

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

HOW DO SKILLED CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA VIEW
ADULT EDUCATION?

By

CHRISTINA LOK

Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Cathy Bray

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta
February 2007

How Do Skilled Chinese Immigrants in Canada View Adult Education?

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine systematically and extensively how skilled Chinese immigrants in Canada view adult education, and at the same time, attempt to unearth the reasons behind these views.

According to *The Monitor*, an on-line quarterly newspaper posted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada which features statistics on citizenship and immigration trends, the fast growing Asian immigrant population over the last twenty years is a very different breed from the previous generation of Asian immigrants. This new breed has come to Canada as college students, graduate students, visiting scholars and skilled workers. Many have at least a bachelor degree or are high achievers in research fields, engineers, teachers, doctors and managers.

China provides a good example of one of these Asian source countries. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2001), 19 percent of the Chinese immigrants had some form of post-secondary education at the time of immigration, such as a formal trade certificate, a college certificate or diploma, or some non-degree university education. Another 13 percent already possessed a bachelor's degree, and 4 percent had a Master's degree (Wang & Lo, 2004, p.14).

I am a Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong, a former British colony. I immigrated to Canada in 1994. Throughout these years, I have come across many Chinese immigrants while attending the Accelerated Accounting Program offered by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Payroll certificate courses. In my workplace, I observe that immigrants are mainly employed in either the Accounting Department or the Information Technology Department. To me, Asian immigrants, especially Chinese immigrants view adult education as vocational training - a means to achieve the end of obtaining a job in the mainstream society. However, I find I am more fascinated by the graduate school programs which encourage independent thinking and critical analysis which give individuals a chance to develop creativity. The personal transformation which I have gone through has and will continue to benefit me for the rest of my life. Change is fundamental to adult life and the nature of life transitions has every potential for learning and development (Merriam, 2005, p.3-4). Adult life transitions, especially immigrating to a place of totally different culture and language, will definitely foster learning and development. Being an immigrant, I would like to turn this anticipated transition of immigrant life into a learning project to learn how to continually increase my ability to learn, that is to re-create knowledge.

There is a great deal of research and literature on adult education available to the mainstream society. It is important to note that seldom do researchers or adult educators examine the issue from the perspective of immigrants, not to mention one particular visible minority group. Being a Chinese immigrant, I would like to take the initiative to share my observations and help diversify the content of the research on this important

issue.

Scope of Research

This research will focus on the recent skilled Chinese immigrants (from both Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China) who have immigrated to and resided in Canada for approximately ten years. In addition to having completed post-secondary education in their countries of origin, they have had working experience outside Canada in their fields. This sector of immigrants should already have predefined learning skills prior to immigrating to Canada.

In the rest of this paper I will first review the current literature on adult education. After that, I shall provide an overview of the historical context and the cultural context of the skilled Chinese immigrants to help analyze their views on adult education. Before I conclude, I will elaborate on the alternative views on adult education, with the focus on three particular views.

Literature Review

In this section I will review scholarly literature on adult education. The primary focus of this research is skilled Chinese individuals immigrating to Canada in the 10-year period from 1995-2005. This 10-year period will be in the same time period Citizenship and Immigration Canada documented their information posted by *The Monitor*. I will compare and contrast actual skilled Chinese immigrants' views with the views of others on adult education by making reference to journals and additional reference materials.

As mentioned above, apart from the small quantity of scholarly literature on this topic, I found it difficult to find research literature directly discussing skilled Chinese immigrants' views on adult education. However, I do find two pieces of research which shed light on the issue. The first is Jun Li's article in the *Canadian Journal of Education* "Expectations of Chinese Immigrant Parents for Their Children's Education: The Interplay of Chinese Tradition and the Canadian Context" (2001). Li points out that the parents "grounded their expectations for the children in Chinese tradition, their deeply rooted cultural heritage. Their personal life experiences and acculturative attitudes also shaped their expectations" (Li, 2001, p.477). Li interviewed seven Chinese immigrant families and developed five common themes: cultural expectations, life experiences, acculturative attitudes, career aspirations, and minority ideology. One of the interviewees expressed explicitly that "a good career meant a well-paid, high-tech job". Considering possible financial strains, this interviewee firmly objected to her daughter pursuing a career in the arts (Li, 2001, p.486).

