

## Chinese Voices in a Canadian Secondary School Landscape

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In this article, I describe the adjustment experiences of 23 Chinese-speaking, foreign-born high-school students in Vancouver, where they are members of the largest school cultural group. During interviews, participants suggested their large numbers enabled them to reproduce their home community in Canada. Students chose behaviours that hindered their adjustment and adaptation. They did not form Canadian friendships, learn English easily, make cross-cultural adaptations, or excel in school. Students' responses raise questions about the direction of Canadian education, the evolution of Canada's pluralistic society, and the obligation of the education system to familiarize students with Canadian democratic life.

L'étude porte sur les problèmes d'adaptation de 23 élèves sinophones, nés à l'étranger et fréquentant une école secondaire de Vancouver. Invoquant le fait qu'ils constituent le groupe culturel le plus important, ils se disent en droit de reproduire au Canada leur communauté d'origine et refusent de s'intégrer, soit socialement, soit en apprenant l'anglais. Leurs réponses suscitent des questions au sujet de l'orientation de l'enseignement, de l'évolution du pluralisme et de l'obligation du système d'éducation de familiariser les élèves avec la vie démocratique canadienne.

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Although I was born in Preeceville, Saskatchewan, of Ukrainian and German heritage, I was raised in Vancouver's East Side, inhabited primarily by immigrants and the working class. I have been interested in social class and ethnicity issues for over forty years. As a teacher and department head in Vancouver, I became increasingly interested in the topic of student adjustment because I observed how hard many of my English as a Second Language (ESL) students worked and how upset they often were when their academic performance did not meet either their or their parents' expectations.

During the 1990s, several studies focused on the topic of student adjustment to a new culture and a new school with a different educational setting (Bolton, 1993; Gougeon & Hutton, 1992; Mansfield, 1995; Popadiuk, 1998; Shaw, Michalles, Chen, Minami, & Sing, 1994; Wang, 1990). These studies examined students' experiences where the host population was the largest cultural group and where the native-born student population

outnumbered the foreign-born student population.

This study has focused on the adjustment concerns of 23 Chinese-speaking, foreign-born, high-school students in a setting where foreign-born students outnumbered Canadian-born students, where the Chinese-speaking students formed a significant component within the foreign-born student population, and where the Chinese-speaking, foreign-born students formed the largest cultural group in a secondary-school setting. For the purpose of this study, I subdivided these Chinese immigrant students into groups based on the circumstances surrounding their immigration and personal living conditions in Canada. Eleven students lived as landed immigrants with both parents full-time; two were visa students, living in Canada temporarily while furthering their education, without parental support, but with federal government knowledge; eleven were satellite students with landed immigrant status, whose parent(s) returned to their home country to live. Five of these eleven were identified as full satellite students because both parents returned to Hong Kong for extended periods, leaving their children either unsupervised or minimally supervised. At the time of this study, thirteen were naturalized Canadians.

In this paper, I describe how the adjustment of foreign students is affected by large numbers of co-nationals. Although they live in Canada in a multicultural environment, their experiences are different from those students who live in a more diverse environment.

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Knowles (1997) chronicled Canada's history and development as a multicultural nation. She argued that the need to maintain Canada's economy influenced Canada's immigration policy. Initially, Canadian policy espoused Anglo-conformity, a policy expecting immigrants to assimilate by discarding home cultural beliefs and behaviours. With successive policies of the melting pot and the cultural mosaic, immigrants gained more freedom to retain their own culture and traditions. With the melting pot, immigrants were permitted to add positive characteristics of their home culture to the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. With the cultural mosaic came a growing acceptance of a variety of cultures within a Canadian pluralistic society. The current policy, cultural pluralism, both supports and encourages Canada's many ethnic groups to maintain and practise their cultural beliefs while simultaneously developing a loyalty to their host country.

