

**EMOTIONAL HEALING THROUGH SHAMANISTIC QUESTION-ASKING IN
TAIWAN**

by

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DEDICATION

This page is dedicated to Dr. Marvin McDonald and Dr. Masahiro Minami for their continuous support in this thesis project and their expertise in the respective research competence and interests. Dr. Marvin McDonald provided ongoing and timely support, which helped build the foundation of this project. As a methodologist, Dr. McDonald significantly contributed to various sections of this thesis, especially with his original development of the Linguistic Ecology Protocol. Dr. Minami has been my long-term mentor and sensei since I started my undergraduate study at Simon Fraser University. His teaching approach inspired me to pursue a career in counselling; his expertise in cross-cultural studies and multicultural counselling is beneficial in this project. Dr. Minami never stopped supporting my growth as an individual and counsellor. In addition, I am beyond grateful to be able to refer to Dr. Fred Chou's PhD dissertation using the Linguistic Ecology Protocol; it helped me navigate the research, transcription, and translation process. Lastly, my family, especially my mother, helped with significant portions of the transcription activities in this study. I would not be here if it were not for their support and encouragement. Thank you for your time, effort, and support in making this research project happen.

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PREFACE

For webpages and documents without English translation, all translations are written by the author and the research team (please see Appendix J) and are presented within parentheses. Please see Appendix I for the Linguistic Ecology Protocol for additional information on translation activities. No transliteration will be included. Research data and analysis are obtained and analyzed in Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English. A list of glossary entries can be found in Appendix A. Some web pages in the references contain non-peer-reviewed content on geographical, statistical, and religious information in Taiwan; these references are transliterated and translated into English. The term “principal investigator” and the pronouns “I” and “we” are all used in this document to me as the thesis author who as supported by a research team.

ABSTRACT

This research examines how shamanistic practices promote emotional healing for the Taiwanese community. A shaman is a messenger that delivers messages between the spiritual and human worlds (Lee et al., 2010). Mental health stigmatization is prevalent in Asia (Lauber & Rössler, 2007), which hinders emotional support-seeking in Taiwan. Folk religions, such as shamanism, bring calmness to the Taiwanese community (cf. Wu & Liu, 2014). The *question-asking* procedure is culturally accepted and regularly practiced in Taiwan. Phenomenological semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture participants' experiences with traditional healing through shamanistic practices. Using a linguistic ecology protocol, we discovered that shamans strengthen hope, encourage autonomy in decision-making, and provide insights into participants' future outlooks. This study investigates shamanistic practices in support of collaboration and complementarity between counsellors and shamans (Moodley et al., 2008). It seeks to illuminate a broader understanding of spiritual coping in Taiwan and internationally in relation to Canadian practices.

Keywords: shaman, Taiwan, cultural practice, emotional healing, lived experience

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS COMMITTEE	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PREFACE	v
ABSTRACT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Taiwanese Culture, Values, and Customs	8
Cultural Historical Connection	8
Confucian Heritage Cultures	10
Collectivist Culture	11
Mental Illness Stigmatization	12
Religion in Taiwan	14
Buddhism	15
Daoism	16
Worship and Rituals	17
Taiwanese' Approaches to Emotional Healing	18
Traditional Chinese Medicine	19
Complementary and Alternative Medicine	20
Shamanistic Practices	22
Research Question	23

CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	25
Study Design.....	25
Phenomenology.....	26
Reflexivity and Hermeneutic Circle.	28
van Manen’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology.	28
Paradigm Assumptions	31
Rationale	32
Procedures.....	33
Participants.....	33
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	34
Recruitment.....	34
Sampling Procedure and Rationale	35
Data Collection	36
Data Gathering, Recording, and Storage	36
Data Analysis	37
Rigour and Quality.....	38
Research Ethics	39
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	42
Shared Meaning Patterns	42
Meaning Pattern I: Cultural and Spiritual	42
Meaning Pattern II: Destiny	45

Meaning Pattern III: Special Shamanistic Gifts and Abilities	46
Meaning Pattern IV: Temporal	52
Meaning Pattern V: General Beliefs and Respect for the Higher Power.....	54
Meaning Pattern VI: Shamans' Traits may Facilitate Stronger Connections with Participants.....	56
Meaning Pattern VII: Participants' Instincts and Judgments.....	58
Meaning Pattern VIII: Shamans as One Primary Source of Support.....	62
Distinctive Meaning Patterns	64
Integrated Summary	66
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	70
Connections with Current Literature	70
Relevance.....	76
Implications.....	78
Research Implications	78
Counselling Implications	79
Limitations	81
Conclusion	82
REFERENCES	84
Appendix A: Glossary	98
Appendix B: Invitation Email and Oral Script	100
Appendix C: Recruitment Poster	102
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	103

Appendix E: Consent Form	105
Appendix F: Interview Guide	109
First Interview	109
Second Interview	111
Appendix G: Debriefing Statement	112
Appendix H: Follow-Up Email.....	113
Appendix I: Linguistic Ecology Protocol	114
Appendix J: Research Assistants	115
Appendix K: Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement	116

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Taiwan, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are widely accepted medical treatment forms. Posadzki et al. (2013) define CAM as the supplementary medical treatment, prevention, and diagnosis that complement or enhance the standard medicine or medical procedure. Huang et al. (2019) discovered that commonly seen CAM in Taiwan includes religious rituals and exercises (55%), Chinese herbal medicine (45%), dietary supplements (40%), massage (26%), scraping (guasha; 22%), and acupuncture (17%). As religion is an integral part of the Taiwanese culture, it is unsurprising to learn that religious practices are the most frequently sought-after category of CAM in Taiwan.

Popular religious beliefs in Taiwan are ranked in the following order: Buddhism (35%), Daoism (33%), and atheism (19%; "Taiwan religion profiles," n.d.). While Buddhism and Daoism each have their adherents, there are a lot of commonalities, fundamental principles, and shared beliefs between them. In Buddhism and Daoism, one of the widely used CAM medical approaches is the practice of shamanism. A shaman is a messenger who delivers messages between the spiritual and human worlds (Lee et al., 2010). A glossary, which includes the term shaman, has been provided for readers in Appendix A. Shamanism is one of the most prominent CAMs central to Buddhism, Daoism, and even some atheists in Taiwan. Due to the stereotypes regarding mental health, including the stigma of disclosing help-seeking behaviours from a certified counsellor, it is worth noting that shamanistic practices serve as the closest alternative medical treatment to Western counselling. In other words, although Canadians may perceive shamanism as a CAM, it is a primary pathway of emotional healing for the Taiwanese community based on observations, lived experience, and relevant research (Huang et al., 2019).

One prevalent stereotype surrounding mental health in Taiwan is the fear that seeking professional help from a therapist may be linked to psychopathology or seen as a sign of unfitness for society. Taiwanese often respond to help-seeking behaviour in a judgmental and critical manner, as such action is typically perceived as weak and problematic. For this reason, many Taiwanese, especially the middle-aged and elderly populations, prefer to access emotional support through shamanism practices (Lauber & Rössler, 2007). In Taiwan, asking a question is a direct translation that carries the meaning of ‘something is bothering me, and I hope to talk about it.’ In other words, the act of question-asking serves as an alternative approach to help-seeking. Not only is it more socially accepted to seek psychological support from shamans, but it is also a culturally recognized mainstream approach to accessing mental health care (Wu & Liu, 2014). While shamanistic practices are integral to Buddhism and Daoism, individuals who identify as atheists or follow other religious beliefs also seek support from Taiwanese shamans. As a result, even though Western psychotherapy is available for addressing mental health concerns, most Taiwanese prefer finding emotional comfort and relief through the process of asking a question of a shaman. This culturally appropriate practice allows individuals to connect with their emotions as they narrate their stories and explore possible solutions in collaboration with a shaman.

The understanding of shamans and psychics differs between the East and the West. In the West, psychics and shamans are sometimes distinguished based on the differences in the skills possessed by each practitioner. To define shamanistic practices more concretely, a *shaman* is often understood as a traditional healer or someone who serves as a medium between the human and spiritual worlds (Lee et al., 2010). On the other hand, a *psychic* is characterized by an individual who demonstrates supernatural abilities such as clairvoyance, telepathy, and

precognition (Leeson, 2011). Psychics are believed to communicate with the deceased without experiencing any harm or negative side effects on their health and well-being. Both shamanistic and psychic services are commonly seen in Taiwan because they are easily accessible and culturally appropriate healing services. They are often performed for free or in exchange for food or monetary donations. It is common and expected for individuals seeking mental health support to encounter those who possess both shamanistic and psychic abilities. Shamanism practices in Taiwan are understood in vastly different ways than in North America; the paranormal abilities both psychics and shamans possess may present themselves in the forms of psychotic or schizophrenic symptoms in the West. As the act of question-asking has become a normalized practice, most Taiwanese are comfortable receiving shamanistic support, as it is not stigmatized in ways that Western psychotherapy or psychopathology is. Accordingly, shamanistic and psychic practices are not only a part of the religious rituals, but also culturally sanctioned healing practices that are prevailing and highly prestigious in Taiwan. Hence, although the term shaman is used predominantly in the current study, I also include the psychic's paranormal skills as a form of shamanistic practice.

While this research prioritizes shamans who can communicate between the spiritual and human worlds, there are a variety of shamanistic practices in Taiwan. These practices include fortune-telling and karma analysis through the shape of rice, praying for wishes to come true through “Jiaobei” (擲杯), lighting incense sticks, “siu-kiann” (收驚 Chin et al., 2020), or reading the shape of a palm, to name a few. The dynamic approaches to shamanism not only serve as a mainstream healing approach for the Taiwanese community to receive emotional support but also play an integral part in culturally accepted forms of emotional help-seeking that combat stigmatization toward mental illness. This study focuses on the type of shamans who can

communicate and deliver messages to someone asking a question with or without a scribe in verbal, written, or action-based forms.

As the principal investigator of the current research study, I am quite familiar with the shamanistic practices available in Taiwan. I lived, learned, and played in the land of Taiwan until I immigrated to Canada at the age of 16. During my development, I was frequently exposed to the shamanistic culture. My family is closely connected to some local shamans in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. In fact, my father is blessed with the gift of being a shaman himself. Our Buddhist beliefs enabled my father to build deeper connections with the spiritual figures worshipped in Taiwan and other Taiwanese shamans.

Through my father and other shamans' ongoing practices, I became thoroughly acquainted with the preparation work, which was almost universal to all clients and the consultation process—which was uniquely tailored to each question-asker. However, shamanistic practice is fundamentally different from Western counselling. Through my observations, I witnessed incredible changes in many clients after receiving one-time or ongoing support from Taiwanese shamans. For instance, a relative who undergoes regular dialysis sought support from a shaman because familial issues and her health had become distressing for her. After several visits to the shaman, her emotional well-being improved drastically, which contributed to an improved health state overall. I am deeply moved by the shifts that occur in an individual because of the authenticity, warmth, care, and unique gifts provided by shamans. My experience inspired me to research shamanistic practices in Taiwan as a mainstream healing approach. Moreover, the current research on shamanism practices in Taiwan may offer an alternative, culturally specific healing approach distinct from those commonly found in North America.

According to Statistics Canada (2022), Canada has the highest immigration rate among all G7 countries; one in four individuals who land in Canada identifies as an immigrant. As researchers and future clinicians, we want to be aware of the global picture of health care because Canada continues to have increasing numbers of immigrants. This trend has continued for the past two decades and is predicted to remain on this trajectory. Sivakumar (2023) states that in 2022, China and Taiwan contributed to the second-largest immigration population in Canada. Therefore, healthcare professionals must be more aware of CAM and the healing practices of the Chinese immigrants in Canada. Healthcare professionals, including hospital personnel, counsellors, and psychologists, need to gain a deeper understanding of culturally diverse health practices and provide services in a culturally appropriate manner.

Additionally, as principal investigators in the counselling psychology research community, we must be increasingly attentive to our client's religious and cultural practices. Researchers (e.g., Na et al., 2016) claim that immigrants in Canada are less likely to seek mental health support unless a culturally appropriate healing approach, such as religious or spiritual connection, is offered. Chinese immigrants are more likely to seek religion-based support compared to Asian Canadians born in Canada. Moodley et al. (2008) state that traditional healing practices intend to create a holistic balance between the mind, body, and spirit and harmony between the individual and their immediate environment. They find that clients often visit traditional healers, such as shamans and counsellors, simultaneously to maximize healing and recovery. It is suggested that dual intervention, where traditional healing becomes integrated into a part of psychotherapy, may generate equilibrium between humans' physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects. The current thesis project offers a crucial understanding for healthcare professionals to understand more comprehensively how shamanistic practices in Taiwan can

support emotional healing for Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants in Canada. In addition, the positive change shamans bring to clients suggests possibilities for collaboration between counsellors and shamans to maximize one's healing. This partnership may be beneficial for Asian clients or Chinese immigrants to experience more significant emotional healing through the combination of traditional counselling and shamanistic services.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I aim to explore an essential aspect of the conventional culture, religion and approaches to emotional healing in Taiwan. In this thesis, *emotional healing* is defined as a process that is both integrative and transformative. Its goal is to facilitate positive change in the mind, body, and spirit while promoting a sense of wholeness within an individual (DuBose et al., 2018). In the current study, healing of the mind and spirit is particularly crucial, as religion, especially Buddhism, is integral to shamanistic practices in Taiwan. While somatic sensations and bodily recovery contribute to emotional healing relatively indirectly (Huang et al., 2019), they still indicate improved psychological well-being. Winkelman (2012) states that shamanistic practices are prevalent across different countries and continents including Asia, Africa, Australasia, Europe, and America; relevant research cited regarding shamanistic studies in these regions is incorporated in this chapter. This research focuses solely on Taiwan's traditionally sanctioned healing practices; it does not examine personal beliefs or political stances in the current administrative priorities in the Taiwanese health care system. This section discusses previous literature reviews on Taiwanese cultural traditions, social norms and values, religion, and forms of CAM practices in Taiwan.

The purpose of the first section of this chapter is to introduce the cultural and historical connection between Taiwan and China, as well as the importance of Confucianism culture that is embedded as the root of moral and societal standards in Taiwan. The collectivistic traits shown by the Taiwanese are fundamentally relevant to the principles of Confucian Heritage Culture (Kang & Chang, 2016). Unfortunately, collectiveness in the nation does not eliminate the intense stigmatization of mental illness in Taiwanese society. Such stigma serves as the drive for individuals to seek emotional support through local shamans. The second part of the chapter

discusses three central religious beliefs in Taiwan: Buddhism, Taoism, and atheism. Religious beliefs are associated with the Confucian Heritage Culture and set the groundwork for shamanistic practices. The last segment of the literature review examines shamanism as a mainstream healing approach in Taiwan. Taiwanese' perceptions of shamanistic practices as a form of culturally sanctioned psychological cure are also discussed.

Taiwanese Culture, Values, and Customs

As a part of East Asia, Taiwan is surrounded by the Taiwan Strait, Luzon Strait, Bashi Channel, the East China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. The land of Taiwan is roughly 36,197 km², resulting in a population density of 649 per km² (Taiwan population 2023, n.d.). In other words, Taiwan is more densely populated than most cities in North America. Although it is a small island, almost 24 million people reside in Taiwan as of 2023, including Hokkien, Hakka, Hoklo, Indigenous communities, international students and workers, and immigrants. The long-standing political connection between Taiwan and Mainland China facilitated diverse cultural and historical development in Taiwan. The long-established Taiwan-China tie cultivated similar cultural values in both regions. As the current thesis is based in Canada, it is worth noting that the Taiwanese culture and traditions are relatively conservative compared to the cultural values in North America (Shorey et al., 2020), which makes the research of shamanistic practices even more crucial. This section discusses Taiwanese culture, values, customs, and rituals.

Cultural Historical Connection

The author of 台灣歷史簡介 (Introduction to Taiwanese History, n.d.) stated that Taiwan had been colonized by both the Netherlands and Spain (1624), Ming and Zheng Dynasties (1661), Qing Dynasty (1683), and Japan (1895) after the prehistorical period. The long-standing historical and cultural connection between Taiwan and China over the last few centuries showed

that the two countries shared similar cultural values and practices. Politically, they were seen as one nation until Chiang Kai-Shek retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after the Second Kuomintang-Communist Civil War between 1945 and 1950 (Dien, 2000). Starting in 1991, Taiwanese Executive Yuan (2023) asserted that the territory of Taiwan includes Taiwan, as well as the islands of Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu. Taiwan gradually evolved into its current social and historical outlook through multiple protests and revolutions. There are six municipalities, 13 counties, and three cities in Taiwan; the languages spoken include Chinese Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Austronesian. Despite colonization by various countries and separation from Mainland China, the Confucian heritage culture continued to be practiced and respected by Taiwanese (Evers et al., 2011). Ethnic groups in Taiwan, such as Hokkien, Hakka, Hoklo, and the indigenous communities, not only inherited Confucian principles but also maintained practices that promote the functioning of the values and rituals in their respective subcultures.

Long before Kuomintang relocated to Taiwan, several indigenous tribes already existed. All tribes spoke a form of Austronesian languages, and they all identified as Austronesia-speaking people who reside in Taiwan, Maritime Southeast Asia, Micronesia, coastal New Guinea, Island Melanesia, Polynesia, and Madagascar (Marzuki et al., 2003). According to the Council of Indigenous Peoples (n.d.), there are currently 16 different indigenous tribes in Taiwan: the Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Pinuyumayan, Rukai, Cou, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu tribe. Most tribes relied on the agricultural industry for a living. Each has its clothing design, social norms and expectations, religious beliefs, language, arts and crafts, music, architecture, dance, and cultural foods. It was worth noting that all indigenous tribes residing in Taiwan highly valued the display of gratitude

towards their forefathers and the spiritual connection with their respective ancestors, the divine, and spirits. Some tribes valued shamanistic practices as the shaman helped connect them to their ancestors or other spirits. Toulson (2012) described this cultural-spiritual practice by illustrating the shamanism culture in the Amis tribe after a typhoon took many Tafalong villagers' lives. An ancestor of the Amis tribe expressed their thoughts, feelings, and emotions through a shaman. Over the years, Wu and Chen (2023) discovered that although some cultural practices and languages have been lost as newer generations come forward, younger individuals from the Indigenous communities continued to search for their cultural roots as they integrated traditional Indigenous practices into their learning and career.