The second article is "Chinese Immigrants in Vancouver: Quo Vadis?" written by Shibao Guo and Don J DeVoretz (2006). Their article attempts to understand the factors which allow the Chinese immigrants to realize their goals and stay in Canada. The goals and suggestions spelled out in the research by the Chinese immigrants provided insight on their views on adult education. For example, some suggested the Government should intervene to provide more training and employment opportunities, and that current English classes do not meet the needs of immigrant professionals (Guo & DeVoretz,

2006, p.21). In view of the lack of research literature directly on this topic, I conducted four short interviews (questionnaire attached in Appendix A) with four skilled Chinese immigrants (two from Hong Kong and two from the People's Republic of China) who fitted the above profile to ascertain whether my belief is shared by other Chinese immigrants. In the following sections, I shall first elaborate on the historical and cultural contexts of the skilled Chinese immigrants before examining their views on adult education:

Historical Context

Dynastic decline, foreign scramble for concessions and domestic disorders make up the history of contemporary China. Hong Kong was ceded by China to the United Kingdom in 1842. In 1984, it was declared in the Sino-British Joint Declaration that the sovereignty of Hong Kong would be returned to the People's Republic of China in July 1997 and Hong Kong would become the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China on 1 July 1997. "In this agreement, China has promised that, under its "one country, two systems" formula, China's socialist economic system would not be imposed on Hong Kong and that Hong Kong would enjoy a high degree of autonomy in all matters except foreign and defense affairs for the next 50 years" (globalEDGE, 2006).

In the colonial era, language was a mechanism of social stratification (Altbach & Kelly, 1984, p.234). The majority of the people in Hong Kong distinguished themselves from the Chinese under the rule of Communist China as they have a distinctive language (Cantonese with exposure to English), lifestyle (capitalistic) and political system (Wang

& Lo, 2004, p.2). During the colonial era, the administration of Hong Kong was mostly conducted in English, with Chinese not being granted official status until 1974 (Dickson & Cumming, 1996, p.41). Though educational authorities in Hong Kong kept advising the government that students learn best when taught in their native language (Zurlo, 2002, p.52), the teaching medium from junior high schools onward in colonial Hong Kong remained in English and the majority of the textbooks were written in English as parents spared no time to ensure that their children can master English by going to schools (Zurlo, 2002, p.52). On the other hand, the civil service exams/interviews for clerical officer level and above were conducted in English only before 1997. Three generations, including my grandfather, my mother and I worked for the colonial government. Like average Hong Kong citizens, we understood that only those who can command fluent English are able to enter the civil service and those who fail to command fluent English are barred from many opportunities of upward mobility.

Nine-year universal, free and compulsory education was not introduced in colonial Hong Kong until 1978 (Government Secretariat, 1981, p.15). As pointed out by the Hong Kong Special Administration Government in the annual year book, before 1990s only those who scored in the top 9% could head off to the post-secondary institutions (Information Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, 1999, p.164). The whole education system is exam-oriented and “emphasizes rote memorization and drilling. The exams students take for eleven years require mostly recalling facts and formulas they have memorized in schools” (Zurlo, 2002, p.44). Students were not prompted to think critically or discuss the issues they have learnt. Dr. Ruth Hayhoe, the

former Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, when addressed on the topic “The Future of Education in Hong Kong” in November 1998 remarked that,

“There has been a strong tendency for education systems in Asia to be shaped from the top down, through a kind of pyramidal pattern which is shaped by the examination system determining entry to university. All parents want their children to enjoy the prestige and potential social status that comes from university education, and so university entry examinations determine the secondary school curriculum and the kinds of activities that are valued in the secondary school, and even the primary school curriculum” (HKDF Newsletter, 1998).

I found from my personal experience that the Hong Kong education system in the colonial era did not encourage independent thinking so as to avoid causing embarrassment to both the colonizer as well as the sovereign state. This is similar to what Frantz Fanon points out, “...one important result of colonial subjection was that most indigenous people could not imagine having a ‘self’ in the Western sense” (Fanon cited in Bonnycastle, 1996, p.210). From what I can see, in the absence of a sense of belonging and self identity, Hong Kong citizens focus on pursuing materialistic goods to provide security. Citizens of Hong Kong feel proud of Hong Kong being the second largest stock market in Asia, one of the four major world traders in gold, and the tenth largest banking centre in the world (Zurlo, 2002, p.10). However, the return of sovereignty to socialist China in 1997 and the 1989 military repression on student activists who protested against government corruption and dictatorial rule made the

middle-class professionals in Hong Kong, the cream of the crop generated by the unique colonial education system, feel insecure. This also triggered off the wave of emigration in the early 1990's (Guo & DeVoretz, 2005, p.5-6).

After looking at the colonial and capitalist imprints on the Chinese people in Hong Kong, we turn to the communist imprint on the Chinese across the border of Hong Kong. The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. As per Wang Yongquan, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the then Soviet Union's higher education system was the model for Chinese higher education (Wang cited in Hayhoe, 1993, p.353). During that time, "the concept of liberal education was deemed impractical and obscure. There were the obvious and pressing demands of a growing industrial society, which liberal education did not seem to address" (Hayhoe, 1993, p.353). Then came the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which wreaked havoc on China's culture and crumbled the education system as well as the peoples' values. The saddest thing is, as Boshier pointed out, that the Cultural Revolution "brought forth a lost generation as urban high schools were closed, formal education was suspended for ten years and urban youth were sent to the impoverished countryside to be re-educated by peasants" (Boshier et. al., 2006, p.202). After the Cultural Revolution, the People's Republic of China adopted an open door policy and the economic boom under market socialism in the mid 90s gave rise to the growth of "new middle income families" (Guo & DeVoretz, 2005, p.6). Once the Chinese Government had relaxed the restriction on people's mobility, this new generation of professionals left China for the western world to study, visit and emigrate in an effort to open up one's panoramas of life. Therefore, the 1990s also witnessed substantial

emigration from the People's Republic of China to Canada (Guo & DeVoretz, 2005, p.6).

