to observe. For example, did she need to choose a special day ... so on. She seemed like thinking the way the folk believers do. I explained to her [that] as Christians we needed not choose a specific day, but to say a prayer will do.

Another observation is that the step of ontological critique seems to be the least frequently attempted among the four steps of critical contextualization. This lack of ontological critique can be attributed to the fact that most people, unlike Brian, do not have the resources (like the Bible, literature concerning the folk issue, etc.) on hand when they encounter the incidents. Though the people were conscious of the four steps of critical contextualization, the majority (eighteen out of the thirty-four reports submitted) still slid down the easy path of short-circuiting the process by just evaluating an issue or offering transforming actions without proper phenomenological analysis or ontological critique. The hypothesis that the seminar could effect long-term behavioral change in contextualization is, therefore, not supported by the findings from the monthly feedback reports.

Summary of findings on research question #4. Generally, the statistical findings confirm the hypothesis that the seminar on “Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study” produced significant contextualization and conviction changes in the participants. In terms of contextualization, the participants were able to contextualize folk issues more critically according to Hiebert’s four steps. In terms of conviction, the participants generally become more conservative. Specifically,

significant improvements in *feng shui* occur only in the area of contextualization but not in conviction. Besides *feng shui*, the participants also recorded a significant improvement in their ability to contextualize ancestral worship. Martial arts is the only folk practice to record a significant change in openness/closedness of conviction.

The post-seminar interview confirms that participants experienced changes in awareness of *feng shui*, knowledge and understanding of contextualization, and conviction. The change in conviction is manifested not in “openness/closedness” but in the development of a clearer, more formalized and articulated conviction. This change could not be captured in the quantitative survey because it measured “openness/closedness” rather than clarity in conviction.

The responses to the end-of-class *feng shui* case study questions provide supporting evidence that the participants’ contextualization has been raised to a new level as a result of the seminar; however, the feedback reports show that when faced with real issues, not everyone has the time or is at the right place or is simply disciplined enough to carry out all the four steps of critical contextualization taught in the seminar. The seminar definitely causes change in contextualization skills and conviction, but like all skills and abilities, it calls for personal discipline and practice over time to become habitual or part of a person’s behavior.

Summary of Major Findings

Although *feng shui* was the main case study in this study, the broad scope of the instruments produces findings that go beyond *feng shui*. Various relationships between the exposure, contextualization, and convictions of the Chinese Christians concerning the Chinese folk beliefs and practices were uncovered. They can be summarized as

follows:

(1) More Exposure to Ancestral Worship and Chinese Medical Practices

Chinese Christians in Singapore are generally well exposed to ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices but not *feng shui*, martial arts, or *qi gong*.

(2) Prior Exposure Influences the Practice of Contextualization

Prior exposure is positively related to a better ability of contextualization. Thus, even intervening variables like the number of years as a Christian and exposure to missiological training influence the way Christians practice contextualization.

(3) Better Existing Ability at Contextualizing Ancestral Worship

Chinese Christians are able to contextualize ancestral worship better than the other common Chinese folk beliefs and practices. Their greatest struggle seems to be with the biblical responses to Chinese medical practices and martial arts. Both these practices continue to be practiced by many Christians today. As for *feng shui* and *qi gong*, most Christians would avoid or reject them before even attempting any contextualization of them.

(4) More Openness in Conviction Towards Chinese Medical Practices and Martial Arts

In terms of conviction, Chinese Christians are generally more open towards Chinese medical practices and martial arts than *qi gong*, *feng shui*, or ancestral worship. They also perceive all five folk beliefs and practices as cultural, though not indispensable to the Chinese culture.

(5) Contextualization Influenced By Clarity and Definiteness but Not Openness/Closedness in Convictions

Openness/closedness in the Christians' conviction do not directly influence the way they practice contextualization. Instead, a clearer and more definite conviction does lead to a better ability to contextualize.

(6) Helpfulness of Paul Hiebert's Four Steps of Critical Contextualization On Contextualizing *Feng Shui* and Other Folk Beliefs and Practices

The seminar on "Critical Contextualization of Folk beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study" produces significant contextualization and conviction changes in the participants; however, the seminar by itself cannot ensure long-term behavioral change.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Major Findings

This study sought to discover the level of contextualization practiced by Singaporean Chinese Christians across five common Chinese folk beliefs and practices, namely ancestral worship, Chinese medical practices, *feng shui*, Chinese martial arts and *qi gong*. It also tested the efficacy of Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization by putting twenty-seven volunteers through a two-day seminar on folk religion and critical contextualization using *feng shui* as a case study for contextualization. Four instruments (namely, a pre- and post-seminar statistical survey, written and oral interviews, an end-of-class *feng shui* case study, and two monthly feedback reports) were used to measure the participants' pre- and post-seminar exposure to the five folk practices, their practice of contextualization on the folk practices, and their beliefs and convictions of each of the five folk practices.

The research study yielded the following six major findings:

1. Chinese Christians are exposed to ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices more than *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices;
2. Prior exposure does influence a person's practice of contextualization;
3. Chinese Christians contextualize ancestral worship better than *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices;
4. In terms of convictions, Chinese Christians are more open to Chinese medical practices and martial arts than *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices;
5. Contextualization is influenced by clarity and definiteness but not

openness/closedness in convictions; and,

6. Paul Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization do help Christians in contextualizing *feng shui* and other folk beliefs and practices.

Evaluation and Interpretation

This study revolves around the Singaporean Chinese Christians' response to Chinese folk beliefs and practices and the accompanying contextualization that was attempted. Though the findings reflect more precisely the situation with the Singaporean English-speaking Chinese Christians,¹ they nevertheless yield useful applications on contextualization for all Christians, particularly, Chinese Christians in Singapore and even all over the world. The following are the evaluation and interpretation of the major findings of this research.

(1) More Exposure to Ancestral Worship and Chinese Medical Practices

Chinese Christians in Singapore are generally well exposed to ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices but not *feng shui*, martial arts, or *qi gong*. The high exposure to ancestral worship can be attributed to the fact that many Chinese Christians in Singapore are first generation converts from ancestral worship backgrounds. The 1990 Singapore population census shows that 65.9 percent of Protestants in Singapore are "not born into the religion," but converted from another religion (Kuo 30).² The census statistics go on to point out that "45.7 per cent of [Christian converts] had converted from Taoism and another 44 per cent from Buddhism. These were mostly Chinese. Relatively

¹ The Singaporean English-speaking Chinese Christian comes from a background that is multicultural, pluralistic, affluent, urban, techno-savvy, highly influenced by the West, and with explicit generational distinctions.

² Christianity is the only religion in Singapore to grow significantly by conversion. The percentages of adherents who were not born into the religion in the other major faiths were very low in comparison: Buddhism, 6.3 percent; Daoism, 2.0 percent; Islam, 2.1 percent; and Hinduism, 1.3 percent (Kuo 30).

few came from a background of Hinduism (3.1 per cent) or Islam (0.5 per cent)” (31).

Thus, close to 90 percent of Christians are Chinese converted from Daoist or Buddhist backgrounds, where ancestral worship is a salient concept.

The high exposure to Chinese medical practices can be attributed to the prevalence of Chinese medical practices in the society. All Singaporean Chinese, whether Christian or non-Christian, probably grew up taking Chinese herbs and medicine. Herbs and health products like Ginseng, bird nests, and *cordyceps* together with Chinese medical practices like acupuncture, foot reflexology, Chinese *sinseh* (traditional medical doctors), and chiropractics are prevalent in the society. They are popular not only with Chinese but also increasingly with non-Chinese. While Christians discontinue ancestral worship after conversion, most may not perceive any controversy with Chinese medical practices. They probably will continue to practice them to a certain extent. In fact, some pastors even utilize acupuncture and foot reflexology as a ministry.

In comparison to ancestral worship and Chinese medical practices, Christians are relatively less exposed to martial arts, *feng shui* and *qi gong*. Relatively few Chinese practice martial arts. Exposure to martial arts usually comes in the form of Chinese popular martial arts films and novels. *Feng shui* and *qi gong*, though popular in the society, are practices with narrower definitions. Most Christians have heard or know about them but relatively few know enough to explain what they really are (e.g., their theology or philosophy). They may be exposed to these practices but may not be sensitive or knowledgeable enough to recognize them consciously. The participants in the research probably had little problem identifying ancestral worship as a pre-conversion practice because ancestral worship is definite, formal, and public. In contrast, even though they

might have practiced *feng shui* or *qi gong* superficially or unconsciously in the past, they might not give them a higher score because these practices are more obscure, informal, and private. In the case of *feng shui*, the people might view it as cooperating with laws, principles, and forces of nature rather than submission to some spiritual powers or involvement in a religion.

Exposure and especially current and existing practices can also be categorically deemed as real-time contextualization in progress. Thus, for example, when Chinese Christians say that they still go “grave-sweeping” around the period of *Qing Ming*, they are actually contextualizing *Qing Ming* (which is related to ancestral veneration or worship) somewhat. Some examples of contextualizing *Qing Ming* (as gleaned from the seminar discussions, written feedback, and oral interviews) include visiting and remembering loved ones who have passed away during Good Friday or Easter (which is around the *Qing Ming* season) instead of during *Qing Ming* itself, presenting flowers instead of incense or food offerings,³ or having a Christian memorial service for the dead.

Though not as obvious, a lot of contextualization is already taking place when Christians engage in Chinese medical practices and martial arts. The Bible does not explicitly refer to these practices and most Christians may not have sufficient knowledge of the Bible or Christian theology to do a thorough ontological critique (step two of Hiebert’s critical contextualization) on Chinese medical practices or martial arts. What is certain, however, is that phenomenological analysis (step one of critical contextualization)

³ Traditional Chinese folk religion includes flower offering as an alternative as well. In the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations’ survey, reported by Chee Kiong Tong, 63.4 percent of Chinese offer flowers to the gods (*Trends* 21). Christians select offering flowers as an alternative because it has more connotation of a memorial ritual than a worship ritual as nuanced in incense and food offerings.

is accomplished partially through firsthand *emic* experiences and participation.⁴ The local Christian community then performs the evaluative analysis (step three of critical contextualization) and produces its own transformative ministries (step four of critical contextualization). Herbal treatments and medication are generally not a big controversy for Christians, and most will not have a problem using them. Other practices like acupuncture and foot reflexology, however, are still shrouded in mystery and may be perceived as controversial by some. Nonetheless, many Christians will not hesitate to resort to Chinese medical practices as an alternative to Western medicine and medical practices. Some even testify to the efficacy of Chinese herbs over Western medicine. Similarly, many Chinese view Chinese martial arts purely as a form of exercise. Although not many Christians practice martial arts (to the statement, “I am still practicing it,” in A2 C, martial arts only score a mean of 1.22), few will shun a martial arts performance or movies depicting Chinese martial arts.

The overall narrow exposure of Singaporean Chinese Christians to their own folk beliefs and practices can also be explained from the current sociological condition in Singapore. Globalization, Western influences (particularly through the media and Western education), a general bias towards science and technology in the government’s education policy,⁵ all mold younger Singaporeans to become more Western-influenced in mind-set, less sympathetic, and less knowledgeable of their own folk beliefs and practices. In fact, this phenomenon is not confined only to Christians. As observed by C. K. Tong, such an indifference towards traditional Chinese customs and rites is evident in all

⁴ Ultimately, bracketing one’s own experience is necessary for phenomenological analysis.

⁵ For example, the Singapore Department of Statistics notes that in 2000, six out of every ten university graduates majored in either Business and Administration, Engineering Sciences, or Information Technology (4).

younger Singaporeans:

Younger Singaporeans are less likely to practise traditional Chinese customs and rites.... Furthermore, it was found that young Singaporeans complain that they do not understand the meanings and functions of these traditional rites, nor can their parents explain why these rituals are necessary. (Trends 31-32)

Tong also contends that “English-educated Singaporeans are less likely to perform traditional Chinese customs and rites when compared to Chinese-educated respondents” (32). Concomitantly, “[t]he higher the educational qualification, the less likely a person will practise traditional Chinese rites” (33).

Of late, however there has been a renewed and growing interest in Buddhism and Daoism. Eddie C. Y. Kuo speaks of the decline in traditional Chinese beliefs and Daoism and of attempts by the latter at self-renewal:

It appears that, with further modernization and social and economic development, Chinese traditional beliefs/Taoism has become less relevant to the younger Chinese Singaporeans. In response to the declining trend, there have been attempts in recent years among the Taoist groups to revive the faith. (14)

Daniel Tong makes a similar observation of Buddhism:

Of late, there has been a resurgence of interest among the young in Buddhism in Singapore. One reason for this may be attributed to the fact that the Buddhists have changed their philosophy of ministry. Where the Buddhist sutra has been used and taught only in Sanskrit in the past, it is today being explained in the vernacular (that is, in the native tongue of the local people). This is a draw to many young people from families traditionally associated with Chinese religious practices, but who are not versed in Sanskrit, as it is easier for them to relate to and accept the teachings of Buddhism. Another draw is the holding of classes on career development and stress management, along with the establishment of cell groups and the singing of choruses (some of which have Christian tunes). (24)

Though Buddhism and Daoism are drawing many young people into their folds, existing Christians usually remain oblivious and indifferent to beliefs and practices associated

with these religions.

(2) Prior Exposure Influences the Practice of Contextualization

This research has shown a significant and positive correlation between the Christians' exposure to folk beliefs and practices and their ability to contextualize those beliefs. In other words, the more a person is exposed to and knows of a particular practice, the more that person is able to contextualize that practice after conversion.

Correspondingly, this study also shows that the number of years one has been a Christian and the exposure to missiological training influence the Christian's practice of contextualization.

Nevertheless, with regards to how much real *understanding* a person can pick up purely from exposure, a distinction must be made between pure experiential exposure and cognitive exposure. When not accompanied by proper education and instruction, experiential exposure and even firsthand experiences can easily denigrate into *misunderstanding*, which can be more detrimental for contextualization. In Religious Conversion and Revivalism, C. K. Tong interviewed Singaporean Chinese Christians on their exposure to Chinese folk beliefs and practices. He discovered not only a "general dissatisfaction" but an accompanying "ignorance" of Chinese beliefs and rituals in his respondents. For example, one of his respondents mentioned accompanying his mother to the temple and graveyard to burn joss sticks and joss-papers and concluded, "But I did not understand what she was doing, I just followed" (22). Tong suspects that the lack of understanding "may be due to the fact that religious instruction is not commonly practiced in a Chinese home" (22). He goes on to explain that such a lack of elucidation on the rituals occurs because Chinese rituals normally do not necessarily presuppose

intellectual understanding of meanings or religious beliefs in their efficacy:

In a sense, the Chinese perform rituals without too much concern for doctrinal propriety or allegiances. The belief system is unquestioned as such queries will be answered with, “It must be done,” or “Customs requires that this is the way to do it.” Moreover, Chinese religion emphasizes the ritual performance itself, rather than an internalization of the ideas and meanings of the religious practices. Such a religious system is acceptable to older and more traditional Chinese. Most young people, however, exposed to the critical, scientific mode of analysis, find it difficult to accept this line of argument. (23-24)

Exposure, therefore, needs to be defined as not mere experiences but cognitive experiences (i.e., exposure that produces understanding and knowledge of the subject studied). Though exposure has a positive influence on the practice of contextualization, it is possibly not the only or the most direct influence. In fact, the relationship between exposure and contextualization may also be a spurious one with complementary influences like proper education, general knowledge, age, maturity, Christian and Bible knowledge all playing a part in helping the Christian contextualize.

Understanding of the Bible and Christian theology together with *understanding* of the culture and folk practice and its theology seem to be common factors in enhancing contextualization. *Understanding* happens when a person is exposed to experiences with accompanying teaching. In fact, Hiebert’s first three steps hinge a lot on *understanding* the issue being contextualized. Phenomenological analysis, according to Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, is the effort to arrive at a very objective and unbiased view of a subject:

The first step in critical contextualization is to study the local culture phenomenologically. Before judging people, it is important to *understand* [emphasis mine] their beliefs because it is on the basis of these that they act. It is too easy to judge people before *understanding* [emphasis mine] them deeply. (21)

Ontological critique is digging into the Bible and other reality testing so as “to

move beyond monoculturalism to the development of metacultural grids” that enable the people to *understand* [emphasis mine] the issue from a “multicultural” view (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 27). Evaluative response is utilizing knowledge and *understanding* to arrive at a fair conclusion. Thus, not just the amount of exposure and experience in folk belief and practice but an accompanying cognizance of these practices and the Bible and science is crucial for contextualization.

(3) Better Existing Ability at Contextualizing Ancestral Worship

Chinese Christians practice differing degrees of contextualization depending on the type of folk belief. As noted earlier, most Christians in Singapore are converted from Daoism, Buddhism, or Chinese folk beliefs where ancestral worship is a key component. Thus, every conversion process is really a confrontation with ancestral worship such that it becomes one of first issues with which a new Chinese Christian would have to grapple and contextualize. Besides, ancestral worship has been a contentious issue with which the Chinese Church has been grappling ever since the missionaries brought the gospel to China (e.g., the Chinese Rites controversy experienced by the Roman Catholic Church in China). The long history of wrestling with the issue has churned up an abundance of literature on the subject so that the Chinese Christian today is not impoverished of appropriate resources. Thus, ancestral worship is a well contextualized issue in the Church today. For example, Daniel Meng Wah Chua attempted an approach similar to Hiebert’s four steps of critical contextualization back in 1988 in Feeding on Ashes. More recently, D. Tong provides another indigenous response to ancestral worship, Chinese medicine and *qi gong* in A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs. Both Chua and D. Tong’s attempts show that ancestral worship is an unavoidable and essential

altercation for the Chinese Church since its inception. Ancestral worship is a public and explicit practice that the Church has to address formally and never ignore.

By and large, Chinese today will avoid the extremes of “absolute rejection” or “absolute endorsement” of ancestral worship. Contextualization has allowed the Church to recognize important moral and cultural values undergirding the practice of ancestral worship. Moral and cultural values like filial piety, family lineage, respect, remembrance, social responsibility to society, the importance of the family unit, and networking within the extended family all need to be preserved especially in a society whose values are increasingly eclipsed, challenged, and threatened by “selfish” pursuits of individual rights and freedom. Consequently, many Christians prefer to contextualize ancestral worship and redefine it as ancestral *veneration* instead.

Christians also understand that all folk issues, even for matters as familiar as ancestral worship, do not have standard responses. The Chinese ancestral worship ritual is cloaked in eclecticism. The “lack of consistency among the non-believers in interpreting the cultural forms has led to a certain amount of ambiguity when Christians try to understand and respond to them” (Chua 75). Christians also understand that personal conviction cannot be imposed insensitively on other Christian brothers and sisters especially during times of bereavement when the bereaved are under emotional crisis, stress, or grief. They know that they have to speak the truth but in love (Eph. 4:15) and practice the same sensitivity as that advocated by Paul concerning food offered to the idols (1 Cor. 8): not to cause a weaker brother to stumble (Rom. 14, 1 Cor. 10:32) and not to be judgmental (Rom. 14).

The Chinese Christians’ greatest challenge lies in their difficulty to solicit

appropriate biblical responses, thus ontological critique (step 2 of critical contextualization), concerning Chinese medical practices and martial arts. Many Christians continue to practice Chinese medical practices and martial arts. Unlike ancestral worship, the amount of research on biblical response to Chinese medical practices and martial arts is scarce. Yet, as in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, Chinese medical practices have been an integral part of the health care system for the majority of Chinese living in Singapore. In recent decades, effort has been made to lift up the credibility of traditional Chinese medicine in the West such as placing “traditional Chinese medicine on a firmer Western scientific empirical and methodological basis as well as efforts to integrate Chinese and Western medical traditions” (“Traditional Chinese Medicine”). Today, Chinese medical practices is also viewed as an alternative medicine in the West to treat the side effects of chemotherapy, cravings and withdrawal symptoms of drug addicts, antibiotic-resistant infections, and a variety of chronic conditions that conventional medicine cannot treat (“Traditional Chinese Medicine”).

Chinese medical practices cover a wide range of disciplines. Some of the more well-known methods include acupuncture, herbology, nutrition or food therapy, cupping, *qi gong* exercises, *gua sha* or coin-rubbing, acupressure, and various styles of massage (including bone setting and foot reflexology), and even *tai ji quan* exercises. While most Christians may have little or no objections to herbology, food therapy, and bone setting, many struggle with the other disciplines which make explicit spiritual references to the five elements, *qi*, etc.

