The Intersection of Class, Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Migration: A Case Study of Hong Kong Chinese Immigrant Women Entrepreneurs in Richmond, British Columbia

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a case study of fifty-eight Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs in Richmond, British Columbia, documenting their experiences during the process of entrepreneurship after immigration. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between the summer of 1996 and January of 1997. Drawing from the literature of ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship and the intersectional approach, this dissertation explores the complexity and diversity of entrepreneurial experiences in terms of the intersection of class, race, ethnicity, gender and immigration. It delineates the entrepreneurial project by detailing the process from immigration to business start-up, and to running the business.

First, this study documents how these immigrant women's entrepreneurial projects were rooted in history, responding to both the cultural and structural impacts of Confucian patriarchy and paternalism, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Secondly, this research outlines, discusses and analyzes their entrepreneurial pursuits by documenting the uneven and diverse impact of racialization, ethnicization, gendering and class-ification. Finally, the study investigates how the social divisions of class, race, ethnicity, gender and migration intersect in different ways, as resources and barriers, to produce and reproduce diverse social relations embedded in entrepreneurship.

In general, the study found that these women's entrepreneurial projects were more socially embedded than economically motivated, which suggested the primacy of status over class. The impact of co-ethnic informal networks was also noted to be substantial during every stage of the entrepreneurial project. Particularly noticeable as well was the overall insensitivity to gender barriers among these entrepreneurial women.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly and respectfully dedicated in memory of my mother, an immigrant woman entrepreneur, whose entrepreneurial spirits and hard work inspired me to pursue this research. Regrettably, she did not live to see this dissertation.

Chapter One

Introduction

Greater Vancouver: Changing Faces

As a settler society, Canada, from its inception as a nation, has been continuously defined and redefined by immigration. The role of immigration has always been important in shaping the demographic composition of Canadian society, which simultaneously has affected and is reflected by its social, cultural, economic and political milieus. Since the post-war years, Canadian society has undergone major demographic transformation. From a predominantly white society with European roots, its population in recent years, particularly in major metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary, has become increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-racial. The reasons behind such changes are complex. This is partly due to declining immigration from European countries after the War, and partly to the lifting of overt discrimination against immigrants from non-European sources in favour of meeting economic demands of skilled labour and capital investment in order to stay competitive in the global market. Immigration selection has opened up since 1967 with the introduction of a universal points system based on humanitarian grounds and economic demands, doing away with over a century's preference for the British and other Western Europeans.

As a result, the demographic picture of Greater Vancouver, one of the top choices of immigrant destination, has become increasingly diverse. During the past two decades and so, it has attracted immigrants from East, Southeast, and South Asia as well as people from non-traditional sources such as the Middle East and Latin America (Hiebert, 1998).

The growth of immigrants from Asia, notably from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and India was particularly tremendous as a result of the recent economic boom in the region. For example, between 1967 and 1986, while the British were still the largest place-of-birth group, the three next largest birthplace groups were from China, India and Hong Kong, and seven of the top ten sources countries were Asian (Hiebert, 1998:10-11). In essence, the proportion of Asian population grew from 2.4 percent in 1951 to 5.4 percent in 1971, and further to 18 percent in 1986 (Hiebert, 1998). Between 1986 and 1996, Vancouver has attracted the highest proportion of Asian immigrants, and immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China made up as many as 44.6 percent of total immigrants to British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 1996).

Among all Asian arrivals since 1967, the growth of Chinese population is particularly striking. By 1996, Chinese constitute close to half (49.4 percent) of the entire visible minority population in metropolitan Vancouver where the Chinese language ranked the top non-official language (11 percent) spoken at home (Statistics Canada, 1996). The arrival of Hong Kong Chinese is even more noteworthy. Its ranking as a source country to Canada went from tenth place in 1971 to fourth place in 1981 to first place in 1987 (Johnson and Lary, 1994:94), and remained so in the following decade. Hence, most of those who immigrated from Hong Kong in the post-war years are relatively recent arrivals: "over 60% of those living in Canada at the time of 1991 census arrived in the 1980s, while another 28% came between 1971 and 1980. In contrast, 8% came in the 1960s and only 1% arrived before 1961" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996). The fear of economic and political instabilities when Hong Kong reverted to Chinese communist sovereignty had instigated a massive outflow of Hong

Kong people (Li, 1998; Costa and Renaud, 1995). By 1996 Hong Kong had replaced the United Kingdom as the single most important place of birth among immigrants living in Vancouver (Hiebert, 1998).

Not only are recent immigrants diverse in terms of ethnicity and race, they are also becoming increasingly heterogeneous with respect to socio-economic status. There is no longer the "typical immigrant" (Hiebert, 1998) who came from the lower rungs of society to work as cheap labour to improve their economic position, probably with a sojourning mentality hoping to cash in and leave for good in a matter of time. Now, as a result of diverse immigration programs, with immigrants coming through different channels, as investors, entrepreneurs, skilled and educated labour, family sponsorship, relative assistance and refugees, we find marked socio-economic differences rather than uniformity (Hiebert, 1998). Such complexity was noted, for example, among Hong Kong born immigrants:

> "... of the 29,300 immigrants from Hong Kong who landed in Canada in 1990, 12,800 were in the independent class and therefore were assessed according to their level of education, work experience, and so on; 1,600 retirees; 20 were refugees; 8,100 were part of the family reunification program; and 6,800 were either principal applicants in the business classes or their dependents" (Hiebert, 1998)

These immigrants are as diverse in education as they are in terms of economic participation. According to a report on the profile of immigrants from Hong Kong (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997) based on the 1991 statistics, Hong Kong Chinese varied in terms of education, employment, self-employment, occupational distribution and income. While 28 percent of Hong Kong immigrants had a university degree, 6 percent had less than a grade nine education. Eighty-five percent of Hong

Kong men aged 25-64 and 69 percent of women in this age range were employed, out of which 15 percent of the men and 7 percent of the women were self-employed. While 49 percent of the men worked in professional or managerial fields, only 33 percent of the women worked in professional fields. Over half, 58 percent, of the women worked in clerical, sales or service positions. With respect to income, even though many made more or less the same income as an average Canadian, as many as 25 percent had incomes below Statistics Canada Low-income Cut-offs as compared with the Canadian-born (15 percent). There is also a remarkable variation between men and women. Hong Kong Chinese men on the average made 50 percent more than their female counterparts.

Overall, the ethnic-cultural transformation of Vancouver's demographics resulted in sweeping changes in many different ways. Economically, Vancouver has benefited from the flow of capital as a result of the Canadian business immigration program, that is, capital-linked migration (Wong, 1997), which makes capital-intensive investment to fulfill their immigration criteria (Li, 1993). For example, between 1987 and 1990, 1,511 entrepreneurial immigrants from Hong Kong brought in a net worth of $1.9 billion to British Columbia, and those who came under the investor program invested $343 million or 46 percent of the total funds by all investors in Canada (Li, 1993:235).

Offshore investments from Asian countries have also become significant. As reported by Li (1993), with respect to Canada as a whole, while foreign investments between 1983 and 1990 from all Pacific Rim countries quadrupled and from Japan tripled, those from Hong Kong alone increased nine times. Major Asian capital investments to Vancouver, according to Li (1993), include the following: $320 million on the expo 86 site and control over its development by a Hong Kong multi-billionaire's

corporation, a Japanese-based multinational corporation's development of a twenty-seven-thousand-square-foot supermarket and an eighty-one store mall in Richmond, and a Taiwan corporation's joint-venture with a Vancouver based company in building a hotel and shopping mall complex. Others include a Hong Kong capitalist who owns the Burrard building and the Hotel Georgia in Vancouver, a Hong Kong movie tycoon who owns land holdings at the entrance of Stanley Park and 30 percent interest in the Cathedral Place of Vancouver, a Macau casino owner and financier who owns le Meridien Hotel of Vancouver, a Vancouver based Hong Kong corporation who owns the English Bay Village, the Aberdeen Centre and Parker Place in Richmond, and controls two television stations and a radio station. Asian investors in total also control as much as 25 percent of the five hundred commercial properties in Vancouver's West End alone. High profile Hong Kong companies also established subsidiaries here, such as HSBC and Jardine Matheson Canada Limited. Ironically, massive off-shore investments from these Pacific Rim societies did not benefit much local ethnic labour or the ethnic economy. Underemployment and unemployment of immigrants from these places were notable (Hiebert, et.al., 1998) as selected immigrants complained about "no experience, no job" and made comments about the lack of economic opportunities like "Hong Kong for money, Vancouver for quality of life" (Hiebert, et.al., 1998).

Geographically speaking, recent immigrants have changed the ethno-cultural profile of urban and suburban neighbourhoods. According to Hiebert (1998), while traditionally, immigrants chose to reside in the City of Vancouver, many extended their residence beyond the city core to neighbouring suburban areas such as Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey, the North shore and the Tri-cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port

Moody). Interestingly, most did not choose to live in municipalities further away from the city centre, which are predominantly occupied by Caucasians. A twin pattern has occurred in terms of their settlement. While on the one hand there is increasing suburbanization, that is, moving away from the city core, on the other hand, many ethno-cultural groups remain highly concentrated[1].

The increase in Asian immigrants is also reflected in the changing political scene. As Asian participation becomes increasingly visible, we find Indo-Canadian and Chinese politicians representing all levels of government[2]. In fact, the representation is so spread out that in the 1997 federal election there were Chinese-Canadian candidates representing all four political parties in the Kingsway riding of City of Vancouver (Hiebert, 1998). Currently, British Columbia's premier is from a minority background, which is unprecedented in Canadian history[3].

Even though the political scene looks encouraging, socially, British Columbians received such dramatic changes with mixed messages. For example, a poll done in 1997

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[1]According to Hiebert (1998), while immigrants tend to move to suburban areas close to the City of Vancouver, their residential patterns are pretty much concentrated. For example, Chinese are more likely to concentrate in the Vancouver eastside, Shaughnessy and Southlands of the Vancouver westside, Western Richmond, the British properties in Western Vancouver, the Westwood Plateau in Coquitlam, and throughout Burnaby avoiding North Vancouver, Delta, most of Surrey, and the Eastern suburbs. Indo-Canadians, on the contrary, settled in east Richmond, the border zone between New Westminster and Richmond, NorthWest Surrey/Northeast Delta, and western Surrey.

[2] Among these politicians, some notable ones include the following. David Lam, a Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong, was nominated as the first lieutenant-governor of British Columbia. Vancouver MP Herb Dhaliwal became the first-ever Indo-Canadian federal cabinet minister in 1997 for the Liberal government. Raymond Chan, a Hong Kong Chinese immigrant, was first elected to the House of Commons in 1993, is currently Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) for the second term. He represents the Richmond riding. Sophia Leung, who is also an immigrant from Hong Kong, is currently MP representing the Vancouver Kingsway riding. Jenny Kwan is the first Hong Kong Chinese immigrant woman elected to provincial legislature for the NDP government after working as a community activist and as a City Councilor for some time. She is currently Minister of Community Development, Cooperation and Volunteers. At the municipal level, Don Lee and Daniel Lee, also immigrants from Hong Kong, are currently Council members for the City of Vancouver.

[3] Ujjal Dosanjh, an immigrant himself, who used to be the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism and later the Attorney-General, became the Premier of British Columbia after former premier Glen Clark was forced to step down as a result of a casino scandal.

by the *Vancouver Sun* and *CBC TV's Broadcast One* found that while 49 percent of the GVRD [Greater Vancouver Regional Districts] residents thought that they were more tolerant of different races and cultures over the past ten years, 45 percent said that they were less tolerant or remained the same (The Vancouver Sun, 1997b). While people may, on the one hand, praise the multicultural images Vancouver has established, they dread and at the same time are threatened by the visible presence of the Asian immigrant population and their cultural inadaptability. Issues over monster houses, tree-cutting, skyrocketing real estate prices, non-English commercial signage, English as a Second Language (ESL) funding, *satellite* kids, overachieving kids, *astronaut* families, gangs and organized crime, violence and militancy, RCMP uniforms and the helmet by-law for cyclist are among the many that have been racialized and overblown by media attention[4]. In general, negative public sentiments and attitudes toward new immigrants have transformed into a different nature, especially for the Chinese.

> "In the past, ethnic conflict was connected to competition for working-class jobs. Now the tension is more about real estate deals, university admissions and the esthetics of houses and landscapes.... Time was when host residents grumbled about poor immigrants who wouldn't adapt to western consumerist lifestyles and were eroding the education system. Now they grouse about a new generation of immigrants who, with their luxury cars, offshore investments and honour-roll kids, have adapted *too* well." (The Vancouver Sun, 1997d:B4c, Italics mine)

[4] More specifically, Chinese immigrants were blamed for skyrocketing real estate prices, building huge houses commonly known as monster homes, cutting trees in their own property, creating problematic *satellite* kids by leaving them alone in Vancouver while both parents return to their home country for better economic pursuits, unwillingness to plant roots in Canada by establishing *astronaut* families with a parent, usually the father leaving, exploiting Canadian benefits such as the school, university and medical systems, draining Canadian resources for ESL program, creating youth gangs, self-segregation, speaking Cantonese and Mandarin in public, driving expensive cars, flaunting their wealth, etc. Indo-Canadian immigrants are blamed for their militancy over religious and their back home political affairs, wife-beating, gang behaviour and organized crime, activism in maintaining the Sikh's turban in RCMP uniform and helmet by-law for cyclists, etc. Vietnamese and Iranian immigrants are blamed for gang behaviour and organized crime.

The expression of anti-sentiments has also become more subtle such that it has become extremely difficult to detect and analyze (Rose, 1999). For example, the relative homogeneity of the suburbs further to the city centre implies the possibility of "White[5] flight" of White residents moving away from these suburbs[6]. Many of these people do not openly admit this to be racist or anti-immigration, citing "too many people" (The Vancouver Sun, 1997d) and problems associated with urban and population growth (Hiebert, 1998) as factors.

Increased immigration also changes the faces of ethnic communities. For example, the Chinese community has moved beyond the old Chinatown in the City of Vancouver to different areas and its neighbouring cities. They are no longer confined to the Strathcona area next to Chinatown. As a result of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, Chinese now take up different spaces, from the modest Strathcona area and East Vancouver to upscale Vancouver Westside and West Vancouver (Hiebert, 1998). Businesses established by Chinese immigrants and residents have burgeoned and moved beyond Chinatown and penetrated into different districts and areas to meet the demand of the increased population[7]. While the traditional *huiguan*[8] normally located in Chinatown still maintain some significance, newcomers who are more diverse and modernized, tend to form and join organizations based on the Western models (Wickberg, 1994).

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[5] Adopted from Anderson and Collins (1995), the term *white* is capitalized when it is referred to a properly named group. However, we should recognize that just as there is no uniform experiences among *minorities* or *women of colour*, the *Whites* are not a universal group but refer only to a particular group experience.
[6] The notion of "White flight" was popularized through media portrayal. Very little was known about it except a recent study by Rose (1999) who briefly took note of some form of mobility similar to this.
[7] More will be discussed in the next section.
[8] According to Wickberg (1994) *Huiguan* are home-district associations and "same-surname" or "clan" associations based in Chinatown that have historically provided services to Chinese migrants and residents. These services include business relations and networking, financial help for emergencies, maintaining

Associations such as evangelical Protestant churches have become key adaptive organizations for new immigrants; social service organizations such as SUCCESS are also formed catering mostly to middle-class immigrants and residents (Wickberg, 1994). Other associations such as school alumni associations and social clubs are formed for business and other kinds of social networking (Wickberg, 1994). All of these organizations are now spread out into different geographical locations to serve the needs of a dispersed Chinese population.

New immigrants remain exclusive in character. Persisting racism continues to draw large ethnocultural groups, especially those with limited command of language, to a network of co-ethnic friends and relatives who define a culture of significant others (Hiebert, et.al., 1998:28). Few new immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong, for example, include White Canadians among their good friends (Hiebert, et.al., 1998:28). Lack of opportunities in employment have intensified intra-ethnic networks and in-group systems of employment that fed the growth of ethnic enclave economies and in turn, socio-economic fragmentation (Hiebert, et.al., 1998:26).

The City of Richmond: Increased Chinese-ization

Richmond, one of the suburbs south of the City of Vancouver, which used to be a farming and fishing community very much rural in character (Rose, 1999; City of Richmond, 1993), experienced dramatic urbanization only in the past two decades, and became a city in 1990 (City of Richmond, 1993). Its population and urban growth coincided with increased immigration when the city attracted immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds, and has become one of the most multicultural areas of greater

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Chinese schools to educate the younger generation, housing and employment assistance, provision of social support and protection, etc.

Vancouver (Hiebert, et.al., 1998). While in 1971, over 87 percent of Richmond residents reported European origin, by 1991, over 40 percent of its population was born outside of Canada with approximately one-sixth who claimed Chinese ethnic origin (Hiebert, et.al., 1998). While the Chinese population constituted less than one per cent of the entire Richmond population prior to 1981 (Li, 1998:114), it has increased to 7 percent in 1981 and 16.5 percent in 1991(City of Richmond,1997). By 1996, Chinese constitutes 33% of the entire Richmond population as the largest group of visible minorities (City of Richmond, 2000b).

As a result of the massive presence of Chinese in Richmond, Chinese businesses have burgeoned in the past two decades. These businesses have broadened from the traditional restaurant and food-related businesses to include a variety of retail and wholesale firms and professional services (Li, 1992). According to the statistics compiled by Li (1992), between 1981 and 1990, Chinese firms in Richmond have almost tripled. Based on a rough count from the *Chinese Buyer's Guide, 1996*, the total number of Chinese business establishments in Richmond was 785[9], approximately 4.3 times more than the Chinese owned firms in 1990 and 11.5 times more than the figure provided by Li

[9] Business telephone directories compiled by the Chinese community seem to be the only available sources on Chinese businesses. While the City of Richmond keeps annual record of business licence, such record does not provide a reliable source of ethnic businesses due to the fact that the ethnic background of business owners is not recorded. During the time of my research, that is, between 1996 and 1997, there were at least three different telephone directories compiled for the Chinese community. The other two were called *738 Directory Services* and *Chinese Phone Book and Business Guide*. These directories are bilingual and include both Chinese-owned and non-Chinese owned businesses in British Columbia that targeted the Chinese market. It is important to take note of the lack of validity of the figure produced. Since it was not possible to determine which businesses were Chinese-owned and which ones were not, I had to make an assumption that businesses with bilingual names or Chinese names only were Chinese-owned; and those with English name to be non-Chinese owned. There were exceptions, however. It was just obvious to identify large national and international corporations such as banks, airlines and insurance companies as non-Chinese owned even when they use Chinese names to attract Chinese clientele.

(1992) for 1981[10]. While the two sources are not directly comparable and the figures are rough, this nonetheless reflects the magnitude of growth in Chinese businesses since 1981, and even more so after 1990.

Not only did Chinese businesses grow in number, they also grew in form and variety. As the *Chinese Buyer's Guide, 1996* reflects, Chinese owned organizations and businesses expanded to include many industry and service sectors in regards to production industries and trades, retail and wholesale businesses, personal, social and professional services that had never taken hold before. These new businesses also take on a style that is quite different from their traditional counterparts. As a result of the substantial presence of immigrants from Hong Kong, these businesses have taken on a Hong Kong character, which has become increasingly multicultural and cosmopolitan in practice and worldviews, to meet their tastes (Lee and Tse, 1994). The culinary inventory, for example, enriched by Hong Kong immigration would include noodle shops selling a variety of Chinese "fast food", Hong Kong style "hot-pot" restaurants (Johnson, 1994), Hong Kong style coffee and tea (Lee and Tse, 1994), etc. There are stores that sell Chinese-language laser discs for karaoke, videos produced in Hong Kong, Hong Kong books, magazines and newspapers, etc. (Johnson, 1994) in addition to traditional Chinese herbal medicine, arts and crafts. Professional services have also expanded remarkably (Li, 1993). New services other than the traditional medical, dental, legal and accounting services that cater to the needs of Hong Kong Chinese mushroomed, for example, driving schools, financial and investment consultants (Lee and Tse, 1994), etc. Furthermore, there are three radio stations (AM1320, AM1470, FM96.1), a Chinese TV

[10] It should be noted that these figures are not directly comparable because of the lack of validity and the difference in sources. While my count was based on the *Chinese Buyer's Guide, 1996*, Li's count was

station[11] (Fairchild), and two major daily newspapers (Ming Pao Daily and Sing Tao Daily)[12] with heavy Hong Kong content. Specificallt for TV and radio stations, Cantonese is used primarily as the medium serving the Hong Kong Chinese immigrants.

Many of these new businesses also adopt modern and middle-class images when catering to the increasingly affluent and more sophisticated Chinese not only residing in Richmond and but also in its neighbouring cities, particularly those who live in the upscale neighbourhood of Vancouver west side and the "upper middle-class Chinese from South Vancouver" (Lai, 1988:164). Modern style supermarkets carrying high-quality Chinese food, Hong Kong-manufactured crackers and biscuits, and frozen dim sum (Johnson, 1994) were developed along with the traditional grocery and food stores while large and luxurious Chinese restaurants replaced the small family-operated food retailing outlets (Johnson, 1994; Li, 1998). In addition, the mushrooming of businesses that target the affluent Hong Kong Chinese women, a group with significant presence and strong buying power, is also unprecedented. These businesses either target single young women or women as housewives and mothers, would include beauty salons, beauty schools, boutiques, cosmetics retail, gift shops, children's wear, tutorial schools, etc.

Another major development in Richmond since 1990 is the establishment of modernized Chinese malls and Asian theme malls[13] which reflects the recent inflow of large capital investment by ethnic Chinese to Canada (Li, 1993; Li, 1998). Aberdeen

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based on the *1990 Vancouver and B.C. Mainland Telephone Directory*.

[11] Another TV station known as TalentTV held also by Fairchild Holdings, which used to be Cantonese-based is now changed to Mandarin spoken as a result of the recent growth of Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and China.

[12] According to a study done by ACNielsen*DJC Research on the Vancouver Chinese media index for 1998, Ming Pao and Sing Tao split quite evenly in Chinese readership, 46 percent and 45.7 percent respectively. Another Chinese newspaper that has substantial readership is the World Journal, at 22.2 percent, which targets Taiwanese Chinese.

[13] A collection of photographs on these malls is placed in Appendix A.

Centre, opened in 1990, was the first large Chinese mall in downtown Richmond. It stands on 120,000 square feet of commercial space housing 60 shops and one cinema, and was developed by a Hong Kong based capitalist enterprise with a subsidiary in Vancouver (Li, 1993, 1998). The success of Aberdeen Centre prompted the development of more Chinese malls and Asian theme malls in the area. In 1993, three new malls were opened nearby, the Parker Place, President Plaza and Yaohan Centre that housed 140, 53 and 80 shops respectively (Ming Pao Daily, 1997). By 1998, seven more malls were built and scheduled for opening in the same district, which has since renamed "Aberdeen" (Ming Pao Daily, 1997). By 2000, Chinese businesses have covered many blocks and complexes of the commercial areas in downtown Richmond, and Chinese malls have developed beyond the Aberdeen vicinity. The magnitude of these commercial developments built specifically for the Chinese ethnic market has constructed a fixed image of the growing "Chinese" character of Richmond (Hiebert, et.al., 1998).

Such a fixed image has prompted responses from the mainstream economy. Supermarkets such as Safeway set up special Asian sections, and department stores display Asian models in their promotion pamphlets (Lee and Tse, 1994). Financial institutions, banks, insurance companies, automobile retails, immigration legal services, etc. make use of Chinese media to advertise their services and products to the Chinese market[14]. Many hire ethnic help catering to serving Chinese consumers, and provide Chinese language assistance to those who are not proficient in English. Many

[14] Li and Li (1999) studied advertisements in a Chinese daily newspaper in Toronto, and found that even though Chinese ethnic businesses placed 69 percent of the advertisements, non-Chinese firms, which are normally bigger, account for 45 percent of the advertising spending.

mainstream corporations such as banks with branches established in Richmond adopted names in order to attract Chinese customers [15].

The dramatic "Chinese-ization" of Richmond contributes to the increasing institutional completeness[16] of the Chinese community, not only in degree but also in form. The ethnic economy as a result expanded in breadth and in size, as well as became increasingly Hong Kong and middle-class in style. Such a growth, both in terms of population and economy, has painted a rosy picture of the Chinese community through the mainstream lens. Popular perceptions credit this to a more tolerant, accepting and racially equal Canada, with the removal of legal barriers, in enabling Chinese immigrants to become an "over-achieving" minority (Li, 1998:154). More specifically, Chinese businesses in Richmond have widely been generalized by the public to have achieved success not only in the establishment of a strong ethnic enclave but also in taking a strong hold in the Richmond economy (Li, 1998). Yet a recent study on long time residents' reaction to the massive demographic change in Richmond shows signs of the existence of anti-immigrant racist sentiments[17], relating them to the changing the physical appearance of the city in terms of monster homes, tree-cutting, heavy traffic, loss of rural character, and being discontent with their self-segregation and establishing self-contained Asian [Chinese] malls that exclude White Canadians (Rose, 1999).

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[15] See also photographs inserted in the Appendix A.

[16] Institutional completeness is a concept first put forward by Breton in 1964. It refers, in a perfect sense, to ethnic communities that have developed formal structures and social organizations catering to the needs of their members to the extent of self-sufficiency, serving a variety of functions that incorporate educational, religious, political, recreational, professional, media and commercial activities.

[17] Even though Rose (1999) suggested that both racist and anti-racist attitudes co-existed due to the complexity of resident responses on immigrant reception, and the difficulty to detect whether the respondents used anti-urbanization as a metaphor for racism, my reading of his findings led me believe that

Research Interests

In the previous sections, I presented and demonstrated the magnitude of growth and change that occurred in Greater Vancouver in general and Richmond in particular, and the general reactions to such changes. The dramatic changes in recent years in Richmond particularly caught my attention. As ethnic businesses burgeoned, expanded and penetrated into every business district in the city, it becomes essential to explore this newly developed ethnic economy and its relation to the mainstream economy and market. Hence, I decided to conduct a case study on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Richmond. I was curious to find out, for example, what drew them to start businesses there instead of in the well established Chinese communities in the City of Vancouver, for example, Chinatown.

My personal experiences and background, in addition, prompted me to focus on a particular group of Chinese entrepreneurs: the immigrant women from Hong Kong. As a Hong Kong Chinese immigrant woman myself, I feel a strong connection to other Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women in their struggles for survival and adaptation after immigration. Joining the slow exodus of Hong Kong emigration that began in the mid-1980s as a result of the political uncertainty of Hong Kong when reverting to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, I settled in Vancouver, witnessing the dramatic increase in Chinese immigration since then. More significantly, I witnessed the development and proliferation of the Chinese ethnic economy in Richmond, which has transformed not only its ethno-cultural, social and economic characters but also the every-day livelihood of Chinese immigrants in its neighbouring Vancouver. As a regular consumer in

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White racism is indeed substantial. However, I do agree with him on the problem of essentializing racism to whiteness.

Richmond, despite the fact that I do not live there, I have dealt with many women business owner-operators, and have watched the growth of women-specific businesses. It seems to me that women's contributions need to be addressed, explored and understood.

As the daughter of a woman entrepreneur with a small family business I grew up with the business, struggling with my parents in their ups and downs, while at the same time enjoying the privileges they brought to the family. I spent my childhood and adolescent years mostly in the store as a result of my mother's lack of option but to sacrifice her family to accommodate business needs in return for financial gain. I observed both my mother working over twelve hours every day of the year as the nature of the business required daily operation, and the cooperation and conflict she had with my father on business matters. I witnessed how my mother, on the one hand, had to work harder than both her employees and my father yet on the other hand, exercised authority over the former but struggled for power with the latter. As the daughter of the owners who helped out after school, I remember how I became friends to many of these employees yet at the same time could not be their real friends because they were wary of my status as the daughter of the owners. My own experiences made me realize the complexity and contradiction of entrepreneurial positions and the emerging social relations involved. More so, I realized the advantages my mother had as a woman, and the barriers she had to overcome in generating business success.

Apart from my individual interests, I was inspired by the literature on women entrepreneurship in critically assessing the androcentric bias of entrepreneurial research. Campbell (1994), for example, calls for an innovative approach that should be culturally sensitive to women entrepreneurs. Women, she believes, who are socialized to be

culturally different from men, when become entrepreneurs will develop a definition, understanding and interpretation on work, money, job satisfaction and success different from the traditional androcentric economic perspectives. History, in addition, also accounts for much of the ethnic and male/female differences. Taking together then, studies on women entrepreneurs need to recognize historical and cultural contexts. Following Campbell's words, I agree as well that "the process of female entrepreneurship will be better understood if studied separately and intensively" (Campbell, 1994:13).

More importantly, in my academic training, I am fascinated by feminist scholarship on gender, race and class. I was informed of the importance in recognizing diversity and difference, and how complex experiences are shaped unevenly by history and structures. But a review of the literature points to scant studies of ethnic minority immigrant women in business. Even though much has been studied and written on minority women and work, with the focus on the much underprivileged and oppressed racial/ethnic minority women workers[18], middle-class minority women working as professionals, managers or entrepreneurs seldom receive attention from feminists in general or anti-racist feminists in particular. Despite of the fact that some women-of-colour feminists theoretically recognize diversity and difference among women resulting from the overarching structures of race, class and gender, such theoretical insights have not been transformed into practical research. Seeing businesswomen as accepting and promoting the [male] capitalist ideologies of individualism, achievement and materialism, and generalizing them as privileged, powerful and elitist, feminist scholars have turned a blind eye on these women and render them deviant not worthy of

consideration. The relative lack of interest in these women in academic research has contributed to a huge gap in women's studies.

In addition, Chinese women as a group in Canada have long suffered from invisibility in academic research and misrepresentation in society[19]. Research on Chinese women in business is virtually non-existent. Instead of being treated as a separate group, Chinese women entrepreneurs are likely to be hidden under the general heading of Chinese entrepreneurship (Li, 1992; Li,1993; Li, 1998; Marger and Hoffman, 1992; Chan, 1992; Uneke, 1996; Wong and Ng, 1998) or Asian businesses (Bates, 1994; Froschauer, 1998). To fill this gap, my intention was to bring this ignored group of women to the centre of my analysis, taking advantage of our shared history, culture and language to explore their identities, positions and social relations within the realm of work. Most important of all, I would like to demonstrate that the power and privileges these women possess are situational, dynamic and fractured relative to their economic position, race, ethnicity and gender, as well as immigrant status. It is my hope to document how their identities, positions and relations are contradictory, experiencing both privileges and disadvantages, and domination and subordination.

Research Agendas

Entrepreneurial pursuits and related economic life, when taking a sociological perspective, involve more than rational economic decision-making processes. Economic

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[18] See, for example, from the Canadian context work done by Gabriel (1999) on minority women workers in general, Das Gupta (1996) on garment workers and nurses, Bakan and Stasiulus (1997) on foreign domestic workers, Duffy and Pupo (1992) on part-time workers, etc.

[19] The historiography of Chinese women in Canada was not adequately covered. Historically, their images were constructed either as exotic and sexual when related to early prostitutes and tearoom waitresses, as passive and uneducated when referred to slave girls and domestic workers, or as hardworking family workers helping out family businesses (Li, 1998; Adilman1992). All other categories were virtually non-existent and invisible. The contribution of these women and their activism was only recently been documented (see Chinese Canadian National Council, 1992).

action rather is embedded in social structures and networks (Granovetter, 1985). Such social embeddedness is expressed in the development and the use of social capital, which is more pronounced in ethnic and immigrant communities (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger, 1995).

Recognizing that entrepreneurialism goes beyond economic and business relations, I attempted to explore Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women's entrepreneurial projects highlighting the social significance of economic actions, bringing into consideration factors such as class, race, ethnicity, gender and migration. My research agendas are two-folded. First, I would like to find out why these women chose entrepreneurship as their career after immigration. As their entrepreneurial projects may be related to the historical specificity of their immigration experience, the cultural and structural specificities of both sending and receiving societies, an account of the history of Chinese immigration from Hong Kong to Canada will also be explored. Second, I wanted to examine the diverse, contradictory relations they put themselves in as Hong Kong Chinese, immigrants, women, and business owner-operators. Recognizing them as active agents in producing and reproducing social relations based on race, ethnicity, gender and class, I brought their stories to the centre of analysis. I do this by closely delineating the processes of business establishment and operation, for example, why they chose Richmond as the location, the processes of how they started their businesses, and how they constructed and managed different social relations while running their businesses.

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of these women and their experiences, I will draw on a number of theoretical perspectives about entrepreneurship

and feminism, bringing together social, cultural and institutional explanations and moving between considerations of structure and agency. As immigrants from one colonized society to another, that is, from Hong Kong to Canada, and responding to structural forces of British colonialism, imperialism, Confucian patriarchy, and capitalism, these women took an active role in their entrepreneurial pursuits by reproducing contradictory positions and relations after immigration through racialization, ethnicization, gendering and class-ification[20]. Most important of all, I wanted to demonstrate that they are not passive pawns, but active agents in *defining* who they are and what kind of life they should live. As Hiebert (1998, 1999) suggested, "immigrants ... do not just *fit in* to what is already there; they participate in the process of *defining* what is here" (31).

Chapter Profiles

The organization of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter two covers the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. First I will review existing literature on ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship and women entrepreneurs. As these approaches fall short in different ways for explaining ethnic/immigrant women in business, I then present a feminist approach, the intersectional theories, which I consider more applicable to explain the diversity and contradictions of minority immigrant women entrepreneurs. Finally, I put forward my own theoretical framework, integrating the intersectional perspective with concepts and theories used in ethnic/immigrant and women entrepreneur scholarship.

[20] Racialization is the process of producing and reproducing boundaries between "us" and "them" using both physical and cultural signifiers (see for example, Miles, 1989). Ethnicization, likewise, involves the use of cultural signifiers only. The process of gendering involves segmentation between male and female traits. Class-ification refers to the construction of class boundaries based on economic criteria. In this

Chapter three reviews research methodology and presents an overview of the characteristics of my sample. I will explain how my research is based on feminist scholarship, drawing from qualitative methodology. Beyond presenting my research design, I will carefully delineate the journey that I went through in conducting this research, and my reflections on it. I will draw on issues that have been overlooked in the past, and raise concerns for future research in this area. Then I will present some statistical profiles of the entrepreneurial women under study. Other than their social and demographic background characteristics such as age, education, marital status, family size, husband's employment status, family background, etc., I will also provide a general descriptive overview of their business profiles.

Chapter four involves an analysis of Hong Kong Chinese immigration to Canada. I will first discuss the impact of imperialism and colonialism in shaping migration. Then I will present a historical account of how structural aspects of both Hong Kong and Canada facilitated migration, and how these aspects intersected with class, race and gender at different points in history. The second part examines the personal voices of the women of this study about their migration processes. It also accounts for, in great depth, the reasons why these women decided to leave Hong Kong and chose to come to Canada. Again, cultural and structural impacts are examined together with the intersection of class, race and gender on the immigration decision and processes.

Chapter five begins the journey of the entrepreneurial venture. Since the work history of these women may have important bearing on their entrepreneurial pursuit, I will first go over their work experiences before and after immigration. Then I will

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study, class relations involves either relations between middle-class and lower-class, the wealthy and the poor, or between ownership/management and labour, depending on how the women define them.

analyze the motivational factors for business start-up. I will demonstrate how structure and agency intersect in motivating them to become entrepreneurs, specifically the intersection between opportunity structures, state policy, and market demands with class, gender, race and ethnicity.

Chapter six examines the processes of business start-up. Acknowledging that these processes are not clearly and separately revealed in most entrepreneurial research, I will first analyze the decision-making processes during business start-up with regards to capital, type of ownership, target market, area of business location, etc. Then I will highlight the start-up process, documenting barriers and the support these women encountered in light of class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Chapters seven and eight examine business relations Chinese women entrepreneurs experienced while running their businesses. For analytical purposes, the two chapters will be divided into four separate sections, on class, race/ethnicity, gender and age. Chapter seven focuses on the analysis of class and race/ethnicity while chapter eight discusses the impact of gender and age. How each intersects with the others will also be carefully examined.

Finally, in Chapter nine, I summarize the major findings of the research, and examine implications for future feminist scholarship, entrepreneurial studies, ethnic community studies, and policy and organizational objectives. Women entrepreneurs, in general, are not as privileged as people usually assume. Entrepreneurship is seen more as one of the career options than a capitalist venture for power and profits. As immigrant minority women, they depend very much on informal networks due to a number of factors including the unavailability of institutional support. To this end, I suggested that

related government departments and community organizations should be more flexible in reaching out to this group of women.

This dissertation is an exploration of Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs in Canada. Since very little was done in this area, and most studies of this sort have been subsumed women under entrepreneurial men, not much is known about these women as a unique group. In filling these gaps, my research contributes to scholarly work in a number of ways. First, it contributes to the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurship by challenging the White male bias in theorizing. Second, it enriches feminist scholarship on entrepreneurship, a topic that has been understudied by feminists. Third, the data provide valuable information on immigration literature by documenting the social and economic adaptation of Chinese women entrepreneurs as a result of immigration. Fourth, this research adds knowledge to the understanding of overseas Chinese ethnic communities, which have been dominated by Eurocentric and androcentric views. Fifth, it provides comprehensive and in-depth data on a group of ethnic minority immigrant women from which analysis can be drawn for future comparative analysis. Finally, it raises some important methodological issues that need to be addressed in future research.

Chapter Two

Theorizing Ethnic Immigrant Women's Entrepreneurship

Ethnic/immigrant women entrepreneurs, in general, and Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs, in particular, have not received adequate attention in academic research. Little is known about them. Because of their marginalized positions, they have been ignored by both malestream and feminist research. These women do not fit into the malestream entrepreneurial scholarship because of the dominance of androcentric and Eurocentric theorizing, which relegates them to the periphery and sees them as not worthy of attention.

If the malestream agendas exclude them and render them invisible, the increasing influence of feminist scholarship, especially the literature by women of colour, should have included them and brought them to the centre. However, this has not been the case. Liberal feminists, with their white middle-class perspectives, have not targeted minority women separately for research[1]. Black feminists, anti-racist feminists or third-world feminists, using diversity and differences as the frame of reference, are largely theorizing about the most oppressed women of colour workers and minority women in poverty, that is, those who are situated at the lower rung of social divisions[2]. Middle-class women, whether they are professionals or knowledge workers (Agnew, 1996) or self-employed businesswomen are rarely subjects of feminist research. The feminists' core agenda to fight for justice and equity among lower-class women of colour has rendered middle-

[1] There has been an abundance of literature on the critique of Liberal feminism. For a more recent account, see, for example, Agnew (1996).
[2] See, for example, a collection of essays and research put together by Dua and Robertson (1999), Bannerji (1993) and Vorst,et.al.(1991).

class women of colour invisible (Agnew, 1996). In addition, women entrepreneurs representing the capitalist spirit of self fulfillment, profit, exploitation and oppression are less likely to raise the concerns of feminists who see such attitudes and behaviour as going against feminist politics (Goffee and Scase, 1985). The use of entrepreneurship as an active means to fight against racism and sexism is never seen among feminists as a desirable strategy. Hence, Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs who are homogenized as the privileged few, have not been a group of concern to feminist researchers. Their contradictory relations within and between social divisions of race/ethnicity, gender and class have been reduced to class relations only.

This being the case, the existing literature can only partially contribute to the immigrant women entrepreneurial agenda. In reviewing the literature, I will first look at the concept of entrepreneurs, and compare it with other related terminology such as small business, the self-employed and the petty bourgeoisie. Then I will critically review a number of theories on ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship, and show how the predominant masculinist perspectives render these theories incomplete. Subsequently the existing literature on women's entrepreneurship will be examined, revealing its limitations for use in the study of ethnic immigrant women in business. Following which, this chapter will present an intersectional perspective of anti-racist feminism, and show how this theoretical paradigm is by far a better approach in explaining ethnic immigrant women's entrepreneurship. Finally, I will integrate the intersectional perspective with some ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship theories to develop the theoretical framework for my research.

Conceptualizing Entrepreneurs

Within the sociological tradition, there has been a conceptual overlap between the petty bourgeoisie, the self-employed, the small business and the entrepreneur due to the congruity of hypothesis in different research (Arai, 1995). Those who pay tribute to Marx or Weber prefer to use petty bourgeoisie as the object of their studies, emphasizing the 'class' aspect of the phenomenon and the corresponding issue of exploitation. Bechhofer and Elliott (1985), for example, define petty bourgeoisie as comprising "all men and women who use their own (typically modest) capital to take over and establish an enterprise, who invest in it their own labour, supplementing that with the efforts of family or kin" and "who may also employ small numbers of other employees" (188). But "the scale of [labour] exploitation is typically very small and is an extension of, rather than a substitute for, their own labour" (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981:183). Hence, "*personal* capital and *personal* labour remain central" (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1985:188). For Steinmetz and Wright (1989), petty bourgeoisie are the self-employed who occupy contradictory class locations, "combining characteristics of the pure petty bourgeoisie [with no hired labour] and the capitalist class" (980). They "earn an income through [their] own labor but not selling [their] labor power to an employer for a wage" and may hire workers or may employ no one" (979). Taken together, the literature on petty bourgeoisie incorporates both the notions of self-employment and small business.

Those who use the concept of the self-employed focus more on the aspect that these people work for themselves than on the issue of labour exploitation (Arai, 1995). Rainbird (1991), for example, defines self-employment as "workers who for tax purposes are registered as business" (202). Even though these people own the means of production

(say, a sewing machine, a computer, etc.), they are not much different from wage and salary workers (Aronson, 1991) in that they usually do not realize their ownership through the establishment of a firm. In this way, the self-employed are different from the petty bourgeoisie and the entrepreneurs in the absence of an enterprise.

The third related concept is the notion of small businesses. The usage of small business pertains to the size of the firm in terms of the number of employees (Arai, 1995). The major concern is about the social relations of production between small firms and large capital. The problem with this approach lies in the ambiguity of boundary definition. While for some (for example, Clement and Myles, 1994), small-scale capitalist enterprises are defined to include the self-employed who do not hire any labour or who hire no more than two individuals, others may include businesses with 20, 50 or even 100 employees (cf. Arai, 1995).

In addition to the concepts of petty bourgeoisie, the self-employed and small business, another widely used concept is that of entrepreneurs. Most scholars who employ this concept would agree that entrepreneurs are unique because they are innovators (for example, Scase and Goffee, 1987; Curran and Burrows, 1987; Light and Rosenstein, 1995). But they differ in the definition of innovation, and to which groups this concept applies. To Curran and Burrow (1987), for example, entrepreneurship "denotes the innovatory process involved in the creation of a new economic enterprise based on a new product or service which differs from products or services offered by others in content, or in the way its production is organized, or in its making" (165). Using this definition, they criticize current research for applying the concept indiscriminately to businesses which lack innovative characteristics, particularly those

owned by ethnic minorities and women. Yet to Light and Rosenstein (1995), innovation encompasses a broader meaning. For instance, starting a new firm in itself is already an entrepreneurial innovation; expanding the firm is another; and changing the manner of doing business is a third (1). Since innovations may be important and frequent or infrequent and trivial, it would be biased if we only recognize and acknowledge the former. Usually, only a small number of entrepreneurs such as Henry Ford would make frequent, important and original innovations (Light and Rosenstein, 1995). The majority belong to the undistinguished ones who, for example, individually add "a new pizza topping" to the pizza they sell; or collectively introduced "chow mein" to the American restaurant menu (Light and Rosenstein, 1995). Since it is empirically difficult to measure innovation and its degree and magnitude, it would be difficult to distinguish between entrepreneurs, small business and the self-employed. To Light and Rosenstein, using the term entrepreneurs is more applicable as businesses usually denote some form of innovation.

Having reviewed the conceptual difference between petty bourgeoisie, the self-employed, small businesses and entrepreneurs, I incline to agree with Arai (1995) that these concepts can be used interchangeably in referring to the ownership and control of small capital and means of production. Yet in this study, I have a preference for the term "entrepreneur" for the following reasons. First, since my study does not follow strictly the Marxist or Weberian tradition, I do not want to mislead the readers by employing the concept of petty bourgeoisie. Second, since it is difficult to determine a fixed and valid boundary between large capital and small business, the concept of small business will lead to ambiguity to the scope of the study. Third, self-employed is not a preferred

concept because the target sample will include owners who expend their own labour and/or the labour of others. In addition, I agree with Light and Rosenstein (1995) that all business owners/operators, whether large or small, possess a certain degree of innovative entrepreneurial characteristics. Having said this, I decided to label the women business owners/operators of my study entrepreneurs for its flexibility and inclusiveness.

Ethnic/Immigrant[3] Entrepreneurial Scholarship

Small capital entrepreneurs have always been a neglected group in sociology due to the scholastic legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber seeing it either as a temporary phenomenon or too marginal to be worth studying (Curran and Burrows, 1987). In different ways, they conceptualized small businesses as typical only "of the early phases of industrialization, doomed to be displaced by the increasing concentration, centralization and rationalization of capitalist forms of production" (Curran and Burrows, 1987:164). Yet reality is that not only has it not be displaced, it survived monopoly capitalism and has even been revived and regenerated (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1985; Steinmetz and Wright, 1989; Clement, Myles and Schellenberg, 1994; Arai, 1995). Arai (1995), for example, points out that even though Canada's self-employment rate has declined from 1953 to 1970s, by 1980s and 1990s, it has recovered to the rate of 1953. Similar patterns happened in the United States when Steinmetz and Wright (1989) note the decline between 1940 and 1970, but subsequent yearly increase ever since.

[3] Most literature on ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship in Euro-American societies uses these two concepts interchangeably. One possible reason is the bias against ethnic minorities, referring to them collectively as immigrants regardless of nativity (for example, Ward and Jenkins, 1984; Ward, 1987; Boissevain and Grotenberg, 1987). Yet for Light and his associates (Light and Bonacich, 1988; Light, Bhachu, Karageorgis, 1993; Light and Rosenstein, 1995), these two concepts should be dealt with separately. While the study of immigrant business enterprises would encompass "conceptual breadth", the study of ethnic entrepreneurship would focus on "historical specificity" (Light and Bonacich, 1988:18). Since most literature confuses between the two in theorizing, it will not be possible to distinguish between the two here.

The resurgence of entrepreneurship of small capital implies political, moral, social and economic significance. Politically, entrepreneurship is celebrated and encouraged by the state to shrug off its responsibilities to combat unemployment (Boissevain, 1984; Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981; Woods, 1987; Rainbird, 1991). Morally, it helps to sustain capitalist liberal-democratic ideologies (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1981, 1985) and revive populist beliefs of the independent producer of the past (Clement, Myles and Schellenberg, 1994; Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981, 1985). Socially, it points to the significance of personalized relations such as paternalistic or fraternal relations (Curran and Burrows, 1987) as an alternative form of relations which have been downplayed and overshadowed by the overemphasis of corporate and organizational behaviour within capitalist enterprises (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981).

Economically, many scholars point to the resurgence of small business as part of the broader context of capitalist restructuring. But they are diametrically opposed to how independent these small business entrepreneurs are. While some see them as independent, serving as "an escape" for better opportunities (Knight, 1983), other sees them constituting both "a dependent and manipulative stratum" (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1985:203) and an alternative form of employment dependent on capitalists for survival (Rainbird, 1985; Steinmetz and Wright, 1989). Such dependence can be extended to the global spectrum in which these people are exploited under world capitalism. This argument is particularly evident when applied to North American ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurs, in maintaining economic survival after immigration, are subject to exploitation by large corporations which make use of cheap ethnic and family labour and their hard working ethics (Bonacich, 1988; Light and Bonacich, 1988). Hence the rosy

picture of an accepting, tolerant and pluralist society that offers minority newcomers opportunities of independence, individual achievement and upward mobility was painted as part of the "American dream" (Bonacich, 1988; Light and Bonacich, 1988).

However, it would be overly simplistic to assume that the consequences of the resurgence of entrepreneurship would affect all ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurs uniformly the same way. Literature on ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship has long recognized diversity. Light (1972), for example, shows that historically in the United States, blacks have been underrepresented in small business ownership. Reeves and Ward (1984) document that in Britain, immigrant from Cyprus and Malta are more likely to be self-employed or employers as compared with those from the Caribbean. Auster and Aldrich (1984) argue that in the United States, ethnic groups such as "Eastern European Jews, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Cubans" (44) are more likely to be involved in small businesses than other groups. However, according to a study done later by Razin and Langlois (1996), Chinese entrepreneurial participation became less prevalent than the other groups in both Canada and the States. The highest participation rates in Canada are Jews, Koreans, Greeks and Germans while in the United States they are Greeks and Koreans.

Not only are ethnic/immigrant groups different in the degree of participation, they also vary in the size and type of business. Despite the overall impression that ethnic businesses are comparatively small, those owned and successfully operated by Jews are more likely to grow from small to large scale enterprises (Mars and Ward, 1984). In recent years, Chinese businesses in Canada have also grown in size, and become capitalist in nature as a result of transmigration and globalization (Chan, 1992; Li, 1993;

Wong, 1997). Sometimes, success is measured in their continued presence in particular areas rather than in terms of growth in size. In Britain, for example, Ladbury (1984) shows that Turkish Cypriots are more likely to be involved in the rag trade and restaurant industry; while Reeves and Ward (1984) document that West Indians are more likely to concentrate in construction and other service activities. Boissevain and Grotenberg (1987), in their study of Surinamese business in the Netherlands, show concentration in "retail, cafes and restaurants, and crafts" (109). Light and Bonacich (1988), in comparing Korean business with the general business community in Los Angeles, document that the former were "over-represented in manufacturing, services, and retail trade" and particularly in running liquor stores. Park (1997) shows how Korean businesses in New York City dominated specifically in greengroceries, dry-cleaning businesses, fish stores, sewing factories and nail salons. Chinese and Italians in particular are heavily involved in food services and restaurants (Mars and Ward, 1984). Studies in Richmond, B.C. (Li, 1992, 1993) also show that Chinese businesses tend to concentrate in food, retail and professional services.

In addition to the diversity in ethnic entrepreneurial participation and activities, ethnic businesses vary in space and time as well. The performance of immigrant businesses, in particular, depends largely upon the reception contexts in specific time periods. Comparing across locations, Razin (1993) shows variation in the rates of self-employment in Canada, the United States and Israel due to differences in local economic structure, which encourages or discourages immigrant entrepreneurship. The rate of self-employment, for example, is the lowest in Canada, where ethnic businesses are more likely to gravitate to metropolitan areas than those in Israel and the United States. Li

(1992, 1993), on the other hand, documented the dynamics of Chinese businesses and growth in capital investment over time in Richmond, B.C. as a result of changing immigration demographics.

What, then, accounts for such diversities in ethnic/immigrant businesses? Theories of ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship have developed a number of explanations on the widespread and persistent group differences in entrepreneurial pursuits. These theories can be grouped into five different frameworks: the cultural thesis, the middleman minority theory, disadvantaged theory, opportunity structures theory, and the interactive model.

The cultural thesis points to the characteristics shared by members of a particular ethnic group that are more likely to predispose them towards entrepreneurship. Ethnic solidarity and intact cultural heritage of some groups facilitate entrepreneurship. Therefore, for instance, the Chinese cultural tradition of kinship and clanship has provided them with the basis of forming rotating credit associations, which helped them to mobilize capital for business (Light, 1972). Religious and cultural ideologies that emphasize hard work, frugality and diligence have facilitated the over-representation, persistence and success of Jews, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese in business as compared to other groups such as the Blacks who lack an entrepreneurial tradition because of the history of Black slavery (cf. Uneke, 1996; Yoon, 1997; Park, 1997). One of the problems with this theory is the emphasis of transplanted cultural endowments of immigrant minorities, ignoring the fact that some entrepreneurial immigrants, such as the Koreans and Cubans in the United States, may not have a history of entrepreneurship before immigration (Light and Rosenstein, 1995). Another problem is the disregard for

structural factors such as racism in the labour market and in financial institutions (Yoon, 1997). With respect to Chinese entrepreneurship in Canada, Li (1992) suggests that such a monolithic cultural model can only be applicable to Canadian Chinese in the nineteenth century when they came from a relatively homogeneous and cohesive background predominantly from a few peasant districts of southeast China (121).

A second related theoretical perspective is the middleman minority theory. The notion of the middleman refers to occupying positions between producer and consumer, employer and employee, owner and renter, elite and masses (Bonacich, 1973:583). Bonacich (1973) relates immigrant entrepreneurs as middlemen because of their sojourning mentality, a cultural factor most notable among Chinese, Jews and Indians. Such a mentality results in a tendency towards thrift and selective concentration in middleman businesses, such as trade and grocery stores, that would not tie them to the territory when they decided to leave for good. This sojourning mentality also consolidates internal communal solidarity with mutual help to cut costs, and a resistance to assimilate to the dominant culture. While this promotes internal interdependence and solidarity and restricts internal competition, it also leads to conflict and hostility with the dominant groups. A major criticism of this middleman theory is the overemphasis of the "sojourning mentality" and the failure to consider structural racism resulting in the lack of opportunities in the labour market as the cause (Yoon, 1997). Besides, middlemen are more likely to be found in peasant and colonial societies during the 19th and late 20th centuries (Yoon, 1997). Even Bonacich (Bonacich and Modell, 1980) later questioned this theory when she noted a relative lack of empirical evidence to support it in recent years.

The concept of "ethnic economy" was later developed from this middleman theory (Dallalfar, 1994) that focuses on the ethnic entrepreneurial activities of immigrant groups who engage in entrepreneurial development, in a variety of locations and neighbourhoods, using both class and ethnic resources beyond their ethnic enclave, such as Chinatown or Korean Town. As middlemen, they are residentially dispersed and make use of both ethnic and non-ethnic producers, suppliers and labour to provide for a broader market than the ethnic niche (Bonacich and Modell, 1980; Waldinger, McEvoy and Aldrich, 1990). Chinese concentration in the restaurant and food businesses, Japanese concentration in agriculture and fishing, and Korean concentration in the liquor store business and manicure salons are cases in point (See for example, Li, 1998; Light and Bonacich, 1988; Park, 1997; Yoon, 1997).

The third theoretical stream is the disadvantaged theory. This theory explains the high participation of minority groups in business in terms of the disadvantages they face in the labour market such as language barriers, less transferable skills and knowledge, unvalidated educational and training credentials and racism (Yoon, 1997; Uneke, 1996). Hence, ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship should not be interpreted as a form of success but as an option, due to these structural barriers, working in their own business as cheap labour (Bonacich, 1988). While it is true that many minority entrepreneurs started their businesses in response to structural barriers, entrepreneurship will not likely be an option if there is a lack of resources such as availability of information and capital, social networks, and adequate opportunity structures. Hence disadvantages do not directly translate into entrepreneurship.

Derived out of the disadvantaged theory is the "ethnic enclave" thesis (Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes and Jensen, 1987; Sanders and Nee, 1987; Mar, 1991) which grows out of the segmentation theory (see Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Hirsch, 1980). There are two labour markets in the economy, the primary and the secondary. The former consists of better jobs while the latter consists of jobs, mostly occupied by women and minorities, that are unskilled, low-paid, insecure and dead-ended. The ethnic enclave represents the third segment consisting of both ethnic entrepreneurs and ethnic workers (Model, 1985). The ethnic enclave arises as a reaction to economic disadvantages faced by immigrants and ethnic minorities. Those with access to capital would mobilize ethnic resources to form an entrepreneurial class. Ethnic solidarity strengthens co-ethnic services and employment, and confers important business resources in enhancing business-related ethnic networks of friends, family and kinship in terms of mutual aid and support, information sharing, social trust and help to train and sponsor co-ethnic for subsequent future entrepreneurial development (see for example Wilson and Portes, 1980; Hisrich and Brush, 1986; Zimmer and Aldrich, 1987; Light, Bhachu, and Karageorgis, 1993; Light and Rosenstein, 1995). A major problem with the enclave thesis lies in its conceptual confusion: whether the spatial factor involves residential concentration or an employment niche (Sanders and Nee, 1992; Sanders and Nee, 1987; Portes and Jensen, 1987). Besides, research on ethnic enclaves tends to focus on the analysis of labour rather than on the entrepreneurs. While some see the ethnic enclave as providing an opportunity for upward mobility for co-ethnics (e.g. Portes and Bach, 1985), others point to subordination and exploitation whereby co-ethnic workers are paid low wages with lower promotional opportunities and a higher turnover rate (e.g. Sanders and Nee, 1987;

Mar, 1991). Still others observe both advantages and disadvantages suggesting complexities rather than over-generalizations (Model, 1985).

Some conceptualize ethnic-based resources and relations as a form of social capital by which co-ethnic friendship and kin networks are formed based on inter-dependence, loyalty and trust (Marger, 1989; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Bates, 1994; Gold, 1994; Waldinger, 1995). The use of family resources is particularly evident as a form of social capital for family and small businesses (see for example, Zimmer and Aldrich, 1987; Sanders and Nee, 1996). As a form of social embeddedness, such ethnic/social networks may have both positive and negative consequences. While these networks may promote ethnic solidarity, they may simultaneously restrict ethnic groups to the confinement of the ethnic enclave and impede economic relations with outsiders (Waldinger, 1995).

The fourth theoretical approach looks at the opportunity structures. Ethnic businesses are inconceivable without some favourable opportunities that are conducive to business (Yoon, 1997). Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) point out that market conditions in the host society are important to the establishment of ethnic businesses. First, the demands of ethnic products and services by the ethnic community especially new immigrants, who prefer to patronize trustworthy and personalized services of co-ethnics during their process of adjustment and settlement, have facilitated the development of ethnic businesses. Second, open market conditions may favour ethnic minorities to start businesses not confined to co-ethnics. For example, the demand of ethnic goods by the general population, the rising trend in small business, the abandonment of certain open market niches due to a lack of successors, and run-down

inner-city neighbourhoods or economic instability may pull ethnic minorities into establishing businesses in the open market. Finally, the availability of opportunities as a result of government policies may motivate ethnic minorities and immigrants to start businesses.

Even though each of the above approaches provides some valuable insights to explaining ethnic/immigrant business enterprising, the approaches are nonetheless partial and incomplete. Thus, some scholars suggest a synthesis to incorporate these perspectives in an interactive way. I will present three models that deal with interaction in different ways: Light's resource theory of entrepreneurship (Light and Rosenstein, 1995), Marger's theory of group resources and opportunity structure (Marger, 1989) and Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward's interactive model (1990).

According to Light, all factors contributing to the unequal participation of ethnic entrepreneurship can be analyzed in terms of the interactive effects between class resources and ethnic resources. Ethnic resources refer to joint characteristics shared by an ethnic group that include "entrepreneurial heritages, entrepreneurial values and attitudes, low transaction costs, rotating credit associations, relative satisfaction arising from nonacculturation to prevailing labor standards, social capital, reactive solidarities, multiplex social networks, and a general pool of unemployed and disadvantaged co-ethnic workers" (Light and Rosenstein, 1995:22). Hence to use Chinese entrepreneurship as an example,

> "If one observes... that Chinese work long hours, save more of their income than outsiders, express satisfaction with low wages, help one another to acquire business skills and information, follow one another into the same trades, combine easily to restrain trade, utilizing rotating credit associations, or deploy multiplex social networks to economic advantage, one

> is calling attention to the manner in which ethnic resources promote Chinese entrepreneurship" (Light and Rosenstein, 1995:22).

What Light did was to combine cultural, social and ethnic market characteristics as ethnic resources. These characteristics alone are not sufficient to contribute to entrepreneurial pursuit. Rather, they interact with class resources, which are individual assets that include material resources such as "private property in the means of production and distribution, human capital, money to invest" and cultural resources such as the vocational culture of "occupationally relevant and supportive values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills transmitted in the course of socialization" (Light and Rosenstein, 1995:23). To apply class resources to ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurs, having "entrepreneurial parents, previous business experiences in their homeland, large sums of money available for investment when they arrived, materialistic attitudes and values, and graduate degree in business administration" (23) would combine to explain entrepreneurship. Understanding the diversity of ethnic business ventures requires looking into how ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurs draw on both class and ethnic resources.

Adopting Light's concepts of ethnic and class resources, Marger (1989) presented an analytical model that incorporates opportunity structures. According to him, "the activity of immigrants in independent enterprise may be seen as the result of the interplay of two sets of variables: those pertaining to group resources and those relating to the opportunity structure of the receiving society" (541). Other than the ethnic and class resources possessed by the immigrants, business enterprising would not have been feasible without the social, political and economic environments that are conducive to

business. Hence, "the nature of the markets and relative accessibility of newcomers to them, the needs of the work-force, the legal system that regulates economic activity, and the social conventions that both facilitate interaction and sustain boundaries among groups" are crucial elements in the opportunity structures that would interact with both class and ethnic resources to produce ethnic immigrant entrepreneurs. Among all factors related to the opportunity structure, the most prominent are the ethnic enclave economy and majority group abandonment. This is especially true when both host and ethnic communities are of sufficient size and diversity. What is also critical is the degree of encouragement the host society has toward minority business activity.

Another interactive model was developed by Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990). Drawing from past theories, they present an even more detailed model that incorporates various group and structural factors, and the interaction between them. The opportunity structures include several market conditions and access to ownership that has been described above. Group characteristics include social, economic and psychological predisposing factors, resource mobilization and differences among ethnic immigrant groups as a result of migration.

The predisposing factors point to cultural and structural disadvantages such as language barriers, nontransferable skills, and discrimination faced in the labour market as a result of migration, the willingness to take risk, and the predisposition to see business as a means to get ahead. Resource mobilization incorporates ethnic social networks such as trusted acquaintances, friendship, family and kinship ties for information sharing, and links to professionals and people of high status in the ethnic community. Another form of resource is the availability of co-ethnic labour and the cooperative and loyal relations

not only in employment relations, but also in relations with suppliers, subcontractors and customers. A third form of resource involves government policies in assisting immigrants, for example, through special minority investment programs. Finally, group differences in terms of (a) premigration characteristics such as the transferability of skills, (b) circumstances of migration such as temporary or permanent settlement patterns and (c) postmigration characteristics in terms of the prevalence of small business in the community are also crucial factors.

Relevant ethnic strategies will then be built and developed from the interaction between these opportunity and group characteristics. These strategies include acquiring information, obtaining capital, training and skills, managing relations with employees, customers and suppliers, surviving competition and protecting themselves from political attacks. How entrepreneurs adapt from the opportunities structures and how they make use of their various resources will be reflected in the kind of ethnic strategies used in the development and running of businesses. Over all, this theoretical model has the advantage over all the others because of its comprehensiveness and the emphasis on interactivity and entrepreneurial dynamics.

Within the Canadian context, Wong and Ng's (1998) study is the only one that adopts Waldinger, et.al.'s interactive model on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. Interviewing mostly male entrepreneurs in Vancouver who immigrated through the Canadian business immigration program, they showed how certain structural forces and ethnic resources were more applicable than others, how some issues were not mentioned by the model, and how certain ethnic strategies were used and not others. For example, not stated in Waldinger, et.al.'s model, these immigrants faced racism when establishing

business in the open market and consequently were restricted in doing business within the ethnic economy. Because their businesses were confined to the ethnic market, competition for vacancies in the open market was not an issue. Besides, not only are government policies in assisting entrepreneurship not available to them, they also suffer from the restrictive entrepreneurial immigration program. Yet while other immigrant groups may face blocked mobility in the labour market, as entrepreneurial immigrants who had plans to go into business before immigration, they did not have to face such barriers. Even the ethnic strategies they employed were not the same as those presented by Waldinger, et.al.'s model. While it is true that they had to mobilize co-ethnic resources and various opportunity structures to develop ethnic strategies such as acquiring information, recruiting workers, managing customers, and securing competition with other businesses in the ethnic economy, they did not have to deal with capital mobilization and political attacks. In addition, however, an ethnic strategy that is unique to them but not discussed in the model is the aspect of transnationalism, through which transnational business enclaves across borders were established.

Even though the literature on ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship has been well developed providing invaluable insights, its major shortcoming lies in the androcentricity and the failure to recognize intra-group diversity. No distinction is made between ethnic/immigrant male and female entrepreneurs, which implicitly implies the biased notion of universality. More importantly, the mobilization of gender resources and their vital role in ethnic entrepreneurship were not being addressed (Dallafar, 1994). Hence, the theories developed in this area can only partially be applicable to the enterprising processes of ethnic immigrant women.

The Literature on Women's Entrepreneurship

Not only is it the case that women in business have never been of interest to the feminists, few studies have made reference to feminism in theorizing. Among them, Goffee and Scase (1985) attempted to relate different types of businesswomen to traditional gender roles and feminist ideologies and noted that only a minority of businesswomen attempted to use their business endeavour to promote gender egalitarianism as a cause. Fischer, Reuber and Dyke (1993) made use of liberal feminism and socialist feminism to explain gender differences in doing business and more specifically, why women entrepreneurs did not do as well as their male counterparts. Green and Cohen (1995) saw women's involvement in small businesses as a hegemonic process in giving women the opportunity to negotiate, to feel autonomous, empowered and in control yet does not alter the fundamental positions and world views of women, particularly working mothers (312). While their work made some contribution towards remedying the existing atheoretical tradition in most entrepreneurial research on women, whether this will generate feminist interests in this area remains to be seen.