Cultural Context

As Zurlo talks about the Chinese's belief in the function of education, he points out that "for two thousand years, the Chinese faith in education as a means to success never wavered" (Zurlo, 2002, p.42). Confucian scholars over the centuries promoted the idea that success in academic studies could lead to the most sought-after jobs. To the Chinese, this would bring fame and fortune to the entire family (Zurlo, 2002, p.43). Since the purpose of education was viewed in terms of utilitarianism, official Confucian education in China's medieval period was always closely linked to the system for selecting scholar-officials for the bureaucracy. In order to provide submissive officials for the emperor to choose from, teaching methods were "those of compulsion, forbidding any educational activities that might encourage opposition to the will of the monarch..."(Hayhoe, 1992, p.4-5).

Traditionally, the Chinese view education as a system to impart knowledge from teachers to students. Students are expected to obey their teachers who are on the top of the hierarchy (Boshier et. al., 2006, p.220). Strict regulations are adopted to ensure compliance from students. Indeed, this is in contrast to the Canadians' view of a system that is to re-create knowledge. According to Wan, "Chinese students come to the United States expecting structure, formal rules, and the hierarchical arrangement of teachers and students. Instead, they encounter creative and flexible teaching arrangements, collaborative engagements, and are often disillusioned with the process of having to be

self-directed and having to be co-constructors of knowledge” (Wan cited in Alfred, 2005, p.8).

As Barbara Sparks points out, “different cultures and ways of being are prominent features of many adult education settings” (Sparks, 2001, p.24). With the above-mentioned colonial and communist imprints, pragmatic attitude, hierarchical education system and unique cultural context, the skilled Chinese immigrants came to Canada to start afresh.

Skilled Chinese Immigrants’ Views on Adult Education

While bringing their historical and cultural imprints to Canada with them, the skilled Chinese immigrants at the same time pick up new values during the resettlement and assimilation processes in the mainstream society. To a certain extent, their views on adult education were also shaped or further enhanced by the objective environment in the Canadian mainstream society. I have identified six areas which affect the decisions of skilled Chinese immigrants on whether to participate in adult education, what programs to choose, and which institutions to attend:

1. Psychological barriers
2. Pragmatic considerations and financial constraints
3. Traditional mode of learning
4. Language barrier
5. Employer’s role
6. Government’ role

In the following section of my paper, I am going to address all the six areas and examine the impact of each of them:

1. Psychological barriers to take the initiative

Boshier et al's study points out that formal education in China is considered "kids' stuff" (Boshier et al, 2006, p.217). During the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), "20 million people were deprived of formal education and they are trying to make up lost ground through adult education" (Boshier et al, 2006, p.221). Therefore, in China, adult education is vicariously associated with the illiterate or the unfortunates. With the rise of globalization, China's economy flourishes and the pressure of market socialism motivates the Chinese to participate in adult education (Boshier et al, 2006, p.201). Since then, adult education is entrusted with the additional task of facilitating the tapping of maximum benefits of the hot economic market.

On the other hand, the Hong Kong SAR Government also sheds light on its adult education policy in the chapter entitled Education in the official annual report *Hong Kong 1999* of the Hong Kong SAR Government. It is said that,

"Opportunities are available for adults to study in their spare time, either for personal development or to update knowledge and skills relevant to their work. Private schools offer language, business and computer courses. During the year, the Education Department provided courses from primary to senior secondary levels to adult learners at 42 centres" (Information Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, 1999, p.167).

Apart from associating adult education with China's "making up lost ground" for those who missed the chance of completing formal education to senior secondary levels, Hong Kong adds to the definition the role of helping career advancement. In fact, after the mid-1990s, Hong Kong could not compete with China's cheap workforce and capital kept being relocated to Mainland China, resulting in a negative impact on the local employment. The Hong Kong SAR Government encouraged those who lost their jobs to learn new skills like computer skills to reintegrate into the ever-changing labour market. The Hong Kong Education Commission introduced education reforms to converge with the global trends. Obviously, one of the common motivational forces for adult education between the two places is to upgrade one's value in the labour market.

Asia promotes elite education and the Asian education system is to look for elites. Middle class elite's feel proud of their educational attainment. If adult education is associated with adults whose market value is comparatively lower, why then will the middle class intellectuals from Hong Kong and China look upon adult education as something they would be proud to participate in? This is confirmed by the Chinese immigrants who responded to my questionnaires. Three out of four interviewees claimed that they did not care about adult education because they had already completed their formal post-secondary education before immigration and they admitted that there was no such need as long as they had a promising career as a professional.