As for martial arts, in recent years, it has gradually moved from self-defense applications to exhibition and competition styles. These often include more acrobatic

jumps and movements added for enhanced visual effect compared to the traditional self-defense styles (“Chinese Martial Arts”). Nevertheless, its most controversial concept is *qi*, the inner energy or “life force” that flows through the body of every living being. This kind of *qi* is encountered in almost all styles of Chinese martial arts. For example, adepts believe that one’s *qi* energy can be improved and strengthened through the regular practice of *qi gong*. “Though Qigong is not a martial art itself, it is often incorporated in Chinese martial arts, and practiced as a complement to strengthen one’s internal abilities” (“Chinese Martial Arts”). Part of the controversy over the *qi* in martial arts and *qi gong* lies in the power behind *qi*. Practitioners claim that *qi* can be used for healing oneself or others. It can also strengthen parts of the body to withstand massive damage to them. It can even be aimed at specific areas of the opponent to cause maximum damage or to disable certain functions of the body. A popular concept in Chinese martial arts movies (and believed by some) go so far as to claim that at an advanced level harm can be inflicted without even touching one’s opponent (“Chinese Martial Arts”).

Even though some Christians may be sympathetic towards the logical aspects of *feng shui* while a number may practice *qi gong* for personal health, Christians hardly attempt any contextualization of *feng shui* and *qi gong*. Unlike ancestral worship, Chinese medical practices and martial arts, *feng shui* and *qi gong* are more personal practices performed according to the personal choice of the practitioners. Practitioners perform them privately, and nobody will know who is practicing them unless the practitioner admits it publicly. In addition, *feng shui* and *qi gong* are more specific and specialized practices that demand self-initiated exposure and specialized knowledge before anybody can produce any tangible, functional substitute. Since most Christians have relatively

little direct contact with *feng shui* and *qi gong*, they probably also do not sense much need in creating functional substitutes or in implementing transformation ministries (step 4 of critical contextualization). Consequently, Christians easily ignore *feng shui* and *qi gong* even though they are practiced by others around them.

(4) More Openness in Conviction Towards Chinese Medical Practices and Martial Arts

In terms of conviction, Christians are generally more open towards Chinese medical practices and martial arts than *qi gong*, *feng shui*, or ancestral worship. They are more accommodating of these practices but do not necessarily have clearer convictions concerning them. Instead of accepting and endorsing Chinese medical practices and martial arts without question, Chinese Christians are merely more open towards these two practices in comparison to the other practices surveyed.

One possible reason for the greater accommodation of Chinese medical practice and martial arts is that among the five practices, Chinese medical practices and martial arts probably have the least to do with religion and are often viewed as non-religious activities. As mentioned earlier, most Christians generally have no qualms with taking Chinese medicine, getting their bones set by an expert *sinseh*, or receiving a soothing massage from a masseur or foot reflexologist. Many Christians may not even mind being diagnosed by Chinese physicians using terms like *qi*, *yin*, *yang*, the five elements, etc., since the diagnoses are usually non-intrusive. Nevertheless, some Christians will not be comfortable going through the more intrusive treatments like acupuncture.

Correspondingly, Christians will not mind being entertained by a display of martial arts skill in an exhibition or in a movie. Some may even engage in it as a form of

physical exercise purely from the perspective of health, bodybuilding, or self-defense. In fact, a particular exhibition form of Chinese martial arts is accepted as one of the official sports in the biannual Southeast Asian Games under the name of *wushu*; however, most Christians with whom I interacted in my research prefer to shun martial arts at the level when the use of *qi* become suspiciously spiritual in nature.

Thus, Christians do draw a line over the practices of Chinese medical practices and martial arts even though they are comparatively more open to them. In contrast, Christians are less open to ancestral worship, *feng shui*, and *qi gong* because the religious overtones associated with these practices are more obvious. In terms of *feng shui*, they are convinced that it can be both religious and cultural. Thus, though Christians have differing convictions concerning each of the five folk beliefs and practices, they also perceive all of them as cultural, albeit not indispensable or essential to the Chinese cultural identity. A good analogy would be the chopsticks. Nobody would deny that it is culturally Chinese, yet a person has to use it in order to be called a Chinese.

(5) Contextualization Influenced By Clarity and Definiteness but Not Openness/Closedness in Convictions

Convictions are built over time from past experiences. They build upon facts that a person perceives to be true, valuable, needful, relevant, and important. This study has shown no direct relationship between openness in conviction and practice of contextualization. Openness or closedness in conviction will not lead to corresponding ability or lack of ability in contextualization; however, the qualitative interview has shown that clearer and more definite conviction can lead to better ability in contextualization. Clearer conviction equates to clearer understanding of a particular

practice and/or a clearer understanding of Scriptural teaching regarding the practice.

Concomitantly, the research also shows that those who are closed and conservative towards a particular practice may reject the practice and not even attempt any contextualization at all. The latter can be detrimental to the witness of the Church as others may perceive it as becoming aloof, detached, arrogant, and, therefore, not indigenous. Joseph B. Tamney and Riaz Hassan observe that more Singapore Chinese Christians settle for a rejection of their “religious” past than acceptance of Christianity as an “add-on” to their existing culture at conversion:

The cultural symbols which became readily acceptable were those which the actors [indigenes] could adopt without having to resort to any major redefinitions of their self and ethnic identities. Thus, for example, learning or acquisition of the English language meant that one simply knew one more language *in addition to one's own* [original emphasis]. It did not require any self or ethnic redefinition. The same was true of European education. But the adoption of other European cultural symbols like Christianity was more problematic. Although some Chinese did *add on* [original emphasis] Christianity to their existing cultural paraphernalia, more Chinese settled for the rejection of all religious categories. The latter choice is consistent with the supposed secularization taking place among the European elite. (40)

In encountering folk beliefs, Christians should balance between testifying to their faith in God and the Bible with an accompanying sensitivity to their culture. David Hock Tey, an indigenous Chinese minister, suggests four guiding principles to help Christians anchor to the Word but yet gear to the culture:

There are four basic principles from the Bible which can help us in our daily lives. First, we need to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:23-24). Second, we need to edify others (1 Cor. 10:23-24). Third, we must offend no one (1 Cor. 10:32-33). Fourth, we need to be lawful (1 Cor. 6:12). (Chinese Culture and the Bible 150)

Hopefully, such principles and convictions can help Chinese Christians become more confident and consistent in their practice of contextualization.

(6) Helpfulness of Paul Hiebert's Four Steps of Critical Contextualization On Contextualizing *Feng Shui* and Other Folk Beliefs and Practices

This research study has followed Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization meticulously from the beginning to the review of literature and to the execution of the research seminar. It works on the premise that Hiebert's four steps of contextualization are clear, transferable, transformative and applicable under different cultural context. The findings confirm an overall significant improvement in knowledge and understanding of contextualization, and conviction in the participants as a result of the seminar on Hiebert's four-step contextualization. They moved from unconscious to conscious contextualization and from informal to formal systematic steps of contextualization. Consequently, the participants experienced changes in awareness and practice of contextualization, particularly in the aspect of *feng shui*, the selected case study for the research seminar. They also experienced change in conviction, not just in level of "openness/closedness" in conviction concerning folk beliefs but, more so, in clearer conviction concerning *feng shui*. This result is expected since the entire seminar concentrated on *feng shui* as a case study for contextualization.

Besides *feng shui*, significant change also occurs in the participants' ability in contextualizing ancestral worship. Ancestral worship stood out from among all the folk beliefs except *feng shui* transformation after the seminar partly because the seminar utilized existing contextualizations of ancestral worship to illustrate how *feng shui* can be contextualized. More importantly, this result shows that the participants were able to apply the general principles taught in the class concerning *feng shui* to other folk practices.

The findings also reveal that while the participants' conviction of martial arts became significantly more conservative, no significant change in conviction occurred in all the other folk beliefs. A possible explanation for the insignificant changes in conviction for *feng shui*, ancestral worship, Chinese medical practices, and *qi gong* is that the content of the seminar together with the accompanying participation of the participants did not alter the people's traditional understanding and conviction of these beliefs. Whereas the participants had viewed martial arts merely as a sport or exercise before the seminar, walking through the steps of contextualization comprehensively during the seminar convinced the participants that the *qi* referred to in Chinese medical practices, *feng shui*, martial arts, and *qi gong* has such differing properties that it may refer to different elements. Thus, in medical practices, *qi* may refer to the bodily energy that is diagnostic of a person's health. In *feng shui*, it is the cosmic energy that can influence fortune, but in martial arts and *qi gong*, it can refer to an internal energy that can be trained, used on or even transferred to others. Such a better-informed understanding of the complexity of *qi* and its spiritual connection to martial arts might have made the participants more conservative towards martial arts.

Susan, in her feedback report dated 7 March 2004, attested to this complexity of *qi*. In reporting her own reaction to her mother's testimony of how her physical conditions could be diagnosed by foot reflexology, she admitted her confusion over the enigma of *qi*:

From my understanding of Chinese medicine, I know there's a lot of *qi* involved in explaining what goes on—but *qi* is a very complex, and also a spiritual notion. This incident again showed me the need for better clarification and understanding of *qi* as a Christian.

Thus, the first corollary finding under this research question is that a proper

understanding and definition of *qi* is essential for contextualization of many Chinese folk beliefs and practices.

Second, the findings also show that when faced with issues in real life, not everyone has the time, or is at the right place, or is simply disciplined enough, to carry out all four steps of critical contextualization taught in the seminar. In particular, most people do not have immediate resources and time to engage spontaneously in phenomenological analysis (step one) and ontological critique (step two) when confronted with an issue that needs contextualization. More often, they rely on what the Church has taught them or what they have read in Christian literature and proceeded immediately to make evaluative responses (step three) and/or suggest transformative ministries (step four). The research group participants probably also fell back on all four steps that they had worked out together during the seminar when they encountered issues after that.

Third, Hiebert's four steps of contextualization seem to be more suitably carried out intentionally by a group than spontaneously by individuals.

Fourth, all the four steps also do not seem to be necessarily undertaken in every contextualization encounter.

Fifth, while the seminar definitely causes change in contextualization skills and conviction, it cannot guarantee long-term behavioral changes. Like all skills and abilities, it calls for personal discipline and practice over time for it to become habitual or part of a person's behavior.

Critique of Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization. The following are some strengths observed in Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization.

First, Hiebert's model has been effective in that it emphasizes the importance of Scripture, culture, reason, and experience. In utilizing Hiebert's method to contextualize *feng shui*, the participants were forced not only to research into the historical development of *feng shui* but also to understand and, consequently, appreciate their own Chinese worldview and culture better. They were also made to search the Scriptures diligently in order to evaluate the various practices in *feng shui*. The group also had to lean on whatever reasoning powers they possessed to determine if certain concepts of *feng shui* were scientific, cultural, religious, or purely superstitious.

Second, the real strength of Hiebert's method lies in the milieu in which Hiebert encourages it to be undertaken. Hiebert, for example, emphasizes that the indigenes are the ones to do the contextualization. He also encourages contextualization to be carried out with dialogue between grassroots folks and the leaders. After all, the people themselves need to formulate their own theology. Instead of emphasizing some classical, unchangeable systematic theology from some ivory tower, Hiebert's methodology stimulates bold engagements with real and grounded issues that the people encounter in their everyday lives. It empowers the local believers to be responsible for articulating their own missiological theology. Neville Robert Bartle rightly observes how such contextualization encourages people to stand upon the Scriptures on their own:

Many churches that were founded by mission organizations have been taught their beliefs but have not been taught how to go to the Scriptures to find the answers to their questions. Contextualization, rightly understood, encourages people in all places to go to the Word of God and, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, find the answers to questions and problems of their everyday life. Where people have not been taught how to do this or encouraged to do this, the church remains weak and dependent upon outside direction. (116)

More powerfully, it breeds ownership and responsibility:

As people learn how to think through the gospel within their own cultural setting the church and the gospel come alive. It is not a foreign gospel or a foreign religion, but it becomes their own. It becomes “our faith, our church and our Savior,” as they think through the issues for themselves. Contextualization is not concerned merely with presenting the gospel and leading people to faith in Christ, but goes beyond that to help people live out their daily lives under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (Bartle 118)

Third, at the same time, Hiebert sees the importance of a hermeneutic that is not ethnocentric but constantly and intentionally reaching out to interact with those outside of one’s own culture for the purpose of obtaining a more wholesome understanding of God’s Word. He thus encourages cross-cultural interaction with those outside the local culture, accomplishing what Darrell Whiteman calls a “form of mission in reverse” where Christians “learn from other cultures how to be more Christian in [their] own context” (“Contextualization” 4). Unfortunately, this particular aspect of involving people from outside the culture was not tested in this research project.

Finally, as confirmed by the findings of this research, Hiebert’s model of contextualization emphasizes synergy from a community of believers. Contextualization cannot be conceived as a solo, scholastic research undertaken behind the walls of some detached academic institution. Rather, contextualization is best actualized within a body of believers, especially one that is multi-leveled (in age, in ministry experience, etc.) and multicultural.

This research project also reveals certain weaknesses in Hiebert’s method of contextualization. First, as an evangelical, Hiebert was perhaps less emphatic of the role of tradition. The Church stands to become impoverished if in seeking to be relevant to contemporary culture, it loses its mooring in its more than two thousand years of illustrious history and tradition. Tradition, after all, is a contextualized history book of

past contextualization attempted or experienced by the Church. It is a manual of past mistakes that the contemporary Church can seek to learn and avoid. In the case of the Chinese Church, certain traditional approaches towards ancestral worship such as the use of flowers in place of joss-sticks and incense or performing Christian funeral wake services in place of traditional Daoist or Buddhist rituals to sending off the dead have become so established that even lay Christians have little problem helping younger Christians apply them. Unfortunately, no tradition has been established to deal explicitly with *feng shui*.

Thus, in addition to Hiebert's synchronous approach to contextualization from other cultures, Bevans emphasizes learning diachronically from history and tradition, even though such theologies of the others (in other times and at other places) can never be one's own (5). As a matter of fact, when I conducted the seminar on "Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study," I was merely adding new concepts of contextualization to existing knowledge and tradition of contextualization according to every participant's Christian background and tradition. I was refining their contextualization practices but never from a clean slate or from nothing.

Second, as the name suggests, Hiebert's critical contextualization method is delineated systematically into four steps. The discipline is easily packaged as yet another methodology, another very linear and intellectual endeavor that is rationalistic but not necessarily spiritual. It could easily be turned into just another intellectual, humanistic pursuit oblivious to God's sovereign involvement and guidance. The hermeneutical community, therefore, must be reminded constantly to submit to, and to deliberately invoke, the help and guidance of the Spirit.

Third, though Hiebert encourages contextualization to be carried out by the indigenes as well as lay folks, the social milieu of the people is insufficiently emphasized. Bevans observes that contextual theology takes into account not just Scripture, tradition, cultural context, and personal experiences but also the social location and changes that the people are situated (7). Hiebert's four steps do not intentionally emphasize drawing the people's social location and the kind of social changes taking place around them into the process of contextualization. For example, the participants in my research project were obviously predominantly English-speaking Chinese Christians. They thus brought along their own social biases such as intellectualism, and deeper apathy towards traditional Chinese worldview and culture from their particular social location—young professionals, middle class. Undermining the role social location and changes play in contextualization can easily reduce Hiebert's four steps into another detached, objective, mechanical methodology where subjective engagements and "lived responses" are curtailed. Presumably, every contextualization can then be sufficiently pursued merely at a cognitive level. Regardless of its pertinence to cultural context, such a four-step mechanical style of contextualization can easily sweep the hermeneutical community of its feet to become less relevant to its social context and location.

Fourth, one other difficulty the research group faced with Hiebert's four steps of contextualization was the problem of arriving at a proper method to carry out ontological critique. Although Hiebert's intention was for the grassroots lay people to be able to use his method of contextualization to formulate their own contextualized theology, this step presupposes a great deal of knowledge in systematic theology and biblical theology. Though many people know about and are even exposed to an issue like *feng shui* from a

folk and popular level, they are not expert anthropologists who could carry out effective ethnographic research or phenomenological analysis on such folk beliefs. During the research seminar, the people literally had to go back and read up about the background of *feng shui* and even their own Chinese historical worldview and culture. In addition, they also had a hard time handling the Bible and their theology. Clearly, Hiebert has not been specific and helpful on what kind of an ontological critique or Bible study method that is most productive for his kind of contextualization. Further, while the people were quite confident in providing their cultural interpretations on certain issues, they felt quite inadequate when confronting the scientific veracity of some of the concepts of *feng shui*. Surely, the lack of specialists in the various fields of science, history, and theology was greatly felt. Thus, though Hiebert has been desirous to help the lay people formulate their own theology, inevitably the contributions of “experts” from various other fields are still needed.

The fifth weakness is the lack of elucidation of a particular Bible study method or hermeneutical method that can complement the kind of ontological critique required of such a critical contextualization. As pointed out in the findings from the interviews with the research participants, even after walking through all the four steps in Hiebert’s critical contextualization, some participants still do not feel very confident about using the method or quoting relevant Scriptures. Such a feeling of inadequacy probably indicates that the existing hermeneutical process or Bible study methods may be too Westernized to engage Eastern worldview and culture effectively. A more definite hermeneutical process which theology is both creation based and redemption based may be needed to help the people in their ontological critique.

Finally, a danger exists that in seeking to be culturally relevant, the people may resort to performing contextualization according to the presupposed “romantic” or “fossil” culture that they have come to know or taken for granted. This culture, however, may no longer be the current and actual culture of the people. Bevans calls this phenomenon “falling into a kind of a cultural romanticism” (25):

[B]asing one’s theology not upon culture as it is today but on ... “fossil culture,” a culture that did exist before colonization [or any other prominent era way in the past] but after colonization and contact with western world does not exist except in some people’s romantic fantasies. (25)

For instance, most Singaporean Chinese are more globally exposed and Western influenced than traditional Chinese from Mainland China. Subsequently, many research participants were surprised to learn that the original Chinese worldview and culture were so different from their own existing worldview and culture.⁶

Care must, therefore, be exercised to ensure contextualization is not based on any “fossilized,” fixed idea of the culture, which may no longer be applicable to the local people. Instead, while seeking to keep in touch with historic and handed-down traditions and culture, the Church must ensure that it is keeping abreast of and being relevant to the culture of the current generation.

Implications and Practical Applications of the Findings

A number of implications and practical applications can be drawn from this study.

(1) Inadequate and Partial Contextualization

The findings show that contextualization of folk beliefs and practices is present

⁶ In fact, the difference between mainland Chinese mentality and contemporary Singaporean Chinese mentality is so great that many Singaporean business people and investors in China currently struggle with culture shock in their business ventures. An example of such differences is the traditional Chinese preference for indirect confrontation together with lots of “face-saving” *li* (mannerisms) versus the more Western-influenced Singaporean Chinese inclination for more direct, face-to-face confrontations.

whether Christians consciously pursue it or not. More often than not, past exposure and experiences of folk beliefs and practices together with the predominant teaching of the local church helps Christians formulate the necessary contextualization (e.g., going “grave-sweeping” on Good Friday/Easter period rather than precisely during *Qing Ming*). Nevertheless, the lack of proper education on the cultural or folk beliefs and practices can easily denigrate advantageous personal exposure or experiences into misconceptions or misunderstandings. Coupled with immaturity in the faith and an accompanying lack of Bible knowledge, many Christians virtually bypass the first two steps of contextualization (viz., phenomenological analysis and ontological critique, respectively) and jump prematurely to the third and fourth steps (viz., evaluative response and transformative ministries, respectively). Thus, while contextualization is done, it is not properly or fully carried out most of the time. If individual Christians encounter difficulties pursuing phenomenological analysis and ontological critique, the local church needs to step in strongly to offer contemporary studies and research and to provide clear guidelines on the Christian response to different aspects of folk beliefs and practices.

(2) Insufficient Engagement

Leonard Sweet mentions that the Church is cocooning, retreating into itself, isolating itself, and becoming immersed in its own needs and desires (34). The findings of this research reveal that many Christians are not very well exposed to and knowledgeable of their own folk beliefs and practices. It implies that Christians are still far from understanding their own cultural roots. Rather than engaging their world and culture, most Christians are guilty of cocooning and retreating into their own comfortable Christian company.

The answer to these two dysfunctions of insufficient engagement and incomplete contextualization is for the Church to proactively engage in contextualization. Instead of sitting back and allowing indifference and ignorance towards folk and cultural beliefs to promulgate, the Church in Singapore should demonstrate its concern for non-believers by actively learning about current cultural as well as folk beliefs and practices, which, in the past, it simply rejected. It needs to recognize that even though Christians are well exposed to issues like ancestral worship, they still possess a lot of ignorance and misunderstanding concerning ancestral worship. Without proper investigation and due respect for elders, tradition, culture, and worldview, many young fervent converts, for example, may end up branding all ancestral venerating practices as superstitious or simply identifying all things Chinese as religious or Daoist. The Church, therefore, needs to help Christians stop perpetuating such a misunderstood notion of folk beliefs and practices. Failure to do so only renders the Church more foreign-looking, detached, and exclusive before the populace. The Church in Singapore has certainly reached a point where it is now ready to tackle the harder issues of phenomenological analysis and ontological critique of its own folk beliefs and practices. Proactive contextualization needs to be next on the Church's agenda in engaging the world.

