

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**EXPLORING THE JOURNEY TOWARDS
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN A
CHINESE CONGREGATION IN HONG KONG**

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requirements of Anglia Ruskin University
for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology

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ABSTRACT

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PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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Twelve years ago I was the key person initiating changes in the roles of women in worship in a Chinese congregation with missionary influence. In this thesis I explore the process of women's empowerment in this church.

I took a retrospective look and employed a case study approach, using interviews and questionnaires. The works of leading feminist theologians from western and local contexts were studied for an understanding of women's empowerment from different perspectives. These works include feminist and sociological definitions of empowerment, a postcolonial reinterpretation of the use of the Bible, the tradition and culture governing congregational change, and women's religious agency in conservative congregations in both the western and the local Hong Kong context.

Against this conceptual framework and based on the data analysis and interpretation, the conclusion is reached that progress in women's empowerment was made in terms of greater visibility and equal partnership in worship, and a new perception of women by the congregation. The changes in women's roles in worship helped in establishing and strengthening the image of women's leadership. However, the biblical interpretation of the missionaries has shaped the tradition and culture of the congregation, and the concept of "headship" still demarcates the roles of women, with women still not holding top leadership posts.

Through the research, I generate a new understanding of women's empowerment in a specific Baptist, colonial, missionary-founded and conservative Chinese congregation. Given women now have visible and equal roles in the pulpit in worship, including preaching and leading the liturgy, a significant contribution was made to empowerment.

Through a new perception that applies to all women; through the construction of new identities for the women leaders; and also through informal empowerment, women can have a positive impact on the congregation, without requiring the formal posts of ultimate leadership, and without having to abandon their conservative theology of male headship, which is both inherited from the colonizers and is also culturally Chinese. This nuanced understanding has helped change the practice of worship in my church.

Key words: empowerment, missionary, biblical interpretation, tradition, culture, headship, final leadership, women, perception, informal empowerment.

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Part 1: THE RESEARCH QUESTION IN ITS CONTEXT

Introduction

Research Topic

The title of my research is “Exploring the journey towards women’s empowerment in a Chinese congregation in Hong Kong”. Through this research, I seek to find out if progress in women’s empowerment has been made and in what ways this has taken place in a patriarchal Chinese congregation in Hong Kong, which has an inheritance of western missionary influence.

Background to the Research

I come from a Baptist church that was planted by a United States missionary organization, the Association for Baptist Worldwide Evangelism (hereafter referred to as “The Association”) some thirty years ago. The missionary organization held conservative views about the roles of women and used 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 as the biblical basis for restricting women’s roles. Women were not allowed to lead the church or teach the men. Following the biblical interpretation and tradition of this United States missionary organization, my church also confined the roles of women. As a result, the female pastor could not preach in the worship service, women could not lead the liturgical part of the worship, only the male pastor could be the pastor-in-charge, and only a man could be chairman of the Deacon Board. Following a reform carried out twelve years ago in 2007 (the result of a study of women’s roles through a task group formed in 2006), the female pastor can now preach in the worship and women can now lead the worship. This was a major breakthrough for my church. A milestone was reached in terms of women’s roles. What remains unchanged, however, is that the male pastor is still the pastor-in-charge and only a man can chair the Deacon Board.

In this research topic, the term “empowerment” refers to the enhancement of women, in terms of the roles they can take up after the reform in my church, the perception women have about themselves, and the perception the congregation has of women in my church. My research thus aims at taking a retrospective look at whether there has been

empowerment as a result of the reform; it asks what facilitated the empowerment; and looks at what has inhibited further empowerment.

Research Gap

Carrying out this research within the context of my church fills a research gap in the area of feminist theology. Feminist theology about empowerment has been widely explored and developed in a western context, but this has not been the case in the eastern context. In particular, it has not been explored in relation to a specific Chinese congregation in Hong Kong with Baptist missionary influence. I am therefore going to use my church as a case study to explore the topic. My church is a church established by a US missionary organization (the Association mentioned above). With this cross-cultural background in a Chinese church, I engaged myself to study how women could be empowered in such a church.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research reveals it was possible to make a significant contribution to empowerment in a specific Chinese congregation in Hong Kong, with Baptist missionary influence and also strong adherence to tradition and culture. Empowerment took the form of a new perception applying to all women and the construction of new identities for the women leaders. Through informal empowerment, it became clear that women could have a positive impact on the congregation, without having to gain the formal posts of final leadership and without having to abandon their conservative theology of male headship, which is both inherited from the colonizers and also culturally Chinese.

Contribution to Practice

It is my expectation that my research can shed light and help bring positive changes to the practice of other Chinese patriarchal congregations with western missionary influence, either in Hong Kong or overseas, or even in churches without western missionary influence, yet having a similar background to my church. In other words, women in churches can be more visible, be given more importance, and have more equal partnerships with men.

Structure of Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

- (1) Introduction: A brief outline of the thesis, the research topic and the research gap.
- (2) Chapter 1: My context, the church where I come from and its historical background and religious convictions. The reason why I arrived at this particular research topic is also discussed.
- (3) Chapter 2: The conceptual framework, covering what empowerment means from a sociological perspective and the feminist perspective as well as the tradition and culture influencing Chinese churches from the contextual perspective and the complexity of women's actions from the postcolonial perspective.
- (4) Chapter 3: Methodology, evaluation and limitations.
- (5) Chapter 4: Data analysis and discussion of factors enabling the empowerment are discussed.
- (6) Chapter 5: Data analysis and discussion of factors prohibiting further empowerment in my church are discussed.
- (7) Chapter 6: The tradition and culture of my church that shaped the mindset of the leaders and the congregation.
- (8) Chapter 7: An evaluation of whether progress in women's empowerment has been made in my church and in what ways it has been made. The evaluation is made based on the four perspectives mentioned in Chapter 2, which relates to the conceptual framework.
- (9) Chapter 8: The empowerment of the female pastor, the female leaders and myself.
- (10) Chapter 9: Conclusion.

Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis analyses in what ways progress in women's empowerment has been made and how a space was opened to allow women's participation in the roles once dominated by men in a Chinese congregation with missionary influence. It explores the factors contributing to the empowerment and also those inhibiting further changes in women's roles, as well as the reflections of the stakeholders and the congregation in the space thus opened. In this empowerment process of women, there was an interplay of different

influences, including the interpretation and use of the Bible, the views of the leaders, and the beliefs, tradition and culture of the church, which are still in force.

Chapter 1: Context

1.1 My Story

I come from a Baptist church planted by the Association. The Association sent missionaries to Hong Kong to establish churches more than fifty years ago. Dozens of churches were set up and all of them are now independent and operated by Chinese pastors. Most of the expatriates have gone back to America. Yet the Association's interpretation of the Bible, especially the roles of women in churches, taken from a paper written more than thirty years ago, has carried weight in the definition of the roles of women in my church, as well as in our sister churches, for the past two decades. It was not until twelve years ago, when reform was carried out in my church, that changes in the roles of women and the female pastor were introduced. Because of the reform, women can now lead the worship and the female pastor can preach in the worship services.

Two incidents led me to ponder the role of women in my church. Nearly twenty-three years ago, an American pastor of the Association phoned me, as I was to be the worship leader (of the singing part of the service) on the day he was due to be the speaker. In an embarrassed and hesitant tone, he asked if there might be a replacement for his sake. He said he did not mind a woman being the worship leader another day, only not on the day when he was to be the speaker. I agreed. When I looked back, however, I wondered if he was upholding the truth of the Bible, or if he was merely following the tradition that the denomination upheld. If it was the former, then women should not play any part in the worship; if it was the latter, then it just came down to the Association's interpretation of the Bible, which could be biased, and that suppressed the roles of women in my church.

Another incident concerning the employment of a pastor occurred a few years afterwards. I was one of the board members for the recruitment. At that time, a discussion about the roles of women took place. The Association pastor, the male pastor applying for the post and the male deacon, referred to 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14, and said that women should not preach in the worship, teach men in church, or play the leading role. I was a deacon, cell group leader, Sunday school teacher, a lead singer in the worship and a member of the recruitment board. I was doing the things they objected to. My issue was this: if what they said was true then what I was doing was in violation of God's command.

Could a fundamentalist church allow such a violation to occur? If they really upheld the truth, why did they not stop me? If what they said was true, then women should stop serving in churches, and shift nearly half of the work to men, who would surely burn out. At the time, there were no more than ten men who were either serving or willing to serve. Was this the will of God? Would God be pleased to see such a turn of events? Yet even though the men had this conviction about women, the work of women was not reduced; on the contrary, they had to take up more leading roles.

Thirteen years ago, while studying theology, I came across the term “patriarchy” which had a great impact on me. The term patriarchy was “originally used to describe the power of the father as head of household, the term ‘patriarchy’ has been used within post-1960s feminism to refer to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination” (Richardson et al., 1993, p.53). The word patriarchy described the scenario in my church well. Patriarchy had its contextual and cultural basis. In ancient Jewish society, where men played a dominant role, their culture was reflected in the biblical text. Some biblical texts are thus contextual, and a cultural product born out of the particular period. They therefore might not hold a universal truth. Writers like Paul were also addressing certain particular issues of the period. Nowadays, if pastors interpret such texts wrongly, or do their hermeneutics according to their denominational traditions, the consequences can be devastating.

The term “patriarchy” shed light for me when I looked at my own situation. I began to wonder if patriarchy also existed in my church. It would be wrong for the men to apply contextual texts, especially those concerning the status and roles of women, and which were applicable to the Jewish society two thousand years ago, to a cosmopolitan society like Hong Kong, in the twenty-first century.

Sensing that it was not in line with biblical truth to suppress women’s roles in church, I approached my former pastor with two questions. First, was the female pastor *really* not allowed to preach in the worship? Second, were women *really* not allowed to lead the worship? Pressed by my two questions, my pastor considered that it was time to reconsider the roles of women (including the female pastor) in our church, and so a task group was formed, called the “Task Group on Studying the Roles of Sisters in Church” (hereafter

called the “Task Group”). Both male and female pastors, as well as four deacon members, two males and two females, formed the group. We took into consideration what our sister churches did and we also studied different articles about women’s roles, including a paper written by the Association thirty years ago, articles written by the pastors of our sister churches, and articles by some biblical scholars. We discovered there were divergent views on the issue. This was not only the case for different denominations, even pastors from within the same denomination held different views. We thus concluded that when it comes to the interpretation of the Bible, there are differences. To look for consensus on some controversial issues was simply not possible, and it was not our objective either. The goal I wanted to achieve at the end of our investigation was that the female pastor would be allowed to preach in the worship and women allowed to lead the worship. After several meetings over a few months, we finally reached the conclusion that the female pastor could preach in the worship and women could lead the worship. The Report of the Task Group on the changes of women’s role can be read in Appendix 1. I achieved what I had set out to do. Although there were heated arguments during our discussions (owing to our differing interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2), we put aside those arguments and I made a compromise in return for the successful implementation of the reform.

The changes in worship have been of paramount importance to the church, as worship is the highest form of adoration of God and the manifestation of the faith of the congregation as a whole. Speaking in the worship or leading the worship is a sign of authority, power or importance. Any changes to this symbolize a change in culture and tradition. Moreover, worship is also considered by many to be the most important area of pastoral work. As mentioned in a research paper 『本地堂會牧者(年資十年內)的「牧職效能」初步研究』 “The Preliminary Review of the ‘Pastoral Performance’ of the Pastors in Local Churches (with less than Ten Years of Ministries)” (English translation) carried out by Simon Kwan Shui Man and Wai Chi Man (Kwan & Wai, 2008, pp.41-55), leading the worship and preaching are the most important shepherding tasks and are ranked number one among other core duties. Therefore, to push forward changes in worship outweighs changes to other forms of ministry and ceremonies, such as baptism. The suppression I experienced in worship had great impact on me, and as a result, I worked hard to achieve a breakthrough.

In 2007, I became the first woman to lead the worship. This was a breakthrough in my

church. I became a pioneer and set the example for other women to follow, and for the men to see. I did not consider that this role was holier than that of the others. I considered that this was just one of the many roles in the church. The symbolic meaning was important, however.

Not only was I the pioneer, I also played other roles in the changes. I played the roles of initiator, stakeholder, key player and demonstrator. I was the initiator because I posed the two questions to the then pastor-in-charge in 2006. I was the stakeholder because I was the one who experienced the suppression of the US pastor who asked me not to be worship leader. I was the key player because I was the member of the Task Group. I was the demonstrator because I have been playing the worship leader since the changes were introduced. Moreover, I was the researcher in this process, analyzing the changes from hindsight, by collecting qualitative and quantitative data from the leaders and the congregation about how they perceived the changes, and thus I have contributed to knowledge and practice through the research.

1.2 The Structure of My Church

Ours is a small church, with about one hundred and thirty members. There are about one hundred adults, who are mainly working people. The others are the elderly, children and students. As the premises of my church is shared by an elderly centre, which is subvented by the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, most of the elderly members in our church are indeed members of the elderly centre also. The rest of the congregation come from a variety of different places. There are two pastors, the male pastor (also the pastor-in-charge) and the female pastor. The head of the church has to be a man, and thus the female pastor has to be accountable to the male pastor. As a whole, both work independently and serve different target groups and both report to and are accountable to the Deacon Board as well. The highest decision-making body is the Deacon Board. Except for the two pastors who are official members, there are several deacons and deaconesses elected by the members of the church. The election is run each year, the term for each deacon lasts for two years, and deacons can sit for a maximum of three terms. Only a male deacon can be elected as chair of the Deacon Board, as stated in the Constitution. Besides this there are different departments managing different affairs of the church. There are the departments of Christian education, missions, evangelism and

church administration. Each department is headed by ministers, who are also elected annually. There is no provision in the Constitution stating that the person heading a department must be a man. This is different from the requirement stipulated for the chair of the Deacon Board.

There are several components to the Sunday worship service, including hymn singing, Scripture reading, the sermon, the offering, public announcement and prayer. Before the changes were introduced, only men could lead the worship, covering the singing part and the liturgical part, whereas women could only lead the singing part, and only male pastors could deliver the sermon. The singing part comprises singing a few worship songs, usually for fifteen minutes. The liturgical part of the worship starts from the end of the singing till the end of the worship; in other words, it covers prayers, Scripture reading, the sermon, the offering and the public announcements. However, since the changes, women can now lead both the singing part and the liturgical part of the worship and the female pastor or other women from other churches or organizations can also preach.

1.3 The Influence of the Association

My church followed the stance of the Association in defining the roles of women. The Association made it clear that authority came from men and women should not exercise authority over men. As such, the female pastor was not allowed to preach in the worship, and sisters were not allowed to lead the worship. Using Paul's patriarchal teachings from a very few verses in Corinthians and Timothy as the basis on which women's roles in the church were defined, my church had suppressed women's rights to speak and to lead in worship. Indeed, the Association had followed the literal meaning of Paul in these few verses closely, and had not taken into account the teachings of the Bible about women's roles or those of men/women in other books of the Bible. Even Paul himself reveals opposite views about men and women in other epistles. In Galatians 3:28 (NIV), he writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". Here Paul shows his ideal of equality among different groups, including equality between male and female. As Morris (1996, p.121) notes concerning the statement made by Paul in Galatians: "Paul brings out his point by referring to the unity that there is in Christ and all distinctions are meaningless". Moreover, such distinctions are no more. The distinctions here refer to "social divisions in that birth to a large extent determines

one's destiny or roles and status in society" (Witherington, 1998, p.271). Yet as Williams (1997, p.107) points out, "in communities of persons who have clothed themselves with Christ these distinctions are honored no more. And so no longer can they grant privilege and prerogative to some while condemning others to impotence and indignity". With the eradication of these divisions, all are equal in Christ. What I consider equality in the context of my church is equal opportunities for males and females, such as the equal right to speak and lead the worship, an equal right to vote and be voted for in all the different positions in church, and equal opportunities to lead the church, be it on the administrative side or in the spiritual sphere. Yet, while strictly following the stance of the Association, our church's male leaders had not taken Paul's holistic teaching and ideals into account when defining the roles of women. It was therefore written into the Constitution of the church that the chair of the Deacon Board (the highest decision-making body) must be a man, and the pastor-in-charge of the church must also be a man.

Besides Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12 is another chapter that my church missed. It is Paul's teaching about gifts. In this gift theology, Paul does not differentiate between men and women in the endowment of spiritual gifts. He only says in 1 Corinthians 12 4-7 and 11 (NIV) that, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines". There is no differentiation between men and women in receiving the gifts given by the same Lord. In other words, both men and women have equal opportunity to receive the same gifts from the Lord. If men can receive gifts in speaking, women can receive the same gifts. If men can receive gifts in management, women can receive the same gifts in management. It was strange to find that the male leaders in my church failed to take into serious consideration these other teachings of Paul, given that they chose to follow Paul's teachings so closely. Clearly, they only strictly followed the Association's choice of Bible texts in defining the roles of women.

1.4 Colonization in the Use of the Bible

As my church was a church planted by the Association, the male leaders chose to follow the guidelines set by the Association. The selective use of Paul's teachings aroused my

suspicion that the Association, which holds conservative views towards women, purposefully used these verses to suppress the role of women in church, in order to maintain their patriarchal rule and enforce women's subordination. The male leaders in my church were satisfied with this arrangement as they faithfully followed the guidelines of the Association in being patriarchal themselves. They might also have wanted to maintain this patriarchal rule. The patriarchal environment was reflected in the structure of my church, to the point where it was written in the Constitution that the chair of the Deacon Board must be a man; the pastor-in-charge must be a man irrespective of his years of service in the church; and the female pastor cannot be promoted to the position of pastor-in-charge and thus attain a higher salary scale. It has also been an unwritten norm that the leading roles are to be held by men, with women taking the assisting role. The patriarchy of the Association, coupled with the patriarchy of my church, led to the suppression of the role of women.

As for my church, which followed the practice of the Association, only those patriarchal texts written by Paul were used. Other liberating passages written by Paul were omitted and the model of Jesus was not considered at all. Indeed, what principles govern the churches in deciding which set of texts is authoritative? According to Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (1985, p.59), "the principle is New Testament over Hebrew Scriptures; Jesus over Paul; eternally valid statements over culture-bound statements". The choice of Scriptures by my church revealed that they were not following these principles, for they only used Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 to substantiate their claims, texts which are culture-bound, and which targeted the church members at Corinth. While choosing only these patriarchal and culturally-bound statements of Paul, and ignoring Paul's liberating aspects, plus not taking into account the model of Jesus in the four gospels, my church revealed its bias. This created suspicion in my mind that they might be using these few verses purposefully to suppress women.

The Association planted churches in Hong Kong more than fifty years ago. They had a mission to reach out to the world and bring people to Christ. What they brought to their planted churches were not only their doctrinal beliefs, that is, those beliefs relating to God, salvation, humankind and Scripture, they also brought their interpretation of the Scriptures. According to their doctrinal faith, the Bible was without error, authoritative and complete.

As such, Wicker (1993, p.372) notes, “they regard the patriarchal perspective of the Bible as divinely validated, and they reject non-patriarchal readings of the Bible. They affirm an inherent superiority of men over women, and of the public, male-dominated sphere over the private, to which women are relegated”. She continues (pp.377-368), saying this is a “discursive colonization which deals with power relationships. ... This kind of colonization is the psychological domination of people through appeals to authority, based on the asserted superiority of one race, gender, class, or culture”. Being the church planter, the Association had authority and could use its authority to advocate its beliefs and thus influence the beliefs of church members. Kwok Pui-lan (a feminist educated in Hong Kong, who now works in the U.S.) comments, “During the pivotal century of missionary expansion, many missionaries acted as though they alone knew what the Bible meant, believing they were closer to the truth” (Kwok, 1995, p.10). Therefore, the biblical interpretation of the Association became the truth that my church chose to follow. As the Association regarded the Bible as divine and without error, so my church would also treat the Bible as divine, without questioning the meanings of different verses and without digging into the cultural context behind the literal meanings of each and every verse. “This kind of interpretation is called a doctrinal model which allows for monologue because it demands obedience of the audience and precludes any other response. And it superimposes its own context onto others, because it does not take into consideration historical and cultural specificity in the construction of meaning” (p.40).

Beliefs about the role of women in churches also shaped the mindset of their planted churches in Hong Kong. “To teach the Bible and to spread the gospel were seen as the ‘civilizing mission’ of the West” (Kwok, 2005, p.61). In this civilizing process, the beliefs of the Association were also implanted in the minds of the church members. Therefore, most of the women in the congregation have inculcated in their minds that patriarchal rule in our church is perfectly fine, and they have also accepted that kind of hierarchal leadership. They were not all enthusiastic about the changes brought to our church twelve years ago, when women were finally given the chance to lead the worship. So far, only two sisters regularly lead the worship, and they are deaconesses.

Given the differences in social and cultural backgrounds, there might be a gap between the

two cultures. In *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (2005, p.39), Kwok Pui-lan calls herself “a postcolonial subject who has been thrown into situations not of her choosing and who has to negotiate different cultural worlds constantly”. Similarly, members of the planted churches of the Association (postcolonial subjects), while negotiating different cultural worlds constantly, have developed different views on the roles of women following social and cultural changes over the years, especially the roles of women in Hong Kong. The beliefs of the Association have therefore now been challenged. According to the studies made by the Task Group twelve years ago, among the thirty-two churches planted by the Association, fifteen have changed their practice to allow women pastors to speak and sisters to lead the worship. Only four had no arrangement for women pastors to speak or for sisters to lead the worship. The more recent information given by the Secretary General of Hong Kong ABWE Alliance Limited early in 2018 revealed that twenty-six sister churches have allowed women pastors to preach and thirty sister churches have allowed sisters to lead the worship. This reveals that the beliefs held by the Association towards the role of women are no longer applicable to the context of the Hong Kong churches, even among those planted by them. Change was and is inevitable. This also illustrates a constant negotiation between different cultures.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985, p.114) notes that “the Bible was shaped by males in a patriarchal culture, so much of its revelatory experience was interpreted by men from a patriarchal perspective”. It is true in the case of my church that the men, who chose a few verses as verdict statements in deciding the fate of women, interpreted them as the revelation of God concerning the fate and role of women in the church. The beliefs held by the Association had an enormous impact on its planted churches, and my church was one of them. “Studies in colonial and post-colonial texts find that empires are not only built or dismantled by the barrel of the cannon, but mainly by textual practices of writing and interpretation” (Shomanah, 1998, p.48). The belief held by the Association thus affected the mindset of the men who decided the fate and role of women in my church.

Under the colonial influence of the Association, my church selected material and interpreted it to comply with and suit the beliefs and practices of the Association. The leaders of my church hold that this is the true message of the Bible. What I, as a woman in this church and a Christian need to do, is understand whether this patriarchal reading of the

Bible is the only possible one, and thus have to accept that the Bible is itself patriarchal, or whether I have grounds for saying that there are other ways of interpreting the Bible which are not necessarily or totally patriarchal. Perhaps the answer is quite complicated—the Bible is part of a religion that has both patriarchal and non-patriarchal elements within it. There is thus a need to find out if there are other ways of looking at the text to see if there are different voices in the Bible, and “reinterpret and restore the suppressed ‘women texts’ as much as possible to confront and decolonise the use of biblical canonized scriptures that authorize the marginalization of women” (Shomanah, 1998, p.52).

Even though the Bible can be considered a double-edged sword, there are substantial liberating elements for women within it, as analysed above. We can say that there are indeed different voices in the Bible, and we can thus reinterpret the suppressed “female texts” to confront and decolonize the use of canonized biblical scriptures that authorize the marginalization of women by churches, in order to restore the status of women. There are indeed women leaders in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, such as Deborah the judge (Judges 4-5) and Phoebe the deaconess (Romans 16).

1.5 Decolonization in the Use of the Bible

In view of the different dimensions in the Bible and the plurality embodied therein, it is inadequate and unjustifiable to use just one voice and one exegesis to represent the absolute truth. In a postcolonial Asian world, and in the case of Hong Kong, there is a need for a new interpretation of the Bible, not just that which emerged under the shadow of the colonizing authority. First of all, in view of the liberating elements in the Bible, we can reinterpret it to see how it might relate to the present situation. In the past, when colonialism was prevalent, “a narrow and exclusive view of the Bible...flourished during the century of mission and so became the dominant position held by many Asian churches” (Kwok, 1995, p.23). The narrow and exclusive views held by the Association towards the role of women in church became the dominant view in my church, and yet with a different context nowadays in Hong Kong, the project to “deconstruct the western view and reconstruct Asian identity” (p.25) is probably the best way forward. Hong Kong has undergone changes over the past several decades, with more women receiving higher education than men, and also entering more professions, where they now hold high positions in different sectors. The Government also enacted the “Sex Discrimination

Ordinance” on 14 July 1995, which states that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of his or her sex. Women’s status has been elevated and recognized as equal to that of men. As such, to plant the cultural context of Paul’s times and the interpretation of the Association with its own cultural context, into the cultural context of Hong Kong, is probably not appropriate or applicable. To echo what Kwok Pui-lan had said, there is a need to deconstruct the western view and reconstruct the view of Asians, or to be more exact, the views of Hong Kong Christian women, by taking into account the unique situation of the women of Hong Kong.

Also, if we want to “demystify the ways the Bible has been used to reinforce unequal relationships between the East and the West, women and men, and the rich and the poor, while constructing new models of interpreting the Bible based on the culture and history of Asia and the struggles of Asian people” (Kwok, 1995, p.30), we have to reconstruct or reinterpret 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 in such a way that they no longer present only one view for church members to follow, or remain the dominant view governing the role of women. Instead, church members can look at these verses from a new perspective, and female church members can gain a new understanding of their role in church, and not just rely on a few selected verses for guidance. Examining the different stories of women who have practiced their faith in equality with men will give women wider scope to liberate themselves from one narrow point of interpretation. This will allow women “to see the church as a community where multiple discourses occur. We will not focus simply on the author’s voice or on the orthodox interpretation of the church leaders” (p.37).

1.6 The Bible As the Core of Belief and Practice

The way my church used the Bible in the past plays an even more important part in the interpretation of the role of women in churches. If a church simply selects those verses that fit their presuppositions or preferred options as guidelines for defining the roles of women, we will find only biased views, which will in turn cause the suppression of women. This is also a problem when women themselves take this bias as the norm without questioning it. As noted above, in spite of its patriarchal elements, the Bible also embodies substantial liberating elements for women.

It is the tradition of my church that the teachings of the Bible are upheld and adhered to. The interpretation of the Bible by the Association played an important part in affecting how we understood the teachings of the Bible and put these teachings into practice. The roles of the men and women in my church have been defined by the Association, according to its selection of biblical texts and interpretations thereof. In this particular area, the impact of the interpretation of the Association on the congregation in my church has been great. As a result, no one doubted or raised any question about the role of women in the church. The congregation believed that it was the perfect practice in church that men should play the leading roles, while women played subordinate and supporting roles. When changes were introduced to my church, such as allowing the female pastor to preach and the sisters to lead the worship, the leaders first went back to the Bible to clarify its teachings in the matter. The Bible is thus the core of our beliefs and the foundation of all church practices. It was encouraging that leaders were able to discover new insights after the study of the Bible. In the few meetings held by the Task Group in my church twelve years ago, the exegesis of those few verses by the Association and that of some Chinese churches were compared by the then pastor-in-charge. Concerning the first passage, which is 1 Corinthians 11:3-5, the Association considered that praying and prophesying did not refer to “speaking”, and so women could not exercise authority over men. Yet Chinese churches generally consider that “praying and prophesying” can also be translated as “prophetic teaching” and thus do not deny the possibility that there are authoritative doctrines in the teaching. Thus is laid the foundation for the change of the practice of my church. There was a difference in the interpretation of the Bible between the Association and the churches they planted. We also drew on different interpretations from the Association. When we reached another interpretation of women’s right to prophecy, we took a road totally different from the Association. We broke away from one of the traditions and cultures that had been shaped by the Association. Yet we still adhered to the concept of headship, derived from the idea that man was created first.

In retrospect, I realize my awareness of the patriarchal situation in my church originated from my theological studies, which prompted me to raise questions about the status quo and brought forth the drive to reform the worship practice in my church. This was an important breakthrough that set a milestone on the path of women’s empowerment in my church, which had been deeply under the influence of the Association and its particular

biblical interpretation of the role of women. The Bible is considered authoritative in the Baptist tradition, yet more attention should be paid to the cultural elements embedded within it. We must also take into account the cultural situation in Hong Kong. It is dangerous just to rely on the exegesis of the Association when interpreting the Bible, and therefore there is a need for decolonization in its use.

Part 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chapter 2: The Conceptual Framework of Empowerment

In this chapter, I discuss the concept of “empowerment” through four perspectives, namely the sociological, contextual, postcolonial and feminist. The sociological perspective lays the basic groundwork for discussing the concepts of empowerment; the feminist perspective investigates women’s experiences in the contexts of patriarchy; the postcolonial perspective touches on the complexity of women’s experiences in a postcolonial context; and the contextual perspective brings in the context of Hong Kong.

These four perspectives are essential for building up the conceptual framework for analyzing my research findings. As my research is on women’s empowerment in a Chinese congregation with a missionary influence, the sociological perspective, which deals with the definitions and forms of empowerment, is important for my evaluation of women’s empowerment in my congregation. The postcolonial perspective and the contextual perspectives align with the context of my congregation in postcolonial Hong Kong, with its diversity of cultures and voices and simultaneous maintenance of the Chinese tradition. The feminist perspective, which investigates women’s experiences in the context of patriarchy, helps me gain a broader perspective into women’s agency and enriches my understanding of the way women are empowered in different contexts, thus enabling me to engage my research findings with these concepts of women’s agency.

2.1 Empowerment from a Sociological Perspective

2.1.1 What is Women’s Empowerment?

Empowerment is a process that “challenges and transforms the existing power structures, systems and institutions and the final goal is to transform the ideology and practice of domination and subordination” (Acharya, 2008, p.73). Empowerment does not equate to the striving for power, but rather aims at remedying the situation of inequality and subordination.

Karl (1995, p.14) defines the term “empowerment” as follows:

Empowerment is a word widely used, but seldom defined. Long before the word became popular, women were speaking about gaining control over their lives, and participating in the decisions that affect them in the home and the community, in government and international development policies. The word “Empowerment” captures this sense of gaining control, of participating, of decision making.

Empowerment may have become more widely used today, with more women holding important positions and having the same importance as men in many spheres of a society. Yet according to Karl, women have long had this wish to control their own lives and participate in decision-making, even though they might not be in equal social positions to men.

Education for Women's Empowerment (Indiresan, 2002), offers several definitions of empowerment, including the following: “Empowerment is a process which helps people gain control of their lives through raising their awareness and helping them take action and work. In other words, empowerment facilitates change and enables a person to do what he or she wants” (p.7).

