TRANSITION INTO THE CANADIAN LABOUR FORCE:
THE EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN

by

EMILY OI CHEE MAK

B. Soc. Sc., University of Hong Kong, 1980
Dip. Ed., The University of British Columbia, 1993

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Department of **Social Work**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This study, guided by a feminist framework, aims to disclose aspects of the lived experience of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market, to explore the factors affecting their job search and employment opportunities, and to identify the gaps between the experience of women and the existing policies and programs, so as to increase our knowledge in this area and to help inform the development of more effective and meaningful intervention strategies to improve their situation. Recognizing the importance of the words of women, this study adopts a qualitative design to generate rich information from the interviews held with eight Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong, with different occupational backgrounds. The women's narratives reflect the disadvantaged position of Chinese immigrant women: their exclusion from the mainstream labour market and concentration in Chinatown. The findings refute what traditional theories and authorities have said: that racial minority immigrant women's personal shortcomings account for their employment problems; their unfulfilled high expectations, culture shock, lack of confidence, lack of language and job skills. Instead, the research findings reveal what has been omitted in most literature: that Chinese immigrant women have been historically discriminated against, that there are structural and systemic barriers perpetuating their employment difficulties. The findings reveal that employment inequality is rooted in unequal power relations and Chinese immigrant women are triply disadvantaged due to their multiple roles as women, as immigrants, and as racial minorities.
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INTRODUCTION

In a research report published by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994), entitled "Visible Minorities Making Transitions", the conditions of racial minorities in the Canadian labour market are described as:

Until the 1970s, visible minorities were easily absorbed in the labour force. Their skills and professional qualifications were in demand as Canada was going through a phase of economic expansion. As the visible minority population grew and the Canadian economy experienced periods of limited growth and deep recession, visible minorities began to face difficulties in their labour force transition to the extent that government interventions have been necessary. (p.1)

As a racial minority immigrant woman, I am struck by the comments of the Report which, in a number of ways, give an incorrect and unfair account of the experiences of racial minorities in Canada. First of all, difficulties encountered by racial minorities in the labour force transition did not begin only after the 1970s. Indeed, immigrants of racial minority backgrounds have been discriminated against and exploited for more than a century (Bolaria & Li, 1985). Secondly, albeit the role played by the Canadian economy in terms of its growth and recession in affecting racial minorities' participation in the workforce is important, other factors such as race, immigrant status, gender and class are of equal, if not greater importance. More alarming, not only does the Report trivialize the hardship of racial minorities in Canada, it places the responsibility for difficulties and barriers encountered in the Canadian labour force on the victims: "As the visible minority population grew.....". It presents
and reinforces an erroneous image that has been portrayed in the media: the problems of "Canadians", white-Canadians in particular, in the labour market are due to the competition by racial minorities. Racial minorities are to be blamed for their employment issues as well as those of their Canadian counterparts. The Report, instead of giving an authentic and just account of the situation of racial minorities, stabs a knife in their back by blaming the victims. Framing racial minorities' issues and problems as arising from themselves, the Report glorifies the saviour role of the government in making available intervention initiatives to better the situation, without addressing and critically reviewing the role and responsibility of the government in the oppression of racial minorities in their transition into the Canadian labour force.

The above account is not an independent, odd and rare case; rather, it reflects a common phenomenon as documented in much feminist literature: the power differentials between the authority and the subordinate, the oppressor and the oppressed, the superior and the less advantaged, men and women, white people and racial minorities, local Canadians and immigrants. The context and nature of unequal power relations may differ, but the commonality is the invisibility of the oppressed group in the description and explanation of their life experiences and oppression. The authority speaks for them, defines their issues and accounts for their concerns on their behalf. The mastery and use of language masks the reality, distorts the problems and trivializes the hardship faced by the less advantaged. As a consequence, their sufferings are
not seen, their voices are not heard, their pains are not felt.

Racial minorities in Canada are at a disadvantaged position and as a Chinese immigrant woman myself, I feel strongly about the inequality and unfair treatment experienced by many racial minority immigrant women in this "multicultural, tolerant, accepting society". As I have embarked on, and continue in the journey of my transition into the Canadian labour force, I can personally relate to the situation as it happens to me. Being involved in the field of employment services for eight years, having had the honour to share the real life stories of many racial minorities in Canada, these contacts and experiences provide me with the facts and evidence to rebut what the authority says, and motivate me to undertake a systematic study of the labour market experience of racial minority immigrant women.

My commitment to study the experience of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market is not only motivated by my personal experience and interests, as I have also given thought to a number of other considerations. I would like to devote this study exclusively to Chinese immigrant women who are triply disadvantaged due to their multiple roles as women, as immigrants, and as racial minorities. Confusion exists among the terms "immigrants", "racial minorities" and "ethnic minorities", and imprecise usage is common as if they are interchangeable and equivalent. This is quite problematic and clarification is necessary. White ethnic minority immigrant women, for example, would be more easily included as "Canadian", while women of colour, no matter if they
are fifth generation Canadians, are assumed to be immigrants and subject to discrimination because of their race and colour. Racial minority women and white ethnic minority women have distinct identities and experiences. Immigrant status also accounts for the oppression of women as accents and foreign credentials become disadvantages when an immigrant woman encounters Canadian society. In the Canadian context with a historical legacy of imperialism and patriarchy, racial minority immigrant women are constructed as "strangers", "different", "outsiders", with the invariable implication of being inferior. Their disadvantaged position is due to their being women, non-white and immigrants, and these all have to be addressed simultaneously.

In addition to the distinct identities and experiences of Chinese immigrant women, the magnitude and significance of their employment issues definitely warrants attention. Immigration statistics show that among the many immigrants arriving in Canada each year, Chinese immigrant women form a significant portion of them, especially those from Hong Kong. Data from BC STATS (BC, Ministry of Government Services, 1994) shows that in 1993 alone, there were 36,026 immigrants from Hong Kong representing 14.28% of all immigrants arriving in Canada that year. At the provincial level, of the total 44,073 new permanent residents landed in British Columbia in 1995, immigrants from Hong Kong (11,807) accounted for 26.8% of all B.C. landing (BC, Immigration Policy Branch, 1997). For the past five years, Hong Kong has remained one of the top ten source countries of immigrants to British Columbia.
In recent years, more women than men have immigrated from Hong Kong (Canada Employment and Immigration, 1989). According to the current immigration policy, there will be a continuous influx of immigrants to Canada, and British Columbia being the second most popular destination for immigrants to Canada after Ontario will attract a significant number of Chinese immigrant women.

While the arrival of Chinese immigrant women to Canada can be traced as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and the reality is that there is a growing number especially in the past two decades with the introduction of the "point system" under the immigration policy introduced in 1967, Chinese immigrant women are so often overlooked and neglected with respect to history, research and policy formulation (Adilman, 1984; Chiu, 1994). Chinese immigrant women have rarely been made the centre of study in literature and usually their experiences are subsumed under the general topic of Chinese immigrants, with men always given the priority. The issues encountered by Chinese immigrant women share some commonality with those of Chinese immigrant men, but are also unique in many ways, demanding our separate attention. Even after more than two decades of second wave feminism in Canada, material and literature produced for and about racial minority immigrant women remains unavailable (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993). The present study is by and about Chinese immigrant women and it is an attempt to explore and address the needs which have long been marginalized and misrepresented.
The migration and settlement problems of Chinese immigrant women are complex and diversified. In various studies, employment issues including job search and workplace adjustment remain one of the persistent difficulties challenging racial minority immigrant women (Bhagaratula, 1989; Estable, 1986; Mak, 1991). Many Chinese immigrant women have worked before immigrating to Canada and plan to seek employment in the local labour market (S.U.C.C.E.S.S. 1991). In a study conducted by S.U.C.C.E.S.S. (1990) in Vancouver, it was found that Chinese immigrant women are facing repeated failures in finding jobs comparable with those held in their country of origin. Those who do find jobs frequently end up being underemployed or trapped in low-level, low-paying positions. Others remain unemployed, retreating entirely from the active work force and experience further isolation. Chiu (1994) examined the job transferability of twenty Chinese immigrant women who came to Canada as "independent applicants" and were admitted on the strength of their academic standing, official language proficiency, and professional training. The discouraging fact was that their skills and training did not give them access to jobs for which they would seem to have the appropriate credentials. Difficulties in accessing the Canadian labour force have significant psychological and social consequences on Chinese immigrant women, especially their self-identity and well-being.

In the capitalist hierarchical society, job seeking and employment can be part of the self-validating process of immigrants to secure self-esteem, identity
and security (Ishiyama & Westwood, 1992). Paid employment is not only a source of money, it also confers on people a sense of personal identity. Anderson and Lynam (1987) studied the meaning of work for immigrant women in the lower echelons of the Canadian labour force and found that a woman's feeling of selfhood increases as economic contribution to the family gives her greater prestige within the family; it also gives her confidence in her abilities as a woman, being competent to earn a living herself. Nevertheless, for many Chinese immigrant women, as the above studies reveal, the job search experience is one which results in lower social status, devalues their self-worth and threatens their sense of security. Having great difficulties in accessing the local labour market, not only do they lose the job satisfaction they used to enjoy in their country of origin, Chinese immigrant women face new financial pressures, and become "dependants" in the family relying on the husbands' support. The job search process is also closely associated with anxiety and stress as evidence from research clearly showed that immigrants experienced a steady decline in emotional health with repeated failures and job rejection in the job search process (Amundson and Borgen, 1987). The stress extends well beyond the job search process as there may be additional problems with family members and physical ill-health. To conclude, labour market experiences have significant social and psychological consequences on Chinese immigrant women resulting in enormous wastage of human resources, additional stress, lower self-esteem and progressive loss of optimism in adapting to the new
environment. Intervention strategies to alleviate the situation seem necessary.

To develop meaningful intervention strategies, the roots of the problems have to be identified. Various barriers exist in the job seeking process as well as in the workplace leading to the problems Chinese immigrant women experience in adapting to life in the new country. According to the Report prepared by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994), a combination of factors affecting the transitional issues facing racial minorities in the Canadian labour force were identified pertaining to the individuals. These included: proficiency in English or French, speaking with a foreign accent, culture shock, high expectations and lack of knowledge of the job search process. Addressing the special needs of racial minority women, the Report spared a few lines describing gender specific barriers which I quote as follows:

Visible minority women, especially those from non-Occidental cultures, face specific barriers to getting employment. Often, women who did not enter the workforce in their country of origin must do so in Canada to survive or succeed. These women are often psychologically and culturally unprepared to enter the labour force.

Single parents, who are primarily women with pre-school children, need support in their transition into the labour force, so they can get off social assistance. To do so, they need provisions for daycare. (p.18)

The Report did not make an inquiry as to what is proficient English, why a foreign accent is a barrier, why expecting to find a job appropriate to one's qualifications and credentials are high expectations, why difference in cultural practices becomes a shock to the newcomers, why racial minorities have little
access to understanding of the local job search practice, why....why...? The fingers of blame are pointing directly at the racial minority groups. The description of their experience conjures up an image of a racial minority immigrant woman who does not speak English or who speaks English with an accent; who has limited work experience, skills and education; who has a certain type of job such as a cleaning "lady" or a seamstress; and who is on social assistance. Biases create more stereotypes, and stereotypes build more barriers preventing racial minority immigrant women from accessing the job market on an equity basis. Racial minority immigrant women learn to believe and accept that they are not good enough, they are inadequate, they should expect entry-level positions, and it is justifiable that they remain at the fringe or the lower strata of the labour market.

What is not mentioned is that racial minority immigrant women have been historically discriminated against because of their gender, their status as immigrants and because of their colour; that many racial minority immigrant women who are in such a triply disadvantaged position face great difficulties in the competitive labour market with a soaring unemployment rate. The First National Conference on Immigrant Women noted that accreditation issues and systemic racial discrimination were factors affecting transitional issues (Canada, Department of the Secretary of State, 1981), while in more recent mainstream government reports many of the root problems were omitted or trivialized. Only the tip of the iceberg has been revealed and the victims are
blamed for their oppression.

The above discussion highlights an important fact -- the oppression and hardship of Chinese immigrant women and immigrant women of other racial minorities are often neglected in history and literature alike. They do not have a voice of their own as someone always speaks on their behalf. They are labelled as deficient, they are held responsible for their problems, and they are socialized to believe that they are inadequate as they are different. The solution suggested is to provide training so that they learn "the Canadian ways", to be like "the Canadians", to speak like them, to behave like them. As they will never be the same as "those Canadians", racial minority immigrant women are viewed as inferior and that is seen to justify their oppression in the labour market, in their day-to-day living.

Social work is committed to providing professional services which improve the coping capacities of people, and to effecting changes in society towards the goal of social justice. Despite the inequality and discrimination experienced by racial minority immigrant women, little attention has been paid to them in the practice and policy agenda of the social work profession. The limited research available, and distortions of Chinese immigrant women's experience in the local labour market make them vulnerable to ineffective policies and services. It is out of this context that this study was initiated. This study, guided by a feminist framework, aimed to correct the distortion of racial minority immigrant women's experience and to highlight the sites and roots of
inequality and oppression. Recognizing the importance of the words of women, this study focused on the direct subjective experience of Chinese immigrant women, those immigrating from Hong Kong. The purpose was to disclose an aspect of the reality of their transition into the Canadian labour market as perceived by these racial minority immigrant women, to explore the factors affecting their job search and employment opportunities, and to identify the gaps between the lived experience of the women and the existing policies and programs, so as to increase our knowledge in this area and to help inform the development of more effective and meaningful intervention strategies to improve their situation. It is my hope that a platform can be provided so that the voices of the racial minority immigrant women can be heard and their needs and issues attended to.

In this introduction, I have highlighted the background, the purpose and the intended contributions of this research. The next chapter examines the disadvantaged position of Chinese immigrant women in Canada from a historical perspective, providing the context which informed the current study. Chapter two is a literature review on the theoretical perspectives explaining the settlement experiences of immigrants, with an application to employment issues. Chapter three provides an examination of selected government policies and programs addressing the employment needs of racial minority immigrant women. Chapter four discusses the methodology of the present design, chapter five presents a profile of the eight women who have shared their labour market
experiences, and chapter six outlines the results of the study, identifying the common themes. Chapter seven concludes with implications and recommendations for policy formation and program planning.
CHAPTER ONE
DISADVANTAGED POSITION OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN
IN CANADA: AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

In her book *Writing A Woman's Life* (1988), Carolyn Heilbrun asserts that throughout the centuries, those who write about women's lives have suppressed the truth of the female experience to meet society's expectations. Similarly, the truth of the Chinese immigrant women's experience has always been suppressed. Historically, studies of Chinese immigrants have been scanty as their resettlement experiences are largely ignored. Yet, it is of utmost importance that Chinese immigrants learn from their collective history, to connect the past and the present, to recognize that their marginal position is not an inevitable, personal fate.

It is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to present a comprehensive documentary of the history of Canada's Chinese community. The material presented in the following section aims to give an historical account of the discrimination against Chinese immigrant women, to highlight the context and provide background information to achieve a better understanding of the current experience of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour force.

**Discrimination of Chinese Immigrant Women Before the 1960s**

While oppression does not exist until the 1970s according to government authority (see earlier government report by Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994),
in reality for more than a century Chinese immigrant women have been excluded from the Canadian society and labour force as a result of racist and sexist ideology instituted through the state, the labour market and the family in a capitalist, patriarchal society.

The history of Chinese immigrant women in Canada connects closely to that of the larger Chinese community. Chinese immigrants have been coming to Canada since 1858, and the history of almost a century is marked by racial discrimination and institutional exclusion, an experience of living and working as second-class citizens (Li, 1988, 1992; Yee, 1988). Much of the historical path has been paved by broader forces within Canadian society over which the Chinese minorities have little control.

The experiences of the Chinese immigrants cannot be fully understood in isolation from the discriminatory immigration policies. The Canadian immigration policies have not been founded upon altruism (Tulchinsky, 1994), rather, they are a reflection of the practical considerations and particular prejudices of the government. They are designed to meet the needs of the Canadian economy, while, as much as possible, preserving Canada as a predominantly white nation (Ng, 1988).

Early Chinese settlers to Canada were mainly men and a large scale immigration of Chinese men took place between 1881 and 1885 with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. There were few Chinese women immigrants before the Second World War, and they were either merchant
wives, prostitutes, or maid servants who were sold to wealthy people (Chiu, 1994). In 1911, among the 27,831 Chinese in Canada, the sex ratio was 2,800 men to 100 women; and in 1931, the sex ratio remained 1,240 to 100 women among the 46,519 Chinese (Li, 1992).

This unbalanced sex-ratio of the Chinese community in Canada in the early years can be partly explained by the capitalist utilitarian immigration policy based on the demands of the labour market. Chinese men were welcomed as cheap labourers when white workers were not available for the growing industries such as rail road construction, mining, lumbering and public works. Racist ideology to maintain a "white society" also excluded Chinese immigrant women because of their reproductive capacities (Chiu, 1994). With the imposition of "head tax" in 1885, and its steep increase to $500 in 1903, it became financially impossible for the early settlers to sponsor their wives and other family members.

Systemic exclusion of Chinese immigrants reached its climax with the introduction of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act (Bolaria and Li, 1985; Wickberg, 1982). The Act stipulated that entry to Canada as temporary settlers for persons of Chinese origin, would be restricted to diplomats, children born in Canada, merchants and students; all other Chinese were excluded. Apparently, very few Chinese women were likely to be in any of these categories. It was not until 1947 that this discriminatory immigration policy was repealed, and after decades of involuntary separation, Chinese women were
permitted to reunite with their spouses in Canada. Chinese immigrants, men and women alike, were subject to institutional discrimination in Canada. Numerous laws were passed to discriminate against Chinese immigrants. To name a few: the "head tax" was introduced in 1885 and applied to every Chinese entering the country; a bill in 1884 disallowed Chinese from acquiring crown lands; the B.C. Provincial Home act of 1893 excluded Chinese from admission to the provincially established home for the aged and infirm; and prior to 1947, the Chinese in Canada were legally denied many basic rights such as the right to vote, the right to travel freely in and out of the country, and the right to enter into many professions and jobs (Li, 1988).

Chinese immigrants were excluded from the core labour market and they could not gain entry into the professions of medicine, architecture and law because they were Chinese. Many of them retreated to an ethnic business such as laundry and food services for survival and to avoid the competition with white workers (Li, 1992). Instead of rebuking the hostile social environment and racial discrimination, Chinese immigrants were blamed by the public for ghettoizing themselves within their ethnic community.

Work experiences of Chinese immigrant women before 1967 were characterized by suffering from double exploitation by the white society and by the Chinese community. The segregated labour market based on race and ethnicity deterred Chinese immigrants, men and women alike, from entering the professional fields competing with the white Canadians. In the traditional
Chinese society, a gender-biased division of labour and the caring role assigned Chinese women further kept women working in the home providing unpaid labour including childbearing, childrearing, cleaning, and food preparation. As Chinese immigrant men withdrew from the industrial sector and retreated to an ethnic business, many Chinese women performed the helping role and provided unpaid labour in the family businesses. Those who engaged themselves in paid work outside of the home were mostly confined to positions such as restaurant workers, laundry workers and seamstresses. Societal and cultural norms and a division of labour based on gender and racial bias confined employment opportunities of many early Chinese women settlers to the home or in a business run either by family or Chinese businessmen (Chiu, 1994). Their paid and unpaid work was devalued and degraded.

For decades since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrant women were excluded from the white society and discriminated against in the Canadian labour force. The unequal treatment of Chinese immigrant women was legally, officially and culturally sanctioned in a capitalist, patriarchal, racist and sexist society. To conclude, I would like to borrow words from Chiu (1994):

In summary, the history of Chinese women in British Columbia from 1858 until 1960 was a history of exploitation and discrimination. Cultural baggage, racial antagonism and systemic exclusion kept them from living on an equal basis with local whites. In the first place, Chinese women were being deprived the right to enter into Canada for the fear of their reproductive capacities. Those who were in Canada were either exploited by their own Chinese community or discriminated against by the white society. Both the cultural norms of Chinese and institutional barriers of the Canadian society were dominant factors accounting for their discrimination in Canada from 1858 until 1960 (p. 23).
Contemporary conditions of Chinese immigrant women in the labour force

The rocky road travelled by Chinese immigrant women continued through the twentieth century to the present. Racist and sexist practices still linger and new frustrations are encountered.

Empirical data on the conditions of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market is very limited. Much of the existing literature treats women as if they are a homogeneous group and describes a generalized picture of their workplace experience: there is growth in female employment; there is a significant number of female part-time workers due to shortage of full-time work, schooling, personal and family responsibilities; most women continue to work in traditionally female-dominated occupations - teaching, nursing or related health professions, clerical, sales, and service; employed women earn less than employed men; employed women still maintain primary responsibility for household work and so forth (Ghalam, 1993). Women, compared to men, in general, are at a a lesser advantage in the labour force; and there is no reason to doubt that Chinese immigrant women also share many of these unequal conditions that women generally experience.

A search in the literature reveals that there are other materials investigating the problems encountered by immigrant women in the labour market (Arnopoulos, 1979; Bhagavatula, 1989; Estable, 1986; Seward and McDade, 1988). Employment issues such as job search difficulties, unemployment and underemployment are common concerns of immigrant
women and have been documented in many of these studies. Data from Statistics Canada, Revenue Canada and other sources (BC, Immigration Policy Branch, 1997; Spigelman, Gibbons and Associates, 1997) indicates that immigrant women have a lower annual employment income than male immigrants and non-immigrants. Immigrant women are over-represented in service occupations and many of them experience a significant degradation in the status and quality of the jobs held after immigration.

