EXPLORING THE STRENGTHS OF LONG TERM MARRIAGES AMONG MALAYSIAN CHINESE COUPLES

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KUALA LUMPUR

2015

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2015

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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ABSTRACT

With the emerging themes of Asian epistemologies and Asian forms of Psychology, the cultural discrepancy between the Western worlds and the Asians is marked. Western hegemony in the knowledge base of marriage has much to contribute, and yet Eastern perspectives are needed to bridge the gaps of human diversity. Thus, this study intended to understand the marital strengths of long term married couples among the Malaysian Chinese from an emic perspective. The research methodology utilized in this research was the qualitative approach. Five couples, with years of marriage ranging from 40 to 60 years, participated in this research through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were carried out. The couples went through 3 to 4 interview sessions, with each lasting for 1½ to 2 hours. Multiple interviews were carried out to reach depth and richness in data, until the objective of the study is attained. The sessions were recorded with the consents of the participants. Two couples are Mandarin speaking and three couples are English speaking. They reside in urban areas. The sources of data were interviews, observation and field notes. Steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. These steps include, member checking, tabling out the researcher's biases, making clear the paradigmatic stance of the researcher, peer reviewing, employing multiple methods and multiple sources of data, being sensitive to relational oriented ethical practice and adequate engagement in data collection. The findings of this study revealed the strengths of long term marriages were tolerance, accommodativeness, empathy, love for the children, respectfulness for the elderly, social supports and religion. They were supported by reciprocal interaction between the couple and the children. The strengths were rooted in other-centered cultural value. The theme for the marital strengths was reciprocal based other-centeredness. The findings reflected both similarities and dissimilarities in the gravity of marriage between the West and Malaysian Chinese. The similarities between the West and East are intrinsic virtues, self-determinism, living

beyond self-fulfillment and inner regulation which are required for betterment in marital relationship. The cultural values which gird the strengths diverge between the West and East. The findings also showed that marital strength comprised the interrelationship among individuals, social network and social influence. Marital strengths are community based. The theoretical implications and the practical implications - to marriage in postmodern generation, education system at home and school, marriage and family policies and counseling practice among the Chinese couples were discussed.

ABSTRAK

Memandangkan kemunculan tema dalam epistemologi Asia and rangka psikologi Asia, perbezaan budaya antara dunia Barat dan Asia telah lebih ketara. Hegemoni Barat dalam pengetahuan asas perkahwinan telah banyak menyumbangkan, tetapi perspektif Timur juga diperlu dalam merapatkan jurang kepelbagaian manusia. Sains manusia yang berdasarkan kepelbagaian manusia yang dapat mewakili keseluruhan umat manusia amat diperlukan. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memahami kekuatan perkahwinan pasangan jangka panjang dalam kalangan orang Cina Malaysia dari perspektif *emic*. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif. Lima pasangan yang berkahwin dari 40 hingga 60 tahun telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini melalui persampelan bertujuan. Temu bual mendalam dilakukan. Pasangan ini telah melalui 3 hingga 4 sesi temu bual di mana setiap temu bual berlangsung selama 1½ hingga 2 jam. Beberapa temu bual telah dijalankan untuk mencapai kedalaman dan kekayaan dalam data sehingga objektif kajian tercapai. Sesi temu bual ini dirakam dengan persetujuan peserta. Kajian ini melibatkan dua pasangan yang berbahasa Mandarin dan tiga pasangan yang berbahasa Inggeris. Mereka tinggal di kawasan bandar. Data dikumpulkan melalui sumber temu bual, pemerhatian dan nota lapangan. Untuk memastikan kebolehpercayaan kajian ini, langkah-langkah berikut telah dilakukan: penyemakan dari ahli, mempamerkan bias dalam pemahaman penyelidik, menjelaskan pendirian paradigmatik penyelidik, semakan rakan, menggunakan pelbagai kaedah dan pelbagai sumber data, bersikap sensitif kepada perhubungan yang berorientasikan amalan etika dan penglibatan yang mencukupi dalam pengumpulan data. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan kekuatan dalam perkahwinan jangka panjang ialah toleransi, bertolak ansur, empati, kasih sayang kepada anak-anak, memberi penghormatan kepada warga tua, sokongan sosial dan agama. Mereka disokong dengan interaksi yang resiprokal di antara pasangan serta anak-anak.

Kekuatan perkahwinan berakar dalam nilai budaya yang mementing dan memberatkan orang lain ("*other-centredness*"). Tema kekuatan perkahwinan adalah berdasarkan pemberatan secara resiprokal yang diberikan kepada orang lain ("other-centredness"). Hasil kajian ini telah mencerminkan kedua-dua persamaan dan perbezaan dalam graviti perkahwinan antara Barat and warga Cina Malaysia. Persamaan antara Barat and Timur ialah nilai intrinsik, determinasi kendiri, hidup melepasi kepenuhan diri dan regulasi dalaman diperlukan untuk kebaikan hubungan perkahwinan. Nilai-nilai budaya yang mengikat kekuatan menyimpang antara Barat dan Timur. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa kekuatan perkahwinan adalah hasil daripada perhubungan di antara individu, rangkaian sosial dan pengaruh sosial. Kekuatan perkahwinan adalah berasaskan komuniti. Implikasi teoretikal dan implikasi praktikal - perkahwinan dalam generasi pasca-moden, terhadap sistem pendidikan di rumah dan sekolah, perkahwinan dan dasar keluarga dan amalan kaunseling dalam kalangan pasangan Cina telah dibincangkan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Coming to this stage of writing, it dawns on me that the completion of my PhD involves a community! Most important of all, this journey would not be possible without the grace of God. Meanwhile, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people who have contributed directly and indirectly throughout this journey.

My supervisors, Dr. Haslee Sharil and Dr. Lau Poh Li, who differ in experiences, capabilities and personalities, and I have the advantage of embracing their differences to enrich my PhD journey. Dr. Sharil's insights and farsighted reminders are helpful to refine my thinking as well as avoiding some unnecessary pitfalls. Dr. Lau Poh Li's acute sense of knowing where to find resources and encouragement helped tremendously to put things in order. And most importantly, they are always there for me.

Besides, this study would not be possible without the couples' participation. My gratitude towards their willingness to take part, to share their stories and to accommodate my presence in their homes is beyond words. In short, they have shared with me generously more than I expected.

The following generous people who delightfully offered their help in editing, reviewing, translating, transcribing, and cross checking. I am deeply touched by their kindness. They are Tan Joo Siang, Sheena Tiong Yin Xin, Choong Choi Yen, Ngu Ik Tien, Dr. Diana Wong Ing Poh, and Cho Wan Fong.

Last but not least, my family members have motivated me greatly along this journey. I want to thank - my parents-in-law for willing to help happily anytime when I needed; my parents, especially my mom, for teaching me to value education; my two lovely boys, Jairus and Jeston, for their patience and my husband's relentless support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract iii

Abstrak v

Acknowledgements vii

Table of Contents viii

List of Figures xv

List of Tables xvi

List of Appendices xvii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Background of the Study 1

1.1.1 Changes of Family Formation in Western Context 1

1.1.2 Changes of Family Formation in Asian Context 2

1.1.3 Changes of Family Formation in Malaysia 3

1.1.3.1 Divorce Rates 3

1.1.3.2 Delayed Marriage 4

1.1.3.3 How Modernization Shapes the Cultures of Marriage 5

1.1.3.4 How Modernization Impacts the Roles of Women 7

1.1.3.5 The Chinese and Their Family Values 8

1.2 Statement of Problem 10

1.3 Purpose of Study 12

1.4 Research Questions 12

1.5 Theoretical Framework 13

1.6 Significance of Study 14

1.7 Limitations of Study 15

1.8 Operational Definitions 16

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 17

2.1 Introduction 17

2.2 American Studies on Marital Quality over Five Decades (from 1960s-2010) 18

2.2.1 Macro Forces that Shaped the Constructs of Marital Quality 18

2.2.2 Micro Forces that Shaped the Constructs of Marital Quality 19

2.3 Foci of Marital Strengths from Western Psychological and Asian Psychological Perspectives 20

2.3.1 Intrinsic Virtues 20

2.3.2 Interpersonal Theories 21

2.3.3 Asian Psychological Perspectives 22

2.4 Rethink Research Methodologies and Marital Parameters on Marital Studies 23

2.5 Overview on Malaysian Marital Studies 26

2.5.1 Studies in the Early Days 26

2.5.2 Studies in the Twentieth Century 28

2.5.3 The Need for Trans-Cultural Theory – Existential Theory 29

2.6 Conclusion 31

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 32

3.1 Introduction 32

3.2 Qualitative Research 32

3.3 The Researcher's Background 35

3.3.1 The Researcher's Experiences that Enhance the Study 36

3.3.2 Research Paradigms 38

3.4 Trustworthiness of the Study 42

3.4.1 Biases of the Researcher 43

3.4.2 Triangulation 46

3.4.3 Member Checks 48
3.4.4 Adequate Engagement in Data Collection 49
3.4.5 Peer Review 50
3.4.6 Audit Trail 50
3.4.7 Transferability 51
3.4.8 Ethics 52
3.5 Data Collection 55
3.5.1 Sampling 56
3.5.2 Sample Size 58
3.5.3 Plans for Entry 59
3.5.4 Research Tools 62
3.5.5 In-depth Interviews 62
3.5.6 Interviewing Husband and Wife Together 63
3.5.7 The Process of Formulating the Interview Questions 65
3.5.8 Observation 66
3.5.9 Documentation 67
3.5.10 Field Notes 68
3.5.10.1 How Field Notes are Utilized and Analyzed for This Study 68
3.5.11 Plans for Exit 69
3.6 Data Analysis 70
3.6.1 Directions for Data Analysis 71
3.6.2 Description 71
3.6.3 Thematic Analysis 73
3.7 Conclusion 76

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS 77

4.1 Introduction....77
4.2 The Sources of Data....77
4.2.1 Data from Interviews....79
4.2.2 Data from Observation Field Notes....82
4.2.3 Data from Documentation....82
4.3 Theoretical Framework....82
4.4 Process of Data Analysis....83
4.5 Findings of the Research....87
4.5.1 The Description of the Findings....87
4.6 Description of Couple 1....88
4.6.1 Introduction....88
4.6.2 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Financial Constraint....92
4.6.3 Challenge 2 – Sicknesses....96
4.6.4 Challenge 3 – Aging....98
4.6.5 Ways to Nurture the Relationship....101
4.6.6 Handling Conflicts....102
4.6.7 Summary....104
4.7 Description of Couple 2....108
4.7.1 Introduction....108
4.7.2 Challenge 1 - Low Income and Long Working Hours....109
4.7.3 Challenge 2 – Empty Nest....115
4.7.4 Ways to Nurture the Relationship....117
4.7.5 Handling Conflicts....120
4.7.6 Summary....122
4.8 Description of Couple 3....125
4.8.1 Introduction....125

4.8.2 After Getting Married – Communal Oriented 131
4.8.3 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Moving around with the Arrival of Children 131
4.8.4 Challenge 2 – Strengths to Cope with High Cost of Education 134
4.8.5 Ways to Nurture the Relationship 136
4.8.6 Handling Conflicts 136
4.8.7 Summary 137
4.9 Description of Couple 4 142
4.9.1 Introduction 142
4.9.2 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Dealing with Mother in-Law 147
4.9.3 Challenge 2 – Strengths for Empty Nest 151
4.9.4 Handling Conflicts 152
4.9.5 Challenge 3 – Strengths for Dealing with Opposite Sex Relationship outside Marriage 156
4.9.6 Ways to Nurture the Relationship 158
4.9.7 Summary 160
4.10 Description of Couple 5 163
4.10.1 Introduction 163
4.10.2 Challenge 1 - Tension with the Mother In-law 168
4.10.3 Challenge 2 – Arrival of Children 171
4.10.4 Challenge 3 – Financial Constraint 171
4.10.5 Handling Conflicts 173
4.10.6 Ways to Nurture the Relationship 176
4.10.7 The Most Challenging Moment 1 – Dealing with the Runaway Son 179
4.10.8 The Most Challenging Moment 2 – Clash at Work 181
4.10.9 Summary 182

4.11 Brief Summary of Five Marriages 186
4.12 Engagement of Malaysian Chinese Literature 186
4.13 Thematic Analysis 192
4.14 The Researcher's Reflection on Thematic Analysis 207
4.15 Overall Summary of the Data Analysis 209
4.16 Conclusion 212

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION 214

5.1 Discussion of the Findings 214
5.1.1 The Findings and Existential Theory 214
5.1.2 The Findings and Intrapersonal Dynamics of Western and Eastern Theories of Self 216
5.1.3 The Findings and Religiosity 218
5.1.4 The Findings and Interpersonal Theories 220
5.1.5 The Findings and Social Networking and Social Influence 228
5.1.6 The Findings and Asian Psychology 230
5.1.7 Other Interesting Findings 234
5.2 Implications of the Study 235
5.2.1 Theoretical Implications 236
5.2.2 Practical Implications 237
5.2.2.1 Implications for Marriage in Post-modern Generation 237
5.2.2.2 Implications for Education at Homes and School Settings 239
5.2.2.3 Implications for Marriage and Family Policy 241
5.2.2.4 Implications for Counseling Practice for the Malaysian Chinese Couples 244

5.3 Limitations 247

5.4 Recommendations 248

5.5 Conclusion 250

REFERENCES 251

List of Publications and Papers Presented 268

appendix 269

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Literature Review Map for the Study. 17

Figure 3.1: Overall Preview of Research Methodology 34

Figure 4.1: Timeline for Data Collection 81

Figure 4.2: The Process of Data Analysis 86

Figure 4.3: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 1 107

Figure 4.4： Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 2 124

Figure 4.5: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 3 141

Figure 4.6: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 4 162

Figure 4.7: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 5 185

Figure 4.8: Process of Thematic Analysis 194

Figure 4.9: Summary of the Findings 201

Figure 4.10: Theme Emerged from the Strengths of Long Term Chinese Married Couples 208

Figure 5.1: Interrelationship of Individual, Social Network and Social Influence 230

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of the Couples 78

Table 4.2: Data Categorization for Marital Strengths in Marital Challenges 196

Table 4.3: Data Categorization for Common Attributes of Husbands and Wives..... 197

Table 4.4: Data Categorization for Marital Strengths in Handling Conflicts 198

Table 4.5: Data Categorization for Enhancers for Couples' Sense of Togetherness 199

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A (i): Information Sheet for Participants……... 269

Appendix A (ii): Information Sheet for Participants (Mandarin)…….. 271

Appendix B: Recruit Couples through Email and Facebook……. 272

Appendix C (i): Informed Consent Form……... 273

Appendix C (ii): Informed Consent Form (Mandarin)…….. 275

Appendix D (i): Background Information……. 276

Appendix D (ii): Background Information (Mandarin)……. 278

Appendix E (i): Consent for Recording……. 280

Appendix E (ii): Consent for Recording (Mandarin)……. 282

Appendix F: Couple Interview Protocol…… 284

Appendix G: Sample of Nodes in Nvivo 10…….. 295

Appendix H: The Card Husband Presented to His Wife during Their Golden Anniversary Wedding (Couple 3)……..... 296

Appendix I: Handwritten Notes from Husband to Wife (Couple 5)…….. 297

Appendix J: The Card Given by One of the Sons of Couple 5…….. 298

Appendix K: Tabulated Strengths in Marital Challenges……. 299

Appendix L: Tabulated Strengths in Dealing with Conflicts……. 300

Appendix M: Identifying the Common Attributes of Husbands and Wives…….. 302

Appendix N: Enhancers for Sense of Togetherness……... 303

Appendix O: Sample of Audit Trail……... 304

Appendix P (i): Observation Notes for Couple 1……... 305

Appendix P (ii): Observation Notes for Couple 2…….. 310

Appendix P (iii): Observation Notes for Couple 3…… 316

Appendix P (iv): Observation Notes for Couple 4……. 321

Appendix P (v): Observation Notes for Couple 5…….. 327

Appendix Q: In-depth Interview Questions…….…….. 329

Appendix R: Sample of Transcription…….…….. 331

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Many love stories end in happily ever after, but how much do people know what it takes to last? To understand the contributing factors of long lasting relationship, this study endeavors to explore the strengths of long term marriage. The background of this study comprises of changes in family formation in Western, Asian as well as Malaysian contexts.

1.1.1 Changes of Family Formation in Western Context

For centuries, marriage arranged division of labor and power by gender and age. It structured production and distribution of goods and people. It also regulated political, economic, and military alliances, as well as set up the link between families and communities. In short, it carried out what the market and the governments do today (Coontz, 2005). In fact, fluctuation rate of marriage was one of the most reflective indicators of a nation's economy health (Desmond, 1973).

Since industrialization, the formation and breakdown patterns of families have shifted (Goode, 1963). More couples are opting to have children without legal marital status due to the fear of losing quality of life (Kravdal, 1997). Single parent families are rampant (Hew, 2003; Pong, 1996). The number of singles, delayed marriages (Gustafsson & Worku, 2005; Saardchom & Lemaire, 2008), and same-sex marriages are increasing (Andersson, Noack, Seierslad& Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006). Some singles chose to adopt children without partner (Rogers-Dillon, 2008). Co-habitation becomes a more common option than legal marriage (Estin, 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Scott, 2008). These shifts in family formation started since the mid-eighteenth century in both America and England. Coontz (2005) stated that changes in family values and structures have proliferated globally.

1.1.2 Changes of Family Formation in Asian Context

As modernization creeps in different parts of the world, family arrangement in Asia also drifts away from the tradition (Yang & Yen, 2011). In China, Chu (1985) points out the younger generation no longer preserves the continuity with the traditional family values. He describes the young ones as "more assertive, less accommodating, and less submissive to authority figures than in the past" (p. 273). However, location is one determining factor that indicates the degree of continuity between traditional and modern family values in China. The degree of continuity is higher in some parts of rural areas of China. One distinct feature of family formation in China is, due to the rising population, many young Chinese couples experience shortage of housing (Dai, 1990).

In Korea, Japan and Taiwan, women were expected to give up their personal pleasure and satisfaction in order to uphold the goals of collectivism (Yang & Yen, 2011). However, Dommaraju and Jones (2011b) describe East Asian societies as "becoming more individualistic and less governed by Confucianist norms" (p. 726). Egalitarianism challenges the tradition of close relationship between men and women. According to Yang and Yen (2011), educated men in East Asian societies still prefer to marry younger women with less educated than they are.

Divorce rates in Asia differ geographically as well as culturally. Divorce rates are high in Asian developed countries, namely Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. Divorce rates are low in South Asia. In most parts of Southeast Asia, divorce rates are examined based on Islam and non-Islam. International marriages and divorce escalate among Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Singapore (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011b). In Insular Southeast Asia, teenage marriage and cohabitation among teenagers alarm for attention (Jones, 2011).

In short, family structures change globally. Modernization has inevitably impacted families in Malaysia[1]. Changes of family formation in Malaysia will be discussed next.

1.1.3 Changes of Family Formation in Malaysia

Discussion of family formation trends includes: divorce rate, delayed marriage, how modernization shaped the culture of marriage, how modernization impacted the roles of women, and Malaysian Chinese and their family values.

1.1.3.1 Divorce Rates

During the pre-modern time (around 1950-1975), divorce rate among Malay Muslims in Malaysia was higher than that in developed countries (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011; Hirschman, 2001; Jones, 1981). This high divorce rate was due to the bilateral-kinship system, which reduced the social stigma of divorce (Hirschman, 2001). With the nation's development, the divorce rates were reduced following introduction of higher education and reinforcement of law. In 2000, the divorce rate among Malaysians as a whole was 1.36 out of every 100 married couples. It rose to 1.37 in 2010 (National Population and Family Development Board, 2004). Among the three main ethnic groups (i.e. Malays, Indians, Chinese), the Malays had the highest divorce rate, followed by Indians and Chinese (Tey, 2011).

Most divorces in Malaysia took place in early stage of marriage (Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan, 2001; Tey, 2011). Similar trend is observed in Western countries (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012) as well as some Asian countries (Hsiao, 2012). Young age at marriage and level of education were proposed as the main contributing factors for

[1] There are three main ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians, who comprised of the total population as 67.4%, 24.6% and 7.3 respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The Eurasian and the indigenous groups in the Peninsula and North Borneo also became part of Malaysia's cultural diversity (Williamson, 2001), which comprise of 0.7% of the total population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010).

marital disruption in Malaysia (Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan 2003; Tan & Jones, 1990).

In Azahari's (2008) study, the researcher underlined some causes that affected Muslim women in marriages. The study has identified economic problem as the most common complaint by wives. The economic problem was associated with the husbands' lack of responsibility. Concurrently, the national study carried out by National Population and Family Development Board identified lacking of understanding as the main reason for divorce, followed by lack of sense of responsibility (Malaysian Population and Family Survey in Peninsular Malaysia, 2004).

1.1.3.2 Delayed Marriage

Another impact of modernization is delayed marriage. Delayed marriages are prevalent among the ethnic groups due to higher educational attainment and workforce participation in women. According to Tey (2011), research on marital trends in Peninsular Malaysia in different time periods have found strong correlations between age of marriage and urbanization, educational attainment and modern sector employment (Brien & Lillard, 1994; Dai, 1990; Lee, 1982; Hirschman & Fernandez, 1980; Hirschman & Rindfuss, 1980; Hull, 2011; Jones, 1995; Jones, Hull, & Mohamad, 2011; Saardchom & Lemaire, 2008; Tey, 2007, 2011; Von Elm & Hirschman, 1979). Despite the governmental policy that aimed to increase the level of educational attainment among the Malay population, the Chinese was found to marry later than the Malay women and Indian woman (Brien & Lillard, 1994; Davanzo & Haaga, 1983; Tey, 2007).

The age at first marriage has shifted from 16.6 in 1947 to 21.4 in 1974 (Brien & Lillard, 1994) and 22.8 in 2004 (Malaysian Population and Family Survey in Peninsular

Malaysia, 2004, p. 106). In Peninsular Malaysia, about 15 per cent of women aged 30-34 were still single (Jones, 1995). According to the Department of Statistics; Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, the number of single males and females had consistently increased from 1,779,839 in 1970 to 7,197,959 in 2010. The number of unmarried males outnumbered the females. The highest percentage for the first marriage is in the age range of 35-39. The main factors for delayed in marriage are financial constraint (Hirschman & Fernandez, 1980; Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Malaysia, 2004; Vijaindren, 2012) followed by lacking of suitable mate (Malaysian Population and Family Survey in Peninsular Malaysia, 2004).

However, other forms of families are prevalent in the Malaysian society but understudied. These types of families include cohabitation, extramarital marriage, inter-cultural marriage, grandparents assume the role of parents and married couples without children. Hull (2011) had highlighted that many needed marital studies in most Southeast Asia countries are still lacking investment.

1.1.3.3 How Modernization Shapes the Cultures of Marriage

From the cultural point of view, traditionally, marriage functioned as social networking (Quah, 2008). Parents used to have total control over marital arrangements (Jones, 1981). For example, marriage was a channel to make alliance with neighboring countries for protection (Hooker, 2003). Early entry into marriage was a common practice (Jones, 1995). In Malaysia, arranged marriages were common among the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians in the early days (Jones, 1981; Tan, 1988). However, in the 1980s, the tradition of arranged marriages was partially fragmented among the three ethnic groups (Lee, 1982; Tan, 1988). Arranged marriages are diminishing in number even in rural areas. Instead of extended families, nuclear families become the dominant household types (Abdul Rahman & Ishak, 2011). This family type

change in Malaysia mirrors the American families in the 1960s. Goode (1963) captured the same pattern in American families as

> wherever the economic system expands through industrialization, family patterns change. Extended kinship ties weaken, lineage patterns dissolve, and a trend toward some form of the conjugal system generally begins to appear – that is, the nuclear family becomes a more independent kinship unit (p. 6).

Parents are no longer the only source for finding a mate like it used to be. Most young people choose their life partners through friends, relatives, workplace and social gatherings (Tey, 2007). In addition, use of internet for mate searching is on the rise (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Wok et al., 2012). According to the study by the National Population and Family Development Board of Malaysia, internet users are 17.5 million of the total population of 28.6 million (Omar, 2013). Recently, it has been revealed that online dating is getting out of date due to the accessibility of smartphone apps that are widely used, especially among school age teens and college students, to establish relationships (Renganayar, Vijaindren, & Ahmad, 2014).

Another study revealed that professional dating services are "becoming a necessassity… due to [the] busy and hectic work life" (Vijaindren, 2012, p. 26). The same study identified long working hours on career development as the main reason for inability to find "like minded singles" (p. 26). On the cultural outlook, the increasing age of first marriage and various alternatives for mates finding reflect a reality: parental control over marital decision is waning (Jones, 1980; Zang, 2005). Besides that, the intrusion of technology, vast choices in mates finding and diverse kinds of relationship are perplexing. Marital decisions have shifted from socially based to personal preference based.

1.1.3.4 How Modernization Impacts the Roles of Women

Concomitant with increasing number of women in the labor force, work stress spill-over effects on families are widespread. In fact, a study in the 1980s had alerted the public regarding the quality of care for aging parents and children (Tan, 1992). Studies on family welfare revealed that role conflicts are the most prevalent risk factor for dual income-earners' family stability (Tan, 1992; Tey, 2011). In Tan's study (1988), she found that women were expected to work full time, as well as to shoulder the workload in the family. On the other hand, men were not expected to share house chores after work. Noor (Noor, 1999) found that women not only bear more family workload, they are also bearing the feeling of guilt when they are unable to perform and meet the traditional standards. Her study also revealed that husbands' unwillingness to help in housework predicts women's distress over time (Noor, 1994). Nevertheless, many women with employment still perceived themselves chiefly responsible for the family and children. They also stuck with lacking of support from spouse (K. Abdullah, Noor, & Wok, 2008). Women are torn between the traditional values, demands and modern lifestyles (Quah, 1980, 2008). In addition, policies and management regulations dealing with family and work stress issues had been inconsistent (Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011). Though the Government had taken on many efforts to ease women's burden of work and family (Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995) by providing support for families through courses and resources, male participation in family responsibility programs was low (Bakar & Abdullah, 2013).

As a developing country, the process of modernization affects the formation of families tremendously. The impacts of modernization could be summarized as: i) the structure of marriage and the relation between men and women are drastically changing; ii) emotional bonding expands its important in marriage; iii) mutual cooperation and

sharing responsibilities between husband and wife is much needed; and iv) the welfares of children and elderly are at the expense of career attainment.

When marriage is in both highly fragile and highly romanticized states in the modern era, what are the essential elements that stabilize family and prolong the longevity of marriage? Marriage is culturally bound. According to Clammer (1996), what holds a culture is its value. The values of each ethnic group among Malaysians overlap as well as differ (Talib, 2010). Thus, to understand what strengthens marital longevity, recognizing the cultural values of each ethnic group is crucial. Improved understanding of each ethnic group's cultural values would assist in establishing inclusive economic and social policies (Cheung, 2012; Clammer, 1996). In light of this, cultural specific marital study for each ethnic group is necessary and therefore, this study is to focus on the Malaysian Chinese. The following describes ethnic background of Malaysian Chinese.

1.1.3.5 The Chinese and Their Family Values

Among the three major ethnic groups, the Chinese had the lowest divorce rate among the three races (Tey, 2011). The Chinese women married later than the Malays and the Indians (Tey, 2007). Although the Malaysian Chinese is a minority, they have a significant control in Malaysia's economy (Ng, Loy, Gudmunson, & Cheong, 2009). They were perseverance in maintaining their cultural values and identities (Ng, 1998).

The Chinese in Malaysia are the third largest group of global Chinese overseas population (Ng et al., 2009), who reside outside of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the 19th century, the Taiping rebellion had caused a large flock of Chinese immigrants to Malaysia from south China. Another flow of Chinese migration to Malaysia was during the periods of 1920s and 1930s, when wars infested in many parts of China (Tan, 2005).

The Chinese had brought with them a set of values and customs. Although they were living in different land, they tried to hold on to their values (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006).

The ties between family members are indispensable (Hsu, 1985). However, due to modernization, the ties between family members were modified. For instance, parental support replaces parental control in mate selection. Grandparents have become the child care support for working couples (Tan, 2005). Family members are still the most favorable option for childcare among the Chinese (Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Malaysia, 2004, p. 301). It is even so for single mothers, who returned to their natal support when their relationships failed (Hew, 2003; Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan, 2003). In other words, the roles of family members are redefined, but the ties remain.

Another form of parental support is that young people still value their parents' support and blessing in their marriages. For instance, when young couples were asked – "Who would be invited to the wedding dinner?" The answer would most likely be the couple's parents' network of friends and relatives (communications with participants, through SMARTSTART Premarital Education Seminar from 2012 to 2013, circle of friends, relatives, pre-martial counseling couples). The bride and bridegroom in Chinese families play little role in the wedding ceremony (Burgess & Locke, 1960). Before getting married, couples will bring their boyfriend or girlfriend to meet their parents (Tan & Jones, 1990). Family support in Chinese families still perseveres, though its shape has changed (Chang, 2013; Clammer, 1996, p. 27-28; Hew, 2003; Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan, 2003).

The effects of modernization affected family formation and family dynamics of Chinese families. Distinguishing the impact of industrialization and the influence of cultural values is impossible, and yet the intertwined of both is inevitable (Goode, 1963). Quah (1990) and Clammer (1996) stressed a convergent view that cultural values are rooted in development and they are the foundation for development. Failure to incorporate how values are constructed into family policies would suffer two consequences: 1) the imported values would supersede the indigenous values as one is more "functional" and the others are "impediments" (Clammer, 1996, p. 34); 2) in light of the wide spectrums of attitudes toward love among different cultures, adopting Western teaching directly without understanding the local cultures and values, family policies could become "a consequence of a composite patchwork of unrelated program" (as cited in Quah, 1990, p. 50). Thus, understanding marriage from its cultural values and contexts are crucial to uphold marriage and family in a society.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Marriages make up the fundamental fabric of society (Desmond, 1973; Mead, 1962; Quah, 2008). Studies from the West and East have shown that satisfying marriage plays significant roles in a society, especially in carrying out the functions of family (Ackerman, 1970; Amato, 2010; Desmond, 1973; Lidz, 1978; Lidz, Fleck, & Cornelison, 1965; Markman & Halford, 2005; Wallerstein et al., 2013), national welfare (Dai, 1990; Desmond, 1973; Lai, 2008; Schofield, Mumford, Jurkovic, Jurkovic, & Bickerdike, 2012), wellness in health, work productivity, health as well as the welfare of the children (Amato, 2010; Barnett, 1994; Burman & Margolin, 1992; Cheng & Kuo, 2008; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Markman & Halford, 2005; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Shah, Abdullah, Aizuddin, & Rohaizat, 2012). Despite of its importance,

deficiency in understanding marriage from its contextual background and cultural values is prevalent.

With industrialization, free market and increased individual autonomy, marriage in Western countries has gone through phases of deinstitutionalization (Fincham, 2010), reinstitutionalization and "uncharted territory" since the mid-18th century (Coontz, 2005, p. 11). In short, marriage in Western developed countries is losing its institutional control. In contrast, what are the states of marriage in Malaysia in the midst of modernization? Is institutional control still effective in Malaysian marriage? The magnitudes of social change and the states of marriage need to be cross examined so that helpful and relevant intervention programs could be implemented to the locals. Hull (2011) noted that marital studies in many parts of Southeast Asian countries were underinvested. Therefore, localized marital studies are much needed.

Forms of marriage are shaped by social change, and also bounded by cultural norms and values. However, marital studies for each ethnic group are scant. Particularly, more studies are necessary to examine the determinants of marital quality of Malaysians from various cultural relevant perspectives (Ng, Loy, Gudmunson, & Cheong, 2009; Tam, Lee, Har, & Chua, 2011; Zainah, Nasir, Hashim, & Yusof, 2012). For instance, when the key words "marital studies" were typed in the Web of Science search engine, the number of marital studies showing up was approximately 15,654. When "marital studies in Malaysia" was keyed in, the result showed 69 Malaysian studies. Among these 69 Malaysian studies, only 5 were related to marital studies. When "marital satisfaction in Malaysia" was keyed into the Google scholar search engine, only 2 studies are available. This shows how limited localized marital research is and there is definitely a need to improve this insufficiency.

Nonetheless, local studies on marital variables revealed a tendency to import Western marital theoretical models into the local context without taking into account the cultural relevancy (Ng et al., 2009; Tam et al., 2011; Zainah et al., 2012). With the emerging themes of Asian epistemologies and Asian forms of Psychology, the cultural disparity between the Western worlds and the Asians expands (Yang, 2000). Yang (2000) called forth for more sensitivity towards the application of Western psychological concepts into local contexts, while not being totally ignorant of the Western frameworks. Therefore, in order to prevent from "ascribing to an entire culture a single set of psychological characteristics" to the locals (Clammer, 1996), more indigenized marital studies are needed. In fact, marriage could be upheld through recognizing its cultural contexts and values as well as incorporating the universal marital constructs.

1.3 Purpose of Study

In view of the paucity of research on cultural relevant studies in marriage and the need to strengthen marriage, the purpose of this study is to capture the marital strengths of long term marriages from emic perspective.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to understand the marital strengths of long term marital relationships, this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the strengths of long term marriages among Malaysian Chinese couples?

The researcher will employ the following dimensions as tentative guides for exploring marital strengths of the couples:

a) Explore the couples' family upbringing.

b) Explore how they met.

c) Explore those happy moments in their marriage.

d) Explore how they deal with their emotions and bounce back when they face challenges in marriage.

e) Explore how they perceive and resolve conflict in marriage.

f) Explore their behaviors that enhance long term marital relationship.

g) Explore their source of strengths.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework for this study is not to dictate the research process. It is to provide a guiding map for this research while taking the perspectives of the participants seriously (Maxwell, 2013). The theoretical framework for this research is existential theory (May, 1958b; Yalom, 1980). How the couples make meanings along their marital journeys will be studied. Their marital strengths would be depicted by how they made meanings out of the challenges they faced. The meanings of marriages would be captured by the strengths demonstrated by the couples through "three meaning systems - creative, experiential and attitudinal" (Frankl, 1967, p. 15; Yalom, 1980, p. 445).

Other than looking into the meanings of marriages, the influence of the researcher should not be overlooked (Clark, 1994; Spinelli, 2007). May (1958b) outlined three dimensions to understand the world of a person. The three dimensions are united as the world of a person, which described by Rollo May (1958b) as, the person and his world are "unitary, structural whole" (p. 59). The world of a person includes the past which shapes one's existence, the environment, culture and various kinds of deterministic forces that affect a person. It also includes the potentialities of a person. It is not something static. Rather, it is constantly in the process of forming and designing. In other words, the background of the researcher could influence the research outcome.

Thus, by addressing how the world of a person in relation to the outside world and another beings, this theory acknowledges not only the outcomes of the study, but also the people who are being studied, and also the influence of the researcher.

Thus, by utilizing an emic approach in this study, the strengths of the couples will be captured based on what meaning they made out of their marriage, in the backdrop of the local contexts and cultural values.

1.6 Significance of Study

While the field of psychology is moving towards global stage by integrating cross-cultural psychology into mainstream psychology (Cheung, 2012), this study adds to the understanding of the Malaysian Chinese marriage from emic perspective. The combination of mainstream and indigenous psychology would demarcate the universal and cultural specifics of marital constructs (Cheung, 2012) among Malaysian Chinese married couples.

Having identified the cultural specific aspects and the universal constructs, Cheung (2012) stated that "by respecting cultural diversity and reviewing subgroup similarities and differences, cultural analysis could provide divergent cultural perspectives to enhance our knowledge base and inform when culture-sensitive approaches should be adopted in practice" (p. 728). This kind of cultural-sensitivity would allow practice of relevant and inclusive family policies, instead of developing family policies solely based on generalized multi-ethnic cultures (Talib, 2010).

In America, Under the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, it launched a public funded Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI). This initiative had diversified scholarly researches in marriage. According to Fincham and Beach (2010), investigation on marital strengths, departing from conflict-centered, will set the stage for upcoming research

agenda (Fincham et al., 2007). Thus, this study does not only expand study of marriage in Malaysia, it also extends existing knowledge of marital strengths from non-Western context.

The outcome of this study will surface preliminary marital themes - which construct the essence of marriage among the Malaysian Chinese. The preliminary emerged themes will contribute to establishment of localized marital theoretical framework. Meanwhile, localized marital studies could also enhance marriage counseling profession in Malaysia, by integrating Western marital theoretical framework with local marital theoretical framework. This would heighten sensitivity and respectfulness of counselors, before imposing Western marital theoretical framework without carefully considering the cultural values.

1.7 Limitations of Study

Marriage is cultural bounded. Although marital studies for different ethnic groups are still much needed, the scope of this study is limited to only Chinese couples. In considering the diversities of cultures among the three ethnic groups, the scope for this study will be too wide to cover all cultural groups. Mustafa et al. (2012) also mentioned that understanding of the differences and similarities among the ethnic groups should not be overlooked when studying marriage. Thus, finding the cultural specific aspect of marriage for one ethnic group is prioritized for this study.

Besides, by limiting the study to Chinese couples, the researcher will be more sensitive to capture her own ethnic's marital culture and values than with other cultures. If three races are studied, the researcher might overlook the essence of marriage in other cultures. Thus, the researcher chooses to study marriage from the culture familiar to her.

The aim of this study is to capture the marital strengths of the couples through in-depth interviews. Five couples will take part in the interviews. Due to the small sample size, some might argue against the generalization of this study. However, generalization of qualitative study is difficult (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Lincoln et al. (1985) argued that "all truth is relative" (p. 114). They underscored the argument by Cronbach in 1975 on "generalization decay" (p. 115) by pointing out that knowledge needs to be updated frequently. Over time, all science will turn into historical interest eventually as life extinct in itself. Thus, the aim of this study inclines towards establishing theoretical constructs which are transferable to the same contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

1.8 Operational Definitions

This study aims at exploring marital strengths of the long term married couples. The following terms are defined for clarification.

Malaysian Chinese - the Malaysian Chinese dominate about 26% of the total population of Malaysia. They are offspring of the Overseas Chinese who migrated to Peninsular Malaysia in the 19th century due to over population, natural calamities and landlord exploitation in the southern coastal provinces of Fujian and Guandong (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006).

Strengths - the inner capacity to choose one's values in the face of marital dilemma through utilize and grow in one's experience (May, 1967).

Long term marriage – the length of marriage is 40 years and above.

Western Theoretical Frameworks – American or British theoretical frameworks or models.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is organized into four sections: 1) American studies on marital quality over five decades; 2) Western views and Asian views on marital strengths; 3) review of Malaysian marital studies; and 4) the need for transcultural theory. Figure 2.1 provides a literature map.

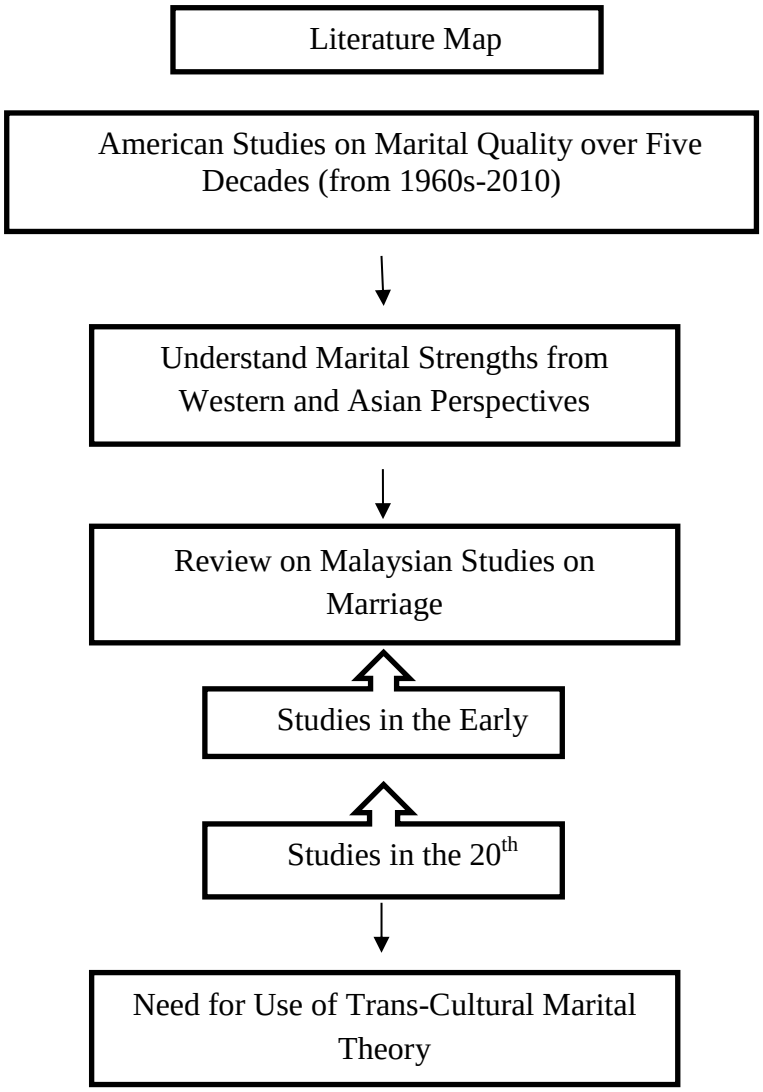

Figure 2.1: Literature Review Map for the Study.

2.2 American Studies on Marital Quality over Five Decades (from 1960s-2010)

The reviews of marital quality over five decades showed constructs of marital quality were shaped by both macro and micro forces (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Spanier & Lewis, 1980).

2.2.1 Macro Forces that Shaped the Constructs of Marital Quality

Their reviews reflected that macro forces were social change and government intervention. Both influenced the constructs of marital quality (Amato et al., 2003; Hicks & Platt, 1970). In the 1960s, factors associated with marital stability and happiness were – high occupational status, incomes and educational levels of husbands; likeness in couple's socio-economic status, age, religion and religious involvement; and utilitarianism. At the same time, pursuing affection in marriage; esteem for spouse; sexual enjoyment, companionship and age at marriage heightened (Hicks & Platt, 1970), that expanded the territory of companionship marriage (Goode, 1963).

During the 20th century, factors associated with marital satisfaction were - high educational level, high income, egalitarian marital relationship; religious involvement; support for marital permanence, no preschool children; monogamous union; husbands' active participation in housework and decline in traditional gender attitudes (Amato et al., 2003). Meanwhile, with advancement in technology, infidelity rates, especially online infidelity and cybersex, increased (Fincham & Beach, 2010).

During the years between 1980 to 2000, there were tremendous increases in cohabitation, children born out of wedlock, increase in age of first marriage, interracial marriages, women employment rate, remarriage and divorce rates. This was during the period when America was highly industrialized (Amato et al., 2003). Meantime due to

the changing roles of women and men, sharing housework between husband and wife became an important marital variable in the 20th century (Amato et al., 2003).

Another macro force that changed the constructs of marital quality was governmental intervention. Under the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) was launched to promote healthy marriage and fatherhood (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Due to HMI, more studies were conducted on previously understudied groups, such as low-income groups, the minority marriage and the military marriage. As a result of the governmental marital initiative, the studies on marriages diversified.

These reviews indicated that social changes and government intervention were two powerful macro forces that could shape constructs of marital quality.

2.2.2 Micro Forces that Shaped the Constructs of Marital Quality

The micro aspects of marital quality shifted over time, but some remained. The presence of children had been identified to lower the marital satisfaction from the studies in the 60s to the 90s (Amato et al., 2003; Bradbury et al., 2000; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). However, at the turn of the new millennium, Schindler and Coley (2012) found that children have increased the bonding of parents. Meanwhile, Amato, Johnson, Booth and Rogers (2003) showed that children reduced the chance of unhappy couples dissolving their marriages.

Over the five decade analysis on marital studies, there have been a few marital variables which were consistently significant to marital quality throughout. These variables were attribution towards the spouse (Spanier & Lewis, 1980), positive affect (Gottman & Notarius, 2002), social support, (Amato et al., 2003; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Hicks & Platt, 1970; Spanier & Lewis, 1980) and religious involvement (Amato et al., 2003; Bradbury et al., 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Hicks & Platt, 1970;

Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Due to the implementation of Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI), religiosity emerged as a significant factor across all status, including low income groups (Fincham & Beach, 2010). It was found that religious involvement enhanced problem solving skills, strengthened marital virtues and commitment. It also hampered negative elements in marriage, such as infidelity, substance abuse and crime (Fincham et al., 2010). Due to influence of religious involvement, more studies on marital strengths for the coming decade are required. The arena of marital studies has shifted from conflict focus to strength focus (Fincham et al., 2007; Fincham & Beach, 2010).

The macro and micro forces that shaped marital constructs have reflected the sociological perspectives towards marital strengths. Understanding of marriage requires multifaceted angles, thus the psychological dynamics of marriage, from Western and Asian perspectives, will be highlighted in the following section.

2.3 Foci of Marital Strengths from Western Psychological and Asian Psychological Perspectives

The foci of studies on marital strengths differed between West and East. Marital strengths from Western psychological perspectives would be highlighted from intrinsic virtues and interpersonal theories. The psychological perspectives on Asian marital strengths would be underlined following the Western psychological perspectives on marital strengths

2.3.1 Intrinsic Virtues

Before marital strengths were utilized as the center stage of study, marital conflicts had been the focus of marital studies. Relationship virtues were found to be powerful sources of change which transformed the negativity in marriage into positive outcome (Fincham et al., 2007). The intrinsic virtues in marital strengths included - gratitude

(Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012); forgiveness (Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006); spirituality (Beach et al., 2011); self-repair mechanism (Fincham et al., 2007); locus of control (Myers & Booth, 1999); and the role of kindness towards communication (Fowers, 2001). Other than virtues, strengths in marriage were also found in interpersonal dimension.

2.3.2 Interpersonal Theories

Two interpersonal theories would be highlighted, namely 1) interdependence theory and 2) family system theories. Interdependence in close relationship emphasized the rewarding outcome of the relationship which could be achieved through "high correspondence of outcomes". High correspondence outcome means the goals and interests of couples correspond. On the other hand, when interests of couples diverged, "transformation of motivation" was required. This was when couples engaged in the process of considering the welfares of the relationship, the wellbeing of the partner and social norms (Agnew & Le, 2015). Thus, according to interdependent theory, the strengths of the relationship were depended on the overlapping goals and interests of couples, as well as the intent to put other's wellbeing into consideration when goals and interests of couples diverged.

Another angle to understand marriage from the interpersonal psychological perspective is family system theories. Lidz (1961) and Minuchin (1985)) stressed the important of complementarity of goals and functions between husband and wife. Due to urbanization, complementarity between couple had become more needed since the nuclear family became widespread (S. Minuchin, Lee, & Simon, 1996).

In Bowen's theory on differentiation of self, the ability to differentiate feeling process and thinking process was foundational in close personal relationship (Bowen,

1976; Skowron, 2000). The assumption of Bowen's theory was the most fusion of feeling and thinking in a person, the poorest function in close relationship would be shown. In other words, the ability to distinguish feeling and thinking process was fundamental in close relationship functioning.

Another influential family system therapist was Virginia Satir. She proposed the importance of self-transcendence in family system. Self-transcendence would motivate other family members to give and grow reciprocally and positively (Satir, 1967).

The Western psychological perspectives on the strengths of marriage accentuated the important of intrinsic virtues, common interests, considerate of other's wellbeing, complementarity, differentiation of self and self-transcendence.

2.3.3 Asian Psychological Perspectives

On the other hand, the foci of Asian studies for marital strengths were family support and reciprocity (Xu, Xie, Liu, Xia, & Liu, 2008); forbearance (Li, 2011); husbands' yieldingness in return to wives' gratitude and covert conflict (Li & Hsiao, 2008). The foci of studies in marital strengths between West and East deviated. Even the terminologies of strengths employed in the studies also varied.

To further illustrate the anchor of strengths in marriage between West and East, the study by Previti & Amato (2003) would be discussed. They identified the rewards and barriers for being committed in marriage. They defined rewards as "satisfaction with the spouse as a companion or with the sexual relationship" (p. 561). Religious factors and children were considered as barrier for marital commitment (Previti & Amato, 2003). However, commitment in marriage for the sake of children is quite common in Malaysia (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011a). In other words, commitment in marriage for the sake of children should not simply be generalized as barrier for staying in marriage. It could

serve as a reward for some couples and barrier for others. This illustrates that marital constructs cannot be interpreted without its cultural contexts and values.

Exploration through marital studies in the States for five decades and the divergent foci of marital strengths between the Western and Asian countries, what surfaced from the studies were social change and governmental intervention were the powerful forces that shape marital constructs. Due to the governmental intervention, various types of marital studies in America were carried out among the disadvantaged group. The diversification of marital studies included studies among the minorities. Religious involvement was found to be significant in marriage across socio economy status. Consequently, studies in marital strengths were focused. However, the foci of marital strengths between the Western and Eastern studies deviate. Therefore, contextual and localized studies are much needed to integrate the knowledge base and cultural specific studies in marriage.

2.4 Rethink Research Methodologies and Marital Parameters on Marital Studies

Hicks and Platt (1970) suggested that terms such as “marital success”, “marital happiness”, and “marital satisfaction” should be discarded because “happiness is ephemeral goal for much of the population” (p. 569). Thus, they suggested “marital happiness” should be removed from social research. Meanwhile, usage of self-report should be reduced to the minimal. Concepts that are value laden should be avoided (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Previti and Amato (2003) proposed survey researcher should try to use open-ended questions to capture subjective experience of married couples while carrying out marital research. Spanier and Lewis (1980) found that cross-sectional studies were less reliable in investigating marital quality. Longitudinal panel studies are favored.

Hicks and Platt's (1970) comments are still relevant. Seeking happiness as a goal of life could be delusional and impracticable (Iacovou, 2009). Dion and Dion (1988) questioned the foundation of love which is based on self-gratification. They stated that "individualism makes it difficult for individuals to become intimate and loving with one another" (p. 286). Hicks and Platt (1970) also stated that "[marital happiness] does not have the virtues of power and simplicity which commend variables to social researchers" (p. 569). Therefore, satisfaction and happiness based on self-gratification should not be the goal for marriage. Instead, there are other dimensions that should be emphasized, like cultural values, religious beliefs and the meaning of marriage.

Nevertheless, the meaning of satisfying marriage differ from culture to culture (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 2004). To understand how people make meanings in their relationships, localized study using emic qualitative approach should be adopted. However, utilizing Western marital satisfaction inventories in Malaysian marital studies is common (Hoesni, Hashim & Ab Rahman, 2012; Hoesni, Hashim, & Sarah, 2013; Juhari, Tsen, & Yaacob, 2012; Mustafa, Mohd Hasim, Aripin, & Abdul Hamid, 2012; Ng et al., 2009; Tam et al., 2011; Zainah et al., 2012).

Bradbury et al. (2000) meanwhile highlighted that "meaning and implication of behavioral interaction cannot be fully understood without considering the broader context in which those interaction occur" (p. 969). With this argument, Beach, Fincham & Stanley (2007) also stressed the influence of social contexts on marital constructs. In other words, contextualized marital variables is important (Beach, Fincham, & Stanley, 2007). Marital constructs need to be understood in its social contextual background.

To illustrate how utilizing Western framework is not appropriate for localized study, four typology of premarital couples based on PREPARE (Fowers & Olson, 1992) would

be used for discussion. The inventory outlined four types of couples, namely vitalized[2], harmonious[3], traditional[4] and conflicted[5]. The purpose of this typology was to "assist professionals in matching interventions to the specific issues of identifiable couple types… Such an approach can better facilitate each couple's growth and development…" (Fowers et al., 1992, p. 11).

The concept of marital satisfaction inventory deviated when implemented in the local context. For instance, the notion of Confucius in relationship to harmony holds a strong root in the Malaysian Chinese culture (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). It connotes "mutual complement and mutual support between the parties" (Li, 2006, p. 589). In the four typology, the highest rank in the scale is vitalized couples. In the vitalized couple type, verbal expression of feelings is highly valued. It also means that a vitalized couple is favorable among the four typology.

On the other hand, expression of feelings between Chinese couples is not common (Yeo, 1999; Dias et al., 2011). Harmony within family, clan and community is valued

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[2] Vitalized couples reported a high degree of overall relationship satisfaction. They indicated a very high level of comfort with their ability to discuss feelings and resolve problems together. These couples reported satisfaction in how they relate to one another affectionally and sexually. They were also happy with how they spend free time together and relate to one another's family and friends. They reported agreement on financial and parenting matters as well. Vitalized couples indicated an interest in religious activity and a strong preference for egalitarian roles. They tended to be somewhat unrealistic in their expectations for marriage, however.

[3] Harmonious couples were characterized by a moderate level of overall relationship quality. They tended to be relatively satisfied with one another's personality and habits, felt understood by their partner, thought they could share feelings with one another, and were able to resolve differences with one another. These couples were also satisfied with how they spend free time together and share affection, and they felt comfortable discussing sexual preferences and interests. Harmonious couples also felt comfortable with one another's friends and family. They tended to be somewhat unrealistic in their view of marriage and had not come to a consensus on child-related issues such as the number of children they wish to have or their parental roles. These couples did not tend to be religiously oriented.

[4] Traditional couples had a profile indicating moderate dissatisfaction with interactional areas of their relationship but had strengths in areas that involve decision making and future planning. They tended to be somewhat unhappy with their partner's personal habits and were uncomfortable discussing feelings and dealing with conflict. Couples in this group were not entirely satisfied with how they spend their free time and how they relate sexually. These couples did tend to be realistic in their view of marriage and were quite religiously oriented. They developed a consensus on the number of children they would like and on their role as parents.

[5] Conflicted couples indicated distress on all of the PREPARE scales. They reported dissatisfaction with their partner's personality and habits, their ability to communicate and discuss problems in the relationship, and how they relate to one another's family and friends. These couples did not tend to be religiously oriented but endorsed a more traditional role pattern than other couples. Although virtually all of their scores tended to be lower than the other groups, these couples had relative strengths in realistic expectations and in their consensus on children and parenting.

greatly (Abdullah et al., 2006). Thus, in Fower and Olson's inventory, harmonious couple type is ranked second after the vitalized couple type. The connotation of the harmonious couple type in the four typology does not seem relevant in the cultural context in Malaysia. Particularly, harmony is an important virtue in relationships within the Chinese culture. If the four typology is used without being sensitive to cultural differences and relevancies, the term "harmonious couples" would seem subordinate in ranking, especially when used cross-culturally. That might create an impression that Asian couples are less happy or less satisfied. Sumari & Jalal (2008) stated that "it is unethical to examine an individual's development from a Eurocentric approach because the results may show he or she does not perform stage-appropriate developmental tasks" (p. 32). Hence, cultural sensitivity is essential in adopting Western framework in marriage (Yang, 2000).

To summarize, the gaps in studies of marital strengths are wide. Controversial concepts like marital happiness or satisfaction should be discouraged in marital studies (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Contextualized marital studies and cultural sensitivity in adopting Western framework are required. The overview of Malaysian marital studies will surface the gaps in cultural relevant studies.

2.5 Overview on Malaysian Marital Studies

An overview of Malaysian studies will cover the studies in the early days, studies in the twentieth century, and the needs for trans-cultural theory. The overview will unveil the need for cultural specific studies on marriage for different ethnic groups.

2.5.1 Studies in the Early Days

Almost all the early studies on marriage were demographically based, which were attached to a few headings such as: 1) Patterns of Marriage and Household Formation in

Peninsular Malaysia (Tan, 1988; Tan & Jones, 1990); 2) Trends in Marriage in Peninsular Malaysia and Age at First Marriage (Jones, 1980; Lee, 1982; Tey, 2011; Von Elm & Hirschman, 1979; Xenos & Gultiano, 1992); 3) Trends in Divorce (Hew, 2003; Hirschman, 2001; Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan, 2001; Jones, 1980, 1981) and 4) Fertility Decline (Brien & Lillard, 1994; Davanzo & Haaga, 1983; Hirschman & Fernandez, 1980; Hirschman & Rindfuss, 1980).

The earliest study which discussed the attitudes of couples towards marriage was Tan Poo Chang's (1988) study. This study was carried out on three main ethnic groups in Malaysia in July 1981 and June 1982. The findings of her study revealed that men and women saw family background as the most important factor for mate choosing. Men chose sharing household and making decision as second and third choice; whereas women chose job security as second and making decision together as third. Both men and women think that women's main task in life is to be a good wife and mother and have a lot of control in family affairs (p. 150). Nevertheless, women prioritized men's role as the main breadwinner, followed by husband as companion/ protector and father to the children. The attitude toward marital expectations then was patriarchal. The perception that husband brought home money and the wife ran the home affairs was prevalent at that time.

This traditional perception of husband and wife was prevailing not only in Malaysia; it was widespread in Singapore as well. In Quah's (1980) study, she argued that traditional belief on the roles of women had been ingrained in the children's minds through the school system. Thus, when women were needed for national economic growth, they were caught in a dilemma. The same scenario is happening in Malaysia, today.

2.5.2 Studies in the Twentieth Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were more studies focusing on the role of conflict, women development and work-family balance (Noor, 1999; Tan, 1992; Puthucheary, 1992; Tey, 1992). For instance, when role-conflict and work-family stress were keyed into Google scholar, there are pages of references, unlike the number of marital studies in Malaysia. Many studies focused on the relationship between work and family, but none of the studies highlight how marital strength has influenced the couple's marriage and work, except Noor's study (1999). Her study mentioned that the element of religion strengthened the women's capabilities to cope.

Meanwhile, around this time frame, marital researches emerged intermittently. There are altogether seven English published studies. About half of the publications appeared in 2012. The surface themes were diverse. For instance, among the seven studies, four studies examined marital satisfaction with different variables, such as gender difference (Ng et al., 2009), relational consensus (Tam et al., 2011), the relationship between personality and marital satisfaction (Juhari et al., 2012), effects of demographic variables (Zainah et al., 2012), as well as couples types and ethnicity (Mustafa et al., 2012). Two studies focused on love in marriage (Hoesni, Hashim & Rahman, 2012; Hoesni, Hashim, & Sarah, 2013). There were two studies on Malay marriages, three studies on Chinese marriages and two other studies on the three major Malaysian ethnic groups. There were no marital studies for the Indian and other tribal groups in Malaysia. The similarity among all the seven studies was an etic approach which was used to conduct the study. The focus for each study was quite diverse. However, among the seven studies, five studies (Hoesni, Hashim & Rahman, 2012; Hoesni, Hashim, & Sarah, 2013; Mustafa et al., 2012; Ng et al. 2008; Tam et al., 2011) stressed that cultural factors underlying the studies should not be overlooked.