Supporters believe cultural pluralism promotes equality and respect (Davetian, 1994; Knowles, 1997) with a tolerance of difference and a

decrease in racism and discrimination among the Canadian population (Moodley, 1997; Wilson, 1994). Critics assert this policy fractures rather than unites the country (Bissoondath, 1994; Granatstein, 1998). Cummins and Danesi (1990) articulate both sides of this argument when they suggest the debate over heritage language is really a debate concerning the Canadian identity under cultural pluralism. In the fall of 1999, at a Laurier Institution meeting, Dr. Milton Wong, Chancellor of Simon Fraser University, coined the term *tapestry* to describe and support Canada's pluralistic society. He stated that Canada, as a nation, is stronger, richer, and more vibrant because of the many distinct but colourful and contributing strands of its diverse ethnic peoples.

Throughout Canada's history, ethnic groups have faced discrimination, based on cultural and/or racial differences (Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Knowles, 1997). In British Columbia, the Chinese, who first immigrated as temporary settlers or sojourners during the 1850s, were treated harshly and with distrust. They were considered unassimilable because of their race, not allowed to bring their families to Canada, and forced to live in deplorable conditions. Four successive head taxes as well as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 effectively prevented Chinese immigration, created insurmountable racial barriers, and disenfranchised them. Even though the Immigration Act in 1947 addressed the Chinese condition, invisible ceilings nevertheless impeded Chinese settlement and progress and barred them entrance into Canada (Knowles, 1997; Stanley, 1991; Ward, 1990). With the introduction of the point system<sup>1</sup> in 1967, the Chinese have immigrated to Canada on equal footing with other prospective immigrants in unprecedented numbers (Statistics Canada, 1996).

Canadian school populations have always reflected the immigrant makeup of the country. Provinces like Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec have developed policies and practices to meet the changing needs of their immigrant student population. In British Columbia's Lower Mainland school districts, where 90% of the province's immigrant student population is enrolled, the ESL population has more than tripled since 1990 (English as a Second Language Policy Framework [Draft], 1998). Several schools in this geographic area have a larger ESL than English-speaking student population.

In previous studies of student adjustment, researchers have reported a variety of adjustment concerns: language, education, family expectations, peer relations, mental health, racism, discrimination, and personal issues. Researchers in several studies have cited language as a factor in student adjustment (Bolton, 1993; Gougeon & Hutton, 1992; Mansfield, 1995; Shaw et al., 1994) because students found it difficult to communicate, make new

friends, understand and meet educational requirements, and manage daily responsibilities such as shopping, banking, or following instructions.

Bolton (1993), Mansfield (1995), Shaw et al., (1994), Wang (1990), and Xue (1995) cite understanding different educational systems and environments as an adjustment problem. They note the following specific difficulties: reading comprehension expectations, spoken and written communication skills, the use of colloquialisms, teaching styles and teacher expectations, behavioural expectations, course content, relationship between student and teacher, and the freer learning environment in Canada.

Bolton (1993), Mansfield (1995), Wang (1990), and Xue (1995) cite conflict as a problem associated with maintaining family expectations as students adapt to a new culture. They experience both intergenerational and cross-cultural conflict when coping with a new culture in a new educational environment while maintaining their home culture.

Scholars also cite peer relations as an important adjustment issue (Bolton, 1993; Mansfield, 1995; Popadiuk, 1998). Feelings of homesickness, isolation, loneliness, and loss decrease with social contact with peers. Some studies indicate students gravitate to co-nationals because of the security provided through social interactions with people from their home country (Mansfield, 1995; Popadiuk, 1998), even though they enhanced their overall adjustment experience when locals became friends. Gougeon and Hutton (1992) suggest racism and discrimination contribute to student loneliness, loss, and isolation.