Chinese immigrant women also experience many of these injustices encountering immigrant women. Nevertheless, there are problems and issues specific to Chinese immigrant women. Facts and findings about the Chinese population, supported with some key studies about Chinese immigrant women, help to demonstrate the disadvantaged position of Chinese immigrant women in their transition into the Canadian labour market. As mentioned in the previous section, the hardships suffered by many Chinese immigrant women are closely connected to the discriminatory immigration policies of Canada. Although the exclusion of Chinese immigration was lifted in 1947 with the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act, Chinese immigrants did not receive equal treatment by the Canadian government compared to European and American immigrants. All kinds of discriminatory clauses existed in the policies restricting admission of Chinese immigrants to Canada (Li, 1988).

In 1967 the Canadian government adopted a universal "point system" of assessing potential immigrants, and immigrants could apply based on different
categories: independent immigrants, sponsored or family class immigrants, and refugees. Later, in 1979, the category of independent applicant was expanded to include entrepreneurs who have the experience and capital to invest in Canadian businesses. At first glance, the policies seem fairly straightforward and it appears that Chinese women can be admitted under a "non-discriminatory" assessment system. Taking a second look, the discriminatory nature of the policies remains as Ng (1988) has succinctly summarized:

This classification of immigrants, as such, does not distinguish between the gender, ethnic origin, or class position of individuals. But when we take into account the indexes for determining entry of "independent immigrants" (based on language proficiency, educational attainment, investment potential, and the labour requirements of Canada, ranked according to a point system), then the sexist, racist and class biases of the immigration policy become visible (p.16).

In a capitalist state, immigration policies remain as a tool used by the ruling class to meet the interests of the economy, to produce reserve labour which can be utilized according to their needs (Basran, 1983). Many Chinese women, despite their many years of work experience in the paid labour force in their home countries, do not have the education, language, skills, and economic resources relevant to the requirements of the Canadian economy, and are prevented from applying as independent immigrants. There are those women who are permitted to enter the country under the sponsorship of men, considered as the wage-earners, and are classified as "family class" and dependents, a status which has significant social and economic consequences for their lives (Ng, 1988). For example, sponsored immigrants are not entitled
to public assistance. In the 1980s, they were restricted from accessing government subsidized language and job training programs (Estable, 1988). This forces immigrant women to be dependent on their sponsor and makes them particularly vulnerable in unpleasant and abusive family relationships. The lack of access to government subsidized training also means that immigrant women are forced to work in low-pay, part-time, menial jobs, with little opportunity to improve their situation and secure career change in the future. Many of them stay in the lowest echelons of the labour market, vulnerable to the employers' exploitation.

On the other hand, while discrimination continued through the immigration policies with the introduction of the point system, as a result of the new assessment criteria, postwar Chinese immigrants did come from a more diversified occupational, educational and geographical background, with a large number of them immigrating mostly from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries (Li, 1988). They transformed the demographic and social features of the Chinese community; they restored a balanced sex ratio, and they brought in more professional and technical workers with language and job skills (Li, 1992). More recently in the 1980s, the economic condition and high unemployment rate of Canada opened the door for business investors and entrepreneurs who brought in capital and created new job opportunities, especially those from Hong Kong and Taiwan (BC, Ministry of Government Services, 1994).
The changing profile of the Chinese community in Canada, however, does not guarantee more equal treatment. I argue that the position of Chinese immigrant women remains that of "second-class citizen". Chinese immigrant women do not have equal opportunity in the labour market and discrimination against them remains strong and powerful. Some statistical data helps to highlight the contemporary reality of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour force.

According to the 1986 Census of Canada, the participation rate of Chinese women in the labour force was 62.1 %, compared to 66.5 % for the total population, 77.5% for men, 55.9% for women, 77.3% for Chinese men, and 64.5% for racial minority women (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994). Their unemployment rate was lower than the national rate, ie. 8.6%, compared to a rate of 10.3 % for the total population, 9.6% for men, 7.9% for Chinese men, 11.2% for all women, and 11.5% for racial minority women. In 1991, among those aged 25 to 44, Chinese immigrant women (78%) were about as likely as all Canadian women (79%) to have participated in the labour force (Costa and Renaud, 1995). Similarly, their unemployment rate was the same (10%) as that of all men and all women. The relatively high labour force participation and low unemployment rate are misleading if one interprets these as reflecting a situation where their skills and professional qualifications are easily absorbed in the labour force. To the contrary, Chinese immigrant women are easily absorbed only in the entry-level jobs in garment manufacturing and the service
industry, to work as reserve labour to fill up positions Canadians do not want. In addition, financial reasons also force many Chinese immigrant women to enter the labour market, to secure an income to support their family.

The 1991 Census data also reflects that Chinese adults have higher levels of formal education than Canadians. Among people aged 25 to 44 in 1991, 38% of Chinese immigrants and 53% of Canadian-born Chinese had at least some university education, compared with 27% of the total population (Costa and Renaud, 1995). Among women aged 25 to 44, 32% of Chinese immigrants and 52% of the Chinese born in Canada had at least some university education, compared with 26% of women in general. The frustration is that educational attainment and active participation in the labour market do not guarantee Chinese women a comparable income level.

Chinese immigrant women continue to earn much less than employed men. The 1986 Census data showed the 1985 average full-time, full-year employment income of Chinese women was $18,885 compared to an average of $30,504 for all men, $19,995 for all women, $27,585 for Chinese men, and $18,865 for racial minority women. Employment equity data showed that the 1990 average full-time, full-year employment income of Chinese women was $25,448 compared to an average of $38,648 for all men, $26,033 for all women and $34,846 for Chinese men (Statistics Canada, 1995). These statistics clearly reveal the unequal treatment of Chinese women in the Canadian labour market. They participate actively, they have educational attainment, yet, they
are paid at a much lower rate when compared to other Canadians, and when compared to men in the Chinese community.

The lower income of Chinese immigrant women and immigrant women of other racial minorities can be partly explained by the types of occupations and positions they are in. Seward and McDade (1988) reported:

Immigrant women were more heavily concentrated in service occupations, as well as in the processing, fabricating, assembly, and construction category of occupations. Many of these occupations are characterized by low-skill and low-wage jobs (p. 14).

According to the 1986 Census (Statistics Canada, 1989) and based on 20% of the sample data, Chinese immigrant women continued to work in traditionally female-oriented occupations. Among 98,220 Chinese women, 29,115 were in clerical and related occupations, 19,635 were in service occupations, and 6,895 in sales occupations, a total of 56.6%. Chinese immigrant women were underrepresented in construction trades occupations (165 or 0.2%), processing occupations (2,970 or 3%), and managerial, administrative and related occupations (7,240 or 7.4%). In 1991, clerical work was very common among Chinese immigrant women (30%). As well, Chinese immigrant women (12%) were much more likely than other women (3%) to be employed in product fabricating (Costa and Renaud, 1995).

The concentration of Chinese immigrant women in low-paying jobs is not limited to those who have limited English or French language ability, work-related skills and education. Chiu (1994), in her study of Chinese immigrant women who were admitted as independent immigrants based on their language
and work skills ascertained that higher social and economic class did not guarantee better job opportunities. The majority of the upper and middle class Chinese immigrant women Chiu interviewed were still trapped in lower status jobs at entry-level positions. Similarly, a study of immigrant women in Vancouver by Bhagavatula (1989) concurred with the above findings that a large number of immigrant women were under-employed (ie. employed in areas that did not relate to their specialities) or employed on a part-time or temporary basis.

In addition to statistics and empirical data, the words of racial minority immigrant women powerfully reveal the unequal treatment they have experienced in the Canadian labour market. They have little access to suitable employment opportunities; they are often the last hired and the first fired; and in the workplace, they are ignored, excluded and they experience a strong sense of loneliness and isolation. In a letter written by Grace (pseudonym) and collected in a book entitled *Sharing Our Experience* (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993), this is expressed:

I started scouting around for a job, which brings me nothing but a series of heartaches and frustrations. My options are very limited, since employment here is scarce and seasonal. I have made the rounds of all the broadcasting firms hoping I could be hired because of my educational background, but was never given a chance for an interview. There was an instance where a receptionist handed me an application form in the most obnoxious manner but was friendly with the local applicants. Yes, I have experienced being called last when I was the first to report for an interview. I have observed that whenever a local person was present, there was an obvious different treatment. The few interviews I was lucky to be called for were all nightmares. It has come to point where thoughts of it send shivers to my spine. I was always told
that I don't have a Canadian experience -- that whatever experiences I
carried from home or from other places were not acceptable here. My
education was not enough and my credentials without substance. I
seriously felt that being different was a stigma, and I am forever doomed
to my situation.

I was hired to work as a clerk although originally the position advertised
was for a supervisor..... Explanation to this was that my qualifications do
not merit the position and I didn't have the Canadian experience. I
accepted the job just the same with the realization that I have to start
somewhere, and have to earn Canadian experience. I found out later
that the position was offered to a local person who was inexperienced
and just fresh from school. Again, the animosities of the other employees
were all apparent in their behaviour..... The cold treatment was too much
to bear. I would eat alone, and whenever a problem arose from work, I
was left to grope in the dark. (p.68-69)

Summary

The message is loud and clear: for the past century and until the present
day, Chinese immigrant women are in a disadvantaged position in the
Canadian labour market. Chinese immigrant women experience
underemployment and have a lower average income from employment than the
rest of the Canadian working population. In addition, they tend to be
segregated in a limited range of occupations, and a limited range of levels
within occupation groups.

By examining the collective history of Chinese immigrants to Canada, we
learn that the hardship suffered by individual Chinese immigrant women is not
an inevitable personal fate. Instead, their disadvantaged position in the
Canadian labour market is closely connected to the discriminatory immigration
policy and other societal forces in a racist and sexist society. It is important to
identify the roots of the problems, the factors perpetuating the discrimination against Chinese immigrant women. To achieve this, I devote the next chapter to examining theoretical perspectives addressing racial minority immigrant women's labour market experiences.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW:
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT

Human behaviours can be perceived through different frames of reference and different types of explanatory theories: psychological, socio-psychological and sociological. These approaches examine individual and social problems in the context of the existing social order with its underlying ideologies, organizations and institutions; and as Mullaly (1993) argued, they are inadequate to inform effective social work intervention. By continuing to recycle mainstream theories that do nothing to challenge the present social order, conventional social work becomes powerless in the pursuit of the goals of social justice. Mullaly's challenge is important and meaningful in the following analysis of theoretical perspectives.

Many factors affect Chinese immigrant women's, as well as Canadian's, labour market experience. Successive Canadian governments have argued that the Canadian economy, with its growth, recession and restructuring, regulates the availability of jobs, and affects the employment and unemployment of all Canadians. Along this line of reasoning, the best way to create jobs for everyone is through an economic recovery led by the private sector. With an expanding and growing economy, business is profitable, investment will increase, jobs will be created and everyone will share good times.

It is not my intention, in this short paper, to go into a lengthy debate
about the problem of unemployment and the various economic theories which perceive the issue as a mere economic agenda. Instead, I will focus my discussion on the theoretical perspectives addressing immigrants' adjustment and labour market experience. I do not mean to deny the impact of the market economy on the employment issues of racial minority immigrant women. Nevertheless, I do share the views of Riches and Ternowetsky (1990) in their exploration of the possibility of a full-employment agenda for Canada from a policy perspective and I also argue that the role and the power of the central government to intervene in the economy has been undermined.

Theoretical perspectives relating to the employment issues of racial minority immigrant women are minimal, nor are there major research studies adopting any of the frameworks for analysis. Historically, racial minority immigrant women are neglected in both academic and political institutions, and they are rarely the focus of academic studies and policy formulation. In addition, most of the studies on racial minority and immigrant women cited in previous chapters only focus on identifying their employment needs, and fail to examine the nature of barriers or the roots of the problems accounting for women's disadvantaged position. Chiu's 1994 study is an attempt in this area, aiming to examine the factors affecting the job transferability of twenty Chinese immigrant women in Vancouver. She concluded that not only are there cultural and structural barriers, there are other "informal barriers" important to the labour market difficulties of Chinese immigrant women. I will examine this study.
in further detail in subsequent discussion.

It is crystal clear that there is a need for exploration of theories and empirical research studies applying theoretical frameworks to achieve a more thorough understanding of the experience and issues encountering racial minority immigrant women. To address racial minority immigrant women's job seeking and work experience, I explored a number of explanatory models under the general framework of immigrant settlement and adjustment, including traditional psychological perspectives, social support network perspectives, cultural perspectives and feminist perspectives. The relevancy and adequacy of these models will be critically examined in the following section.

Traditional Psychological Perspectives

Traditional psychological models of migration adjustment, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, assume a causal relationship between migration and psychological well-being (Carriere, 1991; Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Migration is viewed as loss and the adjustment process is seen as one of grief and bereavement. A large part of the adjustment phase involves coping with grief due to loss of familiar places, people, and customs enjoyed in the country of origin (Zaharna, 1989). The intrapersonal stress associated with migration may negatively affect the immigrants' abilities to effectively make decisions, solve problems, and gather information, all of which are critical elements in their career transition in a new country. Immigrants new to a society frequently experience adjustment difficulties that interfere with normal daily activities and
the development of a new career.

According to traditional psychological models, psychological stress can also be predicted as a pathological discrepancy between the migrant's expectations and reality. Immigrants who expect a "better life" in Canada are bound to experience an erosion of initial optimism and self-confidence with repeated rejection to secure employment despite their qualifications and work experience. Inner conflicts and emotional turmoil can significantly scatter energy, reduce work motivation, and limit risk-taking behaviours and openness to learning (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991).

To help the immigrants thrive through intensive emotions of loss and grief in the process of migration, these models suggest that the migrant's impaired coping strategies have to be dealt with through individual counselling. Effective intervention to assist the immigrants' labour market transition cannot be separated from therapeutic counselling to help the newcomers to achieve relief from psychological stress.

Although these models may appear overly simplistic, they persevere in the literature. The psychological approaches are problematic in various ways. Firstly, they assume all migrants experience grief-like reactions which is clearly not the case. The experiences of migrants vary and for many of them, it is when they encounter inhospitable treatment in the new environment that they experience stress, anxiety and confusion.

Secondly, these models are problematic as they attribute the settlement
problems and employment barriers to the immigrants themselves, emphasizing illness as a metaphor for describing immigrants and the immigrant experience. Focusing on the immigrants as "unwell" diverts attention from efforts to identify and address the roots of the problems in Canadian society, factors over which the immigrants have little control. The structural and institutional barriers are concealed and the coping of the immigrants reacting to an adverse environment is framed as pathological: the immigrants are labelled as maladjusted, stressed, shocked and disoriented.

Thirdly, these models are problematic as the immigrants are often falsely accused of having high expectations which makes their settlement and transition difficult (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994). As a matter of fact, many newcomers, aware of the difficulties in the local labour market as reflected in the high unemployment rate, adjust their expectations in their career transition, and are prepared to take more junior or entry-level positions for survival. It is when they experience discrimination and are unable to have equal access to the local labour market that they become stressed and frustrated.

From another perspective, I question the implication that the newcomers should have "realistic expectations", i.e. low expectations in securing employment, which these models imply. It is ridiculous to relate low expectations to "better adjustment", and leads to the question of why immigrants are expected to take any jobs that are available? This suggestion reminds me of Canadian immigration policies which are always designed to
serve the capitalist economy, to supply reserve labour to fill up positions that local people do not want. Immigrants admitted, according to the point system, on the strength of their qualifications and skills, are then barred from accessing jobs that they are qualified for. Their international qualifications are not recognized, their overseas experience is devalued, and they are expected to cope with the "reality" without challenging the structural barriers of discrimination in the system. And in this process of invalidation, they experience loss and grief, and are labelled as maladjusted.

Unjustly, these traditional psychological models label the immigrants as ill, stressed and responsible for their difficulties. These models fail to relate the individual's disadvantaged position to the social, economic and political policies of the host country which can serve either to frustrate or to facilitate the adaptation of immigrants. Accordingly, I find that intervention measures in terms of psychological and therapeutic counselling as recommended by these models are ineffective, simply confirming the "sick" label of the immigrants and reinforcing their coping with the unjust situation, rather than addressing the roots of their settlement and labour market difficulties.

Social Support Network Perspectives

In contrast to the focus on individual psychology in more traditional explanations of immigrants' experiences, more recent models are based on theories of social psychology. An important concept in these approaches is that of the social support network (Carriere, 1991). This recognizes the social
dimensions of adjustment and the role of social networks in facilitating the immigrants' settlement.

Applying the notion of social support network to the labour market transition of immigrants provides some insights to our understanding of the phenomenon, but also leaves many questions unanswered. I will address some of these issues in the following paragraphs.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1985), social support has affective (emotional), instrumental (behavioral assistance) and informational (feedback) dimensions. Sources of support affecting the immigrants' adjustment and labour market transition may include peers, families, co-workers, employers as well as ethnic communities.

Social networking is considered an effective means for immigrants to enter the work force (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994). It is often said that in the Canadian labour market, over 80% of jobs are obtained through referrals and networking. Friends, acquaintances and family members are important sources of job leads. Ethnic communities and social service agencies also provide information to locate employment opportunities. Immigrants who have limited social networks in the new environment have little access to employment information. Accordingly, to facilitate their transition, immigrants are advised to expand their social networks through participating in community activities or volunteering. Nevertheless, networking has to be cultivated over a long period of time and the immigrants find themselves at a disadvantaged
position in identifying job leads and knowing people in the hiring positions. Leaving the immigrants to cope with the existing system, these models do not challenge the roots of the problems: the unfair labour market practices which rely heavily on inside networks and social relations, and which exclude the immigrants' access to employment information.

According to these models, positive emotional support from family and friends provides security and encouragement which are particularly important at a time of high stress (Amundson and Borgen, 1987). Support received from friends and relatives tends to improve one's ability to cope with crisis, such as unemployment and underemployment (Roberts, 1991). In the workplace, disturbed family dynamics provide little support to assist the immigrant to face the demanding work situation, and may directly or indirectly affect the immigrant's employment behaviour (Westwood and Ishiyama, 1991). To help the immigrant's labour market transition, job finding clubs, a program approach using positive peer support (Azrin and Besalel, 1980) are recommended and widely used as an intervention measure.

I find these models inadequate as they do not provide an explanation of the nature and sequence of the interaction and relations between stress, support and coping across settings and over time. Social support networks tend to play a positive role in enhancing the immigrant's coping with the adverse labour market condition. But what is lacking in these models is a convincing explanation of why immigrants have to face various employment barriers and
Interpersonal skills in the workplace are identified as an "informal barrier" affecting Chinese immigrant women's transition into the Canadian labour market (Chiu, 1994). According to Chiu's study, difficulty in building a supportive collegial relationship, discontent with superiors and conflicts with Chinese co-workers are obstacles Chinese immigrant women encounter in the workplace. The consequences can be drastic: immigrant women may feel so uncomfortable about workplace relations that they have to leave the job or they may be fired by their superiors.

Indeed, interpersonal relations in the workplace can be a barrier to immigrant women's labour market experience. However, by framing these conflicting relations as "informal barriers", Chiu (1994) tends to marginalize the nature of the problems that Chinese immigrant women experience. By attributing the workplace interpersonal conflicts to differences in work standards, different preferences in social and cultural activities, the unequal power relations between the racial minority immigrant women and their supervisors, between the racial minority immigrant women and their colleagues are not addressed. Nobody can deny the existence of differences across cultures and individuals, but the question is: do differences necessarily lead to conflicts and problems? I argue that the power relations between workers, and between workers and employers are the roots of the conflicts in the workplace, constituting a significant factor to our understanding of the labour market.

adversities in the first place.
transition of racial minority immigrant women. More discussion of this area will be presented in Chapter Six with the findings of this present study.

I find the social support network perspectives inadequate to explain racial minority immigrant women's labour market experiences. What is achieved is only an examination of the surface of the problems and a description of the issues. What is missing is a connection of the focal problem with the socio-economic-political-cultural context in which it is located. Social support networks can have positive effects to help immigrants cope with crises in the process of labour market transition. However, these models do not provide an adequate explanation as to why these crises arise in the first place. In addition, interpersonal relations are important to one's workplace adjustment, but relating the problematic relations to differences in practices and values leaves the fundamental issue of unequal workplace power relations unaddressed.

**Cultural Perspectives**

Other major approaches to examination of the settlement and employment issues of racial minority immigrant women can be termed cultural perspectives. Emphasis is placed on the conflicts between the old and new cultures and the influences of the immigrant woman's own culture on her adaptation. The essence of the "value differences approach" of cultural perspectives is the assumption that the immigrants' adjustment difficulties are directly proportional to the differences in values between the host culture and the migrants' originating cultures (Adler, 1975; Furnham and Bochner, 1986).
Some research findings tend to show support for these perspectives. For example, according to Chiu's 1994 study, which I have quoted in former sections, conflicting workplace culture is found to be a barrier Chinese immigrant women encounter during the working stage (Chiu, 1994). The orientation of Hong Kong work culture, characterized by a task-oriented, fast working pace, results orientation, emphasis on role, explicit job description, and an attitude of benevolent paternalism; is found to be incompatible with the work orientation of Vancouver typified by a time-oriented, relaxed working pace, procedure orientation, importance of individual rights, implicit job description and easy-to-layoff and easy-to-quit attitude. The differences are regarded as factors affecting Chinese immigrant women's adaptation in the labour market.

I can recognize the differences in workplace attitudes and practices between the migrant woman's originating culture and the host culture, and I have no intention of minimizing the impacts of cultural differences on the work environment and the adaptation on the part of both the migrant woman and her environment. The questions not addressed by these perspectives, as I have argued in the previous section on social support network perspectives are: do differences necessarily bring conflicts and negative consequences; and why it is usually the immigrant who becomes "maladjusted" when experiencing cultural differences in the workplace?

Research also suggests that the length of stay in Canada is a crucial factor for Chinese immigrants to assimilate structurally and to recover their
original occupational status (Lai, 1971). However, Canadian-born Chinese women's narratives have disputed this assumption as their length of residence does not necessarily improve their disadvantaged position in the labour market (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993).