In view of the trend in strength-focused marital studies and the availability of marital studies in Malaysia, two research gaps surfaced: 1) studies on marital strengths from non-Western context, which link to the existing knowledge base in marriage, are needed; 2) using emic approach in Malaysian marital study is scant.

2.5.3 The Need for Trans-Cultural Theory – Existential Theory

Malaysia is one of the Southeast Asia (Fincham et al., 2006) countries where cultures are deeply rooted in religions (Clammer, 1996). According to Clammer (1996), "[the] continuous interaction between the indigenous traditions and value systems and these imported products, so much so that in many cases what is indigenous and what is not has become impossible to distinguish, so indigenized has the imported system become" (p. 27). Thus, understanding the local marital strengths at this point of time, when Malaysia is moving towards globalization, is timely. As the nation is moving forward to becoming a developed country, it is important to recognize, embrace and integrate the local marital values as well as the imported value systems. By examining through the local perspective, it might open "another window on possible antidotes to the unintended negative side effects of individualism…" (Beach, Fincham & Stanley, 2007, p. 316). Meanwhile, when localized studies are emphasized, it does not mean narrowing the horizon of understanding marital strengths solely from local cultural perspectives. According to Cheung (2012), to be international is not just "paying attention to cultural perspective… "[but also] embrace multicultural models in an emerging paradigm of globalization" (p. 729).

In the context where Western hegemony in counseling field is prevalent and localized marital study is limited, utilizing a theory for an emic study is challenging. For instance, a well-established marital theory, PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) by Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg (2010), though used

widely in many parts of Asian (Huang, 2005), does not seem to fit well in this study. This is because the key components of marital enhancement in PREP, when adopted cross-culturally, could create blind spots to understand the local perspectives and voices (Huang, 2005). May (1958b) once challenged "can we be sure…that we are seeing the [person] as he really is, knowing him in his own reality; or are we seeing merely a projection of our own theories about him?" (p. 3). Thus, a trans-cultural theory is more appropriate for this study. The theory that is suitable for this study is existential theory.

Existential psychotherapy has been used extensively for wives fighting with breast cancer (Lantz & Gregoire, 2000a); couples dealing with death (Lantz & Ahern, 1998); couples dealing with post-parental stage (Lantz, 1999); older adult couples (Lantz & Raiz, 2008); job burnout and couple burnout (Pines, Neal, Hammer, & Icekson, 2011); dealing with trauma in marriage and family relationships (Lantz & Gyamerah, 2002); Vietnam veteran couples (Lantz & Gregoire, 2000b); couples with myocardial infarction (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003); and sex (Kleinplatz, 2007; Barker, 2011). Kalantarkousheh, Hassan, Kadir, and Talib (2011) proposed that existential psychotherapy was useful for both individual counseling and marital counseling.

Existential psychotherapy is grounded on "the creative capacities of human being and how the human being can shape and/or respond to the material facts, limitations, rules, predictabilities, and essences to be found in human life" (Lantz, 2004). It is based on "a world view of existence" (Lantz, 2004, p. 165). It is different from other kinds of psychotherapy which are based on philosophies of essence. Philosophies of essence include "form[s] of philosophical inquiry that focus upon the consistencies, rules, and patterns of the world which govern the manifestation of human life" (Lantz, 2004, p. 165). One of the main reasons why this theory is used is that it allows this research to be carried out by understanding the person rather than understand the person "as an object

to be calculated, managed, 'analyzed'" (May, 1958a, p. 76). By understanding the persons, their values, believes, meanings, responsibilities, which govern their strengths for long term marriages, will be discovered. Thus, the essence of marriage could be captured from the local perspectives.

2.6 Conclusion

Looking into the studies from West and East, the constructs of marital studies were determined by macro forces - social changes, contextual background, cultural influence, social policy, as well as micro forces - attributions toward spouse, positive affect and religious involvement. From the Western and Asian psychological perspectives, the foci of studies in marital strengths differed.

As a developing country, intertwined with multi-ethnicities, cultural values and practices, and globalization, the changes in the forms of marriage among Malaysians are ubiquitous. However, the magnitudes of change could vary according to their contexts, the inherence cultural values over social change and the pervasiveness of social policies.

With widespread family break down and change in the forms of family, understanding marital strengths has become the arena for marital studies. Thus, it is crucial to understand marital strengths through localized studies so that cultural specific and universal factors of marriage could be identified to enrich local counseling practice as well as to extend the knowledge of marriage from the non-Western context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

According to Yin (2011), research designs are "logical blueprints" that connect together research questions, data to be collected, strategies for analyzing data and the validity of a study. This chapter will address the "blueprints" of the research methodology used for this research. The blueprints for this study include the methodology, the researcher's background (because the researcher is instrumental to the research outcome), issues of trustworthiness of this study and ethical considerations, data collection and the data analysis process. The following sections will describe each of them in detail.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was employed for this study. The following will list the five features of qualitative research and how qualitative research suits this study. Yin (2011) proposed five features of qualitative research, which include: 1) studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions; 2) representing people's views and perspectives; 3) covering the contextual conditions within which people live; 4) contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; and 5) striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source (pp. 7-8). An overview of the research methodology is given in Figure 3.1.

Marriages are diversely bounded by cultural norms and practices (Quah, 2008). Husserl (1976) emphasized that consciousness and experience are phenomena by themselves, therefore it is crucial to understand them in their own terms. Thus, in order to understand marital strengths from local perspectives, it is essential to study the meaning of marriage from long-term married couples in real-world conditions. Through

their stories and relevant documents, participants are free to tell their stories. The process of telling stories in a non-confined laboratory environment could help to reveal some important themes for long-term marriage.

Creswell (2012) also stated that qualitative research is "best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore" (p. 16). As stated earlier, study based in Malaysia, on local marital phenomena are almost non-existent for all ethnic groups. Although there are a few marital studies done locally, the marital constructs used to examine local marriage are based on Western models (etic approach). Capturing the strengths of long-term married couples is what this research pursues. Through qualitative research, local perspectives and specific cultural marital variables can emerge.

Qualitative research would also help the researcher to see how participants fit inside cultural context in which the couples live. Through interviewing couples and making home visits, the researcher is able to unveil where the participants are coming from. Collecting this rich data from qualitative research also conveys how cultural norms and values influenced their marital relationships.

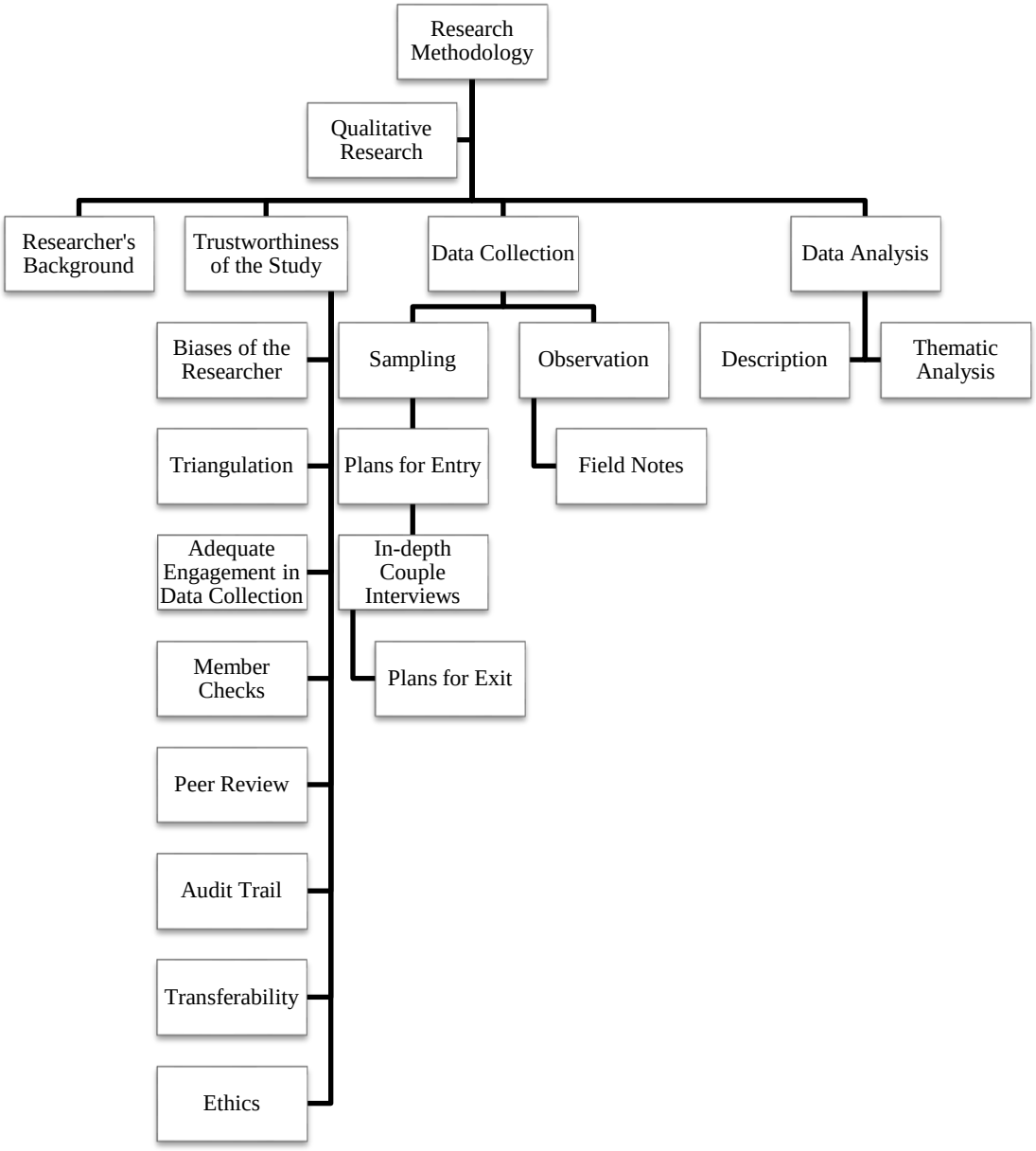


Figure 3.1: Overall Preview of Research Methodology

According to Husserl (1927), all knowledge is founded through human experience. As mentioned before, almost all local marital studies employ the etic approach. By using qualitative study, this study seeks to understand culturally specific variables and

universal variables that contribute to the experience of long-term marital commitment in different cultures. Therefore, using multiple sources, such as in-depth interviews, observation and relevant documents (field notes, pictures, love letters, etc.), experience, cultural norms and patterns of local culture could be triangulated and captured from different sources. This will directly contribute towards this study's trustworthiness.

After discussing how this study fits into the five fundamental features of qualitative study, the researcher is one of the fundamental research instruments itself (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Richardson stated that, "the ethnographic life is not separable from the Self" (Richardson & St. Piere, 2005, p. 965). In other words, knowing the background of the researcher is fundamental to this study. This leads to the description of the researcher's background.

3.3 The Researcher's Background

Traditionally, the background of the researcher could bias the research. Therefore, the researcher's background needs to be disregarded from the research design (Maxwell, 1998). However, integrating the researcher's identity and experience has recently gained extensive theoretical and philosophical support (Patton, 2002). In fact, Maxwell (1998) believed that the researcher's experience could become a major source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks.

The researcher could become what Patton (2002) called, "a scientific double-edge sword" (p. 433) to the research process. The identity and experience could both enhance and impede the research process, especially if a researcher is imposing their values and assumptions on research uncritically. Yin (2011) suggested that "people who do qualitative research view the emic-etic distinction and the possibility of multiple interpretations of the same events as an opportunity, not a constraint" (p. 13). The

researcher shall discuss the researcher's experience which could be enhancing to this research, in addition to the biases that need to be cautioned. Besides that, the researcher's paradigmatic stance in this study was explicitly discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 The Researcher's Experiences that Enhance the Study

The researcher of this study is a married woman, with two boys, aged 8 and 10. As a person, the researcher has gone through ten years of married life. Throughout these ten years of marriage, the process of deepening their marital relationship is like the process of peeling an onion layer by layer. Nevertheless, juggling between personal needs and the needs of family required courage and sincerity to come to terms with one's desires and willingly making sacrifices for the wellbeing of family.

As a Western trained counselor as well as a Chinese wife, Western thoughts and local beliefs sometimes mingle, but sometimes clash. In professional terms, the researcher's marital life has given the researcher the opportunity to walk through the process of differentiation and integration of self. This process of experiencing the West and the East, the researcher hopes, will help to truly honor human dignity by accepting the diversities of humanity.

In terms of educational background, the researcher acquired six years of under-graduate and post-graduate studies in the United States, before starting counseling career at a Christian based NGO called, The Bridge Communication in 2001. At that time, the establishment of counseling practice was still very much at an infancy stage. Local marital studies were quite lagging behind (Hull, 2011). The researcher further pursued a Master in Counseling at University of Malaya after working for five years. Most of the training and theories learned in counseling courses were Western based.

At the initial stage of practice, it never occurred that there were difficulties in applying Western marital concepts to local couples in counseling sessions. Western knowledge was like an absolute truth of marriage for the researcher at that time. Though the researcher was aware of sensitivity toward cultural issues, there were not many local resources for reference regarding the cross-cultural counseling experience. Even during supervision and case studies, cross-cultural issues rarely surfaced for discussion.

It was through years of experience in "trials and errors", through truancy of couple sessions, feedback from genuine and sincere participants of the researcher's seminars and workshops, comments from professional peers and career mentors from Taiwanese Professors, that the researcher began to realize that sensitivity was needed to identify the culturally specific factors before "implementing" Western concepts into context here. In fact, without recognizing the discrepancies between Western models and local cultural values, intervention would seem like cutting off from cultural values, which could be assessed as being symptoms of disorders (Clammer, 1996). This will eventually affect the quality of counseling intervention.

Having experiences of immersion in Western and Eastern concepts, the researcher has the advantage to witness and experience the intertwining of both Western and Eastern concepts in marriage. The researcher, however, should refrain from eliciting insights and inputs from participants to solely fit the theoretical framework. Open-mindedness is crucial to enhance the data collection. Nevertheless, the professional counseling experience the researcher has could enhance the interview process by building rapport with the participants.

Another advantage the researcher brings into this research is that the researcher is able to select couples who are suitable for this study. Over the years observing and working with couples through counseling sessions and workshops, this experience could help the researcher to discern couples who are suitable for this study. Since this study is focusing on the marital strengths of long-term marital couples, it would be important to choose couples who are able to meet the research objective.

By identifying the advantages the researcher brings to this study, it does not automatically mean that the research could be free of influence from the researcher's worldview and ways of understanding couples and marriage (the researcher's biases was addressed under the section of 'Trustworthiness of the Study'). Although researchers are called to limit contamination in their studies (Yin, 2011), this is often easier said than done. Instead of taking strenuous steps to ensure the researcher is objective, even though objectivity in qualitative research is questionable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), explicitly spelling out the researcher's paradigmatic stance is crucial to acknowledge the researcher's influence on the study.

The researcher's stance as an instrument falls on the ontological question – how the researcher defines the nature of reality. In order to answer the ontological question, identifying the paradigms of qualitative research is indispensable. Morrow (2005) stated that "we ground our research not only in the substantive theory base leading to the questions guiding the research but also firmly in the paradigm that is most appropriate to that research as well as in more transcendent criteria for trustworthiness" (p. 250).

3.3.2 Research Paradigms

Spelling out the researcher's paradigm is essential. Ponterotto (2005) urged counseling researchers to be explicit in their research paradigm in reporting their

research. In fact, according to Morrow (2005), the criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative studies are "closely tied to the paradigmatic underpinnings of the particular discipline in which a particular investigation is conducted" (p.251). To understand the paradigmatic position of the researcher, Lincoln and Guba's (2013) views on constructivism would help to explain the researcher's stance.

Lincoln and Guba (2013) stated that experimentation and manipulation are acceptable in physical and biological sciences, even "they cannot produce ultimately infallible results" (p. 38). They argue that relativism is central in social science because reality is defined by intangible form. Particularly, objectivity was disenchanted by human emotions and values. Because of that, researchers need to persistently handle the scientific strategy so that "truth" can be as closely described as possible. However, in the postmodern era, any method that claims to have yielded "truth" or the "real world" would "fall under immediate suspicion of arrogant overreaching…" (p. 34). In other words, for Lincoln and Guba, "objectivity is chimera" (p. 41).

Lincoln and Guba (2013) proposed constructivism as a paradigm that answers the basic questions of ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between the knower and the knowable), methodology (how knowledge is acquired) axiology (the role of researcher's values). The fundamental presupposition of constructivism is:

> social reality is relative to the individuals involved and to the particular context in which they find themselves. Change the individuals and you change the reality. Or change the context and you change the reality. Or change both the individuals and the context and thoroughly change the reality. And if you make that ontological redefinition, obviously you greatly alter the presuppositions it is reasonable to make at the epistemological and methodological, as well as the axiological, levels (p. 39).

With the nature of this study, especially regarding eliciting experiences and meanings on the participants' marriages, it is difficult for the researcher and the participants not to influence each other. In terms of the researcher's interest and marital status, the researcher and the participants could easily involve in a co-created reality.

In this case, it is quite impossible that the researcher would remain objective or detached from the participants in the field, where lived experiences was shared and even exchanged. Therefore, this research is apparently entrenched in the constructivist paradigm. However, the researcher would like to provide a bigger picture of the research paradigms, that shore up the worldviews and premises of qualitative research (Williams & Morrow, 2009) before stating the researcher's stance in the research paradigm. Ponterotto (2005) stated, "a research paradigm sets the context for investigator's study" (p. 128). Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Ponterotto (2005) have provided clear explanations on the four paradigms in qualitative research. The researcher summarized their discussion in the following:

1. Positivism

   The researcher and the participants are assumed to be independent. The researcher is believed to be able to stay clear from being influenced by the participants. The researcher's values and biases are strongly discouraged. This paradigm holds a belief that hypotheses are subjected to verification and confirmation. Confounding variables need to be controlled to prevent contamination of study outcomes.

2. Postpositivism

   This stance arose out of the discontentment of positivism (Ponterotto, 2005). In order to improve on the positivist stance, natural inquiry is pursued so that

an emic view could be elicited. Objectivity is an ideal. It emphasizes on triangulation of evidences to falsify hypotheses.

The commonalities between positivist and postpositivist are objectivity valued, the researcher plays a detached role, and the aim of the study is etic-based.

3. Constructivism

In contrast to the "naïve reality" held by positivist, constructivism assumes that findings are co-created by both the researcher and the participants. Constructions are alterable. It follows "a relativist position that assumes multiple, apprehendable and equally valid realities" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). This position holds the belief that meaning could be raised through reflection. This reflection is facilitated by the interactive dialogues between the researcher and the participants. The aim of the study is emic based.

4. Critical theory

This research position intends to disturb the status quo. The researcher's values are foundational to the purpose and method of the study. The findings of the study are laden by the researcher's values. The nature of inquiry requires dialogues between the researcher and the participants, with the intention to convert ignorance into "informed consciousness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). This kind of research aims to empower participants to work towards goals of equality and democratic change.

In views of the research paradigm discussion, Ponterotto (2005) pointed out that postmodern perspectives were discussed in many fields of the social sciences, but in the

field of psychology in America, discussion of postmodern views lag behind. The researcher observed the same phenomenon occurred in some local institutions. Particularly, many qualitative studies from Psychology and Counseling field seem leaning towards the stance of postpositivism.

In light of the above discussion, the researcher wavers between paradigms. Because choosing a paradigmatic position is not solely dependent of the interest of the researcher, it involves support, resources and the institution's culture. In considering the nature of this study and context of the institution, the researcher, as a new researcher, posits the research paradigm for this research as in-between postpositivism and constructivism. This stance would allow the researcher to learn and experience both sides of the paradigms, with the possibility to embrace both so that suitable methodology could be implemented according to its context. Therefore, the research design would display both fabrics of postpositivism and constructivism (Morrow, 2005, p. 251, for further discussion of research paradigm adoption).

Besides being explicit on the researcher's influence and research paradigms, there are means to safeguard the trustworthiness of the study, which was discussed in the coming sections.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the Study

With regards towards trustworthiness of this study, other than identifying the underpinning research paradigm, the issue of trustworthiness of a study is not only confined to a study's outcome. Instead, it also concerns the total description of a research field event or of the participants' perspectives (Yin, 2011). Parker (2005) stated that every form of objectivity requires some forms of subjectivity. Therefore, instead of

being silent about the researcher's subjectivity, the researcher acknowledges the following biases.

Besides checking on the researcher's biases in this study, there are other steps the researcher will undertake to increase the trustworthiness of this study. The research adopted the strategies proposed by Merriam (2009), namely, 1) triangulation; 2) member checks; 3) adequate engagement in data collection; 4) researcher's reflexivity; 5) peer review; 6) audit trail; 7) transferability; and 8) Marshall and Rossman's (2011) ethics of research process. Each step to ensure the trustworthiness of the study will be discussed followed by addressing the biases of the researcher.

3.4.1 Biases of the Researcher

It is impossible to eliminate the researcher's biases, but it is crucial to identify them and to monitor how the biases would have co-created the reality on data collection and interpretation of data (Merriam, 2009). As mentioned earlier, as a Chinese educated practitioner with Western counseling frameworks, the researcher could bring in both advantages as well as biases. Having the opportunity to be exposed to Western education, there are some Western values and teachings which the researcher personally favors. If the researcher is not cautioned of both Western and Chinese lens she adopted, she will tend to find answers to fit into her frame of reference. The researcher might miss out on the opportunity to understand from the participants' perspectives. This is described by Denzin (1988) as, "the researcher may be imposing schemes of interpretation on the social world that simply do not fit that world as it is constructed and lived by interacting individuals" (p. 432).

Being a counselor, seeing couples and working with them have become part of the researcher's life. Another potential bias is that the researcher might be tempted to

engage in intervention rather than collect data from the participants. In particular, when the participants know the researcher's study area is in marriage, they might look up to the researcher as an "expert". They might expect the researcher to give them suggestions or solutions for their marriage. Particularly, some authors cautioned that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee could fall into a form of hierarchical relationship (Brinkmann, 2007; Bryman, 2004; Kvale, 2006). Maxwell (1998) suggested that abolishing the researcher's influence is impossible. Instead, the researcher could make use of the influence by understanding it and to using it productively.

Therefore, to totally cut off the researcher's influence on the participants in this study would be unlikely. Instead, the researcher could utilize this opportunity of "intervention" to understand how external inputs play a role in their marital relationships, or even to learn how and when interventions would be helpful for the married couples. Meanwhile, to counter the hierarchical interview relationship, the researcher could spell out the rights of the participants before the interview takes place. The researcher can assure participants that they can question the researcher. They can refuse to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable. They even have the right to withdraw from the study any time they wish. Kvale (2006) pointed out that objectivity can be attained when the participants are permitted to raise their objections. Another way to minimize the possibility of forming a hierarchical relationship is the researcher will present herself to the participants as a student.

Another way to deal with researcher bias is to be transparent regarding research procedures (Yin, 2011). It is impossible that the researcher could discard theories, values and assumptions during data collection. The researcher will keep a journal log for personal reflection and observations. This is easily available for scrutiny through

peer reviewing (to be described later). Transparency does not prevent the researcher from acting on biases, but it does help to understand how the researcher's values affect the research process and the outcome of the study (Maxwell, 1998).

Maxwell (1998) mentioned that the effectiveness of the researcher in the research setting could play an important role in the interviewing process. Therefore, the researcher would take the responsibility to ensure her effectiveness as a researcher. For instance, the researcher would mentally prepare herself before meeting the participants and be prepared for any uncontrollable situation that might arise and account for its impact on the research (Merriam, 2009).

Having the experience to witness how some Western constructs are not absolutely relevant during the counseling process, the researcher might fall into the "trap" of separate reality into Western and Eastern perspectives. If the researcher is insistent to see the participants in these two perspectives, this would hinder getting to know the participants. In Malaysian context, this is particularly relevant because it was once a colonial country. Chinese culture could be tinted with colonial experience as well as the multi-racial cultures in this country. Therefore, to counter the researcher's biases, having ongoing dialogues with peers and supervisors is important to capture biases and make adjustments to its hidden aspects.

Besides checking on the researcher's biases in this study, there are more steps the researcher could undertake to increase the trustworthiness of this study. For qualitative research, trustworthiness is based on confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability of the study. The research adopted the strategies proposed by Merriam (2009), namely, 1) triangulation; 2) member checks; 3) adequate engagement in data

collection; 4) researcher's reflexivity; 5) peer review; 6) audit trail; 7) transferability; and 8) Marshall and Rossman's (2011) ethics of research process.

3.4.2 Triangulation

In qualitative research, how well the study captures reality reflects the credibility of the study (Merriam, 2009; Seale, 1999). However, reality is not a static object that can be easily defined and captured. It is assumed to be a "holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing" phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Although, qualitative researcher can hardly capture a total objective reality (Maxwell, 2013), there are still ways to strengthen the internal validity of this study, namely, triangulation. Merriam (2009, p. 215) adopted Denzin's (1978) four types of triangulation: multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators and multiple theories.

The use of multiple methods involves checking against what someone tells the interviewer by what the researcher observes on site or what has been read about in documents. Another type of triangulation is employing multiple sources of data by comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different settings, or through interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people. Multiple investigators method involves using multiple investigators to collect and analyze data. Patton (2002) suggested using two or more people to independently analyze the same data and comparing their findings. Multiple theories mean handling data with a number of hypotheses in mind in order to see how each theory matches the data.

For this study, capturing the reality of local perspectives on the marital strengths of long-term and committed marriage is the objective. Multiple methods, multiple sources of data and multiple theories are used. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews

with a few selected couples. Researcher's on-site observation and relevant documents were used to check against what the interviewees say. The researcher crosschecked and compared the collected data at different times and different settings from the same people through follow-up interviews. Meanwhile, the researcher also crosschecked the data by interviewing people from different perspectives. For example, couples who come from rural and urban areas, couples who were married for less than 40 years; and couple who does not have children. For multiple investigators, due to limited resources, the researcher engaged a licensed counselor to crosscheck the data analysis on a voluntary basis. Multiple theories were used by having hypotheses in mind. For example, the researcher hypothesizes that Chinese speaking and English speaking couples would differ in expressing themselves. This hypothesis was matched with the data.

Under the post-modernist[6] climate, other than triangulation, another alternative for validity is crystallization, proposed by Richardson and St. Piere (2005). This concept provides a more flexible way to achieve validity. It requires self-reflexivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Richardson challenged researchers to see beyond "three sides". She portrayed research being like crystals which "grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions" (Richardson & St. Piere, 2005, p. 963). Crystallization gives wholesome perspectives to understand the topic studied.

As a new researcher, crystallization seems like a new concept to grasp, though the essence of crystallization sounds impressive. The essence of crystallization reminds the

[6] The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge (Richardson, 2005, p. 961).

researcher to be aware of the lens and the ideologies within which the research are imbedded. In other words, it prepares a new researcher to be sensitive to one's own lens as well as the lens of others while doing the research. From the researcher's stance, triangulation will still be used to validate the findings; crystallization was used as a check on the researcher's interpretive lens.

3.4.3 Member Checks

Another strategy to ensure credibility of this study is to do member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) see member checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking for this study was done through asking feedback from the interviewees with regards to the evolving findings. According to Maxwell (2013), this is the most important way to rule out researcher's misinterpretation on what the participants say in addition to identifying the researcher's biases and misunderstanding over what the researcher observed (p.111). Since member validation is for examining the researcher's claims, it should be approached with openness to be revised, rather than trying to confirm a mutual stance between the researcher and the participants (Seale, 1999). Patton (2002) proposed that a researcher should "look for data that support alternative explanations" (p. 553) and otherwise be open to disconfirming information or responses from respondents.

For this study, preliminary analysis was taken back to the participants, with open-mindedness, to identify any evidence or new evidence that might confirm or disconfirm the researcher's claims. This process might be done through a few trips to visit participants. However, Yin (2011) forewarns that providing the entire draft might not make any sense to the participants. Thus, the researcher would check the coding as well as the preliminary draft of the description with the participants.

Therefore, the researcher would not be using cross-checking to confirm the theories which were drawn. Instead, the cross-checking process could be a process of "deconstructing" the researcher's personal biases, ideologies and assumptions in addition to the construction of reality based on their participants' perspectives.

3.4.4 Adequate Engagement in Data Collection

Adequate engagement is useful when the researcher is pursuing the participants' views on the phenomenon studied (Merriam, 2009). How much time spent and how many people are needed for interviewing is a hard question to answer. The best rule of thumb suggested by Merriam (2009) was to look for signs of saturation which is the condition of seeing and hearing the same things over and over again or the point at which no new information is surfaced (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Some writers even suggested seeking data that contest the emerging findings (Maxwell, 1998, 2013; Merriam, 2009, p. 219; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011). Multiple interviews with each couple to reach depth and richness were also suggested to reach depth and richness of data (Morrow, 2005).

However, if saturation of data is based on hearing the same things over and over again, it would not be feasible in this study. In fact, saturation is a vague concept and it is poorly defined (Guest et al., 2006). For this study, the data were elicited through exploring key events in the couples' marital journeys. These couples were married for at least 40 years. With the length of marriage, it would be unlikely to reach a point at which no new information can be obtained.

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative study is not being confined to a fixed method, but to develop a method which fits the context of study. Therefore, in order to set boundaries of saturation for this study, the researcher proposed the

following guidelines: a) always checking the objective of study, as it serves as the guide for adequacy of data (Wolcott, 1994); b) looking for underlying common strengths that are embedded in the key events which were shared by each couple; and c) contesting the emerging findings by asking "what if" questions to the same couple and contesting the findings when meeting the next couple.

3.4.5 Peer Review

Peer review is another step that was taken to safeguard the trustworthiness of this study. Peer review can be accomplished by sending an article to peer-reviewed journals for publication as well as having reviews by peers and colleagues familiar with or new to the research area (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011). The researcher may utilize both peer-review of journal publication as well as peer reviews. For peer reviews, the study was examined by colleagues familiar with the subject area and unfamiliar with the research area (Maxwell, 1998).

3.4.6 Audit Trail

Reliability of a study refers to how much of the research outcome can be repeated. In qualitative research, reliability is a problematic concept to apply (Merriam, 2009). Human behaviors are never stagnant. The interpretations of world experience are diverse. Wolcott (2005) stressed that it is not suitable to utilize the concept of reliability in studying human behaviors. It is impossible for the researcher to manipulate the fields for the sake of replication. Thus, the more important question for qualitative research is "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Thus, the explanation of how the researcher arrived at the results is a crucial factor in evaluating its claim to validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed changing the term reliability to "dependability" or "consistency" to replace the traditional stance of reliability (Seale, 1999). In order to safeguard consistency, audit trail, proposed by

Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a method to enhance dependability of the study. Auditing is also helpful in building "confirmability" in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). Audit trail in qualitative research describes in detail how data are collected, how categories are derived, and how decisions are made throughout the research (Merriam, 2009).

In this research, the audit trail was constructed by keeping a research journal that kept records of how the study was conducted and how the data was analyzed. Merriam (2009) suggests that the research journal could include personal reflections, questions, and decisions made when problems arise while collecting data. It also contains a record of the researcher's interaction with the data analysis and recommended interpretations. A sample of an audit trail that guides this research is shown in Appendix O.

3.4.7 Transferability

Transferability is possible when "rich, thick description" is used. It refers to a rich descriptive and detailed presentation of the context, particularly the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009). Morrow (2005) proposed that transferability can be obtained "when the researcher provides sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument), the research context, processes, participants, and the researcher-participant relationships to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer" (p. 252). Maxwell (1998) stated that rich data, in interview studies, should include verbatim transcripts of the interview. The purpose of the rich data is to avoid researcher bias as well as to prevent the researcher from seeing what the researcher wishes to see (Maxwell, 1998).

Another way to enhance transferability is to employ maximum variation in the sample (Merriam, 2009). According to Patton (2002), maximum variation is a strategy that targets "capturing and describing themes that cut across a great deal of variation"

(pp. 234-234). This enables a greater range of usage for readers or consumers of the research (Merriam, 2009). Ideally, in order to capture common themes among the variation, the research should study cases that are diverse in background. However, Maxwell (2013) cautions that feasibility of access and data collection, the research relationships, validity concerns and ethics should be put into consideration. For this study, variation of sampling was impossible because participation of this research was based on voluntary basis. Instead, study the uniqueness of the samples was adopted (Merriam, 2009).

3.4.8 Ethics

Marshall and Rossman (2011) highlighted that trustworthiness and soundness of a study are evaluated based on its design as well as the ethical practice of the researcher during the research process. They urged that criteria for trustworthiness should go beyond the procedural to the relational. The research process should be grounded on three moral principles of ethical research practice: 1) respect for persons; 2) beneficence and 3) justice.

Ethical practice is a continuous process. Giving out the informed consent form is just a visible sign of the researcher's sensitivity. It should not be treated as an approval that warrants the researcher as being ethical. Being ethical is "explicitly valuing participants and recognizing the potential interpersonal impact of the inquiry helps demonstrate that the researcher was deeply ethical" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 50). Kirthart termed the relational oriented ethical practice as "interpersonal validity", which means "the trustworthiness of understanding emanating from personal interactions" (as cited in Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 50). In other words, this concept of interpersonal validity interlinks ethics and trustworthiness.

In other words, ethical practice demands much sensitivity from the researcher. This study was grounded on the three moral principles, particularly, its relevancy to the context of this study.

1. *Respect for persons – researchers do not use the participants as "a means to an end" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Researchers respect their privacy, their anonymity and their right to participate or not.*

For this study, the researcher was wondering what the participants' experience is like. Are they genuinely comfortable with signing the informed consent form or are they simply obliging the researcher? In order to counter the issue mentioned above, the researcher called the potential participants first before the interview began and explained to them the purpose of study, what would be expected from the interview (like tape recording, photo taking and reading their letters, if they permit), how the data would be kept and the participants' rights. The researcher had them sign the informed consent form during the meeting when the interview took place. The rationale for signing the informed consent form after seeking their consent over the phone or emails is to allow a cooling off period for the participants to think over their participation. This would prevent them from compelling to sign the informed consent form on the spot and reduce the possibility that the participants felt obligated to sign informed consent form.

Another concern regarding the participants' privacy was this research would be best addressed by having the interviews carried out in the participants' home settings. Patton (2002) pointed out that observing the context could provide a holistic perspective on the participants. Thus, in order to respect their privacy, during the initial phone call or email, the researcher sought their permission to conduct the interviews at their homes.

In terms of the researcher's intention to do home visits, the researcher was truthful with reservation. If the researcher is completely transparent that the researcher intends to visit the homes for holistic view of their relationship, the participants may feel compelled to behave in certain ways or otherwise enact a social role that may represent being "holistic". This might weaken the purpose of qualitative data collection strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thus, the researcher chose to adopt Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) advice to be "truthful but vague" (p. 25) while explaining the research objective. For instance, while explaining the purpose of study, instead of saying "in order to get a holistic view of the couple's relationship, this study needs to be carried out in the home setting," the researcher will say, "the objective of this study is to understand individuals as well as the couples' relationships. I am not sure, but would it be more convenient to you if the interview is carried out in your home?" If they refuse, the researcher would not coax them into the study to meet the researcher's end need.

2) Beneficence – the researcher will try his or her best to ensure the participants are not harmed by taking part in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In order to ensure the participants are free from harm by participating in this research, the researcher maintained confidentiality by keeping anonymity of the participants. A marker was assigned to them to represent them. Their real names were kept anonymous. They were told how the data was kept. The researcher informed the participants that the researcher will keep the data secure and that would only be accessed by the researcher and the research supervisors.

Also, the researcher did not make any interpretations or value judgments on their homes and the couples' interactions when carrying out the interviews. The researcher should respect their home settings as well as their interactions. The researcher did not also take any pictures without their permission.

3) Justice – paying attentions of who benefits and who does not benefit from the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The researcher tried not to do anything that would cause discomfort or disruption to the participants. The participants' welfare was prioritized above the researcher's needs. The researcher chose times when it was suitable for the participants. The researcher also prepared a small gift as a token of appreciation for their participation. The gift was given to them after the research was over. If the participants withdrew or they refused to say anything that they felt uncomfortable with, the researcher respected that decision.

The above means of trustworthiness checks provides a foundation for this research design. Nevertheless, Maxwell (1998) and Patton (2002) reminded that an inquiry should not solely be done to support the researchers' assumptions. Alternative explanations and evidence that could invalidate the study should be sought as well. Maxwell (2013) stated that "validity, then, is a goal rather than a product: it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions" (p. 105). Thus, looking out for evidence that supports the study was not the only goal of the researcher. The researcher also paid attention to evidence that might disconfirm this study in order to increase its trustworthiness.

3.5 Data Collection

The objective of this study is to explore the marital strengths of long-term married couples. The following data collection procedure focuses on sampling, the plans for entry, in-depth interviews, observation, field notes and plans for exit.

3.5.1 Sampling

For this study, purposive sampling and snowball sampling was adopted. According to Yin (2011), the purpose of choosing a selected sample is to gain the most relevant data to the focus of the study. The objective of this study is to understand the marital strengths of long-term marriage. Purposive sampling is used so that the participants chosen were able to reflect the objective of this study. The participants for this research exhibited the following characteristics:

a) Chinese Malaysia. Chinese, who are born in Malaysia, reside in Malaysia.
b) Couples who went through mid-life. According to Levinson (1986), "the process of change begins in the Midlife Transition [roughly age 40-45] and continues throughout the era [age 45-60]" (p. 5). At this stage, the costs of living usually surpass the benefits. The major developmental task at this stage is individuation. When this took place successfully, the selves were more reflective, compassionate, sensible and more loving of selves and others, less tormented by inner conflicts and external pulls. By understanding how couples go through mid-life, the researcher was able to understand how the couples display marital strengths through transition of life.
c) Couples who have children. Since the 1960s, there have been a handful of studies recognizing that transition to parenthood took a toll on marriages (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). In contrast, Schindler and Coley's (2012) study reflects that the marital relationship could be fortified through the bonding between parents and children. Children could also reduce the likeliness of unhappy married couples to end up in divorce (Amato et al., 2003). Though there are studies drawing the link between youth delinquency and marital satisfaction

(Babarudin, Krauss, & Pei, 2003; Lai, 2008), there is no study on how the children impact on marriage and vice versa in Malaysia. Thus, the researcher would like to understand how long-term married couples thrive through parenthood and how children played a role in their marriages.

d) Couples who have in-laws. In-laws are considered an important factor that could influence the quality or even the success of marriage (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Chang, 2013). Exploring how long-term couples dealt with their in-laws would shed light on the beliefs and values that strengthen those couples.

e) Longevity of Marriage. In order to be in this study, the couples needed to have stayed in their marriage for 40 years or more. Although years of marriage do not directly reflect the quality of marriage, couples who have been married for a long time would provide the breadth of timespan for the researcher to look into how the couples went through "transition points" of their marriage (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Going beyond 50 years of marriage provides an angle to understand how the arrival of grandchildren impact on the marriage. In fact, having grandchildren has significant meaning for long-term married couples in this cultural context (Tan, 2000). However, finding couples who could articulate (most Chinese in that generation had either low education or no education), married more than 50 years of marriage, both husband and wife are still alive, and be willing to participate in this research was challenging.

As a result, with consideration of the rising age of first marriage, marital duration for the couples chosen did not fall below 40 years. This increased the number of long-term couples who could better articulate (most people around these ages received higher education than the couples who have

more than 50 years of marriage), both spouses were still alive and were willing to participate in this study.

Maxwell (2013) pointed out that selection of sample "depends not only on your research question, but also on the actual research situation and on what will work most effectively in that situation to give you the data you need" (p. 100). In fact, data gathering methods are very much influenced by the resources available and other practical means (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Recruitment of sample was carried out through words of mouth among friends and relatives, emails (see Appendix B), and social media networking. The recruited couples also provided a link to their friends (Silverman, 2013).

3.5.2 Sample Size

Sample size addresses the number of participants to involve in this study and can be a controversial issue in research. The answers to this question vary among scholars (Johnson, 2002). Several researchers suggested that the number of interviews needed for a study depend on the focus of the research question and other complex factors (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Silverman, 2013). Yin (2011) added that instead of finding a standard answer for how many participants to interview, the depth of data and the complication involved in this study should be considered. Merriam (2009) suggested that besides the research question, the availability of resources to support the study is one of the considerations. For Patton (2002), the minimum number of sample size is based on the coverage of the phenomenon studied.

After taking into account the above considerations, the researcher employed five couples. Among the five couples, there were variations among them. There are a few

types of Chinese in Malaysia. Basically, they are classified into the Muslim Chinese, Chinese from the New Village, English educated Chinese and trilingual or bilingual Chinese. The researcher tried to increase the variation of sample types by choosing different types of Chinese. Meanwhile, Miles and Huberman's (1994) comments could also help the researcher to remain open mindedness during the sampling process. According to them, "samples in qualitative studies are usually not wholly prespecified, but can evolve once fieldwork begins" (p. 27). In other words, sample variation depended on who was willing to participate in this research.

3.5.3 Plans for Entry

Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggested that plans for gaining access to the site and the participants should be included in a proposal. According to them, since the researcher is an instrument, the presence of the researcher in the lives of the researched is a crucial element to the research design. They proposed that researchers should present themselves as authentic as possible (Johnson, 2002). Fontana and Frey (2005) stated that the success of the study relies on how the interviewer presents himself or herself.

For this study, the researcher presented herself as a learner. The researcher also prepared the participants that there are no right or wrong answers. The researcher's role was to understand the couples. The researcher tried to minimize the hierarchical position in interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), when the researcher is able to show a human side and freely express feelings and concerns, methodologically, this invites wider dimensions of response and more insights to the lives of the participants.

To gain access to the participants of this study, other than the researcher's personal contacts used, referrals by friends, relatives or others was used. Using the researcher's network and referral are effective ways to get to the participants in this cultural context because people in general tend to trust someone they know (Jankowiak, 2009). Silverman (2013) also proposed the advantage of using personal network due to the existing trust between the researcher and the participants.

After getting their permission to have their contact information intermediaries, the researcher made initial contact by calling the participants (either husband or wife, depending on whose contact number was given to the researcher) before meeting them in person. After the brief introduction of the researcher, the researcher's personal interest in studying marriage and the purpose of the study was disclosed. In fact, the enthusiasm of the researcher's personal interest in the marriage became a valuable channel to get access to the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher sought their permission to visit their homes before the interview took place (that is described more in the Ethics section – previously listed under the heading of *Respect for Persons*). Merriam (2009) pointed out that setting up a preliminary meeting could also be used to screen whether the participants are appropriate for the study. Thus, by making an initial meeting, the researcher could determine whether the couples are appropriate for this study or not. At the same time, the participants were given the opportunity to meet the researcher in person before they decided to take part in this study (Silverman, 2013).

This initial meeting was useful also to elaborate on the research and the researcher's background, especially because they have known the researcher and the study through their friends. The researcher cannot assume that the participants are clear on what the researcher was going to do, however (Silverman, 2013). Thus, the initial meeting helped

to elaborate, clarify, and create a cooling off period for them to reconsider whether to participate or not. This time was also useful to screen whether the participants were suitable for this study.

During the initial meeting, the researcher explained to the participants the general objectives of the study and her role (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The participants were briefed on the activities involved in the interviews, the number of sessions they were required to attend and how they would be contributing to the research. The researcher's role was also to respect the participants' decision to participate. The researcher also answered their questions that pertained to the involvement in the research. Meanwhile, as the responses from the participants were crucial to this research, the researcher prepared the participants to give truthful answers. The researcher would try to minimize social desirable effects by telling the participants, "Thank you for willing to take part in this research. In fact, during the interview, you do not have to feel you need to give me the right answers. Especially there is nothing right and wrong about how one experiences the marriage. It would be very helpful if you could just tell things as it is."

However, in the real life setting, setting up preliminary meetings was not feasible. The researcher observed that once the participants agreed to participate through their friends and over the phone with the researcher, they were ready for the interviews to take place. Thus, screening the appropriateness of the participants would not be likely. The researcher would collect data from the participants who agreed to take part as much as possible. Screening the appropriateness of the participants would be done after collecting data.

During the actual interview meetings with the participants, the researcher respected the perspectives of the participants even if they were against her values or frame of

reference. The researcher also tried to refrain from using jargon or professional terms during the interviews because it could create a kind of "academic armor" (Marshall et al. 2011, p. 118) that would impede the needed "intimate emotional engagement" in qualitative research (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Getting rid of academic armor facilitated the acceptance of the participants toward the researcher.

These were some tentative plans for making entry to the couples who were willing to take part in this research. Once entering the participants' contexts, how the data was collected is addressed in the next section.

3.5.4 Research Tools

Research tools for this study included one audio recorder. If the participants permitted, video recording was utilized.

3.5.5 In-depth Interviews

In order to capture the experiences of long-term married couples, the researcher chose to employ tape recording and, if possible, video recording to record the interview sessions. In addition to field notes, tape recording enables keeping track of the verbatim records of the participants. Particularly, human memory organizes what is seen and heard in ways that is relevant to the individual's past experience (Johnson, 2002).

To find out the marital strengths of the couples, it was not feasible for the researcher to observe the "live" experience of those couples in their home settings on a daily basis. Thus, in-depth interviews were more appropriate for people to talk about themselves, their marriage and their experiences. Particularly, this study involved asking the interviewees to think and reflect over how they coped in various series of events in their marital journey (Bryman, 2004). Interviewing those couples could yield findings that

would not be observed directly. It allowed "the [researcher] to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, pp. 340-341).

Merriam (2009) suggested to begin the interviews with general questions would provide a ground for gaining access to the participants' views, thoughts, values and feelings. However, she also emphasized that the relationship between the researcher and the participants could be complicated. Thus, in order to gain insights and deep understanding of the phenomenon studied, the researcher takes a stance that is "nonjudgmental, sensitive and respectful" (Merriam, 2009, p. 109), to begin with.

Besides using general questions, in order to restrain the researcher from imposing questions out of personal frame of reference, as suggested by Silverman (2013), photographs can be used to represent the participants' experiences. Thus, for this study, using family pictures to start with served as another avenue to elicit the couples' marital experiences and to develop rapport. Talking about the family pictures would sound more relevant and natural to their experiences. This would reduce the chance of having the participants to provide answers for the interviewer's questions.

3.5.6 Interviewing Husband and Wife Together

This research involves interviewing husbands and wives. The interviewing process confronts two challenges. One is the interpersonal dynamics between husband and wife. Should the interviewer interview husband and wife together or separately? Should the interview be carried out separately and in the same day or separately in different day? Another is the gender issue which might arise out of the context when the researcher carries out interviews with the opposite sex (that is a female researcher interviewing male participants). Although interviews have become a common technique for gathering

information, how the contextual, societal and interpersonal factors shape the interviewing relationship cannot be overlooked (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

How does it matter whether the interviews are carried out with husband and wife together or separately? In considering the setbacks and the advantages of interviewing the couple together and separately, the researcher took into the consideration of Arksey and Knight (1999). They pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of the "joint interview" (p. 76). The advantages of joint interviewing are: 1) it is easier to establish rapport; 2) two descriptions of events can be acquired; 3) the story that emerged will appear more complete than a single description; 4) information obtained was more trustworthy as bias in one description could provide a cross-check for the other; and 5) couples' interactions and power structure of the relationship could be observed through their verbal as well as non-verbal communication during the interview. On the other the hand, they listed the disadvantages as: 1) one participant may dominate the interview; 2) there is a risk of stirring up conflict; 3) some participants might conceal some sensitive issues by providing a more general response; 4) the participants might "team up" to withhold disclosure; and 5) interviewees could be distracted by the presence of another person.

Hertz (1995), on the other hand, provides another option for doing couple-based interviews. She proposed simultaneous separate interviews by two interviewers. Her rationale is that separate interviews allow each spouse to tell the story according to his or her version. It even allows the spouse to disclose secrets. Another suggestion is that a separate interview gives the couples room to reveal how they feel about the behaviors of their spouse. However, she also voiced her concern with separate interviews. From her observation, she feels separate but simultaneous interviewing "disrupts the couple's collective memory of events and feelings" (Hertz, 1995, p. 436). It also creates tension

that the spouse was worrying about what the other said of him or her in the presence of the interviewer.

After considering the pros and cons of interviewing the couples together and separately and the research objective, the researcher opted for interviewing the couples together. The rationale for meeting each couple together is that it might open a window to explore the dynamics of the relationship. It may also help to elicit the "collective memory of events and feeling" (Hertz, 1995, p. 436) of the couples. This would serve as verification to ensure the quality of data. For instance, there might be possibility that the husband feels satisfied with their marital relationship, but the wife might not be. Thus, the researcher cannot assume both husband and wife have the same marital satisfaction level. With the relational dynamics, interviewing the couple together can validate the sample chosen.

3.5.7 The Process of Formulating the Interview Questions

Finding participants who were willing to share about their marriage was not an easy process. The first participant came in after more than a month's waiting, after emails were sent out to friends, relatives and colleagues through emails, other kinds of social networking like WhatsApp and Facebook. During the waiting time, the researcher verified the interview questions through friends' parents and parents' friends, who had been married over 40 years. The researcher invited 6 couples for testing the interview questions. The couples were from low educational background as well as university graduates, teachers, business owners, hawkers, professionals, and from both rural and urban area backgrounds. The initial interview question used was – "can you share with me what sustains your marriage over many years?"

Through the interaction with the convenient samples, the researcher noticed two wives from rural areas, with low educational backgrounds, looked quite anxious during the interview. They seemed to worry about how to answer the interview questions. The highly educated ones did not show any problems responding to the question. After discussion with a research supervisor regarding the researcher's experience, the supervisor reflected that the questions were too leading. Thus, the supervisor suggested the researcher to explore the marital journey as a method to understand the couples' experiences. That would also reduce the participants' anxiety to produce right or wrong answers. Thus, exploring the marital journey through key events was used as the tool for collecting data. The data from the 6 couples, who were involved in the pilot testing, would be used to verify the themes emerged out of this research.

Detailed interview protocol was shown in Appendix F (pp. 284-294). The researcher outlined two interview protocols – the proposed and the real life. The real life interview protocols consisted of the researcher's comments, suggestions and experience from field work.

3.5.8 Observation

Rather than solely focusing on verbal communication, observation is another avenue for data collection. Marshall et al. (2011) claimed that "observation is central to qualitative research" (p. 139). They stressed that observation should not be limited to only visual things but also include other senses (Creswell, 2013). Observation complements what interviews cannot achieve. Maxwell (2013) stated that "observation can enable you to draw inferences… that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data" (p. 103). It is also used to discover the complex dynamics in natural setting (Marshall et al., 2011; Ryen, 2002).

The stance of observation for this research is participant observation (Creswell, 2013). For this study, it is impossible to adopt the observational stances as complete participant, observer participant and complete observer. As the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of the married couples, by adopting a participant observation stance, the researcher is able to immerse in the setting, to feel the couples' home settings while participating in interviewing sessions. By observing the home setting, a holistic view of the couples can be captured (Patton, 2002).

Since observation is a valuable set of data for this study, how would the researcher keep track and interpret the observation data? Marshall and Rossman (2011) highlighted the researcher's ideological standpoint could permeate the interpretation of observation data. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggested making "interpretive practice paramount" (p. 78). Since the aim of this study is to unveil how the culture here shaped the phenomenon studied, in order to gain the authentic views of the natural settings of the couples' lives, a cross check between the researcher's interpretations and the descriptions of the natural settings is helpful. An observational protocol for recording field notes for each couple was designed to trace the researcher's interpretations and the descriptions of the natural settings (Creswell, 2012). Please refer to Appendix P for samples of the observational field notes.

3.5.9 Documentation

Pictures, love letters, letters from the children, songs and Chinese literature were used as one of the multiple sources for trustworthiness for this study. The researcher would take pictures of the sources, with the consent of the participants. Since the participants were people who were born around the 1930s to the 1960s, engaging Chinese literature would shed light on the cultural context of the couples. These documents and literatures served as verifications with the interview data.

3.5.10 Field Notes

Field notes are "detailed, nonjudgmental (as much as possible), concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (Marshall &Rossman, 2011, p. 139). Field notes are important for two reasons. The first is that keeping field notes could keep track of what the participants see as routine, which could reflect the reality studied more accurately. The second is that watching and listening to what people do provides better hints than asking them directly (Silverman, 2013). Spradley (as cited in Silverman, 2013, p. 245) suggested that field notes to be kept in four sets: 1) short notes made at the time; 2) expanded notes made after each field session; 3) a fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork; and 4) a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation.

3.5.10.1 How Field Notes are Utilized and Analyzed for This Study

Thus, for this study, in order to keep track of the observation on the naturally occurring interactions, the researcher jotted down what was being observed immediately after the interview. For the expanded notes made after each session and to record problems and ideas arise, such information was kept in audit trials (see Appendix C).

For a running record of analysis and interpretation, Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 51) questions were adopted for developing the analysis.

- What people, events or situations were involved?
- What were the main themes or issues in the contact?
- Which research questions did the contact bear most centrally on?
- What new hypotheses, speculations or guesses about the field situations were suggested by the contact?

- Where should the fieldworker place most energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought?

As important as the field notes are, Silverman (2013) suggested that rich data could be obtained by using one's eyes to observe the spatial arrangement of the setting. This suggestion has helped to increase the researcher's awareness of spatial arrangement of the participants' house while collecting data from interviews.

Field notes are used to keep track of the reflections, observations, thoughts and experiences of the researcher. Besides keeping notes of observations on the external environments, the participants' non-verbal cues, and the reflexivity of the researcher was noted, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) stressed, to keep records of "the related interactional details of how the interview was accomplished" (p. 78). Thus, to complement the tape recorded sessions, field notes of this study consisted of: observations of the participants' non-verbal cues, the physical settings, the interactional dynamics between researcher and the researched as well as the researcher's self-reflexivity.

3.5.11 Plans for Exit

After spending hours listening to the sharing of the couples, the emotional bond between the researcher and the participants is fostered in some ways. Thus, a proper plan to say goodbye without making the participants feel abandoned, a debrief session for the researcher as well as the participants is needed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

For this research, the researcher prepared the participants that the research relationship will end before the project is finishing. Being sensitive to the feelings of the participants, the researcher exited gradually by preparing them for the completion of the research by conducting a debriefing session and by giving gift as an expression of

appreciation when it came to the end of the interview (Marshall et al., 2011). The researcher also found time to debrief the feelings towards the participants with peers. These feelings were also jotted down in the memo.

Exiting is not just getting something from the participants and leaving the field. Reflecting on the relationship between the researcher and the researched is worthwhile to reflect upon regarding how the researcher and the participants have co-constructed their "reality". This reflection provides a perspective for the researcher to view how the researcher impacts on the relationships with the participants and the findings of this study. Silverman (2013) suggested that "whatever your theoretical model, it is good practice to address how your relationship with the people in your study might affect your findings" (p. 283).

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is "the process of making sense out of the data... [It] is the process used to answer your research question(s)" (pp.175-176). Views on what to do with data are diverse. But one common emphasis among the scholars is collecting data and analyzing it should go hand in hand. It should be done after the first interview and first observation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Marshall et al., 2011; Maxwell 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2013; Wolcott, 1994; Yin, 2011). The first analysis will set the stage for the next coming field data collection process, particularly, according to Merriam (2009), "the process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic" (p. 169).

The researcher found the emphasis above to be valuable for tracing the data with the research question. At the same time, after reading several scholars talk about not allowing the data to pile up, it sensitized the researcher to handle the collected data

proactively. This would also help the researcher to space the interview sessions such that there would be enough time for transcribing prior notes before moving to the next interview. It would help to be conscious of making space and time for immediate note taking after the interview sessions.

3.6.1 Directions for Data Analysis

The researcher conducted data analysis according to two perspectives, namely the macro and the micro perspectives. The researcher adopted Harry F. Wolcott's (1994) three ways of data analysis - description, analysis and interpretation as the macro perspectives. At the same time, employing three components of data analysis – data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing/verification would be used for the micro perspective on data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 10, was used to organize the data.

3.6.2 Description

Wolcott (1994) believes that data should be rendered from three levels – descriptive, analysis and interpretative. There is no clear distinction among the three. The terms are used "interchangeably" (p. 11). Descriptive means presenting the data as how it is originally collected. According to Wolcott (1994), description is "the fulcrum, the pivotal base on which all else hinges" (p. 36). Though "pure" description is impossible, he cautioned researcher to be aware that the objective data itself is stained with researcher's interpretation in the process of becoming data (p. 16). In terms of what to be included and excluded, he suggested the following:

1. Be honest about identifying the purposes. He said that "the more explicit we can about our purpose, as both fieldwork and deskwork progress, the better

our position to judge what needs to be described, and at what level of detail" (p. 15).

2. To invite readers who are not familiar with the setting to act as critical reviewers for the early drafts.
3. Instead of rigidly trying to be objective by treating every detail as important, the observer should always have the purpose of their study as guidance.

Nevertheless, Wolcott (1994, pp. 17-23) also suggested ten ways to organize and present the description. As this study aims to collect the key events of the participants, the description was presented according to the events or challenges. The key events and the backgrounds of the participants were narrated by the researcher.

For Wolcott (1994), analysis is "to signal a dramatic shift of role or manner intended to mark a boundary between fact and interpretation" (p. 25). It emphasizes the mind-set of the researcher. He highlights ten alternatives to guide the analysis process, and the relevant ones are chosen for this study as follows:

1. Offer graphic presentation of the data.
2. Be explicit on the analytic framework that shapes the data collection.
3. Follow and report fieldwork procedures systematically.
4. Identify patterned regularities.
5. Critique the research processes.