2. Pragmatic Considerations and Financial Constraints to participation in adult

education

Reality is reality. After immigrating to Canada, immigrants have to face it squarely. After realizing that their prior learning and outside Canada work experience are not recognized, many immigrants have to consider enrolling in adult education programs to get local credentials so as to get a job in the mainstream society as soon as possible. Their plight is confirmed by Statistics Canada in its June 2004 issue of Perspectives on Labour and Income:

“Whereas 25% of recent immigrant men with a university degree had low-education jobs in 2001, the percentage for their Canadian-born counterparts was only 12%. The corresponding figures for women were 38% and 13%. Recent immigrants were therefore at least twice as likely to be in low-education jobs, a phenomenon observed throughout the decade” (Statistics Canada, 2004, p.5-7).

This underemployment is by no means a short-term phenomenon. Without local credentials, immigrants find it hard to find entry level jobs in the mainstream society, not to mention re-establishing oneself to the middle-class hierarchy. Under such circumstances, immigrants have to enroll in adult education programs, even though they did not have to consider this option when they resided in the source countries. Chinese people’s faith in education as a means to success is rekindled and adult education serves as a panacea to redeem immigrants from unemployment or underemployment.

Since seeking employment in Canadian society is their ultimate goal, immigrants are pragmatic in selecting adult education programs. Three out of four of my interviewees

enrolled into adult education program and all of them looked upon adult education as vocational training, linking them to an entry level job in the job market. Hum and Simpson identify in the conclusion of their research entitled “Adult Immigrants: How Well Are They Trained?” that financing, language and the recognition of previous qualifications have been the three major areas immigrants face as far as adult education and training is concerned (Hum & Simpson, 2003, p.21). For many training programs and courses in Canada, prerequisites are required. Yet, if their credentials, education and training abroad are not recognized, immigrants in fact, have “limited” choices even if they want to engage in the adult education training programs. As Hum and Simpson remark, “...those who have immigrated as adults, are more likely to indicate a financial constraint, that is, the training or education required is either too expensive or they do not have sufficient funds to finance it” (Hum & Simpson, 2003, p.20). This is confirmed by the interviews I conducted. The two interviewees who possessed law degrees in Mainland China remarked that they would not consider going to law school in Canada as the tuition fees are substantial and it will take much longer than going to the technical college. On the other hand, the female interviewee from Hong Kong pointed out that the adult education she was looking for was something to make her more “employable”. To her, the most ideal adult education courses were something which provided a practicum and by the time she finished the courses, she had already had local working experience. In other words, the goal is to kill two birds with one stone. It is therefore a common phenomenon that adult immigrants flock to attend the short-term, one-off and economy-led vocational courses like accounting, payroll, secretarial and information technology. Simply speaking, these courses are chosen because of their high market values. As one

of my interviewees who chose accounting remarked, “there are lots of jobs for accounting in the market out there...We need to get a job right away to support ourselves. ...Accountants are well respected in Canada. It is a good career.” This explains the lopsided choice as far as adult educational programs are concerned.

3. Traditional mode of learning as it affects the choice of programs

Also, I find from my personal experience that the Chinese immigrants, owing to their traditional rote learning training, will try to avoid courses that require critical analysis (something that as mentioned above the education system of immigrants from Mainland China and Hong Kong has never encouraged) or anything that does not lead to absolute answers. Boshier et al. state that, “in vernacular Confucianism, teachers should dominate education. This idea is expressed in Chinese sayings such as “no pain, no gain” and is far removed from Western ideas about satisfying needs or creating optimal climates for adult education” (Boshier et. al., 2006, p.220).

The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (similar to the provincial exam in Canada) emphasizes multiple choice type of questions and students are drilled to this pattern of exams throughout high school. One popular motto of students in Hong Kong is to look for the “model answer” which will help them score full marks. Private tutorial schools which aim at drilling exam strategies have become popular. Therefore, immigrants tend to refrain from taking courses like philosophy, psychology, pure arts, pure science or humanities which do not have absolute answers and rely on debates and exploration to recreate knowledge. As Ngai-ying Wong points out in her article entitled

“Conceptions of Doing and Learning Mathematics among Chinese” in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* that,

“...When mathematics is regarded as an absolute truth or a set of rules governing symbols, (the Chinese) students tend to consider doing mathematics as the memorization of algorithms and learning mathematics as a process of transmission. We posed certain hypothetical situations to students in Hong Kong and China and found that they possess a relatively restricted conception of mathematics. Later, we investigated this phenomenon at greater depth by the use of open-ended problems. We found that students usually approached a mathematical problem by searching for a rule that identifies what is given, what is being asked and the category of topic for the problem. Evidence has also shown that this approach to mathematical problems is largely shaped by the way they experience learning, their response to task demands, and the classroom environment” (Wong, 2002, abstract).