Personal issues such as identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem, acknowledged by adolescents in most studies, intensify for foreign students dealing with additional ethnicity and cross-cultural concerns (Bolton, 1993; Gougeon & Hutton, 1992; Mansfield, 1995; Xue, 1998). Studies focusing on Asian students have cited mental health concerns (Bolton, 1993; Khoo, Abu-Rassain, & Hornby, 1994; Lee, 1997; Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1998; Shen & Mo, 1990). Results from these studies indicate that differences in attitudes between the Asian and Western<sup>2</sup> cultures result in heightened mental-health problems for Asian students because their culture does not support seeking help for such health issues.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the adjustment issues of Chinese-speaking,<sup>3</sup> foreign-born students in a high school setting where they outnumbered the Canadian-born, English-speaking students and formed the largest cultural group in the school. As the site for this study,

I selected a large secondary school in the Vancouver School District, one of the Lower Mainland school districts where the ESL student population outnumbered the Canadian-born student population (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999). During the 1998-1999 school year, the 56,995 students enrolled in this district spoke 86 different languages in their homes. At the secondary school used for this study, students spoke 43 different languages at home; only 725 (35.8%) of the 2,029 students spoke English at home. I selected the 401 members of the school's 1999 graduating class to begin my study and used school records to identify each student's home language and country of birth. One hundred twenty-five students (31.17%) were English-speaking, 193 students (48.1%) were Chinese-speaking; 83 students spoke languages other than English or Chinese at home. Of the 193 Chinese-speaking students, 134 were also foreign-born; these students formed the population for my study. I sent letters and reminder notices written in English to possible participants, requesting an interview to "investigate the adjustment issues of Chinese-speaking, foreign-born students where they form part of the dominant school cultural group in a high school environment."

I interviewed the 23 students (11 males and 12 females) who responded. These students were continuing their education either at an adult learning centre, a college, or one of the nearby universities. I conducted ethnographic interviews, lasting from 45 minutes to two hours, from February 15, 2000, to March 9, 2000, at the secondary school they had attended. All interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. The students interviewed provided the following reasons for participating: their willingness to talk about their adjustment issues and reflect on their school experience; their interest and an inquisitiveness about the interview process; their interest in the procedure required for postgraduate study; their desire to help me with my work; their desire to re-connect with their secondary school; and their belief in the merit of this study.

Although I created an interview framework<sup>4</sup> to use as a guide, individual student responses affected the course of each interview. Questions in this study were organized around pre-migration, immigration, school experience, family/friends, and multiculturalism/racism/discrimination. I used the number of students who identified an issue and the number of times the issue was identified as the factors to identify core adjustment issues. I eventually reduced the transcripts to the following fourteen headings:

- Agency
- Chinese Population Concerns
- Comparing Education Systems

- Cultural Considerations
- Current Adjustment Concerns
- ESL Program
- Facilitating/Hindering Issues
- Friendships/Peer Relationships
- Initial Observations/Concerns
- Language
- Mental Health Concerns
- Multiculturalism/Assimilation
- Racism/Discrimination
- Satellite/International Students

To begin with, I analyzed findings based on all 23 students interviewed; then, by sub-category: International (Visa) Student, Satellite Student, Full Satellite Student, Regular Student. Thirteen of the students interviewed were living in home arrangements with either one or both parents absent.

## FINDINGS

For this discussion, I have provided a detailed description of the more important issues to emerge from this study. Four of these issues were common among all students interviewed: language, peer relationships, cross-cultural concerns, and education and the school environment. A fifth issue, mental-health concerns, emerged from the interviews with the full-satellite students.

Four of the five issues that emerged from this study are language, peer relationships, cross-cultural concerns, and education and the school environment. A fifth, mental health concerns, surfaced as the overriding issue for the full satellite students.

TABLE 1  
*Issues Raised During Interviews*

Issue	No. Who Mentioned It	Times Cited
Language	22	156
Peer Relationships	20	54
Cross Cultural Concerns	16	61
Education	14	18
Mental Health	13	29

*Language Acquisition*

Students identify English language acquisition as one of their main adjustment issues. For these students, language acquisition involved problems with writing skills, language development, communication, and Canadian colloquialisms.