Indeed, much of the existing literature on women entrepreneurs is descriptive and quantitative in nature. One central theme centres around delineating profiles of business women as compared with men (Stevenson, 1986; Lavoie, 1988; Belcourt, 1991; Belcourt, et.al., 1991; Fischer, 1992) . Female entrepreneurs are found more likely to be self-employed and small employers (Belcourt, et.al., 1991; Johnson and Storey, 1993), and their businesses tend to be younger than the men's (Belcourt, et.al., 1991). Their investments tend to be segregated in a few traditionally female-specific areas, for example, concentrating in the retail and service sectors (Belcourt, et.al., 1991), in areas

such as "food production, nutrition, health and child care" (Allen and Truman, 1993:8), or in "hotel and catering, personal and social services, administrative and business services, retailing, textiles, ready-to-wear clothing and crafts" (Turner, 1993). They are likely to be first born, raised by middle class families, better educated, children of immigrants and of minority status (Belcourt, 1986/7; 1987/8). Though in general their profile is similar to their male counterparts, there are some significant differences between them. For example, women entrepreneurs are less likely to be experienced (Stevenson, 1986) and qualified (Johnson and Storey, 1993), less likely to adopt appropriate management skills (Goffee and Scase, 1985), and more likely to acquire entrepreneurial skills through self-teaching (Belcourt, et.al., 1991) and to build business from their own hobbies or unpaid domestic skills (Kaur and Hayden, 1993). This is due in part to the male bias toward formal training, which targets primarily men (Turner, 1993).

A second major theme focuses on the motivational factors for business start-up. Over all, most research found that women and men are quite similar in the reasons for choosing entrepreneurship as their career. Like men, women claim the quest for autonomy and independence, increased self-confidence and self-worth, personal challenge, economic necessity, and monetary gains (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Stevenson, 1986; Scott, 1986) as the major reasons for starting their own business. But there are differences due to the gender-specific nature of being women. In contrast to men, women are more likely to choose entrepreneurship as a response to sex-related disadvantages in the labour market such as promotional barriers due to the 'glass ceiling effect' (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Stevenson, 1986; Belcourt. et.al., 1991; Richardson and Hartshorn,

1993), unemployment and underemployment (Turner, 1993), and the need for greater flexibility to fulfill family obligations (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Scott, 1986; Stevenson, 1986; Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993). Some women go into business for social reasons such as making friends and alleviating loneliness (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Lavoie, 1988). Others establish businesses for the political reason of combating male dominance (Goffee and Scase, 1985).

The third theme of female entrepreneurship centres around business operation and success. Female entrepreneurs are less likely to obtain financing from banks and other financial institutions than their male counterparts (Johnson and Storey, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993; Turner, 1993). Indeed, there is also a lack of financial programs specifically targeting women (Turner, 1993). With limited capital, they have to invest in their own labour and a high level of efficiency in order to make their businesses work (Allen and Truman, 1993). In addition, unlike men who rely on family and wives to help out, businesswomen tend to lack support from their husbands (Belcourt, 1986/7, 1987/8; Stevenson, 1986). Those husbands who help are much recognized for their effort. Often they are credited as experts (Stevenson, 1986). In fact, women face constraints on time and spatial mobility as a result of household and domestic responsibilities (Allen and Truman, 1993). Due to family responsibilities, there is "a potential of self-exploitation within entrepreneurship where the boundaries between paid and unpaid work are diffuse and obscure" (Allen and Truman, 1993:9). Women are also more likely to hire women employees. This decision is probably because their businesses are more likely to be women-related such as hairdressing and retail ladies' clothing, or simply because they

tend to have a preference for female rather than male employees (Johnson and Storey, 1993).

The barriers faced by women in business are well documented. Belcourt, et.al. (1991), for example, notes that entrepreneurial women are likely to be trapped in a glass box in which they are being "boxed in by conflicting demands, lack of time, and lack of access to funds and network support, knowledge and experience" (ii). In other words, they experience conflict between work and family, as well as discrimination from male customers, suppliers, bankers and even employees (Belcourt, 1991). Consequently, female-owned businesses are likely to be less profitable (Johnson and Storey, 1993) and more likely to end in bankruptcy despite the fact that businesswomen tend to work longer hours (Belcourt, 1991). Similarly, Miskin and Rose (1990) found that family burden, when combined with less business experiences and performance skills, would retard the growth of a new venture (35). Loscocco and Robinson (1991) also document how the lack of family support on top of family responsibilities makes women's businesses less successful than their male counterparts. Turner (1993) mentions the lack of advice from organizations and agencies to help women due to male orientation, and orientation towards larger business. Fischer (1992) in addition demonstrates how the relatively less experienced and lower motivations of women make their firms perform less well than those of men.

One key problem associated with most of the work on women entrepreneurs lies in treating them as a homogeneous group regardless of diverse experiences. Very few studies pay attention to ethnic women entrepreneurs, let alone the diversity among them, and when they do so, they treat them as uniformly disadvantaged. Turner (1993), for

example, in analyzing the push and pull motivational factors of women entrepreneurs, dichotomizes these factors along ethnic lines subsuming all ethnic minority women to be disadvantaged, and consequently being pushed into setting up businesses to fight against unemployment, underemployment and unsatisfactory conditions and prospects at work. Kaur and Hayden (1993), similarly, wrote about the "double discrimination" Asian and black women face whereby "self-employment may be the only viable alternative" to low-paid work (103).

Belcourt, et.al. (1991) draw our attention to ethnic women's business ventures as a response to sexism and racism. In order to avoid racism, they are more likely to be involved in ethnic businesses. The businesses in which they engage are generally in the service and retail sectors, generating low profits. They usually do not pay themselves, or pay themselves a low income. They depend a great deal on family connections, especially their spouse, for financing and advice. In fact, they are more likely to start family businesses as compared with the average women. They are also more likely to see their family responsibilities as more important than their business careers.

This insensitivity to diversity is largely attributed to the impact of conventional [white] male theoretical and empirical agendas. Campbell (1994), for example, comments on how knowledge of women's entrepreneurial patterns becomes hidden as a result of taking men's experiences as the norm: "on the theoretical level, acceptance of male behaviour as the norm severely limits the discovery of new entrepreneurial patterns, while at the pragmatic level, the male-as-norm bias distorts seemingly objective data" (10). Similarly, Stevenson (1986) charges the positivist approach in using male standards and definitions: "[this approach] makes male entrepreneurship the standard, and then

proceeds to measure women against it ..." (32). For example, "the traditional economic definition of work and the status of money as the true/only measure of success" (Campbell, 1994:12) overlooks the distinctive patterns of women's entrepreneurship. Unlike men, making a profit or expanding the business may not be considered as essential to success. Besides, women may have their unique way of doing business. Building diverse and loosely coupled personal networks of business, employee, and family relationship is crucial to them (Aldrich, 1989; Udo, 1993).

Aside from the androcentric problem in theorizing, Campbell (1994) is also critical of the method used in most empirical studies. She criticizes the prevailing quantitative research strategy as culturally insensitive, that is, unable to escape gender-cultural bias. However, she does not reject it totally but sees it as "a necessary first step" for the collection of "raw demographic data" (12). Yet in order to fully understand patterns of female entrepreneurship, "more cultural sensitive, qualitative methods are needed" (13). Women should be allowed to relate their experiences, their values and reasons for doing business using their own language. Hence, women entrepreneurs should be studied "separately and intensively" (13). And this, I would like to add, is particularly important in understanding the diverse experiences of both white and women-of-colour, and immigrant women entrepreneurship.

Whether Campbell's urge for a change in paradigm and method is successful has yet to be seen. By far, Goffee and Scase's study (1985) is still one of the most widely cited works in providing a detailed and in-depth account of the diversity of mainstream women entrepreneurs and its relations to traditional gender roles. They recognize four types of women entrepreneurs: conventional, domestic, innovative, and radical.

Conventional businesswomen are those who have trading, business and technical skills due to past employment experiences in women-related jobs. These women are more likely to establish gender-specific businesses such as fashion boutiques, hairdressing salons, guest houses, secretarial agencies and office-cleaning businesses. They are more likely to be motivated by personal autonomy and economic needs; however, they do not challenge their traditional gender roles. They would like to maintain their domestic duties along with their business responsibilities. Their business income is considered supplementary. In addition, they tend to reinforce the gender division labour by hiring women employees in their women-specific businesses.

Domestic businesswomen have their home businesses based on their hobbies, creative skills and talents in areas such as dressmaking, pottery making, flower arrangement, etc. Self-fulfillment and personal expressions are more important motivations than economic needs because their husbands tend to have professional careers. They put children and families as the top priority, regarding traditional gender roles as natural and complementary. These domestic businesses can easily transform into family businesses when the husbands lose their careers and incomes. They are more likely to end up taking charge, thus relegating the wives to subordinate roles.

Innovative businesswomen, on the other hand, reject traditional gender relationships and emphasize personal achievement through business success. As businesses take up much of their energy and attention, these women are less likely to get married. Even if they have families, they still give priority to their business interests. These women believe in personal efforts and hard work individually to overcome gender

barriers rather than in the collective organization advocated by feminists. As a result, they assimilate to male values and become marginalized by both men and women.

Radical proprietors, on the contrary, see their business endeavour as part of the collective struggle against gender inequality. Even though they come from middle-class backgrounds, they do not make use of the privileges that come with entrepreneurship. On the other hand, they would like to share these privileges with other women by engaging in co-owned enterprises or cooperative organization. Yet they usually find themselves struggling between egalitarian ideologies and the reality of profit-making.

Cromie and Hayes (1988) later did research to validate Goffee and Scase's model. While radical businesswomen are not found in their sample, 'innovators' are very much similar to those described by Goffee and Scase and the 'dualists' resemble the conventionals. The 'returners' are quite similar to the domestics except that they fulfill their child rearing responsibilities before returning to establishing a career based in business. In any case, these typological models, albeit constructed as ideal types, are valuable in challenging the unitary approach in most entrepreneurial research. Yet both Goffee and Scase (1985), and Cromie and Hayes (1988) fall short in recognizing diversity based on race and ethnicity.

Indeed, very few studies of women entrepreneurs consider ethnic minority women "separately and intensively", to quote Campbell (1994) again. The most recent studies deal with South Asian immigrant women in Britain (Dhaliwal, 1998; Raghuram and Hardill, 1998) and Iranian immigrant women in the United States (Dallafar, 1994). The study of Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs as a case study is almost non-existent. The only study I can locate is Baxter and Raw's study of Chinese women in the ethnic

catering industry in Britain. Most studies of Chinese women's entrepreneurship in Canada, for example, either subsume women as helpers of male-dominated family business (for example, Li, 1998) or obscure gender by considering both Chinese men and women as a single entity (Wong and Ng, 1998; Uneke, 1996), or hide them within the group of Asian entrepreneurs (Froschauer, 1998). In order to explore Chinese immigrant women in business adequately, a shift in paradigm is needed and can only be accomplished with the application of a feminist perspective. In the following, I will detail the intersectional perspective that I consider by far more relevant in explaining the unique yet diverse experiences these women encounter.

The Intersectional Perspective

The intersectional perspective is a feminist approach that theorizes the interconnection of race, class and gender[4], broadening beyond the scope of gender. Intersectional theorists write about topics related to women of colour and are usually represented by black feminists (for example, hooks, 1984; Collins, 1991; Collins, 1993), anti-racist feminists (for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995; Creese and Stasiulis, 1996; Dua and Robertson, 1999) and third world feminists (such as Mohanty, 1991 and Chow, 1991 and 1993). In general, they are highly critical of the masculinist Western traditions and White feminists as non-representative or misrepresentative in explaining the experiences of women of colour. They reject essentialism, ahistoricism, universalism, quantification and prioritization in theorizing systems and relations of power, domination and subordination.

[4] Creese and Stasiulis (1996), for example, called this the "holy trinity", but suggested that such interlocking relations should not be limited only to class, race and gender; but can be extended to other systems of power such as ethnicity, dis(abilities), sexuality, age, immigration, citizenship, etc.

The theorizing of the intersectional perspective focuses on two different yet inter-related issues: women's 'knowing' of their lived experiences as a starting point for feminist activism, and the multiplicity of women's experiences based in multiple locations (Dua, 1999). The two central questions they ask include (1) how women of colour are active agents, capable of knowing and constructing their own experiences within their structural locations, and (2) how the complex identities and experiences of women of colour are affected by the inter-related structural forces of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, as well as through power and agency.

With respect to the first agenda, the goal of anti-racist feminism is to bring women of colour "from margin to the centre" of analysis (hooks, 1984). Women and particularly women of colour, because of their subordinated positions, have been misrepresented by the power of domination. Mohanty (1991), for example, criticized how men, including third-world men, homogenized all women as the 'other'. In particular, she expressed her concern about homogenizing third-world women "under western eyes" as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized... [and]... sexually constrained" (56). Chow (1991) also criticized the romanticism played by western scholars including White feminists to reinforce the authenticity of an indigenous Chinese patriarchy onto Chinese women, championing how Chinese women should be represented. Hence, Hong Kong women who are westernized are seen as "contaminated".

To deal with the misrepresentations of women of colour, it is therefore important to give these women their voices. We have to recognize that women of colour are also active agents, with a "free mind", capable of self-definition (Collins, 1991). We should

not see women as pawns, as objects reacting passively to structural forces, defined by the power of dominance. Nor should we recognize only the experiences and knowledge produced by educated and intellectual women (hooks, 1984; Collins, 1991). All women, rather, are capable of telling their stories from their own standpoints. Such recognition is crucial because this puts the person at the centre, capable of defining, re-defining and deconstructing ideas and knowledge based on their overarching positions of race, class and gender. Yet we have to bear in mind that the stories told by women may be full of contradictions. Not all women, who are oppressed, "know" their oppressions nor do they "know" what needs to be done to end oppression (cf. Dua, 1999). Nonetheless, their contradictory experiences are valuable, representing the ongoing processes of producing knowledge. There is not absolute truth, and the knowledge produced cannot be generalizeable to all other groups situated in different historical contexts (Collins, 1991).

The experiences of women are complex because of how they are differentially located in interlocking historical contexts. Hence, the second agenda of the intersectional perspective deals with how women interact with these structural forces, most commonly expressed in the intersection of race, ethnicity, class and gender. To understand this, we have to recognize that these social divisions are not essential, ahistorical, fixed and absolute categories that are independent of each other, competing for primacy and importance. Neither category should be analyzed separately nor takes precedence over others, nor is related to each other quantitatively. All these categories are socially constructed depending on the contexts, and intersect with each other to produce and reproduce unique experiences and social relations.

For example, according to Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), gender cannot be reduced to biology and analyzed purely on the basis of sexual differences and biological reproduction. Gender division and practices are fluid and negotiable relating to class and race, and other cultural and political projects related to ethnicity and the nation[5]. In other words, gender can be racialized, ethnicized and classed to produce diverse forms of inclusion and exclusion. Likewise, class alone, analyzed as productive processes, cannot be reduced to the economy. Class relations are constructed and reproduced by means of gender and race, ethnic and nationalist discourses and practices. By the same token, race should not be interpreted only by physical traits such as skin colour or 'blackness', and can only be fully understood when interconnecting with nationalism, ethnicity, gender, class and the state. Ethnicity too is socially constructed, and cannot be reduced to culture, with boundaries determined by a number of parameters such as birthplace, culture, religion, language, and other symbolic practices. Ethnic categories form 'imagined communities' (Anderson cf. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992) constructed for the purposes of inclusion and exclusion but varied between insiders and outsiders depending on the interplay with politics, class and gender for political and economic ends. Race, ethnicity,

[5] Closely related to ethnicity is the notion of nationalism. Nationalist ideologies with the perception of sharing common origin and common destiny are characteristic of the hegemonic ethnicity, and are used to racialize and ethnicize gendered groups and different classes as foreign and subordinate, to be outside of the national boundaries, and restricted from participation in civil society. Nationalism is part of racism, and is used to create "imagined communities" where artificial boundaries of the 'other' are constructed together with race, culture, gender and class characteristics for exclusion. As a result, Canadian nationalism, for example, leads to immigration policy and citizenship projects for selective discrimination.
Not only are race, ethnicity and nation inter-related concepts, they also constitute interchangeable discourses. Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995) and Yuval-Davis (1997) point to an important conceptual understanding of these divisions. While these collectivities are all socially constructed imagined communities fabricated by culture and share common origin and common destiny, they become "labelled as ethnic, racial or national by different agents and/or different historical circumstances" (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995:20). Hence, depending on the project, whether it is political, racial and cultural, different labels are applied. Depending on the context and project of power relations, nationalist discourses are articulated as hegemonic ethnicity; racial discourses as racially and culturally inclusive; and ethnic discourses as sharing origin and/or destiny based on culture.

class and gender, therefore, integrate and inform each other in producing and reproducing unique experiences through processes of negotiation and contestation.

Hence, it is crucial to recognize "contradictions inherent in women's location within various structures" (Mohanty, 1991b:66) by situating women in "particular historical conjunctures" while simultaneously "insisting on their oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in 'daily life'" (Mohanty, 1991a:13). The binary vision of all men as exploiters and all women as the exploited or whites rule blacks are over-generalizing (Mohanty, 1991b; Collins, 1991). Rather, "depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of the oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed" (Collins, 1991:225).

Needless to say, then, understanding and explaining the experiences of women of colour lies in the careful deconstructing of social relations resulting from the interplay of structure and agency, grounded in specific historical contexts. With respect to history, the legacy of colonialism and imperialism is of particular significance interplaying with patriarchy[6] and capitalism in shaping experiences of women of colour. Hence, imperial and colonial rule has constructed and consolidated white masculinity as normative, upholding their power "as protectors of morals and women" and therefore correspondingly led to the racialization and sexualization of the colonized people, and the consolidation of colonial institutions, policies, and hegemonic cultures in colonized societies (Mohanty, 1991b:15-16). British Colonial rule, in particular, has created the "White gentlemen" as the "ideal imperial agent that embodied authority, discipline,

[6] Patriarchy is also fluid and negotiable within the racist context and articulates with capitalism, together with the historicization and contextualization of gender (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:107-109).

fidelity, devotion, fortitude, and self-sacrifice" (Mohanty, 1991b:17), and White women as saviours of third-world or black women (Carty, 1999).

But even the impact of colonialism and imperialism is not uniform and even[7] depending on how it articulates with race and gender in subordinating men and women. Canada, as a settler society, being culturally attached to its imperial past, was built as a white nation and has developed extensive systems of exclusion, subordination and exploitation of aboriginal, and immigrant men and women (Yuval-Davis and Stasiulis, 1995; Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995; Ng, 1993) whereby "a variety of coercive, ideological, legal, administrative and cooptative mechanisms" are exercised (Yuval-Davis and Stasiulis, 1995:4). This leads to the implementation of racist and sexist immigration policies, segregation policies on housing, education and employment for minority men and women, racist policies on Indian affairs, and disenfranchisement of minority and aboriginal men and women, and white women. In particular, the notion of "Whiteness" intertwining with the western notion of patriarchy and capitalism in building the Canadian nation has important consequences for women of colour, constructing them all as "immigrant women" through which all women of colour including native women are subjugated as outsiders (Ng, 1989).

[7] Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995) distinguished between "colonies of exploitation" and "settler societies". Colonies of exploitation are the result of more common form of colonialism in which colonial powers constitute "a relatively small, sojourning group of primarily male administrators, merchants, soldiers and missionaries... through a 'thin white line' in exercising control and appropriating land, natural resources and labour" (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995:3). Hong Kong under British rule is an example of this type. The intention of the colonizers is not to settle permanently in the colonized land but to instill and control western imperial, patriarchal and capitalist ideologies and practices. A settler society, on the other hand, is characterized by a large "settler European population of both sexes for permanent settlement" from which "developed much more elaborate political and economic infrastructures" that are independent of the mother country, yet simultaneously have always "maintained relations of dependence" with it (3). Peculiar enough is the co-existence of a strong cultural attachment to the mother country and resentment of its imperial authority.

The fluidity of the intersection of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism result in the multiplicity of experiences among women of colour. Hence, for example, the historical impact of slavery on black women (Thornhill, 1989) would be very different from the impact of colonialism on First Nations women (Bourgeault, 1989; Miracle, 1993; Stevenson, 1998). According to Thornhill (1989), black women have a long history of non-traditional roles as a result of the "Triple Oppression". As women slaves, they were treated as harshly as male slaves in history, and thereby adopted a masculinist role struggling for individual independence. For aboriginal women, their egalitarian gender relations were transformed into the subordination and exploitation of women as a result of British and French colonialism intersecting with European capitalist expansion and European patriarchy (Bourgeault, 1989; Stevenson, 1998). Indian women became sexual commodities to be purchased in exchange for European goods; or to be exploited as cheap labour. The dichotomization between the public and the private put forward by the European ideal of the "cult of true womanhood" was introduced in the colonial transformation through which Indian women were first subordinated to European men and later to Indian men (Stevenson, 1998).

Immigrant minority women from the Caribbean and the Philippines (Calliste, 1989; Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997) faced unique immigration policies and oppression at work. Calliste (1989), for example, documented how Caribbean black women were racialized, gendered and classed to be "admirably" suitable for domestic work because they were "fond of children" and "knew their place" (135-136). Yet they were also perceived "as promiscuous or as single parents likely to be come a public burden" (142) and therefore should only be allowed to stay temporarily. These women domestic

workers were produced by the match between Canada and the Caribbean where the former was desperately in need of domestic labour and the latter's desire to export labour. The Canadian state has used various immigration policies to manipulate and organize this group of labour in conjunction with the Caribbean state, degrading them based on class, race and gender informed by colonialism and neo-colonialism.

South Asian women, yet were racialized in specific ways uniquely different from other minority women (Bannerji, 1993). They were both "physically and geographically invisible", living "in a vacuum, in the state of constant facelessness" (178-179) in Canadian society, yet were constructed with images of "passivity, docility, silence, illiteracy, un-cleanliness, smell of curry, and fertility" (180). Asian (Chinese) women on the other hand were constructed as "passive, silent, and either asexual or readily available, exotic sex objects" (Yee, 1993:40).

All in all, the intersectional perspective points to the notion of diversity and difference, and the interplay between structure and agency by observing the intertwining and overarching effects of race, ethnicity, class and gender. While this approach is valuable in taking an insider's perspective, delineating complex processes of identity politics and social relations, it is limited in explaining why the interplay between structure and agency is diverse. In other words, it fails to account for the order of influence in diverse contexts. In addition, while this approach has been employed by research in a number of areas[8], very little was done in the area on entrepreneurship. Despite the call for the recognition of linking entrepreneurship to race, sex and class (Beggs, Doolittle and Garsombke, 1994), theories and research in this area are still scarce. One of the studies is on the Iranian immigrant women entrepreneurs in Los

Angeles (Dallafar, 1994) in which the mobilization of gender resources, and how they interact with class and ethnicity was noted. Another study is on Korean-owned nail salons in New York City (Kang, 1996), which focuses on language dynamics in everyday interaction based on race, gender and class. Needless to say, no research has been done on the Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs, particularly within the Canadian context.

Theorizing Canadian Hong Kong Chinese Immigrant Women Entrepreneurs

A comprehensive understanding of Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs requires a unique approach not popularly used by past research on entrepreneurship. This group of women, just by naming them, denotes multiple facets and levels of experiences in Canadian society. Such multiplicity could be both complementary and contradictory, depending on the contexts and situations, thus resulting in unique identities. In addition, it is highly likely that this group of women does not all share similar life and work experiences, since they enter into diverse social relations under different historical conditions. As the above discussion indicates, existing theories of entrepreneurship are limited as they offer a malestream essentialist approach. To explore and theorize the entrepreneurial experiences of this group of women requires a more inclusive perspective within which the multiple interactive relations can be fully addressed. I believe that the integration of theoretical frameworks from the literature of ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship and the intersectional perspectives work better to offer a comprehensive understanding of minority women entrepreneurs. Such an approach works particularly well in the exploratory case study I undertook.

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[8] See for example articles published in the journal of *Race, Gender & Class*.

First, borrowing from the intersectional theories I recognize the importance of bringing Hong Kong Chinese women to the centre of analysis. Seeing them as active agents, I would like to demonstrate how they are capable of self-definition relative to others on the basis of the intersection of race, ethnicity, class and gender. It is important to recognize that this group of women is not uniformly privileged or disadvantaged. While as entrepreneurs, they should have enjoyed certain economic privileges and power and control, such privileges are offset because of their disadvantaged position as women, and their marginalized ethnic/racial and immigrant positions in Canada. On the other hand, as women, they may enjoy certain privileges that would help facilitate their class position, for example, in starting and running women-specific businesses hiring women employees. These privileges may intertwine with their privileges as Chinese when doing business in the Chinese community, hence consolidating their class positions. In different ways then, race, ethnicity, class, and gender intersect with each other in producing contradictory positions and relations for this group of women. As subjects, they are involved in the racialization, ethnicization, gendering and class-ification of social relations embedded in entrepreneurship.

In addition, I also recognize the "multiplicity of experiences" (Dua, 1998) of these immigrant women entrepreneurs. Not only are they different from White women, other women of colour, and the Chinese women who were born and raised in Canada, they differ among themselves as a result of origin and destination in their migration process, time of migration, migration experiences as well as personal and family backgrounds, and work experiences. In other words, due to historical, contextual and temporal specificity, it is important to set parameters on the Chinese immigrant women that I want to study: to

confine them to immigrants from Hong Kong in post-war years who reside in the Greater Vancouver area and have their business set up in Richmond. Setting the boundaries on time and space will allow me to understand better how structural specificity acts uniformly on these women, and how they, on the other hand, respond, react and resist differently.

Borrowing from the literature of ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship, I realize that it is important to look at the advantages and disadvantages these women face as a result of individual and group resources and barriers in the processes of entrepreneurship: specifically in deciding to become entrepreneurs, in starting their businesses, and in running them. In terms of resources, and adopting primarily from Light and Rosenstein (1995), I will identify three major kinds: class, ethnic and gender resources. While family has been documented to be an important part of entrepreneurial pursuit in both women and ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship literature, it will be subsumed under class, ethnicity and gender. Hence, class resources include class background and influence of the family, capital, entrepreneurial attitudes, values and motivation, knowledge, skills and education, and previous business experiences.

Ethnic resources incorporate more than just cultural values and attitudes towards entrepreneurship, but social capital as well such as trustful and loyal co-ethnic social networks and connections from business acquaintances, friendship, family and relatives; a pool of available co-ethnic labour; and market conditions such as the demand of ethnic products and services. As for gender resources, due to a lack of reference, I will construct them as consisting of gender-specific knowledge and skills, female labour and demands of women products and services, as well as women-specific social capital in the

form of family support networks, female social networks and connections of business acquaintances and friends. In addition, the notion of transnationalism will be examined in terms of class, ethnic and gender resources. As Wong and Ng (1997) noticed, transnational networks constitute an important strategy for business immigrants. It would be interesting to find out how this would affect Chinese women immigrants in business.

While these resources are distinctly defined for analytical purposes, in reality, they interact in different ways to produce entrepreneurship. It is also important to take note of the fact that even though these resources are analyzed as individual and/or group characteristics, many of them are nonetheless the products of transnational, local, and ethnic opportunity structures as a result of migration.

Class, race and gender barriers, known as classism, racism and sexism co-exist and intersect with resources in affecting entrepreneurialism. Informed by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), classism refers to economic exploitation and subordination based on unequal class relations in the labour market; racism refers to unequal race/ethnic relations as a result of phenotypical and cultural subordination; and sexism connotes subjugation of women in unequal gender relations by means of sexuality and gender stereotypes. Even though each may be distinct in its own right in analysis, they in reality inform each other to produce diverse effects. These barriers can be structural and individual. Structurally in particular, racism, classism and sexism are the products of the intersection of colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy in producing nationalism to exclude immigrant minority women. Hence the role of the Canadian State in implementing racist, sexist and classist immigration and economic policies will be addressed. Simultaneously, the impact of culture, patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism of the source of origin, Hong

Kong, also plays a key part and should be examined. These structural forces of classism, racism and sexism interact as a result of migration, which will inform racism, sexism and classism in everyday social and economic life. The diverse individual responses to these structural forces will explain the multiplicity of these women's entrepreneurial ventures. My research will demonstrate how these women, in responding to diverse structural forces, participate actively in the racialization, ethnicization, gendering and class-ification at various stages of their entrepreneurial projects.

Chapter Three

Research Methods and Profiles of the Sample

My research on Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs is about a group that has been marginalized and invisible throughout their history in Canada. It serves at least three purposes. First, it intends to explore intensively these women's entrepreneurial experiences after immigration. Second, it seeks to find out the complex reasons behind their choice to do business. Third, it looks at how their entrepreneurial experiences are the result of the interlocking relations of gender, race, ethnicity, class and immigration. To achieve these purposes, I looked more for the depth rather than the breadth of knowledge where meanings are more important than frequencies, and personal voices from the subjects are considered more valuable than statistical representation and generalization. Qualitative method, using primarily a nonmathematical procedure of analysis, would therefore be the most suitable means in conducting this research.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methods I used for my research. I will first present the rationale for employing qualitative research as the primary mode of inquiry. Then I will introduce and outline the plans of my research, which serve as a guide only. Since the actual research process is open to the contingency of the situations, it may very well deviate from the original plans. After that I will present a description of my research experiences and the "reflections of my research journey"[1] pertaining to the different stages of my research: the pretest and the interview schedule, the sampling procedure, the initial contact process, the interview process, as well as the transcription

[1] This phrase is taken directly from Linda Carty's article title: "Seeing through the Eye of Difference: A reflection on Three Research Journeys".

and translation process. These experiences are particularly valuable as they contribute not only to my own learning, but also raise issues to future work in this area.

At the end of the chapter, I will present some descriptive information about the sample: the social and demographic characteristics of the women in this study as well as the business profiles will be considered. Education, age, family background, marriage and family status will be examined as important fundamental information to appreciate and explain these women's business behaviour and the social relations embedded within. I will also examine the characteristics of the businesses such as type, scale, and partnership, and further discuss the ethnic and gender nature of these businesses.

Research Method

The sociological methods of inquiry are grounded in two traditions: the positivist or quantitative tradition and the interpretive or qualitative tradition (Goldenberg, 1992). While debates on these two methodologies have been ongoing, there seems to be no conclusive claim as to which is the *best* method. Since these two methods can be supplementary rather than contradictory to each other[2], the choice would depend on the theoretical questions and the goals of the research (Hammersley, 1992). After all, clear-cut distinction drawn between the two is more of an over-simplification when quantitative and qualitative analyses may overlap in actual research. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) pointed out, qualitative data collected from interviews or observation can be quantified and statistically analyzed.

In essence, however, these two traditions represent two diametrically opposite philosophical positions. Researchers who follow the qualitative or interpretive tradition

of research are critical to the positivist approach in its attempt to generate objective, neutral and value-free scientific truth. Instead they argue that knowledge is situational and socially constructed. While the quantitative approach looks for general patterns and ignores deviant or exceptional cases, the qualitative method seeks nuances and articulate details, and is more concerned with cases that tend to be dismissed by quantitative analysis. In addition, qualitative researchers also commit themselves to the insider perspective, arguing that explanations should be taken from the subject's point of view. Further to this stance is the challenge to the authoritarian role of the researcher who, in studying people as objects, treat them and their behaviour as problematic[3].

Feminist scholars who follow the interpretive tradition are particularly sensitive to the last point where they see the authoritarian role of the researcher as marginalizing and degrading women's experiences. Instead of studying women as objects, they should treat them as "knowers" (Richardson, 1995; Campbell, 1994; Collins, 1991), as real people, capable of telling, describing, contextualizing, rationalizing and organizing their past lives and experiences temporarily and in meaningful ways.

Most feminist researchers also argue against absolute truth (Acker, et.al., 1996). Knowledge, rather, is "situated knowledge" that is based in "location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway, 1991:193). In other words, it implies the "qualities of multiplicity" that are "located in time and space and particular cultures" and are "embodied in specific ways, and operate as social and collective points of view"

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[2] An example would be to use qualitative data to illustrate or clarify quantitatively derived findings or to use some form of quantitative data to partially validate one's qualitative analysis, a method known as 'triangulation' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:18-19).

(Gottfried, 1996b:13). Knowledge is not cumulatively additive but partial, transient, and negotiable. It depends on how and where it is situated, and therefore is not generalizeable to different contexts, history and space. Specifically, by incorporating race and class as integral parts of a woman's standpoint, women's experiences are diverse in many different ways: instead of being additive to each other, they contribute to a cumulative social science (Gorelick, 1996). Such recognition of diversity and differences in women's voices goes against the traditional positivist research methodology from which additive, universal and essential knowledge is reproduced.

While some feminists see women as knowers, others realize that listening to women's voices alone is not enough to produce knowledge. Researchers have the responsibilities to connect and relate women's experiences to the relations and structure that underlie them (Gottfried, 1996b; Acker, et.al., 1996). Since it is highly probable that these women may lack "cumulative knowledge" on the "hidden aspects of oppression"(Acker, et.al., 1996:29), their standpoints may not come naturally but have to be mediated by the researcher, acting as a facilitator to dig out the hidden structures of oppression and their determinants. Mediation takes the form of semi-structured or intensive interviews which require "open[ing] our ears ... and hear[ing] what they have to say in their own terms... so that we can hear the unheard and the unimagined" (Belenky, et.al. in Reinhartz, 1992:19-20).

Hence, "[t]he use of semi-structured interviews has become the *principal means* by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (cf. Reinhartz, 1992:18). Following the

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[3] For detailed discussions on these two research traditions, see for example, Goldenberg, 1992 and Hammersley, 1992.

qualitative tradition, this technique emphasizes "free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee" from which discovery and description are maximized (Reinhartz, 1992:18). In so doing, it gives the interviewees opportunities to tell their ideas, thoughts, opinions and experiences in their own words within the parameters and the structure set out by the researcher. The role of the interviewer is to learn about the contexts, for example, in terms of race, class and gender, and relate them to the interviewee as it would be "unrealistic to expect that every interviewee will explicitly articulate all categories of social existence" (Cuadraz and Uttal, 1999:171).

The semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to set the guidelines and parameters in the form of open questions. These questions are designed in advance in a logical sequence of themes and temporality. Yet during the interview, the questions do not have to be followed strictly. Interviewees are given a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in controlling the organization, sequencing and length of their narratives. To keep these narratives in focus, the interviewer is in the position to direct and re-direct the interviewee to stay within the parameters of the research agenda. This depends on the external circumstances, motivation, knowledge and experience of the interviewee, the subjective interpretations of the interview reality by both the interviewer and the interviewee, and the perceived interactions and relations between them. Therefore, each interview is unique in itself. Depending on the circumstances and the judgements of the interviewer, some questions may never be asked while others are added to probe for more details.

The interview technique is particularly appealing to feminist research when the researcher is a woman because this technique "draws on skills in the traditional feminine

role - a passive, receptive, open, understanding approach ... recognizing and responding to other's feeling and being able to talk about sensitive issues without threatening the participant" (cf. Reinhartz, 1992:20). In fact, some feminists argue that it is necessary for women, particularly those who share the same culture, to interview women in order to understand each other. This "insider" location of the interviewer has additional advantages. With the emphasis on understanding and empathy, the "insider" approach will avoid ethnocentrism in the interview, which in turn will help building more egalitarian and trustful relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee. Such egalitarianism, by facilitating a dialogue between the two parties, is beneficial to the interview in two ways. While on the one hand, the interviewee will become more committed, open and engaged in telling her personal stories, the interviewer, on the other hand, will also be eager to disclose her own experiences, which may in turn help elicit more detailed and in-depth information from the interviewee.

Despite of the fact that egalitarianism is valuable in the interview-interviewee relationship, difficulties may arise in real situations, as some researchers have documented (see for example, Acker, et.al., 1996; Gorelick, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1996). Since women interviewers and interviewees are less likely to come from the same backgrounds, there is always the possibility of interviewing up or down (Riehnartz, 1992). In most cases feminist research involves interviewing down with the researcher seen as the knowledgeable middle-class healthy intellectual and the interviewees as the poor or the unemployed, or victims of wife abuse and rape. In such a scenerio, empathy and self-disclosure on the part of the interviewer would work to reduce unequal relationships. However, the situation will be different when the interviewer is

interviewing up. To increase credibility and status, and to gain trust from the interviewee, the interviewer has to adopt the humble role of a learner and listener rather than the authoritarian role of the researcher. In either case, unequal relationships are inevitable, and reciprocity is difficult to attain.

I found the philosophical tradition of the interpretive or qualitative method, and in particular the feminist approach from which it derives, suitable for my research. With the goals of exploring, collecting and analyzing detailed and nuance experiences of women entrepreneurs generated by an 'insider' perspective, I saw the advantage of using a qualitative approach. However, recognizing its drawbacks where no universal principles, no scientific proofs, no tests for truth, or accurate and valid representations are possible, I understand that my research purpose would fall short of generalizeability and representativeness.

I chose semi-structured intensive interviews over other qualitative methods such as ethnography or participant observation for the purposes of eliciting broader coverage and minimizing time constraints. While I believe that researcher mediation is necessary to guide the subjects in telling their stories, I also recognize the potential problem of researchers' subjective construction of reality when actively involved in 'representing' the stories told by the informants. In order to counter this problem, I have to be highly sensitive to the "moral responsibility" (Richardson, 1995) of my role as a sociologist and acquire a "sociological imagination" (Acker, et.al., 1996) that should help in my systematic reconstructions of reality. In lieu of these attempts, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of sociological research, which is likely to produce

knowledge that is limited, relative, transient, and therefore should always be subject to future reinterpretation and reconstruction (Acker, et.al, 1996; Richardson, 1995).

Research Design

This study focuses on Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs in Richmond. The fixity in space is theoretically motivated. The purpose is to avoid any inconsistent structural and cultural factors due to locality that could have impacted on these women and their entrepreneurship. The sample, therefore, is confined to Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs who immigrated from Hong Kong and ended up doing business in Richmond, B.C. These women may not have been born in Hong Kong, but they have to at least identify themselves as Hong Kong Chinese. They do not have to live in Richmond, but their businesses have to be located there.

My subjects included those who identify themselves as Hong Kong Chinese, born outside of Canada but immigrated from Hong Kong, who have, alone or with one or more partners, started up, bought or inherited a business, and are actively participating in the firm's day-to-day operation. This definition includes those who own and manage their business in or outside of their home. The reason for including home-based businesses is at least twofold (Prahst, 1995). First, home-based businesses have been neglected in past research and second, they have increased in importance as a result of recent economic restructuring. One major category that is not included in this research is that of the self-employed, which consists of those who affiliate with business establishments but are classified as self-employed for tax purposes because of the nature of their work and monetary reward. Examples are the ones who work as real estate agents, insurance

brokers, financial and mortgage brokers, and the like. They are not classified as entrepreneurs because they do not own the business enterprises themselves.

My target sample was fifty women. Since the purpose of my research was not for representativeness and generalizability, it would not be necessary to engage in a 'scientific' procedure to get a large sample so that the findings would be statistically significant. After all, knowledge of the population of Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women in Richmond was unknown, and therefore there was no sampling frame from which a sample could be generated. I planned to recruit these women using a number of venues. First, I would place advertisements in the two most popular Chinese newspapers: Sing Tao Daily and Ming Pao Daily. Then I planned to place recruitment notices on bulletin boards and in newsletters of various business associations, community service organizations, Chinese malls and Chinese churches. Ultimately I would seek referrals from friends, relatives and subjects themselves. The intention was to recruit subjects from different sources initially, and then expand by means of snowballing[4].

The research technique I would employ is the semi-structured interviews. Even though the interviews were meant to be flexible and interviewee-led as the qualitative methods suggested, I still designed an interview schedule in advance, which consisted of open-ended questions arranged in temporal sequence. There are four sections to the interview schedule[5]. The first section consists of questions on personal background and immigration history, such as place of birth, family background, education level, marital status, family status, age, place of residence, year of immigration, nature of immigration,

[4] Snowballing is a nonprobability sampling technique in which a starting case nominates others that in turn nominates still others (Golderberg, 1992).
[5]The interview questionnaire was adopted with some changes from Prahst (1995) and is attached in Appendix B.

principal applicant of immigration, reasons for immigration, etc. The second section is about the work history of the subjects. Questions are arranged in a sequence to delineate a chronology of work and business experiences before and after immigration. The third section focuses on current businesses with questions on the nature of ownership and business, the reasons for starting and the process of business start-up, employee and client relations, relations with bankers and suppliers, as well as involvement of self, family and friends, etc. Finally, questions on the general views and experiences on business success, racism, and sexism are included. Before the actual interviews were carried out, pretests were to be administered on three Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs, all known to the researcher either as a relative or a friend. The finalized questionnaire would be bilingual, in both English and Chinese (Mandarin[6]).

The interviews were scheduled to begin in the summer of 1996. All interviews would be conducted in the dialect or language preferred by the subjects. Being able to speak fluently the three of the most widely spoken dialects among Hong Kong Chinese immigrants in Vancouver, that is, Cantonese, Mandarin and Shanghainese, I did not anticipate any communication difficulties. For the purpose of maintaining accuracy and originality, the interviews were recorded on audio-tapes, with the subject's consent. After each interview, the audio-recording was transcribed and translated on paper.

While the research design describes the original plan of my research, the actual experience, as with most qualitative methods, may be quite different from the plan. In adhering to the principles of feminist methodology on discovery and development, it

[6] Mandarin, also known as *Putunghwa* in the People's Republic of China, is the official Chinese spoken language. It is also the universal written language for all Chinese. Specifically, Mandarin represents the complex textual form used outside of China while *Putunghwa* is the abbreviated form used only in China.

would not be surprising to find that practice deviated from the design. The following will provide a detailed account of what actually happened during the course of my research.

The Pretest Experience and The Interview Schedule

After the interview schedule was finished, I did a pretest on three women entrepreneurs who were known to me. One was my relative, and the other two, my friends. All three interviews were carried out in Cantonese, and took approximately two hours to complete. The feedback on the questions was in general positive. None of them found any of the questions sensitive or intrusive. One even made the comment that it was not as big a deal as she thought it would be, meaning that she expected the questions to be tougher. All three interviews started out to be highly structured, probably due to the nature of the questions (on background information) and the initial tense atmosphere. The tension began to ease off a great deal came the section on work history. I was successful in letting the subjects take control of their stories, and directing them back to the issue when they went too far off topic. Thus, all interviews did not follow the exact sequencing of the questions.

The pretest became a learning experience for me more than a test of the questionnaire. The bilingual script was confusing rather than helpful. I noticed that I was reading and translating into Cantonese directly from the English text, seeing this to be more convenient and comfortable than to read and translate directly from Mandarin into Cantonese. This was probably because I was used to going between English and Cantonese in my everyday life. Translating Mandarin into Cantonese, to me, actually involved a more complex procedure: I would translate from Mandarin to English first,

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In Hong Kong, while the official dialect is Cantonese, which is a spoken dialect, the written language is still in Mandarin (complex) form.

then from English back to Cantonese. Besides, because the use of vocabulary is different between Mandarin and Cantonese, when I tried to read the Mandarin text in Cantonese, the interviewees sometimes could not understand, and I had to explain further what the question "actually" meant. Anticipating most interviews would be conducted in Cantonese, I gave up on the idea of bilingual questions, and decided to drop the Mandarin version of it. As I shall discuss in greater detail later, language becomes an issue when a researcher who designs and reports in one language but has to carry out the research in another. The three pretest interviews helped me to notice the problem. But they did not help me to alleviate it. The art of interviewing using Cantonese, a spoken dialect, actually improved throughout the entire research experience, getting better interview after interview.

I did not make major changes to the interview schedule as I found all the questions adequately representing my research themes and issues. But I did put a mark on those I found problematic, and added a few reminders for probes. An issue was added to the questionnaire as the interviews went along. I learned through the interview process that the age of both the entrepreneurs and target customers was an important factor that should not be overlooked and needed exploration.

My pretest led me challenge the rigidity of the research tradition and the significance of the entire pretest procedure, particularly on doing semi-structured interviews. How much can we learn from the pretest, with such a limited experience? How many interviews should be considered as pretest before the final interview schedule could be established? Or, is there a final interview schedule? In my case, the three pretest interviews only helped me to become more familiar with the interview experience

and to build up my confidence, but did not contribute much to the content of the interview schedule. The kind of questions asked, when they are asked and how detailed they need to be, or even the appropriateness of asking them are entirely situational. They cannot be fixed as a result of the problems noticed in the pretest experience. In addition, the use of language and wording in Cantonese relative to the original English text was more a cumulative experience, getting better interview after interview that went beyond the pretest stage. I found that each interview became a pretest for the ones to follow. To me, then, the entire research experience is a learning process, one in which openness and flexibility are the keys to understanding your subjects and their experiences. A pretest may work very well in quantitative research methods that have a formally prescribed structured questionnaire. But for semi-structured interviews, even though the pretest had certain merits in enhancing the interview experience, its contribution was in general limited.

The Sampling Experience

Before I started the interviews, I decided to do some promotion regarding my research. With the help of a friend who worked in a Chinese community service organization I was introduced to a reporter from a Chinese newspaper who agreed to do a feature story on my research. After an interview with me, the feature story was printed on June 22, 1996[7]. This story was partly promotional and partly for recruitment purpose. Along with a picture of me, it detailed my family, education and work backgrounds, the purpose of the research, and my contact phone number. As far as I am concerned, this story worked to sell the idea to potential subjects. Most important of all, it would clear

[7] A copy of this feature story is attached in Appendix C. Please note that I used Frances Chik as my name during the research.

their doubts and queries and help building trust and rapport. It revealed what the research was about and who the researcher was, and it confirmed the genuineness of the project. The only problem I had was my personal information including my home phone number being publicized. Yet I justified this as the risk any devoted and zealous researcher must take.

While waiting for potential subjects to call, I made contact with kin and friends for referrals. As some of them were enthusiastic in helping me out, I started to get informants almost immediately; and in no time the interview schedule was packed. The first interview was done on June 23, 1996, and by the end of July, I had done twenty-two interviews. The busiest day was conducting three interviews in one single day!

In the meantime, I received no calls from volunteers. Not a single person responded to the feature story. So, two weeks later, I placed advertisements[8] in the Chinese newspapers as planned. Again, I heard nothing from the community. I started to post recruitment notices[9] on bulletin boards in various Chinese organizations and churches. Nothing happened. Until one day when I talked with a community service leader asking him to give me space to post my recruitment notice, he convinced me that this was a useless procedure. "The Chinese are not active." He said, "They would read the notice, agree with it, but do nothing. It would be more fruitful if you got your subjects through friends and personal encounters... Besides, business people, unlike other people, are very busy. They don't have spare time to offer."

Since my interviews started to pile up through referrals and I heard nothing from the unknown population, I decided not to depend on volunteers any more. Instead, I

[8] See Appendix C for details.
[9] The recruitment notice is bilingual. See Appendix C for details.

concentrated on establishing referral networks. I began by approaching friends, relatives and association leaders. A number of relatives were extremely helpful. Their referrals got the interviews started, and the networking webs began to build[10] (See Appendix D, Diagrams 1, 2 and 3). In the meantime, two friends agreed to participate. The referral systems started to proliferate, and the interview schedule also began to pile up. As a researcher, I felt that I was vulnerable when I had little control over the time, the date and the place of the interview. Too afraid to lose them, I let my potential subjects decide the schedule that fit them best. As long as there was no time conflict, I would agree to it. The way the interviews turned out, I found myself having no time and energy to follow up on my other friends and relatives. I did not even have time to transcribe notes. The rush went on for one and a half months and by the time I interviewed twenty-six women, the networks began to be exhausted.

I started to panic when there were no more leads on hand. Since no strangers volunteered despite a number of gestures made to recruit them, I tried to contact more association leaders for referrals. But I was unable to recruit any further interviewees from them. The main reason they gave was the relative non-participation of women entrepreneurs in their associations. As one business association leader commented, "We've got very few business women as members. Most of the participants are either the self-employed such as insurance brokers or realtors, or professional people." A community service organization leader gave a similar response, "You don't find business women participating in organizations like ours. Women who join our organizations, for example, the women's group or parents' group, are either seniors or housewives."

[10] I have attached diagrams of referral network in Appendix D.

Desperately I followed up on friends and relatives who had not yet responded. This time I was able to get one or two referrals from each of them. I also started to call on business acquaintances[11] for an interview if they were women, and for referrals otherwise. I avoided them in the first place because I did not want to impose on them as a customer. Out of the five people I contacted, only one refused to be interviewed. The others either consented to be interviewed or referred someone to me. But strangely enough, the interviews during this period did not lead to further referrals (See Diagram 4 in Appendix D).

The help of a friend deserves some special attention. I interviewed her at the beginning of the research but she did not give me any referrals when I asked. In respecting her decision both as a friend and as a subject, I did not pursue further. As my list of potential interviewees began to be exhausted, I started to whine about it to her casually. Understanding my difficulty, she suggested a name. She even contacted the person for me and asked for her commitment. In the meantime something came up in her business that she asked for my help to write English business letters for her. What followed was that while I continued to be her business correspondent [12] she continued to refer subjects to me as an exchange of favours. Such a relationship led to twelve referrals from which six more were generated (see Diagram 5 in Appendix D).

Delighted in a way that this was going to fill my research quota, I began to worry about biased representation. Although it was not my intention to make my sample representative, and there was no way to test for it, I still did not wish my sample to be concentrated in any given area. It turned out that out of the twelve women she referred,

[11] By business acquaintances I mean the business people I know through my relation with them as customers or clients.

ten had their business located in the same mall. In order to correct for this concentration, I decided to expand my sample from fifty to sixty people. In the end, I was able to interview fifty-eight women, two short of my new target. Out of these fifty-eight women, a total of fourteen had their businesses in this very same mall.

My sample ended up to be comprised entirely of referrals from relatives, friends, association leaders and business acquaintances. As a result, the refusal rate was very low. Out of all the women contacted for this research, only eight refused to be interviewed. But when I studied the details of the referral networks, I noticed that the refusal to refer was high: Over half of the subjects did not offer any referrals after the interview. This was probably because I was not pushing hard for it. To me the willingness to sacrifice their time and energy to participate was already a favour. I did not want to force them to give me more names if it was not out of their free will. I considered that beyond the limit of a researcher, and therefore exploitative.

Reflecting on my sampling experience, I noticed that the aspect of familiarity was extremely important for doing qualitative research. The more one is familiar with the people and community under study, the easier the access is. Unlike some researchers who are strangers to the community, I do not have to take deliberate steps to familiarize myself with it. As a member of the community under study, I have been doing that as an everyday routine. My informants are my friends, my relatives, my business acquaintances, and their friends, their relatives or their business acquaintances. They were willing to be interviewed or to make referrals because I look familiar, act familiar and think in familiar ways. I am, at least physically and culturally, an insider. Out of this

[12] To this date, I am still called upon for language assistance.

familiarity trust was built. Though I do not explicitly dispute the value of outsider researchers, their work definitely would face more challenges than mine.

Trust also has an impact on the non-response rate from the community at large. Past survey research has demonstrated that the non-response rate on research conducted on business people has always been high (e.g. Fischer, 1992; Light and Bonanich, 1988). Ethnographic studies like the one done by Wong (1988) on the Chinese in New York also wrote about the norm of non-participation of outsiders,

> "Most of the people given in-depth interviews were friends and friends of friends. Among these interviewees were oldtime family friends who knew me when I was a child in China. They were most willing to talk about their career histories and success stories. ... they provided introductions to many resourceful informants who normally did not give interviews to outsiders." (19)

One of my subjects echoed this,

> "I would not grant you the interview if it were not because of June[13] [her friend, my referee]. How do I know whether you are a disguised Revenue Canada agent or not? I don't mean that I have problem with taxes. But I know the government do things like that." (Tania)

It seems that non-response to research was quite common among the Chinese. Building trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee is therefore very important for any in-depth qualitative methods. In my case, the referral system worked as a bridge between the researcher and the subject through which trust and rapport was established. Lacking that would make the interview less successful.

The Contact Experience

I must be fortunate to have known and be related to some helpful friends and relatives. Out of the fifty-eight women I interviewed, the initial contact was almost

completely made by the referee. Whether this is common practice in the business world or it is uniquely the Chinese way is hard to say. What is true though is that my referees, either to show their sincerity to me or not to give surprises to their friends, or both, would brief them about the research and myself before I made my contact. Some of them got their consent even before I approached them. Not only that, some even had the appointment dates set up for me.

In any case, I still followed the ethical guidelines in making contact with my subjects. No matter what the referee had done, I would follow a set routine. My very first contact with my subjects was usually over the phone. Only three out of all the contacts were done in person. And these were the people I personally knew. During our first conversation I would initially acknowledge the referee, and then introduce myself and the project. The referee was used here to build commonality and trust. To show my sincerity and the seriousness of the project, I would then follow up with a formal invitation letter. This letter has two versions: English and Chinese (Mandarin)[14]. To further prove the genuineness of the project and to build trust, I would send along a copy of my feature story printed in the Chinese newspaper. In order to save cost, I would do it by facsimile[15]. Despite some women having already consented to be interviewed before my call, or were about to set up an appointment on my first call, I still took the effort to send them these necessary documents. Under normal circumstances, I would call them back a few days later to set up an appointment.

My contact to a large extent was successful, thanks to the help from my referees. Their help is further evident when I studied the refusals. Out of the seven people who

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[13] This name and all names used thereafter are pseudonyms.
[14] A copy of this letter is attached in Appendix E.

refused to participate, six were not briefed by the referees on the project before my initial contact. Without the referee bridging the two unknown parties, the contact stood a higher chance of failure. Unlike ethnographic research, intensive interviews lack the time to establish rapport with the informants. Hence, I had to depend on the referral system to fill that gap.

Upon setting up an appointment, I let my subjects choose the time, date and place for the interview. They usually selected a time and a date when they were least busy. It could be early in the morning or after office hours for some, late in the evening for others. Some chose weekdays; other chose weekends. With respect to place, a majority (thirty-four) of them preferred to have the interview carried out in their office or store, usually before or after operating hours, or during a time when business was slow. Their home was the next favorite place (sixteen). However, a few asked me if they could come to my house. These three people all happened to be close friends of my relatives.

Another four women preferred to be interviewed in a restaurant. They selected a time when the restaurant was not busy, for example, early morning, or late at night. And the choice they made was interesting to note. All four of them selected a restaurant where few Chinese would go. One woman explained, "Too many [Chinese] people know me here [in Richmond]. I don't want people to catch me being interviewed. They're very nosy, you know. I don't want word to spread around..." The way she expressed it, it seems that, to some, being interviewed is quite an embarrassing matter. It is not something people want to boast about. This could explain why some women preferred to be interviewed in private, in their home, or my home, or alone in their office/store without the presence of employees. This may well be a major reason why many declined

[15] This is not a problem as almost all businesses have a fax machine in the office these days.

to make any referrals to me after the interview, and why nobody volunteered in the first place.

The Interview Experience

The interview period began at the end of June in 1996 and ended in May of 1997. Despite the rush during the first one and a half months through which twenty-six interviews were done, except for three, the other interviews were spread out during the last quarter of 1996. Due to different reasons, the three exceptions whom I contacted in 1996 could only find time in the following year.

At the beginning of each interview, I would bring along a consent form, a tape recorder, note pads and the questionnaire. I would usually dress between formal business attire and casual wear. Since all of them would picture me as an academic and a researcher before they met me, I tried to appear as such without getting too business like or otherwise. I didn't have to "dress down" as some researchers suggested when they dealt with subjects who are in general underprivileged.

Handing name cards is normal practice among business people. In anticipation, I had mine ready. As expected, exchanging name cards became the routine for greetings. Handing out my name card in this case also served the added bonus of building trust. This is essential as Carty (1996) has noted in her research that sharing a similar background with the subjects alone does not "create an atmosphere of automatic trust and understanding" (139).

Before getting into business, I would socialize with the subjects to break the ice. I would then take out the consent form, explain it to them in detail, and ask them to sign it. I also explained the benefits of audio-taping the interview. Even though before each

interview I would expect some difficulties in convincing my subject to let me tape the interview, to my surprise, all but one consented to do so. There are pros and cons in regards to audio-taping the interviews. One of the strengths is of course the detailed recording of not only texts but also expressions. By going through the tapes, the researcher, on top of reproducing the exact texts, is able to recapture the lively contexts in which the stories were narrated. Another good point about audio-taping is that it allows the interviewer to concentrate entirely on the interaction, and subsequently able to engage in more fruitful communication. The third advantage is with respect to information reduction. Without the use of a tape-recorder, the researcher has to select and sort information on the spot, and instantly reproduce it in written texts. This could easily lead to the production of misinformation or non-representation of important information. When reproduction of information is postponed to a later time after the interviews are taped, it can be done in a more discreet manner. With respect to the problems of audio-taping, a common drawback is its formal aspect, when subjects may not speak as freely with the recording machine on. To overcome this barrier, the interviewer has to make extra effort to ease off such pressure, to make the subjects less conscious about their stories being taped.

A great majority of the interviews were conducted entirely in Cantonese, with a few English words and phrases interjected here and there – a typical Hong Kong style of communication. Five interviews were carried out with English as the major medium and Cantonese as secondary. These women have been immigrants to Canada for a long period of time, and are well educated, holding either a professional or graduate degree.

Only one interview was conducted in Mandarin. Even for that one, we started out with Cantonese, and switched casually to Mandarin as it went along.

The interviews usually started in a structured format for two reasons. First, the interview began with questions on background which were more structured in a strict question-answer format. Second, the interaction between the interviewer and the subject had not warmed up yet. It did require some time for both the subject and the interviewer to adapt to the interview situation. After the first section of the interview was finished, when we got into the second section that was on career history, the interviewee usually became more relaxed, and started to tell her stories. Simultaneously, I would respond, verbally and in gesture, by showing interest, empathy, ignorance, and agreement; often with echoes of confirmation with my own experiences where I saw appropriate. In most interviews, I successfully eased the pressure and broke down barriers between the subjects and myself as the interview went along, sometimes to the extent that they would continue to talk after all the questions were asked. In some cases, I had to turn on the tape recorder again. In other cases, I had to recollect the stories and record them immediately after I left the scene.

Not all subjects were equally eager or anxious to tell their stories though. And the content of their tales also varied by their experience. The interviews were scheduled for a two-hour period and almost half (twenty-three) of the interviews finished within that time frame; whereas another twenty took one and a half hours to complete and ten finished in an hour. A few exceeded the two-hour designated time: four interviews carried over to two and a half hours while one took as long as three hours to complete. The duration of

the interview, and the depth of the narratives, to a large extent, are the result of trust and power relationships between the subjects and the interviewer.

The notion of trust, as documented earlier, is important in facilitating fruitful research. Trust, in general, is easier to attain if the researcher is an insider. Yet it is by no means automatic (Carty, 1996). That trust needs to be developed in order to enable the subjects to view the researcher as an insider capable of understanding their experiences. Furthermore, such trust has to be built before the actual interview. As I previously described, steps were taken before the interview towards the building of trust. Despite being an insider in a number of respects, I could still be viewed as an outsider by some of them. Though my role as a Hong Kong Chinese immigrant woman is similar to my subjects, my age, education, marital status, class background, and immigrant experience could make me both an insider and an outsider, depending on the perception of the subjects. My role as an academic and a researcher put me in the position of an outsider. Those who evaluate me as an outsider would likely be reluctant in sharing their experiences with me, as they would not expect me to understand them.

This insider-outsider duality is complicated when power relationships are established around it. For example, when seeing me as an academic and a researcher, the subjects may feel inferior and exploited when I probed for the details of their experiences. They would doubt the "real" purpose behind my research, resist my control and manipulation by withholding information. On the other hand, awed by my authority, some would feel reluctant to talk, afraid of saying something "inappropriate" or "irrelevant", or "stupid". A few subjects did make comments about how "unimportant" or "insignificant" their business and life is: "My business is small business. It's not

really important to talk about", or "I am just an ordinary woman, not the superwoman type. I don't know if my life really matters". I constantly had to assure them that in any case their stories were valuable to my research.

In some cases, my role as an academic and a researcher made me an outsider who was less powerful. To these women, I was a learner and a student. Their class background – as wealthy business owner-employer – made them feel superior. As a result, they were more than willing to inform and "teach" me. In most situations, they manipulated the interview. These interviews usually took more than two hours. Sometimes, I felt helpless while trying to keep their stories focused. One woman even went on with her life history without letting me interrupt with questions.

Another important factor is that of age. Still living under the Confucian legacy in some respects, Hong Kong Chinese particularly see power related to age. Younger women in general would feel powerless and inferior, and therefore were timid and shy when telling their stories to someone who is older, and consequently is supposed to be more knowledgeable and experienced. Women older than me, on the other hand, would feel more powerful and knowledgeable, and subsequently became manipulative and controlling during the interview.

Is there any way to avoid hierarchical, and the resulting exploitative relationships between the researcher and the researched? The answer is negative. As a researcher, the extent I can do to avoid exploiting my subjects, that is by treating them as real individuals instead of objects and respecting their experiences, is to play the empathetic learner role. I would try to let them lead and take charge by playing ignorant. I would offer to tell them about my experiences, echoing their struggles. But sometimes the all-powerful and

all-knowledgeable academic image was so deeply internalized in their minds that any humble gestures from my part would be fruitless. My friendly gesture may even work against me if they interpreted it as intimidating and hypocritical. As a result, these interviews turned out to be dull, lifeless, and highly structured.

The empathetic learner role may work for some, but it definitely works against dealing with dominating subjects. I can control myself from being exploitative but there is no way I can control myself from being exploited. As a humble researcher who needs the information provided by my subjects, I guess my exploited role is well justified. The issue to be raised here is that unequal relationships involved in the research situation are unavoidable, and can work both ways up and down the status hierarchy. Depending on the research and the subjects, inequality does have consequences not only to the researched but also to the researcher.

In general, the way I feel about my role as a researcher is conflictual and contradictory. A mixed feeling of being powerful and being powerless happens all the time. For example, as a humble researcher I was so grateful for their participation that I would comply with any of their requests. I remember how helpless and frustrated I was when they took control over timing, and how the interview was rushed through as a result. I also recall moments when I was unable to redirect them to stay in focus. I still remember the way I expressed my thanks to them at the end of the interview regarding the favour they have done for me. Such grateful gestures were not considered enough as I would follow up with thank you cards afterwards. Yet at the same time, I implicitly would consider my perspective to be more superior than theirs as a trained sociologist and an enlightened feminist. I went through a tough time lowering my pride to make

sense of their standpoints, especially pertaining to important social issues such as racism and sexism that they tended to have ignored or have oversights[16]. In other words, my humility and pride intermeshed constantly.

My experience confirms the flaws of the mainstream (feminist) research in generalizing research experience about women from the white middle-class perspective. We have to take the aspects of culture, class and age into consideration when trying to understand unequal power relationships during research. As Acker, et.al. (1996) noted, subjective relationships may not always work as they may lead to negative feelings for the subjects, and empathy is not always possible because we may interview people who are more powerful than us. Hence, not only is it important to acknowledge the "multiple diversities of women's experience" (Acker, et.al., 1996:81), it is equally important to address the multiple diversities of researchers' experiences.

The Transcribing and Translating Experience: The Role of Language in Constructing Reality

In regards to the body of literature on the study of minority ethnic communities in the English speaking world, very little was discussed about the issue of language. Popular perception has been that as long as the researcher hires someone who speaks the language of the culture under study or is a member, she automatically would be an adequate interpreter and translator. Seldom was the professionalism of translation or interpretation doubted nor the procedure addressed or documented. It is assumed that anyone who speaks and writes the language of the subjects would automatically have the literacy skills to translate into meaningful representations.

[16] This is one of the important findings of my research, which will come up over and over again in later chapters.

As an 'insider' who shares the same language and culture with my subjects, and at the same time as a member of the mainstream academic world, I have the advantage in bridging between the two cultures and the two languages. I am more privileged than most researchers who do cross-cultural research, and who as 'outsiders' thus have to spend time learning and submerging in the culture under study, and depend on native informants for translation. Despite these advantages, I am still handicapped as an unprofessional translator.

In this research, I had to go through a complex process of putting down words and expressions into written texts. Since most interviews were done in Cantonese and audio-taped, I had to first transcribe verbatim from the tape onto paper. This is a tedious process because Cantonese is a spoken dialect not readily transcribed in written form. But in order to capture the originality of meanings in context, I made use of the Mandarin written texts and occasionally English phonetics to ensure all speech sounds were fully represented. This resulted in lengthy transcripts that were difficult to manage particular the many meaningless and sporadic utterances, ungrammatical and unorganized phrases, and virtually untranslatable local colloquial phrases.