On the other hand, it happens that payroll and accounting have hard and fast rules and the margin for creativity is very limited. Chinese immigrants realize that they will excel in this area. As one of my interviewees expressed, “So the only career I was thinking was accounting and it is easy for me to get in... I believe I had a good education to pick up the knowledge and become a good accountant in the future.” The “good education” she referred to was the solid foundation resulted from the drilling in mathematics back in Asia. The two interviewees who have now obtained their accounting designations were confident that they would outperform their western counterparts in the accounting field.

4. Language Barrier to limit the choice of programs

As Hum and Simpson state that language is also one of the major barriers to training and adult education (Hum & Simpson, 2003, p.21). While immigrants from Hong Kong have extensive exposure to English, immigrants from the People's Republic of China have extremely limited or no exposure to English at all. As adult learners, they know where their strengths and weaknesses are. They have already had to face the challenges from getting their foreign credentials and foreign working experience recognized, why would they "invest" in courses that they may not excel due to language barrier? In addition, the intensive math skills drilling in Asia throughout elementary, junior high and high school years make Asians confident that this is an area which they can avoid competing with local Canadian employees. To avoid any courses which rely heavily on language, accounting and information technology will be preferences for these immigrants.

Moreover, there is no short-term solution to the language barrier in training or adult education. There are altogether eight benchmarks within these assessments (Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, 2006, p.17) and due to the shortage of government funding, those ranked above three will not get any ESL (English As Second Language) funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Moreover, ESL courses mainly aim at survival English - oral English communication. As per Derek Sankey, a writer of Calgary Herald, pointed out in his article entitled "Job Prosperity Eludes Immigrant Professionals" on February 4, 2006:

"Language training courses for business go up to Level Eight, which is the

accepted minimum standard for people to effectively communicate in the Canadian business world. The problem is that English As A Second Language courses only go to a Level Five, leaving little in the way of resources to gain the additional language skills” (Sankey, 2006, 11).

To attain Level Eight competency of written English, the immigrants have to turn their lives into a never-ending ESL class, usually not gaining any credentials. I find not many immigrants pay attention to the written English competency portion. The two interviewees from the People’s Republic of China are aware of this necessity but they regard it as a lower priority than pursuing their accounting designations. They are of the impression that so long as they can converse fluently in the office and understand most of the content of the English conversation, they should not have any problems communicating in the business world. Under such circumstances, skilled Chinese immigrants will choose those adult education programs which they are confident to outperform once they are familiar with the rules.

5. Employers’ Role

After settling down with a decent job and establishing oneself in the middle class circle, can immigrants rely on their employers to give incentives by funding the adult education programs which are non-job related and the employees are interested in? With the rise of globalization, workforce training towards the knowledge-based economy has become the notion of the day in the Canadian workplace. Canadian employers tend to favour job-specific and economy-driven programs. While traditional skills (hard skills) training

programs like computer skills upgrading or professional development courses are likely to be covered under the training fund of the employers, non-traditional programs on personal development or communication skills (soft skills) courses are most likely to be ignored by the employers. In fact soft skills and hard skills are complementary to each other (Statistics Canada & OECD, 2005, p.3) and a broader education base is preferable if the employers want to have a flexible, adaptive and analytical workforce. In an era of intense cost competitiveness, commitment in training/education programs for employees can be considered a cost, instead of an investment. It is understood that some employers worry about other employers poaching their workers which can defeat the purpose of their investment in training. Diversified training programs are, in fact, of mutual benefit to both employers and employees. Hard skills need to be consolidated with soft skills. Bouchard concluded that “employers are more typically concerned with short-term results than long-term projections. In their everyday activities, entrepreneurs are more likely to react to environmental changes rather than to plan ahead of them” (Bouchard, 1998, p.130). Employers’ view on training programs will definitely affect the employees’ choice of adult education program. This is especially so for the immigrants who look upon their employers when planning their career paths.

6. Government’s Role

Canada is a developed and industrialized country and our industries do not only require low-skill work. Therefore training should not be just limited to job-specific. Diversified training programs can encourage worker initiative and invite innovation. If the workers have been well-trained with portable skills and portable knowledge through professional

and personal development training programs, Canada can then build on the capabilities of our labour force when we institute challenging and flexible job designs in the future. It will be nice if the Government and the employers provide more incentives for diversified training programs.

So now in Canada, we have utilitarian Chinese immigrants and short-sighted employers. What are we looking forward to in the future? Have we ever thought about valued personality traits, valued employee traits and valued citizen traits that can stand the test of time? As a field of practice, is adult education only limited to vocational training programs? Does adult education stand for education for life or just education for a living? In the following sections, I am going to examine the breadth and depth of adult education.