(3) Constant Recontextualization

Contextualization is a process of making the gospel as well as the Christian life and theology relevant to its culture and time. Issues like ancestral worship that have been contextualized in the past need to be constantly reviewed and recontextualized as society changes. For example, the vast popularity of cremation encouraged by the government of Singapore has produced new issues for *Qing Ming* "grave sweeping." How much grave

sweeping can a filial descendent perform before a columbarium? How do the family gather together before such a tiny niche? Similarly, issues like *feng shui*, once thought to be confined only to the very superstitious, unlearned, or the very religious and related only to the siting of Chinese graves and temples, are today practiced openly and with lots of fanfare by individuals, businesses, and even public corporations and government bodies over non-religious buildings and structures. Whereas Christians a generation ago could choose to ignore them, Christians today need to be taught how to respond to them. After all, many public structures around them are erected unabashedly according to *feng shui* principles. Their contemporaries may be practicing it. Secular books on interior design are advocating it, and universities are making the study of *feng shui* compulsory in architecture courses. By simply resting on its past laurels and achievement of contextualization, the Church can easily become irrelevant. To maintain its cutting edge in the society, it needs to constantly reevaluate how it is contextualizing folk and contemporary issues.

(4) Sensitive Witness

The seminar on “Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study” has significantly impacted the lives of all who attended. Participants spoke of increased awareness of folk religion, awareness of the danger of split-level Christianity, and the problem of the excluded middle. Though Hiebert’s method of beginning with phenomenological analysis may not be new to most people, somehow it reminds the participants of their propensity to prejudge and be biased against folk beliefs—becoming insensitive witnesses of the gospel. The findings show that people who are properly trained in contextualization and who have been taught to begin

with an objective understanding of folk beliefs can become better contextualizers. Their Christianity will be more relevant to the populace, and they will also become more sensitive witnesses who can appreciate the interaction between culture, folk beliefs, and their Christian faith.

(5) Particular Challenge in Contextualizing *Feng Shui*

The findings show that contextualizing *feng shui* is a challenge because of the different definitions people give it and because *feng shui* does not present itself as an opposing alternative to Christianity but more often as a subtle supplementary add-on help for anybody.

First, when the term *feng shui* is mentioned, depending on one's background training and exposure, it can immediately be considered as either a scientific logic or a religious superstition. Christians, preferring the former definition, would say that *feng shui* refers to the sciences of mathematics, geography, meteorology, and astronomy. in antiquity. Therefore, in actuality, everyone is already practicing some form of *feng shui*; however, those who view it as religious and superstitious point to popular *feng shui* as being steeped in religious superstitions and connections. Rather than confusing and causing less mature Christians or on-looking non-Christians to stumble, they advocate all Christians to shy away from *feng shui*. Contextualization of *feng shui*, therefore, means different things to these two groups of people. Definition on what kind of *feng shui* is being dealt with must come first before any response can be given.

Second, unlike ancestral worship, which is a formal and public ritual that the Church has been forced to confront and contextualize, *feng shui* is a private and discreet practice that seeks to play only supplementary roles in a practitioner's life. Though its

impact on the Church is critical, it does not present itself as something visible and urgent to be contextualized. The result is that the Chinese Church and individual Christians seldom deliberately and adequately respond to *feng shui*.

Third, *feng shui* belongs to a genre of folk practices that is mechanistic. It exists in a “this world” yet “unseen” domain, a sphere traditionally ignored by the Church and inadequately addressed by Western theology. This study has shown that one possible theological response to a folk practice like *feng shui* is to emphasize God at work throughout the created order. God is at work and interested not just in the spiritual and supernatural but in the natural and ordinary world as well. In the process of engaging *feng shui*, the seminar group (which in this case functioned also as the hermeneutical community) realized that contextualization also entails learning new and positive things from existing folk beliefs. For example, *feng shui* particularly reminds the Church of its own need for Christian functional substitutes to fill the vacuum of the mechanistic “excluded middle” with things like prayer, fasting, dedication, and consecration services. Finally, *feng shui* also reminds Christians of God’s desire for *shalom* not just between God and people, but among God, people, and the creation.

(6) Individual and Group Contextualization

In this study, contextualization was attempted first by the seminar group together and then by the participants on an individual level as they tackle folk issues encountered in real life for the next two months after the seminar. This procedure reinforces the point that contextualization needs to be carried out both in community and inevitably by every individual Christian in his or her own unique encounter with issues that engages the Christian faith. Thus, while all Christians need to be trained to perform critical

contextualization on their own as part of the process of their Christian discipleship and nurture, a second and higher level of group contextualization is also needed. The local church must deliberately form such groups in order to lend voice and guidance to engage urgent as well as real issues, such as *feng shui*, that confronts the church.

(7) Completing All Four Steps in Hiebert's Critical Contextualization

This study has shown that not all four steps in Hiebert's critical contextualization are carried out or are required to be carried out at every encounter with folk belief. First, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the shortness of time in an encounter may not permit a comprehensive execution of all four steps of contextualization. Second, the Christian may not have on hand all the resources (e.g., Bible and literature concerning certain folk beliefs and practices) useful for contextualization. Third, such spontaneous contextualizations are usually carried out in fragments according to the situation. Proper systematic contextualization sequenced according to Hiebert's four steps can only be carried out in a deliberate and controlled scenario such as my seminar. Fourth, Christians do not perform all four steps of critical contextualization at any one particular encounter because every new contextualization always build upon past experiences and past contextualizations from past encounters. Current contextualizations also rely on past training or teaching handed by church leaders. Thus, Christians usually lean on the phenomenological analysis (step 1) and ontological critique (step 2) that the Church has done and imparted to them and just apply evaluative responses (step 3) and transformative ministries (step 4) when they encounter an issue. To a large extent, many participants in their subsequent encounters with folk practices used the seminar in this way.

(8) Long-Term Behavioral Changes

In this study, I had hoped to see long-term behavioral changes in terms of the practice of contextualization in the daily lives of the participants; however, the findings show that behavioral change can only come after time, together with disciplined application of what has been taught. Although the participants wrestle with real life controversies in the classroom, the two weeks of seminar was not long enough for them to test their newfound knowledge or conviction on the issues they face in their daily lives. The post-seminar monthly reports show that while most participants still retain head knowledge concerning the importance of contextualization, many are not disciplined to practice contextualization all the time consciously. More importantly, some do not even exhibit much transformation in their spontaneous reactions to folk beliefs and practices, maintaining that such practices were superstitious without giving them the benefit of the doubt or first analyzing them objectively. Engagement in real life issues during classroom instruction is, therefore, important. The findings also demonstrate that head knowledge itself cannot change lifestyle. What the participants need is more conscious reflections of their everyday encounters with folk practices through a more prolonged and less intensive seminar.

(9) Course Curriculum

One practical application arising from this research is the development of a Christian discipleship course that can help Christians learn and practice critical contextualization. The amount of research poured into the study of folk religion and contextualization, the preparation and delivery of the six sessions for the seminar, the PowerPoint production, course notes, case studies, quiz on Chinese worldview,

contextualization practice on *Qing Ming* and *feng shui* all should not be simply tossed aside with the completion of this research project. In fact, all preparations for the seminar together with the research will go a long way towards the production of a missiological course on “Folk Religion and Contextualization” appropriate both for seminary students as well as for equipping the laity.

Contributions to Research Methodology

This research has attempted to measure not just one particular folk belief but five related folk beliefs and practices. Concurrently, it tested Christians’ reactions to all five folk beliefs through a seminar on folk religion and contextualization. Though the survey contains only nineteen items (statements), each completed survey essentially generates ninety-five (nineteen multiplied by five) pieces of information. This arrangement allows not only analysis to be carried out on each individual folk practice but also on the collective whole representing the full range of Chinese folk beliefs.

Another distinctive contribution to research methodology is the employment of a wide variety of instruments for measurement. The pre- and post-seminar surveys were helpful in providing many useful statistical analyses. The qualitative pre-seminar written interview as well as post-seminar oral interview not only supplemented the findings but often helped provide a clearer picture from a second perspective. Such synergy of methodology would not be possible had the research depended solely on the quantitative survey. The *feng shui* case study helped ascertain that participants were able to apply what they had learned, while the two monthly feedback reports were useful in capturing long-term impact on the lives of the participants. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative measurements, measured at fixed times and over a period of time, has yielded

a wide range of information from a wide spectrum of perspectives. The result is a more reliable and consistent interpretation of the findings. For example, differing information from different sources allows for a multifaceted interpretation of the findings while overlapping and similar results from different instruments provide opportunities for double-checking and auditing. All these ensure internal consistency. Such an integrated method of research, with further fine-tuning, will certainly prove useful for future missiological and ministry research studies.

Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study

Because the research insisted on a small group seminar in order to maximize participation, the sample inevitably was small. This small sample became one of the limitations and weaknesses for analysis of the quantitative survey.

In addition, the sample was highly selective. It was taken from three hundred personal friends from my newsletter mailing list. Naturally, these people do not represent the actual spread of Christians in Singapore. Because of their common relationship to me in the context of my ministry at church and with Campus Crusade for Christ, they are naturally biased somewhat towards Campus Crusade for Christ, evangelicalism, and Methodism. The group was also predominantly English-speaking Singaporean Chinese Christians with very high education; consequently, the group tended to focus more on pastoral interventions than personal interventions and, as observed by C. K. Tong, were generally apathetic towards Chinese tradition and values (Trends 33). Thus, the generalizability of the research is limited.

This study was conducted in the form of a short-term two-day seminar. The participants' time commitment began with the two weekend seminars and ended with the

submission of the two monthly reports in two succeeding months. Unlike the ongoing nature of a church community, long-term change is hard to monitor under such a time-limited context. The study could be strengthened by providing more assimilation time through a longer period of time (say, from three to six weekends) as opposed to a “crash” course. The participants would have more time to process their thoughts and more opportunities to encounter folk elements at work around them. They would then be able to come back to class and talk about and process their struggles and contextualization concerning those issues. In addition, the practical exposures and encounters in the field would in turn, create more urgency and impetus in the participants to practice the contextualization they were taught. Consequently, the seminar would become more practical and less theoretical. Possibly, behavioral changes would also be more evident if the participants were allowed more time to integrate their learning experiences with their life experiences under the supervision of the instructor.

Feedback from the participants shows that certain statements in the survey could also be reworded for better clarity and revamped to generate more useful information for the research. For example, to ask if there were any link between a person’s convictions versus the way that person practices contextualization (i.e., in research question #3) was a good research question. Unfortunately, instead of measuring the participants’ clarity in conviction (which more plausibly would relate to contextualization) the survey statements measured “openness/closedness” in the participants’ conviction (which, as it turned out, has no correlation with contextualization at all). Had all the instruments been pilot tested on a larger group of people, a factor analysis test could be run on the data. A more objective classifications of the items/statements in the survey could be generated

and, thereby, improve the accuracy of the findings.

In actuality, the conviction and contextualization practices extracted from the survey and interviews are based on self-identification or self-disclosures made by the respondents themselves. The danger and presence of social desirability bias—the respondents answering from the perspective of a cultural or religious ideal than actual practices in real life—becomes real. This limitation can be minimized if additional qualitative processes, such as biographical reconstructions, causal connections, ethnographic studies, and the adoption of the respondents' role, were carried out; however, they would only make the project impractical, complex and cumbersome since it already made use of four different instruments.

Further Studies

While attempting to answer the research questions, this study raises other important issues worth further investigation. The findings reveal that Christians do not have much knowledge of *feng shui* at all. Presently, only a few Chinese Christian books discuss how Christians should respond to *feng shui*. Even then, the coverage of the subject is superficial, and the total number of pages dealing with *feng shui* from all the Christian books located does not amount to more than a hundred.⁷ A possible future project would be to conduct field research on the prevalence and practice of *feng shui* by Singaporeans today. Part of this study can entail interviewing *feng shui* practitioners and *feng shui* masters, seeking their opinion on their understanding of *feng shui*. Such research would not only provide useful information for contextualization but an

⁷ The following are some Christian books that deal with *feng shui* (the parenthesis indicates the number of pages in each book devoting to the subject of *feng shui*): *Di Shan Ji Yan Kan Xuan Ming, Feng Shui* [An Alternative Perspective on Physiognomy and Geomancy] (26 pages) by Amos Jui-chen Wang, *Feng Shui Yi Fu Qi* [Geomancy and Blessing] (28 pages) by David Hock Tey, and *Ming Jian Zhong Jiao* [Folk Religion] (3 pages) by Ren Tang Chen.

appropriate Christian response to the practice of *feng shui*. In addition, the data yielded, being from a local Singaporean context, could create more awareness on the rampancy of *feng shui* and a subsequent increased sense of urgency to respond to it.

Second, the Church similarly faces an urgent need to contextualize Chinese medical practices and martial arts. As noted, these are areas that Christians are still practicing and which they have a hard time contextualizing (especially in the area of ontological analysis and Scriptural teachings on these practices).

Third, closely related to the above subjects of *feng shui*, Chinese medical practices, and martial arts is the enigmatic subject of *qi*. This study has revealed that a proper understanding of the basic underlying Chinese worldview and assumption on the multifarious nature of *qi* is foundational to the Christian's response to *feng shui*, Chinese medical practices, martial arts, and even *qi gong*. Further studies on *qi* can be carried out concerning its nature, historical understanding and development, use in different contexts, and contemporary understanding.

Fourth, Chinese festivals also form an integral part of Chinese folk beliefs and practices. It was not included in this research study because by itself it promises to be a multifarious and intriguing study. As a matter of fact, a mid-1988 survey of 1,025 households by the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations reveals that younger Singaporeans were losing interest in and becoming confused about Chinese festivals, customs, and rites (Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Association 5). The survey prompted the production of a handbook called Chinese Customs and Festivals in Singapore (7). Singaporean Chinese Christians often face the dialectic tension of seeking to preserve culture in traditional festivals and distinguishing those that are religious in

nature. A study on Chinese festivals and how Christians should respond to them would contribute significantly to the Chinese Church and its engagement with the Chinese society.

Fifth, this study also reveals the inadequacy of the seminar at producing long-term behavioral changes in the participants. Further studies could be conducted to find out how to effect such long-term behavioral changes with regards to the practice of contextualization. For example, teaching contextualization can be carried out over a longer stretch of time or as part of a church's long term discipleship program.

Sixth, further research could also be conducted to test for the relationship between contextualization practices and conviction of folk beliefs and practices against such factors like denominational affiliations, education level, age, birth order, or first language used (e.g., Chinese-speaking versus English-speaking Singaporean Christians). A study like this would provide better understanding on how Christians from different backgrounds view and contextualize Chinese folk beliefs and practices. Besides, it would also reveal how differing Christian backgrounds offer different forms of pastoral and discipleship ministry.

Finally, although a number of studies have already been carried out to apply and adapt Hiebert's four steps of critical contextualization, plenty of room is still available for further investigation and evaluation on each of the four steps. For example, investigation can be made to determine what kind of Bible study methods or hermeneutical procedures are best suited to carry out the type of ontological critique needed in critical contextualization. Alternatively, the study can focus on collecting and documenting the many transformative ministries already performed by experienced pastors and

missionaries in the field. Such documentation will certainly be helpful for the training of future pastors and missionaries.

Conclusion

This study has contributed to the body of Christ by heightening its awareness to issues it may have otherwise perceived as not urgent to engage (e.g., the role folk beliefs play in society and within the Church). It has succeeded in stimulating the Church to reflect and contextualize folk issues critically.

Specifically, the research has shown that the Asian Church cannot depend solely on Western theology to contextualize its own faith. The Asian Church needs to develop its own indigenous theology to engage its naturalistic Eastern thoughts and worldviews. In the process, its theology may need to become more holistically redemption centered as well as creation centered. *Feng shui*, itself, is an excellent example of an indigenous mechanistic folk practice that sits outside the traditional approach of the Church (in the “excluded middle”). Any attempt at contextualizing *feng shui* must take into account its rational beginnings and motivations coupled with its contamination by folk and religious elements especially in contemporary practices. Further, the enigmatic *qi* needs to be recognized as the root issue concerning the contextualization of virtually all Chinese folk beliefs including *feng shui*, Chinese medical practices, martial arts, and *qi gong*.

This study also found that all four steps of Hiebert’s critical contextualization in reality might not be utilized at every contextualization exercise. Nevertheless, the critical contextualization seminar conducted as part of this study has served to add to the participants’ existing church tradition, exposure, and experiences, provoking them to more sensitivity in evangelism and to critical contextualization in their Christian

discipleship.

In a unique way, this research was carried out outside the context of any specific local church such that the contributions in contextualization crossed denominational lines and traditions. A particular tradition of engaging and contextualizing *feng shui* has emerged, and fresh impetus for engagement with ground issues has surfaced. The Church's challenge now is to pass this awareness on to its members and to ensure that its contextualization is ever true to Scripture and tradition and yet relevant to context, location, culture, and time.

APPENDIX A

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #1

Title: Introduction to Folk Religion, Beliefs, and Practices

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Know the importance of studying folk religion, beliefs, and practices.
2. Distinguish what is folk religion versus formal religions.

Real Time 9:00 am	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
9:50 am	0:50	50	Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship • Getting to know each other • Clarification of survey • Reason for this seminar • How the project will be conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express appreciation • Opening prayer • Get class to introduce themselves to each other • Sign-up sheet for post-seminar interviews
10:00 am	1:00	10	What is folk religion?	
10:10 am	1:10	10	BREAK	
10:30 am	1:30	20	Why is the study of folk religion important? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of human existence into 4 sets of relationships • Brief introduction to formal and folk religions 	
11:00 am	2:00	30	Formal versus folk religions	Small group discussion Allow time for small groups to get to know each other
11:10 am	2:10	10	BREAK	

APPENDIX B

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #2

Title: Folk Religion and Contextualization

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Understand what are folk religion, beliefs, and practices.
2. Understand what is contextualization.
3. Know why contextualization is important.
4. Know what is non-contextualization and “split-level Christianity.”

Real Time 11:10 am	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
11:25 am	0:15	15	Formal versus folk religions	Class discussion
11:40 am	0:30	15	Relationship between formal, folk and primal religions	
11:50 am	0:40	10	Folk beliefs and practices	
12:05 pm	0:55	15	Introduction to contextualization of theology	
12:45 pm	1:35	40	LUNCH BREAK	
1:05 pm	1:55	20	The need for contextualization	
1:25 pm	2:15	20	The basis for contextualization	
1:40 pm	2:30	15	Non-contextualization and split level Christianity	
1:50 pm	2:40	10	BREAK	

APPENDIX C

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #3

Title: Critical Contextualization and Worldview

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Know what is uncritical contextualization and syncretism.
2. Know what is critical contextualization and the “excluded middle.”
3. Know what is Paul Hiebert’s 4 step critical contextualization.
4. Articulate what is worldview.
5. Understand Chinese worldview.

Real Time 1:50 pm	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
2:00 pm	0:10	10	Uncritical contextualization and syncretism	
2:15 pm	0:25	15	Critical contextualization and the excluded middle	
2:30 pm	0:40	15	Paul Hiebert’s 4 step critical contextualization	
3:10 pm	1:30	40	Exercise in critical contextualization (Case study: <i>Qing Ming</i> ¹)	Class discussion
3:20 pm	1:40	10	BREAK	
3:30 pm	1:50	10	Worldview	
4:00 pm	2:20	30	Quiz and discussion on the Chinese worldview	Class quiz Class discussion

¹ *Qing Ming* (Ching Ming) literally, the “Bright and Clear” festival occurs 105 days after the winter solstice or two weeks after the spring equinox and is around April (Deglopper 43). It is the time for “grave sweeping”—visiting, repairing, cleaning, sacrificing at tombs.

APPENDIX D

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #4

Title: Phenomenological Analysis of *Feng Shui*

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Carry out phenomenological analysis of *feng shui*.
2. Understand how to apply phenomenological analysis to other folk beliefs and practices.

Real Time 9:00 am	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
9:15 am	0:15	15	Worship	
9:30 am	0:30	15	Recapitulation of folk religion, contextualization and the four steps of critical contextualization	
9:50 am	0:50	20	Example and discussion on phenomenological analysis: Chinese video clip on <i>feng shui</i>	Class discussion VCR needed
10:00 am	1:00	10	BREAK	
10:30 am	1:30	30	Phenomenological analysis of <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., history, Chinese worldview, Chinese religion, <i>qi</i>	Small group discussion
10:50 am	1:50	20	Phenomenological analysis of <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., history, Chinese worldview, Chinese religion, <i>qi</i>	Class discussion Appoint a participant to record the discussion in writing
10:55 am	1:55	5	Wrap-up on principle behind phenomenological analysis	
11:05 am	2:05	10	BREAK	

APPENDIX E

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #5

Title: Ontological Critique of and Evaluative Response to *Feng Shui*

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Carry out ontological critique of *feng shui*.
2. Understand how to apply ontological critique on other folk beliefs and practices.
3. Carry out evaluative response of *feng shui*.
4. Understand how to apply evaluative response on other folk beliefs and practices.