Confucian Heritage Cultures. Confucianism was the backbone of Chinese and Taiwanese culture (Evers et al., 2011). Bockover (2010) recognized it as a philosophical approach to thinking, which focused on the practice of following societal rules and norms, interpersonal harmony, acceptance and obedience towards authority, as well as self-cultivated virtues. The main principles of Confucianism were ren ai (仁愛: love and compassion), li yue (禮樂: manner and music), xin yi (信義: trust, moral, and integrity), zhong shu (忠恕: loyalty), gong jing (恭敬: respect), and xiao ti (孝悌: filial piety). Li (2016) and Hwang (1998) stated that the virtue of Confucianism principles entailed treating others with benevolence, integrity, loyalty, trust, wisdom, forgiveness, and respect while caring for their parents with filial piety. In addition, Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) highly valued an individual's capability to follow the law and societal norms, specifically respecting the elders, those who are more knowledgeable, and those with higher power. Regarding conflict resolution, Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) discovered that Taiwanese tend to oblige and avoid conflict to "save face," meaning to prevent humiliation for self and others. The CHC also emphasized one's willingness and

capacity to reach intrapersonal and intrapersonal harmonious states through engagement with music and dancing as a therapeutic approach to distress.

CHC profoundly influenced values, social expectations, and customs in Taiwan. The book, *The Analects of Confucius* (1989), had been mandated as a part of the core curriculum for all school-age children. Despite the highly encouraged and valued virtues in CHC, researchers such as Stankov (2010) perceived the Confucian principles as a breeding ground for anxiety and self-doubts in school learners' perception of their academic achievements. Nevertheless, Lim et al. (2007) believed that the core values in CHC remained essential to adult children raised in the Confucian cultural context, especially those in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries. Smyer (2011) stated that the Confucianism cultures served as a reference that allowed Taiwanese to explore and understand their role as individuals, as well as their role in society and filial contributions.

Collectivist Culture

Individuals who resided in Asia were known to be living in a collectivist culture. According to Hofstede cultural dimensions theory (2023), the collectivism dimension evaluates the extent of group-orientation tendency in society, the societal and familial obligation expected of an individual, and dependence on groups (Beugelsdijk & Welze, 2018). In addition, collectivism was further assessed based on how individuals defined their self-image. For example, when referring to oneself, an individual with a collectivist background may self-refer as “we,” and an individual with an individualistic upbringing may phrase their identity with an “I.” In line with Confucianism principles where interpersonal harmony, respect, loyalty, and filial piety were highly valued, Taiwan was identified as a collectivist society compared to

individualistic countries such as the United States (Chiou, 2001). Collectivist society emphasized long-term commitment, resulting in tight family or friend group relationships.

The collectivistic culture in Taiwan was manifested through respectful and harmonious relationships in the family. Although society was undergoing some shifts in its demonstration of collectivist and individualistic characteristics, it was expected and a societal norm to see multigenerational families cohabitating until 2012 (Xie, 2013). This was because togetherness and willingness to care for the elders through action were expected of the married couples. Typically, females who married into their partner's family were expected to take on the caretaker role of not only their immediate family but also the parents of their partners' (Lee & Luo, 2021). Males were responsible for the family's financial security and were generally not expected to do many household chores. It was a cultural assumption that married women should prioritize their marital family unit and the in-laws as the natal kin relationship was maintained. The filial piety trait was highly valued, a conventional practice typical of Taiwan's cultural and social norms. Despite such phenomenon, married individuals expect, and were expected, to integrate into their in-laws' family well while fulfilling their obligations to take care of their original family. The collectivistic characteristics were demonstrated in Taiwan.

Mental Illness Stigmatization

As mentioned previously, various researchers have indicated that the behaviour of seeking mental health support was stigmatized in Taiwan as well as most countries in Asia. For instance, Lauber and Rössler (2007) provided a review of past research that demonstrated the stigmatization of mental illness in Asia. In Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, and Japan, mental illness was often perceived as unsafe and threatening, which prevented the public from gaining a deeper understanding of the sources of unwellness. Researchers found that members of

collectivist cultures did not protect Asian patients experiencing psychiatric symptoms from mental health stigmatization within the family. Overt mental struggles such as psychotic or schizophrenic symptoms were especially detrimental to both the individuals facing these challenges as well as their families. Family members of the mentally challenged individual frequently and naturally associate burden and embarrassment with not only the illness itself but also the struggling individuals. Au (2017) also indicated that depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems were more likely to form when the struggling individual's family failed to provide adequate support as a coping resource.

Kudva et al. (2020) also researched the reasoning behind why mental illness is highly stigmatized in Asian countries. They discovered that stigmatization initially started because psychiatric patients were isolated and secluded in most Asian societies. In addition, a lack of understanding of mental illness, as well as its roots, was common in laypersons. Researchers further noticed that parents' existing negative attitudes regarding mental illness were more likely to be adopted by their children, which then maintained the stigmatization towards people who struggled to readjust their mental well-being. For example, individuals would likely prefer not to live near patients showing psychiatric symptoms. Other commonly seen phenomena, such as false beliefs that individuals with mental illness were "weak but not sick" and that they were difficult to predict, were prevalent in Asian societies.

Lauber and Rössler (2007) detected that mental illness was a prominent cause of divorces and separation in a romantic relationship. These phenomena were the result of social disapproval, as well as unempathetic and invalidating attitudes toward patients' families. Interestingly, Lauber and Rössler discovered that in the Asian culture, supernatural and often religious healing approaches such as the shamanistic practice were prevalent and effective in

alleviating mental health challenges. Asians were found to be reserved and doubtful towards the mental health support and treatment plans provided in traditional counselling services. Authors suggested that additional resources on a personal level, as well as financial support, may decrease mental health stigmatization in Asian societies. Au (2017) recommended a re-examination of the unsupportive and stigmatized perception of mental illness in the Asian culture on a systemic level.

The principles of CHC establish socially acceptable and respected standards for the Taiwanese community. Despite Taiwan being identified as a part of the collectivist and showing collectivistic traits, mental illness stigmatization is a hindrance that prevents Taiwanese from seeking mental health support from certified counsellors. In addition to shamanistic support already served as a default when seeking emotional support, the cultural values, norms, and stigmatized beliefs encouraged Taiwanese to reach out for support from shamans as well. This section provides an overview of the existing and increasing need for shamanistic services. It is crucial to acknowledge how other factors, such as religious beliefs, contribute to the growing demand for the practice of shamanism in Taiwan.

Religion in Taiwan

Religion in Taiwan has evolved through colonization in the 20th century. Cheng (2012) stated that the colonizer, the Japanese government, allowed Taiwanese to develop their own religious beliefs, resulting in the creation of the term “folk religion” in present-day Taiwan. The folk religion is comprised of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. While Confucianist principles serve as the backbone of moral and cultural development in Taiwan, they have become integrated with two of the most popular religions in Taiwan, Buddhism and Daoism. According to Taiwanese Executive Yuan (2023), the central concepts of both religions were

closely related. Despite some differences between the two, the religious practices and rituals of the folk religion largely overlap. As discussed in the previous section, religious beliefs are integral to the shamanistic practices in Taiwan, as shamanistic practices are conceptualized and executed based on an understanding of Buddhism. This section discusses Buddhism and Daoism understandings, the rituals of Taiwanese folk religion, and the connection between Buddhism, Daoism, and shamanism.

Buddhism

Buddhism is commonly seen in Asian religious communities and is a widely accepted and adapted worldview in Taiwan. Khan and Aigerim (2020) claimed that Buddhists believe that “yin (因)” and “guo (果)” are the root of everything that happens in life. *Yin* stands for the cause while *guo* means consequence. In Buddhism, believers comprehend life circumstances based on their beliefs on yin and guo because when an individual acts kindly, it is assumed that good karma will be returned. However, yin and guo could be challenging to comprehend in some circumstances. They further suggested that reincarnation would allow individuals to trace the cause and consequences that happened in this life back to their previous lives, explaining good and bad karma in one’s present life. In addition, McLaughlin and Braun (1998) stated that Buddhists strongly believed in *yuan fen* (緣分), a predetermined binding force between two people. In the Anglophone language, *yuan fen* can be understood as fate or destiny. The belief in *yuan fen* was widely accepted, and even atheists found this concept fit their respective circumstances. *Yuan fen* is a fundamental principle for both yin and guo and reincarnation.

According to the Taiwanese National Religion Information Network (n.d.b), Buddhist principles included beliefs in the unpredictability of life (無常), the understanding that the sense of self would not always respond to the human body’s physical presence in the world (無我),

quietness, which entailed appreciating human suffering and rising from it (涅槃寂靜) and that death was inevitable to all beings. Buddhist believers were encouraged to meditate, chant, and continue building good karma to exit the cycle of reincarnation and to a state of nirvana (涅槃).

In English, this state of completion could be described as rest in peace. Khan and Aigerim (2020) further illustrated this idea by reinforcing that ending all sufferings experienced by humans was possible. However, before reaching nirvana, the state of completion, humans must have shown understanding of the right-fold paths, including holding the right view, intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right mindfulness, right concentration, and the right effort. As an individual develops all the “rights,” meditation can help accelerate reaching the goal of nirvana.

Daoism

Xiong and Ju (2023) provided a holistic review of Daoism by exploring its philosophy, epistemology, application about government, educational approach, and one’s ability to self-cultivate. As Daoism holds the principle where appreciation towards *Dao* is beyond ordinary human understanding or behaviours, the Daoist advocates for the absence of action and words. On the surface, Daoism is presented in ways that oppose the notion of learning when excessive knowledge is taught to children. They supported knowledge learning but believed that knowledge that was cumbersome, restricted, unchangeable, and overly explicit in its position ought to be prevented. In addition to knowledge attainment, Daoism encouraged harmony and self-cultivation until the nature of learning and education could be achieved without words. In other words, when the principles are fulfilled, the state of *Dao* is achieved. Chen (2001) illustrated how the CHC, Buddhism, and Daoism were essential to the initial and continuous development of Taiwanese cultural values and customs.

Worship and Rituals

The worship of the Buddhist and Daoist Gods happens in the temples in Taiwan (Cheng, 2012). Temples serve many functions in Taiwan. For example, it is a location for the community to connect, where dialects are spoken and maintained, and most importantly, a sacred site where Taiwanese traditions and rituals are practiced. As religion plays an indispensable role in Taiwanese society, there are more than 16 thousand temples in Taiwan, according to the Taiwanese National Religion Network (n.d.a). Furthermore, Taiwanese believe that individuals' spirits exist even after they pass away. Smyer (2011) illustrated that as a part of the rituals in Buddhist and Daoist households, it is common for most families to build an altar at home. On the altar, idols of the Buddhas and pictures of the deceased family members are worshipped through incense practices, bowing, and displaying food and drinks as a representation of respect for the spirits. In the West, some commentators associate incense practices with superstition, which is then perceived negatively. However, in the East, such as Taiwan, incense practices were anchors that bolstered spiritual growth on an interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural level (Tsai, 2004). Incense practice was treated as a culturally appropriate approach to connect with the spiritual figures of both Buddhist and Daoist religions. Both Buddhist and Daoist believers of all ages and genders commonly practice it.

The incense practices were reported to be used as a tool that initiated a connection with religious figures such as *Guanyin Pusa* (觀世音菩薩), also known as the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion. The practice itself provided calming effects that were often perceived as emotionally healing. Rossato et al. (2021) researched the impact of prayers on children and adolescents with cancer. They discovered that prayers in different religious practices facilitated improvements in physical and emotional well-being; they noticed health improvements in

children and youth who have been diagnosed with cancer. Tsai (2004) investigated the impact of the *Baishatun Mazu*, the Holy Mother of the Sea, pilgrimage mission (白沙屯媽祖進香) in Miaoli, Taiwan. Incense practices were integral to the pilgrimage mission and were adopted as an ordinary practice that connected humans to Buddhist and Daoist Gods and ancestors. He discovered that such cultural practice attempting to communicate with *Mazu*, the mother of all beings in Taiwan, promoted determination to persist through adversities, cultural acceptance and recognition, and increased possibilities for one to experience Buddha's power and presence.

Taiwanese' Approaches to Emotional Healing

In addition to the meaning of emotional healing as previously defined in the introduction of this paper, it can also be viewed as a process that restores the self-efficacy, and the psychological, functional, and social aspects of one's emotional well-being and sense of wholeness (DuBose et al., 2018). Healing occurs when spirituality and religious beliefs are incorporated as a part of the recovery. Emotional healing requires an active energy flow while re-discovering balance (Glaister, 2001). It is multidimensional, fluid, unique from one person to another, and can be associated with bodily condition, personal connection, and one's mindset. As a result, while emotional healing places emphasis on recovering from current and past psychological trauma, an individual's ability to heal is dependent upon factors that impact this balance-restoring process.

Mesquita and Frijda (1992) noted that preferences in emotional expression in different cultures may result from differences in social norms, cultural-specific appraisal tendencies, and emotional regulation. Variance was also evident in the same nation despite shared understanding and appreciation of their standard socio-cultural practices. Kuo (2013) indicated that emotional healing in the collectivist society was often influenced by internal coping strategies: reliance on

self-relaxing and self-soothing techniques, as well as an external coping strategy: seeking help from others. The external coping style corresponded to the interpersonal harmonious aspect of the collectivist culture, where support would often be provided by friends, family members, spouses, parents, in-laws, relatives, support from one's immediate environment such as work connections, and shamanistic practices. Yeh and Wang (2000) further discovered that engagement in family reunions and social activities with friends was predominantly the chosen approach to managing emotional struggles for individuals from a collectivist background. Through these studies, one can notice that the interpersonal harmony aspect of the CHC was deeply ingrained in Taiwanese cultural beliefs and practices.

While CHC virtues and practices are shown in Taiwanese approaches to emotional healing, this section also examines other forms of healing. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is used to achieve a mind-body balance; other types of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are common in the Taiwanese community. Along with shamanistic practices, TCM and CAM are mainstream healing approaches for the people in Taiwan.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

While Huang et al. (2019) defined Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as a CAM in Taiwan, Chan (2005) asserted that TCM has been a mainstream medical approach in Taiwan and China. He stated that using herb extracts to treat illnesses was very advanced in Taiwan. TCM was a commonly accepted and adopted approach for the treatment of both physical and mental challenges for the Taiwanese population at large. Shahrajabian (2019) concluded that TCM encompassed acupuncture, acupressure, herbal or plant-based medication, cupping, dieting, and moxibustion. Nestler and Dovey (2001) claimed that many traditional treatments have been long-established. For example, dating back more than 2,000 years, acupuncture was first developed in

China. It was proven to be one of the most effective approaches in TCM because there were more than 2,000 acupuncture points in the human body that bridged 12 main pathways and eight meridians, the secondary pathways in the body. The meridians are channels that carry vital energy in the human body; the acupuncture points help lessen pain and physiological symptoms when pressed. Individuals can become sick or show symptoms of “imbalance” when the meridian channels are blocked. As a result, clearing such a system is crucial with the help of traditional Chinese medicine.

Aside from acupuncture, TCM’s effectiveness has been demonstrated through ethnopharmacological research. Zhou et al. (2022) revealed that herbal medicine contained elements that would successfully facilitate physiological health and support healing effects that promoted healing of the side effects caused by physical illnesses such as diabetes. TCM has further shown its effectiveness in alleviating symptoms of COVID-19 (Cui et al., 2020), regenerating bone tissue (Gao et al., 2022), as well as general health and wellness (Bian et al., 2015). TCM also enhanced mental well-being as it helped with stress reduction. It is a dominant medical treatment in Taiwan complementary to Western medicine. However, the commonality and effectiveness of TCM do not make it the only physiological, medical, and psychological treatment approach available in Taiwan. Other complementary and alternative medicines are reported to help heal the mind and the body. The following section discusses CAMs in Taiwan, especially the predominant CAM, shamanistic practice, which is a primary way to access emotional healing for Taiwanese.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Traditional emotional healing within the Chinese community vastly differs from Western emotional etiology and recovery practices. In China and Taiwan, emotional etiology or trauma is

believed to originate from an imbalance within one's body and environment. Wu (1982) claimed that Chinese medicine, the traditional concept of Yin and Yang, and the five universal elements are integral to emotional healing for the Chinese. Yin represents a combination of negativity, femininity, passivity, and darkness. In contrast, yang signals positivity, masculinity, activeness, and warmth (see Appendix A). Another fundamental element of emotional well-being, the five universal elements, includes metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The holism between Yin and Yang and the five elements can create a harmonious mind-body state; neither physical nor psychological etiological symptom is evident. Alternatively, a disharmonious state can promote the development of etiological symptoms manifesting in an individual's mind or body. Emotional healing can be achieved through balancing the yin-yang and the five elements within an individual (Pan, 2003). This can be attained via acupuncture, moxibustion, and having a disciplined life with regulated desires and a balanced diet.

In addition to a holistic mind-body balance, Barnes (1998) illustrated the notion of energy (*chi*, 氣) blockage that could lead to etiology in one's psychological, biological, or spiritual state. Similarly, the author believed acupuncture could promote clearing such blockage and restore physiological balance. He further stated that therapists and acupuncturists had attempted a multidisciplinary treatment where traditional psychotherapy was combined with acupuncture. This treatment approach did not only serve as a medium between counselling and traditional Chinese CAM; the idea was also treated as another alternative and complementary medicine, facilitating the intercultural practices that incorporate both counselling practices in the West and the East.