To make sense of these raw data I had to take a second step, massive information reduction, through which I translated the reduced data into English simultaneously. My understanding of the language and culture together with my training in Sociology have helped me make the most accurate judgement, selection, interpretation and representation possible. While I had no problem summarizing the subjects' narratives, I encountered a hard time translating them into English.

To my knowledge, translation in cross-cultural studies involves "conceptual equivalence" rather than precise translation (Deutscher, 1978). But as a lay translator, even doing just that was difficult. As I mentioned earlier, the Cantonese dialect involves slangs, phrases that are virtually untranslatable. In many cases, even translating these into the Mandarin text is problematic, not to mention a different language like English. In addition, there is great difficulty translating proverbial expressions without distorting the original meanings. Consequently, reality could easily be twisted when signification and meanings could not be directly transferable.

Language is part of culture, and it expresses a particular reality (Richardson, 1995). A Chinese concept in most cases cannot directly be translated into a correspondingly meaningful concept in English without much explanation. For example, Gao (1996) has this to say in regards to the Chinese concept of *gan qing*:

> "... The Chinese word *gan qing* does not correspond to the western concept of 'emotions'; rather it symbolizes mutual good feelings, empathy, friendship and support, and love between two people with little emphasis on the sexual aspect. *Gan qing* can be cultivated and nurtured in a relational context by means of 'mutual aid' and 'mutual care'. Although ...[both aspects] ... are found in personal relationships universally, the Chinese use them to establish good feelings and love between people as well as to affirm and symbolize relationships. Thus *gan qing*, as an emotional concept, conveys a sense of interdependency ... [It] is achieved through helping and caring for each other ..." (90-1).

When comparing the above passage to Wong's direct translation of it as "sentimental warmth" (1988:137), it is obvious how originality was distorted in the English version. To compensate for this problem, instead of direct translation from the original Chinese words, I would emphasize the meaning when transcribing into English.

Similar problems arose in the translation of direct quotes. It is virtually impossible to "repeat" a quote in English because of the difference in grammatical and rhetorical structures. Hence, any quote presented in this research is in essence *not* a quote, but my own reconstruction of the "conceptual equivalence" in English. I tried to maintain the original meaning within the parameters of the English language structures. But even so, chances of distorting the reality are high. Having said that, the narratives I presented in this study should be read more as my reconstructed versions than the original texts.

It is unbelievable how research methodology has overlooked the problems of transcription and translation. One thing that we should not take for granted is the assumption that knowing the language of the culture under study would automatically eliminate the problems. It is important that the researcher has to be formally trained in translation, or financially capable of hiring a professional translator and be able to work collaboratively with her. Reflecting on my experience regarding the above said translation, I could certainly empathize with the added challenge a researcher could face when dealing with a foreign culture.

In the previous sections, I discussed qualitative (feminist) methodology and presented the research technique I chose for this study, and the rationale behind it. Inspired by feminist methodology that is qualitatively based, I used the semi-structured interview to gather the ideas, thoughts and experiences of the women under study. I also discussed the research design and showed how the reality of conducting research could very much deviate from the original plan when we had to address ad hoc situations that came up during the research process. As I reflected on my research journey, concerns over certain issues were raised. In particular, issues regarding pretest, non-response,

audio-taping and language were addressed. The importance of the referral system and power relationships were also discussed. Considering the multiple diversities of researchers' experiences, it seems that there are no easy solutions to these matters, and future discourses and debates are needed.

Social and Demographic Profiles of the Sample

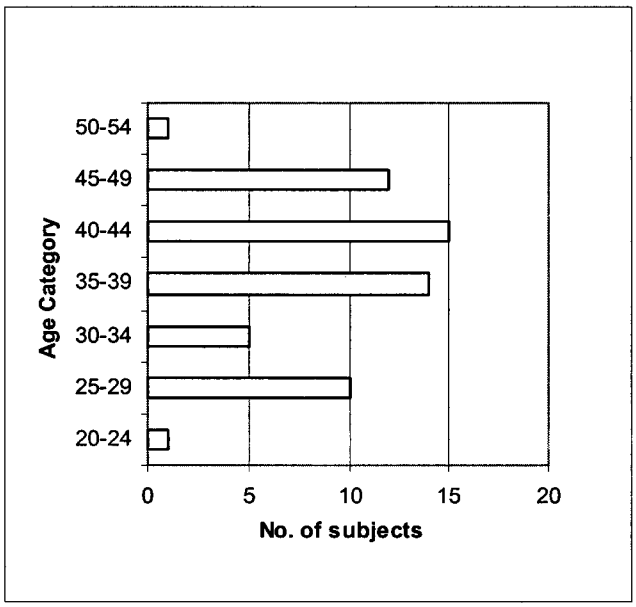
A careful analysis of the social and demographic characteristics of my sample reveals that the group of women under study is unique in different ways. Most of these women are relatively new in Canada and came under the family class or business programs. Very few of them were sole applicants. They usually depended on the family or a male partner for immigration. These women are in general middle-aged, have achieved intermediate level of education, married and have older children. They were more likely to be raised in families with middle-class fathers who worked as business owners, managers or professionals. The family in which they were brought up is very much traditionally oriented. Most of them came from large families with mothers as housewives where divorce was rare. Some of these traits have been transformed in their own marriage and family patterns. They are less likely to be single or live alone, and unlikely to be divorced or live in a common-law union. Yet unlike their mothers, these women have a career, and raise a much smaller family. Since this group of women were raised by traditional families and have adopted middle-class female ideologies and behaviour, there is reason to believe that such background characteristics would have important implication on how they perceive their economic role and their business relations. The following provides a detailed analysis of these social and demographic characteristics.

A great majority (forty-eight or 82.8 percent) of the Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs in this study were born and raised in Hong Kong. Even for those who were not born in Hong Kong they were likely to be brought up there. In fact, only two women spent less than ten years of their life in Hong Kong. As immigrants, these women are relatively new in Canada. Most of them (thirty-nine or 67.2 percent) came between 1985 and 1996, out of which more than half came during the 90's. Over one-third (twenty or 34.5 percent) came under the family class or assisted relative category with another 27.6 percent came under the business program. Only 19 percent came as independent immigrants. These women, in general then, depended on their maternal family or husband for immigration. Indeed, only twelve women (20.1 percent) were the principal applicants for immigration to this country.

One unique characteristic of these women is their age. Those between 35 and 49 years of age constitute as many as 70.7 percent of all subjects, that is, forty-one of them. On the other hand, the younger businesswomen tend to concentrate in the 25-29 age category. Out of all age groups, the 40-44 category has the highest representation. The oldest woman who participated in this study was fifty-one years old while the youngest was twenty-four. The age concentration of these entrepreneurial women is quite consistent with the study on women business owners in British Columbia. (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991), which found that British Columbian women tend to be older than the average labor force (33.7 years of age) with the median age of 42.1 years (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991:8). The median age of Chinese women entrepreneurs in my study is 40 years, only two years younger than their British

Columbian counterparts. It is evident then that these women are in general middle-aged, and comparatively older than the average work force.

Chart 3.1 Age Distribution of Subjects

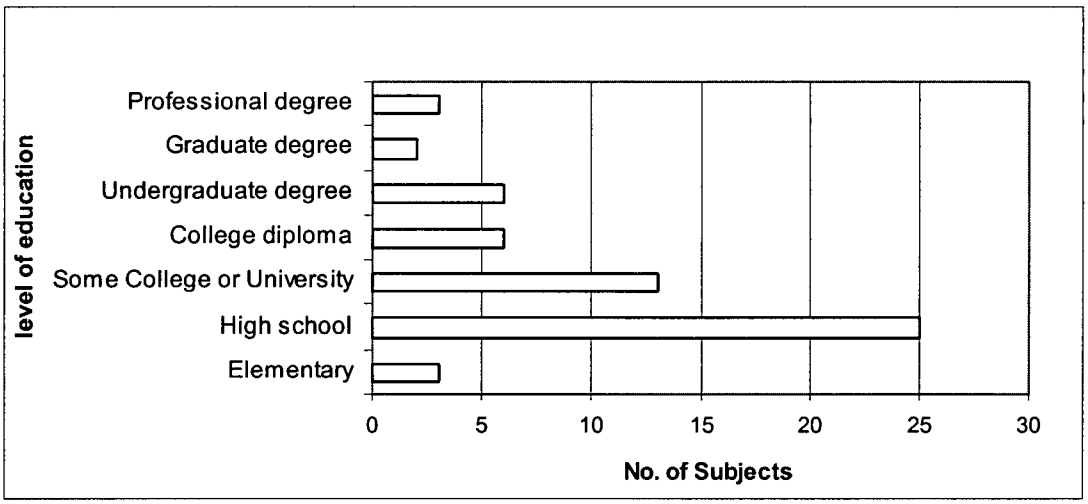


As far as education[17] is concerned, the majority of these women either completed high school or had received some college or post- secondary vocational training (thirty-eight or 65.5 percent). Twelve (20.6 percent) hold either a college diploma or an

[17] The education systems in Hong Kong and British Columbia (B.C.) are different. In Hong Kong, elementary education ranges from Primary one to Primary six, while secondary education goes from Form one to Form five. Form six and Form seven are considered post-secondary education. There is a two-tiered undergraduate system. One may enter a four-year undergraduate program after competing Form six and the required public examination, or join one year later a three-year program after finishing Form seven. In B.C., on the contrary, elementary education goes from Grade one to Grade seven while high school education starts at Grade eight and goes all the way to Grade twelve. Undergraduate degree program takes four years. Despite the difference in the two systems, the number of years required to obtain a bachelor degree is the same. It takes a total of fifteen years starting from elementary school. Yet, if we compare high school graduation, the number of years required would be different. In Hong Kong, those who complete Form five, that is, equivalent to Grade eleven in B.C., would be considered as graduating from high school. Form six is equivalent to Grade 12, while Form seven is the same as First-year university in B.C. Hence, the most problematic aspect in looking at education is the cross-comparison of high school education. It is necessary to measure the education standard of the subjects by the B.C. system for better comprehension. Therefore, high school education would include all who finished Form five and Form six. Those who completed Form seven are classified under some college or university. Likewise, those who completed elementary education may in fact have gone only as far as Grade six, by B.C. standard.

undergraduate degree. Five (8.7 percent) have a graduate or professional degree. Only three women (5.2 percent) are at the elementary school level. Therefore, in general, these immigrant women are not as highly educated as studies on the general population of entrepreneurial women in B.C. would suggest (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991; Lavoie, 1988). For example, all British Columbian women had completed high school and as many as 71 percent continued their education beyond high school (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991:7-8). The comparatively lower educational background of the immigrant women may have some impact on the type of businesses they choose, the scale of the businesses, and how business relations are produced and reproduced.

Chart 3.2 Education Level of Subjects



As far as class background is concerned, these Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women, all of whom arrived after the1970's, are very different from pre-war Chinese immigrants. Most of the subjects came from middle-class backgrounds. Their fathers are either employer-owners (56.6 percent) or work as professionals and managers (39.1

percent). The comparatively high representation of fathers as employer-owners is consistent with studies done on women business owners in Canada, which shows that most businesswomen have a family history of entrepreneurship (Lavoie, 1998:36).

Despite the high concentration of fathers as businessmen, professionals or managers, the majority of the mothers (60 percent), however, have been housewives throughout their lives. For those who worked outside the home, only two (3.6 percent) have been business employers and one (1.8 percent) was self-employed. They were more likely to help out in their husband's business (18.2 percent), or were concentrated in middle class female-occupations such as teacher, nurse, or office clerk (10.9 percent). Only a minority of them work or had worked in low-status jobs: one as a domestic and two as factory workers. The high percentage of mothers working as housewives points to the fact that most of the women entrepreneurs of my study came from traditional families that put a strong value on the "separate sphere".

The traditional character of the maternal family is further demonstrated by its size. The family in which the subjects were raised tends to be large. A majority of them (64 percent) have four or more siblings. A few have as many as seven siblings in total. Another 24 percent of these women have either two or three siblings. Only 12 percent came from a small family with one or no siblings at all. Considering the size of their maternal family and the impact of chain migration, it is therefore common for these women to have some maternal family members living in Canada. In fact, seven or close to 13 percent of all subjects had the whole family[18] immigrated to Canada already. These women either immigrated with the family, or came as the last member to join their maternal family. However, it is quite surprising to find that at the same time as many as

sixteen (29 percent) women are all by themselves without any maternal family members residing in Canada. Their relatively short length of immigration may have some impact on this as twelve (75 percent) of these women immigrated on or after 1991.

One way or the other, family is an important part of these women's lives. Like the overall Hong Kong immigrants in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996), these women are more likely to be married (forty-nine or 84.5 percent). Once married, it is unusual for these women to divorce. In fact, only three women experienced a divorce. Two ended up getting remarried, and one lived with a boyfriend. On the other hand, eight (13.8 percent) women were never married. These single women are comparatively young: half in their twenties and the other half in their thirties of whom most expressed the interest of getting married in the future. The significance of the family in these women's lives is shared by other Canadian businesswomen as well (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991; Lavoie, 1988) even though the Canadian women are less likely to be married (60%) than the Chinese in my sample. This difference is not surprising considering the Chinese women in general were raised in a more conservative environment and culture. Besides, it is easier for married women to immigrate than the singles given the paternalistic bias of the Canadian immigration system[19].

The importance of the family is particularly notable in terms of their pattern of residence. Regardless of age or marital status, almost all subjects live with a family. Only one among all subjects lives by herself, unmarried. All the rest either live in their own established family, with or without the presence of a husband or children, or if they

---

[18] Family here refers to maternal family members and their immediate families.
[19] The Canadian immigration system will be discussed in the next chapter.

are single, with their maternal family. This pattern is consistent with the family status of the Hong Kong immigrants in general (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996).

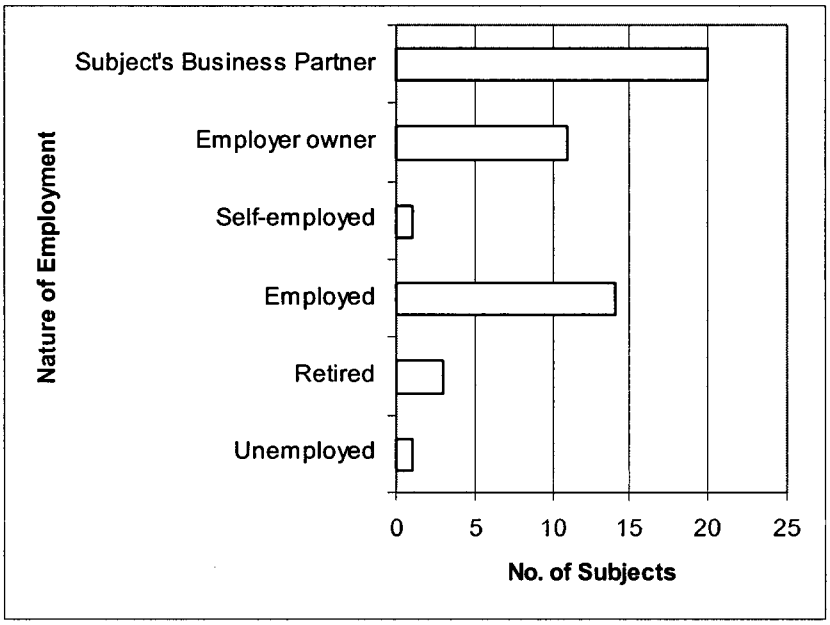
Among the married women, all, except one whose husband is a 'Caucasian', were married to ethnic Chinese, most of whom (81.6 percent) were born and raised in Hong Kong. The other spouses moved to Hong Kong from either Mainland China or Taiwan. Two-thirds of the husbands (thirty-two or 65.3 percent) are either business employers or self-employed, out of which over half, twenty of them, are partners in their wife's business. Among these entrepreneurs, two work for others at the same time. Taken together, fourteen (28.6 percent) husbands work for others. Only four husbands were not working at the time of the interview: three (6.1 percent) were retired while one (2 percent) was unemployed. Among the employed, a majority works in either the technical or the sales sector. When the nature of employment is compared between husbands and fathers, it is noted that entrepreneurship seems to have proliferated in the family. Not only are these women likely to be daughters of entrepreneurs, they are also likely to be wives of entrepreneurs.

The discussion of the family pattern of these Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women would not be complete without addressing its unique *astronaut*[20] phenomenon. Among these businesswomen, this phenomenon does have a presence though not prevalent. Most husbands (forty or 81.6 percent) resided in Vancouver with their wives at the time of the interview. Only nine (18.4 percent) lived and worked in Hong Kong as *astronauts*. Interestingly enough, these men exhibit a common trait. All but one owns

[20] This term is taken "from the Chinese *taikongren* [or *tai-hùng-yàhn* in Cantonese] 太空人, which felicitously combines the English meaning of a person who spends time in space, that is, an airplane, with a Cantonese play on words around 'empty wife,' 'home without a wife'(in Hong Kong), or 'house without a husband' (at the destination)" (Skeldon, 1994:11)

some kind of business in Hong Kong. As we shall see later on, the entrepreneurial predominance of these husbands has an important impact on the entrepreneurial career of their wives in Canada.

Chart 3.3 Nature of Husbands' Employment



When comparing the size of the family of the subjects with that of their maternal family, the former has shrunk considerably. While the maternal family on the average has five children, the average number of children the subjects have is less than two: Close to half (48 percent) of the married subjects have two children; 28 percent has only one, and 14 percent has none. Having three children is beyond the norm. In fact, no subject has more than three children when compared with the parents who have as many as eight. The children of these women tend to be older. Twenty-four (55.8 percent) women have children over 12 years old, out of whom fifteen (62.5 percent) have children

who are over eighteen. From the remaining nineteen mothers who have children under 12, slightly over half have a lone child. Only three have an elder sibling over 12. This

Chart 3.4 Number of Children by Age

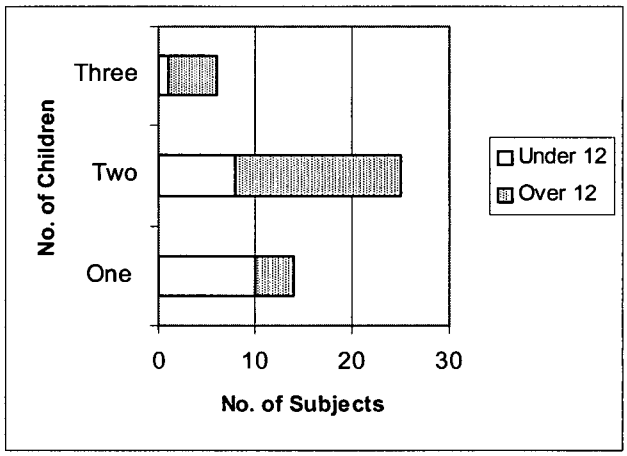
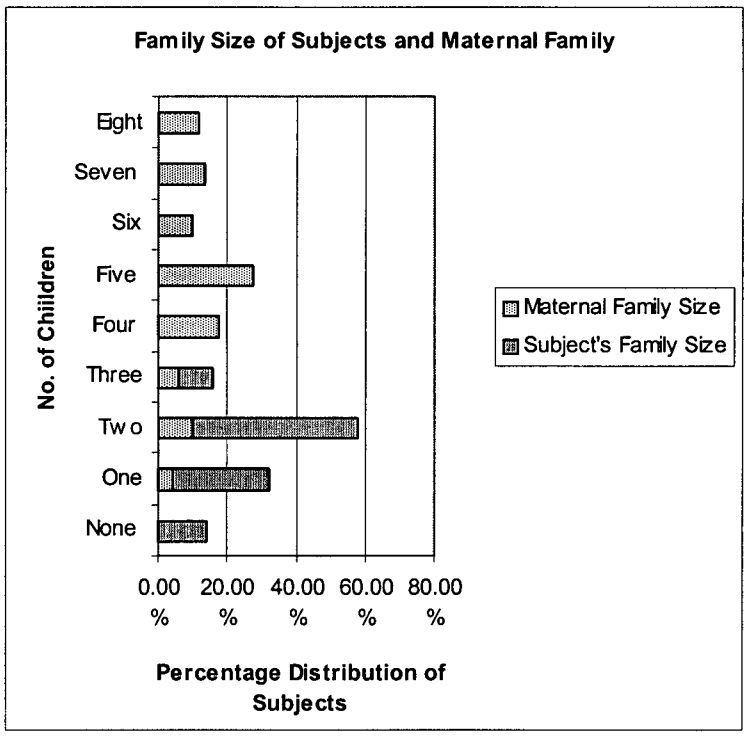


Chart 3.5. Size of Immediate Family and Maternal Family



means that at least sixteen (37.2 percent) mothers need some kind of childcare. When these results are compared with those on Canadian women entrepreneurs in general (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991; Lavoie, 1988), it is found that both groups tend to have less than three children. Yet the Chinese women are more likely to have no children, and if they have children they are more likely to be older than their Canadian counterparts.

In sum, Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs share some common characteristics with the average Canadian businesswomen. The differences between them are also apparent, as ethnicity, race, and immigration are likely to contribute substantially to the entrepreneurial career of these immigrant women. In addition, being raised as middle-class traditional women will definitely have a major impact on their entrepreneurial project after immigration, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Profiles of Current Business

1. Type of Business

The fifty-eight women interviewed own a total of sixty-two businesses in Richmond (see table 3.1). The distribution of these businesses is similar to the average women entrepreneurs (Belcourt, et.al., 1991; Hisrich, 1989; Lavoie, 1988; Curran and Burrows, 1987; Goffee and Scase, 1985) in that it tends to concentrate in the retail and service sectors. More than half of these businesses are found in the personal service sector (thirty-two or 51.6 percent) such as food service, educational service, travel service, beauty and hairdressing services, floral and interior design, books and magazines

Table 3.1 Type of Business and Location in Richmond

Type of Business in Richmond			Location in Richmond			
			Home-based	Chinese or Asian Mall	Mostly Chinese	Mainstream Office/Mall
Professional Service		3				
Accounting	2			1	1	
Legal	1					1
Personal Service		32				
Restaurant/Fast food	8			5	1	2
Beauty service	5		2	2	1	
Hairdressing salon	3			2		1
School/Tutorial	6			3	1	2
Travel service	5			2	1	2
Books/Magazines rental	2			2		
Floral	1		1			
Interior design	1				1	
Wine brewery	1					1
Retail		18				
Women's clothing	6			6		
Children's clothing	2			2		
Gift	4			4		
Art/Craft, furnishing	3			2		1
Cosmetics/Fragrance	1			1		
Kitchenware	1				1	
Computer games	1			1		
Wholesale		6				
Clothing & Bag	2		1			1
Oriental art & craft	1		1			
Beauty products	2					2
Food products	1					1
Production/Construction		3				
Garment	1					1
Real estate	1				1	
Newspaper	1					1
Total		62	5	33	8	16

rental and wine making services. Eighteen women run their businesses in the retail area selling women's and children's wear, gift items, cosmetics and fragrances, arts and crafts, home furnishings, kitchenware and computer games. Another three provide professional

services in the areas of law and accounting. Six of them run wholesale businesses in clothing and bags, Oriental arts and crafts, beauty and food products. Production of garments and newspapers as well as real estate development constitute the rest of the business types. The relative lack of interest in establishing businesses in the manufacturing sector does not pertain to these immigrant women alone. Overall, the high representation of businesses in retail, wholesale, professional service and personal service is noted among Asian entrepreneur immigrant businesses in British Columbia in general. According to Froschauer (1998), based on the unpublished statistics by Citizenship and Immigration Ottawa, as little as 6 percent of entrepreneurial immigrants established themselves in manufacturing between 1986 and 1993 despite the federal and provincial governments' effort to rely on new immigrants to invest in technology and manufacturing.

2. Segmentation of the Ethnic Economy

The Canadian economy is not unitary in structure and relations but segmented in different ways, one of which is the dichotomy between the dominant mainstream economy and ethnic economies. In its least restrictive sense, ethnic economy refers to firms owned by members of an ethnic group (Model, 1992:63). Yet when we look at the concept more closely, the ethnic economy can be further segmented into different structures and relations. One variant of the ethnic economy encompasses the marketing of predominantly ethnic products, knowledge and/or skills to ethnic clientele by means of the interlocking networks of co-ethnic relationships between the entrepreneurs, employees, and suppliers (category 1 in Table 3.2). The second category is comprised of 'middlemen' enterprises that bridge the ethnic and the dominant mainstream economies,

Table 3.2 Segmentation of the Ethnic Economy

	Ethnic-specific products, knowledge & skills		Non-ethnic specific products, knowledge & skills	
Ethnic market	gender-neutral (1a) (1)	gender-specific (1b)	gender-neutral (2a) (2)	gender-specific (2b)
Open market	gender-neutral (3a) (3)	gender-specific (3b)	gender-neutral (4a) (4)	gender-specific (4b)

providing for the ethnic market with non-ethnic-specific products, knowledge and skills (category 2 in Table 3.2). A third variant of the ethnic economy involves a different kind of 'middlemen' business where cultural products, knowledge and skills are provided for primarily the general population (category 3 in Table 3.2). Finally, the fourth segment of the ethnic economy pertains to the least ethnic oriented sector - it involves ethnic entrepreneurs running non-ethnic-specific businesses targeting mainly the general population (category 4 in Table 3.2).

The businesses the Chinese women and their partners operate in my study find their niches in all four segments of the ethnic economy. Fourteen businesses (22.6 percent) fall into the first category, that is, selling ethnic-specific products to and providing ethnic-specific knowledge and skills for co-ethnics. These cultural products do not necessarily have to be Chinese, but may include other Asian cultural products. For example, Sharon and her husband sell curry in an Asian mall catering to primarily Chinese customers; Vera provides a math tutorial service originating from Japan for Chinese students; Fong Yin-yin sells Japanese video games and gift items to Chinese

customers; Aileen sells brand name specialty products manufactured in Japan to Chinese customers, Bonnie sells Asian kitchenware and dinnerware, etc. Other businesses sell Chinese products or provide Chinese knowledge and skills for mainly Chinese customers, examples being Alexis and her family's Chinese carpets and rugs, Man Lai-chen and her husband's Chinese painting retail, Cheryl's Chinese magazines and books rental, Lorna's Chinese dance school, and Michelle and her partners' Chinese vegetarian restaurant.

The majority of the businesses, however, involve marketing non-cultural products, knowledge and skills to the Chinese market. As many as thirty-six businesses (58.1 percent) in areas such as legal and accounting services, beauty-related products and services, hairstyling, food and beverages, fashion and clothing, travel, educational services, furnishing and decoration, printing, construction and manufacturing are non-ethnic specific. These businesses usually make use of co-ethnic staff to promote ideas, products and services that are westernized and cosmopolitan for co-ethnics, and sometimes with an ethnic twist, attending to the specific requirements, interests and tastes of the co-ethnics. For example, the law firm established by Gladys and her partners provides legal services for their Chinese clientele. Joan and her husband's coffee shop sells coffee, *westernized* tea, cookies and soft drinks to mostly Chinese customers. Mary and her partners' restaurant serves *westernized* cuisine to Chinese patrons. Yolanda sells designers' women clothing imported from Montreal, Europe and the United States to Chinese customers. Clara and her partner use *westernized* ideas and furnishing products imported from Europe via the United States to help Chinese customers with home decoration. Alison and her partners sell cosmetics and fragrances imported from France and the United States. Rosemary provides skin care and body care using *westernized*

ideas and products. Ivy and her family provide and adapt *westernized* fashionable ideas on hairstyling for their Chinese customers. Robin teaches the Canadian *Royal Conservatory* piano lessons to Chinese students. Veronica and her partners provide tutorial services to assist B.C. high school students in English and Math. Meg sells airline tickets and tour packages catering specifically to Chinese customers. Faye's bilingual (English and Chinese) financial newspapers attract primarily Chinese and Asian readership. Maureen and her husband build houses and commercial properties for mainly Chinese customers. Mrs. Ting and her husband are subcontractors manufacturing garments for the Vancouver clothing industry. While some businesses like Mrs. Ting's fill the niche abandoned by the general market, the majority, however, reflects the needs and demands of Chinese immigrants whose life style has to a large extent been westernized even before immigration. As colonized people coming from a global city that continues to absorb cosmopolitan worldviews and predominantly a westernized life style, these immigrants continue to demand non-Chinese services and products after immigration but preferably in a co-ethnic niche and with a co-ethnic twist.

Only two businesses (3.2 percent) target ethnic-specific products to the general population (category 3 in Table 3.2). Andrea and her husband own a wholesale business importing Chinese arts and crafts for sale to North American retailers and museums. Anna retails Chinese arts, crafts and furniture to mainly mainstream customers. The rest of the businesses (six or 9.7 percent) provide non-ethnic specific services for the mainstream market. These include Tania and her husband's wholesale women's clothing business, Sheila's handbag wholesale business, Candice's and Ophelia's travel agencies that sell airline tickets and vacation packages to white customers and corporate accounts,

and Beatrice's hair salon that targets mainly the general market. Out of all the businesses, only these eight businesses (categories 3 and 4 in Table 3.2) hire non-Chinese staff because of the target market. As one travel agency owner explains,

> "... because majority of my clients are *gwái-lóu*[21] [Caucasian]... When there is a *gwái-pòh* [Caucasian woman] working in my office, these *gwái-lóu* would feel more comfortable... Besides, in terms of vacation travel, they have their own tastes which we don't have enough knowledge even if we've been here [in Canada] for a long time..." (Ophelia)

Location-wise, businesses that target co-ethnics and require ethnic visibility such as professional service, personal service, and retail are more likely to concentrate in Chinese or Asian theme malls, or malls that house mostly Chinese businesses (See Table 3.1). Wholesale and production businesses that do not require an ethnic presence and businesses that target the mainstream customers are more likely to locate in mainstream offices and malls (see Table 3.1).

In general, the concentration of businesses that caters towards Chinese co-ethnics (categories 1 and 2 in Table 3.2), totaling 86.2 percent, reflects the relative lack of opportunity in the open market for Chinese women, and the cultural barriers these women face with doing business with non-ethnics. However, this also points to the overwhelming demand of the ethnic economy as a result of the recent growth in the Chinese population.

Other than the ethnic factor, gender is also reproduced within the ethnic economy (see Table 3.2). The ethnic- or non-ethnic-specific enterprises can be compartmentalized into gender-neutral and gender-specific undertakings. The former refers to those that sell products, knowledge and skills that appeal to both genders while the latter pertains to

those that provide products, knowledge and skills exclusively to men or to women. Within the ethnic economy, Chinese women engage in businesses that are either gender-neutral or women-specific. Altogether, as many as twenty-one enterprises (33.9 percent) target primarily the Chinese woman's market out of which eighteen or 85.7 percent fall under category 2b in which *westernized* concepts of beauty, fashion and life style are promoted. Only three businesses serve cultural ethnic products, knowledge and skills to ethnic women including children (in category1b): Chinese dance, Asian kitchenware and dinnerware, and specialty gift items. Consequently, these women entrepreneurs also have a high tendency to hire co-ethnic women as employees. The preference of women employees over men seems to be prevalent not only among Chinese women employers but also other Canadian women entrepreneurs (Lavoie, 1988). Interestingly enough, businesses that focus on the mainstream market are all gender-neutral (in categories 3a and 4a). This may be due to the fact that most gender-specific businesses are at the same time ethnicized, when most of the women specific retail or service products require personal service.

Overall, the businesses run by these Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs have certain distinctive characteristics. First, they tend to target Chinese customers, serving not only Chinese but also multicultural products to the ethnic market, concentrated in ethnic locations; and second, they cater to the demands of co-ethnic women in providing *westernized* products and services to this sector. By setting up and operating businesses in the ethnic economy, these women make use of their class resources to provide services and employment not only for themselves, but also for other

[21] This and other romanized terms in Cantonese were derived from the interviews. See Appendix F for a list of romanized Cantonese used here. See also Chapter Four for a detailed analysis of these terms.

co-ethnic women and men. Hence, these businesses help to develop, enhance and solidify the ethnic economy contributing to the making of an almost entirely self-sufficient institutionally complete Chinese community which has become more globalized as a result of adopting a Hong Kong style that is more cosmopolitan in character.

3. Small Scale of Businesses

The small scale of their businesses can best be demonstrated by the amount of initial capital needed in business start-up. While no direct questions about the specific amount of capital were asked due to the perceived sensitivity of such questions, some women did reveal their modest contribution:

> "Setting up a company does not require a lot of money... But the merchandize was expensive. I would not be able to start this business if I did not make arrangement to pay only after the merchandize was sold." (Adrienne)
>
> "It does not require a lot of money to set up this business, only a few tens of thousands of dollars..." (Ophelia)
>
> "The initial start-up cost was low. We bought all furniture second-handed. We did painting and decoration ourselves, with the help of friends who volunteered. He [the partner] chipped in $5000. I put in $1000." (Gladys)
>
> "It does not require a lot of money to start a travel agency, only $30,000." (Ada)
>
> "The start-up cost was low, $50,000." (Robin)

The small scale of these businesses can further be substantiated by the few cases of business proliferation. With respect to location, most of these businesses operated in one establishment, five of which were home-based. Only seven businesses had more than one establishment. In most cases, these businesses expanded outside Richmond, to

Vancouver, Burnaby, Coquitlam or Surrey. Only one business originated from Chinatown, and expanded to Richmond.

In terms of product proliferation, only four women expanded their businesses horizontally into related areas. One owned a retail gift shop and a computer game retail store at the same time. Another owned a wholesale beauty product business, a beauty school, and a personal beauty service concurrently. The third owned a retail gift shop and a wholesale food business. The most ambitious woman is one who expanded her travel agency, not only to different locations, but to the tour bus industry, while buying out a number of other small travel services at the same time.

The number of employees they hired further reflects the small scale of the businesses. Ten women (17.2 percent) did not hire any help in their businesses. Undoubtedly, the low operating cost and revenue generated from the businesses did not justify the hiring of workers, especially those operating under partnership:

> "The business volume is not big at the moment. I can handle all the work myself. Besides, I have to save cost... My husband [as a partner] helps me with accounting work ... and delivery... and drives me around to visit customers..." (Adrienne)
>
> "At the beginning, we [with husband as partner] hired a full-time saleslady because this was required by the condition we had to fulfill for the entrepreneurial [immigration] program. But after the condition was removed, we did not hire any more staff. Otherwise, all the money we make would go to paying them... Because the business is small and it is very difficult to make money, we try to do all the work ourselves including cleaning and dusting..." (Mrs. Tao)
>
> "I don't hire any help. For now, I can handle everything by myself. Even if I spent money getting help, the business would not have improved anyway. Then I would have spent the money for nothing... " (Susan)

Besides, almost all who owned home-based businesses also did not find it necessary to hire workers, as the following statement demonstrates:

> "Since my business is operated at home, I serve clients only by appointment. So, I don't need to hire workers..." (Julie)

Out of the total, over half (thirty women or 51.7 percent) employed less than five workers; ten women (17.2 percent) had between five and ten workers, and eight women (13.8 percent) hired more than ten employees. Only two women employed more than twenty workers who were usually spread out into different locations and small establishments, each run by a few people. In sum, as many as forty women (69 percent) either did not have any employees or employ less than five workers. The small scale of these businesses can further be demonstrated by the kind of help needed. Not all the staff worked full-time. Out of the forty-eight owners/employers, as many as seventeen (35.4 percent) of them hired only part-time help. The rest employed both full-time and part-time workers.

In addition to the size and nature of employees, the small scale of the businesses is reflected also in the wage system of the ethnic economy. Many workers, most of whom being co-ethnic working as sale clerks, bookkeepers, cashiers, receptionists, waiters, dishwashers, etc, were paid minimum wage or slightly above minimum wage since specialized knowledge and skills were not required of them. In general, the pay of these workers was claimed to be the same or a little above average as compared with other Chinese businesses but lower than those who work in a comparable business in the mainstream economy:

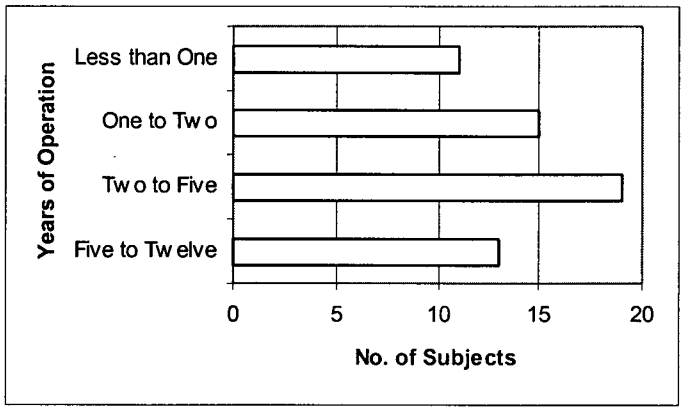
> "Their salaries are on the average higher than other Chinese firms but are lower than *white people's* firms. Chinese

> businesses usually have a lower profit margin and therefore cannot afford to pay them well." (Doris)
>
> "I let my staff know up front that the pay is low [as compared with those who work in the mainstream economy]. I can only pay her minimum wage. And if she is willing to take the job, she should anticipate not getting a raise for a long time..." (Alison)

4. Length of Business

Another characteristic of these Chinese women entrepreneurs is their new experience in doing business in Canada. Due to the fact that half of them immigrated to Canada between 1991 and 1995 and started their businesses in the recently developed ethnic business area in Richmond (Li, 1992), it is not surprising to find that most of these businesses, close to half (twenty-six or 44.8 percent) of which, have operated for two or less than two years. Comparatively speaking, the length of their business ownership is shorter than the business duration of the average Canadian women entrepreneurs

Chart 3.6 Length of Business

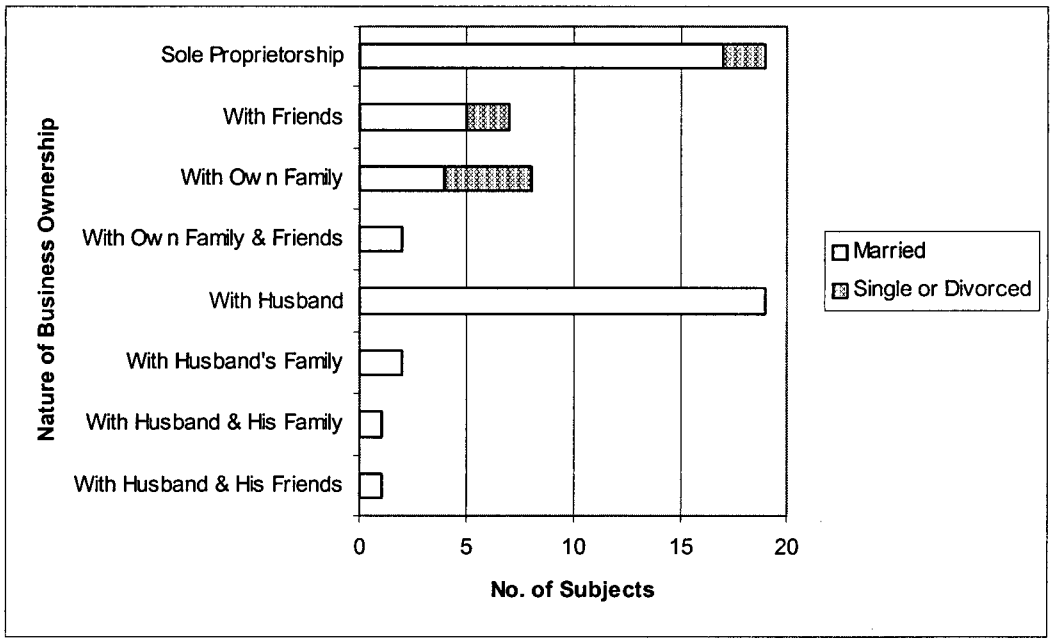


(Businesswomen's advocate, 1991; Lavoie, 1988). For example, firms owned and operated under five years constitute over three-quarters of the sample in this study but only half of the Canadian women entrepreneurs in a previous study (Lavoie, 1988).

5. Nature of ownership

In terms of the nature of ownership, these women have a tendency to share ownership with others (thirty-nine or 67.2 percent). Only one-third (32.8 percent) of the subjects is a sole proprietor. Like other small business owners (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981) and ethnic minority owners (for example, Li, 1993; Min, 1988), the family is an important source of joint ownership, demonstrated by the overwhelming majority who shared ownership, one way or the other, with their husbands, husbands' families and/or own family. Even among single women, they have a higher tendency to share ownership with their own family than with friends or operate alone. Such a pattern is different from women entrepreneurs in general who usually start their businesses alone (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991; Lavoie, 1988). The need for co-ethnic support as a result of immigration for Chinese women may explain the difference between them and their Canadian counterparts.

Chart 3.7 Business Ownership by Marital Status



In conclusion, the general characteristics of Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs and their businesses point to the fact that these women are in general traditional in their upbringing, raised in capitalist Hong Kong by entrepreneurial fathers and traditional mothers. They tend to be middle-aged, married with two or less children, and average in education. Most came to Canada fairly recently and were new in their businesses, which tend to be small and concentrated in personal services and retail, and located in Chinese malls or Asian theme malls. As traditional women, they depend strongly on their husbands or their maternal families, and co-ethnics in their entrepreneurial pursuit. Most businesses are gender-specific, with the help of ethnic women employees, targeting the increasingly affluent women ethnic market.

Chapter Four

Hong Kong Chinese (Women's) Immigration to Canada

The study of Hong Kong Chinese in Canada is not possible without addressing the issue of migration. It is through the continuous inter-migration between Hong Kong and Canada during the past one hundred and fifty years that the present Hong Kong Chinese community was built. Successive waves of newcomers arriving at different points in time shed new light and add new life to the community while those who departed and returned left a legacy of bitterness behind. The invariable status of a visible minority immigrant, as the marginalized 'other', connotes decades of struggles, humiliation and difficulties. The study of the immigration patterns of present Hong Kong Chinese women requires an analysis of those of their predecessors, and how their passages across the Pacific Ocean were constructed, demolished and recreated over time as a result of the changing structural circumstances at the local, national and international levels.

This chapter begins with an overview of the impact of colonialism and imperialism in shaping the Hong Kong people's immigration to Canada. First, I will present the history of Chinese immigration to Canada, analyzed in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and class. I will then consider the situational conditions in both the sending and receiving locations, and how these conditions are related to the global climate of the day. In addition, I will examine as well how present Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs' migration patterns are the product of these historical and structural forces, and how culture constitutes an important element. In the end I will present the

voices of these women on how migration decisions were made, given the impact of culture and social structures.

The Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism on Migration

Hong Kong people's immigration to Canada connotes the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Both Canada and Hong Kong were built under British colonial and imperial powers despite major differences in nature and form. Canada is a settler society built by White European settlers originally from Britain and France. Hence, even though it tried to break away from its colonial past, it has long identified with the cultures of the founding 'fathers', and primarily, that of Britain. As a result, Canada identifies herself as a White society, from which institutional ideologies and practices are primarily Eurocentric, and preferences of citizenship have been given to Whites from the United States, Britain and Western Europe (Abu-Laban, 1998a; Abu-Laban, 1998b; Green and Green, 1996; Anderson, 1991; Hawkins, 1991; Hawkins, 1972). Over the years, a distinction between 'us' and 'them' was constructed, denigrating people of colour including the aboriginals as the 'other' not belonging to the Canadian nation.

Immigration, a selective process, has always served the purpose of exclusion, denying the undesirable from entering. Whether certain groups are suitable or not to a large extent are determined by race, ethnicity, class and gender informed by British colonialism and imperialism. For example, immigration policy was determined by the Western standard of the "gendered notion of men's *public* work and women's *private* work" (Abu-Laban, 1998) and consequently women from England and Scotland were preferred immigrants for the purpose of propagating the White race. Culture became an issue when non-Europeans were considered not suitable to be accepted as Canadians due

to their foreign habits, customs and practices. Class became an issue when people with wealth or in certain occupations were given preferences over others.

While British colonialism and imperialism dictated immigration policy in Canada, it also played a significant part in constructing Hong Kong and its people's consciousness and identity. As a colonized city for over one hundred years, Hong Kong was subject to British rule. But since the War, Hong Kong has become a "classic immigrant city[1]... caught between [at least] two dominant cultures: British Colonial and Chinese Communist" (Chow, 1993), and a third, the Confucian legacy of Chinese paternalism. Hence the Hong Kong Chinese have developed a sense of marginalized 'otherness', "fascinatingly contradictory in their diasporic consciousness" (Chow, 1993:24). They identify themselves with the "Chinese culture" but distance themselves from Chinese communism, resist against British colonialism yet value the prosperity of Hong Kong capitalism British colonialism brought to them. They are trapped as "objects", as the "imperialism's others", and for the women, trapped under both "Western imperialism and Chinese paternalism" (Chow, 1993). Hong Kong people, therefore, have become opportunistic, and over the years, developed tactics to constantly negotiate their cultural identities (Chow, 1993). They have developed a "transient nature", willing and prepared to uproot themselves to where opportunities are (Skeldon, 1994b; Lau and Kuan, 1988). In fact, some Chinese immigrants, especially the *astronauts*, have become transmigrants as a result of the growing trend of global transmigration[2] in recent years.

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[1] Hong Kong has become an immigrant society accepting refugees and immigrants primarily from mainland China, and also other places such as Taiwan and other South East Asian countries.

[2] Transmigration is facilitated by global communications and transportation revolutions, the need for the states to attract foreign investment through multinationals, the stronger protection accorded to minorities in the receiving societies and the adaptable tradition of sojourning itself (Cohen, 1997:164-5). More research needs to be done in this area to find out the prevalence of transmigration among Chinese migrants.

Western imperialism has a legacy of "everyday culture and value" (Chow, 1993:7) that dominates ideologically not only the colonized people but captures every body and land. Such imperialist and colonialist legacy brought the Hong Kong Chinese to Canada, a White society, that is seen as culturally and institutionally superior, and a land of opportunities. Hence, the history of Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese in Canada is a history of inequality and imbalances: with Chinese wanting to get in, and Canadians wanting them to get out. The sojourning character of Chinese immigrants should not been seen as one-sided but rather as the result of the distinction between 'us' and 'them' informed by colonial legacy, in which both Whites and Chinese had become actively involved in defining.

While much has been said about the racialization of 'us' versus 'them' from the colonialists or the Whites (see for example, Mohanty, 1991b; Miles, 1989; Said, 1979), the reproduction of such a dichotomy from the other side was not widely documented. In my study, I have noted that these women had a tendency to dichotomize between the Chinese as 'us' versus the Whites as 'them', ignoring the presence of other racial and ethnic groups. They defined the us/them dichotomy in many different ways: in terms of race, culture, nationality and gender. One such dichotomy is to ethnicize and racialize between "humans" and "ghosts". In this way, the Chinese are ethnicized as *tòhng-yàhn* (meaning humans from the Tang dynasty[3]) and the Caucasian racialized as *gwái* or *gwái-lóu* (as White), *gwái-pòh* (as White female) and *gwái-múi* (as White girl). Other distinctions include the dichotomy between *tòhng-yàhn* and *Western people*; *tòhng-yàhn* and *lóu-faàn* (the White barbarian); *Chinese* and *foreigners* (the White foreigners); *wàh-*

kìuh (as Chinese immigrants) and *local people* (White Canadians), and the more direct *tòhng-yàhn* or *Chinese* and *White people*[4]. In any case, these Chinese women, subject to the influence of White Canadian nationalism, consider themselves as immigrants, and non-Canadians because they are not Whites. Canada, to them, is defined and generalized as a *White man's society*, a *foreign country or* a *Western society* in which they are not an integral part. Only by identifying culturally with being *Chinese* or *tòhng-yàhn*, and with the Chinese community do they find a niche of their own.

Immigration to Canada: A Historical Overview

As a result of European imperialism and colonialism, the history of Chinese immigration to Canada has been a bitter one, marked with repression, exploitation and discrimination. Early Chinese immigrants, who began to arrive in the middle of the 19th century, experienced "more racist laws than any other group in Canadian history" (Law Union of Ontario, quoted in Tailor, 1991:5). Besides the power of European imperialism and colonialism, the weakening of China as a result of it was also a contributing factor. Europe's emerging self-image since the late 17th century as industrial, enlightened and progressive bred the development of biological determinism of science, and together transformed the once romanticized view of China as a grand and imposing civilization into one of stagnancy, backwardness and vice (Anderson, 1991). Proudly related to their European roots, the White settlers brought these attitudes along with them to North America. A weak China, on the other hand, was emerging from defeat in different ways:

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[3] Tang Dynasty is one of the most prosperous regimes in Chinese history, in which many Chinese still take pride of, and hence like to refer themselves as people from the Tang Dynasty, *tòhng-yàhn*. In fact, Chinatown in Chinese is called *tòhng-yàhn street*.

[4] The terms used to describe Caucasians are derived from the interviews. Though derogatory in meaning, they are commonly used among the Cantonese-speaking Chinese unthinkingly in most instances without a sense of malice.

> "The shattering British victory in the Opium War [1840-1842] and the First Unequal Treaties had thrown the ruling Manchu dynasty into crisis, humiliated it, revealed the incompetence and corruption of its leaders, and opened China to the penetration of Western Imperialist powers. Opium, imported by the British, had incapacitated the Mandarin officialdom and weakened the Manchu army. Peasant rebellions against landlords and the ruling dynasty, extreme population pressures, incessant clan feuds, the attacks of roving bandits, and periodic floods, famines and droughts, all further ruptured the fabric of [Guandong] society ..." (Nee and Nee, 1986:31-32).

Chinese emigration to North America began with such hardships at home. As citizens of a defenseless nation, which yielded to the strong western Colonialist powers of the day, Chinese immigrants struggled through a tough period of racism and exploitation. In the following sections, I will divide Chinese immigration to Canada into three three main periods: the 1858 – 1946 period of overt racism, sexism and classism, the 1947 – 1962 period of restrictive family sponsorship, and the post-1962 relatively free immigration stage.

(1) The 1858 – 1946 Period of Racism, Sexism and Classism

The earliest Chinese immigrants to Canada were primarily male peasants from the Southern part of China, coming from the provinces of Guandong and Fujian (Anderson, 1991; Adilman, 1991, Li, 1998). Attracted initially by the gold rush in British Columbia, and later, by job opportunities available with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), while pushed at the same time by political upheavals and natural disasters in China under Manchu rule, these young men came to British Columbia in search of better economic opportunities. The first organized recruitment system was established in 1859 when laborers and merchants were shipped from Hong Kong to Victoria via San Francisco (Anderson, 1991:34). Since then, Hong Kong became the port

of export for most Chinese emigrants. In this period of time, it should be noted that it was impossible to distinguish between immigrants from Mainland China and Hong Kong since the border crossing between the two places was fluid and frequent (Skeldon, 1994b). Socially, culturally and economically, Hong Kong had not yet separated itself from China despite being politically under British colonial rule.

Most of the Chinese immigrants came as laborers[5] who were uneducated, unskilled and from rural and low-class backgrounds. They were willing to work for less in hope of remitting money back to China, or pending for their families later on. Their sobriety, docility, industry and frugality won praise from employers initially. But this soon gave way to collective anti-Chinese sentiments from White workers, and society at large (Li, 1998; Anderson, 1991). Awed by their growing numbers[6], their competitiveness in the labor market, and the potential threat of overrunning the country, the dominant society of the day saw the urgency to stop their massive 'influx'. Widely held as alien, "a filthy and depraved people" (Anderson, 1991:99), the Chinese soon became a "problem" which needed to be addressed independently.

As early as 1872, requests were sent from the British Columbia legislature to the federal government to impose a head tax on all Chinese entering the province. Yet this proposal was not implemented because of the dependence on the Chinese for building the railroad. As soon as the CPR was completed, in 1885, the Chinese Immigration Act was passed to discourage Chinese immigration by imposing a $50 head tax per person upon entry into Canada. Since this amount, the officials believed, was not enough to deter

[5]According to Li (1998:24), between 1885 and 1903, 72.5 percent of Chinese who came to Canada were laborers. Merchants and storekeeper constituted only 5.7 percent.

Chinese from coming, it was increased to $100 in 1900, and later to $500 in 1903 (Li, 1998; Anderson, 1991; Taylor, 1991).

Strong overt racism of the day ultimately found its official expression in the new 1910 Immigration Act. In Section 38, paragraph "c", it states that

> "The Governor in Council may prohibit for a stated period, or permanently the landing in Canada, or the landing at any specified port of entry in Canada, of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or of immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character. (quoted in Green and Green, 1996)"

This Act served as the basis for decades to follow. Later, the term "nationalities" was added to that of "race" to define the origin of immigrants (Green and Green, 1996). These regulations allow the government to separate prospective immigrants into "fit and unfit races" (Anderson, 1991:56), or "those from preferred and those from non-preferred countries" (Green and Green, 1996). Immigration then involved a selective process based on race and country of origin.

Since the head tax was unable to deter the Chinese, an unfit race from a non-preferred country, from entering Canada, a revised Chinese Immigration Act, popularly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, was passed in 1923 (Li, 1998; Anderson, 1991; Taylor, 1991). Under this Act, only big business merchants, university students, native-born and diplomatic personnel were allowed to enter Canada. This Act, as a result, successfully curbed Chinese immigration. In the two following decades, between 1924 and 1944, only 15 Chinese came to Canada (see Table 4.1).

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[6]In 1880, there were 3,000 Chinese in Victoria, and, in a period of three and one-half months in 1882, another 8,000 entered British Columbia. Between 1876 and 1884, 17,028 Chinese were admitted to British Columbia (Adilman, 1992:311).

This early phase of Chinese immigration has been well known and widely analyzed for its racist overtone. What has been considered less is the gendered and classed nature of these policies. With respect to gender, patriarchal ideologies have influenced the making of Canadian immigration policy. Confucian paternalism also has an impact on the emigration pattern from China.

For example, the definition of Chinese by the Canadian policy makers was patrilineal. According to the official definition in the 1887 amendment, a Chinese was "a person born of a Chinese father irrespective of the nationality of the mother" (quoted in Anderson, 1991:58). Patriarchy led the Canadian politicians and officials to treat Chinese women as a dependent category, restricted from work in the labor market in Canada. These women were reduced solely to sexuality and reproduction. And they were used to uphold dominant racist attitudes and practices. To the racist policy makers, allowing Chinese women into Canada was dangerous because their presence bred immorality and fecundity in the Chinese community. As John A. McDonald argued:

> "... If wives are allowed, not a single immigrant would come over without a wife, and the immorality existing along the pacific coast would be greatly aggravated... I do not think that it would be to the advantage of Canada ... occupied by Aryans for members of the Mongolian race to become permanent inhabitants of the country." (Quoted in Anderson, 1991:59)

Yet not all Chinese women were treated the same way because of race and class. For example, those who were married to "British subjects or Christian class" (Anderson, 1991:58) were exempted from head tax. Merchants and clergymen, the privileged few, were allowed to bring their wives and daughters, even during the exclusion years, provided their work was confined to reproductive activities at home. Their exempt status

Table 4.1: Chinese Immigration to Canada

Year	Number of Chinese Immigrants
1906-10	10,325*
1911-15	21,564
1916-20	7,261
1920-23	4,353
1924-37	15
1938-44	0
1946-50	3,584
1951-57	16,455
1958-62	8,010
	Number of Hong Kong Immigrants
1963	1,008**
1964	2,490
1965	4,155
1966	3,710
1967	5,767
1968	7,594
1969	7,306
1970	4,509
1971	5,009
1972	6,297
1973	14,661
1974	12,704
1975	11,132
1976	10,725
1977	6,371
1978	4,740
1979	5,966
1980	6,309
1981	6,451
1982	6,542
1983	6,710
1984	7,696
1985	7,380
1986	5,893
1987	16,170
1988	23,281
1989	19,994
1990	28,825
1991	22,340
1992	38,841
1993	38,582***
1994	44,169****
1995	31,749
1996	29,871

Sources: *1906 to 1962 statistics are taken from Taylor (1991) on Chinese immigrants in general.
**1960 to 1992 statistics are taken from Skeldon (1994b).
***1993 statistic is taken from Statistics Canada (1997), "Staying the Course, 1997 Annual Immigration Plan".
****1994 to 1996 statistics are taken from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1996), "Facts and Figures 1996: Top Ten Source Countries".

was based on a different rationale: to encourage Chinese merchants to do business in Canada. "The [Canadian] government believed that the willingness of Chinese men to do business in Canada would depend on their ability to bring their families without being taxed" (Adilman, 1992:313). Therefore, the opportunity for women to come to Canada depended on their husband's or father's class or race.

To the Chinese, Confucian paternalism in the value of the family and its male members governed the behavior of Chinese immigrant men. Many men used their wives as a symbol to uphold their sentimental link with their extended family and native community in China. By keeping these women in China, who continued to perform conjugal duties in their name, their family ties were sustained. Moreover, they preferred sons to daughters. Therefore, when it was still possible to send for children before 1923, the Chinese in Canada would send for their sons:

> "Before 1923, Chinese residents in Victoria did not sponsor daughters. A Chinese immigrant with a pregnant wife would tell the Canadian immigration officer on his return that the wife had given birth to a son. If later the baby turned out to be a girl, he would sell or exchange her for a boy, usually a nephew or a close patrilineal kin and sponsor him as a son." (Interview notes of Woon, 1988)

Another reason that women were not sent for was because they were considered expensive economic liabilities (Adilman, 1992:312). The head tax legislation in particular exacerbated the situation for Chinese women to emigrate. Since only the female dependents of rich merchants were exempted from the head tax, the average Chinese laborers preferred to send for male members of the family. They were perceived to have economic and productive value and therefore, would be able to repay the amount. The few who sent for wives saw the economic advantage, that they could

work as unpaid or low-paid labor in the home, or in their restaurants, laundries and tailoring shops (Adilman, 1992).

Despite the legislation allowing only family of merchants to immigrate, some single young women came using a different route. These women were generally "purchased" and brought in by Chinese men. They were disguised as wives and daughters of merchants only to work as prostitutes, "slave girls", and tearoom waitresses. "Some Chinese merchants quickly realized that profits could be made from the sexual needs of Chinese workers and the curiosity of white pleasure seekers" (quoted in Adilman, 1992:314). Some prostitutes were even 'children', "ranging from six years old to late teens". Others worked as tearoom waitresses, a job considered to be a little more respectable than a prostitute, despite both involving the sex trade. Still others were sold as "slave girls" who came as "'owned' unpaid laborers [by well-to-do merchants], until they were sold into marriage" (Adilman, 1992:312). Past records indicate there were at least 100 to 200 Chinese women being imported between 1887 to early 20th century, bought and sold for prices ranging from $500 and $2,000 (Adilman, 1992). Hence, with deep-seated patriarchal influences, the life chances of Chinese women, from immigration to how they lived their lives, were controlled in many different ways: internally by their own husbands, fathers, bosses and masters, and externally, by men unknown and foreign to them.

As a result of the racist, sexist and classist immigration policy, and patriarchal ideologies, the early Chinese community was not only statistically imbalanced, dominated by lower-class males[7], but also peculiar in its settlement in Canada. The

[4]According to Adilman, (1992:326), in 1921, out of a total Chinese population of 39,587 there were 2,424 females in the whole of Canada. Of these women, 1,713 lived in British Columbia, where the Chinese

image of a Chinese community of filthiness and vice, notable for gambling, prostitution and drug activities in Chinatown, was constructed. The presence of prostitutes, slave girls and tearoom waitresses also resulted in the construction of biased contradictory images of Chinese women as passive, docile, sexual and immoral. These images persisted until at least the post-war years (Anderson, 1991).

(2) The 1947 – 1962 Period of Restrictive Family Sponsorship

The second period of Chinese immigration to Canada, after a period of complete stagnation, began with the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1947. This gesture was a consequence of the increased liberalized climate among the Western powers during the 1940's. The Second World War tested people's consciences on liberation, freedom, and democracy. Overwhelmed by fascism and Nazism, people began to question the logistics of scientific racism. Canada, involved in the War to fight for justice, began to reflect and question its internal injustice towards people of different races. Remarks such as this, "Substitute the Jews for Chinamen, and you are copying Hitler," (Anderson, 1991:170) began to be voiced. The recognition of China's long war against Japanese invasion, which was then the enemy of the Western allies including Great Britain, United States and Canada, changed the perspectives of the Canadians towards the Chinese. Under such a favourable international atmosphere, and together with the struggles within the Chinese community, the Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1947.

Though this Act was officially repealed, it does not mean the end to racism and sexism. The Chinese were merely subsumed under the category Asians, being racialized together as a group. As a member of the 'Oriental race', they were subject to an

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population was 23,533. According to Li (1998:24), merchants and storekeepers constituted only 5.7 percent of the total Chinese population between 1885 and 1903. The rest were laborers, miners, farm

immigration policy different from that for the Europeans. While Canada, with its low birth rates of two consecutive decades, was dominated by a high demand for unskilled labor, notably in forestry and mining, its selection was by no means inclusive of all labourers (Green and Green, 1996). In the immigration policy of 1947, Asiatic immigration was still addressed in an unfavorable manner, for instance, to quote McKenzie King:

> "The people of Canada do not wish to make a fundamental alteration in the character of their population... The government is therefore opposed to 'large-scale immigration from the Orient,' which would certainly give rise to social and economic problems, which might lead to serious international difficulties" (Hawkins, 1972:93)

This resulted in a restrictive policy limiting Asian immigration to family sponsorship only. Only wives and children under eighteen of Canadian residents were allowed entry. A few years later, the Immigration Act of 1952 retained the same condition, but with one significant change. The term "ethnicity" was, for the first time, used officially to replace that of "race". Such a move was merely a symbolic measure, as a response to the "deracialization of the world" (Satzewich, 1994) in general and a liberalizing attitude in Canada in particular. By 1957, the age of children was extended to twenty-one; and the fiancee of Chinese men "who had lived in Canada for two years ...on posting $1,000 cash bond" (Anderson, 1991:182) were allowed to come. By 1958, the policy was further relaxed to allow relatives of Chinese legal residents to immigrate (Hawkins, 1972:121).

This period of sponsored immigrants carried on the Canadian legacy of racism and sexism albeit in a more subtle manner. By abandoning the term "race", policy

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laborers, laundry laborers and cooks. Women and students added up to only 1.2 percent.

makers could deflect criticism of upholding a racist policy by the rationale of "selection based on culture and the ability to adapt to Canadian social, economic and climatic conditions" (Satzewich, 1994:41). Immigration was still male-led. Women were still subsumed under the category of family and kinship. There were no provisions for allowing women to immigrate separately as an individual and a worker. In other words, women entered primarily as fiancees, wives, mothers, daughters or grandmothers of male residents, that is, as dependents of Chinese men.

This period of family sponsorship successfully reduced the sex ratio of Chinese from 1,241:100 in 1931 to163:100 in 1961 (Li, 1992:62). The family structure also began to become normalized. Chinese families with both spouses living in Canada rose from 1,177 in 1941 to 11,275 in 1961 while those with wives not residing in Canada dropped from 20,141 to 5,384 in the same period (Li, 1992:67). Canadian-born Chinese also rose to its all time high in 1961, from 12% of the entire Chinese population in 1931 to 40% in 1961 (Li, 1992:62).

(3) The Post-1962 Relatively Free Immigration Stage

The 1960 decade marked a turning point of Canadian immigration with the beginning of a relatively free immigration system since Confederation. Notably, the old racist and sexist immigration policy was finally lifted. The legislation of 1962 "removed almost all the vestiges of a color-conscious immigration policy" and "provided for the entry of unsponsored or independent immigrants of all origins with specific skills" (Anderson, 1991:185). The selection of immigrants "was shifted from the country of origin of the prospective immigrant to the individual" (Green and Green, 1996:18). In

1964, women, for the first time, were allowed to sponsor their fiances to come to Canada (Hawkins, 1972).

This decade was especially important to Chinese immigrants. Due to a long period of exclusion and restriction on immigration, many Chinese have attempted to enter Canada illegally. Many came as "paper' family while some came as underground workers. The situation has become so striking and uncontrollable that the government finally decided to deal with it once and for all by granting amnesty to them under the Adjustment Statement Program. Initially, this program was supposed to be short-term. It was extended, and postponed several times until the early 1970's. As a result, between 1960 and 1970, a total of 11,569 Chinese had their status adjusted and became legal residents (Hawkins, 1972:133).

Though the 1962 legislation switched the selection of immigrants to the individual, immigration officers still had the discretion to select persons by reference to ethnicity, nationality, and cultural habits. No objective selection procedure was laid down until 1967, when a universal assessment points system was finally implemented. This point system provides an objective scale based on education, language, age, skill and occupational demand, arranged employment, etc. With the universal assessment point system in place, immigration policy changed its orientation, gearing more towards the adaptation to fluctuating economic conditions. Consequently, in the years ahead, immigration would be adjusted regularly based on market demand. It has become an "economic policy tool" (Green and Green, 1996:22).