The first thing I fear, of course, is the language. (Roger<sup>5</sup>)

I guess the most important one is language problems. (Valerie)

Well, I think mainly language problems since language is the bridge to communication. (Brian)

Several admitted they did not speak English outside the classroom, even though they believed developing English skills was critical to their adjustment. In his interview, Allan indicated the importance of learning English but the difficulty of doing so in the school environment:

English, yes. I think it is the most, almost the only thing, because every problem has relations with English. . . . Actually, it's not a very good place for us to learn English. Because every time, even though we are in class, we speak Chinese. So, it's very hard. There are so many people that speak Chinese and they don't think speaking Chinese is a problem. (Allan)

Although students were aware their numbers exacerbated the problem, they could not agree on how to develop English skills. They noted that all teachers expected them to speak only English in the classroom, yet they viewed this regulation as discriminatory. They even stated that they did not participate in class activities because they had to speak English. While they wanted to learn English, the Chinese speakers made it easier for them to communicate in their native tongue and more difficult to acquire language competencies. They talked about the positive and negative aspects of speaking only English in the classroom and about the difficulty of speaking English outside the classroom where co-national friends laughed at their attempts, where parents were upset when they did not speak Chinese, and where their vocabulary was so limited that expressing it was far easier in their native tongue. The majority continued to read Chinese books and newspapers and watch Chinese TV exclusively. Janet's comment illustrates the difficulties students faced outside school:

I tried to initiate to speak English at home, but my parents don't speak English. So, when

I speak English they think I talk behind them and so I cannot practise more. And I am afraid to try to speak with my friends [co-nationals]. . . . Because I have bad pronunciation and they would laugh at me. Also, although I know they do not purposely laugh at me, I know my pronunciation is bad. (Janet)

Interestingly, some students did not intend to learn English. Their parents forced them to immigrate and they fully intended to return home once they completed their education. Their reaction is similar to the involuntary minorities, described by Ogbu and Simons (1998), who develop behaviours in opposition to the host country where they lived, even though parents rather than the host country placed them in this position.

Some students did not develop language competencies because academic success was unimportant to them. As these students suggested, meeting friends, skipping classes, and having a good time was more important than academics. Garrott (1995), Maclear (1994), Trueba, Cheng, and Ima (1993), and Xue (1995) also found this seemingly atypical behaviour exhibited by some Chinese students in their research.

Overall, these students suggested that their numbers and their decision to speak only Chinese outside the classroom hampered the development of English language competency. The comfort provided by large numbers made it possible for them to live totally within an Asian community inside the Canadian landscape.

### *Peer Relations*

Peer relations emerged as another critical adjustment issue in this study. At times, friendships were more important than families. Friends provided understanding and empathy because they were often experiencing similar difficulties at home, in the school, and in the community. Students referred to friends left behind, the difficulty of making new friends in Canada, the improvement in adjustment once they made friends, and the composition of their current friendship groups. Several students stated they had only Chinese friends. Although some students said they would like to form friendships outside their cultural group, the difficulties they envisioned became an obstacle they could not overcome. They cited, though did not always explain, differences in culture, language, interests, and activities as impediments. Their statements also indicated that their numbers made it easier to maintain their Chinese friends.

Yes, at first I really wanted to make friends with other ethnic groups but it's kind of hard, so it's easy to shift to Chinese people. (Valerie)



I would really feel more comfortable with Asians. (Suzanne)

Paul, who emphasized in his interview the importance of forming Canadian friendships and whose original school experience in Canada began elsewhere, stated:

In [school name] I only can make tons of Cantonese friends. It's hard to make other . . . to talk to them because we are from a different culture and when I get to [school name] I get back to my Cantonese life. I didn't watch any English movies, or listen to any English songs. (Paul)

For the satellite students in this study, friendships assumed even greater importance. As John poignantly recalled when describing his feelings of loneliness and separation barely three weeks after immigrating:

I suddenly find that friendship is very important . . . that's the first that I felt that my sixteen years old birthday was quite lonely to me because I spent it by myself, and at that time my parents were not here. They were in Hong Kong. (John)

Students who started school at the elementary-school level reported different experiences than those who immigrated at the high-school level. They believed ethnicity was not an issue in their choice of friends. Roger suggested friendships should be based on personality, and Nicole said, "I don't think their nationality is as important as you get to know them. They will just become your friends." Beth, an articulate student who also began at the elementary-school level, suggested:

High school changed everything. . . . High school, it seemed once you went into high school everyone went into his or her colour-co-ordinated groups. . . . That's what I saw from my view. It wasn't as if I didn't have any friends that were of other nationalities because up until high school I had close Caucasian friends and whatever, but once I got to high school I was in the Chinese immigrant group. (Beth)

Students suggested they would like to develop Canadian friendships in the future, after they completed their education and were working. Canadian friends would help them understand Canadian culture, teach them Canadian ways, and perform a mentorship rather than a friendship role. Student responses seemed to emphasize a mentor/mentee relationship, perhaps a result of maintaining co-nationals as friends; these statements may also reflect their desire to include Canadians as friends once they were more comfortable with the Canadian culture. While the importance of developing friendships with co-nationals has been

previously documented (Bolton, 1993; Mansfield, 1995; Popadiuk, 1998), the significance of adjusting to a new cultural environment cocooned by large numbers of co-nationals seems to diminish students' desire to form friendships outside their cultural group.

### *Cross-Cultural Concerns*

All students described the difficulties they encountered adjusting to a new country and a new culture. They described these difficulties by citing differences between the Canadian and Chinese education systems, the perceived differences between parental expectations in Canadian and Chinese homes, and the differences in popular culture that Canadian and Chinese teenagers enjoy. The large numbers of Chinese students made it possible to replicate their home country in their host country and to duplicate in Canada the activities they experienced in their home country. As Linda suggested, it is "quite comfortable because everything is — Richmond [a Vancouver suburb with a high Asian immigrant population] is like all — everything is Chinese those kinds of things. It's kind of hard to really adapt to the English culture."

Students discussed how family environment either facilitated or hindered adjustment and how personal attitude made a difference. They described differences in culture through the expectations placed on them by their parents, then compared this to the expectations Canadian parents placed on their children. Students viewed the Chinese culture as being more traditional, demanding, and restrictive, with less room for tolerance of difference and less emotional support. The students saw Canadian culture as more tolerant, open, easy-going.

In Chinese culture, they force their kids, they force them a lot, they push them a lot; they give them a lot of pressure to do what the parents want. In Canada, it's what we want, it's what the kids want. (Deirdre)

Like familial piety. Just obedience to the family, placing the family above all. They're just unspoken rules and morals that your parents try to hammer into you. This is the way you have to be because you are Chinese. (Beth)

Beth went on to describe Canadian culture as

a lot of things like, mainstream ideas. Kind of there's the open mindedness towards everything; towards all nationalities, whatever, sexual orientation, you know. Political opinions, you know that kind of thing. (Beth)

Students cited differences in pop culture as the reason why they had only Chinese friends: clothing, colloquialisms, the “books you read, the songs you listen to, the TV you watch, just something that’s inside” (Linda). Canadians like to dance, go to movies, watch Canadian television, and read English books, while the Chinese students liked to

go karaoke and listen to Chinese songs and go to Chinese restaurant. We know what happens in Hong Kong and we can share in the web site and the Internet. (Don)

Students used cross-cultural differences to justify maintaining their home culture and customs in their host environment. Their large numbers discouraged cross-cultural integration and made it possible to reproduce their home environment in Vancouver. Students freely participated in pop-cultural activities such as karaoke and Chinese movies, read Chinese papers, ate Chinese meals, and maintained Chinese fashion through dress, hair style, and personal grooming accessories. The Internet provided immediate connection and feedback with their home country. Because of their large numbers and the ease with which they could duplicate their home environment in their host country, students in this study consciously decided whether to leave their comfort zone to reach out toward the Canadian culture.

#### *Education and the School Environment*

Students compared the Chinese and Canadian education systems to explain their adjustment concerns. They also discussed student relationships and documented concerns with the ESL program. When comparing and contrasting these systems, they described differences among the teachers, in student attitudes, in the curriculum and content of courses, and the activities available to them. They viewed the Chinese system as stricter, involving more homework, and based largely on memory; and the Canadian system as comprehensive, with a focus on developing skills in a variety of areas such as presentations and homework projects. Some students preferred the Chinese system because of the heavy homework component and memorization demands, while others preferred the Canadian system because of its more comprehensive focus and because students were expected to think. Valerie’s summation presents many of the points students described:

Teachers are more friendly when compared to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong you focus on studying, studying, studying. And, in Canada they have a variety of activities in classes.