Real Time 11:05 am	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
11:15 am	0:10	10	Explanation on ontological critique	
11:45 am	0:40	30	What does the Bible says about <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., motivation, <i>qi</i> , five elements and other tools of <i>feng shui</i>	Small group discussion
12:05 pm	1:00	20	What does the Bible says about <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., motivation, <i>qi</i> , five elements and other tools of <i>feng shui</i>	Class discussion Appoint a participant to record the discussion in writing.
12:45 pm	1:40	40	LUNCH BREAK	
12:50 pm	1:45	5	Wrap-up on principles behind ontological critique	
1:00 pm	2:00	10	Explanation on evaluative response	
1:30 pm	2:30	30	Evaluative response on <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., living in harmony with nature, <i>qi</i> , five elements	Small group discussion
1:40 pm	2:40	10	BREAK	

APPENDIX F

LESSON PLAN FOR SEMINAR SESSION #6

Title: Transformative Ministries

Learning Objectives. By the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Carry out transformative ministries of *feng shui*.
2. Understand how to apply transformative ministries on other folk beliefs and practices.
3. Carry out critical contextualization on other folk beliefs and practices.

Real Time 1:40 pm	Cumulative Time	Time Needed (min)	Content	Remarks
2:00 pm	0:20	20	Evaluative response on <i>feng shui</i> : e.g., Living in harmony with nature, <i>qi</i> , five elements	Class discussion Appoint a participant to record the discussion in writing
2:05 pm	0:25	5	Wrap-up on principles behind evaluative response	
2:15 pm	0:35	10	Explanation on transformation ministries	
2:45 pm	1:05	30	Transformative ministries: e.g., Can a Christian practice <i>feng shui</i> ? Why or why not? Is there anything good in <i>feng shui</i> ? Functional substitutes	Small group discussion
2:55 pm	1:15	10	BREAK	
3:15 pm	1:35	20	Transformative ministries: E.g., Can a Christian practice <i>feng shui</i> ? Why or why not? Is there anything good in <i>feng shui</i> ? Functional substitutes	Class discussion Appoint a participant to record the discussion in writing
3:20 pm	1:40	5	End-of-class <i>feng shui</i> case study	Personal written response
3:35 pm	1:55	15	End-of-class <i>feng shui</i> case study	Class discussion Appoint a participant to record the discussion in writing
3:50 pm	2:10	15	Wrap-up on transformative ministries, critical contextualization and seminar	Distribute paper on “A Christian’s Response to <i>feng shui</i> ”
4:00 pm	2:20	10	Final instructions on post-seminar survey and instructions for oral interviews and monthly reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation • Handout and collect surveys • Collect sign-up sheets for post-seminar interviews • Closing prayer

APPENDIX G

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

MAH YEOW BENG

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Tel: 65830530

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10 January 2004

Dear

**Invitation to participate in a research project seminar on
Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study**

Greetings in Jesus' matchless name.

MY RESEARCH PROJECT

As you probably know from our newsletters and updates, I am currently working on a Doctor of Ministry dissertation entitled Critical Contextualization: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study. The premise for this research is that all Christians, whether they are aware or not, are theologizing and contextualizing their faith with the everyday issues in life that they encounter, like injustice, relationships, deaths, sufferings, encounters with other religions, etc. What is important is that Christians know how to contextualize Christianity to their particular situation and culture so that they and their faith can make sense and contribution to their society. This is what critical contextualization is all about. I have chosen *feng shui* as a case study because it is popular yet subversive while opinions differ as to whether it is scientific, cultural, amoral or religious.

THE SEMINAR

A key component of my dissertation research entails conducting a 6 X 2 hour seminar entitled Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practice: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study. This is more than a teaching seminar. It seeks to gather input from the participants to formulate a collective Christian response to *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices. It will be held on 28 February 2004 (Sat) and 6 March 2004 (Sat) from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at the East Asia School of Theology (EAST) Chapel, 1 Dorset Road Singapore 219486 (In the compound of Christ Church, opposite KK Hospital). This entire project is sponsored for and will be offered free, together with lunch, refreshments as well as course notes to all participants.

CRITERIA FOR VOLUNTEERS

I need your help to be one of 60 volunteers to participate in this project. As part of the conditions stipulated in this research, volunteers have to fulfill the following criteria:

1. They must be Chinese Christians.
2. They must be at least 16 years of age.
3. They must be Christians for at least one year.
4. They must have completed at least Secondary School education.
5. They must be able to understand and communicate in English (since the seminar will be in English).

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF THE VOLUNTEERS

To ensure this project is scientifically viable, of the 60 volunteers, only 30 will be randomly selected to form the research group while the remaining 30 will form the control group. The research group will participate in the following:

1. Complete a pre-seminar survey on folk religion and *feng shui* (which will be dispatched on 31/1 and collected on 21/2).
2. Complete a pre-seminar written interview on folk religion and *feng shui* (which will also be dispatched on 31/1 and collected on 21/2).
3. Participate in the seminar on the two Saturdays (28/2 and 6/3).
4. Complete a post-seminar survey on folk religion and *feng shui* (on 6/3).
5. Meet with me for a one-to-one post-seminar oral interview on folk religion and *feng shui* (anytime from 7/3-30/4).
6. Submit two simple monthly post-seminar feedback on contextualization of folk beliefs and practices via e-mail (3/4 and 1/5 respectively).

The remaining 30 volunteers will form the control group who will only participate in the pre-seminar survey on folk religion and *feng shui* as well as the pre-seminar written interview on folk religion and *feng shui*. Their purpose is to ascertain that the research group's response is normative. Those in the control group will not join in the current seminar on 28/2 and 6/3 but will be invited to a second similar seminar some time after the research.

YOUR RESPONSE IS APPRECIATED

I really need your participation as volunteers and you are welcome to use the extra volunteer forms to help recruit other friends who meet the criteria for this research. I think the seminar and the research are going to benefit both you personally as well as the church at large in Singapore. It will help all of us better able to confront local issues using the Scripture instead of just "importing" foreign theologies, which may be less relevant to our culture.

Kindly take some time to pray and consider helping as a volunteer. I will appreciate if you can respond using the enclosed response form and stamped envelope by 30 January 2004 so that the research can be completed according to schedule. You may also write me at ybmah@pacific.net.sg or call me at 65830530 for more information.

The pre-seminar survey and interview questions will be sent to all volunteers from 31 January onwards. At the same time, all volunteers will be notified as to whether they have been drawn to participate as the research group or the control group.

Thank you and may the Lord grant you a joyous as well as fulfilling Chinese New Year!

Yours in Christ,



Mah Yeow Beng

P/S: I will appreciate reference to interview any *feng shui* masters or practitioners whom you may know personally as part of research study. Thanks.

RESPONSE FORM

(Please check the statement that best represents your response and ensure this response is mailed in by 30 January 2004.)

Dear Yeow Beng,

	Yes! I fulfill all the criteria and will [sic] like to volunteer for your research project and be randomly assigned either as part of the research group or the control group.
	I am interested to consider being part of the research project but would require more information from you.
	I am interested in volunteering for the project but face the following constraints:
	I will not be able to participate in your research project.
	Others:

Name:		Male/ Female:	Tel (H)
Tel (HP):	Tel (O):	Email:	
Address:			
Comments:			

ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER FORM

(Kindly respond by 30 January 2004)

Dear Yeow Beng,

Yes! I fulfill all the criteria and will [sic] like to volunteer for your research project and be randomly assigned either as part of the research group or the control group.

Name:		Male/ Female:	Tel (H)
Tel (HP):	Tel (O):	Email:	
Address:			
Person who told me about this research project:			
Comments:			

APPENDIX H

CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH GROUP

MAH YEOW BENG

274 Pasir Ris Street 21 #08-524 Singapore 510274**Tel: 65830530****Email: ybmah@pacific.net.sg**

31 January 2004

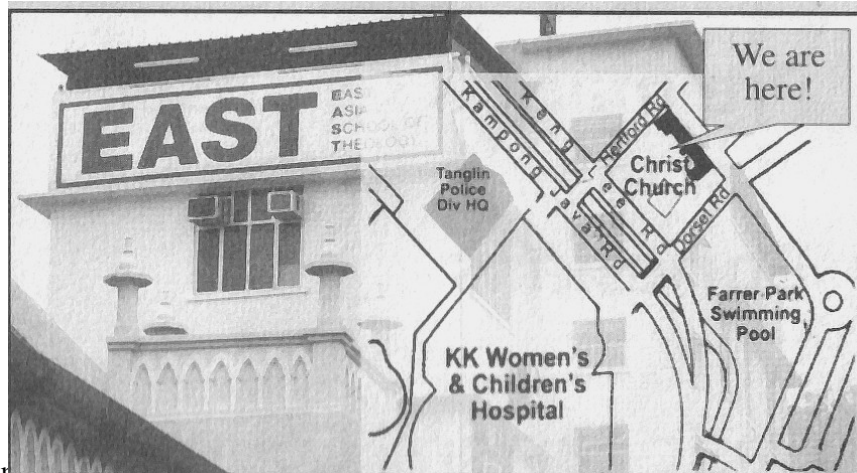
Dear

**Confirmation of Participation in Research Group in
Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study**

Thank you so much for your response and agreement to participate as a volunteer for my Doctor of Ministry dissertation project entitled Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study. I am very encouraged that as of 30 January 2004, twenty-five people, including you, have agreed to volunteer in the project. This means that you (all twenty-five of you) are automatically drawn into the research group (that needs to participate in the seminar).

The two immediate activities which require your attention are:

1. Completing the enclosed (1) Pre-Seminar on Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices and (2) Pre-Seminar Interview Questions on *feng shui* and **returning them to me by 21 February 2004**. You may e-mail them or post them to my postal address.
2. Participating in the seminar on Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study on **28 February 2004 (Sat) and 6 March 2004 (Sat) from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm** at the East Asia School of Theology (EAST), 1 Dorset Road Singapore 219486 (In the compound of Christ Church, opposite KK Hospital). This entire project is sponsored for and will be offered free, together with lunch, refreshments as well as course notes to all participants. Please inform me ahead of time if you intend to invite other friends for the seminar. The directions to EAST are as follow:



From

351 or

980 and alight at bus stop just outside Christ Church/EAST.

From **Bugis MRT Station** (opposite Seiyu Bugis Junction): Take **bus 851 or 980** and alight after KK Hospital, opposite Christ Church/EAST.

From **Little India MRT Station**: Take a 5-minute walk by Rutland Road towards Farrer Park Swimming Pool.

The buses that come to EAST are **56, 131, 166, 607, 851 and 980**. For those who drive, **free parking is available in Christ Church/EAST compound**.

More details concerning other requirements for participants in the research group will be given during the seminar. In the meantime, I will appreciate if you can join me in prayer for the following:

1. Ability to get 30 participants in the seminar (research group). Some of you have told me that you are still contacting other friends to participate as well. Pray that these would be able to respond and participate in the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire before 28 February 2004.
2. God to use this seminar and research to bring about not only a breakthrough in the growth and maturity of the church but even of our own lives and our relationship with him as well.
3. Ability to get 30 others for the control group (to participate only in the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire).
4. Wisdom and protection as I prepare for the seminar.
5. Grace and wisdom upon Ms Josephine Seow and her team of helpers helping in the logistics of the seminar.

I look forward to receiving your completed survey and questionnaire by **21 February** and to seeing you at the seminar on **28 February and 6 March**. May the Lord bless you just as you have already been a blessing and encouragement to me by volunteering for this project.

With gratefulness and appreciation,



Mah Yeow Beng

P/S: I will also appreciate references to interview any *feng shui* masters or practitioners whom you may know personally as part of this research study. Thanks.

APPENDIX I

**PRE-SEMINAR SURVEY ON COMMON CHINESE FOLK BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES**

PART A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Section A1: General Information**

Name:	Male/Female*	Date Surveyed:			
Address:					
Email:	Telephone:				
Age Range (As of last Birthday)*: 16-20; 21-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; >61	Birth Order (Indicate <u>1st</u> , <u>2nd</u> , <u>etc.</u> of <u>total #</u> of children) : _____ of _____	No. of Years as a Christian:			
Occupation:	Highest Education Level Passed:	First Language:			
Name of Church (Denomination):		Ministry/Position in Church:			
Circle any or all of the following Missiological courses you have been exposed to: <table style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk Religions • Cross-cultural Evangelism </td> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative Religions • Contextual Theology </td> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Religions • Others (Please specify.): </td> </tr> </table>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk Religions • Cross-cultural Evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative Religions • Contextual Theology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Religions • Others (Please specify.):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk Religions • Cross-cultural Evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative Religions • Contextual Theology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Religions • Others (Please specify.): 			

* Circle whichever is appropriate.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Ancestral Veneration or Worship:** Praying and making offerings regularly to dead ancestors or relatives.
2. **Chinese Medical Practices:** Visiting *Sinsehs*, Chinese Chiropractors, Foot Reflexology, acupuncture, etc.
3. ***Feng Shui*:** Geomancy.
4. ***Martial Arts*:** *Gong Fu*, *Wu Shu*, *Tai Ji* Exercise, etc.
5. ***Qi Gong*:** Breathing exercise; includes *Falun Gong*.

INSTRUCTIONS

For the following statements, write the number (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive) that best represents the *intensity* of your agreement to and participation according to the corresponding statements under the five broad categories of Chinese folk beliefs and practices (All boxes must be filled.):

No.	Statement (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive)	Ancestral Worship	Chinese Medical Practices	Feng Shui (Geomancy)	Chinese Martial Arts	Qi Gong
Section A2: Exposure to Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices						
A.	I practiced it before I became a Christian.					
B.	I used to practice it as a Christian.					
C.	I am still practicing it.					
D.	I have witnessed this firsthand being practiced by others.					
E.	I have read literature that explains about this practice.					
F.	I have listened to personal accounts and experiences of those who practice it.					

PART B: SURVEY

PART B: CONTEXTUALIZATION

No.	Statement (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive)	Ancestral Worship	Chinese Medical Practices	Feng Shui (Geomancy)	Chinese Martial Arts	Qi Gong
Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization						
1.1	I have been sufficiently trained to contextualize this issue.					
1.2	I can explain what it is about e.g., background, history, current practices, etc.					
1.3	I understand my cultural worldview and how this practice relates to it.					
1.4	I continue to find out more about it so that I can help others who are struggling with it.					
1.5	I am clear which aspects of it are incompatible and which are compatible with my faith.					
1.6	I understand the original intention and motivation behind this practice.					
1.7	I understand how this practice benefits my particular culture.					
1.8	I am aware what aspects of the Christian faith can fill the needs met by this practice.					

No.	Statement (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive)	Ancestral Worship	Chinese Medical Practices	Feng Shui (Geomancy)	Chinese Martial Arts	Qi Gong
1.9	I know what the Bible says about the different aspects of this practice.					
1.10	I can differentiate the cultural, scientific, and religious aspects of this practice.					
1.11	I research secular literature about this practice.					
1.12	I research Christian literature that respond to this practice.					
1.13	I substitute the function played by this practice with some other practices that are compatible to Christianity (e.g., instead of burning joss-sticks before ancestors, some Christians place flowers as a form of respect). Name any examples of your own (write on reverse side of paper if additional space is needed) :					
Section B2: Beliefs and Convictions						
2.1	A Christian can practice it.					
2.2	It does not contradict or threaten my Christian faith.					
2.3	It is not religious.					
2.4	I do not discourage non-Christians from practicing it.					
2.5	It is just an Oriental science, quasi-science, or worldview.					
2.6	It accomplishes what it is supposed to do most of the time.					
2.7	I lose significant attachments to my culture when I do not practice this.					
2.8	It is cultural.					
2.9	I intend to (continue to) practice this.					
2.10	It needs to be preserved and must not be lost.					

APPENDIX J

POST-SEMINAR SURVEY ON COMMON CHINESE FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

PART A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name:	Date Surveyed:
-------	----------------

DEFINITIONS

1. **Ancestral Veneration or Worship:** Praying and making offerings regularly to dead ancestors or relatives.
2. **Chinese Medical Practices:** Visiting *Sinsehs*, Chinese Chiropractors, Foot Reflexology, acupuncture, etc.
3. **Feng Shui:** Geomancy.
4. **Martial Arts:** *Gong Fu*, *Wu Shu*, *Tai Ji* Exercise, etc.
5. **Qi Gong:** Breathing exercise; includes Falun Gong.

INSTRUCTION

For the following statements, write the number (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive) that best represents the *intensity* of your agreement to and participation according to the corresponding statements under the five broad categories of Chinese folk beliefs and practices (All boxes must be filled.):

PART B: SURVEY

No.	Statement (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive)	Ancestral Worship	Chinese Medical Practices	Feng Shui (Geomancy)	Chinese Martial Arts	Qi Gong
Section B1: Understanding and Practice of Contextualization						
1.1	I have been sufficiently trained to contextualize this issue.					
1.2	I can explain what it is about e.g., background, history, current practices, etc.					
1.3	I understand my cultural worldview and how this practice relates to it.					
1.4	I continue to find out more about it so that I can help others who are struggling with it.					
1.5	I am clear which aspects of it are incompatible and which are compatible with my faith.					
1.6	I understand the original intention and motivation behind this practice.					

No.	Statement (1 = Very Negative; 2 = Negative; 3 = Neutral/Not Sure; 4 = Positive; 5 = Very Positive)	Ancestral Worship	Chinese Medical Practices	Feng Shui (Geomancy)	Chinese Martial Arts	Qi Gong
1.7	I understand how this practice benefits my particular culture.					
1.8	I am aware what aspects of the Christian faith can fill the needs met by this practice.					
1.9	I know what the Bible says about the different aspects of this practice.					
1.10	I can differentiate the cultural, scientific, and religious aspects of this practice.					
1.11	I research secular literature about this practice.					
1.12	I research Christian literature that respond to this practice.					
1.13	I substitute the function played by this practice with some other practices that are compatible to Christianity (e.g., instead of burning joss-sticks before ancestors, some Christians place flowers as a form of respect). Name any examples of your own (write on reverse side of paper if additional space is needed):					
Section B2: Beliefs and Convictions						
2.1	A Christian can practice it.					
2.2	It does not contradict or threaten my Christian faith.					
2.3	It is not religious.					
2.4	I do not discourage non-Christians from practicing it.					
2.5	It is just an Oriental science, quasi-science, or worldview.					
2.6	It accomplishes what it is supposed to do most of the time.					
2.7	I lose significant attachments to my culture when I do not practice this.					
2.8	It is cultural.					
2.9	I intend to (continue to) practice this.					
2.10	It needs to be preserved and must not be lost.					

APPENDIX K

PRE-SEMINAR WRITTEN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON *FENG SHUI*

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability without consulting any resources (e.g., other people, the Bible, other books, pamphlets, Internet Web sites):

Background Question

1. How common [sic] do you think is *feng shui* practiced in Singapore: (a) by professed Christians (b) by non-Christians?

Understanding and Practice of Contextualization

2. Describe *feng shui*. How is it related to the Chinese worldview and culture, the *yi jing*, *qi*, the five elements, etc.?
3. *What* is the Bible's response to *feng shui*?
4. *How* do you think Christians should respond to *feng shui*?

Beliefs, Convictions, and Behavior

5. If you have nothing to lose but possibly some things to gain, would you listen to and carry out *feng shui* advice from someone else? Why or why not?
6. If someone explains that the series of mishaps in your life were due to bad *feng shui*, would you consider the recommended "cure" if your situation is very bad and if it does not seem to contravene your faith explicitly? Why or why not?
7. What aspects of *feng shui* trouble you? What aspects benefit you?

APPENDIX L

POST-SEMINAR ORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON *FENG SHUI*

You have already answered the following questions in the pre-seminar written interview. (Allow participant to read his or her responses in the pre-seminar written interview.)

How would you answer them differently now that you have gone through the seminar on “Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study”? (Questions with bullets are clarifying questions.)

Background Question

1. How common [sic] do you think is *feng shui* practiced in Singapore: (a) by professed Christians (b) by non-Christians?

Understanding and Practice of Contextualization

2. Describe *feng shui*. For example,
 - How is it related to the Chinese worldview and culture?
 - What is *yi jing*, and how is it related to *feng shui*?
 - What is *qi*, and how is it related to *feng shui*?
 - What are the five elements, and how they are related to *feng shui*?
3. *What* is the Bible’s response to *feng shui*?
4. *How* do you think Christians should respond to *feng shui*?