Moreover, given that the tea culture has been seen as a central element in both China and Taiwan, Shahrajabian (2019) found that various types of tea, such as black tea, green tea, and

chrysanthemum tea, had functions of reducing stress and anxiety, preventing inflammation, and enhancing other physiological functioning. While these Chinese CAMs were vastly different from Western counselling and medication, Taiwanese have been engaging and have shown continuous engagement in these practices. Although further research is required, Thirthalli et al. (2016) indicated that different forms of CAM and a multidisciplinary collaboration on CAM between mental health and healthcare professionals showed promising results in improving mental well-being. The following subsection examines one of Taiwan's most widely used CAMs, shamanistic practices. Shamanism is viewed as a mainstream approach to emotional healing; the rituals and helpfulness make it a more predominant choice of healing for Taiwanese.

Shamanistic Practices. The shamanistic culture served as a primary CAM for counselling in Taiwan. Krippner (2002) defined shamans as practitioners who were highly appraised for the special gift or talent that they offered to fulfill the psychological needs of the community. Shamans were highly respected because they were unique in the ways they accessed information that others could not ordinarily obtain. Winkelman (1992) studied shamans who claimed to have abilities to interact with beings who were not in the human world. Krippner further explained that shamans served as a channel that helped communicate between a lay person and the spirit. They offered such support to others without involving their interests. The spirit incorporated within shamans allowed them to communicate some sacred and undisclosed content to laypersons. In other words, the shamanistic abilities came naturally; typically, they could not be obtained through ordinary training and practices. Krippner described shamans in a way that closely aligned with shamanistic practices in Taiwan. Due to the mental health stigmatization discussed in the earlier section, asking a question of a shaman became the most widely accepted and practical approach for individuals to seek help in a challenging situation.

Wen (1998) illustrated that folk psychotherapy such as shamanism, beliefs about supernatural phenomena like the display of God or ghost's presence, and spirit possession heavily impacted the Taiwanese' approaches to emotional healing.

In a group case study, Wu & Liu (2014) aimed to discover religious coping for Taiwanese female folk religion believers, their activities, and how these practices enhanced their emotional well-being. Participants were invited to share their experiences engaging in folk-religion practices and activities when coping with adversities. Subjects in this study must have experiences seeking support from religious activities or ritual practices from their ancestors, religious figures such as *Mazu*, Gods of Nature, religious rituals in temples, or a shaman. Each participant was invited to attend one to two interviews. Sixty-eight percent of the 22 participants indicated improved psychological well-being after seeking help from a form of folk-religion practices. They shared that engaging in these activities brought hopefulness, peacefulness, comfortableness, increased self-esteem, and guidance in finding meaning and purpose in life. In addition, they felt more courageous, kinder, generous, and forgiving and had an increased ability to self-regulate. Individuals who visited a shaman experienced spiritual transcendence, where they believed that a significant change occurred that drew them closer to the religion and the religious activities they engaged in. Being closely relevant to the current study, Wu and Liu illustrated the importance of folk religion activities, especially shamanistic practices, in promoting emotional healing in Taiwanese.

Research Question

Current research outlines contemporary cultural values, customs, and practices in Taiwan. CHC has been fundamental in forming cultural values since the Kuomintang relocated to Taiwan. Different ethnic groups and indigenous tribes have developed their respective socio-

cultural practices that continue to be appropriate for their community. Through these transitions, religion is indispensable to each ethnic group's culture. While the indigenous tribes in Taiwan performed many ancestral and spiritually related rituals, most Taiwanese were believers in Buddhism or Daoism. Incense practices were central to the functioning of both religions, especially when an individual attempted to make a connection with spiritual figures with the power an ordinary person could not attain. Due to the mental health stigmatization in Taiwan, individuals often seek help from shamans when they encounter a challenging situation. Researchers indicated that traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, shamanism, and other forms of CAMs contribute significantly to improving one's physical health and emotional well-being. In this study, I investigated how shamanistic practices have shaped the emotional healing process in Taiwanese people. Hence, the research question of this thesis project states, "What happens when Taiwanese ask a question of a shaman?" As most of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the research question in Mandarin is as follows: 問神明或老師的文化對您的心理健康有什麼影響？

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter examines aspects of phenomenology as they fit with a constructivist paradigm. Specifically, I adopt van Manen's (2007) hermeneutic phenomenological approach to capture the essence of participants' experiences of shamanistic support in Taiwan. I outline and explore the design and procedure of phenomenological study and illustrate the features that are unique to it. Elements of study design, procedure, and analysis are discussed, and complex issues are examined in their respective subsections.

Study Design

The current study aimed to understand the Taiwanese's experiences of receiving emotional support from asking shamans questions. Phenomenology has been chosen as the most fitting research methodology for investigating such experiences. Specifically, it is used to explore participants' in-depth lived experiences seeking help from a shaman in this project. These experiences are expected to describe an alternative approach to conventional counselling in Canada. As I am fluent in spoken and written English and Chinese Mandarin and proficient in Taiwanese, significant portions of the interview were conducted in Mandarin; minor parts of the interview were communicated in Taiwanese and English to more clearly express meanings than they could articulate in Mandarin. A member-checking process was integrated into a part of this research. For instance, in the second interview, participants appreciated being shown the present research findings. Some participants also elaborated on how they shifted their mindset after the first interview. As a part of data analysis procedures, the shared and distinctive meaning patterns were translated into English. The translation process helped refine the shared and distinctive meanings in participants' native language during data analysis. Thus, translation helped researchers to grasp and formulate the meaning essences that shaped participants' experiences.

Throughout the research project, I coordinated with a team of collaborators who broadened the linguistic ecology of data analysis (see Appendix I).

Phenomenology

At the beginning of the 20th century, various forms of phenomenology emerged as a form of rejection of the application of objective research as practiced in natural sciences to the systematic study of human beings. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl introduced the concept of phenomenology in his book *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* during the philosophical movement in Europe in the 1900s (Husserl, 1913/2013). Husserl states that *pure phenomenology* entails that scientific and experimental findings are not the essence of phenomenology; human consciousness is. As a continual development of Husserl's ideas, Giorgi (2009) agrees that there are more effective approaches to support the science of psychology than experimentalism. Instead, the phenomenological approach provides a more extensive understanding of human psychological functioning. To make phenomenology more applicable, Giorgi developed guided steps and offered real-life examples of its implementation. He defined strategic practices of phenomenology through phenomenological reduction, description, and finding essences (Giorgi, 2007). In his advancement of phenomenology in psychology, Giorgi established an essential early stage of phenomenology that is being viewed and adopted as a methodology in psychological science. Giorgi's approaches are now known in psychology as *descriptive phenomenology*, which attributes peripheral significance to the context in which one is situated.

As phenomenology continued to develop its significance and versatility in the academy, Heidegger (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), Finlay (2009, 2013), and van Manen (2007) differentiated descriptive phenomenology from *interpretive* or *hermeneutic phenomenology*.

Heidegger posited that the core of hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes the importance of context. He argued that individuals are naturally hermeneutic; their instincts guide them to discover value and meaning in their lives. According to Heidegger's stance in phenomenology, a thorough understanding of an individual can only be obtained when their cultural, social, and political environment is considered. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires both the participant and the researcher to acknowledge their existing beliefs and values, where their respective backgrounds and perspectives are fully recognized. A researcher's reflexivity underlines the core of phenomenology, as the interpretation of the participant's experience and the interaction between the researcher and participants are crucial in discovering meaning.

Over the past two decades, Finlay framed a version of phenomenology as a methodology and addressed the concept of bracketing. Bracketing refers to highlighting specific concepts or ideas that enable researchers to engage fully with the expansive subjective experience of the participants (Finlay, 2009). Furthermore, Finlay (2013) argues that phenomenology has five interdependent components. They include (a) comfortability in accepting and adopting the phenomenological perspective; (b) becoming immersed into the individual's subjective construction of reality, consideration of various forms of implicit meanings, elucidating the phenomenon in its wholeness; and (c) the integration of each participant's unique standpoint.

As another critical contributor to phenomenological research in psychology, van Manen (2007) believes that phenomenology can be understood as *pathic knowing*, wherein our bodies respond to the surroundings and situations in our world and our existence associated with them. In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is an underlying assumption that an individual's biases and beliefs ought to be integrated into the process of interpretation (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). van Manen offered a six-step guideline that employs a holistic, selective, or detailed approach to

analyze participants' subjective experiences. Phenomenology has transformed from a philosophical principle to a methodology that studies a comprehensive and full range of human experiences. Its practicality is highly esteemed, and its usefulness and applicability have become a commonly used methodology in healthcare and counselling psychology (Molley et al., 2018).

Reflexivity and Hermeneutic Circle. Researchers' reflexivity constitutes a crucial part of phenomenological design. As an element of phenomenology, Finlay (2002) defines reflexivity as the researcher's explicit and self-conscious analytical process of their role, background, and biases as they immerse themselves as a part of the study (See also Fry et al., 2017). In a phenomenological study, while the researchers must acknowledge their own biases, these biases act as the foundation for them to fully immerse in the study as they become truly "hermeneutic" (See Figure 1).

van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenology. van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology emerges as the most suitable methodology for the present study, enabling researchers to thoroughly comprehend participants' real-life encounters. van Manen (2016) designed a sequential process of six steps to examine participants' subjective experiences in the domain of interest. These steps entail (a) delving into the essence of lived experience, which serves as the foundation for formulating the research question; (b) exploring participants' involvement in a relevant domain in its lived form; it can be obtained through semi-structured interviews for this particular investigation; (c) reflecting upon essential themes by examining the meaning inherent in participants' experiences closely; (d) engaging in the art of writing and rewriting to delve deeper into the participant's feelings, thoughts, and attitudes; (e) maintaining a focused and purposeful connection to the lived experience as related to the research question; (f) arrive at a balanced state between the research context as a whole and its composing parts and acknowledge

Figure 1

Hermeneutic Circle Illustrating Elements Contributing to The Understanding of Shamanistic Practices in Taiwan



Note. This diagram displays research activities that embody the part-whole connection in the hermeneutic circle.

the significance of individual transcriptions within the overall research design (see Molley et al., 2018).

Within hermeneutic phenomenology (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003), researchers can analyze data using selective, detailed, or holistic approaches. In the current study, the selective approach will be employed to examine participants' emotional healing experiences in multilingual counselling under their respective influences. This approach involves highlighting specific phrases or statements that convey the significance of participants' lived experiences. The selective approach was chosen over the holistic and detailed approaches because the primary investigator aims to capture the essence of the participants' lived experiences when asking shamans questions. In the selective approach, the researcher identifies the overarching meaning patterns, underlying meanings, and essential elements contributing to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). As the researcher intends to provide a rich and comprehensive finding by examining the concentrated data centering around this specific phenomenon, the selective approach is deemed the most effective for this research.

To help integrate the chosen methodology into the current research further, I formulated a step-by-step approach that mapped this study to van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach: (1) turning to the nature of the phenomenon researchers hope to investigate: the participants' emotional healing experiences in the context of shamanistic practices; (2) conducting a semi-structured interview as the participants reflect on their emotional healing experiences and consider when and how culture and religion appear central to their healing; (3) pondering participants' lived experiences and discover inherent meanings, such as feeling set free from further emotional suffering with shamanistic support; (4) engaging further with the emotional healing experiences of shamanistic practices by identifying their feelings, thoughts,

and attitudes in relation to psychological comfort; (5) connecting the discovered meaning of emotional healing that occurs within the influence of religious and cultural contexts; (6) concluding the study with concluded phenomena that reflect each participant's individual experience and the overarching meaning patterns. The emergent nature of phenomenology is natural in this process as the phenomenon deepens in meaningful significance when the essence from the interviews has been collected and analyzed.

Paradigm Assumptions

This study was conducted based on the principles of a constructivist paradigm, where all participants' subjective experiences were examined and validated. Mertens (2016) suggests that in constructivism, reality is created through the continual involvement of subjective appreciation towards truth and realness in our own lives; different presentations of a phenomenon are possible and credible. Knowledge is constructed and created based on our interaction with others in the world. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the hermeneutic aspect of constructivism; researchers should emphasize the meaning comprehension of everyone's lived experiences considering the cultural, political, and social aspects of their respective environments. By being reflexive, unbiased, and collaborative, knowledge is co-constructed between researchers and participants.

In constructivism, researchers are encouraged to uncover implicit meanings, including all nuances that have been implied but not stated. I can anticipate that these implicit meanings are multi-layered as they are constructed through one's comprehension and experience of life built upon different aspects of one's background. Onnis (2016) claims that the researcher becomes a part of the study as one serves as a primary investigator. As a result, with constructivism as the paradigm, I cannot be purely objective in a positivist sense due to our interaction with the participants and our involvement with the project. Appleton and King (1997) underline the

importance of collaboration between participants and researchers. Truth and knowledge creation are interwoven in this process. As participants describe their life encounters, they construct subjective reality grounded in their understanding and interaction with the world. To arrive at the essence of participants' subjective experiences, researchers must possess the knowledge and skills to interpret participants' experiences in a sound and fitting way. However, researchers must also recognize their beliefs and biases, as they may influence knowledge creation while interpreting participants' experiences.

Rationale

The hermeneutic constructivist approach is viewed as an appropriate design for the current study as the researcher explored the meaning behind participants' experiences with emotional healing when the religious, cultural, and emotional impact of shamanism is considered. This study aims to bring light to the lived experiences of Taiwanese participants who find healing not only because of shamans' gifts and skills but also because of the curing impact brought through the roles of religion and culture in this process. Each participant has different backgrounds and beliefs as their cultural, linguistic, social, and political contexts are unique to their experiences. As a result, the constructivist paradigm corresponds to the nature of participants' experiences as they construct subjective truths that are personal and significant through their involvement in this world. This research aims to bring a more extensive understanding of these individuals' experiences to a larger audience as the need for emotional healing increases in a multilingual and multicultural world. Furthermore, this project intends to introduce potential collaboration between shamans and therapists to maximize participants' emotional healing through their engagement in both spiritual and psychological states.

In this study, I hope to utilize skills from Carl Rogers' client-centred counselling approach (Peterson, 2008) to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences in their interactions with shamans. Rogers' orientation guides the collaboration between the participants and me by being authentic, warm, and empathetic, as positive rapport is created in the researcher-participant relationship. In addition, the client-centred aspect of his approach enables researchers to fully accept and comprehend the lived experiences as the researcher and participants work towards co-constructing the subjective truth and knowledge. Participants did not only share their experiences but were also treated as co-researchers in this study. The following section on research procedures begins with a summary of recruitment criteria and factors shaping participant eligibility.

Procedures

Participants

Malterud et al. (2015, 2021) provided guidance in information power for the current research study. I invited eight participants to enrich the impact of shamanistic practices in Taiwan. The total number of prospective participants exceeded the number that Kumar et al. (2020) indicated sufficient for a phenomenological study. Participants were recruited through snowball or nomination procedures via the Internet; they were Taiwanese who identified as having received support from a shaman. Such support may have been highly memorable and impactful to their lives when they sought support from shamans. Participants must meet the above criteria to participate in this study as the researcher aimed to investigate the emotional healing process in shamanistic practices. In addition, participants' experiences may provide significant insight into shamanism in Taiwan, mainly because it is treated with high prestige and has been helpful in individuals' journeys of emotional recovery.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. Participants must self-identify as Taiwanese who have received support from a shaman in Taiwan. They must be willing to share their experience working with a shaman and elaborate on this healing experience. At the time of participation, individuals who were struggling with acute mental health symptoms such as severe antisocial behaviours, personality disorders, psychosis, active substance use, addiction, bipolar disorder, and suicidal ideation were excluded for the safety of the participants and researchers, as well as the quality of the study (Ronconi et al., 2014). Individuals who had not self-identify as Taiwanese or had not received support from a shaman were not eligible to participate in this study.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were appropriate for this research as the researcher hoped to examine how the shamanistic culture helped promote emotional healing in Taiwanese. Participants recruited must have some experience working with a local shaman and be willing to share their knowledge in receiving and participating in this cultural practice. It is worth noting that the study result cannot be generalized as individuals interact with their culture differently, even when they share a similar cultural background. Based on my personal experience, the research team could anticipate some difficulty during the recruitment process in Taiwan as mental well-being and emotional healing were not often discussed in this specific cultural context.

Recruitment. The researcher recruited participants through friends and families who have received support from shamans. While Western counselling is less prevalent in Taiwan, cultural and religious beliefs facilitate emotional healing for the Taiwanese community. On a poster (see Appendix C) with all participation requirements listed in Chinese Mandarin, recruitment occurred naturally with familial support despite resistance to discussing emotional

healing in Taiwan. Regardless of the sense of safety provided to the participants, the research team did not want to recruit individuals who felt uncomfortable discussing topics such as experiences with emotional healing. In this study, the research team created a parallel degree of respect, so participants felt safe and comfortable sharing their experiences with the researchers. In addition to safety, the team made space for cultural sensitivity and conversations that may be emotionally activating. Eligible participants were invited to read through the informed consent. Taiwanese may show respect through implicit communication, such as body gestures, voice, or actions. Consequently, the researcher structured screening activities and interviews according to traits and approaches acceptable to Taiwanese. Eligible participants, two males and six females, were invited to read through the informed consent as part of research strategies to foster safety and respect. Participants were self-identified Taiwanese with ages ranging between 27-63 years old with various vocational and religious backgrounds.

Sampling Procedure and Rationale

The research team approached recruitment with nomination, purposive, and snowball sampling. Purposive and snowball sampling were chosen because the phenomenon of asking questions of shamans was likely familiar among members of the social networks. Patton (2002) stated that purposive sampling enabled the researchers to select participants with extensive knowledge and experience that were highly relevant to the proposed research. Noy (2008) claimed that using snowball sampling as a recruitment strategy could encourage individuals to invite their friends and family who shared similar experiences to participate in the study. The personal connections I had in Taiwan provided a recruitment kickstart. My ability to communicate fluently in Chinese Mandarin also facilitated the screening processes by minimizing language barriers. After recruitment, data collection, and interview transcription, the

research team decided to stop recruiting when we noticed facets of information power had emerged in the data set. These signs implied that the researcher had collected adequate and satisfactory data, and data analysis could begin.