Another component of Wolcott's data analysis is interpretation. According to Wolcott (1994), interpretation means it is the process of thinking and writing, the researcher "transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them" (p. 36). Striking a balance between giving too much or too little interpretation will depend on the foundation of "careful descriptive efforts and cautious

analysis" (p. 36). In terms of treating interpretations, Wolcott's (1994) provides the following as a guide.

> Find whatever insights you can, where you can, whenever you can, but be highly circumspect about insights you attribute directly to research. If you can maintain a healthy skepticism toward description, analysis, and interpretation as facets of research, extend it to the whole research ethos as well. Watch for the tendency to employ research as a basis for self-evaluation. You may discover that it is more important to free yourself from the yoke of research than to harness yourself to it (p. 38).

For this study, Wolcott's data analysis serves a macro perspective for handling the data. It lays out a larger picture as to how the data can be organized. It also informs the researcher to treat raw data and personal interpretation with caution, which often get easily mixed up.

3.6.3 Thematic Analysis

In terms of analyzing data at a micro level, Miles and Huberman's data analysis could complement Wolcott's data analysis because it zooms into how data may be reduced and displayed for drawing conclusions or verification. In other words, it provides a micro perspective on how to deal with the data technically. Their data analysis process is described in the following section.

In the early stage of data collection, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested a few ways to get prepared. The ones which are related to this study are listed in the following:

1. To prevent overloading with data. Conceptual frameworks and research questions set the boundaries against data overload. Miles and Huberman (1994) warned against a "get it all" (p. 56) mentality towards data collection. As a novice researcher, this piece of information helped me to stay focused on the purpose of the study. However, this does not mean that in order to

resist overload, I tried to fit the data according to my agenda. Like what Miles and Huberman argue (1994), "the challenge is to be explicitly mindful of the purposes of your study and of the conceptual lenses you are training on it – while allowing yourself to be opened to and to reeducate by things you didn't know about or expect to find" (p 56).

2. Code to distinguish and combine the data. According to Miles et al. (1994), coding is analysis, which involves "review[ing] a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact" (p. 56). Codes can help in organizing the chunks of data as well.
3. Creating codes. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that in order to code, reading field notes for frequently occurring phrases could surface categories. As this study aims to surface the "etic" and "emic" of data, the researcher will use a two-level scheme to categorize the perspectives from the locals and the perspectives from the conceptual framework.
4. Coherence in codes. Have some conceptual and structural order in creating and revising codes is important. Miles and Huberman (1994) proposed that "codes should relate to one another in coherent, study-important ways; they should be part of a governing structure" (p. 62). This proposal reminds the researcher to zoom in and zoom out for data reduction while looking for a coherence of the data.
5. Check-coding. Check-coding not only to ensure reliability, it also sharpens the definitions and opens up unspoken insights (Mile et al., 1994). As mentioned earlier in trustworthiness of the study, in order to increase reliability of the findings, the researcher will do code crossing checking with

participants and peer. This would allow the researcher to differentiate the locals' description from the researcher interpretations.

6. Pattern coding. After the first-level coding, which usually consists of single term, pattern coding is "[reducing] large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units" (p. 69). Pattern coding is examining the similarities and differences (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, Miles et al. (1994) warned against "premature analytic closure" (p. 70). Pattern codes look like themes, explanations, relationships among people and more theoretical constructs. The theme is then tried out on new participants for rival explanation.
7. Writing memo. Memo seizes the thoughts of the researcher. Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Mile et al. (1994) stressed the importance of keeping a memo. Not to self-censor those thoughts come by is important. It is not only helpful in development and revision of the coding systems, these thoughts of the researcher can be formalized and systematized into a coherent set of explanations. This can be used for generating propositions, reflecting on the findings and conclusions of the study. Then, the propositions can be tested and revised further with other sources of data.

Miles et al. (1994) provided a micro perspective and Wolcott (1994) provided a macro perspective on the data analysis for this study. Wolcott's data analysis layout renders a big picture of how the data analysis could be displayed. Miles, Hubermand, and Saldaña, (2014), at the same time, zoomed into how data could be condensed, displayed and conclusion drawn.

3.7 Conclusion

The researcher came to realize that the researcher's integrity is integral to this study. Patton (2002) remarked that the integrity of the researcher influences the credibility of the research. Research methodology is not just making a research product, but it is the ability to think logically and critically throughout the research process, to stay true to one's self, and to convey the research process with wisdom and integrity. At the same time, the researcher is ready to be open to "bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 5). Like what Wolcott (1994) said, "Research is a means of organizing our thoughts to reach understanding, not an end in itself" (p. 37).

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the data analysis process for the study. The analysis involved several dimensions, namely, the sources of data, theoretical framework which centered the study, the process of data analysis, findings of the research, which included the description of each couple, engagement of local Chinese Malaysia literature, thematic analysis, lastly the overall summary of the data analysis and conclusion.

4.2 The Sources of Data

In-depth interviews, observation field notes, documentation (photos, loves notes, cards, letter and pamphlets) and literature were the avenues for data collection. Over a period of 8 months, the researcher interviewed 7 Chinese couples, 6 have been married from 40 to 60 years and one married for 35 years, from both urban and rural areas. The researcher decided to retain 5 couples for this study. The researcher dropped off one rural couple because of constraints and limited resources to go back and forth to the rural area. Another couple, who have married less than 40 years, was withdrawn from the study due to their frequent traveling. The data of those couples, who were dropped off from the study, were used to verify the theme emerged from this study. Table 4.1 summarized the profiles of the couples.

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of the Couples

	Couple 1	Couple 2	Couple 3	Couple 4	Couple 5
Length of marriage	54 years	40 years	60 years	44 years	40 years
Educational background	Husband: Finished primary school and night classes Wife: A few years of studies	Husband: Form 5 Wife: Form 5	Husband: Finished primary school and night classes Wife: Form 3	Husband: Teacher training college Wife: Bachelor degree	Husband: Bachelor degree Wife: Form 5
Language used during interview	Mandarin	Mandarin	English	English	English
Number of children	2 (1 daughter and 1 son)	3 daughters	4 (1 daughter and 3 sons)	2 sons	3 (1 daughter and 2 sons)
Children's marital status	Both married	2 married 1 single	3 sons married 1 daughter single	Both married	2 married 1 getting married
Children's place of resident	1 in Klang Valley 1 in Singapore	All in overseas	3 sons in overseas 1 daughter in Klang Valley	Both overseas	All in Klang Valley
Grandchildren	6	2	9 grandchildren 6 great grandchildren	3	3
Experience in staying with in-law	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Residential area (all in urban area)	Setapak	New Village	Bangsar	Damansara Height	Bangsar
Occupation before retirement	Husband: Government servant as general official Wife: Home maker	Husband: Service sector (from clerk to managerial position) Wife: Home maker	Husband: Military service Wife: Home maker	Both are teachers	Husband: Professional business owner Wife: Take care of children and helping in husband's business

4.2.1 Data from Interviews

All interviews were audio recorded with consent of the participants. Three couples allowed videotaping. All interviews took place in their home settings. The age of the participants ranged from 60 to 83. The length of their marriages varied from 40 to 60 years. Two couples are Chinese educated and three couples are English educated. All the interviews were transcribed into verbatim. The excerpts of the Chinese speaking couples were translated by the researcher of this study and were verified by a certified translator.

The participants' occupations varied from government servants, professional business owner, and service sector. All of them are urban residents in different parts of Klang Valley. They have grandchildren. Three couples are retirees. Two couples are still working. Four couples do not reside with their children. One couple has an adult child living with them. The participants were recruited through snowballing and purposive sampling. The researcher knew the couples through referrals of friends and church circle. The researcher called the participants once they fulfilled the criteria of this study. During the initial phone call, their consent to participate in this research would be obtained.

Four couples went through 3 interviews and 1 couple went through 4 interviews. The number of interview sessions depends on whether the obtained data had fulfilled the objective of the study. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes to 120 minutes. The researcher explored their marital journey as a method to elicit their marital strengths. The interview data were reviewed before the next interview was scheduled. The spacing of the interview sessions varied from couple to couple because it depended on their availability for interview. One couple had to slot interview appointments in-between tight doctors' appointment. The appointments of two working couples had to be

arranged around their working schedule. The appointments for rest of the couples were quite easy to arrange. Most of the interviews were carried out in week day morning and afternoon. For the two working couples, their appointments were arranged during evenings or weekends. Figure 4.1 summarized the timeline of data collection.

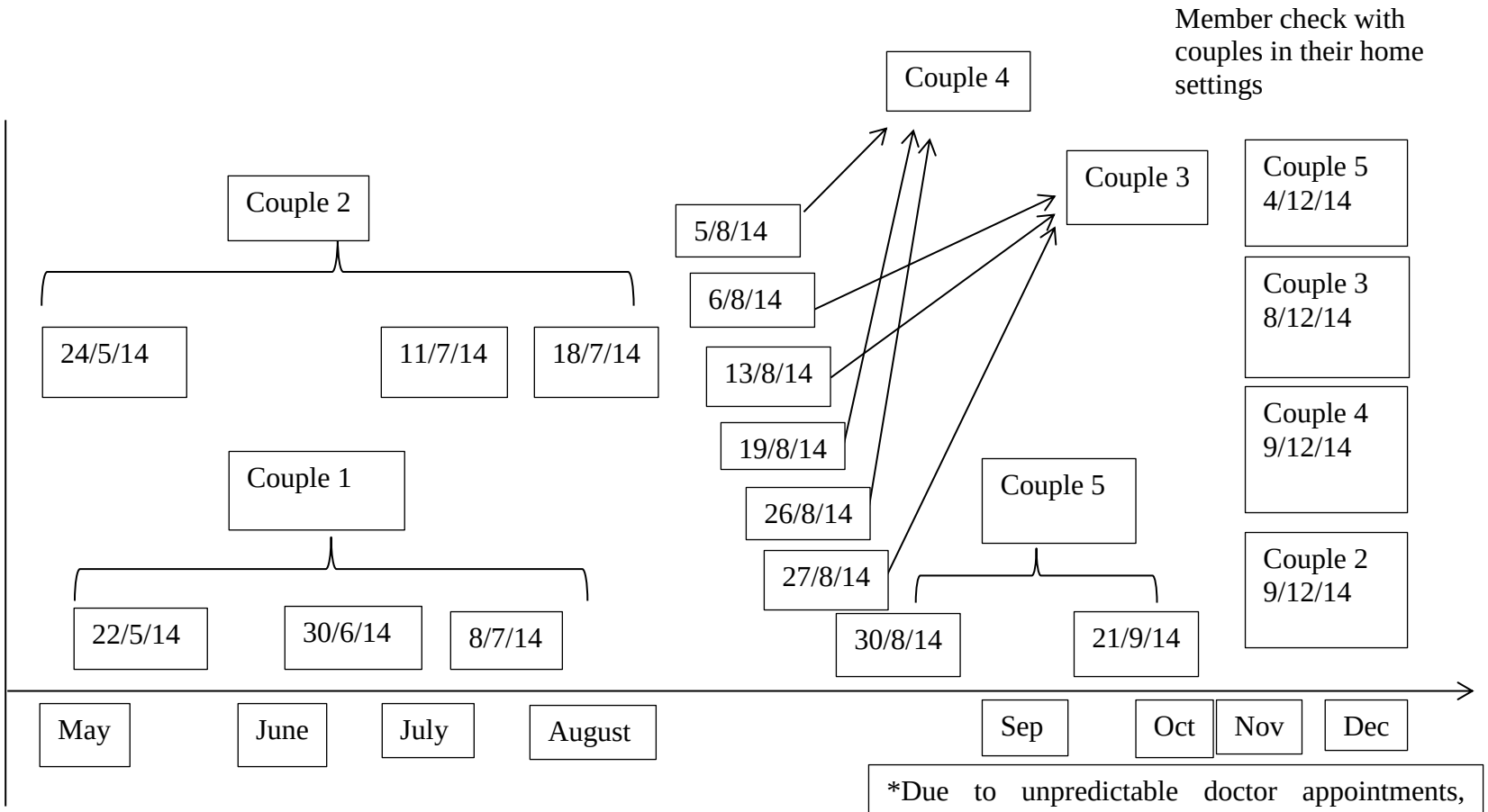


Figure 4.1: Timeline for Data Collection

4.2.2 Data from Observation Field Notes

The field notes from the researcher's observation were another source of data. There were two types of field notes the researcher kept. One is the reflexive journal which captures personal experiences, and the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Another type of observation note was used to describe what the researcher observed (refer to Appendix P(i), P(ii), P(iii), P(iv) & P(v) accordingly to Couples' sequence in 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

4.2.3 Data from Documentation

Another source of data was documentation and literature. Photos, love letters, cards, notes and pamphlets made by their children were the sources to elicit data during interview sessions. About presenting the pictures and other documents, different couples showed different responses. Two couples looked reserved when showing their pictures, even though they were informed that they have the refusal rights. Another couple was selective in presenting their pictures. The rest of the couples happily showed their pictures. During the process of showing their pictures, the researcher came to realize that providing guidelines in advance on what pictures to show and to talk about would help them to narrow the search for suitable pictures. Other than personal pictures of the participants, Malaysian Chinese literature was another source of data which served to provide insights on the cultural values which rooted in the couples' lives.

4.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on existential theory. One of the core dimensions of existential theory is human adjourn between freedom and limitation (Schneider & May, 1995). Freedom includes will, creativity, and expressiveness; while limitations refer to restraints, including natural and social, vulnerability and death. Strengths are exemplified by how individuals making meanings between two polarities.

The objective of the study is to capture the strengths of the couples when confronted with restraints and challenges.

4.4 Process of Data Analysis

The process of data analysis started from transcribing (in fact during the data collection, the researcher noticed analysis had already took place). At the transcribing stage, initial coding took place. The codes were cross checked with the participants in their home settings. As writing was important in figuring the data (Horvat, 2013), the researcher wrote up the description of each couple. Each couple's description was written one at a time.

After writing up the preliminary description for each couple, the researcher invited participants, peer and supervisors to read through them. This was a crucial step to reflect reality of the participants (Wolcott, 1994). The feedback from the participants, the reader and the supervisors were helpful to fine tune the descriptions of the couples. The member checking process helped the researcher to externalize some of the nuances, observations and insights from the interviews and to put them into words. It also sensitized the researcher to write the description from the perspectives of readers.

Understanding couples coming from different generation and cultural backgrounds, was indirectly involved in some cultural studies. Saukko (2005) proposed an integrative approach to cultural studies, which embraced contextual validity, dialogic validity and self-reflexive validity. She underscored that understanding contextual development was essential for dialogic and reflexive validity. For this study, triangulation of Malaysian Chinese literatures would provide insights on the socio-cultural values at that time. Understanding the couples' contextual backgrounds would shed light on how cultural values of couples were shaped.

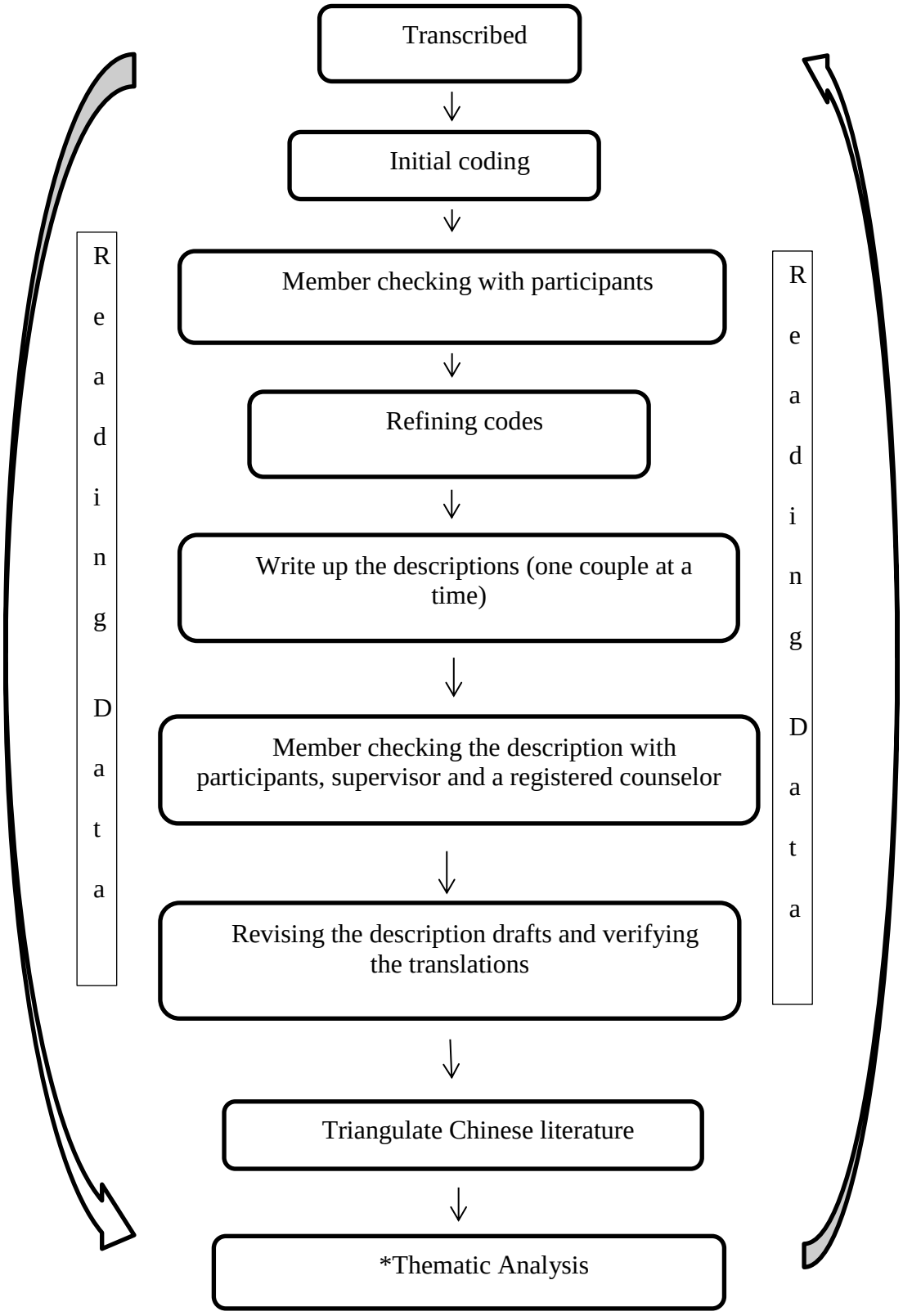
Throughout the process of writing the description, key terms were identified as codes. They were keyed into Nvivo 10 as nodes (the nodes would be kept for later thematic analysis). The researcher observed that using computer software for analysis disrupted the researcher's flow of thought. The researcher experienced usage of computer software blocked the researcher from seeing and feeling the participants. Richards and Richards (1994) stated that computers would not provide quick solution for qualitative researcher. Often the computer software does not support the method which the researcher employed (p. 445). Hence, Nvivo 10 was used for organizing data, like coding and retrieval of data. Repeatedly reading the data and referring to the audio recording when necessary was part of writing up the description.

There are several tactics to handle translations in cross-cultural studies (Lincoln & González, 2008). The tactic used for presenting data depends on the purpose of writing, research situations, resources and publication requirement. With the objective of this research in mind, the researcher, as an "insider" as well as bilingual, chose to present Chinese speaking interviews data in Mandarin and English texts. By presenting the bilingual texts, it benefited both nonlocal as well local readers (Lincoln & González, 2008).

In verifying Chinese and English translation, the researcher noticed that it was impossible to reflect total meanings of the Chinese excerpts in English. The English translated excerpts could only represent close meaning to the Chinese excerpts. For the English excerpts, the fluency and articulation of English differ among the English speaking couples. For the excerpts of English speaking couples, the researcher tried to keep its meanings as close as possible. In fact, the researcher felt the struggle to make the excerpts to be understandable to local readers or the nonlocal readers. By retaining the styles of local spoken English, it might risk incurring confusion among nonlocal

readers. The researcher decided to edit the grammar of English excerpts so that both local and nonlocal readers could understand.

During data analysis, the researcher observed that the Chinese speaking couples rarely used the pronoun “I” when they spoke. However, as an insider, the researcher understands it is common among the older generation Chinese speaking people. Thus, the researcher had to help the translator to understand the words spoken by Chinese speaking participants before verifying the translation. Figure 4.2 depicted the process of data analysis.



*Details of thematic analysis will be elaborated in the Thematic Analysis section.

Figure 4.2: The Process of Data Analysis

4.5 Findings of the Research

The findings of the research are classified into two sections - thematic analysis and description. Gibson and Brown (2009) suggested that themes could provide linkage of diverse experiences. It contrasted and interrelated differences in the data. Thus, thematic analysis was employed in this study to show generalized data. However, in the complex features of social life, solely thematic analysis would obscure the lived experiences of the couples (Gibson & Brown, 2009). In study of marriage, the contexts of the participants were indispensable to understand the themes. Patton (2002) pointed out that "description forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting…" (p. 438). Description in this study would be used to present the diversity and uniqueness of each marriage. For the weightage between description and thematic analysis, Wolcott (1994) suggested that it depends on the objective of the study. For this research, the description weighed more than thematic analysis. This was because this study intended to show the emic perspectives from the local long term married couples. In the findings, the description of the couples will be presented before the thematic analysis.

4.5.1 The Description of the Findings

As the objective of this study is to capture the emic perspectives of long term married couples, the description was a way to stay close to the data as much as possible (Wolcott, 1994). However, Wolcott (1994) warned that there was "no such thing as pure description" (p. 13), as data were constructed through the experiences of the researcher and participants. Thus, the description of each couple was based on their lived experience and sparingly tinted with the researcher's observation remarks.

Wolcott (1994) and Patton (2002) had suggested various ways to present the description. Key events presentation was utilized to capture the strengths of each couple. Presenting key events was appropriate for this study because the researcher can

never be able to get all events throughout their marital journey. For example, some couples shared more on the hardship at the initial stage of their marriage; other couple stressed the in-law issues etc. The researcher did not confine the couples to explore their marital journey rigidly by sequent of events. This flexibility allowed couples to talk about events which were meaningful to them along their marital journey.

In the description, the sequence of each couple's description reflected the sequence of interview session. The length of each description depended on the willingness of the participants, their energy level and the availability of time. In the summary section of each couple's description, there would be disclosure of the researcher's experience with the couple. The snapshots of the couples' challenges and strengths would be highlighted in a chart after the summary of each couple. The researcher's overall experience with all the couples would be disclosed in the overall summary of the data analysis after the thematic analysis.

Last words on the description - As this study intended to capture the marital strengths of couples, the description would look positive laden. It did not intend to portray that their marriages were flawless. The inability to study the incompleteness of their marriages reflected the limitation of this study. It was beyond the scope of this study. However, this limitation will be discussed further in Chapter 5, under the heading of Recommendation.

4.6 Description of Couple 1

4.6.1 Introduction

Jie came from Singapore and Mei came from rural area. They met in Kuala Lumpur, when he was 32 and she was 23. Jie stayed nearby Mei's brother's house. He came to eat with Mei's brother's family every day. At the time, Mei was staying with her brother

in Kuala Lumpur. She had helped in cooking and doing house chores since she was very young. She went to study for a few years, but then she had to quit school to help in doing house chores after her sister married away.

Jie was at the age to find a mate when they met. Mei's brother had positive comments about Jie's character. They went through courtship for about 2 years, and then with parental approval, they married in 1961. They held the wedding in Mei's hometown and followed by Jie's hometown. Jie's salary was low when they started out their marriage. They rented a room as their first home.

According to Jie, what have kept Mei and him to over 50 years of marriage are determination, diligence, thriftiness and sameness in hearts to take care of the family. Due to their hardworking and thriftiness, they were able to buy a house in 1965, which they are still living in. They were also able to support their children through higher education. Using Jie's words to sum up their marital journey, it would be

> Jie: 我office的同事都佩服我，你一個小公務員，薪水這樣底，能夠有屋子，能夠有車，能夠讓女兒受高深教育，兒子受高深教育。那麼這要夫妻同心。最重要的是兩夫婦都要同心協力來捱過。一個去外面工作，沒有不良嗜好，盡量節省；一個在家裡面，很勤力，很節省，咬緊牙根，一步一步的走過來，就這樣子度過了五十年。
>
> Jie: My colleagues in the office admired me. They said, "You were just a small officer, with low salary, you could have a house, you could have a car, you could have your daughter pursue higher education, you could have your son pursue higher education." With all these, husband and wife needed to have sameness in hearts. Most important of all, both husband and wife were willing to go through hardship together. One was working outside, no bad habit, tried to save as much as possible; another one was at home, very hard working, very thrifty. With perseverance, one step at a time, we made it through over 50 years.

Mei

Mei was born in 1938. She is the fourth child among six siblings. During the interview sessions, Jie spoke most of the time. Mei talked less. The following were some of her behaviors from the researcher's observation. She prepared food for interview sessions. She was capable in cooking. Time to time she reminded her husband to give times for snack. She showed concern that their inputs might not be helpful. Their neighbor dropped by their house for a short chat during one of the interviews. They gave her a big bag of containers, knowing that she is good at making crackers. The followings were some clues of her characters and her interactions with the neighbors:

She is in good terms with the neighbors.

Jie: 好像人家讲： 派街坊（粵语）。【她有煮什麼好吃的，都會送些給鄰居】，他们有东西也會送些给我们。。。

Jie: When she cooks something, she gives it to the neighbors. They also gave us in return when they had something.

Jie: 另外一點呢，她跟鄰居的關係非常好。每一個鄰居都對她很好。以前，我們帶他們信主。我們出門可以不必鎖門。

Jie: Another thing is, she has very good relationship with the neighbors. All the neighbors are very nice to her. Some time ago, we led them to Christ. We can go out without locking the door.

Jie: 鄰居守望相助。在這邊住了五十年，大家互相認識。她跟鄰居的關係有如你來這裡問起阿美，大家都會知道你指的是誰。

Jie: We have good terms with the neighbors. We live here for 50 years, we know one another. Her relationship with the neighbors is like when you come to this neighborhood, you ask for Mei, they all know who you are referring to.

Optimistic. In year 2011, Mei suffered from breast cancer. When talked about her breast cancer, Jie felt she was very optimistic. Mei revealed the same optimism when talking about the sicknesses she suffered.

Jie: 因為當她患癌的時候，她還是很樂觀，【遇到什麼，她都可以承受】。

Jie: Because when she suffered from cancer, she was very optimistic. What comes in the way, she bore with it.

Mei: 心情啊，要開朗一點。

Mei: In terms of mood, be optimistic.

Simple. Mei does not desire fancy things. She lives simple life.

Jie: 她也不會像【一些人要求】買多少卡拉的戒指，【炫耀他們的]金剛鑽】。她就是很樸素，勤儉，就是這個樣子。過年時，現有的那條金鏈就拿來戴一下，【就那麼】簡單。

Jie: She is not like some people who like to buy expensive diamond rings. [Some] people like to boast about the diamonds they have. She is very simple and thrifty. During Chinese New Year, she just wears the golden necklace she has, very simple.

Observing the pictures they showed, Mei was always in proper attire when she was young. Her poses were proper as well.

Jie

Jie was born in 1930. He was the oldest son, with one elder sister above him, and 2 younger sisters and 5 younger brothers after him. He went through the experience of the Second World War when he was about 12 years old. When he finished his primary school education, the Japanese occupation came to Malaya. He quit school for 3 years and 8 months during the Japanese occupation. During that time, he learned Japanese through night classes.

Here were some observations from the interview sessions. Jie has an office table in their living room. The table was tidy and clean. He was active in giving their background information during the interviews. During one of the visits, his neck was bandaged. He still tried to move around. He often sat in the easy chair in the living room where he could have good view of the house gate. He was the one who answered the

door during the interviews. He helped out with house chores when he was not traveling to outstation. The followings are Mei's comments about Jie:

Hardworking and thrifty

Mei:。。。他也是很勤力啦。他是很節省的人，覺得他也是很好啦。他去外面作工，我就带那兩個孩子。

Mei: … He is also very hardworking. He is thrifty. I feel he is also very kind. He worked outside, I took care of the two kids.

Loyal

Mei: 他又這么好。【一輩子都】對我這么好。。。

Mei: He is very good. For the entire life, he has been kind to me.

Honest

Mei: 他是老老實實的人。不會多講什麼，不會【甜言蜜語】討你歡心。

Mei: He is an honest person. [He] doesn't say anything, like sweet talk to please you.

Jie's spare time and contribution. He enjoyed going to the public library while he was still able to drive. He also likes classical music, Chinese literature and photography. He is good at Sudoku. In 1977, the King rewarded him for contributing to the nation. The award receiving ceremony was depicted by a picture in the living room.

4.6.2 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Financial Constraint

Thriftiness. Jie's salary was about 200 dollars when they married. He had to travel frequently to outstation for earning extra income. Mei lived thriftily to help in ways she could.

Jie: 不能夠再升職因為沒有什麼大學資格，只能當一個普通的公務員，【職位】不高。我只好呢，盡量被派出外地，因為去外地有 overseas

allowance。那她在家裡是很勤檢的，很辛苦的，照顧兩個孩子，煮飯還要很節省，因為我不能給她很多的伙食費。那麼就只好，有時去到外地，有多一些外地津貼，【把多賺的出差津貼節省起來】。

Jie: I did not have university degree, I could not get further promotion. So I was only a general official, not high in status. Thus, I tried to get assigned to different places, because traveling would get overseas allowance. Meanwhile, she was very hard working and thrifty. It's very tough, taking care of two children at home. She had to cook very thriftily, because I could not give her more money for food. Thus, I had to go outstation and saved up some extra allowance.

Maternal Support. When Mei gave birth to their first child, Jie was assigned to work outstation the next day. Mei's mother and a friend were with her. She went through Caesarian section when delivering the baby. According to Mei, C-section delivery was rare and risky during that time.

Jie: 入息很少的囉，住吉隆坡，租房子住，入息很少。那么，第一個女兒出世， 在中央醫院。【女兒】出世的時候是剖腹生產啊。她生產後，我隔天又有公事不在，由她的媽媽和一個朋友辦理出院。那時候的交通工具就是一輛 motorcycle。

Jie: Income was extremely low. We lived in Kuala Lumpur. We rented a room. Income was very low. Then the first daughter was born in General Hospital. The daughter was born through Caesarian. After she gave birth, the next day I was away due to work. Her mother and a friend made arrangement for hospital discharge. During that period of time, motorcycle was the only transport.

Jie was not there for the second delivery. Mei did not say anything when Jie mentioned about it. However, Jie showed a change in his tone when talked about this incident.

Jie: 兩年以後，就生了第二個孩子。第二個孩子出世的時候，我剛剛好不在，那是 1963 年，東馬要加入西馬，我在砂拉越。小孩子出世不能帶他去醫院（停頓），也是剖腹生產。兩個小孩子出世，還是租房。

Jie: After two years, the second child came along. When the second child was born, I was away. It was in 1963. East Malaysia and West Malaysia were allied, and I was in Sarawak. I could not take her to hospital (pause). She also went through Caesarian. Two children were born. We still rented a room.

Obedient children. When asked about Mei's feelings towards her husband's frequent trips to outstation and abroad, she said she was happy to take care of the children because her children were obedient.

Mei: 我那時很很開心。啊，帶著兩個孩子，而那兩個孩也很聽話。

Mei: I was very happy during that time. Ya, raising two children and two of them were very obedient.

Sameness in hearts. With limited resources and Jie's frequent traveling, they showed sameness in hearts through reciprocally staying away from bad habits, loving the children and family. These factors were indispensable for keeping them going through difficult time.

No bad habit.

Jie: 第一，我就沒有不良嗜好，我不會賭博，沒有抽煙，沒有買千字萬字，沒有 toto，連麻將都不會打。她也沒有不良嗜好，只是顧家。。。

Jie: First, I do not have bad habits. I do not know how to gamble, smoke, buy lottery and toto (something like lottery). I did not even know how to play mahjong. She also did not have bad habits. She only took care of the family…

Love for the children

Jie: 大家都是為了小孩子，要照顧這個家，栽培小孩子，讓他成人，以後受良好的教育。。。

Jie: We were for the children. We wanted to take care of the family. We wanted to cultivate the children so that they became responsible. They could pursue good education in future.

Making reciprocal contribution to the family

Jie:。。。 所以我盡量到外地做工，多賺一點津貼。而她在家裡很節省，很出力，她也養雞啊，也喜歡做烤餅，和做其他的來增加一些收入，渡過難關。

Jie: … So I tried to go outstation, earned more allowances. Meanwhile, she was very thrifty and very hardworking at home. She even reared chicken. She also liked to bake biscuits, and doing other things to earn more income, to go through the difficult time.

Involvement in taking care of children. At the time of limited resources and husband's frequent trips to outstation, Mei enjoyed what she was doing – taking care of the children.

Mei: 那時【有】第一個孩子，我們又沒有車。【我】常帶她去公園啊，搭車去囉。很高興啦，那時有第一個孩子。

Mei: When we got the first child, we did not have a car. I often took her to the park by bus. It was happy moment, when we got our first child.

Love for their descendants. The biggest anchor for their marriage was their love for their descendants.

Jie: 對，共同為了下一代，就是生活怎樣苦都好啦，就是考慮到孩子，考慮孫子的前途，就這樣子挨過了咯。

Jie: Ya, we work together for the next generation, no matter how tough it was. We valued the children. We valued the future of our grandchildren. We struggled through it.

Care for offspring's education.

Jie: 有一段時間，當我的孫還小的時候，我【住我】女兒的家。我星期一過去，星期五回來。她們家有傭人，他們兩夫婦做工。我的孫是菲利賓傭人照顧的，只講英文，而我就替他們補習華語，而【我太太】照顧這個家，就這樣又度過了幾年。

Jie: There was a period of time, when my grandchildren were small, I lived in my daughter's house. I went on Monday, and came back on Friday. They had got maid. Both husband and wife were working. My grandchildren were taken care of by the Filipino maid. They could only speak English. So I gave them Mandarin tuition, and [my wife] took care of this home. We were in this condition for a few years.

Jie: 【一生儲蓄】為孩子將來打算，為將來升學打算。。。

Jie: Saving for the whole life for the children's future and the future study of children…

Leave good example for the offspring.

Jie: 幾十年【下來】，對下一代的影響很深，他們會看到你們上一代幾十年了，互相照顧，所以我的女兒也注重家庭，沒有什麼不良嗜好。

Jie: [Coming from several decades of marriage], it impacted the next generation deeply. They saw how the previous generation took care of each other for so many years. That's why my daughter is also very family-centered, no bad habit.

Acceptance. When Jie was talking about the constraints they lived in, from his tone of voice, he did not show remorse over for what he could not offer. He accepted the constraint of reality and face life as it is.

Accept the constraint of reality.

Jie: 那时候，我们的确入息是很少的。我的女儿，很有兴趣要学钢琴。可是我一直没有能力讓她去學钢琴。

Jie: At those days, our income was very low. My daughter was very interested in learning piano, but I could not support her.

Face life as it is.

Jie: 没有什么，就自然而然的需要度过。你需要走过这段路，你就是迎面赶上。

Jie: Nothing much. Naturally, you need to go through it. You would learn to face it.

4.6.3 Challenge 2 – Sicknesses

They went through several sicknesses together. They narrowly escaped death. Those moments impacted them the most.

Jie: 我想應該是我們度過了幾次的疾病方面，度過幾次難關，度過幾次死裡逃生。1965 年，那時還是跟人家租房，女兒還很小，兒子更小，我就在這家德國醫院，你知道嗎？【在】焦賴的 hospital 啊，從肺部前面，割了一個很大的腫瘤，這是【很】難忘。

Jie: I think it should be the sicknesses that we experienced. We experienced a few difficult moments. We experienced a few narrow escapes from death. In

1965, we were still renting a room, the daughter was small, the son was smaller, I was in the German hospital, do you know that? I was in the hospital in Cheras, where a tumor was extracted from my lung. This is unforgettable.

Jie:【在 1989 年】，在中央醫院，很多次進出，做電療，以後的 follow up，【我從鼻癌】活下來，因為我很早就【接受治療】。在 2011 年，她得了乳癌。本來要在吉隆坡中央醫院【動手術】，不過她因為以前的腳在那邊開刀過一次，用了麻痺藥以後，昏迷進 ICU 搶救，所以醫生說，如果再用麻痺藥的話，危險性很高。不過後來，我的兒子在新加坡大學工作，那裡有醫學院。他認識裡面的醫生。然後就在 2011 年，聖誕節那天，我們就去新加坡，安排進新加坡癌症治療中心，National Cancer Society of Singapore。【手術】以後，繼續在吉隆坡醫【治療】。她的腳也曾經【因為】膝蓋不能行走，換了一個金屬膝蓋，現在走路還是很痛。

Jie: [In 1989], in General Hospital, many trips going in and out of the hospital, like radiology treatment and the follow up sessions, I survived from nose cancer because I went through treatment in the early stage. In year 2011, she suffered from breast cancer. She was supposed to have operation in the General Hospital, but she did not, due to her [previous] experience in knee operation. She fainted after administering the anesthesia. She was rescued in the ICU. So, the doctor said it would be risky if paralyzant was used again. But then my son who works in National University of Singapore, he knew some doctors in the Faculty of Medicine of National University of Singapore. So during Christmas in year 2011, we went to Singapore to receive treatment in the National Cancer Society of Singapore. After operation, she continued to follow up in hospital in Kuala Lumpur. She was once not able to walk due to her knee. Though she did the knee replacement operation, it is still painful when she walks.

Responsibility. The children were small when the sickness struck him. The sense of responsibility kept him going.

Jie: … 孩子還小，你的責任還在。

Jie: … the kids were still small, you still had the responsibility.

Will of survival. In 1989, Jie suffered from nose cancer. The will of survival kept him going for another 29 years.

Jie: 求生的意識。不要悲觀要樂觀。健康地生活。

Jie: Surviving will. No pessimism, but optimism. Live healthily.

Be optimistic. For Jie, death is not a threat. He tried to be optimistic. They still went to church every Sunday.

> Jie: 。。。我很樂觀。去到癌症病房，每個人愁眉苦臉。我是笑著進笑著出。他們講你都快要死了還笑。難道要苦著臉離開這個世界嗎?當然人是免不了一死的，但人離世要高高興興快快樂樂。。。
>
> Jie: … I was very optimistic. I went to the cancer patients' unit, everyone was looking unhappy. I went in and came out with smiling face. They said, "You were dying soon and yet you were still smiling." Well, should we leave this world with bitter look? Of course human beings can't get away from death, but then we can leave the world happily.
>
> Mei: 是啊。現在有什麼病啊，也要樂觀。每個星期去教堂。
>
> Mei: Yes. No matter what sickness I'm having now, be optimistic. Go to church every week.

Take care of each other. During time of sickness, taking care of each other was crucial for them to make it through.

> Jie: 最痛苦的時候，兩個人互相照顧，就是這樣。
>
> Jie: In the most difficult moment, both of us took care of each other.
>
> Mei: 很多病痛啊，他有病我要照顧他，我有病他照顧我。上次我在新加坡，也住了整個月啊，【整天陪著】進進出出咯。
>
> Mei: A lot of sicknesses, usually when he fell sick, I took care of him; I fell sick, he took care of me. It was him who was busy going in and out when I was in Singapore for a month.

4.6.4 Challenge 3 – Aging

Live with sicknesses. Hospital appointments sometimes took up a few days in a week. It was not easy to make appointment to see them due to the doctors' visits.

> Jie: 因为现在我们啊经常要去医院哦。她有很多疾病，我也有。医好了的就是这个 cancer 啦，心脏曾经去沙登医院治疗，膝盖【手術】等等。我

本身这边过了，还有这个电疗什么，还有肺部在这个吉隆坡，呼吸器官学院，它不叫肺痨院。【做過很多】治疗。

Jie: Because we often go to hospital currently. She and I got a lot of sicknesses. The cancers were cured. Once she sought heart treatment in Serdang Hospital, knee operation and so on. I myself got over this, with the radiology treatment, received treatment in Institut Perubatan Respiratori (Institute of Respiratory Medicine) for the lung. The Institut Perubatan Respiratori is no more known as National TB Center. We have gone through many treatments.

Social support from neighbors. At the stage of aging, Jie and Mei have to depend on their neighbors when their children were away and confined to their own family to take care.

Mei: 我們這個家庭兒女很孝順， 但是不在我們身邊，有什么事只好求別人幫忙。不過這里的人【全部】都很好。【都願意】幫忙我們。對面有個信主的，常常載我們去醫院。Supermarket 有便宜東西就幫我們買回來，很好的女子。人之間你對我好，我對你好。她對我們很好。現在我們兩個這麼孤獨都是靠她聯絡。她常常載我們去看醫生，去銀行拿錢，去買東西。

Mei: Our children are very filial, but they are not physically with us. We need to ask for help from others if anything happens. Our neighbors are kind. They are very helpful to us. There is a Christian, who lives opposite our house. She usually takes us to the hospital. She would help us to buy those sales items in supermarket. She is a very nice girl. In terms of human interaction, you treat me nice, I treat you nice. She is very nice to us. Now that two of us are alone, we all rely on her to make contacts. She usually brings us to the hospital to see doctor, to withdraw money from the bank and to buy things.

Accept the constraint of reality. Jie expressed regret that their children were not around much at this stage. He accepted the constraints their children have.

Jie: 。。。儿子在新加坡。女儿做工，五点半放工，回到家里七点多。他们都塞车什么什么，还要煮饭来照顾孩子，也是一大堆，根本不可能来看我们。

Jie:… Our son is in Singapore. Our daughter is working. She gets off at 5.30pm, reaches home around 7 something. They are caught in the traffic jam. They need to cook, take care of the children and many other things. It’s impossible for them to come to see us.

The capacity to withstand hardship. Jie's capacity to face hardship in financial constraint and sicknesses were built by the harsh time he went through during Second World War time and Japanese occupation.

Toughened by past experience.

Jie: 我们是在战争最艰苦的年代长大的哦。

Jie: We grew up in the most difficult time during the war time.

Jie: 【十三歲】我就出来做工了。你知道那时候做什么？就是在日本人的办公室里面，做 office boy，冲杯茶，扫扫地，洗洗茶杯。有信件或者有什么，骑着脚车去這里去那里，所以实在辛苦的。不像你们现在这样一帆风顺。一些需要学术鉴定的，你要去考，全部要靠自修。

Jie: [At the age of 13] I worked. Do you know what I did? I worked in the Japanese office. I was the office boy. I made tea, swept the floor, and washed tea cups. Any incoming letters or anything, I rode bicycle going around. So it was very tough. Unlike now, you guys are so lucky. Some subjects required examinations. You got to go to take the papers and went for the exams. It was all done through self-study.

Jie: 新加坡是没有米的，没有粮食，很缺乏的。跟日本人做工，还有一点点米给你。

Jie: There was famine in Singapore. No food. Poverty. Working with the Japanese, they gave you a little bit of rice.

Jie: 我亲眼看到日本人打中国人，用钢丝绑住手指，吊在那边，脚不到底。看他们活活把人打死什么。非常残酷，杀人这些。

Jie: I saw the Japanese beating up Chinese, using the metal string to tie up their fingers and hung them up. The victims' feet could not reach the floor. I saw them beating up people until they had the last breath. Killing was very cruel.

Jie: 总之这些苦，你经历过了啊，以后的日子，你就不会觉得很难。

Jie: Anyway, after you experienced the hardships, nothing is tougher than these.

Their strengths to go through challenges were their love for the children, sameness in hearts, determinations, sense of responsibility, support from the neighbors, acceptance

and involvement in their roles. Experience in hardship was the foundation for what was to come. Besides the strengths they demonstrated through challenges, they also have ways to nurture their marital relationship.

4.6.5 Ways to Nurture the Relationship

Respecting spouse's hobbies. Jie and Mei have different hobbies and interests. They respect each other's interests. They give each other the space to pursue their interest.

> Jie: … 我們兩個人興趣各不相同。我看書聽音樂什么她沒有興趣。她喜歡煮食，喜歡到幾個要好的朋友家里面做餃子。那么我想這個也沒有什么問題呀。【我曾想】她不會看書不會聽音樂那么日子怎樣過?【她能夠】找幾個好朋友交換一些煮食經驗，出去買買東西，或者什么去小販中心簡單吃一餐就這樣。
>
> Jie: …Both of our hobbies are different. She is not interested in what I read and the music I listen to. She likes to cook. She likes to go to her friends' house to make dumplings. This is not an issue. [I used to think to myself], "if she does not like reading and listening to music, how is she going to pass her time?" But then, she can visit a few good friends and exchanging cooking experience, going out to buy things, or dining in hawker center, those sorts of things.

Common interests. Despite of the differences, Jie and Mei have a common interest.

> Jie: 如果講有共同的嗜好就是看電視。她也喜歡我也喜歡，看唱歌比賽呀。
> Mei: 那些福建歌也是很好聽。
> Jie: 連續劇，比較好的。
>
> Jie: In terms of common interest, that is watching TV. We both like to watch TV program such as singing competition.
> Mei: Those Hokkien songs are very nice.
> Jie: Sitcom, better ones.

Care for each other in daily needs. Jie and Mei showed their care in daily life through taking care of each other's daily needs.

Jie: 大家互相關心囉。她知道我身體很弱，就煲了一些有滋養有補的。她的腳不大行，出門就要照顧她囉。

Jie: We take care of each other. When she knows my body is weak, she will cook something nutritious. Her legs are not well, I need to take care of her when going out.

Mei: 【在家裡】雞蛋牛奶粉啦什么都有。【想吃什麼營養】的麵包芝士都會買回來。

Mei: I buy the nutritious food, like cheese and bread. Eggs and milk powder can be easily found at home.

Mei: 什么都幫我做。有時【去外坡出差】回來了，全部【錢都】交給我，就是很好囉。

Mei: He helps me in many ways. Sometimes when he went outstation, he would leave all the money to me. That's very good.

Showing reciprocal kindness. Jie worked outside, Mei took care of family. Jie trusted Mei with the money, Mei took good care of the family. Jie took care of Mei, Mei took care of him. Mei summed up the essence of their marriage as

Mei: 婚姻就是他對我好，我對他好，不就好了。

Mei: Marriage is he is kind to me; I am kind to him, that's it.

The ways to nurture their marital relationship include respecting each other's hobbies, common interest, care for each other and showing reciprocal kindness. According to Jie and Mei, conflicts are unavoidable in marriage. The followings showed how they deal with it.

4.6.6 Handling Conflicts

Accommodative. Most conflicts arose from differences in habits. They accommodate to them by making adjustment.

Jie: 多數吵架是【因為生活習慣引起】。她比較容易忘記東西。我就每一件東西是有 system 的。她電話幾個月就換。有時放在冰廂里面，有時放在火爐邊，有時跟衣服一起脫了丟在洗衣機里面浸在水裡一個晚上，有時跌下來，有時不懂流去那里，所以我們只好買那些便宜點的。

Jie: Most quarrels are due to habits in daily life. She is a forgetful person, but I am more systematic. She changes her phone every few months. Sometimes she leaves it in the fridge, or beside the stove, or in the clothes and soaked it in the washing machine overnight, or dropped it somewhere. So we had to buy cheap ones.

Tolerance. Conflicts were inevitable, according to Jie. He finds tolerance is helpful.

Jie: 【衝突】是生活細節，免不了的，只要大家互相忍耐一下。因為有時候爭吵，是因為細節問題，比如：對子女的教育，家裡的這個那個，大家觀點不同，這些是免不了的。

Jie: [Conflict arises from those] details in daily life. They are unavoidable. We tolerate each other. This is because sometimes the arguments are due to differences in details, like children's education, home related. We have different views so it is unavoidable.

Memorable incidents for Jie and Mei. When memorable events were explored during the interviews, the following incidents were mentioned:

Gave birth to a boy.

Mei: 難忘就是，哎呀我生了一個女兒是【剖腹生產】的。以前幾十年沒有什么人開刀的。現在有一些啊，他不要生就是開刀。後來我【要求他讓我給他多生個兒子】。他不給我生，他講，"不要啦，危險。"一個女兒不要緊的啦。後來他不反對了。後來我真的【多生】一個男的。就是很難忘囉。

Mei: The unforgettable moment was I gave birth to a daughter through Caesarian. Many years ago, not much people underwent Caesarian. Nowadays, some people go for Caesarian, because they refuse to have normal delivery. Later on, I said to him, "Let me have a boy." He did not allow. He said, "No, it's very dangerous. It's ok to have one daughter." Later, he did not oppose. Then I really gave birth to a boy. That is unforgettable.

Volunteering their time to help other cancer patients.

Jie: 我 1989 年電療了到 90 年，當時有很多人有癌症了。我們去癌症病樓找朋友，勸那些病人接受醫生的勸告。她就煲一些薏米水，【因為】電療了口會很乾。外面【賣的】薏米水有糖不適合。很多【接受電療治療的人】是從外地來的，醫院有個地方給他們住，病人一天只需交三塊錢。我們去勸他們，告訴他們癌症是可以醫得好的，要盡早治療，不要聽那些巫術那些什么東西，不要延醫，要回去吃藥。是有希望的。。。有生之年做這些東西。

Jie: I received radiology treatment from year 1989 to 1990. During that period of time, many people suffered from cancer. We went to cancer unit to visit friends. We encouraged those patients to listen to doctors' advice. She cooked barley water because radiology treatment caused dried mouth. The barley water sold outside was not suitable for them because it contained sugar. Many people received radiology treatment came from outstation. They could stay in the hospital and the charges were 3 ringgits only per day. We went to advise them. Letting them know that cancer can be cured. It needs to be treated early and don't listen to those sorcery. Do not delay the treatment. Go back home and take the medicine. It is hopeful… do such things while you still alive.

Family trip

Jie: 還有一件事，以前去新加坡【的時候】也是很愉快，帶著兩個孩子。因為我母親和兄弟姐妹都在新加坡。所以那時候駕車【載着】一家人回新加坡，一年回一次兩次，這也很開心。

Jie: One more thing, we were very happy when we went back to Singapore with two kids. My mother and siblings stayed in Singapore. So, those were happy moments when I drove the whole family to Singapore once or twice a year.

4.6.7 Summary

The researcher's experience with the couple. When describing their marriage, they showed reciprocal effort to take care of the children and family. Their words were short and terse. They expressed love through how they care for each other and for the family. They relationship reflects many Chinese families in Malaysia, in which doing things for each other is an act of love. The researcher is familiar with this kind of family interaction. No lengthy sessions were held due to fatigue. Mei walked to the kitchen and got something to eat when the session was over time. They sent the researcher away with snacks for each session and they prepared snacks during the sessions. Recording made them look uneasy. When the audio recorder was off, they changed their tone of

voice. They preferred casual talks when there was no recording. During one of the interviews, Mei looked exhausted. She was not in the mood, because they had doctor's appointment earlier.

During the cross-checking time, Jie politely turned down the researcher's return due to unpredictable doctors' appointments. However, Jie accepted the mailed draft for cross-checking. We also discussed and clarified over phone calls. I sent short messages to them over the phone when I needed further clarification on certain terms. Jie never failed to return my texts.

Summing up. Their marriage has come to 54 years. Over the years, the hardship and constraints they experienced did not make them drift apart. They take care of each other at the aging stage when sicknesses dominate their life. They accompany each other for doctors' appointments. When the interviewer tried to understand how arrival of children and frequent travels impacted on the marital relationship, Jie said, "We never pay attention to things like that." At the same time, the interviewer tried to understand how Mei felt about their marital relationship when Jie was often away. She responded, "Nothing much about the feeling. I was happy. We did not think about the relationship of husband and wife. He worked and I took care of the kids." The meaning of their marriage is not fulfilling their gratification. They anchor their strengths on their love towards their descendants. Their foundation of strength is selflessness. It is depicted by Jie's words:

> Jie: 所以說啊，一段婚姻的維持，不在乎你有錢沒有錢，你會賺錢，你做【了些什麼】，而是在【於夫妻倆是否願意為家庭受苦】，為了下一代挨。這樣大家一起同心協力，就是這樣走過來五十年。現在我已經快要到生命的盡頭。。。八十五歲了。
>
> Jie: So upholding a marriage relies not on how much money you have, your ability to make money, your occupation. It depends on whether the couple can go through hardship for the sake of the family. Go through hardship for the

next generation. Together in one heart, we have gone through 50 years. Now I am coming to the end of life…85 years old.

Reciprocally, their strengths also came from the comfort of witnessing their descendants' achievements and their supports.

Jie: 。。。不過有一點我可以比較誇張的，就是說我的兒子我的女兒和我的孫呢他們的學業都非常好。。。 【我兩個孩子】的工作都差不多。那麼新加坡有三個孫，這裡有三個孫。四個進了大學。。。總之，他們的成績很不錯。

Jie: … But there is one thing I can proudly say, that my son, my daughter and my grandchildren, their academic performance was very good… [My two children's] occupations are not bad. I have three grandchildren in Singapore and three grandchildren in here. Four entered university… in short, their academic performance was not bad.

Jie: 我們的孩子很孝順。我的女兒兒子按月給我們錢。以前我的兒子在吉隆坡做工買了一間屋子，他給家里的伙食費。不過現在他在新加坡，他們每個月供應我們的需要，盡量買【東西】給我們。所以現在的生活來講，我們覺得很滿足。

Jie: Our children are very filial. My daughter and son give us money monthly. Last time my son worked in Kuala Lumpur, he bought a house. He paid for the expenses. But now he is in Singapore, both my son and daughter still give us what we need monthly. They try their best to buy things for us. So now talking about daily life, we feel very contented.

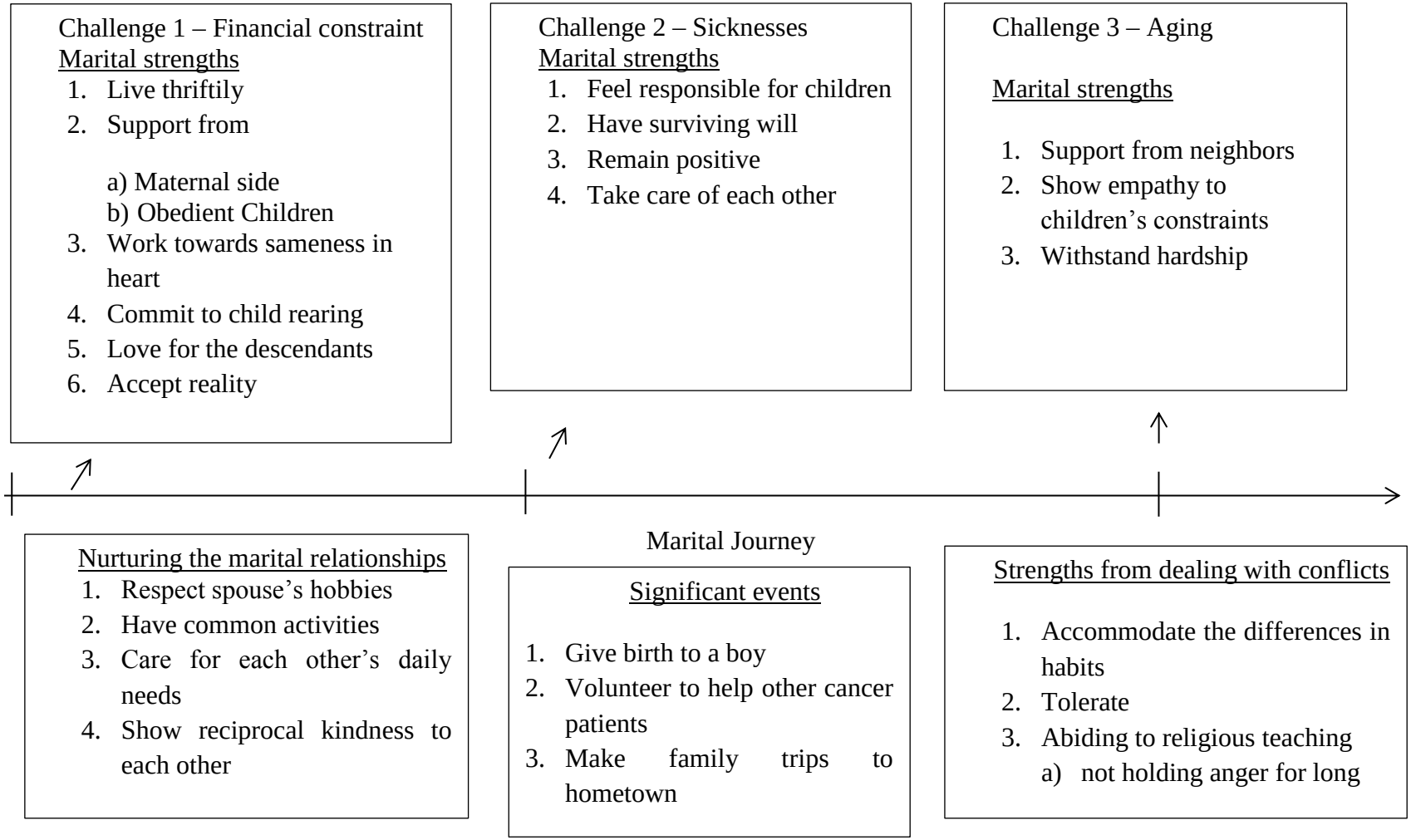


Figure 4.3: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 1

4.7 Description of Couple 2

4.7.1 Introduction

Lee was born in 1949. Xiang was born in 1951. They came from big families. Lee has 13 siblings in his family and Xiang has 8 siblings in hers. Xiang is the oldest among the siblings. Lee is the 5th among his siblings. After finishing secondary school, through his father's friend, Lee got a job working in the service sector. He worked morning until late at night. He worked hard so that he would not let his father down. In fact, he kept this job since he was 19 years old until he was 50 years old, at the age of retirement. Due to long working hours, he met Xiang through his colleague, who was Xiang's schoolmate. Through phone calls, riding with Lee's Vespa, and Lee's father's fried Hokkien noodles (Lee' father ran a famous fried Hokkien noodle stall. Lee would pack fried Hokkien noodles for Xiang's family after work), they built their relationship. In 1975, they got married. They married because it was something normal to do. Lee also felt he was at the right age to get married.