In other words, there must be an awareness of one's situation. The awareness of the inequality and the suppression that one is facing is the first step towards pushing for change. This awareness might not be easy to come by, especially when one is accustomed to the situation, tradition and culture, and is unaware of any problems there. This awareness can be triggered by external factors, such as an idea from a book, or an exchange with somebody, or from questions arising from the situation one is facing. Empowerment also involves change to the existing situation, remedying the situation and making it better. In short, empowerment comes from awareness and leads to change.

While awareness is the first step towards change, change in perception is the second step. Not only is a person then aware of the subordinate situation they are facing, there is also a change in perception. The person becomes aware they do not necessarily have to be subordinate to men, and that they have the ability to do things as well as men. Such a change in perception can unleash greater power within a person, and give full play to their

potential. The long-held false belief that women are weak and inferior and incapable can be eradicated. This shift in perception is important, as it encourages women to see their true selves, not the distorted image once portrayed by institutions and even churches. With a renewed view of self, women can find greater courage to work for their well-being. As such, empowerment also leads to an increase in inner strength, and an enhancement of inner power to work towards change. Furthermore, it enhances the confidence of women in bringing forth change.

Empowerment involves a shift in perception. This shift in perception, a spiritual empowerment, has resulted in action. With the new awareness, women take on even stronger public roles, negotiate with more confidence and find ways to work together. The challenge is to approach women's empowerment as a process that is not intended to change women, but to unmask internalized illusion to reveal who women are and have always been (Sharma, 2003, p.11).

Empowered women do not necessarily aim at getting power from men; instead they work towards the goal of equality, of not being subordinate to men, and of having freedom and making decisions of their own.

Empowered women maintain equal-mindedness, rather than act out roles that merely confront and challenge male dominations. Empowered women do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equals and cooperate in order to work toward the common good (Hall, 1992, p.117).

Empowerment is an ongoing process, starting from the individual awareness, followed by the collective awareness of the situation. With the abilities to organize and make decisions, then there would be greater participation and action to bring about changes for greater equality between men and women (Moghadam, 2007, pp.140-141).

Apart from awareness of oppression, changes in perception, the ability and confidence to change and transform power structures and strive for equality, more recently there has been a discussion about relational empowerment. The transformation of power structures is not going from the top to the bottom. Instead, everyone involved is both a giver and a receiver. "Rappaport, 1985 and Zimmerman, 1990, and critical pedagogy, like Lather 1991 have rejected any construction of empowerment that is based on a sender-receiver type of relationship" (Van der Plaat, 1999, p.774). These authors argue that empowerment is not given, but taken. It is a process where the one striving for empowerment takes it by using

her initiative.

Thus, empowerment is not confined to the taking of power, but also involves extending influence towards others and the larger community. The larger community can then see the change in the one being empowered and can themselves also experience changes in their perception. The empowerment process is then mutually-beneficial. Everyone is influenced for a better future.

In a relational approach to empowerment, everyone involved, regardless of position of power and privilege, recognizes that he or she is both an agent and a subject in the empowerment process. In a truly empowering process, everyone changes. Empowerment always is mutual (Van der Plaat, 1999, pp.776-777).

In short, this section provides a basic framework for understanding empowerment. Empowerment starts with individual awareness of a subordinate situation, followed by collective awareness. From that point onwards, there is a shift in perception and an increase in a person's inner strength and confidence to make changes to the existing patriarchal situation. Through such change, women can be equal to men in the sense that there are equal opportunities, and the power structure is thus transformed, and so too the ideology of the community as a whole, even though ideology is not easily changed as will be seen in the results of my research. Taking relational empowerment into consideration to evaluate if progress in empowerment has been made, is to take into account not only the changes in the one striving for empowerment, but also the changes within the larger community that supports this.

2.1.2 Authority and Power

Brenda E. Brasher, an Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy, interviewed women from two Christian fundamentalist congregations to study how women exercise their agencies for empowerment in conservative Protestant organizations in the United States where males still play dominant leading roles. Brasher reported the findings in her book *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and female power* (1998), and she also brought out an important distinction concerning empowerment, namely the difference between authority and power.

Brasher discusses the interplay of “authority and power”, using a few expressions, such as “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”, “the people who rule the world are those

who nurture infants” and “the other who achieve such remote control are women, those who probably rule, but are not in charge, will be men” (p.58) to explicitly spell out that women are indeed in real control. Even though men hold senior posts, there can be a separation between ruling and the exercise of real control. Brasher raises another question: “Do women make up for their relative lack of authority by having more power than men?” (p.75). This is an important question, and points to the paradoxical situation in a congregation. It touches on authority and power. Brasher suggests a paradoxical situation in which authority is not the same as power. Authority might be related to posts or positions, but power is not necessarily so. One can still exercise power or be empowered without holding a position or post: “Even without posts of authority, women can still have power” (p.75). Brasher illustrates this dynamic through an analysis of women’s enclaves, but notes that the difference between authority and power has a much wider application.

Brasher (p.79) introduces another point by saying that in the shifting of power in the church, women may get the change that they want, but the public image of the senior pastor’s power remains untouched. Women in these churches do not necessarily have to have senior posts or be the public head to get what they want. They find alternative strategic ways of doing so, especially in light of the fact that a fundamental element of patriarchy remains in place.

Nevertheless, “In the future of women in fundamentalism, it is important to note that they can reemerge when currents shift or when the right questions are asked at the right time, making for a new faith history to be born” (p.88). Furthermore, “[w]omen are actively at work shaping congregational life” (p.88). Brasher makes the point here that the process of women’s empowerment is ongoing, and women are continuing to work to bring new possibilities to the lives of the congregations. Even though the structure of male domination remains unchanged, women can still make changes in their own ways.

In short, Brasher’s discussion of women’s empowerment in conservative Protestant congregations provides a very important concept that I engage with in my research. Her interpretation of authority and power provides a framework for me to discuss and analyze the interplay of authority and power between men and women in my church, for I also investigate how women obtained the change they wanted without changing the structure of male domination.

2.1.3 Informal Leadership

In her thesis on African American women in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tava Renee’ Herring talks about “informal leadership”. Herring conducted research on nine

church mothers over seventy years old, the eldest one being ninety-six years of age. “These women hold influence because of their approachability and the trust they engender in others” (Herring, 2013, p.88). According to Herring, informal leaders are those individuals who have influence over a group without holding any positions of authority or power. Herring discovered that the church mothers, who are the informal leaders, had an impact on the lives of all they touched in the church community. “They displayed an ability and willingness to work hard and be accessible. The research points to the same qualities in the informal or authentic leader, who uses their natural leadership abilities instead of power to influence others” (Herring, 2013, p.93). In other words, informal leadership has no relation to authority and power. Yet even without official power or authority, informal leaders can still exert influence on others. While similar in some ways to Brasher’s thesis, Herring’s position is different in that she identifies practical work within the community as the source of impact and identifies this as a form of leadership. Herring’s research thus provides a further perspective from which I look at the situation in my congregation to see how women can have an impact on the congregation.

2.2 Empowerment from a Contextual Perspective

2.2.1 *Female Leadership in the Chinese Churches*

Mary Chung, a Chinese seminary professor in Hong Kong, conducted an interdisciplinary research study into the place and role of women in the Chinese church by looking at an interplay of historical, social and theological factors. She particularly studied how Chinese tradition and culture have shaped the views of leaders and their congregations concerning women’s roles in Chinese churches. Her work provides a theological framework for understanding the women’s empowerment process in my church.

Most of the issues brought to the fore by Chung parallel the situation in my church, including (i) tradition and culture, (ii) the combination of western theology and Chinese culture, (iii) women’s internalised enculturation, (iv) the open attitude of the congregation towards women’s roles, (v) male domination in the pulpit and (iv) the shifting attitude towards women’s ordination.

In relation to leadership composition in the church, Chung states in her book *Chinese Women in Christian Ministry* (2005) that even though men only make up 40 percent of church membership in most Chinese churches, “both church tradition and Chinese culture have traditionally assigned church leadership roles primarily to men” (p.216). Her discussion of tradition and culture accurately describes the scenario in most Chinese churches, where tradition and culture are powerful factors shaping the leadership pattern.

This has been the case in Hong Kong churches as well. “In Hong Kong, many women ministers are more likely to step down from leadership positions and assume subordinate and supportive roles once male leadership in the church emerges” (p.221). Among the denominations, the Baptist churches are one of the most conservative. “Since certain denominations, such as the Baptists, view church traditions as important, they are reluctant to include women in top leadership roles” (p.219).

In relation to the missionary influence, Chung points out that the combination of western theology and Chinese culture have shaped the roles of Chinese women in ministries. The interpretation of the Bible by the missionaries has determined the theology of women’s roles in many churches, and in conjunction with the Chinese culture of male dominance, women have been put in a subordinate position. As stated by Chung, “the interplay of Chinese culture, particularly its gender ideology, and Western theology have reinforced each other in the development of the role of Chinese women in career ministry” (Chung, 2005, p.151).

Chung also discusses the “internalised enculturation” of Chinese women, saying that Chinese women, especially those in Asia, find it difficult to overcome their subordination, since “they are psychologically and culturally oriented to subordination” and accustomed to taking a supportive role in church and society (Chung, 2005, p.220). Chinese women have thus internalised the belief that it is right that men should play the leading role and they are thus willing to play a subordinate or supportive role instead. They tend not to fight for the highest positions or for authority and are satisfied with the positions and roles they occupy in churches.

At the same time, Chung also comments that with the changes in the times, congregations in Chinese churches are now more open towards female leadership. This represents a break from the tradition and culture of churches. “While the views are divided, most men and women in Chinese churches are open to accept the authority and leadership of women” (Chung, 2005, p.220).

Chung also pinpoints the usual practice in Chinese churches of making the pulpit the place of visible and authoritative pastoral leadership. Men assume the post of preaching in the pulpit, and women are not allowed to participate in the preaching ministry even though they have the gifts to do so. “With the strong emphasis given to preaching ministry in Chinese churches, the pulpit is seen as a place where visible and authoritative pastoral leadership is exercised. Women in ministry are then generally not allowed to preach or speak from the pulpit, especially during the Sunday worship services” (Chung, 2005,

p.221).

Another point raised by Chung concerns the shifting of attitudes of the Hong Kong Chinese churches towards women's ordination. Even though not everyone in Chinese churches supports women's ordination, more and more people are now doing so. The statistical findings from researches conducted in 1983 and 1998 reveal "the attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese churches shifting towards women pastors and to women being ordained as ministers" (Chung, 2005, p.152).

2.3 Empowerment from a Postcolonial Perspective

2.3.1 *Negotiating for Women's Agency*

Angela Wong (2002), a feminist theologian in Hong Kong, articulates her views about women in a postcolonial Hong Kong in "Women between East and West: Negotiating Cultural Identities in Hong Kong," a chapter of her book *The Poor Woman: A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women*. Wong attempts to use the experience of women presented in two fictional books as a means of understanding women's struggles and aspirations in the postcolonial and culturally diverse city of Hong Kong. Given Hong Kong is a changing and cosmopolitan society, where there are different ideologies and values brought into the Chinese traditional values from western cultures, and where women represent different age groups, different nationalities, different education backgrounds, and also have differing religious beliefs and values, it is not difficult to see the complexity of women's agency and the multiplicity of women's experiences in Hong Kong nowadays.

The second concept raised by Wong is that Chinese women in Hong Kong employ a wide range of practices, "including accommodation, negotiation and resistance" and this complicates the portrayal of Chinese women as "the uncritical embodiment of any ideological virtue" (Wong, 2002, p.93). This is a very important statement that helps me understand that actions taken by Chinese women in Hong Kong are complex. Women do not simply embody an ideological value uncritically. Following Wong's point that Hong Kong is a modernized and cosmopolitan society reflecting different beliefs and values, women in Hong Kong employ different strategies when facing different situations.

The third point raised by Wong is about the concept of identity, which is "a process whereby one has to take advantage of whatever resources are available and continue to wrestle and negotiate with them" (Wong, 2002, p.95). A woman in Hong Kong has a "chaotic and fluid" identity, in terms of which she moves "between asserting the fractured

identities of the “I-women” and negotiating her roles and place in the ever-changing understanding of families, communities and peoples” (p.112). Identity is thus complicated by the mix of different cultures and different values, and the search for identity involves the “subject-in-process” (p.118). There is a need for wrestling and negotiation. This concept is important for understanding women’s empowerment in my church as the concept itself suggests an ongoing process that keeps evolving. This concept of identity as a process and also of the person as a “subject in process” aligns with the fluid changes of women’s roles in my church.

The fourth concept is “diversity of women’s experiences” (p.112), where Wong writes about women’s experiences in Asia, including the extremes of “institutionalized prostitution, trafficking in women within and between countries” (p.112). Although these sorts of experiences do not apply to the women in my church, their experiences are also diverse in their own way. This research helps uncover these diversified and plural experiences and voices.

Finally Wong draws on the notion of “indeterminacy”, which suggests an open process, one that is never “monologic” nor “determinate in any finality” (p.137). The process of the changes in women’s roles has not been finalized yet. Change is still within the negotiating process, and the outcome has not yet been determined.

In short, Wong’s analysis of the place and roles of women has touched on (i) the complexity of women’s agency and the multiplicity of women’s experience; (ii) the variety of types of agency: accommodation, negotiation and resistance; (iii) the concept of identity in process and the subject also being in process; (iv) the diversity of women’s experiences and (v) the indeterminacy concerning outcome. Her analysis provides a wider framework for me to engage in my research into a specific Baptist congregation, which can then form one part of the jigsaw, supplementing or enriching the bigger picture of women’s empowerment in a macro socio-political context.

2.3.2 Deconstructing the Western View

In her book *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, Kwok Pui-lan identifies the gap between two cultural worlds, especially between the colonial world and the postcolonial world, in which, because of the cultural differences, there are diverging views about the same issues. She remarks that in a postcolonial Asian world, and in the case of Hong Kong, there is a need for a new interpretation of the Bible, not just that which emerged from under the shadow of the colonizing authority. There is a need to

“deconstruct the western view and reconstruct Asian identity” (Kwok, 1995, p.25), and she comments that this is probably the best way forward for Hong Kong. Most of these issues were discussed in the section on “Decolonization in the Use of the Bible” in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Kwok’s theology provides another postcolonial framework to look at the way the Bible has been used and the impact it has had on my congregation.

2.4 Empowerment from a Feminist Perspective

There are two feminist theologians whose work and views shaped my theological framework for empowerment and they are Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Rose Wu. Both stress the need for the empowerment of women. It all started with how they saw women’s situation in church, and how they came to realize that on theological grounds, men and women are equal, as both are created in the image of God.

Fiorenza (1996, p.10), writes of an “ekklesia” of women, which involves “making women visible as active participants and leaders in the Church, to underline women’s contributions and suffering throughout Church history, and to safeguard women’s autonomy and freedom from spiritual-theological patriarchal controls”. The main concept here concerns the visibility of women. In other words, women were made invisible throughout church history, and there was a need for them to be seen, to be visible, for they are part of the congregation. This implies that the status of women had not been well recognized to that point, and there was a need to rectify the situation.

Rose Wu, a Protestant feminist theologian in Hong Kong, expresses her views about the status of women in churches and in society in her book entitled *A Dissenting Church*. From a theological point of view, Wu stresses the equal partnership between men and women as women are half of God’s human creation. She states that, “Women too are created in the image of God, for to be human is to be created in God’s image. In Christianity, the inspiration for women’s liberation is Jesus Christ whose incarnation was to bring life from death, to bring freedom from suffering (Wu, 2003, p.85). Wu’s main concept here is the equality between men and women as they are created in the image of God, therefore they are equal in God’s kingdom and they are thus entitled to share in the partnership.

Fiorenza’s concept of visibility and Wu’s concept of equal partnership are the two

theological voices that help frame my understanding of women's empowerment in my church. The concepts of visibility and equal partnership are used to evaluate the progress in women empowerment in my church.

Apart from Fiorenza and Wu, Chung's research findings on feminist leadership in Chinese churches; Wong's postcolonial theology of women in Hong Kong; Kwok's theology of decolonization of western views; Brasher's understanding of authority and power in the Protestant congregations; and Herring's research findings on informal leadership, all contribute to the feminist views and voices that enrich my understanding of empowerment. They are all investigating women's experience and letting women speak, and acknowledging strong elements of patriarchy. Their views all contribute to my enhanced understanding of empowerment, and facilitate my engagement with the research findings I have uncovered, and thus the development of a new understanding of empowerment in my congregation.

To summarize what has been discussed above, the conceptual framework of empowerment is constructed through four perspectives. They cover the sociological perspective, contextual perspective, postcolonial perspective and feminist perspective. Using these perspectives to analyse empowerment in my church, I carry out case-study research to investigate the empowerment of women in my church and generate a new understanding about women's empowerment in a specific Baptist congregation with missionary influence.

Part 3: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Chapter 3: Methodology

My research is qualitative. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p.28) note:

The functions of qualitative research have been called descriptive or explanatory by other authors and the essential purpose is to explore and describe participants' understanding and interpretations of social phenomena in a way that captures their inherent nature. Explanatory research is concerned with why phenomena occur and the forces and influences that drive occurrences.

This approach fits my research, as I seek to engage the key persons involved in the changes in women's roles that took place twelve years ago. I used in-depth interviews and a focus group study in order to elicit their comments on and interpretation of the changes. I also sent out questionnaires to the congregation to collect their views, and to explore the forces and factors that led to the changes. The opinions of the congregation are essential in helping me understand whether progress in empowerment of women has in fact been made. The goal is to see if they welcomed the changes and whether their perceptions of women have changed as a result of the changes in women's roles. If they have new perceptions of women's roles, or if they think that women have become more important, this will support the conclusion that the reform was able to empower women, not only the women themselves, but also the congregation as a whole. A positive new perception of women's roles will mean a greater chance for the congregation to accept further changes in these roles, and will thus open the door for greater empowerment of women.

I adopt a case study approach to my research. As pointed out by Swanborn (2010, p.13): "A case study refers to the study of a social phenomenon carried out within the boundaries of one social system (the case), or within the boundaries of a few social systems (the cases), such as people, organisations, groups, individuals, local communities and nation-states". The case that my research examines is the changes in the roles of women in my church. This forms a single instrumental case study, because it focuses on an issue or concern, i.e., the changes in the roles of women.

The researcher focuses on process-tracing, the description and explanation of social processes that unfold between persons participating in the process, people with their values, expectations, opinions, perceptions, resources, controversies, decisions, mutual relations and behavior, or the description and explanation of processes within and between social institutions (Swanborn, 2010, p.13).

In my research, I trace back developments over time and gather the views of the key persons and participants in the process. In gathering their views, I also discover their values, expectations, opinions and perceptions towards the changes. As Simons (2009, p.4) puts it: “It is through analysis and interpretation of how people think, feel and act that many of the insights and understanding of the case are gained”. I therefore analyze and interpret the comments made by key persons individually, and the congregation as a whole. As also pointed out by Simons (2009, p.23), a “case study is useful for exploring and understanding the process and dynamics of change”. Or, as Campbell-Reed (2016, p.33) puts it, a case study “is powerful for showing the richness of a complex situation or a person’s life or an entire social or spiritual phenomenon”. Case studies “are empirically grounded, contextually situated; they are hermeneutical in character, fundamentally evaluative and normative, and pragmatically and strategically oriented” (p.37). I thus adopt a case study approach to explore the changes in the roles of women that manifested in their empowerment. The corresponding analysis will be presented in Chapters 5 and 7, titled “Factors Inhibiting the Further Empowerment of Women” and “Has Progress in Empowerment Been Made?” respectively.

3.1 Samples of Research

The criterion for selection of research samples is called purposive sampling. “The samples are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.78). In choosing the samples for exploring the journey towards women’s empowerment in my church, there are a few key persons who were directly involved in or affected by the changes, either by being part of the Task Group studying the roles of women, or because their roles were affected after the reform. For these reasons, how they think and feel about the changes provides helpful insights into the whole event, not just the process, but also the dynamics of the change.

3.1.1 Pen Portrait of the Participants of the Research

The person who has been affected most by the reform of my church is woman pastor B, who has been the pastor in my church since 2004. She has worked in different areas, covering youth ministry, women ministry, and children ministry. She was very energetic and showed her leadership especially in youth ministry. She did not preach in the early stage of her service. She did not strive to preach as she did not think it would be effective in her shepherding and it was also not her strength. Since the reform was carried out twelve years ago, she has been given the chance to speak in the worship services. The frequency of her speaking in the worship is nevertheless not as great as that of the male pastor. From the beginning until now, she speaks around four to six times a year. The change has nevertheless been significant for her. When she was assigned the preaching work, she accepted it passively. Although she has expressed the view that delivering sermons is not her strength, her true feelings and opinions about that change have never been sought, at least not by a member of the Task Group. Neither the Task Group nor the church as a whole knows what she feels and thinks about the changes. As she was one of the key persons affected by the change, I sought to find out if the change has been good for her, in what ways the change has affected her, and how she perceives the change.

The second participant is my previous pastor, pastor F, who was also involved in the reform, and was the person who initiated the study into the roles of women twelve years ago. Pastor F was the pastor-in-charge in my church from 1997-2007. In these ten years, he also worked as the head of the adult ministry. Being his partner in the adult ministry, I worked closely with him. We had regular lunch meetings to discuss matters concerning adult ministry, and we shared many of the same views on many issues. As a result, we built up mutual trust. He trusted what I did and said. Therefore, when I raised the question about the preaching and ordination of the woman pastor, he showed support by setting up a Task Group to discuss the issue. He was also the Chairman of the Task Group. Without his full support, the empowerment process of woman could not have been activated, and we would not have reached this milestone in the church's history.

The third participant is my present male pastor, pastor N. He has served in our church since 2009 and was not involved in the changes. When he came to our church in 2009, the changes in women's roles had been completed. Yet as far as I can observe, he is the one

who grants equal partnership to women. He has cooperated with me in different ministries and it is he who invites me to be his partner every time.

The fourth and fifth participants are two deacons, H and CF, who were also involved in the Task Group. Although they upheld the traditions of our church and followed the guidelines of the Association, they were still open enough to study different interpretations of the two controversial biblical verses of Paul and take into consideration the practices in our sister churches, and were thus ready to make changes.

The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, has been Chairman for many terms in my church. He is the key person as well as the mainstay. His views carry weight and he is highly respected. He is a conservative person, but he is also willing to listen to people's views. He also queried that tradition of the Association which prohibited women from teaching and preaching. As such, he was also willing to study the Bible again to find out what exactly it says, and thus followed suit.

The Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, has been Vice-chairman for many terms also. He too is the key person and the mainstay. Like H, his views carry weight and he is also well respected. He is also a conservative person, but the study of the Bible in the Task Group did shed new light for him concerning the roles of women.

Another group of participants is a few women who have been leading the worship (both the singing part and the liturgical part) since the changes. Apart from myself (who initiated the reform and is the deaconess who has led the worship since the reform), there are a few more who have also played that role. This is the group of people affected by the changes. They are S, SW, C, M and P.

S is a regular worship leader. She has been attending the church for over twenty years. She was the deaconess when the Task Group was formed. She was also one of the group members. She was rather new when the Task Group was formed in 2006. She did not raise many views in the group, yet in the focus group discussion, she was more mature and had many reflections on her new roles, as well as on the roles of the woman pastor and sisters.

SW is a regular worship leader. She has been attending the church for over twenty years. She was deaconess for one term, and she also served in other departments in the church. She was not a member in the Task Group. She supported the changes in the roles of women in church. She worked full time, but later quit her job to work as a full-time mother.

C is a regular worship leader. She has been attending the church for over twenty years. She had been the deaconess for three terms. She was a previous colleague of mine, working in the same Government department. She was not a member of the Task Group.

M is a regular worship leader. She has been attending the church for over twenty years. She had been the deaconess for two terms. She is the younger sister of C. She was not a member of the Task Group.

P is a regular worship leader. She has been attending the church for over twenty years. She is the elder sister of S. She has not been playing the role of deaconess, yet she serves in another department. She was not a member of the Task Group.

In looking at the empowerment of women in the church, the views of leaders are important. Or as Schreiter (1998, p.29) puts it: “Leaders often embody the memory of the congregation, and they will be essential both in providing a description of practices and environment, and in correlating the congregation’s story with scripture and heritage”. After gathering the views and comments of different church leaders, I obtained a clear picture of how leaders perceive the changes in the church. Because they hold the memory of the congregation and have been the keepers of the practices of the tradition, as formed by the interpretation of the Scripture and the church’s heritage for so long, they certainly have profound views about changes in the roles of women. How they interpret the changes and their new mindset towards the practices of the church constitute an important foundation for changing the overall practices and environment, or for making further progress.

Ethical approval was sought from the participants mentioned above before conducting interviews with them. They were shown the purpose of the research and they agreed to participate in it. They all signed the ethics forms as proof of their willingness to participate in the research and agreed that the contents of the interviews would be used as the data for

analysis. The process of seeking ethical approval was conducted according to the regulations of the guidelines of Anglia Ruskin University, and for this process, not only were the participants willing to participate in my research, because they were also the leaders in the church their permission was considered the permission given to me by my church to carry out this research. The main ethical issues that I had to deal with were the use of the data, access to the thesis, and maintaining the anonymity of the participants.

Another group of participants whose opinions I sought was the brothers who lead the worship. There are roughly thirteen men who either lead the liturgical part of the worship or are involved in leading the singing part. Unlike the female pastor and other women, they have not had new tasks since the changes. Thus so far around thirteen brothers have been slightly affected by the changes in the sense that they have less chance to lead the worship (the liturgical part). For this reason it was important to find out how they perceived the changes, and whether they welcomed them or not.

A further group of participants is other members in the adult group who were already members of the church in 2007. They witnessed the changes and so were able to tell whether they thought it had been good to introduce the reform or not. They have not been directly affected by the changes, but I felt it would be interesting and important to discover the views of this group of onlookers. There are roughly seventy of them. They are mostly middle class, with decent education and jobs, mild in manner and seldom raise any questions or objections to the decisions made by the Deacon Board. Their mindset and behaviour are clearly evident in the three Annual General Meetings (AGM).

The research also involved other members of the church. “The second role is that of the entire congregation itself. Members can contribute diverse voices” (Schreiter, 1998, p.29). The congregation’s views are also valuable in helping understand how the membership as a whole views the changes. Their voices may be diverse, but from their opinions it is possible to discover whether members are open and receptive to change. “There might be differences between leaders and other members. And so I might uncover a variety of theologies, developed in diverse ways and to different extents” (p.29). Are the members more receptive to change? Do they have more liberal views towards the roles of women than the leaders? If this is so, success in enhancing women’s roles might be partly due to

the openness of the membership as a whole, who raised no objection to the empowerment of women and facilitated the implementation. The mindset of members can therefore be identified as an important factor in pushing through the changes. There are a few members who had not joined the adult groups and yet witnessed the changes in women's roles. There are roughly five or six in this group and their views are also valuable.

Besides these groups, there are also the elderly and teenagers. I did not seek their views for several reasons. Most of the elderly joined the church after 2007 and so they could not give their views on whether the changes were good or not. Of those elderly who came to the church before 2007, most were no longer with us. Concerning the teenagers, there are only about twenty of them, and most are in their junior form and have attended the church only for a few years. Even though some are university students, they were in junior secondary school when the changes were introduced, so they may not be in a position to provide well-grounded views. There are thus eight different sample groups for analysis. Different methods are employed for the different sample groups. Through these methods, relevant data is extracted for in-depth analysis.

3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through different means: interviews, focus group discussions (see Appendix III for interview questions) and questionnaires designed for the different groups of people (see questionnaires in Appendix V).

Conducting an interview allows for the collection of in-depth information and knowledge and so I conducted an interview with the female pastor. As there was only one female pastor involved in the reform, it was unnecessary to design a questionnaire for her. It seemed more profitable to ask her questions face to face, and seek clarification when necessary. As Judith Bell (2006, p.157) points out, "a skilful interview can follow up ideas, probe responses, and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do". Bell continues: "The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation and so on) can provide information that a written response would conceal" (p.157). A questionnaire cannot gather all the information necessary, especially a non-verbal one, whereas in an interview, various spontaneous probing questions can be

posed to follow up on the spontaneous responses. Moreover, as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p.105) remark,

In-depth interviews are a meaning-making partnership between interviewers and their respondents. These sessions provide an opportunity for researchers to learn about social life through the perspective, experience and language of those living it. Qualitative interviews are thus a special kind of knowledge-producing conversation that occurs between two parties.

It also helps to “explore the issue in depth and detail” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.60). Concerning the data collected from the female pastor, I tried to see if she welcomed the changes. As she was the person who was most affected by the reform, I wanted to know how she perceived it. Did it help her improve herself, especially in her weakest area? Did it help her explore her greater potentialities? Did it help her gain greater confidence in being the female pastor and thus have greater confidence in developing different areas of work and completing different challenging tasks? Or, by contrast, did it place extra burdens on her as she was already quite fully occupied and did she actually detest taking up this extra burden? The interview was semi-structured, “relying on a certain set of questions and trying to guide the conversation to remain, more loosely, on those questions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.102). Her views were considered significant, as I would be able to see if the reform had been worth doing from the point of view of a female pastor.

I also conducted an interview with the male pastor to ask if he thought it had been right to initiate such a reform and if he thought it had been the right time to do so. I also asked about his theology concerning partnerships with women in churches and I canvassed other views he had about the role of women in churches.

An interview with the present male pastor was conducted in order to ask about his theology of partnerships with women in churches also. I asked about his opinion on the roles of the female pastors and women in churches, and if he thought there was greater room for female pastors and women to develop their potentialities in churches.

I also conducted interviews with the two male deacons, in order to try and find out if they welcomed and supported the changes in women’s roles in churches. I wanted to find out

from them too if they thought that there was greater room for the female pastor and women to participate in the church.

For the small group of women who now lead the worship, I arranged a focus group interview. As Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p.102) note, “focus groups may be a profound experience for both the researcher and participants. They also generate a unique form of data”. I was able to gather information revealing if the few sisters who are now leading worship also welcomed the changes. Since they had been assigned roles they had never taken up before, I tried to find out if they thought this had been the correct move, and if the move had helped bolster their confidence. I also tried to find out what they thought about the roles of women in churches generally, and if the changes shed new light on their perception about the roles of women in church. Their views were also important, because these would allow me to see if the changes were worthwhile from their perspective. I issued them a set of questions first, followed up by a focus group study. I did not conduct interviews individually, as I wanted to discuss with the whole group in order to facilitate free exchanges of views. Focus group study is conducive for “generalizing data which is shaped by group interaction and to display a social context-exploring how people talk about an issue-for creative thinking and solutions” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.60). I then conducted a discussion with these women based on their answers to the questions I had sent to them earlier, and asked them questions in response to their feedback. One key question that I asked was whether they welcomed the changes. Through this focus group interview, in which views were exchanged freely and responsively, I was able to gain a clear picture of what these sisters had in their minds. Some were more conservative, some were readier to accept change. The plurality of their views, shaped by their upbringing in church and their personal encounters and experiences, could well explain the final outcome of the changes, and the extent to which the changes could be taken forward.