"Cultural learning/social skills" versions of these models of immigrant settlement assume it is the immigrants' primary task to learn the salient characteristics of their new social environment and to acquire skills to live within it (Carriere, 1991). Lack of proficiency in English or French, speaking with a foreign accent, lack of knowledge and understanding of the job search process are identified as factors obstructing racial minorities' transition into the Canadian labour force (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994).

Language skills, in particular, are found to be of primary importance. Language proficiency and effective communication skills are essential to productive employment behavior and rewarding work experience (Westwood and Ishiyama, 1991). Racial minority immigrant women's lack of official language skills and their accent are used as justifiable causes for their labour market difficulties. Not only are racial minority immigrant women with limited language skills kept at the lower echelons of the occupational hierarchy, those who have language and job skills, education and qualifications are not hired or are kept at entry-level positions due to the employers' stereotypes and discrimination: their assumption of immigrant women's language inadequacy and undesirable work performance (Chiu, 1994).
With an emphasis on skills deficits and cultural incongruence, the cultural perspectives opt for intervention measures to improve "the handicaps" and thus the employability of the racial minority immigrants such as official language training, job finding clubs, job skills training, life-skills training and so forth. I will discuss some of these programs and the issues arising from these government policies in more detail in the next chapter on government programming in response to employment problems. Meanwhile, it is suffice to assert that their effectiveness is being challenged as the roots of the problems remain untackled.

A critical analysis of these models reveals their inherent problems and inadequacy. These models tend to project an image of immigrant women as inadequate, lacking and deficient. The concept of value differences also implies a distinction between a superior and an inferior culture, ie. the host culture and the migrant's originating culture, respectively. The racial minority immigrant woman learns from her encounter with the Canadian society that she is inferior as she is different, deficient and in need of training. This in turn reinforces a lowering of her self-esteem and confidence. On the other hand, her access to training and upgrading is limited, and she may remain stuck in labour market ghettos.

Criticism of the cultural perspectives focuses on their lack of a critical perspective of the historical and political circumstances in Canadian society which present discriminatory barriers to racial minority immigrants (Bolaria and
Li, 1985). Culture is a social construct created to discriminate against racial minority immigrant workers and language skills are a base of power which the racial minority immigrant women lack. The unequal power distribution inherent in race relations defines the host culture as superior and immigrants are to assimilate to it. The unequal power distribution between the employers and job seekers defines the criteria for job application and advancement and immigrants encounter great difficulties in accessing jobs for which they are qualified. The unequal power distribution inherent in gender relations defines women's caring and supportive role and they are segregated in a gender-biased labour market. Racial minority immigrant women are kept at a disadvantaged position in the labour market by forces over which they have little control.

Cultural learning and skills training is applicable in certain circumstances to improve the relationships between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, between the newcomer and the local people. For example, training about communication skills, learning about and appreciation of different cultures can facilitate interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the training relies on the good will, mutual understanding and acceptance of both parties. These models fail to be effective in situations of real political and economic conflicts such as labour problems where there is power imbalance between the dominant and subordinate groups. And as Bolaria and Li (1985) argue, the problems of racial minorities and
immigrants are not a matter of cultural differences or misunderstanding; rather, it is an excuse designed to rationalize the unjust treatment of the subordinate group for the purpose of exploiting its labour power.

Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

Feminist theoretical perspectives have made a significant contribution in the understanding of racial minority immigrant women's experience in the labour market. Feminism has done this in different ways. First of all, despite lack of a unified feminist theory, feminist perspectives assert the importance of women's words and experiences as the basis for all scholarly endeavour (Etter-Lewis, 1991). Women's experiences should be the basis for developing analyses and theories of women. However, it is problematic to assume "one voice" which can embrace the experience of all women. Feminist literature is traditionally dominated by white, middle-class women and the voices of immigrant women and racial minority women have been absent for a long time. Recent outcry from racial minority immigrant women demands more scholarly research by, for and about them to embrace their experience. This research is an attempt to add to the literature about racial minority immigrant women.

Secondly, feminist theoretical perspectives also contribute to redefining the nature of racial minority immigrant women's employment issues. Refusing to accept the labels assigned by traditional theories referring to immigrants as being "sick", having a "deficit" or "handicap", being a "burden to the society and in need of assistance", feminist perspectives make a connection between
individual problems and the socio-economic-cultural-historical-political context in which racial minority immigrant women live. Feminism recognizes that it is victim-blaming to attribute the problems as arising from the women themselves, and there are many societal forces beyond the control of racial minority immigrant women which affect their labour market experience. Feminist perspectives uncover the very real social, political and economic power inequalities that exist and are responsible for women's oppression.

As an explanatory framework for a life experience, traditional feminist perspectives assume the primacy of gender in women's lives; other forces such as class position and racial and ethnic identity are treated as if they are of secondary importance for women and not intrinsic to the female experience. As a result, many of these feminist models produced, taught, and practised are of no relevance to racial minority women who have challenged the fundamental assumption that women share a common oppression which is rooted solely in their gender. More recently, feminism recognizes that women's experience is embedded in a complex web of power relations connecting the social identities of gender, race, ethnicity, immigrant status, class, sexual orientation, age, and so on (Olson and Shopes, 1991). The study of women's oppression is a study of a matrix of unequal social relations in which the roots of the problems lie.

Thirdly, feminist theoretical perspectives also contribute a critique of the existing policies and services provided by the government in relation to racial minority immigrant women's labour market experiences. Feminism maintains
that the government and its various programming is responsible for keeping racial minority immigrant women in a disadvantaged position in the labour market, serving the interests of the dominant groups in a capitalist patriarchal society. Feminist theoretical perspectives disclose the roots of the problems and recommend alternative intervention measures to improve the situation of women.

A more detailed discussion explaining racial minority immigrant women's labour market experiences from feminist perspectives is given below.

Unequal Distribution of Power Organized Through the Social Relations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Immigrancy, and Class

Central to feminist perspectives is an analysis of power: a recognition of the unequal power distribution based on gender, race, ethnicity, immigrancy and class. The essence of power differentials is a belief in the superiority of one group over the others (Lorde, 1984). The power differences between the dominant and subordinate groups become a source of potential oppression in a racist, sexist, patriarchal capitalist society.

The relations among the various constructs of class, gender, race, ethnicity and immigrancy are complex and complicated; the variables are interconnected and reciprocal. Class, traditionally, is measured in terms of economic and social indicators such as people's relation to the means of production, income, educational attainment and so forth. A more recent interpretation of the concept of class refers it to a set of social relations,
relations between people (Ng, 1988; Stasiulius, 1991). For example, gender, immigrant status, race and ethnicity can be factors determining one's class. And the experiences of immigrant women from different classes, ie. different socio-economic backgrounds, different ethnic and racial backgrounds, are not the same.

Ralston (1991) supports the impact of race, class, gender and the specific Canadian context on our understanding of the work experience of racial minority immigrant women. Immigrant women experience difficulties in seeking jobs because of their gender, educational qualifications, language, accent, Third World origin, skin colour, lack of Canadian experience, and the like. Racial prejudice occurs in the labour market, especially when the job seekers come into contact with employers and hiring personnel (Westwood and Ishiyama, 1991). The problem of accrediting overseas credentials keeps the work potential of many skilled immigrants untapped (Fernando and Presad, 1986; The Working Group on Immigrant Credentials, 1992). Many of these racial minority immigrant women with high academic standing or advanced technological training encounter great difficulties in their job search, are unable to access employment related to their previous training, and remain unemployed or underemployed (Merlet, 1989). Barriers are created by the dominant groups denying racial minority immigrant women equal access and opportunities in the labour market to serve the interests of those in power in a sexist, racist and capitalist society.
"Culture", "race", "immigrant", "woman", and "ethnicity" are socially constructed categories, constituting various social relations with inherent power differences, designed to rationalize the unjust treatment of racial minority immigrant women, for the purpose of exploiting their labour to meet the needs of the Canadian economy and to serve the interests of those in power.

Sexual Divisions of Labour and Gender Role Socialization

From feminist perspectives, the sexual division of labour - inside the workplace, inside the household, and between the two - is identified as an important factor perpetuating women's employment difficulties (Kemp, 1994). This division of labour has evolved in which women are the "caregivers" and men the "breadwinners". Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989) found that family ideology continues to prescribe that a certain core of domestic labour is woman's work, regardless of whether a woman engages in wage labour or is a full-time housewife. Inequality inherent in gender is found across cultures. Ideology and norms of Chinese culture reinforce this gender role socialization instituted through the family, contributing to women's disadvantaged position in the labour market as noted by the Hong Kong Group, Association For The Advancement Of Feminism (1993). The assumptions about women's caring role, and their role as caregivers throughout the life cycle, have significant consequences which seriously disadvantage women's career development.

Today, many women are juggling the conflicting demands of family and work and many have resolved periods of intense conflict by moving in and out
of the labour force and by taking part-time employment (Burch, 1985). This disrupted work pattern of women and their devotion of time and efforts to caring for the family make them targets for discrimination in terms of career opportunities, nature of employment, working hours, pay and benefits, training opportunities, and accumulation of experience and seniority (Baines, Evans and Neysmith, 1991).

A study on Chinese immigrant women residing in Richmond, British Columbia (S.U.C.C.E.S.S., 1991) showed that out of 110 respondents who previously worked prior to immigration and were currently unemployed in Canada, 59.1% of the women related their not working to caring for their children and families. Immigrant women are barred from work and training due to child care needs.

Inside the workplace, women are segregated in a few traditionally female-dominated occupations (Ghalam, 1993). Racial minority immigrant women who seek employment in the managerial and administrative categories or the fields of social and physical sciences tend to encounter more difficulties (Boyd, 1987; Seward, 1988). Discriminatory hiring practices bar women's access to these job opportunities. Female racial minorities are underrepresented in logging, mining, construction industries, and public administration and defence; they are overrepresented in manufacturing (Human Resources Development Canada, 1994).

Racial minority immigrant women are seriously disadvantaged in their
employment opportunities by this ideology of familism and the sexual division of labour. They experience both vertical and horizontal segregation in the discriminatory labour market and are often trapped in service-sector jobs characterized by lower wages and entry-level part-time work.

Role of the government in women's oppression

Feminist theoretical perspectives find the government responsible in perpetuating racial minority immigrant women's oppression and problems. Both in its policies and services, the government privileges men over women, white people over racial minorities, and Canadians over immigrants.

To give a few examples to highlight the discrimination practised against racial minority immigrant women by the various levels of government: the exclusion of Chinese immigrant women has been sanctioned by immigration policies for many decades, discrimination against racial minorities has been tolerated in classrooms and in the exclusionary curriculum; differential treatment against minorities is practised in the justice system and policing system; and distortion of non-white images is not uncommon in the dominant media (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993). Indeed, in this twentieth century, slavery no longer exists in the present society; but the powerless are not free from inequities and systemic discrimination, and the government has a significant role to play in perpetuating their miseries.

Various policies and services of the government serve to maintain the disadvantaged position of racial minority immigrant women in the Canadian
labour market. For example, language training and employment training are not accessible to many immigrants, international credentials are not properly evaluated and recognized, mandatory employment equity legislation has not arrived, affordable and culturally-sensitive child care services are nonexistent and so forth. The government and those in the seats of power cannot escape the accusation of effecting the continuation of racial minority immigrant women's employment problems. In the next chapter, I will examine a number of these government policies and programs, discuss them in some detail and make a critique from a feminist stance.

Summary

To conclude, over the years, various theoretical perspectives have been developed to explain immigrants' experiences in a new environment and have shed light on our understanding of racial minority women's labour market experience. The traditional psychological perspectives are refuted as their assumption that all migrants experience grief-like reactions and their emphasizing illness as a metaphor for describing immigrants and immigrant experience are found to be problematic and victim-blaming. More recent models based on the concept of social support networks are also found to be inadequate as they focus on the coping strategies of adaptation to immigration rather than addressing the roots of the problems. Cultural perspectives, which argue that value and cultural differences determine the adaptation problems experienced by immigrants, are criticized as failing to consider the power
differentials between the dominant and subordinate groups, which are the essence of the immigrants' problems. Feminist perspectives, with their focus on a structural, power analysis and the connection of women's problems with the socio-economic-political-cultural context, are particularly useful in bringing new insights to our understanding and explanation of racial immigrant women's oppression. Nevertheless, studies using any of the above approaches to examine the employment problems of Chinese immigrant women are scant, and the present study is an attempt to address this gap in the existing literature.
CHAPTER THREE

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ADDRESSING THE EMPLOYMENT ISSUES OF RACIAL MINORITY IMMIGRANT WOMEN:

A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

A lack of coordination among government bodies leaves the question of immigrant adjustment in a twilight zone. Various ministries and government departments, both at the federal and provincial levels, directly or indirectly, are involved in the provision of services addressing the adjustment and employment issues of racial minority immigrant women. At a first glance, at the provincial level, these include Ministry of Education, Skills and Training; Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Women's Equality; Ministry of Employment and Investment; Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration; and the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture. At the federal level, Human Resources Development Canada, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and Status of Women Canada all have a role to play. The Canadian government has been under the leadership of various political parties and their policies change from time to time. In addition, the government has been under constant restructuring, resulting in an evolution of the roles, functions and services of the various departments over time. There is not a single policy addressing the needs of immigrants, nor is there a central body coordinating the work of all the parties involved; it is not an exaggeration to conclude that the current situation of programming is chaotic, and a commitment on the part
of the government to improve the condition of racial minority immigrant women is lacking.

Throughout the years, government policies and services have evolved and it is beyond the scope of this study to provide an historical account or a comprehensive and all-inclusive list of government policies and programs related to the focal problem. Instead, I will focus on presenting and critically reviewing those current policies and services which I find most relevant to the employment issues of Chinese immigrant women.

Language Training

In the array of government services available to immigrants, various studies have concurred that none is more important than language training. As Sheila Arnopoulos noted in her 1979 study on the problems of immigrant women, the lack of knowledge of one of the official languages is a serious obstacle to entry and advancement in the labour market (Arnopoulos, 1979).

Provision of official language training by the Canadian government has a long history, but even up to the present, the government does not have a comprehensive federal policy on language training for immigrant women. Criticisms have persisted since the inception of the language programs. For example, Seward and McDade (1988) criticized the language training in the 1980s as inconsistent, often inaccessible, and not adequately meeting the needs of immigrant women. Funding for the training came from different sources of federal departments, with different underlying philosophies as to its
purpose and objective. The mandate of the major language program (the Purchase of Training Option of the Job Entry program of the Canadian Jobs Strategy), funded by Employment and Immigration Canada (now Human Resources Development Canada), was to provide language training only to those immigrants whom the government deemed were destined for the labour force. Immigrants who were judged by the local Canada Employment officials as unlikely to go into the labour force were deemed ineligible and, in the early years, women were often excluded. As well, certain classifications of immigrants, such as the large numbers of people sponsored by their family, were ineligible for this program. And again, many women who arrived in Canada under the family sponsored immigration category were excluded from this federal system.

In addition to the restrictive eligibility requirements, there were other problems with these language training programs (Baril, 1994). In many places, there were long waiting lists and sometimes people had to wait months before getting in. The program was a "time based program"; that is students were given a set amount of time - 24 weeks - to complete regardless of language abilities or the level at which they started. The 24 week duration is obviously too short for an immigrant to learn enough English to get a job, except jobs that are low-paying, menial and require little language fluency. In addition, training was delivered through a vast array of mechanisms and programs, and usually monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness were minimal.
In 1992 the federal government dramatically restructured their second language training delivery and a new, two-component structure for English language training was introduced. The first component, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), constituting approximately 80% of language training funds, is available to all categories of immigrants regardless of their labour market intentions. Refugee claimants and Canadian citizens are excluded and only immigrants who need basic language training are eligible for LINC. The training is delivered by Citizenship and Immigration as a part of immigrant settlement programming and is not connected to labour market language training. Only very basic language training is provided to enable the participants to acquire survival English with no job-related component. It is ironic to note that despite all the recommendations for an increase in the number of weeks for language training, the new federal program routinely grants learners much less time to learn English than 24 weeks - it can be as low as 8 weeks!

The second component, Labour Market Language Training (LMLT), was delivered by Human Resources Development Canada and provided beyond basic level, skill-related language training. Eligibility for this training included the intention to enter or re-enter the labour force, and knowledge of English at least at the LINC exit level, yet, there was no "bridge" between LINC and LMLT, both by design and in terms of service delivery. Due to limited funding, the program only reached less than 10% of immigrants.
Various issues and criticisms have been raised since the inception of LINC and LMLT. Their impact on effecting the ghettoization of immigrant women in the labour market is obvious. The division of language training for immigrants into settlement and labour market program areas and the overwhelming focus on newcomers have distorted the delivery of the training. While it is important to afford newcomers the opportunity to gain sufficient language fluency to function in society, the majority are not well-served as they only acquire a minimum level of fluency, a level too low for success in most jobs. Noting that the majority of adult immigrants are intended to enter the labour market, placing the language training focus for newcomers on social integration to the exclusion of economic integration sets the stage for their marginalization in the labour force.

Under the existing system, racial minority immigrant women who have obtained their citizenship are not permitted to take the LINC program funded by the federal government. For those who lack sufficient language skills to enter the work force or who have been trapped in menial positions, their citizenship becomes a barrier to accessing language training opportunities. This policy exacerbates the ghettoization of immigrant women in dead-end occupations.

There are other restrictions for racial minority immigrant women in accessing training. Under LINC, there is no coherent income support structure and the provision of income support to immigrants needing language training
is badly fragmented. Learners who need financial support are barred from accessing training. While there is provision under LINC for child-minding services, there are no standards for the purchase of these services and no guidelines for allocation of sufficient resources. The provision of quality child care services is vital to making LINC accessible to racial minority immigrant women.

The existing language training programs funded by the federal government are inadequate in assisting immigrant women to improve their disadvantaged position in the labour market. Instead, the provision of basic, minimal language training and the exclusion of citizens perpetuates the marginalization of many racial minority immigrant women destined for the workforce.

From a feminist power analysis, language is a significant constituent of power; and without language fluency, racial minority immigrant women are silenced and their voices not heard. Language is a means to discriminate against racial minority immigrant women who learn to believe that their "deficiencies" are the cause for their miseries, and a justification for their concentration in occupational ghettos. Accent is another social construct created by the dominant groups to exclude racial minority immigrant women from accessing more desirable positions that local people want. The government programs and services on language training play a role in perpetuating the inequities that racial minority immigrant women encounter.
Language is a major, but not the only, obstacle to entry and advancement in the labour market. Racial minority immigrant women with language skills are not free from systemic discrimination. There are other institutional barriers sanctioned by the government perpetuating the employment difficulties of racial minority immigrant women, both English-speaking and non-English speaking alike. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the implications of existing programs on employment training and skills upgrading for racial minority immigrant women's transition into the labour market.

**Employment Training and Skills Upgrading**

Government funded employment programs have been criticized as short-term, focusing on traditional limited-income occupations and reinforcing the segregated division of labour (Mckeen, 1987). Recommendations from studies on the needs of immigrant women suggest that the government should divert more resources to increase and improve the employment programs to assist their labour market transition (Bhagavatula, 1989; Canada, Department of the Secretary of State, 1981). I further argue that the effectiveness of government programming is questionable if the fundamental labour market structure with its existing power relations and discriminatory practices remains unchanged, and racial minority immigrant women can barely benefit from it to improve their situation. Before I further my discussion, in the following paragraphs, some of the major government initiatives in employment training will be introduced to
provide the basic information to our understanding of the focal problem.

Throughout the decades, there is little evidence that the government has a commitment to improving the disadvantaged position of racial minority immigrant women in the labour force. The federal government, under the pressure of an increasing unemployment rate and a demand to develop a skilled labour force, has, throughout the past decade, developed various policies and programs in response to these public concerns. Those who trace the evolution of government programming will be amazed, as well as confused, at the array of services developed: initiatives always with new titles but no new contents. The following description is far from a comprehensive list, but a selection of the more relevant programs and services addressing racial minority immigrant women's employment issues.

The National Training Program (NTP) of 1982 emanated from the National Training Act of 1982. The major goal of the program was to "ensure industry access to the skills required for expansion, and to assist individuals to obtain the skills they needed to be more productive and to compete in the labour market" (Canada, Employment and Immigration, 1983). Occupations of national importance were to be nationally determined, and the varied program options of the new training program were designed to improve the productivity of workers. There were three components of the National Training Program: National Institutional Training, which purchased courses from community colleges and vocational schools; National Industrial Training, which subsidized
employers to train workers on site; and the Skills Growth Fund, which provided money to provinces and non-profit organizations for capital expenses in support of training. At a first glance, under the NTP, programs targeting racial minority immigrant women were minimal.

In 1985, the NTP of 1982 was replaced by the Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS), with the aim of helping those employed in jobs that were at risk, and retraining those who were jobless so that they might be better prepared for jobs that might become available. The CJS had six components: Job Development, Job Entry, Skills Shortages, Skill Investment, Community Futures, and Innovations (Daenzer, 1990). Among the six components, the programs more relevant to immigrant women were the Job Development program and Job Entry program.

The Job Development Program targeted the long-term unemployed and on-the-job employment experience was provided through a project or an individually subsidized job. The Job Entry Program had a double-focus: school-to-work transition for youth and the home-to-work transition for women entering or reentering the paid work force. A combination of projects, cooperative education ventures, and the purchase of training were utilized to facilitate this transition. As for the other components, the Skills Shortages program trained workers in skills that had been nationally designated as being in short supply and necessary to the economy; the Skill Investment program trained those persons who were employed but whose jobs were threatened by economic or
technological change; the Community Futures funded projects which generated employment for residents in a community threatened by the loss of industry; and the CJS Innovations provided funding to interested individuals or organizations for the development of pilot programs that would lead to job creation. Each program had a "designated group policy", an equity clause that encouraged employers to pay attention to members of the four equity groups: women, Native Canadians, visible minorities, and the disabled.