Xiang

Xiang had supportive parents. She went to them when she needed support and help. She was a full time housewife when the children were born. She carried out the discipline role in parenting. She called herself "very strict" to their children. She looked uneasy and shy when talked about affection in their marriage. She was often busy washing in the kitchen before the interviews started. She is "more spiritual" as Lee would describe her. She does not indulge herself in material things. For her, gathering and eating with family members are happy moments. Her contentment in life is to care for children and to see them grow. As the oldest in the family, it is not easy for her to share her problems with her siblings. Lee is her greatest support.

Lee

Lee is a giving person. He always puts others first. He even gave away his daughter's bed to a social service center. He highly values sacrifice, making contribution and tolerance. His first job was his last job over his working life. He started his career from a humbling position to the highest post in the company, in which he used to work. He finds his support through hanging out with friends eating and drinking tea. He is a hardworking person. He often played the "loving" father figure when it came to parenting. His wife described him "staying quiet" when accusations and misunderstanding were against him. He listened while his wife was talking over the interviews. Although he claimed working outside acquired more exposure and experience, he did not interfering with his wife's sharing during the interviews.

4.7.2 Challenge 1 - Low Income and Long Working Hours

Lee's salary was low, starting as a clerk in a service sector. He had to do another part time job to provide for his family. He worked until late at night. After working in the service sector, he still saw clients and customers until late night for extra income. Their children came one year apart. They have three daughters. Besides that, his work required him to travel. When he was not around, he left the children for his wife to take care. When he mentioned this, his tone of voice changed and his eyes looked down. And he said, "It's not easy."

Sharing house chores. Every morning, before leaving for work, he would help out with house chores and Xiang went to market for grocery.

> Xiang: 他幫我洗衣服，因為那時三個孩子還是 baby，他幫我洗衣。我去巴剎那些咯。
> Lee: 家務一定要幫忙做的。
> Xiang: 他到現在還是幫我洗衣那些（笑）。

Xiang: He helped me to wash clothes, because during that time the three children were still babies. He helped me to wash clothes and I went to market.
Lee: Must help to do house chores.
Xiang: Up to now, he is still helping me to wash clothes (laugh).

Lee also helped in house chores after work.

Xiang: 孩子那時候還小，一年一個啊。我白天做了，我晚上想要休息，又要他做，又要他幫手，所以他也蠻辛苦的。

Xiang: The children were still small and they came one year apart. I worked day time, then at night I wanted to rest, but then he had to do, he had to help. So it was hard on him.

Xiang: 小孩子小那時，他做工回來，他有幫我看孩子的，換尿片呀。

Xiang: When the children were small, after he came back from work, he also helped me to look after the children, like changing nappy.

Responsible for the family. What motivated Lee during that stressful time was he wanted to do his best to provide for the family. His sense of responsibility as a father moved him.

Lee: Of course 因為這家庭是我們的，我們要對這個家庭負責任。I do my best to provide the needs of this family.

Lee: Of course, the family is ours. We need to be responsible for the family. I did my best to provide [for] the needs of this family.

Helpfulness. He likes to help people to solve their problems.

Lee: 而且我的 character 是喜歡幫人家，幫人家解決問題, so I have this sort of character，喜歡幫人家。

Lee: Nevertheless, my character is I like to help people, help people to solve their problems, so I have this type of character - like to help people.

Other-centeredness. In Lee's sharing, he often talked about how his decision would impact on others. He was mindful of his behaviors.

Lee: 。。。而且作為一個husband, you have many roles to take care you know. Not only your parents' family, 她的parent's的family也要take care. So a lot of things you have to take into consideration when you make decisions. A

lot of people might be affected by your decision you know. So overall 你要考慮到很多方面。When you made wrong decision, it might not only affect your own family, 也影響周圍的人的family members. 這個很重要，結婚不是兩個人的事，不是啊，周圍的人也會affect 到。很多family related在旁邊，也會affect到你們的啊。所以怎樣處人待事，各方面，做人家的husband, son in-law, brother and sister, 不簡單啊。People look up to you as a model. 好像她是the eldest in the family所以they look at her and look at me also. They come to us with problems. They come to us for advice and everything. We have a role to play also. It is very important.

Lee: … Nevertheless as a husband, you have many roles to take care you know. Not only my parent's family, I have to take care of her parents' family too. So a lot of things you have to take into consideration when you make decision. A lot of people might be affected by your decision you know. So overall you need to consider many dimensions. When you made a wrong decision, it might not only affect your own family, it affected the surrounding family members. This is very important. Getting married is not only two parties' business. It's not! Surrounding people get affected too. A lot of surrounding family members can also affect you. So in terms of handling things and people, so it's not easy as a husband, son in-law, brother and sister. People look up to you as a model. Just like she is the oldest in the family, [her siblings] look up to her and look up to me also. They come to us with problems. They come to us for advice and everything. We have a role to play also. It is very important.

Playing the role model. Besides encompassing others in his life, playing the role model for his siblings and Xiang's siblings is important for him.

Lee: 她是做大姐的，她的弟弟妹妹就當她做，好像是一個母親一樣的形象這樣子。有什麼事情，跟她 ask for advice 啦。 無形中，我也要 play the role, as a father's role to her sisters 這樣咯。所以我們一切所說的，所做的，很重要哦. 會 affect 他們，所以我們要很小心處理. 我本身的行為啊，各方面，都很重要，做好榜樣。

Lee: She is the eldest in her family. Her siblings treat her like mother. When they have something, they will come to her for advice. Indirectly, I need to play the role, as a father's role to her sisters. So whatever we do and say would be important. It would affect them, so we need to be very careful. My behaviors, and many other things, are important. Be a good role model.

Husband's high tolerance. Xiang admitted that Lee was very tolerant toward her.

Xiang: 你知道女的啦，沒有解決那個問題啊，他【又】在那邊睡覺，我很生氣，你知道沒有。所以我一直吵他咯，吵到他不耐煩了，他就起來，

"有什麼講了先，講了才睡"。。。所以起來講講，settled了才睡，我會這樣子啦。那件事情沒有settle，我會一整晚吵他，吵到他沒有得睡。所以有時看到他也是很辛苦，看到他有時晚上回來，又給我弄到這樣，他白天又要去做工這樣(笑)。

Xiang: As a female you know, when the problem was not settled, and yet he fell into sleep, I became very angry you know. So I would disturb him until he woke up, then he would say, "You go ahead and talk. Sleep after you talk" … So he woke up and talked. We slept after settlement. I would do that if the problem was not settled. If the problem was unsettled, I would disturb him until he could not sleep. Sometime I felt it was hard on him. I saw him coming back at night and then he was disturbed by me. Then the next day, he had to work (smile).

Tolerance eases problem solving process. For Lee, tolerance is important for problem solving.

Lee: Because with tolerance, you can talk to people, listen to people, and solve the problem.

Agreeable. In terms of resolving differences in opinion, they tried to be agreeable to each other. However, Xiang is agreeable to Lee's stance most of the time. He usually makes final decision after discussion. For them to reach an agreeable point, they based their decision on suitability and availability of information.

Wife's view

Xiang: 意見咯，有得商量咯。
Interviewer: Ok.
Xiang: 彼此有什麼事情的時候，大家有得商量。提議東西的時候，看誰的意見適合，就接納啦，接受去做這樣子咯，mutual respect，這樣咯。

Xiang: We can discuss our opinions.
Interviewer: Okay
Xiang: When we have any problem, we can discuss. For suggestions, we evaluate the appropriateness of it before adopting. Then we will accept and adopt the suitable one, like mutual respect.

Husband's position

Lee: Talk with reasons, but sometime decision making is not only reasoning you know. Sometime it is instinct.

Interviewer: Ok
Lee: Decision making instinct.
Xiang: 他是 decision making 的。
Lee: huh
Interviewer: Ok, so he made most decisions?
Xiang: 我們 made 了什麼，商量了最後 come to conclusion，到最後 may be 是他的 decision 了，不是我的（laugh）。
I: Ok
Xiang: 但是我要知道怎麼樣，給我知道這樣子咯。
Interviewer: Ok
Xiang: 但是有時候，ah。。。多數是他對的啦，他講起來的時候（笑）。
Interviewer: Ok.
Xiang: 不夠他講的啦 （laugh），所以還是聽他講咯。
Interviewer: Ok
Lee: Because in service sector, we have a lot of exposure. We have information from outside. Lady was usually at home, so exposure of outside information limited.

Lee: Talk with reasons, but sometime decision making is not only reason you know. Sometime it is instinct.
Interviewer: Ok.
Lee: Decision making instinct.
Xiang: He is the decision maker.
Lee: Huh.
Interviewer: Ok, so he made most decisions?
Xiang: Whatever decision we made, after discussion, when come to conclusion, at the end it is his decision, not mine (laugh).
Interviewer: Ok.
Xiang: But I want to know how.
Interviewer: Ok
Xiang: But sometime, ah… when we discuss, he is right most of the time (laugh).
Interviewer: Ok
Xiang: He talked better than me (laugh), so I had to listen to him.
Interviewer: Ok
Lee: Because in service sector, we have a lot of exposure. We have information from outside. Lady was usually at home, so exposure of outside information limited.

Maternal support. Lee worked most of the time. Xiang took care of the three children. Her mother and her sister were the social support for her. When recalling the difficult time of raise up the children in the early days, Xiang's mother was a great help to her.

Xiang: 照顧囉，照顧最辛苦囉，不過大的【孩子】有我媽媽幫我照顧。

Xiang: Taking care is the toughest thing, but my mother helped me to take care of my eldest daughter.

Her sister was also another source of support for her when her mother suffered from stroke.

Xiang: 。。。我們沒有請做月陪月的咯。第一個是我媽媽，第二個也是我媽媽【幫忙】，我媽媽後來中風了，第三個【孩子】是妹妹她們。

Xiang: We did not employ [7]confinement lady. My mother helped me to do the confinement for the first child and the second child. After that my mother suffered from stroke, my younger sisters helped me for the third child.

Communal activities. When the children were small, involving in communal activities was a form of support for Xiang.

Interviewer: 那麼比較早期的時候，你們比較辛苦的時候，你們是怎樣？
Lee: 她會帶孩子去 park。
Xiang: 他去做工，我帶小孩子去 garden。
Interviewer: 你一個人帶三個啦。
Xiang: 不是，還有我妹妹的孩子。全部一車，我載着他們去 garden 玩，我去預備 nasi lemak 啊，在 garden 那邊吃啊。他們也很享受那段時期的。
Lee: 因為我做工是跑來跑去的。
Xiang: 他做工，他忙著做工的時候，我就在家裡跟我妹妹帶孩子。

Interviewer: In the early days, during those difficult times, how were you?
Lee: She brought the children to the park.
Xiang: He went to work. I brought the kids to the garden.
Interviewer: You brought three children alone.
Xiang: No, with my sister's children. I drove all of them to the garden in one car. I prepared [8]*nasi lemak*. We picnicked in the garden. They really enjoyed that moments.
Lee: Because my job required me to go to different places.

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[7] In Chinese cultural practice, upon arrival of the baby, a confinement lady is employed to take care of the mother and the baby for a month. During that month, the confinement lady will cook special food for the mother. The foods are believed to boost the mother's health and energy. If the mother is well taken care of during this month, her health would turn out better than before. Most mothers prefer to be taken care of by their own mothers or someone they are close to.

[8] It is a Malay food. It consists of rice which is cooked in coconut oil, chili paste, peanuts and friend anchovies. In Malaysia, the Chinese eat the Malay and the Indian food.

Xiang: He worked, when he was busy with his work, I took care of the children at home with my younger sister.

Partnership. Lee took care of finding income and Xiang took charge of the household.

Lee: 她照顧孩子我做工囉。我去忙我的工作，忙我的 part time 的工作。

Lee: She took care of the kids and I worked. I was busy with my work and busy with my part time job.

Sacrifice. Lee often talked about sacrifices in relationship and making contributions to the society during the interviews. He demonstrated that in his life. For example, there was one incident, he donated his daughter's bed to the social concern center, according to Xiang. When Xiang mentioned about it, he did not remember.

Lee: Be willing to sacrifice and contribute. At the end of the day, everybody [is blessed]. This is what I do in [our] marriage. Do your contribution to all the people around you, of course, within your means. That's very important. There is limit in everything. That's all.

4.7.3 Challenge 2 – Empty Nest

At the age of 50, Lee retired. He got involved in social work, helping out in the social service center. He and Xiang have more time together after they retired and after the children left home.

More time together after retirement and after children left for overseas. During that period of time, wherever Lee went, Xiang followed him. They do many things together.

Lee: 50 歲退休後就出來做 social work, helping in the social service center home.
Xiang: 我時常跟着他。
Lee: 那時孩子都大了。
Xiang: 那時我跟他一起進進出出。
Interviewer: 所以在一起的時間比較多。

Xiang: Huh
Lee: 孩子不在的時候就比較多咯。
Xiang: 50 歲過後。
Lee: 那時沒有做 service sector 了，做 social worker.
Xiang: 孩子又去了外國啊。他去哪裡我就跟着去那裡。一起做，一起進進出出這樣，一起吃飯啊。

Lee: I retired at the age of 50 and got involved in social work, helping in the social service center.
Xiang: I often followed him.
Lee: During that time our children grew up.
Xiang: That time I followed him in and out.
Interviewer: So you have more time together.
Xiang: Huh.
Lee: We have more time together when the children are not around.
Xiang: After 50s.
Lee: That time I was not with the service sector, and I was doing social work.
Xiang: The children went overseas. I followed him whenever he went. We worked together. We went out together and we have meals together.

Talk louder. Lee cannot hear clearly sometimes. They have to talk louder.

Xiang: 他要大声讲话的，有时候。他也大声哦，因为他自己也好像听不到，他也大声哦。
Lee: 人家以为我们吵架。
Xiang: (笑) 是咯。

Xiang: He needs to talk louder. Sometimes he also talks louder as he does not seem to hear well.
Lee: People thought we were quarreling.
Xiang: Ya (laughed).

Keep busy. Their appointments for interview needed to be arranged after 9pm or during weekends because they babysit for their neighbors. Their times are occupied with babysitting. Lee is also actively involved in the housing committees too.

Lee: 忙【的時候】时间就会过得比较快咯。
Xiang: 是咯，我们时间很快过的。
Lee: 一个礼拜一个礼拜很快过的。一下拜五，一下拜五。
Interviewer: 嗯，时间不大够用这样。
Xiang: 哦，五点多六点起来，小孩子六点多就来咯。一直忙，忙到刚才咯，没有停过手的。

Lee: Time flies when we keep busy.
Xiang: Ya, our time goes really fast.

Lee: Time passes very fast weekly. In a swift, one Friday followed by another Friday.
Interviewer: Mh, not enough time.
Xiang: Oh, wake up at 5 something or 6 in the morning. The kids came around 6 something. Keep busy, until just now, non-stop.

They keep themselves busy after retirement and after their children left them.

4.7.4 Ways to Nurture the Relationship

Lee worked long hours. He was busy with his full time job as well as the part-time job. She was busy with taking care of children. They found their ways to maintain their relationship over the years through the following means:

Humor. Lee believes humor is an adornment of life.

Lee: 點綴啦，點綴生活一下咯，why take life so serious？

Lee: Adding adornment to daily life. Why taking life so seriously?

Lee often cracks jokes to make Xiang laugh. He also showed his humorous side during the interviews. Humor is part of their lives.

Lee: 一種情趣啦，幽默感。
Xiang: 他有幽默感，時常【逗】我笑。
Lee: 幽默感。
Xiang: 我就不會。他有幽默感時常【逗】我笑。我是看着他笑，他講我笑而已。

Lee: It's something fun, sense of humor.
Xiang: He always makes me laugh with his sense of humor.
Lee: Sense of humor.
Xiang: I have no sense of humor. He often makes me laugh with his sense of humor. I follow his way of humor. When he jokes, I only respond with laughter because I lack of sense of humor.

Sharing each other's burden. During the down moments, they share their problems to each other.

Lee: 我們會分析分享。

Xiang: 他遇到什么，他會跟我講的，會分享的。。。

Lee: We would analyze and share.
Xiang: When he encountered anything, he would share with me…

Sharing is sharing off each other's burden.

Lee: 要談的。
Xiang: 有什么東西我講給他聽，他有什么東西講給我聽。
Lee: 分忧啦。
Xiang: 現在還會有的。

Lee: Need to talk about it.
Xiang: I will tell him if I have anything and so does he.
Lee: Sharing off the burden together.
Xiang: Up to now, we still have sharing time.

Sharing takes place when they eat together

Interviewer: 這個默契是怎樣來?
Lee: 吃東西的時候。
Xiang: 吃東西也可以。

Interviewer: How did you cultivate this kind of understanding?
Lee: During eating time.
Xiang: It also occurs during eating time.

Sharing takes place when nobody is around

Xiang: 。。。通常也不會有第三者在，第三者在不方便。我妹妹在的時候，我們也不會講的。

Xiang: ... Usually there was absence of third party. It's not convenient to have third party. We did not talk when my younger sisters were around.

Sharing platform developed when they drove together due to traveling in Lee's job. Lee's job required him to travel. Thus, he needed to drive to different places. Xiang drove with him to share off his driving load.

Interviewer: 所以比較多這種【兩人在一起的】空間是在什麼時候開始的，記得嗎?
Xiang: 他跑啦，我看就是工作那邊調來調去的時候。Transfer job 的時候，我有時會跟他下去的嘛。這樣我們駕車去 outstation 的時候，兩個人輪

流駕這樣子在那邊談囉。這樣【我們在一起的時間就】慢慢建立起來囉。

Interviewer: So do you still remember when you started to have more [together time]?
Xiang: I think when he was assigned to go to different places in his work. During job transfer, sometimes I followed him. When we went outstation, we co-drove. That was the time we had sharing moment. That was how we developed slowly. That was how we built [our sharing time] gradually.

The contents of their sharing are things relevant to them.

Xiang: 談事情，談家務的事情嘛，遇到什么事情分享啊。

Xiang: We talk about incidents, household related things and anything we encountered.

Sharing platform developed after married.

Xiang: 遇到什么問題，我們兩個人談而已。
Interviewer: 這樣的一個互動方式是一向來都有的嗎?還是…結婚之前就有還是結婚過後?
Xiang: 結婚過後。結婚之前還沒有這樣子的。

Xiang: When we have any problem, two of us would talk about it .
Interviewer: Has you been having this kind of interaction throughout your relationship? Or… was it happened before married or after married?
Xiang: After married. This kind of interaction did not happen before married.

Strength from religion. Religion is their source of strength and guide when problems were out of hands.

Xiang: 有宗教的力量和教導啦。。。而且通常我們有什麼問題的時候，好像婚姻問題，孩子問題，家裡問題，教會一定會邀請【出去禱告】。我不是出去了咯，出去禱告。就是那種力量來維持咯
Lee: 交託，交託…有些東西不是你說要解決就解決的，it takes times 的。

Xiang: With the strength and religious teachings… Usually when we have problems, like marital problems, parenting problems, family problems you know, the church would extend invitation to pray over the problems. I will go out and pray. That's the strength to sustain.
Lee: Leave it to God. Leave it to God… There are many things, it takes times to resolve. You can't resolve things your way.

Strength from prayer.

Xiang: 一禱告了，經歷到那個力量化解那些東西，不同的喔，因為我經歷過，我知道咯。所以我勸我的女兒們，你們要禱告，就是這樣咯。

Xiang: After praying, I witnessed the strength to resolve problems, it is really different because I experienced it, I knew. So I urge my daughters to pray.

They also pray for each other,

Xiang: 我們有談天的嘛。小孩子走了之後我們就一起禱告讀聖經，除非我很疲倦了，我跟他講我睡覺了。叫他幫我禱告一下。如果沒有，我們會坐在這邊，那時候就講的了。講了之後，分享過後一起禱告。我們是這樣子來解決問題的囉。

Xiang: We do chit chatting. After our children left, we pray and read the Words of God together, unless I am really tired. I will tell him I want to sleep. I ask him to pray for me. Otherwise, we sit here and share together. After sharing, we will pray together. This is how we solve problems.

Understanding. Xiang felt the most important thing in marriage is mutual understanding.

Xiang: 最重要是他明白，他明白我，我明白他這樣子咯。

Xiang: The most important thing is he understands. He understands me, I understand him.

For Lee and Xiang, their lives embrace others. In short, the predominant strength that holds their marriage is other-centeredness. However, in terms of conflict, they adopted the following ways:

4.7.5 Handling Conflicts

Humor. When the tension is there, Lee uses humor.

Lee: 一切都是我的錯。
Xiang: 【當他這樣講的時候】，就沒有問題了咯，我也看開了。

Lee: It is all my fault.
Xiang: [When he says this], the problem becomes not an issue anymore. I let it go.

Religious teaching. At times, Lee's generosity and helpfulness create disagreement between them. For instance, Lee gave their daughter's bed to the social concern center without Xiang knowing it. Xiang felt annoyed. Xiang resolved her annoyance through focusing on her religious teaching.

> Xiang: 哈哈！有時候看開囉。哎呀！看在耶穌的份上，當着奉献啦。這樣子看開了囉。你 focus 在耶穌那邊，就看開了，沒有跟他 fight。
>
> Xiang: (laugh) Sometime letting go you know. Because of Jesus, I treated his donation as an offering. Then I just let it go. You focus on Jesus, then let go. Just take it easy, I did not fight over it with him.

Tolerance. Sometimes when Xiang was not happy, she would throw tantrum at Lee. He would try to tolerate by accommodating her tantrum.

> *Accommodative.*
>
> Interviewer: 她煩的時候會對你有影響嗎?
> Lee: 有時會發脾氣囉。
> Xiang: （哈哈哈）會呀，會發他脾氣。
> Interviewer: 你會怎樣處理？
> Xiang: 我不跟他講。
> Lee: 要忍一點，忍一點就沒事。
> Xiang: 我不跟他講，他就整晚沒有睡覺囉。
> Lee: 退讓一下啦，沒有計較。
> Xiang: 我煩你到整晚沒有睡覺。但是咧，我又不講，他又睡不著。看到我不開心，他睡不著。
> Lee: 找出原因嘛，解決了才可以睡覺囉。
> Xiang: 所以他一直問我囉。
>
> Interviewer: When she was in bad mood, how would that affect you?
> Lee: Yes, sometimes. She threw tantrum.
> Xiang: (laughed) Yes, threw tantrum at him.
> Interviewer: How would you deal with this?
> Xiang: I would not talk to him.
> Lee: Tolerate a bit and it would be okay.
> Xiang: I would not talk to him, then he would not be able to sleep.
> Lee: Give in a bit, not fussing over it.
> Xiang: I disturbed him until he could not sleep. But then I would not say anything. He couldn't sleep. He can't sleep when I was not happy.
> Lee: Find out the reason, resolve the problem, sleep afterwards.
> Xiang: So he would keep on asking me.

Keep quiet. Sometimes when Lee was being misunderstood, he would keep quiet. Keeping quiet could be a way of advancing his view.

> Lee: 有時越解釋越亂。
> Xiang: 對呀，所以他 keep quiet。
> Lee: 以退為進。我們這種孫子兵法。
>
> Lee: Sometimes the more you explain, the more complicated it could get.
> Xiang: Ya, so he keeps quiet.
> Lee: Withdrawal is a strategy for advancing. This is our Sun Tzu's art of war.

Keep quiet for the right timing to speak.

> Xiang: 有時候要看情形的，真的是。看他忙的時候，就不要講。或者是疲倦呀睡覺呀那些又不要講囉。受了委屈呀那些什么，要keep quiet囉。通常我們是一起禱告讀聖經的時候我才講囉。
>
> Xiang: It really depends on the situation. When he was busy, I would not tell him anything. Or when he was tired, sleepy, I also would not tell him anything. When I have grievances, I would keep quiet. During the time we pray and read the Scriptures together, I usually tell him my problems.

4.7.6 Summary

The researcher's experience with the couple. The interviews were arranged during weekends, or evening, after 9pm due to their work schedule. There were a few moments, when affection towards each other was mentioned, they just laughed away. They did not give a direct answer. For example, Xiang experienced a severe earthquake overseas. Lee was in Malaysia then. He cried when he watched the TV news, according to Xiang's sister. When interviewer asked him about his feeling towards his cry over the calamity, he replied, "Very scary. I have a few children over there." Expressing affectionate feelings towards each other was rarely found in the transcription. They listened to each other when they took turn to share their stories during the interviews.

Lee's love toward Xiang was demonstrated through doing the heavy work at home and helping out as much as he could, even though he worked full time and had a part-

time job. His tolerance toward Xiang when she needed to ventilate was another channel to show his love for her. Xiang's love toward Lee was her support to him, like talking to him and taking care of the children. Xiang is dependent on Lee. He is like her protector.

Their couple time together ascends along their marital life span. It includes sharing problems they face, discussion and talking about anything. It was built through co-driving when Lee's job required him to travel to different places to work. Their together time increased after Lee retired and their children left home. They could not remember they had couple time before they married. It was built after they married. The frequency ascended along their marriage life.

Summing up. Lee did not remember Xiang's birthday. He had to get reminder from the children. Their loves for each other did not transpire through fancy or material things. Their love for each other and the family was shown in what they do in daily life. Sharing time, eating together, being together, sense of humor and being patient with each other's temper, are factors that strengthened their marital bond. They ground the meaning of their marriage on other-centeredness. Both of them grew up in big families. Care for others is central to them. The location of their residential area depicted that – their siblings' homes surround their home. During retirement, they still involve in caring for the community. Despite how much they miss their children and the grandchildren, they still respect their children's decision to stay overseas.

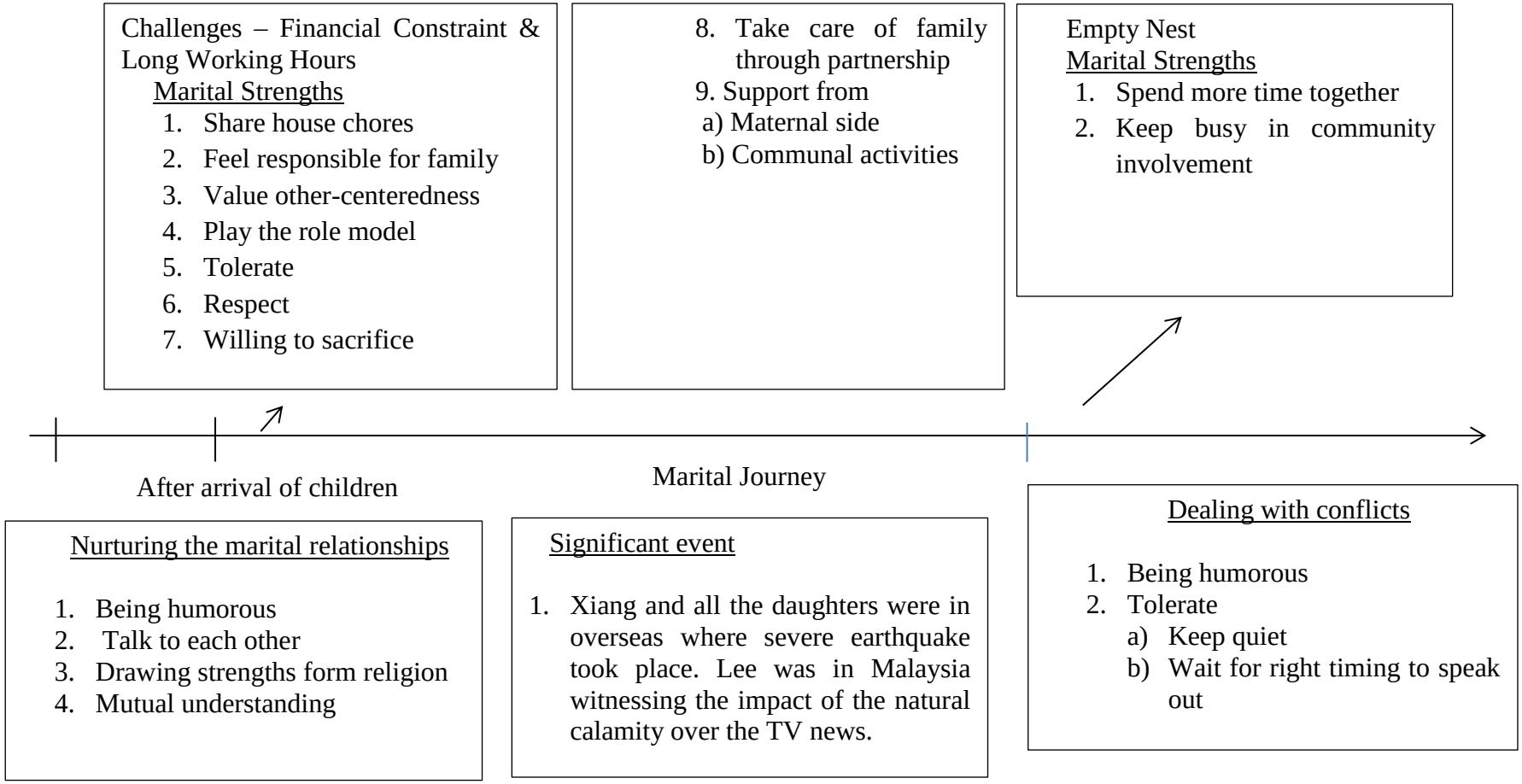

Figure 4.4: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 2

4.8 Description of Couple 3

4.8.1 Introduction

Sam was 81 in age and Mary was younger than her husband when the interviews were conducted at their home. Both Sam and Mary are healthy and strong. They have four children. The oldest child is a daughter, who resides in the Klang Valley. The sons, three of them, live in overseas. In the lounge and dining hall of their home, there are many pictures of their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. The family picture showed 27 members, representing four generations.

They can still drive. Sam is savvy with modern electronic gadgets. Mary cooks most of their meals. Both are still playing active roles in their church. Mary sings choir in the church. Sam holds position in the committee as he was assigned. In fact, they have never missed church service in their lives once. As they recalled the early years of their friendship, the social environment of the 1950s was vivid.

Conducive social environment. In the 1950s, the social environment then was friendly and community oriented. Sam described it as "the environment was very conducive to friendly relationship". Mary described it as "we never closed our house. We didn't close the door you know. My mother's friends came to our house as they liked. On Sunday, they all went to church. After church, they all came to our house. My mother cooked porridge, beef and pork. People came and ate you know."

How Sam and Mary met. In those days, people went out to meet friends in groups. Sam and Mary met when they accompanied their friends to meet their dates. When they met, their friends did not introduce them to each other, instead their friends were busy with their dates. Thus, they were left by themselves at the beach, where Mary and Sam swam separately. Sam got to "officially" introduce to Mary when his friend

brought him to her house. Before that, Sam thought Mary already had a boyfriend. However, he started to go after her once he found out she was still available. Mary disclosed that Sam was smart in finding opportunities to get close to her. He approached the town headman to seek Mary's mother's permission whether he could rent a room in their shop house downstairs. At that time, Mary and family were staying in the rooms upstairs. Her mother rented the room to him. They engaged after they had known each other for a year. They married in 1955, one year after their engagement. It was partly due to encouragement from Mary's mother. When they married, Mary was still in school. They were also deeply in love - their engagement picture depicted it, in which they were sitting very close to each other.

Marital decision

Mary and Sam fell in love. Mary was still in high school when her mother approved her engagement to Sam. According to Mary, her love towards Sam determined her decision to marry Sam.

> Mary: (laugh)… We just felt in love. We wanted to get married. That's it. Then my mother also encouraged us to get married.

Sam longed for a home. Sam's family broke up because of the Japanese occupation. He became an orphan when he was 10 year old. After his father passed away, he said he was "totally on my own." His mother died before his father. During the Japanese occupation, there was shortage of food in Singapore. He found his way from Singapore to Malaya, where he lived with his aunt. He worked in a printing press and attended night school. Other than his love towards Mary, his motivation to marry was his longing to have his own home. He "found the love in the home where she comes from."

> Sam: I never really had a home to go out in, because my parents died early. So whatever home I stayed with, they were relatives, like these aunties and all. I thought that was good to settle and to have [my] own home. And that the children would come along early, while I was still young, I could provide for them, as best as I know how. That was the upper most in my head. That's how we ended buying this house because of University Malaya. It was my hope that our children could further their education here.

Attractiveness. They appealed to each other's appearance. Sam called Mary as "the belle of the town." Mary's attractiveness was another irresistible reason that drew Sam to Mary.

> Sam: She was very attractive to me at that time. Oooooh, she was very attractive.

Mary

During the invasion of war in the 1941, the Japanese took away Mary's father. Her mother brought up three daughters on her own. Mary was the youngest daughter among the three daughters. Their son described the three as "beautiful eligible sisters." She was raised in a family where her mother and father "spoiled" the three daughters. They had maids in the house. She did not have to do any house work. She was an obedient child to her mother as she never broke curfew, even after married. She was active in school. She got to mix with some friends who loved music. She loved singing and she joined a group that occasionally performed for charity purposes. She drove and even rode motorbike at that time. She described that "people came to look" when she rode.

She teased Sam time to time during the interviews. That made Sam blush sometimes. She was assertive and expressive. She wore proper outfit during the interview sessions. Decoration of their house and the display of family pictures revealed her aesthetical ability. Also, according to Sam, "she attends to the garden more than he does." The following were some of her beliefs and attitudes she shared during the interview sessions.

Life is how you make out of it. When asked how she knew Sam was the right person for her, she said, "Life is how you make out of it." For instance, at the initial stage of their marriage, she had to learn doing house work from scratch.

> Mary: … We never learned to cook. Later… when you had your own family, you got to learn.

For Mary, marriage is not something you demand and it happens your way. It is what "you make out of it" by being sacrificial.

> Mary: [You] make out of it. How you want to save your family. How you love your family. Sacrifice for your family. Otherwise, it won't work (raise her voice)…

Give and take. Mary believes that for a marriage to last, it comprises of give and take.

> Mary: Give and take is what I say.

Adapting her roles out of love. When they started out their marital journey, Mary happily learned and adapted to the role of wife and soon after as a mother. She showered her love towards the family. Sam kept emphasizing her contributions to the family during the interviews.

> Mary: So I did the washing and ironing. All these you learned and you felt happy. You didn't think that I was working too hard. I was just happy doing these things every day.

Passing on love from previous generation. Mary learned to be a mother through her mother. She treated her daughter in-laws like how her mother treated her. When her daughter in-laws gave birth overseas, she did her best to take good care of them.

> Mary: I cooked for my daughter-in-law you know and to look after the baby, like bathe the baby. I did everything. One month… I [did it] exactly one month. All the children's [wives] I went to help them.
>
> Mary: But to us, because my mother did all that to me you know. She cooked for me. I learned that kind of special things [for confinement]. So I know how to cook [9]red wine. You know all these must eat with sesame oil and ginger all that.

Mary is a loving person. Her love for the family gives her the joy to do what she has been doing for the family. She said, "I do it from my heart". She is compassionate towards the unfortunate. She was expressive during the interview. She almost could remember all the pictures she showed. According to Sam, she was "not only bringing up the family, there were times where she made some money on her own clever ways" to help the children through their tertiary education.

Sam

Sam is a dancer. He was a dancing instructor. There was a picture showing the couple dancing on the floor gracefully. Whenever he had to go out of town, he always remembered to call Mary, according to the notes by one of their sons. Partying and drinking was very common in military service, but he was not fond of drinking. He would say, "I like to go home." Mary described him as "The men talk and drink you see, but he was the one who straight away came back to the house." The followings were some glimpses of Sam's beliefs:

Accommodative to others' thinking. For Sam, showing understanding and accommodating to other's thinking is important. Demanding is hazard to marriage.

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[9] Red wine is a special confinement food which the mother eats after giving birth. According to the Chinese cultural practice, on arrival of baby, mother and baby will be confined for a month. During this confinement month, the mother will eat special food to revitalize her health.

Sam: You can't deny people from thinking. God gives us thinking. Each of us may be thinking differently… Don't demand. The sad part is when demand is greater than accommodating to each other, that's how some marriages, I supposed, find their difficulty.

Sam: You cannot expect too much that people follow your way. You have to give in reasonably. Just like everybody is entitled to his thinking.

Trust in God. He believed that their marriage is under the leading hand of God.

Sam: Anyway, it's the Lord's leading hand ultimately. If [everything] narrows down to the Lord's leading hand - we have come this far and we are in the way… (pause). I can say we are happy because of what we are now. It has not been easy.

Sam: Believing in the Bible and complete trust just like the last few years. We've been, we've gone through physical medical needs. Things just come in the way, the Lord provided for us and then we went through the stage without fear or really worried over it. We were naturally but not in a way that, cause the faith to, if I may use the word, unshiftable. So it helped knowing that He is the provider. He is a faithful God to us. Don't expect. Things would work out.

Be guided by the Words. Sam believes the Words are the best guide, not by human expectations or human knowledge.

Sam: … Be guided by not what I know or you know, but by the Words. Sometimes it may be people demand or expect too much out of the relationship. I think some marriage got problem, because they expect the only way or the right way…

Appreciate family. Mary commented that "You know in army they had cheap drinks, they always went drinking. But he [did] not. It is in the person, in the character. He is very homely. If you asked him to go and he would not go. After work, he came home. He is a homely type. And then he appreciates family." Sam felt his homely character came from "may be the hardship I grew up those years, [which] taught me differently may be. I supposed that could be the reason." During war time, "nothing came cheap or free," Sam said.

4.8.2 After Getting Married – Communal Oriented

Paying respect to the elderly. After married, upholding the bonds with each other's family and relatives was important. Making trip to visit Sam's relative after married was more for paying respect to Sam's relatives, who did not show up during the wedding, than a treat for themselves. It was a way to show respect to the elderly.

> Mary: … I meant very happy, you know, happy. I didn't know (laugh). We enjoyed ourselves even though we went visit. We felt good. We didn't feel that we must go for honeymoon and all that. We didn't have… I didn't have that kind of thinking you know. [I] just went and met the old people. [It] was good already.
>
> Sam: That was like I supposed as combination of two things. Those days, it was all the relevant and respect to visit the old people and the other part was giving ourselves the holiday we want.
>
> Mary: Honeymoon was secondary. [We] must meet the old people first. Ya! That's our Chinese culture.

Respecting the elderly was highly valued more than fulfilling one's pleasure then. Keeping contact with parents was something happy to do. After married, they also tried to go back to visit Mary's mother in ways they can. Mary said, "any opportunity we could get, we would go back to visit my mother."

4.8.3 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Moving around with the Arrival of Children

Moving around. Sam was in the military service. His job required his mobility to move around frequently. Because of that, Mary never took up employment. Mary said, "I work for him". A few days after their marriage, Sam was posted to Ipoh. Mary moved with him. They shared a 3-room flat with a friend (a couple) and set up their first home. From Perak, Sam's military service took him to many other states.

Arrival of children. The first child came in the first year of their marriage. They were very happy. The second child came 15 months later, followed by two more sons born in 1964 and 1967.

Live within the means. Since the beginning of their marriage, Sam and Mary had learned to live out of what they have. They started their home by sharing a 3-room flat with a couple (who were their friends). In the early days, Mary could even cook different kinds of dishes out of different parts of a chicken, without wasting.

> Mary: You know [at the early stage of our marriage], I bought one chicken, [10]*kampong* chicken. Then I fried the meat with ginger. Bony ones I made soup with big onion, carrot and all. They called [it] ABC soup.
> Interviewer: (laughed)
> Mary: [In the early days, the poultry dealers] gave you [free] chicken intestine. I cooked them with pineapple. That's my dish. Every time, [it's] the same (laughed).
>
> Sam: ... We just accept what we could afford. We live the best we know how. And how we started with rented a room. Then we shared the apartment with others.

Maternal Support. Mary's mother had been a pivotal person in their marriage. She had been very supportive of this relationship. Mary's mother came from Singapore, as well as Sam. This could be the reason her mother felt close to Sam. Mary's mother cooked for her and took good care of her when she was in her confinement (it is the Chinese tradition that women were confined for a month after giving birth. During this month, the mother would be served nutritious food to revitalize her body. It was for the wellbeing of mother). When talking about Mary's mother, through their tone of voice and their eyes, they showed a lot of respect for her. With Sam's work nature and arrival of children, Mary received a lot of support from her mother.

> Mary: … So I moved back and stayed with my mother for one year. [When we] stayed with my mother, he came back to see us every weekends you know. So after one year, we moved back to Ipoh again…

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[10] *Kampong* is a Malay term, which means village. *Kampong* chickens mean chickens which are reared by residents in rural area. *Kampong* chickens differ from the chickens reared by manufacturers. *Kampong* chickens are believed to be tastier and healthier to consume as compared with chickens reared by manufacturers.

> Mary: My mother was very good in helping. We went in and stayed in her place for one year. We didn't pay her anything you know. We stayed with her for one year.

Appreciative of wife's contribution to family. Sam appreciates how Mary learned and made her way through from knowing nothing about doing housework. Many times when Sam was out of town, Mary had to cope by herself with situations which arose unexpectedly. He has not taken her contribution for granted.

> Sam: We managed along the way. She managed the family. Because of my work nature, she was often by herself. But somehow, as hard as it might have been for her because she used to live in a home [where] everything was more or less being taken cared for…
>
> Sam: She contributed otherwise how could we afford to send them to US and overseas.
>
> Sam: … We are not perfect. We are all human. As much as the man may be the anchor, the wife is actually more the anchor in a family.

Partnership. Sam did not expect to be served when he returned home from work. Mary and Sam worked as a team, doing whatever comes in the way. In fact, they both fought for things to do at home.

> Mary: … We were always "fighting" to do [the house chores]. I said "No, it is okay, I do". He said, "No, I do". You have to, everybody has to chip in. Not one sided. It won't work also.

When Sam was away, this was what Mary did:

> Mary: I sent children to school [and] fetched them back. And [then I did] the cooking. Sometimes in the middle of cooking, I had to switch off the gas and went to fetch the children home. [After bringing the children home], I continued the cooking. My life was like that. [There was an occasion], when he [was away for a few weeks [because of his training in training], the car's battery was low. I could not [ignite] the car. I had to ask [a man who happened to walk pass our house] to help pushing my car and to [get the car] started.

Committed in child rearing. In recalling the early stage of marriage, with the arrival of children, Mary described "the children coming along very closely, the first two were 15 months apart." When asked about how she felt during those days when

Sam was away and the children were small, she showed that she was into her caring role that nothing else mattered. This was what she said,

> Mary: … We were also busy with the baby you know. So close you know [one after another]. We were also very busy with them. [How do we have the space] to think of other things right?

Family first. In thinking along with how Mary grew up as an easy person, Sam considered Mary had contributed a lot over the years. She did not earn salary or retirement fund in what she had been contributing to the family. Besides her sacrifices, Sam also showed how he prioritized the children in making choices. For instance, they missed an investment opportunity investment to buy a shop-house because Sam's wanted to buy a house. He wanted the children to enjoy a home-like environment. The children's wellbeing had always been their priority. Sam indicated that:

> Sam: We don't see ourselves as priority first. The priority is with the family. That's' how we made it.

> Sam: People live their lives in different ways. She has been a home maker all these years. And she contributed herself to the family where even though she has never worked, salary job for her whole life time, it's her contribution to her family.

> ***Children were the priority.***

> Sam: We have children as our priority in our mind.
> Interviewer: ok.
> Sam: We gave them the best that we could afford. It wasn't easy, but somehow we managed. With a few hundred dollars salary that I earned, we managed. It was not easy…

4.8.4 Challenge 2 – Strengths to Cope with High Cost of Education

Children got no acceptance to local university. When their children were in tertiary education, they could not get acceptance to local university, despite of outstanding results. The boys had to go overseas to get their tertiary education. The financial constraint was strenuous during that period of time.

Active social networking. Through their pictures from the wedding anniversaries, exchange of sincere letters from friends and relatives, they keep contacts with friends, including friends they know since young. In fact they still keep in touch with the pastor who officiated at their wedding and the same pastor came to their Golden Wedding Anniversary celebration in 2005. Sam and Mary have been active in the community.

Wife's financial contribution. During the time of financial need, Mary had a good friend who was the jewelry wholesale. She could get jewelries at cheaper prices. She managed to get customers to come to their house to buy from her.

> Mary: … I got this good friend who did wholesale. She sold various kinds of jewelries. So I helped to sell jewelries and made some money.
>
> Mary: People will come to my house to see. Because it was from wholesaler, the prices were cheaper. So they all came and got it from me. It helped a lot (laughed). Pocket money too.
>
> Mary: Actually we have to help each other… think of thing we can do, you know.

Reciprocal contribution from children. They were very proud of their children when they talked about how their children made their way through tertiary education overseas. Their children found part-time jobs to help lessen the financial stress.

Responsible children

> Sam: … the younger boys or even the older boy, they also took up part-time job you see. The youngest boy even found it lucrative to work [early morning] during wintertime. He could even save for his world trip after his schooling…
>
> Mary: [The oldest son got] scholarship to study in America. The other two have to… but my children are very good children. They don't spend like, wah! What we gave them, they just managed. And then they went and did… like [the second son] went to do the bakery early morning and earned some money.

> Mary: We are very thankful to God you know. My children behave very well. They are very good children.
>
> Sam: They know how to take care of themselves. Live within means.

4.8.5 Ways to Nurture the Relationship

Talk and joke to each other. Sam and Mary nurture their marital relationship through simple things in life. According to Mary, "Actually [I find] one thing very good is we always talk and we can joke… We talk about things and we laugh". Mary described the moments they talk to each other as:

> Mary: … When we drove, we came across or saw something, we would laugh you know, that kind, not so serious. We are quite relaxed to each other. [We are] quite friend with each other also.

Husband's expressiveness in showing affection. Sam is natural in expressing his affection towards his wife. Mary elaborated his affection as:

> Mary: He always gives me beautiful cards you know. I can show you. He gives me beautiful cards during mother's day, birthday, anniversary, without fail (laughed happily).
>
> Mary: During our son's silver anniversary and our golden anniversary [which took place] at the same time, my husband sang to me at the anniversary.

Expression of love and affection between Sam and Mary was natural. While talking about their strengths to accommodate, to be faithful, to be creative, to put family first, to sacrifice, they were aware that they were not conflict-free relationship.

4.8.6 Handling Conflicts

Sam called conflict as different in opinions. He called arguments as opinions. The underlying beliefs of conflict were to listen first and be open, to think over it, sleep over it and to absorb it. Here are some glimpses of how they deal with conflicts.

Listen first and be open. When they differed in opinions, they adopt the method of listening first and being open about it

> Sam: Just listen, not antagonize too much (laughed). Next morning, I think we sleep over it. We think to ourselves and then we just absorb it.
>
> Mary: So just listen. Listen to see whether he is right or not. If not right, you can [express you opinions].
>
> Sam: There might be some good aspects in reasoning in her mind that cannot come cross my mind. Maybe some.

Compromising. After listening to the other party, adapt, adopt and compromise were some of the ways to deal with differences.

> Sam: Adapt, adopt the situation as you see a way of compromising.

Keep quiet. Keeping quiet was another way to deal with the tension of conflict.

> Mary: Ya, it's just different in details. Sometimes I will just keep quiet (laugh).

No argument in front of children. No argument in front of the children has been the rule they followed.

> Mary: … we don't argue in front of the children. [It serves nothing]. We never argue in front of the children. Anything we want to say, we say it privately later.
>
> Sam: Truthfully, I think, in that sense I think we learn to behave. I don't think we ever had disagreement spoken openly in the presence of the children.

When dealing with conflicts, Sam and Mary could not think of any major conflict that had ever happened in their marriage.

4.8.7 Summary

The researcher's experience with the couple. Sam was always the one who answered the door during the home visit. They were accommodative to recording. The

atmosphere was lively when listening to their sharing. During the interview sessions, there were moments Sam was in tears when sharing about the children and the challenges they went through. They helped each other to recall incidences. There were times, when Mary corrected Sam, he gently responded.

Expression of love and affection were apparent in their marriage. In fact, they were the oldest couple and yet they were the first couple who openly talked about their affection towards each other. They shared a lot moments together. They talked and joked about anything around them. Mary said, "Till now, we are still very much in love". In the eyes of others, they look like they are friends.

To use a metaphor to describe their marriage, a picture of a fruitful tree could depict their relationship, in which a bountiful of fruits has grown. From their tones of voice and their expression, they are happy and feel proud of their relationship, children and family as a whole.

Summing up. Year 2015 culminates 60 years of their marriage. When recalling back, gratitude filled the hearts of Sam and Mary. They expressed their contentment as:

> Sam: To say we have expectations is not quite true because I didn't have any. I just expect that I want them to be happy. And it turned out to be more than that. How to say, we never thought of money up front. Yet, they know there were times when they contributed. Like willingly, without asking, without any hint, their mother needed medical treatment in the past two years, they voluntarily send their contributions… It's a good feeling even if you don't need, yet they know as children, they want to contribute. I think that's more than what we want to expect or can expect of a happy family. That made us very proud of them.
>
> Mary: I am very blessed. I am very very blessed. I can have anything if I buy. If anything I want to eat, I can eat. Unlike [some] people, grow old… I have this house bless for us. I [am not] short of anything actually. God is so good actually. We are so blessed. I never feel that I'm short of [anything] compared with people. I am very contented you see. A good husband, good children that is most important.

Sam still gives Mary beautiful cards to express his affection towards her. Sam still kisses her every morning. They express love through cards, as well as many other things in their daily life. Sam recognizes Mary's roles in their marriage. A card was presented to Mary by Sam during their Golden Wedding Anniversary (refer to Appendix H). It was written as:

> My dearest D,
>
> When we got married, I know we both wanted more than anything to live "happily ever after."
>
> But that kind of joy and closeness doesn't come from just wishing.
>
> It comes from being together every day, though good times and bad and everything in between.
>
> It comes from proving your love over and over, being there for each other, and developing a bond of trust that cannot be broken.
>
> As my wife, you have gone the extra mile more times than one, you're my wife, friend and soul mate.
>
> And you've made me believe that we will indeed live "happily ever after".
>
> With all my love

This was another angle about them, from their youngest son:

> To Mum, the greatest achievement in her chosen life "career" is Dad. Dad is the greatest husband because of Mum… and vice versa. These two go together so well and make each other achieve what they could never have been able to on their own. Mum and Dad are the greatest because of each other. And that's why we are so very proud of them.

They valued the important occasions in their lives together. For instance, Sam celebrated his 80th birthday in August 2013 in Melbourne. The whole family, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, all were present for the occasion which was held

in the home of his youngest son. Some friends, formerly from Malaysia now residents in Australia, also attended the party.

The meaning of their marriage is - happiness is how you make out of it. They make happiness out of these: being receptive to what comes along in life, having the capacity to overlook the unpleasant sides, doing the right things and being reverent to God.

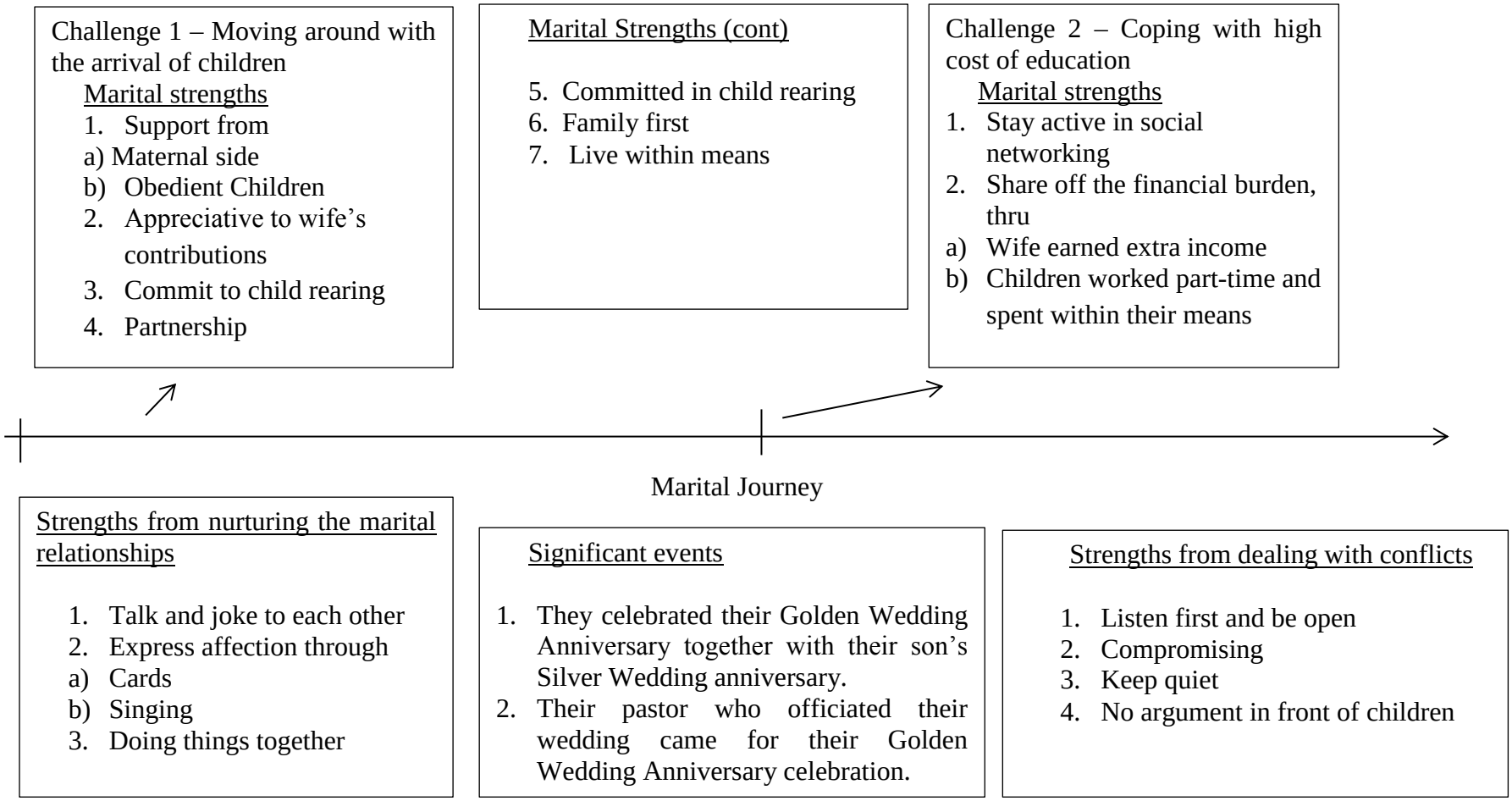

Figure 4.5: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 3

4.9 Description of Couple 4

4.9.1 Introduction

David was born in 1946. He grew up in the rural area. Sarah was born in 1943. She grew up in the urban area. He was Chinese educated and she was English educated. Though being English educated, she was brought up in Chinese values laden family. In 1970, they met in a school setting, where Sarah had been teaching there for a few years and David came in as teacher trainee. At first, they were not along the path to marriage. However, they found themselves having many common topics to talk and discuss.

Their friendship developed along the way. They have many common interests, despite of their difference in educational backgrounds. David described their common interest as "She likes to read; I love to read. Even though she was totally English educated, but then she understands Mandarin. So she likes those old Chinese songs, [very] old Chinese songs." They have good conversations. They are happy with each other. They enjoy each other's company. They really feel comfortable with each other's presence. Their relationship developed naturally. David rented a place to stay near Sarah's home. He followed Sarah home with his motorbike after work. She used to tell her students, "He was chasing me from behind." When it was a suitable time to meet the parents, Sarah brought David home to meet her family.

During their courtship time, Sarah's mother tried to break off their relationship. Her mother did not like the idea that Sarah was often pillion riding on David's motorbike. It was too dangerous, according to Sarah's mother. Then Sarah got a car. It was a Morris Minor then. Her mother did not like the idea that David was riding in her car. They managed to get around it by taking a taxi instead. Nevertheless, Sarah's mother tried to introduce a few men to Sarah, with the intention that Sarah would be distracted from her relationship from David. However, all attempts to break off their relationship were

futile. Their relationship grew stronger instead. At one point of time, David wrote a Chinese letter to Sarah's mother politely revealing his love towards Sarah. Then she realized she could not break them off. She had to accept it.

Before they married, David was assigned to work in the rural area. They wrote to each other every day. He came back every weekend to meet Sarah, even though the trip from the rural area into the city took more than 5 hours including a few transfers onto ferries and taxis.

In 1971, they married. They had both church ceremony and traditional Chinese marriage ceremony. The Chinese ceremony comprised of inviting the friends and relatives for a feast. Since David and Sarah came from different areas, the Chinese ceremony should be held in the man's side first, followed by the woman's. But then for practical reasons, most friends and relatives of David and Sarah were from urban area. Thus, David decided to have traditional Chinese wedding in the urban area first and followed by rural area. But his father was against it. He even refused to attend the wedding in the urban area. David went ahead with his plan. His father turned up at the wedding in the urban area eventually. After the ceremonies, they went to Cameron Highland for their honeymoon. This was what they did during the honeymoon, "we walked around. Then we spent time together."

Sarah

Sarah's father passed away when she was still a baby. He was killed by the communists during the Japanese occupation. She was the only daughter from her mother's first marriage. She was raised by her grandmother for the first few years of her life. Sarah was very close to her grandmother. She always trusted Sarah's ability to do things on her own. Sarah called herself "a very happy child" when recalling her

childhood. She was "very happy, studying, happy, doing all the things in the house." She helped a lot in house chores since young. She was also the big sister for the siblings from her mother's second marriage. She helped financially when her sisters went overseas to study. She loved listening to the martial arts story on air. She was a working woman and she was a university graduate. David depended on her when driving in the city. In fact, he still is.

Living in the center of the city, Sarah experienced May 13 in 1969. She described the incident as:

> Sarah: … There were some gangsters around. They went and blocked up all the entrances to our area. Blocked up. And at night, they really went around, keeping an eye on the whole area. You can't imagine that they would do such a thing. These were all young men you know. Hah! They just went and patrolled the whole area like they were policemen. And then, after that, curfew came. We had no fresh food. No fresh veggies. We went to the small shop, which was a few rows away from our house and bought, everybody grabbed whatever there was, all tinned food. They weren't so fresh at that time. And one of my sisters also had rashes. So we ate up everything.
>
> Sarah: It was about a week…a week… a week. And we were all, all of us had to stay in the house. We were so scared. They [shot] even if you were in the garden.