In the next two decades, immigration was to adjust between short-term market demands and humanitarianism, juggling between promoting Canada's economic

development, and reunifying families and protecting refugees. For example, in 1978, when officials noticed an excess of unwanted labor pouring in as a result of the points system, it was revised with more points accredited to designated occupations while preference was given back to family reunification and refugee claims in order to control in-flow. When recession hit Canada in the early 80's, only those independent applicants with arranged employment could enter.

The close relationship between immigration and the economic domain was further substantiated by the implementation of a business immigration program in 1978. The objective of this program is

> "to promote, encourage and facilitate the immigration of experienced business persons from abroad who will make a positive contribution to the country's economic development by applying their risk capital and know-how to Canadian business ventures which create jobs for Canadians" (quoted in Smart, 1994).

Under this program, potential business immigrants are evaluated on their business investment and economic contribution, rather than on skills, as selection criteria. Their entry to Canada is subject to their personal wealth and economic role (Smart, 1994). In 1984, a revision of this business program separated business immigrants into three different categories: entrepreneurs, self-employed persons, and investors[8]. This emphasis on monetary investment and business-building marked the "philosophical shift [of Canadian policy makers] toward the idea that immigration could be used as a source of capital and as a means of establishing trade links" (Green and Green, 1996) to boost

[8] Entrepreneurs are those who start or buy and manage a business in Canada, employing at least one Canadian. Self-employed are those who specialize in areas such as sports or the performing arts. Investors are those who prove they have a minimum net worth of $500,000 and will invest at least $150,000 in a business venture for at least three years, depending on which province the investment is made. For details, see Smart (1994) or Citizenship and Immigration 1996b).

Canadian economic development. Independent applicants with wealth and business backgrounds were then allowed to enter with no assessment for skills.

Though the introduction of a points system, that is, the independent category, is claimed to have removed racial and gender biases, it is in no way a fair policy. First, the class factor outweighs other factors. Those who belong to the upper and middle classes have more opportunities to immigrate than the poor or the lower-class people. Some critically argue that the independent category comprising the points system and the business program are nothing but an updated version of the head tax scheme imposed on the Chinese immigrants between 1885 and 1947. "Immigrants classified as 'entrepreneurs', gain admission by promising to invest in and operate a business in Canada instead of paying the head tax to the immigration official...'Investors' merely need to be wealthy and be willing to 'lock in' a substantial sum for a few years" (Taylor, 1991:11). As for the educated elite and professionals who qualify for the independent class, they "have to spend more than a head tax to provide themselves with the training and education that will make their immigration applications successful" (11). Thus by removing the explicit racist barriers to immigration, the Canadian immigration policy has set up a class preference to landing: "entrance became easy for the rich, entrepreneurs, professionals and even highly skilled, highly trained labor when demand is high ...; entrance became difficult for all others" (5). Class has overridden race and culture. Anyone with education and/or wealth, regardless of gender, race, ethnic and cultural origin, was welcome to immigrate to Canada. The business program has become a "buy-a-visa scheme" (Smart, 1994:108).

Second, the continuation of the criteria for family class application has provided those who are economically viable more chances to sponsor family members than the poor. Besides, the race factor continues to play a significant role, albeit in a hidden manner. Immigration officers are given authority to evaluate whether the applicants are capable of adapting to the Canadian environment; processing time in non-preferred countries is longer; and more immigration offices are set up in preferred countries. In addition, gender biases persist since women in general are more eligible to immigrate under the family category as wives and fiancees. Other than domestics, nurses and secretaries, the occupations that were preferred were more likely favour male applicants.

Another notable change during this period is the Adjustment of Status program that took place in 1973, between August 15 and October 15 (Hawkins, 1991). While the earlier amnesty addressed only the Chinese, this time it was used to naturalize all legal and illegal immigrants. Different from the previous one, this program was the result of the problem generated by the 1967 regulations. Not only did the regulation permit visitors to apply for immigrant status from within Canada, it also allowed those who were refused the opportunity to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Board who would usually grant them immigrant status on compassionate grounds. Such a policy instigated an influx of people from different countries, resulting in a huge backlog in processing immigration application and appeals. Seeing immigration to be out of control, the government decided to change the policy so that all applications could only be submitted and processed outside of Canada, but on humanitarian grounds, all agreed that they should clear up the existing problems. The Adjustment of Status Program was the resolution to this issue. This program is similar to an amnesty program, by which legal

and illegal residents were required to come forward during the period it was in effect and be given immigrant status in this manner. According to Hawkins (1991), some 39,999 people from over 150 countries had obtained landed immigrant status. This program undoubtedly affected Hong Kong people who were living in Canada, either as visitors, illegal residents, students, or workers. During that year, the official immigrant number jumped to 14,661 from 6,297 in the previous year (see Table 4.1). Since then, Hong Kong immigration to Canada remained high until the policy tightened again.

Hong Kong Chinese immigration entered a new phase in 1986. The recession of the early 1980's was over in Canada, and a central concern about negative population growth was raised among the Canadians (Green and Green, 1996). As a result, the restriction on prearranged employment for independent applicants was lifted to attract more immigrants. Since then, applicants from the family class have declined in number, while those from the independent class (specifically skilled workers and business immigrants)[9] have increased. The relaxation of immigration policy since 1986 coincided with the uncertainty of Hong Kong's future after 1997 when she reverted to Chinese sovereignty from British rule. Hence, after 1987, immigration from Hong Kong accelerated (see Table 4.1). As early as 1983, Hong Kong had become the top source country for entrepreneur immigrants, and has remained in this position ever since (Smart, 1994). Hong Kong also became the top source country for all immigrants in the past decade, and was so until 1997.

The changes in immigration policy in the post-1960 years, eliminating barriers based on race, sex, country of origin and social origin, altered the outlook of Chinese

[9] The retired persons category of the independent class was cancelled in August, 1991 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1996a),

immigrants to Canada. Women, once very much underrepresented, began to outnumber men. For example, in 1990, the male/female ratio reached 48:52 (Johnson and Lary, 1994:94). Between 1986 and 1991, Chinese women immigrants have increased 60.1 percent (Statistics Canada, 1995). In 1991 they constituted 82 percent of all Chinese women in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1995). Once it was only men who applied for their wives and children, now we see more women applying for their families. Women also began to arrive as independent workers when their designated occupation, mostly as secretaries, met the requirement of the points system. Consequently, the percentage of female principal immigrants increased for example to 41 percent in 1988; 43 percent in 1989; and 34 percent in 1990 (Johnson and Lary, 1994:94).

The cultural backgrounds of these immigrants also became diverse. The elimination of social origins and race in the immigration policy attracted Chinese immigrants from different points of origin, such as Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Pakistan, Trinidad, Peru, etc. (Anderson, 1991). These new immigrants are characteristically very different from the old. In addition, due to the closed door policy of China under communist rule since 1949[10], the old stock of immigrants ceased to continue. As a result, the once homogenous Chinese community, confined to the vicinity of Chinatown, has grown into a physically dispersed and heterogeneous community.

In particular, the Hong Kong Chinese immigrants who constitute the largest in number are also very different, culturally, socially and economically, from the old Chinese immigrants. These new immigrants, raised with Western influence and

[6] Immigration from China was resumed in 1974, when Prime Minister Trudeau arranged for the reunification of a small number of families in Canada (Anderson, 1991:214)

knowledge of the English language, are urban, educated and skilled, if not well-off. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1996c), immigrants from Hong Kong at the time of the 1991 census were more likely than people from other groups to have a university degree; 90 percent could carry on a conversation in English; and they are more likely to be employed in professional and managerial positions. While Hong Kong Chinese women's employment and self-employment statuses are similar to that of average Canadian women, Chinese men did much better than other Canadians. For example, in 1991, 15 percent of Hong Kong Chinese men were self-employed as compared with 12 percent of their Canadian-born counterparts; while 49 percent held professional and managerial occupations as compared with 32 percent of all immigrant men and 27 percent of Canadian-born men (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996c).

These characteristic changes also altered the images the white Canadians had constructed of the Chinese over the years. Stereotypical images of the Chinese have gone through at least three stages of construction. Class and culture intersect to produce racialized images. From being racialized as filthy, heathenistic, vicious and immoral in their early years, the Chinese were re-created both popularly and academically as "model minority" and "middleman minority" (Anderson, 1992:213) in the post-war years with their success in small businesses, and their children's success in education. Yet such positive images soon gave way to new negative stereotypes when large numbers of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants arrived in the last decade of the 20th century. The fact that this group of people is comparatively more educated, skilled, well-off and westernized does not make them any better than the early immigrants who were characteristically 'alien' and poor. New stereotypical images such as "rich, selfish, environmentally unfriendly..."

(Smart, 1994:108) were constructed. These new immigrants are now targeted for their wealth and conspicuous consumption patterns. They are ostracized for driving luxurious cars and living in 'monster houses'; for destroying the scenic heritage of Canadian neighborhoods by cutting down trees and building cemented backyards; and for being insensitive to environmental issues such as eating endangered animal body parts. They are criticized for doing nothing but "flaunting their wealth" (Lam, 1994). And their wealth is suspected to be related to organized crime. Chinese women are teased for their overly cautious driving and lavish spending habits. Chinese families are criticized for the '*astronaut*' and 'space parent' phenomena. They are blamed for the widely publicized youth problems, notably the 'Asian' gangs. They are seen as selfish snobs, unwilling to pay taxes but take advantage of Canadian taxpayer's money on education and health care. Chinese businesses and Chinese shopping malls are accused of 'reverse' discrimination by not putting up English signage and by hiring front line people who do not speak English. They are accused of being "misleading, hostile and racist" (Smart, 1994:108).

In general, Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, despite their differences, are accused of their unwillingness to adapt to and settle down in Canada, just like those in the old days. Such negative sentiments even triggered a new immigration proposal in 1998 to make proficiency in either official language mandatory for immigration. It was dropped when open resentment and criticisms from the Chinese community and other ethnic minority groups were voiced.

Emigration from Hong Kong: A Historical Perspective

To make the discussion of Hong Kong Chinese immigration to Canada more complete, it is essential to take a brief look at the historical, structural and cultural

contexts of the sender: Hong Kong, and how various circumstances it encountered had affected the emigration of its people. In this way, we are able to gain a holistic view bridging immigration and emigration.

As a creation of colonialism and imperialism, Hong Kong was first occupied by the British in January 1841, when it was still a village populated by five or six thousand inhabitants (Skeldon, 1994b: 21). Under minimal economic intervention of British rule, it has grown into a prosperous and vibrant capitalist metropolis, beginning in the 1960's. Since then, Hong Kong's economy grew at an alarming rate for the following thirty years. Its growth was facilitated by various waves of migrants from Mainland China. From the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the famine in 1959-61 (Skeldon, 1994b), thousands of Chinese refugees from provinces along the South China Sea fled to Hong Kong. These people moved to Hong Kong for political shelter and economic survival. Most brought their family and children along. Some left family members behind, only to be reunited later on. Others started a new family in Hong Kong, while maintaining some contact with those left behind. Still others were less fortunate, and never got to unite with their family again.

Culturally, the Hong Kong Chinese are "marginal people" very different from the traditional Chinese and the Socialist Chinese (Lau and Kuan, 1988). They are on the one hand, deprived of the formal and institutional training of Confucianism or Marxist-Maoist socialism, and on the other hand, unable to absorb entirely Western ideologies and practices imposed by the colonialists and imperialists. They become jugglers who try hard to strike a balance between the old and the new, the East and the West.

Such marginality constitutes rootlessness. Most Hong Kong Chinese, until recently[11], have never developed a concrete identity of their own. Raised under Western capitalism, they fear Communism, and therefore are less likely to look "inward" to China for identity, except for sentimental attachment left behind by past generations. Yet they are equally loosely attached to Hong Kong, a place they feel more like an adopted home. Therefore, Hong Kong people are more likely to look outward, to the West, for better opportunities and standard of living.

In sum, as a migrant territory populated by 6.6 million people by the 1990's, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, Hong Kong has nourished its people of a "transient nature" (Skeldon, 1994b:24) with only "superficial roots in the territory" (22). The Hong Kong Chinese, either directly experienced the flight from China, or are descendants of those who had such experiences, are more ready, willing and prepared to uproot themselves from Hong Kong (Lau and Kuan, 1988). Hong Kong, over the years, has developed into a "transshipment point for migrants going overseas" (Skeldon, 1994b:24).

Thinking and talking about emigration, therefore, has become a part of life for most Hong Kong people. Emigration, particularly to 'advanced Western societies', has become a goal for many. To systematically analyze the history of emigration of these people, we can divide it roughly into four phases (Skeldon, 1994b): the 'old' overseas Chinese emigration before the 1930's, the transition stage during the 1950's and 1960's, new patterns in late 1960's and mid-1980, and the recent emigration from mid-1985 to 1997.

[11] Studies in the 1980's on Hong Kong Chinese show that more Hong Kong Chinese have now developed a strong unique identity as Hong Kongers as compared to the past.

The pre-1930 period marked the export of unskilled male labour to settler societies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. When the door to these countries were shut early in the 20th century, emigration from Hong Kong changed its course to Southeast Asia which subsequently also restricted immigration. As I have noted earlier, no distinction can be made between the Hong Kong Chinese and the Chinese from Mainland China at this initial stage because of the fluidity of border-crossing between the two places before the establishment of the People's Republic of China under communist rule. During this period, a distinctive Hong Kong identity was far from developed.

The second wave was marked by Hong Kong emigration to the United Kingdom, from the villages of rural New Territories, in the 1950's and 1960's. During this period, rapid industrialization in Hong Kong was on its way, and consequently disintegrated the rural economy of the New Territories, forcing villagers to look outside for employment (Baxter and Raw, 1988). At the same time, post-war economic restructuring in Britain fostered the growth of service industries part of which was the increasing demand for ready cooked meals. This encouraged Chinese men from the New Territories to move to Britain and work in the growing ethnic fast food industry (Baxter and Raw, 1988). The Immigration Act at this time was male-led, but it allowed women and dependents to join their husbands and fathers (Baxter and Raw, 1988). Yet, the encouragement of Chinese labour did not last long. By the 1960's, the British restricted Hong Kong Chinese immigration, as a result of recession and a decline in demand of labor in the food service industry. This put a halt on the mobility to England, and also ended the second wave of Hong Kong emigration.

During the 1960's, Canada, and subsequently the United States, lifted its restrictive racist and sexist immigration policies and replaced them with a points system of selection. Australia and New Zealand followed suit in the following decade. This facilitated the third stage of emigration in Hong Kong history. In the next two decades, the United States absorbed most of the Hong Kong emigrants. Yet in Canada, the new nondiscriminatory immigration policy also drew a substantial number of immigrants from Hong Kong. This resulted in a gradual increase that peaked in two plateaus: 1968 and 1969, and 1973 to 1977 (see Table 4.1). The 1968 and 1969 plateau could well be explained by both the push and pull factors: the result of the 1967 riots by the communists in Hong Kong causing fear of political instability, and the introduction of the point system in Canada. The second plateau, as discussed earlier, was more likely the result of the Adjustment of Status Program in 1973 that regularized the status of illegal overstayers in Canada, and its aftermath. The decline in number in the following years was due to the tightening of immigration policy in Canada, with its orientation towards family reunification and refugees claims, limiting the independent applicants to those with prearranged employment only.

The recent period of Hong Kong Chinese emigration, beginning in mid-1980, signifies a happy marriage between Hong Kong and Canada. It is a period when Canada opened its door to well-to-do business people, and educated and skilled workers; while the Hong Kong political environment became more conducive to emigration. This fourth stage of emigration began after the signing of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, which proclaimed the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997. China promised to operate on a "one country, two systems" model by which Hong Kong

will remain capitalist, and sustain a high degree of political autonomy. Apparently, those who have survived upheavals in China did not believe that Hong Kong's capitalist system would remain untouched. Such pessimism led to an exodus of Hong Kong Chinese, particularly those of middle class status:

> "... [T]he mood of Hong Kong's middle class is one of pronounced and growing dread. As the communists tighten their grip on Hong Kong, this dread is helping to squeenze out money and people... As 1997 nears, an ever-deepening flood of Hong Kong money and ... Hong Kong citizens, is being channeled toward Canada, both to protect old fortunes and to forge new ones." (DeMont and Fennell, 1989:18-19)

Hence, what is popularly known as the '1997 issue' has sparked what some would call "one of the most orderly mass migration in [Hong Kong] history" (The Vancouver Sun, 1998). The impact began to be felt when in 1987 Canada relaxed its immigration policy, and when the Business Immigration Program became highly publicized with business immigrants having preferred treatment to all other classes of immigrants except refugees. Since then emigration to Canada climbed significantly in number. The Tienanmen Incident of 1989, in which many demonstrating students and workers were killed at Tienanmen Square in Beijing, when China used military force to crack down on their pro-democracy movement, exacerbated fear and instigated an even higher mass of exodus. As a result, emigration increased sharply after 1989, from an official estimation of 42,000 in 1989 to a high of 66,000 in 1992 (Skeldon, 1994b). In 1992 alone, total emigration to all destinations in fact exceeded 100,000 (Skeldon, 1994b:31). And Canada, among all countries, became the principal source of destination for Hong Kong immigrants[12].

[12]According to Johnson and Lary (1994:94), Hong Kong's ranking as a source country to Canada went from tenth place in 1971 to fourth place in 1981 to first place in 1987, where it remained ever since.

Emigration to Canada reached its all time high in 1994. Specifically, the number of entrepreneur and investor immigrants peaked in the 1992-1994 period (B.C. Statistics, 1997). Since then it began to drop as 1997 drew near. There are two possible explanations for this. First, it was assumed that those who could afford to leave would have planned and left a few years ahead (B.C. Statistics, 1997). Second, with the advent of 1997, the finalization of the Basic Law[13] and the ever-booming local economy have produced a more favourable environment, which cleared the uncertainty once clouding the Colony. People were becoming more positive and optimistic of the future of Hong Kong. This has lessened the desire to leave. At the same time, unfavourable and discouraging messages on issues such as economic hardships from popular destinations, such as Canada and Australia, cast gloom upon emigrating. In fact, starting in 1996 or probably even earlier, rumours on returned migration from Canada to Hong Kong were widespread. The booming Hong Kong economy lured immigrants who suffered from the frustrating experiences of unemployment, underemployment, low economic return or involuntary retirement to pack their bags and go 'home' for good or for better opportunities.

All in all, based on the emigration patterns of the Hong Kong Chinese, we may come to the conclusion that they had been driven more heavily by the pull factors of the desired destinations than the push factors. The fluctuating migration patterns over the years clearly reflect the changes in the immigration policy of the receiving country: whether it was constricting or loosening. Those who desired to leave Hong Kong had

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Skeldon (1994) documented that in 1992, for example, "some 38,000 Hong Kong people moved to Canada, around 15,000 to Australia, between 15,000 and 16,000 to the United States, perhaps 3,000 to 4,000 to Singapore, some 3,000 to 3,500 to New Zealand, and perhaps 1,000 to the United Kingdom." (31)

always outnumbered the volume of intake of the destination country. However, this situation seems to have changed recently, after the mid-1990's, when Hong Kong people were lured to stay by more favourable economic conditions at home.

Migration of Hong Kong Chinese Women Entrepreneurs: Personal Voices

After gaining an understanding of the cultural, historical, structural and global contexts of Chinese migration to Canada, let me now turn to the individual responses of the Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs. By now, we are well aware of the fact that migration does not take place in a vacuum. Personal migration decisions are made instead based on a combination of structural, historical and cultural grounds, intersected by the connection of race, class and gender.

Most of the women interviewed are offsprings of refugees who fled when the communists took over China in 1949. A few of their parents went to Hong Kong earlier, to flee the Japanese invasion of China. In total, over forty-five women have parents who originated from Mainland China. Several of these parents were refugees from the Guangdong province; some came from other cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. A few of them took a more circulatory route, leaving for places such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Macau, before finally settling down in Hong Kong.

Most of these women (forty-six or 79.3 percent), however, were born in Hong Kong. Only a few were born elsewhere: nine (or 15.5 percent) in China and three (or 5.1 percent) in either Macau, the Philippines orVietnam. Although they are more conducive to geographical mobility because of their family history, the migration history of these women themselves, in general, was not at all extensive. Close to sixty percent came to

[13] Under the Sino-Chinese joint declaration of 1989, agreement was made between China and Britain to allow Hong Kong political autonomy for at least fifty years. Such autonomy is to be protected by a new

Vancouver directly from Hong Kong. A few women chose cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary or Prince George before coming to Vancouver. Some went to other countries, mostly the United States, to pursue an education before they landed in Canada. A couple of them moved between Hong Kong and Vancouver for a number of years before finally deciding to settle down in Vancouver.

After gaining a preliminary understanding of the origins of these women and their families, in the following sections, I will focus on analyzing issues related to their migration decisions and processes. I will first examine the structural aspects of migration: the immigration patterns of these women, and how they are related to the changing Canadian immigration policy. Then I will explore their personal responses to migration in terms of migration decisions, analyzing their reasons for leaving Hong Kong and coming to Canada, and more specifically, coming to Vancouver. Their motives will be understood in light of culture, gender, race and class. Finally, I will discuss the gender, class and culture issues related to immigration applications.

(1) The Impact of Canadian Immigration Policy

Among the fifty-eight women interviewed, the earliest immigrated to Canada in 1967, and the latest in 1995. This means that all of them came either on or after the implementation of the universal assessment system of immigration, with gender, race and country of origin lifted as the criteria for selection. Depending on the period of immigration, they came in different ways: by means of family sponsorship or assisted relatives, pre-arranged employment; assessment of skills, as investors or entrepreneurs under the business program, or as retired persons. My sample, although not scientifically

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piece of legislation called the Basic Law, which was to be drafted prior to 1997.

generated, happens to represent all categories, and their significance during different points in time.

The immigration of these women can be divided into three periods[14]. Based on the different stages of immigration policy change, they are: first, the initial stage of objective assessment between 1967 and 1977; second, a period of family reunification and pre-arranged employment between 1978 and 1986; and third, a period of increasing business immigrants between 1987 and 1996.

Fourteen women (24.1 percent) came during the first stage, prior to 1978. Over half came as dependents. Out of them four came under the family class, three to get married, and one as a dependent child of the family applied for by a sibling. Two applied through the assisted relatives category. Four took advantage of the points system and applied as skilled workers; two came on work visas; while two other students were naturalized under the 1973 status adjustment program.

The second period marked the tightening of immigration, putting the emphasis back to family reunification. As a response to this change, my sample reflects a sharp decline in numbers, most of which applied under family reunification, either to join a sibling or to get married. Only six women (10.4%) came during this period, all except two applied through the family class. In particular, two were applied for by their fiance, and two came as the dependent child of the family applied for by a sibling.

The third stage characterizes a high volume of immigration from Hong Kong and an expansion of the business program. Consistent with this trend, a majority (thirty-eight or 65.5 percent) of the Hong Kong Chinese women interviewed came during this period.

[14] Three women came to Canada as students prior to applying for immigration status. The period of immigration here does not count the number of years they stayed as students.

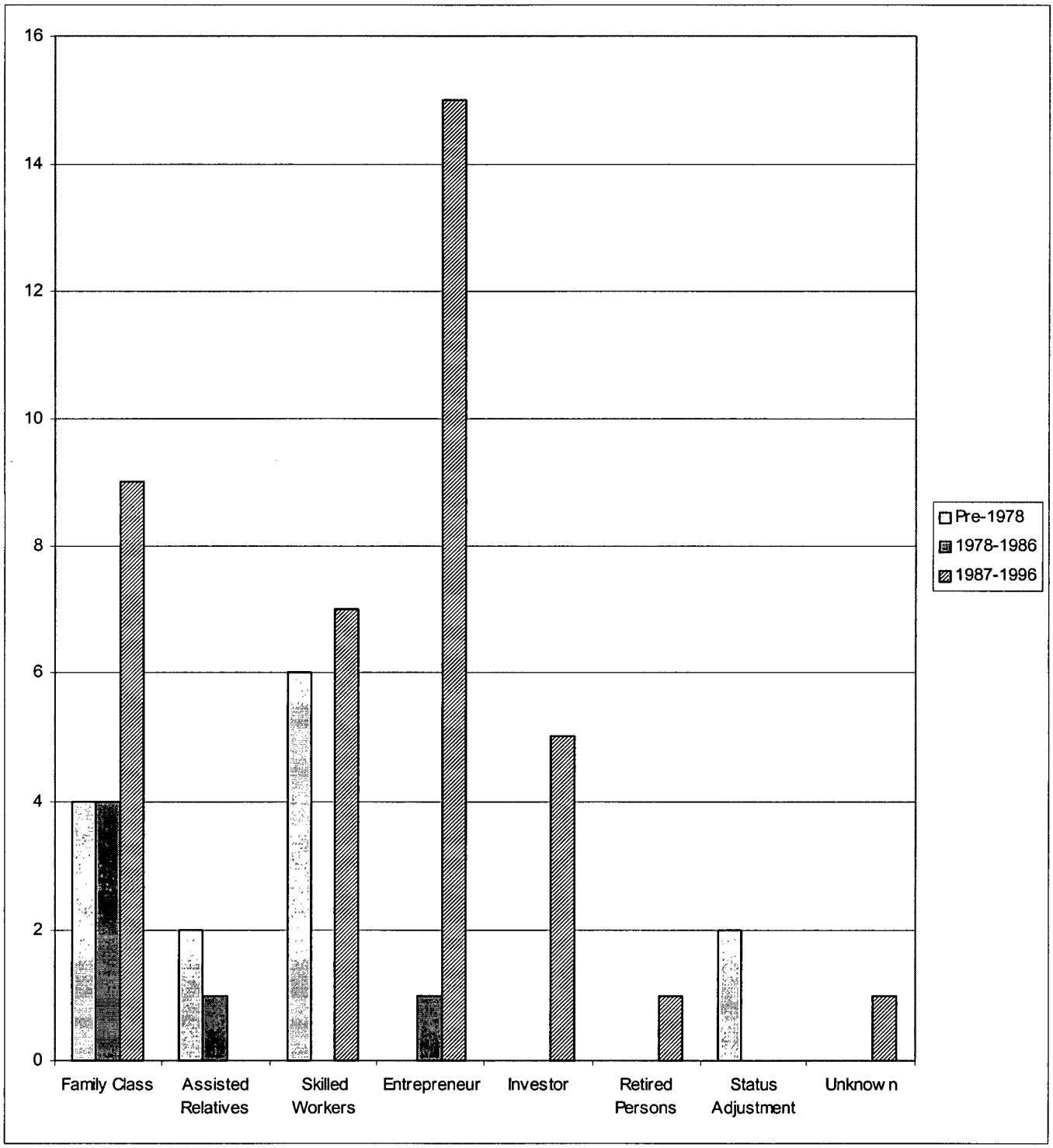
Out of these thirty-eight women, twenty (or 52.6 percent) came under the business program either as entrepreneurs (fifteen in total) or investors (five in total). The rest are made up of the family class (ten or 26.3 percent), skilled workers (seven or 18.4 percent) and one retired person (2.6 percent). Over all, the striking resemblance of my sample's immigration pattern to the general trend underscores an important point: that immigration of these women to a large extent was impacted by the changing Canadian immigration policy.

(2) Reasons for Emigration and Immigration

According to the migration literature, migration is the effect of both push and pull factors. Push factors have to do with how the conditions in the sending society would push the individuals or groups to leave while pull factors are generated by the receiving society that serves to attract people to come. Usually, people are more inclined to move due to social, political or economic reasons. And their migration decisions are more likely the result of a combination of factors, both at the individual and structural levels. In the following, I will examine the push and pull factors for these women, in terms of the reasons for leaving Hong Kong, and the reasons for choosing Canada, and Vancouver specifically, as the place of destination. First I will briefly go over the various reasons given by these women. Then I will analyze these reasons in depth, focusing on how they are shaped by culture, gender, race and class.

Among the women I interviewed, the most frequently cited reasons for leaving Hong Kong in general relate to their family at the personal level, and political uncertainty at the societal level (see Table 4.2). Over 70 percent (forty-one) of these women left Hong Kong mainly for family reasons. Many were motivated by their parents or in-laws

Chart 4.1: Period of Immigration and Immigration Class for Hong Kong Chinese Women Entrepreneurs



to leave; others came because family members, mostly siblings, had already emigrated. Still others left Hong Kong to get married, or to follow their husbands' wish to leave. Slightly over half (51 percent or thirty) of the women were pushed by political uncertainty. A number of them left for educational pursuits, as a result of the influence of the migration trend, or because of their dislike of Hong Kong's physical and social environments. Interestingly enough, very few women left for economic reasons. Only one woman left for better business opportunities, and another woman left as a result of a job offer in Canada.

However, because of the changing Hong Kong environment over the years, there is noticeable variation in the motives for leaving at different periods of time. Such difference is particularly distinct when a line is drawn between those who emigrated before 1984 and those who emigrated after that year. Before 1986, the '1997 issue' was not yet an issue imminent to spark emigration. There is a striking difference in their motive for leaving Hong Kong. For the pre-1986 group, political uncertainty ranked low in their reasons for leaving Hong Kong. Defining it as generated by the 1967 riots[15], only three women responded using it as a key motive for emigration. One woman was still able to remember what had happened to her some thirty years ago:

> "In 67, I wrote my school certificate exam [a public exam for high school graduation]. I remember we were writing our exam, and suddenly we had to go, because of the bomb threats. We had to go... We had to repeat some of our exams later on. So that was very bad. That had a big impact... I think that helped our parents to make up their mind to send us

[15] The 1967 riots started out to resist against the proposed fee increase for the Star Ferry, a public ferry service that goes between Kowloon and the Hong Kong Island. These riots were soon found to be related to and instigated by the pro-communists in Hong Kong. During the course, there were numerous bomb threats. The government had to close down schools, re-route traffic, and impose curfews. One of the most notable events was the bombing of the car of an anti-communist radio talk show host, setting him on fire and killing him instantly. For a period of months, Hong Kong was in a state of chaos and turmoil. Many rich people fled abroad, for fear of the communist take-over.

> abroad. 'You guys have to leave... It is not safe.' This is part of the reason ..." (Maureen)

And the other part of the reason was to further her education, a reason more commonly cited among this group of women than those who came after 1986 probably because they were all in the late teens when they left Hong Kong. As one woman recalls:

> "I was doing very well in school. I had always been in the top three in the class. So my mom thought that it would be better for me to come to Canada to further my education, to go to university here... My sister [who already lived in Vancouver] asked me if I wanted to come. I said 'yes'... 'cause then I would have a chance to ride on a plane... [Her sister then applied her for immigration]..." (Beatrice)

Indeed, having family members who were already residing in Canada constituted another major reason for these women to leave. In fact, many of them, as minors, left as dependents of their families. The words of this woman represent the experiences of the others:

> "My elder sister was living in Canada. She applied for my parents to come... I just followed them..." (Meg)

And a number left Hong Kong for the simple reason "to get married". Some women were dating before their husbands-to-be emigrated, and came to get married later on. In sum, these women were more likely to leave Hong Kong for family-related reasons than political ones, citing getting married and following their own maternal family as the major reasons.

To the post-1986 group, political uncertainty generated by the '1997 issue' and the 'Tienanman Incident' of 1989, both of which have to do with the fear of communism in one way or the other. The reasons given by one woman are representative of the

combined influence of the structural force of political instability and the individual aspect of the family:

> "My second older brother left Hong Kong for Vancouver first. After two years, he came back and told us how good Vancouver was. He told me how good Vancouver would be for my son. My son was very young then. It would be the right time to leave so that he could start his education here... So our decision to move, to a large extent, was influenced by him. We were the second family to move. Afterwards, my other siblings and their families all followed suit... Another reason was due to my parents. They were refugees from

Table 4.2: Reasons for Leaving Hong Kong

Family Reasons		53
To get married	9	
Family members in Canada	13	
Better education for children	7	
To follow advice of parents or in-laws	10	
To follow husband's wish	9	
Come with parents	5	
Political Uncertainty		30
The 1997 issue	20	
The Tiananmen Incident of 1989	7	
The 1967 riots	3	
Personal Reasons		13
To further education	9	
Others	6	
Influenced by migration trend		8
Dislike Hong Kong's physical and Social environments		6
Economic Reasons		3
Better business opportunities	1	
Pre-arranged work	1	
Better career opportunities	1	

> China. They know how it was like to live under communism. So they wanted all of us out of Hong Kong before 1997..." (Amanda)

Some decisions were made right after the Tienanmen Incident in 1989:

> "We were terrified when we saw what happened at 6/4[16]. And when we thought of the future of our children raised under communism, we were worried. So we deicided to leave." (Ivy)

Other reasons these women gave are related to the environments in Hong Kong and the forces for leaving:

> "... The air in Hong Kong is very polluted and the environment very crowded ..." (Sheila)

> "Hong Kong has become so materialistic. It's no longer a healthy place to bring up my kids. Everyone sees only the dollar sign... During a business meeting, I heard people brag about how expensive their shirt is... $3000 a piece ... Then I would wonder, why don't you just paste some $500 notes over your body? ... My kids would come home, and talk about brand names... I think it's OK as long as I can afford to pay for them. But what if one day I could no longer be able to pay for their expenses?" (Faye)

> " ... I never thought of emigrating. But then later, it seemed more like an epidemic. Everyone was talking about leaving, emigrating..." (Carol)

Unlike other earlier Chinese immigrants, only three women left for better economic opportunities. Contrary to some of the recent research on the Chinese in Canada, which claims Chinese immigrants to have "perceive[d] Canada as a land of opportunity where they expect to improve themselves economically" (Uneke, 1996:536), the migration decision of this group did not have much to do with economic

[16] The "6/4 incident" or simply "6/4" was used popularly among Hong Kong Chinese to refer to the Tienanmen Incident which took place on June 4th, 1989.

advancement. Quite the opposite, they saw the Canadian economic environment as less favorable than that of Hong Kong. As Smart (1994) remarked:

> "Hong Kong has a much stronger economy, with a growth rate far higher than that of Canada. In Hong Kong, potential immigrants [may] have established connections and other infrastructural advantages that they cannot duplicate in Canada. They are closer there to the expanding Southeast Asian and China markets and are more able to capitalize on any opportunities that become available." (118)

Let me now consider the reasons for choosing Canada as the country of destination. Interestingly enough, most women, when discussing this issue, liked to compare Canada to other settler countries such as the United States and Australia. Despite the fact that these women came from a British colony, only two mentioned

Table 4.3: Reasons for Choosing Canada as the Country of Destination

Family Reasons		43
Joined extended family members	24	
Joined husband or fiance	9	
Parents/in-laws' choice	8	
Husband's choice	2	
Attracted by Canada's natural, social and educational environments		33
Friend-related reason		19
Have friends in Canada	14	
Influenced by friends in HK	5	
Immigration Policy		11
Comparatively favorable policy	9	
Status Adjustment Program	2	
Economic reasons		3
Job pre-arranged	1	
Past clients moved to Canada	2	

Britain as a source of reference. Very similar to the reasons for emigration, family-related reasons were the most commonly quoted; while economic reasons were the least important (see Table 4.3). Friend-related reasons seem to have an effect on pulling people to come to Canada rather than pushing them to leave Hong Kong. While these women were pushed by political instability and unfavorable physical and social environments in Hong Kong, they were pulled to Canada by its favorable natural, social and educational environments, as well as its more favorable immigration policy. A typical answer combines a friend-related and/or family-related reason with the positive impression of Canada. The following examples give a general idea of how Canada is preferred over other countries:

> "Life in Canada is simple and less competitive. It provides better education for kids. Australia is poor. Life in the United States seems to be more complex. I don't really like it..." (Ivy)

> "We've never considered the United States. Actually I could apply to the States because I worked in an American company [in Hong Kong]. They agreed to send me to work in the head office if I decided to move to America. But I refused. I don't like the States. I have been to New York many times, on business trips. You can't imagine how unsafe and dirty New York is. I was even robbed there..." (Sheila)

> "I visited Toronto in 1984 for the first time, and found that Canada was the best place to live. I have applied for immigration to the United States already. And in a matter of time, I would have got approved. Yet my friends suggested that because the Americans always liked to send troops to other countries, what if they sent my son away if I moved there? Oh, my goodness. So I decided to come to Canada... The British are very conservative; the Americans are too open. The Canadians are the in-between." (Faye)

In some situations, migration decisions were solely the result of Canadian immigration, as illustrated by these accounts:

> "Actually my parents applied to Australia because they've got friends over there. But since my sister turned twenty-one, and Canada was the only country that allowed unmarried children over 21 to be included in the application as dependents, my father had to change his plan. In order to let the whole family come over, my father had to choose Canada over Australia despite we didn't have any friends or relatives here back then...." (Chelsea)

> "When I was still a student in Canada, I did not know whether I should stay after graduation. But then in 1973, there was an opportunity: the amnesty. I decided to apply for landed immigrant status. I did not know why I applied. I guess it was because as an immigrant, you don't have to renew your student visa every year. So it was no harm applying..." (Candice)

After discussing the factors for pulling these women to come to Canada, let me now examine the factors that pull them specifically to Greater Vancouver. As I have indicated earlier, a great majority of the women (fifty-one or 88%) was attracted by Vancouver initially, and chose it as their place of destination. The rest moved to Vancouver after staying for some time in cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary, and Prince George. Similar to the pull factors that attracted them to Canada, many were attracted to Vancouver because of the presence of families, relatives and friends (see Table 4.4). But a reason unique to the choice of Vancouver, as represented by all Chinese immigrants (B.C. Stats, 1997), was its physical attributes: its natural beauty, mild climate and its location on the Pacific Rim therefore closer to Hong Kong. Interestingly enough, most women liked to compare it with Toronto or other Canadian cities when they had to make a decision:

> "We chose Vancouver because the weather was so nice when we visited here in July. I felt this city being so peaceful. It gave me a sense of security. I just love this place. I didn't even consider other places... despite we don't have any friends or relatives here. I just love this city." (Michelle)

> "I found Vancouver the best place when compared to Toronto and Edmonton. I have been to all these cities. Toronto is so cold. Edmonton, in particular, is so quiet and remote, like living in the wilderness. The weather here is nicer. Everything is better here ..." (Monica)

> "We have traveled to a lot of places: Canada, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, South East Asia and Europe. And we found Vancouver to be the best place. You feel very comfortable here even though it is not the most prosperous city. And it looks so similar to Hong Kong... the mountains, the sea, the people..." (Cheryl)

Despite the overall insignificance of economic reasons both as push and pull factors, it seems that a few more women chose Vancouver because of its relatively favourable economic conditions as compared to other Canadian cities. One woman, for example, decided to come to Vancouver after learning that Toronto was undergoing a recession.

> "When I applied for immigration, my choice was Toronto because my colleagues and my brother were there. I have been to Toronto in many business trips. But I've never been to Vancouver. However, after I learned about the recession in Toronto, I decided to land in Vancouver to give it a try, I had no friends and relatives here then." (Sheila)

Overall, taking all the push and pull factors together, these Hong Kong Chinese women placed an overwhelming emphasis on the family in their migration decision. Only a few women (three or 5 percent) did not give reference to their families at all when going through the entire process of decision-making. Other than coming to Canada to join their families, most of them came to look for stability and quality of life. Strangely

enough, even though they were all business owners-operators, very few immigrated for the purpose of better economic advancement. In order to understand better the migration motives of these women, we have to turn to the analysis of culture, gender, race and class.

(i) The Confucian Legacy of the Family and Gender Relations

While mainstream migration theories usually attribute the importance of social and family networks to the minimization of costs and risks, and the corresponding maximization of expected net returns to migration (Massey, et.al., 1997), I would like to add to it the impact of culture that stresses the importance of the family among the Hong Kong Chinese. To examine this more closely, let me now put these women into the cultural context in which they were raised.

As we have previously noted, Hong Kong is a unique society that is culturally,

Table 4.4: Reasons for Choosing Vancouver as Place of Destination

Family reasons		30
Family members in Vancouver	22	
Relatives in Vancouver	1	
Husband or fiance in Vancouver	7	
Parents/In-laws' choice	2	
Attracted by Vancouver's physical environment		31
natural beauty and mild climate	29	
similar and close to Hong Kong	2	
Friends in Vancouver		5
Economic reasons		5
Past clients in Vancouver	2	
Job pre-arranged	1	
Better business opportunity	2	

socially, economically and politically distinct from both traditional and contemporary China. Ruled under British colonialism and influenced by Western imperialism, deprived of Maoist-socialism, while maintaining some aspects of Confucianism, the Hong Kong people become "marginal people who are unable to attach themselves to tradition, but at the same time fail to find their anchorings in modernity" (Lau and Kuan, 1988:61). Confucianism, which had governed the life and institutions of the Chinese, did not have a strong footing in Hong Kong institutions (Lau and Kuan, 1988). Its influences are only felt in the private practices of social customs and family socialization. Among these the most significant is the value of the family and associated with it, filial piety.

As Gao (1996) suggests,

> "[f]amily provides an important context for the development of the Chinese self. It orients the self to others in terms of role obligations, status differences, and ingroup/outgroup distinctions... Family is viewed as the foundation of society... To the Chinese, family is both a home and a community ... [W]hen friends become very close, the Chinese say they're like members of the family ... [Chinese also adopts] such kinship forms of address as uncle, aunt, brother, and sister in one's social relations ... [T]he Chinese self also has an obligation to the family. Chinese children are taught to remember themselves as members of the family and to remember that what they do, good or bad, will affect the family." (Gao, 1996:86)

Hence, the Chinese self is defined in terms of relationships surrounding the family and kinship networks. A man or a woman is never an independent entity, like the western notion of the individual characterized by free will, emotions, and personality (Gao, 1996:83).

Strong family values were rooted also in the Confucian paradigm of the Five Cardinal Relationships[17] in which family relations are ordered in such a way that children are to submit to their parents, wives to husbands, and the young to the old. While such principles have declined in significance over the years, the notion of filial piety, in which children have to obey, respect, and repay their parents, is still taught at home, and is rarely opened to challenge.

Since Western influences have shaken many of these traditional values, the Hong Kong Chinese have learned to juggle among them. In different ways, they seek to accommodate according to changing circumstances. For example, while they still maintain the tradition of addressing each other by family name, they have adopted a western name as well. While they still adhere strongly to the family value of filial piety, the notion of the extended family is gone, and family was redefined as the nuclear family[18]. Many still consider relatives or kin to be important, but they are no longer treated as close as before under the extended family system[19].

Brought up under such a cultural context, Hong Kong Chinese women are, to a large extent, influenced by the Confucian values of filial piety and family ties, resulting in being submissive daughters, sisters, daughter-in-laws and wives. Hence, this is no doubt why family has been the major concern of these women in making migration

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[17] The five relationships are governed by the rule of hierarchy between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and between friends (Gao, 1996). This principle also prescribes gendered relationships in which women have to subordinate to men.

[18] A couple of studies done in the 1980's demonstrate such contradictions (Lau and Kuan, 1988). On the one hand, many Chinese still regard filial piety as the basic social virtue. An overwhelming majority are willing to support their parents financially and they even agreed that "the government should enact laws to force people to take care of their elderly parents" (59). Yet just over half agreed that they should live with their parents after marriage.

[19] According to Lau and Kuan (1988), studies done in the 1980's show that many Hong Kong Chinese still prefer to use resources or seek help from their relatives rather than from the government or other institutions. Yet unlike traditional Chinese, they would feel a sense of uneasiness and discomfort in receiving help from them.

decisions. While single women are dependent on their parents, married women are strongly attached to all three families: their established nuclear family, their maternal family and the husband's family. Hence it is common to find these women referring to them in their decision-making process. For example, one woman made the decision to come to Vancouver because of her mother:

> "We only came to visit here [Vancouver] for two days before we decided this is it. At first, we thought of going to Toronto because the city was bigger and the population larger. So we thought the possibility of doing business would be better over there. But my mom refused to come with me if I decided to live in Toronto. She said it's too cold for her. So I gave in. I chose Vancouver instead." (Robin)

Another woman talked about the significance of her family in the decision-making process:

> "All members of my family [married siblings and parents] came to Vancouver already. I was the only one left in Hong Kong. Then it was "6/4". They phoned me and asked me to come. They said before the immigration policy changed again, I'd better apply [as the last member of the family]. So I said O.K. I did not have any plans then. I did not know what I was going to do after coming to Canada. I did not know what to do when the application was approved. I had to choose between my career in Hong Kong and coming here... I had to choose between my boyfriend and my family... But I finally decided to come." (Cheng Ming-Ying)

Besides the importance of the family it is also typical for these women, deeply embedded by the Confucian version of patriarchy, to be submissive to male members of the family. This could be a husband, a father or a father-in-law or even a grandfather. One woman who came in the 1990's has this to say about the influence of her husband:

> "I didn't want to leave Hong Kong and emigrate. First, because I am afraid to speak English. I had never been here before. I am so scared of coming to a place full of *gwái-lóu*, speaking English. I didn't have any friends in Vancouver, and

> no relatives either. But my husband [who has made up his mind to be an *astronaut*] always wanted us to emigrate, get a [Canadian] passport, and then go back. He's come to Vancouver before. He told me how beautiful the city was... the flowers, green grass, blue sky... He knows I love nature: flowers, birds... So he talked me into it..." (Gail)

Some women were even forced to emigrate:

> "It was my husband's intention to leave. I did not want to leave. He did not trust Mainland China [communism]. I think this is a very common reason [for people to emigrate]. When I was young, I was envious of people who could emigrate to *foreign places*. But after I grew up and had the opportunities to travel to different places, my aspiration to go and live in other countries declined. I think it's OK as along as you're just visitors. But it is sad if you have to leave home and settle down in other places. When I knew that I had to emigrate, I felt so miserable." (Monica)

Other than husbands, fathers are as powerful, if not more so, in having an impact on migration. A woman, for example, who came in 1972 as a student was pressed by her father to stay:

> "My father wanted me to go abroad to study. After I finished my study, he didn't want me to go back to Hong Kong. Even though I expressed to him many times that I wanted to go back, he wanted me to seek a stable life in Canada, and said life in Hong Kong did not suit us. Probably because I am the eldest, and I come from a complicated family background [her mother is the second wife]... He wanted me to stay so that I could bring my mother, and my brothers and sisters over later." (Ophelia)

Some of them, as dependent daughters, emigrated according to the wish of the parents or grandparents without any involvement in decision-making:

> "My father's brother and his wife had been in Canada for more than ten years. My grandfather [their parents] too has been over here for a long time. When the 1997 issue became imminent, my grandfather told my father it's about time to leave. So we came." (Alexis)

> "Even though I went to university in Ontario before [on student visa], we came to Vancouver [as immigrants] because my Dad said so. He said it's closer to Hong Kong...." (Gabriella)

> "We decided to come here because my mother's sisters and brothers were here already. Because Toronto was so cold, my mother couldn't stand it. She wanted to come to Vancouver... If I had a choice, I would have gone to Singapore, or other places in Asia. It is so boring here in Canada..." (Alice)

The most extreme case of submissiveness is expressed by the words of this woman. Here, the traditional notion of filial piety and gender subordination was still very much alive:

> "My husband's family decided to come to Canada. He was forced to come along. So we came too. At first, they decided to go to Montreal. So we went along... After they stayed there for one and a half years, they could not adapt; so they decided to go back to Hong Kong. As a result we moved back too. So I thought we were not going to come back to Canada any more. Then it was '6/4'. His father decided to come back again. This time, he chose to come to Vancouver because the weather is nicer here... I did not know why they chose Canada in the first place, and why they chose Montreal. Probably because it was easier [to get approved]... There are a lot of things I did not know... It was their decision, not mine. So this time, his father decided to come to Vancouver. Again we were not involved in making decisions. My parent-in-laws have friends in Vancouver. But we don't." (Fong Yin-Yin)

But again there are exceptions, albeit only a few, where women were the sole decision-makers. One woman, for example, made the decision against the objection of her husband:

> "... My daughter was eight years old then; and she was not doing well in school. [With all her siblings already in Vancouver], I thought it's about time to send her over to catch up on English. But my husband did not want to come. He wanted to stay in Hong Kong because life was more exciting over there. So I just ignored him and came with my daughter... Yet three months later, he decided to come over and join us." (Mary)

In short, raised under the influence of Confucianism on the family, most women gave reasons related to parents (particularly fathers), in-laws, husbands, children, brothers or sisters. Very rarely were decisions made for their own sake. In fact, only three women gave reasons unrelated to their family. While most decisions were made jointly between husbands and wives, shown by the number of times they used "we" in telling their stories, some decisions were made entirely by male members of the family in which the women were not involved at all. In fact, not many women made these decisions on their own. These Hong Kong Chinese women, being raised in traditional families as mentioned in an early chapter, are to a large extent dependent on their families in making major migration decisions.

(ii) The Aspects of Race and Class

After examining the importance of gender and the family in making migration decisions, I now would like to take a closer look at the issues of race and class. While it is obvious that these women entrepreneurs are dependent on men or the family in migration decisions, the relations between migration and race and/or class are much less explicitly expressed.

Race-related issues such as racism rarely came across their minds in the migration decision process. Among all responses given, only a few mentioned their concern as a Chinese person moving to a primarily White society:

> "We have traveled a lot, to different places, and found that Canada is the best. There are more Chinese here. And Canada is not as anti-Chinese as other countries…" (Mrs. Ting)
>
> "… even though discrimination against the Chinese exists everywhere in the western world, Canada seems to be a more friendly country…" (Faye)

"Racism is less severe as compared to Australia..." (Tania)

There is reason to believe that Hong Kong Chinese are less sensitive or reactive to racism because they were raised under British colonialism and White imperialism, in which unequal race relations were normalized. They may have accepted their subordination and oppression as a way of life, and rarely challenge White authority. Hong Kong Chinese women in particular, socialized under the Confucian notion of patriarchy at the same time, are structured into disadvantaged relations of race and gender. In addition, brought up under capitalism, and coming from a middle-class or entrepreneurial background, their class position may have overshadowed the concern for race and gender, resulting in a collective fear for communism, which overrides other disadvantaged relations.

Yet even though most of them come from middle-class backgrounds, wealth and economic advantages or disadvantages were rarely mentioned as the motives for migration. As indicated earlier, very seldom were economic reasons cited as the reasons for migration. One woman, in relating migration decisions to better business opportunity, was the exception rather than the norm:

> "[In considering between Canada and Australia], we found Vancouver to be more promising. Many of our former customers have moved here. But we've got no friends in Australia. Our old customers persuaded us to come. They said that if we came and opened our business [hair salon] here, they would continue to use our service. They told us there was no quality hair salon in Vancouver. So this is very encouraging. At least we don't have to worry about clientele initially. So we decided to come to Vancouver." (Clara)

Only a few are aware explicitly of the advantages class brings. For example, one woman who went back to Hong Kong to work for ten years before returning to Canada explained why she decided to come back:

> "... Things have changed so much these ten years. I have grown up with more life experiences, and with more money in my pocket. So I thought, this time, even if I just sit here and do nothing [that is, without a job], I can still survive nicely for a number of years..." (Cheng Ming-Ying)

Another woman talked about how upward mobility has made her dream come true:

> "When I was young, I could not afford a good education because there were so many children in the family... I really envied those who could go abroad to study... I promised myself that if I ever had money, I would send my children abroad for an education... I also reminded myself not to have so many kids so that I could afford to pay for them. Now that our financial situation is good, and we have our own business, our own apartment and a nice car, we can send our children abroad... Then there came '6/4'... we decided to leave together as a family... " (Clara)

Even though Hong Kong Chinese women are in general taught to be submissive, their class position may crosscut gender in a few instances. But again, they seem to have taken the matter for granted. Only two women realized their power as the result of economic independence or class position in terms of migration decisions:

> "Being the owner of a toy manufacturing company, I was more qualified to apply for immigration than my husband. I decided to apply as an investor because I did not want to start a business here in Canada. I was not familiar with the business environment here. So I thought it would be easier to invest money in some kind of fund.... He [husband, as a worker] could not offer much help [in the decision-making process]. He is the kind of person who cares about nothing. After all, it's my money..." (Martha)

> "My husband objected to the idea of emigration. Why would anyone want to leave if they're doing well in Hong Kong, he said. He anticipated that life would not be easy any more after emigration. So he was very much against it. But since I had my own business, to a certain degree, I think I could fight with him. Even if I made the wrong decision, I could still be able to manage... We quarreled over this issue quite a bit... [Ultimately her husband gave in.]" (Faye)

In short, the Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs in general are less sensitive to the impact of race and class on migration decisions. To these women, family-related reasons, and the longing for stability and a good standard of living constitute major reasons for migration. They tend to take for granted that their class position may have facilitated their decision to move. They also tend to avoid openly acknowledging the significance of race, and probably postpone the issue until they physically land in Canada.

(3) Immigration Application: The Gender and Class Issue

Since the post-1967 immigration policy has become formally gender-neutral, the persons who apply for immigration are no longer confined to men. As indicated earlier, Johnson and Lary (1994:44) document a strong presence of women as principal applicants, to the extent of being as high as 43 percemt in 1989. It seems that women have become increasingly important participants in the immigration application process. But among the women I interviewed, only twelve (20 percent) were principal applicants: four women applied as single individuals while the remaining eight were the principal applicants for their families. Out of these twelve women, four, (two married and two single), took advantage of their work as secretaries, and applied at the time this occupation constituted maximum point level for assessment under the points system. Two became naturalized under the status adjustment program in 1973 when they were students. Three applied through the entrepreneurial program because their pre-migration status as businesswomen made them ideal candidates over their husbands who were workers. Another three came as investors. Interestingly enough, all these three women

were in business for many years in Hong Kong, but chose the investment category because they had no intention to start a business here.

But even if more women were the principal applicants, it does not necessarily imply that they were becoming more powerful or influential in the migration process. When I looked closely at the decision process of selecting the principal applicant, I noticed that the decision in most cases was strategic. In some cases, it has much to do with their husband's intention to stay after immigration; however, some husbands had plans to go back to Hong Kong after landing. Before immigrating, they already anticipated the difficulty of finding a decent high status job equivalent to that in Hong Kong, or to successfully do business in Canada. They wanted to continue their work or business in Hong Kong to guarantee income for the family, and to maintain their established power, prestige and privileges associated with their class and status positions. As a result, some of these women became the principal applicants to free their husbands from possible hassles immigration could bring them. One woman's experience is particularly incredible:

> "My husband worked in a bank as a manager and I worked as a senior officer in the government for many years. So we actually were not qualified to come [under the points system]. My friend suggested that I should apply as a secretary [which was granted maximum points]. But I did not want to cheat. It would be disastrous if I got caught. So the only option for us was to apply through the entrepreneurial program. But since my husband did not want to quit his job and his intention was to go back immediately after immigration, I would be the one to get prepared to become an entrepreneur. In order to qualify as an entrepreneur, I quit my job two years before applying for emigration. I went to work in my husband's brother's factory, which manufactured leather goods. I became a partner there. So when I applied for immigration, my proposal was to open a factory of the same kind. I proposed to invest $150,000 and

> hire one employee...[This woman ended up opening a books and magazines rental store.]" (Cheryl)

Another woman, the wife of a businessman, became the principal applicant too because her husband did not want to live in Canada for good, yet he wanted them out of Hong Kong:

> "My husband wanted us to leave Hong Kong. He said he had experienced how life was under communism... He said that since we have children, we should leave... I had no comment. But I think even if I objected to his idea, it would have been useless... He would still make us leave anyway..." (Michelle)

From the above examples, it is clear that the wife's principle application was merely used as a strategy to meet immigration criteria. Being a principal applicant does not necessarily mean that women are becoming more powerful in the migration process. Immigration, to a large extent, is still male-led and class based. Unless necessary, it is still the norm for the male head of the family to take charge of migration matters.

Conclusion

Recent Hong Kong Chinese immigrants are very different from earlier Chinese immigrants in terms of class and gender as a result of the liberalization of immigration. More immigrants came as a family, and more women came as singles or as principal applicants. With the promotion of business immigration programs, and the switch in orientation towards the possession of skills and capital, the social demographic make-up of immigrants in the past two decades has changed considerably.

An analysis of the social, economic and political development of Hong Kong as the sending society provides another perspective in looking at these immigrants. The political uncertainty because of the reversion of sovereignty back to China together with the drastic economic boom have produced a unique class of emigrants. Those who came

in the past two decades were mostly affluent people who intended to escape political uncertainty. Seeing Canada as economically less favorable than Hong Kong, these immigrants did not come for the purpose of economic upgrading. The Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women in particular, socialized and brought up under the residual influence of Confucian notions of patriarchy and the family, remained, in general, conventional and traditional in character. Specifically, their emigration decision was primarily male-led; and to a large extent, they are still highly dependent, and relegate themselves to a supportive role in the family as daughters, wives, mothers, and daughter-in-laws. Since economic or occupational betterment has never been at the top of the agenda as the motive for emigration, just how they arrived at the decision to be entrepreneurs is an interesting phenomenon that I shall explore in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Becoming an Entrepreneur

The decision to become an entrepreneur is not a simple one. In order to explore the complexity of decision-making at length, this chapter attempts to answer two separate but interrelated questions: why and how Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women became entrepreneurs. In so doing, I will first give an overview of the work and entrepreneurial history of these women, which may have important impact on later decisions to start their current businesses. Then I will identify the reasons these women gave for taking up their entrepreneurial projects. Arguing against the literature where reasons or motivational are analyzed in a linear, simplified and quantitative fashion, I would like to offer a more comprehensive perspective instead. Not only will the reasons provided by the subjects be analyzed in some depth, their intricate interactions will also be carefully examined. Besides the separate description of the subjective forces of agency and the objective forces of structure, their intersecting influences will also be explored. More importantly, by situating these women within the contexts of the global, national and local/ethnic economies, I will analyze how class, race, ethnicity, gender, and immigration are constitutive of each other in affecting their choice of entrepreneurship.

Work History Prior to Immigration

Out of the fifty-eight women I interviewed, the majority worked prior to immigration. While only thirteen (22.4 percent) came to Canada as students and did not work before immigration, as many as forty-five (77.6 percent) had worked. Among those who worked, thirty or 67 percent of them started their career in the white-collar sector

(see Table 5.1) taking up low-status female-specific jobs such as clerks, secretaries, receptionists and sales. Eight of them worked in the semi-professional and technical areas, which also emphasized female nurturing traits or dexterity; examples being teachers, social workers or beauticians. Since the majority of them came from middle-class family backgrounds, they had less preference for menial work. Only four women worked in factories as blue-collar workers.

When examining the differences within occupations closely, the femaleness of the jobs these women held remains apparent. There were those who worked as factory workers involved in sewing or manufacturing electronic chips; clerks who concentrated on filing and accounting; salespersons who worked in boutiques, gift shops or jewelry stores; a social worker who dealt with youth issues; and teachers who either taught kindergarten or elementary school, or music or dance.

Two women, both of whom were immigrants from Mainland China, took an unusual route by starting their career as business owners. Their experience of becoming an entrepreneur is typical of new immigrants using entrepreneurship as a strategy for economic adaptation against structural hardships resulting from migration, especially when they realized that because of social and cultural differences, their skills and language were not transferable upon migration[1] (see for example Waldinger, et.al.,1990).

In looking at the last job they held prior to emigration, it is found that most of them had experienced some upward mobility (see Table 5.1). The majority of these women moved from low-ended white-collar and blue-collar work to become business

[1] Mainland China and Hong Kong are culturally different in many ways. Hong Kong had been governed by British colonial rule for over a hundred years while China was ruled by the communists since 1949. Both women talked about problems in looking for work after moving to Hong Kong as a result of language and nontransferable credentials. Both were not fluent in Cantonese and did not know English. Even

Table 5.1: Work History Prior to Emigration to Canada

	First Job		Last Job	
Proprietors & Managerial				
Business owner	2		12	
Managerial & supervisory	0		6	
Management trainee	1		0	
Sub-total		3		18
Semi-professional, Technical & Skilled				
Computer programmer	1		1	
Social worker	1		1	
School teacher	2		1	
Teacher (music or dance)	2		2	
Actress	1		1	
Beautician	1		1	
Hair stylist	0		1	
Financial representative	0		1	
Flight Attendant	0		1	
Sub-total		8		10
Clerical, Sales & Service				
Bank teller	1		0	
Executive secretary	0		2	
Secretary	6		5	
Retail sales	5		1	
Clerk	13		4	
Receptionist	3		0	
Messenger	2		0	
Sub-total		30		12
Blue-collar				
Factory worker	4		0	
Sub-total		4		0
Unpaid work				
Housewife & mother	0		4	
Housewife & mother, and helped out in husband's business	0		1	
Sub-total		0		5
Student		13		13
Total		58		58

though they were university trained, their credentials were not considered applicable to earn related employment in Hong Kong.

owners or managers. The only women who were stable in their career were those with less transferable semi-professional or technical skills, such as teachers, computer programmers, social workers and actresses.

Eleven out of these forty-five women (or 24.4 percent) became entrepreneurs prior to emigration. Most of them started as receptionists, messengers, clerks, or secretaries in business firms. One began her career as a factory worker. Except for the two women who were pushed into business as a result of immigration to Hong Kong from China, others became businesswomen either out of self-effort or as the result of marriage. To a few, their previous job in the same type of business helped them become familiarized with the business process. As one woman recalled how she became an entrepreneur:

> "My first job [after high school] was a messenger in an office. While working there I took night courses in accounting, Japanese, etc. hoping that I would be able to change to a better job. Then I got a job working in the accounting department as a filing clerk.... Then I changed to another job. This time, I worked as a secretary. The company I worked for was an international buying office, serving buyers from all over the world to shop for merchandize for their department stores such as Eatons, and the Bay.... Later on, through on-the-job training, I became a merchandizer, in the handbag department. I worked there for thirteen to fourteen years. Then I quit, and started my own handbag wholesale business with a partner. Many people in this industry ended up having their own business. It is because you have established a clientele base after working there for so long. You also understand the needs of your clients, and have become familiar with the buying process. Besides, it's really hard work, working for others in this industry. Most of the time, you have to work until midnight. And the pay is comparatively low... I did not have enough money to start the business on my own. So I looked for a partner. That business lasted for three to four years. I closed it down when I emigrated to Canada." (Sheila)

What Sheila went through was the consequence of the combined effort of hard work, training, motivation, relevant business experience and established connections. These are factors traditional entrepreneurial literature would cite as essential class resources in becoming an entrepreneur.

But only a couple of women made it with self-effort. To many others, their entrepreneurial orientation was the result of marriage, that is, getting married to entrepreneurial husbands or families. Among the eleven women entrepreneurs, as many as six became partners in the business initiated by their husbands or their husbands' families. To these women, marriage became an avenue for upward social mobility, providing opportunities to acquire class resources such as knowledge, skills, and business experience, and, furthermore, becoming business owners or partners in family business. The experience of one woman best demonstrated the impact of such:

> "I started to work immediately after finishing high school... My first job was a clerk. I did not have much skills and knowledge in the business field so I took a number of 'commercial' [business] courses for six months. Then I changed job, and worked in a shipping company handling clerical work related to shipping and export. Then I went to Japan to study Japanese. I met my husband there... After we got married, I worked in his father's electronic manufacturing company for close to ten years. I primarily handled administrative work. Then my father-in-law encouraged us to open our own factory... He said he's too tired to do it himself. He supported us financially. So we started our first business, with my husband and I as joint owners... Since my husband had to travel constantly between Japan and Hong Kong, doing consulting work for a Japanese firm, I was in charge of the entire business. His role was only supplementary. In the mean time, we also started another business, manufacturing aluminum blinds for export to Japan. This business was the result of the connection my husband established with his friend in Japan. But again, I was basically in charge of the entire operation...." (Monica)

Through marriage, she acquired class resources such as skills, knowledge and capital.

However, few women took charge of the businesses like Monica did, most women, rather, took a supportive role similar to that of a wife. A couple of them talked about cooking for the staff, cleaning the floor and dusting as part of the job requirement. Most of them were responsible for traditional female office work such as answering phone calls, or doing accounting work.

Contrary to the above scenerio in which women took advantage of marriage to move up the social ladder to become business owners or partners, a number of them quit their job after becoming a mother. Among the forty-five women, four stayed home full-time, and only one helped out in her husband's business on a part-time basis. These women improved their status after marrying to mostly entrepreneurial husbands who were willing to provide them with financial security. A couple of them even lived the life of a traditional 'idle' wife with domestic maids helping out at home. Since all women worked in low-status and low-income work prior to marriage, becoming a full-time wife and mother became more rewarding and attractive to them. For these women, familial responsibilities, and more specifically childcare responsibilities outranked the importance of sustaining a job, not to mention the pursuit of a career or financial independence.