Another group of participants was the men who lead the worship. Of these thirteen individuals, some just lead the liturgical parts of the worship, while some lead the liturgical parts as well as the singing parts. Indeed, they have not experienced many changes, apart from the fact that some might now have fewer chances to lead the worship. My questions concerned whether they welcomed the changes, given that it meant they could take up fewer tasks? Did it pose a threat that their position was now being assigned to women? Did

it affect their views on the role of women in churches? Did they have new views about the role of women in church? Were they ready for greater change if necessary? How did they evaluate the role assigned to the female pastor, given she was now allowed to speak in the worship? Because they were not the ones initiating the changes and their roles had not significantly changed, I did not conduct in-depth interviews with them. Instead I sent questionnaires seeking their answers to the abovementioned questions.

The last group of participants was those adult members not covered in the more specific groups mentioned above. They mostly did not participate in leading the worship, and had the role of onlookers to the change. They had not been affected in any direct way. Yet they had witnessed the changes, so my questions included asking if they welcomed the changes. Did the reform cause them to see the roles of women in a new light? Did they think that women had been assigned more important positions, or could even be considered to be on the same footing as men? Also, did they have a new perspective on the role of women in the church, and would they be ready for further changes if necessary? How did they evaluate the role assigned to the female pastor, given she was now allowed to speak in the worship? As there was a large number of participants in this group, I sent out questionnaires, rather than conduct interviews or focus group studies, especially as they were not directly affected by the change. Moreover, I only wanted their general opinions as members of the congregation. In other words, I sought their comments on the changes in their capacity as onlookers. Some of them were newcomers, i.e., who joined the church after 2007 and had thus not witnessed the changes. I asked this group of respondents an additional question: when did they join? This piece of information was important, as the year they joined the church could affect their views on the changes. The views of those who came before 2007 might be more substantial and significant, but for those who came after 2007, the situation in the church had already changed, and they would not be able to comment on the before/after difference.

For the men leading the worship and the members of the congregation, questionnaires were sent to seek their views. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires would be used as triangulation to support the argument. The dominant methodology would still be a qualitative one.

3.2.1 Feminist Methodologies

In summary, feminist methodologies were adopted in the research, in the sense that the voices of the women were heard. That covered the woman pastor, the five sister leaders involved in the worship. Moreover, my role in the changes of the women's roles in my church was analyzed as well. Much weight was placed on listening to the voices of women as they were the ones directly affected by the changes. I conducted interview and focus group interviews with them as I wanted to go deeper into their thoughts and feelings about the changes. I also intended to analyze my own role as I had been the key player in pushing through the changes. Apart from the pastor and two deacons, with whom I conducted interviews as they were also involved in the changes, I just sent out questionnaires to the other brothers leading the worship as they were not unaffected by the changes.

As far as a feminist methodology are concerned, not only were the voices of women heard, their experiences were also recorded and explored in greater depth, including their aspirations, their views about the changes of women's roles in church, their fears and the burdens brought about by the new roles, along with the reasons for their support for the changes and so on. As Nicola Slee put it: "Women's experience is called upon as both source and norm in feminist theory" (Slee, 2004, p.46). So in the research, the experience of the women was called upon and explored.

Slee further elaborated on feminist methodology as "a commitment to liberating and empowering women" (p.49). She claimed that research is "not merely the subject matter or content (research about women) or the gender of the research (research by women) but the commitment to conducting research with the specific goal of empowering and liberating women (research for women)". Thus my research results were also intended to have a positive impact on the women, by helping them evaluate their new roles as a result of the changes, and also to reflect on the overall roles of women in our church. For this reason it was hoped they would develop a better picture of the position of women in church and thus the partnership between men and women for the kingdom of God.

As far as the empowerment principle is concerned, the research itself also aimed at changing the practice of church, especially challenging the "marginalization of women in

churches” (p.50). Through the model of change in my church, I also aspired to impact other churches with similar background and practice.

3.3 Data Analysis

I tried to search for important emerging themes from the data. “Analysis is a process of breaking down the data and thematising it in ways which draw out the meanings hidden within the text” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.57). Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, pp.3-4) note that this sort of analysis is of “themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon.” They call this a “form of pattern recognition within the data”. The themes that emerge then become the categories for analysis. In line with this process, coding and categorisation were adopted in order to group the data into underlying themes. “Coding the data involves working through the text, ideally line-by-line, in order to identify meaning units, and labeling these with a code that captures the meaning identified. In an inductive thematic analysis, the coding frame itself emerges from the data” (Willig, 2013, p.61). From the data collected, I would be able to find out if the congregation had accepted the changes in the roles of women; how they looked at the roles of women; and if there was room for further enhancement to women’s roles.

Furthermore, I recorded the individual interviews and focus group interviews and then transcribed them. Relevant parts of the data were translated into English and used for analysis. The relevant parts were those sections of the interviews that answered the questions I asked, not repetitive statements or irrelevant comments. They were those parts that could be coded to identify meanings and find emergent themes, as well as that data that shed new insight into the issue I was studying. This was accomplished through a selection process of the data I had in hand, and the selection was based on my judgement. The limitation of this selection of data for translation was that my judgement might be biased and some data might have been missed. However, with good judgement, the selection of important and relevant data for translation would serve the purpose of providing a focused analysis and generate a new understanding of the changes in my church. The analysis was conducted to “create deep and rich insights into the meanings that people place on particular forms of experience” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.63). Through in-depth conversations with the interviewees, and interpretation of and reflection on the transcribed discourse, as well as reflections on the interpretations, how the leaders and

congregation gave meaning to the experience was discovered. As the researcher, “I became the primary tool...used to access the meanings of the situation being explored” (p.60). “The interview process was a unique space for the creation and sharing of meaning” (p.64). I was the one to give meaning to the whole reform process through studying the themes that emerged from the data provided by the interviewees. The interviewees themselves also gave meaning to the reform. On the whole, we shared the same standpoint in affirming the positive nature of the reform, although we could not agree about the further extent of the reform. The participants felt the reform had been carried to its utmost, and no further radical changes should be introduced, unless an unprecedentedly difficult situation arose or it became extremely necessary. My own personal view is that the changes could certainly be taken forward to a larger and greater extent.

3.4 Contribution

The research aimed at finding out if progress in women’s empowerment could be made in a Chinese patriarchal congregation with inherited western missionary influence, situated in a modernized society with greater gender equality than some other such societies. It looked at the ways in which progress in empowerment was made. I expect that the research can bring positive changes to the practices of Chinese patriarchal congregations bearing western missionary influence in a society where gender equality is gaining impetus. I also hope that the same changes can be brought to other churches in Hong Kong, as well as to overseas Chinese churches, or even Western churches with resemblances to my church. At the same time, I myself, as the practitioner in the process of changing the practice of my church, and also the researcher, discovered the prerequisites for initiating changes, the factors contributing to the successful implementation of the changes, and the factors inhibiting the implementation of change. I expect that the knowledge that I have generated through the research, and the experience I gained in the empowerment process, can be used as a reference point for other churches that are seeking women’s empowerment.

3.5 Evaluation

The research was carried out successfully. Five individual interviews as well as focus groups were conducted. All the participants were very cooperative and were more than ready to assist. They answered all the questions that I posed aimed at generating a new

understanding of their views about the changes and they did not withhold their opinions. As we have known each other for more than ten years, some even as many as thirty years, we were not strangers to each other. There was thus no need to hide information or withhold the truth. I could not ask them directly if they were telling the truth, of course, and instead relied on the mutual trust and bond we had built up over the years.

What the female pastor told me was important, and it revealed how she looked at the new role that had been assigned to her. She did not look at it in the way I assumed she would, and this new discovery generated a new understanding about which of her roles she considered most important. This was far from what I originally thought. In this sense, this particular interview successfully generated a new understanding and thus confirms the comments of Hesse-Biber, that qualitative interviews are “a special kind of knowledge-producing conversation that occurs between two parties” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.105). They also help in exploring an issue in depth and detail. The pastor was willing to tell me what she thought without reservation. She told me more than I asked, in fact, so I had no need to prepare another set of questions for her.

Another concern that I had before carrying out the research was whether the two deacons would disapprove of the project. To my surprise, they showed great willingness to assist in the research. They did not consider that my inquiry, which touches on the traditions of our church, the discussion of the changes in women’s roles, or even speculation on possible further changes in women’s roles would harm the reputation of our church. They did not even ask if my research would reveal the name of our church or that of the Association.

Of the questionnaires I sent out to the congregation, I received sixty completed responses from the eighty-two respondents to whom they had been sent, mainly through the assistance of cell group leaders (nearly all the adults in the church participate in cell groups). Although response was not one hundred percent, it was still satisfactory. I intended to generate an overall view of the congregation’s opinions, so 73 percent can be considered sufficiently representative to present an overall view. As with the interviews, I was concerned that the congregation might reject my research or object to it on some or other grounds. However, they turned out to be very cooperative in giving their opinions, which certainly facilitated the progress of the project.

The potential risks that I foresaw before carrying out the research thus did not arise at all. The interviews all went smoothly and all the participants showed their willingness and readiness to participate. I believe they did express their true opinions and show their true feelings. As for the questionnaires that I sent to the congregation, respondents were very cooperative in completing them and sending them back to me.

The data I collected helped me generate a new understanding about the views of different people in our church, some being key players or those most affected by the changes, with others mainly the congregation, or the onlookers. Their opinions and views helped me realize what had facilitated the changes in women's roles, and what had hindered further changes to women's roles. An interesting finding was that men might not be the ones hindering further changes in women's roles, and that women themselves might be the ones most hindering their own further empowerment.

My role in the research could be described as that of an insider. I have been in this church for twenty-four years and I know the leaders and the congregation well. Moreover, I was the initiator of the changes; I developed a clear picture of the process of the changes; and I knew the traditions and the culture of my church very well. "One advantage as an insider researcher over an outsider researcher is the valuable knowledge about the cultures and informal structures of the organization" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.114). These insights characterize my role as an insider researcher well. The knowledge and pre-understanding I held meant I had a good understanding of the research context and personnel, which ensured greater credibility and trustworthiness. Furthermore, I could also use my experience in my context to "ask questions ...and follow up on replies and so obtain rich data, participating in discussions or merely observe what was going on without others being necessarily aware of my presence" (p.115). This insider status thus allowed me to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

3.6 Limitations

Apart from the interviews, which targeted key players or those directly affected in the changes, not everyone in the congregation was involved in answering the survey provided through questionnaires. Two groups were not involved: the elderly and the youth. This was a limitation, in that not all members of the congregation could express their views through

my research. However, if all had been involved, there would have been certain technical difficulties. The scale would have been too large for a research project such as this.

Some have commented that “a single case study can also mislead or misdirect readers to stereotypes, one-sided assessments, or oversimplified analysis” (Campbell-Reed, 2016, p.33) and that “the lack of clear limits on data gathering, the problem of ‘generalizing from one case to another’ and bias on the part of the researcher” (p.37). I therefore needed to avoid oversimplifying the case, and instead draw deeply on the complexities of the situation in my church in order to generate new understanding and knowledge about the particular case in my church.

The second limitation is also related to my role as an insider researcher. Although I had the advantage of profound knowledge of my church, this pre-understanding could mean that I might “assume too much and so not probe as much” (Campbell-Reed, 2016, p.115) and miss some important issues or take the answers for granted and thus fail to look deeply enough into the issues. Moreover, there was certain degree of “role confusion” (p.121) in the sense that I had double roles in the research: one being the researcher and another being an active participant in the change process. I thus needed to strike a balance between subjectivity and objectivity.

Another limitation was that I had no certainty whether the respondents were telling the whole or just the partial truth, and if they were giving views designed to please me, because I was the deaconess and had good relationships with them all. I could only rely on what they told me, and what they told me became the basic data for my analysis. “Clearly any form of research in any organization has its political dynamics. Political forces can undermine research endeavours and block planned change. Gaining access, using data, disseminating and publishing reports are intensely political acts” (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.127). To counteract any political forces, one thing that I did was build up good relationships with the interviewees and the survey respondents. Yet to reiterate what has been noted above about knowing whether the interviewees and the survey respondents are telling the truth, I think this applies to all qualitative researches where interviews are involved. No researcher can be absolutely certain in this matter, but still the research goes on and the researcher relies on the data to analyze and generate new knowledge.

3.7 Conclusion

To conclude, my research centered on a single case study in order to generate understanding about the changes that occurred twelve years ago in my church. Triangulation in the form of both interviews and questionnaires was adopted to ensure a balanced view and to obtain the truest possible picture of the scenario. I obtained the data required and the data produced many interesting insights for further pondering and analysis.

Chapter 4: Factors Enabling the Empowerment of Women

In the following two chapters I take up the emergent themes of “Bible”, “God”, “Gifts”, “Abilities”, “Leadership”, “Tradition”, “Culture”, “Headship”, “Emotional”, “Obedience” and “Laziness” and develop what participants said. On the basis of this categorization, in Chapter 4 I analyze the factors that enable empowerment of women in my congregation, and in Chapter 5 I analyse the factors that inhibit further empowerment.

4.1 Conformity with the Bible

One of the major reasons behind the success in implementing the changes was that the leaders and the congregation did not consider that the changes violated the teachings of the Bible. In Nvivo findings, the theme “Bible” was the third most frequently used with 129 reference points, and was mostly mentioned by the focus group and by one deacon. Church leaders agreed to and supported the changes on the basis of the biblical teaching that God created men and women differently but equally. They had different roles to play and there was no implication that one was more important than another.

The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, commented as follows:

According to the teachings of the Bible, it has been emphasized many times that in the creation, the roles have been fixed. God created Adam first, then Eve was made from the rib of Adam. So the roles of male and female were fixed and the differences in the two roles were also fixed. In other words, the roles of man and woman were decided in creation. There was no implication that one role was more important than another role. God had His will in the creation. How could we put this into practice in the church to respond to the needs of the church? In the past, we said that the leading roles would be left to the brothers, and sisters could not teach and they thus could not stand on the pulpit to preach. The Association drew a line like this. Yet through the biblical study, we found that the line was not drawn like this. Indeed after our discussion, I came to realize that if we made it clear the men be the head of the church, the head being Jesus Christ. In terms of management, the men take the lead. We have a male pastor playing the role of pastor-in-charge, and we have also written in the Constitution that the chairman of the Deacon Board must be a man. So after the biblical study, we had a clearer idea, i.e., God assigns different roles to man and woman and they can cooperate with each other. Woman is the helper. And on the basis of this principle, we can define the role of sisters: Sisters being the helper also can teach. Provided that she is under the leadership of brothers, she can lead and teach. We adopted this understanding to define the roles of sisters more properly.

In the above quotation, it can be seen that H mentioned the Bible four times. “The Bible” here mainly concerns “biblical study”. Through biblical study, H found out “the will of God”. “The will of God” mainly refers to the will of God in creation. The will of God in creation specifically applies to the roles of men and women. H stressed the will of God in creation; that the man and the woman had different roles and the roles were fixed. Yet through the Bible study in the Task Group, he came to realize that if they made it clear that the head of the church remains a man, women could have freedom to play different roles, including the leadership roles, such that she could lead and preach. As such, the changes could proceed under this principle, and they therefore did not violate biblical principles. The key points which arose from what H said are the roles of man and woman are clearly stated in the Bible. Through a study of the Bible, he came to know God’s will more clearly, i.e., that man and woman are equally important and have different fixed roles to play. Only if the head of the church is a man can women take different roles, including leadership roles.

The Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, commented as follows:

Our old practice was when there were men and women in a ministry department, we presumed that men would be leaders, whereas women would be deputy leaders. In Sunday’s worship, undoubtedly the men would be the worship leader (the liturgical part), whereas women lead the singing part of the worship. We consider it to be normal and natural. It has become our tradition that for leading roles, or roles that represent the church, brothers would take up those roles, not sisters. However, we finally find that sisters also have gifts in leadership, while some brothers might not have gifts in leadership. We used to think that no matter if the brothers had the gifts or not, brothers should play the leading roles. However, now we realize that to serve God according to one’s own gifts is also the teaching of God.

In this quotation, CF mentioned “tradition”, “leadership”, “gifts” and “the teachings of God”. He specifically remarked that “tradition had it that men played the leadership roles”. This has been the tradition of my church and the tradition was passed to the church by the Association. The leadership role refers to the roles that represent the church, including being worship leaders in Sunday worship, heads in different ministry departments and Chairman of the Deacon Board. However, CF also reached a new understanding after the Bible study that sisters also had “gifts in leadership”. He mentioned this a few times in the quotation, and the gifts he mentioned refer to the “abilities bestowed by God to do spiritual

things.” He reckoned that sisters also had gifts in leadership. According to “the teachings of God” which CF obeys, “to serve God according to one’s own gifts” is also God’s teaching or God’s will. For this reason he supported the idea that sisters with gifts in leadership could also play leadership roles, as this complies with the teachings of the Bible. He gained this new understanding about the roles of sisters after the Bible study, and the Bible served as the guideline for his new perception. He also felt at ease about the changes in women’s roles.

CF further elaborated on the issue, as follows:

Basically, men and women were created to be different. If not, there would not be men and women. There must be a difference. The difference does not mean that some are more important than others. God created men and women to have their own characteristics, and with their own strengths and weaknesses. The will of God has to be fulfilled by men and women together. On this theological basis, we are asking how husbands and wives cooperate together to fulfill the will of God, how brothers and sisters in churches fulfill the will of God, for the most important thing is to fulfill the will of God. This does not mean that we have higher opinions of either brothers or sisters, or that either husbands or wives are more important. God does not want us to argue over this matter, whereas He wants us to work together to fulfill His will, or how we can glorify God and work out the divine purpose of creation.

CF also mentioned “the will of God” five times. In his view, “the will of God” refers to the roles God has given to men and women, and that God likes men and women to work together to fulfill His will and His purpose. CF put forward two important views: one was “men and women were created to be different”, and the second was “the will of God has to be fulfilled by men and women together.” These two comments explain why he supported the changes as he saw that it was God’s will that men and women were created to be different and fulfill the will of God together. In other words, they are different but equal.

In the focus group, the five sister leaders also supported the changes because they did not violate the teachings and principles of the Bible. The sister leaders expressed their views as follows. First, SW commented:

I think in the times of the Old Testament, the status of the women was not as high as the men. It might be due to national or cultural factors. Their status was lower than that of men. As such, they could not play the leading roles. However, for the present moment, the world has changed and the culture nowadays is different. Therefore, there

has been no violation of the biblical principles. Having a woman pastor speaking in the worship and sisters leading the worship has not violated the biblical principle. Owing to our needs and the changes in times, I think it is ok.

SW stated that the culture was different nowadays, and women's position was no longer lower than that of men. In other words, women are in the same position as men and therefore can play the leadership roles. She mentioned "the biblical principle" twice here, and considered that under the circumstances, the biblical principles were not contravened, and the changes were acceptable to her.

Another leader, M, had the following views: "If the Bible has not said clearly that women cannot speak in the pulpit or act as the one leading the worship, I think the arrangement has been appropriate. This is my principle". The main concern of M was whether "the Bible" had said anything against the changes made in the church.

The third leader, C, remarked "So far I think that the changes have not violated what I have been taught about the Bible. So far if we have not seen negative impacts, or if God was against this decision, or if it was against His teachings, I think God would show us something. And so I think the changes have been appropriate". C echoed the two previous sister leaders in that what was written in the Bible carried weight. She mentioned "Bible" and "God" twice in the quotation. The changes were in conformity with the teachings of the "Bible" and "God" was not against this decision.

The fourth leader, P, said that "I agree with what SW said, that the times have changed. And I don't think that the changes have violated the biblical truth. Also the culture is different. The roles of the women in the times of the Old Testament are different from nowadays". P also mentioned "culture" as SW did, saying times had changed, the roles of women were now different, and the changes thus did not violate the biblical truth.

The fifth leader, S, commented as follows:

We have come to this decision after the Bible study. I can be so sure that in the circumstances of our church, the changes have been appropriate. Owing to the culture in Hong Kong, the needs of the church, and the principles of the Bible, we have made this decision. And about the male headship, I remember we touched on this topic in our discussion. Our decision was no matter in what circumstances and in what form,

the male final leadership still exists. Under this prerequisite, we women can preach and lead the worship. We can do it on different occasions. I can also do it with great ease.

S also mentioned about “culture” and “the principles of the Bible”, and that the changes did not violate those principles. Like H, she also was a member of the Task Group and had joined the Bible study. She also held the same view that under the prerequisite of top male leadership, the changes were acceptable.

In summary, the sister leaders mentioned the “Bible” to which they attached great importance, and they stressed that they believed that the change did not run counter to biblical truth. One or two of them also pointed out that it was not specifically stated in the Bible that women were not allowed to preach or lead the liturgical part of the worship. One also stated that provided that the principle of “male headship” was followed, women could preach and lead the worship in any situations. Apart from “Bible”, some of them also mentioned “culture”. They commented that the culture had changed and the culture in the Old Testament no longer applied to Hong Kong, and there was a need to change the roles of women.

The past male pastor-in-charge, F, shared his views as follows, “Theologically speaking, what I think is God created men and women, not to mention the creation order, the gifts that men and women [had] were the same. My belief is as far as preaching work is concerned, I don’t think that God restricts women in certain roles, not allowing them to do other roles”. F shared the views of others, that God treated men and women equally by endowing them with the same talents and gifts to preach and teach.

As can be seen from the above responses, the church leaders considered that women could play leading roles as well as men because the teachings or the principles of the Bible had not been violated. The teachings and the principles of the Bible relate to the will of God in creation, particularly concerning the roles of men and women: that they were created differently but equally. They can cooperate with each other in fulfilling the will of God.

The congregation as a whole also supported the changes, because they too considered that the changes did not violate the teachings of the Bible. Although they did not specifically

elaborate just how the teachings of the Bible were not violated, they supported the changes because they considered that the Bible did not directly prohibit the female pastor from preaching in the worship, or women from leading the worship. It can thus be seen that both the leaders and the congregation attached great importance to the Bible and treated it as the most important guideline for the church's objectives, direction, developments and changes. (The details of the views of the congregation are recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

4.1.1 Importance of the Bible for Women's Roles in My Church

In parts of the Baptist tradition, the Bible is the foundation of the faith and each word is considered error-free. Whatever policies and developments are introduced or implemented, the leaders first look to the Bible for guidance and direction. The Bible is the source from which leaders and the congregation in my church discern the will of God. God was the second most frequently found theme in the interviews with 155 reference points based on the Nvivo findings. The Bible and God are of course closely related to one another. As the leaders and the congregation study the Bible to search for the will of God, the will of God is the guiding principle we follow. One particular aspect of the will of God mentioned in the interviews was the creation of men and women and the will of God in the creation.

As can be seen, the Bible played an important role in giving directions to our church practice. We spent time studying the Bible before making any decisions regarding the changes in the roles of women. This was the first time such a particular Task Group had been formed to study the biblical principles in the church's history. Not only were the changes in women's roles a breakthrough, the actions taken before the implementation of the changes were also significant.

H elaborated on the background behind setting up the Task Group:

We also tried to have one small group which was led by the pastor. We wanted to put all the relevant parts of the Bible together to study. We did this and we then studied the relevant parts of the Bible. It might be the teachings of Paul had something to do with the background and the historical factors. We also studied these things. And we also studied the relevant parts in Genesis to understand the will of God. Then we tried to see how we put them into practice in our church and in our times, that we could also practice them in compliance with the will of God, not in violation of the will of God, and also in response to the needs of the church. Under these circumstances, the small

group was set up.

According to H, the purpose of setting up the Task Group was to study all the relevant parts of the Bible to know the will of God and to put this into practice in church so as not to violate the will of God, but to respond to the needs of the church. It can be seen that the Bible plays an important role in church, and leaders in my church search for guidelines in the Bible to lead them in every major move.

Two main theological grounds had previously been adopted by my church in relation to women's roles. One was the order of creation, mentioned specifically by Paul in 1 Timothy 2: 12-13 (NIV), where he writes, "I do not permit woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve". These two verses were adopted by my church to define or restrict the role of women. Paul's teaching in Timothy that Adam was formed first, followed by Eve, was taken as the golden rule. That order of creation became the principle used by my church to define the roles of women. Women could not be higher in position than men in terms of the final leadership. Provided that this principle was followed strictly, women could nevertheless be given sufficient room to give full rein to their gifts in serving God in church.

Another point was the "preaching" of the female pastor in church. Here again Paul's teaching was accorded great importance. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 (NIV), Paul wrote, "And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved." In verse 11:13 (NIV), Paul continued, "Judge for yourself, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" In the Task Group, we conducted biblical studies on the words "pray" and "prophesy". After careful study of the definitions of these two words, and with reference to essays written by the pastors of the same and different denomination, as well as those by scholars of Paul, we came to the realization that these two words "pray and prophesy" carried the meaning of "preaching". As a result, we concluded that the female pastor could preach in the worship.

Paul's views have played an important part in forming the views of our leaders about the roles of women. There is an historical background to this, in that the Association that established our church more than thirty years ago took Paul's views as the guiding principle in defining women's roles in church. The Association came from the Northern

Baptist tradition, which also held conservative views about women. In their practice, women could only play subordinate or assistant roles, and were not allowed to lead or teach men. The theological reasons behind this were attributable to the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2. Paul's views in these two chapters were the key theological grounds on which the roles of women were based. The Association also wrote a paper on the roles of women more than twenty years ago and our church followed the guidelines set down in this paper concerning the roles of women.

4.1.2 Impact of the Biblical Interpretation of the Association

Concerning the interpretation of the Association, the Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, raised queries and comments as follows:

As regards the tradition of the Association, the emphasis is on the leadership of the brothers. So when the church was established in the beginning, we followed the tradition of the Association. For leading roles like preaching, we would let brothers take up the role. So for the preaching role, which was more special and high profile, the female pastor could not play this role in the beginning.

H continued:

But when we came to a certain stage, it might be when there were two worship sessions, what biblical teachings we were following when only the male pastor took up the role, and the female pastor did not need to? Or whether the female pastor had the chance to preach? In the past, we did not study in detail the basis of the biblical teachings. How did we interpret the teachings of the Bible? As we had sisters being Sunday school teachers, we also had deaconesses, and we also had female leaders in different ministry departments. So how did we interpret the role of leadership? If we were not allowed to let women teach the men, we should not have allowed sisters to teach in the Sunday School. Indeed, in our Sunday School for adults, most of the teachers were sisters. As such, it was worthwhile for us to make things clear whether we were doing things midway, or if we really understood the teachings of the Bible and applied them properly.

Based on what H said, it can be seen that he questioned the tradition of the Association as he found that there was a contradiction between the tradition and the practice. He thus sought to find a clearer understanding of the principle in the Bible on this issue. He continued by saying that through the changes, the church had moved forward: "We moved one step forward in comparison with the past. I think that the Association was being conservative and took a safer position. However, if we studied the Bible seriously, we

could find some principles to follow. We did not need to step backward that much for safety reasons”.

He stressed again the importance of understanding the Bible clearly and applying the principles therein correctly.

If we understand more accurately the Bible, i.e., the will of God in His creation, then I think that sisters could have more roles to play. We could use this as the basis to define the roles of sisters. In this case, sisters would experience fewer restrictions in serving. Indeed, in many Chinese churches, the number of sisters far outweighs that of brothers. This is a fact. Can we take away those unnecessary restrictions on sisters? Therefore after the study of the Bible, the church has rationalized some contradictions which have not been dealt with so far. When we look at the details, we have many sisters as Sunday School teachers. If we say that sisters can't teach, but we allow sisters to teach in Sunday School, in this case, we select some principles to follow, but not all.

As can be seen above, how the Association interpreted and used the Bible affected the way our church interpreted and used the Bible. If we had not been under the influence of the Association, we might have had different ways of interpreting the Bible. In some other Baptist churches in Hong Kong, women's preaching has never been a problem or an issue for discussion, and the role of preaching has long been assigned to women. Thus even in the Baptist tradition, there can be differences in terms of women's roles, depending on the tradition and culture of different Baptist churches. For example, one sister church planted by the Association, Grace Baptist Church, has a totally different practice. The woman pastor can preach and the chair of the Deacon Board is a woman. It is interesting to find that their tradition and culture is very different from the normal practice of the Association.

4.2 Supportive Views of the Leaders

The views of the leaders played an important role in pushing through the changes in the church. As can be seen above, all the leaders supported the changes. Without their unanimous support, the changes could not have been implemented so smoothly. The congregation did not fully grasp what had been discussed and decided, although the minutes of the Task Group were available for inspection and the final result was announced. Yet they were strongly convinced that what was of paramount importance was the teachings of the Bible. They were also strongly convinced that the leaders had carried out

an in-depth study, and that what they had concluded and presented could be considered trustworthy. The congregation had confidence in the leaders.

The female pastor B had this view: “The sisters in this church are capable, and given time, they can do it”. She considered that the sisters were capable of taking up the role of leading the liturgical part of the worship. B reckoned that the sister leaders had the “abilities” and “gifts” to take up the changed role. “Abilities” and “Gifts” were the two emergent themes found in the interviews. In the mind of B, what mattered most was whether the sister leaders had the “abilities” and “gifts” to take up the changed role. Since the sister leaders showed these abilities and gifts, B supported sister leaders taking up the changed role.

Concerning a woman pastor preaching from the pulpit, the Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, commented as follows:

I think that we were well prepared for the changes, as we had gone through discussions and we had shared it to the brothers and sisters. They understood the rationale behind the changes. The changes were positive for the church. The changes meant much to the female pastor as she was told that she did not need to preach when she first came to our church. We did talk about it with her before about her taking up preaching work, and she had some time to get prepared. She needed to get prepared, be it psychologically prepared or practically prepared. However, a few years after the changes, we could see that it was a training for the female pastor, and one more pastor to preach from the pulpit. Different pastors have different styles, and brothers and sisters can have more diversities. Moreover, they accepted the changes very much. So I think the changes were positive.

In the view of H, the changes were positive. He remarked that we (leaders and congregation) were well prepared for this. There had been much discussion and the rationale had been shared with the congregation as well. They all understood and supported it.

On sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship, H commented that the impact of the change was not great.

When sisters get ready to do so, they can go ahead and try. At the beginning, a few sisters tried to take up the role. And we did not have large-scale change, but rather gradual change. We started with a few sisters first, those with greater faith could try

this role, and brothers and sisters also accepted the changes greatly. The sisters also performed the roles well. The change was positive.