It was an impactful incident for Sarah. She described it as "I was thinking about the conditions in Malaysia might not change, if it would be another May 13 was happened. At least one person will carry and take the children and run. That was in my mind all the time." May 13 affected the number of children they wanted to have and their family migration decision.

David

David was the 4th child among the 12 children in his family. He grew up in a huge tea plantation in Cameron Highlands. He described his childhood as "very playful." He was

very close to nature. After school, he “went to the hill, tracking birds, catching insects, fishing, swimming, all sorts of things.” He loved to read martial arts story books.

His father was a land owner, quite an influential person in that area. His mother taught in a private school. Life was plentiful when they were in the tea plantation. David often brought left over vegetables to give out to his school teachers. The vegetables came from the farmers who owed his father money. When he was a boy, his father gave him 3 dollars per day to buy food for ten people. He could manage to feed everybody with 3 dollars per day, in addition his 20 cents martial arts story book. When he was caught using 20 cents to buy story book, his father punished him by giving the task to his brother. But nobody could use 3 dollars to feed ten people per day.

His family financial situation changed drastically when his father married a second wife. David was in high school that time. His father sold the tea plantation and invested in rubber. They moved to the village where his father’s second wife came from. But David tried to stop him, as he learned from school that synthetic rubber was emerging in the market. Synthetic rubber would replace rubber. Its value would drop. His father refused to listen. Consequently, they came from plentiful to “we eat porridge, a very dilute the porridge. We got no money to buy vegetable. So we just put some salt in it. We ate like that we drank you know. I went through a lot during that time.”

During the difficult times, he was thinking of quitting school to sell ice cream to support his family. But then he came across a teacher in standard 6, who told him, “You are still very young. You still don’t know what’s happening. Don’t give up.” With his teacher’s encouraging words, David continued high school. He had no money to go to university, so he became temporary teacher. He was “the only one making some

money" then. Half of what he earned went to support his family. Then he went for further education in the teacher's training college.

Initial stage of marriage. David was waiting for his posting after married. He did not want to stay in the room with Sarah's family. Then David was assigned to teach in the rural area. Sarah remained in the city. David wanted to get rid of the posting by pursuing high education in university. But Sarah's mother was against the idea. Her mother was afraid that David might meet someone else if he pursued higher education in the university. When they planned to pursue David's higher education, Sarah was posted to rural area where David was.

During that time, they had their first baby when Sarah was assigned to work in rural area. Sarah's mother did not allow them to take their baby to rural area because the living conditions were bad. Sarah agreed with her mother. David was angry that he could not decide for himself. However, they left their first baby to Sarah's cousin sister, who took care of their baby. When the second baby came along after nine months, David insisted that all children came to stay together.

Before Sarah went to stay with David in the rural area, there was a severe flood. They lost contact with each other. This was how they felt about it:

> David: No email, no nothing. So [the army officer] took me to see one of the guys who was in charge of the station. Then he put a call through for me. Then I got a call to her. Otherwise, for one whole week, we used to write to each other almost every day you see. So for one whole week, there was no communication, terrible!
>
> Sarah: Ha ha ha…there was actually a terrible thing, because you missed each other, and then you were wondering what happened you know. Because he was going to a strange place.

4.9.2 Challenge 1 – Strengths for Dealing with Mother in-Law

Since Sarah was the only daughter from her mother's first marriage. Her mother was dependent on her. Sarah loved her mother very much. Her mother somehow was not happy with all the sons-in-law. Sarah felt her mother "always had the idea that all the wives must control the husbands." But Sarah disagreed with her mother's belief. The challenge David and Sarah had to deal with was Sarah's mother's negative and hurtful comments against David, before and after Sarah's step father passed away. They went through the following stages:

Negative comments from mother in-law. According to Sarah, she happily did the house chores. She would rather work in the kitchen by herself. She was alright with her husband pursuing his hobbies. However, from her mother's perspective, she could not bear to see her daughter shouldered all house chores by herself. Thus, the mother-in-law complained about David.

> David: … The words spread to the sisters, spread to the aunties, and to the cousins and all. They all have [the impression] that David was very lazy.
>
> David: … what happened was, when my two boys were very young, I took them out to exercise in the evening. Because then, we stayed near to the golf course there in Sentul. So I would take the two boys, I looked after them while she cooked. So the mother from next door will look at her, "oh, you bully my daughter."

Torn between husband and mother. Torn between her love towards her mother and her husband, there was no overnight solution to deal with the in-laws. It was the willingness to work through the process step by step.

> Sarah: I just couldn't take it into my heart. Even until so long after our marriage, I still didn't hurt her. And I didn't want to hurt my husband.

Care for others above own self. Sarah usually dealt with the pain caught between her mother and her husband herself.

> Sarah: I didn't want to let them know that my mother was hurting me as well as him. I opened the back gate and just walked around my garden and talked to my papaya trees and all that… And let go. Let go and I was very happy after that. He didn't know what was happening.

Initial process. At the initial stage, Sarah was hurt and defensive when David talked about her mother. Her reaction made David "more angry."

> David: Earlier on, she used to defend her mother.
> Sarah: I used to defend my mother.
> David: When she defended her mother, I got angrier.
> Sarah: Mh…

Establishing a sharing platform. David extended the invitation to establish the platform to talk about it slowly. Sarah agreed.

> David: … So then we talk about it. It is better we talk about it, instead of, finally that sort of became the problem between us you know. So we talk about it.

Allowance for ventilation. When David approached Sarah with his unhappiness towards her mother, Sarah would let him express his feelings.

> Sarah: But sometimes, I used to, I knew his mood. And I knew what was behind it. So I always tried to soften it.
> I: What did you do to soften it?
> Sarah: Actually, I just say, go ahead and tell me what happened.

Discussion on the pros and cons. When Sarah's mother gave suggestions on what to do, they discussed the pros and cons before they decided.

> Sarah: We always talk. We discuss the pros and cons.

Talk about it in different contexts. Sarah's mother stayed with them for 28 years. Sometimes, when they needed to ventilate, they talked in different contexts by taking a drive.

> David: We walked out. Some time we take a drive somewhere.

Discernment to know the difference. Although Sarah was instilled with the ideas that a wife should control the husband, it is something she did not want to do to her husband. Particularly, witnessing how her mother controlled her step-father.

> Sarah: And she always refused to let him do this, refused to let him do that and I was very unhappy about the whole situation you know. But I never told her you know. But in my own marriage, I do not want to do that to my own husband.

Show respect to the mother. Living with Sarah's mother for 28 years, despite the challenges they faced, they still show respect to the elderly.

> David: So for me, whatever I thought, because she was wife's mother. At first, I accepted her like my own mother. I treated her just like my own mother. So I respected her. I do whatever I can for her. Like as I told you, she liked to watch her movies, I would borrow the movies for her. She liked the books. She told me there were certain types of books. I went to bookshop. I bought it and kept it in her room. I did whatever I could as a son in-law.

Their respectfulness to the mother was further illustrated in the following:

> David: So you see for yourself, even today, can you name 28 years we stay together, have I done a single thing purposely to annoy her, to hurt her? I had done nothing.
> Sarah: Ya, he allowed me to give her whatever food. So whenever I bought fish, I would cut it into two pieces. Half was for her, the better half…
> I: Mh…
> Sarah: And my husband never complained.
> I: Ok
> Sarah: We both would eat the other half. So, we let her eat. To me, feeding an old lady was very important.

Respect for elderly. David was aware that when he was angry, words came out form his mouth could be hurting. He tried to put a stop to that.

> David: Sometimes she really irritated me. I still didn't use any strong words against her.

Let go. After they talked and discussed about it, they learn to let go.

> Sarah: So we discussed it and then we let go. Both of us, we have to let go. If we didn't let go, it would have a blown. He would have blown his head off and I would have blown my head off.

Prayer. When caught between mother and husband, Sarah did not want to hurt both. Prayer was where she found relief.

> Sarah: And I had a prayer to God and I said, please let this settle down. So I came back very happy.

Accepting her primary role as a wife, not a daughter. After few years of marriage, through their mutual continuous effort to create the platform to talk through, Sarah realized, "I think I became more mature. I grew up. I had to grow up because I cannot be all the time on my mother's side. To me, he is the most important person in my life."

Still different views on mother in-law. Their perceptions towards Sarah's mother differ. Sarah mentioned about her mother packed chicken drumsticks for David during the weekends he came back from the rural area, where he used to teach. Sarah felt her mother did it quite often, but then David felt it was just once in a while. Sarah did not insist on her view. She looked down. They dropped the topic and talked about something else.

They were able to find ways to work out the tension with the mother in-law, but then the experience with the mother in-law could still be different. Dealing with mother in-law before and after marriage, and staying together with her for 28 years were the challenges they had to deal with in their marriage. It was a long process of patient endurance and love. The focus of their coping leaned towards considering how others feel rather than own feeling. The lesson they learned was they would not stay with their children in the same household. They also encourage their children to stay with the parents- in-law close by, but not together.

4.9.3 Challenge 2 – Strengths for Empty Nest

Empty nest experience. David and Sarah have two sons. Due to the government policies then, feeling concerned with their children's education and future, they planned to migrate overseas. It was an exciting experience for them to leave the country at first. But then they realized it was not something they liked in long term. They had to return to homeland and left both of their sons overseas. It was a heart breaking experience for all of them. They also disclosed that their sons were having hard feeling when giving up their Malaysian citizenship. The empty nest experience was intense when both of their sons were in Australia continuing their studies. It was a terrible experience missing their sons.

> David: Two left at the same time, very difficult

> David: So when they left, the first year was terrible.
> Sarah: Ah, first year was the most difficult.

Make more visits. By allowing the children to come back every year and meet in the middle of the year had helped the transition and adjustment.

> David: We allowed them to come home every year.
> David: So in the middle of the year
> Sarah: We might go over.

Enjoy their time together. When their children were not around, it actually created more time for them to share and to enjoy being together.

> David: Actually we spend a lot more time together. We discuss about what we read. So when she reads a nice book, she will tell me stories.
> Sarah: … He is a very wide reader. He will tell me a lot of stories. Even now he still tells me stories. And he keeps me going because I love to listen to stories.

Spiritual growth. When their children were not around, they have more time to do what they enjoy and to do what they had neglected when they were young. Spiritual growth is one of the areas they revisit.

> David: We… we have to prepare for the spiritual life.
> Sarah: Ah, yes.
> David: Because in the past I think we neglected it.
> Sarah: Ya.. we were. Ya we neglected our spiritual life. So now, we find it very interesting to sit down and to listen, and then sometimes we lie down here [while] we listen to the Bible.

For David and Sarah, the stage of empty nest was not filled with emptiness, though separation from their children was tough. They still taught after retiring as they enjoyed teaching. They spend time exercising. They read. They watch movies and listen to music together. They have time to socialize, even with those friends who had lost touch, and passing knowledge to the young through the Tai Chi classes.

4.9.4 Handling Conflicts

Love for their children. David and Sarah love their children very much. The pivotal point for them to stay cool during conflictual tension was their children.

> Sarah: Because we love our boys very much (tone became very low)… So we don't want to cause any hurts on our sons.

They settled their disagreement behind scenes.

> Sarah: We never, actually, we tried as far as possible, not to quarrel in front of the sons (pause). Because I think it hurts them a lot.

Love for each other. Their love for each other also served as a buffer to the small frictions in daily life.

> Sarah: I think it is the love we share. Our love ah, is very deep. It's still very deep… we enjoy each other's company, both of us.
> David: We have a lot of interests in common.
> Sarah: We just forget about all the other things.

Cold war. They adopted cold war as their way to buffer the tension. During cold war, they did not talk to each other and did not touch each other. They faced the other side when they slept.

> Sarah: I faced the other side, he faced the other side. So we won't speak. The whole night I won't speak to him. He won't lay his hand on me. He won't touch me. So, but then in the morning, we piped down already, both of us.

Reflection time. Although they did not talk to each other during cold war, they actually processed and thought through the issues they were dealing with.

> David: You thought about the whole thing huh…
> Sarah: Yes, then we thought about it. So, sometimes he was wrong, sometimes I was wrong. So we just forgot about the whole thing.
> I: Ok…
> Sarah: And then we got up normal people, happy happy ya.

Cool off. Cold war also served the purpose of cooling off and reflection, rather than intensifying tension.

> Sarah: Yes, to cool off. It's very important. You had to have that period to really pipe down and thought about what you were arguing about. What you were discussing; what you were not happy with the other party you know. You can just say, "I am going to slam the door and walk out of the house, one party or the other." That would really hurt the marriage. Our marriage has been, over the years, we have been like that.

Refrain from hurting words. During the cold war time, they refrained themselves from using hurting words to each other. They knew once they spelled wrong words, it would not be reversible.

> David: We got angry, cold war, but we refrained from using nasty languages that can really hurt.

Let things be. They still carried out daily routine during their cold war.

> Sarah: I just went and did my reading, or I would do my cooking, and I taught my boys, talked to the boys, and things worked out fine.

Accommodative. When differences cannot be resolved happily, they accommodate the differences.

> David: … Like buying car, the first thing she would say was, why you need to buy another car? After 5 years still okay, she said. I mean to a lady, I don't know how you all think.
> I: (smile)
> David: But most ladies, they would say, a car is for transport, [which] can take me to A to B points. So I had to tell her, to a man, the car is different thing. It may not only mean a transport. I had to explain to her. We, I normally used my car not over 6 years. About 5-6 years when the resale value was still very good, I just traded in and got a new one. Men usually love car, I would say. So eventually she stopped telling me not to change. Then I would look for a car. Then I would say, "you go and choose the color."

Sarah was not totally happy about the decision to change the car. She said, "He thought I would be happy but actually I was not happy with the changing." She was laughing when she made this remark. Then she started counting the cars they had changed over the years. Then she agreed they were good cars.

No hard against hard. Their children had once made a comment that the mother "gives in a lot" to the father. This was what they feel about "give in" –

> David: I think, my son, two days ago, he asked me, why your relationship seemed to be one sided (laughed), not normal. So I asked him, what is not normal?
> Interviewer: (Smiled)
> David: So then he talked over the phone, he told me, mummy seems to be giving in all the time.
> Interviewer: Okay…
> David: It's true because I have a very bad temper, very nasty bad temper. When it comes to argument or things like that, finally, she will sort of give in.
> Interviewer: Ok
> David: But then we will settle it after that.
> Sarah: On our own, we always settled behind the scene, so our sons never saw all these.
> David: They didn't see the fact.
> Sarah: Hah.
> David: Probably they are thinking that I bully her all the time.
> Sarah: But actually it is not [the case].
> David: So I told him huh, if both hard against hard, you were going to crash. So one side normally had to sort of (finding words)…walk away.

For them, giving in is for avoiding hard against hard. It could also serve as a cushion during the tense moment.

Being generous. Sarah is generous when they experience disagreements at times. When she tried to make David happy, "sometime he would give me a cold shoulder." She was usually the one who tried to make David happy after unpleasant experience. This was what she would do:

> Sarah: Normally yes. I was the one who tried to make him happy. Because I still feel that we are couple. And we didn't want to show anything in front of our children or my mother. Slowly we made up. After that we were happy. We are very happy. Actually 90% of the time, we are pretty happy couple and family with my two boys. And with my mother, we tried la to make her happy also.

Compromise by considering spouse's perspective and other related factors. When resolving differences, David and Sarah would try to compromise by taking in spouse's perspective before they came to a common ground.

> David: Mostly compromise.
> Sarah: We come to compromise
> I: Both?
> Sarah: Mid way. We meet mid-way.

For example, David liked his children to go to Chinese school, but Sarah preferred the children went to the government school. This was because she was concerned that "she might have problem communicating with [the children]." Despite of all the good reasons to attend Chinese school, David would take Sarah's perspectives into consideration. He would try to weight the choices they had and then compromised.

> David: I saw her point that she was scared that their thinking process might be different, from purely Chinese school to National school. So the thinking process might be different. She might not be able to communicate with them too well. She also scared that they might be in the disadvantageous as far as the English was concerned. And then, there were other factors. I could supervise them any time I want, because [the government school] was just next [to where I taught].

I: What about Sarah at that time?
Sarah: Actually I thought, my husband is bilingual. So he could always manage to supervise them. Whereas, I as English educated and Malay, I could only teach them things in English. He could make them sit down doing Math and English and all the other subjects in English because he also has the English base. So it would be so much easier. Then the whole family will be in English. To me, that was what I… but now, I do regret that we didn't send them to the Chinese school. We should have sent them to a good Chinese school.

Even after compromising, there was no guarantee the decision would be a perfect decision. They lived with the decision they made in the early days. When they talked about this, their tone sounded that they regretted for sending the children to government school. It did not appear that they were blaming each other over the decision they made early on.

Love for each other and for the family. In daily life, small little things, like ways of driving and where to put books after reading, could make a couple to fight. Small little frictions in daily life could accumulate and it could negatively impact the relationship. After more than 40 years of marriage, small little things in daily life, though causing discomfort here and there, it did not tear David and Sarah apart. It is the love they have for each other and the love for the family which keep their relationship lasting.

I: What are some things that buffer all these small frictions?
(Silent)
Sarah: I think it is the love we share. Our love is very deep. It's still very deep. We enjoy each other's company.
David: We have a lot of interests in common.
Sarah: We just forget about all the other things.
David: And then we are very happy with our children. We are very happy with our grandchildren.

4.9.5 Challenge 3 – Strengths for Dealing with Opposite Sex Relationship outside Marriage

Making friends with opposite sex after married. Meeting someone opposite sex was unavoidable when the circle of friend was wide. One of David's favorite

hobbies was Tai Chi. He had a lot of opportunities traveling with his reputable teacher at one point of time. He got exposure to meeting people who were younger and of the opposite sex.

> David: When I was with my teacher, the Tai Chi old man, I used to travel with him. There were a lot of young students…

How did David deal with friends from opposite sex? Here are some of his precautions.

Keeping a distance

> David: Don't sort of get too close. Don't allow myself to get into that situation. I mean one leads to the other and more and more. You have to refrain.

> David: But, you have to keep a distance. Just be friend, that's it. No further. If you get into a deeper one, you will get deeper and deeper.

Being aware of own vulnerability

> David: I mean men generally, I won't say all men, including myself, can be wayward if you are not careful.

Being aware of own status

> David: I always remind myself that I have a family. I have a happy family.

Treasure the marital relationship

> David: I have a wife who loves me very much. I cannot betray her.

Turn negative experience to positive motivation

> David: Past influence, I think, the fact that my father had a second wife, and then we all suffered so much. And then I saw my mother suffered so much. I will never want to harm my presence. My children will suffer. My wife will suffer. That is very strong. I will never do that sort of thing. I never do. Because throughout my life, I told her I never do such thing.

Religious teaching

David: Religiously, the Bible says, there will be consequences up there.

Being realistic

David: Earlier on you might find it appealing, but after some time, you might find that you know, they are always more attractive than your wife, because you are not staying together. When stay together, very easily affecting [each other]. When staying apart, you might find everything is nicer, but it may not be true. Until you enter the relationship, then you became, "Oh! It is not what I want."

Bonding with his wife

David: For my wife, I cannot leave her for even one day. So during those times I used to join my teacher for Tai Chi, he asked me to go outstation with him. Even for one or two days, I didn't like to go. I didn't like to go because people were dying to go with him because he enjoyed such a good reputation. So to go with him, traveling around to all the centers, it is such a big thing you know. You got to appear in the papers. Snap photograph with him. I am not interested because my place, my home, my sons, and my wife you know. So I went with him once or twice, a few times very reluctantly.

4.9.6 Ways to Nurture the Relationship

Love for the Children. David talked about their children incessantly over the interviews. He missed his children very much. He even apologized that he got carried away talking about their children rather than their marriage during the interviews. In terms of tension with mother-in-law, resolving their conflicts, separation from their children, Sarah felt "most of the time, we were thinking of the boys."

Lovely children. They are also "very happy with the sons." There was one incident in which David's car broke down near the school. He was on his way home from work. He worried about what would happen to his car the next day; so David decided to sleep in the car overnight. Sarah worried about him sleeping overnight in the car. The two boys told the father, "We will come with you." They felt touched when they described this incidence. Their children are one of the key anchors that hold their marriage.

Common interests. From the beginning of their relationship up to now, common interests glue them together. David considered that as "we have a lot more views in common. We also have different wants. But we have more in common than differences. So I think that is a big blessing." Common interests, common hobbies, and common friends are "very very important" to them. Here is a glimpse on their daily sharing:

> David: Life in general. Then sometimes we discuss about the books that we have read. When I read different [books] and I find it interesting, I will tell her to read. Then she is telling me the stories.

Crisis. The crisis took place when Sarah about 38 years old. Sarah had to go through hysterectomy. Their children were in high school. David was not happy with the wards in the hospital, which Sarah chose. But Sarah decided to stay in that hospital because they had good gynecologist there. She also felt at peace with the hospital.

Fear of losing his wife. David expressed his feeling at that time as "I am scared that she might not make it." He cried when he elaborated, "And then I am not used to be by myself. We have never been separated for long period of time. And I actually wanted her to go to private hospital. I think the facilities were better you know. Then I didn't feel bad." Then David began to think, "What will happen if she doesn't make it."

Love grows deeper. The incident had made their love grew deeper.

> David: I think our love grew deeper because I was so scared that she would just leave…

Their sons were "quite good in that sense. The younger one went to cook rice." At night when Sarah was not in the house, their children "went to accompany him and slept on their bed." For Sarah, her feeling from this incident was:

> Sarah: Very good. Very close. I became very close to him and to my boys. I love them very much. So I mean we became very close.

Support from friends. Sarah was very thankful for the friends' supports when she had her operation.

> Sarah: My friends supported us very well. I have a few, two very good friends, who cooked for my family. Cooked and asked David to collect the food from them. And then he brought back to eat. And then my Indian friend, she was very good. She cooked their herbal drink you know and asked him to bring it to me so that the wound would heal fast. She is very good. So these are very good friends. I have still keep in touch with and we are still very old, all of us. We are still very good friends.

Respect spouse's hobby. David's tone filled with thankfulness and excitement when he mentioned Sarah did not complain about him enjoying his hobbies.

> David: One thing that I appreciate her very much, because she knows I like that way. I love my Tai Chi. I love my martial arts. She gives me a lot of time for me to explore my own sort of activities. She never complained. She never complained about doing housework by herself.

Wish to build a happy family. Fostering a happy family is something very close to their hearts.

> Sarah: I think it is just that we both work together to make a happy family. We just find it is very important.
> David: I want [the children] to be happy. So I told them, as long as your whole family is happy, we are happy. We are quite old already. We don't know we still have how many years. We are 70's very soon you know. I told my younger boy, as long as I pass everyday happily, that is an achievement.

4.9.7 Summary

The researcher's experience with the couple. Sarah and David are warm people. The researcher felt welcomed during the visits. Sometimes, David answered the door; other time Sarah answered the door. The interview sessions took place at the same air-conditioned TV room every time, where many books and DVDs were shelved. The living room was partitioned into different functions, like the TV room, the gym section and the bigger space for bigger group of gathering.

At the first interview, they were hesitant who should share first. But then the wife took the initiative to start the interview. Then the husband joined in later. They shared their experience naturally and spontaneously as the interview proceeded. There were moments of red eyes, tears and joy when talking about their marriage, children and their lives. From the transcripts and their sharing, they followed each other's flow. There were rarely interruptions in the flow of sharing. Collective memories were evident in their sharing. They could elaborate on each other's views. However, the researcher noticed Sarah attempted to make some corrections or provided different perspective when David talked about his mother in-law. There was moment, when the audio recorder was switched off. David disclosed that he did not know that the interviews could come so naturally for them to share about their marriage. He was quite anxious what to share at first.

They talked a lot about their children during the interview sessions. They can talk about their marital relationship with their children through social media. They can talk with their children about issues on parenting, marriage, careers and others. Their children like to consult their opinions on family matters. They are mentors to their children.

Summing up. Their love towards their children is very strong. They also love their grandchildren dearly. What they find meaningful to their marriage is the elderly, their children and grandchildren and they themselves are happy. What leverages their strengths to keep the marriage lasting is putting others first. Sarah believes their marriage is "made in heaven and it is meant to stay and no one could break it off." To live to that belief, they work towards a happy life and a happy family by working out their differences with patience endurance and putting others first.

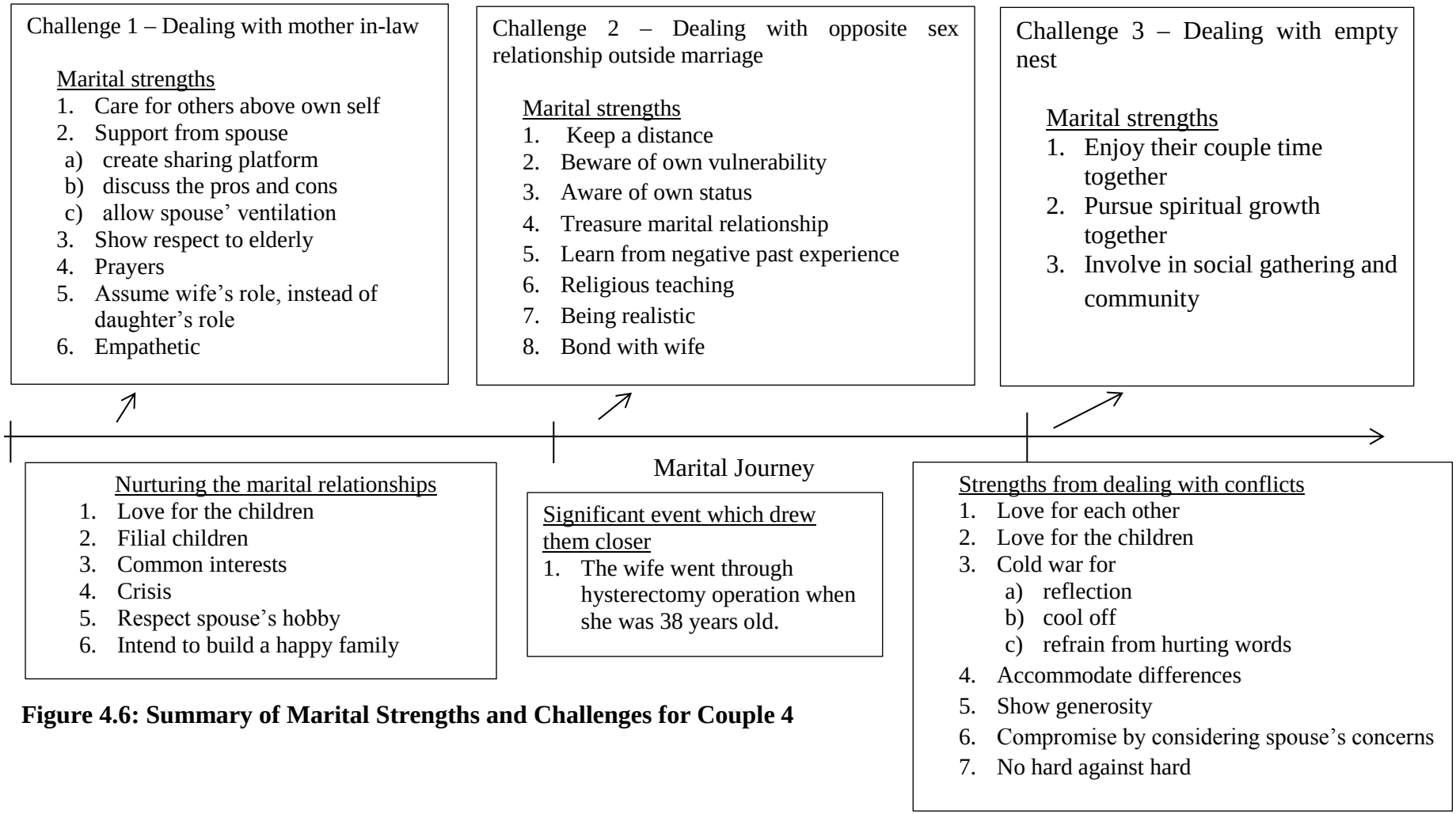

Figure 4.6: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 4

4.10 Description of Couple 5

4.10.1 Introduction

It was in 1971, Alan and Sharon met through a church pastor. When Sharon came from rural area to the city, their pastor "appointed" Alan as her "personal assistant" to help her settle in. In fact, Alan just came out from a failed romance then. Their love developed gradually through long letters and separation when Alan was assigned to work outstation.

Relationship developed through long letters and separation

Sharon: Ya, the hand writing is so nice. I'm just longing to receive his letters to see beautiful handwriting, enjoy long letters.

Alan: So I was at the border (Northern part of Peninsula Malaysia) because I came out once in two months only, you know. We were taken out of the jungle to [Kuala Lumpur by a helicopter]. After that, we went back for two months. As we wrote, we began to realize we missed each other more.

Simple courtship

Alan: Ya, we didn't do those [things] like watch movies, go out to have food. We were very poor, very poor.
Sharon: And I didn't enjoy movie.
Alan: Ya.
Sharon: So I didn't ask for all these.
Alan: We also didn't go to park, like hold hands and walk around.

Involvement in church activities. Instead, they were busy with church activities during their courtship time.

Alan: So most of the time we [were at] the church or fellowship.
Sharon: Fellowship and Bible study. So [when] we talk about courtship, people [would think] it's very uninteresting. But that's [what] we did. After married, we only started courtship.

Prayer centered. They agreed to "meet" in prayers when they lived separately.

Sharon: He will pray at the border and I pray here. Every day we meet at 8 o'clock, we pray.

At the initial stage of their relationship, prayers and studying Biblical scriptures laid the foundation for their marriage and their lives.

Sharon

Religious family. Brought up in a religious family, in which her mother worshiped many gods in their house. Sharon "had already got a worshipping heart" since young. Her mother took good care of them. She did not learn to do house work before she married. She "did not even know how to cook rice".

Quarrelsome experience. Witnessing her sister's and her parents' quarrelsome intimate relationship, she made sure she would not find a boyfriend who would quarrel with her before and after marriage. Her parent's marriage became constant strife when the father wanted to marry a second wife. The pain from experiencing her parent's broken marriage had turned to be a cornerstone for her marriage.

Turning the negative experience to positive motivation. Witnessing her parents' broken marriage, she was determined to have a good family.

> Sharon: So I [witnessed] my parents' [marriage], I told myself, I don't want to have a quarrelsome family. We want tolerance and there is also the words of God and the help of Holy Spirit that dwell in us that give us the strength.

Mother as the role model. Her mother has become the source of motivation for her to be a good wife and good mother.

> Sharon: My mother was a very hard working, very understanding woman. So I was kind of, like my daughter now said, [my daughter] sees me resemble my mother. She said, I remember you are like my grandmother now, so gentle, so nice. So may be [I was] influenced by her. My mother was a very very gentle and hardworking person. I always respect her. And I always thought about how much she had done for the family. And after [being] married, I always tell

myself, I wanted to be good wife and I want to be good mother. And I praise the Lord, though I don't score 100%, at least I got 50-60.
Alan: 90 over.

Learn from others' mistakes. Sharon likes to learn from others' mistakes so that she "would not make the same mistakes."

Sharon: Like I shared just now, I always like to learn from people's mistakes. What I see from other people, I make sure I don't do that. When I see this is not right, I don't do that.

Sacrificial. When their children were in primary school age, Sharon's business in direct selling prospered. That was before Alan started setting up his own business. When she involved herself in direct selling, they had to take turns taking care of the children. After Alan got off from work, she would go out to do demonstrations to increase her sales. She would come home around 10pm. After trying out this kind of lifestyle for some time, they eventually decided they did not want this kind of life. She gave up what she was good at in order to develop her husband's profession and to stay home to take care of the children.

Sharon: I was doing quite well. So they are thinking you can build up your business in [direct selling] also… No, don't do that. Practice your profession.

Sharon: But for a very short [period of time] we tried whether it worked or not. Looks like it's a good life, but after we did it, we thought better he worked alone and I took care of the family.

Supportive to husband. She also contributed to her husband's company at the initial stage of establishing his company.

Sharon: I remember when he started his company. So I go in to help because at that time we [had] very little capital to start [with]. So to engage a secretary needs some money. That money we can save. So I went in to help. So I am a cleaner, receptionist…
Alan: The tea lady.
Sharon: Operator, everything, whatever. Of course the technical side, we have some staff to do…

Sharon had contributed much to her husband's success. She did not claim or act as boss lady in their company.

Alan

Lost his father. Alan's father passed away when he was 19. He is the oldest among the 9 siblings. His father left nothing behind except debts. His mother had to head the household "with no profession." He helped to shoulder the financial stress when he was young.

Sharing the burden of family financial difficulty since young

> Alan: At the age when I was 19, my father passed away 1969. He left behind nothing but debts only. And my mother didn't have any profession. I was only 19 years old. I was in college that time. I joined college and I got scholarship. No need to pay anything. One month I got 100 ringgit allowance. I got to give her all.

Building Christian faith. Knowing that he needed to improve his English, he learned it in a church. This was where he got himself into the Words of God and church circle.

> Alan: I was a young man, at the age when I was at form four. My English was very poor. At that time, if your English was poor, you could not get grade 1. So I went to the XX Church, where they gave free tuition. From there, I learned more about Christ. I was baptized in 1971. So I would say that during the secondary [school years], I [learned] the Scriptures already.

Good role model from his father. Alan showed much admiration for his father when he talked about his late father. What he remembered most about his father was his father's interaction with his mother. His father had left a role model for Alan on how to be a husband.

> Alan: My father, I would say that he was a very good husband, but my mother was very fierce to him. So I wanted to learn from my father. My mother always grumbled, scolded him, he just quietly walked away. And I had not actually

> heard my father shout at my mother. My father absorbed a lot of, you know, all these conflicts huh. He [was] a gentle man. I like him. May be subconsciously he was my model at that time before I became Christian.

Good role model for his sons. Alan is also a role model for his son. There was a card which was given by one of his sons. It reads as (refer Appendix H):

> To My Beloved Father,
>
> Daddy, when I grew up I want to be just like you, only with more hair.

Giving. Alan is a giving person. He is generous to family, friends and people in needs. He also involves in community work, in terms of time and finance.

> Alan: I think not only to partner, but also to friends, to other people. We must be, God says, merciful to others. Be gracious to other people. [What] you do to them [is] like you are doing on behalf of Jesus.
>
> Alan: I tell her, the money does not belong to us. It is God's money. We are just steward you see. So God gives us money, we become manager. It is not your money, it is not my money…

Considerate. He always put others' needs before his.

> Alan: She always [used to say], that person never paid back the money, you still wanted to give. Today, we still [have] a lot of people who haven't paid us back. I always say, 'never mind, forget it' you know. So in that sense when she became a full-time housewife with three kids and house chores, then I also became considerate you know. [After] coming back [from work, I must quickly [try to] help.

Blissful Early Stage of Marriage

In 1975, with partial pressure from Alan's mother, they decided to marry and end their separation. At the initial stage of their marriage, Alan was assigned to work in a rural area. Living in rural area near seaside was a blissful moment for them. Alan got off from work around 4pm. He usually came home for lunch. During that time, they were very active in church. They had young people gathered at their place every Sunday after church. They were together all the time. They described that blissful moments as:

Sharon: I think because we were not rich, so we could not buy a lot of good food. But simple things, we just sat by beach side, then we went for a swim. That was a good time together.
Alan: Ya. That's the best.
Sharon: We enjoyed each other's presence.
Alan: Those were romantic time.
Sharon: Huh, very romantic.

High spiritual time and together time. The blissful time came before their first baby arrived. That time was also their "high spiritual time and together time".

Sharon: We spent, actually we [went] to the beach 2-3 times a week. We [went] to the beach. And other time, we [were] also very involved in church. Whether we [were] in [Kuala Lumpur] or Kuantan, we joined XX church. We [were] also very involved. We joined choir. We joined Saturday cell group there. Then we [had] prayer meeting. And Sunday we [had] worship [time].
Alan: We do everything together.
Sharon: And we are always together one, huh. There is no occasion that one person go away. So we are always together and then that's where…
Alan: Except in office. Ha ha ha.

4.10.2 Challenge 1 - Tension with the Mother In-law

Very soon after married, Sharon experienced tension with her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law expected her to cook, but she never learned to cook in her family. She also experienced her mother in-laws' jealousy towards her. Her determination to be good wife, learning from other's mistakes and buffer from husband were her strengths to cope.

Determination to be a good wife for her husband.

Sharon: … Before I married, I got one imagination. I wanted to be a good mother and to be a good wife. So I tried all my best, I just wanted to be a good wife… Because I really want to learn and I make sure I do a good job.

Learning from other's mistakes

Sharon: … I also remember one of my church members, a very nice sister who shared with me… she warned me, "don't hurt your mother in-law. When you have any misunderstanding with your mother in-law, you will also have a bad relationship with your husband." And she shared with me her experience. So

> for that I said [to myself], I wanted to learn from people's experience. I learned from their mistakes. I caught up faster. So I think he should be happy. I treated his mother very nice.

Buffer from husband – when the experience with the in-law was unpleasant, Sharon would share her feelings with Alan. Alan would comfort her.

> Interviewer: So when you complained to him, how did he respond to you?
> Sharon: He was always very nice, very comforting.
> Interviewer: What would he say?
> Sharon: He will tell me nicely, please tolerate (laugh)… and then the next day will be holiday for you. That means whole day I don't need to cook. He will take me out for dinner or go out for a walk. Otherwise, I will be in the house whole day. Because I was not working, I have to take care of the kids. He came back from work. We went out for a ride. I was already very happy.

Loving each other's parents

> Alan: Also by [respecting and taking care of my late mother before she passed away], she gained the respect of the husband. Her husband will love her more, because she loves his mother… Actually I respect her parents very much. That in a way, she was also happy. So there was no friction between us, between me and her parents. I love her more because she loves my mother. So by loving the seniors also improved our marriage life.

Dealing with the expectation to stay with mother-in-law. Things were much easier when they were living outstation. They saw the mother-in-laws just once a month. But then when Alan was transferred back to his hometown, he was expected to live with his mother. Living with parents was a common thing to keep the harmony of the family. However, they had decided to buy a cheap house and to live separately from the mother in-law. It was not an easy decision because the mother in-law was very upset over their decision not to stay with her. Sharon made her stance clear to Alan. The bases for the husband's decision were Bible teaching, being considerate towards his wife's feelings and continuing to show more understanding and showering more love to his mother.

Assertive in wife's stance

Sharon: I said if we stay with your mother, if there is any clash, it is going to spoil our marriage. So I cannot stay with your mother.

As the oldest son in his family, this was how Alan dealt with the dilemma:

Making decision based on Bible teaching

Alan: It's Bible teaching. Bible teaching you know, "both of them shall leave the family and cleave as one." So that's the Bible teaching. So we married, we both must leave the parents from your own family.

Considerate to wife's feelings

Alan: … So, if we stay in, that means we don't leave the family. That will put pressure on her. After married and still staying with parents, I also didn't feel comfortable. So I decided, though we were very poor, we found a cheap house and came out to stay.

Throwing more love and understanding to his mother

Alan: … And that made my mother very angry, very angry. Last time you stayed in Kuantan, no choice. Now you come back to [Kuala Lumpur], you [still] didn't want to stay with me. But, after a while, we showed her our love, we went back weekly.

Alan: But I tried to understand my mother because my mother always, maybe she thought that the son was staying with another woman. That woman has snatched her son away. [She had] that kind of attitude. I tried to empathize her. Throw her more love. Throw her more love. Care for her. Talk to her.

Bearing the unbearable. Dealing with the tension with in-law, at times putting up with the unbearable was part of the package in marriage.

Alan: … Then I told her, you just give in. Then after that, I went and bought present for her.
Sharon: (laughed) you know every time, we went back to his house, he dare not even give me a cup of water. The mother would get jealous. So he would take his own. Because he always treated me so well, when go to the mother's house huh, he become another person, as if I am all by myself. Then I felt very uncomfortable. And I got to bear with it. So every time we went to the mother's house, the next day was holiday. He would bring me out for food.

4.10.3 Challenge 2 – Arrival of Children

Sharon had once said during one of the visits, "marriage is not a bed of roses." Having enjoyed the blissful initial stage of marriage, there were times along the marriage life, their attention towards each other had diluted due to the demand of taking care of children.

> Alan: I think it was a different adjustment with the children. We had the second, third one. Every time there was an adjustment. The house was more and more busy. And then our attention to each other became diluted.
> Sharon: Less… ya.
> Alan: We had to take care of children. Even we went out, [we] cared more for the children. We wanted to make sure they didn't run wild and get accident, rather than we hold hands and [took it easy]…

When Sharon's attention was caught up with taking care of children, Alan tried to help after coming back from work. To make adjustment to that, Alan adopted tolerance, understanding and not demanding to be pampered by the wife.

> **Tolerant and understanding**
>
> Alan: Ah… as far as adjustment…because as a breadwinner, I had to work outside, more was on her. She took care of the three kids. But thank God, when I worked, I was able to engage a worker, a helper in the house, domestic helper. But I also realized that it was not easy to take care of the children. So I became more tolerant, more understanding.
>
> **Not demanding to be pampered**
>
> Alan: … And I didn't demand on what I wanted, like time for myself, to come back to be pampered by the wife. Although I had to overlook, forego a lot, rather [I like] to see these three kids went to the park or went somewhere so that she could relax for a while. That kind of understanding and adjustment was important [to cope with the demand of child care].

4.10.4 Challenge 3 – Financial Constraint

As the oldest son in the family, Alan still needed to support his family financially after he married. In fact, about three quarters of the household income went to support his mother and eight other siblings who were still in school. They sometimes hardly made end needs.

Living with tight budget

Sharon: That time we really lived in poverty, like we could not afford [11]Maggi mee. Maggi mee at that time was 30 cents. It's very expensive. Cintan mee was only 15 cents or 20 cents. So we preferred to eat Cintan mee.

Sharon: Sometimes two of us shared one[12]Cintan mee. That's our breakfast. For lunch, I cooked rice with fish and vegetable. [We did the same for] dinner, very simple kind of things. There was no luxury at all. So when I was expecting my girl that time, they said you must eat more fruits. I was telling myself, [I didn't have money] to buy fruits. Every month he went back and sent money home to his mother. His mother would give us some oranges back. Those oranges were my fruits. He would not be able to eat those oranges. All were for me because I was expecting the baby. And [one orange] was cut into four; each meal I can only eat one quarter. Not so luxury to eat the whole apple. No no no. No such thing. And what I [worried most] was during the festival seasons. We had to spend more to give to the parents. And we got nothing extra, especially go back to my hometown, to my mother, I had nothing to give.

Alan called this state as poor and Sharon called it as poverty. They have different opinions on their financial state. Living with very tight budget, however, the financial difficulty was not their focus. Instead, they uphold their marriage through the community values, involvement in church and give faithfully to God.

Community values

Sharon: … I only felt sorry during festive time. I could not give my parents any extra. But other time, thank God we were in a rural area. That place, nobody would think about making money. Everybody was having a very peaceful life. And they were so active in church. Actually in a small place, people were very contented you know.

Involvement in church

[11] Maggi mee is one kind of instance noodle. Maggi is the brand name. Mee means noodle in Malay.

[12] Cintan mee is another type of instant noodle. Cintan is the brand name.

Alan: In fact, as I recall, our very good spiritual time was during those three to four years times in the rural area. That time we had not much. We served the church. That time we were in XX church. And then we helped them to start Bible study, cell group, visitations. We were very very busy.

Give faithfully

Alan: So [no matter] how tough we were, how poor we were but then God still sent us our allowance, our pay on time… (Pause) so there had been no problem. But that was a good training. The XX church pastors [once] challenged us, "hey, we are going to make a new building, give 2 months of your pay." Wah! 2 months of my pay! How to survive man! But still by faith, we gave.

Sharon was having hard time recalling how they survived through the difficult time. What she could remember was they went through that stage happily. Focusing on their faith, and not the deficiency, was their strength to withstand the financial constraint.

4.10.5 Handling Conflicts

There were times when Alan and Sharon were angry at each other's differences. Sharon was not happy with Alan's "inconsiderate friends" as Sharon called them. They were very poor then. Yet when the friends came, they had to spend money on food. The followings depicted how they dealt with it.

No open quarrel. Alan and Sharon tried not to have open quarrel.

Alan: No open quarrel.
Sharon: We only have cold war. Not talking to each other.
Alan: Never shouting at each other.
Sharon: We don't have open quarrel. Praise the Lord. So many years.
Alan: Ya.

Cold war. Sharon would keep quiet when she was not happy.

Sharon: Just keep quiet. Don't want to talk. You tell me anything, I also don't want to answer (laughed).

No reasoning. When the anger was there, how Alan dealt with Sharon:

Alan: I think when a person is angry, he talks a lot. You retreat. So don't talk. I don't want to talk. So usually when she is in that mood, I don't try to convince her not to be angry.
Interviewer: Ok
Alan: Nor I want to tell her the fact is like this. I don't tell.

Self-soothing. In the midst of anger, how would Sharon deal with her anger?

Sharon: Either did craftwork, did something to occupy myself. Or just sing. I won't sit there grumble or angry with someone. I won't do that. Always, when I was not very happy [with] something, or which was not very pleasant [and] I didn't like it, I would just go and praise the Lord.
Interviewer: Okay.
Sharon: Through singing or I did some crafts. I did a lot of handwork. So I did that to occupy myself. So it was easier. After a while, you see what you had done, then you feel happy.

Not reactive. They still carried out routine as usual. They did not magnify the anger.

Alan: For example, she was very angry. I didn't approach her until the next day. I did my own thing. I did gardening or did something. Evening time, we still talked. Then I knew, there was no need to rush to pacify her and so on.
Interviewer: Okay.
Alan: Because she had not turned hysterical. Some women [when they] got angry, wow! [They] opened the cabinet, [packed their clothes] and wanted to run away.
Interviewer: (laughed)
Alan: But she was never like that. And then it came to 5 or 6 pm, she started cooking.

Not keeping anger for long. Their boundary for anger was not keeping anger beyond sunset.

Alan: But that do not last for one day, dear.
Sharon: Ya, don't last very long (laughed).

Build Common Ground - Based on the Bible. They mutually agree to the Bible teaching - "No anger beyond sunset". They practice that when dealing conflicts.

Alan: Again we based on the Bible, you know. I only share with somebody, husband and wife don't keep hatred. Don't keep anger.
Sharon: Beyond sunset.
Alan: The Bible says, don't keep anger beyond the sunset. So when the sun comes to the horizon, you got angry then, that's all. We don't talk about it.

Sharon: We don't keep.

They would remind each other, such as

> Alan: So [no matter] how angry [you were], you said, "Hey, it's sunset already you know, do you still want to get angry?"
> Sharon: Then okay (laughed).

They mutually agreed that "after sunset they must talk."

Keep quiet. When they reconcile, they did not talk about the cause of their anger. They felt the more they talk about it, the more anger one would get.

> Alan: The more you talk about it, it becomes hatred.
> Sharon: It builds up anger.
> Alan: Because when she is angry, the more you explain, the more it might blow up you know. So let her, let her just slowly deal with herself. But when comes a time, she knows that time was up
> Sharon: When one was angry it's good the other one was quiet.

Use of humor. Usually Alan was the one to initiate reconciliation. As he was more capable of making Sharon laughed.

> Sharon: Usually he initiated [reconciliation].
> Interviewer: Okay.
> Sharon: Because he could tell jokes. He could tickle you. And I was very good in laughing. So when he tickled a bit, I was already laughing.

Having reciprocal response. It took two parties to clap. They tried to respond reciprocally when effort for reconciliation was initiated.

> Alan: Both must accept, I think the Bible is important. Both of us must know. We could not keep anger for so long. Even though I don't tell jokes, when I approach you and I talk softly, you must respond.

Finding the right time to talk. Alan would talk to Sharon, when the anger was not there.

> Alan: I tell during dinner time, when she should not have anger.
> Interviewer: (smiled)
> Alan: Then she can accept my logic.

On the other hand, how would Sharon deal with Alan's anger? Alan jokingly responded, "I haven't got angry." Sharon laughed. This was how Sharon would do:

Leave him alone

Sharon: Because I did not know how to console, didn't know how to comfort, so I leave him alone.

Cautious with words may hurt

Alan: I think when somebody was angry, he lost his logic. He used emotion [to rule]. So when you go to explain, he will scold you.
Shirley: Ya, words may hurt.

Not finding out the cause of anger

Sharon: …After a while, he was okay. And after it's over, I wouldn't go and say, why were you angry?
Alan: No point.
Sharon: I don't want to find out. Like nothing happen.
Interviewer: Ok
Sharon: Then we are ok.

They learned to deal with conflicts through experience and over the years. Alan summed up the process of dealing with conflict, "don't be scared that you must approach him. No. Let him be on his own for a while. Still uphold that he was not supposed to get angry beyond sunset."

4.10.6 Ways to Nurture the Relationship

They enjoy each other's presence. They miss each other when the children and grandchildren are around for a long time. They have endless common topics to share. They have three meals together most of the days. They still hold hands. The anxiety level was intense for Sharon when death was talked about. They nurture their marital bonding through their belief, daily experiences and sexual fulfillment.

Spouse centered. Besides God, the most important thing in life is their marital relationship.

> Alan: Ya, I think to me I go back to the Bible. When God put a man and a woman together, it is a covenant till death put us apart, for as long as we live. So your spouse is the most important, not the children. Not the mother in-law. Not the father in-law. Two of you are the most important, so therefore, we always try to remember that two of us are the most important.

Sharing their devotion time with God. They found enjoyment in sharing their devotion time with God while they walked to breakfast together in the morning.

> Sharon: I enjoy, because sometime after his devotion, we do a walk out for breakfast. And on the way, he will share with me his meditation. What he learned, what scriptures. I enjoy because it also helps me and encourages me.

Doing things together. Their marital bonding has developed over the years through doing things together most of the time.

> Alan: We do everything together.

Sexual fulfillment. Besides the time of sharing and togetherness, sex is also an expression of love that enriches their marital bonding. Staying loyal to one's spouse is very important to keep the sexual fulfillment, according to Alan.

> Sharon: Sex to me is actually very natural. When you love each other, you are so passionate. You want to be together.
> Alan: And good sex life, good relationship also enhance marriage life, isn't it huh? God makes us to have that kind of expression of love, intimacy.

Not taking sexual life for granted. Alan and Sharon agreed sexual life plays an important part in their relationship. Their attitude towards it is they do not take it for granted. In the initial stage of marriage, they tried to make sexual intimacy as their part of marriage life.

> Sharon: I think those good old days, we make sure every week, we make sure we got one day we enjoy each other.

Sharon: We cannot just take for granted, like he has [the need] and I don't have [the need]. Sometime [we] must complement each other.
Alan: Ya. Don't neglect. Sex life plays an important role.

Making mutual efforts to make sexual life satisfactory. They try to make sexual life as pleasant as possible.

Alan: You must have that kind of ambience [and] romance to build it.
Sharon: True.
Interviewer: So you engage this in your life also? Like create that kind of ambience?
Alan: Mh… ya.
Sharon: Ah huh. We bought flowers for our room.

The intention to enjoy sex with your spouse. When talked about the external helps to induce sexual experiences in marriage, they stressed the intention to enjoy sex with own partner instead.

Alan: That is not what God gives.
Sharon: [When] you have the intent to enjoy sex with your own spouse, that is enough already. We don't need to get any help. We just enjoy and we are natural.

Wife's Response. Wife's feedback and response also play an important role in husband's sexual fulfillment.

Alan: … As far as I see she is okay. I am satisfied you know.

Learn to appreciate our spouse. Trying to appreciate their spouse is another way to induce the sexual experience.

Sharon: We must learn to appreciate each other.
Alan: Mh (showing agreement).
Sharon: At times, when we were angry at many things that would not enhance marital or sex life. See the opposite side of it, learn to appreciate, see the good side of it. The beauty of that person then I think it works better.
Alan: Mh (showing agreement).

Accept the low times in sexual experience. Most of the time, they enjoy sex in their marriage. However, there were also times, the sexual experience was low. Sharon

also noticed sexual urge is going down the hill compared with the time when she was young.

When sexual satisfaction is low

> Alan: But then there are also times, no satisfaction. But it is okay, never mind, looking forward for the next one.

When the sexual urge is low

> Alan: … I think the frequency is less. But I take it as it is also natural compare to the younger days. Every time we do it, I think we still have the full satisfaction…
> Sharon: (laughed) not so much, I personally don't have so much desire than when I first got married 40 over years ago. Early 30s, I still … okay, but now especially pass 60s, I think the urge is not that much. But of course, I still enjoy.

Stay loyal to spouse. Staying loyal to one's spouse is very important to keep the sexual fulfillment.

> Alan: As life partners we must be true to each other, by all means avoid third party, be away from adultery. We are committed to each other and carefully and watchfully avoid falling into sin.

It was a fun experience hearing them sharing how they nurture their relationship. They are playful and creative when it comes to pleasing each other sexually.

Nevertheless, other than sharing fun and positives sides of their marriage, they also disclosed two incidents which were the most challenging moments in their marriage.

4.10.7 The Most Challenging Moment 1 – Dealing with the Runaway Son

Differ in stances and feelings. Alan and Sharon felt it was the most challenging time for them when their youngest son, who was at the age of 18, ran away from home. Alan and Sharon were worried about him. They had different stances in how to deal with their son.

Alan: [Working] at the [cybercafé]. Stay with his friend. No money all that. I was very strict. Since he said he hated to be in this house. Don't let him come back. She said, "No, after he becomes drug abuser, then people abuse him and so on. Better take him back." I said, "No, I am not going to look for him." Wah! Like that. It was tough time for her and it was tough time for me also.
Sharon: I cried most of the time. Especially meal time, the moment I closed my eyes and wanted to talk to the Lord, I would cry. If I continued going to work, in my work, I felt okay, because that distracted me. But the moment I closed my eyes, I got to tell the Lord about my son, then I cried. Meal time, every time on thanks giving prayer on that table, I closed my eyes and I imagined my son got nothing to eat. So I cried most of the time I would say. It was very very painful.
Alan: Ya. I had to depend on prayer also. I asked God, should I go and call him back or not. Hey, God, how? [Should I invite him to come back?] So want or not. So I said, move my heart if you think I should take him back. But then God said, don't. Let him. Don't you know the prodigal son's story…? So after that I took it easy…

Building common ground. Their stances and feelings towards the son's running away were different. They tried to reach a common ground. They knew the whereabouts of their son, but they did not go to see him.

Alan: About one month, one month I didn't visit him.
Sharon: Both of us didn't go.

Assurance from the Scriptures

Alan: I just want to make sure, what I do is God allows it. Mh... What I do must be right. And God said, do it this way you know. That is more important… then God says, prodigal son. Then okay. I don't care already (laughed).
Sharon: Actually some time you have scriptures to comfort you and then you are more assured. You don't worry so much, because there are words of God to comfort us.

When this incident was brought up again, Alan and Sharon showed different views on how the incident was handled. It seemed like when they talked about this during the interview, they had the chance to hear each other's views. Alan's stance was "It is only I didn't go out and ask him to come back." Sharon perceived Alan's handling as "he won't allow him to come back yet." When they talked about this, there was laughter, but

the tone of voice was high. It sounded like they still have unresolved feelings over this issue.

4.10.8 The Most Challenging Moment 2 – Clash at Work

Working together. Alan and Sharon work together in the company they both established. Sharon did not claim herself as boss lady in the company. She described herself as:

> Sharon: So in the office, I am never a boss lady. I am just a staff. Just work with them accordingly. I do my work. It is only during annual dinner or what, they will say, thank you Mrs. Alan. Otherwise, nothing. I just carry on with my thing.

Separate work and home. Their pastor had warned them that husband and wife working together could endanger the marriage. They were very cautious about this. This was what they practice:

> Sharon: So I just prayed to the Lord and we both agreed that in office we talk about office; at home we don't talk about office work. So when [we are] back at home, we don't talk about office work. Back home is family life. If we want to talk about work, talk in the office. We always remind of each other so we [are aware] of it. Let say in the house you talk so much about office work, I would say, "this is home, don't talk about office work."

They think, "We succeeded it" in putting work and home separately. It works well for them. However, there was one incident, they had a clash.

> Alan: It clashed once seriously.
> Sharon: Once or twice.
> Alan: That's when I gave bonus to my staffs, she thought the other staff did not reserve that much. This staff should reserve more. So she disputed with me. So we were very very unhappy. Until I told her who is the boss?
> Sharon: Ha ha ha…. (Softer tone)
> Alan: Luckily she realized. Even I made a mistake; she respected me because I know my staff more than she.
> Sharon: (interrupted) I always I have my opinion, I will tell. But he disagreed, he has the last say.
> Alan: Yes, in the end okay.
> Sharon: But at least, he must listen to my opinion also. Cannot…
> Alan: No, I didn't ask for it (smiled).

> Sharon: No. Some times as husband and wife, the wife is not a robot you know. Keep following, keep following. It is very stupid. And I don't think it would be interesting in the marriage where one is just dump and following you know. Some time you must allow us to express our feelings. Then…
> Alan: But don't insist.
> Sharon: Never. Do I have the chance to insist? (Smiled). Always… do I have the chance? No matter how is that, at last the choice is still his. So… (ha ha ha)…must allow us to express. Otherwise, we are just like performing a duty like that (laughing).

Tension was high when the above conversation took place. The pitch was high. The pacing was fast. Sharon used "we" and "our" to represent wife's position. A few laughing moments were noticeable. The researcher curved the conversation to "May be you go back to talk about the arrival of children again". This conversation emerged during the third interview. It could project many interpretations. For the tense moment to occur during the interview, the researcher interpreted tension is relative to the levels of trust and genuineness in the relationship among the researcher and the couple.

These two incidents depicted that challenges in marriage life is real. Marital journey contains both pleasant and unpleasant moments. Embracing both without hurting each other requires kindness and patience.

