Greetings from all of us at the University of Victoria’s Intercultural Family study, directed by Dr. Catherine Costigan. We have had the privilege of meeting with many immigrant Chinese families in Victoria and the Lower Mainland in the past few years, and in this newsletter, we would like to share a small picture of some of the things we have learned. We would not have been able to do any of this without the generous cooperation of so many families who opened their homes to our research team and shared with us details of their experiences in Canada. We are deeply indebted to all of the participating families.

THE PARTICIPATING FAMILIES

We would like to begin by telling you a little about the families who participated.

To be eligible for this study, families had to meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify ethnicity as Chinese
- Both parents immigrated to Canada after age 18
- Lived in Canada for at least 2 years
- Have an adolescent between 12-17 years old

We interviewed 182 families at Wave 1. At this time, parents were in their mid-40s, on average, and families had lived in Canada for an average of 10 years. The average age of adolescents at Wave 1 was 15. There were approximately equal numbers of male and female adolescents. Approximately half (55%) of these adolescents were born outside of Canada and arrived in Canada after the age of 6; the other half (45%) were either born in Canada or arrived before the age of 6.

Procedures

Typically a father, mother, and adolescent child from each family participated. Each family member privately answered a booklet of questions about their experiences since immigrating to Canada. We asked family members about many different aspects of their lives, such as the extent of their involvement with Canadian culture, their feelings about their Chinese heritage, and the stresses that family members experienced in Canada. We also asked about aspects of family life and family relationships, and about everyone’s overall feelings of well-being.

Wave 1

One of the unique features of our study is that we have been able to follow families over time to see how experiences in Canada and how relationships within the family change. Specifically, we were able to reconnect with 152 of the original adolescents and their families 18 months later for a follow up assessment. Adolescents were 16 ½ years old, on average, at Wave 2.
Cultural Behaviour & Identity Differences Within Families

Chinese Canadian family members might differ from one another in their cultural behavioural practices, their cultural identities, or both. Cultural behavioural practices refer to specific daily behaviours that are orientated towards one culture, such as the language you speak, the friends you spend time with, and the music you listen to. Cultural identity refers to more subjective feelings; it is an inner reflection of cultural belonging and understanding.

Differences in Chinese and Canadian Behavioural Practices

We compared family members in terms of their Chinese behavioural practices. Mothers and fathers were similar in their preferences for Chinese behaviours, whereas children were less likely to engage in Chinese cultural practices.

Interestingly, over time, both mothers and fathers increased their Chinese practices while children remained the same.

Family members’ reports of Canadian behavioural practices were an interesting contrast. Here, children reported higher levels of Canadian behaviours than parents, who were similar to each other. There were also no changes over time for any family member.

At both time points, children engaged in more Canadian than Chinese behavioural practices, whereas the reverse was true for parents.

Differences in Chinese and Canadian Identities

We also looked at family members’ subjective feelings of belonging to the Chinese and Canadian cultural groups. Although parents reported more Chinese behaviours than children, the same differences were not found for identity – parents and children reported similar levels of identification with the Chinese culture.

Differences were found with respect to Canadian identity, however, as children reported a stronger sense of identification with the Canadian culture than did parents.

Fathers and children reported increases in Chinese identity over time. There were no changes over time in Canadian identities for any family member.

Girls reported more Chinese and Canadian behaviours, as well as stronger identification with Chinese and Canadian cultures than boys.
PARENTS’ ENCULTURATION AND ACCULTURATION GOALS

We were interested in the explicit efforts parents make to teach their children about Chinese culture. This process of teaching children about their cultural heritage is called *enculturation*. We were also interested in understanding parents’ views about how they would like their children to balance Chinese and Canadian cultures, what we have termed parents’ *acculturation goals*.

PARENTS’ ENCULTURATION EFFORTS

We asked all family members about *enculturation* efforts in the family - how much parents teach their children about different aspects of their Chinese heritage. Mothers’ reports were the highest, followed by fathers. Children perceived less enculturation from their parents compared to what parents said they were doing.

Parents’ reports did not change over time, but children reported less enculturation from their parents at Wave 2 compared to Wave 1.

At both times, mothers of children who are first generation (born outside of Canada) reported more enculturation efforts than mothers whose children are second generation. Younger children (<15 years old) also perceived more enculturation efforts from their parents than older children.

PARENTS’ ACCULTURATION GOALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

**Acculturation Goals to be Chinese**

We asked parents how important it was to them that their children *maintain their Chinese heritage* in terms of language, social ties, values and identity. We also asked kids their own opinions, as well as what they thought their parents wanted for them. It was more important to children themselves to retain their Chinese culture than it was to their parents. Parents of girls had higher Chinese acculturation goals than parents of boys.

**Acculturation Goals to be Canadian**

We also asked family members how important it was for children to *adopt Canadian culture* – to speak English, associate with Canadians, identify as Canadian, and think like a Canadian. Fathers reported higher Canadian acculturation goals for their children than mothers. Surprisingly, both parents reported higher Canadian goals for their children than children reported for themselves. Girls reported higher Canadian acculturation goals for themselves than boys.

![Acculturation Goals Graph](image)

How well do children understand their parents’ goals for them?

In both instances, children misjudged their parents’ goals. That is, children thought their parents’ Chinese acculturation goals were significantly higher than they actually were, and they thought their parents’ Canadian acculturation goals were significantly lower.
We asked children to tell us *whose opinion mattered more* to them in different domains of life: their parents’ opinions or their friends’ opinions. Overall, children were fairly evenly divided between how much they looked to their parents and how much they looked to their friends.