Like you have discussion, homework projects, presentations, and it's more interactive. But in Hong Kong it's like spoon-feeding. So, like the teacher gives you lots of materials and you have to memorize them. And, in here it gives you a chance to really understand the material and discuss with other people. (Valerie)

Student relationships were also viewed as part of the school environment. Students were seen as friendly even though there was little integration among the ethnic student populations. They noted this segregation occurred not only between the Chinese students and other ethnic groups but also within the Chinese population, based on their home country. They said adjustment would be easier if the various student groups in the school were to mix. Several suggested students be forced to mix through activities that encouraged and expedited integration.

Even though several students supported the ESL program, others viewed it as a major area of concern. Originally designed to assist students with their adaptation and adjustment, the large numbers of Chinese-speaking students made it difficult for this program to continue to meet its original objectives. While enrolled in the ESL program, Chinese-speaking students made friends with other Chinese-speaking students, friendships maintained throughout their entire high-school experience. This effectively hampered forming friendships outside the cultural group. Students felt their ESL label impeded adjustment because it remained with them throughout their high-school years. The following comments represent student feelings:

Some of the kids feel . . . they were labeled as ESL kids. They felt that being labeled as ESL and being stuck in ESL they were already kind of segregated and put away into the ESL class. So, they didn't feel they had any encouragement to become kind of the dominant group. (Beth)

Some of the ESL students don't want to be called ESL students. Yeah, because they think ESL is low level compared to regular class. (Paul)

Students also felt the ESL program prevented them from taking the more meaningful credit courses required for college and university entrance. Roger's statement is the most extreme, eloquently presenting his viewpoint of the conflict faced by an ESL student:

I think cancel the ESL program. Because the ESL program puts people that speak the same language [together] . . . they start speaking Chinese and they don't learn the language. You have to force them, put them in normal classes. You know, for the first while who cares if they don't know what you're saying. After a while they will. They must, or

otherwise you [the student] fail and that's the intensity. (Roger)

Students who participated in the ESL program made comments about its benefits. They cited the advantage of mixing with other students like them, forming friendships within the ESL program, developing language skills, and being taught by caring, sensitive ESL teachers. Ultimately, Catherine's suggestion may be key: "I think the ESL program is good for those who intend to learn English." Her statement supports the ESL program, placing the onus on the students' desire to learn English.

This study supports the findings of other studies that suggest students view education and the school environment as an important adjustment issue (Bolton, 1993; Mansfield, 1995; Shaw, et al., 1994; Wang, 1990; Xue, 1995). However, students in this study emphasized concern about the ESL program and the differences between the Chinese teachers and Canadian teachers they encountered rather than emphasizing the importance of academic performance.

### *Mental Health*

Mental health issues emerged as an overriding concern within the satellite sub-population, especially for those students who remained in Canada while both parents returned to Hong Kong. Feelings of loneliness, sadness, fear, helplessness, and depression resounded as they recounted their experiences. They described most poignantly the loneliness and isolation they experienced. Although satellite students became resigned to their situation, they often did not feel supported by their parents. Allan and Deirdre described how lonely they felt:

And so it's just like I have lost everything and I have to start over again. (Allan)

So I came here and I felt very lonely and isolated. (Deirdre)

Full satellite students stated this loneliness made it difficult to form friendships, trust others, and seek the help they required. Nicole aptly explained and described her reaction:

Because people like us are very defensive and just try to be an island and cut themselves off from others [and] I don't like people to feel sorry for me because I think that feeling sorry for someone is just like taking their power away from them. (Nicole)

Satellite students adjusted, then readjusted, as parent(s) returned to

Canada, and then went home. Even though they made frequent contact with parents, it was bittersweet. Marie, who talked to her parents daily, explained,

So, I always have to talk to them on the phone. . . . Sometimes I just feel like crying. Once I hang up the phone it's like, oh, my god, it's so good to hear their voice on the phone. And once you hang up, reality is back. (Marie)