4.10.9 Summary

The researcher's experience with the couple. Through the pastor, the researcher contacted the husband for the consent to participate in the study, then followed by an email to introduce the objectives of the study. The email interaction started between the researcher and the husband. Later the husband included the wife in the upcoming back and forth emails. Thus, the email interaction had become the interaction between the researcher and them. When the researcher would like to have clarification over certain things, for example, the type of pseudonyms names used, the husband usually responded by, "let me check with my wife first".

Alan and Sharon was the last couple the researcher interviewed. The couples preceded them stressed children as the anchor for their marriages. Alan and Sharon, on the other hand, acknowledged that spouse centered was crucial in their marriage. Their marital belief, which was different from other couples, could arise from their religious belief. Through their sharing, the researcher witnessed the power of religious beliefs, which could supersede cultural values.

During the interview, Alan made a lot of humorous remarks. Alan teased Sharon time to time during the interviews. They enjoyed talking about their past when they walked down memory lanes. They shared a lot of creative ideas to enrich their marital relationship. When talking about the death of either one, the separation anxiety and the sense of lost were intense. Their marital strengths were exhibited in both good times and tough times. They openly expressed their affection towards each other.

In one of the visits, their grandson was around. They happily introduced their oldest grandson, who is in the primary school age, to the researcher. The researcher felt humbled by their warmth and affection toward their grandchild, who needs special care and attention.

The interview sessions took place in the open space living room with wooden furniture, as well as the dining room, when snacks were prepared in the midst of the sessions. There were many steps in the house. There were also special corners for family pictures, which showed pictures of the ancestors and the current generation.

Summing up. To use a few words to describe this marriage, it would be Bible driven marriage. Alan and Sharon try to uphold their marriage which pleases God. In terms of resolving the challenges in their marriage, the common pattern is they try to be Bible

centered. Sharon's source of strength is "I want to be a good mother and to be a good wife. So I tried all my best, just want to be a good wife." That is her love for Alan.

Cards are one of the channels to express their affection towards each other. There is one hand written card (refer to Appendix I), which is written as:

> "No standard card can express my feelings and our days together.
>
> I am always grateful to Almighty God for giving me the perfect wife. Though at times I have to [strangle], but I always do it without regrets at the end.
>
> May God continue to strengthen our bond, teach me to be sensitive, caring, loving and mindful of your presence."

Their children commented how their marriage differed from a traditional Chinese marriage, in which children come first. The church members called them the "holding hands couple". From starting to how they managed along the way, they intend to build a God-centered marriage. The meaning they live for this relationship is to be faithfully God-centered.

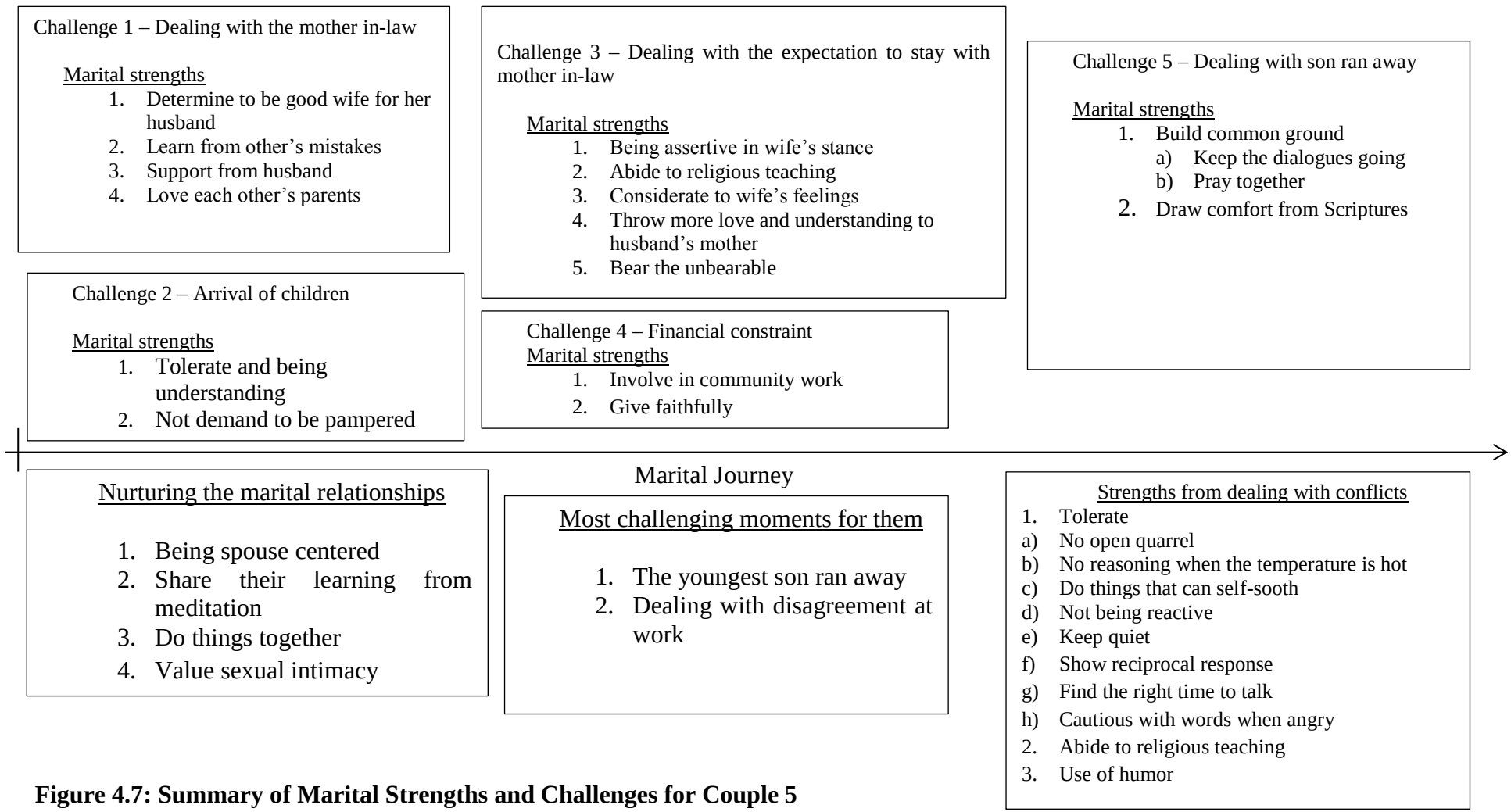

Figure 4.7: Summary of Marital Strengths and Challenges for Couple 5

4.11 Brief Summary of Five Marriages

The description of each couple provided snapshots for the lived experiences, contexts, glimpses of the persons, and the challenges couples experienced. How the marriages fitted into different life settings and how couples coped with the challenges were uniquely woven. The contextual background of couples is important to understand their strengths in holistic dimension. Thus, engagement of Malaysian Chinese literature would be described in the following.

4.12 Engagement of Malaysian Chinese Literature

The couples who took part in this study were the second generation Chinese from the second wave of the Chinese immigrants. They were born around 1920 to 1955. Engagement of the Malaysian Chinese literature would shed light on their socio-cultural background and their cultural values at that period of time.

In the 15th century, the first wave of Chinese immigrants came to Malaysia to trade during Zheng He's administration. They settled in Malacca and married the local women. Their descendants are called Babas and Nyonyas. The straits of Malacca was discovered to be a strategic place for trading (Khoo, 1996). During the British colonial era, there were thousands of *sinkhehs* (called new sojourners) came in the 19th century. They were the second wave Chinese immigrants. They were Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Fuzhou and Henghua (Lim, 2005). They came to Nanyang out of despair of overpopulation, natural calamities and landlord exploitation in China. Meanwhile, under the British free trade policy, there were ample working opportunities in Penang, Singapore and Malacca. Most of the Chinese immigrants came from Fujian and Guandong (Yen, 2000). Coming to foreign lands, preserving cultural values and ties with kin (Tan, 2000) among the immigrant Chinese were very important (Hsu, 1985; Lim, 2005).

Preserving cultural values. According to Tan (2000), the Chinese schools in Malaysia were supported by Chinese themselves. The tradition of "everyone pitching in to raise money" (p. 237) to support the Chinese schools persevered since early 20th century. The founding and running of the Chinese schools were "motivated by a simple pride in [Chinese] culture and the desire to have [the] children educated in their own language and culture" (Tan, 2000, p. 236). One of the participants was an active committee in the school's board of governors of his primary school, in terms of both time and money.

> Alan: I am involved in the Chinese primary school's board of governor, where I used to attend (Couple 5).

Respect the elderly. Filial piety is an important virtue for Chinese. In Confucian belief, self-cultivation was developed through engaging one with others (Tu, 1985). Hsu (1985) stated that *jen*, the Chinese word meaning man, is "the place of the individual in a web of interpersonal relationships, while his wishes, predilections, and anxieties are judged according to whether they contribute to or destroy his interpersonal relationships" (p. 33). The participants of this study showed they valued filial piety in their marriages.

> Jie: 我們那個時代不同，因為那時後戰爭剛剛結束不久，還是很動亂的時候，與現在不同。那時也沒有現在有高科技，有什麼上網啊，沒有facebook，沒有什麼，所以那個年代，應該算是很單純的年代，認識了，同意了，雙方談，我的家長不在，我叫我的朋友代表，跟她母親談了以後，同意了，就結婚… (Couple 1).

> Jie: Our generation was different, because it was just after the war and the situation was still messy, unlike now. We did not have high tech, like internet, no Facebook, nothing. Thus during that that time period things were simple. We knew each other. We agreed and then two parties' parents talked. My parents were not around, my friend talked to her mother on behalf of my parents. After that, all parties agreed, then we married… (Couple 1).

> Lee: Nevertheless, the in-law is very important also. Respect the parents-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, respect them. Treat them as your parents, feel closer, very important (Couple 2).

> Sally: (laughed) He discussed with my mother. I followed you know. When you were young, you just listen and follow to what your mother said.
> Sam: But then your mother listened a lot to you (laughed). [Don't you think]?
> Sally: [Not really that]. You all talked about this marriage, what date… what date, you know the date was fixed by his auntie in Seremban (Couple 3).

> Interviewer: Is there any reason why you particularly choose this area [to buy your house]?
> David: Convenient.
> Sarah: Convenient.
> David: Because her mother was [near to this area]. It was very near (Couple 4).

> Alan: Even now we teach our own children, you all must love and care for [your spouse's] parents. Treat them like your own parents. Don't treat them like strangers. You know my son, when he went back to [his parent in-laws], I said, you make sure you stayed there and paid them some money (Couple 5).

Communal oriented. Ties with kin and community were important aspects for Chinese in the early days.

> Sam: They were just Chinese association made up of people who played the drum, activities which inherited from the culture and I had a lot of time with nothing to do. I could have joined them. And at one time I did look at them as something fun to be with... (Couple 3)

> Sally: Actually the aunty, there were two aunties, in the families. Only one aunty and the cousin, the cousin sister came only. The others didn't come to attend our wedding. That's why we went there for [13] "chum cha" (tea ceremony). You know the Cantonese people were very particular. So went and met the other aunties and families and uncle all that. So we went. That was the Chinese custom (Couple 3).

Ties with kin and community. The Chinese living overseas treasure their bonds to their clans and community. Forming clan or native associations (*huiguan*), Kongsi, secret societies, telling stories in the associations, newspapers, keeping Chinese school (Lim, 2005) were the ways to keep the communal life. The participants in this study showed they were involving in the community as well as keeping the ties to their kin.

[13] Chum cha is a tea ceremony in which the newly wed offers Chinese tea to the parents, and the elders of both sides signify their respects and the union of the two families.

Sam: [The idea of visiting the hometown of her mother as well as mine] just came naturally. Her mother was very keen to go also in her own way because her root was there and there [were] some relatives there that she wanted to see too.
Sally: My mother also liked to go and see the nephew. My mother supported this nephew in education. So he's like a son to her also. So she liked to go visit. Then you offered to have a car to drive us, that's why we were very happy you know. No need to take a train or take a bus, which was so inconvenient (Couple 3).

Sharon: So we rented a house. We got no furniture. We used bricks to make book shelf and [the youths from the church] could just sit down on the floor. The cement floors in the old house were very smooth. Every Sunday after church, all the youths would come.
Alan: Motorbike.
Sharon: Ya, they came in motorbike. And then they [packed their own lunch]. We didn't know how we went through. We got nothing to serve them. But they were happy, singing, playing guitar...
Alan: They brought their own food, had lunch there and chit chatted (Couple 5).

Jie: 。。。還有一件事，以前有去新加坡啦也是很愉快，帶著兩個孩子。因為我母親和兄弟姐妹是在新加坡。所以那時候駕車一家人回新加坡。一年回一次兩次。這也很開心 (Couple 1)。

Jie: One more thing, we were very happy when we went back to Singapore with two kids, as my mother and siblings were in Singapore. Those were happy times, when I drove the whole family to Singapore once or twice a year (Couple 1).

Xiang: 還有帶老人家去吃東西，我的father，我們兩個帶他出去吃東西。或者弟兄姐妹聚集起來，一邊談天，一邊吃東西，不知幾高興（笑）。那是快樂咯，跟他們一起 (Couple 2)。

Xiang: We took the elderly, my father, out to eat. We took him out to eat. Or the brothers and sister gathered together, chit chatting while eating happily. That's happiness, having gathering with them (Couple 2).

David: When we were working, we had quite a lot of friends. Once in a month, we went out for dinner or lunch together.
Sarah: We used to …
David: Sort of like a family affair. They would bring their children. We brought our two sons. Sometimes, they invited us to go to their house. We also invited them to come to our house. That sort of thing, it's like social gathering.
Sarah: We used to have great times. Now both of us have retired. It's very difficult to actually meet because some of us are looking after the grandchildren. Some of them have gone overseas. So the timing is very difficult. But we still try to meet (Couple 4).

Close kinship ties matter the most. In the early days, the immigrant Chinese kept the bonding with the family members through letters in China (Lim, 2005; Yen, 2000). According to Hsu (1985), for Chinese, relationship with the immediate family members is of utmost importance. Khoo and Mak (2003) studied the intention for permanent settlement in Australia; their study showed that the skilled immigrants from Singapore and Malaysia strongly inclined towards family factor, while career factors were not the main reasons in their permanent settlement intention. The couples in this study also showed a parallel pattern in putting kinship ties first, except one couple who put spouse as first place due to the religious faith.

> Jie: 因為物質生活來講，其實都是身外物，而精神方面，共同的照顧那個家，共同的為下一代，為下下一代，那才是重要的 (Couple 1)。
>
> Jie: Materialism is external. But on the spiritual aspect, we took care of the family together, working for the next generation. That is important (Couple 1).
>
> Lee: Of course the family is ours. We need to be responsible for it. I do my best to provide the needs of this family (Couple 2).
>
> Sally: … So we just concentrate on the family only. You know, never thought of anything else (Couple 3).
>
> Sam: We have children as our priority in our mind (Couple 3).
>
> David: The sons and our grandchildren are very important.
> Sarah: Very important (Couple 4).
>
> Alan: Ya, I think to me I go back to the Bible. When God put a man and a woman together, it is a covenant [that binds us] till death put us apart, for as long as we live. So your spouse is the most important. Not the children. Not the mother in-law. Not the father in-law. Two of you are the most important. So therefore, we always try to remember that, two of us are the most important. Once the children grow up, they have their own family. So we don't over emphasize in the children and neglect each other. So we ourselves come first (Couple 5).

Eat for keeping kinship and networking. There is a Chinese saying "eating is *fu* (good fortune)". Appreciating food is part of the Chinese heritage. According to Lim

(2005), it is not difficult to find restaurant for [14]*dim sum* and *yum cha* in most overseas Chinese communities. This happens in Malaysia as well. The participants in this study also revealed that eating was actually important to foster the sense of togetherness and closeness.

> Jie: 她[【住她哥哥家】，我是單色漢，就在她家裡塔伙食，就從那時候開始【我們就認識了】(Couple 1)。
>
> Jie: She [lived with her brother], I was single. I ate with her family, since then [we got to know each other] (Couple 1).
>
> Jie: 他煮东西吃，好像人家讲：（粤语）派街坊，送了给【鄰居】。他们有东西也送给我们。我们在这边，有个朋友开农场的，种香蕉，有时拿来给我们。
> Mei: 是咯 (Couple 1)。
>
> Jie: When she cooked something, she would distribute the food to the neighbors. They also gave us things in return. In our neighborhood here, there is a friend who owns a farm, in which they grow banana trees. Sometime, he gives us the bananas.
> Mei: Yes (Couple 1).

> Xiang: 他時常打包【食物】回來的。
> Lee: 坐那個 Vespa。
> Xiang: 打包什麼啊，福建面。
> Lee: 因為我爸爸是炒福建面的。
> Interviewer: 你爸爸啊？Ok。
> Lee: 很出名的。
> Xiang: 很 famous 的，我妹妹他們叫他，打包的（笑）。
> Interviewer: oh, ok.
> Lee: 所以男朋友不去宵夜，一定打包要回家，給她父母親咯（笑）。
> Xiang: 所以我妹妹他們時常吃到，所以時常笑這個 (Couple 2)。

> Xiang: He often delivered the food.
> Lee: I rode Vespa.
> Xiang: The Hokkien noodles [was packed as a take away].
> Lee: Because my father sold the Hokkien noodles.
> Interviewer: Your father? Okay.
> Lee: Quite famous.
> Xiang: Very famous. My sisters called him, the delivery man (laughed).

[14] *Dim Sum* and *yam cha* is a Cantonese cuisine, comprising of dumplings and Chinese tea, traditionally taken as breakfast.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.
Lee: So the boyfriend did not go for supper. He must deliver the noodles to her parents' home (laughed).
Xiang: Thus, my sisters often got to eat the noodles and they often laughed at this (Couple 2).

Sally: … Then come Sunday, they all went to church. And then after church, they all came to our house. My mother would cook porridge, beef, pork and people came and ate you know (Couple 3).

Sarah: … We socialized with that family, three of them, the daughter, the wife and him. So sometimes they invited us to eat there with them. I would cook different dishes and brought over and shared with them, so quite happy in that sense (Couple 4).

Sharon: Those days when he was working with the government, no problem. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner together. He would come back for lunch. Then when he joined private [company], I make sure I have breakfast with him, and he will come back for dinner, even at 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, I will still wait for him to have dinner together. So lunch he will eat out. And then later on [he] came to private [company], we try not to have dinner appointment. For dinner, must come back to the house (Couple 5).

Sharon: … Because we are not so anxious about how the children should do in school, how they should be, what they should have. To us, this is not important. But it is the togetherness, like I always insist that we have to be back on time to have dinner together. That is where we have family bonding. Other than that, they have all the freedom to do what they want (Couple 5).

Family ties were highly valued. Joy and happiness were found in family gathering. Their lives were communal oriented. In other words, the underpinning cultural value that rooted in the strengths of the couples was other-centeredness. This value formed the overarching theme and backdrop of the couples' strengths.

4.13 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative analysis is constantly in the swing between providing rich detail of the social worlds and the process of how these worlds and experiences are constructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). In the discussion of thematic analysis, the process and the experience of how marital strengths were reduced and categorized would be the focus of this section.

In terms of data analysis, there are different views in how data could be analyzed. Coding is the commonly employed method in qualitative studies, in which data are coded, categorized, and reduced into a series of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, in the post-coding world, data are not coded. According to Mazzei (2014), she proposed a diffractive reading of data, which could result in "spread[ing] thought and meaning in unpredictable and productive emergences" (p. 742). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) also argued that "qualitative data interpretation and analysis does not happen via mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes… [because] such simplistic approaches preclude dense and multi-layered treatment of data" (p. vii).

Both coding and post-coding in data analysis acquired its own value. In fact, it was both amazing and impressive to realize that qualitative study has moved so far from positivism. However, as a new researcher, the researcher needed to make a stance in how the data should be analyzed, though there was "no study conforms exactly to a standard methodology" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 5). Miles & Huberman (1994) suggested that individual's study should call for researcher to "bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting" (p. 5). In considering the accessibility of support and training, the context and culture of the institution, and the objective of the study, the researcher adopted the coding approach for thematic analysis, which focused on finding out the common strengths among the couples.

The process of thematic analysis was depicted in Figure 4. 8. The process of data analysis would be presented as data condensation (coding of data), data display (categorization) and conclusion drawing/ verification (Miles et al., 2014). The condensation process had been an on-going process during data collection stage. The codes were entered into the Nvivo 10 computer software as nodes during the description write up (see Appendix G).

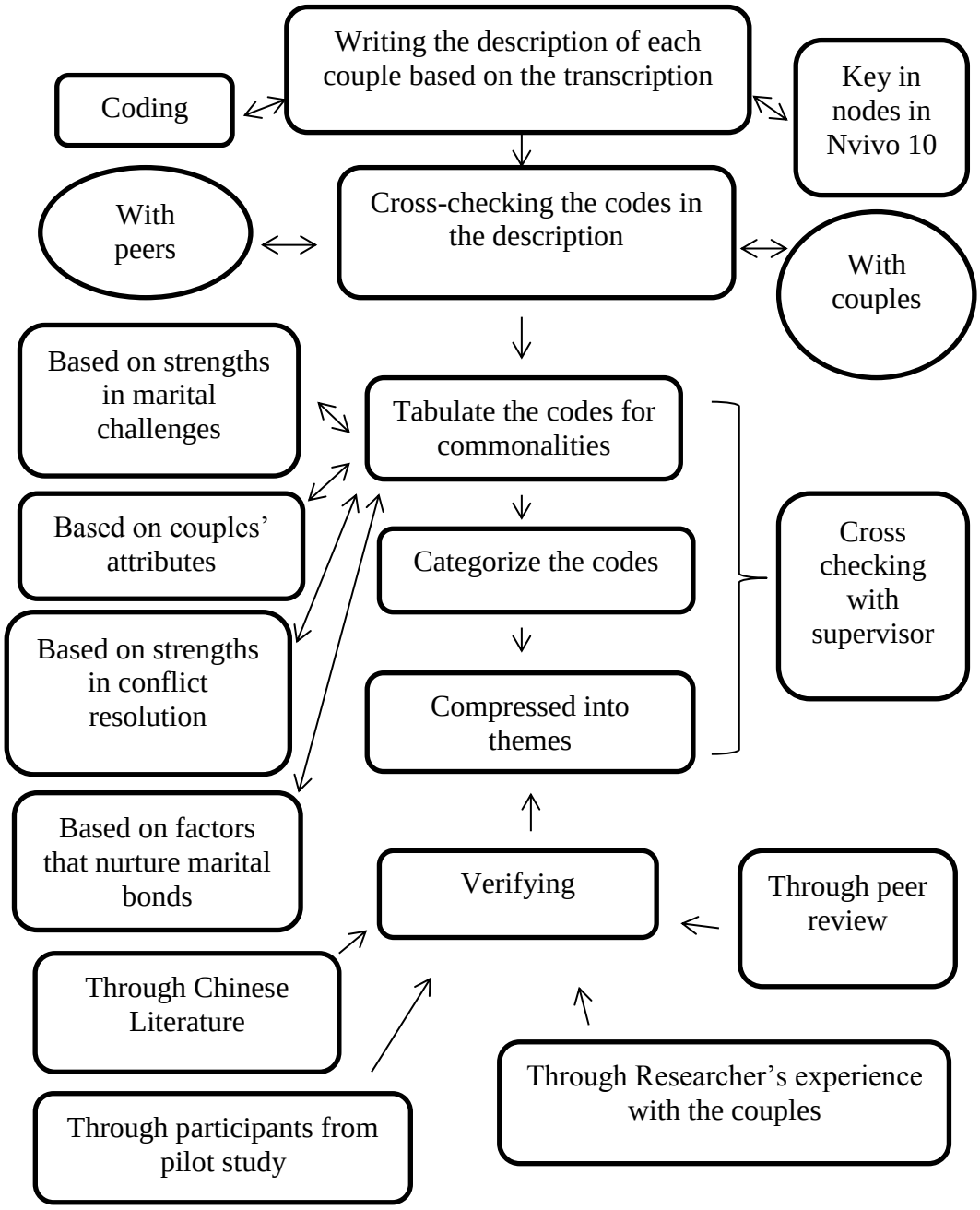

Figure 4.8: Process of Thematic Analysis

After identifying the codes in Nvivo 10, the nodes were retrieved and tabulated according to: a) Strengths in marital challenges (see Appendix K); b) Strengths in dealing with conflicts (see Appendix L); c) Common attributes between husbands and wives (see Appendix M) and d) Enhancers for couples' sense of togetherness (see Appendix N). This structure matched the format in the descriptions of couples. Then the

codes were categorized according to their relationship and similarities. The similarities were categorized into common similarity (three similarities among the five couples), more common similarity (four similarities among the five couples) and the most common similarity (common similarities among the five couples). The most common similarities among the five couples were chosen for data display. However, while the most common similarities were insisted, the researcher noticed some important codes would have to be omitted. For example, children-centeredness was common among four couples. One couple believes spouse-centered was essential for their marriage. Considering the context of the Chinese in Malaysia, children centeredness is still an important anchor for marriages. Thus, the cut off point for the strengths of the tabulated codes were between the more common similarity and the most common similarity.

When the similar strengths among the five couples were identified, each of the strengths was further looked into for any sub-categories which were associated with the identified strength, according to the transcription. Data categorizations were organized according to: a) Marital Strengths in Marital Challenges (see Table 4.2); b) Common Attributes between Husbands and Wives (see Table 4.3), c) Strengths in Dealing with Conflicts (see Table 4.4); and d) Enhancers for Couples' Sense of Togetherness (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.2: Data Categorization for Marital Strengths in Marital Challenges

Strengths in Marital Challenges
Common strengths among the five couples: 1. Religiosity a) Abiding to the religious teaching b) Prayer 2. Tolerance a) Due to the next generation b) Due to spouse's feeling c) Due to the love for the family d) Due to the relationship e) Due to the love from God 3. Empathy 4. Support Systems a) Maternal support b) Support from spouse c) Support from responsible children 5. Communal oriented a) Respect the elderly b) Children-centered c) Committed in the social expected role 6. Partnership a) Playing their respective roles b) Sharing house chores 7. Accommodativeness a) Not demanding b) Believing in give and take c) Accepting reality d) Remaining faithful

Table 4.3: Data Categorization for Common Attributes of Husbands and Wives

Common Attributes Of Wives	Common Attributes Between Husbands And Wives	Common Attributes Of Husbands
• Supportive • Committed • Sensible • Meek • Selfless • Thrifty	• Hard working • Determined • Community prone • Tolerant • Respectful to elderly • Religious • Accommodative • Empathetic • Children centered • Studious • Positive	• Giving • Responsible • Appreciative to wife's contribution • Hardy • Caring

Table 4.4: Data Categorization for Marital Strengths in Handling Conflicts

Strengths in Handling Conflicts
1. Religiosity a) Through prayers b) Through abiding to the religious teaching 2. Other-centeredness a) Love for the children – no argument in front of children b) Be role model for other siblings 3. Tolerance a) No Keeping of anger b) Keep quiet i) For cooling down ii) For reflection iii) To avoid open clash c) Still carrying out daily functioning routine d) Choose the right time to speak e) No open quarrel f) Refrain from hurting words g) Let go Based on: i) Religious teaching ii) Relationship iii) Respect for the elderly 4. Accommodative a) Accommodate by adjusting to it b) Accommodate other's thinking c) Accommodate by compromising d) Accept spouse's characters 5. Humor 6. Reciprocal responses

Table 4.5: Data Categorization for Enhancers for Couples' Sense of Togetherness

Enhancers for Couples' Sense of Togetherness
1. Sharing common interests a) Common friends b) Common hobbies c) Common topics of sharing d) Common views and thoughts e) Common lifestyle f) Common activities i) Watching TV/ Movies ii) Eat and drink iii) Social work/ volunteering iv) Sport 2. Together moments a) Talk i) To joke about things around ii) To share each other's burden iii) To solve problems iv) To make decision v) To share things which are relevant to their daily lives vi) To ask for opinions b) Enjoy the presence of each other 3. Religious connection a) Pray together b) Sharing the learning from meditation 4. Life crisis and sickness 5. Respect each other's parents 6. Love for the children 7. Value marital sex 8. Take care of each other's daily needs 9. Partnership 10. Respect spouse's hobbies 11. Express affection 12. Humor

The data display in the preceding tables was further compressed for common similarities. The Strengths in Marital Challenges were cross examined with the Common Attributes between Husbands and Wives. The rationale for this was to surface the attributes of the couples, as well as the strengths which were beyond personal attributes. As a result, besides the common attributes of husbands and wives (tolerance, accommodativeness and empathy), children, elderly, religion and support systems emerged as important anchors in long term marriages.

Then the Strengths for Marital Challenge and the Strengths for Dealing with Conflicts were compressed for similarities. The surfaced strengths were: religiosity, love for the children, tolerance, and accommodativeness.

For the enhancers of the couple's sense of togetherness, the data display listed the enhancers which were mentioned by all the couples. There were three similar anchoring strengths surfaced: religiosity, children and showing respect to the elderly. These strengths were commonly talked about by all five couples as important anchors that induced appreciation in their marital relationships. The process of compression was discussed closely with the research supervisor. Figure 4.9 summarized the findings.

By considering the similar strengths demonstrated by all the couples, other-centeredness was drawn as the theme for their strengths. The theme was further verified with the Malaysian Chinese literature, the researcher's experience with the couples and the data from the two dropped out couples as well as those six couples who were involved in formulating the interview questions (pilot study).

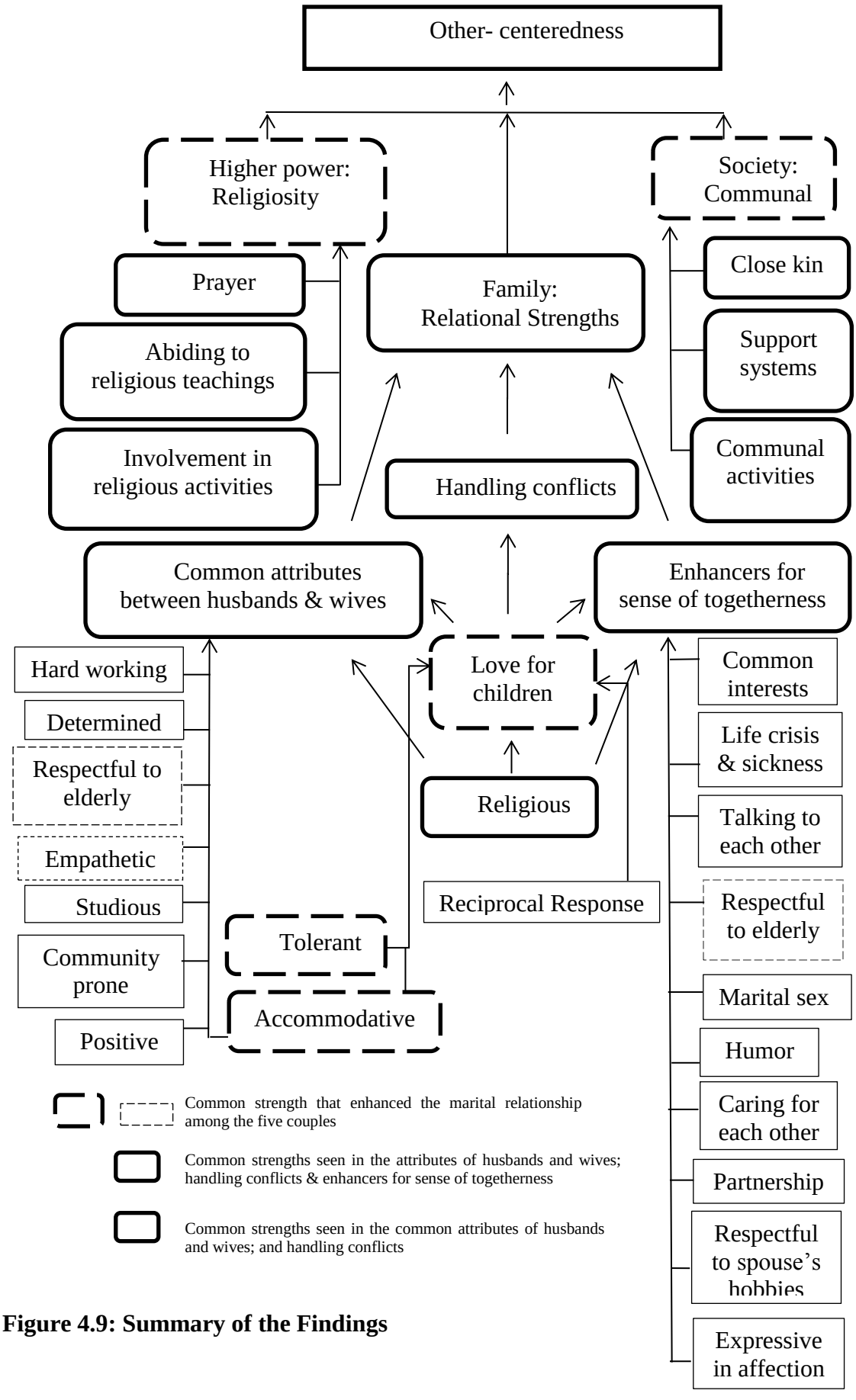

Figure 4.9: Summary of the Findings

The common anchors of couples' strengths were religion, children, elderly, communal supports, tolerance and accommodativeness. These strengths were highlighted in bold and dotted boxes.

Religion was the most prominent anchor for the couples' strengths. However, there were frequent discussions on the difference between religion and spirituality. Walsh (1999) identified the distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion is defined as "an organized belief system that includes shared and usually institutionalized, moral values, beliefs about God or a Higher power, and involvement in a faith community" (p. 5). Spirituality, nonetheless, is a set of internal values, which "fosters a sense of meaning, inner wholeness, harmony, and connection with others - a unity with all life, nature, and the universe" (p. 6). Nevertheless, Chu (1985) observed that the self of Chinese is founded on the interactions with three elements, namely the significant others, materials and objects; ideas, beliefs and values. Second to the relationship with significant others, the strength of Chinese self is cultural ideas, which comprise values and religious teaching. In other words, Chinese tended to be other driven. In light of Walsh's distinction between religion and spirituality, Chu's observation on the self of the Chinese, "religiosity" seemed more appropriate in the contexts of the couples. Religiosity of the couples was reflected through reverence to the higher power, abiding to the religious teaching and involvement in community life.

Other than religion, children were also prominent strengths that anchored the marriage during challenging and high tension moments. Nevertheless, good children, characterized by responsible and caring children, also created supports for couples.

> Sarah: [Watching the *kung fu* show in Shaw brother theaters was] a family outing. And then the older boy, there was one day, when it was drizzling quite heavily. So coming from Ipoh Road into the Capitol theater, there was a stretch. So what I did was I took an umbrella, shared with two of them, and we

took them over. So I said, now I am going to fetch daddy on the other side. So there was no car at that time and he was waiting at the bus stop there. So I went back and I said [to the older boy], you look after your younger brother.
Interviewer: How old were they?
Sarah: Quite young… quite young…
David: Before they went to school.
Sarah: Before they went to school.
David: About 5 or 6.
Sarah: So I held the umbrella and quickly went to fetch him. When we came back, the older brother was hugging on to the little brother. So scared that he would run out you know (laughed).
Interviewer: (laughed)
Sarah: We was so touched. And we praised him. They are very good brothers. Even now, he cares about his brother. The two of them, they care for each other (Couple 4).

Mary: Scholarship in America. To study in America. The other two have to… but my children are very good children. They don't simply spend the money. What we gave them, they just managed. And then they went and did… like [the second son] went to do the bakery early morning, went and earned some money (Couple 3).

Another common strength was respect for the elderly. The couples expressed appreciation for their spouse' respect and love for each other's parents. Respect to the elderly was commonly mentioned by the couples as being crucial in making their marriages long lasting.

Lee: The in-laws are very important. Respect the parent in-law, father in-law, mother in-law, respect them. Treat them as your parents. Feel closer, very important (Couple 2).

Alan: She has set a very good standard that [no matter how] tough the mother in-law was, she would treat herself like the daughter and love them. Even though they abused her, she still loved them. So by that she gained a lot of respect from the husband (Couple 5).

Other than religion, children and elderly, communal support was another important aspect which girds the strength of marriages. Communal support included support from close kin (good children and maternal support), support systems (support from friends, neighbors and church members), and communal activities. Communal support was important to ease marital challenges experienced by couples.

Mary: Also my mother was very good in helping sometimes. We went and stayed in her place for one year. We didn't pay her anything you know. We stayed with her for one year (Couple 3).

Xiang: 照顧最辛苦囉。不過大的有我媽媽幫我照顧 (Couple 2)。

Xiang: Taking care of the kids was the toughest, but then I [received] help from my mother to take care of the kids (Couple 2).

Sarah: Because my wound was healing very well. My friends supported us very well [after my hysterectomy operation]. I have a few, two very good friends, who cooked for my family. Cooked and asked my husband to collect the food from them. And then bring back for them to eat. And then my Indian friend, she was very good. She cooked their herbal drink you know. And [she] asked him to bring it to me so that the wound would heal fast. She is very good. So these are very good friends. I still keep in touch with them and we are very old, all of us. We are still very good friends… (Couple 4).

Jie: 那麼我們現在最大的頭痛是，我的女兒，本來我有一輛汽車，她認為我這樣老不適合駕車，所以我們出入會不方便，要靠鄰居 (Couple 1)。

Jie: Our biggest headache now is, our daughter thinks we are not suitable to drive, we used to have a car though. Thus, it's very inconvenient for us to go around. We have to rely on our neighbors (Couple 1).

Sharon: [After I gave birth to our first baby], we got very good church members who cooked for us before his mother arrived. His mother got to travel from KL. So I thought I was more worried, because the baby was so fragile and I didn't know what to do with it (Couple 5).

The prominent attributes to hold the marriages were tolerance and accommodativeness. Tolerance and accommodativeness appeared overlapping in the meanings. A closer examination of tolerance and accommodative, the researcher decided to separate tolerance and accommodativeness. The researcher noticed that tolerance acquired self-control to delay one's reaction and to refrain from doing things that hurt the relationship, when the relationship was tense. The following excerpts illustrated tolerance as:

Alan: I think when a person is angry, he talks a lot. You retreat. So don't talk. I don't want to talk. So usually when she is in that mood, I won't try to convince her not to be angry.
Interviewer: Okay
Alan: Nor would I want to [explain] to her the facts. I don't do that (Couple 5).

Sarah: What had happened was there were times when we had all these problems, I would just leave him alone. And things will work out fine when we meet.
Interviewer: Okay
Sarah: I just went and did my reading, or I would do my cooking, and I [helped] my boys [with their homework], talked to the boys, and [then] things worked out fine (Couple 4).

Mary: We never argue in front of the children. [If] we want to say anything, we say it later (Couple 3).

Xiang: 要看情形的有時候真的是。看他忙那時候真的不要講。或者是疲倦呀睡覺呀那些又不要講囉。受了委屈呀那些什么要keep quiet囉。通常我們是一起禱告讀聖經的時候我才講囉 (Couple 2)。

Xiang: Sometimes it depends, really. When he is busy, I won't [speak]. Or when he is sleepy or tired, I won't [say anything]. I'll keep quiet when I feel lousy. Usually when we pray and read the Scriptures together, I [will then bring out the issue] (Couple 2).

For accommodativeness, it involved flexibility when adjusting to differences. It was characterized by not demanding, believing in give and take, accepting, remaining faithful, adjusting and compromising.

Alan: … And I didn't demand on what I wanted, like having time for myself, to come back to be pampered by [my] wife. Although I had to give up, forego a lot, but rather to see, these three kids can go to the park or go somewhere so that she can relax for a while. That kind of understanding and adjustment is important (Couple 5).

David: But for the home things, like kitchen things, all those things, most of the time I will let her decide. Then we have to see who uses it more often. I will let her decide. But then certain things I felt that what she chose, it's not too practical. So I would explain to her why I wanted [a different] one. [In the case of buying a fridge], she wanted a smaller fridge and said it's enough. Then I [would prefer] a certain brand but she didn't like it and she said [it's] too big.
Sarah: I found it's too big.
David: (laughed)
Sarah: But now it's working. It's okay. There are a lot of decision-making in the family. And then we [learn to] give and take (Couple 4).

David: But then your character is like that, so sometimes it really helps [that she gives in when my temper starts to boil].
Sarah: His character is like that (Couple 4).

Alan: We joined choir and so on. Even though we didn't have enough food to eat or whatever, yet we didn't like to cry over it, or looked sorrowful. We were

so busy in the church and we trusted the Lord. The Lord would supply (Couple 5).

Sam: We may have our differences in thinking [and] we are entitled to think the way we want. If husband and wife cannot [communicate] to each other, who else can we [talk] to? After that, [just shelf] the problem up in the sleep. I think it helps us a lot along the way (Couple 3).

David: No major argument. We just discuss it.
Sarah: We discuss and then we…
David: Thought about it
Sarah: Then sit down and look through the budget. [Then] see how things go…
Interviewer: How you normally resolve the difference or argument? How do you normally resolve it?
David: Mostly compromise.
Sarah: We come to a compromise
Interviewer: Both?
Sarah: Mid way. We [agree at] midway (Couple 4).

Empathy was another strength which sustained the couples through constraints and difficult time. Empathy was depicted in the followings:

David: [When I was angry with the mother in-law], I initiated [the conversation] most of the time, I think.
Interviewer: How did you respond?
Sarah: But sometimes, I used to, I know his mood. And I knew what was behind it. So I always tried to soften it.
Interviewer: What did you do to soften it?
Sarah: Actually, I just say, go ahead and tell me what happened. He would tell (Couple 4).

Alan: Ah… as far as adjustment…because as a breadwinner, I had to work outside, more was on her. She took care of the three kids. But thank God, when I worked, I was able to engage a worker, a helper in the house, domestic helper. But I also realized that it was not easy to take care of the children. So became more tolerant, more understanding (Couple 5).

After compression, these were the prominent strengths, namely, religion, children, elderly, communal support, tolerance, accommodativeness and empathy. One theme emerged from these strengths was other-centeredness. The theme was drawn based on the Malaysian Chinese literature and the experience of the researcher. The emerged theme was verified with data both from the couples who were dropped off from data

collection and the couples from the convenient sampling (which derived from pilot study at the initial stage of data collection).

4.14 The Researcher's Reflection on Thematic Analysis

However, while working through the thematic analysis, the researcher often felt the struggle of seeing the parts without considering the whole. For instance, a few couples talked about sense of responsibility which sustained their marriages, while other couples did not mention the importance of responsibility. This did not mean that sense of responsibility was not important for those couples who did not mention it. The same applied to complementary division of labor in the household. In fact, the domains of strengths which the couples emphasized differed among couples. In other words, marital constructs need to be rooted in the life and cultural contexts of each couple. This would reflect the nature and uniqueness of each marriage.

The researcher also felt the impossibility to generalize the strengths surfaced from this research. Underlying all the strengths, the researcher noticed there were reciprocal interactions which supported the strengths of couples. In other words, the theme of this study needs to be understood from a systemic point of view. The strengths of the couples were co-created and they should not be evaluated from a linear perspective. Figure 4.10 depicted the theme emerged from this study.

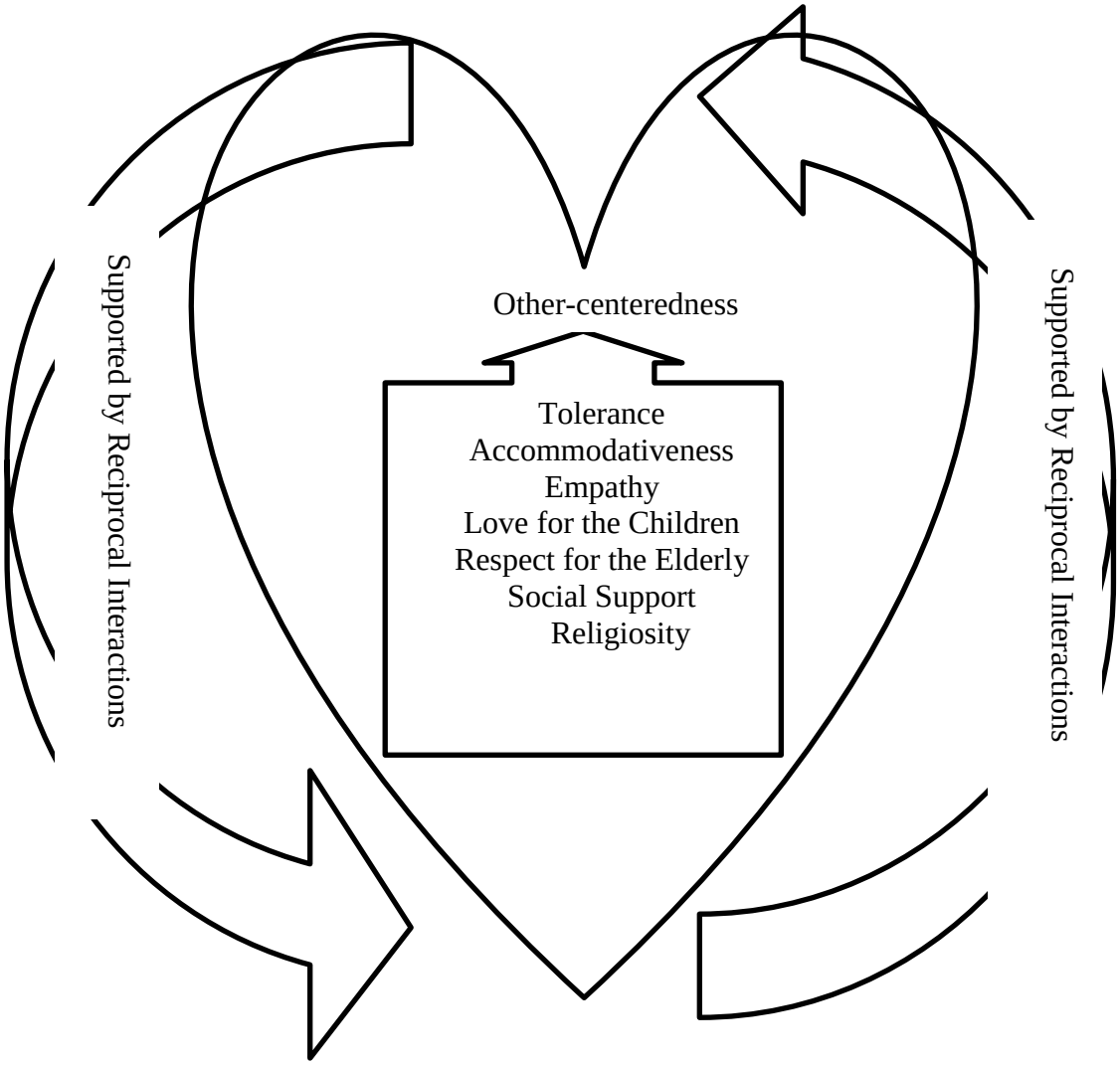

Figure 4.10: Theme Emerged from the Strengths of Long Term Chinese Married Couples

With the above consideration, the seven emerged strengths could not simply be used to represent strengths that sustain long term marriages. By doing so, it would oversimplify the complexity and the enriching experience of the couples. Instead, holistic views on the lives of the couples, the cultural values and the external social system should be taken into consideration.

4.15 Overall Summary of the Data Analysis

Malaysians are made up of diverse cultures and ethnic groups. Even among Chinese, the use of languages, dialect groups, lifestyles, belief systems differ widely. How couples carry themselves differ in the location they reside. The researcher's experience with the couples' residential surroundings differed from one couple to another. The landscapes of some residential areas were well established with trees lining the well-paved roads and fully equipped recreational areas.

On the other hand, in some residential areas, constructions could still be seen in the midst of already congested and disorganized housing areas. The roads were torn and inundated with holes. Hawker stalls occupied parts of the road sides. The surroundings of the residential areas reflected not only the social networking, socio economic status, tastes and priorities of the couples. It also connoted the politics of social policies.

The experiences of meeting the English speaking couples and the Chinese speaking couples were an interesting one. Coincidentally, all the contacts for entry were through the husbands. When meeting Chinese speaking couples, once they knew the referrals were from their friends, the consent to participate was granted to the researcher by a mere phone call. Though they showed a warm welcome, often the addresses and directions given to reach their places were vague. The researcher needed to get help from Google map before taking off. They sent the researcher away with snacks after the interview sessions. Whereas, for the English speaking couples, after a phone call explaining the objectives of the research, they would request for an email explaining the objective of the study and the informed consent in black and white. They showed eagerness to find out my background before they granted their consent for entry. Once they granted their permission to participate, they would show concern whether the

researcher knew how to get to their places. The direction they gave was clear. Two among the three English speaking couples invited the researcher for meals.

Another difference between Chinese and English speaking couples is communication style. The Chinese speaking couples were terse in speaking compared with English speaking couples. It seemed easier for Chinese speaking couples to relate events or incidents. The researcher observed that it was quite difficult to elicit information from the Chinese speaking couples, if the interview questions were to ask, "How do you feel about it? Or how would you perceive…?" However, these types of questions would not seem difficult for the English speaking couples to answer.

Expressions of affection also differed among English speaking and Chinese speaking couples. The researcher grew up in a family environment in which affection was not freely expressed. When interviewing Chinese speaking couples, for whom affection was not openly expressed, it was something familiar to the researcher. In fact, it was common among many Chinese. However, when the researcher met the English speaking couple, who had married for 59 years, they openly talked about how they fell in love with each other. They hold the longest marriage among the couples whom the researcher met, and yet they were the most affectionate among the couples. It was something shocking to the researcher. Their marriage shook the researcher's generalization on Chinese marriage. This encounter taught the researcher to be mindful of not lightly making presumptions towards marriage. In short, each couple whom I met painted different pictures of marriage.

Though the social "protocol" differed among the English speaking and the Chinese speaking couples, the common thing among the couples was they were community

inclined. They valued Chinese cultural practices. They were respectful to the elderly. They enjoyed social gatherings with their kin, friends and community.

In terms of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, there was a certain degree of trust, based on the researcher's experience and the participants' responses. The degree of trust differed among the couples. The researcher noticed the degree of trust with Couple 4 and 5 were higher. This could mean the researcher is undergoing the process of change, judging from the constructivist stance (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The researcher noticed that trusting relationship between the researcher and the couples can put both parties into vulnerable situation when it came to write up and analysis.

The analysis and interpretation were at the discretion of the researcher. The researcher was cautious not to exploit the trust given by the couples. Handling trust in the process of analysis and interpretation, it was a process the researcher had to take risk and to learn from mistakes along the way. The researcher came to realize the power between the researcher and the participants, in which authors in qualitative studies had discussed.

Another dimension of power which the researcher observed was triangulation in the family triad. The researcher was quite relaxed when she was the third party during the interview. The researcher did not feel the tension that she had to take side to balance the power. Or did the couple exhibit the tendency to triangulate the researcher into their relationship to resolve any unresolved tension.

Even though there was a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants, the researcher did not ignore the fact that the participants filtered and selected what they wanted to share. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) stated that "data is

partial, incomplete and always being re-told and re-membered" (p. 3). With that in mind, the researcher acknowledged the humility of being a qualitative researcher, whose work could never be thoroughly complete and is constantly going through progression. Yvonna Lincoln (2013) said it well, "This effort to capture the basic presupposition and their implications for human inquiry is a work in progress, probably very far from completion" (p. 31).

Standing in between postpositivist and constructivist paradigms, it enlightened the researcher to realize the importance of matching the objective of study and the paradigm of research. In constructing the reality, the researcher had to admit that data analysis is tinted with the researcher's life experience, values, knowledge and the contextual background where the researcher grew up in. The researcher felt it was almost impossible to be totally objective when life experiences were elicited and exchanged. While the criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research still ascribe itself to widely criticized conventional ways of validity checks, the researcher agreed with Morrow (2005) that researchers should drift away from "extrinsic parallel criteria and adopting intrinsic standards of trustworthiness that have emerged more directly from the qualitative endeavor" (p. 252).

4.16 Conclusion

To answer the research questions, seven strengths were identified among the long term married Malaysian Chinese couples, namely tolerance, accommodativeness, empathy, love for the children, respect for the elderly, social support and religiosity. These strengths were found to be supported by the reciprocal interaction between the husband and wife, the reciprocal supports among the family members and the cultural values at that time. The strengths should be understood in lights of the cultural contexts. In taking into consideration of the cultural contexts and the commonality of the

identified strengths, the emerged theme from the strengths was reciprocal-based other-centeredness.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, implications of this study, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and the conclusion. The discussion of findings will focus on: 1) linking the findings to existential theory; 2) linking the findings to intrapersonal dynamics of Western self and Eastern self; 3) linking the findings to religious involvement; 4) linking the findings to interpersonal theories; 5) linking the findings to social influence; 6) linking the findings to Asian Psychology; 7) other interesting findings; 8) the theoretical and practical implications of the study will be discussed. Lastly, recommendations for further research will be offered, followed by the conclusion.

5.1 Discussion of the Findings

Existential theory is the main theory used in this study. The following discussion will focus on how the findings relate to existential theory. Besides, other theories and perspectives are incorporated to further explain the outcome of this research.

5.1.1 The Findings and Existential Theory

In this study, the theme that has emerged prominently is other-centeredness among the Malaysian Chinese couples in long term marriage. It is a value embedded in the Asian culture that upholds collectivism. Other-centeredness is well grounded among the couples to overcome challenges. It is a strong anchor in long term marriage, and this is congruent to existential theory. As Frankl (1967) stated, in attaining meaning, man has to go beyond himself. He specified that "The meaning which a being has to fulfill is something beyond himself, it is never just himself" (p. 10). For example, the causes of meanings found in these couples are to have a happy family, to live fully for God, to

love the family and to leave a good legacy for the children. The basis of their meanings is beyond self-fulfilling.

The essence of existential theory, according to Sartre (1987), was the will to choose in the midst of the inevitable. In other words, human beings are responsible for choosing their actions and behaviors. He said, "What happens to me happens through me, and I can neither affect myself with it nor revolt against it nor resign myself to it. Moreover, everything which happens to me is mine" (p. 53). The common essence among the existential theorists is that man can choose how he wants to relate to the life conditions he faces. They emphasized that it is the attitude of a person towards his environment or life confinement that determine his/her fate. Man navigates his destiny. Self-determinism is prevalent in existential theory.

In this study, the couples' attitudes toward challenges in their marriage also exhibited self-determinism. The couples chose their attitudes in relating to the tension with in-law, the negative influence from the family of origin, financial constraints, arrival of children and illnesses. For example, the husband of Couple 4 and the wife of couple 5, both of them grew up in broken families, in which their fathers had extra-marital affairs. The extra-marital affairs tormented their families. Instead of being negative about the past, they turned the negative past into a motivation to build a happy marriage and family. Self-determinism was also illustrated by Couples 1, who overcame the pain of illnesses. Nevertheless, the researcher noticed there was a slight different in the root of self-determinism between this findings and the existential theory.

The root of self-determinism in existential theory is the drive of man to deal with unchangeable life condition and to be the navigator of his fate (Sartre, 1987). Whereas, the couples in the findings showed that commitment to their roles was the foundation of

self-determinism. For example, the husband of couples 2 worked long hours and had a part time job. He still helped out in doing household chores on top of his existing long working hours. The bases of his attitude were his roles as the bread winner, setting an example to his siblings, as well as his wife's siblings. In other words, his positive attitudes were girded by the roles he played. The disparity will be further discussed to understand the dynamics between the Western and Eastern theories of self.

5.1.2 The Findings and Intrapersonal Dynamics of Western and Eastern Theories of Self

For Western theories of self, inner regulation and making good choice are important elements in the self. For Maslow (1968), integration of self is defined as "A fusion of ego, id, super-ego and ego-ideal, of conscious, preconscious and unconscious, of primary and secondary processes, a synthesizing of pleasure principle with reality principle, a healthy regression without fear in the service of the greatest maturity, a true integration of the person at all levels" (p. 96). Rogers (1961) stated that the development of self is through recognizing that "I am the one who chooses" and "I am the one who determines the value of an experience for me" (p. 122). According to Frankl (1967), "[Man] becomes capable of taking a stand not only toward the world but also toward himself. Man is being capable of reflecting on, and even rejecting himself. He can be his own judge, the judge of his own deeds" (p. 2). In other words, for Western theorists, self involves regulation of internal psychic and making good choices in order to cope with life situations.

On the other hand, the Chinese self also consists of inner regulation and making good choices, but there is a slight deviation from the self in Western theories. Chu (1985) and Hsu (1985) stated that the self of Chinese is founded on the roles they play or the expectations from others. The findings of this study showed that the self of Chinese

contained both other-driven as well as regulation of inner experience. For example, the wife of Couple 5, she did not know how to cook when she married to her husband. Her mother-in-law scorned at her inability to cook. She clung on to her roles, as she told herself, “I wanted to be a good mother and to be a good wife. So I tried my best, I just wanted to be a good wife”. She showed her regulation of inner thoughts by learning from other, as she said to herself, “I wanted to learn from people’s experience. I learned from their mistakes. I caught up faster. So I think he should be happy. I treated his mother very nice”. In other words, the findings of this study supported the studies on the self of Chinese that it is founded by other-centeredness. This study also confirmed that self is consisted of inner regulation experience which functions as making better choices for the relationship. However, highlighting inner regulation of thoughts was not the focus of Chinese studies on the self.

The findings of this study supported both theories on the Western and Eastern self. This study showed that self-determinism, inner regulation, making good choices and other-centeredness are important elements in overcoming challenges for both Western and Eastern models. However, the basis for self-determinism, inner regulation and making good choices among the Malaysian Chinese couples and Western theory differed. In the Western theory, the bases for self-determinism, inner regulation and better choice making are going beyond fulfilling self, to be the god of their life and to own their experience (Frankl, 1967). The bases of self for Malaysian Chinese are secured in other-centeredness and their expected roles.

Nevertheless, there were some on field observations the researcher noted. The capability of the Malaysian Chinese couples to express their experience in inner regulation depended on their educational level and their articulation ability. The English

speaking couples were found to be more comfortable and capable in relating to questions pertaining to experience in inner regulation.