Beliefs, Convictions, and Behavior

5. If you have nothing to lose but possibly some things to gain, would you listen to and carry out *feng shui* advice from someone else? Why or why not?
6. If someone explains that the series of mishaps in your life were due to bad *feng shui*, would you consider the recommended “cure” if your situation is very bad and if it does not seem to contravene your faith explicitly? Why or why not?
7. What aspects of *feng shui* trouble you? What aspects benefit you?

Seminar Evaluation

How has the seminar on “Folk Religion and Critical Contextualization: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study” helped you in contextualizing *feng shui* and other Chinese folk beliefs and practices?

APPENDIX M

FENG SHUI CASE STUDY

James is considering buying a particular house. He likes everything about it. The neighborhood looks pleasant, safe, and quiet. It is within walking distance to amenities like the market, shops, and the MRT station. He also likes the layout of the house, particularly the master bedroom's balcony overlooking the entrance of the house. But perhaps what appeals to him most is the price of the house. At \$1.2 m., it is way below the market price. He knows of another house built around the same time on another street going for \$1.5 m.

Upon further investigation, James discovers that two families have lived in the house before this within a relatively short span of four years. The first family was a Buddhist family who believed in *feng shui*. They did not have any control over the building of the house because it was built and given to them as a gift by a rich uncle. They believed that the house had bad *feng shui* because it was at the end of a T-junction. They thought that *Sha qi* was rushing towards them particularly in the master bedroom because of oncoming cars from the street facing their entrance. Despite calling on a *feng shui* Master to correct the *feng shui*, a year after they moved in, the husband's business failed and the wife came down with breast cancer. The family moved out quickly and the man's business subsequently flourished while his wife went into remission after a successful operation and chemotherapy.

The second family that moved in were atheists who actually refused to believe in *feng shui* despite being told of the earlier problem with the previous owner. Initially, everything seemed good, but last year the couple had a bad quarrel and they decided to divorce. They have a hard time trying to sell the house and that was why the price was drastically reduced.

Since you are a good friend of James and he looks up to you as a spiritual mentor most of the time, he wants to know your opinion about buying the house. James knows what *feng shui* is and is quite troubled by it.

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Q2. What aspects can you learn or know of God as a result of this incident?

If you were James and you decided to move into the house, after moving in, you feel that things do not seem to go right for you. A neighbor who knows a little bit of *feng shui* tells you that you could landscape your front garden with artificial barriers both to logically protect the glare of oncoming vehicles and to block the *sha qi* from your house. It will be quite a costly venture and you have not intended to do anything yet to the garden since it is nice and beautiful.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

APPENDIX N

MONTHLY FEEDBACK REPORT

CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
FENG SHUI AS A CASE STUDY (MARCH FEEDBACK REPORT)

Describe one encounter with a particular folk belief or practice and your reaction to it during the month of **March**. Please turn in this report to **Mah Yeow Beng, 274 Pasir Ris St 21 #08-524 S(510274) Tel: 65830530, Email: ybmah@pacific.net.sg** before **3 April 2004**.

NAME: _____

1. Date of incident:	2. Description of incident:
3. My involvement in the incident:	
4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):	

CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF FOLK BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
FENG SHUI AS A CASE STUDY (APRIL FEEDBACK REPORT)

Describe one encounter with a particular folk belief or practice and your reaction to it during the month of **April**. Please turn in this report to **Mah Yeow Beng, 274 Pasir Ris St 21 #08-524 S(510274) Tel: 65830530, Email: ybmah@pacific.net.sg** before **1 May 2004**.

NAME: _____

1. Date of incident:	2. Description of incident:
3. My involvement in the incident:	
4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was attempted or done):	

APPENDIX O

CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION IN CONTROL GROUP

MAH YEOW BENG

274 Pasir Ris Street 21 #08-524 Singapore 510274

Tel: 65830530

Email: ybmah@pacific.net.sg

31 January 2004

Dear

Confirmation of Participation in Control Group in Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate as a Control Group volunteer for my Doctor of Ministry dissertation project entitled Critical Contextualization of Folk Beliefs and Practices: *Feng Shui* as a Case Study. Kindly complete the following enclosed survey and questionnaire and return it to me either by email or by post **by 21 February 2004**:

1. A Pre-Seminar survey on Common Chinese Folk Beliefs and Practices and
2. A Pre-Seminar Interview Questions on *feng shui*.

As the control group, your answers to the survey and questionnaire are important because they will be used to verify if the response from the main research group is normative. Meanwhile, I will appreciate if you can join me in prayer for the following:

1. Ability to get 30 participants in the seminar (research group). To date, only 25 have agreed to participate as research group volunteers.
2. God to use this seminar and research to bring about not only a breakthrough in the growth and maturity of the church but even of the participants' own lives and their relationship with him as well.
3. Ability to get 30 people for the control group (to participate only in the pre-seminar survey and questionnaire).
4. Wisdom and protection as I prepare for the seminar.
5. Grace and wisdom upon Ms Josephine Seow and her team of helpers helping in the logistics of the seminar.

I look forward to receiving your completed survey and questionnaire by **21 February**. May the Lord bless you just as you have already been a blessing and encouragement to me by volunteering for this project.

With gratefulness and appreciation,



Mah Yeow Beng

P/S: I will also appreciate references to interview any *feng shui* masters or practitioners whom you may know personally as part of this research study. Thanks.

APPENDIX P

CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF *FENG SHUI*¹

Critical Contextualization as a method of relating the Christian gospel to a particular culture was originally proposed by Paul G. Hiebert in his article entitled, “Critical Contextualization,” in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research. He, along with Shaw and Tiénou, further expounded on the four steps of critical contextualization in Understanding Folk Religion. These four steps are phenomenological analysis, ontological critique, evaluative response, and transformative ministries (21-29). The following is the application of the four steps of critical contextualization on the Chinese folk practice of *feng shui*.

Step #1: Phenomenological Analysis

In this step, one tries to analyze the phenomenon of *feng shui*. This step includes analyzing the background of *feng shui* and the assumptions, logic, worldview, and values espoused in it objectively and without bias. The original information obtained from the phenomenological analysis has been reproduced under the sections “The Chinese: People, Worldview, Religions, Beliefs and Practices” and “*Feng Shui*” in Chapter 2. They will not be replicated here.

Step # 2 Ontological Critique

In the second step of critical contextualization, one performs an ontological critique by comparing *feng shui* and its claims to other knowledge, in particular, biblical teaching and Christian theology. To enter into discussion with all the related concepts and elements of *feng shui* would be tantamount to an ontological critique on the entire

¹ This appendix is condensed and modified from my own article entitled, “Living in Harmony with One’s Environment: A Christian Response to *Feng Shui*,” published in the Asia Journal of Theology.

Chinese worldview. Although such a discussion could lead to a comprehensive contextual analysis of *feng shui*, it would not be possible in a short paper like this. The contextualization is limited to the motivation behind the practice of *feng shui*, the key concept of *qi*, and the five elements and other divination tools like the *ba gua* and the *yi jing*.

Motivation: Harnessing Benefits from and Living in Harmony with Nature

According to Stephen Skinner, *feng shui* is all about “the art of living in harmony with the land, and deriving the greatest benefit, peace and prosperity from being in the right place at the right time” (4). So, on the surface at least, the crux of *feng shui* is really a desire to live in harmony with the environment. How does this measure up to biblical teachings? One begins by asking, “What does the Bible say, too, about harnessing benefits from and living in harmony with nature?”

Nature: the mandate of living in harmony with nature and the stewardship of nature. The Bible does have a lot to say about living in harmony with nature but not in exactly the same way as that presented in *feng shui*. The Bible states that God created the world and that it was good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Adam was told to exercise stewardship over it in terms of naming it (Gen. 2:19-20) and tending it (Gen. 2:15). Creation was ordered and structured (Gen. 1, 2). Christians, therefore, have a mandate to keep the harmony of God’s creation.

The problem: not living in harmony with nature and selfish abuse of nature. When the Fall occurred as recorded in Genesis 3, it came about as a result of evil and sin. The *shalom* between human and God, human and human, and human and earth was broken. Until now, all creation is groaning (Rom. 8:19-22). Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

defines God's *shalom* as the blessed harmony and flourishing intended for creation. Sin, according to him, is a culpable and personal affront to God (13) that breaks the *shalom* he intended (14). Sin is also defined as any act "that offends God not only because it bereaves or assaults God directly, as in impiety or blasphemy, but also it bereaves and assaults what God has made [the creation]" (16).

Goal: restoration of harmony with nature and stewardship of nature. God's salvation plan is not just for individual persons but also for the entire creation. The Hebrew word for *shalom*, for example, points to wellness, completeness, and soundness and is indicative of a restored relationship brought about by salvation. *Shalom* is the reality of human beings dwelling at peace with God, with self, with other human beings, and with nature. It is not just a right relationship but experiencing a delight and joy in these relationships (Wolterstorff 124). Even after humans have jeopardized the creation mandate through sin, God still provides salvation, and that salvation includes not just being at peace (reconciliation) with God and other humans but with the creation as well.

Concepts and Elements in *Feng Shui*

Does the Bible have anything to say of *qi*, the five elements and the tools of *feng shui*?

The concept of *qi*. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for God's Spirit (*ruach*) carries the connotation of wind (Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:13) and breath (Ezek. 37:1-10). To some degree, *ruach* bears epistemological consonance to the idea of *qi* (which can mean breath, air, vitality, material force, energy, life breath, etc.). Nevertheless, the Christian understands the Holy Spirit as not just an impersonal supernatural spirit or a force; the Holy Spirit is both fully personal and fully other beyond nature. The Spirit

constitutes the entire triune Godhead together with the Father and the Son (Jesus Christ). Thus, the Christian perceives the Holy Spirit as God and addresses the Spirit as a Person rather than an object. God the Spirit is to be responded to with adoration, love, and obedience rather than impersonally manipulated.

The Bible also refers to natural forces like wind (Job 1:19), earthquake (Acts 16:26), fire (1 Kings 19:11,12), storm (Exod. 9:24), sea (Job 38:8; flood—Job 20:28), and mountain (Jer. 51:25). Beside these created forces of nature, the Bible also speaks of spiritual forces like angels (Ps. 91:11), spirits (Matt. 8:16), demons (Luke 4:41), devil/Satan (Jas. 4:7), and other principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12). All these, however, are all only creations with assigned powers. They cannot be compared to God who is Creator and whose power is sovereign.

The five elements and the tools of *feng shui*. The five elements of wood, fire, metal, water, and earth are all widely found in the Bible; however, their use is not intentionally linked to any powers nor consistently aligned to any moral polarity. The Bible also makes no reference to any similar special conglomeration of the five elements. The Bible does not suggest any linkage between the five elements and a person's destiny or to any form of astrology. In fact, it explicitly negates assigning inherent supernatural or numinous power to any element of nature. A clear distinction is made between the Creator and what is created. God is distinguished from and sovereign over his creation. Physical elements on the earth and terrestrial elements in space all play a part in God's world, but not in plotting a person's destiny. According to respected theologian, J. I. Packer, God works in creation but is completed apart of it:

Space and time are dimensions of the created order; God is not “in” either; nor is he bound by either as we are.... As the world order is not self-

created, so it not self-sustaining, as God is. The stability of the universe depends on constant divine upholding ... and without it every creature of every kind, ourselves included, would cease to be. (21-22)

The Bible does acknowledge the practice of astrology but speaks against its use as a means of guidance (Isa. 47:13, 14a). It does not refer to instruments similar to the *yi jing*, *luo pan*, or *ba gua*. As noted earlier, the use of these instruments are historically related to divination. The Bible explicitly prohibits all kinds of divination, astrology, and sorcery (Deut. 18: 10-12; 2 Kings 17:17, 21:6; Acts 16:16-18).

Interestingly, however, the Bible does allude to similar practices like the deliberate location and selection of graves. For example, Abraham deliberately selected the cave of Machpelah for his wife Sarah's burial (Gen. 23) while Joseph of Arimathaea, actually had his own preselected burial cave released for Jesus' use (Matt. 27:59-60). Such intentional actions demonstrates that the Jews do follow certain in principles in grave selection although how related they are to Oriental *feng shui* principles is still a question.

Step # 3: Evaluative Response

The next step is evaluative response. The Scriptures were written for particular contexts and times; therefore, its silence over a particular issue does not necessarily equate to approval or disapproval of the matter. Since the Bible does not address Chinese concepts like *qi* and the five elements directly, they must be evaluated based particularly on the hidden implications and motivations behind the practice and use of these concepts in *feng shui*.

Harnessing Benefits from and Living in Harmony with Nature

The original purpose of living in harmony with nature in *feng shui* actually sits

squarely under God's creation mandate, an issue of concern for Christians, too. Sadly, this ideal today is almost totally adulterated by a commercialized kind of *feng shui* that emphasizes harnessing and *using feng shui* for one's own benefits. Field says that "the science of fengshui analyzed this force [*qi*] in the environment with the intention of controlling its manifestations in the individual." In other words, the motivation of *feng shui* practitioners today is the control of *qi* not for environmental or other people's gains but usually for personal advantage, sometimes even at the expense of the environment and others. For example, someone related how Chinese immigrants to Canada started chopping down beautiful fir and pine trees in front of their houses because the sharp pointedness of the trees were like "poison arrows" that broke their good *feng shui*. The result was a lot of tension between the Canadians and immigrant Chinese ("Re: Favor"²).

The creation mandate from God is to take care of creation for creation's sake and for God's glory. People are not the masters; they are the stewards. They are answerable to the Creator, the Owner, and the Master, who is God. The aspect of harnessing benefits from creation, therefore, needs to be carefully carried out as stewardship rather than for personal and selfish gain without concern for the general well-being of other aspects of creation.

The Concept of *Qi*

How does *qi* fit into Christian theology? It cannot point to God and his power because the Christian God is personal. Although both *qi* and the Holy Spirit find a common root in the idea of "wind" and "breath," which may refer to preternatural powers to assist humans, they are fundamentally different in nature. While the Chinese view *qi* as

² Name of author intentionally left out as part of confidentiality assured to respondent of research survey.

an impersonal force, Christians would vehemently reject any notion of the Holy Spirit as a force. They believe that the Spirit is fully personal and fully other than nature and identify the Spirit as the third person of the triune God. Thus, while *qi* is meant to be harnessed impersonally by the Chinese for harmony and well-being, the Holy Spirit is to be obeyed, loved, and adored by Christians.

The use of the term *qi* in the Chinese language, admittedly, covers a wide area. Besides its description in *feng shui* as an energy that flows according to the contours of physical objects, it is also used to describe the wind that works meteorologically and the unseen energy that works in one's body. This bodily *qi* by itself is already very ambiguous. On the one hand, it can refer to the vitality that determines the health of a person.³ On the other hand, it is also associated with *qi gong* (Chinese meditation and yoga), *tai ji* (Chinese exercise), and Chinese *gong fu* (martial arts) (Lam 246).⁴ To date, the term *qi* still remains as undefined and inconclusive as ever. Although the generic term *qi* may be employed to describe so many different phenomena, in each case *qi* could refer to different elements. As implied by Jonathan Chao, some of these could even indicate demonic influences whereas others, especially those with no spiritual allusions, could possibly refer to scientific phenomena, which Western empirical science has yet to understand.

Many *feng shui* enthusiasts today simply employ the arrangement of forms (of building and environs) to get a good *feng shui*. However, such practices have been decried as insufficient by practitioners who integrate *feng shui* with the *yi jing* and *luo*

³ This is the basis for Chinese medical and therapeutic discipline, which involves the use of acupuncture and Chinese herbs. Both the use of acupuncture and Chinese herbs are gaining creditability even though empirical science has yet to develop viable methods to authenticate them fully.

⁴ For a good clarification on the use of *qi* in Chinese martial arts, see Erwin de Castro, B. J. Oropeza, and Ron Rhodes.

pan. These emphasize the additional aspects of time and personality in addition to forms. Whenever *qi* is interpreted alongside the horoscopes, the *yi jing*, or other astrological and divination devices, it clearly manifests itself as more than a non-spiritual force and suggests something that is mysterious, dangerous, and beyond human control and manipulation. If such a *qi* can affect the fate and luck of a person, it cannot simply be a physical or metaphysical force but must be a force with *spiritual qualities* and of the spiritual realm. Christians, therefore, should distance themselves from the *qi* in *feng shui* because of its close collaboration with divination, which is forbidden in the Bible. Robert Cook cautions Christians against jumping into dogmatic assertions on the false premise that God is only present and active through Christians. Commenting on such Christians, he writes, “They also seem to have an unwarranted confidence in science, concluding that what current science cannot explain must be supernatural and since it is happening to non-Christians it must have a demonic source” (184). As mentioned, unfortunately the term *qi* has come down as an umbrella term covering many distinct kinds of phenomena, which may be very different in nature. The *qi* in *feng shui* lies within the spiritual realm and not just beyond current scientific knowledge. Further, its alliance with divination, which is forbidden by God, disqualifies it immediately as a possible work of God within a non-Christian background (Montenegro, “Feng Shui” 4).

The Five Elements and the Tools of *Feng Shui*

The Bible teaches that God as creator is sovereign and distinct from the creation, even forces that are in the spiritual realm. Why should Christians trust in the five elements and the tools of *feng shui* if they can relate directly to God? Moreover, the five elements and the tools of *feng shui*, like the *yi jing*, *ba qua*, and *luo pan* are all founded in

astrology and divination practices. The biblical injunction against such practices is clear and definite. At issue is also the false belief that fate and destiny are written in the stars and in nature. Using all these is an offense to God as they shift trust in God to God's creation, thus to chance and fate. Ultimately, as Montenegro says, all astrology and divination will not solve the problems of life, both now and in the world to come:

Whatever benefit one may believe lies in feng shui, ultimately it will not solve your serious hurts, problems, nor satisfy your spiritual longings. It cannot cleanse you nor introduce you to a living God. The power of feng shui, or any other system dealing with *chi* energy, pales in comparison to the power of Christ, who was given authority and power over all authorities, powers and dominions, both of heaven and of earth (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20, 21; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:22). ("Feng Shui" 4)

Step # 4: Transformative Ministries

In the final step of critical contextualization, transformative ministries, one seeks to help people move from where they are now to where God wants them to be in relation to the issue of *feng shui*. Thus far, we have *feng shui* has been treated as disconnected pieces. Now it will be addressed as a whole. Can a Christian practice *feng shui*? One should also try to uncover values in *feng shui* philosophy that may be beneficial for preservation and determine whether functional substitutes are necessary or even available.

How Should Christians Respond to *Feng Shui*? Can A Christian Practice *Feng Shui*?

Feng shui appeals to the postmodern world today because it presents itself to be more scientific and less religious. Conversely, many Christians perceive it as a neutral practice at best and are hopeful that they can recover its scientific origins without the religious embellishments. Although not many Christians will practice *feng shui* overtly, many may defer to its practice covertly. For example, they may unconsciously have bought into the mind-set of going after auspicious numbers or acquiesce to subtle *feng*

shui advice, just to be safe. For many the practice of *feng shui* comes as compliance to social and peer pressure. For others, it may really be out of economic reasons, hoping to get some good *qi* or a good resale value for a car with auspicious license plate numbers. Many may adopt the mentality, “It is better to be safe than sorry.” After all, *feng shui* does not require the worship of any god, has no religious commitments (like going to a temple or praying), and looks pretty harmless. As part of the transformative ministries, the following summary is offered to help Christians see why *feng shui* is incompatible with Christian faith.

The practice of *feng shui*, rooted in magic and divination, is forbidden by God. Of late, *feng shui* proponents like Jenny T. Liu, have been busy defending *feng shui* as a non-religious activity. This paper, however, has shown that *feng shui*, for whatever original scientific or aesthetic reasons in which it might have been birthed, has come down with many religious and occult trappings. When Christians dabble in *feng shui*, they may unconsciously be dabbling in the occult, in sorcery, divination and astrology, all of which are prohibited in the Bible. *Feng shui* practice could, therefore, allow the entrance of demonic influences and activities. *Feng shui* could also slowly strangle a Christian’s vitality and gradually make one increasingly compromised. In my own survey on *feng shui*, a respondent testified that she noticed personally that Christians involved in these practices struggle with its meaning in their Christian walk.⁵ “There is often a coldness to spiritual things, or at least a shallowness in their walk,” the respondent said,

⁵ Part of the research for this paper was to a survey some two hundred people who were mostly Chinese (from Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, and the United States) between October and November 2002. Thirty-five responses were received. From the descriptive answers to questions given, fourteen indicated that *feng shui* demonstrates no faith in God; eleven indicated that it demonstrates self-centeredness and greed; eleven thought that it was religious and demonic; nine thought that *feng shui* has some truth in it and may have originated from some sort of common sense or science.

“and pride and control operate more openly in their lives, as they seek to manipulate the energies.”