Similar to his comments about the preaching of the woman pastor, he considered that sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship had been a positive move. First of all, the changes were not large-scale, but gradual, and those who were prepared to do so took up the new role. Moreover, they performed it well. This echoed what B had said about sister leaders taking up the new roles, in the sense that they had the “abilities” and “gifts” to do so. With these “gifts” and “abilities”, sister leaders were well fitted to take up the new role and the outcome had been positive.

The Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, shared his views about the woman pastor preaching and sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship as follows:

Since the changes, the female pastor has also been assigned the task to preach. I think it is a good move. On one hand, she could help ease the burden of the male pastor, on the other hand, our female pastor might think that it is not her strength to preach, and so she might sometimes feel that it's difficult for her to do so. We understand that each one has his or her shepherding gifts, and that the female pastor finds that preaching is not her strength. I also observe that she is being obedient, in other words, when we asked her to try, to ease the burden of the male pastor, she is willing to be obedient, and I also see that she does her best to prepare. I also appreciate what she has done.

Concerning the preaching of the woman pastor, CF commented that it was not B's strength to preach, yet she was obedient in doing so. “Obedience” was another emergent theme from the interview. Because of the obedience of B, the changes could proceed. She could have rejected them, as mentioned by H, in that “she did not need to preach when she first came to our church”, yet she obeyed. She also needed time to get “psychologically prepared and practically prepared”. As CF said: “She does her best to prepare”.

In the matter of the sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship, CF commented as follows:

In my observation, not many sisters are playing the role of worship leaders (liturgical). Only the few deaconesses or a few sisters who have been in church for a long time play these roles. I found that they performed the roles so well. On the other hand, many sisters have not tried this role. It might be because in our tradition, sisters have not played this role, or it might be because they don't want to try. As such, it is still not

common for sisters to do so. I think it would be better if more sisters also tried this role.

Similar to H's comment, CF also pointed out that the few sisters had performed well. The views of both H and CF also tallied with B that the sisters had the "gifts" and "abilities" to take up the new role.

The past male pastor-in-charge, F, shared his views about the preaching of the woman pastor:

In my own opinion, and what I have been taught is that God gives men and women the same talents and gifts to preach and to teach. God summons men to serve, and also summons women to serve. I put this in my heart. At the same time, I also think that in the Chinese churches, as well as in the history of the Chinese churches, there has been quite a long period of time when women have been given the important tasks to preach and to teach in the pulpit, no matter if it is for the adult work or the children's work. Therefore, women have been preaching in many Chinese churches of different denominations. They have been playing the roles well, without making any mistakes.

He further commented, "If female pastors have more gifts in certain areas, why not give them more chances to give full play to their gifts? I don't think that the church should restrict their roles according to their sex". Therefore, in his view, the female pastor should be given the chance to preach if she has the "gifts".

The leaders all commented that the changes were positive and represented a good move. One key element behind their support was that they considered the changes did not violate the teachings in the Bible. They hold fast to what is written in the Bible. The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, believed that the Bible states men and women are equal. He even queried the practice of the Association that only men could play leading roles, as discussed in 4.1.2. His understanding of the Bible was that both men and women could play leading roles.

The Vice Chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, shared the view that men and women are equal and said that the biblical study on the roles of women shed new light for him in this matter:

Basically, men and women were created to be different. The difference does not mean that someone is more important than others. God created men and women to have their own characteristics, and with their own strengths and weaknesses. The will of God has to be fulfilled by men and women together. On this theological basis, we are asking how husbands and wives cooperate together to fulfill the will of God; how brothers and sisters in churches fulfill the will of God; and the most important thing is to fulfill the will of God. This does not mean that we have higher opinions of either brothers or sisters, or say that husbands or wives are more important. He wants us to work together to fulfill His will, or find how we can glorify God and work out the divine purpose of creation.

The women leaders also commented that the changes were not in violation of the teachings of the Bible and they too supported them. As discussed earlier in 4.1, in the focus group the five sister leaders also supported the changes because they did not violate the teachings and principles of the Bible.

All the leaders therefore had very strong biblical grounds for supporting the changes. There was a clear rationale behind the implementation of the changes. White (2003, p.142) talks about changes in institutions: “Institutions are a bit different. There change comes a bit more slowly. Indeed the new values must come first. People need to be thoroughly converted and convinced as to the ‘why’s’ of change before the ‘what’s’ of change”.

White’s views provide a helpful framework for analyzing the case in my church. With my church as the institution, new values must come first, or the leaders would not have been convinced the changes were justified, i.e., what White calls “the why’s” of change. As stated above, the leaders were convinced that the Bible teaches that men and women are equal and complementary. With such a justification, they reached consensus that women could also play a leading role in worship and preaching. With the “why” of change justified, the “what” of change could proceed smoothly.

There are the innovators. When it comes to change, these are the ones who tend to actually come up with the ideas that are at the heart of the rethinking. This group makes up about 2 percent of your church. Every church has a set of opinion leaders. These opinion leaders communicate the ideas of “innovation” to the congregation. They make up about 14 percent of the church. Together these two groups make up your community of leaders (White, 2003, p.145).

In the case of my church, the opinion is that the leaders are mainly the deacons and deaconesses on the Deacon Board, and their opinions carry weight. They make up less than

ten percent of the church, yet their views have great impact on the congregation. The congregation of my church is really obedient, and seldom challenges the views of the leaders. It is not that they are submissive; rather they trust the decisions made by the deacons, or the opinion leaders. They certainly raise questions about issues that they might not fully agree with at the very beginning, yet they are willing to listen to the explanations of the leaders and put aside their ideas and obey the decisions made by the leaders.

When the opinion leaders gave support for the changes in women's roles on the basis of biblical teachings, the changes could proceed smoothly. The congregation also accepted them. White also points out that there are three groups of followers: early adapters, late adapters and resisters (pp.146-147). In this process of change, nearly 99 percent of the congregation were early adapters. As such, there were no late adapters and resisters in our church. Nearly unanimous support was secured in this process of change. This is unusual in a conservative church like mine and reflects the importance of the views of the opinion leaders. As White says, "change is very leadership intensive" (pp.146-147). It is clear that without the motivation of the leaders, no change could be initiated in an institution such as our church.

Leaders see the vision, formulate the year plan, and implement the year plan through the coordination of different ministry departments. It has been the norm and custom in our church that the congregation follows the direction set by the leaders. Changes in the church were initiated when I asked if the female pastor could preach in worship. I took up the role of "innovator." As White puts it: "There are the innovators. When it comes to change, these are the ones who tend to actually come up with the ideas that are at the heart of the rethinking. This group makes up about 2 percent of your church" (p.145). I had a question about the role of women in my church and I had an idea about what the changes should be. Yet I still needed the opinion leaders, i.e., the deacons and the past male pastor, to support my idea and give it the green light. Indeed, we were the community of leaders who formed the Task Group looking into the roles of women and what the Bible said in the matter. We found our basis for women's roles through the study of the Bible and a number of meetings where we looked at how other churches of the same denomination viewed the issue. We concluded that allowing the female pastor to preach and the sisters to lead the worship was not in contravention of the teachings of the Bible, and that different churches, or even

churches of the same denomination, had differing interpretations and understandings of the roles of women.

With the discussion conducted and a conclusion reached, the leaders shared the vision and decisions with the congregation, who accepted the changes without opposition. As the innovator, and one of the community leaders, I also became the first woman to lead the worship. I set an example for others to see and follow, and the feedback of the leaders indicates that they considered this a positive change, with other women able to play a new role in the worship as well.

The changes in our church were a leadership intensive process. In other words, it was the partnership of different leaders that successfully brought the changes to the congregation. One leader alone could not have implemented the changes successfully. It had to be achieved through the cooperation of a group of leaders, a community of leaders. The changes that were endorsed were put into the records for the congregation to refer to, and were announced at an AGM. The congregation gave the changes their unanimous support. As stated above, the congregation had total trust in the views and decisions of the leaders.

Thus the changes in women's roles went through different processes, yet not only were the views of leaders important in pushing through changes, there was also a need for consensus about the changes brought to the church. In view of the above, our leaders all shared the same vision on the basis of the Bible. Their views were not divided, with all maintaining that the Bible stated that men and women were equal and important, and that women could take leadership roles. As can be seen, the Bible played an important role in shaping the mindset of leaders. The leaders would rather query the convictions of the Association than the teachings of the Bible. What they gathered from the Bible formed their main point of view about the roles of women.

White (2003, p.150) notes that "to change an institution's behavior takes a change of culture, and those are huge shifts". The changes involved were close to a change of culture, and though not on a large scale, were nevertheless a milestone in the history of our church. The success of the reform is attributable to the consensus of the leaders and their partnership in making the changes possible and achievable.

4.3 The Congregation's View of Equality

The research findings indicated that 96.6 percent of respondents agreed to the woman pastor preaching and women leading the worship, which was an overwhelming majority. The views of the respondents are shown in Appendix VI. Among those agreeing to females preaching and sisters leading the worship, 91.7 percent supported the changes because of gender neutrality, gender equality or complementarity (Appendix VII). In other words, most of the congregation already held the view that male and female were equal and could complement each other. They had an open attitude towards the roles of males and females. This is another reason why the changes were successfully carried out, for the views and attitudes of the congregation carried important weight.

It is encouraging to see that not only women supported the changes, but men also. Out of the twenty-two men answering the questionnaires, only two objected to the changes. Men's awareness is also important in the elevation of women's status. "Only when woman is acknowledged as an equal partner in societal discourse will our one-sidedly male-structured partner be transformed" (Fiorenza, 1993, p.20).

Only when men are aware that the society is made up of both males and females, and females are not inferior, but on the same footing as them, will they respect women as women should be respected. In my church, that "equality" is the number one reason the congregation gave for supporting the changes in the roles of women, and this is very positive and encouraging. Out of the twenty-two male respondents, twelve of them supported the changes because of "equality". This shows that most of the men in the congregation are very open-minded, and that they respect women as they should be respected. This might be due to the fact that we live in a rather westernized society, Hong Kong, where people tend to be more liberal-minded. Furthermore, women in Hong Kong enjoy a high status, with many holding senior positions in companies or even taking the position of boss. Many women hold high-ranking posts in government, often functioning as heads of the departments. In a culture such as this, the male mindset is shaped to adopt a more liberal attitude towards women. Thus the culture of a society does have an impact on the mindset of the congregation. This echoes what Christina Wong (2005, pp.24-25) states in a journal article entitled "Chinese Churches Today":

When the society encourages equality between men and women, it might indirectly encourage churches to accept women leadership. And churches also gradually accept that men and women serve in church based on their gifts and talents. Churches should not reject social cultural norm, but rather take it as a motivation force for changes.

Her comment echoes what Mary Chung has said, i.e., that “most men and women in Chinese churches are open to accept the authority and leadership of women” (Chung, 2005, p.220). There is a more open attitude towards women leadership in church nowadays.

Equality here does not signify domination or power over others or control of others. “Equality is enabling, energizing, creative authority” (Fiorenza, 1993, p.247). Being equal means the same position, same footing, same opportunities, same treatment and same importance. No one is greater or higher in any way than another, but is the same in every way. Being equal gives one the same privileges of developing oneself and having ample room to give full play to one’s talents.

When the congregation put “equality” as the reason for their support for the changes in our church, it ran counter to the tradition that only men could be leaders. In my church, which is based on the biblical tradition, it has always been the practice that men are the leaders. In the two roles that underwent changes, the new part that women now play would symbolize leadership roles as well, as was noted by the congregation. It is thus in contradiction to the tradition and practice of the church that women now have leadership roles. The congregation, however, liked seeing men and women being given the same opportunities to serve God.

It is evident that the biblical tradition that has shaped the foundation of belief of our church, i.e., that men are the leaders, might not bear so great an influence on the congregation. The gender implications are not that crucial to the congregation. They consider that men and women are equal and “equality” is the basis on which the church functions. They consider that men and women should be given the same opportunities to do different tasks and serve in different ways. This is the decisive rationale behind their support for the changes in the church. Under the influence of the Association that set our church up nearly forty years ago—the tradition that was upheld until the changes were introduced—only men could stand on the stage to preach and lead the worship. Given that the new practice had been

running for seven years when the survey was conducted in 2014, the congregation had clearly accepted it without any problems.

“Equality” has also been widely practiced in our church. Even though we have the tradition that men take up the leading roles, sisters have been given many opportunities to serve as well. The sister leaders in the focus group also think that they have been given many opportunities to serve and try different things. They did not consider that they had been denied the chance. They also experienced “equality” in the church’s practice. The few sister leaders made their comments as follows:

S: “I do not feel any restrictions. We have many chances to try different things. I usually think that it is not the church or the external environment that give you restrictions, the restrictions come from ourselves. If you want to, there is so much more than you want to do”. SW remarked, “There are many chances. If you want to try, you certainly have the chance to do. We have much room for our free trial”. P said, “In our church, I think that there are no restrictions due to our gender. Especially nowadays, the chair in the worship has been open to sisters already. So it depends on whether you like to do it yourselves”. C commented, “Before the changes in the roles of women, I have never felt that there has been restriction on giving full play to my gifts because of my gender. And now it’s even more so”. In summary, the few sister leaders have experienced “equality” all along, there have been many chances for them to try different things, and they have not experienced any restrictions at all.

The female pastor B shared the same views as the sister leaders, i.e., that she had not experienced suppression in her ministry. When asked whether male-dominated culture had suppressed or affected her role, she said:

I won’t think this way as I have my choices. I feel that the culture nowadays is different from the culture before. If you voice it out, you can change the world. The only thing that matters is whether I want to do it or not. If I find that the culture has not been changed, I will rather be patient and wait. So you can say that I am not proactive enough. There are some constraints for me in a male-dominated church. I know this reality. But I know I still have the choices about whether I want to do it and how I can do it. My choice is to wait for the change of the culture. Or simply wait till they make progress themselves. Many brothers need to make progress.

She mentioned “choices” and “culture” a number of times. Given the change in the culture, she had many choices. She could voice them out and what mattered was whether she wanted to do something or not. She could also wait for the culture to change to her advantage.

This was the women’s understanding and practice of “equality”, although there remains one feature that the leaders are not willing or prepared to change, and that is the “final leadership”. In their view, “final leadership” belongs to men and in this area they do not advocate “equality”.

When the congregation brings a secular conviction to the practice of its church, there can be clashes with the tradition and culture, or the conviction can affect the normal practice of the church for the worse. However, in the case of my church, the congregation’s conviction about “equality” brought a positive outcome in the form of changes in women’s roles. The majority view of the congregation played an important part in the successful implementation of the changes in the church.

4.4 Facilitating Women’s Full Use of Gifts

The findings of the interviews and the questionnaires revealed that giving full play to the gifts of women was another important reason the leaders and the congregation supported the changes in women’s roles. According to the Nvivo findings, this theme was quoted with 66 reference points, and the female leaders in the focus group mentioned it 29 times, while 19 respondents to the questionnaires also mentioned the gifts of women.

Before elaborating further on the gifts of the sisters, there is a need to differentiate gifts from talents. Gifts are the special qualities and strengths that God gives to a person to serve Him, whereas talents are natural abilities or those abilities inculcated in the work process or in other aspects of life. Talents can also be turned into gifts if one uses them to serve God; they are indeed interchangeable. Yet in the church context, we use “gifts” to describe the talents one has in serving God.

One sister leader, P, commented “I think the changes can help unearth the gifts of sisters. I think the gifts of sisters are sometimes covered up. I think sisters have gifts in preaching

and leading worship, and when they do not have the chance to play these roles, they do not have the chance to give full play to their talents”. In other words, she also considered that women could also preach and lead worship provided that they were given the chance. Before the changes, they had no chance to do so and their gifts might have been hidden. Now, with the implementation of the changes, their gifts can be given full play.

For giving full play to one’s gifts, the previous past pastor, F, also shared this view, “As far as preaching work is concerned, I don’t think that God restricts women in certain roles, not allowing them to do other roles. If female pastors have more gifts in certain areas, why not give them more chances to give full play to their gifts? I don’t think that the church should restrict their roles according to their sex”. His views indicate that the gifts of women should be given full play if they really have the gifts. Gender should not be a factor for consideration as God does not restrict women’s roles. He pointed to preaching work especially here, and noted that God does not prohibit women from preaching, and so if a woman has the gift to preach, she should be given the chance to do so.

The Vice Chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, had the following views on the use of gifts:

However, we finally find that sisters also have gifts in leadership while some brothers might not have gifts in leadership. We used to think that no matter if the brothers had the gifts or not, brothers should play the leading roles. However, now we realize that to serve God according to one’s own gifts are also the teachings of God. Indeed many sisters have the gifts in leadership and we have no reason to waste the gifts of sisters. Indeed we believe that God will use everyone and He will grant everyone the gifts to serve Him.”

CF mentioned “gifts” seven times in the quotation, especially gifts in leadership. He realized that sisters had gifts in leadership, and he also realized that to serve God with one’s gifts was in compliance with God’s will. Therefore, to comply with God’s will, the sisters’ gifts should be given full play and not to be wasted. In other words, if they have gifts in leadership, they should be given the opportunity to play leadership roles.

Some of the female respondents opined that if women have the gifts to serve, they should be allowed to serve in any roles and in the same roles as men. Some said that their prevailing view was that both men and women are servants of God with different gifts of service. Another said gifts in teaching and prophesying were bestowed upon both men and

women. One said she had the gift of preaching and leading worship. Others said women could finally have the chance to give full play to their talents. And one said men and women had different gifts, but that women played an indispensable role in church. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

Male respondents shared the same views. Most of them commented that men and women are created by God and endowed with different gifts and women could give full rein to their talents. One said it was talents, not gender, that determined which roles to serve. Women should have full scope for their talents and become more influential. If they are not allowed to give full rein to their talents, the development of the church will be obstructed. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

All of the men who lead worship said that their roles had not been influenced, with one or two of them saying that they now led worship less frequently. One said the change was positive. Another said he had discovered more about the gifts of women, including that they could accomplish the task of leading the worship well. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

In short, most of the respondents were of the view that men and women were endowed with different gifts for serving God, and they should be allowed to serve in different roles. To give full play to their talents is another main point that the leaders and the congregation raised in supporting the increase in women's roles, including the roles that used to be held by men only. The congregation thus supported the changes in the roles of women, such that the female pastor could preach and women could lead the worship (liturgical part). According to the congregation, gifts are not gender-based, but are given to each individual by God.

This echoes the views of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and 11 (NIV), "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now

to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines”. According to Paul, gifts are given to each and every one for serving God. No gender is mentioned in this passage. The gifts are equally distributed by the same Spirit. When talking about the gifts of sisters in leading worship, some people commented that these women could help the congregation become more involved in the worship, and that they were more mature and caring and always attended to details. One man who was one of the worship leaders also praised the sisters for performing the leadership role in the worship well. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

Apart from the prerequisite that sisters be endowed with the gifts to serve, the congregation considered that women had the gifts to help people be more attentive in the worship and they also remarked that women were able to draw them closer to God. One member who attended the church after 2005 commented that “sisters are more caring and sentimental, they tend to lead the congregation to get involved in worship more easily”. As such, the congregation recognized the special gifts that sisters have and even that women might perform better than men. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

This recognition that women have special gifts that are well suited to making people more attentive in worship is very important. This recognition by the congregation might have formed as a result of the performance of new roles by women in the pulpit. When the questionnaires were distributed to the congregation, the changes in women’s roles had been in place for seven years, and therefore they had had the opportunity to assess how the female pastor preached and how the women performed the liturgical part of the worship.

On the other hand, this recognition might also have come from daily observance of the female pastor and the sisters in different roles over the years. This is because, apart from the new roles, the female pastor and sisters have played other roles in the church. For example, they have been cell group leaders, deaconesses, Sunday school teachers, worship leaders (the singing part) and so on. Indeed all of them are very important roles and the women playing these roles have demonstrated their gifts in teaching and leadership well.

The congregation had perhaps already formed the impression that women in my church had special gifts to serve in different roles.

Thus the impression that the congregation had about the gifts of women helped them consolidate their conviction that men and women are endowed with different gifts by God. This biblical truth has not been frequently taught, yet their strong conviction might have come from what they have seen over the years. In other words, the experience of the congregation was important in helping them form their views.

In summary, the leaders' views and the congregation's views played an important part in pushing through the changes. One common view among them was that they all saw that men and women were created equally but differently by God, and that they were endowed with different gifts to serve God. After careful study of the Bible, the leaders came to the conclusion that to allow the woman pastor to preach and women to lead the liturgical part of the worship was not in violation of the Bible. When permission was given for the changes to proceed, the congregation received it without opposition, as they have always supported the idea of equality between men and women and that each have their own gifts for serving God.

Chapter 5: Factors Inhibiting the Further Empowerment of Women

Although the female pastor can speak in the worship and sister leaders can lead the liturgical part of the worship, there are some roles not yet taken up by women for reasons of gender. In short, further empowerment has not yet been accomplished. What I mean by further empowerment in the context of my church would include the ordination of the female pastor, and women being able to become chairwomen of the Deacon Board. I will discuss the factors prohibiting such further empowerment in the church in this chapter, and I will also cover the emergent themes found in the interviews and questionnaires in this matter. They are “Headship”, “Emotional”, “Laziness” and “Obedience”, “Tradition” and “Culture”.

5.1 Male Leaders’ Opposing Views on Further Empowerment (Ordination)

On the ordination of the female pastor, the men (two deacons and one incumbent male pastor) agreed, but remarked that they must take the culture of the church into consideration and considered that it was not yet the right time to do so. The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, commented:

Indeed, pastor is a role we respect. There is no restriction on the ordination of female pastors, according to our biblical study. In the Bible, there has been no mention about ordination of pastors. Only roles like apostles, teachers etc. are mentioned. Maybe as time goes by, we have pastors, and then they are ordained. This is just a token of recognition and respect, showing our respect for this role. At this stage, I see no reason why ordination of woman pastors is a problem.

The Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, did not reject women’s ordination, but tied it closely to shepherding and to respect gained for leadership over a period of time. His view was as follows: “When a pastor has been shepherding the church for some time, brothers and sisters acknowledge his or her leadership, then ordination is a way to show the recognition of the shepherding work of the pastor”.

The incumbent male-pastor, N, shared his views as follows:

Nevertheless, from the biblical point of view, it is acceptable to ordain a woman pastor. Is she playing the pastoral roles as stated in the Bible? In the Old Testament, there are

female prophets and female judges, and the female prophets are playing the pastoral roles. If the female pastor is ordained, what is her pastoral role? Her pastoral role is exercised through teaching the words of God and shepherding and caring the congregation. If this is so, her role is the same as those of the female prophets and female judges.

In their opinions, the ordination of the female pastor signified recognition of the shepherding role she was playing, which included leading the youth group, teaching in Sunday school, caring for the women, and now preaching in the worship. Therefore, they supported the ordination of the female pastor.

However, the few male leaders opined that there was no urgency for ordination at this moment, but if sister churches started to ordain woman pastors or if there were disputes about it, then would be the time to discuss it. As stated by the Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF:

We have not yet prepared for this. It might be because of our tradition, we won't take the initiative to talk about it. In case our sister churches have come across this issue or if sister churches have some arguments over this issue, i.e., like the problems we came across before, we might think we need to talk about it now.

CF continued by saying that to avoid disputes about the ordination of female pastor, it would be better to have the consensus of the congregation first. "If the situation occurs, we need to have the understanding and consensus of the whole congregation as it involves some theological and traditional concepts. So to avoid disunity and argument in church, I think we need to discuss more thoroughly before taking any action". He stressed that God's will should be upheld, and not to be contradicted, and what he meant by God's will here was unity and harmony in church.

CF's views were echoed by the incumbent male-pastor, N, who said, "So we will ask if the changes are a must, if a must, then we must change; if the change is not immediate, and can be delayed for a while, then why not do it later. If we insist on doing it right now, and cause disputes in the church, then the church will suffer, and can't be salt and light on earth anymore". Like CF, N also considered that unity and harmony were important, and it would be better to handle the issue about ordination at the right time and that it should not be carried out with great haste. N also mentioned culture:

To the Association, it is a big issue. It is so big that it might cause disputes. However nowadays, not all churches allow woman pastors to preach. Under the circumstances, although every member church of the Association is independent and each of them can make their own decisions, if our church ordains a woman pastor, it might not just be a theological issue, but also a cultural issue. No matter what the church does, it involves a cultural issue. Even though it is acceptable from the biblical point of view, it is not acceptable yet culturally and will cause great disputes in the church.

N attached importance to the “culture” of the church and considered that the “culture” must be taken note of in order to maintain the unity and harmony of the church. “Culture” is another emergent theme found in the interviews, with both pastors and the sister leaders mentioning it quite a number of times.

5.2 Female Leaders’ Opposing Views on Further Empowerment (Ordination)

The female leaders (five in total) did not all agree with the ordination of the female pastor. Some commented that they did not object to the ordination of the woman pastor, B, but provided the male pastor N was ordained first. As the male pastor had not been ordained yet, symbolically it would suggest that the female pastor was the real leader if she was ordained first.

These views were shared by S and C. S, who said:

If we have a woman pastor, we will naturally have an ordained woman pastor. But not to mention the biblical principles, in a practical situation, our pastor-in-charge now is a man, who is still not ordained. If the woman pastor is ordained because of seniority, then in this case, in the symbolic sense, people would think that the ordained woman pastor becomes the leader. However, just treat it as a single case, I think it is okay then.

C commented, “Unless we do not accept a woman pastor, I can’t think of any biblical teaching that disallows the ordination. However, I also agree with what S said, about the post of pastor-in-charge. Can a woman pastor take up this post? This is another question. I don’t see any problem ordaining a woman pastor”.

S and C did not object to the ordination of the woman pastor, just that the male pastor-in-charge had not been ordained, and for his sake, the ordination of the woman pastor was not appropriate at that moment. So in their understanding, an ordained pastor

symbolizes the leading role. In this case, it can be seen that there were contradictions and inconsistencies in the way they thought and the way they acted. Even though S and W accepted the ordination of the female pastor, they would not support it as they thought that the male pastor should be ordained first because of male domination.

Different from the male leaders who considered that ordination was a recognition of the shepherding work of the female pastor, the female leaders considered that the ordination stood for the symbolic representation of the head of the church. As such, unless the male pastor had been ordained first, the female pastor could not be ordained. In other words, in their opinion, the head must be a man. Provided that it was under male headship, the female pastor could be ordained, otherwise the congregation and people outside the congregation would deem the female pastor as the head of the church. M said:

If God assigns man to be the head, then I am thinking what does an ordained pastor represent? The ordained pastor is a symbolic role. If in a more conservative sense, I would think even for ordination, the ordained pastor must be a man. The ordained pastor represents the leadership of the church, which is very symbolic. For leadership, I prefer men to take up the roles. If an ordained pastor does not represent anything, I would think this meaningless, and contradictory.

M was even more conservative in the sense that in her understanding, ordination was a symbolic gesture, and an ordained pastor was a leader. She preferred this leading role to be taken up by men. S remarked:

So in a mega church, there are many pastors, then in this case, the ordained pastors might be in the middle layer, and the pastors got ordained because of their seniority. You won't think that the ordained pastors become the ones leading the church. In the case of our church, what others think about woman pastor being ordained? It is not a question of principle, but practicality.

Even though the leaders in my church held conservative views towards the ordination of the female pastor, there was women's ordination in Hong Kong more than seventy years ago. "The significant historical breakthrough for women ordination in the Chinese Church came in 1944 when the Anglican Church in Hong Kong ordained a Chinese deaconess in China as the first woman priest in its denomination" (Chung, 2005, 189).

This important historical event indicates that the ordination of a female pastor is not a new practice, but that there has been a long-term historical development. The practice has not just been restricted to less conservative denominations, but has been in operation in Baptist churches as well. Even though the Baptist churches long opposed the ordination of female pastors, finally they agreed to it, as pointed out by Mary Chung: “The Southern Baptist Convention in Hong Kong has finally concluded it will not stand in the way if any local Baptist church decides to ordain women as pastors” (2005, p.227).

The numbers of women’s ordinations have been increasing and more churches from different denominations also ordain women:

From 1989 to 1997, eight other denominations in Hong Kong began ordaining women pastors. From 1944 to 1997, about fifty-six Chinese women were ordained into pastoral ministry by sixteen denominations and independent churches. By 2004, the total number has increased to at least eighty women pastors ordained by over twenty-two denominations and independent churches in Hong Kong (Chung, 2005, p.227).

The figures above indicate that Hong Kong churches are becoming more liberal and open towards women’s ordination, however, it is still not the case in my church. The comments of the leaders in my church indicate they are still very conservative towards women’s roles, and the objection to the ordination of the female pastor is an obvious example. Given that all the leaders are born and bred in the westernized society of Hong Kong, their views towards women’s roles are conservative, and they have not made much progress in this area. One reason behind their conservatism is their adherence to tradition and culture, where men take the leadership role and women are subordinate. Although many women have been taking up leadership roles in different areas, the final leadership roles are still reserved for men. When it comes to ordination, which sister leaders consider the confirmation of the final leadership role, much opposition would still be raised. As Chung remarked: “While churches in the West view the ordination issue more as a theological and biblical question, Chinese churches in Asia find it more a question of church tradition and cultural traditions” (p.229).

5.3 Leaders’ Opposition to Further Empowerment (Chair of Deacon Board)

In the matter of a woman being chair of the Deacon Board, the male leaders had

reservations, but they did not totally rule out the possibility. The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, opined that if there was a need and if the congregation was ready for it, then there would be a reason to discuss and amend the Constitution. He supplemented this by saying it should not be a general practice, but a response to exceptional circumstances. H commented as follows:

I have no idea whether the congregation accepts this idea or not. The Constitution has this provision and if all of us are ready for this, then we need to amend the Constitution. If under special circumstances where we have no choice then we will amend the Constitution.

The Vice-Chairman, CF, echoed the views of the Chairman and opined that only when there were no men to take up the Chairman post, could sisters do so. However, he still maintained that the ultimate leadership was male. CF said, “If one day, no men can play the role of the chairman of the Deacon Board, and we only have women to play the roles, we have to look into the situation”. However, he clearly found that the idea was far short of the ideal: “I will only accept that arrangement if there are no other choices”, and he still maintained that the final leadership should be male, as he stated that it would be a real problem to have a female chair of the Deacon Board “if the pastor-in-charge is not a man”.

CF mentioned a few times that unless there was no other choice, he would not accept that women could take the role of the chair of the Deacon Board. CF continued by saying what he considered the ideal arrangement:

We think that in a church, the best arrangement would be that the highest representative might be a male pastor, or on the deacon board, the chairman is a man, and the female pastor or the deaconesses play the assisting role. I think that is the best arrangement for the operation for the church and the shepherding of the congregation.

It can be seen that CF considered that the highest representative in the church should be a man as that was the best arrangement. He mentioned “the best arrangement” a few times. He reckoned that the best arrangement would be the men being the highest representatives with women playing support roles.