In 1989, there were further changes in the federal programming with the introduction of the Labour Force Development Strategy. The two programs most relevant to immigrant women are Project Based Training (PBT) and the Employment Assistance Component which encompasses Job Finding Clubs, Community-Based Employment Assistance and Outreach projects. PBT targets participants facing serious labour market barriers and employment training is provided through a combination of classroom training and workplace-based (on-the-job) training.

Despite minor differences in these federal programs, similarities are found among the NTP, CJS and LFDS in that they are based on the same ideology: the programs implicitly reinforce the view that the person, the worker, has a problem or a deficit; and training or retraining is necessary to increase their productivity and adaptability to meet the changing needs of the workplace. The problem of these skills training/cultural training models, as discussed in Chapter Two, is that by blaming the victim, the real issues and the roots of the
problems are concealed. Daenzer (1990) asserts that the government legitimates the idea of "individual fault" and obscures the state-induced "market-deficiencies". The government defines labour force needs in terms of training and not in terms of jobs. By focusing on the supply of labour rather than increasing the demand for jobs, federal programming has not stimulated long-term labour market stability through demand measures and workers remain uncertain about securing employment after the training.

In various ways, these federal initiatives of employment training fail to address the employment needs of racial minority immigrant women, but serve to perpetuate their disadvantaged position in the economy and to exploit their labour.

By setting various eligibility parameters, many racial minority immigrant women are excluded from accessing training opportunities. For example, the CJS Job Development program was only eligible for people who had been unemployed for twenty-four of the last thirty weeks. An entire class of underemployed racial minority immigrant women who had to work due to economic necessities and who were engaged in casual and temporary low-status jobs had no chance of stabilizing in the primary labour sector. This group of low-cost labour was essential to serve the interests of the capitalist economy, and they were deprived of the right for development. Public welfare policy such as the CJS reinforced unequal power relations and labour-force stratification (Daenzer, 1990).
Similarly, in the 1990s, an increasing number of the LFDS Project Based Training programs targeted only unemployment insurance recipients. There has been a continual erosion of Consolidated Revenue Funds (CRF) available to the Human Resources Department for programming and training for non-UI recipients (Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1993). Reductions in funding by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) to labour market training programs in British Columbia have amounted to $126 million between fiscal years 1990/91 and 1995/96. A total of $101 million in Consolidated Revenue Funds was cut from HRDC's expenditures in BC (BC, Immigration Policy Branch, 1997) which had a major impact on resources for the labour market training of immigrant women. The new Employment Insurance Legislation came into effect on July 1st, 1996. The Legislation severely restricts client access to training programs. In particular, immigrants are no longer eligible for seats on training programs funded by HRDC, unless they are in receipt of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits, or have been eligible for EI benefits in the last three years. Immigrants, men and women, seeking to enter the labour market for the first time are not eligible for EI and thus they cannot access HRDC training programs.

Language is another obstacle for racial minority immigrant women to access training. Most of the federal programming and training have requirements for official language fluency, and only a few of the programs offer a language assistance component. In addition, as stated earlier, the current
federal language programs only provide very basic language training and there is a huge gap between the survival language training and employment language training needed to prepare immigrant women for the job market. Without the required language proficiency, immigrant women become ineligible for many training options. They only have access to a few training programs focusing on entry-level work. Consequently, racial minority immigrant women remain in jobs few other Canadians want; work that restricts them to a life of marginality and deprivation.

One of the major criticisms is that the federal programming reinforces a segregated gender-biased labour market which places women at a disadvantaged position (McKeen, 1987). Women are trained in traditional low-paying occupations such as clerical work and sales. There are few programs offering women training in technical and non-traditional occupations, and most of them are trained in soft skills such as secretarial, health care, and office skills. This often results in women taking jobs that pay only half as much as technical, male-dominated jobs; and for many racial minority immigrant women who have English as a second language, their situations are even worse, as many of them become trapped in tenuous low-income jobs.

The former Department of Employment and Immigration adopted the Designated Group Policy in its programming, with the objective of eliminating the barriers preventing the full productive contribution of the designated groups (women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities and people with disabilities) in the
labour market. The Designated Group Policy has been criticized by the equity
groups as a token gesture which is unenforceable as the employer is under no
obligation to alter their discriminatory hiring and training practices to reflect the
best interests of members of the equity groups, who are denied equal access
to valued employment and meaningful training opportunities. What is even
worse is that the Designated Group Policy which has been effective since 1988
was no longer in effect under the new Human Resources Development
Canada, according to letters from the federal government departments to
equity-seeking groups (Braundy, 1997).

At the provincial level, employment training programs provided under BC
Benefits by the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training are for income
assistance clients. Immigrants who do not apply for income assistance, those
precluded from doing so by reason of Family Class sponsorship requirements
for example, are not eligible for the training programs provided under BC
Benefits.

At the time of this study, Settlement Renewal is underway whereby
Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) intends to transfer responsibility for
the administration of immigrant settlement services and funds to the province.
At the same time, the federal and BC provincial governments are negotiating
a devolution of labour market training responsibilities. As to date, it is doubtful
these changes will help to advance the labour market situation of racial minority
immigrant women.
Accreditation of International Credentials

For years, accreditation of international credentials has been identified as one of the barriers perpetuating the disadvantaged position of immigrants in the labour market. Despite the efforts of various advocacy groups urging the governments to address the needs of immigrants, little improvement has been made.

Many racial minority immigrant women are admitted to Canada under the "point system", on the strength of their language, education, and work experiences: skills and credentials which allegedly are in demand in the Canadian economy. But when they encounter the local labour market, their overseas credentials become "foreign credentials", a term that invariably implies a sense of inferiority. For racial minority immigrant women seeking accreditation of academic and professional qualifications, the greatest frustration facing them, especially if they are from Third World countries, is that their education and professional training is not granted equivalency, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with that of Canadians. For example, an immigrant woman with a bachelor's degree might be asked to retake her undergraduate degree and her prior education only considered to have the equivalency of first year university education in Canada. Merlet (1989) has studied the accreditation issue in British Columbia and readers interested in this area can refer to her study for more detailed information. Those in power, lacking understanding of other countries, assess racial minority immigrant
women's credentials and presume that their qualifications are less desirable; and this constitutes a hindrance in their career path.

"Canadian experience" and "foreign credentials" are convenient excuses for not hiring a racial minority immigrant woman. Without recognition of credentials, there is no job, without a job, there is no Canadian experience, and so goes the Catch 22 situation (Merlet, 1989). The irony is, sometimes the reason the immigrant woman is accepted into Canada, at least for those admitted under the independent category, is the very reason she is rejected in the local labour market. Very qualified people cannot find jobs and the only jobs available to racial minority immigrant women are those Canadians do not want.

In Canada, education falls within the provincial jurisdiction while employment and immigration is the jurisdiction of the federal government. But despite the efforts of various advocacy groups urging the governments to take action in addressing the issue of evaluation of international credentials, there is no effective central body or mechanism or means, accessible to both immigrants, employers and admission personnel, whereby the nature and extent of equivalency of international credentials can be assessed.

A recent breakthrough is the opening of the International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) in 1996 in BC which provides credential evaluation services to clients holding post-secondary educational documents for studies outside Canada. However, the effectiveness of the service is questioned since immigrant clients still have to "requalify", as many educational institutions,
professional associations, unions, employers as well as governments do not recognize the ICES evaluations.

Lack of employment opportunities for many racial minority immigrant women stems from lack of recognition of their professional qualifications earned in overseas institutions, and also stems from devaluation of the experience, knowledge and skills that women acquire outside the paid labour force. "Foreign credentials" and "Canadian experience" remain code words for discrimination against racial minority immigrant women. To advance the disadvantaged position of racial minority immigrant women in the labour market, governments should take the lead to promote initiatives that incorporate accreditation of international credentials and assessment of prior learning and experience. However, it is unrealistic to assume that international credentials recognition will ensure equal access to employment opportunities. I argue that there are other obstacles to racial minority immigrant women's labour market transition; discriminatory hiring practices and inequity in the workplace, for example.

Employment Equity

Many racial minority immigrant women have stories of personal incidents of racism and sexism that contributed to denying access to training and employment opportunities. Nevertheless, these personal experiences are difficult to document or prove, and are sometimes seen as independent incidents of aberration. The view that discrimination is an aberration obscures
the existence of systemic discrimination, which involves a structural bias saturating all institutions and practices in our society (Braundy and Grzetic, 1995).

Despite a general denial of racism and sexism, empirical data has presented a convincing argument that structural bias is a reality. Racial minority women are underrepresented in many occupations such as trades, technology, construction, public administration and defence, as well as professional occupations (Human Resources Development Canada, 1994). They are concentrated in positions such as sewing machine operators, general farm workers, kitchen and food service helpers, domestic workers, in occupations characterized by low-income, low-status and little potential for advancement. Neither do racial minority immigrant women achieve pay equity. In general, the earnings of women employed on a full-time, full-year basis in 1991 were just 70% those of comparable men (Ghalam, 1993). The earnings of Chinese women in Canada was just 62% those of comparable men (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994). Intervention strategies at a structural level are necessary to redress the inequities racial minority immigrant women encounter in the labour market.

The Employment Equity Act, targeted at four groups who are often referred to as "designated group members", was first introduced in 1986 and was later replaced in 1996. The four equity groups are women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people and visible minorities. Employment equity is a
strategy that is developed to address the fact that discrimination exists in hiring, training and promotion practices in most corporations and companies. The purpose is to ensure fair and equitable access to training and employment opportunities, to remove the barriers that prevent the participation of the four designated groups in the Canadian labour force, and to ensure that these groups achieve a degree of employment which is at least proportionate to their representation in the workforce as defined by qualification, eligibility and geography.

Responsibility for employment equity at the federal level is shared by Human Resources Development (HRD), the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and the Public Service Commission (PSC). Three employment equity programs have been established by the federal government: Employment Equity in the Federal Public Service, The Legislated Employment Equity Program, and the Federal Contractors Program.

Despite the existence of employment equity legislation and initiatives, their effectiveness and accomplishments are being challenged. The new Act explicitly prohibits the imposition of "quotas" on employers and employers are asked to set their own goals and to "try their best". Employment equity policy has been criticized for its lack of specific goals, timetables, systematic monitoring mechanisms, and effective sanctions for non-compliance (Coalition of Visible Minority Women, 1988). Implementation of the policy via lobbying for
voluntary initiatives rather than regulation and imposition of penalties is found to be ineffective to change occupational inequity. It is indeed an irony to find that the federal government itself has a poor record in terms of hiring and promoting racial minorities and other members of the equity groups.

To achieve equity in the workplace, the development of a national employment equity strategy, mandatory affirmative action, employment equity legislation with some teeth in terms of more heavy penalties, and an effective monitoring/enforcement/evaluation system are urgently needed, or else, members of the four equity groups will continue to be victimized by discrimination in the system.

Sites of oppression exist not only in the workplace. Racist and sexist practices are developed and rooted in the playground, in schools, in the curriculum, in the university, in the media, in the family and in other government institutions as well as the workplace (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993). Employment equity issues should not be considered as segregated from their broader context. Commitment of the government to address the problems of racial minority immigrant women and other most exploited groups starts with an acknowledgement of systemic discrimination and the development of concrete measures which give effect to the principles of equity and justice.

**Child Care**

Like many other women in Canada, racial minority immigrant women
continue to face obstacles in the labour market, obstacles that are not addressed by the joint efforts of provincial and federal strategies. One major obstacle, identified decades ago, is the unavailability of high-quality childcare services which thwart even the most ambitious career goals (Daenzer, 1990). Social policy always remains so greatly behind times; and the crucial role of childcare policies in facilitating equality of the sexes in the workplace and in the household, remains a controversy with little resolution (National Council of Welfare, 1988).

Like other government policies and programming, child care in Canada is a fragmented series of programs and services which have evolved over a period of time. Criticisms of the existing system include: a critical shortage of quality, affordable, culturally sensitive child care services available to meet the needs of parents, especially those with atypical work hours, including shiftwork, weekends, and part-time hours; inadequacy of standards meaning quality of child care is unknown throughout the country; concentration of female workers in daycare positions and little recognition of the profession in terms of low status, low wages and benefits, resulting in high staff turnover and difficulty in recruitment and retention of qualified staff; the fragmentation of responsibilities between ministries and little coordination in the planning, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and expansion of services and so forth (British Columbia, Task Force on Child care, 1991; Milne, 1993).

Government subsidized and licensed child care is only one of the
options in child care policies, though it captures most of the attention. There are other policy options available for government manipulation, such as childcare expense deductions, subsidies to daycare providers, child subsidies such as the family allowance, parental leave, "wage" subsidies to the parent and so on. Each policy option has a different impact and benefits different groups of women: women from different socio-economic-cultural backgrounds, women from different geographical locations, women as service providers and mothers (Ferguson, 1991). For example, for mothers who opt for staying at home, direct payments in the form of wage or salary may be more supportive; for a double-income family using a nanny, an unlimited tax deduction is a preferable option; and for carers in the licensed sector, direct grants to improve their working conditions provide the best form of support. The urgency of the child care issue and the demand for government commitment and coordination have been articulated in various studies (British Columbia, Task Force on Child Care, 1991; Seward and McDade, 1988). Similarly, its significant impact on women's labour market participation has been repeatedly reiterated (Morley, 1986). The presence of children, especially pre-school age children, is generally regarded as the most important determinant of the labour force participation of women. To take care of the children, very often, women are compelled to take part-time as opposed to full-time jobs, which has inhibited them from acquiring the continuous work experience and training that are significant to promotion and advancement. Childrearing responsibilities may
restrict women's labour market mobility, inhibit their earnings and occupational attainment.

Despite the urgency of the issue and the availability of various policy options, financial constraints and current deficits are always given as the principle reasons to justify inactive and ineffective government intervention in child care. A more thorough analysis reveals the underlying philosophical and political ideologies behind the scene which perpetuate women's disadvantaged position.

Because quality child care is expensive, the government has an interest in promoting women's primary goals and responsibilities as being marriage, family and children. The old mystique said mothers should stay home with their children, while fathers are the breadwinners; the new mystique says mothers should try to compete at work while raising children: the exemplary woman in the 90s is the image of a "supermom", carrying baby, briefcase, and purse (Berry, 1993). A woman's individual rights and responsibilities are socially defined, and across cultures, the ideology of familism emphasizes the importance of women's responsibilities for children and family. There are those who reduce their labour market participation due to care-giving functions; but because of economic necessity and choice, many women are struggling between their family responsibilities and paid work. Yet, regardless of their status, income, or hours outside the home, employed mothers spend as much time at household labour as unpaid housewives did decades ago. The
traditional family ideal legitimates unequal gender relations and patriarchy keeps many women at a disadvantaged position in the labour market. The view that child care is a private, family issue instead of a public responsibility reinforces a lack of government commitment and intervention, which continues to perpetuate women's employment difficulties.

Developing strategies to address women's unequal situation requires a fundamental and direct challenge to the unequal power relations, and a challenge to the disparity between private matters and public concerns. The government, through various policy manipulations, exerts an important impact on the lives of women; and plays an equally significant role in addressing their problems and improving their status. The private is public and the personal is political.

From feminist perspectives, the issue of child care is actually an issue of gender power relations, rather than an issue of who is more suitable to provide care (Berry, 1993). The unbalanced gender relations define women's caring role and their responsibilities at home. The history of child care indicates that children have been taken care of by mothers, fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, other members of extended families, nannies, nurseries, neighbours and boarding schools; and the development of the children, for better or for worse, depends on the quality of care. Today, the mother-care tradition is subject to debate, and a more critical review of the relations between gender roles, child care, and infant and child development is necessary. A
fundamental change in the traditional gender roles which allows more fluidity is important to advocacy for women's rights and greater opportunity for women in the labour market.

I further argue that race and class differences also play a role in the child care issue. Women who have the resources can hire other less resourceful women, and in the case of the Canadian labour market, usually racial minority women, to perform the caring role. Many women from South East Asia countries leave behind their families and children, enter Canada as contracted domestic workers. Unequal relations inherent in gender, class and race define the caring role of the less powerful. We need to challenge the unequal power relations organized through the social relations of gender, race and class in order to improve the status of women, meaning all women, in the labour market.

Summary

Racial minority immigrant women, coming from all parts of the world, with diverse backgrounds and cultural knowledge, help to enrich this multicultural society. They also bring economic talents, skills and resources which help build a thriving and competitive economy. Nevertheless, their contributions are hardly commemorated, and their position in the labour market too often remains a lifetime of marginality.

The government lacks a commitment and effective programming to ensure racial minority immigrant women's equitable and full participation in the
economy and other aspects of Canadian life - social, cultural and political. The government does not have a central body responsible for immigrants' employment issues. The government does not have a major strategic labour market integration plan for immigrants. There is no appropriate structure coordinating the work of all government departments and funding for immigration settlement and integration is scant. The existing public policies and programs - those affecting racial minority immigrant women's labour market integration - fail to address their needs. In this chapter, I have examined the limitations of government programs in the areas of language training, employment training and skills upgrading, accreditation of international credentials, employment equity and child care. In its policy and program planning, the government fails to challenge the roots of the problems, the structural barriers which perpetuate racial minority immigrant women's disadvantaged position.

In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology of the present study on Chinese immigrant women's experience in the labour market.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

This present study on Chinese immigrant women's experience in the Canadian labour market was first initiated in the spring of 1995. The first stage (five months from January to May 1995) involved ongoing consultation with thesis advisors, literature review, formulation of research questions, methodology design, obtaining ethics approval from the university, contacts and interviews with participants, and data analysis. After the initial five months' work, I started working full-time and was unable to concentrate on this study. Later, due to health problems, I had to apply for a sick leave from school. It was in January of 1998 that I resumed working on this study again. In this second stage (from January to March 1998), I did an update of the first three chapters, adding new information based on my ongoing study and involvement in the employment field, and completed the remaining four chapters.

The following sections include a detailed description of the research design, participant recruitment procedure, interview process, data collection and analysis.

Design

The preceding literature review has shown that the issues and difficulties faced by Chinese immigrant women are areas that have been neglected in social work research and policy formation. To fill this gap, this study aimed at correcting both the invisibility and distortion of racial minority immigrant
women's experience, striving to improve women's unequal social position. The purpose of this research was to disclose aspects of the reality of Chinese immigrant women's employment experience, to explore the factors affecting their transition into the labour market, and to identify the gaps between the lived experience of the women and the existing government policies and programs, thus informing more effective intervention. The study posed the following research question:

What are the factors affecting the labour market experience of Chinese immigrant women, both in their job seeking process and in the workplace?

To explore the lived experience of Chinese immigrant women, I selected a qualitative method from a feminist perspective. Qualitative research methods permit researchers to record and understand what people's experiences mean to them in their own terms rather than presupposing what the results will be (Patton, 1990). The feminist perspective provides for more indepth interaction and co-creation of results (Herbert, 1994). These features coincided with my intention of listening to the voices of Chinese immigrant women and understanding the realities of their lives from their own perspectives. A self-critical feminist stance also alerted me to the power relations in the research process, guided me against imposing my own ideas on the participants, and helped to achieve a way of knowing through mutual exchange of ideas (Gluck and Patai, 1991).
Participants and Recruitment Procedures

A qualitative method emphasizes depth of information and seeks to generate rich knowledge about the focal issue under investigation. The intent of this study was to collect data from Chinese immigrant women knowledgeable about the topic and participants were recruited on the basis of their related knowledge and experience. The current research on Chinese immigrant women's transition into the Canadian labour market used purposeful, snowball sampling to select participants based on the following criteria:

1. Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong residing in Canada for at least two years;
2. Eighteen years of age or older;
3. Have job seeking or/and work experience in the local labour market.

It is necessary to point out that Chinese immigrant women are a heterogeneous group in terms of country of origin, socio-economic background, education and training, occupation and work experience, language, age, marital status and number of children, length of residence in Canada, immigrant status and category, and so forth. Their labour market experience may vary because of their different material circumstances and educational attainment. It is beyond the scope of this exploratory study to present a complete review of the labour market experience of all Chinese immigrant women, considering their differences. Nevertheless, to embrace the diversity of experiences, I invited Chinese immigrant women from different occupational backgrounds to inform
this study, including:

1. women working in factories;
2. women in office/customer service work;
3. women working as domestic workers;
4. women in professional occupations.

In the literature, there is no preferred sampling size for qualitative research. Qualitative research usually focuses on small samples that are purposefully selected (Patton, 1990). The intent of this exploratory study was to examine the labour market experience of eight Chinese immigrant women in Vancouver, two from each of the four occupational subgroups listed above. This study makes no claims to the statistical representativeness of the sample. The experiences shared by the participants in this study are part of what constitutes the totality of Chinese immigrant women's experience in the Canadian labour market (Anderson and Lynam, 1987).

My work experience in the employment field and contacts with the Chinese community provided me access to potential participants. However, in my previous experience, I had limited contacts with Chinese women who are factory and domestic workers. Assistance was sought through personal contacts with workers in various social services agencies or organizations (see Appendix A) to invite referrals of potential participants. I purposefully made the contacts at a personal level instead of soliciting an agency's participation. This would allow myself as the researcher to keep an impartial stance in conducting
the research, and allow me to remain free from being accountable to any organizations involved. Agencies and organizations relying on government funding might have a concern about any "undesirable research findings", especially those relating to an analysis and critique of government policies and sponsored programs. Independent studies place the interests of women as the primary concern; to ensure the voice and experience of women is authentically reflected, and the roots of their problems uncovered. Ongoing consultation with my thesis advisers, Dr. Kathryn McCannell and Dr. Paule McNicoll, from the School of Social Work and approval obtained from the University of British Columbia Behavioral Sciences Screening Committee ensured that the study complied with research ethical standards and the rights of the participants were honoured (Appendices B and B.1.).