Data Collection

My experience as a Taiwanese immigrant in Canada having experienced emotional healing through participating in Taiwanese religious practices and Western psychotherapy informed the activities in this thesis. My approach to healing includes Western counselling practices as well as practical knowledge and experience as a supporter of clients who have sought support from shamans. The exposure to both healing approaches allowed me to have cultural sensitivity and openness to the healing practices of shamanism in Taiwan. Grounded in my lived experience and the principles of a phenomenological approach, I cultivated my reflexivity during data collection. In other words, my background, knowledge, and worldview shaped and informed the interview, data collection, transcription, and analysis of interview data with a selective approach.

Data Gathering, Recording, and Storage

For screening purposes, the researcher scheduled a 15 to 20-minute Zoom video conferencing meeting with prospective participants before the semi-structured interview to ensure that the participants met all inclusion criteria and did not present with characteristics listed in the exclusion criteria. Research data was collected in a 1.5 to 2-hour semi-structured interview. I followed the interview protocol and guiding questions in this process. The consented video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted drive for up to two years from the day of graduation. Participants could withdraw consent until the first semi-structured interview began. From this point onward, I would store their contributions to the study securely in an

encrypted drive. Participants' names were presented in their preferred pseudonyms in study results or when presented at conferences or thesis defence. See Appendixes D and F for an interview protocol and guiding questions. The research team have adapted the linguistic ecology protocol (LEP) to acknowledge the multilingual feature during data-gathering. It was adapted to address the specific features of the language contexts for my research, as the research process was covered in Mandarin, English, and Taiwanese (see Appendix I).

Data Analysis

Once all interview data had been recorded and stored, the research team started the transcription process. As this study involved Taiwanese participants, a research team member and I were the primary researchers who transcribed and translated selective material into English. This study used the LEP (Chou, 2019; McDonald & Chau, 2008) due to the different languages and dialects that emerged during the interview. I followed van Manen's six-step hermeneutic phenomenology analytical approach when analyzing research data (see Molley et al., 2018; van Manen 1990, 2007, 2016). While immersing myself in experiencing participants' descriptions of their lived experiences, I engaged in bracketing and multilingual data analysis (cf. Finlay, 2009). Being aware of my experiences and reflecting on the most salient and relevant content contributing to the research question allowed me to sort out the interview content into research data and key informant data. I delimited forms of shamanistic practices involving interpersonal interaction with the shaman for data gathering. Other forms of shamanistic practice were retained, and they informed data analysis as key informant insights. van Manen's analytic approach captured the essence of participants' lived experiences. It guided the research team in understanding how shamanistic practices facilitated emotional healing in Taiwanese.

Rigour and Quality

Researchers' ability to remain reflexive and their ability to notice the influence of their role and background increased the integrity and credibility, which promoted the rigour and trustworthiness of the study (Conklin, 2007). De Witt and Ploeg (2006) claimed that phenomenological research that contained balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization could maintain the credibility and integrity of an interpretive phenomenological approach. Malterud et al. (2016, 2021) recommended adopting information power to discover a sample size fitting for qualitative research. Elements including a narrow study aim, dense experience specificity, more established theories, close research-participant dialogue, and diverse analysis strategy guided researchers to develop solid qualitative research rigour.

I aimed to equip this research with accepted rigour and quality to maximize research contribution to the academy. With the phenomenological approach, participants were invited to share their in-depth experiences of receiving support from a shaman. With semi-structured interviews, researchers collected rich information based on participants' lived experiences. Additionally, the participant-researcher dialogue was perceived as secure but not overwhelmingly intertwined. The quality of this relationship appeared similar to the rapport-building process in counselling, with respect and care for the participant as the foundation of the relationship. This generated a sense of safety in the relationship, providing research participants comfort in openly sharing their experiences without camouflaging certain aspects. Second, as researchers, we communicated clearly to the participants when we explored aspects of the experiences that were not often discussed. For example, what aspects of shamanistic support provide emotional healing experiences to them? The research team anticipated some challenges

with the interview content as participants may have yet to share or contribute their experiences receiving such support in a research study in the past. In addition, participants' acknowledgement of the researcher's care and support may have provided them with comfort when attempting to share their lived experiences through spoken words, which may be hard to articulate due to mental health stigmatization in Taiwan. As a result, the researcher-participant conversation provided strong rigour as guided by information power.

Further, I analyzed research data collected from the semi-structured interviews with McDonald and Chau's (2008) and Chou's (2019) *Ecological Linguistic Protocol*. This protocol has been adapted to fit the current study, where shared and distinctive meaning patterns indicated by Mandarin-speaking interviewees were translated into English. The Mandarin transcripts served as the foundation for data analysis, and a preliminary version of the results (i.e. the meaning patterns) was presented to the interviewees in Mandarin. Participants were invited to participate in the second interview to verify how much the findings corresponded to their contributions. They were encouraged to add, remove, or modify ideas that have shifted for them since the first interview. The multilingual and cultural consultants provided support throughout data analysis to ensure that the essence of participants' lived experiences was captured. The research team trusted that participants provided rich content that shaped the answers to the research question. As a result, further data gathering was not required. The current research protocol demonstrated satisfactory rigour and quality for the research question investigated.

Research Ethics

Some ethical concerns arose during the translation process of this research study. As discussed previously, cultural-based practices such as shamanism may pose difficulty in translation because of the unique features of its rituals, procedures, and impacts. Therefore, it

was crucial to recruit translators and transcriptionists with similar linguistic proficiency profiles in Taiwanese, Mandarin, and English as myself. The translation and transcription teams were committed to keeping the translated content confidential. As a research team, we also considered how a pre-existing relationship between participants, translators, transcriptionists, and other research team members may impact the research quality. Pre-existing relationships may blur specific standards of professionalism during data analysis as the coder's interpretations of the transcribed content may be biased by their connection with the participant. On the other hand, it was also possible that such pre-existing relationships strengthened the quality of the participant-researcher connection and the interview content. In short, there were several ethical issues to be considered in the research procedure.

Moreover, as I was raised in an environment heavily exposed to shamanistic practices, her background and biases may have influenced how the interview was conducted. In addition, such biases may also play a crucial factor when the researcher interviewed the potential participants with whom she had a pre-existing relationship. While researchers' reflexivity was highly valued in a phenomenological approach, it was crucial to acknowledge the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that might emerge during the interview. I consulted my reflections and responses with my supervisor to examine the validity and rigour of the interviews.

Lastly, as this research recruited Taiwanese participants, the research team must be aware of the ethical regulations in Taiwanese academia. For instance, the HREB requirement may differ in Taiwan, mainly when culturally and religiously sensitive content is being investigated. On the other hand, I stayed vigilant and mindful of the HREB institutional requirement, primarily because this research was carried out with participants outside of Canada. In

conclusion, the research procedure, pre-existing relationships among myself, the research team, and participants and the HREB requirements in both countries have been acknowledged and addressed when conducting this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

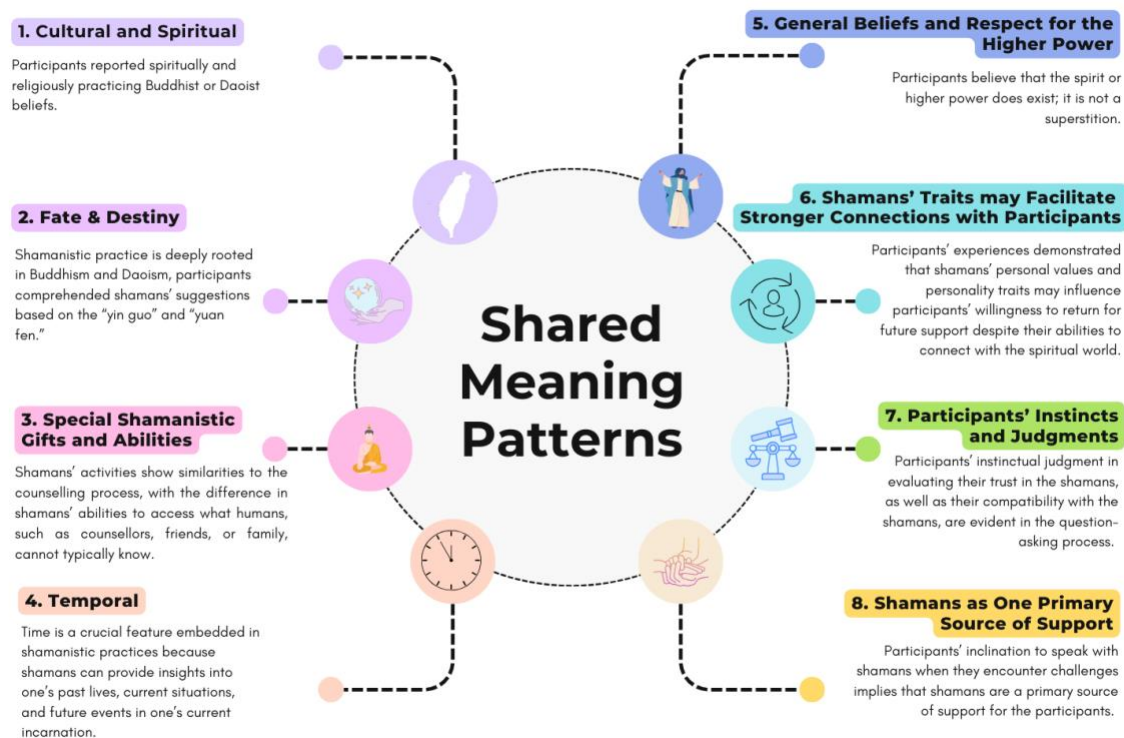
This chapter addresses the shared and distinctive meaning patterns, as well as the interpreted integrated findings. Specifically, through hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, hundreds of meaning units were identified, which helped shape rich descriptions of participant experiences. They were incorporated into shared meaning patterns and distinctive meaning patterns. The shared meaning patterns were contributed by two or more participants; the distinctive meaning patterns were indicated by only one participant. The preliminary meaning patterns were presented to the participants during the second interview. They verified, modified, and contributed further to the information gathered in this section to provide a deeper understanding of shamanistic practices in Taiwan.

Please note that an integrative summary is provided at the end of this chapter. Readers may choose to read the integrative summary as you begin reading this chapter, along with reviewing the shared meaning patterns outlined in Figure 2. You can also consider flipping back and forth with the figure while reading through the shared meaning patterns.

Shared Meaning Patterns

Meaning Pattern I: Cultural and Spiritual

Cultural and spiritual elements are commonly identifiable in information sharing among participants. Most participants reported spiritually and religiously practicing Buddhist or Daoist beliefs, the two largest religions in Taiwan. Participants who self-identified as having more sensitive spiritual embodiment abilities shared that they become even more discerning of spiritual energy when chanting Buddhist sutras or intentionally practicing spiritual sensitivity. Participant Yen stated that when she graduated from university, she began chanting Buddhist sutras.

Figure 2*Shared Meaning Patterns Based on Participants' Experiences Receiving Shamanistic Supports*

Note. Yin stands for the "cause," and "guo" means consequences. Yuan fen describes a predetermined binding force between people. For a list of glossaries, refer to Appendix A.

The first few times I chanted (地藏經), I would dream of many spectres of lost at night (see Appendix A). I would start tearing up uncontrollably when greedily chanted more than I should. The most terrifying experience was that I dreamt of a field of skulls... countless amounts of skulls just lying in the field. I stood in the middle of the field, watching the skulls form a river with blood.

Yen's sensitivity toward spiritual energy increased after she began chanting, which intensified her experiences when there was a change in energy flow. With years of practice and advancing her knowledge in spiritual connection, she began to understand that this may be a form of help-seeking, where the spectres of lost intended to express the desire to be helped, or to no longer be a ghost. Buddhist and Daoist beliefs were explicitly and implicitly implied throughout Yen's interview. Her engagement in Buddhist and Daoist practices also serves as the foundation to connect with the shamans.

The shamans' presentations to clients may appear completely different before and after they become connected to the spirit. Participant Edwin Tsai described an instance when he witnessed his grandfather's gradual connection with a spirit, General Yang (楊家將), in his family home.

I saw my grandfather losing control of his body and consciousness when he got taken over by a spirit, like a "dung-ki" (see Appendix A). He would turn into this state with some actions when he sensed something was off. My grandfather is a quiet and gentle man, but when he danced and became a dung-ki, he looked exactly like a General. He could lift the table by himself no matter how heavy it was, almost like he had unlimited strength. He acted much like a Chinese ancient-time General performing martial arts and

was out to defeat evil spirits. He was so powerful... when he was a dung-ki, we needed several people to help settle him down.

Edwin Tsai's sharing demonstrated the massive difference before and after his grandfather became connected, spiritually and physically taken over by General Yang. While some shamans can behave and speak according to their personalities when they become spiritually connected, some can appear distinctively different when they become possessed.

There also appears to be a difference between different spirits based on the frequency and quality of the divine meditation by the shamans or spirits. Participants described that spirits cultivating themselves for higher spiritual refinement have more power to help humans achieve their goals. Spirits with lower levels of spiritual refinement are less capable of providing practical support to the question-askers. Participant Yen said she and her husband visited a shaman who promised to help expand their business when it launched. However, it did not go as planned: the business did not pick up. When Yen and her husband next visited the shaman, he apologized immediately, as his ability to see into their lives allowed him to know that nothing changed. Yen believed this experience manifested the relationship between shamans' self-refinement and their capabilities to help individuals achieve practical and spiritual goals.

Meaning Pattern II: Destiny

Shamans' comments frequently hint at the principles of fate and destiny. As shamanistic practice is deeply rooted in Buddhism and Daoism, participants comprehended shamans' suggestions based on the "yin guo" and "yuan fen." Participant Moda stated he would not actively seek shamanistic support when encountering a challenge. However, it appeared to come to him in a way that felt acceptable, natural, and unforceful. In university, Moda was trained to be a teacher, but a shaman told him he would become a doctor one day. He thought that it was a

ridiculous idea for him to become a medical professional. A few years ago, he became highly interested in how blood flew in the human body. His interests guided him to study heart functions further, and he eventually became able to treat some medical concerns by massaging pressure points because of an “unknown voice” that continues to guide him in helping people. He indicated:

Along the way, I felt that some people, things, and even an “unknown force” continued to lead me onto this path- a path where I could lessen people’s pain as a para-medical treatment provider. Sometimes, I feel that these encounters are coincidental; I even questioned why I encountered these people and things. However, now I think back on it, I believe that all encounters carry purposes and meanings.

Even though Moda did not believe he could provide medical support to people one day, things that happened in his life and the people he came across led him onto this path he was destined to be on.

Through participants’ sharing, a notion of “trying their best and leaving the rest to God/fate” also emerged. They believe they must “do their part” for the higher power to maximize their help. Through Moda’s experience, it is illustrated that yuan fen prompted him to “do his part” in advancing his cardiovascular knowledge, which led to the gaining of his “gift” to help alleviate individuals’ medical concerns.

Meaning Pattern III: Special Shamanistic Gifts and Abilities

Shamans’ activities show similarities to the counselling process, with the difference in shamans’ abilities to access what humans, such as counsellors, friends, or family, cannot typically know. The shamans serve as a medium to communicate the spirit’s messages to humans; they strengthen hope and restore peacefulness for individuals who feel lost, helpless or

need words of affirmation. While asking the shaman questions regarding Pat's father, she mentioned:

I told the shaman that my father no longer knows my name. He cannot even recognize who I am. The shaman said: "But he is pleased that you are back."

Pat vividly remembered this comment as it brought her peace of mind and let her know that her hard work visiting and caring for him was received well. In addition, she learned that her father felt comforted seeing her return to Taiwan and cared for him. The shaman used his ability to connect with individuals' spirits to deliver information that Pat would not have known otherwise. The shaman's insight gave her the courage to continue caring for him and helped inform her decisions.

Participant Noella stated that when she sought shamanistic support, she was often in a desolated or confused situation.

At least when the shaman shares some form of insights with me when I am in this state of mind, I feel less disturbed by the challenge. Even when the advice isn't necessarily what I want to hear, I would still form a clearer thinking path to find potential solutions.

Shamans' unique abilities to provide visions for current and future situations consoled the participants and decreased the level of anxiety.

In addition, shamans can offer insights into participants' future life courses within their current incarnation. Participant WF stated that the spiritual figure she is connected with (義父) informed her that she is destined to help others in the current incarnation.

In your current incarnation, you are to accept an order from the higher power so you can begin helping others.

WF said she always knew that she carried some purpose in this life but did not know what it was until the shaman told her.

You could be like a middleman, helping and supporting others in His (higher power's) name.

WF initially did not believe in her ability to support others in this role. However, she began recognizing her life purpose after self-reflection and critically evaluating her mission. WF's spiritual practice and the shaman's pointers allow her to learn her purposes in this life and refine and ascend her spiritual development further.

Shamans can explain life's situations or current challenges by bringing in "Yin Guo" and karma from one's previous lives. Pat told the shaman that her husband had been the passive one in the relationship.

When we used to date, he never drove me home after dinner. When I needed to get surgery a few years ago, he wasn't there when I needed him." The shaman answered: "Your husband used to be the young master in the household you serve. He saved your life once when you were bullied. You promised yourself that you would return the favour one day. Therefore, you will always care for him in this life even if he doesn't show you as much affection as you like.

Pat realized that her purpose in this life was to return the favour and fulfill the promise she made to herself. Her attitude toward marriage changed from taking things for granted to appreciating his contributions to maintaining the relationship. The shaman helps Pat understand the connection between yin and guo and illustrates the Buddhist principle of karma and how it may play out in this incarnation. She has become more accepting and appreciative of her marriage since.