The incumbent pastor-in-charge, N, shared his views about sisters taking up the role of the Chair of the Deacon Board. In his view, the role should be given to a man as is stated in the

Constitution and in compliance with the Bible:

In the Constitution, it was clearly stated that men be the chairmen of the Deacon Board. Obviously, it has been implied clearly in the Constitution that the Chairman of the Deacon Board plays the leadership role. If the leadership role is played by the Chairman of the Deacon Board, then, if I don't misinterpret it, brothers should play the leadership role. In this case, it would be more in compliance with what has been said in the Bible about leadership.

In short, the male leaders shared the same views. To allow women to take up the chairlady post on the Deacon Board could only be a contingency measure in response to circumstances. The best arrangement would be men taking up the role of the Chairman of the Deacon Board.

By contrast, the female pastor, B, supported women being Chair of the Deacon Board. She considered that the sisters had the gifts to take up the post, but lacked the confidence to do so. She nevertheless further opined that the sisters adhered to the tradition and culture that men play the leading roles. B said:

The sisters in this church are more emotional, even though they have good sense of judgement and being rational. If they act as the chair of the Deacon Board, I don't see any problem there. What I mean is this can happen. They have good qualities to do so. If we can have this breakthrough, I think it will be okay. Sisters have the mental power and the heart to serve, what they lack is confidence. But given time, they can do it. This is why I have a high opinion of the sisters in this church. However, they all respect the culture. Brothers and sisters in this church respect the culture very much, i.e., the culture brought by the Association.

B pointed out that sister leaders had the ability to be the chairwomen of the Deacon Board, but lacked the confidence. Furthermore, they were also respectful of the culture of the church that determined men should be the leaders.

The female leaders totally objected to this suggestion, however. Their conviction was that the ultimate leadership should be male. They pointed out that based on the teaching of the Bible, men and women were created differently, and men were endowed with gifts in leadership. The two deacons in the church demonstrated their leadership gifts well, and therefore would follow the will of God in following the leadership of men.

SW said: “On the symbolic aspect, men are the head, and so I agree that men be the leader”. S remarked, “It is not about gifts or abilities, we need to go back to the Bible to find out the truth”. M commented:

We have a bottom line here. Unless the situation becomes so severe, and all the brothers are gone, unless we come to this situation, I am not saying no capable brothers, or suitable brothers, but no brothers at all. This is an exceptional situation. I will only accept sisters taking up the leading roles in that situation.

C said:

Indeed, for many leading roles in our church, I incline to have brothers playing the leading roles. Nowadays in our church, many sisters take up the leading roles in different departments. I don’t think that the situation is ideal. I still prefer that men and women cooperate and men still play the leading roles. I think this is the most ideal situation.

Another emergent theme in the collected data was “obedience”. The female leaders in the focus group mentioned it three times, and the female pastor mentioned it once. What they meant by “obedience” was “following the biblical teaching that men be the leaders”. This was their conviction and they held fast to it. They were firm in adhering to their conviction that only men could play the final leadership roles. The female pastor B held the same conviction, as she also considered that “men” were the real leaders, and she would first see what the “men” thought before she tried any new task or ministry. C said:

This makes me think of what the Bible has said. The man being the head, in the family, and the wife assists him. I will apply this teaching to the church. If the church is also the family of God, of course the Christ being the head, and I will apply the teaching to the church. Therefore I don’t think it is just the cultural issue, but also the teaching of the Bible.

M said: “About serving God in church, where is our focus? Are we following God’s will, i.e., the teaching of God? When we say that women can also do many things, can we just ignore the principles clearly stated in the Bible, that men should be the head?” SW said, “I have abilities, and I also have to follow the teachings of the Bible.” S said, “I think that nowadays, women are comparable to men in terms of their abilities. This is for sure. I also deeply believe that, like what our female pastor said in her sermon today, men and women are different. This is not what I say, this is the issue of creation. God created Adam first.”

These sister leaders all said that they would go back to the Bible to find out what it said and that they would follow the teachings of the Bible, that “God created Adam first” and that “Men are the head”. Their viewpoint is that men should be the leaders, for according to them, it is the truth of the Bible and it is also their preference that men take the leadership roles, as, symbolically, men are the head. The female leaders were so firm in their beliefs there was no compromise on this issue. When it came to “leadership”, which was another emergent theme found in the interviews, the sister leaders all had the same conviction that the role should be taken up by men, according to the truth found in the Bible.

5.4 The Concept of Headship

The reason behind the strong conviction that men should hold final leadership is the ideology surrounding the concept of “headship”. “Headship” refers to “men being the head”, “Christ being the head”, and “Men being the head in the church”, and is a biblical concept. The notion that “men are the head of women and thus the leaders” was deeply implanted in the minds of the leaders. This “headship” concept, which they adhered to, meant they considered only men could be the leaders. The theme “head” was mostly mentioned by the focus group. According to the findings of Nvivo, “head” was the most frequently used word, with 177 reference points. The sister leaders mentioned it 74 times, and the female pastor mentioned it 30 times. In other words, the sisters mentioned it most often, followed by the existing male and female pastor. The female leaders in the focus group stressed that they would uphold the biblical teaching that “men are the head”.

The concept of “headship” shapes the understanding of “leadership” in our church, where we have concepts like “final leadership”, “symbolic leadership”, “spiritual leadership” and “administrative leadership”, all of which derive from this headship concept. Because of this headship concept, all leaders consider that the final leadership, i.e. spiritual leadership, symbolic leadership and administrative leadership, rests in the hands of men. The female leaders used the word “leadership” 32 times, and what they meant by “leadership” was the “final leadership”, “spiritual leadership” and “symbolic leadership”. They were followed by the incumbent pastor who used the word 29 times, and what he meant was “highest leadership”, “spiritual leadership” and “administrative leadership”. The Vice-chairman of

the Deacon Board used it 24 times, and what he meant by “leadership” was “symbolic leadership” and “highest leadership”.

“Spiritual leadership” refers to the one who gives directions in spiritual matters. This is usually the pastor, who provides spiritual guidance and direction to the congregation, and so the pastor exercises “spiritual leadership”. “Administrative leadership” refers to the one who leads in the administrative area, such as the general policies and developments of the church, and it is usually the Deacon Board that plays the role in making the decisions. Thus the Chairman of the Deacon Board exercises “administrative leadership”. “Final leadership” is the combination of “administrative leadership” and “spiritual leadership” and refers to the pastor in the spiritual arena and the Chairman of the Deacon Board in the administrative arena. “Symbolic leadership” symbolizes the teaching of the Bible that “Christ is the head of men” and “men are the head of women” and thus should be the leaders in the church.

The leaders all advocated the concept of “final leadership” and unanimously felt that it should be men holding the posts of final leaders. The Chairman of the Deacon Board, H, stressed that “If we have no male pastor to act as pastor-in-charge, the female pastor is not suitable to be the final leader or the highest leader. According to the Bible study last time, we had consensus that the final leader was a man”. The Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board, CF, expressed the same view: “I also think that if the symbolic head of a church is a brother, i.e., the pastor-in-charge or the chairman of the Deacon Board, then under this hierarchy of leadership, each one can serve based on their gifts”. The incumbent pastor, N, stated:

But what about the final leader? In the Constitution, it was clearly stated that men be the chairmen of the Deacon Board, In other words, administratively, the chairman of the Deacon Board takes up the leadership role, while the pastor-in-charge takes up the spiritual leadership role, according to the teachings of the Bible.

The female leaders also used the term “symbolic leadership” to supplement the idea that male leadership also bore symbolic significance. SW remarked, “On the symbolic aspect, men are the head, and so I agree that men be the leader”. S commented, “I still think that the pastor-in-charge is the symbolic head, and the leader.” M had even stronger views, “As I said, the Chairman of the Deacon Board and the pastor-in-charge are similar, both are the

symbolic leaders. I will not open this to women. The male should be the final leader. The pastor-in-charge would be male.” They pointed out that “final leadership” had symbolic meaning and so they also described it as “symbolic leadership” i.e., final leadership, in representing the beliefs and convictions of the church as a whole.

The “headship” concept originates from Paul’s epistles, 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:13. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV) Paul writes:, “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man”, while 1 Timothy 2:13 (NIV) states, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve”. These two statements became the guiding principles in our church in defining the roles of men and women. These teachings of Paul, whose views also shaped the mindset of the leaders, thus formed the ideology of the church, which in turn affected the congregation. According to Paul, the created order, as stated in Genesis 2, justifies the “headship” role of men, and thus he said the head of the woman was man.

The tradition of “headship” can even be traced back to the early Church Fathers.

We have observed how the traditional views of male-superiority and female-inferiority, and of male-domination and female-subordination that characterized ancient Greek culture were espoused by the early Church Fathers and later by the Reformers, such as Luther, Calvin and other later conservative Western theologians. Unfortunately, these views have prevailed to the present (Chung, 2005, p.203).

In the case of most of the Chinese churches, it has also been the practice that women are subject to the leadership of men.

While Chinese churches have generally accepted the fact that women can assume leadership roles alongside men in team ministries, it appears that these leadership roles are subject to a measure of qualification in most cases. It does not imply equality in leadership roles, that is particularly the case among Chinese churches in the West. Rather it infers a hierarchical leadership, with female leaders obliged to submit to male leadership and their authority (Chung, 2005, p.219).

As can be seen, the “headship” concept has its historical and cultural development and influences. Our church, with its missionary influence and Chinese cultural background, has come to the stage where male headship has been practiced for a long time.

5.5 Lack of Leaders' Support for Further Empowerment

The main obstacle to the further changes in women's roles was that there was no unanimous support from the leaders. The male leaders supported the ordination of the female pastor, but they also pointed out that this would only be in recognition of the shepherding role of the pastor, and that the final leaders should still be men. By contrast, the female leaders did not support female ordination because of their convictions about headship, i.e., that leaders should be men. The male leaders had reservations about the proposal that a woman could be chair of the Deacon Board and remarked that they would initiate the discussion and even make an amendment to the Constitution, but only if there was urgent need. The female leaders commented that they definitely would not support this. They were firm in their opinions, saying that they would adhere to the will of God, as stated in the Bible, that men should be the leaders. They also considered that men were endowed with the gifts of leadership.

5.5.1 The Congregation Following the Leaders' Decisions

According to the findings of the questionnaire, 85.2 percent agreed to further changes in women's roles (although it must be pointed out that further changes were not clearly specified in the questionnaire). The views of the respondents are elaborated in Appendix VI (Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents). The main reasons behind this support were the same as their support for the existing changes in women's roles: (1) equality of the sexes, (2) the changes did not violate the teachings of the Bible, and (3) the gifts of sisters should be given full play. In spite of the majority support for further empowerment, the congregation still followed the decisions made by the leaders.

In our church, decisions are made by the Deacon Board, whose members are chosen by the congregation each year. Each tenure lasts for two years, and each deacon can have three consecutive terms before a Sabbath year. Each year there are three AGMs where important issues are presented for endorsement. The congregation can ask questions in relation to the issues and show their support or disagreement by voting. For the past twenty-three years, nearly all the proposals raised and presented by the Deacon Board at the AGM have been endorsed. The congregation has had total confidence in every decision made by the Deacon Board and has trusted each and every Deacon. Thus twelve years ago, when the Deacon

Board presented the discussion about the changes in the roles of women, these were well received by the congregation. No-one raised any objection and the changes were implemented smoothly. However, on the issue of further changes in women's roles, the leaders on the Deacon Board and other leaders did not give their unanimous support, and therefore the changes could not be taken forward. As a result, the issue of further changes in women's roles was not brought to the AGM for presentation, discussion and endorsement. The congregation plays a passive role here, as the congregation seldom raises issues for discussion by the Deacon Board. Although the congregation can vote for or against the decisions of the Deacon Board, and the Deacon Board is indeed subject to the endorsement of the congregation in the AGM, the congregation seldom votes against the decisions of the Deacon Board.

Henceforth, in view of the practice mentioned above, it can be seen that the views or the decisions of the leaders play a decisive role in our church. The congregation has followed the decisions of the leaders all along. Leaders play the role of shaping the mindset of the congregation and leading the congregation. Our church has thus been practicing a top-down model in carrying out decisions. In other words, it is a leader-oriented model in the church's operation, where leaders' views are of paramount importance in the decision-making and operation of the church. Even though a majority of people supported further empowerment, owing to the lack of leadership support, further empowerment could not be taken forward.

5.6 Congregation's Diverse Views on Further Empowerment

As noted above, 85.2 percent of the congregation agreed to further changes in women's roles. The changes in women's roles had greater impact on women, yet more women objected to further changes than men. Based on the findings of the questionnaire, all but six sisters accepted the possibility of further changes. With thirty-eight female respondents, the percentage was around 15. All but two men accepted further changes. With twenty-two male respondents, the figure was around 9 percent. It can be seen that more women opposed further changes than men. (The details of the views of the congregation are shown in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

5.6.1 More Women Opposing Further Empowerment

There were six women who objected to further changes in the roles of women. One (Respondent EN) said that she did not accept further changes in women's roles as their value would not be enhanced simply because of the changes in roles, and furthermore there was no need to do so. Another (Respondent MY) commented that she did not accept further changes in women's roles. It depended what new roles there would be, but men should still play the leading roles on the Deacon Board. A third (Respondent GL) remarked that she did not accept further changes in women's roles as there was no need to make any such changes. The fourth (Respondent SL) said the Bible does not mention any women leaders. If there were any, she would only accept them in light of detailed information and teaching. Two more women (Respondents SL and A) objected to further changes, but did not give any specific reasons. (Details are recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

5.6.2 Common Characteristics of Women Opposing Further Empowerment

These six sisters who objected to further changes in women's roles share some common characteristics. They are middle aged, with five of them in their forties, fifties or sixties. One is in her thirties. The one in her thirties (SL) is an Indonesian Chinese, i.e., she was born in Indonesia of Chinese nationality. She has been in the church since 2010. Another (A) has also been attending the church since 2010. Of the other four sisters, one is the pastor's wife (EN), and is in her sixties. She joined the church with her husband, our pastor, in 2010. The other three sisters (MY, GL and SL) have attended the church for more than twenty years since 1994. The first two sisters (SL and A) did not give specific reasons why they objected to further changes. The other four sisters made the following comments: The pastor's wife (EN) opined that the value of women would not change because of further changes in women's roles and there was thus no need to make such changes. Another (GL) commented that there was no need to make changes, while the other two commented that men should still lead the Deacon Board (MY), plus there is no mention of women leaders in the Bible (SL). The woman who said that men should still lead the Deacon Board, has a husband who has all along been either the Chairman or Vice-chairman of the Deacon Board. The woman who said that there was no mention of female leaders in the Bible, has a husband who is one of the worship leaders, and is the only one who objected to the

changes as well as to further changes in women's roles. She said that there was no mention of women leaders in the Bible. These six women do not have tertiary education.

5.6.2.1 Duration of Attendance in Church

Looking into the background of these six women, it can be seen that there are some common factors. Firstly, the length of their attendance has had an impact on them, especially the three sisters (MY, GL and SL) who have attended the church for more than twenty years. The tradition and the culture of the church have shaped their mindset in relation to the roles of men and women in the church. Until now it has been the conviction and practice in the church that men play the leading roles. The pastor-in-charge is a man, and only a man can be the Chairman of the Deacon Board. The leaders of most of the ministry departments in the church are men. The biblical principle that the church adheres to is that man was created first, and so man should be the head and the leader. They have adopted Genesis 2 as their guideline for the order of creation. Because these sisters have been in the church for a long time, the belief that men are the leaders is deeply implanted in their minds and they have no doubt about it. On the contrary, they question whether women can be leaders.

5.6.2.2 Educational Background

Another common factor is their educational background. They have not received tertiary education, and their education level might affect their perceptions. Another group of women who are also middle aged (forties to sixties), and who have attended the church for nearly twenty years, did not object to further changes. One common factor about that group is that they all have tertiary education. It is likely that those with higher education levels tend to have a more open mind and do not adhere to one mode of thinking. Given that these two groups of women have attended the church for the same number of years, the difference in their education levels might affect their way of thinking.

5.6.2.3 Impact of Husbands

Another possible factor that is worth considering is the impact of the women's husbands. The sister (MY) who said that men should still play the leading role on the Deacon Board has a husband who has all along been either the Chairman or the Vice-chairman of the Board. It is likely that the role of her husband has a great impact on her, forming her

deep-rooted belief that men are leaders and not women. Another woman (SL) commented that the Bible does not mention women leaders in the church. Her husband (Respondent DAY) was the individual who did not agree with women leading worship, as he considered that a leading role, and besides, women leaders are rarely mentioned in the Bible. They thus shared the same views. It is also highly likely that the husband's views have had an impact on this woman. It can be deduced that the formation of one's views can be influenced by those of another person, especially someone very close. Their husbands' views have great impact on many women. (Details are recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

5.6.2.4 Bias towards Changes in Women's Roles

The two women who objected to further changes in women's roles supported the existing changes, but had their biases as well. One of them (GL) did not consider that a women's role should become more important than a man's, as women should have a heart to assist and be humble. The other (SL) did not consider that women's roles had become more important, because the female pastor was playing an assisting role, and was not head of the church, while the sisters leading worship were just sharing the workload. It is evident that these women did not consider that women now played leading roles, and the changes that had been implemented were simply a matter of providing assistance. With these presuppositions, it is no wonder that they did not support further changes to the roles of women.

5.7 Women's Self-perception

Having said that more women objected to further empowerment, it can be supposed that another major factor that affects the further empowerment of the women is women themselves. How women (especially the female leaders involved in the changes and the women members) looked at the changes plays an important role in whether or not the changes are pushed to a higher plane or not. Their emotions also affect their decisions.

5.7.1 Emotions Governing Their Actions

Concerning the new role given to the female leaders, i.e., leading the worship (liturgical part), since the changes were made in 2007, only myself and one other deaconess have

performed the role on a regular basis. Recently, the other deaconess has also quitted the role, and so I have become the only female member carrying out the role. In the focus group discussion conducted with the female leaders, three mentioned that it exceeded their physical and mental ability to perform two roles at the same time, and they found that the new role brought increased pressure and was a burden to them.

The emotions and the feelings that the sisters had about this new role accounted for their attitude and responses towards it. They did not see that this was an enhanced role for them, but was instead an additional burden. They did not see that this role providing the opportunity to increase the visibility of women and increase the partnership of women in the church's ministries. S commented:

I have done it twice. For these two times, I led the singing part as well as the liturgical part of the worship. I felt good, yet I had to be in charge of so many things, I had to welcome the guest speaker and now for the chair in the worship, there are so many songs to sing. If I lead the singing part as well as the liturgical part of the worship, I have so many things to do and I can't focus, then I will be so panic-stricken. I reflected this to the department concerned, not to assign me two roles at one time, but that I prefer to play two roles separately.

Her main comment was she could not play the two roles at the same time as there were too many things to handle. SW remarked:

I did it three times. Also I did two roles together, leading the singing part as well as the liturgical part of the worship. I myself was so involved in the singing part, and I felt that I also encountered God there, but then I had to change my role suddenly, becoming like a priest and very formal. I could not shift that quickly and easily. I could not control it. I did not reject leading the liturgical part of the worship only. But they did not assign me that role any more, just assigned me to lead the singing part of the worship.

S experienced difficulty handling the two roles at the same time and switching quickly from one to another. C said:

I also did the two roles together, leading the singing part and the liturgical part of the worship. After trying it twice, I also had the same feelings as the other sisters that I was so exhausted after leading the singing part, my physical condition did not allow me to do two things at one time. It was not something about my gifts. I then asked for splitting the two roles and doing them separately. I felt more at ease then.

Physical exhaustion prevented C from handling the two roles at the same time. Another two women mentioned that they had no ability to perform the role. “Abilities” was another emergent theme in the interviews. The female leaders mentioned the word 26 times. What they referred to was the “ability” to perform the new role. However, they also stressed that it was not “abilities” that determined whether one could join the ministry or not, but that it was “gifts” that were the deciding factor. P said:

I lacked the training and I felt that I had to be in charge of so many things. Indeed sometimes after leading the singing part of the worship, I was already so exhausted. I felt I wanted to stop and do nothing more. I had no sense how I should play this role well. Maybe my gift was not there. I did it a few more times, and the worst was the last time. I was so nervous, and I was so empty minded I lost the sense of direction. I felt it was a total failure. I also expressed my fear of taking up this role to the responsible persons. Then I declined this role. I did not have self-confidence in this role.

Basically P felt she was not gifted for the role, and lacked confidence to carry it out. M commented, “After trying it once, I did not accept this role anymore. It was because I found that I had no gifts for it. I think God will give me other gifts to serve Him that would not diminish my confidence.” She too felt she lacked the gifts for this new role.

These few sister leaders all expressed a lack of confidence, abilities or gifts to handle the new role, or a lack of physical and mental strength to handle the two roles at one time. As a result, even though women are now being given the chance to lead the liturgical part of the worship, not many sisters have tried to do so or are willing to try. The lack of female leaders taking up the worship leader role has limited the impact of the empowerment of women on the congregation as a whole, as a more far-reaching measure to influence more sisters to take up the roles of worship leaders cannot be implemented. As I am the only woman who still takes the worship leader role, it is only I who demonstrate to the congregation that women have the gifts for the role; that women as a whole have more important roles; and that women can now assume the role of leadership.

The female pastor, B, was asked in the interview how she looked at the new role given to female leaders and whether women could act as chairwomen on the Deacon Board. She commented that sisters had the talent to do so, but they lacked the confidence and were

emotional. B said: “The sisters in this church are more emotional, even though they have a good sense of judgement and are rational. If they act as the chair of the Deacon Board, I don’t see any problem there. Sisters have the mental power and the heart to serve. What they lack is confidence”. “Emotional” was another emergent theme in the collected data. The female leaders in the focus group mentioned it six times. The female pastor mentioned it once. It was not mentioned by the male leaders. The female leaders also considered that women themselves were more emotional and less rational than men. As such, men are better in decision-making. P said, “It is only a feeling that as far as decision-making is concerned, men are better and give me a sense of security”. SW said, “I do not think that only men should play the role in decision-making. It might be just in our church, but there are a few men who are really good in analytical thinking. And I really do appreciate their decision-making ability”.

“Emotional” runs counter to “rational”, so in other words, based on the observation of the female pastor, female leaders are governed by their emotions rather than their reason in making decisions. This tallies with the opinions about their new role voiced by the female leaders in the focus group discussion. They commented that this new role had given them additional pressure and burdens, which was an expression of feelings, and they did not see it as a great opportunity to enhance the roles of women themselves. They also opined that it exceeded their physical abilities to perform two roles at the same time, and showed that they had no ability to do so. Their opinions reflected that their psychological barrier, or the emotional side, prohibited them from trying new things or accepting new challenges.

Similarly, in relation to the new role given to the female pastor, the female pastor B commented that this was extra work and she did not see it as an effective way to shepherd the congregation. As such, she did not take up the new task with enthusiasm, but instead treated it as a new responsibility that she had to carry. B said:

I was worried. As I had my workload and I had one more task now, i.e. to preach. You know when you preach the message of God on the pulpit, you have to spend more time on that. I cannot work it perfunctorily. I need to prepare my draft three weeks before I preach. In these three weeks, I also need to cope with the existing workload and handle some unexpected urgent matters. It is a burden. How can I feel good?

The feeling that this was an extra workload on top of the existing one meant that the

female pastor lacked enthusiasm in taking up the new task.

5.7.2 Laziness Preventing Pushing Beyond the Boundaries

When B was asked whether she was suppressed in carrying out her different tasks or in exploring new tasks, she replied in the negative, saying instead that she was given a free hand to do different things. B said, “I won’t think this way as I have many choices. The only thing that matters is whether I want to do it or not”. B did not, however, take the initiative in adopting new roles as, firstly, she had to know beforehand what the “men” thought, and secondly, she said that she was “lazy” sometimes. B said, “So far, not much constraint has been put on me. If I need to persuade the group of men to do something, I lack the initiative to do so as I am rather lazy. I am lazy and I do not want to do this”. “Laziness” was another emergent theme in the collected data, with B using the word five times in the interview. She was the only one to do so. From what the female pastor said, it was evident that she still considered that “men” were the leaders whom she had to follow. B said, “I need to see what the pastor-in-charge is doing, and what the deacons are doing, before I tell myself what I can do”. Secondly, she was “lazy” and she did not want to be more proactive in exploring new tasks. Similar to the “emotional” side of the sister leaders, the “laziness” of the female pastor poses a barrier, which prohibits her from reaching further and doing more.

In summary, the congregation’s views and the leaders’ views play an important role in the further empowerment of women in my church, and the leaders’ views particularly count for a great deal in setting the direction of the church. The concept of “headship” shapes the theological views of the leaders, and the mindset of women themselves also plays an important part in the process of further empowerment. All the factors are interconnected and also mutually reinforce one another. The headship concept, inherited from the Association and also followed strictly by the leaders, especially the women leaders themselves, has become a decisive factor in prohibiting the further empowerment of women. The strict adherence to the particular understanding of the Bible brought by the Association, and the Chinese tradition and culture of upholding and preserving the long-term tradition and practice have also made it difficult to make a radical change to the inherent culture, and thus push forward the further empowerment of women.

Part 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 6: Tradition and Culture

Jesus, like every human being since Adam, arrives in the midst of not just “Culture” but a culture, a specific cultural tradition of a family, a language, a people, a nation. He is not Jesus, full stop-he is not Jesus the Son of God or even just Jesus the Messiah. He is Yeshua bar-Yosef, Jesus Joseph’s son. He was a cultural being. If he had not been, he would not have been a human being at all. (Crouch, 2008, p.135)

This statement illustrates well that we are all born in a culture, and not just as isolated human beings. Jesus was also born into a culture. Here Crouch notes the importance of culture because we are all shaped by it. Culture shapes our identities, our ways of thinking and doing, and each nation, each tribe, each community and each family has its own culture. We are all brought up in a particular culture and the culture forms our view about ourselves and the community, nation, and the world in which we live.

In *Furthering Humanity*, Timothy Jervis Gorringe writes:

Human beings, says Clifford Geertz in a famous image, are animals suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun. “Culture” is the name for those webs. It is what we make of the world, materially, intellectually and spiritually. ...Culture, we can say, is concerned with the spiritual, ethical and intellectual significance of the material world. It is, therefore, of fundamental theological concern. (Gorringe, 2004, p.3)

Following what has been discussed in the previous two chapters, I discuss in this chapter the importance leaders attached to the culture and tradition of the church. These are two emergent themes from the interviews that are closely related and that merit further analysis and discussion. Based on Nvivo findings, the theme “culture” had 81 reference points. Another theme, “tradition”, had 31 reference points. The female pastor mentioned culture the most, nearly 40 times in the interview. What she meant by culture was the traditional culture, the culture of the Association, the culture of the church, the social culture, the pop culture, and the culture in which men played the dominant role. This suggests that she was very sensitive to the culture of my church and the one most influenced by the culture of the church. Pastor B commented:

There are some constraints for me in a male-dominated church. I know this reality. But I know I still have choices about whether I want to do it and how I can do it. My choice is to wait for the change of the culture or simply wait till they make progress themselves. Many brothers need to make progress.

She would only be subject to the culture if it sounded reasonable to her, and she elaborated as follows:

It's like being an outsider observing their culture. I would think if the culture can be applicable nowadays. I would not care for something too outdated. For example, like they said to me that the woman pastor could not preach, I would think, you male pastor, would be too overloaded. But this is your culture and I would respect it. And I also could choose not to do it. Also for the chairman of the Deacon Board, I would judge if what he said was reasonable. If what he said was unreasonable, I would not care about culture. So the culture has not restricted my roles that much. To put it in a nutshell, I don't care what others are doing, I only care what I can do, and then I do it.

Female Pastor B was greatly influenced by the culture of the church, as she took great care in observing it. When she considered that the culture was unreasonable, she would choose to ignore it, or wait till the culture changed. The female pastor was not brought up in our church. She came in 2002 and has served in our church for sixteen years. When the interview was conducted in 2014, she had been in our church for twelve years. What struck her the most or had the greatest impact on her was the culture.

Pastor-in-charge N also paid attention to the culture of the church, and was cautious about the changes in church. When asked about the ordination of women, he commented:

If our church ordains a woman pastor, it might not just be a theological issue, but also a cultural issue. No matter what the church does, it involves a cultural issue. Even though it is acceptable from the biblical point of view, it is not acceptable yet culturally. Then it will cause great disputes in the church. So we will ask if the changes are a must, if it is a must, then we must change; if the change is not immediate, and can be delayed for a while, then why not do it later?

As can be seen, the two pastors who were outsiders of the church, were cautious about the "culture" and "tradition" of the church. They respected these and had no intention of changing these two foundations of the church, in order to avoid disputes and chaos.

6.1 The Tradition and Culture in My Church

In *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (Bennett, 2018, p.106), states:

Tradition is a key religious word, carrying etymologically the meaning of “handing on”, but also of “handing over”. ... It is living and evolving, inextricably embedded in a communal life that contains narratives, symbols and praxis. These dimensions facilitate a construction of theological identity sustained over time”. (p.106)

In short, tradition is something that is handed on and handed over, and it constructs the theological identity of a congregation. In my church, the tradition has been handed on by the Association, and includes the importance attached to the Bible and male domination.

In the Baptist tradition, the Bible is the foundation of everything. In the case of my church, this tradition refers specifically to the Association. As discussed in Chapter 4 — Factors Enabling the Empowerment of Women — the most important enabling factor was that the changes did not violate biblical teachings. The leaders and the congregation considered that the female pastor speaking in the worship and the sisters leading the liturgical part of the service were not in violation of the teachings of the Bible. According to the frequency of those themes in different interviews or the source material, the third most frequent theme was “Bible”, with 129 reference points in six sources. It can be seen that the leaders attach great importance to the use of the Bible. The congregation also treats the Bible with great deference. In the Baptist tradition, the Bible is considered error-free and we are taught to find guidance in it for whatever we do, with the church finding direction therein for whatever policies they adopt.

Owing to the said tradition, what has been passed on has become the culture in our church. One aspect of the culture that exists in our church is that men play the leading roles, or are assumed to play the leading roles. Not only must the Chairman of the Deacon Board be a man, as is stated clearly in the Constitution, it is also assumed that men will play the leading roles in the various departments of ministries. If there are both men and women chosen to be leaders of the departments of ministries, men are assumed to take the leading role and women are assumed to play a supporting part. Under circumstances where there are no men for the posts, women will take up those roles. This culture of male dominance has always existed in our church. There is no dispute about it, and the congregation has

lived with it. The longer one stays in the church, the firmer becomes one's support for this culture. The only exceptional case is the cell groups. There are nine cell groups in our church, and five of them have female leaders. Four out of these five groups only have women leaders. The cell group in our church is the only community where leaders are not chosen because of their gender, but because of their gifts and commitment. However, as stated in Chapter 5 on factors inhibiting the further empowerment of women, the concept of "headship" has had great impact on the leaders, and they thus consider that the ultimate leaders in our church must be men, i.e., the Pastor-in-charge and the Chairman of the Deacon Board. This ideology leads to continuous male dominance in our church.