To recruit participants for this study, a letter of invitation was directly sent to potential participants or distributed through the workers, introducing the purpose, objective and methods of the research (Appendices C and C.1.). A sample consent form (Appendices D and D.1.) and interview questions (Appendices E and E.1.) were also included for participants' information. Follow-up telephone contacts were made to clarify concerns, to confirm participation and to arrange for an interview.

A total of eight letters were sent out and all eight potential participants, knowing my background and understanding the purpose of this study, willingly agreed to share their experience. They consented to participate voluntarily in
this study as they felt that their stories could contribute to helping other Chinese immigrant women in their labour market transition. Five of the women whom I contacted directly knew about me before the research invitation, with the length of time of our acquaintance ranging from two to six years. The other three women were briefed by the referrer and I also had the opportunity to introduce myself during the telephone contacts. All of the eight participants selected met the criteria of this study. I am greatly honoured to have had the opportunity to share the life journey of these women, and I am equally thankful for their trust and assistance.

I would like to introduce the women who shared their personal experiences with me. Some of them requested that their names be used, while others preferred using alias names to protect their identity and to ensure confidentiality. I respected their choices. The eight women who participated in this study were Rita, Janet, Joan, Hannah, Audrey, Alice, Lai Ping and Beth. The following demographics will provide some general background information about these women as a group without revealing their identities.

The women are all of Chinese descent and immigrated from Hong Kong. Their length of stay in Canada ranges from four to nineteen years. Five of them immigrated on the independent category, and the other three were admitted on family class. Their ages range from 33 years to 50 years; three women are single with no children, one is married and currently pregnant, the other four are married with children whose ages range from 4 years to 24 years. Two of
the women have some high school education, four of them have completed high school or post-secondary training, one has a university degree and one has a graduate degree.

All of them had prior work experience in their country of origin and started to look for jobs shortly after their landing at Vancouver. They all have job seeking and work experiences in the local labour market, working in Chinese owned businesses as well as "mainstream" companies. Three of them have attended government funded training programs such as a job finding club and project-based training. At the time of the interviews, the eight women in this study were all employed, although uncertainties about the future were also expressed. I will present a more detailed description of their individual stories in Chapter Five to provide a better understanding of the difficulties they encountered in their transition into the Canadian labour market.

Interview Process and Data Collection

To remain in the realm of qualitative and feminist research methodology, I chose to use in-depth interviews for information gathering. Interviewing provides opportunities to generate a large amount of data to inform this inquiry with the small sample size. As Reinharz (1992) has suggested, "interviewing is also consistent with many women's interests in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (p.20). The participants were engaged in an interactive interview process that allowed for clarification, discussion, and exchange of ideas. An interview guide (see Appendices E and
E.1.) was used to facilitate the dialogue process. The interview guide approach is useful to keep the interaction focused, but at the same time allows flexibility and individual perspectives to emerge (Anderson and Jack, 1991). The interview guide evolved as a result of my own social work experience working with racial minority immigrant women regarding their employment concerns and my previous research experience in the same area. It was also shaped by the literature review and the recommendations of my thesis advisors. In addition to sociodemographic information, the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions with probes to cover different aspects of the topic. The interview guide was not used as a standardized list as the focus was on the process rather than on the right questions (Anderson and Jack, 1991). The participants were asked to share their stories and experience in the Canadian labour market and their perception of the factors affecting their labour market transition. Questions for discussion and clarification arose from the information shared by the participants. I learned from the research experience of Oxner (1992):

Initially, I had more questions, but found that richer information could be obtained by having the women in the last few interviews basically tell their "recovery story" and focus my questions from the content of the information they presented (p.43).

However, I also cautioned myself not to assume that all women are used to interviewing or equally eloquent in expressing their ideas. I did find that my genuine interests in immigrant women's issues, my social work training and interviewing skills, my gender and cultural identity all contributed to building rapport and supporting an interview process where the voices of women could
be heard. To avoid any communication barrier due to language proficiency, the participants were offered a choice of conducting the interview in either English or their native language, Cantonese or Mandarin, as they chose. As a result, all eight women preferred to use Cantonese during the interview.

The interviews were conducted in a place and at the date and time chosen by the participants. Two interviews took place in my home; one participant chose to meet at my office; two participants were interviewed at their home, two at the participant's workplace and the other at a workers' union office. The principle was to find a convenient place where the participants felt safe and relaxed. Transportation and child care expenses were offered, though after the interviews, none of the participants requested a reimbursement.

The interviews ranged in length from one and a half hours to two and a half hours, sometimes followed by conversations that continued outside the formal setting, by going for lunch at a nearby restaurant or having refreshments at home. The relaxed atmosphere tended to generate even further meaningful discussion of the focal issues.

Two methods, audiotaping and note taking were planned as means to record the interview. I discussed with each participant and asked her permission to use an audio-tape. Where possible (without objection from the participant), the interview was audiotaped, transcribed and later translated from the participant's native language to English. Where signs of rejection were detected and taping was not possible, notes were taken during the interview.
and then transcribed and translated afterwards. Audiotaping was preferred in this research as it offered a much more accurate account of the women's words. All except one of the participants agreed to audiotaping the interview process. During the interviews, one woman experienced painful memories that caused some tears. I stopped the tape, waited, took some time to debrief the feelings, and continued the interview when she felt she was ready. I believed it was important to achieve my own agenda, and at the same time, to respect the needs of the women.

All the seven audio tapes were entirely transcribed and selected paragraphs were later translated from Cantonese to English according to the emerging themes. To ensure accurate translation of the data, I sought assistance from a certified and professional English teacher who was fluent in both Chinese and English languages.

The primary data generated from the interviews was subject to an interpretive process where the commonalities of the women's experience were allowed to surface. Concepts and methods from the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) were applied to this research to draw out and identify the main themes as derived from the participants' narratives.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) discuss the importance of credibility in qualitative research. In this study, these issues were attended to in the following ways: a detailed documentation of the research process, procedures, literature review and field notes; audiotaping of all except one of the interviews;
and the researcher's fluency in the participants' native language ensured accurate understanding of the women's words.

In addition, in this study, credibility was enhanced by a process of "co-creation" of data and results (Herbert, 1994). This co-creation of results between the researcher and the researched was achieved through an interactive interview process and the participant validation of the data analysis.

The notion of value free objectivity in more conventional research methods has been challenged by feminist researchers and subjectivity in the process of enquiry is an existential fact (Gluck and Patai, 1991). Nevertheless, to minimize the effects of personal bias on the data, the researcher's self-consciousness and self-criticism of her own subjectivity helped to enhance credibility of the research. Being an immigrant woman myself and in the journey of making my transition into the Canadian labour market, I shared many of the employment concerns of other Chinese immigrant women, and my perspectives on the focal issues were constantly affected by my own experiences and perceptions. Moreover, the impact of feminism on my interpretation and analysis of social problems could not be ignored.

Acknowledging these factors, to minimize personal bias, the interview was designed as a process of reciprocal interaction, and opportunities were provided to clarify the perception of the participants and to negotiate the meaning of subjective experiences. During the interview process, I guarded myself against any opportunities to impose my own analysis on the participant;
and in the case of different opinions, I recorded the discussion and ensured that the women's authentic self was represented. I must acknowledge that at times when the participant engaged in self-blaming for her adjustment difficulties in the local labour market, I chose to ask specific questions clarifying the situation, or to present an alternative perspective, bridging the gap between the personal problems and the social context of these women. Three women acknowledged that they gained new perspectives on their experiences and expressed feelings of elation and empowerment with these opportunities of sharing and exchanging ideas.

There is continuous debate over the purposes of feminist research (Gottlieb and Bombyk, 1987). My position is to keep a balance between various objectives, with the development of knowledge as an immediate priority, and the improvement of women's status as an ultimate aim. Neither political purposes nor "truth seeking" should take precedence over one another. Consciousness raising, though not an overt objective of the research itself, can be a by-product achieved in the process, empowering women and challenging the systemic inequities.

Co-creation of results of the study was also achieved through the inclusion of women in the data analysis. In this study, due to the time lag between the initial and final stage of research work, out of the eight women who informed this study, I managed to contact only three of them through follow-up phone contacts. They provided valuable feedback on the provisional findings.
which helped me ascertain that my interpretation of the emerging themes accurately represented their experiences. Credibility of this study would be further enhanced should I have the opportunity to include the input of all eight women in the data analysis.

Inclusion of women at different stages of the research process not only helps verify the findings, it also complies with the feminist stance of honouring and empowering women. It is unrealistic to assume that women never disagree. As a researcher and social work practitioner, I am aware of my own views and convictions. The essence was to respect differences in order to achieve a richer understanding of the complexity of lived experience. In situations where consensus could not be reached, I adopted an approach Borland (1991) has suggested: to present the views of both the participants and the researcher.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

UNHEARD STORIES: WOMEN SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES

The women's narratives of their life experiences are the most powerful witnesses to the inequities they encountered. In this section, I have included excerpts from the stories of the eight women who courageously shared their experiences in the Canadian labour market. The women's subjective experiences allow us to adopt a different point of departure for the study of their experiences, to walk through the journeys they have embarked on, providing background information for the emerging themes in their life experiences.

Listening to these personal narratives, I found that there were themes that kept repeating or reappearing throughout the conversations. These were concerns and issues which held deep meaning to the individual woman. In the following section, I include a theme in terms of a title phrase, followed by a direct quote from the woman's narrative, to give an essence of each story. Some of the title phrases are creations of my own while others are direct quotations based on the women's narratives. There are themes that inter-relate with each other, and a more thorough discussion of these will be given in Chapter Six.
Janet: They do not count my previous experience and training

"We have the experience. So, I now tell you the main point. It is that no matter how experienced you are, even if you have a certificate in your country of origin, when you are here, they do not count your certificate (accredit the credentials). So basically there is a level, it is basically different. So, as you say, if I should want to be as glorious as I used to be, you must be out of your mind. So, you might as well plant both feet firmly on the ground, like me. As for me, I don't have such ambitions anymore."

For almost twenty years, Janet demonstrated her business skills and entrepreneurship by managing the family businesses, running a trading company in the first place and then a garment manufacturing factory. Graduated from high school, Janet continued to upgrade herself and received training in office and secretarial work and fashion design. She also received a certificate in garment production from a vocational training institute before her immigration.

Immigrated as an independent garment designer with her husband and two teenage children in 1989, Janet was confident that she could have a place in the local garment industry. Upon landing, Janet could not sit still but started looking for a job. She was prepared to start at the very entry level as she needed an income to support the family and to learn more about the local market. She was offered a seamstress job paid at a rate of $5.50 per hour in a small factory making high quality fashionable clothing. Actually, throughout her six years in the local labour market, Janet's experiences were confined to working in small sized factories. Janet learned a lot from her foreman, a highly skilled and well experienced tailor who, due to his language barriers, has been
trapped in this small Chinatown shop for years.

After working for two weeks, Janet was referred to work in a knitwear factory where she was told she would be able to earn as much as $80.00 per day. She worked for a week only to find that she could never possibly earn the said amount because no matter how hard she worked, the employer always had different means of preventing her from getting any extra dollars. Enraged at the unfair treatment, Janet returned to her first job and worked until she was referred to a supervisory position in a factory newly opened where she hoped her full potential could be realized. Nevertheless, with the many added duties and responsibilities, she was only paid $6.00 per hour. When her sister sought her assistance in sponsoring her family to immigrate to Canada, Janet changed her job again to work as a cutter and managed to get a slightly higher income, at $6.50 per hour. Janet worked for nine months when her friend, an entrepreneur immigrant, asked for her help to set up a manufacturing factory. Night and day she devoted herself to her job; yet to her frustration, when the immigration condition was removed (entrepreneur immigrants are required to start a business that creates jobs within a limited period of time), the employer laid off all the workers, closed down the factory, and Janet lost her job.

Getting tired of frequent job changes, Janet considered retraining. She searched for training opportunities which could assist her to advance in the garment industry, but there were none. She realized that her former training and previous experience were hardly recognized and to get a local certificate,
she had to start from scratch, taking basic sewing courses which she had done many years ago. Considering a change in career, Janet applied for a government sponsored program focusing on hospitality service. She was advised by the counsellor that her English was so good that she should have few problems in finding a job and therefore she did not need the training. She then applied for an early childhood education training program and was later informed that only those with prior experience could be admitted. In desperation, she considered a more generic program targeting women over 45, but was again unsuccessful as the program had already started.

Since all the doors were closed and no choices appeared, Janet found herself a cutter position in an unlicensed small factory. Her ability was quickly recognized by her boss and at the same time, caused the suspicions of her co-workers. Janet managed to receive a raise in her salary and is confident that with her skills, she will not be laid off. Nevertheless, she is equally certain that she will not be promoted to a better position and is also worried about losing her job because of the owner's mismanagement of the company.

Having chased after the wind for years, the only alternative Janet can think of is to start her own business should she have the resources and the local marketing network. Feeling drained and exhausted after years of overwork, Janet feels that her confidence is fading; at the age of 50, she wonders if she still has the energy and strength to climb another mountain ahead.
Lai Ping: Be united and make your voice heard.

"Actually at times, (if only) we people will come forward to speak up, even to the employer, if to me the issue is worth talking about, you with your reasons, you with your information, there is no need to be afraid of speaking up to others. Also, you can speak to the boss. Maybe the boss will know why you are or he may not be aware of the problem. But many people dare not speak up; many people dare not try to understand this. ...... For example, like my work, I say to my boss, "Well, the way you pay me, I think is not right." (Usually) Whatever the boss gives you, it is either to take it or to leave it. Not like us with a union. It is like having a manager to help you handle everything. You don't even have to be bothered about your medical care or drug bills. What they consider they can do, what can be won will be won. But, also, they will help you, in terms of salary, (to get) at least no less than minimum pay."

Lai Ping came to Vancouver in the summer of 1980 to join her fiancee who sponsored her immigration. She has 10 years work experience as a worker in the electronic and manufacturing industries in Hong Kong.

In the first month after her arrival, Lai Ping started looking for work as she wanted to get in touch with society. She had few friends and acquaintances to render her assistance. One after another, she knocked at the doors of each factory to ask for work. She had some experience in sewing and she soon got her first job as a seamstress in a small factory. Owing to limited experience and lack of knowledge about labour rights, after working for two to three months, Lai Ping was usually told that she was laid off. At times it was due to a shortage of work and in other situations, the employers simply gave the job to someone they knew and preferred. In the first few years, Lai Ping experienced frequent job changes and lay-offs. She remembered that she worked for more than ten garment factories. There was hardly any job protection and when Lai Ping tried
to seek help when the employer was not treating her fairly, she found no one to back her up. The workers did not have a voice and Lai Ping became very used to being laid-off, to job insecurity, to low pay, to poor working conditions, to ill-treatment from the foreman, and to the switching back and forth among the positions that nobody wanted.

Despite all the hardship, Lai Ping insisted on upgrading herself, as she became even more aware of the importance and the need for this. At that time, there were hardly any government subsidized language training programs to assist immigrant women's transition into the work force. She registered herself in some fee-charging courses, and for three years, she continued to study English in the evening after a long day's work. After the birth of her first son, Lai Ping considered a job change so that she could have more time for the newborn baby. She worked as a counter-sales clerk in a Chinatown bakery from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for half a year. Lai Ping's husband started his janitorial work at 3:00 p.m. and the couple took turns taking care of the baby. Because of a lack of job security and the low pay of the garment industry, Lai Ping considered a more long-term career change. In 1985, she enrolled herself in a training course in hospitality work, hoping that the 1986 Expo would bring new opportunities. To her disappointment, she could not find any housekeeping job in the hospitality industry. So, filled with despair, Lai Ping decided to go back to the garment industry. With information given by her friend, she found a seamstress job in a reputable garment factory and has worked there since
then.

The factory she is working in involves a strong union. There, Lai Ping got to know and befriend the union's business agent, Pauline, an immigrant herself of Chinese descent, and a real fighter for the workers' interests. Lai Ping became more aware of her rights, and she knows that in unjust situations, she has someone to count on. The union has rendered her solid assistance in incidents of labour disputes. She is empowered through each confrontation and labour action, and she grows stronger every time. Now, with almost ten years of work experience in the same factory, with her seniority, Lai Ping enjoys more stabilized work. She became an active member of the union and offers herself as a representative to help other workers. Despite the pressure and problems she encountered after taking up this position, Lai Ping finds great satisfaction in helping. She strongly believes that it is important for individual workers to have the courage to stand up and speak for one's own rights. It is equally important to have an organization such as the union, as well as individuals such as Pauline, to help. With the implementation of the NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement), there are valid concerns and worries for the future of the industry and it is anticipated that many workers will be affected. Workers need to unite together to have their voices heard and to work together for a better future.
Rita: All I need is an opportunity

"But the most important thing is to give me a chance. To have an employer who will hire me, so that I can prove my ability. Without any employer to hire me, it is useless no matter how skillful I am. No one will even glance at me."

Rita had eight years work experience in the banking field before immigrating to Canada. To prepare herself for immigration, Rita purposely resigned from her job as an assistant bank manager and worked as an office assistant in a post-secondary college for a year and half to gain some hands-on experience in secretarial work. Learning about the difficulty in finding a job in Canada, Rita made preparations and equipped herself with skills and knowledge which she hoped would allow greater flexibility and adaptability in the Canadian labour market.

Soon after her arrival in Vancouver in May 1991, Rita started looking for a job. She sent out resumes and it did not take too long for her to get her first job as a teller in a trust company in Chinatown. It was not until she started her work that Rita realized why she was able to get the job. Part of it had to do with her Chinese language fluency and her banking experience. More important, Rita found that her job was the kind of work that local people would not want: you were to please the superiors with all kinds of flatteries, you were to do as told, and you were the scapegoat for any fault made. Over 80% of the employees working in the company were new immigrants who were afraid to lose their job and an income. Should they make any complaints or criticisms against their superiors, the consequences could be disastrous: they would be
given a poor reference and their career would be in jeopardy. Rita ran into big
trouble when she did not follow suit and flatter her boss. After working for one
year, her employment was terminated without a just cause provided. Not
knowing her rights, she received no vacation pay nor payment in lieu of notice.
When she interviewed for work, without a good reference, prospective
employers were hesitant to offer her a position. In desperation, Rita filed a
complaint with the Labour Standards Branch and managed to get a repayment
of the benefits she was entitled to receive. Nevertheless, she encountered
great difficulties in reentering the banking field.

Rita went to a social service agency in the Chinese community for
information and assistance. She was admitted into a government-funded
employment program focusing on office and English training. For Rita, who
already possessed a good knowledge of the basic skills required for general
office positions, the seven months training provided a shelter for the job seeker
to be free from the worries and anxieties of searching for jobs. What is more
useful is that the program provided job leads and Rita was referred to work as
a clerk in a Chinese owned customs broker and freight forwarder company.
Working for two years, she has achieved a sense of job satisfaction in a
friendly, supportive environment. Presently, Rita is expecting her new baby and
is looking forward to getting the license to become a customs broker in the
future. For Rita, the crisis she experienced in her first job turned into a new
opportunity. All she needed was a job opportunity where she could demonstrate
her skills and capabilities.

Audrey: I'd rather work in an accepting environment!

"It took a long time for my co-workers to accept me."

Like many other immigrants who immigrated on an independent category, Audrey had extensive working experience before coming to Canada. She had worked as a secretary in different divisions of a renowned bank in Hong Kong for more than 10 years and was fully equipped with secretarial, computer, and language skills.

Shortly after landing in Vancouver in July 1990, Audrey found herself a secretary position in a computer company. She had little difficulty in handling the new job within a Chinese environment. She took every opportunity to upgrade herself and to get acquainted with the society. Audrey completed legal secretary training, attended a job finding club, took English language training and participated in Toast Masters Club. After working in the computer company for a year and half, Audrey considered a change for new exposure. She sought assistance from a social service agency in the Chinese community and was referred to a reputable advertising company. The company had an opening for a media coordinator which required someone fluent in both the Chinese and English languages as the job involved dealing with business corporations targeting the Chinese market. Given a trial period of two weeks, Audrey impressed her supervisor with her strong office skills.
Although Audrey was new to the field, she found the job required skills that she had. However, as the media coordinator, her job relied on teamwork involving different departments such as marketing and production. Their tight work schedules often demanded immediate action and timely work by various co-workers. Audrey had a hard time coordinating the work of other colleagues and seeking their collaboration in order to fulfil her duties. Even after working in the company for one full year, Audrey still had a strong feeling that she "doesn't belong" and she found this "mainstream" setting less comfortable and accepting. Later, Audrey was laid off since one of the major accounts involving the Chinese market did not renew their contract.

Audrey made various attempts to apply for jobs after she was laid off. There were openings for legal secretaries, but to her disappointment, Audrey was rejected as she had no local work experience in the legal field. Her ex-supervisor, a minority woman, appreciated Audrey's performance and recommended her to a number of employers. Audrey worked as an administrative assistant in another media company planning to develop Asian-related business. Her fluency in both Chinese and English languages was her asset. Audrey only stayed in this company for a short time as she was offered a position in the Chinatown branch of a local bank.

Audrey is very pleased with her new job: a secretary in the commercial loan department of a Chinatown bank which is closely related to her previous job in Hong Kong. Aiming at pursuing further career advancement, Audrey
works very hard and keeps upgrading herself by attending training at a local banking institute. At one point, there was an opening for a senior secretarial position in the headquarters. After much struggle, though feeling competent to perform the job, Audrey decided not to apply. Her experience in the advertising company reminded her of the concerns about working in an environment with "complicated interpersonal relations". She would rather wait for a chance in a more friendly and accepting work environment.