Shamans have directly or indirectly helped individuals regain physical wellness by cleansing negative blockages of energy (氣 chi) in their bodies. Participant Yen stated,

The “yin (陰)” and “yang (陽)” energy are so different. When [yin] enters my body, I feel sick, close to vomiting, and extreme dizziness. I cannot move at all. My doctor, who specialized in Chinese Medicine, could communicate with the spirits. He told them, “She does not have permission to help you right now.” He then taught me how to obtain permission from the Buddhas to perform “siu-kiann” on myself (see Appendix A) so I could feel physically better.

Participant Jane also described that the shaman would help exorcise her body's bad energy or spirits.

I feel a major difference before and after the exorcism. When I sensed a bad spirit entering my body, I felt dizzy, and my eyes felt foggy. After the ritual, I felt light in my head, and it felt like I had gotten a brand-new pair of glasses that allowed me to see clearly.

Shamans’ ability to clear the negative energy in one’s body helped participants feel better physiologically and psychologically.

While shamans can offer insights into one’s future outlook, the decision is back in the participants’ hands after hearing their suggestions. Pat’s experience demonstrates her emotional struggles after hearing the shaman’s suggestions.

I recall the shaman said, “Remember, after you leave the country, [your father] will likely pass away.” I couldn’t know for certain how long my father would live with dementia. I was the only person wrestling with my decision... it was a very difficult time for me. The shaman said that my father still had four months to live. If I leave Taiwan now, I may

never see him again. But people around me really wanted me to leave because they weren't sure how long my father would last. [They also needed me to care for them and not just for my dad].

Pat's vulnerability, fear, sadness, helplessness, and confusion are shown through the recollection of her memory. The shaman's insight helps inform her decision, but she is the only person who can decide if she wants to stay to care for her father or leave to care for her family.

Shamans inspire individuals to strengthen their mentality by providing perspectives laypersons cannot see. This helps them become more accepting of the current challenge and lowers their anxiety. A shaman told participant CYH,

When you enter senior high school, people may gossip about you. Remember, focus on yourself and do what feels right. There is no need for you to waste energy on them." She recalled, "Everyone was so kind to me in my first year. Starting the second year of senior high school, guys in my class would sarcastically say: "She is eating bread again. She eats a mountain of food at lunchtime but is still skinny." In the last year of senior high school, her classmates would tell guys who liked her, "She is only going to ignore you."

As the shaman has "warned" CYH about potential challenges, she had an opportunity to start preparing for the worst that may happen. She accepted the shaman's suggestions by neglecting the untrue rumours and successfully finished high school. This further exemplifies that shamans' ability to see into the future allows participants to prepare for future situations.

Shamans' abilities allow them to tailor suggestions and solutions based on the participants' personalities without any rapport built. Participant CYH was hoping to find work in northern Taiwan but had not been offered a position for a few months; she went to see a new shaman whom she was meeting for the first time. Without knowing CYH, the shaman suggested

that she try finding work in southern Taiwan as her personality matched better with the work ethics and colleagues' values. CYH took a job in northern Taiwan but kept the shaman's warning in mind. She reported,

I discovered that my values and personality were not as compatible with individuals in northern Taiwan. I also noticed my physical health worsening because it rained a lot there.

CYH's experience demonstrated that the shaman's gift of looking into the future provided another perspective for her to consider. The situation validated the shaman's suggestions and showed that shamans offer suggestions according to an individual's values and traits.

A crucial element that makes shamanistic gifts helpful is shamans' ability to convert what they see and feel into a language and presentation that a layperson can understand. Participant Jane said,

The shaman I seek support from has the "permission" to see into people's lives. I don't want to say that his spirits are superior, but they are more powerful than others. I think the most important gift of this shaman is his excellent ability to express and communicate. [He] can accurately look into people's future situations and effectively deliver messages in ways that question-askers can comprehend. This is a special quality of this shaman.

Jane believes that shamans' capabilities to relay messages in ways that can be accessed and understood by question-askers can help them grasp a deeper understanding of the situation. It can also effectively provide solutions to resolve the challenge.

Shamanistic insights can also be inaccurate at times. The truthfulness of the shamans' suggestions influences individuals' willingness to return for help. Participant Noella stated:

Some older generations in Taiwan may still believe that male infants are more precious than female infants. Currently, my in-laws hope that I can have a baby boy because I already have two daughters. When I was pregnant with my second daughter, I followed my mother-in-law's suggestions on diet and cultural practices to ensure that I could have a baby boy. We also saw a shaman who stated that it would be a baby boy if he were born in the Year of the Tiger. We confirmed this through jiaobei (see Appendix A), indicating we would have a male infant. Nevertheless, we ended up having a baby girl. In the future, we may choose the scientific route by freezing my eggs and implanting them through in vitro fertilization (IVF) [to ensure that we can successfully have a boy in the house.]

While many believe that shamanistic abilities can help resolve life challenges, Noella proved through her personal experience that medical interventions are sometimes more trustworthy than her faith in shamans in a life-changing circumstance like this.

Participants have commonly described shamans as someone who can fortune-tell, mind-read, and serve as trusting and hope-giving individuals. Through the interviews, it is noticed that shamanistic practices share similar features with counselling in the West, where the counsellors provide validation and empathy for the clients. While shamans can offer insights into one's future outlook, the accuracy of their prediction is another factor that influences participants' willingness to seek shamanistic support again. Despite the occasional faulty prophecies, most participants expressed interest in connecting with shamans again in a challenging situation in the future.

Meaning Pattern IV: Temporal

Time is a crucial feature embedded in shamanistic practices because shamans can provide insights into one's past lives, current situations, and future events in one's current incarnation.

As a result, shamans' suggestions can sometimes be validated through time in this life, but some cannot. The temporal element is shown through all interviews. For example, participant Pat experienced this first-hand when her father was passing. Pat consulted with a shaman regarding her father's deteriorating health. With the ability to look into the future, shamans informed Pat that her father may pass within a few months. If she decides to leave Taiwan, she may not see her father again on her next visit. Pat was left in a dilemma but had the power to decide whether to stay with her father for the remainder of his life or to return with her husband and children to another country. She made a breaking decision to take care of her family but promised herself that she would revisit her father in four months. When she returned to Taiwan again, she said,

It takes 14 days to stay in a quarantine hotel. I tried everything to wish for my father to regain good health; I prayed every day for a chance to see my father again. Nevertheless, on day 13, my father suddenly became unconscious... he struggled to breathe and was sent to the hospital. When he arrived, the doctors said that he had lost consciousness, and his lungs had collapsed. The next time I saw my father was to help organize his funeral.”

Pat's worst nightmare came true- her father passed away the day before she completed her quarantine during COVID-19.

Pat interpreted the shamans' warning as a prediction that came true. Her trust in the shaman prompted her to plan the next visit as soon as she left Taiwan. As much as she hoped that she would see her father alive again, she made her choices and planned as best she could in her situation. Pat appreciated the shaman's "warning" ahead of time, as it helped inform her decision and prepared her for her father's death.

Meaning Pattern V: General Beliefs and Respect for the Higher Power

Participants commonly demonstrated their beliefs and respect toward the higher power in all the interviews. They believe that the spirit or higher power does exist; it is not a superstition. Participant Edwin Tsai believes there must be something that exceeds science to explain science.

Science itself cannot quite explain science. There is a magical power that exists in the universe and is not covered under the realm of science.

Edwin Tsai's idea about the higher power matches Jane's perception,

The current research and research findings explain the phenomenon that already exists.

They point out the phenomenon but do not explain how or why it occurs.

Some participants have had personal encounters with spirits. Therefore, they full-heartedly believe in the existence of a higher power in the spiritual world. Noella said,

I always believed in the existence of spirits. I should say that I have seen it with my own eyes and remember it vividly. When I was a kid, we went to a just-built temple, and it was undergoing the 開光 (Kai Guang) process (see Appendix A). It wasn't quite the auspicious moment yet (see Appendix A), but I saw the spirits show themselves through three visible lights in the sky. Not only did I see them, but everyone else there also saw them. This may sound extremely abstruse, but you will believe in its truthfulness when you see it with your own eyes. To me, it is not a superstition. My encounters with these spirits cannot make it more real.

Noella's experience prompted a stronger belief in the existence of spirits and exhibited the realness of the spirits.

Participants' responses demonstrated their trust in the shaman and connection with the spirits. Pat's narration shows her respect for the higher power and a strong sense of trust for the shaman. Participant Yen stated,

Shamans make me feel like there is an invisible power helping us through the major or minor challenges in life.

She used the weather as an analogy:

The shamans help weaken the wind resistance or shield us under the rain. Asking the shaman for help brings me peace of mind. It makes me feel that some form of protection or force helps push us forward to conquer the challenge. Sometimes, I am thankful that I asked for their protection, or else things may have been worse than they are. My trust for the shamans and their spirits comes with relief and reassurance.

Yen's faith in shamans illustrates the existence of a higher power, which shapes her beliefs and actions. Along with others, all participants demonstrated their respect, acceptance, and sincerity toward the shamans and spirits.

Despite participants' trust and respect for shamans and spirits, they believe that it is crucial to respect the shamans' suggestions but not overly rely on them. WF exemplified this by saying,

If you believe in the higher power and the principle of yin guo in Buddhist beliefs, you may engage in acts of kindness and believe that good karma will follow. However, when you excessively rely on shamans' advice, such as asking the higher power, "What should I wear today? What should I have for dinner," it shows low self-efficacy as you only believe in the higher power and not your judgment. Therefore, as helpful as shamanistic practices can be, they can be debilitating for individuals who rely on them entirely.

Participants' beliefs in higher power are evident but do not prevent them from making sound judgments.

Meaning Pattern VI: Shamans' Traits may Facilitate Stronger Connections with Participants

Participants' experiences demonstrated that shamans' personal values and personality traits may influence participants' willingness to return for future support despite their abilities to connect with the spiritual world. Participant Pat implied that the shaman supported her with honesty, sincerity, and wisdom in her father's situation. The shaman's gentle yet truthful sharing helped Pat to come to the final decision:

When he responds to my questions, most of what he said has not happened yet. Nobody, not even a doctor, dared to tell me that if I left this time, I may not see my father again."

The humanness of the shaman allowed Pat to make her decision with as little regret as possible.

She further stated,

The shaman presented entirely different when the spirit is within him...it is almost like there are two different personalities when he is connected to the spiritual world. The shaman has a vibrant and distinctive personality, but his speech and behaviour change when the spirit talks through him. Even though their demeanours are dissimilar, he still gives off a trustworthy and comfortable vibe as both a person and a helper.

Participant Noella stated,

When I think of shamans, I imagine them having higher moral standards and socially accepted values and behaviours. If they randomly spit on the road or engage in behaviours that do not fit my expectations for shamans, I may not return.

Shamans' qualities as individuals impact participants' perception of fitness and willingness to trust their suggestions.

Shamans' interpersonal qualities may also determine participants' openness to return to the shamans for help again. During their visit with shamans, most participants expressed feeling accepted, heard, seen, validated, comfortable, and inspired. Participant CYH stated,

The shaman seems to be able to “catch” my questions perfectly and offer thoughts or suggestions immediately. I feel a sense of support, understanding, and acceptance talking to him.

Participant Moda hinted at a tendency for humans to feel seen and to receive recognition.

The shaman's encouragement provides guidance and gives me more confidence to face the challenges. It gives me peace of mind and a sense of calmness to continue using my para-medical knowledge to help improve people's health status.

Humans' desires for recognition become even more promising when they come from a shaman because participants feel that the spirits connected to the shamans are guiding them to achieve their goals.

As illustrated above, aspects of shamanistic suggestions show similarities to the counselling process in the West, which increases individuals' willingness to return for further emotional support and healing. Participant Jane mentioned that shamans help her gain more understanding and awareness of her values and beliefs.

When I am speaking with the shaman, he provides suggestions that are unbiased and free from his personal opinions. What I am getting more from consulting with him is actually a reflection of my questions.

Jane implied that the shaman acted like a mirror for her. He reflected on her questions and confusions and invited introspection, which allowed her to examine her feelings and values in

the current challenge. Similar to finding a compatible counsellor, shamans' personality traits influence participants' willingness to connect and return.

Meaning Pattern VII: Participants' Instincts and Judgments

Participants' instinctual judgment in evaluating their trust in the shamans and their compatibility with them is evident in the question-asking process. Some aspects of their instinctual responses are similar to how one perceives their counsellors. It is observed that when the shaman's suggestions match the participants' expectations, they feel happy and affirmed. In contrast, when the shaman's suggestions do not match participants' expectations, they feel frustrated, sad, and sometimes annoyed. Many participants expressed that they already have ideas of what they would like to hear from the shaman before they go. They are simply seeking validation, though sometimes such expectations and behaviours are carried out unconsciously. Participant Noella stated, "I often know what I wanted to ask before I saw the shaman. However, the truth is, I know the answer to the questions which I wanted to ask. When I receive answers that fit my desires, I feel extra encouraged, almost like my problems have already been solved. However, when I get responses that are the complete opposite of my wish, I would feel low and disappointed." Noella further expressed that when shamans' suggestions do not match hers, she may seek advice from other shamans to find alternative solutions that are acceptable to her.

When shamanistic suggestions do not fit with participants' expectations or do not deliver results as promised, some will choose to stick to their comfort zone and make decisions based on their sense of rightness. For instance, Noella's hopes to have a male infant did not come true after seeking shamans' help on many occasions. She carefully considered her options and results and decided to possibly adopt medical intervention if she decided to have another child. Participants may also make decisions when there is a predetermined goal that they hope to

achieve. In other words, question-askers have the autonomy to make decisions independently. It is common for them to make decisions based on their sense of rightness if shamans' advice does not correspond well with their current situations.

In addition to the above scenarios, some participants also learned to take the shamans' suggestions as a word of advice. Participant Edwin Tsai mentioned that different shamans may offer different insights to the same question. He sought shamans' advice on the prosperity of his business. One shaman said his business would not be successful because of the shape of the landscape near his business. Another shaman said that because the business is close to shore, the evaporation from the water would help with the success of his business. Due to the insights provided by different shamans and his clear vision of what he would like to achieve, Edwin Tsai learned to take the shamans' offerings as words of advice. He also learned not to let shamans' suggestions affect his mood significantly. This illustrates question askers' autonomy in making their own decisions despite the helpfulness of the shamans.

Another factor influencing the likelihood of participants taking on shamans' advice is their sense of self-efficacy or self-confidence. Participant Edwin Tsai stated,

I am quite confident and eager to conquer life's challenges. I would still want to seek shamanistic suggestions to weigh my options. For example, if the shaman told me, "Your business may end soon, you should prepare for it." I heard him, but I needed to continue trying to keep my business open. If I can keep it going for one year, I support my employees and their families for another year. Since realizing this, I have been seeking shamanistic support relatively less. Because it doesn't matter what the shamans say, I will still try my best until I can no longer advance toward my goals.

Edwin Tsai's trust in himself and his determination to achieve his goals encouraged him to rely on his beliefs more. He would still consider shamans' suggestions. However, they no longer change the "final destination" for him.

Experienced question-askers utilized their instinct to determine the compatibility between shamans and them. Shamans with no ulterior motives make participants feel comfortable and accepted. On the other hand, shamans with ulterior motives, such as those who use their abilities in exchange for financial reward or power, often make participants feel uncomfortable, threatened, and fearful. Participant Yen once met a shaman who provided shamanistic insights in exchange for money.

Shamanistic supports that are for-profit would often offer a portion of their "expertise" as a lure for us to seek their services again. Often, they hold back on their comments, make threatening suggestions, force you to sacrifice something in return for their services or create a fearful situation so you would give in.

Luckily, most shamans she encounters now are authentic and altruistic, which brings her a great sense of comfort and emotional safety.

You can tell that they are genuinely looking out for you. They want you to be better, and you can sense it.

In addition to instinctual judgment (see Appendix A), Yen mentioned that a trusted shaman provided a rule of thumb for them to determine whether the shamans were being truthful or not.

Donating money to the temple to help them maintain regular functioning is fine, but Buddha doesn't and shouldn't need money.

Integration of participants' instincts and the shaman's rule of thumb in evaluating other shamans have become a frame of reference for Yen and others. It is also used to determine compatibility between shamans and the question-askers.

Shamans can help promote change in participants if they are willing to leave their comfort zone. Participant CYH described her experiences in trying things that were unfamiliar and unhabitual for her when the shaman advised her to stop eating beef before taking professional exams.

I experimented with his suggestion. The first time I "tested" his advice was when I took the national exam for university students. I stopped eating beef a month before and noticed that the test score was not as high as anticipated but met my expectations for myself. I tested his advice again, but I stopped eating meat three months ahead of this time. My test score came out even better and met my expectations again. I stopped eating beef for the most recent exam, which lasted for half a year. The results came out much better than my expectations." She further clarified, "After my experiment, I noticed that not eating beef did make a major difference. I noticed my ability to smoothly and accurately answer the exam questions increased. It is almost magical.

CYH's willingness to leave her comfort zone by adapting the shaman's suggestions allowed her to obtain better results.

Contrasting to times when participants' instincts found shamanistic support helpful, they also mentioned instances when they felt that the shaman was not helpful. Participant Yen mentioned her experience seeking her shamanistic friend for images of future situations.

He kept telling us everything happened because of yin and guo. Do not care too much; you have to let go. This is almost the same as not saying anything... I didn't feel that he

provided me with any comfort and did not catch my feelings. He told me what to do without accepting or validating my emotions. My anxiety didn't go down, and the whole process felt like a waste of time to me.

Noella claimed that when shamans fail to provide insight into a particular aspect of the current challenge, it is deemed unhelpful.

When the shaman's responses were irrelevant to what I asked, I would not have gone. I felt more anxious than I was getting this type of answer.

Participants' instincts helped them determine whether shamanistic advice has been helpful in a particular situation. Shamans can fail to support individuals when they lack the skills or empathy to help the participants feel heard or when they offer suggestions that are unrelated to their challenges.