Alternative Views on Adult Education

In her journal article entitled “Shifts in the Landscape of Learning: New Challenges, New Opportunities” in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Mary-Jane Eisen quotes the five philosophies of adult learning: liberal education, progressivism, behaviourism, humanism and radicalism (Eisen, 2005, p.18). According to Eisen, while liberal education promotes learning for learning’s sake, progressivism advocates pragmatic education for everybody to improve society. On the other hand, behaviourism emphasizes programmed instruction and humanism focuses on the individual and the potential for self-actualization. Finally, radicalism attaches importance to social responsibilities as it strives for social changes (Eisen, 2005, p.19). Eisen quotes what

Sharan Merriam, an adult educator, said that “adult learning is far too complex, too personal, and too context-bound for one theory. Rather, we have an ever-changing mosaic”(Eisen, 2005, p.17). Indeed, Eisen is correct to say that there is overlap in these philosophies as both behaviourism and progressivism emphasize pragmatism while both humanists and radicals value critical thinking to uncover and challenge unexamined assumptions (Eisen, 2005, p.19). I believe that it makes sense to take ideas from each approach to frame one’s personal philosophy.

In another article, Knud Illeris remarks in his research entitled “Adult Education as Experienced by the Learners” that “the majority of participants enter the programs because they are more or less forced to do so, and not because of an inner drive or interest. In practice, they typically develop a variety of psychological defence strategies to avoid learning that challenges their identity and personal ways of thinking, reacting and behaving” (Illeris, 2003, abstract). This will happen when adult learners attach adult learning to vocational training which they are not really interested in. However, there are three alternative views on adult education which will be examined in more detail, to conclude my research:

1. Adult education as a liberation process

When comparing the West and the Chinese emphasis on adult education, Boshier et. al. remarked, “In the West, the emphasis is on the individual and program issues, while in China, it is institutional and policy issues” (Boshier et. al., 2006, p.221). In other words, learners’ needs and differences are ignored in China. On the other hand, Oplatka and

Tevel sought to understand the motivation of midlife Israeli women students to enroll in higher education institutions and the meaning they attach to this institution in their research article entitled “Liberation and Revitalization: The Choice and Meaning of Higher Education Among Israeli Female Students in Midlife”. They found that these students look upon higher education a means through which they are “emancipated from a feminine identity that was constructed in conjunction with societal rules and stereotypes” (Oplatka & Tevel, 2006, p.78). Like the Israeli female students, many of us Chinese immigrants have been haunted by societal rules, historical-cum-cultural imprints and stereotypes. We cannot see even our authentic identity, not to mention finding our dreams. Adult education which triggers off independent thinking helps learners take control of their own lives and to free them from the structures which dominate and constrain them. Therefore, I think that adult education is an important tool to immigrants in the process of liberation. Without going through the liberation process to reframe our authentic identity, we can hardly move onto the stage of personal advancement.

Yet, I understand that there are bound to be contradictions in the liberation process. Jan Sinnott says that “adults are complex, connected individuals who want to change but also want to maintain continuity of the Self” (Sinnott, 2005, p.27). Similarly, while longing for the chance to expose themselves to a new culture, skilled Chinese immigrants would like to continue their elite status or seek every chance to re-establish their middle class status. Sinnott reminds us that other cultures learning methods “stimulate imagination and appreciation of the mysterious, multi-layered quality of life. They challenge us to open to a different and larger reality from the one in which we find ourselves stuck”

(Sinnott, 2005, p.33). According to Sinnott, exposing oneself to the learning traditions of other cultures enable one to clue into one's strengths and weaknesses. In my opinion, this is especially important for immigrants as we are caught in two cultures after migration. Eisen quotes Malcolm Knowles, an adult educator, in her journal stating that he attributed much of his personal growth to "having been exposed to a variety of systems of thought, often conflicting systems of thought, which forced me to think more critically" (Eisen, 2005, p. 17). I treasured the chance of immigration and enjoy my experiences within other cultures. Without this enlightenment, my personal transformation and growth will be very limited.

2. Adult education as an empowering process

Adult education, if it is multi-disciplinary, can be empowering. Seeing things from multi-disciplinary perspectives enables us to find treasures. Arts and sciences are interdisciplinary and should not be seen with stringent rules of separation. For instance, Kristin Lems proves that music which is also rule-based indeed can motivate and help adult English language learners (Lems, 2005, p.14). Artistic ways of knowing enhance our creativity, something which offers diversity when we need to solve problems. Adult education itself is an empowering process through which individual learners can gain access to the multi-disciplinary instruments of their own advancement and empowerment. Bouchard confirms that adult education is a "powerful tool for shaping people's world view" (Bouchard, 1998, p.139). Finger and Asun elaborate that adult education is "a tool for understanding the world in which one lives, so that one can make appropriate decisions about how to live in it. Furthermore, it is a tool for understanding how to relate

to ourselves, to others and to our environment, and how to act accordingly and responsibly” (Finger and Asun, 2001, p.142). Doubtless, learners who are competent in independent thinking and who can analyze critically from different perspectives and inter-disciplines will gain higher levels of insights and will no longer act on the beliefs or judgments of others (Oplatka & Tevel, 2006, p.78).