The age of children made a difference: younger children (12-15 years old at Wave 1) were more oriented towards their parents than older children (15-18 years old at Wave 1). However, the younger children became more oriented towards their friends between Wave 1 and Wave 2.

Over time, all children decreased their orientation to their parents in two areas
- Selecting clothes
- Who they confide problems to

Younger children decreased their orientation to their parents over time in terms of
- Whose opinion matters most about how smart you are
- Whose values you identify with
- Who understands you the best

Importantly, however, older children *increased* their orientation to their parents with respect to “who understands you best.”

Interestingly, males were more likely to feel their parent knew them best compared to females. Otherwise, there were few differences between boys and girls.
**CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH LIVING IN CANADA**

**PERCEPTIONS OF DISCRIMINATION**

We asked parents and children whether they ever felt they were treated unfairly because they were Chinese. Fortunately, reports of perceived discrimination were low. Parents reported more discrimination than children reported. Older kids reported more discrimination than younger kids. Kids who were born outside of Canada reported more discrimination than kids born in Canada.

Although reports of discrimination were infrequent, the experience of discrimination was powerful. We found strong relations between reports of discrimination and feelings of psychological distress.

**CHILDREN’S ACCULTURATION CHALLENGES**

We asked children how much they experienced stress because of difficulties speaking English (language stress) and how much they experienced stress because of difficulties balancing Canadian and Chinese culture (acculturation stress). We found that acculturation stress was greater than language stress at both time points. Language stress decreased over time, whereas acculturation stress remained the same.

![Children's acculturation challenges over time](chart)

<table>
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<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Acculturation Stress</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Stress</td>
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**PARENTS’ ACCULTURATION STRESS**

Parents also face many potential stressors as they acculturate to Canadian culture. We asked parents to rate how much different issues were a source of stress for them. Mothers’ and fathers’ reports were very similar.

Parents reported it was rare to experience stress related to ethnic stereotyping. This is consistent with Canada’s multiculturalism policies that encourage and support the retention of heritage cultures. However, about half of the parents reported stress related to difficulties communicating in English. In addition, many parents told us it was stressful trying to loosen ties with their country of origin.
DEcision MakIng In tHe FaMily

We asked all family members to tell us who makes decisions in different areas of the adolescent’s life, such as when to do homework, who their friends should be, and what time to be home in the evening. The options for responding were “teen decides alone,” “parents decide alone,” and “parents and teen decide together.”

Children perceived more ability to make decisions on their own than parents perceived. Instead, parents were more likely to perceive that decisions were made jointly.

All family members reported an increase in the number of issues that teens decide for themselves over time. Parents’ perceptions seem to catch up with children’s perceptions later in adolescence. First-generation children reported more ability to make decisions on their own than children who were born in Canada.

Language Brokering for Parents

Overcoming language barriers is often a key challenge when adjusting to a new culture. In many families, parents find that their children learn the new language more quickly than they do. This is in part because children often have greater opportunities to be immersed in the new culture, such as through going to school. When this happens, children are sometimes asked to help translate and interpret for their parents. This is called language brokering.

Almost all of the children reported that they help their parents with interpretation and translation. Although most children helped their parents occasionally, language brokering wasn’t very frequent. On average, children reported interpreting or translating for their parents only a few times a year.

As children progressed through their teenage years, we found that daughters more than sons were increasingly helping their parents with interpretation and translation. We also observed increases in language brokering among the children who reported more positive relationships with their parents. There were potential costs associated with language brokering, however, including increases in children’s symptoms of depression and anxiety when children were language brokering frequently, perhaps because they felt pressured or worried about doing a good job.
Being a parent comes with many rewards and challenges. When caring for children and making parenting decisions, having the support of another adult (whether your spouse, your own parents, or other extended family members) can be incredibly helpful. The act of working together to parent the same children is called coparenting.

A supportive coparenting relationship involves providing assistance and encouragement to one another and trying not to harshly criticize the other parent’s decisions. Supportive coparenting relationships are related to better adolescent well-being and less stress for the parents.

We found that if one parent is more involved in Chinese culture than the other, fathers tended to perceive a less supportive coparenting relationship.

This link was partially explained by differences in parents’ expectations for their adolescent to assist the family around the house. That is, larger mother-father differences in Chinese cultural involvement were related to greater differences in parents’ ideas about how much assistance to expect from their children. These differences in expectations led fathers to feel less supported in their parenting role. Mothers’ feelings about their coparenting relationship were less affected by these differences.

We are committed to sharing the results of our research with diverse audiences. In addition to creating newsletters like this one that provide an overview of our findings, we also strive to present our research to others within the academic community, to organizations that provide services to the immigrant community, and to governmental policy makers.

We have published research reports in numerous scientific journals, and presented results from this study at many scholarly conferences within Canada and the United States, including locations such as Ottawa, Toronto, Quebec City, Vancouver, Chicago, Seattle, and Philadelphia.

The information that you have provided us has also served as the foundation for five different graduate students as they completed their master’s and doctoral degrees in psychology at the University of Victoria.

We are also pleased to have presented some of our findings at the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria, and we have plans to continue to share the implications of this research with the community.

The data families provided to us are very complex, and we have just begun to explore the changes that take place in families over time. We are excited to continue exploring the challenges faced by immigrant families in Canada, and the strengths families exhibit in confronting these challenges. More information about our research and our findings can be found on our website at

http://web.uvic.ca/~ifslab/