Meaning Pattern VIII: Shamans as One Primary Source of Support

Participants' inclination to speak with shamans when they encounter challenges implies that shamans are a primary source of support for the participants. It is evident throughout all interviews that participants ask shamans different questions depending on the life stages they are in. Participant CYH mentioned that when she was in school, her parents often took her to see a shaman to inquire about her studies and academic achievements. When she grew older, she took on her parents' traditions by visiting shamans to query about her career, advancing her education, and her health status. She mentioned,

The next time I see a shaman, I will likely ask about work or relationships.

Participant Noella followed a similar trajectory, where she asked about her pursuit of education, work, relationships, and pregnancy preparation. Participant WF stated that she used to inquire about her life development like everyone else. However, since she became more spiritual and

more able to connect with her spiritual figures for guidance, she now asks about the enlightenment she obtains from spiritual awareness and appreciation. These illustrate that participants seek shamanistic support depending on where they are in life.

Shamans are a primary source of support for the Taiwanese community because participants often go to shamans for support when they feel helpless and lost. Participant Pat mentioned,

I do not typically need shamanistic support unless I run into some difficulties or if I would like to have some insights into things I do not have access to. To me, the shaman feels like a piece of driftwood. When I am drowning, I feel safe to hold onto his wisdom and advice.

Noella further mentioned that aside from seeking shamanistic support when feeling powerless or confused, she would choose to see a shaman when she doesn't feel comfortable sharing with her friends and family.

When I speak with people in my circle, I need to be careful with my choice of words and the way I describe the situation to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. I believe there is nothing that I cannot ask shamans about. In my understanding, shamans already know everything. So, I feel comfortable asking them about anything in my life.

Participants' sharing demonstrates that shamanistic services are deeply rooted in Taiwanese culture. Its importance and commonality allow believers to instinctually seek support when they are at their wits' ends.

At least two or more participants have shared the meaning patterns discussed above during the interviews. While shamanistic practices may be foreign to individuals in the West, it is an easily accessible service that combats mental health stigmatization in Taiwan. Participants'

contributions manifest not only their rich experiences seeking shamanistic support but also the benefits and costs of such service. For most participants, even though they have encountered situations where shamans' suggestions have not been the most helpful, almost all have expressed willingness to return to compatible shamans for future support.

Distinctive Meaning Patterns

Aside from the mutual meaning patterns discovered, several distinctive meaning patterns were presented during the interviews. The distinctive meaning patterns are only shared by one participant in the interview; it is a particular feature of a specific participant's experience. Participant CYH mentioned that the urgency of the matter determined the likelihood of her following through with the shaman's advice.

For example, if I have been searching for a job for quite a while, I may take in his suggestion immediately. However, if I haven't even begun looking for work but just wanted a second opinion, I may not adapt his insights immediately.

CYH's intention to visit a shaman and the severity of the challenge shape her eagerness to accept the shamans' advice, mentally and behaviorally. In non-urgent situations, CYH says she would wait to see how they develop as she evaluates the shamans' suggestions.

Participant Yen mentioned that shamanistic support provides a non-human perspective, which she finds extremely helpful, as self-exploration or self-reflection cannot offer her insights from a non-human perspective. However, participant WF stated,

I need to have a thorough understanding of myself and the ability to self-reflect for shamanistic support to be helpful.

Both hold unique perspectives toward shamanistic practices, but WF claims it can be challenging to benefit from shamanistic advice if they do not recognize how their personality and values may influence their mindset or choices. WF further elaborated,

There is equal importance to seeking advice from friends, family, and shamans. However, I need to know what I want before going to them. For example, I can go to my friends if I want comfort. If I want to know more about things that humans cannot typically access, I will go to a shaman.

For WF, shamans' suggestions can be maximized when integrated with introspection and self-reflexivity. Shamans' insights are helpful for Yen as they provide a different angle or perspective that humans do not typically consider.

Participant CYH offered another viewpoint on this. In her experience, she collaborated with a shaman to figure out the most suitable solution for her situation.

I remember being somewhat doubtful about what the shaman had said. [Even though he told me it would be very good for me to finish my master's program before I turned 27], I was very against this idea [because I didn't enjoy studying]. I told him that even if I was destined to advance my education, I still wanted to work. He said, "That is all right, you can still work, but remember to consider my advice- [you will have excellent luck completing your master's program before you turn 27 years old.]

In CYH's situation, she communicated her desires and limitations to the shaman and felt even more reassured that she could follow her plans while considering the shaman's advice. She knew what would be best for her, but having the autonomy to make the final decision eventually led her to finish her master's degree, as indicated by the shaman. She appreciated the collaborative

approach, which helped her become more willing to leave her comfort zone and work toward goals she did not initially consider.

Participant Pat mentioned that after asking the shaman, the perceived responsibility decreases when she reaches a decision based on the shaman's suggestions.

When I heard that my father was sick and my mother could no longer take care of him, I felt that it was my responsibility to care for them both. After the shaman informed me that my father still had some time before passing, even though it was still my responsibility, I felt that it was less urgent. It allowed me to composedly plan out my life so I could take care of my parents in a way that felt less pressured to me.

Pat felt the shaman lifted some weight off her shoulders by sharing insights with her. After speaking with a shaman, she fulfilled the expectation of filial piety and the responsibility to care for her parents. While the practical responsibility still existed, the self-pressure to care for her parents decreased significantly.

Lastly, participant Noella indicated that she becomes more anxious when she frequently seeks shamanistic support. As previously mentioned in the shared meaning patterns, participants become upset and frustrated when shamans' responses do not meet their expectations or desires. Noella felt that the anticipation of shamans providing insights that do not align with her mindset increases her levels of anxiety at times. She may consider other sources of support instead of seeking shamanistic advice as the primary source of comfort in the future.

Integrated Summary

The overall meaning patterns that contribute to the heart of this research contain a reflexive approach to hermeneutic phenomenology. Participants' sharing symbolizes their roles

as co-researchers in this research. Both explicit and implicit meanings of the cultural, emotional, and spiritual aspects of asking a question of a shaman are discussed.

The eight shared meaning patterns connect by shedding light on the Taiwanese culture of question-asking. The question-asking tradition illustrates spiritual and cultural elements in the Taiwanese community. While shamanistic services appear to be more popular among the middle-aged and older populations, they are open to people of all ages and individuals with diverse religious beliefs. A few features are shown in the practices of question-asking. Firstly, all participants' demeanors when responding to me during the interviews and their responses display their respect for Buddha and spirits in general. As shamanism is deeply rooted in Buddhism and Daoism, the two largest religions in Taiwan, most participants were introduced to shamanistic practices since childhood. Older generations who have heard, witnessed, or experienced first-hand the rare "shamanistic miracles" may hold onto this belief even more tightly. As a result, such beliefs and practices are passed down to the younger generations, who, in the interviews, have expressed their trust in shamans because of their family values or personal experiences.

Secondly, the shared meaning patterns illustrate trust, a natural default option for emotional help-seeking. Participants have also learned to utilize their judgment to determine how much they live their lives based on shamans' recommendations. Participants' interview contributions demonstrate that they usually seek advice from a shaman when encountering life challenges. It is also evident that individuals were encouraged to observe and learn to ask questions when they were children. While most participants' questions center around school, career, health, and relationships, some hope to get insights into specific parts of the challenges they face. Regardless of which scenario participants inquire about, they originate from a deep sense of trust in the shamans. It is worth noting that shamanistic advice is not all-encompassing;

participants indicate that they adopt the shamans' suggestions but do not overly rely on them. Therefore, despite shamanistic services being one of the natural and instinctual responses to access emotional support, participants have learned to utilize their judgment to determine the extent to which they live life based on shamans' recommendations.

Thirdly, another meaning pattern is that participants' beliefs toward yin and guo, rooted in Buddhist and Daoist doctrine, connect all eight shared patterns (refer to Appendix A). This is shown through the temporal horizons, spiritual and cultural resources, fate or destiny principles, and shamans' suggestions based on their abilities to look into the past, present, and future. Buddhist and Daoist principles advertise the ideas of cause and effect in one's life. Connections made in previous lives may be presented differently, positively or negatively, in the current incarnation. Therefore, individuals who have unresolved issues that involve others may encounter similar situations or make connections with those people again in this life. Participants' sharing and shamanistic suggestions display this feature. It not only helps individuals to understand how the current life situation unfolds but also serves as a medium for people to heal emotionally.

Lastly, it is noticeable that most Taiwanese do not have a habit of resolving issues through counselling. However, asking shamans questions has provided participants with a form of emotional healing that combats mental health stigmatization, which shares many features that are similar to what Western counselling can offer. For instance, shamanistic support helps people feel heard, understood, and validated. Shamans' roles are similar to mirrors that reflect participants' personality traits and struggles. It is worth noting that one of the biggest differences between shamanism and counselling is that shamans can see into the past, current, and future, whereas counsellors cannot. Shamans' abilities allow participants to weigh their options,

including the ones informed by the shamans, before making a decision. While shamans can offer insights into what humans cannot typically access, they do not have the power to change anything that is destined to happen, similar to Noella and Pat's experiences. Therefore, although shamanistic support is limited in changing or controlling fate, there may still be an extent to which it can support individuals as they weigh out options during the decision-making process.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the current research, I aimed to understand the various elements contributing to shamanistic healing when Taiwanese ask shamans questions. Under the constructivist paradigm, van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as the research methodology. The research team utilized the linguistic ecology protocol to consider the cultural and linguistic factors contributing to emotional healing in culturally sanctioned shamanistic services. Several shared and distinctive meaning patterns are discovered through two semi-structured interviews. This chapter examines the current research findings' connection to literature, relevance, research and counselling implications, and limitations. Readers are encouraged to refer to Appendix A for a list of glossary entries and findings of the shared meaning patterns.

Connections with Current Literature

The research findings have several connections with existing literature in shared meaning patterns of cultural and spiritual practices, beliefs in fate and destiny, and special shamanistic abilities. Some of the distinctive meaning patterns and participants' ideographic experiences have also shown relevance to published studies. The cultural and spiritual practices are illustrated in several research studies. Chen (2001) demonstrated how Buddhism and Daoism served as the foundation of Taiwan's cultural development. Pertinent religious beliefs and principles, such as yin guo and yuan fen, are essential to the formation of Taiwanese culture, values, and customs. The current research shows that participants' perspectives toward shamanistic practices are deeply rooted in Buddhism and Daoism. Some shamans use religious teachings to guide participants through challenging times.

Winkelman (2012) states that shamanistic practices are prevalent across different countries and continents including Asia, Africa, and Australasia. The existence of shamanistic

services is not only commonplace in various parts of the world; it is also frequently engaged by Taiwanese and the Indigenous populations in Taiwan. The American psychologist Krippner (2002) claimed that shamans are highly recognized for the special gift or talent that they offer to fulfill individuals' psychological needs. They serve as a channel that helps communicate between individuals without shamanistic abilities and the spirits. Krippner's understanding of shamanism is almost identical to the roles shamans play in the Taiwanese community, as indicated by many participants in this research. Winkelman (1992) further stated that shamans can interact with non-human beings that are not typically visible or sensible to humans. Wen (1998) displayed that shamanistic practices represent God or a ghost's presence. These researchers' understanding of shamanistic practices corresponds to the current research findings, as shamanistic abilities are unique traits that provide emotional alleviation to the participants. Participants shared their healing journey and experiences witnessing others recover emotionally with such unusual gifts supplied by shamans. This indicates that although shamanistic practice is an under-researched topic, it is frequently engaged by people in Taiwan.

In Toulson's (2012) review, she described a video showing how shamanistic support was offered to the Amis tribe after many people lost their lives after a typhoon hit the Tafalong village. This example indicates that when individuals feel lost, helpless, or hopeless, they commonly seek support from shamans as a defaulted response. Participants in this research reported similar experiences where they would seek shamanistic support when they felt directionless or desperate to find the "way out." Additionally, most participants shared feelings of "weights lifted off of their shoulders" when they were supported by shamans' abilities to provide emotional comfort and support. Some members of the Amai tribe and participants in the study shared that they gained peace of mind after being connected with a shaman.

Shamanistic support can be further exemplified through Tsai's (2004) study, where she studied the impact of the Baishatun Mazu (the Holy Mother of the Sea) pilgrimage mission (白沙屯媽祖進香) in Miaoli, Taiwan. She discovered that incense practices were essential to the pilgrimage mission, and it was a natural part of an ordinary practice that connected humans to Buddhist and Daoist Gods and ancestors. She discovered that engagement in the religious ceremony encouraged one to conquer hardships, promoted cultural acceptance and recognition, and increased the likelihood for an individual to experience Buddha's "existence." Participants reported similar experiences where shamans may demonstrate their connection to the spirits through tools or practices such as incense, burping, or dancing (dung-ki; see Appendix A). The combination of current and past research findings shed light on the variety of shamanistic practices, as well as shamans' presentations after they have become possessed (see Appendix A) by different religious spirits.

Similarly, Wu and Liu (2014) found not only the centrality of religious principles such as karma, God's power, and the helpfulness of shamanistic rituals, present in the research, but also the positive impacts including a reappraisal of adverse events, a decrease of emotional pain, enhancement of positive emotions, and reinforcement of CHC in their research. Such discovery aligns with participants' experiences seeking shamanistic support as most participants shared a decreased level of anxiety after speaking with a shaman. Furthermore, many shared that shamans' suggestions allowed them to view the challenges differently and conquer them more effectively.

A combination of meaning patterns showing cultural and spiritual manifestations and principles of destiny or fate is illustrated in multiple studies. Khan and Aigerim (2020) claimed that Buddhist believers consider yin (因) and guo (果) (cause and consequences) as the root of

everything in life (refer to Appendix A). They further showed how cultural and spiritual practices and fate were intertwined. They suggested that reincarnation allows individuals to better understand the causes and consequences that happened in this life, as compared to their previous lives, explaining the principle of karma in one's present life. In addition, McLaughlin and Braun (1998) reconfirmed that Buddhists strongly believed in yuan fen (see Appendix A), the prearranged connections between two or more people. As a result, examining connections in past lives may help individuals understand the relationships they form with others in the current incarnation.

Several participants shared that the shamans' provided the teaching of yin and guo that is tailored to their particular circumstances in life. For instance, participant Pat always wondered why her husband does not show affection in ways that meet her expectations. The shaman offered insights by informing Pat that she and her husband got married in this life because she promised to return the favour for him saving her life in the past. When Pat understood the yin and guo behind such yuan fen, she became more content with her current relationship and started appreciating her marriage more. Participants Moda, Yen, and Edwin Tsai also shared their experiences and knowledge gained from the idea of yin guo after connecting with shamans. It is evident that shamanistic practices have a strong connection with Buddhism and Daoism and serve as one of the primary sources of emotional support for the people in Taiwan.

In addition to confirming previous results, further insights also emerged. Despite the gifts shamans bring to the question-askers, we noticed there is a limit to how shamans can help resolve issues. For example, the prevalence of yin guo and yuan fen in this study signifies the importance of fate and destiny due to the predetermined connection between individuals. Therefore, shamans' special gifts cannot settle issues that are already determined. The shaman

could only inform Pat when her father may pass; he could not stop her father from passing as death was predetermined for him. Similarly, shamans could only warn CYH that she may experience minor bullying in school; they could not have changed anything for her with their special ability. Although shamans' ability is finite, they remain the default path of emotional healing for the people in Taiwan, including the Indigenous population.

Another commonality between the current and published research is the potential stigma associated with individuals seeking formal emotional support, such as speaking with a mental health professional regarding their struggles. Lauber and Rössler (2007) and Kudva et al. (2020) indicated the prevalence of mental illness stigmatization in Asia. While participants do not expressly state such a phenomenon, it is implied by sharing their experiences working with mental health professionals. Most participants indicated that they have never sought help from a counsellor; connecting with shamans appears to take precedence over receiving formal psychological support. Additionally, counselling professionals cannot provide them with insights they cannot already gather. A few participants who have seen a counsellor or a psychiatrist indicated that they did not find this process helpful. Participants stated that while it is beneficial for the counsellors to help them re-examine their values and beliefs, they also wanted practical support that highlights possible paths they could take. The current research findings illustrate that formal emotional support-seeking is not typically an automatic response to solving psychological challenges for the Taiwanese community. To avoid stigma and to resolve emotional struggles more effectively, most participants would still choose to consult with a shaman over seeking counselling.

Kuo (2013) described internal coping strategies, such as self-relaxing and self-soothing techniques, and an external coping strategy through help-seeking support for individuals'

emotional healing in a collectivist society. Participants stated that aside from seeking external emotional support from shamans, friends, and family, they also engage in internal self-care activities such as exploring nature, baking, and exercising, among others. Yeh and Wang (2000) further elaborate that family gatherings and social functions with friends were chosen to be one of the primary approaches to managing emotional struggles for individuals from a collectivist background. Participants in the current research indicated that while they appreciate shamanistic suggestions, some equally value the opinions and support gained from their friends and family. They suggest it is crucial to determine the purpose of external help-seeking, which further decides who they go for emotional support. As a result, Taiwanese seek both external and internal emotional support under different circumstances. It also shows the vitality of social connection to emotional healing for people in the collectivist society.

Researchers stated that emotional healing required an active energy flow while re-discovering balance (Glaister, 2001). In other words, the energy flow should not be blocked in one's body. Barnes (1998) also mentioned that energy (chi, 氣) blockage could compromise one's emotional, biological, or spiritual state. The findings correspond to participants Yen and Jane's sharing, where they have personally experienced the massive difference before and after shamans helped cleanse the negative energy out of their bodies. They shared that their brain and bodies could not function normally when they sensed that negative energy flow had entered and had been trapped in their bodies. Shamans' unique abilities and capability to serve as a medium, communicating with the spirits, demonstrated that emotional, physical, and spiritual balance could not be obtained without an active flow of energy. It is, however, worth noting that participants' sensitivity towards the changes in their bodies could impact their ability to detect whether there is a blockage in their energy flow.