In this study, the researcher also noticed that couples who were able to live with "a synthesizing of pleasure principle with reality principle" (Maslow, 1968, p. 96) are showed to be more affectionate, lively and humorous in their interactions with each other. In fact, relationship excitement was found to induce satisfaction in relationship (Malouff, Mundy, Galea, & Bothma, 2015).

In short, self-determinism, inner regulation, making choices revealed both similarities and its dissimilarities between the Western and Eastern frameworks. Religiosity is another crucial dimension of the self, which deserves to be discussed in separate section.

5.1.3 The Findings and Religiosity

The studies of religiosity and marriage in the West are measured by church attendance, joint religious activities, similar and dissimilar denomination, conservative and liberal religious attitudes, perception of the sanctification in their marriage, religious belief and marital stress (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2008). Their meta-analytic review between religiosity, marriage and parenting revealed that joint religious activities and sanctification of marriage (which is referring to couples' perception on one's marriage "as having spiritual character and significance" (p. 80)) heighten marital functioning positively. These two elements are referred to as "proximal religious variables" (p. 80). The findings of this study reinforced the importance of "proximal religious variables" in positive marital functioning. The couples in this study showed how religious belief impacted their marital functioning positively in managing conflicts, nurturing their marital bond and coping with marital challenges.

However, there are a few dimensions, which reflect how religiosity could be influenced by cultural values and contexts. Understanding the teaching of Confucius would shed light on these dimensions. In the Confucian belief, self-cultivation is mandate for spiritual development because human nature is heaven inherent (Tu, 1985). According to Tu (1985), one's selfhood is deepened and widened through relationships with significant others. This reciprocal participation with significant others is deemed to be "absolute necessary" (p. 247). The engagement with others provides a context to cultivate the self so that it reflects the heaven inherent nature of humans. With that, communal activities in religious exercise are important aspects in cultivating the self.

In this study, the researcher observed communal involvement that includes the connection with community by having meals together, running activities beneficial to the community, as well as involvement in religious activities as a community. This is termed as extrinsic religious communal. Another dimension of communal involvement is to uphold the ideal of marital life that bears testimony of religious belief, so that others (including children, siblings and friends) would be impacted positively. The researcher names this as intrinsic religious communal, where religious faith is engaged in personal belief and behaviors. The religiosity of Malaysian Chinese couples bears both extrinsic religious communal and intrinsic religious communal. Both communal involvements are other driven.

This study has shown that the forms of joint activities and the perception of sanctification among Malaysian Chinese couples differed from the study by Mahoney et al. (2008), in which the concept extends beyond the marital relationship. Another difference is the perception of others is more influential than the couples' perception of their own marriage. In other words, other provides a measurement for the couples' behaviors.

In terms of depth of religious influence, the couples in this study showed different extent in religiosity. The depth of faith depended heavily on the demand of work and child care and the availability of religious communal support. If the demand of work and child care is great, the involvement in religious activities would be less. If the availability of religious communal support is strong, it would enhance the degree of faith.

Religiosity plays a significant role in shaping the behaviors, perceptions and belief systems of married couples. It is central to relationship maintenance behaviors. However, the forms of religious involvement and perception of religious values on marriage could be shaped by cultural values.

The intrapersonal dimensions of the self in close relationship acquire inner regulation, being considerate to others, reverence to the law of nature and religious involvement. The discussion of the intrapersonal aspect of close relationship did not seem to substantiate the reality captured in this study. Thus, interpersonal dimension as well as the social environment will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1.4 The Findings and Interpersonal Theories

In this study, reciprocal interaction was prevalent between couple and within the family. Family system theories and interdependent theory will be incorporated to elaborate the findings of this study.

In the discussion of family system theories, Bowen's family system theory will be discussed first. Family system theory offered a new approach to conceptualize the relational process that occurred in family systems (Magnavita, 2012). The fundamental concept in Bowen's theory is the differentiation of self (Bowen, 1976). Differentiation

of self is regulated by emotional and intellectual functioning. It is important to achieve maturity without losing the sense of connection with others.

Moreover, the definition of emotion among Chinese and Westerners could be different. In Bowen's family system theory, the ability to differentiate emotion and intellectual functioning is essential for growth. For Chinese, on the other hand, *qing* (closest to emotion) consists of joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate and desire are inborn feelings that are foundational to being genuine. *Li* (rituals) is used to refine emotions (Averill & Sundararajan, 2006). In Confucius teaching, self-cultivation is central to growth. Thus, the main variance here is, in Bowen's theory, the intellectual process helps to govern the life of a person (Bowen, 1976); whereas for Chinese, self-cultivation is essential for development. In fact, during the data collection stage, the researcher observed it was not easy for Chinese speaking couples to express their experience and feelings. They preferred to describe their experiences through events, people or incidents. In other words, it would be quite difficult to distinguish feelings and intellectual process, as these two processes imbue in the self. This reflects the varied meaning of self in Western and Chinese cultures (Lam & Chan-So, 2015).

Studies showed that family of origin and the quality of parental marriage have significant impact on the children's relationship quality (Bradbury et al., 2000; Holman & Busby, 2011). In Bowen's theory, the multigenerational transmission process is characterized as passing on the patterns of coping with stress. The symptom of family problems can be carried forward through several generations (Gladding, 2010). In this study, there were two participants who talked about the negative influence of the family of origin. Both of them shared the impacts of their fathers' extra-marital affairs. These incidents had hurt them greatly, and yet their pains motivated them to remain loyal to their spouse and to build good marriage. Thus, the researcher proposes that

multigenerational transmission process is not necessarily characterized by negative influence from the previous generation. Multigenerational transmission process could be diverted into positive motivation for current marriage. There should be more studies to investigate the positive effects of generational family influence.

Multigenerational involvement with close kin members and relatives were found to be positively associated with high marital functioning (Klever, 2015). This study supported the significant of interacting with relatives and close kin. For example, the house of Couple 2 is surrounded by their siblings. The close connection with their kin is a buffer for them during great festival, like Chinese New Year, particularly all their children are residing in overseas.

Although the outcomes for relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction varied among studies (Skowron, 2000), there was one aspect of self that is relevant to this study - the level of solid self and the pseudo self in intimate marital relationship. The following is Bowen's description:

> In a marriage, two pseudo-selfs fuse into a we-ness in which one becomes the dominant decision maker or the most active in taking initiative for the we-ness. The dominant one gains self at the expense of the other, who loses it. The adaptive one may volunteer to give up self to the dominant one, who accepts it; or the exchange may be worked out after bargaining. The more that the spouses can alternate these roles, the healthier the marriage. The exchanging of selfs may be on a short or long term basis (p. 69).

In the cultural context at that time, women's power and position were lower. Women tended to give up their selfs in order to establish the we-ness in the relationship more than men. The males were the dominant ones in the marital relationship. The fusion of the wives' selfs reflected in the marriages in this study was based on the respect to the elderly, love for the children, the family and the God they worship.

Nonetheless, the researcher also observed that it was crucial that the exchange of pseudo-selfs, especially the one who volunteered to give up self, was not exploited in the relationships. Most of the wives showed a greater degree in give up self as compared to the husbands. The husbands in this study showed recognition for their wife's contribution. They also showed support to the wife. Thus, their relationship was able to be maintained in a balanced manner. In this study, it was shown that the degree of self's fusion depended on the support of the spouse, the immediate contexts, the role undertaken and the rewards and costs incurred from exchanging the selfs.

In addition to system theory, the outcome of this study also showed that exchange of pseudo-selfs was reinforced by the rewards from the spouse, the children and the community. With rewards and costs in close relationship, interdependence theory will be incorporated for discussion. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) first introduced the interdependence theory. Agnew and Le (2015) defined interdependence analysis as it is "relational in nature, with an emphasis on how each person's behavior have implications for the other" (p. 363). The consequences of the interaction are classified into rewards, refer to the pleasures, satisfaction and gratification one receives. On the other hand, costs refer discomforts or great physical or mental effort is needed (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When a couple's goals and interests correspond, and desire outcomes are achieved, the interdependent theorists called this "high correspondence of outcomes" (Agnew & Le, p. 363). When interests of couple diverge, "transformation of motivation" (p. 363) is shown. This is when the partner is in the process of moving from self-interest to considering the wellbeing of the partner and social norms.

This study has shown that high correspondence of outcomes in the marital relationship is essential to enhance the couple's bonding. For example, sharing common friends, common interests and hobbies are gluing factor that nurture the relationship.

The researcher observed both high correspondence of outcomes and transformation of motivation could occur in a marital relationship at different life stages and at different contexts. For example, a few couples shared they have more time to pursue common activities after their children left them. The bases for transformation of motivation in this study were love for the children, spouse and family, respect for the elderly and religious teachings.

Other than receiving direct rewards from the spouse, this study also showed that rewards could come from external sources, namely good responses from the children and positive feedback form the community. Saving face or to set example (Murphy & Murphy, 1968) for the kin is important part of the culture among the Malaysian Chinese (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). Thus, having good children and portraying a good image as husband and wife could be one form of rewards, especially when praises from community or circle of friends were received. Positive feedback from the external sources could be considered as "a desired outcome achieved" by the couple. In fact, having "positive illusions" toward one's relationship boosts stability in marriage (Agnew & Le, 2015).

According to the interdependent theory, the bases for dependence in a close relationship are: 1) the relationship fulfills the individual's most important needs (e.g. intimacy, companionship and sexuality); 2) quality of alternative is poor, and 3) many resources tie to the relationship (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004). The findings of this study showed the bases for dependence in a close relationship are both converging and diverging from the Western study.

Malaysian Chinese community contains a mixture of Chinese educated, Malay educated and English educated Chinese. Thus, if the basis for dependence in a close

relationship is to fulfill the individual's most important needs, the couples in this study showed a mixture of influence from the East and West. The couples from an older generation were more children-focused in their marital relationship. The couples who came from later generation demonstrated the characteristics of children-focused and companion-based.

Nevertheless, instead of poor quality of alternative, the researcher observed another foundation for strong relationships among the couples was commitment to the marriage and family. The findings of this study also did not reflect dependence in a close relationship arose from many resources tied to the relationship. All the couples in this study started their marital journey with very low incomes. However, their partnership prevailed even though with limited resources.

Another dimension of family system theory for discussion is the complementary roles of husband and wife in a family. Lidz (1961) emphasized the importance of labor division, complementary and to find common purpose in raising their children. Minuchin (1974) stated that spouse system in a family is formed when husband and wife share common purpose to form a family, where they implement their tasks in complementarity and mutual accommodation. The findings supported the importance of complementary roles of husband and wife in a family.

In the system and subsystem of a family, Minuchin (1974) emphasized that the husband and wife "must have a psychosocial territory of their own – a haven in which they can give each other emotional support" (p. 57) in a family's subsystem. The researcher observed the forms in which the couples have their "psychosocial territory" were diverse among the couples, but the common one is doing things together. The range of doing things together among the Malaysian Chinese couples was chit chatting,

joking, co-driving, watching television, reading together, eat together and discussion. However, with arrival of children, the subsystem of husband and wife shrank to accommodate the tasks to take care of young children. Most couples even expressed that they did not even have time to talk to each other when the children were small. They regained their couple's psychosocial territory when the children became older or left home. This is congruent to what Minuchin (1974) said, "The spouse's functions must differentiate to meet the infant's demands for care and nurturance and to handle the constraints thus imposed on the parent's time" (p. 17).

However, how far can the couples put aside their "haven" in the spousal subsystem, when the children are small? The researcher observed "a haven" intentionally created for spousal system in a family is rare among the Malaysian Chinese couples, especially when the demands for care were high. Exceptionally, there was only one couple who intentionally created their couple time together. Their priority for marriage was influenced by their religious belief. For most couples, the anchor to meet the constraint of parenting came from the love for their children. When asked about how they would describe their marital relationship when the children were still very young, most of the couples expressed that marital relationship was not prioritized. This is typical among Malaysian Chinese families. In fact, one couple disclosed that at the initial stage of their marriage, there was no psychosocial territory in their marital relationship. Their space for closeness was built when they became older, especially after the children grew up.

Thus, questions were raised regarding to "protect [the spousal subsystem] from interference by the demands and needs of other systems", as highlighted by Minuchin (1974, p. 57). Do all couples need the "haven" if their love for their children could provide sufficient support to overcome life constraints? How would one explain the seemingly absence of spousal system among Malaysian Chinese couples upon the

arrival of children? Are these notions to protect the relationship from demands and to create a "haven" in the spousal subsystem just another Western-imported family system or a Western ideology?

To answer the questions above, the researcher's stance is that couples need each other when the children arrive. However, judging from the cultural point of view, offspring are important in the Chinese culture (Murphy & Murphy, 1968). Witnessing the children thrive in life brings the greatest joy and contentment for the Chinese couples. In addition to that, Chinese are mostly situation-centered when it comes to relationship (Murphy & Murphy, 1968). Hence, the researcher proposes that when the couples' "haven" seemed to be buried by tasks and chores of caring for small children, the couples at the same time received nurturance from witnessing the growth of their children reciprocally. Thus, the couples' care and love for the family and the joy of seeing the children grow overtook the need to protect the "haven" in the spousal system. Similarly, to prioritize the need to take care of the children was also considered as the rightful thing to do, especially when children were of young age. Thus, when the spousal subsystem was compromised among all the couples, they did not show strong reaction against it. Instead, they went along the process by accommodating to it. The researcher suggests that the couples did not have a fuss over protecting their "haven" because they were not instilled with the thought that they needed to. That was why there were no conflictual views between couples. This could imply that counseling intervention and public education could potentially create an ideology that might cause conflicts between couple.

Other than interpersonal dynamics of spouse, the ties with social support and community are equally crucial for the quality of relationship. Lidz (1961) and Minuchin (1974) both agreed that kinship systems provide important resources to support a

family. In this study, the findings supported the importance of social support from kin and friends – in satisfying marriage – as underscored by Amato, Booth, Johnson and Rogers (2007). The couples in this study revealed how support of kin and friends helped to buffer marital adjustment and challenges. At this juncture, the external influence on marital dynamics will be discussed next.

5.1.5 The Findings and Social Networking and Social Influence

Other-centeredness, an important cultural value, was highly valued and practiced in previous generation. The self of the couples could be shaped and nurtured by the cultural values at that time. Mead (1962) stated that "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (p. 135). In other words, besides meanings and reciprocal relational influence of family system, the influence from the external environment is another force that contributed in shaping the relationship of couples (Amato et al., 2007).

The findings of this study reflected the interrelatedness among individuals, social support and social influence. For instance, the couples shared that divorce was not a norm in their generation. In fact, it had been stigma and unacceptable since their previous generations. Thus, divorce was not an option in that cultural context, which heavily influenced their attitudes toward their marriage. They committed to their marriage despite marital ups and downs.

Another social influence was strong ties to kinship network in the early days. Family social gatherings and maternal support cushioned the pressure from marital challenges, including husbands' long working hours and arrival of children. In this study, all the

wives shared that maternal and social supports were crucial when they gave birth. This is due to Chinese cultural practice that the wives are confined for a month after giving birth. The Chinese believe confinement is good for the wellbeing of mother and baby. During this period of time, special kinds of food are prepared to revitalize the health of the mother. Thus, they need as much support as they could get during this month.

Another influence from the external environment was the government policy. In year 1969, 13th of May, there was a Malaysian riot. When the researcher asked general questions to explore impactful life events of the couples in this study, the riot in 13th May 1969 was mentioned by most couples. Most of them were not impacted as much as the wife of couple 4, who resided in the midst of where the incident took place. Although this incident did not directly affect their marital strengths, it affected their family size. They decided to limit the size of their family so that they could protect the children if the incident of May 13th recurred.

Besides intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of marital strengths, marriage is also a social product (Kuo, 2013). The strengths of marriage are grounded in individual's values, social influence and social network. The relationship of society, social network and individual is depicted in Figure 5.1. In short, the strengths of marriage are community based.

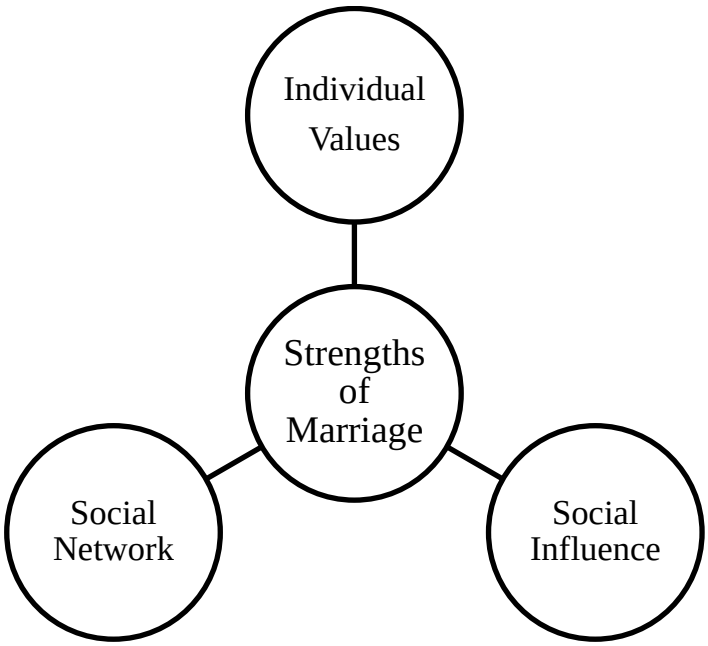

Figure 5.1: Interrelationship of Individual, Social Network and Social Influence

5.1.6 The Findings and Asian Psychology

In Asian psychology, the researcher would like to highlight two concepts: the concept of *ren* (tolerance) and the concept of going with the nature. These two concepts did not discuss much in the Western studies, but they were ubiquitous in Taiwanese studies and current study. This discussion also focused on family strengths and resilience of Chinese families.

In constructing marital resilience theory among the Taiwanese couples, Li (2006) identified 3 major forces involved in development of marital resilience: 1) the individual's personal belief system about marriage, hardships, and life; 2) the individual's active and passive coping strategies; and the constant give and take or *ren* (忍, a Chinese concept of tolerance). In Li's (2006) study, *ren* could be developed into a kind of moral self-cultivation. Although the couples in Li's study reflected discomfort in tolerance, in long term, they still believed *ren* is a good choice. Particularly, *ren* promotes self-cultivation. In other words, *ren* was a prominent marital concept in the studies among Taiwan Chinese.

Later in Li's study (2011), *ren* with tolerance predicted spouse's support and higher marital satisfaction (*Ren* was categorized into three types: tolerance, endurance and yieldingness). In marriage, tolerance based on acceptance generated higher marital satisfaction than self-suppressed kind of yieldingness. Her study also revealed that *ren* behaviors differed according to gender and education.

In this study, the similarities reflected in this study and Taiwanese studies in the concept of *ren* were: 1) the concept of tolerance was prevalent in both cultures, 2) it was an avenue for self-cultivation, and 3) though tolerance incurred discomfort feelings, it was still a good choice. All couples in the current study revealed that tolerance was important to overcome the challenges in marriage. For instance, they demonstrated tolerance by holding their tongues, speaking at the right timing, refraining from open quarrels, head on conflicts, hurting words, keeping of no anger, keeping quiet, not being calculative and carrying on with daily routine in times of conflicts. Tolerance did not incur pleasant feelings, but it was still a good choice to buffer tension. However, not all individuals in this study believed that tolerance led to self-cultivation.

The Taiwanese studies revealed the basis of *ren* was self-cultivation. However, for this study, not all participants believed in *ren* led to self-cultivation. The bases of *ren* for the Malaysian Chinese leaned towards the love for the children, respecting the elderly and the love for their spouse. For example, Couple 3 and 4 mentioned that they tried to hold their tongues in front of children because they did not want to harm the children. Thus, their basis of *ren* was for the wellbeing of the children.

The difference in the discussion of *ren* among the Taiwan Chinese and the Malaysian Chinese couples in this study was the concept of *ren* in Taiwanese studies connoted Chinese cultural values and Buddhism. However, in this study, *ren* implied mixture of

Chinese cultural values, Christian beliefs and Malaysian culture. For instance, husbands of Couple 1, 2 and 4 mentioned *ren* led to self-cultivation. The husbands from Couple 4 and Couple 5 believed *ren* was based on Christian teaching. Husband of Couple 5 also used *ren* in Malay term. The diverse implications of *ren* reflected assorted fabrics of Malaysian Chinese culture, which was marked by Chinese cultural values, religious values, and the Malay culture.

Li's study (2011) showed the use of *ren* differed in gender and education. In her study, the higher educated husbands would employ *ren* more than husbands with lower level of education in time of conflict. Husband also exhibited higher tolerance towards wives. In this study, tolerance among husbands did not differ in educational level. In this study, tolerance was the terminology used by the husbands, though the wives acknowledge the importance of tolerance, they however, preferred to use accommodate and ignore when dealing with tension.

The discussion of *ren* showed similarities and dissimilarities among the Taiwanese studies and the Malaysian Chinese study, *ren* is a predominant marital concept in both cultures. It is a prominent marital concept inviting further studies.

Other than *ren*, "go with the flow of nature" was also another prominent belief surfaced in this study. According to the Taiwan Chinese study by Chang and Kuo (2011), they highlighted that the law of nature played a significant role in the Taiwan Chinese marriage. According to the traditional cosmology, the subject is an inseparable part of nature, which consists of heaven, earth and person. Following the flow of nature and not going against the law of nature was quite a prominent belief they held. For example, all couples in this study would adopt "go with the nature" strategy when they were in conflict. All couples adopted the strategy to "wait for things to cool down".

When they encountered challenges in life, they just “go with the flow” and “see how things work out”.

Nevertheless, in Chang and Kuo’s (2011) study, wives and husbands showed different coping mechanisms when encountering marital challenges. The wives looked up to social network (family members, friends or elderly) or religious practice to solve their problems. The husbands, on the other hand, inclined to adopt their ability, self-control, tolerance or give in to solve their problems. In this study, the behaviors of wives’ and husbands’ problem solving strategies did not show consistent patterns of coping practice emerged in the study of Chang and Kuo (2011). For instance, some husbands in this study, besides showing tolerance, also adopted religious practice to cope with their problems. Some wives, other than seeking help from their social network, also practiced tolerance. This could imply that gender roles among Malaysian Chinese couples differ from those of Taiwan Chinese couples.

In the study of Chinese family strengths and resiliency (Xu et al., 2008), despite the change in family size and socioeconomic development over the last decades, family support was still identified as fundamental strength among the families in China. This study confirmed the important of family support among Chinese. Particularly, in the time of child birth, maternal support played an important role in confinement month as well as child care support.

The discussion on the findings captures the similarities and dissimilarities between Western and Eastern marital studies. The similarities shown by the studies in West and East are inner self-regulation, other-centeredness, division of labor and reciprocity. These are universal elements for enrichment of marital relationship. The dissimilarities diverge according to the cultural specific factors and the contextual backgrounds. The

discussion also showed that among the Chinese studies, in Taiwan and Malaysia, the marital concept could connote differently due to varied contextual backgrounds. The findings in this study also reflected that Malaysian Chinese culture is tinted by Western influence (due to British colonialism), Chinese cultural values, the Malay cultures and diverse religious values.

5.1.7 Other Interesting Findings

In this study, food was one common factor shared by the participants that it enhanced the sense of togetherness between couple, among family members and community. The findings reflected the Chinese belief that eating brings good fortune (Lim, 2005). It was also used for rapport building. For instance, four out of five couples in this study served snacks during the interview sessions. In other words, eating is connecting.

Between the mid-18th century and the mid-20th century, the traditional structure of marriage changed (Coontz, 2005). Studies in the 1990s showed that husband sharing house chores had become an important contributing factor in marital satisfaction (Amato et al., 2003). However, in this study, the husbands helped out in doing house chores. It was approximately around 1960s and 1970s when they established their families. That means sharing house works among husbands had already taken place before 1990s, when change in gender roles in Malaysian was not as rampant as it was in the Western countries. It was an eye opening experience, as the researcher grew up with the perception that doing housework was solely women's responsibility. According to the husbands in this study, the motivation for them to take part in the house chores was their understanding towards their wives and the needs of the immediate context, in which the children were small. Complementarity was crucial to uphold the couples when they show sensitive and empathy their spouse.

Thriftiness was another element which was often mentioned by all couples in this study. It was a strength that sustained the couples through financial hardship. When they talked about how they lived thriftily, it also showed their creativities in living with tight budget. For example, one of the wives in this study shared that she could use different parts of one whole chicken to cook into various kinds of dishes.

Another interesting finding was expression of affection between English speaking couples and Mandarin speaking couples differed. The English speaking couples were quite comfortable in expressing their affection. On the other hand, when affection in the relationship of Mandarin speaking couples was explored, they showed uneasiness, with look of embarrassment.

Due to compression of data analysis, a few common attributes were forced to be excluded from the theme formation. However, these attributes were valuable in this study, and deserved to be mentioned here. The commonality among all the husbands was they were hardy. They went through hardship since they were young. This had indirectly shaped their hardy attribute to withstand the challenges in their marriage. The three common attributes among all the wives and husbands were hard working, determined and positive. Another attribute among the couples was they are communal oriented and fondly inclined to community work. The word responsible was mentioned by a few couples, though not all couples talked about it. However, these couples showed a strong sense of responsibility in providing for the family.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study surface noteworthy implications, which reflect the foundation of long and stable marriage. It is a needed message in the age of materialism and modernization, which comes at the costs of family breakdown and other social

problems. The implications of these findings will be conveyed in two broad dimensions, namely theoretical and practical implications. Several layers in practical implications will be discussed, including marriage in the young generation, education systems at home and schools, marriage and family policy, and counseling practice among Chinese couples.

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

After teasing out the similarities and dissimilarities among the theories and the findings, it is apparent that the meanings of marriage converge as well as diverge cross-culturally. Existential theory stressed that the meaning of life is to put others beyond self, self-determinism and making choices in unalterable situations. This study confirmed this theory. However, this study also showed divergence from the theory.

The study expanded the theory of human understanding from non-Western perspectives. It surfaced the underlying factor which girds self-determinism between Malaysian Chinese and the Western counterparts. The root of self-determinism for the Malaysian Chinese couples is others (the close-kin: the children, the elderly and the family); whereas the root of self-determinism for the Western counterparts is to be the navigator of one's life.

This study showed that marriage cannot be understood in a single theory. Marriage is multi-dimensional. This study confirmed the importance of complementarity and division of labor in family system theories. It also reflected some variations due to cultural factors.

This study also confirmed the interdependent theory that high correspondence of outcomes in the marital relationship is essential to enhance bonding between couple.

Common interests between the couples were found to be significance to strengthen the marital bond in this study.

Current study also confirmed the importance of communal involvement, family support, religious involvement in marriage and reciprocity. Tolerance, go with the flow of nature, love for the children and respect for the elderly are new information that reveal the strengths of marriage.

In Malaysia, the concept of healthy marriage is scant. This study could serve as a preliminary framework for establishing martial theory for the Chinese couples.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study will be discussed in the following areas: marriage in the post-modern generation, education at homes and school settings, marriage and family policies and counseling practice among Chinese.

5.2.2.1 Implications for Marriage in Post-modern Generation

Social change relentlessly shapes the forms and the meanings of marriage. With influx of individualism, accessibility of social media, education attainment, diverse choices of close relationships, increase in family breakdown, the roles of men and women diverse. The relational dynamics of men and women transformed drastically. Happy companionship and self-fulfillment prevail in close relationship between male and female among the young generation (Chong et al., 2004). How would the findings of this study impose significance meaning in the marriage of the post-modern generation?

Particularly the couples interviewed in this study were born in different era. They went through the historical events which the younger generation has never experienced.

The gender roles in previous cultural contexts were different from the modern cultural contexts. Intertwined in the difference in contextual backgrounds, the concept of love of modern couples was further complicated by the concept of love from Hollywood, Korean movies, Hong Kong or Taiwanese movies.

From the current study, the daily life in the previous generation was less exposed to influence from media. On the other hand, the lives of couples in the modern era are bombarded with media, apps, internet, social media etc. The perceptions and expectations of modern couples towards marriage are more diverse than couples from previous generation. With the influx of love portrayed in movies, individualism and consumerism, self-gratification and self-fulfillment dominates the theme of love among the young couples. The theme of this study shored up the foundation of close relationship maintenance. It balanced the self-centeredness among the young generation.

With social change, change in the roles of men and women, reduce stigma in divorce, discontinuity from traditional values, the choice to stay or not to stay in marriage is less restricted than before. Themes for marital strengths between the generations are different. The young couples are: 1) more value on career advancement, 2) less adherence to the approval of in-laws, 3) more intentional to make room for couple time, 4) more involvement in children's education and 5) more value on happy companionship.

Even though the themes are different between the older generation and younger generation, self-centeredness still does not fuse in long lasting relationship. Self-centeredness actually causing dilemma in close relationship (Dion & Dion, 1988). For many young Malaysian Chinese couples, with the small number of children, the love for

their children would occupy a larger portion in the radius of other-centeredness, particularly involvement in children's educational. Though the young couples would still respect the elderly, they show less clinging to the virtue of respecting the elderly than the previous generation. This could be more obvious among the highly educated women. Unlike the women in previous generation, they need to comply with logical understanding. The forms of other-centeredness have inevitably changed with social change. Thus, the significance of other-centeredness cannot be rigidly imposed. Understanding of social change and sensitivity to the differences in social norms are needed to educate the value of other-centeredness.

Frankl (1969), May, (1967) and Yalom (1980) stated that self-fulfilling relationship fails. Long lasting relationship is nurtured by the virtue of other-centered. The value of other-centered in marriage resonates in both Western and the Eastern studies in marriage. Thus, for the post-modern young married couples, it is central for the young couples to be aware of the essence of other-centeredness.

Values and attributes are developed in the process of growing up. Hence to uphold marriage in the post-modern era, instilling good values since young through education at homes and schools is essential.

5.2.2.2 Implications for Education at Homes and School Settings

From the findings, the attributes of the couples had been molded since young, through their family upbringing, life contexts, school settings, cultural values and circles of social networks. They carry the positive attributes and beliefs into their marriage. In other words, upholding long and stable marriage should start from ground work -- cultivating value centered people.

The findings also show that intrinsic values, other-centeredness, are fundamental to relationship. People have fewer children in today's generation and hierarchical positions of family are upside down. Children are comfortably provided for; they are the kings and queens of the household (personal communication with kindergarten school teachers). How would children survive in the real world when they have grown up if they have been served like kings or queens at home in their growing years? Home sometime could create an unrealistic and impractical world for children's development. Home should be the place where children learn how to live, work with others and survive in the outside world (Gladding, 2010). Thus, other-centeredness is an essential value to instill in the younger generations in this era.

Nonetheless, massive parenting products on how to raise self-confident children or children with high self-esteem, whether imported or locally produced, are overwhelming. Even the media are emphasizing its importance, either by the experts or the radio and TV hosts. Some stress the importance of building independence in children. Others emphasize building confidence through appreciation, so on and so forth. In short, self-confidence is so achievement oriented. What would that mean if children's self-confidence is founded on achievement and exclusion of others in their lives? It is essential for parents to be able to see that values are equally fundamental to children's development. Self-confidence does not come from knowing only learned-techniques and skills; it should also be built upon knowing that other individual are equally important as one self is. Incorporating the value of other-centeredness into parenting skills is definitely indispensable.

The findings of this study convey that being able to put others above self requires "heart" work. In the school and institutional settings, students learn to think critically, speak eloquently, mastering the subjects and to learn knowledge of all kinds. They learn

to expand their brain activities in schools and institutions. These are brain works. However, fostering the attitudes of caring for others, being considerate to our friends, despite backgrounds or ethnic groups in educational systems, seems to be lacking. If educational institutions cannot exhibit the value of caring for others, what does that say about our educational system? Excellency in academic cannot be achieved at the expense of humanity. Expanding both brain and heart capacities in our educational systems is necessary. Fromm (1973), in his study on human's destructiveness, resonated that "Critical and radical thought will only bear fruit when it is blended with the most precious quality man is endowed with – the love of life" (p. 438).

In short, the findings of this study reflect what has been forgoing – values. In both home and school settings, value-centered teachings should be at the heart of education.

5.2.2.3 Implications for Marriage and Family Policy

Western hegemony is prevalent in the knowledge base of marriage and family in Malaysia. Marriage is not natural science. The studies in natural science from the West can be applied directly to the local context but studies in marriage might not be the case. Marriage is girded by cultural values and practices. From the findings and the researcher's field experience, even among the Malaysian Chinese participants in this study, how the couples interpret the meanings of their marriage differ widely among themselves. Marriage is as unique as a tailor made handcraft. How people maintain their marriage requires a lot of understanding and studies. There is no one size that fits all marital program. Marital program should be diverse and inclusive. They should contain the fabrics of marriage from the cultural values of the users.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study surfaced the importance of values in long term marriages. How couples dealt with challenges in their marriages was influenced by

their personal values and cultural values. In views of respecting the uniqueness of individual marriage and the significance of values in marriages, the researcher proposed two types of marital enrichment programs for the Malaysian Chinese couples.

First, implementation of marital enrichment program could be carried out in interactive small group workshops. Qualified licensed counselors conduct the workshops. The workshops do not intend to impose values or teachings to the participants. The workshops aim to empower, to affirm and to exchange the values of marriage. With that the values of the couples and how the couples make up the meanings of their marriages would not be superseded by the values of the facilitators or the imported values which the counselors acquired. However, the counselors or the facilitators can play the role to expand the participants' knowledge of marriage by exchanging or suggesting, not imposing, other frameworks of marriages from different cultures. Since the workshops are conducted in small group, the costs to reach out to the most the public would be high. Thus, the participants are required to pay certain amount of fees to cover some expenses. At the same time, the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN – Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara) subsidizes the programs. Since the workshops are conducted in interactive forms, it is highly recommended that the counselors or the course facilitators are competence in carrying out their roles. Otherwise, the outcome of the marital enrichment would be negatively affected and it might defeat the purpose of interactive workshops.

Second, the findings of this study revealed the significance of values in marriages. Value based teaching in marriage could be conducted to the general public. The purpose of big group meeting is to create awareness on the important of values that uphold marriages. The government could support social service organizations, NGOs, churches,

mosques, temples to carry out this type of seminar. The preferred speakers for this kind of seminar are those who have experience in conducting marital seminars, and who acquire sense of humor. The seminars need to be captivating and interesting to the public. Otherwise, the public will lose interest and trust towards seminars supported by the government. At the same time, it is a waste of national resources by spending the money and yet not attaining effective outcomes to promote healthy marriages.

Another part of marital enrichment program is marital mentoring program. Amato, Booth, Johnson, and Rogers (2007) recommended mentoring program as part of marital enrichment program. Their study has identified the association of supportive networks and marital satisfaction. The findings of this study also support the benefits of mentoring program for newly-weds. One couple in this study, who engaged in premarital counseling mentoring program, revealed that the mentoring program did help them to prepare for and start their marital relationship with the right teaching and foundation.

The government could encourage marital mentoring programs by supporting courses for training the mentors in religious affiliations and NGOs or other social services which have network to couples. The requirements of the mentor are trustworthy, passionate towards upholding marriage, including his or her own marriage, patient, showing respect for different gender, receptive and respectful for differences. By connecting the religious settings and NGOs, they do not only provide ready-made platforms for couples to participate in mentoring programs, they can also serve as a monitoring system to their own organization to uphold the effectiveness of marital mentoring programs. To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the government could send representatives to interview the participants, the mentors and the person in charge of the program.

With the accessibility of media, the notions of marriage are often contaminated with romantic elements from Hollywood and Korean dramas. Pre-marital educational program (e.g., SMARTSTART) should contain practical and realistic aspects of marriage. For example, household division of labor between husband and wife should be emphasized. Increasing the support of social network should be encouraged. Partnership of husband and wife in a household should be instilled in the pre-marital program. The current existing SMARTSTART program consists of communication, knowing your spouse, financial management, conflict resolution and sex. These components are important, however, complementary roles of husband and wife, partnership between husband and wife, division of labor, establishing social support and the value of other-centeredness cannot be overlooked as well.

From the study, the researcher observed the wives contributed to family finance, house chores and taking care of children. All the husbands admitted that their wives have contributed substantially in the journey of building their families. The status of home maker should be equally important as the one who brings back the pay check. Thus, the role of home maker should be highly valued in media as well as in family policy.

5.2.2.4 Implications for Counseling Practice for the Malaysian Chinese Couples

As a licensed counselor, the findings of this study have impacted the researcher in two dimensions. First is the prevalence of Western hegemony in counseling practice; and second is the preoccupation of skills and techniques, rather than values, in marital counseling.

Addressing to the prevalence of Western hegemony in counseling field, Allport (1969) once stressed that “The roots of social psychology lie in the intellectual soil of

the whole western tradition, its present flowering is recognized to be characteristically an American Phenomenon" (p. 2). Thus, employing Western framework requires sensitivity. Counselors work in a setting where local resources are limited, awareness of one's position toward Western intellectual hegemony is crucial. Since there are not much Asian psychology or counseling textbooks, discussion on cultural factors and values should be encouraged and facilitated in the classrooms of higher learning institutions. That would help the counselors to actively engage their practice by integrating Western theories as well as localizing their learning. The researcher suggests some questions that could be used for engaging discussion in higher learning institutions - "Am I proactive in the knowledge I learn by actively engaging myself with the real life experience and the theories?" or "Am I a colony in the world of knowledge?"

Overlooking cultural factors and values could bring harm to couples in counseling sessions. Yeo (1999), a late counselor in Singapore, shared that it is easier for Chinese speaking couples to express "I love you" in actions. Taking care of each other's daily needs and helping each other in house chores are they ways of expressing "I love you". In my study, most couples did not express emotional affection. Small number of English speaking couples felt natural in expressing their affection. Cultural practices could vary among the same ethnic group. Minuchin, Lee, and Simon (1996) stated that "If we are to intervene in a family to increase the flexibility of family members' repertoire or alleviate pain and stress, our interventions must be guided by an informed understanding of the context in which we are intervening" (p. 16). Thus, to foster cultural sensitive counselors, supervision should be mandatory for all practicing counselors. It would help counselors to be sensitive to cultural values and own values

judgement. This could prevent counselors from imposing personal values or Western values to the counselees.

Addressing to preoccupation of skills and techniques in counseling practice, the values the couples hold should be upheld and even affirmed. The findings of this study reflected that the strengths of marriage were found in ordinary things in daily life. The aim of couple therapy should be value based, rather than problem solving oriented. In fact, values gird decision making in daily life. Counselors seek to understand the values which the couples embrace in their lives. Counselors should restrain from adopting techniques or skills to solve the couples' problems. Minuchin (1974) warned practitioners not to entice clients to an ideal marriage, which depicts in movies but not in the real world. Counselors are required to understand their clients from their life contexts. Frankl (1967) and May (1958) also stressed the significance of seeing a person from the contexts he or she was in. It is crucial that the counselors' intervention is not intended to supersede the values of counselees, but to empower them.

The strengths surfaced in the findings of this study could be used as a guide for the married counselors to cross-check with the couples' marital conditions and to expand the assessment threshold of counselors. Couples who seek counseling often look for directions to enrich their marriage. The strengths, are not meant to be imposed, could be discussed with couples. At the same time, counselors could explore options with couples as to what can be done to implement these strengths to fine tune their marriages.

With this study conducted in emic approach, this study intended to look into the psychological perspectives of marriage, cultural perspectives as well as sociological perspectives. Thus, what counselors can benefit from this study is the counselors'

assessment lens could be expanded beyond single psychological dimension. Counselees could be understood from more holistic dimensions.

The implications of this study are manifold. To build marriage that produce healthy children, cultivating the values of human being is instrumental. The implications of the study also call for sensitivity in application of theories into local contexts and value based intervention should be upheld.

5.3 Limitations

The couples participated in this study have children and grandchildren. Having descendants was shown to be a significant anchor for the marital strengths of these couples. Thus, the findings of this study would not be applicable for couples who do not have children.

Power is an essential component in marital relationships. Due to the objective and the scope of this study, investigation of power was impossible. However, the dynamics of it was obvious during the interview sessions. Thus, failure to investigate power play in the marital relationship is the limitation of this study. Recommendation for power play was underlined in Recommendation.

In the process of carrying out the thematic analysis, the researcher observed there were some important strengths that had to be eliminated during the reduction process in data analysis. Attributes such as responsibility, commitment, humor and so forth, had to be discarded to enable the compression process. These qualities were important qualities in the literatures related to marriage. If some couples did not mention these qualities it did not mean these are unimportant in their marriage. What couples said at that moment of time and the kind of words they used during the interview were part of construction process. In order to counter the “fluidity” of the data, surfacing pattern coding and

identifying themes in the initial stage of data collection are important steps. With that, cross checking with the subsequent interviewers and rival explanations could be obtained. However, authors have different opinions of when to carry out pattern coding and identify themes for qualitative research. The researcher of this study strongly recommends carrying out pattern coding and surfacing themes at the initial stage of data collection if it is of the same nature of study.

Although steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the effects of social desirability were unavoidable. The participants choose what they want to share. In order to reduce the contamination of social desirability in the data, interviewing the children of the couples at separate setting can be considered to provide additional angle to enhance data validation.

The findings have reflected that each marriage is unique. The domains of strengths differed from couple to couple. The findings are good resources for other couples to learn. However, the perspective of the researcher has significantly influenced the data interpretation. Thus, knowledge in marital studies need to be constantly updated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5.4 Recommendations

The couples in this study have children and grandchildren. Having children and grandchildren were shown to be crucial in gluing the marriage. However, for future studies, the strengths of couples who do not have children could be explored. The common strengths of couples who have children and grandchildren and couples who have no children could be surfaced and compared.

The researcher would recommend understanding power play in marital relationship by carrying out couple together and separate individual interview sessions. The separate

sessions could be conducted simultaneously with two interviewers. That would reduce the anxiety of the participant who waits for his or her turn. In the future, researchers who endeavor in this direction need to be cautiously sensitive to the boundary of sharing. Before the interview, it is advisable to role play separate interviews so that the impacts of having separate interviews could be captured. This would help the interviewers to sensitively plan the interview protocol so that the interview process would not incur anxiety and tension between the couple. The participants should be clearly informed on the purpose of having separate interview sessions and the questions for separate interview in the beginning.

Putting together and writing about the lives of the participants was a vulnerable experience for both researcher and participants. The participants took the risk to trust the researcher. The researcher is accountable to give the highest respect and honor to all participants. Thus, before going into the field for data collection, the researcher offers a few suggestions that would help to avoid some pitfalls the researcher went through in this study. These tips cater especially to researchers who take the constructivist paradigm in their research.

First, determine the data analysis in advance before carrying out life events or life experience sharing. Knowing how data analysis would be done in advance would help to better prepare the participants of what comes next. Not all participants are alike. One would have never known how they would respond to the data write up until it is shown to them. Thus, to know the data analysis in advance, the researcher could prepare the participants on how the analysis would look like in forms and boundaries of co-construction could be uttered at the very initial stage of data collection. Second, in the process of co-construction of the reality with participants, whatever materials or write up the researcher e-mail to the participants or sends to them, the researcher should

prepare them how they should approach the materials. This would help to reduce misunderstanding. Last but not least, no one really knows what will happen in the field. Consulting peers who traveled the road before would be helpful. Reading up on veteran researchers' suggestions and experience could be another helpful resource. Future researchers can plan and take precautions to avoid some of the unnecessary downsides. However, the researcher is keen to encourage future researchers to bear in mind that many valuable lessons learned in qualitative studies are through the mistakes we risk.

5.5 Conclusion

Family plays an important role in producing good citizens in a society. Marriage is pivotal to the wellbeing of a family. The findings of this study have reflected the nutrient of marriage is value-based. It is based on putting others above self reciprocally in a family system. Meanwhile, marriage also wavers with social changes. Thus, for relevant intervention to uphold marriage and family, local values and the magnitudes of social changes should be understood. The findings of this study have many implications to society. The findings provide only one part of understanding in Malaysian Chinese marriage. Thus, more localized marital studies are still very much needed in constructing local marital theory for different ethnic groups. A well-established marital theory should be one which is able to depict the universality of marriage and its cultural relevancy to the locals. Last but not least, the researcher would like to conclude with a quote by Lincoln and Guba (2013), which mirrors the attitudes the researcher would like to adhere for this study and future studies:

> That theory is most successful that both improves professional practice and is informed by that practice, that is, that fits, that works, that has local relevance, and that is open to reconstruction as new information and more sophisticated modes of analysis and interpretation become available (p. 201).

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS PRESENTED

List of Publication:

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2015). Discussion on the proposed methodology and preliminary field experience of a qualitative research. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences, 5*(7), 416-428.

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2015). The impact of positive interaction on sexual satisfaction, conflict resolution and time together among the Malaysian Chinese married couples. *Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling* (in press).

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2014). A preliminary study on the proactive position of Malaysian counselors in integrating Western and Eastern values in marriage intervention programs. *Jurnal PERKAMA* (in press).

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2015). *How socio environment and social policies become daily challenges for the elderly: Voices of elderly couples.* Paper presented at the National Seminar Protecting Elderly against Abuse and Neglect 2015, Faculty of Law, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (in book chapter, in press)

Papers Presented:

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2015). *How socio environment and social policies become daily challenges for the elderly: Voices of elderly couples.* Paper presented at the National Seminar Protecting Elderly against Abuse and Neglect 2015, Faculty of Law, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2015). *Nurturance of companionship among long term married couples*. Paper presented at International Seminar of Old Age 2015, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2014, December). *Towards understanding the strengths of long term marriages among the Malaysian Chinese.* Paper presented at the National Research and Innovation Conference for Graduate Students in Social Sciences 2014, Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Teoh, G. K., Haslee, S. A., & Lau, P. L. (2014). *A preliminary study on the proactive position of Malaysian counselors in integrating Western and Eastern values in marriage intervention programs*. Paper presented at First Malaysia International Counseling Conference 2014, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Award:

2nd place in Three-Minute Thesis Competition at Faculty Level (2015)

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A (i)

Information Sheet for the Participants

Topic of this Study: Explore the Marital Strengths of Long Term Marriages among the Malaysian Chinese Couples

Hi, my name is Kin. I am a postgraduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling at the University of Malaya, pursuing my doctorate degree in counseling. I am undertaking a research on how marital strengths are maintained in long term marriage.

What will be involved in the study?

The study is about exploring the marital journey of long term marriages. Several interview sessions with the couples will be carried out. During the interview sessions, marital stages, the life stories, experiences, thoughts and feelings of the couples towards their marriage will be explored. If possible, diaries, photos and other items which would facilitate the sharing would be used.

What is required from the participants?

It is entirely out of the willingness of the couples to participate in this study. If you want to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate your willingness to participate. Even when you decided to withdraw later, you are free to do so anytime without having to give reason.

With participants' permission, the interviews will be audio recorded and video recorded. All the information collected during the course of this study will be kept confidential. Markers will be assigned to identify the couples in order to keep anonymity.

As the information disclosed by you is crucial to this study, sharing real experience is highly valued.

What are your costs and benefits?

The cost to your participation is you will have to squeeze out your precious time to be interviewed by the researcher a few times, or may be several times. Plus, you will have to put up the researcher, a stranger, to be around your house during the interviews.

However, one of the benefits is the participants will have an opportunity to review their marital stages of development. Another is you are making contribution to the community by letting your stories to be heard.

Thank you very much for willing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX A (ii)

給參與者的研究說明信

研究主題: 探索馬來西亞華裔夫婦長期婚姻關係中的韌力

你好，我是張玉金。我是馬大心理教育和輔導系的研究生，目前正在修讀輔導博士學位。我正在進行一項有關<如何在長期婚姻關系維持婚姻的韌力>的研究。

研究所觸及的範圍

這是一項關於婚姻韌力的研究。研究範圍將包括訪問婚姻關係長久的夫婦。你們的生命歷程、生活經歷、你們對婚姻的反思和感想，都是探討範圍。

參加者需要做什么?

這項訪談完全是出自參與者的意願。如果你要參加這項研究，你需要填寫一份同意書，表示你自願參與。即使在半途中你決定退出，你也可以在不須給予理由的情況之下，自由提出退出的要求。

在接受訪問的過程，你可以針對此項研究提出你的疑惑或問題。如果受訪問題對你來說太敏感，你可以拒絕回答。

在征求你的同意之後，訪問過程會被錄音和錄影。訪問期間所收集到的資料都會保密。受訪夫婦都會被匿名以保護他們的真實身份。

由於你所提供的資料對這項研究來說非常重要，因此我期待你分享真實經歷。這些經歷沒有對或錯的標準答案。

參與此項訪談的利與弊?

參與此項研究的弊是，你們需要挤出寶貴時間被研究人員訪問幾次，或多次。另外，你得面對在受訪期間，有研究人員出現在你家的不便。

不過，參與這項研究的利是，你和你的配偶將有機會重溫你們的生命和相愛的故事。另外，通過分享你們的故事，你們其實也在為社區作出巨大的貢献。

感激你的樂意參與。

APPENDIX B

Recruit Couples through Email and Facebook

Care to Help?

Please help to circulate

Dear friends,

I am currently doing a study on marriage, particularly marriages that have been lasted for a long time. This research will help me to gain insights as to how this group of people sustain through the marital ups and downs and yet remaining stable. Deeper understanding of those marriages will unveil the strengths those couples exhibit. Hopefully, their experiences will bless the yet to be married couples, the married, and eventually the children of our society.

In order to gain more understanding of those couples, the couples I am looking for need to have the following categories:

1. Chinese Malaysian, who reside in Malaysia.
2. The couple has been married 40 years and above.
3. The couple went through mid-life.
4. The couple has children and grandchildren.

Please feel free to call me at 012-6714766, or email teohgaikkin@yahoo.com, if you know of any couple who fits into the above categories and they are willing to take part in this research.

Your help is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kin

APPENDIX C (i)

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this study, which aims to understand the marital strengths of long term married couples. As there is no right or wrong way of maintaining a long term marriage, your honesty and genuineness of your responses are very much appreciated.

Information

The purpose of this study is to increase our knowledge on the marital strengths of long term marriage. The outcome of the study will provide another dimension to define marital quality.

Confidentiality

Your participation will be treated as private and confidential. You will be provided a pseudo name in the report to keep your anonymity. The documents and recorded interview sessions will be confidential. It will be accessed by the researcher and the supervisors only.

Participation

You will be invited to participate in several couple interview sessions. Each session will last about 1 ½ - 2 hours. All interviews will be audio taped or video with your permission.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to terminate, you may withdraw anytime, no question will be asked from the researcher. The recorded data will be abolished.

Contact

If at any time you have any queries about this study or the procedure, you feel free to contact the researcher, Teoh Gaik Kin at 012-6714766 or teohgaikkin@yahoo.com

Consent

Your participation of this study is strictly voluntary. Please indicate your willingness to take part in this study, that you have been fully informed and understood the information related to this research, by your signature. You may withdraw at any time even you signed this consent form. There will be no penalty imposed on your withdrawal any time.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C (ii)

參與訪談的同意書

我衷心的邀請你參與這項研究。此研究的目的是探討長久婚姻夫妻的韌力。在訪談的過程，你不必覺得你需要給對的答案。訪談的題目沒有對或錯的答案，因此我期待你給予誠實和真實的回答。

研究的成果

這項研究的目的是加強我們對長期婚姻關系韌力的認識。研究結果將為婚姻素質提供另一個層面的定義。

機密

你的參與將獲得保密。在研究報告中，你會被匿名以保護你的真實身份。訪問期間所有收集到文件和錄音資料全都保密，只容許研究人員和監督員參考。所有與你有關的資料將在課程結束后，都會被刪除。

參與方式

你受邀接受幾次的訪問。每一 次的訪問耗時大約一個半小時到兩個小時之間。所有的訪問過程都會在獲得你同意之下被錄音和錄像。

你的參與是自願的。如果你決定停止，你可以在任何時候退出。研究人員不會詢問任何問題。所記錄的資料都會被刪除。

聯絡人

如果對這項研究或研究程序有任何疑問，歡迎通過手機號碼 012-6714766 或電郵 teohgaikkin@yahoo.com，聯絡研究人員張玉金。

參與者的同意

你的參與絕對出自自願。 請表明你樂意參與這項研究，並且你在清楚明白這項研究後簽署同意書。即使你簽了同意書，你還是可以在任何時候退出，你的推出將會被尊重。

參與者的簽名：_____ _____

參與者姓名：_____ _____
日期：_____

APPENDIX D (i)

Background Information

Name: (H)_____ (W)_____

Date of Birth: (H)_____ (W)_____

Place of Birth: (H)_____ (W)_____

Parents' Occupation: (H)_____ (W)_____

Educational Background: (H)_____

(W)_____

Occupation before Retirement:

(H)_____ (W)_____

Current Job (if applicable):

(H)_____ (W)_____

Hobby/ Hobbies before Retirement:

(H)_____ (W)_____

Current Hobby/hobbies:

(H)_____ (W)_____

Years of marriage:_____

Did you have experience staying with in-laws? Yes / No

Number of Years:_____

Had you experienced war? Yes / No

Descendants' Information:

Birth Order	Age	Marital Status	Occupation

Number of Grandchildren: _____

APPENDIX D (ii)

背景資料

姓名：（夫）_____（妻）_____

出生日期：（夫）_____　（妻）_____

出世地點：（夫）_____　（妻）_____

父母的職業：（夫）_____（妻）_____

教育背景：（夫）_____（妻）_____

退休前職業：（夫）_____　（妻）_____

目前職業（如果有）：（夫）_____（妻）_____

退休前嗜好：（夫）_____　（妻）_____

退休後嗜好：（夫）_____　（妻）_____

結婚年數：_____

有否與姻親住過：有 / 沒有　　年數：_____

有否慶祝結婚週年：有 / 沒有

有否經歷戰爭的經驗：有 / 沒有

孩子資料：

孩子排列	年齡	結婚/未婚	職業

子孫數位：_____

APPENDIX E (i)

Consent for Recording

Introduction

Studies in marriage is lacking among the Malaysian Chinese. To capture the marital themes relevant to the Malaysian Chinese is the objective of this research. Thus, the purpose of video/audio (whichever applicable) recording is to ensure the researcher accurately record the information provided by you and your spouse. The recorded information will be transcribed after the interviews.

Usage of Recorded Interview

With your permission, the recorded interviews will be used only by the researcher and the researcher's supervisors (if necessary) as confidential as possible. If the outcome of this study involves publication, a marker will be assigned to represent you. Your personal name and other related information about you will not be disclosed, even in the storage devices. After the completion of this study, the interviews data will be erased. Strict confidentiality will be observed as much as possible to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Participants' Rights

At any time, if you decided to withdraw consent from recording, you may do so by informing the researcher. Your refusal will be respected. Note taking will be used instead. You may ask for a copy of the recorded interview session.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 012-671-4766 or teohgaikkin@yahoo.com

---

Informed Consent

I have received an explanation of the study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

(Name) (Signature)

(Name) (Signature)

_____

(Date)

By signing above, I consent the interview sessions to be recorded by video or audio recorder (whichever applicable).

If you would like to receive a final copy of the study, please provide the email or postal mailing address below where you would like the final copy of this study to be sent.

_____

_____

With a lot of sincere thanks,

Teoh Gaik Kin

APPENDIX E (ii)

錄影同意書

介紹

在馬來西亞，關於馬來西亞華人的婚姻研究還是很缺乏。這項研究的目的是要了解馬來西亞華人婚姻的特色。為了能夠主抓本地華人的分享，在你們的同意下，訪談的過程將會有錄音和錄影。所有錄取的錄音資料將會錄制。

錄取資料的處理

所有的錄音和錄影只供給研究者及指導老師觀看，而且會嚴謹的保密。如果這項研究的結果有牽涉出版，你們的姓名和關於你們的資料，都不會公開。你會被匿名以保護你的真實身份。在這項研究結束時，所有錄取的資料將會刪除。

參與者的權利

在任何時候，如果你拒絕錄音和錄影，你可以通知研究者。你的拒絕將會受到尊重。研究者將會採用筆記的方式進行訪談。你也可以索取一份所錄取的資料。

如果你有什麼疑問，請你撥電致 012-6714766找我或電郵teohgaikkin@yahoo.com.

告知同意

我已經明白這項研究，並同意參與。我明白我的參與是出於自願。

(姓名)　　(簽名)

(姓名)　　(簽名)

_____

日期

簽署以上的同意書，我允許訪談被錄音和錄影。

如果你想要一份錄音，你在以下填寫你的郵址：

感激你們的參與，

張玉金

Appendix F

Proposed and Real Life Interview Protocols for Couples' Sessions

Proposed Interview Protocol before Field Experience	Interview Protocol from Real Life Experience	Comments
Part A: Before entry • Making initial contact by calling the husbands • Explain the purpose of study; what to expect in the study, and the time commitment. • Ask for their consent for participation and the consent for recording. • Ask for the suitable time to visit them. • The researcher proposed to meet at their home. At the same time, choice was given to them to meet outside their homes. • Sending email to further explain the objective of study, the interview questions and informed consent in black and white, upon request.	Stage 1: Pre-entry preparation – Formulating Interview Questions - Formulating interview questions by role playing the questions with peers who are PhD students. - Role playing allowed the researcher to hear what kind of possible answers will be elicited from the participants. The exercise also enabled the researcher to understand how the questions would impact on the interviewees. - As the questions were role played with PhD students. The researcher was curious to know how the elderly who has low or no education background would feel about the questions.	Interview questions are very important tool for this research. It is worthwhile to give some times to test it out and to receive feedback.