The practice of *feng shui* demonstrates fear and a lack of faith in God. The second reason why *feng shui* is incompatible with Christian faith is that it presents a rival object of faith in God. Christians who profess belief in God but still dabble in *feng shui* imply that they are still unable to exercise faith in God in some areas in their lives as explained by one participant in the *feng shui* survey:

A Christian who practices *feng shui* is also opening him/herself up to psychological proclivities that physical and geographical arrangements of one's environment can affect the direction and degree of one's life. The dependence on *feng shui* to affect our lives, constantly worrying about what to eat and wear (in this case what to put in our house, ward off evil or negative forces, etc.) does not align with Biblical principles.

People who practice *feng shui* will be caught up with it. *Feng shui* will begin to occupy their minds both consciously and subconsciously. Instead of offering peace and happiness, *feng shui* can make them more insecure and fearful as they develop a phobia for things that are not done according to *feng shui*. In the end, *feng shui* runs people's lives instead of God. According to Yung Hwa's opinion, Christians need to recognize that the biblical worldview posits a creator who is sovereign over and distinct from the creation but who nevertheless deals intimately with it (“Systematic Theology” 8-11). They need to address two fundamental questions: “Who controls nature and events in our lives? Whom do I trust more: God or the elements of nature?”

The practice of *feng shui*, breeding self-centeredness and greed. The current concept of *feng shui* can be a very powerful psychological aphrodisiac for those yearning for a way to manipulate their lives and surroundings using the physical to affect their circumstances. It is one of those complex spiritual systems that draws people into itself

and themselves and away from God. The Bible calls for Christians to live for God, but *feng shui* today suggests people should live for self. At its very core, it is the manipulation of things around a person for selfish benefit. The motivation is self-centeredness and greed. Nothing in it is of God, faith, hope, and love.

Functional Substitutes: Does *Feng Shui* Have Anything of Value Worth Preserving?

Feng shui's greatest appeal is its frequent portrayal as non-religious. At the same time, people are attracted to it because it provides virtually a one-size-fits-all solution to everything in a person's life. *Feng shui* also meets existential needs.

The Christian answer and functional substitute is to pray in the will of God (1 John 5:14-15). Christians need to be taught the importance of prayer and why prayer can be a more efficacious substitute for *feng shui* in their everyday lives. Christian discipleship needs to emphasize confidence in facing the problems and uncertainties in life by depending upon a trustworthy and sovereign God rather than relying on efficacious formulae like *feng shui* arrangements.

Feng shui is able to meet another need in the Chinese ideal of filial piety. *Feng shui* satisfies by emphasizing the importance of rituals in siting ancestral graves. Even though Western Christianity has not transmitted an equally strong emphasis on filial piety, non-Western, and especially Chinese, Christians have sufficient space here to contextualize this dimension into their lives. For example, the pastor can participate too in gravesite selection and in offering prayers to God to watch over the burial site of the dead. As mentioned earlier, the Bible alludes to deliberate grave sitings and selections (e.g., Abraham—Gen. 23 and Joseph of Arimathaea—Matt. 27:59-60). Such care in selecting burial sites likely demonstrated veneration for the dead and awareness of logical

ecological considerations such as aesthetics, security of site, proximity to home.

Contemporary Christians may use similar criteria for the selection of grave sites.

Incidentally, these probably were part of the original purposes behind Chinese *feng shui* as well. Having said that, perhaps more importantly Chinese Christians should be reminded to practice expressing filial piety while one's parents are alive rather than after they have passed away.

Certain practices or principles of *feng shui* are definitely commendable. For example, *feng shui* proponents often claim they seek good *feng shui* in order to have good relationships with the people around them. This aspect of living at peace and in good will with others is certainly virtuous. Another aspect of keeping things in order and clearing the clutter is obviously good advice for those who prefer to have “piling systems” rather than filing systems. After all, Paul said to do everything in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor. 14:40). *Feng shui* may incorporate common sense, practical considerations, and aesthetic concerns for physical arrangements as well. For example, *feng shui* finds good moving *qi* in running streams rather than stagnant ponds. Common sense says that running water is better than stagnant water. Similarly, when *feng shui* says that trees should not block the front of a house, it was actually common sense advice to allow more sunlight into a house during the cold winter months. Such attention to the architecture, practical layout, and blending in with the ecology is, therefore, worth preserving. Doing so shows concern for both neighbors and environment and not just selfish desires.

Finally, Western Christianity today is unfortunately heavily influenced by the Enlightenment. Thus, as David J. Bosch eloquently discusses, Christians have an unhealthy propensity to be dualistic and to separate the spiritual from the physical and

secular (262-345). Although *feng shui* seeks to get people living in harmony with nature from a misconceived pantheistic notion, Christians can recover from here the right notion of living out their *shalom* with God, with fellow humans, and with the creation. The emphasis on the souls of people and their spiritual lives should not diminish, but Christians should rediscover God's salvation plan as encompassing the entire creation. Christians should show their care for the environment by being concerned for issues like recycling, beautifying the world, cleaning up the streets, caring for the animals, and conserving natural resources. By so doing Christians acknowledge the hand of God in creation and show themselves good stewards of all that God entrusts to them.⁶

Conclusion

Many people are attracted to *feng shui* because it seems to work and because it gives them a sense of personal control; however, not all things that appear to work are necessarily true and right as Montenegro explains in the article:

The fact that such a treatment may work is not a good enough reason for using it. Many things in the occult and mystical world seem to work. The standard for Christians in adopting a spiritually based idea or practice is not whether it works. We are admonished to "not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God..." (1 John 4:1a). These words should be taken to heart in regards to many other holistic and alternative treatments as well. ("Yin and Yang")

Feng shui also epitomizes the human need for control. Humans want to control their own fate, lives, and destiny. Every time *feng shui* is practiced, it reenacts Adam and Eve's Fall in the Garden of Eden. It is motivated by the same sin: the sin to be their own master rather than giving God the rightful place as the Master of their lives. Perhaps, the best Christian response is to point people to the one who ultimately has true control over

⁶ Refer to the list of books on the subject of creation listed under footnote 4 of "Contextualizing *Feng Shui*" in Chapter 2 (p. 83).

all the *feng* (wind) and all the *shui* (water). The wind (*feng*) was an instrument at God's disposal (e.g., Gen. 8:1; 10; 14; Ps. 104:4). The water (*shui*), too, was definitely subdued by God in the creation (Gen. 1-2), controlled in the deluge (Gen. 7-9), and overcome in the exodus (Exod. 14-15). In the New Testament, Jesus calmed the wind (*feng*) and the water (*shui*) by a word (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 4:37-41), he walked to the disciples on the water, and again calmed the wind (*feng*) and water (*shui*) when he entered the boat. Christians have no need of *feng shui* if they have the one who has absolute control over *feng* (wind) and over *shui* (water). God, and no other, is the one that we should rather "fear" and trust.

APPENDIX Q

**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR ALL SCALES BETWEEN RESEARCH
GROUP AND CONTROL GROUP**

	COMPONENTS	RESEARCH GROUP/ CONTROL GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig. (p)
ANCESTRAL WORSHIP	AW A2 EXPOSURE TO ANCESTRAL WORSHIP	Research	27	16.1852	4.28806	2.138	.150
		Control	28	17.8214	4.00974		
		Total	55	17.0182	4.19210		
	AW B1 UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ANCESTRAL WORSHIP	Research	26	39.0000	11.48216	.338	.564
		Control	24	41.0000	12.85031		
		Total	50	39.9600	12.07453		
	AW B2 BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS CONCERNING ANCESTRAL WORSHIP	Research	27	15.7037	7.12425	.033	.856
		Control	28	15.3929	5.42518		
		Total	55	15.5455	6.25927		
CHINESE MEDICAL PRACTICES	CM A2 EXPOSURE TO CHINESE MEDICAL PRACTICES	Research	27	16.9259	6.93334	1.272	.264
		Control	28	18.7143	4.64166		
		Total	55	17.8364	5.89338		
	CM B1 UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF CHINESE MEDICAL PRACTICES	Research	26	34.3462	12.23419	.320	.574
		Control	24	36.2917	12.06316		
		Total	50	35.2800	12.06790		
	CM B2 BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS ON CHINESE MEDICAL PRACTICES	Research	27	28.4815	6.09142	.001	.977
		Control	28	28.4286	7.51013		
		Total	55	28.4545	6.78729		
FENG SHUI	FS A2 EXPOSURE TO <i>FENG SHUI</i>	Research	27	13.1111	3.80620	.636	.429
		Control	28	14.0000	4.42217		
		Total	55	13.5636	4.11755		
	FS B1 UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF <i>FENG SHUI</i>	Research	26	34.8077	12.20826	.290	.593
		Control	24	36.7500	13.29024		
		Total	50	35.7400	12.64558		
	FS B2 BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS CONCERNING <i>FENG SHUI</i>	Research	27	15.8148	5.76486	.052	.820
		Control	28	16.1786	6.03725		
		Total	55	16.0000	5.85314		
MARTIAL ARTS	MA A2 EXPOSURE TO MARTIAL ARTS	Research	26	13.0769	5.54922	.587	.447
		Control	28	14.1429	4.66440		
		Total	54	13.6296	5.08901		
	MA B1 UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MARTIAL ARTS	Research	26	32.7692	12.14021	.034	.854
		Control	24	32.1250	12.47018		
		Total	50	32.4600	12.17761		
	MA B2 BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS ON MARTIAL ARTS	Research	27	24.1111	4.84636	1.822	.183
		Control	28	22.1071	6.06959		
		Total	55	23.0909	5.54534		
QI GONG	QG A2 EXPOSURE TO <i>QI GONG</i>	Research	27	12.3704	4.48200	.094	.760
		Control	28	12.0357	3.56404		
		Total	55	12.2000	4.00648		
	QG B1 UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF <i>QI GONG</i>	Research	26	31.7692	12.51657	.361	.551
		Control	24	29.7500	11.11306		
		Total	50	30.8000	11.78723		
	QG B2 BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS ON <i>QI GONG</i>	Research	27	19.3704	5.98169	.001	.978
		Control	28	19.3214	6.78808		
		Total	55	19.3455	6.34566		

APPENDIX R

PROFILE OF RESEARCH GROUP PARTICIPANTS

No.	Pseudonym	M/F	Age Range	Birth Order	No. of Years as Christian	Occupation	Highest Education Passed	Denomination	Church Involvement	Missiological Courses
R1	Albert	M	31-40	2 of 2	26	Sales/Marketing	Bachelor	Baptist	Small Group Leader	2
R2	Brian	M	31-40	5 of 5	26	CCC F/T Staff	Bachelor	Brethren	NIL	0
R3	Charlie	M	31-40	2 of 3	13	Self-employed	Diploma	Methodist	Church Board/Deacon	0
R4	Dionnie	F	41-50	5 of 6	28	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	GCE "O" Level	Methodist	Church Ministry staff/Pastor	1
R5	Evelyn	F	41-50	4 of 5	25	CCC F/T Staff	Bachelor	Methodist	Missionary	5
R6	Fred	M	51-60	5 of 6	26	Retired	Diploma	Brethren	SS Teacher	1
R7	Gerlynn	F	41-50	3 to 5	30	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Brethren	SS Teacher	5
R8	Harry	M	31-40	2 of 2	18	Sales/Marketing	Adv. Diploma	Methodist	Church Board Chairman	0
R9	Isaac	M	31-40	2 of 2	18	Engineering	Bachelor	Methodist	NIL	0
R10	Jerry	M	31-40	6 of 6	21	Teacher	Master	Methodist	NIL	0
R11	Kim	F	31-40	4 of 4	21	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Methodist	Church Board/Deacon	3
R12	Lorraine	F	21-30	1 of 2	14	Self-employed	Diploma	Methodist	NIL	0
R13	Maggie	F	41-50	5 of 8	34	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	Master	Methodist	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	3
R14	Nick	M	31-40	1 of 2	15	Engineering	Master	Methodist	Church Board/Deacon	4

No.	Pseudonym	M/F	Age Range	Birth Order	No. of Years as Christian	Occupation	Highest Education Passed	Denomination	Church Involvement	Missiological Courses
R15	Olive	F	41-50	10 of 11	28	CCC F/T Staff	Diploma	Methodist	NIL	2
R16	Peter	M	31-40	2 of 2	30	F/T Student	Master	Methodist	NIL	4
R17	Queenie	F	41-50	1 of 6	15	Homemaker	Diploma	Independent	SS Teacher	0
R18	Rose	F	41-50	10 of 10	27	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Brethren	SS Teacher	3
R19	Susan	F	31-40	9 of 9	27	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Presbyterian	NIL	3
R20	Tom	M	31-40	1 of 3	31	Teacher	Bachelor	Methodist	Music & Worship	2
R21	Ulysses	M	31-40	2 of 3	14	Sales/Marketing	Master	Methodist	Church Board/Deacon	0
R22	Victor	M	41-50	3 of 6	33	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	Master	Methodist	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	2
R23	Winnie	F	41-50	7 of 8	20	Teacher	Diploma	Methodist	NIL	0
R24	Xerxes	M	21-30	1 of 2	8	Engineering	Bachelor	Brethren	NIL	0
R25	Yvonne	F	41-50	2 of 4	28	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Presbyterian	Church Board/Deacon	2
R26	Zoe	F	41-50	5 of 8	26	Church Ministry Staff/Pastor	Master	Presbyterian	Small Group Leader	1
R27	Zachary	M	31-40	2 of 3	22	CCC F/T Staff	Master	Baptist	Music & Worship	4

APPENDIX S

COMPILATION OF ALL RESPONSES

TO END-OF-CLASS *FENG SHUI* CASE STUDY⁷

#1. Name: Albert

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Pray over the property and break all curses that had visited upon the property. Pray God's blessing over the property and also over its future occupants.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is sovereign and powerful. He can turn around things where it's not been possible. Even the principalities and spiritual forces have to be submitted to His approval.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I will pray to God and hear from Him which is logical advice and which is not. And I will still continue to break the streak of residual curses not fully cleared and severed previously.

#2. Name: Brian

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

1. I will explain to him the origin of *Feng Shui* and why I think people are practicing *Feng Shui*. This is to help him understand what *Feng Shui* really is about before we talk about what the Bible has to say about that.
2. I will point him to the fact that we are to entrust our well-being in the Lord and not in *Feng Shui*.
3. However, if he still feels uncomfortable about buying the house (perhaps he is still immature as a Christian), I will advise him not to because this may give Satan a chance to shipwreck his faith, for "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

1. God is above all. He is in sovereign control over all things including earthly and spiritual elements or forces.
2. Without knowledge of God, our faith will waver.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, I will not take my neighbor's advice because that will reinforce his belief in the fact that Sha Qi can determine our well-being. IT will be difficult to tell him about trusting in God in the future. Furthermore, it is too costly a venture to alter what is already a nice and beautiful garden.

#3. Name: Dionnie

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

If he had not shifted out, I would advise him to seek the Lord and let Him direct his path. Ask him to search himself before the Lord to see whether he has placed the Lord above all else or he is in control of his assets, business, etc.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

I believe God is still in control but just that James is fearful of Satan instead of God. Our God is a LOVING GOD and He gives James his choice and let him see for himself where does his faith lie in.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I will not take my neighbor's advice. Since I shifted in because I like the way it was built, then I should seek the Lord and see what He has for me with his house. I'm just a steward of His providence.

⁷ The case study is found in Appendix M.

#4. Name: Evelyn

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

- Tell him I do not believe in *Feng Shui*
- Tell him the origin of *Feng Shui*—was utilized to orient the homes of the dead rather than the homes of the living.
- Tell him that modern *Feng Shui* is rooted in magic and divination, which are forbidden by God.
- Tell him about God's sovereignty and that the practice demonstrates a lack of faith and is disobedience to God.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

- God does allow certain misfortune to happen for a divine purpose.
- God is the truth and truth comes from God.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I will not take my neighbor's advice because I do not believe in *Feng Shui* and there is deception in the human's mind.

#5. Name: Fred

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Good to invest in any good property. Invest like what one would do for any investment. Of course, there will be difficulty in selling to fengshui believers. Other than this there ought not be any deterrent. Factors like agreement with family members, noise, neighbors are more important issues to consider for peaceful living.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

Man may believe all things, but if we fully trust in a God Almighty and sovereign then all things would work together for good for those who love Him.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

Faith tested is real faith. I would never attempt or test God in this manner. No deal.

#6. Name: Gerlynn

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

He should not be fearful of the so-called bad luck but could go ahead and buy the house. But after purchase of the home, to cleanse and dedicate it to the Lord. My reasons for the advice are because as God's children, James' family fortune and future is in the hand of our sovereign Lord. He should trust God for blessing and protection.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is still sovereign over all things in our lives and in the lives of non-Christians even if they may encounter such misfortune. Even if this house has indeed been cursed, God is powerful and can deliver the occupants if they trust in Him

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I might do something simply to block the glare of oncoming vehicles (physical consideration) if the glare is really bad, but not because I need to block the Sha Qi from my house. I won't do it because of the Sha Qi, as I do not believe the whole thing of the Sha Qi rushing towards my house and bringing me bad luck. Again I [will not do it] because God is the one who will watch over me and protect me and my family. To build structure because of Sha Qi is dabbling in divination.

#7. Name: Isaac

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

- It makes good economical sense to buy it since it is at a much reduced price.
- However, one has to be aware of the factors of noise since it is at a T-junction. If that is okay, the house seems a good buy as it is near MRT, market, shops and neighborhood

looks pleasant, safe and quiet.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

From the case study, note that God is sovereign and greater than *Feng Shui* issue. A good example was when the *Feng Shui* Master corrected the *Feng Shui* and the husband's business still failed and wife still came down with breast cancer.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I would not, since the garden is nice and beautiful.

#8. Name: Jerry

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Pray about it extensively, paying close attention to what God says/shows through his Word. Ask James to speak to one or two church leaders/pastors and hear what they say.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

There are things of the world we do not comprehend. There are things beyond us, but none is beyond God. A life in God is paramount even as we encounter things we do not fully understand.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

If I feel strongly about the present landscape I would open the house to church leaders and dedicate the house to the Lord. It might do little than a psychological boost or it might be a great sense of peace in God. I will not change the landscape based on *feng shui*.

#9. Name: Kim

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Pray together with him regarding the house—commit the decision to God; don't rush and wait for his reply somehow. Asks James: does he really need to move house, what intention, can he consider spending his money in a more fruitful way. Even if he decides to move in, pray for God's blessings daily and trust in him to work wonders.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God's blessings will break the curse of misfortune, which stays in the house as experienced by others. God is good and he cares. When we seek him, he will reveal. When he provides, he will bless too.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, I will not. I do not believe in *fengshui* though things may turn out to be positive when people follow advice related to this practice.

#10. Name: Lorraine

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

I would ask James if the history was not known, how does he feel about the house and if he likes it. If he feels good and likes it, and price is OK, just buy. Then, plan for a dedication service and dedicate the house for God's usage and cleanse the house. Pray for God's blessing on the house. My reasons: As long as the Spirit of God resides in the house, in this case, (James has the Holy Spirit in him) the house will be blessed.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No! Because when things don't seem right for me, it doesn't mean it's due to the *Feng Shui*. My belief is that when God resides in the house, he will bless and watch over my coming in and going out.

#11. Name: Olive

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Don't buy it! Because if with all the stories he heard, he don't [sic] feel good about buying it, why go thru' all the trouble when he can't settle with his heart—"peace of mind."

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

We can depend on Him. My peace comes from God.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, I don't believe in "Sha Qi." "Things don't seem right" does not mean bad *Feng Shui*. Firstly, I need to check on my personal relationship with God and do something with it. I need to look into other problems e.g. my perspective, worldview.

#12. Name: Queenie

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

I would advise James to take a second look at the house. If he really likes it and feels the peace when he enters the house, with everything taken into consideration, he should go ahead and buy it. If he felt uneasy after hearing the rumors then maybe this house is not meant for him. Go and scout for a new house. Peace is the most important factor here. God would have given him the peace if the house is where God wants him to stay.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

That God will give you peace when you have prayed about it. If you don't have the peace, then maybe God is telling you otherwise, not to buy.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I would not. This is because landscape and advice from a neighbor are not what we should seek when things do not seem to go right for me. I should seek God and the church, maybe the pastor, for help.

#13. Name: Rose

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

1. It appears that all the bad things that happened were connected to the so-called bad "*Feng Shui*" of the house.
2. We know that there is only one God and one Lord—Jesus Christ, "through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6)
3. If James has a weak conscience and feels uncomfortable (no peace) then, it may be wise for him not to buy this house.
4. Encourage him to do a PRO/CON chart in his decision-making process.
5. Pray and seek God's will.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is sovereign, all wise and all powerful.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, because then it would be subscribing to the "bad *Feng Shui*" philosophy. To a weaker brother, this may be a stumbling block.

#14. Name: Susan

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

- Point to the fact that Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth.
- God's goodness (character) and therefore desire to bless James and family.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

- James' understanding of God.
- What do we fear? Fear God or fear "fate"?