Alice: All for children

"Must take care of them (children). So, therefore, how should I put it... It doesn't matter what kind of job I do, because, the reason being, when they.. say even if you had a job which is your ideal, and you find out that your children have problems here and there, then it will be too late. Because the children would have already developed roots (habits), whether good roots or bad, they are already there. (It is) because I am like this. I fight to get back into society. It doesn't matter whatever I do, like, I can stand it. Like, I don't say that I am very hard working, but I'm not considered lazy. So then whatever I do is all right, it doesn't matter. But, (I) take care of my own kids."

Alice immigrated to Canada in 1976 and was sponsored by her fiance. Like many new immigrants, Alice hoped to look for a job related to her previous experience: she had eight years of experience as a salesperson before immigrating to Canada. Trying to get assistance from her acquaintances, she sensed that her requests for job leads were not welcomed, possibly due to the highly competitive labour market. It was nine months after her arrival that Alice was referred by her mother to her first job: a waitressing position in a restaurant.
owned by a Chinese Canadian.

In the workplace, being new to the field and lacking fluency in the English language, Alice was faced with the bullying of the white co-workers and the boss. She was the one to handle all the menial tasks, but was not given a fair share of the tips made. Not knowing how to defend and protect herself, all Alice could do was to do as told, to work and to make no complaints. Despite all the torments, Alice took every opportunity to learn and improve herself. When nobody offered a helping hand, she observed, practised and learned. The motto Alice bore firmly in mind which helped her thrive through times of challenges was: to endure and be diligent. She showed remarkable powers of endurance and her hard work was gradually recognized by her employer who entrusted her with more important duties. It was when Alice knew that she was pregnant that she quit the job. After the baby was born, the boss wanted her back and with the assistance of her mother and sisters to take care of the newborn child, Alice resumed her work. She stayed with the restaurant for five years and after the birth of her second child, Alice decided to stay home full time to take care of the family.

Children became the center of Alice's life and her very first priority. She was prepared to give up a more promising career to ensure top quality care for her children. When her daughter was three years old, Alice considered reentering the labour force. She did not mind taking on any job providing that it allowed her to be available to the children when they were home. Her
husband, who was doing landscape gardening, came across a family who needed someone to do housekeeping. Though having no experience in housekeeping work, by her endurance and diligence, Alice impressed her employer by managing the 9,000 square feet mansion all by herself. Her work increased from housecleaning to many other extra duties, like taking care of the children and the elderly, buying groceries, handling bills and correspondence, and so on. In this all-in-one job, Alice was the nanny, housekeeper, nurse, cook, driver, and secretary. Repeatedly Alice stressed that it was out of mutual respect and her demand for excellence that she volunteered to do all the extra work for the employer. Domestic work is no simple or easy task; rather, it demands many practical and interpersonal skills. Alice takes every challenge as an opportunity to learn and to perform her best, and she is confident that, given time, she can thrive with any new job.

For five years Alice worked for the same family, then had to look for work again when the family returned to Hong Kong. She encountered difficulties during her job search. Her previous experiences were barely recognized and some employers discriminated against her age. Alice experienced hurt and anxiety, seeing how her fate rested on the discretion of the employers. Finally, she found herself a seamstress position, but quit after trying for two days when she was offered another housekeeping job.

Again Alice works as a domestic worker and after work, she starts her second job: taking care of her family and children. As always, Alice puts her
children as her first priority and she will not accept a job that demands her full concentration at the expense of neglecting her children. She finds greatest joy and satisfaction in an affectionate family and loving children. Alice insists that it is a choice about which she has little regret: all for the children.

Beth: Exclusion from the Mainstream

"There, I discovered looking for a job was not easy. Like, if in a Chinese community, if you don't mind, finding a job is not too difficult. If you don't mind whatever post, if you don't mind doing clean up work by yourself, if you want to, there are such jobs available. But if, say, you want to get into the white people's society, the so-called mainstream society, I, also, would like to know. Actually, I really want to get to know this society, what this white people's society is really like. But the chance is slim."

Beth is very much determined and interested in a career of serving people. She was trained as a child care worker and before coming to Canada, she had over fourteen years experience in the child care field, seven years of which she spent serving children who were physically and mentally challenged.

In October 1990, Beth, her husband and their two children immigrated to Vancouver. One month after landing, Beth went to a social service agency in the Chinese community to get some information. There she met her former coworker from Hong Kong. She learned that the agency was running a parents' group and that they needed a child care worker to work for two hours every week. To get a feel of the child care service, Beth gladly took the job. The funding for the program was cut after 10 weeks, but her skills and hard work were recognized and Beth continued to work as child care worker for an
English training program for women organized by that same agency. Her work hours gradually increased from three hours per day to both morning and afternoon sessions. Nevertheless, when the budget for the women's English training program was cut, Beth lost her job. After that, she worked temporarily as a coordinator for a tax clinic in the agency for two months. And when the tax season was over, she was referred by her friend to work as a nanny for some time until again there was no work.

Beth started a job search and from the newspaper she learned that there was a position for a child care worker in a group home for children with multiple-disabilities. With her training and work experience, Beth was confident in applying for the job. The position required someone who spoke fluent Cantonese as the job involved caring for a child whose parents were from China and spoke limited English. She had several interviews with the supervisor and the parents and she was offered a position on a three month probation period.

Her excitement in the new challenge turned into disappointment and frustration when Beth started working in the group home. She experienced isolation in the work relations and found that she was never meant to be part of the team. Like a stranger, she was rarely included in the coffee breaks, she was ignored as if she was not there, and workers passed on to her duties that they should be responsible for. In addition, she was never allowed to touch one of the children, the reason being that that was a severe case. Nevertheless, the
job had no specific requirement except first aid training and Beth managed to get a certificate. Later, she learned that it was the child's parent who was suspicious of her and did not prefer her caring for the child. Three months passed but no one ever mentioned the probation except that comments from the supervisor indicated that her performance was excellent. Her work was extended for another three months when Beth was told that there was a cut in funding, and accordingly, a cut in her working hours. Actually, it was approaching summertime, a time which usually demanded additional workers. Instead her work hours were cut from four to two days per week, and later changed to a casual on-call basis. In order to have an income to support the family, as a temporary measure, Beth worked as a domestic worker taking care of an elderly person and two children, hoping that she would return to work in the group home when funding was available. Beth shared her situation with her supervisor: her interests in the job, the need for an income, the temporary domestic work and her availability for weekend work. To her surprise, Beth was told that many Canadians did not have work and the job opportunity would be given to others as she already had a full-time job. As a result, she was given an employment record, specifying a shortage of work, and she left the agency. There was a replacement for her position, but instead of hiring a racial minority, a white worker took the job.

Beth is committed to a career of helping and serving others, and with this belief, she has been able to remain patient and cheerful in adversity. Her work
in the group home involved very unpleasant duties, and she said, half-jokingly, that with this experience there was no other work that would be a difficulty for her. She found it a valuable experience working in the mainstream, though she now prefers working in the Chinese community where she feels more comfortable. Keeping her job as a domestic worker, and looking ahead, Beth hopes that some day, with enough resources, she can run her own family day care service. She has taken training in this area and looks forward to actualizing her ideals and better utilizing her potentials.

Joan: Employment equity helps

"That is, I feel, if, from my point of view, I feel that if they (the government) have an employment equity program, it would be better. Because from reading the papers they published, like for example, the percentage of minorities in each ministry, the percentage is really low, say 6% minorities out of 100%. Then I feel it should be increased. .......... The system did not consider the immigrants. Only when there is a special program, then they will hire, so that these people would not be as disadvantaged."

Leaving behind her family, friends, and a job with bright prospects in the Hong Kong Government, Joan immigrated in August 1988. A graduate from the University of Hong Kong with further training in journalism, Joan came to Canada as an independent immigrant. She first landed in Edmonton, and at the advice of a friend, she applied for a position in the Translation Bureau of the Province of Alberta. With years of experience in translation and media work, Joan had little difficulty in passing an assessment which certified her as a
qualified Chinese-English translator for government contracts. Before she had a chance to receive her first contract with the Translation Bureau, Joan returned to Hong Kong, and when she reappeared in Canada, it was six months later and she moved to Vancouver.

Coming to Vancouver, one of the first things Joan did was to get accredited and registered with a local translators' association. Two months after her arrival in Vancouver, she worked for a private translation firm on a casual, contract basis. In August 1989, she was offered an administrative position in the Chinese community, her first full-time position in Canada. Joan devoted herself wholeheartedly in the demanding new job, upgrading herself with new information, resources and knowledge. Night and day she was immersed in her work. It was not uncommon to work past 12:00 a.m. and Joan remembered vividly at one time it was 4:00 a.m. when she stepped out of the old Chinatown office.

In early 1991, a department in the provincial government became more aware of the need to make their services more accessible to clients of different ethnic backgrounds. As a result, two openings were posted on a six month trial basis, both requiring someone with a second language. This information was passed on to Joan, who applied for the position, went through the assessment procedure, succeeded in getting the position, and became the first Chinese officer in her department. Despite her personal strengths and capabilities, as an immigrant and a racial minority woman, Joan shared frankly that her chance
of being selected would be slim should the position have made no specific requirements for a second language, ie. Chinese. Not only is the Ministry not prepared to employ staff of racial minorities, the selection system itself puts racial minority immigrants at a distinct disadvantage. Joan was equally upset and frustrated by the disparity between old and new immigrants from within the Chinese community, as she was told by an "old" immigrant that without the training she had received from working in the Chinese community, she would never have had this chance. Her personal efforts and capabilities were undervalued.

In the workplace, Joan encountered no less frustration or pressure. As the first Chinese woman in the branch, she had to work twice as hard to prove herself capable and suitable for the job. In addition, she has experienced discrimination against her gender and her race. There were clients who, after learning her surname, hearing her accent, and seeing her, made various discriminatory comments and actions, such as complaining to her superiors and refusing to work with a Chinese minority woman. Joan has had to put up with pressure and assaults that a white male colleague would not have had to face. Nevertheless, these experiences served only to make Joan even stronger and more competent in her work. Working in the branch for four years, Joan has already achieved a proven record of excellence. When the opportunity came and there was an opening for a more senior position, Joan outperformed other competitors before the selection panel and was promoted.
Joan strongly believes in the importance of employment equity in overcoming barriers in a system which has various built-in visible and invisible barriers that deny racial minorities equal access to employment opportunities comparable to their skills and qualifications.

Hannah: "They think that theirs is the true culture, is the best."

"They think that theirs is the true culture, is the best. Now Canada is inviting immigrants. These immigrants will bring in culture just as at the beginning when the white people arrived and brought in a culture. Other immigrants bring with them cultures from different countries. Pooling all these together makes the Canadian culture. It cannot be insisted that what the white people brought in at the beginning are considered culture whereas what other immigrants brought in are not. How can you, from a historic point of view, select a part of history and insist that just that period of time represent the whole culture? Impossible! I feel that that is fundamentally not right... (I: So, actually behind the cultural difference is...) a kind of self-righteous white supremacy. That is what it is."

Hannah arrived in Vancouver in June 1990. She was going through a transition period in her life journey when after working for many years in a most demanding job, she felt drained and needed a change to refresh herself.

With graduate training in the United States majoring in psychology, Hannah worked as a psychologist in Hong Kong and was later promoted to a supervisor position. Despite her North American training and qualifications, her experience in the local labour market is not without difficulties. Within the first month of her arrival, Hannah was offered a position as a counsellor in a social service agency serving mostly Chinese Canadians, but she turned the job down for two reasons. First, the salary was not attractive, and more important,
Hannah wanted to try other opportunities, to get a feel of the mainstream.

Since then, Hannah encountered a lot of difficulty in finding a job. Ten months after her immigration, she applied for work in Winnipeg where the Provincial Government of Manitoba was looking for psychologists. The job would involve travelling to outlying towns which were very remote and deserted. The physical environment would not be inviting, and after considering for a long time, in the end, she declined the offer. Later, Hannah was offered a counsellor’s position, but the predecessor wanted the job back before the contract was signed and she lost that job. Hannah did not allow herself to remain idle. She was actively taking courses to upgrade herself, self-studying, and volunteering. Later, she was hired by a weight loss centre as a part-time counsellor to give training on how to control eating habits.

A year later, after one of the interviews she had earlier attended, she was recalled regarding a half-time job at a new branch office of a counselling service agency located in an area with a significant Chinese population. Hannah felt that her effort was not altogether in vain and she was hired. Subsequently, a friend of Hannah, a Chinese Canadian working in the same agency where she had lost her job to the predecessor, wanted to change from working full time to working half time. She asked if Hannah would be interested in sharing her job. The agency quickly approved the request and Hannah got this other half-time counselling job. For the first time, after being in Canada for three years, Hannah obtained a job that was within her own profession.
In the workplace, her frustrations arose from an adjustment to the cultural differences in work attitudes and practices between Canada and Hong Kong. Hannah found herself working in a system characterized by role ambiguity, shared responsibility, indirect communication patterns and slow pace. There was a lack of efficiency and she was unable to do what she at one time could clearly get done better, and, in a shorter period of time. Behind this cultural difference, Hannah concluded that there was a kind of supremacy in the host culture and a resistance to new experiences and ideas. Out of her conscience, she made various effort to seek changes and improvement, but to no avail. Often, her voice was too small, and her opinions ignored and disregarded by other co-workers.

As a counsellor of Chinese descent, Hannah experienced discrimination from clients. There were incidents when the client's whole person stiffened up at the sight of a racial minority counsellor. Others revealed to the supervisor that they did not click with this particular counsellor. However, there were others who were very suspicious at the beginning, but as they talked, they learned that Hannah was capable of helping them and they accepted her help.

Hannah also found herself at an even less advantageous position in her career development. In order to pursue a psychologist status, a doctorate education is required; nevertheless, invisible barriers exist in the system of admittance, denying immigrants equal opportunity. Just as employers may prefer hiring someone they know, teachers may have preference for former
students or those applicants whose references are from someone whom they are acquainted with. Hannah made attempts to apply for doctorate study, but, as a newcomer, she has none of those advantages.

Presently, amidst all the challenges, Hannah focuses on serving her clients, on performing her duties the best she can in the interest of her clients: a goal she finds always achievable and most gratifying.
CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH FINDINGS:
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented a recapitulation of the employment stories of the eight women who shared their labour market experiences. The stories themselves provide rich information about the experiences of Chinese immigrant women. To analyze the data in a systematic manner, I adopted the grounded theory method in identifying, conceptualizing and categorizing the main themes that emerged from the women's stories (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this study, the method of data analysis involved a coding process to identify concepts that best fit the data. Through line by line coding and gradually paragraph by paragraph coding, major themes were drawn out from the raw data which highlighted the essence of the women's narratives, and provided connections among the employment experiences of Chinese immigrant women.

To assume that Chinese immigrant women share the same experience is overly simplistic. There were differences in their experiences and perspectives, yet similar themes and concepts emerged from their stories. Despite their different backgrounds, their labour market experience can be summarized as:

(1) they were at a disadvantaged position in their job search and in the workplace, and there was a significant degradation in the quality of the
jobs they obtained in Canada relative to their home countries;

(2) there were societal forces denying their equal access to employment opportunities and benefits, barriers rooted in the unequal power relations due primarily to their race, immigrant status, and gender;

(3) despite adversity, these women faced the challenges with great courage and took an active role in their struggle for a career.

In this chapter, I attempt to capture the essence of the women's labour market experiences by describing five themes: Chinatown, racial discrimination, disadvantages as an immigrant, gender issues and Chinese immigrant women's struggle for a career. The themes are interrelated and interconnected. I have to admit that I felt most inadequate in this process of analysis, considering the richness of the women's stories. There is so much to say, and in this small study, it will not all be said. For example, some women mentioned the importance of age as a hindrance to employment, while others stressed the availability of material resources. I have chosen to focus on the common themes that connect women's experience and have inevitably left out information that might be unique to an individual situation. I want to emphasize the complexity of women's experience but a discussion on emerging themes highlights their essence. In addition, considering the relatively small sample size in this qualitative study, I want to restate that the findings should not be generalized to the experiences of all Chinese immigrant women, with their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Nevertheless, the results from this study
provide important data to our understanding of an aspect of the reality of Chinese immigrant women's employment experiences, and may guide future research and action to achieve social change to improve the status of racial minority immigrant women. A table summarizing the themes will be presented, followed by a discussion of the findings.
TABLE 1 - THE EMERGING THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS WITH EIGHT CHINESE CANADIAN WOMEN REGARDING THEIR LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCES

CHINATOWN
- From Exclusion To The Chinatown Shelter
- Exploitation Within The Chinese Community

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
- A Stratified Labour Market Based On Race
- Workplace Discrimination
- Cultural Supremacy

DISADVANTAGES AS AN IMMIGRANT
- Canadian Labour Market: Four Walls and A Closed Door
- Canadian Experience vs. International Credentials

GENDER ISSUES
- All For Children: Impact On Women's Employment
- Women's Work, Devalued Labour

RACIAL MINORITY IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR A CAREER
- Achievement By Proven Capability
- Unfailing Hope and Aspirations
Chinatown

An analysis of the stories of the women revealed the marginal position of the Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market. They have not been accepted into Canadian society, but remained segregated in "Chinatown" where they were vulnerable to exploitation.

From Exclusion To The Chinatown Shelter

There was a distinct feature in the employment stories of Chinese immigrant women: their exclusion from the "mainstream" labour market and their concentration in "Chinatown" as a result of segregation in an unaccepting labour market. Chinese immigrant women often started their first job in Chinatown and remained working in Chinatown for many years after their immigration. The length of residence did not guarantee their transition into the mainstream Canadian labour market.

From vignettes of the transcripts, the eight Chinese immigrant women in this study all managed to find a job within a relatively short period of time after their arrival, ranging from one to nine months. This could be partly explained by the growing number of Chinese immigrants coming to British Columbia, especially after the mid-1980s. Entrepreneur and investment immigrants bringing in financial and other resources helped create job opportunities. The changing demographics created a market in demand of Chinese-speaking workers. However, to conclude that Chinese immigrant women are easily integrated into the local labour market is a distortion of their experiences. One
has to consider the kind of jobs these immigrant women have, the inequities they have encountered in the job seeking process and in the workplace, and the fact that many immigrant women, because of economic necessity, accept less desirable positions that local people do not want. At least six of the women (Rita, Alice, Joan, Janet, Lai Ping and Beth) directly expressed the need to gain an income to support themselves and their family. These women had been very active in job search. Upon learning about the employment difficulties in Canada, they adjusted their expectations, accepting jobs which were a degradation in terms of pay, skill-level, and status, relative to what they had in their country of origin.

A common theme that connects these women's labour market experiences is the fact that Chinese immigrant women have great difficulties in accessing the mainstream labour market and are trapped in Chinatown. The concept of "Chinatown" refers not only to a segregated Chinese geographical location, with a boundary separating the territory of the Occidental people and that of Chinese people; for example, the area around Main Street and Pender Street in Vancouver has been known as Chinatown for many years. I agree with Anderson (1994) who argues that Chinatown as a characterization is constructed by and for Vancouver's white Europeans, who, while conferring outsider and inferior status on Chinese immigrants, affirm their own identity and privilege. Chinatown as a social construct represents the distance and difference between people, a reflection of the differential power relations
between racial groups (Li, 1988).

Systemic discrimination makes it difficult for Chinese immigrant women to seek employment in the core sectors of the labour market, and as a result, they retreat to their ethnic community. By working in "Chinatown", I refer to those Chinese immigrants who are:

(1) working in companies that are physically located in Chinatown;
(2) working in companies owned by Chinese;
(3) working in jobs dealing mainly with Chinese clientele or the Chinese market;
(4) working in positions with Chinese language proficiency as a requirement; and
(5) working in occupational sectors traditionally dominated by Chinese and racial minority immigrants such as the garment and service industries.

According to the above definition, all the women in this study got their first job in Chinatown. Not only did Chinese immigrant women often have their first job in Chinatown, they remained segregated despite of an increase in the length of their residence in Canada. The women did not choose to stay in Chinatown in the first place. Instead, they wanted to integrate and find employment in the mainstream society. However, local employers are not often prepared to hire racial minority immigrants. Chinese immigrant women are often hired by mainstream companies for positions that local people do not want or they are hired for other practical reasons: they are hired to serve Chinese-
speaking clients or to meet the needs of a growing Chinese market. They are less likely to be offered a position when companies are doing white people's businesses. Audrey, for example, was hired by a media company to handle a big Chinese account. When this account was lost, Audrey was immediately laid-off. Similarly, Beth was hired by the group home serving children with multiple disabilities only at the request of a Chinese-speaking parent. And when there was a budget cut-back, she was the first to go and the last to be recalled to work. Joan also stated that she would not have received her position in the government should there be no specific requirement for a second language, ie. Chinese. Hannah, who did not agree that she was hired only to serve Chinese-speaking clients, was actually placed in a family counselling centre located in an area with an increasing Chinese population.

Chinese immigrant women remain segregated in Chinatown as they are barred from accessing job opportunities in the mainstream labour market. In addition, Chinese immigrant women's continuous segregation is a result of their responding to discrimination in the workplace. Both Audrey and Beth, who have experienced isolation and discrimination in the workplace, preferred to work in a more accepting environment in the Chinese community. Others were trapped in Chinatown as there was little opportunity for a change. Janet, Lai Ping, and Alice, who have been working as seamstresses and domestic workers, attempted to pursue a career change. Nevertheless, they found that choices available to them were confined to those in the garment industry, service and
hospitality field, or domestic work. Chinese immigrant women continue to be segregated in occupational sectors characterized by low-paying jobs and with a concentration of racial minority immigrant women.

To conclude, various push and pull factors contribute to Chinese immigrant women's exclusion from the mainstream labour market. Their segregation in Chinatown can be partly explained by the fact that their chance of securing employment in mainstream companies is slim and women are forced to look for work in the Chinese community. Chinese immigrant women are segregated as a result of their experiencing rejection and exclusion in the "white people" society. Feeling isolated, Chinese immigrant women lose their motivation and confidence to pursue integration, and decide to look for work in the Chinese community. They are excluded due to their multiple roles as a racial minority, as an immigrant, and as a woman; and in the following section of this chapter, I will discuss this exclusion in more detail.