Adjusting to a new language and culture is made more difficult without parental support nearby. Marie described the living arrangements of satellite students as

just living with relatives and grandparents so that basic daily life things are being taken care of. I think it's a cover up. It seems like you are living with your family, but you're actually not. (Marie)

This study confirms the findings of previous studies involving Asian students that identify mental-health concerns as an adjustment issue (Bolton, 1993; Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994; Lee, 1997; Lorenzo et al., 1995; Shen & Mo, 1990) and also provides new evidence to indicate that a sub-population of the foreign Chinese-speaking population, the satellite students, experience severe mental health issues as a result of forced separation from their parents. Although these students did not seek help, they stated that they received help once school personnel became aware of their living conditions.

#### *Impact of Large Numbers*

The sheer size of the Chinese-speaking student population in the school and community environments coloured the student adjustment experience. Students were aware of their numbers, constantly referring to both positive and negative aspects of this condition. They indicated that their large numbers exacerbated adjustment difficulties because it was easier to choose the comfort and familiarity of their home culture than to struggle to adapt to the differences in the host culture. Students decided whether to duplicate their home environment in Canada or embrace their new environment, whether to actively develop English-language skills or learn just enough English to survive, whether to search out and make Canadian friends or retain only Chinese-speaking friends. Daily, students chose whether to remain within the comfort and safety of their cultural background or actively reach out to develop skills and behaviours they believed would

assist and enhance their adjustment. They decided whether to remain separate and distinct or to become more active participants in the larger Canadian scene.

[It] all depends on the person. . . . it's all his choice. (Allan)

There is nothing that can be done because even if you make the policies, it will depend on people to listen to it. (Carole)

For some students, integration into the Canadian culture was slowed because they did not see the need, and/or because of the forced character of their migration. In particular, several of the satellite/full-satellite students believed living in Canada was temporary; they planned to return to their home country and their families. They stayed in Canada because their parents expected them to obtain a Canadian education. They had no intention of integrating and yearned for the time they would return to Hong Kong.

Students referred to their large numbers through comments such as "there were so-o-o many people in the school, like in Hong Kong" (Marie) and "oh, it's just like Chinese school because too many Chinese in there" (Paul). They began their Canadian schooling buffered by a large number of co-nationals, a situation that facilitated adjustment because students did not feel they were in the minority or in another country. This condition also hindered adjustment because students became too comfortable to struggle to acquire the skills necessary for integration into the greater Canadian society. Valerie's statement described this struggle:

At first, like in Hong Kong, I was always nervous about, I didn't think that they had lots of Chinese people. It surprised me because when you walk around you see lots of Chinese people so sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not. Because, it's good when you don't understand something you have people to talk to in your own language, but it's not good because you know they're Chinese people and you'll start talking Chinese with them and so you don't really have a chance to meet other people. (Valerie)

What these students did not seem to realize was how their numbers made it difficult to embrace a new culture because of the social pressure placed on them by family, co-nationals, and their culture. This duality played out in behaviours that often contradicted what they viewed as important for their adjustment when, in actual fact, their large numbers provided the setting that both facilitated and hindered the adaptation process.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The 23 Chinese-speaking, foreign-born students in this study cited language, peer relations, cross-cultural concerns, education and the school environment, and mental-health issues as critical to their social adjustment in Canada. They continued speaking their home language though they believed developing English competence was the key to their adjustment. They used parental expectations to describe the differences in the Canadian and Chinese cultures, with the Chinese culture demanding obedience and excellence, and the Canadian focusing on the needs of the individual. For most of the students in this study, friendships were with co-nationals or Chinese speakers, while Canadians were viewed either as friends who performed a mentorship role or as friends in the future. Students described differences in the Canadian and Chinese education systems through the differences in teacher behaviours and expectations and in the difference in the instruction and expectations in the classroom. Canadian teachers were less strict and more helpful and friendly; the Chinese system emphasized memorization and regurgitation while the Canadian system was more comprehensive, teaching students to think. Mental-health issues resounded in the full satellite sub-category where parents returned home, leaving children unsupervised, with guardians, or with family members. This finding supports previous studies on Asian students that identify mental health as an adjustment concern (Bolton, 1993; Khoo, et al., 1994; Lee, 1997; Lorenzo et al., 1995; Shen & Mo, 1990).