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, because it is costly—there is better use for money. It'd be perceived to be out of fear rather than faith. This can be ground for witness—faith versus fear. It is to link life with these forces of *feng shui* (manipulative mindset—dangerous!).

#15. Name: Tom

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

I would advise him to buy the house if he really likes it. As to the matter of the misfortunes that happened to the previous owners, I would tell him that these should not have been the result of bad *feng shui*; rather, it could possibly be the result of an evil spirit lurking in the house. I would suggest that he dedicate the house to the Lord by having a pastor bless the house. On the other hand, I would also advise him not to buy the house if he is not comfortable at all with the idea that the house was formerly occupied by people who practiced *feng shui* despite all that he likes about the house.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is in control of all things. It is important to dedicate the house to the Lord so that he would come and reside in it. Misfortunes do not result because of bad *feng shui*.

If you were James and you decided to move into the house, after moving in, you feel that things do not seem to go right for you. A neighbor who knows a little bit of *feng shui* tells you that you could landscape your front garden with artificial barriers both to logically protect the glare of oncoming vehicles and to block the *Sha qi* from your house. It will be quite a costly venture and you have not intended to do anything yet to the garden since it is nice and beautiful.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

If the glare of the lights from oncoming vehicles disturbs me greatly, I would like consider erecting the artificial barriers to block out the glare. I will probably make known to my neighbor that I have taken up his/her suggestion not to block the *Sha qi* but that it makes sense to block out the glare.

#16. Name: Ulysses

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

If he likes the house, go ahead and get it. Knowing well that God is in full control of every situation, there is nothing that can happen without God's permission. Since we are children of God, we should rest assured that God does good to those who love him.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is omnipotent. He controls everything.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

No, if it is not within my budget. It is within my budget, other than for aesthetic or practical reasons, such as reducing the glare of oncoming vehicles; I will not take the neighbor's advice.

#17. Name: Victor

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

I would advise James to pray before he purchases the house. No matter what had happened to the first two owners, try not to believe in *Feng Shui*. God is the Lord of the whole creation. He is the source of all blessings.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

I learn that when people face tragic events when beyond their control they tend to believe in *Feng Shui*. As Christians living in this kind of culture, we need to know what the Bible says about *Feng Shui*. People who believe in *Feng Shui* seem that they believe in a hidden and mysterious God.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I would not take my neighbor's advice because by doing what my neighbor advised, it will contradict my Christian faith. Instead, I would invite my pastor and church members to bless my house, for I believe the Almighty is able to make all things right.

#18. Name: Winnie

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Commit the house to our Lord. James can get the pastor to do house blessing.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

Sovereignty of God—God is in control of everything. Power of prayer—Instead of worrying, commit them to God in prayer.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

I may take my neighbor's advice if it is not a costly venture. My neighbor may have his logic and

every Christian wants “peace” and it is always better to be safe than sorry.

#19. Name: Yvonne

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

If the house selling for \$1.2m suits his criteria, then he should go for the house, not to worry about the stories regarding *fengshui* of the house. As Christians, our future lies in God’s hand and not some theories like *fengshui*. As children of God, the bible tells us that the evil one cannot harm us. God will also send his holy angels to guard over us.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

God is almighty and mysterious in His ways. Man definitely cannot maneuver life through some human efforts like the architecture of buildings or conduct of persons.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor’s advice? Why or why not?

I’ll not take the neighbor’s advice because I believe my life is in God’s control. When things don’t go well for me, I’ll continue to trust God and move on with life. Even when the suggestion is a good idea from the aesthetic point of view and not due to *fengshui* consideration, I’ll make it a point NOT to do such a thing so as not to have anything to do with *fengshui*. This is to make a point that I do not believe in *fengshui* so that when my circumstances improved later on, credits will not go to *fengshui*.

#20. Name: Zoe

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

Pray for God’s guidance as to whether he should buy the house. And decision should be based on practical reality of excellent location rather than F. S. belief that a T-junction attracts negative forces. If decision is to buy, then dedicate the house as thanksgiving to God and allow God to be glorified in all they do there. If not comfortable, don’t buy.

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

We need to establish God’s sovereignty over all. He allows us to make a choice so it is all right if James decides he does not want to take the risk—allow time for spiritual maturity.

Q3. Would you take your neighbor’s advice? Why or why not?

If I have prayed and made my decision based on trusting in God, I will not erect barriers based on F. S. advice. I have to learn to trust God in good and bad. Following F. S. advice is a step to taking things into my own hands. MI should be aiming to entrust more and more into God’s hands, instead.

#21. Name: Zachary

Q1. As a fellow Christian, what advice would you give to James? What are the reasons for your advice?

-recognize the sovereignty of God, His divine protection, and promised care to His children

-explain the origins and current forms of *Fengshui* (i.e. Embellished in religious and superstitious trappings)

-explain how *Fengshui*’s dependence on divination and astrology precludes Christian’s outright embrace of the whole; divination and astrology flies against biblical injunctions against them

-it appears James’s concern may be in two areas: “bad luck” for himself and loved ones who may stay in the same house, and possible difficulty in selling a house with a “bad rap”

-as believers we’re called to a walk of faith in dependence on God

-the concept of “bad luck” is anathema to a walk of faith

-though we recognize 1) the existence of “evil spirits” which can and do impinge on the workings of the present world, and 2) the application of Rom. 8:28 in “bad circumstances” of a believer’s life (when the situation is not a direct result of sin in the person’s life)

-if James likes the house and the lower price, he also needs to accept the possibility that he may not be able to sell it at a good price in the future due to its negative history up to this point

-(on the other hand, the Lord may well bless James in his stay at the house which would prove the falsity of the “bad *Fengshui*”)

-recognize the reality of the spiritual warfare we are all in and thus to claim the victory we have in

Christ, His divine protection, and to claim and pray for His blessings on the occupants of the dwelling we stay in

-we are to humbly assert our spiritual authority and freedom in Christ wherever we are

Q2. What aspects of God do you learn as a result of this incident?

-the Lord continues to provide opportunities for us to a walk of faith as we lived out "being in the world but not of it"

-God also wants believers to use both his spiritual discernment and mental acumen to critically contextualize the reality of Christ's power and victory in the culture we're in

-we are challenged to make relevant Christianity (perceived as Western) in a Chinese culture with its spiritually-acute (in an animistic sense) and naturalistic worldview combined with its pragmatic bent

Q3. Would you take your neighbor's advice? Why or why not?

-no, not in the form as described by the neighbor as adherence to the actions will be interpreted as subscribing to the *Fengshui* precepts (this may undermine the Christian testimony)

-no, as the actions is an attempt to change the future without due reliance on God (block the Sha Qi and thus prevent bad luck) and go against biblical injunctions

-but, it may be good to install some sort of visual barrier against the glare of oncoming vehicles, maybe an awning or curtain

APPENDIX T

COMPILATION OF ALL MONTHLY FEEDBACK REPORTS

Case #: FR1 **Pseudonym:** Albert

1. **Date of incident:** March
2. **Description of incident:** A woman in the bookshop asking for a *feng shui* mag subscription.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** As an observer and eavesdropper.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** The woman spoke with a confident and “tai-tai” [rich man’s wife] styled English. Looks educated and affluent, pleasantly polite. My first thoughts were, “How could an educated person even believe in *feng shui*? I guess the impression I have of *feng shui* is that it’s linked to superstitions and irrational logic.

Case #: FR2 **Pseudonym:** Brian

1. **Date of incident:** March 14, 2004
2. **Description of incident:** My mother mentioned about going to sweep the grave on *Qing Ming*.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** I was not required to go.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** In the past, I would have been very negative but now I see beyond the surface and understand that my mother was doing this out of filial piety to her parents.

Case #: FR3 **Pseudonym:** Brian

1. **Date of incident:** June 1, 2004
2. **Description of incident:** I saw a lot of people walking round and round my estate carrying candles in their hands.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** I was observing from the windows of my apartment.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** My initial response was to brush it off as superstition. Then I remembered the next day is Vesak Day so it might be related. I decided to go read up something about Vesak Day (I always knew it only as a public holiday). I found out it’s a day to celebrate the birth and enlightenment of Buddha—maybe that’s why they carry candles. Kind of remind me of the Festival of Lights in the Bible. I thought of reading up about Vesak Day because I want to be prepared to discuss with people just in case I have the opportunity.

Case #: FR4 **Pseudonym:** Dionnie

1. **Date of incident:** March 10, 04
2. **Description of incident:** Visit to booked niche at All Saints Memorial Hall [columbarium] in Poh Huat Road.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** Just listen to her frustration over the niche that she has booked which was being taken over by someone who has passed away.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** Superstitious—she associated to her recent illness with the dead occupying her booked niche at Poh Huat Road.

Case #: FR5 **Pseudonym:** Dionnie

1. **Date of incident:** April 4, 2004
2. **Description of incident:** My uncle requested for observation of *Qing Ming Jie*.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** to co-ordinate with family members for the occasion.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** Since this is a yearly affair, my spontaneous reaction was to see which date is convenient for all family members. On the very first session that we went, we already made it clear that we’ll not go on the actual day when it’s very crowded with burning of joss-sticks, etc. We’ll normally go around the 3rd or 4th week with flowers just to remind us of our late grandparents and parent.

Case #: FR6 **Pseudonym:** Evelyn

1. **Date of incident:** April
2. **Description of incident:** Funeral Wake (on TV).
3. **My involvement in the incident:** A viewer.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** First thought was that the children of the deceased were being filial in participating in the funeral rites. They did what they were told without knowing the meaning of the practice they did. It is a sad thing to me.

Case #: FR7 **Pseudonym:** Evelyn

1. **Date of incident:** April 19, 2004
2. **Description of incident:** Funeral Wake.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** A Visitor.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** Some questions were in my mind when I saw a man setting up a table for the funeral rites with food and several copper coins. Why the practice of food and coins offerings? Is it relevant? Does the spiritual world care or need all that? Why is the man doing that? Just for tradition purpose? Does he believe in the practice? Is it just for being filial? I do not believe in such practice so I see it as people are spiritually blinded.

Case #: FR8 **Pseudonym:** Fred

1. **Date of incident:** 26 March 2004
2. **Description of incident:** Asked by sister to gather family members together to visit daddy's tomb in this Qing Ming season.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** I need to respond to the suggestion. I need to politely say that it is hard to gather all together as we are not closely connected. I suggest any date my family would go and let everyone feel free to go any time.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** Due respect ought to be given without offending my loved ones in the family. Filial piety is still a very strong value that needs to be kept but ought to be practiced void of ancestral worship.

Case #: FR9 **Pseudonym:** Gerlynn

1. **Date of incident:** April 14, 2004
2. **Description of incident:** Watching the news coverage over TV about a group of Toa Payoh residents visiting different places of worship—Hindu temple in the estate.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** No involvement.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** I saw the part where a Hindu priest put something on the forehead of a little boy and then sprinkled something (I could not see clearly what that was) over the boy. I thought to myself that such rites being done to the boy might result in Satan or his demons being given some foothold in the boy's life. I also thought that the people were really ignorant of the spiritual impact of such folk practices done to them.

Case #: FR10 **Pseudonym:** Gerlynn

1. **Date of incident:** Some day in May
2. **Description of incident:** A Soka (Japanese Buddhism) Funeral service, with people seated in theatre style in front of the section where the coffin was laid. But they were nosily chanting away very earnestly, some with hands clasped. There was a man standing in front of an altar-like structure, but I could not see clearly what he was doing.
3. **My involvement in the incident:** No involvement. Just passed by that funeral.
4. **My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done):** It reminded me of a Christian funeral service, with people seated in theatre style. I thought the chanting sounded very disturbing to me, being rather loud. No contextualization was done. I simply watched the service for a moment.

Case #: FR11 **Pseudonym:** Isaac

1. **Date of incident:** About mid-February (even before I attend the course)

2. Description of incident: Was told by my aunt that my cousin wedding will be in May. The date will be a particular Thursday in May 04.

3. My involvement in the incident: I queried why is it that it will not be held on a weekend. She replied that my cousin had consulted a Master (presumably a *Feng Shui* Master) and was told that was an auspicious date for a long-lasting marriage.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): My reaction to my aunt was that such a "inconvenience" date was chosen because of advice by *Feng Shui* Master. She did not really respond to my comments. Also I knew the family would prefer a weekend.

My personal response (to myself) was that a "inconvenience" date for the attendees was selected because of the word of the *Feng Shui* Master. Helpers will most likely have to take leave.

No contextualization was done.

Case #: FR12 **Pseudonym:** Isaac

1. Date of incident: Late April

2. Description of incident: From a TV program. The serial was on the 7 warring state of China. The era should be about 200 BC. The story goes something like that:

The premier actually wanted to dethrone the emperor of Qin. He actually witnessed a comet hurdling earthward.

He got his advisor/astrologer to see if there are ways to use the phenomenon to dethrone the emperor. The no. 10th chapter of Yi Jin was mentioned during the confrontation with the emperor. The Yi Jin stated that it was a sign that people will not be supporting the emperor and a sign that the emperor was too detached from the people.

The ministers take the prediction very seriously and advise the emperor to step down as it will be against heaven will and will not bode well for the country.

However, one minister comes up with a clever plan. That is to carve the king's name on the landed comet (they actually found it). So the emperor was saved.

3. My involvement in the incident: I was watching the TV.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): It seems that in the ancient day, the people take the stars, Yi Jin quite seriously. The emperor was almost dethroned just based on the interpretation of stars and Yi Jin. There were also full time astrologer.

Felt that these can be abused. It is really all based on your interpretation and how well that one uses the words or twist the laws of Yi Jin to achieve one's objective. Therefore, Yi Jin could be a rather dangerous tool especially if the general population buys it and the *Feng Shui* master misused it.

Case #: FR13 **Pseudonym:** Kim

1. Date of incident: No particular date.

2. Description of incident: Incense joss-sticks, small altar tablet, fruits (oranges), statutes (small ones) of gods were placed before trees.

3. My involvement in the incident: Nil. I'm just a passer-by.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): Pray for the souls of men for they are foolish to worship the trees. Felt like throwing the statute or altar tablet away but didn't do so.

Case #: FR14 **Pseudonym:** Kim

1. Date of incident: April 19, 2004

2. Description of incident: Attended a colleague's father's funeral wake. IT was a Taoist style funeral with lots of display and evening rituals.

3. My involvement in the incident: Nil. Just a visitor.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): Didn't go forward to observe the various displays. Not very interested. Find the scene detestable. My friend is a Christian and her father has accepted Christ before his death. A lot of noises during ritual. Some family members joined in. My thought: they did not know what they were doing.

Case #: FR15 **Pseudonym:** Lorraine

1. Date of incident: March 18, 2004

2. Description of incident: A friend, after hearing a comment by *Feng Shui* Master, not of good intention told us that the *Feng Shui* Master comment that we should change the facing of our house staircase so it will not face the door, cos it'll affect our "prosperity."

3. My involvement in the incident: 3rd Party.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): First reaction: Ridiculous, because all the design of the houses are the same (as it's a row of terrace houses). All staircases are designed to face the door.

Four days later, when I've got an opportunity to talk with my this particular friend, I managed to convey my opinion or contextualize my view on this *Feng Shui* matter. Though he still believes that to certain extent, *Feng Shui* has its logic, I can tell that he may not be as strong in his view on *Feng Shui* compared to before.

Case #: FR16 **Pseudonym:** Lorraine

1. Date of incident: 30th April

2. Description of incident: My friend decided not to attend our common friend's wedding due to the recent death of his grandmother, as Chinese folk believe that it'll bring bad luck to the bride groom.

3. My involvement in the incident: I was told to help to pass ang pow on behalf of him to pass the newly weds (as a listener, a 3rd party).

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): My immediate reaction was, we as Christians don't believed in such a folk belief and I told him that it is mostly fine to just attend the wedding.

Case #: FR17 **Pseudonym:** Queenie

1. Date of incident: March 17, 2004

2. Description of incident: My grandfather's death anniversary. My grandmother asked me to make a yam cake.

3. My involvement in the incident: I helped her to make. I see no harm in making it. I do not pray. She brings it to the altar to pray.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): My reason is the same as above. I try to render as much help as I can. After the prayer, (I did not participate at all), after she had burned the incense papers, I helped her to clear the food and tables and chairs. I don't want to be perceived as lazy.

Case #: FR18 **Pseudonym:** Queenie

1. Date of incident: During the Ching Ming Festival

2. Description of incident: I saw my neighbour engaging a Chinese medium to go round the house chanting prayer, ringing a bell in his hand for the Ching Ming festival. Later, they burnt a lot of incense papers after the ritual.

3. My involvement in the incident: I am only a viewer. My house is opposite theirs and I am on the upper floor. So I happen to have a glimpse of what is going on.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): What went on in my mind when I saw the medium with the bell going round was whether was the house haunted? Maybe they were trying to get rid of some spirits. Then it dawned on me that it was Ching Ming Festival. They were so entrenched by the folk beliefs. I had a surge of compassion for them. They were so lost. No contextualization as I do not know the neighbour well.

Case #: FR19 **Pseudonym:** Rose

1. Date of incident: March 26, 2004

2. Description of incident: *Qing Ming* festival—family visit to our parents' graveyards.

3. My involvement in the incident: My family members brought a lot of food—*pau* [buns], *tau sa pau* [bean buns], fruits together with wine and Chinese tea and joss stick/incense, paper money; they offered these at my parents' grave sites.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): The meaning of

the Chinese word *Shao Mu* was to clean the gravesites. I brought a mini-broom and dust pan to sweep the grave (my mother's grave—burial ground; my father—cremation, therefore ashes in vases); pulled out the wild grasses and literally cleaned up the grave before they placed all the food/fruits/drinks as offerings at the gravesite. I arranged the chrysanthemum flowers/orchids on the two vases at the gravesites. That's my simple way of showing love and respect to my deceased parents.

Case #: FR20 **Pseudonym:** Rose

1. Date of incident: April 2004

2. Description of incident: Part of the Nicoll Highway collapsed due to underground construction work at the Circle Line.

3. My involvement in the incident: Watch (the TV reports) and pray for those workers who were reported as lost/missing.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): When the search for the missing body of Mr. Heng was called off, the family of this worker engaged the services of priests and performed the funeral rituals at the site of the collapse along Nicoll Highway. My reaction: If it was a Christian family, they would probably hold a thanksgiving/memorial service in honour of the bravery of this man. The sharing that God is the one who gives life and he has the right to take it back anytime and that life is short. Death is imminent hence all men should consider life after death; so instead of sorrow and sadness, it could have been victorious; that this is just a temporary separation...

Case #: FR21 **Pseudonym:** Susan

1. Date of incident: March 7, 2004

2. Description of incident: Mom and sister went for foot reflexology. Mom recounted how accurately the massager was to diagnose their physical conditions just by their reactions to her foot massage.

3. My involvement in the incident: incident was being recounted to me first hand.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I listened without making any judgments (I am trying to contextualize),

I was intrigued at how accurate the diagnosis were.

I still feel a little loss as to how Christians should respond to some of these Chinese medicine - is it a science ? Is it spiritual?

From my past understanding of Chinese medicine, I know there's a lot of Qi involved in explaining what goes on - but Qi is a very complex, and also a spiritual notion.

Case #: FR22 **Pseudonym:** Susan

1. Date of incident: 4th April 2004

2. Description of incident: I was in Xian, China, when I saw in the night many fires were lit. When I observed more closely, I saw small groups of people burning paper on pavements in the city.

I asked the taxi driver what the occasion was and it turns out to be Qing Ming—the Chinese all souls' day. It is to commemorate their dead.

3. My involvement in the incident: I was a spectator.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): it started with curiosity especially since China is supposed to be pretty irreligious. I was intrigued to see the many people involved, and also the nonchalance of most others—they were not surprised by such an occurrence.

After I spoke to the taxi driver to clarify what they were doing, I felt a sadness.

I know that it is a way for them to express their respect and love for the departed, and I am glad to see the display of familial ties. However, it was discouraging because it shows how the Chinese quickly revert back to their age old religious practices—in this instance, burning hell notes. (in a separate city, I found hell notes sold in the supermarkets!)

I think subtly I was trying to contextualize—to seek to see this practice from their eyes, but

also to come back to a biblical standpoint and evaluate the practice.

Case #: FR23 **Pseudonym:** Tom

1. Date of incident: April 10, 2004

2. Description of incident: I was watching a documentary on Martial Arts on the Discovery Channel. The documentary focuses on the Martial Arts itself but it mentioned about certain aspects of *yin* and *yang* and showed these Martial Arts experts practicing their skills in an area marked out by an octagonal border. I identified it as the *ba gua*.

3. My involvement in the incident: I was a bystander as I was only watching the documentary.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I was aware that Martial Arts was, in some way, linked to the Yin and Yang though, I did not know how they were related to one another. However, after the course on contextualization, I understood how it, especially when I saw the Martial Arts experts practicing their skills in a *ba gua* marked area.