The contemporary condition of Chinese immigrant women in the labour market reminds me of the history of discriminatory immigration policy and the exclusion and segregation of Chinese immigrants from Canadian society as I have presented in Chapter one. This exclusion continues to the present day, keeping Chinese immigrant women at a disadvantaged position. Just like those early pioneers to British Columbia, Chinese immigrants are unfairly blamed for segregating themselves from the Canadian society and huddling together in their own ethnic neighbourhood. I do not want to deny that Chinese immigrants
are active agents in building their neighbourhood. But it is equally true that their segregation from the mainstream society is a result of hostile reception on the part of the host society. In a context of hostility and discrimination, Chinese immigrants, women and men, withdraw to their own community for refugee and they find solace with their own people. After a hundred years, history is repeating itself. I want to end this section of analysis by concluding that Chinese immigrant women today are experiencing inequities and segregation in the labour market; they are trapped in Chinatown, which has been "a victimized colony of the East in the West" (Anderson, 1994).

**Exploitation Within the Chinese Community**

For more than a century, Chinese immigrants have played an active role in building our own ethnic community. Chinese immigrants set up a network with various associations which was a help for subsequent arrivals of Chinese immigrant groups. Today, there are different organizations and associations in the Chinese community providing assistance to immigrants to ease their transition. These associations provide information, news, and above all else, friendship and comfort to help immigrants adapt to the new environment. "Chinatown" with its people, familiar faces, geographical location, languages, food, and associations is perceived as a shelter, a refugee where immigrants can find solace, support and assistance (Anderson, 1994). The women in this study, for example, obtained job leads and employment opportunities through the Chinese community.

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Yet, there is another side of the coin. Chinatown is not a safe haven for Chinese immigrants. The reality is that exploitation and inequities exist in the Chinese community, as well as in the mainstream economy. Exploitation within the Chinese community takes different forms. Very often, jobs in "Chinatown" are characterized by over-work and under-pay, and remarks of the women reflect the exploitation they have experienced.

**Lai Ping:** There are many job opportunities in the Chinese community, usually the pay is very low, and (the employers) will not pay you for overtime.......For myself, I do not prefer working in the Chinese community...... they would not follow the labour standards.

In addition to over-work and under-pay, many of the women who work in Chinatown are required to be responsible for extra duties. Alice, a domestic worker, admitted that she had to do many additional duties, although she stressed she did it voluntarily:

**Alice:** But there was a lot of work to do, all-in-one job...... (I: At first you were hired to do housecleaning.) Housekeeping, not babysitting. She (the employer) had a teenage son, had to drive him to school and bring him home. At times I had to buy groceries for the two seniors (the employer's parents), when they were sick and the children were all at school, she asked if I could drive them to see the doctor, of course I could. (I: using your car?) Yes, she gave me gas money. The longer I worked, the more work I had. Sometimes the bills, "You know English, don't you?", I told them the bills were due. Later her son went to the States to study, before she (the employer) left (for a trip), she prepared the cheques and asked me to send them out..... Yes, more and more work. These I did voluntarily.

Within the Chinese community, there is a disparity between old and new immigrants. New Chinese immigrants are hired to take up positions Canadian-born Chinese do not want. Rita, who had a very bad experience in her first job
in a bank in Chinatown, commented that:

**Rita:** Yet it was after I got in that I discovered why they hired me. Because local born people would not take the job, because he (the supervisor) was mean, therefore he hired new immigrants. The local-borns wouldn't listen to him..... He knew they would not let him control them. If he had had a choice, he would pick the one fluent in English. There are many local-borns, fluent in both Chinese and English, graduated from UBC, graduated from Simon Fraser, it wouldn't be me. My previous experience was an asset, and I was a new immigrant, I just did what he told me to do. I didn't even know the labour standards..... Why he hired new immigrants, it is because he knew they didn't even know the basic things, and he could tell them to do whatever he wanted.

The exploitation in the workplace within the Chinese community reflects the unequal power relations between the employer and the employee, especially new immigrants who know little about their rights and who need the job for a living.

To conclude, Chinese immigrant women, like their predecessors, remain excluded from the Canadian labour market and are vulnerable to exploitation both by their own Chinese community as well as the white society. There are obstacles and barriers hindering Chinese immigrant women's transition into the mainstream labour market and finding employment opportunities comparable to their skills and abilities. Barriers to employment are rooted in longstanding attitudes and practices not only about race and colour, but also about immigrant status and gender. The following sections will address these issues.

**Racial Discrimination**

Li (1988) analyzes Chinese immigrants' employment experiences in the structural context of Canadian society and asserts that race remains a salient
factor in employment inequality.

Race is a category socially constructed, constituting an unequal power relationship. It is not the inherent traits, whether physical or cultural, per se that account for racial minorities' marginal position in the labour market. Instead, it is the social meaning attached to these traits as defined by the dominant group. Racial minority immigrant women are treated as "strangers" and "outsiders" with the invariable implication of being inferior to justify their exclusion from the core labour market. In this study, all women explicitly related their difficulties in entering the core sectors of the Canadian labour market and their unequal treatment in the workplace to their language, accent, colour, culture; though some of them were hesitant to name these as racial discrimination. There has been a lot of denial about racism but the experiences of the women present a serious challenge to this denial.

A Stratified Labour Market Based on Race

Skin colour, Third World origin, language, accent, are categories constructed by dominant groups to justify a stratified labour market based on race. The legal exclusion of Chinese in Canada from professional occupations has been documented and for decades, racial discrimination defined their work opportunities (Yee, 1988). Today, legal exclusion has been repealed and second or third-generation Chinese Canadians are able to move into professional and managerial occupations (Li, 1990). Nevertheless, Chinese in Canada continue to have difficulties accessing core sectors of the labour
market. For example, public service continues to show poor representation of racial minorities in the upper management levels. They make up only 2.1% of senior managers and this has increased to 3.0% since the Employment Equity Act (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994). Joan, who worked in the government, found that she was the first Chinese in her branch and her chance of getting in would have been slim had there been no requirement for a second language, i.e. Chinese.

Joan: At that time, when I first joined them (the government), it was June 1991, there was no ethnic minority. All were white. Why they employed not only Chinese, but also East Indians like Punjabis, was that at that time there was a great demand... because of the increase in the number of immigrants. They began to feel the need because there truly were many newcomers. When they (minority immigrants) came to this office, nobody (from this office) could communicate with them. Nobody could answer their questions. So they (branch office) began to consider hiring someone (ethnic minority). ..... At first when they (branch office) hired ethnic minority, I think they must have had a concern. First of all, they must have felt quite strange and new, because their office had never had any such people (ethnic minority). Didn't know if you could handle the work or not. After all it is still a second language. No matter how good your English is, it is still your second language. Although you are required to have Cantonese or Chinese language skills. Secondly, it is my personal interpretation, it may not be so. They didn't know if you could get along with your co-workers because you have to work as a team. Because they have never tried that before, so they have this concern.

Chinese immigrant women are rarely a preferred candidate, except for jobs local people do not want or jobs dealing with their own ethnic clientele. Women in this study have testified to this discrimination. Despite their comparable skills and qualifications, employers assumed that they were less capable to perform the job. Janet remarked that her employer was surprised to
know that she could speak (English) fluently. In addition, because of her skin colour, she always found herself at a secondary position in the labour market.

**Janet:** It's difficult to compete with them (white Canadians)..... You have to face the reality, because your colour, the way you talk, no matter how fluent you are, you are not like them.

Many employers are unwilling to give racial minority immigrants a chance to prove themselves and are inclined to hire someone most like themselves, in other words, white, and Canadian-born. When being hired, the women in this study had to work doubly hard to prove their capabilities. Only time proved that they performed equally well as white Canadians.

Chinese immigrant women in this study who were less proficient in English found themselves trapped in low-paying and menial positions (Janet, Alice, Lai Ping). Their options, "an option out of no options" (quoting Janet), were limited to jobs in the garment industry, restaurants, hospitality services and domestic work, with little opportunity for upward mobility. Without the language, their access to skills upgrading and employment training was also denied as there was usually a requirement of language proficiency.

Language proficiency and accent define a person's access to employment opportunities, mark a person's place in this stratified labour market. Racial minority immigrant women, those with limited language proficiency and Third World accent, despite their job skills, qualifications and work experience, are perceived as incompetent and are organized as a distinctive kind of labour, filling the lowest strata of the labour market. They
form the backbone of the economy, yet their work is devalued and they are deprived of an equal share of the benefits they generate.

Government documents on racial minority immigrants' labour market transition (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994; BC, Immigration Policy Branch, 1997; Spigelman, Gibbons and Associates, 1997) suggest that their employment difficulties are explained by their "personal shortcomings" - language deficit - and the solution is language training. With no training, whether due to a lack of effective and flexible programs, or due to financial or child care needs which make training impossible, racial minority immigrant women's marginalization in the labour market is perpetuated and justified. Racial minority immigrant women come to Canada with confidence and motivation to start a new page of life. However, in this process of interaction with white Canadians, with the employers and co-workers, and with the government, racial minority immigrants learn to blame themselves for their disadvantaged position.

I do not mean to minimize the significance of language nor to discourage an acquisition of the official languages. But, consider this alternative: a Montreal-based training program trains immigrant women for the non-traditional occupation of welding which does not have the language requirement. Immigrant women without the official languages and who are not qualified for traditional jobs, like secretaries and clerks, have a different option, a job that pays significantly more. They do not have to take five to ten years to improve
their language proficiency before they have a job above minimum wage (Aggrey, John and Lawrence, 1994).

Workplace discrimination

The women in this study immigrated to Canada with enthusiasm and eagerness to integrate into the society. They purposefully made efforts to enter the mainstream labour market, but to their disappointment and frustration, they found they were rejected because of their race. Six of the eight women in this study shared experiences in the workplace where they personally encountered racial discrimination by their supervisors, coworkers and their clients/customers. These included: being laid off and later replaced by white workers, having ideas and suggestions not accepted by supervisors and coworkers, encountering coworkers who were not cooperative and made their work very difficult, being isolated and secluded by coworkers, rejected by clients, and so forth.

Joan: Take for an example, I went to a factory on Water Street. I went to a garment factory. Quite sizable, but it went bankrupt. There was of course no money if they went bankrupt. The amount of money involved was a few hundred thousand dollars. I went to see the controller. There of course was salaries owing.....He practically..... I walked into the office, you could see his face, the expression on his face: What the hell are you doing here? You, a Chinese minority, here. Do you know how to do this? Like, he didn't say it, but he, from his questions, you know that he is accusing you, almost like, when did you graduate? Then, he turned around and called my manager and asked how long Joan had been in her department. Is she competent in handling this case? A lot of money is involved! There are these things that happen. But if a white person was to walk in, would there have been similar questions? No, definitely not!
Hannah: there were those (clients) who made such comments that you knew were racially discriminatory.

Beth: I knew one of the parents, she might have some resistance. Perhaps it's because I'm a Chinese, I guess this was the case..... The boy was a fairly severe case, she (the parent) wouldn't let me touch her son..... maybe she thought I wouldn't know how to use the equipment. She never let me touch the boy.

Beth: they (co-workers) thought we were aliens, so sometimes when they had a chat, they would, might intentionally or unintentionally, ignore me, as if I were not present. They didn't want to involve me during the breaks.

Some of the women in this study, feeling the hostility and alienation, were so frustrated that they retreated to the Chinese ethnic community. Beth and Janet considered that starting their own business would be the only option; just like decades ago, responding to the hostility, Chinese immigrants withdrew to the Chinese business enclave. Other women endured the pain, and worked twice as hard to overcome the pressure and to prove their capability.

Cultural Supremacy

Women in this study shared their frustration and the impact of cultural difference on their labour market transition. According to Joan, in her experience of applying for a job or a promotion, a record of excellent work performance did not guarantee success. Instead, preference was given to candidates who excelled in the interview process. For example, the employers preferred someone who was aggressive, outspoken, and vocal in their presentation. People who spoke or behaved in a more reserved manner, like many Chinese did, would be interpreted as having a lack of confidence, being
unable to perform, and therefore not selected.

In the workplace, Hannah's frustrations arose from an adjustment to the cultural differences in work attitudes and practices between Canada and Hong Kong. Hannah found herself working in a system characterized by role ambiguity, shared responsibility, indirect communication patterns and a slow pace. There were never-ending meetings but with no concrete solutions. Hannah disagreed that she could not adapt. She got frustrated because she could have served her clients in a more effective and efficient way. She made various efforts to seek changes, only to find her ideas ignored by employers and coworkers. Those who had the power, a voice, defined what was better.

Dominant groups have the power to decide what is the culture, the best culture. But what is the Canadian culture? Hannah gave her views as follows:

**Hannah:** But culture changes. Culture is not a dead thing.....there is no culture that stays still forever, or does not change, unless it were on a deserted island, like the discovery of some people on an island still living in the stone age, there's not been any changes, where they have not been affected by outside influences, thus isolating their culture.... But Canada can not be so. She is in contact with the outside, with other countries in the world. Look at Canada, her history, there were the aborigines, the Eskimos, the natives, then the arrival of the white people, all along the culture is changing. If you don't want the Canadian culture to change, then you may have to live like the first nations people, leading a nomadic life style, then that is the Canadian culture. What is Canadian culture? That is the earliest Canadian culture. When the white people invaded their land, the white people have already changed their culture. This is a culture of the white people, not a Canadian culture.

It is not my intention to arouse tension and hatred among cultural groups, nor to compare cultural supremacy and inferiority. By the preceding
analysis, I want to point out that it is the power differentials that account for the disadvantaged position of certain groups in the society, and I urge mutual respect and mutual learning, for the benefit of the nation and its people, meaning all people.

Disadvantages As An Immigrant

Not only were Chinese immigrant women in this study at a disadvantaged position in the labour market due to racial inequities, they were marginalized because of their immigrant status. Employer bias and unfair labour market practices against immigrants were a hindrance to their transition into the Canadian labour force.

Canadian Labour Market: Four Walls and A Closed Door

Lack of job search knowledge and skills is usually identified as a factor causing racial minority immigrants' difficulties in entering the labour market. However, in this study, all of the eight women had extensive job search and work experience in their country of origin prior to immigration. Shortly after they landed, they were actively looking for work and applying these job search skills in the local labour market.

The women looked for job opportunities in the newspapers, they responded to newspaper ads, they sent resumes, they sought help from their friends and relatives for job leads, they directly approached employers, they applied in person and completed application forms, they attended interviews, they wrote tests and so on. They did what local Canadians would do in their
job search.

What they did not know and expect was that the Canadian labour market was a closed system heavily based on inside information, referrals and connections. What they did not have, as immigrants, were local networks and references. Newspapers, employment centres, information channels that are more open and accessible to all job seekers, only provide information on less than 20% of the job openings available in the market. Even if there is an ad in the papers, personal connections and referrals are often determining factors for hiring and selection. Rita and Hannah commented that:

**Rita:** Here they do not advertise in the newspapers, I am talking about clerical jobs, not senior positions..... Personal referral is very, very, very important.

**Hannah:** I discover that now, where there are job openings, they will look for someone that they know. Although they do put ads in the papers and make the job openings public, they will look for someone they know. Of course, you can apply, but if they know you, they have more confidence in you and will hire you.....if it is unionized and there are contracts, openings must be posted internally first. Then internal applicants are hired according to seniority. Then if no one applies internally, the position is posted for outsiders. They will look at your work history and see where you have worked. Reference is very important.

Immigrants, especially recent immigrants who are new to this environment and who have few friends and relatives, find themselves at a disadvantaged position to access employment. They have little information on job openings in the mainstream market, and they often end up getting their first job in the Chinese community, usually characterized by a part-time basis, low-
pay and demanding work load.

Chinese immigrant women in this study also found themselves at a disadvantaged position in the hiring process. Joan, for example, talked about her experience in the government. In job applications, current staff members in the government were usually given extra marks/points according to their seniority which made them more competitive. In addition, local Canadians and current staff members, who had better knowledge about the system and the job requirements, were at a more favourable position in interviews. The system (except for in-service openings which disallowed external application) did not exclude new immigrants from applying, but many barriers existed which made it difficult for immigrants to compete and succeed.

Unfair hiring practices exclude well-trained and qualified immigrants from the core labour market. Government policies further exclude new immigrants from accessing employment training and other related services. In Chapter Three I have discussed the new 1996 Employment Insurance Legislation and its restrictions on immigrant access to training. Rita benefited from taking an employment training program which referred her to more satisfying employment. She remarked that for many immigrants who had difficulty finding their first job and who were not eligible for employment insurance, they were excluded from accessing government subsidized services such as work placement opportunities where one could meet potential employers and prove her/his performance.
Visible and invisible barriers exist in the system of hiring and admittance which place immigrants at a disadvantaged position. What immigrants need is effective measures that will help break these walls and open an employer's door for them.

**Canadian Experience vs. International Credentials**

In a survey on recent immigrants, Canadian work experience is identified as a significant barrier preventing immigrants from obtaining jobs in Canada (Spigelman, Gibbons and Associates, 1997). The findings suggest that it is the personal shortcomings of immigrants that cause their employment difficulties.

However, in this study, most of the women showed confidence in performing a new job in a new environment. For them, with their years of work experience and training, a lack of local experience did not have a major impact on their work performance. Instead, local experience was perceived as a convenient excuse for local employers not to hire immigrants:

**Hannah:** Local experience is a factor. But local experience can be picked up quickly. What is difficult to learn is the basics in the professional training and the work attitude. It is true universally, it applies everywhere. By local experience, they mean if you know of this society's resources, how to make use of these resources. Once you are on the job, you will learn and within a year, you will have all this information in your hand. This can be picked up very readily. I feel that it (local experience) should not be used as a criterion for employment. Especially since if you wouldn't employ this person, where could this person gain local experience? I think local experience is emphasized because there are just too many applicants. Since there is such a choice available, then this becomes a very convenient reason for eliminating applicants. This is a very convenient excuse for not hiring someone.
Immigrants from all over the world, with their skills, experiences, overseas contacts and new perspectives can be a positive impetus, a great resource, which enables Canadian companies to remain competitive in an increasingly diverse market and global economy.

**Hannah**: If I were the supervisor, as I was in Hong Kong, there were people locally trained as well as those from overseas. I wouldn't not hire someone because of their lack of local experience. Rather, I would see it as that those new experiences and new ideas would be introduced to the work place. It is true that the person lacks local experience and at the beginning, there may be some inconvenience and problems. But if the individual has the ability, this can easily be rectified, if the person is competent and able. The new experiences and new ideas that are brought in would be stimulating and beneficial to the service.

Lack of local experience is a barrier to employment. Yet, it is not a personal shortcoming of immigrants, but an excuse used by employers to exclude immigrants from accessing employment with the underlying message - you cannot perform, you are deficient and inadequate, you are not suited to this job.

To facilitate immigrants' integration into the local labour market, we need a fair and accessible assessment mechanism where immigrants' international qualifications and prior learning can be evaluated. We need a hiring and selection process based on qualifications, merits and performance.

Women in this study, Joan for example, sat for an assessment which certified her as a qualified English-Chinese translator and interpreter. She got accredited and registered with a local translation association which enabled her to access employment. For Hannah, her training in psychology and counselling
was recognized and she was offered a position as a counsellor.

Other women in this study did not have the same opportunities as Joan and Hannah did. Women whose credentials and experience were not recognized had difficulty obtaining employment commensurate with their qualifications. Should they be employed, they were underemployed, holding positions in which their full potential was under-utilized. Consider the following cases:

**Janet** - immigrated based on the independent category as a garment designer, but her training in fashion design and her certificate in garment production were hardly recognized, thus she worked as a seamstress.

**Beth** - trained as a child care worker with over fourteen years experience in the child care field, seven years of which she spent serving children who were physically and mentally challenged; was hired as a child care worker in a group home for children with multiple-disabilities where no formal training is required (was hired to meet the request of a Chinese parent), was soon dismissed and replaced by a white worker.

Janet and Rita's words best summarized their experience:

**Janet**: We have this experience. So, I now tell you the main point. It is that no matter how experienced you are, even if you have a certificate in your country of origin, when you are here, they do not count your certificate.
Rita: It's not a problem of their (other trainees in the employment program) work performance. They did not give them a chance to try. They always remained in the unemployed circle, couldn't get their feet out. As for our qualifications, I'm at a high school graduate level. Only Chinese companies recognize that we're high school graduates. For a local company, high school graduates of Hong Kong, they think it's equivalent to Grade 8? Grade 10? Not Grade 11. I understand very well, Canada will protect her own professionals. They will say it's not equivalent. Even if it were equivalent they will say it's not equivalent. You have to sit for all the exams. Like my husband, he was graduated from the Hong Kong Polytechnic (a former post secondary institution and at the present a recognized university in Hong Kong). He came here, and wanted to study in VCC, he had to write the grade 12 exam, after that, he had to write the Department's exams. They did not consider him a high school graduate.

To conclude, women's words in this study echo what I have discussed in Chapter Three: a lack of recognition of international credentials and an emphasis on Canadian experience perpetuate the disadvantaged position of racial minority immigrant women in the Canadian labour market.

Gender Issues

Recent research data suggests that there are few significant differences between the labour force integration experience of men and women (Spigelman, Gibbons and Associates, 1997). Reviewing the women's stories in this study, I argue that there are gender issues affecting Chinese immigrant women's employment. The following discussion will concentrate on two areas: (1) the caring role of women and its impact on employment, and (2) women's work, devalued labour.

All For Children: Impact On Employment

In Chapter Two I have discussed how women's devotion of time and
effort to caring for their children and family affects their participation in the labour force, in terms of career opportunities, nature of employment, working hours, pay and benefits, training opportunities, accumulation of experience and seniority. The experiences of Chinese immigrant women in this study affirm the relation between the disadvantaged position of women in the labour market and their caring role. The difference in women's career development can be partly related to their disproportionate share of family and child care responsibilities.