Another aspect of the culture that exists in our church is that the views of leaders carry weight. In the changes to women's roles in our church, the leaders' views played an important part. In the interviews conducted with the pastors, the Chairman of the Deacon Board and the women who lead the worship all had favourable views on the changes in women's roles. They unanimously agreed that they were not in violation of the teachings of the Bible and they supported the changes. They therefore gave the green light and so the changes proceeded smoothly. When it came to further changes, they had their reservations and did not fully agree to them, and so there was no further progress and the changes in women's roles could only reach a certain point. Most of the policies carried out in our church are initiated by the leaders, in other words, the deacons and the deaconesses, or to be precise, the Chairman of the Deacon Board, the Pastor-in-charge and the female pastor. Seldom do we have suggestions raised by the congregation for changes to policies or about the implementation of new policies. Our church practices a top-down model in its daily operations. This is not because our church is so oppressive that it refuses to accept proposals from the congregation, but rather because our congregation simply entrusts the policy-making authority to the Deacon Board. They have total trust and absolute confidence in the proposals and decisions made by the Deacon Board. The leaders in our church have been exemplary in many areas and are looked upon as role models most of the time. As a result, the leaders always have the greater and the final say in most if not all the policies and developments in our church. Their views have great impact on the congregation in that their views usually become the views of the congregation.

The congregation always follows the decisions of the leaders. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, they seldom make any proposals concerning the policies of the church. Seldom have we received any objection to any proposals or decisions made by the Deacon Board. The congregation is rather passive and obedient and always adheres to the tradition that our church has been practicing. At the AGM, the congregation simply attends and listens to the presentations of the Deacons, and seldom asks any questions. For the voting on agenda items, nearly 90 percent endorse all the items. It has always been peaceful at the AGM. This is an illustration of typical Chinese culture, where the junior always shows respect to the senior, and people are observant of the hierarchical order. Our church is also exemplary in manifesting these characteristics of typical Chinese culture.

Chinese immigrants in the United States are usually confronted with two different sets of values and beliefs. Many immigrants are forced to choose between the independence demanded by American society and the submission to authority and family demanded by Chinese society, between the high value of innovation in a capitalist society and the value of tradition and repetition in an agrarian society, and between self-expression in the form of argument and the value of saving face and preserving harmony. (Palinkas, 1988, p.127)

In this quotation, what Palinkas describes is the conflict between the first generation of immigrants to the U.S. and the second generation who were born and bred in U.S. culture. The differences between these two generations are so obvious: one adhering to Chinese culture with its various characteristics, and the other embracing western culture. Palinkas has described correctly the characteristics of Chinese culture, including submission to authority, emphasis on the value of tradition, and “preserving harmony”. These descriptions also fit the culture of the congregation in my church. As discussed above, the congregation is obedient to the leaders’ views and strictly follows the decisions made by the leaders. They doubtless have total confidence in the decisions made by the leaders, yet the complete lack of opposition in my church is also indicative of Chinese culture. That is, the congregation always shows respect to authority. This is most obviously seen in the respect shown to the pastors. The pastors are seldom challenged or criticized, and are always held in respect. Not only the pastors, but the leaders on the Deacon Board are respected by the congregation. Those who like to challenge the decisions made by the Deacon Board do not stay in the church. This is not because the Deacon Board is so totalitarian that they do not welcome opposition views; it is rather that the ones who like to challenge the decisions of the Deacon Board find they are not in tune with the overall

culture in my church. It is a culture of “harmony”, in which an atmosphere of “harmony” is upheld.

It has always been the practice of the Deacon Board that unanimous votes are sought for whatever policies or developments are to be implemented. They prefer unanimous agreement, not a majority vote. They consider a unanimous vote is indicative of the will and the work of God. With unanimous votes, there will be more peace and harmony, and fewer disputes. It can thus be seen that conflict is not a preferred choice in my church, for in all circumstances, the leaders and the congregation as a whole prefer harmony. This mindset is reflective of Chinese culture.

Another cultural aspect is the upholding and the preservation of tradition. The most obvious example is the upholding of the tradition of male-dominance. Not only do the male leaders themselves uphold this tradition, but the female leaders do also. As for the congregation, women who have been in the church for over twenty years uphold this tradition even more, and reject further enhancement of women’s roles, in terms of the final or ultimate leading positions. This tradition of male-dominance also echoes Mary Chung’s statement that “while men today account for only 40 percent of church membership in most Chinese churches, both church tradition and Chinese culture have traditionally assigned church leadership roles primarily to men” (Chung, 2005, p.216). This has been the case in many Chinese churches where males play the dominant roles. For my church, the tradition and culture is male leadership, which has also affected the roles of women for many years. However, women do not reject this culture and tradition. On the contrary, they also have the internalised conviction that they should be subordinate to men. In Chapter 5, “Factors Inhibiting the Further Empowerment of Women”, the findings reveal that female leaders share the conviction that men should be playing the leading role, such as SW, who said, “On the symbolic aspect, men are the head, and so I agree that men be the leaders”. M said, “We have a bottom line here. Unless the situation becomes so severe, and all the brothers are gone. I will only accept that sisters take up the leading roles in that situation.” C said, “I incline to have brothers play the leading roles. Nowadays in our church, many sisters take up the leading roles in different departments. I don’t think that the situation is ideal. I still prefer that men and women cooperate and men still play the leading roles. I think this is the most ideal situation.” Apart from the female leaders, and as discussed in

Chapter 5, more women are opposed to further empowerment of women. There are different reasons behind their opposition, but one significant reason is that the tradition and culture of the church have shaped their ideology, since most of the women objecting to women's further empowerment have been in church for over twenty years. The internalised enculturation of these women also echoes Mary Chung's point that "as women, they are psychologically and culturally oriented to subordinate and supportive roles in church" (Chung, 2005, p.220).

The women have never doubted this practice or questioned it. They consider that this is the tradition of the church and so it must be preserved. The longer they stay in the church, the stronger become the convictions they have about the male leadership. They are satisfied with the status quo and have no intention of breaking from this. Changes bring instability, and so if there is no absolute need, it is preferable to remain the same.

6.2 Who Decides the Tradition and Culture?

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, a particular culture exists in our church. Its features are the importance of the Bible, and of the male leadership, the importance and the impact of the leaders' views, and the obedience of the congregation.

We are a church that was planted by the Association. The Association sent missionaries to Hong Kong to establish churches more than fifty years ago. They came from the Northern Baptist tradition. In the Baptist tradition, the Bible is considered error-free and the book of guidance and principles for us to follow. We have adopted this tradition and are encouraged to read the Bible each and every day. Sunday School courses are organized in our church on a regular basis for all ages. Children, youngsters, adults and the elderly all attend the Sunday School, the main purpose of which is to study the Bible and know it well. The attendance rate is really high, and nearly the whole congregation attends.

Apart from the importance attached to the Bible in the Baptist tradition, we have also followed the teachings of the Association. One of the teachings was the role assigned to women in church. To this end, the pastors of the Association wrote a paper stating their point of view about the role of women nearly thirty years ago. They used 1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV): "The head of the woman is man", and also 1 Timothy 2: 11-14 (NIV): "A

woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner”.

These few verses written by Paul are very patriarchal. Phrases like “full submission”, “do not permit”, “must be silent” are like the demands from a master to a servant. The Association chose these patriarchal statements written by Paul to define the roles of women. The theological justification behind this was that Adam was formed first, and that it was the woman who was deceived and first became a sinner. The choice of biblical statements was biased, and did not reflect a balanced view. Moreover, only Paul’s statements were adopted, whereas the equality that women experienced in the Jesus movement was not considered at all. It seems that the Association was just using a few selected statements to support their own established standpoint on women, based on their particular interpretation of the Bible.

Against this background, our church followed the teachings of the Association on the roles of women in church closely. It taught that the head of woman is man, and so to comply with this headship concept, the ultimate leaders must be men. The final or ultimate leaders refer to the spiritual leader and the administrative leader. Before the changes were implemented twelve years ago, the female pastor was not allowed to speak in the worship and women were not allowed to lead the liturgical part of the worship. As a result of the changes implemented, these two roles have now been assigned to women. This has been a major breakthrough. Yet with theological concepts taken by the Association to define the roles of women, such as the creation order, our church has been using this particular theology to justify the headship concept, and so the two final leadership roles have not been assigned to women and are still only assigned to men.

It can be seen that the impact of the Association on our church was substantial. Our church has followed the biblical interpretation of the Association all these years. The conviction has been so strong and firm that it has not been shaken. Not only do men accept this, but women do also. Even the female pastor considered that she should find out what “the men” thought about before she launched any new project. Female pastor B said, “I need to see

what the pastor-in-charge is doing, and what the deacons are doing, before I tell myself what I can do". She was the one who mentioned "culture" the most. Not brought up in our church, and as an outsider entering this culture, she is supposed to be the one with the greatest sensitivity towards the culture, and so in her observation and even practice, she knows that she should seek the opinions of men first. The female leaders also hold firm views about the roles of men and women. In terms of their mindset, the final leaders must be men, and they rule out any possibility that women can be the ultimate leaders. The women who have been in the church for more than twenty years have also rejected the idea that women can be the ultimate leaders. They consider it the tradition that men play the main leadership roles, and there is no need to change this. Moreover, some have opined that there is no mention of female leaders in the Bible.

Here we can see how the way the Association interpreted the Bible concerning women's roles, and the deference of the church leaders to this interpretation of the Bible have formed the tradition and culture in my church. The combination of western theology (the Association's theology about women's roles) and Chinese culture (obedience to authority) have made the tradition of male dominance strong and stable. This is what Mary Chung refers to when she comments that "Western theology, as a legacy of the Protestant missionary enterprise, has deeply influenced the Chinese perception of the Christian ministry" (Chung, 2005, p.151).

How the Association interpreted the Bible has evidently had great impact on the tradition and culture of our church, and its standpoint on women continues to impact most of us. There was nevertheless a danger in adopting the interpretation of the Association without reviewing it through a critical lens. There is a cultural background to many biblical passages; and failure to take into account that cultural background while interpreting the Bible can lead to misunderstandings about its meaning. When we follow the Association's interpretation of women's behaviour in 1 Timothy 2:11:12 (NIV), "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man", by taking its literal meaning and simply believing that a woman should behave like that, and without finding out about the cultural background, we might well be misinterpreting the true meaning of the text.

Much of the biblical material is presented in cultural forms that are very specific to cultural practices quite different from ours. Because of their specificity to the cultural agreements of the original hearers, these materials communicated with maximum impact to them. At the same time, this fact enormously complicates the task of the person immersed in another culture who seeks to interpret the Scripture (Kraft, 1979, p.134).

As the New Testament was written under Greco-Roman culture, and because of the cultural differences between then and now, the meanings we attribute to a particular text might be different from the original meaning the author intended in that particular time. Taking the example of 1 Timothy 2:11-12, some biblical interpreters comment that these verses refer to wives at home, where the husbands were the heads of the families and the wives had to be submissive, and do not necessarily refer to women's behaviour in churches. Some interpreters also consider that educated and high-class women who had been behaving improperly in churches had to be brought under control, and so these verses pinpoint those women and have no connection to the women who actually served in the churches. The danger of interpreting the Bible just by looking at the literal meaning is that the meaning can be distorted or biased.

A much bigger problem lies in those areas where the Scriptures use cultural symbols that are familiar to us but for which our cultural agreements are different. We are tempted to interpret according to what seems to be the "plain meaning" (p.132), and if interpretation is done naively as in the plain-meaning approach, meaningful dialogue between past revelation and present need is often prevented (p.144).

While our church adopted the biblical interpretation of the Association completely, opposite scenarios unfolded in other colonized places. One Indian Bengali Christian, for example, has a different view about the way we inherit the biblical interpretation of the colonizing countries.

One of the methods adopted in this theology is that of decolonizing one's mind and rereading the scripture. This rereading of scripture, an act of defiance and hermeneutical insubordination, has been causing a theological revolution, not only in Christianity but in other religions too. The misuse of the Bible has caused most havoc in the world and therefore the oppressed Christians of today are in the forefront of the theology of liberation (Barton, 2004, p.229).

Barton criticizes the misuse of the Bible, and encourages the re-reading of the Scripture. She considers it an act of defiance and hermeneutical insubordination. Her view echoes

that of Fiorenza (2013, pp.37-38): “Since biblical androcentric texts are recorded and told from a patriarchal point of view, it will be helpful to retell the androcentric biblical stories from the woman’s point of view”. Barton’s advocacy of the decolonisation of the views of the missionaries echoes the views of Kwok Pui-lan (1994, pp.67-68), who states as follows:

Christian triumphalism, a product of the nineteenth century missionary attitude, is still tangible both in Britain and in the Indian sub-continent. Religious imperialism operates in a “superiority-inferiority” syndrome, where the value and dignity of the “other” is not respected. Asian women theologians recognize the need to address the issues of religious pluralism and inter-faith dialogue.

The reason why there is a need to decolonize the views of the missionaries is because the missionary attitude operated as part of a superiority-inferiority syndrome, and the “other” was not respected. That might not be completely the case, yet the cultural differences between the missionaries and the colonised places, as well as the differences in the interpretation of the Bible between the Hebrew authors and the missionaries, also require a re-reading and reinterpretation of the Bible. As noted by Kwok Pui-lan, there is a need to “deconstruct the western view and reconstruct Asian identity” (Kwok, 1995, p.25) in postcolonial Hong Kong.

Barton (2004, p.226) considers that the western theological system is alien to her country and her people. She describes it as something “handed down to us in the Indian subcontinent [that] was like shoes that do not fit us”. This description captures the mismatch between the western theological system and that of the eastern one, or in this case, the Indian one.

In the view of Mukti Barton, the misuse of the Bible or the interpretation of the Bible by powerful people leads to injustice in a society, as women are always exploited in this situation. There is therefore a need to re-read the Bible from women’s perspective, or so to say, from the perspective of the powerless. Barton once came from a colonized country and was under the missionary influence, and now she seeks the decolonization of the views of the missionaries. As she puts it: “The rereading of sacred texts is not only a religious activity, but an important task in the creation of a just society. If we do not expose its misuse, scripture will continue to undermine our efforts for building a just society”

(pp.231-232).

As my church was also under great influence from the Association missionaries who brought in their interpretation of the Bible on the roles of women, the congregation had inculcated the same ideas about women's roles in the church. This formed the tradition in my church. The theological interpretation or system of the Association might not be suitable for us, but instead, as noted by Barton, rather alien.

My church has never considered the system of the Association missionaries as alien, however. My church completely adopts the theological interpretation of the Association without question. We have not tried to reinterpret the Bible, but have just adopted the teachings of the Association in the matter of women's roles in church by following the choice of the biblical texts of the Association.

Another African feminist shares how she looked at the colonization influence in her church, noting a lack of voices from women because of imperialism and paternalism. For this reason, they now feel the urge to speak for themselves. They were suppressed for so long, breaking away from the suppression and finding the right to speak became her aspiration.

The primary concern of African women has been their lack of voice in theological as well as in other discourses. This situation has largely been attributable to the legacy of imperialism and paternalism that has characterised the relationship between Westerners and Africans. African women insist that the right to speak for themselves is a necessary condition for their emancipation and must be respected by all. (Hinga, 1996, pp.27-28)

Hinga reflects that to speak for themselves is the need and urge that arise in the face of the imposition of cultural imperialism, especially the imposition of western religion. She also considers that the practice of injustice runs counter to the teachings and vision of Jesus, who put forward the foundations for equality. "Recognising the practices of injustices in church and society as a sinful betrayal of the vision of Jesus who laid a foundation for a human society characterised by equality, freedom and justice" (pp.30-31). She echoes the views of Barton that there is a need to re-read and re-evaluate the role of the Bible since "women's critique of Christianity also involves them in a critical rereading and re-evaluating of the role of the Bible as a source for Christian theology" (p.31).

These Indian and African feminists share common characteristics. Both were under colonial rule and Christianity was brought to their countries along with colonization. Christianity was thus tinted with the colour of colonization, in that the interpretation of the Bible by the missionaries had an impact on the colonized people. Both feminists seek the re-reading of and the reinterpretation of the Bible to eradicate aspects of patriarchy and uphold areas of equality. Moreover, they strive for the space to speak for themselves. How about my church? While Indian and African Christians break away from colonial influence and strive for independence, we retain the colonial influence and exercise colonized subservience by following what was given to us by the Association. Thus progress in further empowerment of women can only be made when the church breaks away from this colonial influence and subservience.

6.3 The Influence of the Association in the Use of the Bible

As stated in Chapter 1, as the church planter, the Association had authority and could use that authority to advocate their beliefs and thus influence the beliefs of church members. Their controversial beliefs towards the roles of women in churches also shaped the mindset of planted churches in Hong Kong. The beliefs held by the Association thus affected the mindset of the men who decided the fate and roles of women in my church. And the women, being so obedient, followed the teachings of the men without questioning.

However, given the difference in social and cultural backgrounds, there might be a gap between the two cultures here. As such, members of the planted churches of the Association (postcolonial subjects), while negotiating different cultural worlds constantly, have developed different views on the roles of women following the social and cultural changes over these years, especially in the roles of women in Hong Kong. Owing to the difference between two cultural worlds, there will be different views towards the same issue. The beliefs of the Association have been challenged by the thirty-two churches planted in Hong Kong; twenty-six of them changed their practice by allowing women pastors to speak and thirty of them allowed women to lead the worship. This reveals that the beliefs held by the Association towards the role of women are no longer considered applicable in the context of the Hong Kong churches, even among some of those planted by them. Change was inevitable, which also illustrates a constant negotiation between

different cultures.

Our church has been following the teachings of the Association closely all along. Changes were introduced twelve years ago after a Task Group studied the Scriptures. Now the female pastor can speak in the worship and women can lead the liturgical part of the worship. Yet the final leadership is still in the hands of male leaders. Although there are deficiencies in the interpretation of the Bible from using a few patriarchal statements of Paul without reference to the Jesus model, and there are differences in cultures, and following completely is like putting on clothes and stepping into shoes that do not fit us perfectly, we still faithfully follow the Baptist tradition laid down by the Association.

In this matter we are different from the Indian and African Christians. In the case of our church, the difference might also be due to the difference in culture. The Chinese, the main group in my church, are really obedient to authority. As Palinkas said in reference to the first generation of immigrant Chinese in the churches in the United States, our church, with its deep-rooted Chinese culture, also attaches great importance to harmony and obedience to higher authority. Therefore it is not in the culture of the Chinese to challenge authority. The culture is instead to be obedient, submissive and follow completely those with higher authority.

6.4 The Impact of the Tradition and Culture

In short, the tradition and culture in my church have shaped the mindset of the leaders and the congregation, which in turn affects the operation of the church. The strong missionary influence of the Association, coupled with the typical Chinese culture of obeying authority, led us into a state where we have not reinterpreted the biblical statements in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 about the roles of women, but still follow the interpretation of the Association without decolonizing their view. As a result, the roles of women are still defined and confined in more or less the same way the Association defined and confined them. Although there has been a major breakthrough, in terms of which the female pastor is finally able to speak in the worship, and the female leaders are able to lead the liturgical part of the worship, the roles of final leadership can still only be taken up by men, because this is the conviction of the leaders and the congregation, based on the interpretation of the Bible given by the Association.

In *Rethinking the Church*, White (2003, p.143) mentions that “most people initially confuse tradition with orthodoxy”. This is also the case in my church, where people consider the tradition to be orthodoxy, and never question or criticize. The tradition of male leadership has indeed been implanted in the minds of everybody, and nobody will challenge it. White further argues that “institutions are a bit different. There change comes a bit more slowly” (p.142). He explains that there are different groups of people with different ideas towards changes in an institution, and one group of people is resistant. “They don’t want to change. The resistant feel that things should stay the way they are and that the church should stay the way they are and that the church should do things the way it always has” (p.146). These statements explain the situation in my church where the women are the resisters, and resist the changes because, as stated here, they feel that things should stay the way they are and the church should keep the tradition. In fact, the tradition and the culture were formed by the Association.

The reason why the ideology and practice of male domination cannot be transformed is mainly because of the tradition and culture in my church, laid down by the Association, which has its own interpretation of the Bible. Thus the missionary influence has had a great impact in shaping the tradition and culture of my church. Yet its interpretation is flawed and requires re-examination. As pointed out by Mukti Barton (2004, p.229), “the misuse of the Bible has caused the most havoc in the world and therefore the oppressed Christians of today are in the forefront of the theology of liberation”. Yet our church leaders have not doubted the interpretation of the Bible by the Association, and have instead followed it completely. This is different from other colonized countries that have made great effort in breaking away from the influence of the missionaries, as described in relation to Barton from Indian Bengali, or Hinga from Kenya. Hinga (1996, pp.27-28) comments that “the primary concern of African women has been their lack of voice in theological as well as in other discourses. This situation has largely been attributable to the legacy of imperialism”. She points out the problem, whereas our church leaders have not done so. The female pastor and the sister leaders never considered that they had been robbed of their voices. One of the reasons behind this can also be tradition and culture. Yet in this instance, it is not only the tradition and culture established by the Association, but also the Chinese tradition and culture in terms of which people always respect those from the hierarchy, be

it parents in families, seniors in offices, teachers in schools and so on. Therefore, in my church, the congregation follows the leaders and the leaders follow the instruction laid down by the Association. As such, our male-dominated culture and female-subordinate tradition have not been transformed. Even though the female pastor can finally speak in the worship and the female leaders can lead the liturgical part of the worship, the final leadership remains with men.

Chapter 7: Has Progress in Empowerment Been Made?

Having discussed the various factors enabling or inhibiting the empowerment of women in my church, I now discuss if progress in empowerment of women has been made since the changes in worship. I refer to the different perspectives discussed in Chapter 2, “The Conceptual Framework of Empowerment”, for the evaluation and interpretation of women’s empowerment in my church. The way to look at women’s empowerment in my church, being a Chinese congregation with Baptist missionary influence, needs to be broadened to take into account the complexity of postcolonial women’s experience in Hong Kong, different forms of women’s agency, the interplay of authority and power, and the force of Chinese tradition and culture.

7.1 The Conceptual Framework for Interpreting the Findings

The literature used in Chapter 2, “The Conceptual Framework of Empowerment”, will be employed to engage with the findings of the research in this chapter and the next, so as to enhance the understanding of empowerment.

Firstly, those factors of empowerment covered in the sociological analysis in Chapter 2 will be used as a perspective from which to evaluate the kind of empowerment found in my congregation. These factors include the awareness of one’s subordinate position, followed by a shift in perception, a transformation of the ideology and practice of domination, as well as a gathering of the inner force with which to construct one’s identity.

Brasher identified the interplay of authority and power in conservative Protestant congregations in USA. The situation is similar to my church, a Baptist missionary congregation in postcolonial Hong Kong. She points to a situation where one can exercise power or be empowered without holding any posts of authority. I also evaluate the situation in my church to see if women can exercise power or even be empowered without holding posts of authority.

Following the line of thought of Brasher, Herring’s study on informal leadership in an African Methodist Episcopal church shares similarities with Brasher’s idea of “authority

without power” or “power without authority”. Informal leaders can still exert influence on people even without authority and power. They are different from the formal leadership, who can only exert influence on people employing formal authority and power. I also explore through the findings whether women can exert influence on others even if they do not hold the highest positions of authority.

Secondly, from a contextual perspective, Mary Chung’s portrait of female leadership in Chinese churches describes well the scenario in my church. As mentioned by Chung, the Chinese churches in Asia (Hong Kong being one of these) exhibit a combination of western theology and Chinese culture, the tradition and culture of male domination, the male domination of the pulpit, women’s internalised enculturation, an open attitude of the congregation towards women roles, and a shifting attitude towards women’s ordination. All these features are found in my church and they are clearly demonstrated in the research findings.

Thirdly, from a postcolonial perspective, Angela Wong’s postcolonial theology of women explores the multiplicity of women’s experiences and the complexity of women’s agency, including the paths of accommodation, negotiation and resistance. To gain power, there is a process of negotiation. Through the process of negotiation, a new identity can be built. Given the multiplicity of women’s experiences, the negotiation process itself is contradictory and complex. This too aligns with the complex situation of women in my church in the process of empowerment. Fourthly, from the feminist perspective, Fiorenza’s theology of visibility and Wu’s theology of equal partnership are also important for understanding women’s empowerment in my church.

7.2 On Empowerment

With reference to the findings from the interviews and the questionnaires, I can say that progress in empowerment has been made. It affects those people directly involved in the changes as well as the congregation. The impact was not only on females, but also on males.

Based on the findings of the questionnaire completed by the congregation, nearly all of the members commented that there had been female subordination all along. As a starting

point, the congregation had an awareness of female subordination. According to this group, the changes signified elevation of females from being subordinate to playing more leading roles in worship. The awareness of female subordination in worship also became a positive supporting factor pushing forward the changes to women's roles in worship.

The shift in perception relates to preconceived ideas of what women are and have always been. With the introduction of the changes, the subordinate position of women was elevated. The female leaders and the congregation considered that when a woman lead the worship, the role signifies that of a priest, as stated in the Bible. The role of a priest is to act as a channel to bring people to God, as described in Leviticus 8-10. In these few chapters, it is stated clearly that the priests offered sacrifices to God for people as atonement or thanksgiving. In this way, the priests acted as the middleperson in forging a closer link between God and His people. Women who lead the liturgy in the worship in my church are like the priests offering the sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus, in that they are bringing people to God through the practice of liturgies. Therefore, the roles of women have become more important. The congregation also considered that particular role a leadership role. Thus leadership was not confined to males, but could be open to females as well. Moreover, men also discovered the gifts of women through this change, as they saw that women (a few sisters who had led the liturgical part of the worship once or twice and myself) could take on the role of worship leader, and do it well. All these new understandings led to a shift in perception. According to Sharma, "Empowerment involves a shift in perception. This shift in perception, a spiritual empowerment, has resulted in action. With the new awareness, women take on even stronger public roles, negotiate with more confidence and find ways to work together" (Sharma, 2003, p.11). The shift in perception helps women negotiate with more confidence. (Details of the views of the congregation are recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents and Appendix VII: Statistical Findings from the Questionnaires.)

Empowerment also involves a transformation of the ideology and practice of domination and subordination. This means challenging and transforming the existing power structure. According to Acharya, "the final goal is to transform the ideology and practice of domination and subordination" (Acharya, 2008, p.73). Before the changes were introduced, the female pastor could not preach and sisters could not lead worship. This was a system of

domination and subordination in worship, based on ideology drawn from the interpretation of the roles of the two sexes in the Bible. With the introduction and implementation of changes that challenged the practice of domination and subordination in worship, a new structure emerged where females were no longer in a subordinate role. Females could take the same roles as males in terms of preaching and leading worship. This new structure has been a challenge to the past practice of domination and subordination in worship. The female pastor and female leaders gain power in the pulpit, once dominated by males only. This also links up with the idea brought forth by Brasher about “authority and power” (1998, p.75). Women have surely gained power here. Women now are considered as priests as stated above. The role of priests is important to the congregation. They are the middleperson forging a link with God. This is also a manifestation of power. Women need not obtain a post higher than men or secure the positions of the highest authority to have an impact on others.

Fiorenza, speaks of the “ekklesia” of women (1996, p.10) as a means of “making women visible as active participants and leaders in the Church”. Through the changes in my church, the visibility of women thus became greater. In the pulpit, and in the worship, women were seen more, and seen to be in an equal position to men. In the past, only men were seen preaching; nowadays, the female pastor is also seen preaching. The same applies to the liturgical part of the worship; in the past, only men were seen leading here, now women can also do so. It is not only that women are now more visible, this change also signifies equal partnership between men and women. Rose Wu, mentioned earlier, talks about “equal gardeners” (2003, p.85) The term “equal gardeners” represents the idea that both men and women have the same duty to work in the kingdom of God as they are equally the creation of God. Therefore, men and women should be in partnership, with equal distribution of work. Sex should not lead to any difference in role distribution. After the changes, not only are women becoming more visible, they are equal in partnership with men in sharing the workload of preaching and in leading the liturgical part of the worship.

The changes not only empowered the female pastor and the women leading the liturgical part of the worship, they also had an impact on the congregation as a whole. Church members consider that women are equal to males in position and importance now. They consider that the two roles (preaching and leading worship) are important, as they are

leading roles. In other words, women have become leaders. Furthermore, the gifts of women in leading worship are witnessed and recognized. As a result, the congregation gained a new understanding of women's roles and considered that women became more important. Among those holding this new view, most were females. The changes themselves led the congregation to build a new image of women and helped them gain a new understanding of the gifts of women, and the perception they once had was thus transformed. The impact on women was greater than that on men. Women considered that they themselves could now take up leadership roles and the changes affected the way they looked at themselves as well. In the past, under the influence of the tradition and culture of the church, women would always look at men as leaders and would be content to take a more subordinate position. But now, with the breakthrough successfully implemented, they look at the female pastor preaching and the women leading worship as a major step forward and a new milestone in the church. This also empowers them, as they see that women now play leading roles and are in equal partnership with men. They also have a new image and think that as leaders, women have a greater say in the decision-making. They also think that this constitutes a change in the power structure, with decision-making no longer the exclusive province of men. This links up with Brasher's ideas about authority and power. The women in the congregation have not been given any authority, yet when they have a new understanding of women and have a shift in perception about women, they too have been empowered. (All these opinions are recorded in detail in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire and Appendix VII: Statistical Findings from the Questionnaires.)

When the female pastor and female leaders stand in the pulpit, once dominated by men, they have gained a new identity, the identity of a leader. In the eyes of the congregation, especially the women, the female leaders on the pulpit have established themselves as leaders, equal to men and with a greater say in decision making, even though they are not equal in authority in structural terms and are still subject to male final leadership. This search for and building of identity have been the product of a process of negotiation. Angela Wong calls identity "a process" (p.95) and speaks of "the negotiating subject in process" (Wong, 2002, p.118). Here the process refers the journey of my awareness of women's subordination and the fight for women's visibility in the pulpit. The process included also the growing awareness of the women leaders when they realized that they

were like priests in the pulpit, conducting the liturgy, or as one of the worship leaders, SW, commented: “The worship leader is like a priest bringing the congregation to God. And so the role is very important.”

The impact on the congregation has been substantial. Women used to think that the pulpit belonged exclusively to men, so the changes to women’s roles in worship have reversed “their internalised enculturation that as women they are psychologically and culturally oriented to subordination and supportive roles in church and society” (Chung, 2005, p.220). Women standing in the pulpit symbolize the image of leadership and the congregation has experienced a shift in perception themselves. Thus one of the female respondents, FA, commented that once sisters were empowered, “their roles [became] more important.” Another female respondent JL, stated that women’s position had become more important because they could now play a leading role.