In general, out of the forty-five women who started working before immigration, eleven were entrepreneurs. These women either owned a business alone, with a friend, or with a partner who was usually the husband or a relative from the husband's family. Two became business owners as a result of immigration to Hong Kong. Another two women were motivated enough to have achieved this position by self-effort and connections established based on past work experiences. These women are comparatively aggressive,

independent and self-motivated. Yet the majority became entrepreneurs as a result of marriage, influenced and encouraged by their husbands or their families. While a few of these women became independent and took charge of the family business, many took a secondary supportive role, remaining dependent on male partners.

Not only have these women acquired class resources over time, as conventional women, they have also accumulated gender-specific resources. Working as a beautician, dance teacher, piano teacher, hair stylist, seamstress, secretary, etc., and in an industry targeted at women customers such as fashion or jewelry have helped them not only to find work after immigration, but also to establish a female business niche later on. In short, these women came to Canada with the class and gender resources acquired through work and marriage. As we shall see later on, many of these resources became racialized or ethnicized when transferred into enterprises upon settling in White dominated Canada.

Work History after Immigration

Migration denotes an interruption of life and career continuity. To examine this transition, I will first explore the process of transformation from the last job held in Hong Kong to the first job held in Canada. Then I will compare their first job in Canada and their last job prior to the establishment of the current business (see Table 5.2).

Among the forty-five women who started their career in Hong Kong, nineteen (42 percent), most of whom came under the entrepreneurial or the investment immigration program, started a business after landing in Canada. These women were able to make use of their class, gender and ethnic resources to maintain or improve their status, or to avoid downward mobility upon arrival to Canada. The rest have gone through a more meandering route of career change before finally settling down as business owners.

While a few of them were able to maintain their pre-migratory status through employment, many faced initial status dislocation or downward mobility. Still others decided to become housewives or mothers, due partly to uncertainties of their future in Canada, and partly to avoiding struggles in the labour market.

Traditional mobility literature on immigrants widely held the notion of status dislocation upon entry into the receiving society. A look at the transformation of work between the last job held in Hong Kong and the first job in Canada of these forty-five women shows indeed a notable pattern of status dislocation (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

Most obviously, there is a loss of work as managers and supervisors, as well as semi-professional, technical and skilled work, and a gain in clerical, sales, service, and factory work. Some women who moved up to become managers and supervisors prior to emigration could no longer hold on to these positions; while those who were able to move out of blue-collar work in Hong Kong moved back into it.

There is certainly a lack of opportunity to continue a career in high status jobs in the managerial, semi-professional, technical and skilled categories. None of those who worked as managers and supervisors were able to maintain the same position after immigration. While four of them started their own business, two moved down to work in low-level white-collar work: one took up employment as a retail salesperson in the same industry she once worked as a manager; and one worked as a clerk in a different industry.

The initial drop in status also occurred among semi-professional and clerical workers. They experienced downward mobility because their specialized knowledge and skills were not recognized by the receiving society, and therefore became non-transferable. For example, a schoolteacher had to work in her father's retail store selling

fashion clothing and jewelry; and the social worker became a receptionist in a doctor's office. Even those who worked as secretaries could no longer maintain their previous status after immigration. Executive secretaries moved down to work as ordinary secretaries or clerks while secretaries became clerks or retail salespersons.

The two women who started their careers as factory workers in Hong Kong and over the years managed to get out of blue-collar work to become the partner of a family jewelry business and a clerk respectively, took up factory work again as their first job in Canada. One worked as a seamstress and the other worked in a chocolate manufacturing factory.

Only those who planned strategically prior to immigration were able to avoid status dislocation. Other than making plans to establish businesses, some women made arrangements before immigration to secure a job similar to that before immigration. For example, a woman who worked as a beautician in Hong Kong, had work arranged with a friend who owned a hair and beauty salon in Canada and was able to continue working in the same position upon arrival. Another woman continued to work as a secretary with a job pre-arranged prior to immigration. Others went through re-training and therefore were able to make a career change smoothly after immigration. One woman, for instance, who worked as a financial representative in Hong Kong took courses in skin care before emigration, and was therefore able to find related work after immigration.

Overall then, unless these women decided to set up a business after landing (attributed mostly to the mandatory requirement of entrepreneurial program), many experienced status dislocation or downward mobility initially. Many women were forced to take up less desirable work in the Chinese labour market because of the lack of

Table 5.2: Work History in Canada

	First Job in Canada		Last Job in Canada Prior to Current Business	
With Work Experience Prior to Immigration				
With Prior Work History in Canada				
Proprietors & Managerial				
Business Owner	3		5	
Managerial & Supervisory	0		1	
Sub-total		3		6
Semi-professional, Technical & Skilled				
Tutor (Math)	0		1	
Beautician	2		1	
Teacher	1		1	
Sub-total		3		3
Clerical, Sales & Service				
Secretary	2		0	
Clerk	7		2	
Sales	7		8	
Receptionist	1		0	
Sub-total		17		10
Blue-collar				
Factory worker	2		1	
Storeroom worker	0		1	
Sub-total		2		2
No Prior Work History in Canada				
Preparing for Current Business		15		15
Housewives or mothers		5		9
Total		45		45
No Work Experience (Student) Prior to Immigration				
With Prior Work History in Canada				
Proprietors & Managerial				
Manager	1		2	
Sub-total		1		2
Professional				
Accountant	1		2	
Lawyer	0		1	
Pharmacist	1		0	
Sub-total		2		3
Semi-professional, Technical & Skilled				
School teacher	1		0	
Insurance agent	1		1	
Account analyst	0		1	
Beautician	1		1	
Hair stylist	0		1	
Sub-total		3		4
Clerical, Sales & Service				
Clerks	2		0	
Sales	3		3	
Waitress	2		0	
Sub-total		7		3
No Prior Work History in Canada				
Housewives or mothers		0		1
Total		13		13

opportunity in the mainstream market to minority newcomers. Among them, only twelve (26.7 percent) had worked in the mainstream market; the rest worked for Chinese-owned businesses and firms. Structurally, the development of a more institutionally complete ethnic community as a result of the rapid growth of Chinese population in the late 1980's was able to provide employment opportunities for these co-ethnics even though these jobs may not be desirable for some.

While most women suffered from status dislocation upon entrance, a few managed to avoid it by giving up on work entirely. Five women became housewives or full-time mothers after immigration. While three of them were housewives before, the others made such decisions as a result of migration. These women chose to be housewives and full-time mothers after immigration because they were financially capable of not working. As dependent wives of wealthy husbands, they were able to avoid facing the challenges of looking for work after immigration.

After examining the initial transition from work in Hong Kong to work in Canada, let me now look at the transition between the first job and the last job prior to the establishment of the current business. Here I will compare two groups of women: one with work experience prior to immigration, and the other who started their careers in Canada. Within the first group of women, not many changes took place between their first job and the last job in Canada. Many stayed in the same occupation. This probably has to do with their comparatively short length of stay here. The mobile ones mainly moved horizontally between companies and firms, but stayed in the same type of work.

However, comparatively speaking, more women moved out of employment altogether by becoming entrepreneurs or housewives.

In general, after initial status dislocation, only a few women were able to move up the occupational ladder again. For example, the social worker who started her career in Canada as a receptionist in a doctor's office got a job as a math tutor. But even so, she was unable to work in her pre-migration profession. A few women experienced more complex career change than others, and ended up doing better than they did before immigration. For example, a woman who worked as an executive secretary prior to emigration started out working as a filing clerk upon arrival in Canada. She later became a secretary in a bank, and from there she was promoted to a private banking officer. Later, she changed her career path to work in a travel agency, and finally became a manager there.

Some women, being displaced into a different industry, over time, were able to return to the industry in which they had experience. For instance, a woman who worked as a clerk in an accounting firm initially later got a job in ticketing sales with a travel agency, an area in which she had worked for many years in Hong Kong. Yet even though she finally found employment in the industry in which she had experience, she was never able to work as a manager again. While many women did not attempt or could not find work in the mainstream market upon arrival, some were able to do so over time. Over time, however, only eleven women had the experience of working in a non-Chinese environment.

When these women are compared with those who started their career in Canada some notable differences can be distinguished. First, of those who started their career

here in Canada, thirteen are either Canadian or American trained: four graduated from a Canadian high school, six from a Canadian university, one from a college in Canada, and two from a university in the United States. The majority of them either held a university degree or had some other professional qualifications. Second, their work was of a different nature than the group who started their career in Hong Kong. They were more likely to be employed in a wider range of occupations including professionals, a category not found among women in the other category. A few of them worked as waitresses, an ethnic niche unlikely to be an option among these middle-class women when they were working in Hong Kong. None of them had to work in blue-collar industries, nor did they have to resort to proprietorship to create employment.

Third, they are more likely to be earlier immigrants than those who started their career in Hong Kong. Ten of these thirteen women (76.9 percent) immigrated to Canada prior to 1985, constituting half of the women who immigrated during that period. Fourth, they are more likely to be employed in businesses that are owned by non-Chinese or targeted at a mainstream market than those who started their career before immigration (85 percent vs. 42 percent in all).

Another difference between the two groups of women is that those who started their career in Canada were more likely to stay employed: Only one woman became a housewife and a mother. After this woman moved to Vancouver, she was unable to find a full-time teaching job she once had at Prince George. And since she was married to a chartered accountant who could support her financially, she decided to stay home until entrepreneurial opportunities came up years later. Like the housewives and mothers in

the other category, this woman's decision was the combined effect of structural barriers and personal resources.

As indicated earlier, ethnic businesses generally are not big enough to provide opportunities for upward mobility. Even though there is an advantage to providing jobs for co-ethnics, there are limited promotional opportunities due to its scale. This could be one of the reasons why entrepreneurship became the alternative for the struggle to achieve or maintain high status. Therefore, out of all the women interviewed, those who experienced upward mobility after immigration by means of job promotion were more likely to have worked in non-ethnic corporations[2]. For example, a woman who worked as a sales person in a boutique went to work as a clerk in a travel agency run by a department chain, and from there moved up over the years to become a regional manager. Another woman who started her career as a clerk in a multinational financial institution worked her way up, over fifteen years, to become a department manager. Since most Chinese firms in which these women worked were small, their chances of promotion within the firm became virtually non-existent.

In sum, many women who came after 1985 experienced status dislocation upon entry into Canada, most of whom had difficulties in maintaining their original occupations, professions or industries after immigration. Upward mobility after immigration was also rare due to their employment in the Chinese labour market that offers mostly dead-end jobs. It seems that becoming an entrepreneur, to these women, is the best alternative in order to maintain pre-migratory status, or to advance economically

[2] The opportunity of upward mobility in the mainstream economy for these Chinese women should be read with caution. While structurally the mainstream economy provided more opportunities as compared with the Chinese ethnic economy, this does not mean that barriers were non-existent for Chinese women

and occupationally. Whether this is indeed the case will be examined more closely when we turn to what these women have to say about their motivational factors when engaging in business.

Motivational Factors: Literature Review

Studies on the motivational factors involved in business start-up tend to emphasize either gender or race/ethnicity. Some literature on women entrepreneurs categorizes motivational factors into push and pull factors. Push factors refer to the motives generated out of past disadvantageous experiences in the opportunity structures while pull factors facilitate positive choices made to enhance personal outcomes. Turner (1993), for example, in her study on women business owners in Europe, cited advanced education, business connections and networking, in addition to business experiences and backgrounds, as the positive motives contributing to women's choice of entrepreneurship as a viable option. They are pulled by factors such as personal ambition, creativity, desire for independence, better economic returns, and flexibility when combining family responsibilities with gainful employment. Ethnic minority women, women with limited skills and know-how, or those who face barriers in the labor market are more likely to be pushed into becoming businesswomen. In other words, push factors such as unemployment, underemployment, unstable and unsatisfactory work-related conditions and prospects would push these women into creating their own jobs through establishing a business. While Turner's dichotomy may have some validity, it would be oversimplified to place and then analyze women entrepreneurs in these either/or

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workers. In fact, as the next chapter will show, incidences of classism, racism and sexism were common in the mainstream labour market.

categories. Ethnic minority women may well be both pushed and pulled into entrepreneurship simultaneously.

Other scholars are less likely to establish motivational factors on a clean slate, distinguishing between push and pull factors. Goffee and Scase (1985), pioneers in the study of women proprietors, discussed, for example, the motivational factors of business start-up in a more comprehensive way, incorporating both positives and negatives. Their research points to the fact that women engage in business due to a combination of reasons, which are gender and class specific. Other than the commonly cited entrepreneurial reasons for gaining economic and social independence, and self-expression, additional gender-related factors such as obtaining an income compatible with family obligations, escaping employer-manager control and male control, strengthening family relationships and combating male dominance were discussed as well. While Goffee and Scase's analysis provides a more profound understanding of why women start a business, its shortcoming lies in their failure to address the race and ethnic component of women entrepreneurship.

Studies on the motivation of becoming entrepreneurs among Canadian women generally lack the depth of understanding. Some research findings emphasize the positive motives of starting one's own business. To Lavoie (1988), for example, the most important reasons for business entry of women entrepreneurs are "a desire to make greater use of talents, the desire to be financially independent, and the desire to take on a challenge" (30). Women involved in family businesses are driven positively by the opportunity to take care of the children and look after the house, and to fulfill their potential. British Columbian women, in particular, cited the desire for self-satisfaction

and independence, self-development, and more monetary gain as the top three reasons for becoming a business owner (Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991:10). Though women are "frustrated by inflexible work styles found in the corporate world", they "display a high degree of self-esteem and confidence in starting [their] business[es] and [were] motivated by a desire to control [their] own destiny than by financial gain" (7). Belcourt, et.al. (1991), on the other hand, focused on how women were pushed into entrepreneurship as a result of adversities in the labour market such as downsizing, negative job experiences, the glass ceiling effect, and racial discrimination. Similarly, Stevenson (1986), while comparing women and men entrepreneurs, observed that the former is more likely to be pushed into a business than the latter. Women are more likely than their male counterparts to emphasize the wish to escape insecure and low-paid employment, supervisory controls, and constraints of traditional domestic roles as well as the desire to reject institution-imposed social stereotypes as the major reasons for becoming business owners (35). Yet, at the same time, just like the male entrepreneurs, they are also pulled into entrepreneurship with the desire for autonomy, self-determination, greater flexibility and independence.

The major problems with the literature and research on women entrepreneurs are the over-simplicity and linearity in determining motivational factors. Most studies relegated women entrepreneurs to one homogeneous category without taking into account the diversity and the differences among them. Even if they do, they tend to look at women from a Eurocentric perspective using the western cultures and standards as the yardstick to measure women from diverse backgrounds, experiences and histories; and subsume them into a single collective group. Another problem lies in the methodology:

Most studies tend to take a quantitative approach when measuring motivation, which focuses on a simplified either/or perspective, subsequently limiting the analysis.

Not much has been discussed about the motivational factors of Chinese entrepreneurs. A look at the literature on the reasons for establishing businesses shows sketchy and contradictory results. While Li (1998) found that most early Chinese entrepreneurship was driven negatively by structural barriers such as racism and positively by strong ethnic social networks, recent research on Chinese entrepreneurs in Canada (Uneke, 1996) found that they are mostly pulled by individual ambitions. Uneke (1996) stated factors such as being one's own boss, independence and monetary gain as the top reasons mentioned by 90% of the entrepreneurs under study. Only a small number (10%) were pushed into it by disadvantaged structural barriers such as the lack of gainful employment (Uneke, 1996).

The sketchy, partial and incomplete understanding of the reasons why people start their businesses has prompted me to investigate this issue in a more thorough and meaningful way. An integrated and intersectional approach, I believe, would provide a better picture. Rather than superficially drawing conclusions from the factors presented by the subjects, the analysis will go further to discuss how these factors were arrived at. With the belief that Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women are unique in their histories, experiences and beliefs not only relative to women and men of other backgrounds but also among themselves, their motivation to start their own businesses should be seen as varied and diverse. Following partially Waldinger, et.al.'s interactive model, the reasons to start one's own business after immigration will be analyzed in terms of the interaction between opportunity structures, group characteristics and individual characteristics. Yet

due to the uniqueness of the subjects under study, these broad categories will be interpreted in a way quite different from the original model. Most importantly, adopting the intersectional perspective, my analysis will concentrate on the interaction of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration. More specifically, I will examine the interplay between immigration policies, opportunity structures (demands in ethnic and non-ethnic markets), barriers in the labour markets (classism, racism, and sexism) and the possession of ethnic and gender resources (friendship and family networks) along with class resources (human capital and the spirit of entrepreneurialism) as motivating factors for entrepreneurial pursuit. Special attention will also be paid to the transnational aspect of these resources.

Reasons for Becoming an Entrepreneur

The stories told by the Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women in my research revealed complex interactive networks of factors for entering business after immigration. Some of these women were drawn into entrepreneurship by one of or a combination of the following individual and group factors: their personal entrepreneurial ambition, previous business and work experiences, and encouragement from family and friends. Others started their own businesses as a result of a combination of work-related and migration-related structural factors. Still others started their businesses in response to the complex interaction between individual, group and structural characteristics. Hence, these women, while making a decision to start their own businesses, included a complex process of evaluation stemming from the intricate integration of their personal ambition and experiences, as well as contextual factors.

Table 5.3 provides a summary of these women's responses to why they entered into business. These reasons can be summarized as individual, social or structural characteristics: individual reasons referring to the personal entrepreneurial qualities, qualifications and experiences; social characteristics pertaining to the influences of family and friends; and, structural characteristics referring to the opportunities and constraints that facilitate engagement in businesses.

Table 5.3: Major Motivational Factors for Starting Current Business

	N
Individual Reasons:	
Entrepreneurial Spirit and Attitudes	18
Previous Training, Work and Business Experiences	13
Social Reasons:	
Family Influence and Encouragement	15
Influence by Friends	11
Structural Reasons:	
Work-related Barriers	26
State Policies	10
Market Condition	7

Three patterns are generated. First, the reasons these women gave varied widely. Unlike the study by Prahst (1995) on men and women in British Columbia, which cited individual reasons such as "to be your own boss," "greater flexibility," and "self-fullment" as the most common factors, and Uneke's study of Chinese entrepreneurs (1996) which also cited the predominance of individual reasons (90 percent), the women in this study revealed group and structural factors as well. Secondly, the most

commonly cited reasons for business pursuit are the reaction to barriers at work. Thirdly, the impact of structural factors, comparatively speaking, is the greatest among all three sets of reasons.

More can be understood, however, when the relative magnitude of these reasons and how they intersect with one another are examined. In this regard, two questions need to be raised and answered here. First, to what extent are these motivational factors influenced by class, gender, ethnicity, and immigration? And second, if there are multiple reasons, how are they intermeshed with each other? The following sections will provide answers to these questions.

1. Entrepreneurial Spirits and Attitudes

The literature on entrepreneurship, particularly from the business point of view, sees the possession of entrepreneurialism as an essential asset to success in business. In my sample, however, not all women were motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit or attitude. In plain words, these women may have started their businesses for different reasons. The possession of entrepreneurial spirits and attitudes, as explained in an earlier chapter, involves the "right" attitudes for doing business. The reasons the sample cited include the bourgeois attitudes and values of monetary gain, autonomy and control, a sense of satisfaction and self-fulfillment, as well as freedom and flexibility. Most important of all, these women enjoyed the material rewards, and the satisfaction that stemmed from independence, freedom, flexibility and autonomy in entrepreneurship. None of these would have been possible had they been working for others, as illustrated by the opinions of some:

> "I prefer to work on my own rather than for others because I like the flexibility and freedom. If I worked for someone, I

> would be restricted by strict working hours, which I hate. I hate being supervised. I hate people imposing a work schedule on me. I enjoy the freedom and flexibility of working for myself. I like to be personally responsible for my own clients." (Sandra)
>
> "I decided to start my own business because I think it's better than working for others. If my job is to sell clothing, why don't I sell for myself? Besides, when the customers know that you're the owner, they will respect you more. You will get more satisfaction. Most important of all, the monetary return will definitely be higher than working as a saleslady. Besides, you can be independent, being your own boss. Another reason is that I will have control over my own schedule." (Susan)
>
> "I always wanted to be my own boss. I will have a better opportunity to make a lot more money. Of course, I realize there is always the risk factor. But it would lack challenge if you work for someone making the same amount of money every month. There is no opportunity to make more... Even though having your own business means more hard work, more worries, I still want to have my own business." (Mary)

The above passages demonstrate how these women saw entrepreneurship as the avenue for personal gain. Motivated by the willingness to take risks, the longing for taking charge of one's work, and the anticipation of gaining more monetary rewards, these women possessed the necessary class resources for starting their own businesses.

One crucial element that I would like to highlight is that capital, a major component of class resources, rarely came up as a motivational factor for these women. The availability of capital, either through personal savings or family support, was interpreted instead as a given. It seems that those who came from affluent backgrounds may have taken class for granted. Another reason could be the small capital required for these businesses that has rendered it unimportant when compared with other contributing factors.

2. Previous Training, Work and Business Experiences

Prior training, work and business experiences can be analyzed, in addition to the possession of entrepreneurial spirit and attitudes, as class resources as well. These class resources constitute the human capital these women accumulated in the course of their school and work life. But it may be too simplistic to interpret these resources solely as class-based. Rather, they may be gendered and ethnicized. Sheer class-based training, work and/or business experiences may not be sufficient for immigrant women to start or continue their businesses after immigration when such training and experiences are not directly transferable. Only those that are ethnic-specific, catering to the needs of the ethnic communities or the demands of the larger society, or ethnically gender-specific, targeting the needs of ethnic women stand the best chances of transferability.

Some of the human capital is transnational in character. Those women who brought ethnically gendered human capital with immigration were easily motivated to begin a business upon immigration. Lorna, for example, who had been a teacher of Chinese dance before immigration, established a dance school serving co-ethnics after immigration:

> "When I arrived in Canada years ago, there was no one teaching Chinese dance in the [Chinese] community. I decided to start a dance school because this is what I was trained for. I could not do anything else. Besides, I always loved Chinese dance. I wanted to promote this to the people here..." (Lorna)

Lorna, and women like her, transferred pre-migration ethnicized gendered skills and experiences, integrating them with her personal interests and ambition into her business. Other women like Andrea who earned experience trading ethnic products made use of

their knowledge and experiences to set up transnational trade, importing ethnic products from China via Hong Kong to export to North American markets.

> "Because of my past [ten year] business experience in Hong Kong involving the wholesale of Chinese handicrafts, we had plans to start up a business immediately after immigration ... I wanted to use my established connections to continue my business here ..." (Andrea)

For those women who found their past work or business experiences not transferable after immigration, they would seek re-training and new work experiences during their process of settlement. Many, for instance, re-trained themselves by taking courses in aesthetics, hair styling, tourism, airline ticketing, management and/or accounting with the initial hope of finding work. Subsequently, after gaining work experiences and acquiring on-the-job training, most likely within the Chinese ethnic labour market, they would decide to go ahead with their own business pursuit. As Audrey and Gloria explained:

> "After I took courses in aesthetics, I worked at a beauty clinic [in Vancouver]. I was able to establish very good relationships with my clients. Then I said to myself, 'why don't I open my own business?'..." (Audrey)

> " ... After I took [travel-related] courses at BCIT, I worked as a commissioned sales agent for travel agencies [in Vancouver], and established very close relationships with the customers. They trusted me, and were very satisfied with my service. So I decided to rent an office and start my own travel agency." (Gloria)

Hence, only those women with transnational skills, work and business experiences would be motivated to continue in the same businesses after immigration. Otherwise, they would have to go through re-training or gain relevant experiences and business contacts before they were ready to start new businesses for themselves.

3. The Impact of the Family

The impact of the family on the life of Chinese women is enormous. Family solidarity of Chinese immigrants is usually analyzed in ethnic terms, and interpreted as a cultural characteristic of the Chinese. As analyzed and argued in past chapters, Hong Kong Chinese women, despite being raised under British colonialism, still adhere to some residual Confucian principles of filial piety and female submissiveness. Since the majority of these women was raised in traditional entrepreneurial families with fathers who were business owners/operators/managers and mothers as housewives or helpers in the husbands' businesses, it follows that these women should be comparatively traditional in thoughts and behaviour. In other words, they would place a great deal of emphasis on the family, with decisions made around it.

To the Hong Kong Chinese, family encompasses beyond the nuclear unit. Even though the traditional patriarchal extended family was a common pattern, according to these women, their maternal grandparents, parents, married brothers and sisters were still considered part of the family. Unlike the concept of the family in the dominant Canadian culture, which differentiates between the family of origin and family of procreation, both were considered equally important parts of these women's adult lives.

The importance of the family is likely to have accelerated as a result of immigration. According to the ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship literature, ethnic kinship networks, whether local or transnational, have a strong impact in facilitating business development and success after immigration. While studies on the average Canadian women entrepreneurs revealed that family was rarely a motivational factor for business start-up, Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs in this study demonstrated

otherwise. They were more likely to be influenced by family members, be it from the family of origin or from the family of procreation, or both, in their decisions to start a business.

One thing that is even more evident among these women is the gendered nature of family relations. In particular, the influence of their fathers, brothers, and husbands far outweighed that of their mothers and sisters. Almost all the family-related reasons cited gave reference to the men in the family, only a couple mentioned the influence of mothers. None mentioned their sisters despite there were some involvement of them as business partners.

Aside from gender, many of these influences are also class based since these fathers, husbands and brothers were likely to be entrepreneurs themselves. Not only did they influence women going into business, some of them were also the source of capital for these businesses. Putting it all together then, the influence of the family is well substantiated along gender, ethnic and class lines.

The impact of the family has many facets. First, there are the single women who, aspiring to be like their entrepreneurial fathers, were motivated by them to start a business. These women became sole proprietors with the help of their fathers for financial support. Second, there are the married women who, for the love of their husbands and children, were motivated to start home-based businesses. Third, we find women who were lured into joining their husbands' existing businesses to reduce the burdens faced by these husbands. Fourth, there are those who started a family business to create employment for their husbands and brothers, or to prepare their *astronaut* husbands for smoother career transitions should they decide to settle permanently in

Canada. To these women, the business project is a project of love, growing out of respect, care and love as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers.

The single women who started their own businesses because of the positive encouragement they got from their fathers or brothers showed their respect and admiration for these men in the family:

> "My father has his own business. Therefore I always believe that it is useless to work for others. One can only be successful if one owns a business." (Rosemary)
>
> "I decided to take up this business because of my Dad. He always encourages us to have our own business. He says it's useless to work for others. He wants me to get into a viable business so that it will bring a lot of profits. I am very proud of my Dad. He's not educated, and does not speak English ... But he's very aggressive, very goal-oriented. He's very determined. Whenever he wants to achieve something, he would go ahead and do it ... My decision to start this business was greatly influenced by him ..." (Chelsea)
>
> "My brother is very experienced in the restaurant business. Long before when he was still in university, he started working part-time in a restaurant washing dishes. Later, he was promoted to be a waiter, and then a manager... I really respect him a lot... I also trust him. So when he says it's best for us to work together as partners, I agree totally..." (Cheng Ming-ying)

Some fathers used their money to create employment for their daughters in order to secure their career future, as Becky recalled:

> "My father helped me to set up this boutique with his money. It doesn't really matter whether I would be making a lot of money or not. As long as I don't lose his money and am able to generate a stable monthly income for myself, he would be pleased. His whole intention was to help me to establish a decent career" (Becky)

The second group of women decided to start home-based businesses so that they could still maintain their childcare and husband-care responsibilities. Feeling obligated

to be a good wife and a good mother, these women used home-based businesses as the option to balance between work and home:

> "The most important reason is my husband. He's retired now. If I go out to work, he will be left alone at home. I can't take care of him. If I left him alone in the house, he would feel very lonely. He would feel depressed..." (Isabelle)

> "The major reason to start a business at home is flexibility. I can control my work schedule so that I can take care of Peter [her son]..." (Julie)

> "The biggest motivation was that I could work from home. I had a daughter who was very young then. I had to give her time. I hoped that when she came home from school she would see me there. The biggest attraction of this business was that I could work from home. I had complete control over time ...to be with my daughter." (Vera)

This group of women was more conscious of their role as mothers and wives, and sought to resolve conflict between work and household responsibilities by starting home-based businesses.

The third group of women are those who responded to the demand from their husbands to join their businesses. Though the influences of the husbands may vary in form and degree, they all had a similar orientation, that is, to make use of the wives' labour, devotion and love to their advantage. As immigrant minorities, many Chinese owned and operated labour intensive businesses with a stringent profit margin. Involving their wives would be one of the few viable options for business survival and success. Hence many women were lured into joining their husbands' businesses as concerned wives.

> "In Hong Kong, I was not involved in his salon. No wife would go to the salon and help out. It was not professional-like ... the customers would not feel comfortable seeing the wife around... But after we came over here, my husband said

> we should do it together. The most important reason was to save cost. Even if you hire someone, they may not perform up to your standards and expectations whereas a wife would be more committed. In Canada, family business is very common. Many businesses involve husbands, wives and relatives…" (Clara)

> "I joined my husband's coffee shop business because there is so much work involved. He definitely needs at least one full-time helper. But the workload is so high that even if he hires a full-time worker it's not going to be enough… Even so, we could not afford to hire more people. So I finally decided to help him out…" (Joan)

> "After I quit my work at X, I joined my husband's travel agency. My husband's office was very small. It was very difficult to get permanent help. Because it's a small business, employees usually do not have opportunities for career advancement. So no matter how nice we treat them, they won't stay long. They'll stay for two to three years at the most. So I thought may be I should help him out …" (Ophelia)

While these women were encouraged to join their husbands' existing businesses to save cost, other women, however, started their businesses to create employment for their husbands or brothers. Still governed by the traditional notion that men ought to be economically active if not the major breadwinner of the family, these women made use of their human capital to sustain an economic image and entrepreneurial status of the men in the family.

> "… People told us that it would be difficult to find work here, especially for my husband. He used to work as a computer analyst in Hong Kong. It would be difficult for him to find the same type of work here in Canada. But he's not interested to take any job lower [in status] than his job in Hong Kong… So I …set up a business so that he could have work…" (Andrea)

> "When we first came here, I had no intention of starting my own business. I had a job and I was happy. But my husband could not find work for two years. He used to be a sales consultant of medical equipment in Hong Kong. So I decided

> to set up a business. It was because of him. At least then he would have some place to stay during the day, and help me to do some deliveries, or drive me around. If I stayed in my job, he would continue to stay unemployed. So I finally decided to quit and start up this business..." (Adrienne)

> "I started this restaurant so that my husband could get involved. Then he would stay with us and he couldn't find excuses to go back to Hong Kong. This would stop him from becoming an *astronaut*. [Husband has been out of work for four years.]" (Martha)

One woman, however, started a business to create employment for her brother. While both she and her sister were gainfully employed, when her brother and his family immigrated to Canada, she decided to quit her job and start a coffee shop with her brother. The other sister, without quitting her job, became a partner as well.

> "The reason I opened this café was because of my brother. He and his family immigrated to Canada and stayed with us. We knew that it was very difficult for him to find work here. We've got many friends whose husbands worked as waiters and were not happy ... so we decided to start a family business." (Edna)

To other women, starting a business serves the purpose to prepare a career for the absent husbands. These are the wives of the *astronauts* who started a business for their husbands to maintain their career continuity and pave the way for their transition should they decide eventually to settle in Canada for good. As one woman explained:

> "My husband has to stay in Hong Kong to make money to support us. He cannot give up his business just like that. He will not be able to find the kind of work he likes if he comes over. He's been his own boss for so long that no one would hire him as a worker. Besides, he will not be willing to start all over again at the entry level. So there is no chance of getting work ... He wanted me to start a business so that when he decides to come over, he would have something to do..." (Gail)

All in all, the influence of the family is expressed in many ways. Apart from those who were encouraged by their entrepreneurial fathers and brothers to go into business for personal gain, many others started their businesses for the purpose of creating employment for their husbands and brothers or to fulfill their responsibilities as wives and mothers. Unlike the average entrepreneurs, these women became entrepreneurs for love and obligations as wives, sisters, and mothers. The purpose of their entrepreneurial pursuit was primarily for the maintenance of the status of their husbands and brothers, and in general, the family. Getting involved in a family business becomes a gendered ethnic-specific decision in maintaining the privileged class position against adversities resulting from immigration. The notion of status bestowed by class is demonstrated clearly here to be an important factor that should not be missed.

4. The Friendship Network

The literature has widely indicated the importance of ethnic social connections as ethnic resources in establishing and doing business. Yet not much attention was paid separately to how friends motivate the decision to enter into business, probably because in general, kinship outweighs friendship in motivating individuals to go into business. Very few women were like Julie who started her facial business as a result of the influence of a friend being her role model:

> "... I had a friend who always brought me along to do facial. Later, she started her own salon... She became very successful and had expanded her business, and invited me to work for her. I really admired her. She is such a smart and successful woman." (Julie)

Rather, more women responded to their friends' invitation to start a joint venture:

> "I did not have any intention to start a business. A [girl]friend of mine whose sister was a buyer in Hong Kong

> asked me if I was interested to open a boutique with her. She said if I agreed, her sister could provide us with supplies. Well, I thought there's no harm trying. After all, it's just a small business..." (Yolanda)

While all the friends were co-ethnics, the gender aspect should not be overlooked when these female co-ethnic friends played an important role in encouraging women to establish women-specific businesses such as boutique or beauty-related services, as the above examples demonstrated.

Gender, however, played a less obvious role in gender-neutral businesses such as restaurants, wineries, legal services, and tutorial services where the clientele is mixed. In this research specifically, joint ownership was a phenomenon more common in gender-neutral businesses in which both male and female friends were involved. In many cases, these women were invited by their male friends to join as business partners. Whether these men had a hidden agenda to approach these women was not obvious to them. But these women may very well be invited to become partners because they were women, that is, for the purpose of maintaining gendered division of labour. In a later chapter, the gendered division of labour of business partners after the business was established very much supports this point.

Relatively speaking, friends are less important an influence in motivation when compared to that of the family. But as we shall see in the next chapter in the discussion of the process of business development, friendship and related social connections would then take on a comparatively more important role, at times even more so than the family.

5. The Impact of State Policies

Some women started their businesses as a response to state policies. As minority immigrants, these women are subject to stringent and restrictive legislation not affecting

other Canadians. One such legislation is the immigration policy. As noted in previous chapters, many of those who immigrated in the 1990s came to Canada under the business immigration program. These women who were either experienced businesswomen themselves or were wives of businessmen possessed human capital and class resources to continue in business. They were the ones with wealth, technical and business skills and past work and entrepreneurial experience, which were approved by the Canadian immigration officers as transferable to the Canadian economy. They were also better prepared as compared with the rest, with a professional business plan set up and approved prior to immigration. Yet due to stringent regulations imposed by the Canadian government, they were required to set up a business within two years of entry into Canada to be eligible for citizenship. As a result, just like the other Chinese immigrants who came under the entrepreneurial program (Wong and Ng, 1998), many women were obliged to start businesses very hastily in order to meet the requirement.

An important point that requires some attention is that not all women who immigrated through the entrepreneurial program wanted to start a business after immigration. Some of them, as reluctant entrepreneurs, made use of this program as a mechanism for emigration in order to earn Canadian citizenship. As one woman remarked:

> "If it were not because of the immigration condition, I would not have started this business. I would rather go and take a few courses, look for a part-time job, and enjoy life here." (Cheryl)

Therefore, it is not uncommon to discover general pessimism towards their entrepreneurial pursuit. Many anticipated that their businesses would fail. Some had already prepared for the loss: "It would be nice if the business could survive, and make

some profit. Otherwise, losing money is fine as long as it removes the condition for immigration." (Alexis)

A less commonly cited policy these women responded to was the tax legislation. A few women started their own business for the purpose of paying lower taxes:

> " ... taxes in Canada are too high. If you work for others, you have to pay a huge portion of your income as taxes. You won't have much left in your own pocket. But if you have your own business, you have many ways to claim expenses so that you don't have to pay so much money to the government..." (Becky)

Only one woman in particular started her business as a response to both policies:

> "Removing the [immigration] condition was one of the reasons for starting this business ... Besides, I noticed that income tax is really high if you work for others. If I got a high paid job, I had to split my income with the government. But if I got a low-income job, I would not want to take it. So I think it works in my favour if I start my own business." (Faye)

Starting a business as a response to these policies demonstrates both the privileges these women enjoyed because of their class position and the disadvantages they faced as immigrants. On the one hand, these women, because of their class background, were able to use entrepreneurship as an avenue to buy citizenship and to evade taxes. Yet on the other hand, they may be forced into a business reluctantly without having enough time and getting sufficient assistance for business planning and preparation.

6. Market Conditions

Another factor that these women stated as having influenced their decision to start a business was the structural condition of the market which could be racialized into the mainstream and the ethnic. The mainstream economy in general was seen as unfavourable and antagonistic constituting a push factor for these women to start their

businesses. Some reasons associated with it were corporate downsizing, closing down of companies and perceived job insecurity, forcing those who worked in the mainstream labour market to leave their jobs. Vera, for instance, after working for an airline company for ten years, decided to quit for fear of being laid off, and later decided to start her own business:

> "Because of the energy crisis, they wanted to close down some offices. If they did so, I would be bumped because of my junior position as compared to the others..." (Vera)

Alison, on the other hand, lost her job after working for a department store chain for seven years due to company shutdown, but decided to start her own business with the help and encouragement of a family member:

> "After learning the company is going to close, I did not look for work. I thought it's a good opportunity to make a change. At that time, my sister-in-law wanted to invest in a business and approached me... " (Alison)

Other women started their businesses out of the fear of job insecurity:

> "After I came to Canada I realized that if you work here you have to worry about your boss's business. It's very likely that they will go out of business because of the poor economy here. In Hong Kong, I never had to worry about this. If the job market is so unstable, why don't I start my own business and spend the energy worrying about my own business?" (Veronica)

> "... I was so scared of the high unemployment rate here, and so many layoffs. It's so insecure to work for others. So I may as well have my own business." (Andrea)

While some women responded to the negative economic environment, a few were pulled by the favourable conditions of the expanding ethnic economy. They reacted to the rising demand for ethnic services and products by the growing Chinese population as a result of increased immigration in the 90s. Seeing the City of Richmond becoming the

new attraction for the recent Hong Kong wealthy and middle-class immigrants, for instance, had encouraged them to start businesses there. As one woman who decided to set up a beauty salon commented:

> "Richmond has grown so much the past few years. All these new [Hong Kong] immigrants, especially the women, have so much money to spend. Many of them are wives of *astronauts*. They're left alone here with nothing much to do and lots of money to spend. So they have more time to spend on facial and skin care... They dare not drive across the bridge to Vancouver... All their activities are in Richmond..." (Rosemary)

In general, more women tended to be pushed into entrepreneurship as a result of the unfavourable economy in the mainstream labour market. Fewer women were lured into setting up a business because of the expansion of the ethnic economy. Yet comparatively speaking, the impact of market conditions was not felt as seriously as the barriers they experienced in job-seeking and in employment.

7. Work-Related Barriers

Work-related barriers were by far the most commonly cited reasons among these women. As minority immigrant women, many faced unpleasant experiences in the labour market in terms of frustration in job search, unfair treatment at work, low wages, denial of raise, denial of promotion, etc. These barriers and constraints may be class based, if they were treated unfairly by employers and managers; gender based, by men at work; or race based, by the Whites. Though these oppressions can be analyzed separately, in real life situations, they cannot be distinguished easily. To the Chinese immigrant women in particular, this intermeshing condition of classism, racism and sexism was constructed with a different twist. While some of them were more sensitive to the maltreatment by their bosses/managers and were totally insensitive to sexism and

racism, others were more likely to attribute all negative experiences to racism alone or to a combined influence of racism and classism. In essence, very few women were able to identify sexism as an issue. Such a pattern is quite consistent with the Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984), which claim that minority women have a tendency to consider their fathers, husbands and brothers their allies against external discrimination and marginalization, thus overlooking oppression by these men themselves.

Racism became a prime motivator when these women failed to find work in the mainstream market. One woman, in particular, suffered from unemployment for one whole year before she finally decided to start her own business:

> "I have been looking for work for one whole year. Most of the jobs I applied for were sales jobs in boutiques. I remember one time a [Caucasian] woman [during a job interview] criticized my appearance. She said my appearance is not convincing to customers because I am small, immature and not elegant. I think *Western people* may feel that because Chinese people are usually smaller and young-looking, they are not trustworthy ..." (Aileen)

While some women, like Aileen, were drawn into starting their own businesses as a result of racist experiences when looking for work, many others used entrepreneurship as a means to create employment for themselves to protect against the likelihood of confronting similar negative experiences. These women usually enjoyed high status prior to immigration and could not face the thought of working in low status, undesirable work.

> "I did not look for work after immigration. Two months after staying here, I started this business. I figured it would be difficult to look for work here because my English is not as good as the local people. As a computer programmer before, I think it would be difficult to find a job in this area. The big company would rather hire someone with good English skills" (Gabriella)

> "We didn't look for work because of our age. We're not young any more, and it would be even more difficult to get a job. Besides, we're stuck in the middle: we're not willing to work in low paying low status jobs, but we cannot get the kind of work we like ... There are many young educated professional [Chinese] immigrants who are now working for $7 and $8 an hour. There is such a waste of qualified manpower here. It is particularly difficult for Chinese people to look for work, I mean, suitable work. Of course, it'd be easier if you don't care ... There is racism. I find that it is very difficult to get into the W*hite people*'s society. They won't hire *yellow people*. Many of my friends who are Ph.Ds are working as sales people in computer stores. It's a pity that the *Canadians* don't know how to use the potential and talent of people." (Man Lai-chen)

In addition to the perceived racism in the market that would restrict chances of employment, class also became a key factor in barring these women from looking for work. As Monica, who was an entrepreneur herself and married to a wealthy entrepreneurial family, recalled:

> "I have thought about looking for work. But I did not think I could get a job working in an office because my English skills were not good enough. But I did not want to work as a saleslady or a dishwasher. It would be such a disgrace to the family. Even if I were willing my father-in-law would not allow it" (Monica)

Those who were fortunate to get work in the mainstream economy may end up feeling even more distressed as a result of racism, classism and sexism. Since these women were more likely to interpret their labour exploitation by class alone, they were generally unable to identify the articulate integration of race, gender and class, overlooking the fact that classism could be gendered and/or racialized. The following are the testimonies that illustrate this phenomenon:

> "I worked for this [hair] salon [White owned and operated] for close to five years and never took a day off even though I was entitled to two weeks holiday each year... But one day, I got

> sick because of food poisoning. They sent me home, and I took four days off. Since we're only allowed one day of sick leave per month, when I received my paycheck for that month, they deducted three days of my pay. I was very upset [because of their inflexibility]. I talked to the payroll department, and they said bluntly that it's company policy. I was very unhappy because I had never taken any leave of absence in these years. Then I thought about how I helped them start up, how I dedicated myself to it, and how I kept everything right on track for them... I felt disappointed. So I quit.... [After a few months, she started her own hair salon]." (Beatrice)
>
> "I quit my job because of too much pressure from work. There's a lot of politics going on in big companies. Everyone is watching over you. Sometimes, when you go for a longer lunch, people would report it to the boss... I've got so much work to do that I have to bring it home... [As a supervisor], you're kept in the middle. You have to answer to your boss's command... who forces you to push your subordinates to overachieve all the time... I was asked to make false figures to make my boss look good... Over time I felt I was going crazy... I became so depressed that I just could not hang on any more.. And our policy was so unfair to us: Even if you're rated for a salary increase, it will only be effective six months after the review. It's so unfair. Finally, I quit... I think it's about time that I move on to something else. [She eventually joined her husband's business and became a partner.]" (Ophelia)

While Beatrice and Ophelia attributed their negative experiences solely to the insensitivity and exploitation of management, that is, a class issue, a few others were able to identify classism as racialized or gendered. But their interpretations were quite different:

> "I was hired to serve one manager. But later on, I had to support two, and then three, and then five. All five partners [male and White] gave work to me. So it was a lot of work. I found it very difficult to handle. I don't know whether it was because they liked my performance or because I was the only Chinese in the office. So they exploited me. The pay was not good either. The other staff, for example, those *gwái-pòh*, always called in sick before long weekends. Many times, they

> left their work for me to clear up. Even though my own boss was nice to me, the others would say bad things to me, you know, things with hidden meaning. So finally I decided to quit ... [and set up a café]." (Edna)

> "One of the managers [a Japanese male] did not like me. It is because he thought that Asian women should not go out to work. And during all these years of working there, I went through two pregnancies. The first time when I was on maternity leave, he filled my position with another person. He assumed that after I became a mother, I would not go back to work. So I had a big fight with him... Then he made things difficult for me. For example, when I wanted to relocate to the office closer to home [in Richmond], he sent me to Port Coquitlam. So if there's anything discriminatory, I would say that I was discriminated against by a Japanese, not by *Canadian* people... This is one of the reasons why I left [this company and start my own company later]..." (Candice)

Edna's story reveals a possible combination of classism, racism and sexism, but she identified it more as an issue of work exploitation resulting from her ethnic background as Chinese, that is, racialized classism. The possibility of discrimination based on gender was not recognized. Candice, on the other hand, interpreted her experiences in a very different way, seeing racialized sexism from a Japanese male as the sole cause of her frustration at work. But Candice's experience is unique and is not representative of most other women. In fact, most other women were unable to identify sexism as a source of oppression at work.

In the same way those who worked for co-ethnics in the Chinese labour market could not identify sexism or gendered mistreatment. Rather, they saw their frustration directly the result of overwork and underpay, that is, class exploitation.

> "For many years, my [male] boss underpaid me. Considering the workload and the kind of responsibilities I had, I was making $300 to $500 less a month [as compared to other Chinese-owned travel agencies]... My boss also treated me badly. He had a very bad temper, and would yell at us all the

> time...[She finally quit and started her own travel agency]." (Meg)
>
> "I was not happy working for others. All my bosses [all women from three previous jobs] were very exploitative. They made you work and work, and paid you low wages. Even though I worked as an aesthetician, I had to do extra work such as dusting the counters, mopping the floor, and even washing toilets... The husband of one of my bosses was even worse. When he was manager [when her boss was away], he was so mean to us. He even locked up all of the toilet paper. You had to ask him for a roll each time. He treated us as if we're all thieves..." (Rosemary)
>
> "When I started working there [a travel agency], there were only three other people [all male]. They were all managers. I was the only one who was not a manager. So my work involved everything else. I worked the workload of seven people. I was responsible for accounting, marketing, answering phone calls... etc. Nobody wanted to answer the phone, and we had seven lines!... I didn't even have time to go to the washroom or to go for lunch..." (Audrey)
>
> "I quit and started my own business because my [male] boss treated me so badly. He didn't know how to appreciate my ability and hard work... [having extensive experiences in the travel industry prior to immigration] I helped him develop his business, from one office, to two, to three... But the staff in the office was getting fewer and fewer. It was because I was able and capable... So he was taking advantage of me. Then we had some major arguments... and I quit." (Gloria)

While gendered classism could very well be present, these women did not acknowledge it. Rather, they constructed these negative experiences as class-based. Having been raised in traditional patriarchal families under the reminiscence of Confucianism very much explains why these women in general lack feminist consciousness and see their disadvantaged gender position as natural.

Even though they lack the sensitivity to identify sexism in the workplace, this is by no means absolute. A couple of women were able to recognize the adversities they

faced as a result of being Chinese and a woman and a worker. Whether this is out of coincidence or not, both women were earlier immigrants and were highly educated and trained in Canada, which may have enlightened them with regard to Western gender politics. Maureen, for example, commented on how she was denied the opportunity of a promotion:

> "Both my colour and my gender are factors... disadvantages ... You see, the bank is not unionized. So whoever is the best gets the job. But when there's time for promotion... I remember a few times my name was up; but no chance. They would say, 'Do you think she can handle it? Is her English good enough?' They would tell me that they're worried I could not handle the job. It's because I'm a woman, I'm Chinese, so I can't be a leader. So I would go home and cry.. I am better than they are. Why can't I get it?" (Maureen)

Besides the painful experiences of racism, sexism and classism as employees, discrimination from co-workers was also felt in a White dominated working environment. As minority immigrant women, these women were further marginalized and alienated by their colleagues who were supposed to be their equals. These co-workers, though they occupied the same class positions, exercised gendered and racial power over them. Yet again many of the Chinese immigrant women related these experiences with race rather than gender. Their stories range from subtle polite racism to overt verbal and behavioral rejection and targeting. Some commented on their relationship with their co-workers as confined only to "a nine to five thing ... saying hello" (Gladys) and "keeping a distance" (Anna). Others mentioned how they were never invited to after work social gatherings: they tend to "draw a very clear line between you and them" (Edna) and "don't extend their relationships beyond work" (Ada). Blatant verbal accusations were also reported, from how they "hate Chinese" (Leanne) to "you are a piece of garbage" (Joyce). One

woman's comment sums up these incidents nicely: "A lot of *gwái-lóu* [co-workers] are very discriminatory. They would look down on you if you 're not up to their standard. But if you worked hard and overachieved, they would get jealous of you and isolate you" (Mary).

Even then, discrimination from co-workers was generally tolerated and did not constitute a sufficient motive to leave the job and start a business. As one woman explained why she would not quit her job even when she was isolated by her White co-workers, "... But my boss was nice to me. Why should I quit? I would be a loser if I quit."

In sum, for most of these women racism alone was not a defining cause to quit their job and start their own businesses. And sexism did not even enter into their consideration. Rather, it was classism or racialized classism which justified their move. If it were meaningful at all to rank the importance of adversities produced by class, race and gender in facilitating entrepreneurship, classism would definitely be at the top of the list. Once again, status becomes an important factor that motivates these women to enter business. Unfavourable labour market conditions pushed these women into business, the prestige generated from which would enable them to at least maintain pre-migratory status.

The Interplay between Structure and Agency

The above section identifies the major factors that stimulate Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women to enter business. In reality, these factors are interactive in many different ways, and the weight of each factor varies depending on circumstances. One of the ways to analyze the impact of these factors is to look at how structure affects

individual decisions. In this case, macro-structural forces such as global and local economies along with immigration policies intersecting with racialized and gendered group characteristics, and together with individual class characteristics add multidimentionality to the process of becoming an entrepreneur.

As noted in a previous chapter, immigration is a selective process and has always been governed by the social and/or economic climate of the day. After 1967, Canadian immigration, with the implementation of the points system, was open to racial minorities. Yet between that time and the mid-eighties, the focus was more on family reunion and skills demand. Hence, Chinese immigrants who came during this period were likely to come as members of a family or as workers. At one point in time, during the first half of the eighties, immigration was tightened up as a result of economic recession. Since then, immigration has been directed primarily by economic demands, by which those with education, skills, capital and other forms of investment money irrespective of colour, origin and gender became preferred immigrants. The subsequent implementation and promotion of the business program further attracted large number of wealthy middle-and upper-class immigrants from Hong Kong. Based on the change in emphasis on immigration criteria, these Hong Kong immigrant businesswomen can roughly be divided into two categories. Those who immigrated between 1967 and 1986 were of a different background than those who came after 1986: the former were likely to come with family connections, either as dependant children or "immigrant" brides or with jobs pre-arranged; the latter included business immigrants not found in the former.

The kind of work and business experiences they acquired also varied between these two periods. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, those who came prior to 1986

were more likely than the later immigrants to have earned local experience in the mainstream labour market before they started their own businesses. Situated in a comparatively less developed and matured ethnic economy and a more favourable mainstream economy, which at the time had a high demand for female service and office workers, they were more likely to find work in the mainstream labour market. Those who sought female dominated work in restaurants or low-ended white-collar work in banks and offices usually remarked on how easy it was to find work as compared to the present days:

> "In those days, it was so easy to get work. Now, it is difficult even to look for a job with minimum wage. Before, even if you didn't have experiences, people would hire you. When I first started working in a restaurant [owned and operated by a Caucasian targeting the mainstream market], I didn't have any knowledge and skill. I didn't even know how to speak English... just 'yes' and 'no'. I remember my first day of work. When I served coffee to a customer, I was so freaked out that before it reached the customer it was half spilt. But my *gwái-lóu* boss looked at me and said, 'Relax, take it easy.' He wasn't angry at me. But if this happened now, you're fired! It was so easy to get a job then... unlike today..." (Beatrice)

> "I got my job [from a multinational financial institution] by going through newspaper ads. It was very easy then. I went for an interview on Thursday, and was asked to start working the next day... But you know, in 1973, the job market was not that competitive. It was very easy to find work." (Ophelia)

In fact, out of the twenty-three women who had worked for Caucasian firms and businesses, eighteen (78 percent) came to Canada prior to 1986. Hence, comparatively speaking, women who came during the earlier period were more exposed to racialized gendered classism in the workplace than those who came later. On the other hand, they were also more privileged than the recent immigrants in the sense of acquiring localized

business information, skills, knowledge and experiences, and in establishing necessary social connections, whether ethnic or not.

Those who came after 1986 were more likely to come for political reasons: to escape the perceived political instability when Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. These women were likely to come from middle-class or wealthy entrepreneurial backgrounds, either as businesswomen or the spouses of businessmen. They were also more likely to have started their career prior to immigration, and hence had to struggle to maintain career continuity upon immigration. Since many of them were Hong Kong educated and arrived in Canada more recently as working adults, they had to deal with more settlement problems at the time of the interview as compared with those who came prior to 1986. And because they came with the massive inflow of Hong Kong Chinese immigration, they were more easily and readily absorbed into the growing Chinese ethnic economy, notably in the cities of Vancouver and Richmond. Besides, since they arrived at the time of economic downturn and recession, looking for work in the mainstream economy had become extremely difficult. Hence, as compared with those who came prior to 1986, they were more frustrated with their job-seeking processes. As a result, these women were less likely to have exposed directly to racialized gendered classism in the workplace due to restricted opportunities to work in the mainstream labour market.

Since these women immigrated to Canada under different structural circumstances, their reasons for business start-up also varied. The stories that follow recount the experiences of these two groups of women separately. Selected for their unique experiences, the stories of the first group of three women are representational of

those who immigrated prior to 1986 while the stories of the second group of four women represent those who came after.

Doris, who came to Canada in 1973 as a student and obtained her immigrant status a year later, graduated from a Canadian university and became a Chartered Accountant (CA). She then began her career in accountancy and moved on to work for a number of CA firms. Looking for work in the mainstream economy was never a problem for her:

> "I didn't encounter any problem while looking for work. Ever since I graduated, I never stopped working. I had always been able to find work... All the firms I worked for were large firms ... " (Doris)

Doris always served 'White clients' until recently when the Chinese economy began to expand, she was assigned to deal with Chinese clients:

> "The clients were majority Whites. It wasn't until later years when I worked for X and then Y that I was in charge of Asian business... " (Doris)

However, her vision of continuing working as a Chartered Accountant for privileged large firms shattered when downsizing hit the market:

> "Between 87 and 91 these firms began to shrink in size... I saw many of my colleagues got fired, especially those who held senior positions. The firm considered these people's salary too high if you did not produce enough... I wanted to take control of my own destiny. I wanted to control my time. I felt it would be better if I started my own firm. Chinese businesses are usually small in scale. These large firms never paid much attention to this market. I thought then if I started my own CA firm, I would serve these people better. These small businesses would match perfectly the goals of my firm. Besides, I now had gained the experiences of dealing with Chinese clients..." (Doris)

All along, oppression due to race and gender were not considered an issue at all because of her good command of the English language:

> "I never felt being treated differently... In the firm, if you're a woman, you may feel a little bit of discrimination. If you're a Chinese and a woman, you may feel a little bit too. But for me, I think it's a matter of communication. If you're able to communicate with others well, people won't treat you differently. Personally I didn't feel I was privileged, nor did I feel being discriminated against." (Doris)

To Doris, the reason to start her own business was a combination of structural, group and individual characteristics. She was pushed into entrepreneurship as a result of unfavourable mainstream economic situations, but was pulled into establishing her own CA firm because of the class and ethnic resources she possessed, along with the favourable ethnic opportunity structure. Her professional localized training in accountancy, her extensive work experiences in the area and the urge to take charge provided her with class resources essential to the successful entry into business. Her bilingual proficiencies in both English and Chinese and her established ethnic clientele afforded her with necessary ethnic resources. The growing Chinese population has generated favourable opportunity structures within the ethnic market. The combination of her localized technical information, professional skill, work experience and business connections have rendered the need for family support insignificant. With these favourable assets and the growing ethnic economy, Doris was able to avoid being laid off by venturing into a new career in establishing her own CA firm amidst the mainstream economic downturn. She became a liaison person, as a "middlewoman", bridging the Chinese community and the larger Canadian society through her business pursuit.

Like Doris, Sandra's story also demonstrates how class resources interact with opportunity structures in her business pursuit. Along with these, gender resources such as her gender-specific knowledge, skills and experience as a beautician became an added asset. Unlike Doris, Sandra began her career as a beautician before immigration. With transnational ethnic connections, that is, a friend who owned a hair-salon in Canada and needed to employ a beautician, Sandra was able to pre-arrange a job prior to her immigration in 1977. After working in her friend's salon for a few months, she asked to change her work status to that of self-employed. "I prefer to work on my own ... I enjoy the freedom and flexibility ... and control over my own work." Instead of receiving a fixed salary from her employer, she was able to pay a percentage of her income to her employer. For a few years, she moved from one salon to another with a similar kind of arrangement while building up her skills, knowledge and clientele. The salons where she worked were owned by people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds targeting a mixture of racial and ethnic patrons. The experience and connections she built up over the years together with her entrepreneurial orientation ultimately led her to establish a beauty salon with a *gwái-pòh* partner in Vancouver which targeted a multi-racial market.

The two women remained partners for two years. Although her partner was reluctant, Sandra wanted to expand the business. "I was interested in making more money. I wanted to go for the challenge and didn't mind the risk. But she was too conservative. She didn't want to." So eventually Sandra left and established a new business on her own: "I was the first Chinese [woman] who opened such a large scale operation in this industry". Initially, her business targeted both the mainstream and

ethnic markets. "My customers were 30 percent *westerners* and 70 percent *tòhng-yàhn*." Then her business began to proliferate horizontally into related areas: wholesale cosmetics and skin care products. Later on in 1990, with the growing Chinese immigration and the expanding Richmond Chinese market, she moved her operation to Richmond. Currently, she is the owner of three related businesses: a wholesale outlet of beauty-related products, an aesthetics training school, and a beauty salon, as a "middlewoman", selling mainstream products and services to the Chinese market.

Her decisions to start and expand her businesses were motivated primarily by her entrepreneurialism: the desire for personal control and monetary gain, which was assisted by the opportunity structures of the growing demand for women-specific products and service in the mainstream economy, and eventually, the growing Chinese economy. Like Doris, her long-term accumulated experiences and business connections have rendered family support irrelevant. Additionally, Sandra never felt or expressed adversities due to racism, sexism and classism. Her entrepreneurialism may have barred her from seeing and feeling dislocations and marginalization associated with race and gender. She represented those women whose class and gender resources were able to work against any possible racialized and gendered barriers.

To Leanne who came to Canada in 1975, the reason for starting a business on the other hand was due to the bitter long-term consequences of racism, sexism and classism, even though the immediate reason seemed to be something else. After immigration, Leanne, once an executive secretary in Hong Kong, found work immediately in a bank where she worked for six years. She left that position because of conflict with her supervisor:

> "She's [White] very exploitative. She looked down on Chinese. She gave me a hard time, and she did not want to promote me. She promoted another girl junior to me because she was also White. So I felt very unhappy... [Besides], I was made to take up other people's workload when they did not come to work. I worked so hard that I even got a miscarriage... So finally I quit..."

But the situation did not improve when she moved to another company also owned and operated by Caucasians. There she took a job as a secretary and had to work even harder:

> "I worked the workload of eight people! Everyday, I started in the morning and typed until seven or eight in the evening. We didn't have computers then. We just switched to electronic typewriters. I had to type so fast that I was like a professional pianist running down the keys... fast, fast, fast... One day, the photo copier broke down; my typewriter broke down.. I had nothing to do, and I broke down...They sent me to emergency. I was diagnosed with an ulcer. I had a surgery immediately. After that, I could not eat properly. Every time when I ate, I threw up... For the next six to seven years, I was transferred from one hospital to another. They did tests on me, numerous of them... Then one day they told me that I had severe depression. And finally I was admitted to psychiatric ward..."

Leanne was hospitalized for many years, and through her own determination to quit medication she was finally released. Soon after, she met a group of co-ethnic friends at a Church who taught her how to do craft work and make floral arrangements. And subsequently encouraged her to start a business in craft and floral arrangement:

> "After I was released from hospital, I met a group of [female] friends at the church. They were all very good at arts and crafts. They taught me how to make these things. And I found out that I was really interested in doing this. I started from making small items to big ones. I also learned from them how to make floral arrangements. When I became confident with my work, I sent things to my friends as presents. Then they suggested to me that I should make money out of this. It all began when a friend ordered some flowers and crafts from me for Valentine's day..."

Partly due to her husband and partly due to cost, Leanne finally decided to start a home-based business:

> "One reason for starting a business at home was money. It's less expensive. Another reason was because my husband encouraged it. He wanted me to stay home and cook for him. My husband depended on me to take care of him. If I had a business outside of home, I think he would divorce me. Besides, my business was more like a second income. We didn't really depend on it financially. It's more a matter of interest..."

The reasons for entering business, for Leanne, were a response to the combined effects of her bitter experience of oppressions that led to economic inactivity, opportunities for re-training, encouragement from friends, and the reaction to family responsibilities. Her home-based business was the consequence of the long-term effects of racialized gendered classism at work on the one hand and the impact of class, ethnic and gender resources on the other. The opportunities to acquire gendered classed resources (women-specific knowledge and skills) and gendered ethnic connections (co-ethnic female friends) intermeshed with her gendered family responsibilities in pulling her into starting a home-based business, serving the ethnic community.

While Leanne's case may be out of the ordinary, it nonetheless illustrates the extreme scenerio of hardship, particularly for minority women, work may cause. Those who came after 1986, however, were less likely to have directly experienced racism at work. There is a combination of factors contributing to this new pattern. First, the general economic downturn starting in the late 1980s has reduced the availability of jobs in the mainstream labour market. Second, those who came during this period were likely the well to do who could afford the luxury of not working after immigration. Third, the growth of the Chinese ethnic market has provided more opportunities to look for work

from within a Chinese labour market, hence allowing these women to seek a more comfortable career path. Fourth, since many of these new immigrants came under the entrepreneurial program, starting a business became an obvious and necessary choice. For these reasons, many of them did not attempt to look for work. They either became housewives or began a new career as entrepreneurs in order to create employment for themselves or for their families. As for those who intended to work, they would initially look for jobs in the ethnic economy.

Another characteristic of these women which is not likely to be found in the previous group is that of being wives of *astronauts*. *Astronauts* are a recently developed phenomenon. As explained in an early chapter, they refer primarily to immigrant men who travel between the sending society and the receiving society. These men are usually business people or professionals who send their family to settle in Canada while maintaining their career in Hong Kong and/or elsewhere across national borders. According to Skeldon (1994) and Wong (1997) such a phenomenon is the result of globalization in which businesses became increasingly trans-national. Adding to that was the disparity of opportunity structures of the two places during the 1980s and 1990s. There were more opportunities available for businesses and career development in Hong Kong than in Canada due to the rapid economic growth in the former and unfavourable conditions such as racial discrimination, high taxation and economic recession in the latter. The phenomenon of *astronauts* is again reflective of the unique characteristics of recent Chinese immigrants as compared to those in the past. Unlike early immigrants, this group of immigrants is either well-off or highly educated, or both, and are most worried about political and economic instabilities resulting from the 1997 return of Hong Kong to

Chinese rule. They are able to use their class resources to maintain their income, wealth and status after immigration while escaping the perceived threats of political and economic uncertainties there. With their wealth, they are able to manipulate the restrictive immigration policy, playing around the gaps and the grey areas. Becoming an *astronaut* is, therefore, by far the best option for those who wish to reap the profits of immigration without economic or financial sacrifice[3].

Hence, the wives of *astronauts* are those who would have been the least motivated to look for work upon immigration. Indeed, many women in the sample whose husbands were *astronauts* retired as housewives after immigration, even though they had been economically active in Hong Kong. They were able to take advantage of their husbands' remittances and wealth to avoid encountering the obstacles and hardships in job search or employment. Those who decided to start a business did so either to satisfy conditions prescribed by the entrepreneurial immigration program or to create employment for their *astronaut* husbands.

An outstanding difference between this group of women and those who arrived earlier is that the former is more likely to establish a business for non-entrepreneurial social reasons. They may start a business as a response to the entrepreneurial immigration requirement, or to create employment for themselves and their families as a result of immigration for the purpose of maintaining their class or status. Due to the lack of local experience and familiarity with the local market, they are also more likely to be drawn into business through the encouragement and support of co-ethnic friends and

[3] The possibility of family disintegration and related problems as a result of the *astronaut* phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study.

family, both locally and transnationally. The following stories of Gail, Sharon, Chelsea and Mrs. Tao illustrate these distinct characteristics.