	- Pilot Testing: The interview questions were tested on couples who came from rural areas. They were couples mixture of low and no education background. They speak mainly dialects and some are able to speak Mandarin. - Discuss with supervisor about the appropriateness of the interview questions. - We decided to explore life stories through marital stages as the method for the study. - After drafting the life stories questions, the researcher verified the interview questions with our Counseling Department's expert in marriage. - After verifying the interview questions with expert, the interview questions were translated by the researcher and then they were verified by the translator (please refer to Appendix Q, p. 330, for English and Mandarin interview questions).	The participants of the pilot testing were based on convenient sampling. They are friends of the researcher's parents. They did not mind to be interviewed. The pilot testing experience was a worthwhile try because it showed the researcher that some elderly were having difficulties to understand the questions. The researcher observed they were even looked anxious to answer my question when they did not understand my questions. Thus, the researcher brought the on field observation to supervisor. My supervisor felt my interview questions were too leading. They seemed to capture what the researcher wanted to obtain. After discussion with supervisor, we decided to use questions which most likely would feel comfortable to all types of elderly. They were questions which ask about life stories. In rural areas, when the couple interviews were carried out, unlike the urban couples, the grandchildren and children of the couples, who stayed with them, were so curious about the interviews. They were also

		present during the interview. Honestly, the researcher was quite apprehensive when this happened! Thus, the researcher decided to go along the process, particularly the couples wouldn't mind the presence of others.
Part B: Getting started • Show appreciation for their participation and their contribution to the world of knowledge. • Introduce the objective of the study. • Explain confidentiality and participants' rights. • Explain the purpose of recording. • Give them to platform to ask questions regarding the researcher and the research before starting the interview	Stage 2: Before Entry - The researcher would call the couple through phone once the couple's name was given. - The researcher introduced her name and her status as UM's student pursuing her PhD. Then the researcher explained purpose of study and seeking their consent to interview in their house. - Then followed by sending the information sheet for the participants. - The fond size of particular sheets, information sheets, informed consent and any documents for them to refer to should be at least in font 24 (they could hardly read it if the fond was less than that). - Find out the social norms or social courtesy, people from previous	As this is emic study, the researcher did not use any instrument to screen the couples. The researcher intended to capture local views. Thus, when referrals were given, the researcher would ask the person, who gave referral, how they feel about the couple who was being referred. This would give the researcher the preliminary impression on how other perceived the couple. The researcher noticed the phone calls were all answered by the husbands. Almost all English couples would like to receive the information sheets through email before the interview. They gave full consent by replying the researcher's email. Whereas, Mandarin couples did not bother to receive information sheets. They straight away gave consent and gave their home

	generation abide to. - Before going to their house, the researcher always checked the level of battery for the audio recorder. - Finding out the location of their houses. - Prepare note pads. - Dress properly. The researcher always wore something which have related with UM or contained UM logo. The researcher also wore student ID while carrying out the interviews. - Confirm the time and day of the interview before one day or two days before. - Try to let them choose the time they feel comfortable to meet. Urban couples' schedules were quite packed. It is not feasible for them to accommodate the researcher's time. - Prepare a small gift, which is not to be given right away. It was to be kept in your bag, in case they gave you something.	addresses. In terms of dressing, it could be something quite sensitive, especially the interviewer was female. The interview involved husbands and wives. Wearing something which was not too distracting worth considering. The rationale for preparing a small gift was the researcher encountered a few incidents, the couples sent the researcher away with food. The researcher was caught off guard because she did not prepare for that. For the elderly, it is a courtesy to show reciprocal exchange.
Part C: Getting to the interview • Getting started by asking how did you	Stage 3: Entering their home - Sensitive to what kind of impression the	

meet? • How and who initiated the marriage? • How was it like during the wedding? • How was it like after getting married? Any difference before and after married? • How was the experience like with the arrival of the first child and the rest of the children? • How was it like when the children were in school? • How was it like when they children left home? • How do you nurture the relationship? • How do you deal with conflicts? *It took about 3-4 interview sessions, which lasted for about 1 ½ to 2 hours each, to go through their marital journeys. Key events will be picked up from their sharing.	researcher leaves to the couples. i. : Park the car in properly. ii. : Wait for response after ringing the doorbell. Don't try to walk around. iii. : Meet them with a friendly smile and wave of hand. iv. : Follow them when going into their house. v. : Let them choose their seats. Or let them show you where to sit. The researcher observed some couples get used to seats they always sit at home. - Get the information sheets, informed consent and the consent to record ready. - Get the stationery ready. - Explain to them in person again (though you have spoken to them over the phone), the objectives of the study, the informed consent, the refusal rights of participants, confidentiality, the purpose of recording, and how the recorded materials would be managed. - Ask them is there any questions they would like to ask or to clarify before we start. - Check with them how they feel about audio recording. - Prepare them how the questions would	How the car was parked would not only cause disturbance for the interviews, it also reflected sensitivity to reduce inconvenience or discomforts to the elderly and their neighbors. If the car was inconsiderately parked, this would affect the outcome of the subsequent interview sessions, as well as the interviewer's credibility. First impression lasts. So giving good impression right at the start is very crucial. Knowing some social norms in the elderly's generation was important because this would help to avoid some unintentional behaviors which might be misperceived as rude. Try to have your audio recorder with full battery and get the stationery ready. It would not look nice to consume their house's electricity and to have them walk around to look for stationery for the researcher once they were seated. Many elderly, who the researcher visited, were having difficulty standing up once they had seated. Take time to explain the objective of the

	be asked – like we would be talking about the stages of marriage (the researcher emailed the interview questions to some couples ahead of time). - Prepare them the involvement of this study was to participate in several interview sessions. - Also prepare them that if there was anything they did not feel comfortable answering, they could refuse to answer without have to give explanation. - Assure them they can ask questions or stop for rest or toilet break any time along the interview.	study, the refusal rights of participants, confidentiality, the purpose of recording, and how the recorded materials would be handled. Going through the explanation slowly, it actually helped to prepare the researcher and the participants to "check in" to the research process. While the researcher going through the explanation, it also allowed the researcher to feel the pace of their interaction and their understanding. Some literatures pointed out that some people from different cultures perceive informed consent differently. The researcher observed that the couples were quite comfortable to sign the informed consent. Some of them even felt proud to join this kind of study! In fact, it helped to usher the couples into the study. So don't take the explanation lightly. Don't rush. Some participants have hearing problems. Try to be patient and going slow. Sit closer. They might feel embarrassed by their hearing difficulty. Try to be sensitive to them.

Part C: Conclusion • The participants are expected that the interview will take up a few sessions. • Being sensitive to the emotional bonds with the participants in the fields, the researcher prepared the couples ahead of time when the last interview would take place. • Open for Q & A if they have any questions, doubts, concerns or request. • Prepare them also the researcher will come back for member checking, question raised during data analysis and debriefing session. vi.	Stage 4: Getting to the interview - The interview sessions were conducted with the presence of both husband and wife. - Started by exploring how they started to get to know each other. - How and who initiated the marriage? - How was it like during the wedding? - How was it like after getting married? Any difference before and after married? - How was the experience like with the arrival of the first child and the rest of the children? - How was it like when the children were in school? - How was it like when they children left home? - How do you nurture the relationship? - How do you deal with conflicts?	There were benefits and setbacks for both conducting interviews with the couple together and conducting interview with the couple separately. For this study, since the objective of the study was to capture the strengths of the couples, to be able to capture their collective memories was crucial. Thus, conducting the interview with the presence of husband and wife together was chosen. Conducting the interview together also allowed observation on their enacted interaction. Meanwhile, there were also values to conduct interview separately. Separate interviews would capture sharing which the husband or wife might not feel comfortable to share in front of the spouse. However, conducting couple interviews separately required tactful arrangement. It would incur anxieties between the couple. The separate interview might make the couple wondered about what the spouse talked about him or her. To overcome that, past literature suggested to conducting separate and simultaneous interview which

		means two interviewers conduct interview with husband and wife separately and simultaneously. Due to lack of resources to engage another interviewer and the objective of the study, this study did not adopt the separate and simultaneous couple interview. These are the questions used for the interviews. They were guidelines. Allow some flexibility. Some couples might start talking about conflict at the initial stage of interview. So just go along with it. Pictures could be used in two ways: 1) To help those couples who were less articulate. 2) To elicit more information in the subsequent sessions. Some couples could not recall much about their past. By looking at pictures, it helped to trigger the memories. However, with pictures, they might have thousands of pictures. If the researcher did not specify what kind of pictures, they

		would get overwhelmed by which pictures to show for the coming interviews. Pay attention to gender issues that might incur during the interview. If the interviewer is female, the interviewer might want to be sensitive to how the wife feels about her presence and vice versa. The width and the depth of their answers will depend on the objective of the study. The objective of the study was an important guide to trim the scope of their sharing.
Part D: Debriefing session • The researcher felt the debriefing session was needed because of the intense emotional bonds with the participants which were built over the interview sessions. • The intention of the debriefing session was to debrief their experience after undertaking the study. • This session also allowed the researcher to check whether they need resources for help.	Stage 5: Coming to the end of interview - One or two session before the ending, start preparing the couples interview will come to an end.	

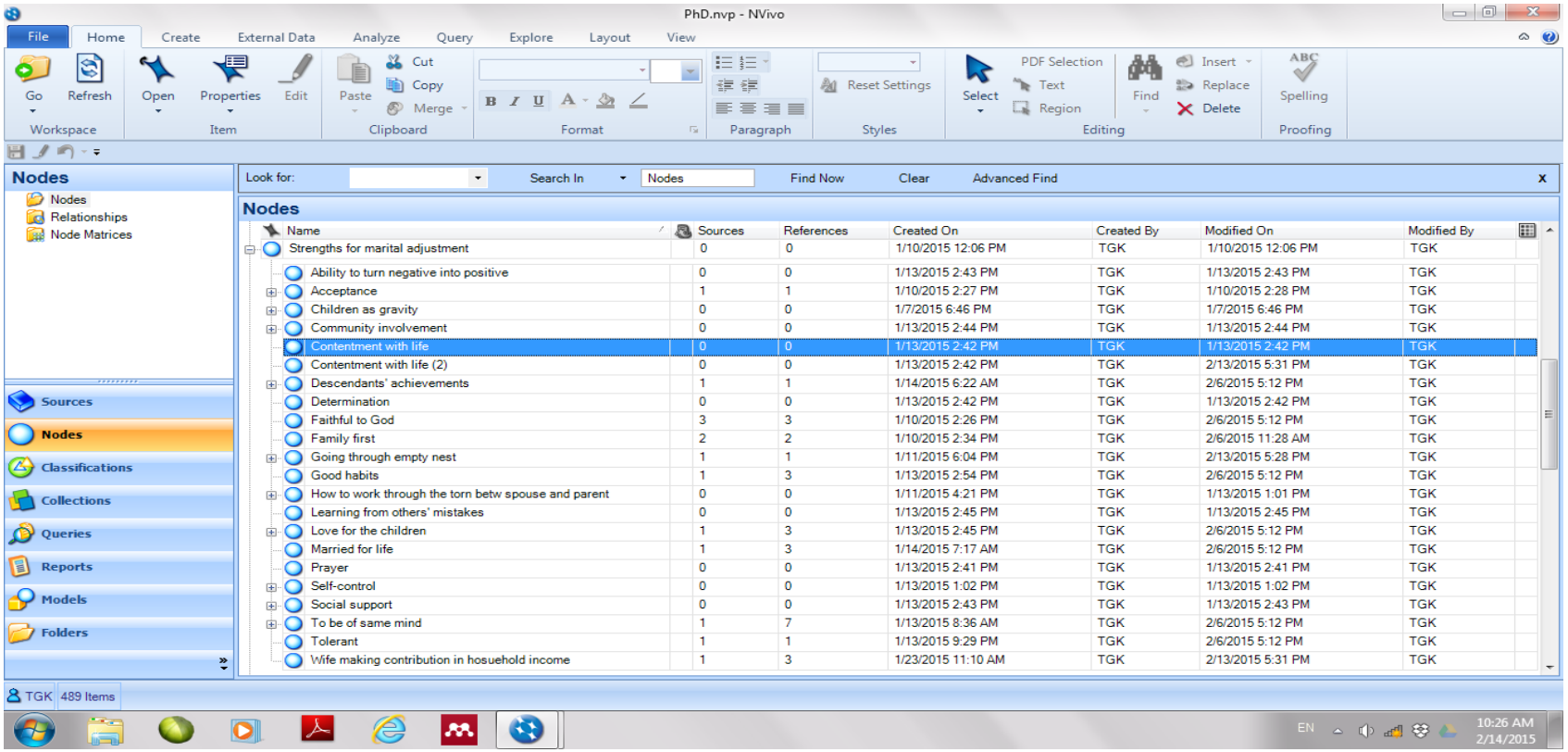
	Stage 6: Debriefing session - The purpose of having debriefing session was to evaluate on the interviews. The scope of debriefing session covered how they felt about the interviewer's presence; any area of sharing they felt regretted; any area of suggestion or improvement for the interviewer; how had the interview sessions impacted on their marital relationship; any additional information that like to add on etc. - This debriefing session was also intended for showing appreciation to the participants.	No audio recording was used for debriefing session because it was intended for informal. Some couples would like to make a treat for job accomplished. Whether to accept the treat depended on the relationship between the participants and the researcher. The researcher accepted their treats. It was a way they also wanted to show appreciation to the researcher's effort to organize their information and listening to their stories. Prepare a small gift. Write a note of appreciation to the couple in a thank you card. The researcher could feel the participants appreciated the interviews. They wanted to keep in touch. I stay in touch with the couples who showed intention to maintain friendship. After the interviews and debriefing session, do keep in touch with the couples by dropping a note or email, letting them know the stage I was in. It was a long wait from

		my submission for examination to my VIVA. My participants actually wondered about my whereabouts. Try to be sensitive to their feeling. It is important not to make them feel that they were being used.

"The procedures and evidence that have led to particular conclusions, always open to the possibility that conclusions may need to be revised in the light of new evidence" (Silverman, 2013, p. x).

APPENDIX G

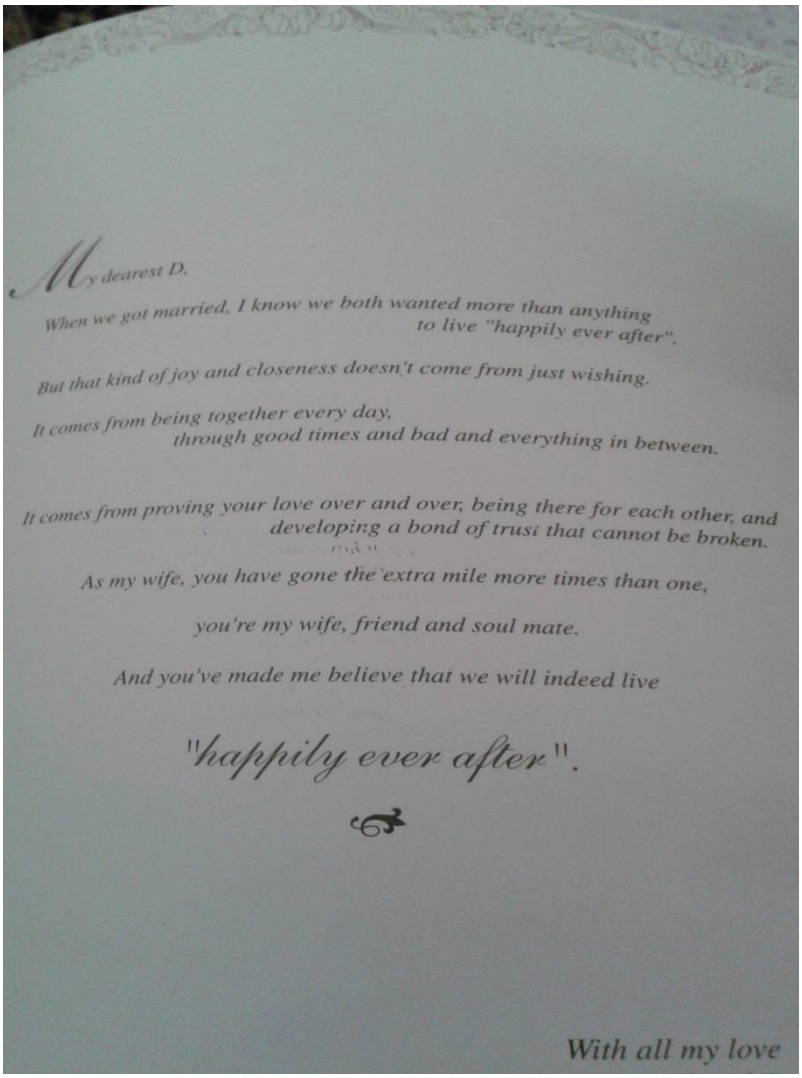
Sample of Nodes in Nvivo 10



Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Strengths for marital adjustment	0	0	1/10/2015 12:06 PM	TGK	1/10/2015 12:06 PM	TGK
Ability to turn negative into positive	0	0	1/13/2015 2:43 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:43 PM	TGK
Acceptance	1	1	1/10/2015 2:27 PM	TGK	1/10/2015 2:28 PM	TGK
Children as gravity	0	0	1/7/2015 6:46 PM	TGK	1/7/2015 6:46 PM	TGK
Community involvement	0	0	1/13/2015 2:44 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:44 PM	TGK
Contentment with life	0	0	1/13/2015 2:42 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:42 PM	TGK
Contentment with life (2)	0	0	1/13/2015 2:42 PM	TGK	2/13/2015 5:31 PM	TGK
Descendants' achievements	1	1	1/14/2015 6:22 AM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Determination	0	0	1/13/2015 2:42 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:42 PM	TGK
Faithful to God	3	3	1/10/2015 2:26 PM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Family first	2	2	1/10/2015 2:34 PM	TGK	2/6/2015 11:28 AM	TGK
Going through empty nest	1	1	1/11/2015 6:04 PM	TGK	2/13/2015 5:28 PM	TGK
Good habits	1	3	1/13/2015 2:54 PM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
How to work through the torn betw spouse and parent	0	0	1/11/2015 4:21 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 1:01 PM	TGK
Learning from others' mistakes	0	0	1/13/2015 2:45 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:45 PM	TGK
Love for the children	1	3	1/13/2015 2:45 PM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Married for life	1	3	1/14/2015 7:17 AM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Prayer	0	0	1/13/2015 2:41 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:41 PM	TGK
Self-control	0	0	1/13/2015 1:02 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 1:02 PM	TGK
Social support	0	0	1/13/2015 2:43 PM	TGK	1/13/2015 2:43 PM	TGK
To be of same mind	1	7	1/13/2015 8:36 AM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Tolerant	1	1	1/13/2015 9:29 PM	TGK	2/6/2015 5:12 PM	TGK
Wife making contribution in hosuehold income	1	3	1/23/2015 11:10 AM	TGK	2/13/2015 5:31 PM	TGK

APPENDIX H

The Card Husband Presented to His Wife during Their Golden Anniversary Wedding (Couple 3)



My dearest D.

When we got married, I know we both wanted more than anything to live "happily ever after".

But that kind of joy and closeness doesn't come from just wishing.

It comes from being together every day, through good times and bad and everything in between.

It comes from proving your love over and over, being there for each other, and developing a bond of trust that cannot be broken.

As my wife, you have gone the extra mile more times than one,

you're my wife, friend and soul mate.

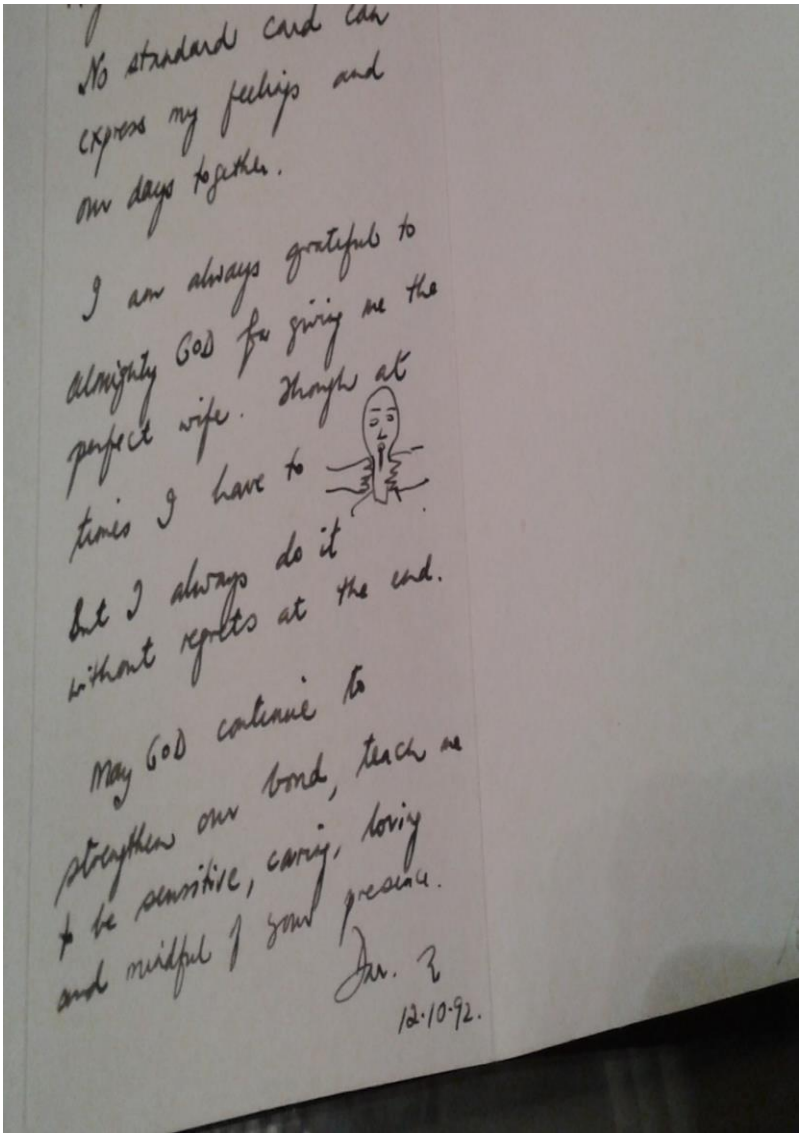
And you've made me believe that we will indeed live

"happily ever after".

With all my love

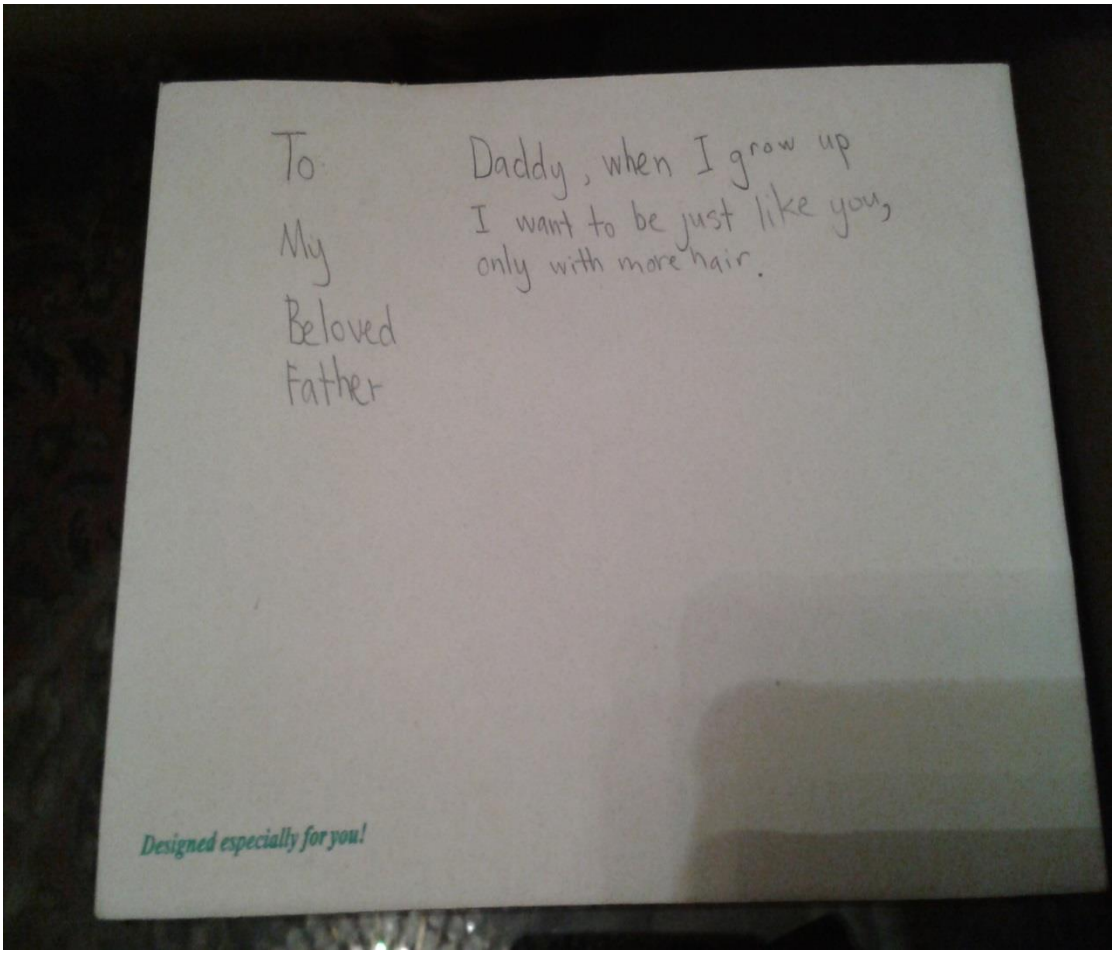
APPENDIX I

Handwritten Notes from Husband to Wife (Couple 5)



APPENDIX J

The card given by one of the sons of Couple 5



APPENDIX K

Tabulated Strengths in Marital Challenges

	Couple 1	Couple 2	Couple 3	Couple 4	Couple 5	
Community involvement	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Religious Involvement	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Empathetic	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Tolerance	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Accommodative	√	√	√			TMC
Responsible	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Sacrificial			√	√	√	C
Committed	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Care for each other	√					
Children-centered	√	√	√	√		MC
Live for higher good	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Maternal Support	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Social support	√			√	√	C
Respect the elderly	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Not demanding	√	√	√			MC
Live within means	√	√	√			C
Partnership	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Responsible children	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
No bad habit	√					

TMC – The most common

MC - More common

C – Common

APPENDIX L

Tabulated Strengths in Dealing with Conflicts

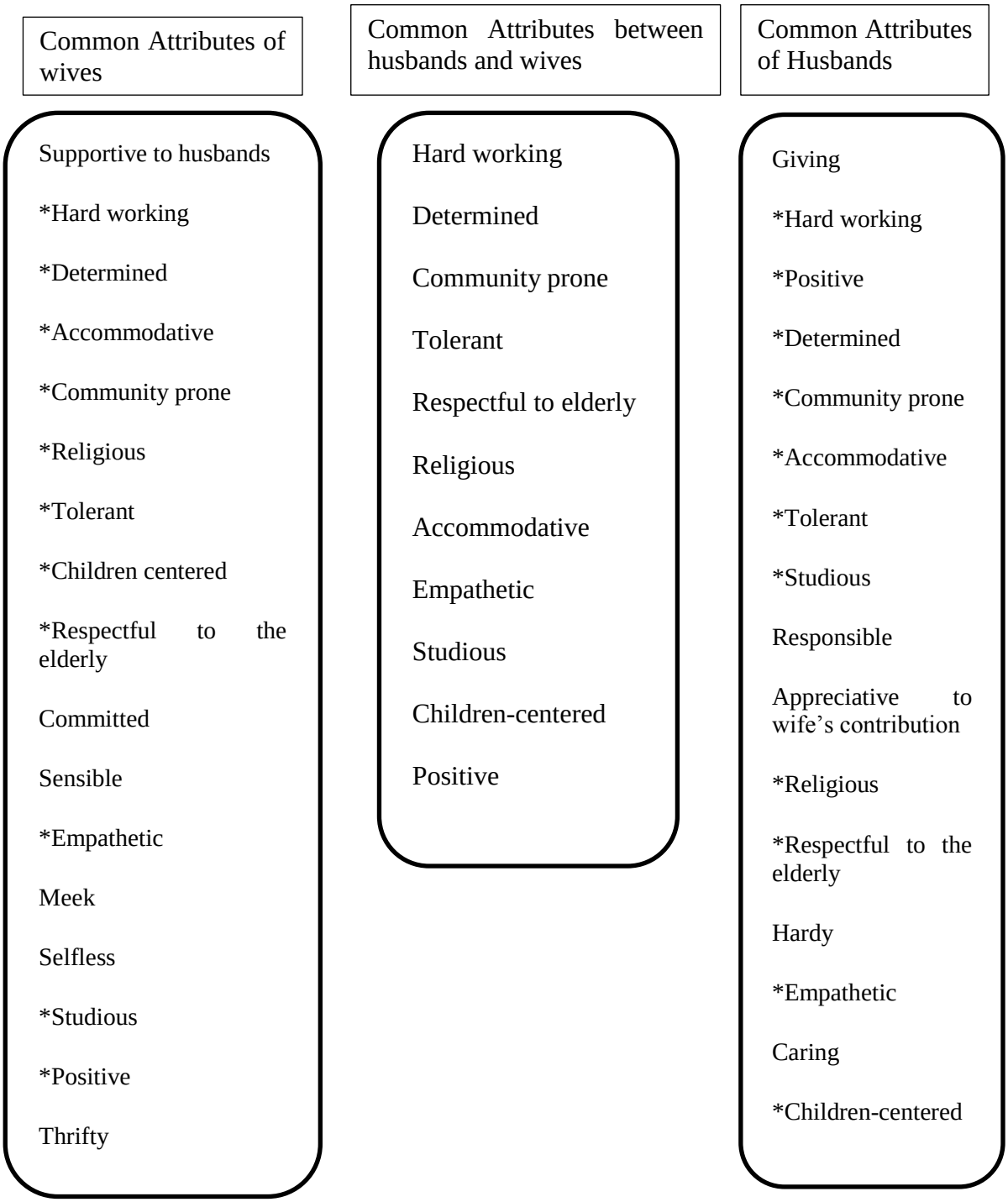
	Couple 1	Couple 2	Couple 3	Couple 4	Couple 5	
No putting partner to shame		√			√	
No open quarrel		√	√	√	√	MC
No talking about the causes of conflict or issue	√		√		√	C
No keeping of anger	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
No demanding			√		√	
Keep quiet	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Avoid hurting words			√	√	√	
Husband initiates the make up	√	√	√		√	MC
Wife initiates the make up				√		
Walk away	√				√	
Talk about the disagreement or the unhappiness		√		√		
Listen first		√	√			
No argument in front of children as the rule			√	√		
Still carrying out daily functioning routine	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Having cold war				√	√	
Avoid hurting words				√	√	
Compromise			√			
Absorb			√		√	
Settle behind the scene			√	√		
Give in	√		√	√		C
Sleep over it			√			
Forget	√					
Waiting for right timing to speak		√	√	√	√	MC

Playing the model role	√	√	√	√		MC
Forgive				√		
Humor		√			√	
Abiding to religious teaching	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Love for children	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Reciprocal response	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Accommodative	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Tolerance	√	√	√	√	√	TMC

TMC-The most common; MC-More Common; and C-Common

APPENDIX M

Identifying the Common Attribute of Husbands and Wives



APPENDIX N

Enhancers for Sense of Togetherness

	Couple 1	Couple 2	Couple 3	Couple 4	Couple 5	
Talk - Talk about things that are relevant to their lives. - Jokes		√	√	√	√	MC
Life crisis & sickness	√	√		√	√	MC
Common interests	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Eat		√		√	√	MC
Respect each other's parents	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Love for children	√	√	√	√	√	TMC
Enjoy the presence			√	√	√	C
Value marital sex				√	√	
Watching TV together	√					
Take care of spouse's daily needs	√		√		√	C
Humor		√	√	√	√	MC
Affection						
Respect spouse's hobbies	√			√	√	C
Spouse centered					√	
Religious connection		√	√	√	√	MC

TMC – The most common; MC – More common; C – Common

APPENDIX O

Sample of Audit Trail

Participants: Couple 1

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Tools used for data collection: MP3 recorder

Description of Setting:

Interview Data	Observation	How data are coded	Personal reflections/ Questions/ Issues	Theoretical Frameworks

APPENDIX P(i)

Observation Notes for Couple 1

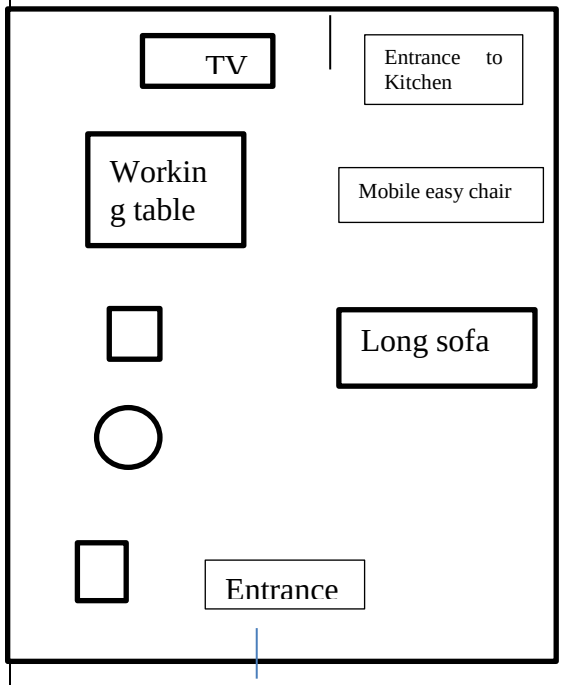
Couple: 1

Session: 1 and 2 Time: 10am-1130am and 2pm-330pm

Setting: Their house

Description of my observation	Observer's comments	Observation of our relationships
The yard - No tile, the original cemented floor. - Some plants on the left side of the house. The plants were given by those leprosy patients. - No auto-gate - Two bicycle - Long porch - The house is light orange and light yellow. The home - There is some smell in the house. - The floor is dusty. - Brown sofa. - A neat working table in the living room.	The house was in its original state. It reflects their thriftiness. I guess the floor was not taken cared often due to their age and energy. They have someone to clean once a week. Their week days are filled with doctors' appointment. From the arrangement of the house, seems like TV was not the main thing in their life.	- It was a very polite and social surface.

- A wheeled tea table.
- Some family pictures hanging against the walls in the living room.
- Husband's picture honored by Sultan was there as well.
- Television positions right across the entrance.



The house lady offered pao (snack) for me to eat, which was made by her.		I prepared a melon for them. I felt really bad that I did not prepare anything the first round. So I hid it in my bag and brought it out after the interview.
They asked me no video record for the second session. She cut watermelon for me during the second session. The wife talked about we can still be friend after the interview. She said I can drop by anytime.	I guess maybe she felt the pressure that she had not much to elaborate, because she asked me about what others said.	

Couple: 1

Session: 3 Time: 212-345pm

Setting: Their house

Description of my observation	Observer's comments	Observation of our relationship
They put the pictures on the TV table. I went to carry for them. We talked about the pictures. There were black and white pictures. In all three sessions, we had snack after the interviews.	The husband was not sure what to show because there were thousands of pictures. It was quite a scary experience for couples to show pictures because they did not know which to show. They left the pictures for me to see. The selection of the pictures were their daughter's graduation, a lot grandchildren's pictures, pictures to Xia Men, one picture of the wife's single picture which was taken in studio and one black and white picture when they were in courtship. The only picture the husband talked about more was the trip they went to Xia Men in China. He talked about how they were red carpet treated. I noticed the wife was nicely dressed in most of the pictures. She looked stylish and modern when young.	I felt the relationship was much closer when we found out that we have the common friends like XX and other XX church's brothers and sisters. But the wife was quite distanced in this session. I brought dragon fruits to them. I brought it out after the session. They kept telling me no need to bring anything.

	While the husband was talking, I noticed the wife looked through the grandchildren's pictures. She murmured, "very happy to see the grandchildren." The husband talked more this session; wife was taking a lay back position (I guess she was tired because she just woke up when I arrived). I pointed to them XX, then realized the husband was very closed to XX. But the wife's expression looked so. Though the wife was also a cancer survivor, but there was not much excitement when talked about cancer surviving experience with the wife. But seems like the husband's cancer surviving experience was more click to XX's experience. This session they felt more relaxed. The husband expressed to me that we just had casual talk, you integrate and organize the information yourself afterwards.	The wife prepared prawn crackers made by her. She asked me to bring the whole container home. I asked for a plastic bag. I took all the prawn crackers.

APPENDIX P(ii)

Observation Notes for Couple 2

Couple: 2

Session: 1 Time: 330pm-5pm

Setting: In their Apartment

Description of my Observation	Observer's comments	The relationship between the researcher and the researched
They live in an apartment where the wife's sister and husband's brothers are living close by. In fact, their family members almost occupied the whole 10th floor. The floor was clean and the living room was tidy, though there were a lot of "gazettes" around the living room. We were sitting around the dining table for the interview. The wife looks quite lively in her age and quite well preserved. The husband is quite a heavy size.	Very community oriented kind of people. It also showed up in the interview dialogues in which the husband gave away a bed which his daughter had been sleeping. I guess they are running day care for children. That's why those gazettes were laying around. But it did not look messy.	I could feel they intend to help me to conduct my study.

Couple: 2

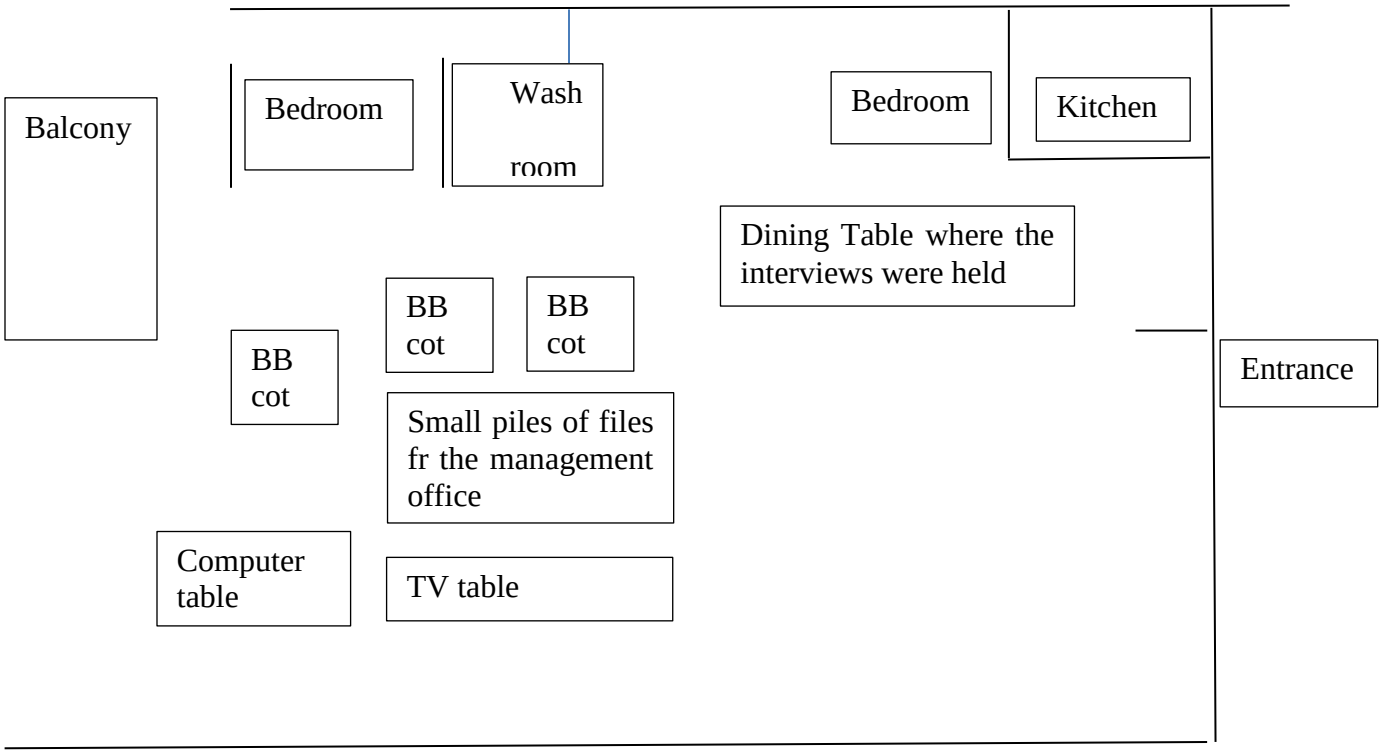
Session: 2 Time: 930-1115pm

Setting: Their home at Apartment

Description of Observation	Observer's comment	Relationship between researcher and researched
When I reached around 930pm, the husband was sitting on the dining table chair, watching TV. I did not see the wife. I heard noises coming from kitchen. I guess she was busy with dishes. I went down to take the bananas I prepared to give them. I put the bananas aside, hiding from their sights. Planned to give them after interview. When I came back from picking up bananas, I used the toilet. After using toilet, I asked whether the wife needed help in cleaning up kitchen. She said no need. She finished up already. She apologized to me that I had to come in so late. I replied by telling them I really appreciate them for willing to meet. We sat around the dining table.	I wondered if they were financially more able, will they do nursery? Their working hours made me thinking of our social security system in our society. Husband seemed to enjoy himself watching TV despite of the wife doing with the dishes.	

The husband kept yawning when we were beginning our interview session. I sat in the same place, husband sat on the place where the wife sat in the last interview. The wife made me a honey lemon juice. Husband prepared one picture. Wife did not. The moment I was about to leave, the wife asked me, “is this the last session?”	I perceived she was overwhelmed by making time for those appointments. But then after talking to Dr. Sharil, may be they have disclosed a lot in that session. Need to assure her of the confidentiality.	

Their home arrangement:



Couple: 2

Session: 3 Time: 10pm-1055pm

Setting: Their home

Description of observation	Observer's comment	Relationship & self-reflexivity of observer
The husband was watching TV. The wife was talking over Skye with her children in Singapore and Japan. I told them to take their time. The wife said it would be very long. I used the toilet. It was dry and smelled good. I said today was earlier, unlike last time, I came in 920pm, the wife was still washing. The wife said she hasn't shower and the dishes were still not done yet. I felt the reluctance when asking to look at those pictures. In fact, this is the second time I asked. I noticed the husband (including the Setapak husband) likes to ask the wife to get something for him, even though he knows where to get it.	I felt I came in at the wrong timing. I was planning to build the momentum to get it over (according to Seidman's book), but then I realized this time I came in at the wrong timing. Next time I should ask the wife before I go. The husband is ok with everything without aware of the limits sometimes. I really felt their time is really tight. This Friday evening is their time to chat with their children and I came in. Though pictures are good source of data, I noticed they are reluctant to show. May be too low energy to move the pictures from the shelf or box.	Dr. Sharil was true that last session they disclosed something quite deep and embarrassing. I felt their uneasiness to be taped recorded. The wife said about how data is being used. She said they seldom talked about their financial situation to others. The husband also talked about how the data being used. I assured them of the confidentiality and how anonymity will be kept. This round I could feel they tried to restrict their mouth, especially the wife. I also assured them that they have the rights to withdraw anytime they want. But then the wife said that they might feel bad for me for the efforts I put in. I think the relationship between the

I left around 11pm. I assured them again about confidentiality and anonymity.	I felt I was quite inconsiderate and insensitive because she still has to do dishes after I left.	researcher and the couple is quite tense at this point. It is better to give some space to it. I will leave this couple alone after I transcribed their stories. Three of us look quite tired in this session. Husband is yawning and wife did some too. My eyes were heavy and my head began to have headache.

APPENDIX P(iii)

Couple: 3

Session: 1 Time: 10am-1230pm

Setting: Their home

Description of observation	Observer's comments	Relationship and self-reflexivity of the observer
The couple lives in a terrace house in Bangsar. There is a Toyota Vios parks at the porch. The husband answered the door. The wife took a while to come down from upstairs. When she came down from upstairs, his husband introduced her as, "people call her Lucy." The wife was modernly dressed. She wore lipstick during the interview. In fact, this is the first wife I encountered, who made up for the interview. She wore red blouse and white loose linen pants. Husband was neatly dressed with polo shirt and khaki.	I was a little cautious with this couple. Due to the previous exchange in emails. He asked for my home address. I refused after consulting with my supervisors. His tone sounded very uncomfortable. I almost dropped this couple. I am glad I did not. I perceived the husband was very domineering. But it turned out not. From his action, looking closely, he is very delicate, very sensitive, like what his wife said. He still kisses her every morning until now. I noticed the seating positions were quite uptight at the beginning of the interview, with set up of video camera and audio camera. In the middle of the interview, I noticed	I feel very touched to see both of them. They just allowed me to do whatever I wish to help me for my dissertation. I feel they tried to make me feel comfortable. Their sharing was quite genuine and real. I felt they were very willing to share. While I was writing my observation about this couple, I was comparing my feeling towards the couple I met in D. I felt the D couple holds something in their relationship which is different from this couple. I felt the experience with this couple from B was more "pure." Whereas, the couple from D was more complex or sophisticated, but I can't tell what exactly makes me felt complex. What I can see with my eyes and hear with

Husband shook hand with me and welcomed me. He even waited for me to settle down. Then he offered me drink. I told him I brought mine. He looks friendly. He invited me to find a place to sit whichever I feel comfortable. His wife sat down and eager to start the interview. He even talked about my caution when he asked for my home address. He said, "it is always better to be cautious." The house was not much renovated. There were a lot of pictures hung on the right wall. They are neatly arranged also. The furniture of the house was neatly arranged. The only daughter's picture was separated from the three sons, which were displayed on the side coffee table. The husband asked me to speak louder	their seating position, especially the husband one, was not as neatly situated as the beginning of the session.	my ears: - They are loving couples. - They care for each other, e.g. husband took two cups of water. What they showed from non-verbal: - Husband did not react towards his wife, when his wife tried to correct him (to make sure he answered my question). - Husband blushed when wife asked him whether he loves her or not (when talked about the decision before their wedding). - Wife expressed that in the process of making the marital decision, husband spoke to her mother more than her.

because his hearing is not doing very well. In the middle of the interview, the husband went upstairs and pulled out a compiled booklet which consists of their life stories. He read from the booklet time to time when he needed reference. He also brought two mugs of water, one for himself and one for his wife. Husband told me the son from Australia asked for copies of the CDs.		

Couple: 3

Session: 2 Date: 13/8/2014 Time: 10am to 12pm

Setting: The living of their house

Description	Comments	Relationship and self-reflexivity
It took some times for the couple, the husband, to answer the door, unlike the first time. I felt very clumsy with all the electronic gazettes. They were sitting there ready when I was trying to set up the electronic gazettes. I used their rest room. The floor and the toilet are dry and clean. The husband did not tuck in his shirt. The wife is wearing nice clothes like the first time. They look more relaxed. They expressed their concern whether they are helping me. When I saw the video, I noticed the		When they showed concern that they were helping me or not. I feel touched. But then when I think from the relationship perspective, I feel they were trying to keep the elder position in this relationship with me. It was quite normal, I guess. They were trying to help me. Do they exhibit this kind of position in their relationship with their children? I think yes. Do they exhibit this, high position, in their marital relationship? I think no. I feel they are quite equal in this relationship. There is a subtle current in my relationship

husband was in deep thought when the wife was talking about something happily. The wife's tone changed when I said, "I heard you mentioned about the sons a lot, what about the daughter? I assured them that this study does not require finding nice answers. It is the life experience that count. Understanding them as a person, like how they perceive things; how they feel about something were central to my research. The husband did not seem to be able to recall things much. His sharing comes mostly perceptual sharing. Wife shared more the details. Husband is very clear on the year, time, location etc.	I felt this question was too abrupt. I could have stayed long to talk about the sons. Then swift gently to the daughter. I felt the wife was a little defend when mentioning her daughter.	with them – highlighting their strength in their married. The husband is more obvious in doing this. He looked he was in deep thought when the wife was talking something, which he thought was not relevant.

APPENDIX P(iv)

Observation Notes for Couple 4

Couple: 4

Time: 1030am-12pm

Session: 1

Setting: Their home

Description of Observation	Observer's comments	Relationship & self-reflexivity of observer
They reside in a semi-detached house in Damansara Height. The car parks at the porch is Mercedez Benz. Husband answered the door, when I walked into the house. The garden in the yard did not seem to be well maintained. The house was partitioned for different functions, e.g. TV room is for reading and TV watching. Living room is for quiet gathering etc.	A well-known residential area for the well off. The wife was inside the TV room when I walked into the house. She seemed to tidy up the room a bit, e.g. She was moving the big pillows from one side to another. When someone at the door, the	They sounded quite open to talk about their marriage. We did not seem to be able to focus and follow the stages structure. Most of the content of the interview was quite leaning towards the in-laws and the third party interference. The marriage showed that and their sons' marriages exhibit that also. They seemed to be happy after the interview. Children are important buttress in this marriage. They seem to trust me. I felt welcomed by them.

We had the interview in the TV room, which is a small room partitioned out. The room was filled with books, Chinese as well as English books. There are two TVs in that room. The room was air-conditioned with sliding doors. The house was dark. The only well-lit place was the TV room, where we sat down. Physically, the wife looks a bit limp. The husband's hand was a little bend. Husband decided to have audio recording only. They are comfortable in using social media to get in touch with their children in overseas. When they brought the tea set, tea cup and tea pot, there were only two cups. They invited me for lunch.	wife answered the door. My curiosity was settled when the wife shared the tea cup with the husband. I was startled. I did not know what to do in my first reaction. I turned down by saying that I needed to pick up my kids. I think I was torn between inside by what I should do and should not do ethically.	The husband seems to be more dominant in this relationship. For example, wife was expressing that the secret she has for this marriage is she kept secrets for the children. Then she made comments like, I am not sure about you, do you have secret in this marriage? I became her alliance for balance. Another example is all their children would take side on her mother's side. They tried to protect the mother. Another example is when the informed consent forms were rendered to them, the husband shifted the responsibility to his wife, as the wife who usually takes care of this kind of thing. I feel there is power imbalanced in this relationship, though the wife accepts and absorbs it.

Couple: 4

Session: 2 Date:19/8/2014 Time:1030am-1250pm

Setting: The TV in their living room.

Description	Observer's comments	Self-reflexivity and relationship
The wife and husband came to the door the second time I came. The first time I came, the husband came to the door. The wife was in the TV room. The wife is wearing outing clothes. She wore t-shirt the first time I came. The wife was making cold tea for me. The first time, the husband made Chinese tea. The husband gave me a stool for putting my things. Husband was in tears when talking about children had to live in overseas. They seemed more conscious of what I would like to ask. For example, they will consciously	The tentative theme for this couple is the mixture of West and East or persistency. Husband seems like an idealistic person. He does not seem easy to let go of the mistakes he made. He is preoccupied with the wife's mother's wrongdoings. For example, the wife was saying how her mother packed the drumstick for him when he went back to Subramana, but he seemed to deny it.	Their relationship with me seems to be equal. The husband and the wife asked me questions time to time.

ask, what is your question? They had to slowly move when they got up from sitting. The husband was in tears when he talked about the separation from the children.		

Couple: 4

Session: 3 Date: 26/8/2014 Time: 10am-1pm

Setting: their home

Description	Observer' comments	Relationship and self-reflexivity
They were looking forward for my arrival, like the second time. May be they have been since the first session. But I feel more during the second and third session. They got ready the pictures. (This kind of behaviors was not seen in the D P couple). The wife opened the door this time. We talked about their family of origin this session. I used their restroom. The wife asked me, "do you need the lights on?" They did not turn on lights on those areas where is not in use. They expressed, "anytime when	The husband showed some facial expression when mentioned about his father's second wife. Later he mentioned that his father had the second wife did have a big impact on him. He does not want to be like him. The wife was a little sad when mentioned about her mother lost her only son. The wife could be that type of daughter who tried not to her mother. That could make this marital relationship worse by not setting boundary. They both also mentioned that they should have been setting their foot on when the mother interfere their marriage. Husband was a talented in managing the resources.	I felt I was a little sad while I told them that I will not be seeing them for a while. The interview sessions will come to an end. I saw the husband was having some facial expression as well. I guess my interview sessions could be the highlights of their days. Among the couple, this is the first couple I have the sad feeling while preparing for an end. I feel there is some kind of attachment with them. I feel this kind of attachment also exhibited in their relationship with their children. I feel their apprehension when talking about their living condition when they are not in good health.

you need anything, please let us know." I did not have that with Chinese speaking couples, except the one in SP.		

APPENDIX P(v)

Observation Notes for Couple 5

Couple: 5

Session: 1 Date: 30/8/2014 Time: 8pm-10pm

Setting: The living hall of their bungalow

Description	Comments	Self-reflexivity and relationship
The husband gave me a very clear direction to their house. It took me about ten minutes from UM to reach their place. When I reached there, I rang the doorbell. I was talking to machine. It took quite a while for someone to answer the door. The husband shook hand with me at the door. Then the wife came to the living hall, she also shook hand with me. Then we sat at the living hall. They asked me questions, like which church I attended; what my husband does; how old are my kids; how did I come to know Pastor Marcus etc. I assured them that it is ok to ask me questions. The husband made a comment like, luckily	Very nice to hear their story. This is the only story which puts children as secondary, and their marriage as primary. But respecting the old folks is the strength of their relationship (a sign of other-centeredness). There was a moment I felt really bad when they talked about respecting the old folks. I felt I was so wrong to talk about my mother-in-la time to time to my husband. I felt I am not honoring my husband enough. I felt a strong sense of guilt. I felt God was convicting me.	I feel they were quite cautious and open at the same time. The husband was more cautious. The wife is more open in terms of sharing.

they agreed to my interview because I know so many people they know in church circle. I clarify whether they feel obligated to participate due to the church circle. They took me to dinner. We were sitting in a two door coupe. Now I understood why they wanted to buy dinner because they were not heard of me at all from Pastor Marcus. We dined in a Penang restaurant. They kept scoping the dishes for me. After dinner, we came back to have coffee, but we all ended up having plain water. The husband passed water to his wife in the midst of interview. I could feel their sweetness when they talked about their early days. They closed the meeting in prayer. The husband and wife hold hands while they do the prayer.		

Appendix Q

In-depth Interview Questions to verified by Dr. Melati Sumari

(on 25th June, 2014)

1. Can we start by sharing how two of you come to know each other?

   我們可以先從你們如何認識開始嗎？

2. How did you come to marriage?

   你們如何走到結婚這個階段？

3. How was your relationship like after married? Anything you remember the most?

   結婚後，你們的關係是怎樣的？有什麼是難忘的嗎？

4. How was your marital relationship like after the arrival of the first child?

   第一個孩子的出生後，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

5. How was your marital relationship like after the arrival of second child?

   第二個孩子的出生後，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

6. How was your marital relationship like when the children started school?

   在孩子上學的階段，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

7. How was your marriage like when your children were in teen stage?

   孩子在少年的階段，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

8. How was your marriage like when the children were in college?

孩子在大學或學院的時候，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

9. How was your marriage like when your children were in working stage?

孩子在工作的階段時，你們的婚姻是怎樣的？

10. When your children got married, can you describe how it was like for both of you?

當你們的孩子結婚的時候，你們可以形容你們的心情是怎樣的嗎？

11. How was your marital relationship like after your children form their own families?

當你們的孩子成家後，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

12. When you have grandchildren, did that mean anything?

當你有子孫時，它意味着什麼？

13. How was your marital relationship like when the wife was going thru menopause and andropause stage?

在經歷女性和男性更年期時，你們的夫妻關係是怎樣的？

14. Is there any incident that really took a toll on your marriage? How did you walk through the impact of the incident?

有什麼事件曾經對你們的婚姻造成很大打擊的？你們如何走過這風暴？

Additional Questions for debriefing:

1. After looking into the stages of marriage, what would be meaningful or blessings to you?
2. After looking in the stages of marriage, would meaning you make out of this exploration?

Appendix R

Sample of Transcription

I Relax hu. I start huh? How did you all get to know each other?

H Most of the time, she will do the answer

W No la. Ha ha ha (laugh).

H Because she can not go for me ma.

W Ha ha ha.

I (laughed) Where did you all meet?

W We meet in church.

I Oh, ok…

W I came from Kuala Kangsar. It's a pastor who introduced me a job in his church in Setapak. That time, as a child care teacher. So he came down and then, I think it's the pastor who match mate us.

H Ya.

W It's when after we want to… we said we are getting married, then the pastor broke the news, he said, I am actually the match maker.

I Ah…

W And he did it so…

H Naturally

W Naturally that we didn't even know that.

H No, you didn't know.

W Ha ha ha…

H I know.

W I didn't know that I have a match maker. Ha ha ha…

I So he actually planned.

W Ya, he planned. Ah…for us to be always to be together. Because I came from Kuala Kangsar, KL is new to me.

I Ya…

W So if I want to visit my sister, the pastor will ask him to escort me.

I I see…

W We go by bus you know.

I So just now Mr. Leong said, you knew also. You were kind of together with the match maker?

W Ha ha ha…

I Ok ok …

W We don't know la.

H Alright…actually my pastor, (name), was a kind hearted man. Because she came down and know nobody, so a big gang of us in the YF. So he just called me to have dinner, the first dinner to welcome her.

I Oh…

H Ya, so pastor invited me to come and my brother, younger brother. Ya, so just three of us. So since then she wanted to find the room, find the house, find anything la. So I was like a PA to her already la.

I (laughed) ok ok…

H That was 1971

W Ya…

H June?

W June

H 1971 June…ya.

I Ok, was it the first sight thing or developmental kind?

W I don't know about him. Not me. Ha ha ha…

I Ok… (laughed)

H I didn't know we were like that the first sight

W (laughing)

I Ok ok…(laughing)

H Because at that time I just came out of a failed romance you see. She stayed in the church, but she rejected me la. So I was a bit depressed… but this pastor counseling me, said, don't worry don't worry, God will fit it. So it wasn't the first time.

I Ok…

H First sight.

W Not love at first sight.

I Ok… so how it develops you know

H I started border service in 1971 ah… in August?

W July August

H Two three months later ah.

W Two three months later after getting to know each other.

H I was a government surveyer, land surveyer. I had to go deep into the jungle to mark the national boundary between the Thailand and Malaysia

I Ok…

H That was known as Baling crew, that one. So the first two months I was in KL, so we always meet in the church while take care of her. Then when I was stationed at the Thai border of the deep jungles, so we began write letters la.

W Write letters.

H Ya, write letters.

I Oh… so who wrote to who first?

H Can't remember who write who first.