7.3 On Further Empowerment

According to the survey results, nearly all the congregation members agreed with the changes in women’s roles, and a majority agreed with the idea of further changes, in other words, further empowerment of women. These changes include the ordination of the woman pastor and the possibility of having a chairlady on the Deacon Board (although these further changes were not clearly specified in the questionnaire). As mentioned above, the changes in women’s roles had greater impact on women than on men. However, there were more women who objected to further changes than men. While the women in my church are still very conservative, the trend has been changing over the past few decades in Hong Kong in the matter of the ordination of women. More and more women have been ordained. According to Mary Chung, “by 2004, the total number has increased to at least eighty women pastors ordained by over twenty-two denominations and independent churches in Hong Kong” (Chung, 2005, p. 227). In my church, based on the findings of the questionnaire, all but six sisters and two brothers accepted the possibility of further changes. It can be seen that more women opposed further change than men. For those opposing further change, three had been in the church between eighteen and twenty years, while the other three had been in the church for a shorter period. Nevertheless, the majority of the congregation supported further change. (The data is also recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire and Appendix VII: Statistical Findings from the

Questionnaires.)

Moreover, there is also a difference between how the congregation, the female pastor and the female leaders responded to the changes. The congregation welcomed the changes, believing that the status of women had been elevated from subordinate to leading roles and they now had a new understanding and perception of the gifts of the women. The female members considered that the sisters became leaders when they became worship leaders and thus also had greater say and decision-making power. In spite of all this positive feedback, the lack of enthusiastic participation by the female leaders in leading the liturgical aspects of the worship has hindered the progress of empowerment. They have not been enthusiastic because some said that they did not have the necessary gifts. One of the worship leaders, P, said, “I lacked the training and I felt that I had to be in charge of so many things. I had no sense how I should play this role well. Maybe my gift was not there.” Another worship leader, M, commented, “After trying it once, I did not accept this role anymore. It was because I found that I had no gifts for that.”

The congregation was more open-minded towards further changes, since a majority of the congregation (especially the younger generation) welcomed further changes. They also accepted the idea of women chairing the Deacon Board, provided that there was a capable sister who could take up the task. Moreover, the findings of the interviews and the questionnaires showed that male leaders were more open to further empowerment than female leaders. The men were willing to ordain the female pastor as they saw this as recognition of her role in shepherding the congregation. By contrast, female leaders were more conservative, and did not agree with the ordination of the female pastor unless the male pastor had been ordained first. With regard to electing a chairlady to the Deacon Board, the male leaders considered this a last resort should there be no male candidate for the position, while the female leaders firmly rejected even this possible arrangement. Among the congregation, more females objected to further changes than males. (The details of the views of the leaders are recorded in Chapter 5: Factors Inhibiting the Further Empowerment of Women, and the views of the congregations are recorded in Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents.)

There was stronger opposition to further empowerment from women. This resembles Chung's discussions about Chinese women, especially in Asia, who "find it difficult to overcome their internalised enculturation that as women they are psychologically and culturally oriented to subordination and supportive roles in church and society" (2005, p.220). The female leaders or some of the female members of the congregation have an internalised opinion that men should be the leaders, especially the final leaders, no matter what the circumstances. This is a deep-rooted belief. This belief is also shaped by the tradition and culture of male domination in my church.

The church leaders agreed to and supported the changes on the basis of the biblical teaching that God created men and women differently and equally. They considered that women could play leading roles and yet they still upheld the belief or conviction that it should be a man (the ultimate leader) who led the church. In relation to further empowerment, they agreed to the ordination of the female pastor, provided she was under the leadership of a male pastor. There should also be careful discussion beforehand, and the congregation must have knowledge and understanding about the issue of ordination. Concerning whether there could be a chairlady on the Deacon Board, most did not agree with the idea, as they thought that the head should be a man. The role of chairman of the Deacon Board has a symbolic meaning, which signifies the head of the church. Yet the male leaders were open enough to say that should there be a need for the Deacon Board to have a chairlady, they would initiate a discussion and amend the Constitution. The focus group, which mainly comprised the female leaders, neither supported the ordination of the woman pastor nor having a chairlady on the Deacon Board. They had a rather firm view on these issues, as they adhere to the belief that a man should be the head of the church and that there was a symbolic meaning to that role. (The details are recorded in Chapter 5: Factors Inhibiting the Further Empowerment of Women.)

As can be seen from the above, the leaders' views counted for a lot in the empowerment process. With their unanimous support, there was success; without their unanimous support, there would have been failure. Yet it can be seen that the strongest objection to further empowerment came from sister leaders.

Based on the above analysis, there was also a difference between the opinions of the

congregation and the leaders. The congregation was more open towards women's roles. As Mary Chung states: "While the views are divided, most men and women in Chinese churches are open to accept the authority and leadership of women" (Chung, 2005, p.220).

However, the leaders were more conservative. They adhered to the tradition and culture of male domination. As Chung mentioned, "both church tradition and Chinese culture have traditionally assigned church leadership roles primarily to men. The Church in general is male-oriented with a reluctance to include women leadership" (Chung, 2005, p.216). There was also an ambivalent attitude towards women's ordination among leaders. This echoes what Chung has stated: "the attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese churches are shifting significantly towards women pastors and to women being ordained as ministers" (Chung, 2005, p.152).

The tradition and culture Chung discussed in her book *Chinese Women in Christian Ministry* reflects the situation of most Chinese churches, including my church. Therefore, in relation to the issue of women holding the highest position, the leaders are very hesitant and ambivalent. Their views about women's leadership and ordination are shaped by the theology of the western missionaries and Chinese culture. This point resonates with Chung's finding that "Western theology, as a legacy of the Protestant missionary enterprise, has deeply influenced the Chinese perception of the Christian ministry" (Chung, 2005, p.151).

7.4 Diverging Views among Women

There was a difference in perception about empowerment between myself and the few women who were also involved in the change. When I thought fighting for the empowerment of women was a realization of the increased visibility of women in church and equal partnership, as per the feminist perspective of Fiorenza and Wu, the few women who were involved in the change did not see it the same way. The female pastor commented that preaching in worship was not an effective way for her to shepherd the congregation. The sisters commented that they did not have the gifts to lead the liturgical part of the worship. It would appear that they are not so keen for more visibility or equal partnership in church.

It is not only that there is a difference in perceptions of empowerment, but there is also a divergence in how we view the empowerment that has occurred. From the comments and responses given by the female pastor and the few female leaders, it is evident that they are already satisfied with what they have. They remarked that females had ample opportunities to serve in different roles, many of which were leadership roles, such as cell group leaders and heads of different ministries. They also considered that with the female pastor preaching and sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship, women had been empowered. They did not share my vision of a need for further empowerment of women. Furthermore, they did not see the need to secure higher positions for empowerment.

Here it is obvious that there is a “multiplicity of women’s experiences” (Wong, 2002, p. 63). I had my experience of suppression when denied the chance to lead the worship because of my gender, while the female pastor and female leaders did not have that experience. They did not have the experience of suppression and therefore they did not see the need to seek empowerment as I did. They did not resist the lack of female visibility and equal partnership in the pulpit, or the prohibition against women taking up the top leadership posts or being ordained. The difference in experiences led to different perceptions of the same issue.

In retrospect, the changes have empowered the stakeholders and the congregation, especially the women. Progress has been made, but there still is room for further development if the situation allows. Owing to the strong opposition raised by women leaders and some women members in the congregation towards further empowerment, the empowerment could not progress to another plane as not all were prepared for this change or had the enthusiasm to alter the tradition and culture of my church. However, the empowerment process did awake them to an understanding that the new roles given to women symbolize the growing importance of women in my church, which is equivalent to that of the priest. This is a new perception for them, but unfortunately not all have participated in pushing it to a further horizon. These differences in perceptions, leading to different degrees of participation and a lack of concerted effort in taking changes to a higher level, has inhibited further progress in the empowerment process. Indeed, the empowerment process itself is complex and diverse; there is no single route with only one

destination at the end.

Therefore, there is also “a wide range of actions—accommodation, negotiation and resistance” (Wong, 2002, p.93). Apart from the complexity of women’s experience mentioned above, there are also different actions taken by women as can be seen above. The female leaders have opted for “accommodation”, feeling satisfied with what they have and fitting themselves well into the structure. Some female members of the congregation have also adopted this stance of “accommodation”, while I have been the one resisting the structure and seeking change through “negotiation”.

The process of empowerment is characterized by “indeterminacy”, and is “not determinate in any finality” (Wong, 2002, p.137), Empowerment is a process, one step after another. Nevertheless, within the process a milestone has been reached, and there might be another one in the future. Following the new perception of the women, there is a possibility that further empowerment could occur later when another opportunity for change arises. As Brasher says of the future of women in fundamentalism, “it is important to note that they can reemerge when currents shift or when the right questions are asked at the right time, making it possible for a new faith history to be born” (1998, p.88).

7.5 Conclusion

In summary, my evaluation of whether women have been empowered is based on the conceptual framework mentioned in Chapter 2. On the basis of the analysis above, progress in empowerment has been made. From the feminist perspective, the two elements of empowerment, “visibility” and “equal partnership”, have been realized. Visibility has been realized since women can now stand on the pulpit as men do, to preach and to lead the liturgical part of the worship; equal partnership has been realized in that women can serve in the same position as men in preaching and leading the liturgical part of the worship. Moreover, from a sociological perspective, one important aspect of empowerment is a shift in perception. I can see that empowerment not only concerns whether women secure more prominent positions or achieve greater authority, but is concerned with how they look at themselves, whether from a new angle, with new understanding, or with more confidence. Empowerment is also related to how the congregation looks at women, and whether they think women are now in the position of leaders; whether they look at women

as leaders; and whether they think that women have the gifts to perform the leadership roles. A shift in perception and transformation of consciousness is realized when the leaders and the congregation see that women have the gifts to serve as well as men do and that the women have become leaders as well. Everyone changes and everyone can be empowered in the empowerment process. What remains unchanged is the ideology and practice of domination and subordination, whereby the final leadership must be men. Although the power structure might not undergo substantial change, the changes in perception matter more. Empowerment lies not in holding posts of authority, as Brasher points out, since “even without posts of authority, women can still have power” (Brasher, 1998, p.75).

Since perceptions and ideology are what shape attitudes towards different issues and situations, they also affect the actions one takes in different scenarios. They are thus of paramount importance. In the empowerment journey, the new roles that the female pastor and female leaders have taken up have given the female leaders and the congregation a new perception of women and a new identity of leaders. When women are more visible in the pulpit, especially taking up roles not given to them before, they present the image of leadership, equivalent to the position of men. They have also proved capable of performing these new roles. This certainly gives the leaders and the congregation as a whole the confidence that women are as capable as men, and will shine when opportunities are given to them. This change in perception can definitely help build up the confidence people have about possible further changes in the roles of men and women.

Indeed, as with the changes of worship in my church (the woman pastor preaching and sisters leading the liturgical part of the worship), progress in women’s empowerment has already moved one big step further, as women’s visibility has been increased and they have greater share of equal partnership in worship. Moreover, the perceptions of the stakeholders (the female pastor, sister leaders and myself) and the women of the congregation have already changed, as they now see that women are becoming more important because standing in the pulpit represents a leadership role. The men also think that the women are performing the new roles well and can see the gifts of women in operation.

Once dominated by men, and “a place where visible and authoritative pastoral leadership is exercised” (Chung, 2005, p. 220), the pulpit is now also a place for women. Women can also be visible in this place, and the changes that have occurred in the pulpit are thus symbolic, as they represent a change of the structure of domination of men and subordination of women that has been in practice in worship for so long. Indeed, “women are actively at work shaping congregational life” (Brasher, 1998, p.89). The overturning of the structure of male domination and female subordination in the pulpit represents a revolution in my church.

Chapter 8: In What Ways Have Women Been Empowered?

Based on the conclusion of the previous chapter, one of the considerations when deciding whether women have been empowered is how women look at themselves and how the congregation looks at women. The question is not solely whether women have secured more prominent positions or achieved greater authority, but also how they look at themselves, whether from a new angle, with a new understanding, or with more confidence. My conclusion in the previous chapter is that progress in empowerment has been made. I will therefore analyze in this chapter the ways the woman pastor and other sister leaders (including myself) have been empowered in the process, as we are the stakeholders in the empowerment process.

8.1 The Empowerment of the Female Pastor

Female pastor B found her new preaching role a challenge at the beginning. However, with the passage of time, and as she went through the process, she changed her mindset, and developed a more positive attitude towards this role. Most importantly, she grasped the way to preach and grew in her confidence. She overcame her hurdles and was elevated to a higher plane.

When B was originally employed, she was not required to preach and she did not consider preaching an effective way to shepherd. She said:

There are two sides to look at the issue. I applied for the post in this church because there was no need to preach. It is a bit subjective. I wonder if brothers and sisters will really listen to the preaching and put it into practice. I think the percentage is rather low. Therefore I will not put much emphasis on this. Moreover, according to the tradition and culture, we think that it is men playing this role. Therefore I would rather care about individual brothers and sisters, and teach in Sunday School. This is my choice.

At the start of her preaching, she was worried and made great effort in overcoming the obstacles. According to her remarks, she said that she had been worried about coping with the extra workload when preparing for the sermon. She remarked, “I had one more task now, it was a burden. How can I feel good?” She considered preaching a burden and she did not want to do it at first.

Her confidence also grew when she realized she possessed the psychological ability to succeed at the task:

As far as my confidence is concerned, to work on something new to you, from the time you know nothing till you master it, you have to have good psychological quality. What do I mean by having good psychological quality? I mean you know your congregation, but you have to hold back what you want to say on the pulpit. You want to put across some messages, but you will also antagonize someone.

She also shared her difficulties at the beginning:

When I started to preach, I found that there was not much support from the church. When I took up the preaching role, there was no pastor in the church. In other words, I had to find my way out. I tried to read different books, or listen to preaching recordings. I would also ask myself what I would do and what I can do. There were gradual changes. On the other hand, I also needed to put up with my failures. This is a process which I had to go through.

She accepted that this was a process from failure to success, and she worked hard to go through it. She also had the confidence that she could make it one day: “I have one conviction, even if you fail today, you can still make it tomorrow. As regards my ability to do so, I had no chance to practice this before, and I also need to spend much time doing so, so I think I need time to grow and I can make it one day”. She felt that with more practice, and when she spent more time preparing them, she could overcome her psychological barrier and deliver good sermons to the congregation.

When asked if she had more confidence after having preached many times, she replied, “I only know one thing. I know what I want to say now. I see more clearly while preaching. I know more clearly whether I am talking from myself, or from God. I know more clearly what I need to preach”. Her confidence definitely grew when she knew what to say and when she felt she was delivering a message from God.

She was also convinced that she must overcome a sense of failure and consider preaching as a means of serving God.

I think I need to overcome the sense of failure. I find that I accept my failures more than before. I know that my days of serving God are getting less, and so I will grasp the

opportunities to serve God. All I can do is try my best to preach and will preach as much as I can. I no longer take into consideration whether I fail or not. I will preach as much as God asks me to.

When she did so and when she had the belief that she was delivering the message of God to the congregation, she found great enjoyment in preaching, and when she knew what to say and what to do she was no longer worried about success or failure. The psychological barrier was broken and she felt at ease when performing the task of preaching. She said:

The present situation is different from the past situation. In the beginning I did not know what the congregation needed. Now I realize what I receive from God, I give to them by putting the messages across. In the exploration process, I have worked with God. At first, I really did not want to do it, now I accept and say okay, as I know what God wants me to say, this makes a difference. I can really find enjoyment in doing so.

The female pastor commented that her confidence had grown in the process. She once said that she did not think that preaching was an effective way for her to shepherd the congregation, but when she was given the chance to speak, and when she finally overcame her weakness in preaching and knew what messages to deliver, she was able to deliver them with greater confidence and even enjoyment. She has thus been empowered in this process, going from feeling obliged to preach and feeling pressurized to do it, to enjoying it and doing it with confidence. She has elevated her self-esteem and has a new way of looking at herself. In other words, she has a new perception of herself. She has moved from seeing herself as not having the ability to preach to seeing herself as being able to preach and do so with enjoyment. Because of the changes, she has a new identity as well, and is now not only a female pastor shepherding backstage, but also a preacher voicing her views in the capacity of a female pastor in the pulpit. In this empowerment process, I negotiated a place in the pulpit for the female pastor, through asking questions and through working with the Task Group. She was also a member in the Task Group, and she was indeed a participant in this negotiation process for empowerment.

8.2 The Empowerment of the Female Leaders

The female leader (Deaconess C), who tried leading the liturgical part of the worship, also found her gifts in performing this role. Deaconess C shared her experience, “I became more certain of my gifts in this area, but not something to do with my self-confidence”.

When given the chance, women can discover another side of themselves, the more positive side. This discovery helps enhance the self. As Sharma (2003) notes, empowerment involves a shift in perception that can “unmask internalized illusions to reveal who women are and have always been” (p.11).

With the new discovery about self, coupled with a shift in perception, a new awareness of self emerges that can help in overcoming the illusion that women are inferior to men and should be subordinate to them. In my church, the woman leaders tend to think that men are better than women in leading. As M commented: “I think that women do not have the qualities men do.” Men, in M’s opinion are calmer and more decisive. She remarked that men were indeed better than women in leadership as they have leadership qualities which women lack. Yet when women make new discoveries about themselves, they gain more confidence to take up greater roles, not only supporting roles or subordinate roles, but leadership roles as well. They dare to challenge the existing structure, and create a new one that works better for them.

As discussed in Chapter 7, empowerment here refers to a shift in perception and a new understanding of the role of women. A few female worship leaders pointed out that leading the liturgical part of the worship was taking the role of priest. One of the worship leaders (SW) commented, “I think that we have a greater role, shouldering more responsibilities. The role of women is getting more important.” She went on to say that the role of worship leader is similar to that of a priest in “bringing the congregation to God.” For this reason the role is very important. The congregation considers that women are now equal to men in position and importance because they lead the worship. According to one female member of the congregation, PL, because women could now preach and lead the worship, “they had the same position as men.” Women’s roles have become more important because the two roles (speaking in worship and leading worship) are important leading roles. Another female member of the congregation JL said, “I considered that women’s position had become more important because they could now play the leading role.” The female leaders in these new roles even have a new identity, the identity of priests. The women formed this new identity through this process of empowerment.

It is evident that the congregation attaches great importance to the worship. Worship is the highest form of adoration to God in all Christian denominations. Much reverence and love to God are shown in this ceremony. Worship is also a manifestation of the faith of the congregation as a whole. As a result, speaking in the worship or leading the worship is a sign of authority, power or importance. The roles are equivalent to the roles of priest in the worship. Leviticus 8 - 10 spells out that when the priests offer sacrifices to God, they act as the middlemen in bringing people to God. With the worship leaders acting as a channel, the congregation is brought close to God through leading the singing and the liturgies.

Henceforth, when women speak or lead the worship, they possess the symbolic authority, power and importance previously vested solely in the hands of men in my church. It is a big breakthrough, a milestone in the history of my church. For this reason the congregation has a new understanding of women, considers them leaders, and equal in position to men in worship. A majority of the congregation consider that females have been given greater significance or more space to develop their potential or gifts. The changes signify the elevation of women from subordinate to more leading roles and to increased visibility in the church. As Fiorenza (1996, p.10) puts it, this is a process of “making women visible as active participants and leaders in the Church”, and is also a process of gaining “equal partnership” with men (Wu, 2003, p.85). As stated in Chapter 2, empowered women do not necessarily aim at getting power from men; they work towards the goal of equality, of not being subordinate to men, and of having the freedom to make decisions of their own. Or as Hall (1992, p.117) writes: “Empowered women maintain equal-mindedness, rather than act out roles that merely confront and challenge male dominations. Empowered women do not aim at being superior to men. They respond as equals and cooperate in order to work toward the common good”.

When women become more visible, they give the impression to the congregation that they are leaders and are equal to men. In other words, women have previously been behind the scenes, not centre stage, and possibly forgotten by others. Now, as they stand in the pulpit, speaking and leading the liturgical part of worship, it makes a great difference. What the congregation sees and thinks is an important element of empowerment as well.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, empowerment is not confined to the taking of power, but concerns extending influence towards others and the larger community. This was demonstrated when a great number of the congregation commented that the women were becoming more important, and most of these comments were from women. The larger community can see the change in the one being empowered and they themselves also experience changes in their perception, and have thus also been empowered. The empowerment process is for this reason mutually beneficial. Everyone is influenced for a better future.

In a relational approach to empowerment, everyone involved, regardless of position of power and privilege, recognizes that he or she is both an agent and a subject in the empowerment process. In a truly empowering process, everyone changes. Empowerment always is mutual. (Van der Plaats, 1999, pp.776-777).

8.3 My Five Roles in the Empowerment Process

In reviewing the process of empowerment, it can be said that I played a very important role. Indeed, I played several roles in the process. I was the initiator, a stakeholder, a key player and the demonstrator. Added to these four roles is my fifth and present role, that of the researcher. I was the initiator because I was the one who posed the question to the then pastor-in-charge in 2006. Because of my question about whether the female pastor could preach, the pastor-in-charge considered it time to start reflecting on and reviewing the roles of the female pastor as well as those of female leaders in the church. My question prompted the pastor-in-charge to initiate discussion about the roles of women in church. Following the discussion, a major breakthrough was achieved in women's roles. I was also a stakeholder, because I was the one who experienced the suppression of the U.S. pastor who asked me not lead the worship when he came to speak in our church. Even though I was a cell group leader and a Sunday school teacher, I was told that "a woman should not teach a man" as written in 1 Timothy 2:12 (NIV): "I do not permit a woman to teach." I was a stakeholder because my rights were infringed and I was directly affected by U.S. missionaries who held the conviction that women had to be submissive to men. I was also a key player because I was a member of the Task Group. This group comprised the pastor-in-charge and the female pastor, the Deacon Board Chairman and Vice-chairman, as well as another female member of the Deacon Board and myself (also a member of the Deacon Board). We studied the roles of women in the Bible as well as the views of sister

churches. This Task Group made the final decision on the roles of women in our church, that is, the female pastor could speak in the worship and female leaders could lead the liturgical part of the worship. I was the one who advocated for the changes in women's roles and strongly strove for these two rights. I was and have so far been the demonstrator in the process, because I was the first sister to lead the liturgical part of the worship and I am still performing this task. I persist in this role because I have paid in effort of striving to do so, which is a manifestation of equality to a certain extent, and I have no intention of giving that up. I also intend to let all the people, be they male leaders or female leaders or the congregation as a whole, see that women can play this role as well as men, provided they are given the chance. At this point, I am the only one still fulfilling that role. The other female leaders tried a few times, but no longer fulfil this role for the reasons given in Chapter 5. The four roles that I have played and am playing are essential and influential in bringing changes to fruition and maintaining this changed state. What then is the force that pushed me to work for these changes?

In retrospect, it all began with a personal experience in my church more than twenty years ago: what the Association did and said left doubt in my mind. I wondered if it was correct to interpret the roles of women in that way. If this really was the truth, then what I had been doing in my church was violating the truth, for I was a cell group leader as well as a Sunday school teacher, leading and teaching men.

My desire for change is also attributable to my theological education in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I came across the word "patriarchy" in my theological studies. This word became the answer to my doubt, and this word also gave me a better description of what my church was like. The leadership of men in all circumstances was indicative of patriarchal practice. This word showed me that I did not necessarily have to follow the rules of the church. If "patriarchy" was malpractice, why should I follow it? It was also because of my theological education that I broadened my horizons in reading the Bible and acquired different hermeneutics for interpreting the Bible. Thus when my church used Genesis 2 as the basis for describing the order of creation, I pointed to Genesis 1:27-28, and indeed my point of view was that God created men and women at the same time without any difference in order. When my church adopted 1 Timothy 2:12-14 to say that women could not teach men, I took 1 Corinthians 12 to counteract this argument, by

pointing out that gifts were not gender-based and were given to men and women equally, and that therefore women could also lead and teach men if they had gifts in leading and teaching.

It was also due to the good and trusting relationship between myself and the pastor-in-charge that I had the confidence to ask questions. I partnered with the pastor-in-charge in the Adult Ministry Group, and he demonstrated confidence in me. He was also open enough to accept my comments, suggestions or new ideas. With these prerequisites in hand, I put the questions to him and he responded quickly and constructively.

Lastly, it was because of my education and exposure to new ideas that I saw that equality between men and women was important. I believe that men and women should be given equal opportunity to do different tasks, and women should not be exploited because of gender difference.

I was thus a key person in the process of empowerment in my church. Without my initiative, the process of empowerment might not have kicked off. Without my being a stakeholder and a key player, the process of empowerment might not have reached its fruitful conclusion.

8.3.1 *My Empowerment*

As an initiator, a stakeholder, a key player and the demonstrator in the process, have I been empowered? Having analyzed who have been empowered and the hurdles to further empowerment, I also need to look at myself to see how I have been affected. I have mentioned that I played four roles in the process. Now, coming to the end of my research, I find that I have a fifth role to play. It is the role of a researcher in the empowerment process. In his article, “Forks in the Road when Exploring the Sacred: Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion”, Ganzevoort (2009, p.10), talks about the role of a researcher. He comments that there are four roles the researcher takes up: the player, the coach, the referee and the commenter. I have been a player in the process as a practitioner from the beginning, for I participated in the practice of my church, was a member contributing to the practice, and also a player participating in the changes to the practice.

As such, I know the practice really well. When carrying out the research, I had first-hand knowledge and experience of the practice, and the background leading to the practice. I also take the role of the coach and the referee to keep the changes operating, and to ensure that they do not go astray. If I did not play these roles, the changes would not have come to fruition or lasted to the present day. I also play the role of the commenter. While collecting data through interviews and questionnaires, I critiqued what has happened and what progress has been made through the empowerment process. In retrospect, it is a process of rediscovering different ideologies and the power struggle behind the process, about which I can then comment.

Having played different roles, I find that it was also a process of self-discovery. Who am I? Why did I strive so hard for this? Born and bred in Hong Kong, I have enjoyed equality between the sexes. Women are offered the chance to learn and work on an equal basis with men in Hong Kong. As a result, in my mind there is no difference between men and women and everyone can be offered an equal chance to learn and work provided that they have the talents.

However, the situation was not the same in my church. Women were given the chance to serve as much as they could and would like to, yet there were a few roles reserved for men. The critique I made of that practice in the beginning brought forth changes to the church. I never imagined that I could play such an important role in bringing forth change. I did not imagine that I would effectively be a practical theologian in bringing change to the practice in my church.

I put into practice a model of practical theology. My experience prompted me to review and reflect upon the practice of my church. I used a critical perspective to examine the practice, and in pushing forward changes, I also engaged in a re-reading of the Bible, pinpointing in particular the few important theological bases the Association and our church leaders had used. I then developed a new interpretation of the Bible verses that they had been using and aligned these with the new practice in my church.

Throughout these processes, I came to realize that I could be influential and could indeed bring forth change. I have been empowered in the sense that I have a new perception of

myself, which I also brought to the congregation (especially to the women), i.e., a new perception about women, that they might now see women as leaders. I also increased the visibility of women by demonstrating what women leaders can do in the worship. Though I might not be able to change the structure of final headship of my church, the impact that I have had has been great, as a breakthrough has been made and a milestone has been reached. This reinforces my conviction that the role of leadership should not be restricted to men alone, for women can also be effective leaders if they are given the opportunity.

8.3.2 *Maintaining the State of Empowerment*

Since the changes were introduced twelve years ago, apart from speaking in the worship, which is mainly the role of the female pastor, and in which other women cannot take part, I am the only one who still performs the role of leading the liturgical part of the worship. Being an initiator, a stakeholder, and a key player in the empowerment process of women, I feel the need to keep and maintain the state I paid great effort to achieve. I still intend to be the demonstrator who shows the congregation that women in our church are leaders and are in an equal position to men. I also intend to demonstrate to the sisters that they can also perform this role if they have the courage to do so.

8.4 Conclusion

In short, progress in women's empowerment in my church has been made, in terms of the journey of the few important women stakeholders and of some others in the congregation. The few women stakeholders and the women members in the congregation who have gained a new perception about themselves, and I myself, have been the ones mostly empowered in this journey. Even though the power structure might not have been overthrown, more subtle changes have occurred. Change lies in the new self-perception of the women themselves (both the women leaders and the women in the congregation) and the new identity certain of the women leaders have constructed in the process, which has also impacted the congregation. This is far more important than gaining the position of the highest authority. It also represents a kind of informal empowerment for women, empowerment not in terms of positions the women can gain, but in terms of self-development, actualizing one's potentialities, changing the perceptions of oneself and others and also having an impact on others.

This echoes Herring's research into African American women in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She talks about informal leaders. They are people who, without holding any posts of authority, nevertheless have an impact on others. This parallels the case in my church where the female leaders can also exert influence on others, albeit not through positions of power. In the changes that took place in my church, the female leaders have been able to change the perception of the congregation and also impact them, particularly the women.

Given the pervasive Chinese culture, where the tradition and culture are respected, and seldom overthrown, and where authority is held in high regard, the formal power structure (male Deacon Board chairman and male pastor-in-charge) has not been changed, yet the informal power structure (how women are perceived in church, their self-development, actualizing potentialities and the ability to make a significant contribution and have an impact) has changed substantially and significantly, as revealed by the data collected. Women have elevated their confidence, found their gifts in their new roles and constructed new identities. At the same time, the congregation have also received the changes well, especially the women themselves, who now consider that women also play leadership roles and are becoming more important. They themselves have also been empowered. The impact has been great and far-reaching.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

As a conclusion to my research “Exploring the journey towards women’s empowerment in a Chinese congregation in Hong Kong”, I can say that the journey in women’s empowerment has been fruitful. It has been revealed through the research that progress in women’s empowerment had been made in a Chinese congregation in Hong Kong with missionary influence. This thesis constitutes an exploration of how that progress can be understood.

9.1 Women’s Empowerment in My Congregation

Progress in women’s empowerment has been made in my congregation. In the process, the visibility of women, as well as the self-confidence of women, has increased. Equal partnership of women in worship has been achieved and the perceptions about women’s roles among the leaders and the congregation have changed in the sense that the new role of women preaching and leading the liturgy of the worship is equivalent to the role of leaders in the pulpit in the worship. The change in perception signifies a change in ideology, even though the structure of the final leadership has not been changed. The changes in ideology are subconscious but the impact is far-reaching. Changes in ideology can create a ripple effect and pave the way for further empowerment in future when the time is ripe. As Brasher noted (p.88), women continue to work towards shaping congregational life.