Past research has indicated that shamanistic practices are an integral part of folk religions in Taiwan. To expand on the current literature, the research findings and descriptions of key informant data illustrate the varieties of shamanism in Taiwan. We distinguish that “asking a question of a shaman” is not only a “face-to-face” activity between a client and a shaman but also a ritual practice engaged in temples or at the shaman’s home or office. The question-asking procedure is commonly carried out without another person participating in the question-asking activity, though friends and family can be present for moral support or to ask their respective questions.

Lastly, though shamanism originated from Buddhism and Daoism, it can be complementary or compatible with other religious practices, such as Christianity and atheism. Mainstream anglophones in Canada tend to draw strong distinctions or emphasize tensions between adherents of different religious traditions. Emphasizing incompatibilities between religious communities or worldview outlooks can become a focus or an assumption at times. The compatibleness between shamanism and another faith is exemplified in Pat’s experience, where her Christian commitments and consultation with a shaman do not contradict and are incorporated well. Hence, the union of one’s original religious beliefs and the ritual practices of another religion may not create conflicts but produce benefits in emotional stability or recovery for the question-askers.

Relevance

As the current research focus is rarely discussed in the larger academic and professional community of therapists in the West, there is an inherent, even urgent, value to studying different healing practices, especially in a diverse country like Canada. The purpose of this study is to bring a culturally different practice and understanding of healing to Western society, especially

in the domains of mental health. As traditional healers, Taiwanese shamans are emotional healers that people seek out when they encounter struggles in life. While Western psychotherapy is also available in Taiwan, this culturally sanctioned practice is a popular healing approach for both the older and younger generations in Taiwan. In Taiwan, shamans are sometimes viewed as “means” to get connected to the spiritual figures that one believes in, such as the Buddha in Buddhism. While shamans are seen as an effective cultural healing resource in Taiwan, in the Western world, such spiritual connection with God, is sometimes treated as symptoms of an acute psychotic episode. Therefore, it is crucial to shed light on the differences in practice and traditional healing between the West and the East, particularly in Taiwan.

It is also worth noticing that although measurement of shamanism’s efficacy as assessed by Western biomedical criteria is currently unavailable, most individuals who have asked shamans questions find this processing extremely soothing and healing. It is crucial to examine the different approaches that may contribute to the efficacy of psychotherapy between Taiwan and Canada. As a culturally sanctioned traditional practice, shamanism does not necessarily have formal guidelines for providing emotional comfort and healing to the clients. However, since Lee et al. (2010) uncovered its effectiveness for the Taiwanese community with the study of dung-ki, they discovered cultural factors that contribute to the effectiveness of such practice. The cultural background that promotes the successful practice of shamanism in Taiwan may be crucial to its effectiveness. If so, these same factors may limit its practical value when adopted in a Western society that does not share a relevant or similar cultural background. Nonetheless, recognizing different cultural practices in different parts of the world can help Canadian clinicians gain a culturally sensitive understanding of the value of shamanistic work in the East, especially when working with Taiwanese clients. Furthermore, growing respect for traditional healing practices

among Indigenous peoples in Canada may also facilitate growth in Canadian health professionals' appreciation for the value of shamanistic work in the East and vice versa.

Implications

Future research on shamanism should aim to deepen understanding in the following topics: governmental regulation that outlines shamans' eligibility to provide services, professional collaboration between shamans and clinical counsellors, and comparative studies between the diversity within shamanism as well as the difference between shamanistic services and counselling. As the current research is conducted with self-identified Taiwanese, another practical implication touches on ethical concerns and confidentiality protections specific to the Taiwanese population, such as the lack of confidentiality during shamanistic consultations.

Research Implications

Future researchers can conduct comparative research between counselling and shamanistic practices. In the current study, participants shared many emotionally healing benefits that they experienced seeking shamanistic support. However, shamanism is still different from counselling, and it contributes to clients' growth and recovery in distinctive ways. Therefore, discovering the pros and cons of each approach may help determine whether a client may benefit more from attending counselling, receiving shamanistic support, or a combination of the two.

The current research focuses strictly on the type of shamanistic support that allows the shaman to communicate between the spiritual and human worlds. Nonetheless, there are many different types of shamanistic services in Taiwan and across the world. Even when they share the same title, such as the profession, "dung-ki," they may still carry different cultural elements depending on where the service is provided. As a result, a closer look at each shamanistic

service's benefits may allow future researchers to acknowledge the diversity of shamanism in Taiwan and offer clients compatible services based on their needs.

We noted a complementary or compatible feature between shamanistic practices and other faith beliefs, future researchers may be interested in examining spiritual practices shared or borrowed by adherents of different religious traditions. Participants in the current study have shown that their religious practices can be incorporated with another religious ritual without conflict. Researchers should examine how the incorporation impacts one's mental well-being. Specifically, whether a conflict between the two religious practices and beliefs and whether one's healing can be maximized after the practices are combined should be examined.

Counselling Implications

Shamanistic support is a culturally sanctioned practice that combats mental health stigmatization in Taiwan. Researchers should consider outlining relevant criteria for shamans who wish to practice. This is because shamanism is not a certified profession in Taiwan. As shown by the participants, they rely on their instinctual responses to determine the legitimacy and helpfulness of a shaman. As a result, a regulated shamanistic practice that outlines whether shamans are eligible to charge fees, the quality of the services provided, and the accuracy of their shamanistic abilities should be examined and evaluated. Over the years, there have been many self-proclaimed shamans providing services that became reportedly harmful or used as a means to sexually or financially harass the question-askers. As a result, future researchers must explore relevant guidelines that are compatible with Taiwan's cultural and professional norms.

Thirthalli et al. (2016) pointed out that different forms of CAM and a multidisciplinary collaboration on CAM between mental health and healthcare professionals facilitated improvements in mental well-being. While shamanism is considered a type of CAM

internationally, it is a mainstream approach to emotional healing for the Taiwanese community. Future studies should also explore the possibility of collaborations between shamans and counsellors. We noticed that shamanistic practices offer some benefits that one can receive in counselling, yet there are still several noticeable differences between the two healing approaches, such as style, orientation, and others. Nevertheless, shamans have provided support that helped individuals gain insight into situations that they could not access otherwise. As a result, the combination of shamanistic services and counselling may maximize clients' acquisition and increase emotional healing in a session. Shamans can utilize their shamanistic abilities to offer visions of what individuals cannot typically know; counsellors can apply their training and offer practical steps to equip clients with skills which they can exercise to help with their healing journeys. The partnership between shamans and counsellors can offer clinically proven, evidence-based support and culturally safe and integrated services. This may be particularly helpful for clients with diverse cultural backgrounds open to alternative healing approaches.

Shamans are not a regulated profession in Taiwan. Therefore, there are also some limits to what shamans can provide when this service is offered in Taiwan. For instance, participants shared that they felt a lack of privacy during their consultations with shamans. Many interviewees indicated that during the question-asking process, many others who also came to seek shamanistic advice were also present; there was no designated space where they could meet to maintain the confidentiality of their conversation. Therefore, future researchers should examine how lack of privacy impacts the participants and consider including this as one of the criteria before a shaman begins practicing. The integration of privacy while respecting the cultural traditions in Taiwan, especially in instances when parents bring their children to seek shamanistic support, may be challenging.

Limitations

There are a few foreseeable limitations of the current study. First, as stated by Lee et al. (2010), the practice of shamanism appears to be the most effective in the East, particularly in Taiwan. As a result, such culturally sanctioned practice may not apply to treating Canadian clients who may not share a similar cultural background. In addition, shamans' extreme predispositions in their spontaneous connections to a supernatural figure (Kendall, 1981) may pose some difficulties for Canadian clinicians who would want to adapt the shamanistic gifts and abilities for counselling work in Canada. As a culturally sensitive and grounded practice, these skills and techniques can be difficult to modify into a form of effective practice for Canadian clients.

Secondly, the culturally specific shamanistic practices in Taiwan may be presented in ways that correspond to the DSM-5 descriptions of schizophrenic or psychotic disorders. For lack of a better description, these shamanistic features may create some barriers for Canadian clinicians. Shamanistic presentations are contextually and culturally specific; such presentations may pose difficulties for Canadian clients to understand the cultural roots and meaning of such practice.

Thirdly, as all participants were interviewed in Chinese Mandarin, some meaning-filled content must be translated into English. Translating such culturally specific content is inherently tricky, especially when Western society needs to have widely disseminated knowledge of shamanistic practices. As a result, some phrases, quotations, and responses may need to be translated into the English language with adequate depth or accuracy. A glossary that offers the closest approximation and explanation to these terms is provided to supplement materials that are difficult to translate.

Lastly, as the current study is under-researched in counselling psychology across the world, research findings are based on the research team's observation and reflection of participants' responses after asking shamans questions. For example, most clients who seek emotional support from a shaman feel relieved, emotionally and physically, after speaking to one. Empirically, although the efficacy of shamanism has not been proven scientifically, the Korean community agrees that shamans' intra-psychic ability is much more significant and powerful than the therapeutic effectiveness they provide as traditional healers (Kendall, 1981). Kendall notices in her research that shamans who possess high levels of natural predisposition to spontaneous possession provide a more effective service, even for patients who demonstrate psychotic or schizophrenic concerns. He claims that clients often find consultations with the shaman effective because of their ability to provide gifts of healing in a culturally sanctioned manner. Individuals who have not received shamanistic support may struggle to understand the helpfulness of such practice, yet this research hopes to bring light to the broader counselling community that intrapsychic abilities may not be visible but have brought emotionally healing effects to many people.

Conclusion

The current study investigated factors that facilitated the emotional healing of shamanistic practices for people in Taiwan. Complementary to counselling services in the West, the question-asking procedure with shamans is viewed as a mainstream pathway to emotional healing for Taiwanese that combats mental health stigmatization. Through hermeneutic phenomenological interviews, the research team discovered several meaning patterns, such as special shamanistic abilities, beliefs of fate or destiny, cultural and spiritual elements, how participants' instinctual judgment may impact the helpfulness of shamanism, and other aspects of

shamanistic healing through the sharing of participants' lived experiences. Collaboration between shamans and mental health professionals is encouraged to provide a culturally and emotionally safe environment for individuals with diverse backgrounds, such as the immigrant or refugee populations in Canada.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Asking a question: It is a direct translation that carries the meaning of ‘something is bothering me, and I hope to talk about it.’ It is used informally to indicate one’s desire to seek emotional support through shamans (see p.2).

Auspicious moments (吉時): The “right” or “perfect” time a ceremony can get started. It is commonly used in wedding ceremonies or a new start of something

Chi (氣): Chi is a moving, circulating, active energy flow in the human body.

Confucian Heritage Culture (儒家思想): A culture and practice that focuses on Confucious virtues and conduct, such as ren ai (仁愛: love and compassion), li yue (禮樂: manner and music), xin yi (信義: trust, moral, and integrity), zhong shu (忠恕: loyalty), gong jing (恭敬: respect), and xiao ti (孝悌: filial piety).

Dung-Ki (乩童/八家將): A spirit or medium that helps communicate between the spiritual or human worlds. It can be a form of shamanism in Taiwan.

Instinctual judgment(直覺判斷): As shamanistic practices are not currently regulated, participants utilized their judgement and instinct to decide on the fit and the helpfulness of the shaman.

Jiaobei/Puah-pue (擲杯): Puah-pue refers to using a pair of crescent-shaped blocks, wooden divination tools, to seek divine guidance in forms of yes (affirmative) or no (negative) responses.

Kai Guang (開光): A ceremony held after a temple is newly built. This process welcomes good spirits, typically Buddhas, to live within the Buddha’s statue in the temple. It also invites the spirits to guide the believers through their challenges.

Possessed (上身;起駕): Possession often has a negative connotation when used in the West. In this thesis, possessed refers to a state of mind when a shaman has been connected to the spirit or when the spirit has taken control after entering into a shaman’s body.)

Shamans (廟公, “老師”): A messenger who delivers messages between the spiritual and human worlds. It is worth noting that the term shamans is used differently by scholars in different disciplines.

Siu-kiann (收驚): Describes a procedure performed by a Daoist shaman who takes away the

“shock” imposed onto them. For example, it can reduce nightmares, night scares, or unknown diseases for mostly children and some adults.

Spectres of lost at night (孤魂野鬼): Wandering spirits. This term usually has a negative connotation, referring to ghosts or spirits hostile or unfriendly toward humans.

Yuan fen (緣分): A predetermined binding force between two people.

Yin Guo (因果): Yin stands for the “cause,” while “guo” means consequences.

Yin yang (陰陽): In the Chinese culture, Yin represents darkness, femininity, passivity, and the earth. Yang, on the other hand, represents light, masculinity, activity, and the heavens.

Appendix B: Invitation Email and Oral Script

Hi (name),

My name is Shu Mei Chang; I am currently in my first year of counselling psychology program at Trinity Western University. In my thesis, I aim to understand how shamanistic practices have impacted emotional healing in Taiwan. I am looking for participants who self-identify as Taiwanese and have received support from a local shaman. This research aims to explore culturally healing elements that contribute to emotional healing in the Taiwanese community. While your participation in this study can be deeply personal, all efforts to maintain your confidentiality will be made.

您好！我的名字是張書梅,目前正在加拿大西三一大學就讀諮商碩士的學位。在我的論文中我想了解台灣問“神明”或是“老師”的文化以及為什麼這種文化能夠提供心靈上的慰藉。我正在找願意分享跟老師或神明諮詢經驗的台灣人。如果您願意分享您的經驗請確您滿足下列幾個條件：(1) 您是台灣人嗎？(2) 您目前有什麼急迫的精神狀況嗎？比如說,反社會人格,人格障礙,思覺失調,酒飲或毒癮,躁鬱症,或是有輕生的傾向呢？(3) 您本身有過問老師或問神明的經驗嗎？(4) 在這個過程中,您有得到心靈的慰藉嗎？(5) 您願意花一個半到兩個小時的時間參與我目前的碩士研究論文並分享您本身問神明的經驗嗎？本研究會以視訊的方式在線上交流。我很感謝您分享您的經驗-所有您分享的內容如果被選用在研究結果內,都會匿名的方式呈現。您的隱私將會完全的被保護請不用擔心。

I am looking for eight to twelve participants in Taiwan who meet the following criteria:

- Do you identify as Taiwanese? 您是台灣人嗎？
- Are you currently experiencing acute mental health symptoms such as severe antisocial behaviours, personality disorders, psychosis, active substance use, addiction, bipolar disorder, and suicidal ideation? 您目前有什麼急迫的精神狀況嗎？比如說,反社會人格,人格障礙,思覺失調,酒飲或毒癮,躁鬱症,或是有輕生的傾向呢？
- Have you been exposed to and experienced Taiwanese shamanism practices in the past? 您本身有過問老師或問神明的經驗嗎？
- Have you experienced emotional healing in this experience? 在這個過程中,您有得到心靈的慰藉嗎？
- If you meet all the above criteria, are you willing and able to participate in a 1.5 to 2-hour research study over a video call? 您願意花一個半到兩個小時的時間參與我目前的碩士研究論文並分享您本身問神明的經驗嗎？我們會以視訊的方式在線上交流

If you are interested in participating in this research, or if you have any questions regarding this study in general, please email me at _____ or scan the QR code for LINE. If you feel that anyone you know might be a good fit and would be interested in participating, please feel free to pass this invite along!

Thank you,
Shu Mei Chang

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

誠徵論文個案訪談受訪者： 以「台灣人求神問卜的文化習俗」 為主題之碩士研究

您好！我是張書梅，目前在加拿大西三一大學攻讀心裡諮商碩士學位。我的碩士研究論文主題是關於台灣人向“神明”、“靈媒”或相關宗教媒介求神問卜的文化習俗，以及這種文化習俗如何提供心靈上的慰藉。我正在尋找願意分享自身經驗，且曾經向神明或上述媒介尋求協助或解答的台灣人。如果您滿足以下條件，且願意分享您的經驗，我將非常感激：

- 您是台灣人。
- 目前並無急迫的精神狀況，例如反社會人格、人格障礙、思覺失調、酒癮、毒癮、躁鬱症，或有輕生傾向。
- 曾有過向神明、靈媒或相關宗教媒介求神問卜的經驗。
- 在這個過程中，您感受到了心靈上的慰藉（感受如同參與心理諮商或教育輔導：感覺到情緒有宣洩出口或問題有機會被解決）。
- 願意撥出三到四個小時的時間（共計2次，每次1-2小時）參與本次論文研究的一對一個案訪談，並分享您求神問卜的經驗。在第一次訪談前會邀請您參與15-20分鐘的前訪去篩選資格及相關經驗。

本研究會以視訊的方式在線上交流。為保護你的個人隱私，您所分享的一切內容，如果被選用在研究結果中，都將以匿名方式呈現並僅作為研究分析之用。完成訪問後，我將以郵寄的方式寄出價值新台幣500元的星巴克禮卡以感謝您撥空受訪。

如果您有興趣參與，請掃描下方QR CODE加入我的LINE

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

1. Begin with the researcher providing introductory comments:
 - Welcome and thank each participant for participating in this study.
 - Introduce myself and my relationship with this research.
 - Verbally introduce the purpose of the current research and invite the participants to review it again on the consent form.
 - Hand out the consent form.

2. Review the consent form (Appendix E) with the participants, invite them to ask questions, go over the confidentiality section, and sign the consent form when they feel comfortable to move forward with the research. I will also inform the participants that they have the right to stop participating in the study at any time. If they decide to withdraw their consent after the first semi-structured interview begins, participants will be given the option to have their data destroyed or retained in the study. A blank copy of the consent form will be provided to each participant. The step of reviewing the consent form will be completed during the screening interview (15~ 20 minutes).

3. Give participants information about the procedure of the interview and other information required before the start of the interview. This step indicates that the participant meets the inclusion criteria. This is the beginning of the first interview (~ 2 hours).

4. Ask an opening question to help the participant and me become more familiar with each other. This question can be, “How did you find out about this interview?” My goal is to provide more comfort and safety for the participants.

5. Go through the interview guide; see Appendix F.

6. At the end of the interview, let the participant know when I am going to ask the last question. This allows the participants to share anything that they have not already shared and make last comments before the interview is concluded. For example, I may ask “I know that we have covered quite a bit in this interview. Is there anything else you would like to share before we wrap up the interview?”