3. Adult education attached to social responsibilities

Michel Venne, an education journalist, points out that in this modern world, individual freedom gives rise to responsibilities which will not only shape our personal lives but also those of our communities. He elaborates that since “truth is the fruit of ongoing debate, it is critical to educate competent citizens who are capable of participating in this process, in this perpetual deliberation, in this constant dialogue with their fellow citizens looking to determine the common good” (Venne, 2005, p.59). Therefore, adult education has a social purpose: “to foster autonomous beings who are interested in everything around them and who are able to form an opinion on the major issues that shape society” (Venne, 2005, p.59). In other words, adult education can foster valued citizen traits.

Canada always feels proud of its diversified cultures and indeed at a time of globalization, diversification is something to celebrate. Skilled immigrants help enrich the Canadian workforce and facilitate Canada to reach its economic potential. Bringing with them their different cultures, languages, world-views and work life experiences, skilled immigrants are conducive to creativity and innovation in workplaces. If skilled Chinese immigrants can reflect critically their views to the mainstream society on social

issues like education, labour, economics and politics, they can help build a sustainable human community. We light up each other's lives by sharing experiences and exchanging views. As co-workers, skilled Chinese immigrants can share with their co-workers how drillings help consolidate daily routines. As citizens, skilled Chinese immigrants can function like think tank by reflecting critically their views on social issues to the government. We may be able to shed light on the solutions to some of the social problems. Asians and Canadians may be in two extremes as far as adult education issue is concerned. Having been exposed to two different extremes, immigrants are the most convincing ones to inform both sides of the pros and cons of the two systems and recommend to them what will work for a better future for all.

Conclusion

Dr. Ruth Hayhoe, the Canadian who spent half of her life working with the education systems of Hong Kong and China and was also the former Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education wrote in her book entitled *Full Circle: A Life with Hong Kong and China* that her Hong Kong experience caused her to reflect deeply on issues of language, culture, and identity (Hayhoe, 2004, p.219). Likewise, my Canadian experience made me reflect critically on issues of English language learning, my historical and cultural context, identity and the Chinese's views on adult education.

I agree that adult education is shaped by the world around it and conversely it also shapes our world (Overview of Foundations of Adult Education, Athabasca University). Getting a bigger world view means opening up new panoramas of life for us. Isn't it something

that immigrants look forward to before migration? There must be a reason for immigrants to leave their homeland and it is logical that immigrants are more ready than any others to open up themselves to embrace new values, views and norms. During the transition process, we need to “let go of the past, experiment with strategies and behaviours” (Merriam, 2005, p.7). I can understand that a lot of Chinese are scared by the traditional spoon-fed learning mode and upon graduation from post-secondary institutions, they choose not to commit to further academic studies. However, in my opinion, immigrants who are brave enough to leave their homeland to look for greener pastures should have the courage to seize this golden opportunity to let oneself go through the liberation and empowering processes.

With the passage of time, skilled Chinese immigrants will finally settle down in the Canadian society. Perhaps the time is ripe for immigrants to think about the meanings of adult education. Adult education in the larger sense means more than vocational training or help to career advancement. If we fail to see the breadth and depth of adult education, we are going to miss the forest, seeing only the trees. To conclude, being an immigrant, it is important for me to “learn my way out”.

References

- Alfred, Mary V. (2005). Overlooked in Academe: What Do We Know About Immigrant Students in Adult and Higher Education? *New Horizons in Adult Education*. 19(1), 1-14.
- Altbach, Philip G. & Kelly, Gail P. (1984). *Education and the Colonial Experience*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Books.
- Bonnycastle, Stephen. (1996). *In Search of Authority: An Introductory Guide to Literary*

Theory. 2nd ed. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Boshier et. al. (2006). Market Socialism Meets the Lost Generation: Motivational Orientations of Adult Learners in Shanghai. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 56(3), 201-222.

Bouchard, Paul. (1998). Training and Work: Myths about Human Capital. In Sue Scott, Bruce Spencer, and Alan Thomas (Eds.), *Learning for Life: Canadian Readings in Adult Education* (p.128-139). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Calgary Immigrant Aid Society. (2006). A Directory of ESL Programs and Services for Immigrants and International Students in Calgary. September 2006 – March 2007. Retrieved November 21, 2006 from:
<http://www.calgaryimmigrantaid.ca/images/stories/esl%20directory%20of%20programs%20and%20services.3.4.pdf>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *The Monitor*. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/monitor/issue13/05-overview.html>

Dickson, Peter & Cumming Alister. (1996). *National Profiles of Language Education in 25 Countries*. Berkshire, England: National Foundation for Educational Research. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://www.cbs.polyu.edu.hk/ctdso/Paper/Lang%20in%20ED%20HK%20.pdf>

Eisen, Mary-Jane. (2005). Shifts in the Landscape of Learning: New Challenges, New Opportunities. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 108, 15-26.