In this regard, even though women have not achieved the highest leadership, and it is also not their intention to do so, what they have achieved is informal empowerment for themselves. Their empowerment is not evaluated in terms of whether or not they have access to the final leadership positions, but in terms of better self-esteem, greater confidence, a new perception about themselves, and impact on the congregation. Moreover, they have also constructed new identities for themselves in the pulpit, and in the worship, with the female pastor as the preacher and the female leaders as worship leaders.

Empowerment is also relational in my church, a win-win situation, as all parties are achieving something and contributing to something, which in a Chinese context is

culturally important. The perception of the congregation has also changed. Women members in the congregation have been influenced the most. They have a new perception of women when seeing the woman pastor and the female leaders in the pulpit. They see that now women have become more important because they can speak and lead the liturgy, and they see that women are now leaders. They themselves have new ideas about the role of women in church and they can also change their perception that women are always subordinate to men. Women's empowerment in my congregation is not about overthrowing the structure, but making a contribution and having the ability to influence others. The research revealed that securing informal empowerment (self-development, a new self-perception exerting influence on others) rather than formal empowerment (obtaining the final leadership) is more important as the impact can be more far-reaching. It is also better suited to the tradition and culture in my congregation, especially in a Chinese church where the leaders and the congregation adhere to the culture and tradition of male headship and respect for authority.

9.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The concept of empowerment has been widely explored through this research, including understandings from the sociological, contextual, postcolonial and feminist perspectives. In Chapter 2, where the conceptual framework of empowerment was discussed, empowerment can be understood from the sociological perspective as a shift in perception towards equal mindedness, as challenging and transforming the existing power structures, systems and institutions, as a form of power without direct authority, and as informal leadership. In terms of contextual perspective, the historical context of Chinese churches has been explored, especially the tradition and culture of male domination, particularly from the pulpit, and women's internalised enculturation. From the postcolonial perspective, the complexity of actions and the notion of identity in process, as well as deconstruction of the western view, were touched on. From the feminist perspective, greater visibility of women and equal partnership were discussed. From these perspectives, I contributed to the wider discussion an analysis of a specific Baptist, colonial, missionary-founded and conservative Chinese congregation, thereby generating a new understanding of women's empowerment in that context. Given the changes in women's role in the pulpit in the worship, and their accompanying visible and equal public roles during church services, this new understanding also makes a significant contribution to the literature on empowerment.

It creates a new perception that applies to all women and results in the construction of new identities by the women leaders. It is an informal empowerment of women in that they can have positive impact on the congregation, without having to gain the formal posts of final leadership, and without having to abandon their conservative theology of male headship which is both inherited from the colonizers and is also culturally Chinese.

9.3 Contribution to Practice

In retrospect, I see that I have been playing the part of a practical theologian. When I initiated the changes twelve years ago, I managed to change the practice of worship in my church. In the process, I have also reflected on the Bible verses that the Association and my church adopted, and I have criticized their usage and interpretation, especially the theological understanding of “headship”. I am still playing the role of a practical theologian, through my ongoing demonstration from the pulpit of how a woman can contribute to a pulpit ministry that used to be dominated by men, I wish to change the consciousness and perception of the leaders and the congregation continuously. As I mentioned earlier, although the ideology and practice of male leadership have not changed in relation to final leadership, a way has nevertheless been opened for women to move one step forward, and this step has already been significant for our church. The findings of my research demonstrate that the changes to women’s roles in worship have been well received, and the changes have also empowered women. The research findings have also demonstrated in what ways women have been empowered and this understanding can help lay the foundation for the changes in practice to move further forward.

As stated in the research, because women have a new perception about themselves, and because they have seen that women’s roles have become important, they have been encouraged to take up leading roles in the pulpit. Apart from myself, several female leaders have taken up liturgical roles in worship again, and more women have tried leading the singing part of the worship.

I have also shared the findings of the research to my congregation through Sunday School, with fruitful discussions followed. I educated the people about the understanding that has emerged from the research, and they showed great enthusiasm when discussing women’s empowerment and the way forward. Because of the enthusiasm the congregation showed

in the discussion, further educational possibilities can be explored that will increase awareness of women's empowerment, support women in leadership, and train women to take up leading posts in the pulpit.

9.4 Contribution to My Own Professional Development

While engagement in congregational practice is voluntary and not a professional practice, it is appropriate that I consider the contribution to my own personal development for the future. I hope to foster a new understanding about the roles of women in churches in my context, through publication of my thesis, through Sunday school teaching, or through conferences where I present my paper. Through all this written work and sharing, I intend to continue my work of challenging the ideology behind, and perceptions towards, the roles of women, by pointing out that there can be a new way for women in a male-dominated church, and women can be and need to be empowered through changes in androcentric practice. In this way, new insight can be created and a better future for women can be built.

9.5 Conclusion

Through the research, I came to understand the dynamic of the changes initiated twelve years ago. I also gained a clearer picture of the factors enabling the empowerment and the factors inhibiting further empowerment, and have enhanced my understanding of empowerment. I discovered that progress in women's empowerment had been made and in what ways it was made. All the women leaders and the congregation as a whole were empowered in one way or another as they now have a new perception about women and new identities of women have been constructed in the church.

The empowerment of women is not given by men, but is gained by women themselves. If women do not see the need for this, or do not have the heart for it, then there is no way of making progress in empowerment. If they do see the need for it, however, and work towards that goal, then progress in empowerment has been made. What then remains is finding the opportunity, and effecting a shift in the ideology of those in power, and of those who have internalised women's subordinate roles (Chung 2005, p.220), that the people might be able to make further progress towards total empowerment.

However, a new opening has been created for the women in my church and for the congregation as a whole, a new horizon has also been revealed.

As a final personal reflection, I note that in the empowerment process, I took the role of a forerunner, making and preparing the way, cutting down the thorns and thickets, in order to help the women in my church walk on that new path towards a new horizon. I brought them new roles for women, a new perception about what women could do in church, and a renewed understanding of the possible future of women. It felt a bit like John the Baptist paving the way for Jesus, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, and the Kingdom of God, and urging people to repent. I was not speaking loudly to my congregation as John the Baptist did, but I tried to bring about another possible understanding of women's roles in my church, not from my subjective view, but on the basis of the Bible. This was a prophetic act, and I can be called a forerunner, standing in front of the congregation, looking far beyond, and seeing something new in front and thus showing people the way.

- End -

Appendix 1: Report of the Task Group

A report was compiled by the Task Group to record the review of the women's ministry roles in my church. The report covers the member composition, the purpose of the establishment and the working process.

As stated in the report, the Task Group aims at reviewing the existing ministries of women, on the basis of the biblical teaching and in consideration of the current situation of my church, so as to adjust the roles of women to respond to the current situation.

Firstly, finding out the present arrangement of the women's ministries in other sister churches, and studying the articles written by pastors of sister churches as well as studying the few verses in Pauline's letter about women's roles. Then collecting the views of the congregation, making suggestions to the Board of Deacons and reporting the change made in the AGM.

Among the thirty-two churches established by the Association, twenty-six of them now allow woman pastor to preach and thirty of them allow sisters to lead the worship. They were shepherded by the western missionaries and had stronger ties with them.

For studying the few verses in the Bible, such as 1 Corinthians 11: 3-5, 14:34-36, 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 12, the Task Group analyzed the theological viewpoints of the Association and the Chinese churches, the contradictions in the few verses and the applications of my church.

Despite the difference in the interpretation of the Association and the Chinese churches where the former did not support the women's preaching and leading and the latter supported the women's preaching and leading, and the difficulties in providing satisfactory answers to the contradictions of the four verses, the Task Group came to a conclusion about women's roles by using 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 and 1 Timothy 2:13-15 as well as chapter two of Genesis to define the roles of women where the concept of "Headship" was adopted. As such the Task Group had made the following decisions:

1. Under the principle of male leadership and women's subordination to men, women could preach and teach;
2. The Pastor-in-charge and the Chairman of the Deacon Board must be men to put the theological concept of "Headship" into practice;
3. The roles of women could be adjusted and enlarged to cover preaching and leading the worship (liturgical part).

Appendix II: References to Paper Two in Stage One

I discussed deconstructing the views of the western missionaries and reconstructing the Asian identity in my Paper 2 “Colonisation and Decolonisation of the Use of the Bible”, where I employed the concept advocated by Kwok Pui-lan in the same book “Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World” to argue that we needed to have another interpretation of the Bible about women’s roles, instead of copying those from the western missionaries, even though our church was established by them.

Appendix III: Interview Questions

(A) Questions for the female pastor

- (1) Her feelings and opinions about the change?
- (2) Has the change been good to her? Or vice versa?
- (3) In what ways did the change affect her?
- (4) Did it help her improve herself, especially in her weakest area?
- (5) Did it help her explore her greater potentialities?
- (6) Did it help her gain greater confidence in being the female pastor and thus have greater confidence in developing different areas of work and completing the different challenging tasks?
- (7) Did it bring extra burden on her as she was already quite fully occupied and she actually detested taking up this extra burden?

(B) Questions for the past pastor

- (1) Was it right to initiate such a reform and was it the right time to do so?
- (2) His theological views about women's roles and women's partnership in church.

(C) Questions for the present pastor

- (1) His theological views about women's roles (including female pastor and sisters) in church.
- (2) Is there still greater room for female pastor and sisters to develop their potentialities in church? What more can they do?

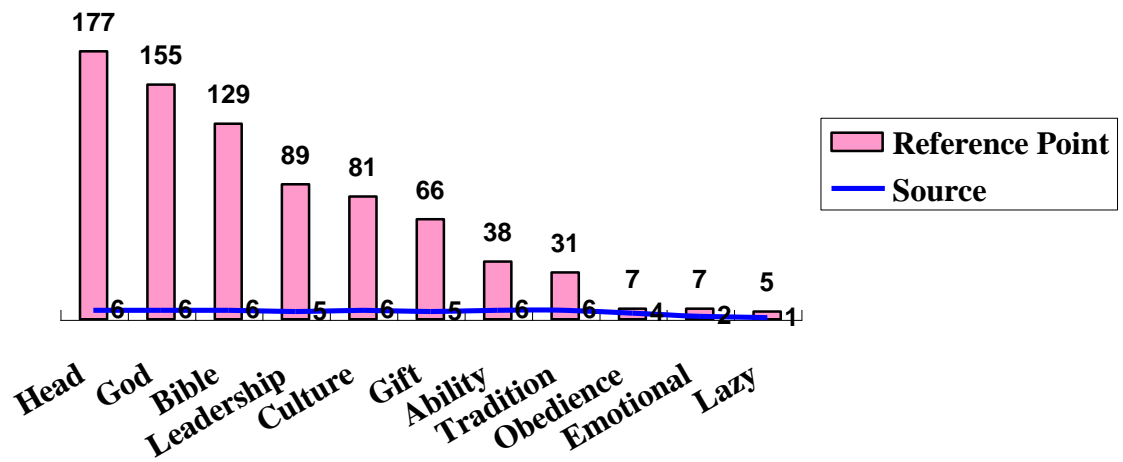
(D) Questions for the two deacons

- (1) Did they welcome the changes of women's roles in church?
- (2) Did they support it?
- (3) Is there still greater room for female pastor and sisters to participate in church? What more can they do?

(E) Questions for Focus Group (Sisters leading the worship)

- (1) Did they welcome the changes? Do they think it was the correct move to introduce them?
- (2) Did the change bolster their confidence?
- (3) What do they think about the roles of sisters in churches? Leading or supporting roles?
- (4) Did the reform shed new light on their perception about the roles of sisters in churches?
- (5) How many times did they lead the worship?
- (6) Do they like this new role being assigned to them in worship?
- (7) It seems that most of them (nearly all) no longer play this role? Why?

Appendix IV: Frequency of Themes



Frequency of Themes

Appendix V: Questionnaires

(A) Questionnaires for the thirteen brothers who lead the worship

1. Do you agree to the speaking of the female pastor in worship and sisters leading the worship?
 - (a) Agree (please answer Question 2)
 - (b) Disagree (please answer Question 3)
2. Why do you agree?
3. Why don't you agree?
4. Do you think that your role in the worship will be affected when sisters can also lead the worship?
 - (a) Yes (please answer Question 5)
 - (b) No (please answer Question 6)
5. Why do you think they affect you?
6. Why don't you think they affect you?
7. Do you have new perception about the roles of sisters in church when they can now lead the worship?
 - (a) Yes (please answer Question 8)
 - (b) No (please answer Question 9)
8. What new perception do you have?
9. What perception do you always have towards sisters?
10. If there is a need for further changes in the roles of sisters, will you accept them?
 - (a) Yes (please answer Question 11)

(b) No (please answer Question 12)

11. Why do you accept it?

12. Why don't you accept it?

(B) Questionnaires for the adult members

(1) When did you attend the worship in this church?

(2) Do you agree to the speaking of female pastor in worship and sisters leading the worship?

(a) Agree (please answer Question 3)

(b) Disagree (please answer Question 4)

(3) Why do you agree?

(4) Why don't you agree?

(5) Did these changes give you a new perception about the roles of female pastor and sisters in church?

(a) Yes (please answer Question 6)

(b) No (please answer Question 7)

(6) What new perception do you have?

(7) What perception do you always have towards female pastor and sisters?

(8) Do you think that the roles of female pastor and sisters have become more important as they can now speak and lead the worship?

(a) Yes (please answer Question 9)

(b) No (please answer Question 10)

- (9) Why do you think that their roles have become more important?
- (10) Why don't you think that their roles have become more important?
- (11) If there is a need for further changes in women's roles in church, will you accept them?
- (a) Yes (please answer Question 12)
 - (b) No (please answer Question 13)
- (12) Why do you accept them?
- (13) Why don't you accept them?

Appendix VI: Summary of Findings from Questionnaire Respondents

The respondents are divided into three groups. The first group (A) is sisters, the second group (B) is brothers and the third group (C) is brothers leading worship.

Group A

Attending church since 1994

(1) WL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as it would benefit the congregation more if they could also know the views from female pastor.

Her persistent view towards women's roles was that different sexes had different strengths and could complement with each other.

She did not find that women's roles became more important as they just shared the work of church in response to the changes in times and in need.

She accepted further changes of women's roles in principle, but it also depended what kind of new roles they would take up.

(2) LL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because there was no restriction of women serving God in the Bible, on the condition that men still played the leading roles.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that women played the assisting role to assist men.

She did not consider that sisters' roles became more important as they were members of church, just like brothers.

She accepted further changes if there was a lack of brothers who could lead. But the church should also find or train brothers who could lead.

(3) FY

She agreed to the changes in women's roles provided that they had the gifts and could touch the congregation.

Her new view towards women's role was that sisters could play leading roles.

Her persistent view was that brothers played leading role, sisters played the assisting role.

She did not consider that women's position became more important as men still played the leading role.

She accepted further changes in women's roles provided that there were suitable persons and sexes were not important.

(4) CN

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because the Bible also had stories about how God used women to work for Him (women prophet, women apostles).

Her new view towards women's role was that sisters could also play leading role.

She did not consider that sisters' position had become more important as she always thought that sisters played important roles, but the church had been late in allowing sisters play the leading roles. As sisters could lead the worship, more new elements could be added to it.

She accepted further changes in women's roles but it also depended on what roles sisters played. Sisters should complement with brothers. She did not agree that only sisters played leading roles.

(5) MY

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as the Bible did not object to it.

She did not accept further changes in women's roles as it depended on what new roles there would be and men still played the leading roles in the Deacon Board.

(6) GL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as the gifts in teaching and prophesying were endowed to both men and women.

She did not consider that sisters' role became more important as they should have the heart to assist and be humble.

She did not accept further changes in women's roles as there was no need.

(7) SL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as female pastor had received theological training and sisters leading the worship had been selected.

Her new view towards sisters was that sisters seemed to represent new leading roles, but

not teaching roles.

She did not consider that sisters' roles became more important as female pastor was playing the assisting role, not being the head of the church, while sisters leading worship was just sharing the workload.

She did not accept further changes in women's roles as the Bible did not mention any women leaders. If there were any, she could only accept it when there were detailed information and teaching.

(8) WY

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as it was mentioned in Galatians 3:28 that men and women were the same, and there was no difference between them. And in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women should cover their heads if they prophesized.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that both men and women were servants of God with gifts and chosen by God.

She considered that the roles of sisters became more important as they were servants of God with abundant gifts.

She accepted further changes in women's roles if it complied with the teachings of the Bible.

(9) AC

She agreed to the changes in women's roles owing to equality between men and women.

Her new view towards women's role was that the equality between men and women finally could be put into practice. Sisters could finally have the chance to give full play to their talents.

Her persistent view was that men and women were different with different gifts.

She considered that women's positions had become more important as when women were treated equally, they would feel that they were treated with importance, then they would no longer think that they only played subordinate roles.

She accepted further changes of women's roles because of equality between men and women and many women were leaders in the society as well.

(10) CS

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as with the changes in times, and sister's

knowledge in the Bible was sufficient and it also complied with the teachings in the Bible. Her new view about women was that sisters could also play leading role to share the work of brothers.

She considered that when sisters were given the chance to lead the worship, their views would be given weight.

She accepted further changes in women's roles if it was not in violation of the teachings of the Bible

(11) AL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women and if they had the gifts and talents, they could serve in the same role as men.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that sisters were equally loved by God. There was no difference between men and women. She considered that when sisters could lead the worship, the number of times when brothers had to play this role would be decreased. With sisters leading the worship, there was plurality in it and thus enriched the worship.

She accepted further changes in women's roles so long as this complied with God's will and sisters' gifts could be given full play.

(12) GH

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

She considered that women's roles had become more important as the two roles, i.e. giving sermons in worship and leading worship, were equally important and had great impact.

She accepted further changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

(13) CL

She agreed to changes in women's roles.

Her persistent view towards women's role was whether the gifts of women could be given full play.

She considered that their roles had become more important because their gifts could be given full play.

She accepted further changes in women's roles on the condition that these did not go

against the teachings of the Bible.

Attending church since 2000

(14) WY

She accepted changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women and female pastor also had received training and could share message about God and from God. They also shared the workload.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that only when they could serve God with their gifts, they could take up any roles.

She considered that women's roles had become more important.

She accepted further changes of women's roles provided that they had the gifts and abilities and they acted in response to the calling of God.

(15) LC

She agreed to changes in women's roles because people served God according to their gifts and abilities and it was not advisable to reject someone to take up certain posts because of their gender nowadays.

Her new views towards women's roles were that woman pastor could give sermons in the worship, her roles were the "same" as male pastor and there was no difference between male pastor and female pastor.

She did not consider that women's roles had become more important but that when they took up more roles, there could be plurality in worship.

She accepted further changes in women's roles as the changes could help sisters and the congregation to move forward.

(16) FC

She agreed to the changes in women's roles.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that they were good helpers in many ways.

She considered that when women were given more roles (new roles) to play, they had more strength.

She accepted further changes in women's roles if it was good for God's work.

(17) JL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women. Her persistent view towards women's role was that they could do something which men could not, like they could care about sisters more.

She considered that women's position had become more important because they could now play the leading role.

She accepted further changes in women's roles with the conviction that what men could do, women could also do.

(18) SP

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women. Her persistent view towards women's role was that female pastor and sisters could also serve in worship (not only leading the singing part, but also the liturgical part).

She agreed to further changes in women's roles if it complied with the teachings of the Bible.

(19) EL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles. If sisters had the gifts, they should make good use of it.

She considered that as sisters could speak in the worship and lead worship, they started to have more important roles.

She accepted the further changes in women's roles as sisters were also very important in church.

(20) SC

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women and female pastor could also give sermons or lead worship.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that female pastor and sisters were equally important as male pastor and brothers.

Sisters had always been important and their position would not be enhanced more because of the addition of roles.

She accepted further changes of women's roles because of equality between men and women.

(21) KL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because female pastor was also the servant of God and she had received theological training. Sisters were also members in Christ and could also lead the worship.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that female pastor was also the shepherd and sisters were also members in Christ and were also loved by God like brothers.

She did not find that women became more important when sisters had one more role to serve.

She accepted further changes of women's roles as it would be alright to do so.

(22) JM

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as God did not restrict women's ministries in church and men and women complemented each other.

She agreed to further changes in women's roles. If further changes could benefit more people, then it was good and people should accept it.

(23) LY

She agreed to changes in women's roles as she wanted to listen to the sermons given by female pastor.

Her new view towards women's role was that female pastor was also chosen by God, so there should be no difference in being male or female.

She accepted further changes in women's roles because they could serve God together.

Attending church since 2005

(24) FA

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because men and women were equal in God. So either men or women could also give sermons in worship and lead the worship.

She considered that men played the leading role in church in the past, once when sisters could take up important roles (speaking in the worship and leading the worship), their roles were thus more important.

She agreed to further changes in women's roles owing to equality between men and women.

(25) DL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as men and women could play the same role to keep abreast of the changes in times.

Her new view towards women's role was that women could be more active.

When asked whether she considered that women's role become more important, she opines that it is half and half.

She agreed to further changes of women's roles if the biblical teachings were followed.

(26) SK

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as she could know the different points of views from different sexes.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that both men and women were people serving God.

She agreed to further changes in women's roles as they served God together.

(27) LC

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as women could be more sentimental and could arouse people's feelings in worship.

Her new view towards women's role was that women demonstrated that they could be capable enough to take up new tasks and they could also pay attention to details.

Their roles had become more important as they could share more of the workload of men.

She accepted further changes in women's roles when there was the necessity to do so.

Attending church since 2010

(28) IL

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because men and women were the same being God's servants.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that women were the same as men.

She considered that women had more important roles now as the number of women outweighed that of men.

She agreed to further changes of women's roles owing to equality of men and women.

(29) EN

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as the Bible did not object to it and these changes did not contradict with the truth of the Gospel.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that men and women had different gifts and sisters played an indispensable role in church.

She did not consider that women became more important as what they did was in compliance with the teachings of the Bible.

She did not accept further changes in women's roles as their value would not be changed because of the changes in roles and there was no need to do so.

(30) CLC

She agreed to changes in women's roles because they also served God as men did.

Her persistent view towards women's role was that both sisters and female pastor could serve God as men did.

She accepted further changes of women's roles because she always accepted it.

(31) SL

She agreed to changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women

She did not accept further changes in women's roles.

(32) AS

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as men and women had different gifts and if women had the gifts, they could take up the task in giving sermon and leading worship, provided that this did not obstruct church's development and which was in compliance with the biblical teaching.

She considered that women's roles had become more important, but could not go beyond men.

She agreed to further changes in women's roles. They could do it if they had the talents to do so.

(33) MY

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

She considered that their roles had become more important as they had always been

important.

She accepted further changes of women's roles.

(34) PL

She agreed to the changes as sisters had mature spiritual life, the gifts of God and talent, so they should serve in the worship.

She considered that woman pastors could speak in the worship and sisters could lead the worship, they had the same position as men.

She accepted further changes in women's roles as there were women pastor giving sermons in worship.

(35) Ada

She agreed to changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

She did not accept further changes in women's roles.

(36) AW

She agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

She accepted further changes in women's roles as church was a family and we ought to accept it.

(37) MC

She agreed to changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

She accepted further changes in women's roles as they could handle any tasks well.

(38) Hung

She agreed to the changes in women's roles as female pastor was more caring.

Group B

Attending church since 1995-2000

(1) CW

He agreed to the changes in women's roles because men and women could also share God's words and the most important thing was to find the suitable person to share.

His persistent view towards women's role was that sisters complemented with brothers in

doing the ministries.

He did not consider that women's roles became more important as their roles were equally important to men's roles.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as their roles were equally important as men.

(2) PC

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as according to the teachings of the Bible, women could also teach and share in meetings.

His new view towards women's role was that women were also created by God, there had been many brilliant women working for God.

He considered that in the past where no woman pastor could preach, now it seemed that there was elevation in the ministry of women.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as men and women were created with different talents and so only when God used them, there was no difference between men and women.

Attending church since 2000-2005

(3) KAY

He agreed to the changes in women's roles owing to changes in times and women also had the leadership abilities.

(4) CC

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as it was fair to women and women and men could complement each other.

His new view towards women's role was that as men and women were equal, if she could help the congregation understand God's words, it would benefit the congregation.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that he wondered why female pastor could not give sermons in the worship, he did not agree to the idea that they could not handle the task well.

He considered that women's roles became more important as they could lead and that they felt that they were given due importance.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as they could give full play to their gifts and

had more influential power.

(5) JY

He agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

His new view towards women's role was that he now could listen to the preaching of both male and female pastors who could share different messages.

He did not consider that women's roles became more important as they could share the work of ministries.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as there could be new chances to change the mode of ministries.

(6) CW

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as it complied with God's will.

His persistent view was that men and women were also chosen by God and they could also give full play to their gifts.

He did not consider that women's roles became more important as the focus was worshipping God, men and women could make good use of their gifts.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as the number of sisters was more than that of brothers and it would be ideal if they were given more chances to serve.

Attending church since 2005-2010

(7) DC

He agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women.

His new view towards women's roles was that it was no longer that traditional.

He considered that sisters' roles became more important as there was more variation in women's roles.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as sisters could be given chances to do more and better in ministries.

(8) LC

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as the church members could take up any tasks provided that they had the talents and gifts and also because of equality between men and women nowadays in society, there was no discrimination.

His persistent view towards women's role was that sisters were more caring and sentimental, they tended to lead the congregation to get involved in worship more easily. He did not consider that women's roles became more important as the most important thing was the attitude, not gender-oriented.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as it would be inadvisable to despise women. It should be talents rather than gender that determined who took up which role. As there were more sisters in church than brothers, so if sisters were not given chances to give full play to their talents and gifts, the church development would be obstructed. To keep abreast of the developments, ordination of women pastor had already been practiced in many denominations.

(9) WW

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as men and women could also shared biblical truth.

His persistent view towards women's role was that women were the same as men.

He considered that woman pastor could speak and preach the words of God in worship, it showed that they were equal as male pastor.

He accepted further changes in women's roles.

(10) Eric

He did not agree to the changes in women's roles.

He did not accept further changes in women's roles.

(11) LM

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as men and women enjoyed the same rights.

His persistent view towards women's role was that female pastor was usually more familiar with biblical verses.

He did not consider that women's roles became more important as each role was also important.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as women could have potential for further development.

(12) CT

He agreed to changes in women's roles owing to equality between men and women.

He accepted further changes in women's roles.

Group C

The one leading worship

(1) SY

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as this did not violate the biblical principles.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that with sisters leading the worship, the number of people serving in the roles increased and the participation of sisters in that role also brought into new elements.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that men and women were equal nowadays and leading roles were not confined to men.

He accepted further changes in women's roles provided that it did not violate the teaching of the Bible.

(2) YP

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as their gifts should be given full play. And the Bible did not prohibit it.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his leading role in worship, provided that sisters had the gift and ability to lead the congregation to worship.

His new view towards women's roles was that he found that more about the gifts of sisters, such as they could accomplish the task of leading the worship well.

He accepted further changes in women's roles provided that it did not violate the teachings in the Bible.

(3) HP

He agreed to changes in women's roles as female pastor was also the chosen servant of God, and sisters leading worship also led the congregation to get involved in worship.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his role as they all did their best to serve God.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that each sex had different gifts and they all could please God.

He accepted further changes in women's roles.

(4) HL

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as he thought that women were the helpers of men and so the changes could also let women assist men.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his role as no matter which sex played the leading role, the focus of worship was still God.

His new views towards women's roles was that he had new views about women's roles as sisters were more mature and meticulous than brothers, and they could play the leading role better than brothers.

He accepted further changes in women's roles provided that they did not violate the teachings in the Bible. He would not accept it if it violates the teachings of the Bible.

(5) TL

He accepted the changes in women's roles as both men and women were created by God. No matter men or women served God, God would still be pleased with it.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affecting his role in worship as both men and women were children of God and the focus of worship was God.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that both men and women were the children of God, without much difference.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as women were given the equal position in the Bible and so both men and women were the same in God's eyes and they could also serve God if they had the gifts.

(6) WC

He agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women nowadays.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that with sisters leading worship, the frequency of serving in that role decreased, but the result was good and positive. He

thought that sisters had the abilities to take up any tasks or play any roles.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that sisters had the abilities to take up any tasks or in any roles.

He accepted further changes in the roles of women as sisters should try different roles.

(7) DL

He agreed to the changes in women's roles because of equality between men and women in the Kingdom of God.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his role in worship as although the frequency to play the role decreased, the attitude in serving remained the same.

His persistent view towards women's role was that men and women could serve, what mattered most was their attitude and preparation.

He accepted further changes in women's roles provided that it was in compliance with God's wills.

(8) YH

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as there was no difference listening to men or women sharing God's words.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his role.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that women served God like men did and were both servants of God.

He accepted further changes in women's roles owing to the equality between men and women.

(9) CL

He agreed to the changes in women's roles as there was no difference between men and women in sharing gospel and serving God.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the changes in women's roles did not affect his role.

He accepted further changes in women's roles as he did not see why it was not allowed.

(10) DAY

He accepted the changes in the role of female pastor as she had the gift in giving sermon and had been trained. Yet he did not agree to sisters leading worship as that role was a leading role and it was rarely mentioned in the Bible about women leaders.

Regarding his leading role in worship, he commented that the frequency of leading worship decreased.

His persistent view towards women's roles was that it was mainly the deaconess who led worship and it might be due to the fact that not many brothers were willing to do this. This was a temporary arrangement and brothers should be helped and encouraged to take up this task.

He did not accept further changes in women's roles. He accepted that sisters could lead the singing part in the worship, but not the liturgical part as the singing part was only one part of the worship. He considered that it was not appropriate for sisters to lead worship.

Appendix VII: Statistical Findings from the Questionnaires

Table 1: Do you agree to female preaching & sisters leading worship?

	%	Reasons
Yes	91.7%	Gender neutrality, gender equality or complementarities
Yes	6.7%	Female superiority
Yes	1.6%	Other reasons

Table 2: Whether the new changes brought forth a new understanding of female's roles?

No	76.6%
Yes	11.7% – had a new understanding about female equality engendered by female role change

Table 3: Did you have persistent views about female's Roles; did you all along think that there was gender neutrality?

No	91.7%
Yes	35% – had persistent view of female equality
Yes	8.3% – had persistent view of gender neutrality

Table 4: Did you consider female's roles to become more important?

	%	Reasons
Yes	40.4% (63.3% of them are females)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75%: females were given higher significance or more space for their potential to develop • 98.3%: there had all along been female subordination and now the changes signified the elevation of female roles from being subordinate to more leading roles
No	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male was still dominating
No	3.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was not a change in status

Table 5: Did you accept further changes to female's roles?

	%	Reasons
Yes	85.2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36.7% are female-related • 21.7% are cultural/organizational/ faith-related • 5%: female subordination needed further enhancement • 11.7%: other reasons
No	3.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.3%: owing to gender neutrality, there was no imminent need for further changes • 6.7%: female should still play a subordinate role and so would not support further changes

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