Gail, the wife of an *astronaut*, who immigrated in 1988 with her two children, decided initially to retire as a housewife after years of working as a clerk in Hong Kong. During the first year, she devoted herself entirely to child-rearing and domestic activities, while assisting her children to adapt to a new way of life. The original intention was to stay in Canada for three years and then returned to Hong Kong after obtaining citizenship. Seeing life after immigration as transient, she had no intention of looking for work. Besides, her relatively low education and inadequate English language skills also prohibited her from looking for more desirable clerical work in the labour market. In addition, as the wife of an established entrepreneur she was also well supported financially.

Two years after immigration, she and her children decided to stay here permanently. Because of this, chances of her husband coming to join them loomed large. After careful deliberation, Gail decided to start a business to pave the way for his transition once he decided to wrap up his business in Hong Kong and settle permanently here. Anticipating that it would be difficult for her husband to find decent and comparable work in Canada, Gail started the business to maintain employability and the class position for her husband.

She decided to "familiarize herself with the business environment in Canada" and began to look for work. She found a job in a chocolate manufacturing company as a worker and learned the skill of making chocolates. However, since her husband believed that a restaurant was one of the most viable businesses, she later went to work in a

Japanese restaurant as a waitress in order to learn the intricacies of the businesses. Yet she became so resentful of her experience as a waitress that she decided never to be involved in a business of this nature. Moreover, her husband objected to her working because he considered her Canadian work experience a disgrace to the family's class position. Eventually, she stopped "gaining Canadian experience" and jumped right into entrepreneurship.

With her husband's business connections in Hong Kong and Sri Lanka along with the connections she established in Canada, Gail opened a retail and wholesale business selling chocolates, tea and other gift items in a Chinese mall. Her husband provided full support, moving capital and products transnationally across borders. Yet due to her lack of business skills and experiences, the business had not been profitable. But she insisted that earning business experience would be more precious than monetary gain. She was proud of her persistence to hang on despite the loss, and would maintain this business until her husband comes to join the family.

Gail was not alone here. Other women whose husbands were *astronauts* had developed the same consciousness: their prime motive was to fulfill a wife's important role for the maintenance of career continuity if not class and status positions for their husbands. "The reason to open this business was to prepare for my husband's return. We don't have to worry about him not able to find work." Unlike other entrepreneurs who are motivated by personal, business, or economic reasons, becoming an entrepreneur to these women is more for love and the survival of their husband's, and consequently, the family's class and status positions.

As the wife of a wealthy businessman, Gail was able to make use of her transnational networks in terms of her husband's capital and business connections to compensate for her disadvantages in language skills, business knowledge, skills and experiences. She was pushed into entrepreneurship by the structural conditions she found herself in as a result of immigration which interrupted not only her work but also her family life. Establishing a business after immigration would be the best outcome in response to the perceived obstacles of immigration amidst the contexts of opportunities in the ethnic, transnational and global economies.

While Gail's story illustrated the experiences of those that were not oriented toward entrepreneurship but nonetheless decided to start a business for the husband, Sharon's situation was a little different. She represented those who started a family business to create employment for both herself and her husband.

Sharon immigrated to Canada in 1992 as an independent applicant. In other words, she and her husband were not required to start a business like those who came under the entrepreneurial program. Sharon held executive positions in different business corporations for many years prior to immigration while her husband worked in the police force, "heading a department of more than 200 people". Upon arrival in Canada, she had no intention of starting a business, but considered looking for work: "Even though we came with a bundle of money, I think we are still too young to retire." Anticipating that her work experience would not be transferable, she decided to look for work as a secretary instead. With the thought that it would be easier to get work in the Chinese community, she looked up the ads in Chinese newspapers. But what she encountered was nothing more than humiliation and frustration:

> "I was very experienced in personnel management, but I knew nothing about the labour law here in Canada. So I thought of working as a secretary. I went through the ads in the [Chinese] newspapers. A legal firm owned and operated by *tòhng-yàhn* was looking for a person who's fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. Such criteria suited me fine. Besides, being a personnel manager for so long, I didn't think I should have any problem working under people. So I phoned them. They asked me a lot of questions. That's fine. But when they asked me whether I had a driving license and whether I owned a car, I became suspicious. I asked them why they would like to know. Then they told me that the job required me to deliver documents... Well, even though I didn't mind working as a secretary, I did mind working as a messenger! This is the job of a messenger! So I said, 'forget it'. If I had to lower myself to this extent, I might as well go to work as a waitress. At least then I could make more money – get a lot from tipping..." (Sharon)

Feeling humiliated, she decided to quit looking for work, and thought of becoming self-employed, that is, to take courses and be re-trained as a realtor. It was not until a friend who was involved in the building of X [an Asian mall] in Richmond approached to sell them a commercial space, that they began to give some serious thought to establishing a business:

> "My husband was pretty much against it because he had never worked in a business environment before. He's not the business type. He had set his mind to enjoy life here: to go fishing, hunting... But I liked the satisfaction I could get out of operating my own business. I liked the idea if having my own career. So I convinced him... and we finally decided on engaging in [ethnic] fast food business. My father has always been in the restaurant business [in Hong Kong], so he can give us advice... My sister owns a Japanese restaurant in Australia... After all, I like food... I asked my father for his opinion, and he supported the idea wholeheartedly... A friend of mine who worked in a fast food business selling fried chicken was doing very well... So it was encouraging." (Sharon)

For Sharon, the decision to become an entrepreneur also illustrates the integration of structural, group and individual characteristics. Most important of all, they arrived at a time when the ethnic economy was expanding in Richmond. Major constructions of commercial projects were under way. Specifically, one of the most impressive ethnic malls was ready for sale in the market. With a lack of local information, skills and experience, co-ethnic friends and family connections were available to offer encouragement and support. These positive conditions were further facilitated by her possession of class resources: capital, entrepreneurial spirits and related background. Simultaneously, she was also pushed into entrepreneurship by the perceived and experienced barriers in finding desirable employment both in the mainstream and the ethnic labour markets. Hence, the primary motive for starting a business was to create employment with the use of her class resources, the availability of transnational social networks along with the opportunities in the expanding ethnic economy.

The recent increase in the middle-class Chinese population with high consumption power in Richmond also contributed to Chelsea's decision to become involved in a partnership business, but unlike the others, the business was not confined to the Chinese market alone. Chelsea came to Canada in 1990 with her parents and siblings. After completing a government-funded immigrant career training program set up by a Chinese community service organization she found work in the mainstream market. But the company closed down due to economic recession and she, together with four other colleagues, three white men and one Japanese woman, lost their jobs. One of her former colleagues, a white man, approached her when he decided to set up a winery business in Richmond.

> "He invited me to join probably because I am Chinese. Being Chinese is to some extent advantageous in this business. Since this business is in Richmond, my presence can target the Chinese market..." (Chelsea)

As an unmarried Chinese daughter, this decision could not have been made without consulting her parents, specifically her father. She took this opportunity "because of my dad" who always encouraged her to go into business and was willing to financially support her. Like other unmarried young women who came during the 90s, the emotional and financial support from the family facilitated a great deal in pulling these women into entrepreneurship targeting the growing Chinese market. In Chelsea's case, her decision to enter this business represented the combined effect of social connections from her previous employment in the mainstream market, the influence and financial support of her entrepreneurial father, her ethnic resources as Chinese, the expanding Chinese market and the downturn of the mainstream market. Yet like many other women immigrant entrepreneurs, being a Chinese situated in a growing Chinese market alone may be in and of itself a sufficient asset to starting a business even without any prior business information, skills, knowledge and/or experience.

Ironically, many of those who had prior business experience before immigration were not eager to establish businesses after immigration. Instead, many of them made use of the entrepreneurial program solely as a means to enter Canada. Like these businesswomen, Mrs. Tao who came in 1993 under this program commented on how she would not have done so if she could have immigrated through the independent category or through family sponsorship. Taking advantage of their class resources, that is, capital and business experiences, she and her husband were able to counter the otherwise

restrictive immigration policy that was biased toward educated and skilled personnel and those with family sponsorship.

Starting a business after immigration, to Mrs. Tao was also a response to the perceived barriers in finding adequate work:

> "We did not attempt to look for work [after immigration]. We knew it would be difficult to get a job here. We don't speak good English, we lack adequate [transferable] work skills. [The only other job both held prior to immigration was that of an elementary school teacher.] So [even before we immigrated] we decided to start a [family] business. This is the only way to get employed." (Mrs. Tao)

Mrs. Tao and her husband were drawn into entrepreneurship in response to the integrated effects of their class resources, the immigration program developed and promoted during this period and the perceived barriers in looking for work after immigration. Overall, these stories reveal that starting a business could be used by these women as a protective strategy to counter any racist, gendered or classist barriers they perceived would occur after immigration.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first described pre- and post-migratory work and entrepreneurial experiences of the women entrepreneurs prior to the establishment of current businesses. Then I examined at length the reasons and motivational factors contributing to enter business. The intention was to offer a more comprehensive discussion, incorporating multidimensionality into the analysis. Past literature tends to focus primarily on stating and describing the reasons in a linear fashion, and consequently overlooks the complexity of intersection. A detailed understanding of the motivational factors warrants a more complex analysis, which dictates the acknowledgement of difference even within a

perceived homogeneous group of women. It requires a close examination of the interplay between structure and agency, and how they intermesh in different ways when class, status, gender, race, ethnicity, immigration, economic conditions and transnationalism are brought into the analysis.

These Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women arrived in Canada during different periods of time, subjected to different economic conditions and immigration contexts. They also possessed diverse group and individual characteristics because of the differences in pre- and post-migratory experiences. In response to multiple individual and contextual forces, these women constructed a variety of meaningful explanations justifying their move into entrepreneurship. Hence we find women entering business because of the possession of a combination of class, ethnic and gender resources, both locally and transnationally. There are others who were pushed into it while fighting against combined effects of class, ethnic and gender adversities. Still others juxtaposed resources against adversities in different ways depending on the economic conditions and immigration periods. All these illustrate how this group of women made use of their privileged class, ethnic and gender positions to work against possible classed, gendered and racialized disadvantages in order to establish a promising career after immigration. Status maintenance, to many, is a key motivator of becoming an entrepreneur.

Chapter Six

Processes of Business Start-up

From the early chapters we learn that not many women had prior business experience before and/or after immigration. As many as twenty-four women (41.4 percent) did not go through training, or acquire skills and knowledge related to the current businesses. Even those who had done so still lacked the experience of starting businesses in the Canadian context. In fact, only three women had related Canadian business experiences when starting the current business. Since a majority of them were novices, it is likely that they would have encountered difficulties during the course of business start-up unless there was help and support available to them.

This chapter analyzes the process of business establishment. In order to provide a better understanding, I will first examine how decisions were made regarding source of capital, choice of ownership, type of business, target market, and location. Then I will delineate the experiences these women encountered while setting up their businesses. How they became familiar with the local business environment, learned the skills of a new trade, located their business premise, researched suppliers, applied for licenses and permits, and decorated the business premises will be closely analyzed. Since most were inexperienced and new to Canada, undoubtedly they would encounter many barriers and difficulties during the process of setting up. However, as Chinese immigrant women with strong co-ethnic family and friendship support and class resources, these women would have overcome these difficulties and eventually started their businesses. As we shall see, social embeddedness reflected in terms of informal networks is particularly

striking in helping these women during this process. While some of these networks were established after immigration, those that exhibited a transnational character, that is, built prior to immigration, were also notable. The significance of social embeddedness as an integral part of the entrepreneurial process will be documented and highlighted.

Source of Capital

One of the most important criteria for starting a business is the availability of capital, which is usually acquired through personal savings or bank loans. Early Chinese immigrant businessmen, with a strong ethnic solidarity to help each other out, preferred to use rotating credit associations or the *hui*[1] to raise capital (Li, 1998; Light, 1972). While recent Korean immigrants still made use of this system (Yoon, 1997), a recent study found that new Chinese immigrants no longer depended on this old-fashioned means (Uneke, 1996). The women in my study confirmed this. As my research reveals, the women I interviewed, who were raised in the mature capitalist institutionalized economy of Hong Kong, denounced such practice as illegitimate, useless and unsafe. Some women, especially the younger ones, have not even heard about it. Those who knew about this channel of raising money made these negative comments:

> "I never attempted to get money this way. I heard that it was unsafe. Many people fled with the money. I have never come

[1] The *hui* is known as the *kye* in Korean. They both work more or less the same way. According to Yoon (1997), "the kye [*hui*] operates according to the following principles: several people (often ten to twenty) contribute an equal amount of money to a fund, which is lent to each of them in a rotating order. All kye members, including the borrower, continue to make the monthly payments until everyone benefits from the fund." (144) The Chinese way works according to a bid system "in which each member bids for the privilege of taking early rounds. The bidder who offers the highest interest rate receives the first lump sum of money, and he or she distributes the interest payment to the other members... Those who are not in urgent need of money can collect the high interest paid by members in the early rounds" (144). *Hui* members are usually friends and/or family members in order to guarantee trust. The *hui* system works for those who are in need of a lump sum of money without having to go through the bank which would demand a collateral or a formal credit check. With the interests paid to other *hui* members being higher than the bank interest rate, this system provides opportunities for those who are disadvantaged in obtaining bank loans. Early Chinese immigrants used this way to raise capital for starting their businesses without having to go through the unnecessary hassle the banks demanded.

> across people using this means in Canada. This may be more prevalent among old *Wàh-kîuh* because they don't speak English." (Edna)
>
> "The new generation does not raise money this way. It's outdated now." (Mrs. Tao)
>
> "This is something popular only among the older generation. For example, my mother still participates in it." (Susan)
>
> "This is such a stupid idea. The risk is so great." (Tania)

In my research, not a single woman participated in this practice. Considering themselves better informed and more sophisticated, they challenged its legitimacy. In fact, their privileged class background may also explain why they did not need to use this avenue to generate money.

Very different from the earlier immigrants, the majority of whom came from rural China, these women were privileged in terms of the possession of class resources such as money and education. As many as thirty-nine women (67.2 percent), particularly those who came after 1986, had their start-up capital brought from Hong Kong. More importantly, these women, as wives and daughters, were advantaged in seeking financial support from their husbands, fathers and even fathers-in-laws. Only sixteen women (27.6 percent) used entirely their own money to establish their businesses. Among the restm twelve women (20.7 percent) asked their husbands to contribute part of the capital while two women received help from their fathers-in-law. More interestingly, as many as sixteen others did not have to use their own money at all, but that of their husbands (seven of them), fathers (two), fathers-in-law (two) and mother (one). Culture plays a crucial factor here. Family solidarity, sustained by remnants of Confucianism, works to the advantage of these women when the men in the family feel obligated to contribute

financially to support their wives, daughters and daughters-in-law. The following excerpts illustrate this:

> "I approached my father with this business idea. He said if I were really interested, he would give me the money and let me give it a try." (Aileen)
>
> "My husband sent money over from Hong Kong. So I did not have to worry about money." (Gail)
>
> "I invested my own money. But I asked my husband to help out too. In addition, he promised to support me should I need more money in the future." (Faye)

Another popular means to generate capital was to call for partnership. While some women managed to get help from family members without having to involve them as business partners, others invited friends and family members to contribute as joint owners:

> "I invited my sister-in-law to join as partners so that she could chip in some money. Her husband was an *astronaut* making lots of money in Hong Kong. When I expressed interest in starting this [cosmetics retail] business, she offered to help me out." (Alison)
>
> "My father-in-law gave me money to start this [beauty salon] business. So it's only natural that I put him down as an official partner." (Rosemary)
>
> "The start-up cost for this [restaurant] business would be about $70,000. That's a lot of money. So I invited a woman friend to join." (Mary)

Very few women, five in total, were able to secure a bank loan. While some did not find this necessary, many were shunned by the perceived discrimination against new immigrants:

> "I didn't ask for a bank loan. I heard that it's very difficult to get a loan as a new immigrant. So I didn't even bother to try..." (Faye)

Others were frustrated by the inflexibility of the banks when dealing with newcomers or new businesses:

> "There is one thing I don't really understand. In the bank's ads and commercials, they always say how they're going to help small businesses. But when I went there to apply for a loan, they wanted to see my financial statement. They then asked for this and that. As a new immigrant, how would I have established credit? So the image they project is quite different from actual practice." (Monica)
>
> "Who would want to use one's own money to start a business? But it is very difficult to get bank loans. This is because Canadian banks are very conservative. They only lend money to those with long standing of credit. But if this is your first time starting a business, they don't trust you and won't lend money to you." (Joan)
>
> "I used money out of my own pocket. I went to apply for bank loan, but was rejected, twice. Both banks said they would not lend money to new business. They said if I could give them the financial statements of my business after a year, and if the assessment were favourable, then they would consider giving me a loan. But if my business were good after a year, why would I need a loan for?" (Audrey)

Once again, these women were insensitive to the possibility of gender biases. While existing literature on women entrepreneurs has documented how women were not treated seriously by bankers (see for example Belcourt, 1991; Stevenson, 1986; Goffee and Scase, 1985), not a single woman mentioned the limitation of acquiring bank loans to be attributed to the lack of trust in women[2].

Hence, unless these women had cash as start-up capital or were able to acquire help from other informal sources, the chances of depending on financial institutions for raising capital were slim. Either they earned and saved money for their business pursuit,

[2] Even when I probed for the possibility of discrimination against women during the interviews, these women rejected that they were treated differently by bankers or financial representatives.

or as dependent wives and daughters, they had their men to fall back on for financial support. Or they would prefer to look for help from co-ethnic friends through which capital could be generated by means of partnership. Other popular means such as raising capital from banks in general or from *hui* in particular among Chinese immigrants were not desirable. In general, unlike the average women entrepreneurs who faced many difficulties obtaining capital (Johnson and Storey, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993; Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991) and financing their businesses with their own savings (Belcourt, et.al., 1991), Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs were able to benefit from their class, gender and co-ethnic networks, either locally or transnationally, when raising capital. But such privileges should not be overstated, especially the class privileges these women enjoyed, since a great majority of their businesses were small and the start-up costs were not very high.

Deciding the Type of Ownership

As indicated in a previous chapter, the women entrepreneurs in this study were likely to start their businesses with partners. Only seventeen or 29.3 percent were sole proprietors. These women were more likely independent, with adequate class resources such as start-up capital, business knowledge, skill and experience, and were individually profit-driven. The following illustrates their decisions:

> "I had no intention to have partners probably because I am a more independent person. Besides, in our kind of business [CA firm], there's not much start-up capital involved. I had money; and savings. I was not afraid of not having business for a few months. Financially I was pretty secure. I didn't need capital from anyone else. Besides, technically speaking, when I first started, there wouldn't be too many clients anyway, why would I need a partner for?" (Doris)

> "At first I was approached by a friend who has been in the [travel] business for twenty years to be a partner. But I didn't like the idea. He's been in business for so long that he could easily take advantage of me without me even being aware of it. So I refused his offer, and decided to start on my own." (Ada)

> "I decided to start a beauty salon at home on my own. It's really nice feeling to have all the money put in my own pocket. Besides, my husband had a job already. I didn't need his help." (Julie)

However, most women depended on co-ethnic family and friendship participation as partners. Among those who shared ownership with others (forty-one of them), over half engaged in family businesses with their husbands or their families and friends; ten women shared ownership with their maternal families; eight with their own friends only. Interestingly enough, only three women involved female partners, two with sisters and one with female friends. All other women either partnered with men or were involved in a mixed gender set up. Since joint ownership is not as prevalent among other women entrepreneurs (Belcourt, et.al., 1991; Businesswomen's Advocate, 1991), this unique pattern of joint ownership may well demonstrate the vulnerability of these women as minority immigrants. As Belcourt, et.al. (1991) noted, ethnic minority women entrepreneurs are more likely to depend on family connections than average women entrepreneurs. Besides, ethnic minority businesses are also more likely to be a family project (for example, Li, 1998; Yoon, 1997; Uneke, 1996; Light, et.al., 1993). Co-ethnic gendered family and social networks, utilized for their collective effort, became crucial in the fight against post-immigration constraints encountered during business start-up.

There is a business need for joint ownership. While many women took the initiative in looking for partners, others were invited to join. The major advantages of

joint ownership, according to these women, were the pooling of capital and labour. As the analysis in the previous section suggested, joint ownership became a preferred option to draw start-up capital. While raising capital may have been an issue to some, many others saw partnership as a source of labour power essential for cost-effective division of labour once the business was started. The partners' skills and expertise, experience, and connections were taken as assets to the business operation. The following statements illustrate this:

> "Peter [a friend] and I became partners because he's very experienced in this area [interior design]. My experience was in doing paper work. So there would be strict division of labour. I will be responsible for administration and sales; he's responsible for the technical stuff: design, decoration, etc. Besides, we're able to pull more capital..." (Carol)
>
> "We were involved in family business [hair salon] before we came to Canada. So it's just obvious for us to continue. My father-in-law and mother-in-law will be responsible for older customers. My sister-in-law, my husband and I will be responsible for the younger people. We only have to hire one more hair stylist." (Ivy)
>
> "I put down his [husband's] name for two reasons: First, he's an accountant so I can ask him for a lot of advice. Second, he will refer many clients to me." (Candice)

However, as dependant women in particular, there are reasons for partnership other than the satisfaction of business need. Joint ownership, in addition, provides comfort and security as two of these women explained:

> "I dared not start a business on my own because I didn't have any experience. I was scared. Even though my cousin didn't have any experience either, he worked as a manager before immigration. It's safer to have a partner. We could face all the problems together..." (Bonnie)

> "...It's always easier to have a partner. You don't have the kind of work pressure on your own. It's really tough if you're on your own. " (Gladys)

Interestingly enough, a few other women felt obliged to involve their husbands even if it was not essential and necessary:

> "Actually it was all my money. But I felt obliged to include my husband's name because I wanted him to help me out. I didn't want him to feel that he's working for an outsider. Besides, he would lose face if he had no ownership." (Martha)

> "Even though my husband had a full-time job elsewhere, I still involved him as partner. In this way, I can make him come and help me out during weekends or after work..." (Judith)

The decision on sole or joint ownership to some extent also reflected the length of stay in Canada. While partnership outnumbered sole ownership, those who came prior to 1986 were more likely to start their businesses alone than those who came after (45 percent and 18 percent respectively). This corresponds to the findings in the previous chapter where I noted that the pre-1986 category of women was comparatively more individualistic with resources and motivation, and less dependent on family and friendship influences than the other group. In other words, recent immigrants had more of an inclination to depend on family and friendship support in their entrepreneurial venture. A lack of familiarity and understanding of the Canadian economy that was relatively foreign may have instigated their decision to involve partners for a safer and more secure course. Hence, the decision on ownership is more than just a business decision: it is embedded in social relations particularly pertaining to ethnicity and gender.

Deciding the Type of Business

As indicated in Chapter three, the types of business that these women decided to pursue were quite varied, which included professional and personal services, retail and

wholesale as well as production and construction. Decisions made on the type of business were also diverse. Those who decided on the basis of business reasons did so more on the class resources they possessed, such as knowledge, skills, past business experience and connections, and costs, than on the basis of gender and ethnicity.

> "I have worked in this industry [travel] for over thirteen years. So it's only natural for me to start my own business in this area." (Meg)
>
> "I was very interested in hair styling when I was young. I remember doing my mom and my sister's hair when I was only 11 or 12 years old. That's why I went for training in this area. Besides, I hated working in offices. I couldn't stand sitting for the whole day. So after I worked in this area for five years, an opportunity came up for me to start my own business... It's just natural that I would start a business in this area." (Beatrice)
>
> "The good thing about this industry [accounting firm] is that you don't have a big initial investment. [It is] unlike other industries that are involved in the selling of products where you will be in deep trouble if your products don't sell." (Ursula)

They were able to "use established connection in past businesses" (Andrea) or to secure patronization of "the clients from the company I worked for before" (Gloria). As one woman summarized succinctly, "It's always easier to become involved in something familiar than to start on something entirely different" (Mrs. Tao). These class resources, in addition, may also be gendered and ethnicized, as reflected in the concentration of business in the women sector, the selling of ethnic products and services, and the use of ethnic connections.

However, as many as twenty-four women (41.4 percent) chose the type of business in which they had no prior training or expertise, and/or related work or business experience. This situation was particularly evident among those who immigrated after

1986. Over half of these women (57.9 percent or nineteen out of thirty-eight women) were complete novices in the type of business they chose whereas only 25 percent of those who came before 1986 (or five out of twenty women) were so. To these women, gender and ethnicity outweighed class resources in their decision-making. The most common reason given had to do with their personal interests as women:

> "I am a big fan of this brand name. I grew up using this brand myself. My toys, gifts, daily accessories and stationary were all from this brand..." (Aileen, specialty gift shop)
>
> "I chose [lady's] fashion clothing because this was what I was interested in. I like shopping for clothes and I like wearing new clothes. I like trending things..." (Susan, boutique)
>
> "... I am a mother. So I am interested in children's wear." (Amanda, Children's wear)
>
> "As a mother, I am very interested and concerned about my daughter's education..." (Vera, Tutorial service)

Some inexperienced women chose the type of business on the basis of co-ethnic support from family and friends who were able to provide them with information, knowledge, sources of supply, both locally and transnationally:

> "My husband's business in Hong King involved importing tea from Sri Lanka. I could make use of this connection. So one of the items that my business sells [wholesale] is Ceylon Tea." (Gail)
>
> "Because my second oldest sister operated a fashion business in Hong Kong. So I don't have to worry about supplies." (Gabriella)
>
> "My uncle was a wholesale distributor of kitchenware [in Vancouver]. He would provide us with merchandize. So [even though we're inexperienced], we didn't have to worry about sourcing merchandize. Besides, my uncle promised he would teach us how to start a retail business in this area." (Bonnie)

Others were invited by families and friends as joint owners, and therefore could depend on them for support:

> "My husband has been in this industry for a long period of time. He invited me to join his business after I lost my job. So even though I was new to the business, it's okay because he would teach me how to do it." (Ophelia)

> "A friend of ours whose father was the franchiser of this coffee shop in Hong Kong had started a coffee shop in Toronto already. He asked if we're interested to open a coffee shop here. Since we didn't have any experience in doing business, this is a good opportunity to start one... He would help us out to start up and operate." (Joan)

The demand of the market, either ethnic or mainstream, also affected the decisions of some. With respect to the Chinese population in general, or women or the younger generation in particular, the choice of business was to fill the gap or the needs not yet satisfied:

> "Many of the new immigrants have an appetite for reading Chinese popular magazines and books. But the price of buying them is very high because of the costly mailing expenses. Usually they don't keep the magazines after reading. So many people would think it's not worth spending money on buying something they would not keep. Besides, the libraries here only carry dated issues. In order to read the most current issues without paying the high cost, these immigrants prefer to rent them. So there is a high demand in this kind of service. This book rental idea has become very popular in Hong Kong too." (Cheryl)

> " ... I had to decide between floral arrangement and beauty care. While flowers are perishable items, skin care products are more durable. Nowadays, many women are willing to spend money on beautifying themselves. They don't mind coming in to have a facial every two weeks." (Isabelle)

> "We thought that selling brand name items such as clothing, bags and shoes could make money because these days young people have high consumption power and they're really into brand names." (Becky)

In addition, there were those who chose the type of business abandoned or not interested in the mainstream market. For example, in Edna's case, despite the fact that no one in the family had any knowledge, skill or experience in running a café business, they still decided to start a café in the medical building because

> "my sister worked there as a receptionist in a doctor's office. She always heard doctors and patients complaining about nowhere to go for coffee... The medical building is over thirty years old. For all these years, people have been asking for a coffee shop there. But nobody would be so stupid to do it. It is because the building is only three stories high. There may not be enough customers to sustain a business. But we decided to give it a try with the hope that the family nature of the business could reduce cost and be profitable."

Anna decided to start a retail store selling oriental crafts and furnishing because there was only one store of this nature in Vancouver serving the mainstream market:

> "This store monopolized the market because in those days there were no people involved in this business. Then I thought why didn't I open one in Richmond. There was no company of this sort in Richmond then." (Anna)

There were a few who chose the type of business for odd reasons, for example, as a response to the Canadian refund policy or for easy management and operation:

> "Many retail businesses got themselves into trouble because of the refund policy. So I thought the only type of business that is not affected by it is food service. Customers may complain about the food. But they can't return it... So I decided to establish a coffee shop." (Edna)

> "We didn't have any experience in doing business. So we didn't know which type of business we should become involved in. We were looking for businesses that were easy to operate, that would not require much specialized knowledge and skills, and could be easily managed." (Judith)

> "The book rental business is cleaner, easier and tidier than food service. It does not require a lot of skills and business knowledge." (Monica)

In sum, since many of them were inexperienced or did not have the required expertise in starting a business, the type of business they chose would be more likely be based on a number of social factors such as gender, local and transnational ethnic networks, market demands, and state policies. Business-related reasons, among these women, were rendered secondary.

Deciding the Target Market

The majority of women (thirty-seven or 64 percent) decided to target their businesses toward co-ethnics. Another twelve (21 percent) wanted to target both the Chinese and mainstream markets while nine women (15 percent) preferred to serve only 'Caucasians' or 'Westerners'. In deciding the target market, these women participated in the process of racialization, ethnicization and class-ification, dichotomizing it between 'us' and 'them'. Most of the time such a distinction referred to the wealthy Chinese community as a whole versus the not-so-wealthy 'White' community. These women assumed that Chinese had high consumption power and were culturally specific in terms of language, values, interests and tastes relative to 'them', generalized as 'Whites' or 'Canadians' who either did not have money or were cautious in spending.

With respect to wealth, one woman who owned and operated a computer game store explained:

> "When we first started, we had already made up our minds to target the *tòhng-yàhn* market. We sell video and computer games manufactured in Japan. Prices are almost doubled to those manufactured in North America. So we thought that the *gwái-lóu* could not afford them. Besides, many of them are not

> even aware of the availability of these products." (Fong Yin-Yin)

Another woman who decided to start a restaurant had this to say:

> "The Chinese have much higher consumption power. They have the habit of eating out. Some of them eat out almost every meal. But *gwái-lóu* usually eat in a simple way. They make sandwiches at home, and they rarely dine out." (Martha)

Aside from spending power, the market is dichotomized between Chinese and 'White' in terms of tastes and interests. Some women justified their decisions this way:

> "The ways Chinese and *gwái-lóu* travel are very different. The Chinese want to see a lot in a very short period of time at the lowest price possible. But the *gwái-lóu* like to explore on their own and take the time to relax. So the Chinese are more likely to patronize Chinese-style travel agents. I can't serve both people. I have to target the Chinese market because I don't know enough the needs of *gwái-lóu* customers." (Meg, travel service)

> "I did not target the *gwái-lóu* market because I was more familiar with the taste of Chinese." (Yolanda, women's fashion)

> "I did not attempt to target the *gwái-lóu* because I did not understand their needs. I did not really know what they like or dislike." (Sarah, gift shop)

> "... As far as I was concerned, I thought the good thing about targeting the *tòhng-yàhn* market was that you knew their taste. You knew what they liked." (Amanda, children's wear)

Other women avoided targeting the *Caucasian* or *Western* market due to a lack of trust as a result of the difference in values. Such a lack of trust was based on myths manufactured and disseminated within the Chinese community:

> "We thought about targeting all people. We did not mind serving *gwái-lóu* customers. But after some careful thought, we became scared. It was because we heard that they were very picky. It was not easy to satisfy their needs. If anything went wrong and they were not happy, they would sue you.

> We heard about this from people who have been in this [hair salon] business for a long time. So we're scared." (Ivy)

> "I only welcome *tòhng-yàhn* customers because I was afraid the *gwái* customers would report my business to the government. My [home-based beauty service] business was illegal because it was not registered and insured. All my *tòhng-yàhn* customers knew about this. I knew they would not report it. But I wouldn't dare to let my *gwái* neighbours or customers from my last job know about this. They would report it, for sure. So from the very beginning I had no intention of promoting my business to these people." (Julie)

Another culture-related factor that influenced these women when targeting the ethnic market was language. The market was dichotomized into Chinese speaking and English speaking. The inability of most Chinese consumers to converse in fluent English was a major reason they turned to co-ethnics for needed services. Such barriers became an asset for the entrepreneurial women who decided to target the Chinese market. As one woman recalled:

> "When I worked [as a cosmetics sales] at X [a department store], I noticed that even when I was away for lunch or a coffee break, the Chinese customers would wait for me to come back and buy from me. Probably because of their language problem, they preferred to buy from someone who spoke their language. Even when other [non-Chinese] sales women were available, they still waited for me. So when I decided to start this business [cosmetics retail], I chose to target the Chinese market." (Alison)

To many other women, the inability to speak English comfortably, on the other hand, constituted a major reason to restrict their businesses to the Chinese community. As one woman explained:

> "I did not attempt to serve *gwái-lóu* because my English was not good. So it would be a problem for me." (Mrs. Tao)

Hence, language can be both an asset and a barrier for these women when deciding the target market for their businesses. While on the one hand, speaking the Chinese language (usually Cantonese and/or Mandarin) became an asset for these women to serve co-ethnics, the inability to converse in fluent English also confined their choice to the ethnic market.

Aside from dichotomizing the target market between 'Chinese' and 'White', these women also were involved in the class-ificiation of the Chinese market into the wealthy 'new' Chinese immigrants and the not-so-well-off 'old' Chinese immigrants. 'New' immigrants generally referred to recent immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan and 'old' immigrants were those who had been here for 'a long time'. The 'new' immigrants are wealthy and place a high value on trendy and high-end goods and services along with lavish consumption while the 'old' immigrants are not well-off and value frugality. As some women commented:

> "We did not want to target the *old wàh-kǐuh* [Chinese immigrants who came here a long time ago]. We wanted to target 'new' [Chinese] immigrants. They're more modernized and are more willing to spend money on hair care." (Ivy)
>
> "... 'Old' [Chinese] immigrants, after staying here for so long, have become more frugal and stingy. Even though they may have brought some money along when they first came here, in time they would become very cautious when spending money. But 'new' [Chinese] immigrants usually don't care." (Audrey)
>
> "I have to target 'new' [Hong Kong Chinese] immigrants because our clothing is imported from Hong Kong. They're relatively more expensive and more in fashion. 'Old' [Chinese] immigrants would not buy from me because they would think my products are too expensive. They can't afford them. But 'new' [Hong Kong Chinese] immigrants don't really care. Besides, they are not used to the style and pattern of the clothes sold in *gwái-lóu* stores. They prefer those imported from Hong Kong." (Amanda)

To many women then, they preferred to target the wealthy co-ethnic market on the basis of the assumption that their businesses could benefit from their high consumption power and patterns. Other than racialization and class-fication, the target market in many cases was also gendered. This is particularly true in businesses that are beauty-related such as beauty salons, cosmetics or women's retail fashion. These owners targeted particularly the new middle-class Chinese women immigrants who were assumed to indulge in conspicuous consumption. With her target market gendered, racialized and classed, one woman remarked:

> "I had to target new [Chinese women] immigrants. Only they could afford to do facial, body treatment or diet treatment regularly. The price range for facial alone could go between $40 and $100. Hong Kong women were used to these prices. They were used to having facial once a week. They could afford to spend that kind of money. But *westerners* were not used to spending so much money on their face. Even 'old' Chinese immigrants would not spend that much money. Unlike the 'new' immigrants, they were more stingy." (Audrey)

While racialized and gendered consumption plays a big part in deciding the target market, co-ethnic and gendered networks also contribute to targeting the businesses toward the Chinese community. Available networks of referrals and past local and transnational connections prompted these women to orient their businesses to co-ethnics in general and/or co-ethnic women in particular. As a couple of women stated:

> "Even though competition was high in the floral business, I had established very good relationships with my friends. They promised to buy from me so that they could help 'Leanne make some money'". (Leanne)

> "We continued with our hair salon after immigration because of the requests from our old clients [from Hong Kong] who had immigrated to Vancouver. They wanted us to start a

> quality hair salon. So from the very beginning, we had no intention to target the *mainstream* market." (Clara)

Comparatively speaking, very few women decided to target their businesses at the mainstream market. Those who did so (eight of them) shared one thing in common: They all had work or business experience in a Caucasian or English-speaking environment. These women felt comfortable serving non-Chinese because of their experience in dealing with Caucasian customers and clientele along with their proficiency in the English language. As two women commented:

> "I had always dealt with *westerner* customers when I was in Hong Kong. So I decided to target the *westerner* market when I started my business [wholesale handbags]. It's very difficult to do business with the Chinese here. They could always go back to Hong Kong to shop." (Sheila)

> "The salon I worked with targeted mainstream customers. So it followed naturally that when I decided to start my own salon, I would do the same thing." (Beatrice)

While most of the women were very definite about their target market, ten of them had no specific preference on any segment of consumers. These women had the general impression that a business would be more likely to succeed if it were not restricted to a particular segment of the population:

> "In Canada in order for the business to be successful, you have to be able to attract all customers, not just *tòhng-yàhn*. If you started out restricting yourself to Chinese people, for example, it would be very difficult to expand to the mainstream market later on." (Gail)

A number of them who decided to run Chinese restaurants, because of the nature of the product and service, were not targeted at a particular segment of the population. A couple of others did so because of work experiences in serving multi-ethnic customers and clients.

Deciding the Geographical Locale

The intended market to a large extent influenced the choice of geographical location. Usually, before these women decided on the exact location of their businesses, they first had to choose a geographical area. One of the popular areas for Chinese businesses was Chinatown in Vancouver, which over the years not only had attracted Chinese shoppers but also non-Chinese consumers who looked for authentic ethnic products and service. In fact, in recent years, Chinatown had developed into a tourist attraction (Anderson, 1991). Yet as a result of the "shortage of land for further development in old Chinatown", and other problems such as "parking, traffic congestion, high rents, and throat cutting competition", many "new businessmen or investors [were] forced to look for properties in other parts of the city where there were lower rents or land prices, more parking spaces, and proximity to new Chinese residential areas" (Lai, 1988: 57). Richmond consequently emerged as one of the "new Chinatowns" during the past decade. Its growth was accelerated after the construction of the first ethnic Chinese mall, Aberdeen Centre. Since then, Richmond became a popular area for new Chinese businesses, attracting not only its Chinese residents but also the "upper middle-class Chinese customers from South Vancouver" (Lai, 1988:164).

Since most of the businesses started by these women (forty-seven or 81 percent) were after 1990, and many of them targeted the Chinese market, there is reason to believe that their choice to establish businesses in Richmond had a lot to do with the growth of the Chinese population there. As some women commented:

> "Richmond was a better area because many new [Chinese] immigrants chose to live here. Having an office in Richmond had the benefit of being closer to where they lived. I worked in Downtown before. My clients then were also *tòhng-yàhn*.

> But they always complained that Downtown was too far away, and parking was not convenient." (Ursula)
>
> "At that time, many Chinese immigrants chose to live in Richmond. There, many new businesses and facilities have developed for the Chinese market." (Faye)
>
> "I chose Richmond because there were so many *tohng-yahn* living there. Not only were there *Hong Kong people*, there were also many Taiwanese. These people all had high consumption power." (Susan)
>
> "One of the reasons we chose Richmond was its central location. Not only is it able to attract local shoppers, it also attracts those who live in Vancouver westside." (Carol)

In addition, reasonable rent, parking convenience and spacious commercial lots also attracted these women to Richmond relative to other locations in Vancouver, including Chinatown:

> "Space in Vancouver was precious. You could not find big commercial spaces like those in Richmond. Parking in Richmond was more convenient. Rent was also relatively cheap. Vancouver was too expensive. Besides, Richmond was also easily accessible to people who lived in Vancouver. So I decided to start a dance school there..." (Lorna)
>
> "When we first started, we looked for a location along Victoria Drive in Vancouver. But parking was very inconvenient. Chinatown was too competitive. At that time, there were already two stores selling kitchenware. And the rent was too expensive. It's too risky. As a start, we did not want to take too much risk." (Bonnie)
>
> "I did not consider Chinatown. Personally, I did not like shopping there because of a lack of parking space. I avoided shopping there for four years already. Besides, they're too many coffee shops and restaurants there - too competitive. And the rent and property tax also were more expensive." (Mary)

Not only was Chinatown less attractive because of high competition, high rent and other space and traffic problems, it was not considered for a different reason. While

Chinatown was analyzed as a product of Western racialization and had evolved and emerged into a tourist attraction (Anderson, 1991), this was not the general perception of the Chinese people, at least not the women in my research. These women who took "an outsider's view from within"[3], that is, as outsiders of Chinatown but within the Chinese community, viewed Chinatown as belonging to the Chinese of the past, the '*old wàh-kìuh*'. Since they class-ified these people to be of a lower socio-economic position, following this, they also constructed the image of Chinatown as a lower class neighbourhood and business district.

In other words, these women had manufactured a dichotomy between the long-time immigrants and their Chinatown, and the new immigrants and the "new Chinatown" in Richmond based on class. Businesses in Richmond were perceived as geared toward the new wealthy immigrants who were more sophisticated, modernized, educated and cosmopolitan while those in Chinatown were for the lower-class, poor, old-fashioned, stingy and traditional *old wàh-kìuh*. Regardless of the time period of their immigration, these women saw themselves as belonging to the wealthy "new immigrant" group, and consequently were unwilling to do business with the *old wàh-kìuh* upon whom they despised and discriminated against. The following excerpts are from women who came in different periods of time and who engaged in various businesses. They vividly illustrated this widespread image:

> "We felt that Richmond was more high class. In Chinatown, there were *old wàh-kìuh*. They could not afford legal service." (Gladys, pre-1986 immigrant, legal service)

> "Chinatown would be the last place I considered. The environment there was not good. My students usually came from middle-class backgrounds whose parents were educated

[3] I adopted this phrase from Carty, 1996.

> and were willing to expose them to art and dance. But people who lived in Chinatown were restaurant workers. They were usually too busy making ends meet. They did not really care about developing their children in art, dance or music. They either did not have the money or the time to drive their kids for lessons." (Lorna, pre-1986 immigrant, dance school)
>
> "I never considered Chinatown. Chinatown to me was going down. People there were 'low'. They were not my client base." (Doris, pre-1986 immigrant, accounting service)
>
> "Only lower-class uneducated people liked to shop in Chinatown. They liked to bargain. I don't like my customers to constantly bargain with me. It's really tough doing business this way. Besides, there were already too many travel agencies there." (Meg, pre-1986 immigrant, travel service)
>
> "Chinatown was not appealing at all. It was dirty, and low-class. Only *old wàh-kìuh* shopped there. It was not the right location for children's wear. It was more like a grocery market. Besides, it was very dangerous too, especially after 6 p.m." (Judith, post-1986 immigrant, children wear)
>
> "I did not like to serve those 'uneducated and unsophisticated' housewives who patronized Chinatown stores and shops." (Rosemary, post-1986 immigrant, beauty salon)
>
> "I never thought of Chinatown. It was too old fashioned. Only the *old wàh-kìuh* would go there and shop. Besides, it was so dirty. Nobody there would be interested in shopping for trendy clothing." (Susan, post-1986 immigrant, lady's fashion)
>
> "We don't want to go to Chinatown because the products and designs we sell are of high quality. We sell brand name products, not the average cheap blinds and curtains." (Carol, post-1986 immigrant, furnishing and design)

Apart from the impact of the growing Chinese market and class biases, gender constituted another reason for some women to decide on Richmond. As part of the middle-class Chinese population attracted by the growth of Richmond, many of these women and their families were also residents of Richmond (forty-one or 70.7 percent).

Feeling obligated as wives, mothers and daughters, many chose Richmond for its geographical proximity in order to be close to home. And for those who decided on home-based businesses, the choice was obvious: their own homes were in Richmond. The following excerpts illustrate how some women expressed their concern for the family:

> "At that time, my second child was still very young. I had to work close to home. I had to drive my two kids back and forth to and from school. Sometimes I had to go home during my lunch hour. I wanted to make sure that my home was at most 10 to 15 minute drive from my office." (Candice)
>
> "We didn't think of any area other than Richmond because we lived here. The location was close to home. If anything happened at home, it would be easier and quicker to attend to." (Edna)

In sum, choosing Richmond as the geographical locale involves mainly the integration of business decisions on cost, convenience, competitiveness and pulling power, gender decisions as mothers, daughters and sisters, and classed and racialized decisions on the desirable market. More notably, the Chinese market was divided by class and space. These businesswomen avoided Vancouver's Chinatown in order to escape association with its widespread derogatory image.

Setting Up a Business

After discussing the major decisions these women made when starting their businesses, I am now going to examine the processes of setting up the businesses. Business start-up, besides the initial decisions on capital, type of business, partnership and geographical location, also involves the procedure of looking for business premises, researching supplies, equipment and products, applying for business licenses and other permits, and going through interior decoration of the store. In addition, to the women

who were new to Canada or who lacked expertise in area of business they were pursuing, this process would also include becoming familiar with the new business environment and learning a new trade. In the following, I will tell the stories of a few women about the process of their business start-ups. Again, the analysis will highlight their utilization of co-ethnic social networks, class resources and gender resources, and more so the obstacles they faced being minority immigrant women. Even though some women, usually with years of business experience and proficiency in the English language, found no barriers and problems when setting up their businesses, they are the exception rather than the norm:

> "The whole process of starting up was pretty easy. When we arrived here, we went to different [government] departments to ask for information, and that's it. So within a couple of months, we're ready." (Andrea)

But to many other women, they had to depend greatly on co-ethnic friends and family members, that is, informal networks, either locally or transnationally to assist in the process of setting up the businesses. Institutional support from the government or ethnic organizations, even though would be available, was not a favourable option.

1. Becoming Familiarized with the Local Business Environment

For the women who were new to Canada and were anxious to start a business in a short period of time, for example, those who immigrated under the entrepreneurial program and thus were required to set up a business within two years after landing, becoming familiar with the local business environment was urgent and imminent. Usually this was done through personal exploration and information gathering from co-ethnics. Even though these women had their business proposals approved by immigration officials during the processing of their immigration application, they were

still skeptical about whether their proposal would be workable. In order to confirm this, these women would have to do some exploration work. As Mrs. Tao and Mrs. Ting recalled,

> "When we first arrived in Vancouver, we waited for a year before we started this business. First we had to familiarize ourselves with the [business] environment here... So we went around, looking, browsing, observing... We spent a lot of time walking around both *western* and *tòhng-yàhn* malls, studying how people did business here. We wanted to look for a business that would be profitable here. Even though we were supposed to start a women's fashion retail according to our [entrepreneurial immigrant] application, we were not sure if this idea would be workable in Canada. We wanted to know whether this kind of business was saturated, whether there were enough demands, etc." (Mrs. Tao)

> "We were supposed to open a jewelry business here because we were in this business for so long before immigration. For close to two years, we've been looking around, driving around, observing... Then we found out that the consumption power in Canada was very low [on jewelry]. People here simply could not afford to buy luxury items. Their income was low and taxes were high... Usually people only bought jewelry on special occasions: Christmas, Valentine's, weddings, etc. So what about the rest of the year? ... After checking things out and exploring, we finally decided not to go into the jewelry business." (Mrs. Ting)

Even official sources were available, they did not know where to look for them. A more convenient way would be to obtain information from co-ethnic families, friends or business acquaintances, which they felt was more trustworthy. As one woman commented: "in the process of setting up, you *have* to trust your sources and your friends" (Man Lai-chen). In some cases, the co-ethnic networks were so strong that even potential competitors were willing to offer help:

> "... we also sought advice from friends. For example, we would go to visit Ben's hair salon all the time. We went there and observed how he ran his business. There were other

> friends who were in the same industry. We would go there and visit, and asked them questions, and get information from them." (Clara)

> "When we first arrived in Canada, we knew that operating a hair salon here would be very different from that in Hong Kong. In order to understand how this business was run in Canada, my husband went to work in a friend's hair salon for a few months. So he learned how to set up the right price, how to recruit and split income with your employees, how to split tips, how to organize promotions, etc." (Ivy)

Kin and family members were usually more involved than friends as a result of solidarity built within family system. Many felt an obligation to help out. As Alexis recalled, her business would not have started without her aunt doing everything for her:

> "When we first arrived here, we were not familiar with Vancouver. We had never been here before. We knew nothing about starting a business here. But since we had to start a business immediately to remove the immigration condition and we had already had a business in mind, we had to depend on our aunt for help. She looked for a space for us right next to her own store. She did the whole set-up for us. Basically, she did everything for us..." (Alexis)

In general, for the women who had to start a business within a time limit, they had to go through the process of familiarization with the local business environment unless they received the kind of help Alexis had from her family. As Wong and Ng (1996) noted in their research, the government was not there to offer assistance to new business immigrants despite their welcoming gesture. Being forced to open their businesses within two years of landing, entrepreneur immigrants were vulnerable to taking on adventurous routes of business ventures unlikely to be common among business projects established by local people. As Smart (1994:111) commented, the business immigration program was a "rip-off" through which entrepreneurs were "channeled into risk ventures". With the short time limit allowed, the expectation to start a viable business

would be rather "miraculous" given that they may not possess transferable knowledge and business experiences and lack the familiarity of the local market forces other local Canadians have.

2. Learning the Skills of a New Trade

One of the many difficulties some immigrant women faced was the novelty of the business they planned to engage in. When these women realized that their learned skills and knowledge from past work or business experience could not be transferred to their new business pursuit, they had to go through an additional process of learning a new trade. Usually such a process involved extra drive and hard work as, unlike the others, they had to learn the skills within a set time limit. The following stories illustrate the exceptional qualities these women possessed and the hardship they endured in order to realize their dreams.

Sharon, who worked in an executive position in the personnel department of a large corporation before immigration, found her work experience nontransferable to small businesses. Following the decision to set up a food business selling *curry* and *teriyaki*, the next important step for her was to learn how to make these foods. Her inexperience was compensated for by transnational family networks. As the daughter of a Chinese restaurant owner in Hong Kong and the sister of a *teriyaki* restaurant owner in Australia, she was able to seek assistance from her father and her sister. Through her father's arrangements with three renowned chefs, she flew back to Hong Kong to learn the skills of making *curry*.

> "I learned to make *curry* from a Malaysian, an Indian and a Pakistani chef. These chefs did not know I learned from the others or they would not teach me. Because of my past training in computers and procedure processing, I was able to

> take very detailed notes. You see, these people are not teachers. They don't know how to teach. They just demonstrate. You have to know how to ask good questions and take careful notes, step by step." (Sharon)

When she returned to Vancouver, she began to practice at home. She made it a daily effort to try out different recipes and invited friends over to give comments. After months of practice by "trial and error", she finally came up with her "own recipe integrating recipes from all three chefs." As for the *teriyaki*, her sister sent a recipe over from Australia. Again she went through the same ordeal and finally invented her own recipe for the *teriyaki* sauce.

Sharon took the sole responsibility for learning to make *curry* and *teriyaki* even though the business was partnered with her husband. He refused to participate in the learning process because he "did not like to cook". The gender element is obvious here: As a man who used to head a police department before immigration, it was degrading to become a cook.

Edna and her sister went through a difficult time learning how to make sandwiches and coffee when they decided to set up a coffee shop with their brother who was new to Canada. Frustrated by racism at work, and with the intention of helping her newly immigrated brother to find work, she decided to quit her job and start a café with her brother and her sister. Their experience in office (clerical) work did not help them to establish any kind of small business. They ultimately decided to start a coffee shop because the refund policy in Canadian business practice would not apply to food businesses.

Since they did not have any prior knowledge of operating a coffee shop, they had to go through the tedious process of learning the trade, e.g., how to make sandwiches and

coffee. With respect to sandwich making, like Sharon, they went through experimentation and utilized their friends for comments:

> "To establish our menu, we went to other coffee shops and copied theirs. We would go around trying out their sandwiches. Then we would open these sandwiches and see what the contents were. Then we would make them at home. After we learned how to make sandwiches, we would ask our friends to try them. Then we would modify from their comments. We would let them try again, and modify again... until we felt that the sandwiches were good." (Edna)

Ethnic utilization was not as strong in Edna's case because of the non-ethnic nature of the business. The coffee shop was *western* in style, and targeted the mainstream market. Their proficiency in English and past work experience in the Canadian mainstream economy became assets for them to look for help outside the Chinese community. Going through the *Yellow Pages*, they looked for coffee wholesalers and discovered that they were willing to offer training to retailers.

> "I went to work in their store for a few days, and learned about all the names of coffee. There were at least eight different kinds of coffee. In fact, there are over a hundred different brands in the market. We chose only three. We actually didn't know the difference. The wholesalers recommended brands to us." (Edna)

In addition, they also learned a great deal from other suppliers:

> "Two months before the opening of the business, we called several suppliers and asked for information, for example, on the quantity and quality of sugar, toilet paper, plates, dishwasher detergent, etc. You will be surprised how much information you're able to get from them. They even gave us information on how to make sandwiches, how much ham we need to order, and they would recommend this, and that, and everything... So we accumulated knowledge and information this way. Usually these people give you a lot of ideas, many of these ideas you would not have thought of... For example, paper plates, what is the weight we should order? Ham, how should I slice the ham? How many ounces would be most

> desirable? What is the cost of a piece of lettuce, the cost of one spoonful of mayonnaise? That's how you work out the cost of a sandwich! We eat sandwiches all the time. But we're never aware of these details. We didn't realize the importance of knowing the cost of a sandwich until they told us." (Edna)

Edna and her sister, with the help of their co-ethnic friends and mainstream suppliers, were able to get the business started, despite the tedious and hard-working process of learning the tricks of the trade. Interestingly enough, their brother, just like Sharon's husband, never participated in the learning process. "My brother just sits there, says nothing and does nothing." Such unequal participation reflects the unequal gender relations in which women's labour was exploited by men even in a supposedly equal business partnership. Such gender inequality, particularly in a family business, was a common pattern not only at the start up stage. As the next chapter will illustrate, unequal gender relations continued and extended into business operation once the business started.

3. Locating the Business Premise

When it came to the decision on specific locations, the target market and the nature of business became primary concerns. If the businesses were targeted towards co-ethnics, most of these women would prefer Chinese or Asian theme malls, or malls that were occupied by many Chinese or Asian businesses for pulling power. Many, whose businesses were in retail or personal service, or based on walk-in customers, preferred enclosed malls rather than strip malls or commercial spaces along the street for better traffic and pulling power:

> "We decided to choose this [Asian] mall because it generated more traffic. Many of our customers were impulsive buyers. So the [enclosed] mall setting could attract people to shop

impulsively. No one would walk along a street and suddenly come up with the idea of buying a lipstick. We decided on this mall because we wanted to target Chinese customers." (Alison)

"I prefer enclosed malls over strip malls or store spaces on the streets because more traffic is generated in an enclosed mall. When I was looking for a location, there was a space available just across this mall for half the rent. But it was situated in a strip mall. I thought then I had to pay extra for promotion and advertising if I chose a strip mall. So finally I decided on this one. In an enclosed mall, your business itself was already a moving ad. People who walked by could look inside [beauty salon]. You could draw their attention. In a strip mall, no one would walk by just to take a look at your store." (Audrey)

"We lived here long enough to know that people here did not walk on the streets. So strip malls or commercial spaces on the street was a definite no. Besides, security was also an issue. Street spaces are less secure. Enclosed malls are better. Since our products were all expensive items [computer games], security became our major concern." (Fong yin-yin)

"This [Chinese] mall was a good location because we were targeting new and young Chinese immigrants. Basically, all new immigrants liked to shop in Richmond even those who lived in Vancouver. They did not like to go to Chinatown or Metrotown. Besides, there were so many Chinese restaurants around here. Usually the whole family would come down for *yám- chàh* [or commonly known as *dim sum* by Westerners] during weekends. After that, they would stroll in the malls." (Becky)

"We were not familiar with the business environment here when we first arrived. So we spent a lot of time walking around both *western* and *tòhng-yàhn* malls .... After some time for observation, we found that the enclosed mall was the most ideal location for retail here. In the winter, nobody would walk on the streets and shop for clothes. My English is not good, so *tòhng-yàhn* mall would be more suitable for our business." (Mrs. Tao)

Location became a secondary matter when the businesses were wholesale, or when the customers were mainly by referral. Women involved in these types of

businesses had more opportunities to look for cheaper and more spacious locations without having to consider the impact of pulling power. Some of these women had the added advantage of putting the family first. They would look for space that allowed them to accommodate their family responsibilities. Hence, as mentioned in the last chapter, many women decided to run a home-based business when the family became a priority. Other women put family concern as a major reason when looking for a space close to home:

> "I decided to rent a space in a small strip mall very close to home. So I could always go home between scheduled classes. The rent was cheap, only $750 a month. Parking was convenient. After all, we were not looking for walk-in customers. Initially, all my [piano] students were my old students from Hong Kong. Later, they referred more students to me." (Robin)

> "I was really stupid then. And I didn't know how to do business, and had no experience in it. When people looked for a location, they usually looked for a good one for business sake. But when I looked for a location, I was looking for comfort. I was looking for a place that was big enough to make a partition [a room] for me to put a TV and a bed for my son so that I could look after him and do business at the same time." (Gail)

While some women made the enquiry themselves by physically shopping around, others looked up the location mostly through newspaper ads and through referrals by co-ethnic friends who worked in real estate. Still others made use of the connections established with business associates. For example,

> This office space is owned by my client [from previous work]... It was a good deal... This client of mine set up a business in this office building. But it did not work out. So I took it over... I can use the facilities [he set up] without having to invest more money..." (Doris)

The impact of co-ethnic connections when looking for locations is even more distinguished when considering this unusual phenomenon. While it is obvious that some women put business consideration as the primary concern and others put family as a major factor when looking for space, some made the decision solely on the basis of the influence of friends. As oddly as it seems, some women decided on the location first before they even started to think about their businesses. This happened when they were first approached by friends to purchase commercial spaces in Asian malls. To these women, the consideration to purchase a space instigated the idea of doing business. In other words, they built their business ideas around the commercial space. As the following excerpt illustrates:

> "We were approached by our friend who was involved in the construction of the [Asian] mall to purchase a commercial lot there. So we never considered other places. Actually, it all happened very quickly. When we made the purchase, we did not have a business plan in mind. We made the decision because the name of the mall X attracted us." (Sharon)

In fact, a number of women made the decision because the mall was named after a famous Japanese owned department store in Hong Kong. Therefore, it was assumed that the name would attract many Chinese customers. One woman even bought the space from Hong Kong before immigration demonstrating again the working of transnational networks:

> "It was in 1993 when they were building this mall. We were still in Hong Kong then. At that time, we thought that even though we did not know whether we would start a business or not after immigration, it would be a good idea to purchase a commercial space if the price was right. We had a friend who was a realtor. He told us that there was space for sale at X. He was able to convince us that it was a good investment. So we decided to go for it. At that time, I had no idea where it was located. The realtor told me that it was located in a busy

> commercial area in Richmond. My husband was visiting Vancouver then. So I trusted his judgement too." (Man Lai-chen)

While many women preferred ethnic malls for the purpose of targeting their businesses toward co-ethnics, there were a few women who were forced to choose ethnic locations after being rejected by mainstream malls. The following testimonies illustrate this:

> "It was not easy to find a space at the *westerner* mall. I tried X. They wanted me to submit a business proposal or they would not even consider talking to me. This was just a small business that I was involved in [specialty gift shop]. What did I need to write a proposal for? Besides, if these big companies like Y or Z wanted a space, they would prefer them rather than me. So it was really difficult." (Aileen)
>
> "I tried to look for space in the *western* malls. But they had very high restrictions and did not offer any flexibility. The rent was very high too. I don't think they welcome small businesses like mine [woman's fashion retail]." (Yolanda)
>
> "We found a space in a strip mall along X street. But the owner did not want to rent to us because there was already another hair salon run by a *westerner*. They were worried that we were unable to meet the competition, and therefore would not be able to pay rent." (Carol)

All the women who were turned away by these mainstream malls were new immigrants who arrived after 1986. Whether this was the result of racism was difficult to determine; however, it certainly attested to the vulnerability of some women as new immigrants. In fact, only two women successfully procured a business location in mainstream malls in Richmond. Both of them were pre-1986 immigrants.

The above analysis points to the fact that the decision on location was not solely based on business reasons such as rent, parking, flow of traffic, etc. but was also socially embedded. Class, gender and ethnicity played an important role to many of the women

concerned. The growing Chinese market along with the class of the target market, familial responsibilities as women, local and transnational ethnic connections and rejection from mainstream market led to the decision to start a business in a variety of desirable locations in Richmond. The most crucial factor among all was the development of the 'new Chinatown' (Lai, 1988) in Richmond, with the continuing construction of Chinese and Asian malls, providing ample retail and office spaces for ethnic business development.

4. Researching Suppliers of Products and Equipment

Another important procedure in starting a business was to research for equipment and products. New immigrants depended extensively on transnational connections initially when they set up their businesses due to a lack of understanding and trust on the local economy and the unavailability of ethnic-specific products or services locally. For those who had business experience prior to immigration or who had established Hong Kong connections, their start-up process would have been easier. Some women had made pre-arrangements with dealers and suppliers:

> "Since I planned to continue my Hong Kong business here, I had made arrangements with the distributor. We ordered merchandize from the company where I used to be a partner before immigration. So I didn't really have to worry about this." (Andrea)
>
> "My second oldest sister is the partner of this [woman's fashion] retail business. She worked in the fashion business in Hong Kong and was responsible for supplying merchandize to our store here." (Gabriella)
>
> "My boss [in Hong Kong] was the sole distributor of skin care products and had an office in Toronto. He supported me and agreed to supply merchandize to me." (Adrienne)

Others, without such pre-arrangements, would have to look for available sources, usually through Hong Kong connections. Sharon, for example, worried that the kinds of curry powder were not available for sale in Canada, took the trouble to order bulk quantities of curry powder when she was in Hong Kong taking cooking lessons. Rosemary also chose to go back to Hong Kong to buy equipment and merchandize for her beauty salon:

> "I went back to Hong Kong to prepare for my business. It was because in those days Canada did not have the equipment I needed for my business. At that time there were not that many wholesale outlets here. Things only improved in the past two years when people realized the demand of the Chinese market here. I am not saying that Canada did not carry such equipment. But there were more types to choose from in Hong Kong. I also wanted to import products not available in Canada in order to be more competitive. One line of skin care products, for example, had to be ordered from Hong Kong initially. It was only available for sale from the Canadian wholesalers recently." (Rosemary)

Clara and her husband purchased all the equipment and furniture for their hair salon from Hong Kong because those available here were not up to their standard:

> "We bought all the furniture, mirrors and other equipment from Hong Kong. We had no intention of buying these things here because we noticed that the things used here were outdated and not modern enough. The interior decoration of hair salons here was so traditional and old-fashioned. You see, if you planned to attract wealthy Hong Kong customers, your salon had to be up-scale and high-class in design." (Clara)

Martha, however, bought all the equipment for her restaurant from Hong Kong for a different reason: a lack of trust when dealing with *gwái-lóu*.

> "I bought all the equipment from Hong Kong. I knew a friend who owned a restaurant in Hong Kong. So he referred me to a company where I could order all the equipment. I also shopped around here. But the prices of the products sold by the *gwái-lóu* companies were very high, probably because they were taking advantage of me for my lack of experience.

> So I finally decided to order from the Hong Kong company. Well, at least I felt more confident doing business with them." (Martha)

Because of their relative unfamiliarity with local markets, those who were new, inexperienced and looking for sources locally, had to go through a tedious process of locating the right products and supplies. Mary, for example, talked about the necessity of asking around for information:

> "We learned as we went along. We had to ask around and look around in order to get the information we needed. We could not afford to miss a chance to ask for information. For example, which wholesale company would provide more quality meat at a cheaper price? One day, when we were eating out at this restaurant, we met a friend who was working as a chef there. We grabbed the chance and asked him for advice. He was so nice that he even invited us to take a look at the kitchen and told us where to look for quality meat. He said he didn't mind releasing this information to us because he was just an employee there." (Mary)

Sharon faced a different problem when she went to look for equipment for her food business:

> "In the course of starting the business, things were really miserable. In Hong Kong, when you decided to start a business, people would automatically approach you for various kinds of service. But here? Nothing! Nothing! ... What about kitchen equipment? Where should I go to buy these things? Nobody approached us! Fortunately, we know English. So we opened the *Yellow Pages*, and looked for kitchen equipment. Then like two crazy people, my husband and I drove around and looked for these places only to find out they sold only home-used items. None of these places served food businesses. And no one was there to give us information. Finally a saleslady from a store told us to try Z. She gave us a name. But we did not know how to find the place. We were so new then... Finally we were able to find this place... Only then we knew the items we were looking for were called 'food equipment' here, not 'kitchen equipment'. No wonder we were unable to locate any of the stores. See, even if you know English, you may still encounter these problems! ... Finally,

> when we started to decorate the unit, all these people then showed up: 'Do you want to purchase this or that equipment?'... Crazy!" (Sharon)

Edna too went through the *Yellow Pages* to look for supplies for her coffee shop from the mainstream market. The process was similarly frustrating:

> "We shopped around for suppliers. But some of them were very arrogant. They were very rude to us. Some were even unwilling to talk to us." (Edna)

While it was difficult to determine if this was due to racism, Edna attributed this to the small scale of her business.