7. When the interview is completed, go through the debriefing statement, see Appendix G.

8. Point out the contact information at the end of the consent form again and provide resources for participants to contact with follow-up questions or comments or if additional mental health support is desired. I will briefly go through each resource if requested.

9. Thank each participant for volunteering their time and energy to participate in this study. This is the end of the first interview. Participants will be contacted via email a few weeks after the first interview. They will be asked to review two transcripts: one in English and one in Chinese Mandarin of their interview. Participants will be invited to verify the accuracy of the script and

bring in any concerns or suggestions for revision in the second interview. See Appendix H for the follow-up email.

10. In the same email as (9), participants will be invited for the second interview. The second interview focuses on any revisions to be made from the first interview (see Appendix H and I). In addition, I will invite the participants to share their experiences participating in this research.

Appendix E: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form



[What happens when Taiwanese ask a question of a shaman?]

Principal Investigator

Shu Mei Chang, M.A. student, Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University.

Contact information: _____ ; _____ or LINE with the following QR code. If you are calling outside of Canada, please phone _____ Please be aware that the international calling rate may apply.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in MA Counselling Psychology. This research is part of a thesis and will be made public following completion. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. McDonald and Dr. Minami. You may contact my supervisors at the following contact information provided below.

Co-Investigators

Supervisor

Dr. Marvin McDonald, Associate Professor, Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University.

Contact information: _____ ; _____ . If you are calling outside of Canada, please phone _____ . Please be aware that the international calling rate may apply.

Co-Supervisor

Dr. Masahiro Minami, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University.

Contact information: _____ ; _____ . If you are calling outside of Canada, please phone _____ . Please be aware that the international calling rate may apply.

Purpose

This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how the shamanistic practices in Taiwan have effectively provided emotional support and stress alleviation to the public, considering that Taiwanese shamans are not board-certified counsellors. This research hopes to explore factors that contribute to how shamanistic practices provide emotional healing for Taiwanese. In addition, we also hope to introduce and expand on existing services through the collaboration between shamans and counsellors. This project provides insights into the benefits of Taiwanese people utilizing culturally acceptable practices to reduce emotional stress. Shamanistic practice is identified as one of the most popular forms of alternative coping approaches in Taiwan.

You are being asked to participate because you self-identified as a Taiwanese. You indicate that you have been exposed to shamanistic practices in the past and that you have experienced emotional healing in this experience. You further stated that you are currently free from acute difficulties or distress such as psychosis, severe antisocial behaviours, personality disorders, active substance abuse or addiction, bipolar disorder, or suicidal ideation. You have contacted the principal investigator regarding

your interest in participation through LINE, email, or her phone number. As you meet all the criteria to participate in this study, I would like to invite you to share your personal emotional healing experiences with shamans.

What is involved

If you voluntarily consent to participate in this research, your participation will include a 15-to-20-minute screening procedure, where the informed consent will also be explained and signed if applicable. In the first semi-structured interview, it may take 1.5~2 hours. Questions about your experience with shamans as well as emotional healing will be explored. You will receive transcripts in both English and Chinese Mandarin after the interview, and you will be invited to review them and propose revisions as needed. The second interview will take 1~2 hours discussing the revisions and your experience participating in this research. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the method used in this research. All interviews will be video and audio recorded, and they will be conducted via Zoom.

You will have access to my completed research after it is completed. After the research is completed, you can reach out to the principal investigator via the contact methods outlined at the beginning of this form. You can also request the principal investigator send you a link to the published thesis on the university's webpage after it is completed.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

The risks associated with participating in this research are minimal, no more than those encountered during everyday life. You understand that if you inform the researcher that you or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities—they may discuss this with you first but may be required to report with or without your permission. When the interview is completed, the researcher will provide a list of local shamans and counsellors available for additional support if needed.

Potential Benefits to Participants and/or to Society

Participating in this research has some potential benefits. Through discussion with a sympathetic interviewer, you may gain a deeper understanding of how shamanistic practices might have been beneficial to you personally. The discussion may also explore how consulting a shaman can continue to be beneficial to you in the future. This realization may further encourage help-seeking behaviour from local shamans, which may enhance your mental well-being in the long run.

Community members in Taiwan may gain a deeper understanding of how shamanistic practices might be beneficial to them. This may further encourage help-seeking behaviour from local shamans, which may enhance their mental well-being in the long run. In addition, this research serves as exploratory research for mental health professionals in Western society to better understand the prevalence of shamanistic practices serving as a mainstream healing ritual in Taiwan, even when the shamans are not certified psychotherapists according to Western standards.

Remuneration/Compensation

To thank you for your participation and compensate you for any inconvenience related to it, you will be given a \$500 TWD (\$22 CAD) Starbucks gift card as a token of appreciation. This incentive will be awarded via mail or digital gift cards in Taiwan. If you choose to withdraw from the study prior to the first semi-structured interview, this compensation will not be provided.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be protected by using the pseudonyms of your choice. All recorded content will be stored in an encrypted drive. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Data maintenance

Data from this study will be stored in an encrypted drive for two years after research completion for future thesis publication purposes. However, if you decide to withdraw from the study at any point, you will be provided with an opportunity to have your contributions deleted or maintained in the study.

Contact for information about the study

If you have any questions or desire further information about this study, you may contact the principal investigator through the contact methods provided at the beginning of this form. You may also contact the principal investigator's supervisors through the contact methods provided on the first page of this form.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Ethics Compliance Officer in the Office of Research, Trinity Western University at 604-513-2167 or HREB@twu.ca. If you are calling from outside of Canada, you may dial 002-1-604-513-2167. Please note that international calling rates may apply.

Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardizing your right to ask shamans questions in the future.

You understand that even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. You can withdraw by contacting the principal investigator, Shu Mei Chang, via the contact methods provided on the first page. You understand that you can withdraw permission to use data from your screening interview before the first semi-structured interview. However, if you decide to withdraw from the study after participating in the first semi-structured interview, you will be given the option to have your existing data destroyed or to allow it to remain in the study. With your consent, all data collected after the first semi-structured interview will be stored securely for up to two years in an encrypted drive.

The data from this study may be used in future research or thesis publication for up to two years after PI's graduation. If you do not wish it to be used in future research, you may indicate so below. It will then not be used beyond this study. Do you have any questions, concerns, or comments?

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you have answered your questions about the study to your satisfaction and have received a copy of this consent form for your records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Research Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Research Participant

Preferred pseudonym

Do you consent to the use of your data from this study (in anonymous form) in current and future research?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Appendix F: Interview Guide

First Interview

Introduction script: *Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this study. This research means a lot to me, and it will greatly benefit the larger Taiwanese/ Chinese community in general. Before we begin, is there anything you need that can help you feel more comfortable before we get started? I understand that there might be parts of our discussion that can feel foreign, unusual, awkward, or vulnerable, so I want to remind you that you can choose to share as much or as little as you like. If you need a break or are feeling uncomfortable about continuing with the interview, please let me know, so we can provide you with what you need. [Note to interviewer: sequence and wording of questions can be changed for each participant.]*

Research Question: What happens when Taiwanese ask a question of a shaman?

Some questions have a rating scale of 1-10. Please note that 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest.

Guiding Questions:

Approach: Getting to know and become familiar with the person holistically. For example, how do Taiwanese conventionally introduce themselves to one another? How might a good friend describe them?

1. Tell me about what drew you to this study? (請問您當初為什麼想參與這個研究呢?) Please provide information on your religious outlook, level of education, family, career, age, gender, and background that may help me understand your well-being. (請問你的宗教信仰, 教育程度, 家庭, 工作, 年齡, 性別, 以及其他您覺得能夠幫助我更了解您的資訊)
2. Can you please tell me how you became interested in speaking to a shaman? If you feel comfortable sharing, why did you decide to go speak to a shaman? (如果你願意分享, 當初是怎麼接觸到問老師這件事呢? 您是因為什麼原因想要請教老師或是神明呢?)
3. What is it about speaking to a shaman that feels comforting or helpful? (你覺得問老師或神明的這種習俗為什麼能給你帶來心靈上的慰藉跟幫助呢?) Were any aspects of speaking to a shaman that were not comfortable or helpful? (有沒有什麼您覺得老師沒有幫上忙 或者是讓您覺得不想繼續討論的時候呢?)
4. What is your perception of the shaman? Please describe the shaman for me. (你對靈媒或是“老師”的印象是什麼呢? 請描述) In what ways did they help you feel comfortable sharing, such as their approach, attitude, warmth, authenticity, the rapport built, etc? (靈媒或是老師怎麼樣讓你覺得想要傾訴你的困惑呢? 例如說, 他們的態度, 給你的感覺, 等等的) Please rate the comfort of this experience on a scale of 1-10 (請標示您跟老師的接觸的安心程度 一是最底 十是最高)
5. Please describe your bodily and spiritual experiences before, during, and after speaking to a shaman? (可以您描述一下您在跟老師諮詢前, 諮詢的時候, 跟諮詢之後的身體及心靈上的感受)

- 嗎？) Please rate your felt sense of peacefulness before, during, and after the consultation on a scale of 1-10 (請標示您諮詢前, 中, 後, 的心靈平靜度 一是最低 十是最高)
6. Did the shaman say or do anything that helped you feel like you are ready to handle the challenges in life again? (老師或靈媒有做了或說了什麼讓你覺得又能再次面對目前的困惑或挑戰嗎？) Please rate your readiness to handle challenges in life before and after the consultation on a scale of 1-10 (請標示您在諮詢前跟後準備好面對困難的程度 一是最低 十是最高)
 7. What are 2-3 other important calming, healing, inspiring activities that are important for you? (請分享其他兩至三項您覺得對您來說有效的療癒心靈的方法) How is speaking to a shaman different from reflecting on your own, talking to your friends and family, or talking to a therapist? (請問 問老師, 自己思索, 跟家人朋友討論, 跟諮商有什麼不同之處呢？) What was different that made you feel like talking to a shaman is helpful? (是怎樣的的不同讓你覺得“問老師問題”是比較有幫助的呢？)
 8. Do you feel that shamanism is a form of superstition, science, or other ways you would interpret this service? (你覺得問老師這種文化是一個“迷信,” 有科學根據的, 還是是什麼呢？) How was your experience being in contact with a “spirit”? (你跟一個“靈”接觸的感覺是什麼？) Please rate your experience on a scale of 1-10 and explain why (請標示你跟 “靈” 接觸的經驗並解釋為什麼 一是最低 十是最高)
 9. Would you return knowing that shamans are not certified counsellors? When and why? (“老師”通常不是國家認證過的諮商師 依照您的經驗 你覺得你會再次來找老師尋求幫助嗎？會在怎樣的情況下來呢？) Please rate your willingness to return to a shaman on a scale of 1-10 (請標示您是否會再次來諮詢 一是最低 十是最高) (*Note to interviewer: if they say: 3-5, what would make it a 3, what a 5?*)
 10. Have any background or family factors been mentioned that seem related to their experience with a shaman? (您問老師的經驗跟剛剛提到的因素, 比如說家庭, 宗教信仰等等的有什麼關聯呢？)
 11. Anything that could help me understand more about your experience talking to a shaman? Any wonderings you have? 請問有沒有什麼我們還沒有討論到的主題 你覺得能幫助我們對於問老師的文化能夠更加了解的嗎？有什麼最後的想法或問題嗎？)

Second Interview

1. Share interview results.
2. Are there additional meanings that have become clearer in the last few months? 在過去的幾個月, 有沒有什麼其他關於靈媒文化的想法, 或是因為這個訪談而啟發的思維呢?
3. Is there anything you would like to change? 繼上次訪談後, 有沒有什麼您想要增加, 移除, 或修改的地方?
4. Did you recognize some of your experiences in the way that this overall picture looks? 聽完我分享完研究發現後, 您覺得您所提供的内容有被包含在這裡面嗎? 什麼樣的内容呢?
5. Are there aspects of it that you recognize but have not personally experienced? 有沒有什麼研究發現是你可以想像, 但自己沒有經歷過的呢? 是哪些呢?
6. Are there any meanings in this overall pattern that contradict your experience? 有任何研究發現是跟您的經驗相反的嗎?

Appendix G: Debriefing Statement

Congratulations on completing the first part of this research! Thank you so much for sharing your invaluable and unique experience in your engagement with a local shaman. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how shamanistic practices effectively provide emotional healing to Taiwanese. I wonder how are you feeling after the interview? Are there any questions that I can help answer? If you wish to withdraw from this study, please note that you will have the option to have the data you supplied destroyed or to keep it within the study. If the data collected from you is chosen to be used in the thesis, or if you have provided consent for the data to be retained in the study in your withdrawal, all of your personal information will be camouflaged and presented confidentially. My contact information and a list of local shamans and counsellors are provided along with this form. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any of these resources if further support is helpful. I will contact you in a few weeks with two different drafts of the translated and hermeneutically analyzed documents for you to review. Please do take some time to review these documents as you will have an opportunity to share any revisions that should be made in the next interview. I will also schedule a time for the second interview with you. Thank you again for your participation in this research. By sharing your experience, you have deepened our understanding of the popularity and helpfulness of shamanistic practices to the scholarly community in North America.

Principal investigator: Shu Mei Chang

Contact information: _____ or LINE with the
following QR code. If you are calling outside of Canada, please phone _____.
Please be aware that the international calling rates may apply.

Supervisor: Dr. Marvin McDonald

Contact information: _____; _____ . If you are calling outside of
Canada, please phone _____. Please be aware that the international
calling rates may apply.

Sincerely,
Shu Mei Chang

Appendix H: Follow-Up Email

Hi _____ (participant's name),

I hope this email finds you well. Thank you again for participating in this research and allowing me to understand your experience of receiving emotional support from a Taiwanese shaman. We have covered quite a bit during the interview, and I want to remind you that if you want to talk about the study or debrief it further, I will be happy to schedule a time with you to go over what has come up for you.

As described in the research protocol, I have attached two documents to this email. One, an interpreted English translation of the interview content; two, the translated version of the English interpretation into Chinese Mandarin. Please review both documents before the next interview to ensure the accuracy of the interview. If anything needs to be revised, added, or removed, please do not hesitate to let me know. I also plan to schedule an interview with you in the next few weeks. Any time between 9 am- and 1 pm Taiwan time will work well for the follow-up interview. If another time slot will work better for you, please provide options of when you will be available. If anything comes up in the future, you can always reach me via email. Thank you again for your participation in this study, your contribution is greatly appreciated.

With gratitude and appreciation,
Shu Mei Chang

Appendix I: Linguistic Ecology Protocol

Please refer to Chou's dissertation (2019) for more detailed descriptions of processes for this protocol. The current project has modified the LEP to better suit this research's unique linguistic features and procedures. The steps and processes listed here overlap substantially.

Step 1- Recruitment: Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and nomination through PI and her friends' and families' networks in Taiwan.

Step 2- Narrative interviews: The first semi-structured interview asked all the interview questions outlined in the Interview Guide (see Appendix F). This interview invited participants' engagement and responses to their experiences seeking emotional healing through Taiwanese shamans. Rating scale questions were embedded in some questions to better understand participants' experiences before, during, and after consulting with a shaman.

Step 3- Transcription: All interview content was transcribed verbatim into Chinese Mandarin as well as other languages involved, such as Taiwanese and English. As some phrases may be unfamiliar to the Anglophone cultures, a list of glossaries (see Appendix A) was created to provide meaning for untranslatable and culturally specific phrases shared in the interviews.

Step 4- Interpretive reading and narrative drafting: the PI engaged in the interpretive reading and phenomenological analysis while acknowledging her values, beliefs, and biases, as well as how they may impact the meaning analysis process. Shared and distinctive meaning patterns were identified in this process. Several research assistants helped with steps 3-5 (see appendix J).

Step 5- Summarize the shared and distinctive meaning patterns and translate them into English: To bridge the potential language barrier in this multilingual research, PI summarized and translated all meaning patterns into English. Untranslatable and culturally specific phrases were supplemented by the glossaries (see Appendix A).

Step 6- Present meaning patterns to participants in the second interview: The identified meaning patterns were presented to all participants in their native languages, Chinese Mandarin and Taiwanese. Participants were invited to add, remove, or modify their inputs if the identified meaning patterns were inconsistent with their experiences or if their positionality had changed since the first semi-structured interview.

Step 7- Review of analysis: After reviewing participants' feedback and making necessary changes, an integrated research analysis was completed.

Appendix J: Research Assistants

	Name	Relationship	Role
1	Shu Mei Chang	Self	Principal investigator Translator Interpreter Data analyst Transcriptionist Cultural consultant Linguistical consultant
2	Dr. Marvin McDonald	Supervisor	Thesis project supervisor
3	Dr. Masahiro Minami	Supervisor	Thesis project supervisor
4	Tung Chiung Chang	Father	Recruiter Cultural consultant Linguistical Consultant
5	Hsu Shu Yuan	Mother	Data analyst Transcriptionist Cultural consultant Linguistical consultant
6	Tzu Yun Chang	Sister	Recruiter
7	Timothy Lin	Cousin	Translator Interpreter Data analyst Cultural consultant Linguistical consultant Administrative support

Appendix K: Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

This form may be used by research assistants conducting specific research tasks, such as recording or editing image or sound data, transcribing, interpreting, translating, entering data, and destroying data.

I _____, as a research assistant, agree to:

- I will keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing it in any form or format (e.g., USB sticks, transcripts, video, and audio recordings) with anyone other than the individuals listed in Appendix J.
- I will keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., USB sticks, transcripts, video, and audio recordings) secure while it is in my possession.
- I acknowledge that I must encrypt and password-protect electronic data, and return them to the researcher to be shredded after my role in the research process.
- I will erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the researcher (e.g., information stored on a computer hard drive).

I have read the above Confidentiality Agreement and agree to be bound by its terms both during and after my work with this study.

Research Assistant Name

Signature

Date

Witness Name

Signature

Date