Case #: FR24 **Pseudonym:** Tom

1. Date of incident: March 24, 2004

2. Description of incident: I, together with several other colleagues, visited a colleague in hospital who had just given birth. When asked how they (the parents) came up with the baby's Chinese name, they replied that they decided on the name after consultation with some *Feng Shui* people and got the name after certain specific calculations.

3. My involvement in the incident: I was just a bystander.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I was a little surprised because she was a catholic (not sure about her husband though). However, I did not venture to give my opinion because it was a decision between her husband and herself.

Case #: FR25 **Pseudonym:** Ulysses

1. Date of incident: March 21, 2004

2. Description of incident: *Qing Ming*.

3. My involvement in the incident: Loan of car.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): Last year, a friend approached me to borrow my car because he needed to ferry his family and '*Qing Ming*' items to the grave site. At that time, I didn't feel comfortable lending my car because it was for *Qing Ming*. This year, during *Qing Ming*, even though he didn't approach me because he knows of my uneasiness, I do not think I would have still loan the car because there are still "religious" items that need to be brought for the occasion.

Case #: FR26 **Pseudonym:** Ulysses

1. Date of incident: May 3, 04

2. Description of incident: A friend related this incident of his brother consulting someone in choosing a suitable wedding date from the Almanac for his wedding.

3. My involvement in the incident: Listener.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I did not give any comments as I was a mere listener. However, based on my limited knowledge on the Almanac, it is part of the various tools used by the Chinese religion to determine good dates for festive or important occasions. Because of that, I do not think that contextualization can be done as it is not right at all to use the Almanac.

Case #: FR27 **Pseudonym:** Victor

1. Date of incident: March, 2004

2. Description of incident: House moving.

3. My involvement in the incident: Pray and bless the house before moving in.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): _____ asked me before she moved to her new house what was one of the things she needed to observe. For example, did she need to choose a special day ... so on. She seemed like thinking the way the folk believers do [sic]. I explained to her [that] as Christians we needed not choose a specific day, but to say a prayer will do.

Case #: FR28

Pseudonym: Victor

1. Date of incident: April, 2004

2. Description of incident: Two members of the family suffering from cancer.

3. My involvement in the incident: Family Visit.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): Mr. Tan Yong Aik has been a Christian for more than 15 years. Since he became Christian, God has been a great blessing to him. However, not long ago, two members of his family suffer from cancer, Mr. Tan thought that something must be wrong. His concept of God was very similar to his past folk beliefs. I shared with him that our God is not like other God. He is the God of love, who will not simply punish us as what he thought.

Case #: FR29

Pseudonym: Winnie

1. Date of incident: March 20, 2004

2. Description of incident: Before *Qing Ming*.

3. My involvement in the incident: Bringing flowers to visit my mom's tomb.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): An act of filial piety (Matt 15:1-9). Remembering our loved one.

Case #: FR30

Pseudonym: Winnie

1. Date of incident: 3 April 04

2. Description of incident: A church member's mother's funeral.

3. My involvement in the incident: Giving a 'token' (place money in white envelope)

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): To show concern for friend(s) who grieve.

Case #: FR31

Pseudonym: Yvonne

1. Date of incident: March 24, 2004

2. Description of incident: Heard from a staff that a ministry member believes in *fengshui*, bought a house due to its "good" *feng shui* although it is beyond his budget, and the family moved in on an auspicious date. He felt that *fengshui* is different from fortune telling, which is superstitious, whereas *fengshui* is more of natural principles of matter.

3. My involvement in the incident: None.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I was not directly involved so no contextualization done. My reaction upon hearing the news is that this believer being a Chinese national does not have a firm foundation in his Christian faith. He brings into his Christian life his non-Christian outlook of life. The fact that his purchase is based on *fengshui* and choosing an auspicious date to move in shows a lack of faith in God. He is putting his faith in the things of this world, pinning his hope of blessings for his family on some principles of matter developed by man and which has already incorporated many superstitious elements in it but he is blind to his. His claim that *fengshui* is a set of natural principles of things is only a cover for his lack of trust in God.

Case #: FR32

Pseudonym: Yvonne

1. Date of incident: 11 May 2004

2. Description of incident: Read an article entitled "The A to Z of Home Decor" in "Contact," a community magazine of south east district. For the alphabet "G," the article writes, "G is for geomancy, or *feng shui*. Believe it or not, the way we design our homes and work spaces affects the flow of energy or qi within, which in turn influences our health, wealth, relationships and more. To enhance your life positively, apply good *feng shui* practices to help qi circulate unimpeded. Hey, if it works, why not?" And for the alphabet "Z," it reads, "Z is for applying Zen principles of simplicity, function, and harmony to create the peaceful sanctuary we call home."

3. My involvement in the incident: As a reader of the article.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I felt that adherents of *feng shui* and Zen Buddhism are very shrewd. Just like in New Age Movement, these people subtly bring *feng shui* and Zen principles into the art of home décor, presenting them as valid means for aesthetic purposes. That could be the reason why many English-

speaking, highly-educated people are buying into *feng shui* practices, which would be thought of as superstitious in the early days.

I'm wondering whether Christians should also subtly write articles to discuss, correct wrong impressions that are being propagated.

Case #: FR33 **Pseudonym:** Zoe

1. Date of incident: March 30, 2004

2. Description of incident: getting a quote for renovation of flat by my sis-in-law

3. My involvement in the incident: I was standing by. The contractor was advising my sis-in-law to have her flat renovated according to *Feng shui*.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): My first thought was "Will she take his advice?" Later she and I had a discussion on renovating for good luck or according to her aesthetic taste. She decided not to seek good luck by depending on *feng shui* but to decorate according to her own taste and to trust God to bless her home.

Case #: FR34 **Pseudonym:** Zoe

1. Date of incident: 13 April

2. Description of incident: My mother became a Christian last year. Due to my father opposing Christianity, she has not yet informed him, so she had to continue to prepare the necessary offerings for the Family Altar where my father pays respects to his father. My cousin asked that his father's (my uncle's) tablet be placed at this altar also.

3. My involvement in the incident: My mother asked my advice. She said to me that she is only doing the necessary for my grandfather but that she did not want to perpetuate this practice with the placing of my uncle's tablet for her to maintain.

4. My spontaneous reaction (indicate if any contextualization was done): I was glad that she did not want to maintain this practice for my uncle. We shared and realized that my mother would have to go through the motions of maintaining the altar for my grandfather but she had already realized that there was no point "worshipping" the dead and that only Jesus is worthy of our worship. She said to allow the uncle's tablet to be placed at the altar would mean continuing a practice she no longer believed in and so she spoke against it.

APPENDIX U

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF MONTHLY FEEDBACK REPORTS

REPORT SUMMARY				ANALYSIS				
Case #	Date of Incident	Pseudonym	Description of Incident	Phenomenological Analysis	Ontological Critique	Evaluative Response	Transformative Ministries	Critical Contextualization
FB 1	March	Albert	Observing a well-educated lady asking for a <i>feng shui</i> subscription in a bookshop.			1		1 -/-/superstitious/-
FB 2	14-Mar-04	Brian	Mother mentioned of going grave-sweeping on <i>Qing Ming</i> .	1		1		2 see beyond surface/-/filial piety/-
FB 3	1-Jun-04	Brian	Observed a lot of people walking round the estate with candles in their hands.	1	1		1	3 read up/festival of lights in Bible/-/prepared to discuss with people
FB 4	10-Mar-04	Dionnie	Visit to columbarium.			1		1 -/-/superstitious/-
FB 5	4-Apr-04	Dionnie	Uncle requested for observation of <i>Qing Ming</i> .			1	1	2 -/-/to remind us/go around the 3rd or 4th week (CONTEXTUALIZATION OCCURRED BEFORE THIS)
FB 6	April	Evelyn	Watching a Chinese funeral wake on TV.	1		1		2 did what they were told without knowing the meaning/-/filial/-
FB 7	19-Apr-04	Evelyn	Attending a Chinese funeral wake.	1		1		2 Why the practice...?/-/Spiritually blinded/-
FB 8	26-Mar-04	Fred	Sister requested visiting daddy's tomb during <i>Qing Ming</i> .			1	1	2 -/-/filial piety/due respect, politely, without offending, practiced void of ancestral worship
FB 9	11-Apr-04	Gerlynn	TV program of people visiting different places of worship.		1	1		2 -/Satan/the people were really ignorant/-
FB 10	May	Gerlynn	Passing by a <i>Soka Gokai</i> Buddhist funeral wake.		1			1 -/Reminded me of a Christian funeral service/-
FB 11	Mid Feb	Isaac	Being told that a cousin has chosen a particular Thursday for wedding based on <i>feng shui</i> Master's recommendation.			1		1 -/-/inconvenience/-
FB 12	Late April	Isaac	Watching a TV serial on the Warring States in China in 200 BC in which astrology and used of <i>Yi Jing</i> was mentioned.	1		1		2 the people took the stars, <i>Yi Jing</i> seriously/-/can be abused/-
FB 13		Kim	Passed by a grove where offerings were placed under a tree for some small gods.			1	1	1 -/-/Pray for the souls of men, felt like throwing the statutes or altar tablet away
FB 14	19-Apr-04	Kim	Attended a Daoist funeral wake.			1		1 -/-/They did not know what they were doing/-
FB 15	18-Mar-04	Lorraine	A friend conveyed a <i>feng shui</i> Master's recommendation to change alignment of staircase.				1	1 -/-/Convey my opinion,
FB 16	30-Apr-04	Lorraine	Friend decided not to attend another friend's wedding because he thinks it is inauspicious to do so just after a death in his family.			1	1	2 -/-/Christians don't believe in such a folk belief/told him that it is really fine to just attend the wedding
FB 17	17-Mar-04	Queenie	Asked to help make yam cake to offer to grandfather on his death anniversary.				1	1 -/-/try to render as much help as I can
FB 18	Qing Ming	Queenie	Observed neighbor engaging a medium to pray over the house during <i>Qing Ming</i> .	1		1		2 Was the house haunted?/-/Entrenched in folk beliefs, lost/-
FB 19	26-Mar-04	Rose	Family grave sweeping outing to graveyard during <i>Qing Ming</i> .	1	?	?	1	2 Meaning of Chinese Word <i>Shao Mu</i> /(Probably Done)/(Probably Done)/literally sweep the grave

REPORT SUMMARY				ANALYSIS				
Case #	Date of Incident	Pseudonym	Description of Incident	Phenomenological Analysis	Ontological Critique	Evaluative Response	Transformative Ministries	Critical Contextualization
								Supporting Keywords in Participant's Response: Phenomenological Analysis/Ontological Critique/Evaluative Response/Transformative Ministries (See examples of interpretations in footnote.)
FB 20	April	Rose	Watched on TV Buddhist priests enlisted to pray over victims buried alive in a construction accident.		1	1		2 -/If it were a Christian family/God is the one who gives life/-
FB 21	7-Mar-04	Susan	Mom recounting accuracy of foot reflexologist's diagnosis.	1				1 listened without making judgments. Qi is a very complex and spiritual notion/-/-/-
FB 22	4-Apr-04	Susan	Saw people lighting incense on roadside during <i>Qing Ming</i> .	1		1		2 Clarify, express their respect and love/-/sad/-
FB 23	10-Apr-04	Tom	Watching a documentary on Chinese martial arts on the <i>Discovery Channel</i> .	1				1 <i>ba gual</i> /-/-/-
FB 24	24-Mar-04	Tom	Catholic friends consulted <i>feng shui</i> calculation concerning newborn's name.					0 NO CONTEXTUALIZATION
FB 25	21-Mar-04	Ulysses	Lending car to non-Christian friend for <i>Qing Ming</i> grave-sweeping.			1		1 -/-'religious' items/-
FB 26	3-May-04	Ulysses	Listened to how someone consulted the Almanac for auspicious wedding date.	1		1		2 Limited knowledge of the Almanac/-/not right to see Almanac/-
FB 27	March	Victor	Praying and blessing a house before moving in.		1	1	1	3 -/Christians need not choose a specific day/thinking the way of folk believers/say a prayer will do
FB 28	April	Victor	Encouraging someone who thought he has offended God because of sickness in family.		1			1 -/Our God is not like other gods/-/-
FB 29	20-Mar-04	Winnie	Bringing flowers to mother's tomb before <i>Qing Ming</i> .			1	1	2 -/-'filial piety, remembering our loved ones/bringing flowers
FB 30	3-Apr-04	Winnie	Attending a funeral wake.			1	1	2 -/-'Show concern for friends who grieve/giving a 'token' (in white envelope)
FB 31	24-Mar-04	Yvonne	Heard of a Christian who bought a house because of good <i>feng shui</i> .			1		1 -/-'lack of faith/-
FB 32	11-May-04	Yvonne	Read an article in a home decoration magazine that recommends use of <i>feng shui</i> and Zen principles.			1	1	2 -/-'felt that adherents of <i>feng shui</i> and Zen Buddhism are very shrewd/write articles to discuss
FB 33	30-Mar-04	Zoe	Listened to how contractor advising sister on renovating house according to <i>feng shui</i> .					0 NO CONTEXTUALIZATION
FB 34	13-Apr-04	Zoe	Advising mother on perpetuating ancestral worship at home.				1	1 -/-'Shared and realized my mother would have to go through the motions
TOTAL				11	6	22	13	52

Note: Interpreting the analyses: Example 1: In FB 1, “-/’superstitious/-” means that the keyword “superstitious” indicates the presence of Evaluative Response. The corresponding dashes (-) in the first, second and fourth sections indicate the absence of Phenomenological Analysis, Ontological Critique, and Transformative Ministries, respectively.

Example 2: In FB 2, “see beyond surface/-’filial piety/-” means that the keyword “see beyond surface” indicates the presence of Phenomenological Analysis while “filial piety” indicates the presence of Evaluative Response. The dashes (-) in the second and fourth sections indicate the absence of Ontological Critique and Transformative Ministries, respectively.

APPENDIX V

GLOSSARY OF STATISTICAL TERMINOLOGIES

The definitions in this glossary are taken from the Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences by W. Paul Vogt.

Alpha (α) “Usually called Cronbach’s alpha to distinguish it from the alpha in alpha level. It is a measure of internal reliability of the items in an index. Cronbach’s alpha ranges from 0 to 1.0 and indicates how much the items in an index are measuring the same thing” (6).

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) “A test of statistical significance of the differences among the mean scores of two or more groups on one or more variables or factors. It is an extension of the *t* test, which can only handle two groups, to a larger number of groups. More specifically, it is used for assessing the statistical significance of the relationship between categorical independent variables and a continuous dependent variable. The procedure in ANOVA involves computing a ratio (*F* ratio) of the variance between the groups (explained variance) to the variance within the groups (error variance)” (9).

Control Group “In experimental research, a group that, for the sake of comparison, does *not* [original emphasis] receive the treatment the experimenter is interested in studying” (56).

Correlation “The extent to which two or more things are related (‘co-related’) to one another. This is usually expressed as a correlation coefficient” (58).

Correlation Coefficient “A number showing the degree to which two variables are related. Correlation coefficients range from -1.0 to $+1.0$. If there is a perfect positive correlation ($+1.0$) between A and B, whenever one is high or low, so is the other. A correlation coefficient of 0 means that there is no relationship between the variables. (A zero correlation may also occur when two variables are related but their relationship is not linear.)

There are numerous ways to compute correlation coefficients depending on the kinds of variables being studied. Among the most common are Pearson’s product-moment, Spearman’s rho, and Kendall’s tau” (58-59).

Cronbach’s Alpha “A measure of internal reliability or consistency of the items in an index.... Cronbach’s alpha ranges from 0 to 1.0. Scores toward the high end of that range (e.g., above .70) suggest that the items in an index are measuring the same thing” (64).

Dependent Variable “(a) The presumed effect in a study; so called because it ‘depends’ on another variable. (b) The variable whose values are predicted by the independent variable, whether or not caused by it” (78).

Factor Analysis (FA) “Any of several methods of analysis that enable researchers to reduce a large number of variables to a smaller number of variables, or factors, or latent variables; a factor is a set of variables, such as items on a survey, that can be conceptually and statistically related or grouped together” (107-08).

F Ratio (or Value or Statistic) “The ratio of explained to unexplained variance in an analysis of variance; that is, the ratio of the between-group variance to the within-group variance” (115).

Hypothesis “A tentative answer to a research question; a statement of (or conjecture about) the relationships among the variables that a researcher intends to study. Hypotheses are sometimes testable statements of relations. In such cases, they are usually thought of as predictions, which, if confirmed, will support a theory” (134).

Independent Variable “The presumed cause in a study; also, a variable that can be used to predict or explain the values of another variable. A variable manipulated by an experimenter who predicts that the manipulation will have an effect on another variable (the dependent variable)” (137).

Internal Consistency “The extent to which items in a scale are correlated with one another, and by extension, the extent to which they measure the same thing” (142).

Intervening Variable “A variable that explains a relation, or provides a causal link, between other variables. Also called ‘mediating variable’ and ‘intermediary variable’” (144).

Likert Scale “A widely used questionnaire format developed by Rensis Likert. Respondents are given statements and asked to respond by saying whether they ‘strongly agree,’ ‘agree,’ ‘disagree,’ ‘strongly disagree.’ Wording varies considerably... Likert scales, and Likert-like scales, are the most widely used attitude scale type in the social sciences. They are comparatively easy to construct, can deal with attitudes of more than one dimension, and tend to have high reliabilities” (160).

Mean “Average. To get the mean, you add up the values for each case and divide the total by the number of cases. Often symbolized by M or as \bar{X} (‘X-bar’)” (172).

n “Number.... Among the most common meanings of the lowercase n are (a) number in a sample, as opposed to in a population, and (b) number of cases in a subgroup” (186).

p “Probability value, or p value. Usually found in an expression such as $p < .05$. This expression means ‘the probability (p) that this result could have been produced by chance (or random error) is less than ($<$) 5 percent (.05).’ Thus, the smaller the number, the greater the likelihood that the result expressed was not merely due to chance. For example, $p < .001$ means that the odds are a thousand to one (one-tenth of 1%) against the result being a fluke. What is being reported (.05, .001, and so on) is an alpha level or

significance level. The p value is the actual probability associated with an obtained statistical result; this is then compared with the alpha level to see whether that value is (statistically) significant” (204).

Pearson Correlation Coefficient “More fully, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. More briefly, Pearson r .

A statistic, usually symbolized as r , showing the degree of linear relationship between two variables that have been measured on interval or ratio scales, such as the relationship between height in inches and weight in pounds” (211).

Population “A group of persons (or institutions, events, or other subjects of study) that one wants to describe or about which one wants to generalize. To generalize about a population, one often studies a sample that is meant to be representative of the population” (217).

r “Symbol for a Pearson’s correlation, which is a bivariate correlation (between two variables). The ‘ r ’ of Pearson’s r originally stood for ‘regression’” (232).

Reliability “[T]he consistency or stability of a measure or test from one use to the next. When repeated measurements of the same thing give identical or very similar results, the measurement instrument is said to be reliable” (245).

Respondent “A person who answers questions in a survey or an interview or otherwise responds to a researcher’s inquiry” (248).

Sample “A group of subjects selected from a larger group in the hope that studying this small group (the sample) will reveal important things about the larger group (the population)” (252).

Scale “A group of related measures of a variable” (256).

Significance “The degree to which a research finding is meaningful or important” (264).

Social Desirability Bias “Bias in the results of interviews or surveys that comes from subjects trying to answer questions as ‘good’ people ‘should’ rather than in a way that reveals what they actually believe or feel” (269).

Spurious Relation (or Correlation) “(a) A situation in which measures of two or more variables are statistically related (covariation), but are not in fact causally linked—usually because the statistical relation is caused by a third variable. When the effects of the third variable are removed, they are said to have been partialled out....

For example (definition a), if the students in a psychology class who had long hair got higher scores on the midterm than those who had short hair, there would be a correlation between hair length and test scores. Not many people, however, would

believe that there was a causal link and that, for example, students who wished to improve their grades should let their hair grow. The real cause might be gender: Women (who usually have longer hair) did better on the test. Or that might be a spurious relationship too. The real cause might be class rank: Seniors did better on the test than sophomores and juniors, and, in this class, the women (who also had longer hair) were mostly seniors, whereas the men (with shorter hair) were mostly sophomores and juniors.” (273)

Standard Deviation “A statistic that shows the spread or dispersion of scores in a distribution of scores. It is a measure of the average amount the scores in a distribution deviate from the mean. The more widely the scores are spread out, the larger the standard deviation. The standard deviation is calculated by the square root of the variance” (274).

Statistical Significance “Said of a value or measure of a variable when it is (‘significantly’) larger or smaller than would be expected by chance alone” (278).

***t* Test** “A test of the statistical significance of the results of a comparison between two group averages, or means” (296).

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