> "These people did not want to do business with us probably because of the small scale of our business: we could not order large quantities from them." (Edna)

Such discriminatory experiences towards new and small business starters were also experienced by other women such as Adrienne.

> "Usually people here are very concerned about small businesses. When I signed a copier rental agreement, these people asked for a personal guarantee. They were skeptical about new immigrants because we had not established any credit yet. My niece told me that it was due to bad experiences in dealing with new immigrants who started their businesses to meet the immigration requirement. When the immigration condition was removed, they would close down the businesses. So the suppliers had to protect their own interests. What if you just disappeared with their copiers?" (Adrienne)

The process of looking for supplies and merchandize could be so frustrating that it added anxiety to women like Yolanda. Inexperienced in the clothing business she went through a tough time worrying that there would be no merchandize for the opening of her boutique:

> "I was worried about how to get merchandize. People told me that there were many wholesale outlets in Downtown

> Vancouver. There you could find the entire building of fashion outlets. So I went to explore. I went from one outlet to another, went in to browse and ask for information. But the whole process of ordering was so frustrating and troublesome. I realized that every year they set deadlines for seasonal orderings. It was very difficult to order stuff in between the deadlines. I was so scared that I was unable to open the store on time. It would be so embarrassing if the store was opened with so little merchandize. I began to regret falling into this trap..." (Yolanda)

5. Applying for Licenses and Permits

The establishment of a business involves dealing with government departments for various kinds of licensing. As new immigrants who may also be novice in business start-up, these women faced additional difficulties because of the unfamiliarity with the procedures.

> "Things were really complicated here. It seems that starting a business in Hong Kong was so much easier and simple." (Mrs. Tao)

As a result, many of them sought professional help to counter unforeseeable difficulties. Co-ethnic professionals such as lawyers and accountants serve as the 'middlepersons', bridging between them and the mainstream institutions. Hence, hiring these professionals helped to ease the process for these novices:

> "I had no experience in starting a business. But I was not worried at all because I could always consult my lawyer. My lawyer would teach me what to do." (Yolanda)

> "My accountant helped me to set up. He did everything for me. So there's not much that required me to be involved." (Judith)

Many sought help from these professionals because "it is easier to communicate in Chinese; they can understand better what our needs are." Coincidentally, many of these professionals were men. "We had no intention to look for men; it was just out of

coincidence." This may reflect the over-representation of men in the Chinese professional market.

Even with the help of these professionals, some women, regardless of whether they had pre-migratory business experiences or not, still encountered frustration in the process. Sharon and Mrs. Tao, among others, complained about the lack of information regarding legal matters:

> "Nobody showed us the way to do things here. We had to grope in different directions to find answers. Nobody told you anything, such as what kind of permits and licenses were needed to start a food business, and which government departments to contact for the application of these permits and licenses. It was really difficult." (Sharon)

> "We had no idea about the procedure involved in starting up a business here. So we learned as we went along. We had to ask around for advice, people like our friends, our accountant and our lawyer... All the way, as we went from one stage to another, I was so scared and nervous. I was afraid that I would have mistakenly done something illegal. I was so afraid that I would be charged for doing something wrong without myself being aware of it. I did not know the laws here. Everything was so different from that in Hong Kong. There, I knew exactly the right procedure..." (Mrs. Tao)

Joan talked about how she was frustrated by the formality she had to go through:

> "Here in Canada the process of starting a business is very complicated. You cannot do everything at the same time. You have to follow a sequence. For example, you can't apply for one permit without first obtaining the permit from another. The whole procedure was so slow. You could not just walk in and ask for information. You had to make appointments. When the inspector promised to come, he would not tell you the exact time. You had to put everything aside and sit there to wait for him." (Joan)

Edna, on the other hand, complained about inefficiency:

> "I phoned City Hall and asked them if the zoning of the building allowed the operation of a coffee shop. They said

> yes. So I sent my lawyer to negotiate a lease for us. When we were half way through, I suddenly became skeptical of their verbal consent. So I phoned them up again and asked for a written document. This time, they said it was not allowed! I was appalled by their answer! I was jumping up and down! I had already spent a few thousand dollars on legal fees. So I stopped everything. Then I asked them to send me an official document stating that it's not allowed. But a few days later, they faxed me a letter saying that it was okay!" (Edna)

6. Decorating the Business Premise

The impact of the co-ethnic network is strong especially when dealing with the interior decoration of premises for businesses. In every single case, an interior decorator was hired through some kind of ethnic connection. An interior decorator or contractor was usually sought through families and friends in the form of referrals.

> "In regards to interior decoration, my husband also helped me out. I used the company he used to set up his office... Because he has gone through the entire process himself, from working for others to set up his own office, and from a one-man office to an office of more than ten staff, and has helped many of his clients to set up their businesses, he's very experienced. So I did not have to know a lot myself... And because my husband helped me out all the way, everything went very smoothly. It would have been difficult if a woman had to do everything on her own..." (Candice)

If information from friends and families was unavailable, ethnic media such as newspapers became an important source of help.

> "... We had to look for interior designers to decorate the retail space. No one among our friends knew anybody in this area. So they helped me to look them up through the ads placed in Chinese newspapers...." (Mrs. Tao)

> "I looked for the contractor through [Chinese] newspapers. I phoned them up and asked them for quotes. Then I decided on the best and the cheapest one." (Sheila)

> "I went through the [Chinese] newspapers to look for contractors. Everything turned out pretty smoothly." (Gabriella)

While most interior decorating work was done by co-ethnics, a few women looked for *western* interior designers and contractors. These women were either pre-1986 immigrants or had worked in the mainstream market before. But even in these cases, the contacts were through co-ethnic sources.

This section illustrated the difficulties most women faced while establishing their businesses. They had to struggle against all kinds of barriers imposed on them as new immigrants and/or new businesswomen. One important element that needed to be addressed here is that most of those who came prior to 1986 or who had related Canadian business experience were less likely to report problems. The following testimonies illustrate this:

> "We did not have much money to start up. So we could not rent anything decent. All our friends came to help out. We did the painting together. We bought all our furniture second hand. A friend of ours was an interior decorator and designer, and she helped out... there weren't a lot of difficulties..." (Gladys)

> "As for the process of starting up, we had no problems because we had been in business before, even though this was of a different kind. Everything was pretty easy except for interior decoration. It took a while to get the plan approved. You know how slow people do things here." (Alison)

Invisibility of Institutional Support

The analysis of the process of business-start-up points to the fact that overall Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs did not look for formal support from community organizations or other institutions such as the banks or government departments. This pattern is interesting because it contradicts the literature on ethnic

voluntary associations regarding their role in assisting Chinese immigrant settlement and businesses.

Voluntary associations in the form of "*huiguan*", fraternity organizations, other special-interest organizations and umbrella organizations have performed functions to help Chinese people in business among many other settlement and political matters (Wickberg, 1994). While these benevolent associations continue to maintain Chinatown politics and economy, with the incoming of recent immigrants who are diverse in cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, new forms of modern voluntary associations such as protestant churches, school alumni associations, service clubs and community service organizations were developed, and prospered (Wickberg, 1994). As much as the significance of these associations was documented in terms of building status, reputation and trust to members and officers in enhancing business connections, it seems that such advantages had not been recognized by Chinese women in business, at least those in my research. With respect to seeking help in establishing businesses, only one woman mentioned the dependence on co-ethnic voluntary association, in which case the connection was with a protestant church. The rest of the women relied on informal individual sources such as families, friends and/or business acquaintances. This general invisibility of institutional help may be explained by a combination of reasons. First, the male dominance of traditional associations due to the origin of Chinese community as a "bachelor society" continued and sustained over the years to exclude women. Second, voluntary associations relate women to families rather than businesses, and hence have not reached out to businesswomen. Third, business associations extend membership only to those already in business, therefore, excluding those who are in the process of starting

a business. Fourth, membership to business associations is restricted to professional businesses and large businesses that are also dominated by men. Fifth, women prefer informal networks to formal institutional connections. Sixth, the strong bonding with families and friends deems formal networking unnecessary.

These above assumptions were confirmed by my interviews with a number of leaders of Chinese voluntary associations and the women entrepreneurs in my research. Pandora, the secretary of a Chinese service club, told me that only three women actively participated in that club: only one was in small business, and the others were a banker and a lawyer. Kenny, an executive program director of a Chinese community association told me that the women's groups organized there were mainly for housewives and mothers. The women in my sample also responded negatively to joining and participating in clubs, voluntary organizations and business associations due to their position as women and small business owners[4].

The invisibility of government help was also noted in the process of business start-up. Generally, the Canadian government was blamed for putting these entrepreneur immigrants at risk by forcing them to start a business within a time limit without providing them with information and help about the economy (Wong & Ng, 1998). Paula, who headed the small business development and training office of a Chinese community organization, confirmed this. She talked about how recently this office was set up, and that the training program they organized was the only one available in B.C. for immigrants. Long before the start up of this program, their organization had received numerous telephone inquiries from Chinese immigrants on matters related to small businesses. But they were unable to offer adequate help because of a lack of expertise

without government funding. It was not until 1994 that the government decided to fund small business training for new immigrants.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the multiple experiences of Chinese immigrant women while starting their businesses. While some of them, especially those who had lived in Canada longer and had prior related local work and business experiences had started their businesses relatively smoothly without problems, the majority of them encountered barriers and obstacles one way or the other in the course of start-up. As ethnic minority women immigrants who were either new to the country or new to business, they had to make use of a combination of class, ethnic and gender resources effectively to combat these barriers. Among all the resources, strong support from informal co-ethnic networks, both locally and transnationally, was particularly striking.

Overall, these women were more privileged than earlier immigrants in that they either possessed sufficient capital or they had family members, usually husbands and fathers who were ready to offer financial help. Thus, many of them did not have to go through the frustrating banking process of obtaining loans.

Whether experienced or not, these women depended primarily on information provided informally by co-ethnic families and friends, and professionals, for example, when looking for business premises, in decoration or renovation projects, in getting licenses and permits, etc. They had a tendency not to seek institutional advice or help. The only formal support they looked for was the ethnic media when primary sources were unavailable. Informal ethnic solidarity was so pronounced that in some cases even potential competitors were willing to offer advice and support. For recent immigrants in

[4] Details will be discussed in the next chapter.

particular, many of these co-ethnic connections were transnational, that is, from Hong Kong or elsewhere. They traveled across national borders for training or obtaining products and supplies to upkeep the Hong Kong style of their businesses. This situation was less prevalent among those who lived in Canada for a longer period of time, that is, those who immigrated prior to 1986, and who had become familiar with the local economy. The dependence on co-ethnic networks was also less pronounced among those who had good English communication skills and who had local business or work experience.

Being women had an added advantage in that family members, mostly husbands and fathers, were willing to offer support. Yet, they also found themselves working harder or taking up chores that were not desired by their male business partners. Some of them had to accommodate their business decisions around their roles as mothers and wives. Traditional gender culture and the importance of family had an important impact on both success and barriers when establishing businesses.

In the process of business start-up, these women actively participated in the racialization, gendering and class-ification of the market. Many decisions made, for example, on the type of business, geographical locality, and target market were based on the constructed class, race, ethnic and gender boundaries. For example, the 'White' market was assumed to be less profitable and therefore not desirable; recent Chinese immigrants were generalized to be wealthy and having high consumption power relative to the 'Whites' and the 'old' Chinese immigrants; Chinese immigrants were generalized to have unique tastes and interests relative to the 'Whites'; recent Chinese women immigrants were assumed to be conspicuous spenders; Richmond was perceived as a

middle-class predominantly Chinese neighbourhood even though its land value and rent were comparatively cheaper than other areas in Vancouver specifically Chinatown. All in all, this chapter demonstrated that major decisions relating to business set-up were not necessarily business oriented but embedded in the social aspects of race, ethnicity, gender and class.

Chapter Seven

Doing Business - The Benefits and Limits of Class and Gender

After examining how Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs are diverse in their business start-up experiences, in this chapter I will explore the social relations in which they involved with respect to class and gender in running their businesses. Class refers to the economic positions these women found themselves relative to others. Whether the position of entrepreneurs connotes uniform class privileges in terms of power and wealth is subject to question. In reality, the Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women experienced contradictory relations not only in economic terms alone, but also when class was experienced in gender and race/ethnic relations. Likewise, the gender positioning of these women when doing business implies complex intersections of privileges and disadvantages, especially when such relations are analyzed in terms of race/ethnicity and class.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. First, I will examine the benefits and limits of these women's class positioning and relations. The multidimensionality and multiplicity of class in terms of personal economic gain, labour, and power relations embedded in different forms of business relations will be explored. The second section focuses on gender relations. I will discuss how gendered division of labour and business relations are produced and reproduced by these women, and how their roles as wives and mothers interfere and intersect in complex ways with their role as businesswomen. More specifically, I will demonstrate how their traditional upbringing as Chinese women has

both barred them from realizing their privileged class potential and assisted them in running their businesses.

The Benefits and Limits of Class

While it was noted that the ethnic economy of the Chinese in British Columbia is no longer confined to small businesses or the periphery sector of the open market but is increasingly making its way into the large capitalist sector of the mainstream economy (Li, 1993; Li, 1998), such a situation was not found among the women entrepreneurs in my study. It seems that large capitalist enterprises are still predominantly an upper-class male-driven project. As noted in an early chapter, becoming a wealthy capitalist was rarely the motivation of these women when starting their businesses. Rather, many of them would like to make use of their personal savings, connections and expertise in order to make a reasonable living after immigration. While a few had made use of entrepreneurship to aim for upward mobility, many others looked for sustaining pre-migration status or securing employment for themselves and their family. Thus, status maintenance was taken as a priority over power and profit generated by class. Besides, since many of them had occupied middle-class professional, managerial or lower white-collar positions before immigration, or had worked in low-tier service sectors after immigration, their class resources such as capital and experiences accumulated were too limited for them to strike it big. Hence, similar to the average petty bourgeoisie, these women were looking for a taste of the "most immediate, personal, and direct experience of capitalism" through which "a reasonable living, the chance to be your own boss, and the prospect of a little social mobility" (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1985:204) could be achieved. Bearing this in mind, the class advantages they possessed should not be

overstated. Rather, these limited class resources allowed them to pursue only small businesses that are labour intensive, and in doing so, they became petty bourgeoisie, many of whom exploiting their own labour. Likewise, they were less likely to behave like bosses even though they may enjoy the status entrepreneurship brought.

As indicated previously, due to the lack of large capital and extensive localized entrepreneurial experiences, most businesses were small in size. Even for the few who expanded their businesses, proliferation was in general horizontal extending into different locations. These women made low earnings, sometimes even lower than their employees, or no earnings at all. Their work was therefore semi-proletariat in nature and their class position marginally bourgeois: while enjoying the benefits of being one's own boss and some form of labour control, they also laboured intensively like other workers. They provided employment for workers who were generally not skilled and did not require a high level of education. The pay they offered was modest, and employment was temporary and flexible. Most workers they recruited were co-ethnic immigrant women who were content just to be employed. In sum, both entrepreneurs and workers in this study shared their marginality in the ethnic economy.

A. Power Structures and Class Relations

The small scale of the businesses prescribes a simple business structure. For those who did not hire help, their businesses were operated on a one-level structure: the owner is also the worker. Otherwise, in almost all remaining cases, the power structure was dichotomized into a simple hierarchy of employer-manager and workers, including those that had proliferated into different locations or industries. Only three women in this study hired managers to run the businesses for them primarily in branch offices to

achieve efficiency. But even in these three businesses, the managers did not take over entirely the responsibilities of people management. Their role was more involved in task management overseeing the daily activities of the store or branch. To examine class relations more comprehensively, in the following I will address the issue of part-time help separately from the general aspect of employee control.

1. Managing Part-time Help

A common pattern shared among these women employers was the use of part-time help. As many as thirty (62.5 percent) of those who had employees working for them took advantage of the low pay and flexibility of part-timers in order to save costs. Many of these employers used part-time help who worked an alternate schedule to release them from work. With work responsibilities scheduled in this way, there is an absence of strict employer-employee division of labour:

> "I have two part-time girls working for me. I work Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. They work the other days. There is no clear division of labour between my staff and I. We basically do the same kind of work: keeping the store and selling.... They are there to release me. Occasionally, I would show up if I had work to do... Otherwise, they are basically left alone..." (Gabriella)

> "The reason to hire a part-time worker is to be able to take time off myself... We rarely work together... When she's here, I take off." (Judith)

Others used part-timers to cut corners in responding to stringent state policies:

> "We hired three part-timers each working different hours for us. Even though this could indicate we needed at least one full-time helper, we did not want to hire full-time workers. You see, the government policy [labour laws] here is very troublesome. If you hire full-time help, you have to contribute half of the UI, and you have to pay them OT if they work more than 40 hours a week. You also have to give them vacation pay, and all other benefits. There would be too much

> additional expense. So if we hired part-time workers, we could save a lot of money..." (Joan)

Those who hired only part-time help as a replacement exercised minimal control and supervision over the workers. They claimed the relations with their employees to be more egalitarian than hierarchical[1]. As one woman remarked:

> "I never see myself as the boss. We are more like equals. After all I do not pay them much. We do not have a fixed work schedule for each of us. But we discuss and try to accommodate each other's time. We will come up with a schedule that satisfies both of us. If they are busy, I would work their hours, or vice versa. For example, last week my baby was sick so I could not come to work. They ended up working more hours..." (Gabriella)

The low wages they offered to these workers further minimized their authority:

> "I pay my staff minimum wage... I think it would be a little lower as compared to people who work in the *gwái-lóu* market... So I have to be very easy on them. I don't mind if they come in a little late or leave a little early to attend to their personal matters..." (Sarah)

> "I pay my staff minimum wage. So I can not have much expectation of them. Besides, the work here is pretty simple. You just have to register the rentals..." (Monica)

> "There is a student who works part-time for me. Her sole responsibility is to watch the store and sell. I allow her to study and do her homework when the store is not busy... After all, I don't pay her much, just minimum wage." (Becky)

However, despite the widely claimed liberal sentiments and practices, worker exploitation could still happen, the sheer fact being that as employers, they had power to manipulate the flexibility and vulnerability of part-time help to their advantages. Some, for example, made use of part-time women to work on weekends or Sundays so that they

[1] Caution should be given to the testimonies given by these women owners, who provided only their own perspective in their analysis of class relations. These perspectives do not represent the views of the workers and therefore could very well be biased.

could have time with their families. Others saw part-time help as the reserve army of labour, calling on them when needed:

> "The good thing about hiring part-time workers is that I would call them only if I needed them...If these people have to depend on the pay I gave them for survival, too bad I could not provide them with fixed hours." (Leanne)
>
> "I liked to hire students to work part-time for me because they don't want a lot of hours. It's good for them that they can earn some pocket money while going to school. It's good for me that I don't have to contribute to UIC and they are here only during busy hours." (Martha)
>
> "We don't have a regular schedule for our part-time staff. In case my cousin [partner] has to go out of town, then we will call someone to help out." (Bonnie)
>
> "I hire a part-time woman to help me with administrative work. She usually comes in on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. But she does not work fixed hours. Her hours depend on the workload." (Vera)

2. Employee Control

Formal management theories do not apply to small businesses as one woman who hired two full-time and one part-time employees sarcastically put:

> "[When I was in university], in Business Management courses, we learned about how bosses should delegate work to workers. But when you run a small business, how can you delegate? We are all janitors; We are all advertising managers; We are the salesmen; We are clerks ... We are everything! The things you learn from university can only be applied when you work in an organization... It's useless in small businesses." (Ophelia)

Ophelia's comments may be a little overstated. As employers, many of them did exercise some form of control over their staff, albeit in an unstructured and informal manner. The relationships between small business employers and their employees were

likely to be paternalistic[2] (see for example, Wong, 1998; Yoon, 1997), which can be translated as 'maternalistic'[3] in the case of women employers. With maternalism, relationships tend to be asymmetrical emphasizing on familialism, empathetic and caring values, affective and personalized relations (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997). This type of employer-employee relations applies to the women in this study regardless of the race and gender of the employees. Many women employers boosted about being considerate, empathetic and caring, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

> "Women usually are more patient and more caring when handling work relationships. Women are more flexible and therefore we make better bosses. I usually talk to my people very gently and nicely. And I am very fair to them. I believe that if your are fair to them, they will be fair to you." (Faye, employer of Caucasian and Chinese male employees)

> "Our employees liked me more than the other [male] partner probably because they felt that I was more understanding than him. For example, whenever I went to buy take-out food I would ask my staff if they wanted any. But my partner always bought food just for himself and he would eat in front of the others. To the employees, this is a very selfish gesture. I think they liked me more because I was more considerate. I think women are more considerate and less selfish than men." (Joyce, employer of male and female Chinese workers)

However, many others claimed their relationships to be more egalitarian than asymmetrical, and more friendship-oriented than familial. Some attributed this to their past experiences as women workers themselves, and such a rationale applies also regardless of the race and gender of the employees:

> "Because I had been a worker before, I understood very well the perspectives of employees. So I would not impose an

[2] According to Wong (1998), Chinese small employers still expect their employees to commit and be responsible as if they are part of the family, and they relate themselves as heads of the family to their employees.

[3] The concept of maternalism is adopted from Bakan and Stasiulis (1997) in their discussion of the power relations between women employers and domestic workers.

> overpowering attitude on them. I wanted to treat my staff as equals... I would ask for their suggestions and we would solve the problems together." (Michelle, employer of male and female Chinese workers)
>
> "My staff works shorter hours as compared to other [Chinese-owned] travel agencies: from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. If there is a need for overtime, I will do it. They only work weekdays. If there is work that needs to be done during weekends, say, Saturdays, I will come to the office to do it. I don't want my staff to work OT. I had been a worker almost all my life before I started this business. I know how employees feel about overwork...." (Candice, employer of Caucasian and Chinese female staff)
>
> "I treat all my staff as friends. I am the kind of person who likes to treat everyone as equals... I still remember how badly I was treated by my managers when I was an employee before. So I am very fair to my staff... " (Leanne, employer of a multi-ethnic male and female workforce)

Others claimed that they were unable or reluctant to exercise authority and control over their workers because of informal co-ethnic connections in recruitment:

> "The problem with hiring a friend is that you cannot play the role of a boss. You cannot order her to work or scold her for not performing. I have to speak to her in a tactful manner, explain things to her in a nice way. If she still did not get it, I would just do the chore myself." (Becky)
>
> "Because our employees were referred to us through friends, we could not play the role of a boss. So a lot of times, instead of asking them to do chores, we had do it ourselves. We treated them like our friends, so we always went out together after work, to *karaoke* or play *mahjong*. The drawback was that I felt reluctant to order them to do things. For example, they never bothered to pick up the garbage, so I would do it myself. They also did not dust the shelves. So again, I would do it." (Fong Yin-yin)
>
> "I am very close with my employees because they are my relatives. But the bad thing is that it was very difficult to maintain an employer-employee relation. When they had to leave early because of family matters, they would just do so

> without asking me for permission. They took advantage of our personal relationships." (Tania)

Still others exhibited liberal attitudes towards employees based on the perception of reverse dependency. As small business owners and some of whom without prior related business experiences, they felt that they had to depend on their workers for success:

> "We always chat and have fun while working. Otherwise there would be too much pressure at work. In this [manufacturing] industry, the big manufacturer depends on us, and we depend on our workers. So there is no use to exploit them. I would rather pay myself less and pay them more as long as they are able to meet deadlines." (Mrs. Ting)

> "It is no longer true that the boss has advantages over the employees. I am the one who does all the extra work in the salon such as cleaning the toilet bowls, dumping the garbage... You have to treat them like friends, like equals... It's difficult to keep good employees. There are so many beauty salons out there. The good ones would leave if you don't treat them well." (Audrey)

> "They [the kitchen workers] helped us out and taught us how to manage things... They taught us how to make Hong Kong style coffee... I am especially impressed with a woman dishwasher. She's very experienced in the restaurant business and always offered valuable suggestions. Another male chef what has been in this industry for over thirty years knew that we were inexperienced. He could not stand the way we run the business, and told us how to improve our menu and how to organize things more efficiently. In a way, we depended a lot on their advice. We had to be humble and listen to them." (Jean)

But of course, not all women are maternalistic or egalitarian in their approaches. There were always those who felt that impersonal relationships were the key to efficiency.

> "In order to be successful in this business, you cannot get too close to your staff. You have to play the role of a boss. You see, people who cook in the kitchen are very bad-tempered. They can get cranky very easily. In order to provide a better

> environment for them, [following the Buddhist principles and matching the religious principle of vegetarianism], we forbid them to say foul words. We forbid them to bring meat to the kitchen and eat meat here. They are not allowed to smoke or drink at work. So those who could not stand such tough rules would quit... Those who like our policies would stay. So now we have a very nice group of employees. These are the people who like to work here because of the good working conditions: clean, tidy and well-disciplined ..." (Cheng Ming-ying)

It seems that women employers were less likely to claim that they exercised control or established exploitative relations with their workers. Some women could not exercise direct supervisory control over their part-time employees when they worked alternate schedules. Many others found themselves vulnerable to control and manage as a result of co-ethnic friendship and kin relationships. In some cases, their previous experiences as disadvantaged women workers also contributed to their desire to seek more equitable relations with their staff. In general, they were reluctant to identify with the power they possessed as employers.

Despite the general liberal sentiments claimed by these women employers towards their workers, it was noted that worker exploitation was to some extent inevitable. The disadvantages of small businesses in the ethnic economy accounted for much of the exploitation. For example, if it were not for the official policy on minimum wage, these workers may have been paid even lower wages due to the high competitiveness of ethnic businesses. Sometimes workers had to work long hours under unfavourable conditions as a result of established hardworking ethics within the Chinese community. Some industries, for instance, are more competitive than others and therefore demand more work from their workers, as the following excerpts illustrate.

> "If they could be efficient and work fast enough, usually they would not have to go overtime. So it's important that they knew how to manage their work. In [the travel] industry, it's always busy during office hours. Sometimes they had to stay overtime when the customers came in before closing. They did not get overtime pay. But I would give them an annual bonus, or I let them take extra days off to compensate for it." (Gloria)

> "The turn over rate [in the restaurant business] is very high, especially for those who work as assistants in the kitchen. We paid them minimum wage. Just recently, the minimum wage increased from $6.30 to $7. So we had to increase their pay. This is really bad because we cannot adjust the prices of the food accordingly... And they have to work long hours. In *gwai-lou* restaurants, workers only have to work five days a week. But in Chinese restaurants, you have to work more days. This is just common practice in the restaurant businesses in the Chinese community." (Mary)

B. Exploiting One's Own Labour and Time

Whether women entrepreneurs hire help or not, the nature of small business requires intensive participation on their part, both in terms of labour and time commitment. Since small businesses are highly competitive, and even more so within the ethnic economy where profit margins are low when compared with large capitalist enterprises or businesses in the mainstream sector, taking advantage of one's own labour and time becomes the norm for all women entrepreneurs. The women in this study would class-ify themselves more as labourers than owner-operators, sometimes working even harder than their respective workers.

Usually, upon setting up a new business without much experience, these women would be afraid to hire help in order to lower the cost. With fluctuating clientele and unstable revenue, they would use conventional strategies such as self-exploitation to keep the business going. As one woman recalled:

> "At first, it was really hectic, and it was really hard. I worked seven days a week and over twelve hours a day. I had never worked like this before. I was the cook and my husband washed the dishes and cleaned the kitchen, not to mention we both had to serve at the counter at the same time. We were new to the country so we did not know that it's common practice to hire part-time help here. Even if we wanted, we did not know how to make up a work schedule for them... And every night when I went home I still had to do the accounts. Then after a while, I just could not hang in any more. Then we hired someone to do the accounts for us... For the first year, we just worked, worked and worked. We did not realize that we should hire help until we saw customers lining up and we were unable to handle them... During the first year, we did not have even one day off... " (Sharon)

Besides, labour intensive work, a common feature of small businesses especially in the service and manufacturing industries, usually requires the owners to expend their own labour, and sometimes even more so than their workers:

> "I do all miscellaneous jobs in the factory. I make tea every morning, I dust the floor and do all the clean up work. I wash the toilet bowls too. I am also the back-up person in case someone calls in sick. I am also a pattern maker... I am also responsible for quality checks... Sometimes when we have to meet deadlines, we have to work up to 12 hours a day... Since I started this business, I lost 20 pounds... If I worked for others at least I got my weekends off. But now, even during weekends I have to work. In order to save [labour] cost, I am the only one doing all the OT work during the weekends." (Mrs. Ting)

> "I work seven days a week, twelve hours a day, with no breaks. My major work is to make tour arrangements: getting tour guides and tour buses. I also look into matters related to sales and advertising. I also answer phone inquiries. Everyday there are so many phone inquiries. People would phone for information at any time of the day. I remember when I first started, I advertised on the Chinese Radio that I provided phone information service 24 hours a day. In fact, I did get phone calls in the middle of the night. After a few years, I could not deal with it any more. So now I switch my phone off when I go to bed, and switch it on again when I wake up. I cannot delegate someone to do this job for me

> because no one else is as knowledgeable as I am... Chinese customers have the habit of planning trips or going on a flight at the last minute. So my job is very hectic because nothing can be finalized until that last minute... I noticed that whenever I went for a trip and left things to my employees, business would go down. So despite the hardships, I prefer not to take a break unless it is really necessary." (Ada)

> "I worked seven days a week. I would start with breakfast and work until lunch was over. Then I would go home around three in the afternoon... and return around six and work until 10:30 or 11 in the evening. But it was really difficult. When there were a lot of customers, my one-day workload would resemble that of a normal three-day load. But if there were not enough customers, I would stand there the whole day worrying. Then I said to myself, 'if I keep on like this, I will end up going crazy'. Finally, I decided to take one day off... so that I would have some time to breathe..." (Martha)

Such intensity may extend even to professional services:

> "The firm opens five days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. But I usually stay behind until 6 p.m. after the staff is gone. Even though the firm is closed on weekends, I usually go back on Saturdays to work. If it were tax season, I would even go back to work on Sundays. The most difficult part of my work is the shortage of time." (Ursula)

While hard work is common among labour intensive small businesses, on the other side of the continuum, the demand would be on 'time' rather than on labour. This is more prevalent among retail businesses notably those located in Chinese malls, which are opened between 8 to 10 hours a day, seven days a week and non-stop for 365 days a year. The women who ran these businesses agonized over the idleness of long hours. As one woman lamented:

> "The most difficult part of my work is when I have nothing to do. It's really boring. Usually there are three to four hours in a day that not one single shopper would come in. And when all my daily chores are done, I have nothing else to do but sit there. I would stay there all by myself with nothing to do, nobody to talk to and no customer to serve." (Becky)

Whether it is a matter of physical labour or long hours, the demand of attention and dedication in terms of the emotional attachment to the businesses was enormous, as two of the women put it:

> "When you are your own boss, you can never put your work down, even when you are at home and supposedly you are relaxing. Mentally, your business occupies your mind, always." (Ophelia)
>
> "You carry your business to your office, to your home, wherever you go. It has become an inseparable part of your life." (Vera)

Even though these women usually accepted the idea that the businesses had become part of their lives, many still complained about hard work and long hours their businesses brought along. Single women generally whined about not finding time for personal life while married women with children complained about not having enough time with their children and sometimes for themselves as well, as the stories of these women demonstrate:

> "I had to sacrifice my personal life. I did not have time for my friends. I was so involved in my business that I lost touch with the outside world..." (Bonnie, single)
>
> "I lost my personal life. I am still young and sometimes I just wonder if I should waste my precious youth here. I really envy my friends. They can go places, and have fun during weekends while I have to work." (Becky, single)
>
> "I neglected my children [because of this business]. I was unable to raise them like a good mother should. At one point in time, my daughter was very unhappy... She was rebellious and upset me a lot. I was unable to supervise her daily activities... " (Beatrice, a mother and wife)
>
> "I spent too much time in the restaurant and lost my family life. My children, even though they learned to become

> independent, missed me a lot at home. They did not have a family life any more..." (Joyce, a mother and wife)
>
> "I have lost the time to be with my children. If I were not in business, I would also have time to take some courses, to enrich myself and to broaden my horizon." (Judith, a mother and wife)

Apparently, very few women saw the benefits of class as owners but instead identified more with the problems small businesses brought, relating themselves more as workers exploiting their own labour and time.

C. Economic Benefits

Despite the sacrifices these women made and the time and labour they committed to their businesses, the financial rewards were not necessarily satisfactory. Only a few women mentioned how their financial situations had improved since establishing their own businesses:

> "I am making a lot more money than I was when I was working for others." (Julie)
>
> "I was able to make a lot of money over these years. I was able to purchase a house and enjoy life... I would never have achieved all this if I had continued to work for others." (Bonnie)

Comparatively speaking, however, more women expressed concerns over unsatisfactory monetary return:

> "I was making a lot of money before [before immigration]... Now I am struggling to make ends meet... too much pressure and too many worries." (Sharon)
>
> "I have lost a lot of my precious time and effort. But the return is not comparable at all." (Mrs. Tao)
>
> "It's very difficult to make a profit when running a business here. I would be happy if I could balance the budget." (Michelle)

Sheila's experience was particularly astounding, even though it might represent an extreme scenerio:

> "It is really difficult to run a wholesale business here. The big companies have buyers to make purchases directly from Hong Kong. So I can only target the small retailers. But these small retailers usually order small quantities, sometimes even as small as one or two items. I remember once I brought 45 handbags to show to the retailers in X Mall [in Burnaby]. After a round of visits, I only sold 2 bags. And the profit was $10. Then I felt so tired and hungry that I wanted to rest and find something to eat. I went to the food court there and after looking at the menu, I decided to go home and make myself instant noodles. I did not want to spend the money I made on the food right away otherwise I would have made the trip for nothing!" (Sheila)

Financial uncertainty is yet another concern, even among those whose businesses were profitable. Business instability makes entrepreneurship an adventurous endeavour, which is particularly evident for the small businesses serving the Chinese market. Many felt vulnerable to unexpected and uncontrollable structural changes, as these women put it:

> "In my kind of business [retail], there is no guarantee that every month the business would be good. I can never predict what business will be like next month. There is a lack of security because business is so unpredictable. Besides, there are a lot of things that are out of my control. For example, my old customers may come in one day and tell me they are going back to Hong Kong. Then you will never see them again. Business is usually slow in the summer months because they go back to Hong Kong for a vacation..." (Alison)

> "You always have to worry about business. It's been so unstable. You never know when the business is good and when it is bad. But now it looks like businesses are going to slow down because of the government's new policy requiring people to report overseas assets. Many people are considering packing up and leaving... going back to Hong Kong. We are worried about the future." (Samantha)

Hence, many of the women in my study confirmed what Clement and Myles (1994) said about the general 'old middle class': "Being one's own boss" represents nothing more than "a shift from the uncertainty of the labour market and paid employment to a different, equally uncertain market place" (56-57). In addition, their stakes were higher as a result of fluctuating migratory patterns.

Due to the unstable and unsatisfactory returns, many women had to strategically minimize expenses and maximize return. Some decided to pay themselves a wage, albeit dismal, so that they could bring in some personally monthly income from 'work':

> "Of course, we [with husband as partner] paid ourselves. But we paid ourselves lower than the average worker here. The revenue from our business does not justify high wages." (Alexis)
>
> "I paid myself on a commission basis. So on the books, I am self-employed. Many of my daily expenses can be claimed to reduce income tax at the end. At the same time, the company does not have to contribute to UIC and pension..." (Meg)

Others saw paying themselves as even more detrimental to company finances, and therefore decided against it:

> "I did not pay myself because the expenses were too high. We were not making money. So we did not have extra cash to pay ourselves." (Edna)
>
> "I did not get paid. Our business is not making money. So why bother?" (Yolanda)

For those whose businesses were making money, they made conscious decisions, in most cases with the help of professional accountants to combat high taxes on both personal income and business profit, and were able to maximize monetary return:

> "Every partner gets paid for tax purposes. But the pay is low. I was paid $800 a month at the beginning. I would have made a lot more money if I worked for others. But since I am a

> partner, I cannot complain. My salary was raised to $1000 after our accountant warned us that our wages were too low; and if we continued this way we would be challenged by Revenue Canada." (Ivy)

> "I paid myself monthly so that I could file income tax, and contribute to RRSP... But I cannot pay myself too high an income or else I would have to pay more income tax. And the business has to contribute more to CPP and things like that." (Alison)

However, no matter what the financial situations are, these women enjoyed the tax relief any employee would not have had, as vividly proclaimed by this woman:

> "The good thing about running your business is the kind of expenses you can claim as self-employed. There are so many avenues for reducing taxes. The ideal situation is for one member of the family to work as an employee with regular income and another to be in business. For example, in my case, I am less pressured with financial uncertainty because we can live on my husband's income; but I can make use of my business to avoid paying some taxes." (Amanda)

Again, the low profit margin of small businesses together with financial uncertainty and instability create hardships for these entrepreneurial women. Consequently, they were less likely to see the advantage class brought to them as business owners.

D. Relationships with Large Suppliers

Bechhofer and Elliott (1981) see petty bourgeoisie "as a dependent stratum, dependent first and foremost on the dominant economic groups and institutions" (187). Clement and Myles (1994), in addition to the widespread notion on the marginality of small businesses that fell under the domination and control of larger corporations, wrote about recent growth of small businesses as "nominally autonomous enterprises", "the *real* petty bourgeois" (Clement and Myles, 1994:54). Bonacich's argument (1988), however, is more in line with Bechhofer and Elliott. She argues that immigrant entrepreneurship

exhibits a form of exploitation by capitalism and world capitalism through which immigrant entrepreneurs and their cheap labour are exploited by large corporations and big businesses for capitalist profits and growth. Not all small businesses in my study were run as dependent enterprises, at least not directly. Many established business connections with other small businesses out of which some acted as intermediaries to large capitalists. Some were autonomous enterprises unrelated to large enterprises at all, such as professional firms. Only a small number had direct connections with large suppliers, and for these businesses, some form of exploitation did take place. But even so, it seems that these women were not conscious of it. The contradiction here is that while these women were unable to identify with class privileges with respect to power, financial rewards and work, they were simultaneously unable to see their class disadvantages in relation with big businesses. Such insensitivity may very well attributed to their lack of ability for critical reflections as a result of their relatively privileged backgrounds as the daughters and wives of middle-class men.

The most obvious dependence on large capitalists is the franchised business. In my study, only Vera's tutorial service exemplifies this type of business. Her experiences demonstrated not only how large capitalists exploit her labour but also how she was ignorant of such exploitation:

> "I have very good relationships with the franchiser. Even though I did not attend monthly meetings, they would inform me of any changes or news... I had established a good name among all the other centres. I always maintained a good number of students and no one phoned the head office to complain about me. Every centre had to write a Diagnostic Achievement test regularly. But because my centre had always maintained the standard, I don't have to write it any more... This year, they phoned me up and asked me if I would be interested in becoming a lead instructor for them. [A lead

> instructor involved traveling and organizing seminars and workshops for the franchisees, and giving speeches and talks.] If I took this offer it would mean extra commitment on my part without getting extra remuneration. This job also involves a bit of traveling. But I took the offer because I felt that they recognized my achievement and performance. Even though I did not have enough time to sleep and rest already, I still thought that I made the right decision because I believed this [tutorial] program was good for children." (Vera)

Mrs. Ting and her husband were subcontractors manufacturing garments from a large manufacturing company. When they first started, they went through hardships in getting orders from large manufacturers. Hence, jobs were intermittent: they had worked for a few months and were idled for a few weeks. Later, it was through some co-ethnic connections that they were introduced to a "big" company. Since then, they received continuous orders and business became stable. Asked about their relationship with this "big" company, Mrs. Ting commented:

> "This big manufacturer really likes us. I don't know why. Probably because they knew that we were dedicated and we [the owners] personally spent a lot of our time on the job. One day they told us to get more machines. They said if we had more machines, they would give us more orders. So we purchased six more machines from Hong Kong. I think they liked us because we were very hard working." (Mrs. Ting)

Again, Mrs. Ting and her husband were so overjoyed with the continuous incoming orders and were so proud of their accomplishments that they failed to see the big picture, that is, how small clothing manufacturers like theirs helped the boom of mainstream capitalists. An interview with the owner of a large Vancouver fashion designer-manufacturing-retail chain by a local newspaper journalist would indicate how small manufacturers set up by Hong Kong immigrants provided opportunities for capitalist growth:

> "Growing number of immigrants from Hong Kong setting up in Vancouver as small manufacturers provided the opportunity... [As a result,] sales have climbed 100 per cent since 1990" (the Vancouver Sun, 1998:D1).

Manufacturing is subcontracted out locally and so that they can compete with other big chains. As the owner of this large fashion company commented:

> "If something goes fast at the beginning of the season, in three weeks we can produce more. We don't have a two-year lead time. We're fabricating now for fall and traditionally, that's quite late. True designers are selling by now, but we're [still] in the creative process." (the Vancouver Sun, 1998:D1).

So the availability of small manufacturers owned by Chinese who are flexible in taking orders and meeting deadlines gives more leeway and time for the big designer-manufacturer to do better market testing, and hence produce more sales and profits.

Other small service industries and retailers in my study, such as those in the cosmetics and beauty service industries, food services, travel industries, and specialty items were also dependent on big capitalists for products, knowledge and skills training. While sometimes they dealt with small localized distributors, most of the time they established direct business relations with the national corporate distributors or off-shore head offices. For the latter, like the others, the experiences of dealing with large corporations were claimed to be positive. Procedures and policies imposed from above were not recognized as asymmetrical and overpowering but as common practice and sometimes were considered helpful. The following excerpts demonstrate this state of mind:

> "When I started this business [selling cosmetics], the sole agents [of the brand name products] did a credit check on me before they agreed to use my store as their retail outlet. All these companies are in Montreal. I usually dealt with them directly in ordering products. But when it's time for

> promotion or when they launched new products, the local representatives would come and contact us... Well, as retailers, we do not have a say in pricing and promotions. They gave us a standardized retail price list, and they scheduled and organized promotions... So our job is pretty easy. We are just responsible for selling. If there were any customer complaints we would let them know... These suppliers also organized regular seminars and workshops for us. So they are really helpful in updating our knowledge." (Alison)
>
> "Even though we are making very little selling airline tickets, sometimes only $10 for each ticket, I don't feel like I am being ripped off by these airline companies. This is how business is done in this industry...This is a tough business." (Meg)
>
> "The representatives from these big wholesalers were really helpful. They would tell us what we needed for our café. They gave us many ideas, a lot of them I would not have thought of myself. They would recommend things to us to make our café more appealing... They would suggest that we order this and that... And later we found out that a lot of their ideas worked!" (Edna)
>
> "The representatives are generally very nice. You see, our business relations are based on mutual benefits. They'd like to make money, I want to get quality products [for my restaurant]. These companies now even hired *tohng-yahn* representatives to serve us [for better communication and convenience]..." (Mary)

Overall, the relationships with large corporations were considered positive. Rather than feeling disadvantaged and dependent, many saw their relationships as symmetrical and interdependent. Even asymmetrical relationships were normalized as mutually beneficial.

E. Weighing Class Benefits Against Costs

Other than the general positive experience in dealing with big suppliers, the small businesses run by these women otherwise connote pessimism. First, there is a great deal

of financial uncertainty besides not reaping reasonable profits or adequate financial rewards. In fact, some businesses were on the verge of closing while others made modest income equivalent to that made by their staff. The only thing they enjoyed financially was the tax relief made available to them as self-employed. Among all women entrepreneurs, only a few were making a profit large enough for the consideration of business expansion. Second, in line with past literature on small businesses and petty bourgeoisie, the Chinese women entrepreneurs were "engaged frequently in a kind of self exploitation rather than exploitation of proletarians (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1981:194). Self exploitation in terms of labour and time was a common phenomenon shared among all entrepreneurs in various degrees. Many complained about fatigue and not having time for themselves and/or their families. Third, employee control was generally perceived as minimally exercised and realized when class relations were personalized with labour "recruited from kinship, friendship and neighbourhood" (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1981:194).

Yet even though the costs of entrepreneurship seemed to have outweighed the benefits, these women entrepreneurs still enjoyed being their own bosses. Only a few, three in total, stated that they would rather work for others were they given opportunities to start over again. All the others enjoyed autonomy, flexibility, self-satisfaction and status bestowed from ownership and control that were not possible should they become employed again. These intangible benefits outweighed the modest material rewards they received and the hard labour and long hours they contributed:

> "One of the good things about running my own business is that I am able to be more flexible when managing time. Before, I had to work fixed office hours. By the time I got home I was so tired that I did not want to do anything else.

> But now I am able to manage my time more efficiently... Even though I also worked very hard before, the feeling was different because you were earning a wage. Now it's my business, my own money. I am able to work more freely and less mechanically. I enjoy it so much more..." (Alison)

> "I am now in control of my own work and schedule. I can do whatever I want. I don't have to answer to anyone. I am the boss. When I worked for others, whenever I made a suggestion, I had to find reasons to justify it. Now I don't have to do that." (Ada)

> "I like being my own boss because it is so much freer. I can go anywhere I like. My imagination and creativity can run really wild. This is so much more challenging. Work is so exciting and flexible. Now, I don't have to answer to my boss and read their long faces. I don't have anyone controlling me." (Leanne)

> "The most satisfying experience from being my own boss was the positive feedback I got from customers. I would feel so proud when they praised the quality of the merchandize. Even if they ended up not buying anything from me, the praise itself was already gratifying... I also enjoyed the kind of respect I got being a business owner... " (Judith)

Hence, many of these women still preferred entrepreneurship because of the intangible reward it brought with. Others decided to hang on in order to maintain their status position either for themselves or for their husbands. These women were able to do so despite unfavourable profit situations because of their gender positions as wives, daughters and daughters-in-law. Again, as women, raised in the Chinese culture which normalizes female dependency, they had their middle-class or entrepreneurial husbands, fathers and fathers-in-law to fall back on:

> "It is very difficult to make money here, unlike in Hong Kong. Fortunately, my husband has a full-time job. So the money I make here is only supplementary. So as long as the income can balance off the expenses, even though it does not generate profit, I am still fine. I can still hang in there..." (Amanda)

> "It's very difficult to make a profit when running business here. I would be happy if I could balance the budget. The good thing for me is that I don't have to depend on this business for a living. My husband [an *astronaut*] runs his business in Hong Kong. He sends us money. So I don't have to worry about not making money." (Michelle)
>
> "Making money is not a major concern for me because my family does not depend on my business income. My husband is an accountant who also owns a firm. The money he makes is more than enough to support the family." (Candice)
>
> "Because my father provided financial support, I did not face the kind of pressure other people would face if business was not good. Besides, I lived with my family, and I was well provided for too. My father did not exert any pressure on me. But of course, I tried my best not to lose his money and disappoint him." (Aileen)
>
> "Even though I was worried when business was slow, I was not as pressured as the others because I knew my life would not fall apart if I did not make it. My father-in-law was very supportive. We could always depend on him for financial support." (Yolanda)

The above analysis demonstrates the contradictions these Chinese women entrepreneurs experienced as employers/operators. Like other small business owners, they were both privileged and underprivileged as quasi-bourgeois and semi-proletariat in class and work relations. The class resources they possessed, other than helping them escape the uncertainties and oppressions when working for others, provided them with the opportunities to be self-dependent, autonomous, and flexible with time and chores. However, these very class resources would limit them in exercising managerial control over their employees, and subsequently their own labour and time. The predominant co-ethnic connections of recruitment and maternalistic control further substantiated a less authoritarian and more humanistic orientation towards class relations. While a few were advancing slowing and moving towards prosperity, many were stuck with minimum

financial rewards, struggling to make ends meet. Yet these setbacks were offset by their favourable co-ethnic gendered class resources, as women privileged with co-ethnic male kin support, through which co-ethnic gendered family solidarities helped to sustain their businesses in difficult times. Overall, the women in this study were insensitive to their ambiguous class positions. While on the one hand, they did not recognize their class privileges as bosses, on the other hand, they were unable to see their class disadvantages in relation to large capitalists. Instead they enjoyed more the status bestowed by their class position.

The Benefits and Limits of Gender

In previous chapters, I documented the general ignorance and unconsciousness of these women entrepreneurs of their disadvantaged positions as women. Gender was a less concerned matter as compared with race and class. Being brought up in middle-class families by mostly traditional housewife-mothers, and subject to the influence of Confucian paternalism, these women felt on the one hand, that it was a privilege to depend on men and be taken care of by fathers, husbands and brothers, and on the other hand, that it was their obligation to support the men in the family. Hence, traditional gender stereotypes in regards to work and family were reproduced and upheld by these women as normal without question.

In the following, I will first examine how gender segregation with respect to work was reproduced by these women entrepreneurs, as privileged employers and decision-makers in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Second, I will analyze the power positions of these women relative to their male partners, demonstrating the complexity of gender relations. Bearing in mind that many women entrepreneurs were at the same time wives

and mothers, I will then analyze the barriers and conflicts these women faced, and how these differences were overcome by class and ethnic resources. Finally, their relative insensitivity to gender matters will be highlighted and discussed.

A. Reproducing Gendered Segregation of Labour

Occupational gender segregation is a prevailing phenomenon in the general labour market. Employers hire men and women to do different jobs on the basis of their sex and gender characteristics. Feminine traits such as being sensual, sexy, detailed, soft, delicate, nurturing, submissive and sociable deem them suitable for certain feminine jobs as nurses, teachers, secretaries, beauticians, waitresses, retail sales, administrative clerks, seamstresses and domestic workers. Women tend to cluster in the pink collar sector, providing retail, clerical and personal services. In addition, it is also widely understood that women in general are more likely to be confined to low-status, low paid, dead end jobs where authority resides external to them (Kemp, 1994). Not only are occupations gendered in a hierarchical way, for example, with female nurses assisting male doctors, and female secretaries answering to male managers, gender segregation is also found within occupations. Male retail sales clerks concentrate in the masculine areas that are better paid usually with commission such as hardware, motor vehicles, appliances, etc. while female retail sales work on salary, selling lower priced goods such as housewares, clothing for women and children (Kemp, 1994:231).

Within the Chinese ethnic economy, gender segregation is also widely reproduced. Despite being women themselves, the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in my study, driven by capitalist and patriarchal ideologies, followed the conventional norm of assigning roles by gender; and in so doing, assisted in the perpetuation of gendering at

work. They have created a gendered labour market, favouring the hiring of women over men, at least statistically. Among those which hired help, as many as twenty-five businesses (52.1 percent) recruited only female help while only three of them (8.3 percent) hired strictly male employees. The rest of the businesses maintained employment of workers from both genders with women outnumbering men. However, it would be oversimplified to assume such female representation was the result of women favouring women. Rather, the over-representation of women employees has much to do with the nature of work demanded by the businesses. Since most businesses these women engaged in were in the competitive, low-skilled and low-paid retail and service sector, women would become the ideal candidates for employment. In the travel businesses, for example, it was noted that women workers outnumbered their male counterparts because of the demand of intensive labour not consistent with pay:

> "So far all my employees are women. I did not deliberately hire women. But in this industry [travel service], the average pay is low. So only people who work for a second income would choose to work here. So men would not want to work in this business... That's why in this industry, the workers are predominantly women. Besides, women are also more detailed. They are more capable to handle the tedious work of tour arrangements and ticketing... I don't mind hiring men. But they usually will not stay long." (Candice)

> "... Considering all the tedious and detailed work, I would say travel agency is the most underpaid business. The workload is very demanding. Some cannot handle the stress and quit after a few weeks or a few months, especially men. During peak seasons, they have to work non-stop for the whole day, and sometimes go overtime when customers come in the last minute before closing. In this industry you have to constantly update information. Airlines always change policies. You have to update computer skills, knowledge of geography and international news. You have to spend time talking to your customers in order to know what their preferences and tastes are before you can give them any advice. You have to be

> clear-minded all the time because the airlines offer so many different packages and programs. There are also huge responsibilities to bear, for examples, in case if customers forgot to obtain the proper travel document or visa, or in case of baggage loss, etc...So sometimes people [especially the men] may wonder, why do I have to work here for this kind of money?" (Gloria)

Other retail and service businesses that demanded women-specific skills and targeted the women clientele would naturally look for women as desirable workers:

> "I think a woman, especially a married woman would be better suited to sell children's wear. For children's wear in particular, you need someone who's experienced so that she would know how to recommend the proper size. So a woman who is a mother would be the ideal employee. Besides, she would also be able to chat with customers about childcare and related topics. This would be good in building up long-term relationships with your customers..." (Amanda)

> "... I don't think it would be appropriate to hire a man to sell women's clothing. It would be inconvenient and awkward... Even though I also sell jeans to men, I still believe that a saleslady is better than a salesman. Men do not mind being served by women. They would not feel embarrassed. But women would mind being served by men. I think this is just common sense that clothing stores should hire women as salespersons." (Becky)

> "My employee has to be a woman. Even though many big stores have started to hire men to sell cosmetics, in a small business like ours, it is still preferable to get a saleslady. We have to establish good relations with our customers. So when they are here, you have to chat with them. You know, women talk - on fashion, family, etc. I don't think a salesman can do that." (Alison)

> "In my business [skin care], you have to hire women. Not only do they have to be women, they have to be good looking, presentable, and most importantly with beautiful skin..." (Rosemary)

> "I like my staff to be feminine. They have to be soft spoken and with good manners. As an aesthetician in dealing with

> mostly wealthy women customers, you have to look hygienic, delicate and sophisticated..." (Audrey)

In addition, women also constituted the ideal employees in firms and offices as receptionists, clerks and secretaries:

> "We hired a woman to be the receptionist and handle simple clerical work... Well, a receptionist ought to be a woman." (Ursula)

> "Most of the staff we have in the firm are women. The clerks and secretaries are all women except one who works for my [male] partner." (Gladys)

In businesses that were not gender-specific, some women still preferred the hiring of all female or all male staff due to preconceived gender stereotypes or the avoidance of inter-gender conflict. Consequently, for instance, Beatrice had all women hair stylists working for her while Faye hired all male employees:

> "All my workers are women now. I hired men before. But all of them did not stay long. I think probably because they did not feel comfortable working with women. In our salon, we all work like a team. When we are free, we all work cooperatively to wash the towels and to do clean up work. But the men usually just sit there and never volunteer to help out. So the women staff felt it was unfair. The girls all did it voluntarily. But the guys never did. Each and every time I had to ask them to do it... So far, I had hired six to seven men already. None of them stayed long. But all my girls worked for me for years... So finally, I decided not to hire men any more." (Beatrice)

> "In the Richmond office, I have four men working for me. In the Surrey office, there are three men... They all do marketing work for me. I used to have women working for me. But they always have to leave early or come in late because of family matters. The boys are better. They don't mind traveling a long way to get a deal... They always put their job as the top priority. The girls like to use the phone and chat away the time too... The boys don't do this kind of thing..." (Faye)

Gender segregation is also reproduced within a particular kind of business. In the restaurant business, for example, there is a clear hierarchical division of labour with the chief cook being the highest paid and the most prestigious in status (Reiter, 1996), followed by assistant cooks and waiters with the dishwashers occupying the lowest position. Such a hierarchy is also gendered particularly within the Chinese restaurant business where the cooks constitute male-dominated occupations. The Chinese women entrepreneurs who run restaurants maintained this gender segregation in their hiring practice with mostly men work in the kitchen as cooks and assistant cooks, and men and women work up front on the floor as waiters and waitresses. A woman who operated a fast food stall justified her preference this way:

> "Most of my staff are men. I prefer men because work in the kitchen is heavy-duty and involves a great deal of physical strength. For example, the utensils used for cooking are huge and heavy. Even food preparation can involve the cutting and chopping of hundreds of pounds of meat. Women cannot handle that... I hire a woman who works at the counter, serving... Otherwise, all the kitchen workers are men..." (Sharon)

The impact of physical strength as the major reason for the preference of male employees was prevalent in other restaurants too:

> "I hired a woman to do the dishes because I think women usually do a better job... But I like to hire men in general because they can handle heavy-duty jobs. Men are good especially for night shifts. They can do clean up after closing. It's also safer, for them and for me." (Martha)

> "Those who work in the kitchen are usually men. It's not because I am discriminatory. It's just that very few women applied for the chef's position. Even if women had applied, they were less physically fit than men. So it's just natural that we had to hire men. You see, in Chinese cooking, you have to be skilled and physically fit to handle a huge and heavy wok" (Cheng Ming-ying)

> "There are four people working in the kitchen. They are all men. In the dining area, there is a mix of men and women...We did not intend to hire men to work in the kitchen. But it seems that all those who are experienced in working in the kitchen are all men...I never heard of women chefs... People who work in the kitchen are paid a fixed salary. They are also better paid because they are more professionally skilled." (Michelle)

Not only in the restaurant business was the aspect of physical strength an important impact, it was also prevalent in other industries such as wholesale and manufacturing:

> "I hired two full-time workers. One helps me out in receiving and delivery, sorting merchandize for shipment and doing shows. The other works in the office, answering phones, taking orders, typing up invoices and collecting money. The merchandize guy is a man. The other is a woman. I also hired a part-time woman who does book-keeping and accounting work for me. It's just obvious that you have to hire a man to do heavy-lifting work. Women cannot handle that." (Andrea)

> "We have around 12 to 13 seamstresses working for us. We also hired two labourers to handle heavy work. All seamstresses are women, of course. It's just common in the industry. You don't find men sewing garments. As for the labourers, they ought to be men because we need people who have the physical strength to pack and carry bundles of materials and do other heavy labour jobs." (Mrs. Ting)

Other than strength, gendered labour was divided as well between the internal and the external. In the travel industry, for example, women were more likely to work in a secure indoor office, using their delicate skills to handle detailed work while men were more likely to work as tour guides and bus drivers dealing with outside adventure and handling large machines. One woman employer had this to say:

> "In my business, there are more women working in the office and more men working as tour guides or tour leaders. It is because the tour guides sometimes have to be the drivers as well when the group is small. Besides, tour guides also make more money. Office work is paid less." (Ada)

While notable gendered segregation was found among workers, such gender distinction was also perpetuated through division of labour between the women and their male partners. Aspects of the internal-external, safe-adventurous, physical-delicate and technical-social constituted how work was divided between partners:

> "My father-in-law [partner] is not involved in the daily operation of this [skin care] business because it is not convenient. It is a woman's business so he should not be there. But he does help me out fixing the machines when they break down, and doing the GST, PST and payroll at home." (Rosemary)

> "I am responsible for ordering merchandize from China, managing the staff in the office and doing miscellaneous office work. My husband is responsible for sales. He has to travel not only within the Vancouver area but also to other places in the United States to do shows. It's a hectic job to do shows... So I guess my husband is more suited to it. Besides, I have to take care of my two children. I cannot afford to leave home." (Andrea)

> "As a woman I cannot handle tough jobs in the kitchen. So I told my partners that I could not work there. I think it would be more suitable for women to serve in the dining room. So my [male] partner works in the kitchen." (Joyce)

> "I am responsible for the internal, basically on the operation of the factory, working alongside other women seamstresses. My husband is responsible for the external, picking up materials from the contractor and delivering finished products to them. He is also responsible for accounts and the payroll because I hate figures and I cannot handle math. When the sewing machines break down, it's also my husband's responsibility to find people to fix them. I know nothing about these machines. I only use them to sew at work." (Mrs. Ting)

> "I am responsible for trading, businesses and properties - corporate matters. I also do wills and estates. I don't have to go to court. But my [male] partner goes to court. He does family and criminal [law]." (Gladys)

> "I teach piano lessons. My husband teaches music theory and music history classes. I also do the dirty work such as dusting, cleaning the toilets and vacuuming while he is in charge of paper work such as accounting and financial matters." (Robin)

> "My husband is the video game technician, providing maintenance and related mechanical jobs. I don't know anything about video games so I am responsible for everything else, such as keeping the store, doing filing, accounting and inventory count, monthly statements, PST, writing checks. I also sell. (Fong Yin-yin)

> "One brother is responsible for kitchen management, and ordering food and stock items. Another brother works in the kitchen making *dim sum* for lunch. I am responsible for marketing and promotion, and socializing with customers..." (Cheng Ming-ying)

Gendered division of labour, notably among the partners, is also arranged according to the gendered contexts of the industry. For example, Bonnie talked about how she and her sister-in-law are responsible for storekeeping, while her brother deals with the wholesale people because in the kitchenware industry, wholesale representatives are primarily men:

> "My brother-in-law [as a partner] is responsible for ordering because in this industry, all the suppliers are men. The suppliers usually operate as a husband-wife business but usually it is the men who work as representatives to deal with retailers. So it is easier to talk on a man-to-man basis. In this business, the women do the paper work. So my responsibilities are accounts, payroll, banking, etc. other than storekeeping and sales." (Bonnie)

Interestingly, even though gendering of work was common such practices were offset or deemed insignificant when economic interests became a priority. Then we find women entrepreneurs doing both male- and female-specific tasks regardless of situations, making full use of their human potential. For example, even though Sharon preferred hiring male kitchen workers and female servers, fearing that her staff would steal her

recipes, she took up the work of a chef (which was perceived to be a masculine job) by preparing curry paste in her home kitchen every night for use in the next morning. Alexis and her sister, by taking up and continuing their father and grandfather's family oriental carpet business after their immigration, became involved in the handling of heavy carpets without hiring male workers. These women, as entrepreneurs, while on the one hand helped perpetuate gendered segregation at work, on the other hand demonstrated simultaneously how such practices were not essential to work.

B. Gender Inequality between Partners

After discussing how gendered division of labour was reproduced by the women entrepreneurs, this section deals with the unequal participation and power relations of partners in everyday business operation. I identified five types of gender relations between partners, all evenly distributed among these businesswomen.

First, there were the women who worked full-time and took full responsibilities in running the businesses. They were the sole decision-makers while the male counterparts, either as husbands, fathers or fathers-in-law, were silent partners. Gender resources as wives, daughters and daughters-in-law allowed them to seek financial help from the men to start the business. While these women had the advantages of power, control and autonomy, they had to put in a lot more of the time and effort as compared to their male partners. For example,

> "I am the one who's involved in running the business. My father-in-law is a silent partner. He helped me out with money in establishing this business. I make all decisions because my father-in-law does not know anything about beauty service. He would help me out to fix the machines when they broke down. Occasionally, he would help me out with some account work at home. That's it." (Rosemary)

> "I am the only one responsible for the business. My husband works in Hong Kong [as an *astronaut*] so he is not involved at all." (Susan)

Similar to the first group, the second group of women also took full responsibilities and decision-making in the businesses with the exception that these women used their own money. These were the women who invited the men, that is, their husbands or brothers, to be partners for the reason of granting them a partnership status. As a result, some of these men did not see the businesses as their own, and therefore were unwilling to participate equally in them. Others, because of the lack of relevant skills and knowledge, took on a secondary and supportive role, and as a result contributed only partially to the businesses. The following excerpts provide evidence of their secondary role:

> "We started this business to provide employment status for my brother. But it ended up that I was the major decision-maker, and involved in all kinds of work. My brother would help me out during busy hours, for example, during breakfasts and lunch. Then he took off in the afternoon to work on his other part-time job." (Edna)

> "Even though this is a family business [with husband invited as partner], I play the major role. I am in charge of everything and I make all decisions. My husband is only there in the evening, manning the cash register and socializing with customers. He doesn't care about anything... What can I do? Everyday, he would wake up at noon, and at night he would read newspapers and watch TV until 4 a.m. while I work myself to death. I am in charge of making breakfast, doing the ordering, accounting, hiring... basically everything." (Martha)

> "My husband has a job elsewhere. So I am in charge of everything in the store. Occasionally, he would help me out to unpack the merchandize, or help me with storekeeping when I was busy or when the part-time help was unavailable." (Judith)

The third group is the women who took an assisting role in the partnership businesses with the male partners, as husbands or brothers, in charge. While all partners committed fully to the running of the businesses, major decision-making power was in the hands of the men. This situation occurred when the male partners possessed business expertise, skills and experiences that were lacking in the women; or when the business was initially established by the man while the woman was invited to join later. The following examples illustrate this:

> "My cousin is in charge of all major decision-making because he is experienced in doing business. I take care of administrative work such as payroll and banking, and I am involved in sales and inventory. We don't have any conflicts because we [including the cousin's wife] let him take charge." (Bonnie)

> "My husband is in charge of everything, from ordering to account work. He is the major decision-maker. I am only in charge of sales. This is because my husband has been in the business for a long time, long before immigration. I was only invited to join as a partner when we started our business after immigration. So I take on a supportive role, helping him out." (Samantha)

The fourth group is those who claimed to have equal involvement with their male partners, and their division of labour and decision-making was entirely function-oriented, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

> "I am responsible for the internal: administration, accounting, warehousing and sales. My husband is responsible for the external: go to the Far East to do sourcing, go over samples, etc. We each have our own territory, so there is no arguments. We respect each other's decisions." (Tania)

> "My husband is responsible for all financial and accounting matters because he is more detailed, and he's good with figures. I am responsible for ordering merchandize and sales because I am more knowledgeable about paintings. But he also helps me out with sales when I am busy. I would say that

> we are equal in workload, and we each make decisions in our area. There is not much conflict." (Man Lai-chen)

Finally, there are those who felt exploited by their husband-partners despite that the division of labour and decision-making appear equal. They were frustrated by the imbalance of workload, as these women complained:

> "My responsibility is internal ... My husband is responsible for the external... But my workload is much heavier than his.... Sometimes I felt so resentful and mad when I saw him sitting there, doing nothing, and not helping me out." (Mrs. Ting)

> "I feel my work is more pressured and much heavier than my husband's. I work in the front, handling customers while he worked in the back, making coffee and tea. I am responsible for greeting customers, taking their orders, and remembering who orders what because sometimes they all come at the same time, and do the ordering at once. Then I have to collect money from them. Our till is not computerized so I have to make sure I make the correct change... He just works in the back. While he's responsible for banking, I am responsible for all accounting, and I have to spend extra time after work to do that." (Joan)

Power and control, therefore, were not evenly distributed among these women relative to their male partners. While the sole proprietor may have absolute control over their own businesses, those who shared partnership with other men found themselves in varying degrees and levels of subordination due to gender. The first group, for example, was subordinate financially to their male partners despite having control and decision-making power in running the businesses. The second group appeared powerful and independent but they were unable to get their men's commitment without granting them the legal status of partnership. Other than the fourth group who claimed egalitarian relationships, the third and the fifth groups represented those who took a supportive and submissive role with the male partners, mostly husbands, taking charge.