Finger, Matthias & Asun, Jose Manuel. (2001). *Adult Education at the Crossroads - Learning Our Way Out*. Zed Books.

GlobalEDGE. (2006). Hong Kong. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://globaledge.msu.edu/ibrd/CountryIntro.asp?CountryID=19&RegionID=3>

Government Secretariat, Hong Kong Government. (1981). *The Hong Kong Education System*. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
http://www.emb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_689/edsys_e.pdf

Guo, Shibao and DeVoretz, Don J. (2005). The Changing Faces of Chinese Immigrants in Canada. Vancouver Centre of Excellence: Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://riim.metropolis.net/virtual%20Library/2005/wp05-08.pdf>

Guo, Shibao & DeVoretz, Don J. (2006). Chinese Immigrants in Vancouver: Quo

- Vadis? Vancouver Centre of Excellence: Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://riim.metropolis.net/virtual%20Library/2005/wp05-20.pdf>
- Hayhoe, Ruth. (1992). *Education and Modernization - The Chinese Experience*. Pergamon Press and OISE Press.
- Hayhoe, Ruth. (1993). *Knowledge Across Cultures*. OISE Press and Hubei Education Press.
- Hayhoe, Ruth. (2004). *Full Circle: A Life with Hong Kong and China*. Women's Press.
- Hong Kong Democratic Foundation. (1998). HKDF Newsletter [Electronic version]. Retrieved October 17, 2006 from:
<http://www.hkdf.org/newsarticles.asp?show=newsarticles&newsarticle=79>
- Hum, Derek & Simpson, Wayne. (2003). Adult Immigrants: How Well Are They Trained? *Education Quarterly*. 9(3), 17-22.
 Retrieved October 17, 2006 from:
http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81_003_x20020036672
- Illeris, Knud. (2003). Adult Education as Experienced by the Learners. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. 22(1), 13-23.
- Information Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government. (1999). *Hong Kong 1999*. The Government Publications Centre.
- Lems, Kristin. (2005). Music Works: Music for Adult English Language Learners. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 107, 13-21.
- Li, Jun. (2001). Expectations of Chinese Immigrant Parents for Their Children's Education: The Interplay of Chinese Tradition and the Canadian Context. *Canadian Journal of Education*. 26, 477-494.
- Merriam, Sharan B. (2005). How Adult Life Transitions Foster Learning and Development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 108, 3-13.
- Oplatka, Izhar & Tevel, Tova. (2006). Liberation and Revitalization: The Choice and Meaning of Higher Education among Israeli Female Students in Midlife. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 57(1), 62-84. Retrieved December 10, 2006 from:
- Sankey, Derek. (2006). Job Prosperity Eludes Immigrant Professionals in *Calgary Herald*. February 4, 2006. P.11.
- Sinnott, Jan D. (2005). The Dance of the Transforming Self: Both Feelings of Connection and Complex Thought are Needed for Learning. *New Directions for Adult*

and Continuing Education. 108, 27-37

Sparks, Barbara. (2001). A Sociocultural Approach to Planning Programs for Immigrant Learners. *Adult Learning.* 12, 22-25.

Statistics Canada (2004). Immigrants: Settling for Less?. *Perspectives on Labour and Income.* 5, 5-6. Retrieved November 20, 2006 from:
<http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=75-001-X20041066921>

Statistics Canada & OECD. (2005). Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey.

Venne, Michel. (2005). Freedom and Civic Responsibilities. *Education Canada.* 46(1), p.59-60.

Wang, Shuguang & Lo, Lucia. (2004). Chinese Immigrants in Canada: Their Changing Composition and Economic Performance. Toronto: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement.

Wong, Ngai-ying. (2002). Conceptions of Doing and Learning Mathematics among Chinese. *Journal of Intercultural Studies.* 23(2), p.211-229

Zurlo, Tony. (2002). *Life in Hong Kong.* Lucent Books, Inc.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

- 1 What is your place of origin?
- 2 When did you immigrate to Canada? Which city or cities have you lived since landing in Canada?
- 3 What was your highest level of educational attainment in your place of origin?
- 4 What was your profession before immigrating to Canada?
- 5 What kind of job(s) have you done after landing in Canada?
- 6 What were your professional goal(s) in Canada before immigration and are they still the same? If not the same, why? What are the barriers (language competence, Canadian working experience, etc.)?
- 7 What is your definition of adult education?
- 8 Have you ever enrolled in any adult education programs after landing in Canada? If yes, why and what is the field of study? If no, why not?
- 9 From the perspective of an immigrant, what do you think the role of adult education in Canada should be? Should it be a tool to upgrade your work skills or should it be a tool to gain certification for your foreign credentials or should it be something else?
- 10 Is there any way that the governments, local communities or the employers can help you realize your professional goals through adult education programs? If yes, what would you suggest them to do?
- 11 Do you have kids? If yes, what is your advice to them as far as the choice of career is concerned? (optional)