Unlike previous studies, the foreign-born students in this study are in the majority within a country that encourages and celebrates diversity. These factors present positive and negative elements, individually and in combination, that contribute significantly to the overall adjustment experience. Students do not see their adjustment as one of integration when they can replicate their home environment in the host environment and they can maintain their home culture and language. Some students suggest Canada's policy of cultural pluralism supports their behaviours because this policy embraces, encourages, and celebrates the ethnic diversity of its population. In addition, the large number of Chinese-speaking students in the school setting affects adjustment. These students are buffered and protected by their home culture within the new educational and cultural contexts. They feel secure, confident, and comfortable within their home culture. Reaching out and actively adapting to a new way of life takes determination and courage, seemingly unnecessary in an environment where there are so many co-nationals. Students are aware of some of the positive and negative aspects of their



large numbers; they know their actions do not reflect behaviours that ameliorate their adjustment concerns. While they believe they can choose whether to adapt to Canadian culture or whether to remain in the Chinese culture, they do not understand the significance their large population plays in the conflict they experience throughout their adaptation process.

British Columbia's Lower Mainland is only one of the major population centres in Canada to attract large numbers of immigrants. Other Canadian cities such as Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, or Toronto also house students who face struggles similar to the ones in this study. Canada's policy of cultural pluralism supports their adjustment when they arrive because they are encouraged to maintain their home culture. Yet, this very policy may also slow adjustment when large numbers of immigrants settle in one area because of the ease of reproducing the home culture in Canada rather than the necessity of acquiring skills to live in the Canadian mainstream.

Within the school system, educators have concentrated on developing ESL programs with a focus on language education and instruction because they recognize the importance of language acquisition to future success. This study presents data to show how language acquisition may be adversely affected by the social conditions in which these students live, conditions springing from the large numbers of co-nationals who have settled in the same geographic area. If language is as central to adjustment as this and other studies indicate, then investigating how to manage the challenge of assisting students when they live in a social environment that both supports and hinders adjustment is a crucial area for further study.

Results of this study indicate the need for further investigation in at least three additional areas. In view of current ESL numbers, a first step would be for British Columbia and other provinces with significant immigrant student populations to reassess the appropriateness of current policies, practices, and educational programs to determine whether they continue to meet the needs of the current immigrant population and/or what changes would be suitable. Secondly, personnel in the education system, the ministry, and the federal government have a responsibility to become more knowledgeable and aware of the satellite phenomenon. This phenomenon results when individuals with landed immigrant status expect to simultaneously profit from both their home and host countries. Children remain in Canada, often unattended, and in secrecy, to reap the benefits of a Canadian education. As long as federal and provincial governments tacitly support this situation, schools need to work with appropriate social services and with parents to provide the encouragement and support these students require. And finally, the results of this study warrant continued

investigation into the topic of student relationships and integration of ethnic groups in a school setting, especially if we expect to live in Canada in an environment free from racism and discrimination, where cultural pluralism is fully supported by all its people.

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#### NOTES

1. This system determines the suitability of individuals applying for landed immigrant status. Points accumulate on a pre-determined set of variables such as education, financial ability, specific skills of the applicant in relation to Canada's economic needs, and other family members already in residence. Landed immigrant status results when the applicant scores enough points.
2. Considerable literature describes the difference between the Eastern and Western cultural perspectives, perspectives blurring through globalization. In the Eastern perspective, the individual's role and hierarchical relationship within the group is predetermined and understood; the individual is secondary to his/her position within the group. The Western perspective places a priority on the individual and his/her interests and needs; position in the group is secondary to establishing a separate identity.
3. Students described themselves as Chinese-speaking, though, upon further questioning, they explained they spoke either Cantonese or Mandarin.
4. Readers can receive further information about the letter of introduction, reminder notice and interview format from the author.
5. I have used pseudonyms throughout this article.

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