At the time of the study, three women were single and one was married and with no children. Each of these four women were actively and aggressively pursuing their career goals. They took full-time employment, remained in the labour force except for short periods of lay-off, and continued their learning and skills upgrading. Audrey never stopped taking training to upgrade herself and looked forward to advancement in the banking field; Joan aimed at further promotion and new opportunities in the government; Rita was planning to get a customs broker license; Hannah had considered pursuing the doctorate degree and was occupied with her two part-time jobs.

The other four women were married and had children ranging from school age kids to adult children. Janet and Beth, who had teenage and adult children, did not have to move in and out of the labour force in order to juggle the demands of family and work. From the narratives of Lai Ping and Alice, they recalled times when their care for their pre-school children was in conflict with their employment and training, and this had significant consequences on their
career development. In Lai Ping's case, she had to quit her language training and her full-time employment. For Alice, she had to leave the work force for a number of years and when she re-entered the labour market, her children were always her priority when she considered any employment.

**Lai Ping:** It's 1985, I had my first son in July, and then, I returned to work, I thought I could not work full-time, I had to take care of my baby. I worked 6 hours, from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m..

**Lai Ping:** I had a child to take care of, I did not have the time to study. It's not so in the past, I got married and for three years, the first three years, I could go to study.

**Alice:** Why I take these jobs (domestic work), is because, in one word, to take care of my children.

A lack of quality and affordable child care keeps many women at home, causing a hindrance to their career development. Alice was determined to devote herself so that her child had the best quality of care. Alice clearly articulated her caring role in the family; although she would not agree that gender had impacted her career development. For Alice, family responsibility always took precedence over her career achievement, and she was happy about it.

**Alice:** I always say to myself, it seems like I am living for others. I go to her (employer's) house, I work for them and to their satisfaction. Coming home, I work till I am satisfied, my husband is satisfied, then I am contented. This is me, it's my personality. I'm happy.

**Alice:** It doesn't matter what kind of work I do. Maybe you say, you are educated, why are you doing domestic cleaning work? Maybe you ask, have you thought about your future? Say you earn a lot of money, a lot of money, and one day the school called, it's your child (in trouble), it's even worse. I'd rather earn less, doing kind of job, whether you say it's a good job or a bad job, that's my problem. None of your business, right?
I like to take this path. I choose to take this path, the consequences I will bear. I won't blame others.

Many Chinese immigrant women, like Alice, honour the traditional caring role of women and the cultural values it represents: caring, selfgiving, family love, nurturing. They object to the idea that staying home is despicable and they choose to give family members the best care. Indeed, the new wave of feminism emphasizes choices, encouraging women to do what they want. Yet, making such a choice, for example, choosing a career as a caregiver and homemaker, does not address the issues: that women end up having double shift work, that women are not rewarded for the work they do outside the paid work force, that women do not have pensions and income security, that women live in poverty when husbands leave. Until women are rewarded for their caring work outside the paid labour force, I argue that the gender role of caring puts women at a disadvantaged position in the family, in the labour market, and in the society.

Women's Work, Devalued Labour

While women's caring work at home is not rewarded, their work in the paid labour force is also devalued. Despite progress in advancing women's status and rights, gender inequities still persist. Cultural ideologies and norms reinforce a gender-biased division of labour and in the labour force, women are segregated in traditionally female-dominated occupations, many of which are at the lowest strata of the economy, paying despicable wages and demanding intensive labour. Women working in garment factories, women working as
domestic workers and many other women, mostly racial minorities, labour day and night for minimal wages and have no job security. They are an invisible group, their stories unheard, their sufferings unattended.

My conversation with Pauline Coyne, a garment-union business agent, and the stories of Janet and Lai Ping, reflected the exploitation experienced by garment workers, mostly women, many of whom were of Chinese origin. They were underpaid, overworked, deprived of overtime and statutory holidays by employers who showed little compliance with labour law. They worked in small garment shops with poor working conditions, shops located in old, shabby buildings not conforming to city health and fire regulations. They used old, second-hand sewing machines and primitive equipment which made it impossible for them to work faster in order to earn a few more dollars. They, especially those working in non-union shops, experienced frequent lay-offs, at the discretion and preference of their employers:

**Lai Ping:** Usually the pay is low, they didn't give you overtime..... If they didn't need you, they laid you off immediately.

Immigrant women, new to Canada, like Lai Ping, do not often know their rights. Even if they knew their rights, it takes a lot of courage to speak out against an employer or supervisor. With limited English and desperate to keep their jobs, women seldom file a complaint with the Employment Standards Branch when facing workplace inequities:

**Lai Ping:** I didn't know (labour rights). If they (the employers) will not pay (work benefits) you, they will not pay you. If you make a noise (about work benefits), you're bound to be fired. Who would dare make a noise,
who will back me up?

For Lai Ping, it was only after she met Pauline (the union's business agent) and with the help of the union that she began to speak out against the inequities and help others to do so. Nevertheless, with the radical changes in the B.C. garment industry in the last few years (partly related to the North American Free Trade Agreement), and a number of the largest garment manufacturing businesses closing or leaving Vancouver and moving to Mexico or Central America for cheaper labour, the future of the garment industry is not optimistic. Hundreds of women, having few alternatives, will become home garment workers, suffering from exploitation out of the sight of the public and government inspectors.

Women's work in many traditional female-dominated occupations is devalued, for example, garment workers, domestic workers, bank tellers, office workers, despite the knowledge and skills required. Women in non-traditional, senior or management positions also encounter various forms of discrimination, making their work difficult.

Audrey shared the experience of her supervisor who was a racial minority woman holding a senior administrative position in an advertising company. Despite her seniority, staff members, especially younger ones, showed little respect to her and made fun of her gender and her colour. Joan, working in the government, explicitly said that it was because of her gender as a woman that she experienced discrimination in the workplace:
Joan: Sometimes there are those people, if they see that you are a woman, they will say they want to talk to a male officer. Then I say, no, I handle this case.

Women, because of their gender, have to face additional barriers and unnecessary difficulties that men do not have. Yet, despite their disadvantaged position in the labour market, racial minority immigrant women respond with courage, with hope, with hard work, with skills and talents; actively, they construct their future.

**Chinese Immigrant Women's Struggle For A Career**

The preceding discussion has dealt with the disadvantaged position of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market. The women's narratives also demonstrated how Chinese immigrant women, despite the adverse environment, persevered in their struggle for a career, with great capability, with lasting hope and with mutual help.

**Achievement By Proven Capability**

Employers' assumptions and community bias send the message that racial minority immigrant women cannot perform. Chinese immigrant women in this study shared experiences when they were denied employment opportunities and career advancement because of their race, immigrant status and gender. As soon as many employers saw a woman of different skin colour, speaking with an accent, instead of waiting to see her ability, they assumed that she was not capable of performing the job. Chinese immigrant women also experienced discriminatory remarks and rejecting messages in their interaction.
with their clients and co-workers.

Nevertheless, women in this study, bringing with them years of training and work experience, when given an opportunity to prove themselves, demonstrated their capability and excelled in their work. Some of them earned the trust of clients and praise of employers, others got promotions and salary increases.

Joan outperformed other competitors and was promoted to a senior position in her department after four years of hard work. Hannah, with her genuine concern for her clients, and with her skills and knowledge, gained the trust of clients who were initially suspicious and rejected her help. Janet, with her extensive experience in the garment industry and her hard work, managed to earn a raise in her salary and was confident that the employer, recognizing her performance, would keep her for the job. Alice was asked by her employer to return to work after a long leave. The supervisor's comments for Beth's performance were excellent, hardworking, describing her as completing a job well done. Audrey, with a proven record of good performance, successfully got a job referral by her supervisor to a reputable company when she was laid off.

Double standards and employers' bias cause a hindrance to Chinese immigrant women's successful employment. Yet, Chinese immigrant women, given time and opportunity, demonstrate their capability and forge ahead in their struggle to develop a career in the Canadian labour market.
Hope and Aspirations Never Die

Women in this study, when they first came to Canada, had great hope for a new page in their career and life journey. Their self-confidence, aspiration and motivation allowed them to uproot themselves, leave their countries of origin and immigrate to a new environment. They came with the hope to integrate into Canadian society, to look for a job which utilized their skills and which provided them a living wage:

**Joan:** My initial goal, the most important thing, was to find a job, you could survive, and at the same time, you could pursue your interests. This was one of the goals when I came to Canada.

**Hannah:** I turned the job down (an offer in the Chinese Community) for several reasons. The salary was not so attractive, but that was not the main reason. I had wanted to try other opportunities, to get a feel of the main stream. I didn't want to come here and immediately start work in a limited circle.

To realize their hope of integrating into the labour market, Chinese immigrant women made all sorts of preparation and initiation in their job search. Prior to their immigration, Rita and Janet acquired new skills and credentials which allowed greater flexibility in employment options; Joan and Audrey sought information on job leads from friends. Shortly after their landing, all women actively started looking for employment.

As Chinese immigrant women interacted with a racist, sexist, classist world, some of them experienced deterioration of their confidence and motivation. Nevertheless, all of them faced the pain of rejection and exploitation with courage and endurance, they persevered to resist closed doors to
employment. Throughout this process, women redefined their job goals and did not stop upgrading themselves. They constantly looked for new alternatives, taking into consideration immediate difficulties and future possibilities. They kept looking for more satisfying employment and grasping every opportunity to a better future. They saw the hope of improving their disadvantaged position and committed themselves to advancing the status of Chinese immigrant women in the labour market. All of the eight women consented to participate voluntarily in this study as they felt that their stories might contribute to helping other Chinese immigrant women in their labour market transition. Women's experiences also witnessed the hope of changes for a better future:

- **Lai Ping**, with the help of the union worker, was confident to stand up for her rights against inequities and offered herself to help other workers sharing similar experience. We see the hope of women helping women, people helping each other, to make their voice heard and to bring positive changes for themselves and for others.

- **Joan**'s experience in the government testified to the importance and usefulness of an employment equity program to help equity groups members access more satisfying employment.

- **Rita** asserted that effective government programs and supporting counsellors could work to open an employer's door and help immigrant women put their skills and abilities to work.
Beth, despite the exclusion she experienced in the workplace, has established more rewarding relationships in her neighbourhood. She believed that things could be different should the government take the lead in promoting mutual respect and mutual learning between host Canadians and immigrants.

The women in this study chose to stay in Canada and did not give up the aspirations of having a career of their own. They hope their words and experiences inspire more Chinese immigrant women to continue their struggle to a career without losing hope. The powerful autobiographical accounts of these women enable us to end this chapter with a sense of hope and leave us with the challenge to seek possible actions for social change. This agenda will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to disclose an aspect of the reality of Chinese immigrant women's experience in the Canadian labour market, and to inquire into the factors affecting their job search and employment experiences.

The results indicate that many Chinese immigrant women, who have job skills and work experience, are excluded from the mainstream labour market and remain segregated in "Chinatown". They experience a degradation in the quality of the jobs they obtain in Canada relative to those held in their country of origin. They also experience a deterioration of their motivation and self-confidence in their interaction with an unaccepting labour market. There are societal forces denying Chinese immigrant women's equal access to employment, barriers rooted in the unequal power relations due to their race, immigrant status and gender. Despite the adverse situation, Chinese immigrant women face the challenge with great courage; given time and opportunity, they demonstrate their capability and perseverance in their struggle for a career.

This study, guided by a feminist framework, highlighted the sites and roots of inequality and redefined the nature of Chinese immigrant women's employment issues. Traditional theories addressing immigrants' settlement and employment issues focus on the person as the focal point of understanding the problem and planning intervention. In many government documents, personal
factors such as high expectations, lack of local experience, accent, cultural shock, lack of self-confidence are identified as barriers to employment. Women's words in this study challenge this assumption and support the feminist theoretical perspective's emphasis on the impact of social-economic-cultural-political forces on Chinese immigrant women's labour market experience. The focus shifts away from "personal shortcomings" of Chinese immigrant women toward systemic barriers which exist in Canadian society and within the labour market such as racial discrimination, gender inequities, and discriminatory government policies. In-depth dialogues between women (researcher and participants) not only allowed a description of the problems, they also permitted an inquiry into why and how the problems arose in the first place. This study corrects the traditional victim-blaming approach to immigrants' issues and argues for fundamental changes in the existing social order to advance Chinese immigrant women's status in the labour market.

Implications for social work practice

Social work is an action-oriented profession. Achieving a better understanding of a focal problem calls for further action and intervention by social work practitioners. This study has attested to the usefulness of the feminist perspectives to explain Chinese immigrant women's employment problems: the emphasis on structural, power analysis and the connection between the private and the public, the personal and the political. Intervention on the focal issues can be approached from personal, interpersonal, structural
and ideological perspectives which are equally important and inter-connected with each other. The following discussion, though far from complete, highlights some of the important implications for social work intervention.

At an ideological level, consciousness raising about the nature and magnitude of the focal problem is necessary for policy makers, social workers, clients and community alike. Literature reveals that the employment issues of racial minority immigrant women have received little attention by the social work profession and the community at large. In addition, traditional perspectives to address the issues are ineffective and are refuted as they fail to address the roots of the problems. There is a need for research efforts to examine the actual experience of the target population to inform policy formulation. There is a need to construct a more integrated framework, embracing and integrating the various socio-economic-political-cultural factors affecting the employment experience of racial minority immigrant women, to guide research efforts. There is a need to challenge the ideological hegemony of patriarchy, classism, racism, sexism and other oppressive thought structures, in quest of an more ideal, equitable society. Otherwise, with its acceptance of the present social order and its emphasis on change of the individual and limited social reform, conventional social work becomes powerless to deal with the increasing social inequities (Mullaly, 1993).

Continuous efforts to expose and reveal the extent and nature of the employment problems facing racial minority immigrant women through various
channels including women's groups, labour organizations, ethnic associations, media, government departments and so forth will make the issues visible and draw the attention of more concerned individuals and groups. In this process of ongoing advocacy and educational work, building of coalitions and unity among different groups involved in the issue can be sought (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988).

In British Columbia, Women's Employment and Training Coalition, for example, is an organization concerned about employment and training developments that affect women. Regular meetings between Coalition members and government officials provide a forum where racial minority immigrant women's employment issues can be addressed. At a national level, women's and racial minorities' representatives are participating in the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) which was established by the Government of Canada in 1991 to address training and labour market concerns (Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1993). The role of the equity group representatives is to ensure that their voices can be heard in the process of policy making. Social workers can participate in these organizations and contribute to the consolidation of these existing networks, helping to build linkages among organizations with shared visions, and to develop and expand connections at the local, the provincial and the national levels, to address the employment needs of racial minority immigrant women.

Social work intervention is also recommended which aims at changes in
the policies and services affecting racial minority immigrant women's employment. The role of the state in effecting racial minority immigrant women's disadvantaged position has been identified in previous discussion. Ongoing lobbying and advocating for changes in legislation, policies, and programs are necessary to achieve social, economic and political equality for visible minority women (Coalition of Visible Minority Women, 1988).

There is a need to have a central body coordinating the work of all government departments responsible for immigrants' settlement and employment issues. There is a need to have a major strategic labour market integration plan for immigrants. Canada accepts and invites immigrants to enter the country; it makes no sense for Canada to desert immigrants once they have arrived (Spigelman, Gibbons and Associates, 1997). Immigration policies should include programs and services to ensure that immigrants can integrate and participate fully in the economic, political and social life of the new country. Structural barriers to employment including accreditation of international credentials, access to language and employment training, and provision of child care should be addressed through policy making. Canada needs to invest in public and employer understanding about immigrants' skills and abilities, and to help open the employers' door for them. Employment equity measures are found to be effective to assist immigrants in accessing employment. Although the principle of gender and race equality exists in Canada's social policy, action towards these ends is woefully lacking. The call for mandatory affirmative
action has been restated (Azyan, 1991). In addition, federal government policies always stress the supply and training of labour, but make no major commitment to stimulate the demand for workers. Pressures, through group and/or organizational efforts, should be added to the ruling government to actualize the promise to put Canadians back to work through job creation and other efforts (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993). Moreover, measures should be taken to close the gap between regulations and enforcement of employment standards to prevent exploitation of labour.

At a personal and interpersonal level, various intervention strategies can be planned by social workers and social service agencies to assist racial minority immigrant women in their job seeking and employment. Women's words in this study have indicated that racial minority immigrant women lack information on job opportunities in the local labour market. To facilitate their entry to the work force, racial minority immigrant women will benefit from employment services which provide information on the local job market, career choices, market trends, and job leads. There is a need for development of a career counselling model which is gender and cultural sensitive, aiming at empowering racial minority immigrant women (Worell and Remer, 1992). The model can adopt feminist principles and incorporate power analysis and gender-role analysis, to assist racial minority immigrant women in understanding the roots of their problems. Special attention is needed to collaborate with the immigrant women to assess their skills and abilities, to
reflect on their values and beliefs which may be gender-biased, to identify feasible and meaningful job goals, to develop concrete action plans to attain their goals; and in the process enhance the self-confidence and esteem of the immigrant women. Support groups can be organized inviting racial minority immigrant women to share their labour market experience. The groups serve as a source of support and centre of information to the job seekers. The bridging role played by the ethnic social service agencies can be enhanced by reflecting the needs of racial minority immigrant women to the government and helping the job seekers to be informed about available government services.

Implications for Further Research

The data generated from the eight interviews in this study has provided rich information on the actual experience of Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labour market. However, due to the small sample size, the results must be considered cautiously. This study does not claim statistical representativeness of its sample; instead, further research with a larger sample population is recommended to strengthen the findings resulting from a qualitative study of this size.

To embrace the diversity of experiences, I invited Chinese immigrant women from different occupational backgrounds to inform this study including women working in factories, women in office/customer service work, women working as domestic workers and women in professional occupations. Nevertheless, there are many Chinese immigrant women who were excluded
from this study such as: women in non-traditional occupations, women with disabilities, women re-migrating to their countries of origin, Chinese immigrant women from other parts of the world (Mainland China, Taiwan for example) and speaking dialects other than Cantonese. Different findings might have resulted with different target populations and there is a need to repeat the research with participants of different backgrounds in the future.

While this research focuses on Chinese immigrant women, it neglects the experience of other ethnic groups. Related to this, the experience of immigrant men has not been addressed. In addition, the participants of this study were all currently employed at the time of the interviews, thus the experience of job seekers who have remained chronically unemployed demands our attention. Comparative studies can be conducted to fill these gaps.

This exploratory study adopted a women-centred approach and incorporated a more systemic analysis in the understanding of racial minority immigrant women's labour market experience. Women's words and experiences formed the basis for developing analyses. The results reflect the many systemic barriers perpetuating racial minority immigrant women's disadvantaged position. Future research adopting a feminist stance and emphasizing the importance of women's words is recommended to shed light on developing a more holistic approach to address issues affecting racial minority immigrant women.
A possible challenge to the findings of this study arise from my personal background: my identity as a Chinese immigrant woman, my own struggle for a career in the Canadian labour market and my many years of experience in the employment field. It might be argued that I have preconceived ideas which influence the analysis of data and the results of this research. However, my identity and personal experience can also be my strengths: I have a deep understanding of racial minority immigrant women's issues that other researchers do not have. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, credibility of this study is achieved by a detailed documentation of the research process and by a process of "co-creation of results". To ensure an accurate understanding of women's words, the interactive interview process allowed for clarification of ideas and uncertainties. In addition, I have contacted three of the eight women to verify my interpretations of their experiences. Better results could be achieved should all the eight women be included in giving their feedback on the findings. Still, ownership of this study is shared and women's words are honoured.

All in all, regardless of the limitations of a pilot study, this research fills some gaps in the literature and presents a voice that is under-represented. I hope that this study will spur further interest in future research in this area, and that it will serve as a step towards admission of the problem and urging related parties to address the inequities racial minority immigrant women experience in the labour market.


Association For the Advancement of Feminism. (1993). Hong Kong women's profile. Hong Kong: Author. (in Chinese)


Appendix A

List of Participant Referral Agencies

1. Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union
2. Industrial Homesewing Working Group
3. Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers
4. United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society
The purpose of this study is to explore the factors affecting Chinese immigrant women's transition into the Canadian labour market. Your personal experience and your opinion will provide valuable and much needed information in this area.

1. Could you tell your story of job seeking and working since the day you immigrated to Canada until now?

2. Looking back over your experience in the Canadian labour market, what are the factors affecting your transition?

   What are the factors you consider being a help?
   i.e. any particular situation, person, services etc.

   What are the factors you consider have created a block for you?

3. What is it like being a woman; how might it affect your labour market experience?
   What is it like being a Chinese immigrant and having an accent; how might it affect your labour market experience?
   What is it like with your background as a professional/office worker/factory worker/domestic worker; how might it affect your labour market experience?

4. Could you describe what "transition" into the labour market means to you?

5. What do you think the government should and could do to assist your transition into the labour market?
Appendix E.1.

面談內容

是項研究目的在於瞭解影響華裔移民婦女過渡到本地勞工市場的因素，你的個人經驗及意見為這方面的研究提供非常寶貴的資料。

(1) 請你講述你移民加拿大至今找工作和做工的故事。

(2) 回顧你在本地勞工市場的經營能，什麼因素影響你的就業？
    那些因素你覺得是一個幫助？
    例如一些情況、人物、服務等，
    那些因素你覺得是一個阻力？

(3) 身為一個女性，你覺得你的性別如何影響你的就業？
    身為一個華裔移民及有口音，又如何影響你的就業？
    身為住家女工／文職人士／工廠工友／專業人士，又如何影響你的就業？

(4) 你覺得「過渡到本地勞工市場」對你是什麼意思？

(5) 你認為政府應該及可以如何協助你過渡到本地勞工市場？