C. Gender Barriers: as Mothers and Wives

As mothers and wives most women encountered conflict and difficulties when running their businesses simultaneously. The few single women in my research were privileged in a way that not only were they fully able to be devoted to their businesses without family obligations but at the same time they were taken care of by their parents or other married family members. All of them, with the exception of one, either lived with their maternal families or with married siblings. Hence, for example, they would have dinner ready for them when they got home. Their commitment to household activities was not supplementary and secondary, but with flexibility. Yet the married women, especially those with children, were not as flexible and free. Like other female workers, they had to juggle between family and work because the conventional norms did not relinquish the responsibilities of career women as mothers and wives.

Prahst (1995), in her study on the male and female entrepreneurs in British Columbia, classified business entrepreneurs into four types: the business-centred, family-centred, conflict-ridden and the balance group from which she determined whether business arrangements were organized around family activities or vice versa, or whether businesses were separated or blended with family. While a matching comparison between results of my study and hers is impossible, some general conclusions can be drawn from using her criteria.

Similar to Prahst's female entrepreneurs, the women entrepreneurs in my study were mostly business-centred. These women spent more hours working in their businesses than at home doing domestic and childcare activities. They arranged their family activities around business schedules, and operated their businesses separately from

their families. It is thus not surprising to find that many of them either had older children or did not have any children. The following excerpts illustrate this type of entrepreneurs:

> "I like to treat my private life and my business life separate. Even though I am the boss, I don't take advantage of my work time to do personal matters. If I have to go to see a doctor, or bring my son to the doctor's office, I would do it during my lunch hour. I do grocery shopping on my days off or during my lunch hour. I don't like my son to visit me during office hours." (Meg)

> "I don't have to do much juggling between work and family because we don't have children. So during busy months, I would work until 11 p.m. at night. My husband is very understanding. He never complains. If we don't have time to cook, we just eat out or buy some take-out food." (Ursula)

> "I spent most of my time in the salon. But even though I may come home as late as 9 p.m., I would spend some time on my daughter's homework. I make it a habit that every evening I have to spend some time on her academic work. I never mix up my business and family matters. I don't allow my daughter to come to the salon. My salon has to look professional. I can't run my business while taking care of my daughter. The clients would not like it... " (Audrey)

Business-centred women do not like family matters to interrupt business activities but they continue with business activities after work hours when they are supposed to attend to their personal and family life:

> "Every morning, before I go to work, I would prepare for dinner. I start working at 11 a.m. [when the mall is opened] so I have plenty of time to attend to family matters in the morning. When I get home by 7:45 p.m., all I have to do is to heat up the food I prepared in the morning, or do some quick stir-fry. It's easy. After dinner, I would spend some time doing bookkeeping and accounting work for the store. You can't do that during work hours because you have to serve customers." (Amanda)

Yet unlike the women in Prahst's study, many Chinese women entrepreneurs in my study were able to seek help to do family and daycare chores, and therefore could

focus their attention on their businesses. Those with younger children would usually look for help from either hiring live-in Filipino maids or from family members such as mothers, sisters and mothers-in-law, while those with older children employ part-time help to do domestic chores. The following stories illustrate this:

> "My mother and my older sister helped me out with domestic and childcare activities. My mother lives with us. I pay for all her expenses, so I don't have to pay her. She helps with domestic chores in return. As for my sister, I pay her to take care of my two children. She lives close by, and comes every day. So both my husband and I do not have to do any housework." (Gloria)

> "I have a Filipino maid at home taking care of all domestic chores and childcare work. Therefore, I am able to maintain sanity and patience amidst the nitty gritty details of my work because I am free from domestic work. When I get home, I can relax and play with my children. That's why I can fully put myself in the job. If I have to make time and take my child to the doctor in the middle of the day, my work will not be the same any more because of the interruption... Now I am able to work straight from 8:30 in the morning to 6:30 in the evening and sometimes even without taking any breaks." (Ophelia)

> "My kids are all grown up now. So they can take care of themselves. They cook for themselves and they help out with some domestic chores too. My husband does not do any housework. I think all Asian men are like that. I hired a part-time maid to do major cleaning once a week. So I can concentrate on the business without having to worry about home." (Anna)

In line with the female entrepreneurs in Prahst's study, husbands' involvement in household and childcare was not much. Similar to the men in her research, their involvement, if any, was concentrated on masculine jobs such as lawn mowing, vacuuming, and other heavy duty and maintenance jobs. Hence, these women would not have been able to put their businesses as the priority would it not be for the help of hired

female labour or help from their mothers, sisters and mothers-in-law. A common phenomenon that was not found among Prahst's groups is the prevalence of substituting eating-out or take-out food for home-made meals, hence releasing a great amount of cooking time for the women who worked long hours.

Another major group of the Chinese women entrepreneurs was the family-centred. Majority of these women involved in home-based businesses, and organized the business activities around family activities. They shared the common characteristics of taking up sole responsibilities in domestic and childcare work without any hired help, or with minimal free help from husbands or other family members. The advantage of running a business at home was the flexibility to attend to domestic activities, particularly childcare:

> "I established my business so that it would be easier to control my work schedule. I only took appointments [doing facial] when my son was not home. If my clients wanted to come at the time when my son needed me, I would turn down the appointment and stay with my son. I constantly have to juggle between my clients' appointments and my son's schedule... Sometimes I worked evenings when my husband was home to baby-sit my son. But I don't work on Sundays. I would take my son out and go visit my mom. It's family day... On Saturdays, I don't work after 4 p.m. when my husband comes home from work... it's family night." (Julie)

There was also a small group of women who ran their businesses away from home, but were family-centred. These were the women who preferred to hire help to run the business while they spent time taking care of their children:

> "I hired seven part-time employees to help me out with running the business. I did not want to spend too much time on it. I very much liked to see my children grow. If my business failed, I could just wrap it up then and leave [for Hong Kong because my husband was an *astronaut*]. But if my children had problems, I would lose everything in life. I would be a

> total failure. There is nothing more important than my children. They are always my prime and foremost priority." (Gail)

> "I hired a full-time employee to keep the store. I usually came around 3 - 4 p.m. in the afternoon for a while. If there wasn't much to do, I would go home. My full-time staff worked weekdays. I hired a part-time worker for weekends. Personally, I did not spend much time here because I had to take care of my baby. When I had to go check things out in the store, my mother would help me out taking care of him for a while. So it all worked out perfectly." (Sara)

Others blended family and work by engaging in childcare activities at work:

> "I usually brought my son to the store because it was not really busy. I would bring him to work with me in the morning and then send him to pre-school later. Then my mother-in-law would pick him up from school and bring him to me. We would stay together until closing... I liked to have him in the store. I could play with him when there was no customer." (Judith)

The third group is the conflict-ridden group, which has to juggle between the conflictual demands of family and business almost entirely alone without adequate help. This was normally found among women with home-based businesses. Even though they enjoyed the advantage of time flexibility, conflict could still arise when the demands from both sides clashed. As a result, blending of family and work responsibilities became necessary, as the following stories demonstrate:

> "When I had to go visit customers and my son was out of school, I had to bring him along. My son is a very nice kid. He would not complain and whine, and just come with me. Sometimes even when he was sick, I had to bring him along to deliver merchandize or to show samples to the customers. I told him to behave because Mommy had to do business and make money. Sometimes he felt so tired that he would fall asleep while I was talking to the customers. My customers usually do not mind [me bringing my son along] because they understand [my difficulties]." (Sheila)

> "I would do housework and business activities interchangeably. For example, if David and Lillian needed some clean shirts to wear to work and school, I would put aside all other work and do the laundry first. They don't like to eat out, so I always have something ready for them. But I don't set up a fixed schedule for work and housework. I find it too pressured. So sometimes I would do three to four loads of laundry while attending to my business matters at the same time. If I cannot finish with my business, I will not fold the laundry until later. Sometimes I would do business work strictly for 16 hours without doing any domestic chores. I juggle depending on the urgency of the matter." (Vera)

Conflict was also prevalent among those who worked long hours hence facing difficulties in attending simultaneously to family demands. Blending of family and business activities became inevitable, as these women stated:

> "Not only do I have to spend long hours at the salon, I also have to do housework after work. My children do not help me out. After I get home, I have to prepare dinner, and then I have to do clean-up work. So during the day, whenever I have time, I would sneak out to do some shopping both for the salon and for the house. I would go to the bank and attend to family financial matters. When my son comes to the salon after school, I would ask him to help to do loads of laundry, and dust the floor. Fortunately, my husband now understands how tiring I am in meeting the demands of both the business and the family, so he's helping me out to prepare for dinner after work. Sometimes, he also helped me with cleaning and dusting at home. He was not involved in any housework when he was in Hong Kong." (Clara)

> "My husband is responsible to take my sons to school before he goes to the salon while I stay home and do some household chores. Then around 10 a.m. I go to the salon and start my day's work. In the afternoon, I am responsible to pick the kids up and take them to day care. Around 6 p.m. I will pick them up and bring them home. Then I have to prepare dinner, wash the towels for the salon, and do domestic chores until sometimes as late as 2 a.m. My husband does not help me out. When he gets home, usually around 7:30 p.m., he just sits there and watches TV. I am responsible for shopping, taking my children to the doctor, bringing the car for a tune-up and repair, and everything else in the house. So sometimes my

> work in the salon is interrupted because I have to attend to these activities. And I don't have a maid to help me out. And my parents-in-law [as business partners] do not understand. They always complain that I 'disappear' during work hours. Sometimes it is really tough. When I am in the middle of doing a customer's hair, and it's time to pick up the kids from school, I cannot just leave like that. I have to finish my work first. Then I would be so scared that my kids would get into trouble at school staying behind all by themselves." (Ivy)

The last group of women, which is also the least common, is the balance group. They were able to pay equal attention to both business and family activities and juggle well between the two. The following examples demonstrate this:

> "I don't feel that I have to juggle between family and work. I don't have any problems. I am very involved in both my family and work. After work, I usually do housework until very late at night. But I don't mind at all. And I don't feel exhausted or a lack of time. After all, my children are all grown up. They don't mess up the house like little kids, and they don't need close attention." (Man Lai-chen)

> "I paid equal attention to my family and my business. I worked half-time and I paid my staff to work half-time. Then there are two part-timers who work for me during weekends. I work mornings so that I can pick up my sons from school in the afternoon. Even though they are old enough to drive, they don't like to. I plan my schedule this way so that I can attend to both my business and my family. My sons are important to me because my husband is not around [as *astrounaut*]. Even though they do not need me as much now, I want to make myself available to them as much as possible." (Monica)

Working a 'double shift' is common among women who have families, and this is no exception for the Chinese women entrepreneurs in my study. Many of them, because of family responsibilities, had to continue working even after work. Some of them brought business activities home when the tasks were not done during working hours. While husbands and grown-up children did occasionally help out in domestic chores, their participation was not significant, hence leaving the burden on the women. As a

result, just like other working women, these women led a tougher life compared to their husbands and other male partners. However, they enjoyed certain advantages the employed women lack: As their own bosses, they had more choices on how to juggle between family and work and the freedom to prioritize to the best of their expectation.

Because of class, ethnic and gender resources, some women were able to get help by hiring co-ethnic or other ethnic women as maids. Others sought help from mothers, sisters and parents-in-law. Still others relied on restaurants and other food services to ease the burden of cooking after work. These women, in solving the conflict between work and domestic and childcare responsibilities, were privileged to release some of the burden with the use of money and co-ethnic women labour.

Despite these privileges, many women felt a sense of guilt for not being able to spend time with their children. This can be reflected by the way they claimed their priorities in life. An overwhelming majority of those with young children, whether they belonged to the business-centred, family-centred, conflict-ridden or balanced group, stated that they put their family as the top priority, which helped ease the pressure for not committing enough time and energies as mothers. The following are excerpts from the business-centred mothers:

> "I always put my family as the top priority. My work is important only because it provides me with an income." (Sharon)
>
> "My priority is always the family. If I had not hired domestic help, I would not have started this business...Occasionally I may feel guilty for not being around my children enough, but I guess quality time is more important..." (Candice)
>
> "Even though I spent more time in my business, I still considered my family as the top priority..." (Anna)

Only the single women, married women with no children or older children would talk about putting business before their families or themselves:

> "I think I put my business as the top priority. I don't have to think too much about my family because my husband is in Hong Kong and my children are all grown up... I devoted almost all my time to this business... I did not have much time for myself..." (Michelle)

> "Since my children have all grown up, I don't have to worry too much about my family. My major concern now is my business." (Clara)

Priorities in life also changed with the demands of childcare, as this woman recalled:

> "When my daughter was young, she was definitely my top priority... If I had a choice, I would not want to be a career woman. I enjoyed staying home and watching my daughter grow. This is something very fulfilling and pleasant. But now my priorities changed. My daughter has grown up and she does not need much of my attention. Now priority is on my business." (Faye)

The prevalence of putting family or rather children as the top priority reflects the influence of gender ideology on the role of married women as housewives and mothers. Joan's words best summed up these women's perception on themselves:

> "After getting married, a woman should put her family as the top priority. I always believe that before marriage, you are an individual. But after marriage, you become part of the family. You want to act accordingly as a wife and a mother. You would not want to do things that hurt your family." (Joan)

D. Gender Resources: Creating a Women-specific Ethnic Economy

A phenomenon that is unique to some of the women-run businesses is their gender-specific nature. As indicated earlier, many women were able to make use of their gender resources to run businesses with and for women in the ethnic economy without having to compete with men. These resources provided them with the opportunities to

set up beauty-related and women fashion businesses catering to the needs of co-ethnic women. Gender-specific skills and knowledge on skin care, cosmetics and fashion also provided work opportunities to other women, which were not available to men. Besides, the sharing of the feminine culture facilitated client and work relationships. Hence, these women were able to find a comfortable niche that allowed them to do business with only women, avoiding having to deal with men in the daily business operation. A woman put this situation sarcastically:

> "All my [facial] clients are women, married women. Fortunately I am married or else I would not be able to find a man. I deal with only women in my work life." (Julie)

Oddly enough, despite the advantages these women enjoyed working with other women, none of them were aware of it, and no one mentioned the privileges (or disadvantages) of women doing business with women. This further confirmed the insensitivity of these women entrepreneurs to women issues. To them, being a woman involved in women-specific businesses targeting the women's market, employing women workers and dealing with women suppliers was a natural phenomenon that did not require explanation or deep reflection or elaboration.

E. Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Gender

Since most of the women entrepreneurs were not aware of their disadvantaged position as women, the 'double shift' they worked, their dependence on men and the gendering of work were normalized as 'natural'. For the few women who recognized these disadvantages, they had the following to say:

> "As a woman, you have to work extra hard to convince people and prove to them you can do it. You have to be very outstanding in your work to make people recognize you... So people would say, 'As a woman, it's not easy to be good at this

> ...' Even though this sounds like a compliment, there's some discriminatory connotation... You see, as a woman boss, you have to show your male staff your qualities to gain their respect. I had to show them how good I was to make them respect me. But my husband? He did not have to do anything, my staff would just listen to him..." (Sharon)
>
> "No matter how we want to believe that men and women are equal, we are not. Women have to put in 200% effort in order to be recognized." (Chelsea)
>
> "Sometimes it's difficult when you had to go out with a male client, say to lunch... We didn't really have many common topics other than business... Besides, when my friends saw me having dinner with a man, and it's not my husband, they would give me a weird look... This could lead to misunderstandings...gossip, you know. That's why I tried to avoid entertaining my clients. Sometimes if it were really necessary I would invite their wives and my husband to go along. Then I would feel more comfortable." (Ophelia)
>
> " I always have to present a 'superwoman' image in front of the bankers, suppliers and customers. I have to show that I am very tough otherwise they would take advantage of me or not take me seriously as a woman." (Gloria)
>
> "Sometimes I didn't feel being recognized as a boss. For example, when the wholesale reps came, they usually would look for my husband. And if my husband was not in, they did not even bother to talk to me and said they would come back some other time." (Joan)
>
> "As a woman, the worst thing is that I have to deal with so many things all by myself both at work and at home. Physically I am tired and mentally I am tired too." (Martha)

But many more women believed either there was no difference between men and women in doing business or women had more advantages as compared to men. Comments like "there is not much difference between men and women" (Judith) and "I don't think men and women make any difference. Women can do whatever men can do" (Mrs. Tao) were

commonly shared by close to half of the women entrepreneurs. The other half pointed out various advantages they enjoyed as businesswomen:

> "I think being a woman has advantages rather than disadvantages. For example, you can play around your role depending on the circumstances. You can act like a feminine woman or act like a man if you wish to get your way. But men don't have these privileges." (Gabriella)
>
> "I think it's easier for women to deal with young male customers. These male customers dare not bargain with me." (Font Yin-yin)
>
> "I think women have more advantages than men. For example, when I went to the suppliers, people from the export department were more polite to me than to the men. They would help me carry heavy merchandize but they would not do this for the men." (Aileen)
>
> "As a woman, there are advantages. People would trust you more because they thought women were more sincere and honest. Besides, if there were any problems, you could always use your family and children as excuses to cover things up." (Tania)
>
> "Men are usually easier on women. They are generally gentler to women, and would not give you a hard time." (Rosemary)

Overall, the women entrepreneurs in my study shared more commonalities as women than their positioning with respect to class: Many women were not sensitive to their disadvantages as women but saw their feminine traits as favourable in doing business. As traditional women, many helped perpetuate gender stereotypes and segregation at work. With class, ethnic and gender resources, they also actively built a women-specific ethnic economy that addressed the needs and demands of both female co-ethnic labour and market, and helped promote feminine interests. While there were women who complained about hard work and the difficulties in juggling between family and work, and expressed dissatisfaction with the men for not helping enough, many more

were proud of their abilities to perform both roles adequately at the same time. To sum up, entrepreneurship was considered a desirable option in giving them the freedom of choice to be able to fulfill both family and economic roles successfully. As Green and Cohen (1996) argued, women entrepreneurs are simply balancing their traditional (double-shift) demands in a new way rather than breaking new grounds.

Chapter Eight

Doing Business: The Benefits and Limits of Race/Ethnicity and Age

This chapter continues with the interactive analysis of the joint effects of the 'holy trinity' by bringing class and gender into the analysis of race/ethnicity. I will assess the resources and barriers generated as a result of race/ethnicity, and the complexity when intersected with class and gender. The role of women entrepreneurs in racialized, ethnicized and de-ethnicized business relations will also be discussed. Then I will explore the impact of age, an issue that has not been adequately addressed by the existing literature on entrepreneurship, and subsequently had been ignored in this research. It was only through the interviews that the women brought this issue to my attention. What follows then is the presentation of some sketchy information based on the limited data collected on the issue. The purpose here is to draw attention to advanced thinking and future research in this area. This chapter concludes with a summary analysis from Chapters seven and eight integrating the crisscrossing relations between class, gender, race/ethnicity and age in business relations.

The Benefits and Limits of Race/Ethnicity

This section discusses the aspect of co-ethnic social networks and in the racialization, ethnicization and de-ethnicization[1] of business relations. The examination of co-ethnic social networks will be related primarily to doing business in the ethnic market (refer to categories 1 and 2 in Table 3.2 in Chapter three). The issue of de-ethnicization will be raised regarding the ethnic businesses that cater to the open market

[1] De-ethnicization involves the process of making the business look un-Chinese, in terms of products, services, business environments in order to appeal to the open (mainstream) market.

(that is, categories 3 and 4 in Table 3.2). The argument will show how co-ethnic networks are more crucial to doing business in the ethnic market while 'de-ethnicization' is a more common strategy when the businesses are non-ethnic in nature and targeting the mainstream market. In the end, I will discuss the pros and cons of co-ethnicity in light of racialized markets and a segregated ethnic niche with the analysis of inter-racial and intra-ethnic conflicts.

A. Ethnic Networks as Resources

Many of the businesses in my study functioned in a segregated ethnic niche by means of co-ethnic connections. Ethnic solidarity within the Chinese community became a necessary resource in order for these women to run their businesses successfully. For most businesses serving the ethnic community, activities involve a chain of co-ethnic networks, which can be both local and transnational, from the set-up of the businesses to the recruitment of employees, from purchasing and marketing merchandize to accounting and banking services. A notable pattern stood out: the majority of these co-ethnic connections operated primarily through informal personal networks with formal institutional support deemed secondary. Such an aspect social embeddedness based on trust and co-ethnic solidarity constituted an integral part of running ethnic businesses.

1. The Insignificance of Ethnic Associations

Past literature on Canadian Chinese communities demonstrates the importance of co-ethnic associations in the assistance of co-ethnic settlement (Li, 1998; Wickberg, 1994). Literature on ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurship also indicate the contributions of associations in establishing and running businesses (Light, et.al., 1993; Light and Bonacich, 1988; Yoon, 1997). Yet the important role of these associations

seems to have been missed by the women and their partners in my study. Very few women and their partners joined ethnic associations because they did not see this as essential for their businesses. Rather, informal co-ethnic connections and relationships predominated their business experiences in the form of word-of-mouth and informal personal referrals.

For the few women who joined ethnic associations, none of them were associated with the traditional clan associations or '*huiguan*'. Rather, they preferred service clubs such as the Lion's Club, social service associations such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and protestant churches. Even so, they were mostly inactive members due to the lack of time: "I don't have time to participate in their activities." Among them, only three women saw active participation in ethnic associations as essential to business relations. The following is their rationale:

> "In order to draw more business, I have to make connections with associations. I am a member of [a Chinese social service organization] and volunteer for them. I hope this will bring in some business. I also establish connections with the Buddhist temples here, hoping that they will bring in business... It is important to expand the customer base by making connections with these associations. So I have to go out to meet people, to let people know of my restaurant. I have to let them know that my restaurant is the biggest vegetarian restaurant in North America. We are the only one that can provide service for banquets and large functions." (Michelle)

> "You have to be very active in order to generate business. You have to get involved in a lot of community service.... I quit [a mainstream business organization] because it is not Chinese oriented. I joined [a Chinese business organization] and [a Chinese social service organization] instead. Through networking there I am able to meet people and get business, especially corporate businesses." (Leanne)

> "I joined [a mainstream business organization] so that I can familiarize myself with how people do business here. I also

> joined [a Chinese business organization]. I also attend [Chinese] church regularly. I join these associations so that I can meet more *tòhng-yàhn*. In this way, I can get a better understanding of both markets, get more information on what the market needs are." (Gail)

For many other women, the time and labour intensity of small businesses had discouraged them from joining associations. Again, "I don't have time" is commonly cited by these women as the reason for not joining. Others commented further: "If I had time, I'd rather take a rest to recuperate both physically and mentally" (Joan) or "If I had time, I'd rather spend it with my sons" (Sheila).

Gender and status played an important role in deterring these small business owners from participating in many ethnic associations including clan associations and '*huiguan*'. Membership, which was predominantly male and of professional and corporate backgrounds, had intimidated some women:

> "I was invited by a friend to join the [a Chinese Business Association] last year. I wanted to join because I thought this might help my business. But I cancelled my membership this year. All they asked from me was to pay membership fees. I did not feel I belonged... These people were all lawyers, doctors, accountants and bankers... How can I approach them and say, 'Come to my store to buy cosmetics?' They are different kind of people. We cannot communicate. Besides, it seems that there are more men than women members...What can I get out of it? Nothing! So I quit." (Alison)

> "... I would like to join [Chinese] business associations. But I felt intimidated because many of them were run and dominated by men and old *wàh-kìuh*. Twice I attended a Chinese merchant association and felt so out of place." (Gloria)

Hence, even though it was widely claimed that ethnic associations encouraged positive business relationships and networking, such gestures seemed to have extended only to the

Chinese male entrepreneurs or men and women with professional or financial backgrounds.

Surprisingly, more women joined the mainstream associations as inactive corporate members. The purpose for joining was mainly for getting corporate discounts and information update. This may very well be one of the few situations where race/ethnicity and gender played a less significant part:

> "I joined [a mainstream business association] so that I can get discounts. What it does is that it offers discounts to participating members who patronize each other's business. They also organize workshops and seminars, luncheons and dinners... But you have to pay for it...I did not attend any of these activities. I joined so that I could get a booth in home shows to promote my products." (Andrea)
>
> "I joined [a mainstream business association] so that we can get a discount on charges from the credit card companies... Many retail businesses join it... There are other benefits too such as mailing cards, employee insurance, etc.... I never bother to read it." (Fong Yin-yin)
>
> "I am a member of [a mainstream business association]. As a member, you have to pay $60 annual membership. All they do is send you magazines every three months. But the articles focus more on hair than on aesthetics... The suppliers usually place ads in the magazine. I would study them and see which products I'd like to buy or which suppliers I should contact..." (Julie)
>
> "I joined [a mainstream restaurant association]. They send information updates about restaurant industries. But the information caters more to the *mainstream* restaurants, and not to Chinese restaurants. Occasionally, there may be some information that I can relate to." (Mary)

Despite the general lack of interest and time to participate in ethnic associations, these women would occasionally make use of immigrant service associations like S.U.C.C.E.S.S. as a source of recruitment, especially of skilled workers such as legal

secretaries and travel consultants. This was the result of some employment programs organized by such service associations through government funding to aid job placements for Chinese immigrants. The outreach of these programs made the owners aware of the supply of co-ethnic workers that had gone through Canadian re-training after immigration. Through such government initiative, co-ethnic service associations became the liaison in making the necessary co-ethnic business connections.

2. The Role of the Chinese Media

Co-ethnic business relationships can be established with the help of the Chinese media, which, in British Columbia, has developed and flourished in recent years. Currently, other than the multicultural channel organized by the mainstream Cable TV that dedicates a certain amount of broadcasting time to Chinese programs, the Chinese community has established two television channels, catering to the Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland Chinese audiences. There are three locally published Chinese newspapers, two branched out from the Hong Kong head offices, and one from Taiwan. *Ming Pao* and *Sing Tao* are the two rival newspapers competing mostly for Hong Kong Chinese immigrant readership and each has substantial coverage of advertisements from the local community. Furthermore, there are three privately owned Chinese commercial radio stations serving the Greater Vancouver area, competing fiercely for local commercials as well. In addition to these media facilities, Chinese business directories similar to the *Yellow Pages* and a free telephone business enquiry service had also been established.

With a mature media industry penetrating into all segments of the Chinese community, they provided an important ethnic resource facilitating ethnic businesses through classified advertisements such as buying and selling of businesses, recruitment

advertising and business promotion. But despite the abundance of media resources, not many women in my study made use of these facilities to promote their businesses or to recruit employees. Only 33 percent placed advertisements and commercials on Chinese newspapers, radio and television channels for promotion; and 39.6 percent recruited their employees through placing an advertisement in Chinese newspapers.

Money is a major factor for not using the media for promotions. Even though many women recognized the significance of media influence in drawing clientele, they did not make use of it due to its cost. Furthermore, being in small business confined these women to informal networks when establishing and maintaining customer base. As one woman remarked:

> "When we first started this business, we placed ads in [Chinese] newspapers. We were able to attract many customers. But later on, we noticed that it was not economical to place ads. They are too expensive. We could not afford it. So now we depend on old customers and their referrals." (Joyce)

As for the recruitment of employees, these women preferred to hire through the recommendation of friends, relatives and business colleagues because of the trust they had developed on these informal co-ethnic networks. They would only recruit through the media when employees were not readily available through such networks. Even so, the media was also racialized when used: Ads would be placed in the English newspapers only for the hiring of non-Chinese or Whites; Chinese language papers were used solely for the recruitment of Chinese staff.

In sum, Chinese women entrepreneurs, unlike their male counterparts, did not make extensive use of institutional support in doing business. While ethnic associations played a minor role in business referrals and recruitment, the ethnic media was not

widely and regularly consulted due to money concerns. As women in small businesses, they placed a great deal of trust on informal co-ethnic networks instead, illustrating the importance of social embeddedness.

3. Informal Co-ethnic Networks

The significance of co-ethnic business networks was noted in three major areas: promotion, recruitment and supplies. As many as 86 percent of the women told of the importance of referrals or word-of-mouth in the establishment of their client base. And 64.6 percent hired workers through the personal connections of friends, business colleagues and kin. Support from other co-ethnic businesses was also widely noted in the case of information sharing and product supplies. The following provides an analysis of such informal co-ethnic relationships, and how they were interjected simultaneously by class and gender.

3a. Personalized Co-ethnic Client Relationships

With the majority of businesses targeting the Chinese market, in order to attract, maintain and increase clientele, emphasis had been put on co-ethnic personal relationships. Personal relationships were believed to build trust leading not only to repetitive patronizing behaviour but also referrals. Hence within the restraints of capital, these women owners believed that word-of-mouth referrals obtained through good service were more efficient and economical than formal promotions using the mass media. Socializing with the clientele in personalized ways, facilitated by their ethnic resources such as Chinese language proficiency and shared culture, became essential in building trust, and consequently in the establishment of good client relations. The following excerpts highlight the remarks made by owners of different businesses:

> "It is important to make the customers feel special. For example, I remember their taste and preference. Some like their coffee with more cream and less sugar, some like it black. It is important that I remembered that after they came in a few times. Then when they came in again, if I were able to tell them what they liked before they told me, they would feel very special." (Joan, coffee shop)

> "It is important that you are able to build up good relationships with the students and their parents. I have to let the parents know that I pay special attention to their children. If their children's homework shows a little irregularity I would phone them immediately. I would call the parents if I noticed a problem before they came to me. I have 300 students. Not only do I have to know everyone of them personally, I also have to know their parents... I chat with the parents during every class." (Vera, tutorial service)

> "I have tried newspaper advertisements. It did not work. I even did displays in malls to attract customers. It too did not work. So my business was based on referrals from friends and clients. I provide my clients with personal service they cannot get elsewhere... You see, stories spread very quickly within the Chinese community. If people liked my job, everybody would know. I always provide good service to my clients with top quality products but at a cheaper price... Many of them became my friends. We usually go out for lunch or dinner together." (Leanne, flower arrangement and décor)

> "The best way to attract clients is to provide good service. Even though all lawyers would provide good service, my way was to make our relationships less formal. My clients could phone me up anytime and talk to me... I would show them I really cared for them. I even dressed down to make myself more approachable. I don't wear formal suits to work." (Gladys, law firm)

Such informal personalized relationships were even more significant when gender was taken into account, that is, between women business owners and their women co-ethnic clientele. The unique femaleness of women-to-women relationships facilitated by co-ethnic gendered resources plays a key role in these women-run businesses:

> "I am very pleased that I can establish a group of loyal customers. I am very nice to them. I am sincere because I like to sell good quality food. I became friends with many of my women customers. They would call me at home and we would chat over the phone. We sometimes go shopping together." (Sharon, food stall)

> "In dealing with customers, I usually talk to them a lot. I have to build up trust. I have to sell them the right products and make them feel comfortable. Then they will come back and they will refer their friends to come too. Even after they make a purchase, you have to keep on having a conversation with them. Usually we talk about beauty-related topics, fashion, etc. Sometimes they may stay for the whole hour, just talking... You build up relationships this way..." (Alison, cosmetics retail)

> "Many of my customers came back because they liked the products. But we also chatted a lot... not just plain selling. We talked women's talk... That's why in this business, a man cannot do the job. Sometimes, my customers may just come in and chat when they were passing by." (Yolanda, women's fashion)

Such personalized co-ethnic gendered relationships were even more pronounced with immigrant women patrons whose *astronaut* husbands left them alone or with their children. It is through such informal relationships that these women owners were able to maintain returning customers or to obtain referrals from them:

> "Many clients came solely for the purpose of relaxing themselves. So as long as I was able to maintain a tranquil environment, they would be happy. But there were others who'd like to talk. They liked to talk about their lives, their families, their clothes, beauty tips, etc., that is, women topics. Many of them were wives of *astronauts*. They were bored with their lives and they were not happy. So when they came here, they would take the opportunity to talk about their problems. I am very sympathetic to these women. I would play the role of a good listener, and sometimes try my best to cheer them up. But of course, there were also those who did not want to mention their problems, fearing that they would lose face in front of me... But in any case, if I were able to satisfy their individual needs, they would come back again,

> and they would refer their friends to me." (Isabelle, Beauty service)
>
> "We chatted a lot, you know, women talk. The wives of *astronauts* in particular liked to chat. They felt so bored with their lives that they would come back again and again and talk. They would complain how useless they felt staying here living on their husbands' remittances... One woman even told me not to let her fall asleep [when doing facial]. She said she had no one to talk to at home, and she had nothing to do but sleep all the time when she's home." (Julie, beauty service)

In general, the building of trust with co-ethnic clientele through the establishment of personalized relationships was considered essential for business success. Class and gender interacted with ethnicity in specific ways to produce favourable business conditions unique to these women-specific businesses.

3b. Personalized Co-ethnic Recruitment Networks

Recruitment of co-ethnic workers was a common practice among businesses catering to the Chinese market due to functional necessity and a sense of ethnic solidarity. Business service was racialized with the popular beliefs that co-ethnic workers were the ideal candidates to serve co-ethnic clients because they share the same language and culture:

> "I never consider hiring *gwái-lóu*. First, it would be difficult for them to communicate with my other Chinese staff. Second, our business caters to Asians, mostly Chinese people. It would not be appropriate for *gwái-lóu* to serve Asian customers." (Sharon)
>
> "All the employees are Chinese. I intentionally looked for Chinese because it would be easier for us to communicate with each other." (Andrea)

In some cases, women made use of their privileged position to provide employment opportunities for the otherwise disadvantaged co-ethnics men and women:

> "Most of my staff members are new [Chinese] immigrants from Hong Kong. I like to hire new immigrants because I was one before. I understand how difficult it could be for them to get work. So I don't mind if they do not have any experience. I will train them." (Gloria)

In the process of recruiting co-ethnic employees, these women had a tendency to turn also to informal connections, through friends, kin, or business colleagues and associates due to their assumed trustworthiness and dependability. Consequently, many women hired personal friends and relatives or the friends and relatives of friends and business associates:

> "My employee was recommended from a friend of mine. In this way I would know that her credential and experiences were credible. I also would know better whether she's suitable for the job. I would know whether she's honest or trustworthy before I hired her. You see, in retail business, the salespeople not only have to be skilled and experienced in sales, they also have to be honest and dependable. They deal with cash and credit card transactions all the time." (Alison)

> "The staff I hired was a colleague of mine in Hong Kong. She helped me out on Sundays so that I could have a day off. She had the keys to the store and she could get access to everything. That's why I had to hire somebody I knew, someone that I could trust." (Amanda)

Such co-ethnic trust can be at times gendered as well when they believed that women employees were more trustworthy than their male counterparts:

> "I like to hire women more than men because I think they are more trustworthy... They are more honest." (Cheryl)

The emphasis on informal relationships in recruitment was both a boon and a bane to these women employers. While they were able to recruit employees that they perceived as trustworthy and dependable, the personalized relationships established, as a previous section indicated, also inhibited them from exercising control as employers. On

the whole, however, a more personalized, humanitarian and egalitarian work relation seemed to work better for these small businesses, which once again demonstrates the relatively strong impact of social embeddedness.

3c. Co-ethnic Business Support Networks

In the last chapter I discussed class relationships between capitalist and small businesses, and concluded that women business owners were generally unconscious of the privileges and exploitation of large capitalist enterprises. One of the reasons may possibly be the accommodating gesture of these big businesses when they recognized the potential of the Chinese market and the significance of co-ethnic solidarity. Consequently, many, particularly the cosmetics wholesale outlets and vacation travel, had looked for local Chinese distributors in order to serve the growing Chinese market. Other large suppliers of wholesale hair products, wholesale plastic cutlery and paper products, for instance, began to hire Chinese sales representatives for easier communication with Chinese retailers. As one women recalled:

> "When I first started this business a few years back, the reps were all *gwái*. In recent years, they'd changed to *tòhng-yàhn*. I think they did this to suit our needs. Some of our business associates expressed the concern that they were unable to communicate with the *gwái* reps. They could not understand when they introduced and explained their products." (Clara)

Other mainstream institutions such as banks also hired Chinese front-line workers and managers to satisfy the needs of the co-ethnic clientele:

> "I did not intentionally look for a Chinese banker because I speak English. But when I went into [a bank] and talked to them about opening a corporate account, they immediately sent a Chinese to me. Then we started speaking Cantonese." (Gabriella)

> "Now no matter which bank you deal with in Richmond, you will be served by a *tòhng-yàhn* staff. The banks here [in Richmond] are full of *tòhng-yàhn* employees." (Carol)

At the same time, with the growth of the Chinese economy, many small local Chinese wholesalers were also established, competing for a place in the Chinese market. While many of them served as intermediaries, linking transnational business relations between China, Hong Kong and Canada, others began to 'monopolize' co-ethnic business connections locally notably in the areas of produce wholesale and garment manufacturing:

> "There are so many *tòhng-yàhn* wholesalers in this industry [produce and meat] that we don't have to contact *gwái-lóu*..." (Martha)

> "The suppliers in vegetarian food products and vegetables are mostly *tòhng-yàhn*. Other than ice cream and soft drinks, we deal with Chinese suppliers only." (Martha)

> "Many of the garment manufacturing companies in Vancouver have been monopolized by the Chinese. So as sub-contractors we don't have to deal with the *gwái* market directly." (Mrs. Ting)

Despite the availability of local business sources, many women in my study, as a result of their pre-immigration experiences and connections, looked for suppliers outside of Canada. As many as eighteen of them (31 percent), most of whom arrived recently after 1986, had established transnational connections: They "[made] use of their networks in Asia and [took] advantage of the different economies in order to maintain and operate their businesses in Canada" (Wong and Ng, 1994:81). In line with the findings from Wong and Ng's study (1994) on Canadian Chinese entrepreneurs in Vancouver, who were mostly male, the same varieties of business operations were found among the Chinese women in my study. A couple of the immigrant women, who continued their

family businesses in Hong Kong after immigration, had integrated their Canadian business operation with their business in Hong Kong through import-export trade. Another woman made use of "Canada as a station-stop in ... penetrating the larger U.S. market" (Wong and Ng, 1994:81) by importing arts and handicraft from China and exporting them to the United States. Others made use of their past connections to engage in wholesale transnational businesses by becoming wholesalers of goods such as handbags and women's clothing imported from Hong Kong. Many others involved in retail transnational businesses, importing goods such as gift items, video games, children's wear, women's wear, Chinese arts and furnishings, Chinese paintings, Chinese carpet, as well as Chinese language magazines and books from Hong Kong, China and Japan.

My findings did not correspond totally to those of Wong and Ng. While businesses involved the export of Canadian manufactured and designed products were found in their research, they were absent in mine. This could be explained by the relative lack of interest in manufacturing and construction among women entrepreneurs. What Wong and Ng did not find in their study, however, was the transnational business relations involving the recruitment of staff and the use of ethnic materials from overseas in providing co-ethnic services in Canada. The Chinese dance school run by a Chinese woman in my study was operated on the standards and levels established in Beijing. Not only did she invite adjudicators from China every year to adjudicate exams, she also recruited dance teachers from China, and ordered pedagogical materials and dance costumes from China.

The rest of the businesses ordered supplies locally via local wholesalers or branch offices of national wholesalers. But the mainstream suppliers usually lost ground to the Chinese counterparts despite their accommodating gesture, that is, by hiring Chinese staff to deal with the Chinese market. Many women expressed their preference for Chinese-owned wholesalers if there was a choice. For example, those in the food business usually ordered vegetables and meat from Chinese wholesalers but paper products and soft drinks from *gwái-lóu* suppliers because these supplies were not available through co-ethnic channels. Such discriminatory practices were culture-related particularly when communication problems became an issue:

> "Many of the owners in this food court asked me to be their interpreter when they had to make a complaint to the wholesalers, for example, about the delivery of coke... If there were a choice, they would prefer to do business with Chinese wholesalers because they could not speak good English." (Sharon)

Cultural differences in terms of how the *gwái-lóu* companies failed to understand the Chinese way of doing business was another commonly cited reason. As these woman explained:

> "We prefer to deal with *tòhng-yàhn* wholesalers. The *foreigners* are not competitive enough. They are unwilling to lower the prices. They are also not as hard selling as the *tòhng-yàhn*. They are not flexible enough." (Cheng Ming-ying)

> "The suppliers we deal with are *tòhng-yàhn*. *Gwai* suppliers are unable to hit the *tòhng-yàhn* market because they are so inflexible in doing business. For example, they set up a minimum quantity, and would not give us any leeway if we were not able to meet the criterion. They also required us to sign a contract guaranteeing so many orders per year. How can I do so if I do not even know how much business I am going to have per year? But *tòhng-yàhn* suppliers do not have such a stiff policy. And the *gwai* companies are not willing to

> change their policy to adapt to our needs. Chinese suppliers also use a lot of gimmicks to attract business. For example, they are willing to give me a special rate if I pay in cash. But the *gwái* suppliers are not willing to do that." (Audrey)

In some occasions, such differences may even lead to conflict, as the experience of this woman illustrates:

> "The *gwái-lóu* and Chinese do things differently. For example, I had to deal with *gwái* operated bus companies [because there were no Chinese owned bus companies then]. When I needed an extra bus the next morning and I phoned them at 9 p.m., they would turn me down abruptly, saying 'no more buses, why didn't you call me at 5?' To them, after the office hour was over, they were unwilling to work. They were unwilling to contact the bus driver for me even if there were buses available. They would say, 'You Chinese are crazy. Everything is last minute.' But then the Chinese customers always made their decisions the last minute... So they could not cope with our business style. They would say, 'Don't you have personal time for yourself?'... They would think 'you Chinese are troublemakers'. But for me, the ability to provide quick service is the way to keep customers. If I were able to satisfy their needs the last minute, they would think of my agency whenever they decided to go for a trip.... Now, these *gwái* bus companies had adapted to our needs. Many are open till very late at night." (Ada)

Hence, it is common practice for both mainstream companies and Chinese business owners to engage in the process of racialization and ethnicization. Co-ethnic bonds were utilized to maximize business profits. Mainstream companies, in order to stay competitive, recruited Chinese employees to meet the demand of Chinese businesses. Their accommodating gestures sometimes won positive feedback from the women entrepreneurs. Comments such as "they are very nice and very polite" and "we have established good relationships" were common. It seems that the priority of economic benefits could reduce the chances of overt inter-racial conflict or racism.

3d. Co-ethnic Family and Kin Labour

Except for the involvement of co-ethnic family members as official business partners, the women entrepreneurs in my study did not use family and kin labour on a regular basis. More than half (58.6 percent) of the businesses did not use family or kin labour at all, whether paid or unpaid, and the reasons were related to gender, partnership, skills and knowledge, and immigration. First, many of them did not seek help from their husbands because the businesses were gender-specific. And some of the husbands refused to help out for the same reason. Second, these women did not want their family members to get involved when the businesses were partnered with friends or other business associates. Third, some work required specialized knowledge and skills that were not available through family members. Fourth, as pioneer immigrants, some recent immigrants did not have families to depend on as compared to those who had been here for a long time.

For those who used family or kin labour, they did so only temporarily. The help needed was seasonal or contingent rather than regular, and was more likely from their own teenage children. Ten out of the twenty-four women who sought family help asked their children to help out during weekends, summer holidays, Christmas seasons, or when emergencies arose. Since helping out parents is seen as a way to express family solidarity and support, the parents would prefer to show their appreciation by remuneration such as gifts or pocket money rather than a wage. To them, the work experience their children earned and the lessons they learned far exceeded material rewards, as some of them remarked:

> "My two daughters had to take Chinese lessons on Saturdays. So after the lesson, they would come to the store

> and help out - to serve customers and to handle cash. The reasons I wanted them to help out was to let them know how difficult it was for mommy and daddy to make money... I did not pay them. I would buy them CDs or other gifts instead. Sometimes I bought them tickets to concerts. The reason I refused to pay them was to teach them that this was a family business, and so they're also part of it... I wanted them to know that even though their parents were no longer working as senior management in large organizations, there was no shame in what we were doing right now... " (Sharon)
>
> "During summer time, I would ask my daughter to come and help out with basic accounts work. I wanted to give her some training so that when she grew up she would have earned some working knowledge and experience." (Ophelia)
>
> "When I went to shows or exhibitions, I would bring my children along. They would help me with sales. I think this is good for them to gain some experience. I did not pay them. I would instead give them verbal encouragement. I wanted them to understand that it was their responsibilities to help out as part of the family. Sometimes when my employee called in sick, I would ask my daughter to work in her place. I would show appreciation by buying her gifts or movie tickets. I wanted her to know that she's doing this for the love of the family." (Gail)

The next group of family members more likely to be called upon was the husbands. While it is common practice for husbands to exploit the labour of wives in ethnic businesses (Dhaliwal, 1998; Baxter and Raw, 1988; Westwood and Bhachu, 1988; Zimmer and Alridch, 1987), the reverse had not happened. Aside from those who jointly owned businesses with their wives, only five men were willing to help out without material rewards. However, their involvement was comparatively speaking more extensive because they were motivated by the intangible rewards of the power of influence, and probably also by the power of love, as reflected by the stories told by these women:

> "David helped me with all the computer work such as making newsletters, gathering statistics, making presentation kits, and writing notices to parents. He did all these for free. It was him who suggested to me that I should get everything computerized. Before, I did everything manually. He was right... Now I see the beauty in it... Now he has a few projects in hand. First, he has to update the student list. He has to do reports... Basically he is doing everything that involves the computer... From the beginning, he knew that I was unable to pay him. But he's willing to do it." (Vera)

> "My husband is now responsible for administration and accounting while I am responsible for marketing. He came every day to help out. He was even more anxious than me when readers responded to the ads on the paper and phoned in for information about business opportunities. He acted as if he's a partner but he was not. He did not want to be a partner for worries that if business did not turn out he would lose face. Now since the business is under my name, if anything went wrong it would have nothing to do with him. I even used my own maiden name to register to make him feel better...[Her husband was a renowned businessman before immigration.]" (Faye)

So instead of playing a subordinate role, these husbands were able to work independently and had power to influence and control. However, this was not the case in other circumstances when their children or other family members and kin were helping out.

Other than the children and the husbands, the third group of family members these women were more likely to seek help were their sisters, mothers and sisters-in-law. Again, many of them did it for free because the jobs were not regular. For example, Robin would ask her mother who was a piano tuner to tune the pianos in her studio when needed without paying her because "she lived with us and we had always been financially responsible for her". Becky's sister would help her out "in case of emergencies" when, for example, she had a doctor's appointment. Amanda would ask her sister-in-law to keep the store for a while when she had to pick up merchandize from the Canadian

Customs: "I did not pay her because it was a matter of a few hours". Men were rarely sought for, and if so, were only used for their physical strength. Alexis, among the few, would occasionally ask her brother to help out packing and delivering carpets because they were heavy. Andrea would ask her brother-in-law to help packing stocks in times of making exhibition trips.

If exploitation refers to labouring workers as subordinates without adequate remuneration, then these women employers were more likely to exploit their less powerful children and women relatives than their husbands. In the cases where husbands' or brothers' labour was seen as a necessity, they would grant these men partnership status as a reward to guarantee active participation. This indicated that men, unlike their female counterparts, were less likely to be willing to work for free. In any case, exploitation on family and kin labour was not as common and extensive as the situation noted among male ethnic entrepreneurs.

B. The "De-ethnicizing" Strategy

As indicated earlier, even though an overwhelming majority of the women in my study targeted their businesses at the Chinese co-ethnic market, there were a few of them who deliberately wanted to escape the confinement of the ethnic niche (refer to category 4 from Table 3.2 in Chapter three). In order for the businesses to be more appealing to the general population and stay competitive in the open market, the operation was created racially to appeal to White customers and clients. In so doing, it would be essential for these owners to be familiar with the mainstream culture and to be proficient in the English language. Beatrice's hair salon, Candice's and Ophelia's travel agencies were cases in point.

Since all three businesses were in the retail service sector, it is important that at least the exterior of the establishments should look inviting to White clientele. To achieve this, all three businesses, none of which was given a Chinese name, were located in mainstream open strip malls. Not a single piece of decoration had a Chinese reference. Displayed in the establishments were magazines and posters in English with western music playing at the background. Other than the visibility of a few Chinese and Asian employees, the décor and atmosphere were entirely *westernized*. Such a de-ethnicizing strategy, however, was nonetheless novel: Newell (2000) took note of how the Chinese entrepreneurs at the turn of the 20th century combat racism by choosing to "recede behind the scenes" (16) and by adopting non-Chinese business names.

In addition, the women in my study had to have a good grasp of the Canadian culture and the English language in order to provide personalized services:

> "An important way to keep customers [in the hairstyling business] is good service. When they are happy, they would refer their friends over. Price is not a concern because usually it does not vary that much within the industry. The skills of the hairdressers are also secondary. What is most crucial is the ability to chat with them while doing their hair. When they talk about hockey, you have to talk with them. When they talk about vacation, you have to know how to respond. So basically you have to know a little about everything in order to be able to respond... The senior people like to talk about their grandchildren... Sometimes these people would keep on talking for so long that you thought you could take a break by not listening. But then they eventually would catch you by asking, 'Did you hear me?' Then I would reply, 'ya.' Then they would ask, 'What did I say?'... But of course, there are people who do not like to chat. They would come in and grab a magazine and start to read. When I asked them questions, they would reply with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Then I would know immediately that they did not like to talk. But in general, there are more people who like to talk..." (Beatrice)

> "Over the years, I developed very close relationships with my [*gwái*] customers [who patronized our travel agency]. You have to get to know them personally. You have to know their tastes and preferences. Our business works like a custom-made service. The more you know about them, the easier your job will be. Sometimes they would just give me the general ideas, then I would do the planning and scheduling for them... Many old customers just wanted me to arrange everything for them, from flights, to hotels, to itinerary...They had developed so much confidence in me." (Ophelia)

While these women trusted their own capabilities in dealing with White customers, they did not have similar faith in co-ethnic workers. Instead, they believed that White employees would be more desirable to attract White customers and keep them at ease. Candice, for example, started out her travel agency employing one White woman to work at the front desk for the purpose of serving White clients. Only when the Chinese population in Richmond started to grow and her business began to attract Chinese clients, she began to hire Chinese staff. Even so, they had to be fluently bilingual so that they could also serve White clients. There was an unstated rule that governed communication in the office. Even though Candice and her Chinese staff communicated in Cantonese during their daily conversations with the presence of the White employee, they would switch to English the moment a White client stepped in. Unless they were helping Chinese clients at the same time, no Chinese conversations were allowed in front of White customers. The rationale was to maintain a non-Chinese business environment.

Beatrice went even further. In order to make her business look predominantly mainstream, she hid her identity as the owner, and hired a White woman as the manager in charge of daily operation together with other White hairdressers:

> "I hired a *gwái-pòh* as the manager of my salon. I also hired six *gwái-pòh* hairdressers to serve the *gwái* clients. In this [mainstream] mall, I know many business owners are Chinese, but they hired *foreigners* to work at the front as a disguise. People know me only as a hairstylist working in the salon. I don't want them to know that the boss is Chinese. *Gwái* customers do not like to patronize Chinese-style hair salons. I worked in this industry long enough to realize this. So when I started this business, I decided not to let clients know that this is Chinese owned. When they come to the salon and see a Chinese person at the reception area, and all hairstylists being Chinese, and hear Chinese people talking loudly in Chinese, they would not feel comfortable. They resent that kind of environment. That's why I hired a *gwái-pòh* working as the manager in the reception area. This makes the *gwái* customers feel at ease...My manager is also responsible for dealing with sales representatives sent over by the wholesalers, who are mainly *gwái*." (Beatrice)

In Beatrice's hair salon, she was the only non-White "worker" responsible mostly for Chinese clients. The remaining White workforce helped her attract and maintain White customers, especially those who appeared "racist":

> "When there was a walk-in customer, they would not have become attached to a hairdresser. So the policy is that whoever is available will serve that person. So I would approach them when it was my turn. But sometimes I would know immediately that the [White] person did not like me. They doubted my abilities and would ask questions like, 'Do you know how to do haircut?' I usually would feel very embarrassed in front of my staff and other regular customers. But what could I do? I am used to it. So I would just let my other staff serve them." (Beatrice)

The above evidence shows that the construction of a predominantly White environment is essential when doing business with the general population, particularly when the products and service are non-cultural. Clara's experience further substantiates this point. With the intention of targeting only Chinese clientele, Clara and her husband were excited when they found White clients patronizing their hair salon. These people,

referred by their Chinese friends and colleagues, at first were happy with their service and kept returning. But after some time, Clara noticed that they did not show up any more:

> "I think the major reason is because they did not feel comfortable among the rest of us talking in Cantonese, listening to Canton Pop music, and reading Chinese magazines. So later, I changed the radio channel to English, and I replaced some Chinese magazines with Canadian magazines. But this did not encourage them to return probably because they still felt uncomfortable hearing Cantonese conversations... Now I only have one Caucasian client. Every time he comes with his wife and she is Chinese. Probably he is used to hearing Cantonese at home, and so he does not feel intimidated.... I think these people do not like us because our salon is too Chinese style. Another reason could be because of language barriers. Even though we speak English, our level does not allow us to get into deeper conversations. Sometimes we just run out of words or out of topics." (Clara)

What Clara did not realize is that they were unable to compete with mainstream hair salons that provided similar kinds of service. White customers seem to be more than happy to patronize ethnic businesses when such services are not available in the open market. For example, those who dine at Chinese restaurants would not feel intimidated or uncomfortable among large groups of Chinese speaking patrons. Hence, some women in my study who served the general population did not have to adopt a 'de-ethnicization' strategy because their businesses were culture-specific. Andrea's wholesale Oriental arts and crafts and Anna's Oriental arts, crafts and furnishing retail stores, for instance, hired Chinese employees to deal with White customers. Their businesses did not have to appear 'White' because they were uniquely cultural with little competition from the mainstream economy. In dealing with ethnic goods, these businesses involved a market that would be more convincing with an ethnic emphasis.

C. Inter-racial Conflicts

The ethnic resources most women possessed, in the form of coherent and extensive ethnic networks established both locally and transnationally, had reduced the chances of inter-racial conflicts. While many of them had experienced racism when they were working in the mainstream economy, such unpleasant experiences were subsequently reduced if not disappeared entirely after they had established their businesses. As the business relations were primarily co-ethnic, most women did not have to involve in inter-racial relations.

But even for those who had business relations with the Whites, their experiences were generally claimed to be positive, especially with White suppliers and workers. For instance, those who dealt with White suppliers and dealers found their relationships particularly rewarding and pleasant since these relations were based primarily on economic benefits:

> "There is not much racism in my business operation because they [the White suppliers] wanted to get money from you. So even though my English was not fluent, these people were exceptionally patient in trying to understand me" (Gail).

Some were able to avoid possible conflicts by using their class resources to hire White workers to deal with White clientele and suppliers. Relationships with White workers were also claimed to be pleasant as "these women would not be willing to work for me if they were racist in the first place, and they did not mind hearing us speaking Chinese" (Candice). Hence, these women, by using their class and ethnic resources, were able to create a pleasant and non-discriminatory environment, which otherwise would be difficult to attain.

The situation became quite different, however, when dealing with mainstream (mostly White) clientele and customers. Unless these women made use of White labour to avoid direct relationships with mainstream clients, those who had to deal with customers from other racial backgrounds shared frustrating experiences, as the following two women noted:

> "Some of the customers thought that because you were Chinese they could take advantage of you. For example, when they did not read the menu carefully they would blame me for 'false advertising'. They would blame me for charging them half a sandwich for the price of a sandwich, but in fact the price was stated very clearly in the menu. A White male doctor came in every morning and ordered bacon and egg for breakfast despite I told him repeatedly that I was not allowed to serve this kind of food because of building regulations that did not allow us to fry. Every time he would get upset, and sometimes would even make arrogant comments like 'what kind of a café is this? You don't even serve proper breakfast!'" (Edna)

> "I had very bad experiences with East Indian [male] retailers. They bargained so hard that I almost lost my dignity... Each time after I closed a sale, I would feel very depressed. But after I closed the sale, they would then tell me they could only pay after six months. I think the problem was because I am a woman. They are exceptionally chauvinistic, and they treated me as if I was ignorant. The White men are only a little bit better. At least they were polite to me. The *tòhng-yàhn* are the best. They were very friendly, and we could develop close relationships. They would not trick me. They were able to appreciate my effort, and would not lower the price unreasonably." (Sheila)

Here we find the power of economic consumption integrated with race and gender leading to bitter race and gender relations at work. Such a condition was not found in situations when these women were powerful consumers themselves (in dealing with White suppliers) or when they were powerful employers (in their relations with their

White employees). It seems that inter-racial conflict could be avoided with the strategic use of class, ethnic and gender resources.

But even though many women created themselves a racist-free and comfortable environment with their class, ethnic and gender resources, this was not perceived positively by the mainstream society. The ethnic market, for example, in the form of Asian (Chinese) malls, was criticized to be self-segregating, leading to reverse discrimination. Perception about unwelcoming and discriminatory gestures against White customers were issues hotly discussed and debated in the English media. In response to these claims, some women had the following to say:

> "Occasionally, we did have a few *gwái-pòh* patronizing our [hair] salon. And we welcome them. In fact, as business people, we would not discriminate against any potential customers, whether they are White or Chinese or Black. But we came across a bitter experience once. You see, the Chinese style of running a hair salon is different. We did not do it by appointments but on a first come first serve basis. So very often, there was a lineup of customers waiting to be served at the reception area. It happened that one day a Chinese male customer went to the washroom when it was his turn and this White woman, without realizing that he was in line, accused us of letting him jump the queue. She accused us of being racist, and later even took it to the strata council of the mall threatening to sue us for racism. Since then we were extra cautious in dealing with non-Chinese customers. Luckily we rarely had White people patronizing us." (Ivy)

> "It is not true that we are racist against White people. Sometimes this could be due to misunderstanding. For example, occasionally we would have some White people strolling in the mall and browsing. But we knew that they were here more like tourists than as customers. They came here out of their interest and curiosity than to shop. So sometimes when there were two groups of customers in the [children's wear] store, Chinese and White, it would be very likely that I would approach the Chinese because I knew that they were serious shoppers. Probably then the White people

> might feel bad because I was ignoring them and not serving them." (Judith)

The above examples demonstrate that the effort of creating a separate ethnic business environment may not work to avoid inter-racial conflict. The mainstream society, in different ways, has pointed fingers at the Chinese business community for their exclusiveness, putting pressure on them to confide in their inadequacies. For example, the issue on monolingual Chinese signage that occurred a year after the interviews had forced the Chinese merchants in Chinese malls to settle the issue apologetically, as reflected in the following media story:

> "Ever since Aberdeen Centre opened eight years ago, the Asian malls have gained a reputation as being unfriendly to non-Asians, an attitude fuelled by shop owners erecting Chinese-only signs. But Lowe said that the attitude is changing as [these shopkeepers are pushed] to adopt signs in both languages even though they are not required to do so by the city of Richmond's bylaws. 'It takes time, but we are gradually improving. It'll take a lot of work. We want to open our hearts.'" (the Vancouver Sun, Dec. 6, 1997)

In the press release on a new shopping centre to be constructed at Coquitlam, the Chinese developer proclaimed,

> "We watched what is happening in Richmond with Aberdeen [Centre] and other malls that cater so much to the Asian community and alienate the main group... we want to make sure we don't make the same mistake..." (the Vancouver Sun, Dec 16, 1997)

D. Intra-ethnic conflict

Past literature has concentrated on the study of ethnic resources in assisting ethnic enterprises but tend to overlook intra-ethnic conflict. Other than the recognition of the high competitiveness of co-ethnic businesses resulting in low profit margins and labour intensity, the extent and context of intra-ethnic conflict did not receive sufficient

attention. In a previous chapter, I pointed out the existing phenomenon of segregation within the Chinese community by means of the dichotomization of the market between the Chinese communities in the Vancouver Chinatown and Richmond. I documented how the women entrepreneurs in my study, representing a homogeneous class, had classified the Chinese markets between the 'old' *wàh-kìuh* and the 'new' immigrants. Within the ethnic niche in Richmond, these women constructed a different dichotomy, resulting in yet another distinction of 'us' and 'them', this time under a different interpretation of class and culture.

An artificial boundary was drawn between the 'old' Chinese immigrants who were assimilated to the Canadian culture, fluent in English, and had achieved success through 'struggle and hard work' and the unassimilated 'new' immigrants who did not speak proper English and did not understand the Canadian culture, and who came to Canada with enviable wealth. This dichotomy was manufactured by the 'old' immigrants who had become assimilated to the dominant culture, from which they had adopted the biased view against their co-ethnic recent arrivals. These 'old' immigrants usually blamed the 'new' immigrants for their discriminatory experiences:

> "Before [the massive incoming of new immigrants], I was not reminded I was Chinese. I did not feel that I was any different. But now I felt that people had negative images on the Chinese. They felt that all Chinese were wealthy and without having to work for a living. They would think I was one of them. 'Why don't you just go home and relax?' This made me feel very unhappy. I am not one of them." (Candice)

> "My *foreigner* customers like me very much because they know that I am not the 'new immigrant' type. I remember once a customer asked why I had to work on New Year's day. I told her that I needed the money to pay mortgages for my house and my car, and I had children to support. You know what she said? 'No, you don't. Chinese people are rich…'

> You see, these new Chinese immigrants had created some bad images for all Chinese. I had to tell my *foreigner* customers that I had been here for a long time, that I was like them working hard to make all kinds of payments. Then they would not treat me like they treated other Chinese [new immigrants]." (Beatrice)

They also blamed the 'new' immigrants for creating a harmful business environment:

> "Some 'new' immigrants started their businesses for the sake of removing the immigrant condition on their immigration status. They did not care if their businesses were making money or not. Their purpose was not to make money but to keep the operation running until the deadline. So they would mark the price very low. How could healthy businesses like ours compete with them?" (Leanne)

The cleavages between the 'old' and the 'new' immigrants, however, did not translate into discriminatory business practices. None of the 'old' immigrants would openly reject doing business with these 'new' 'other', just as the racist images of the dominant culture on the Chinese community rarely led to harmful business relations when the accomplishment of business goals was primarily on material profits.

Besides this 'old' and 'new' dichotomy that was economically driven, there was, in addition, another dichotomy that was constructed but for a different purpose. The 'left' and 'right' dichotomy between the pro-China and the pro-Taiwan camps was produced for political reasons, as this woman stated:

> "The Chinese here associated me to be pro-Mainland China because of my business connection with China. So the Taiwan people would not want to have anything to do with me. It's really sad that people had to link art [Chinese dance] to politics." (Lorna)

E. Weighing the Benefits against the Costs of Race and Ethnicity

Ethnic resources, most notably informal networks, play a significant part in doing business after immigration. Many of such connections contributed to creating a highly

institutionally complete ethnic niche which provided a safe and comfortable environment, not only for the business women but also for the consumers. Sharing the same culture, same history and the same language had allowed the entrepreneurs, especially the 'new' immigrants or those with English language difficulty, to find a niche in a foreign place, as some women remarked:

> "The good thing about doing business with Chinese is that you know what their needs are. It's also easy to communicate with them using the same language. The customers also feel close to you when we talk about our [common] past, about Hong Kong. So it's very easy to establish personal relationships." (Bonnie)
>
> "I feel very comfortable doing business in this Chinese environment [Chinese mall]. I feel being protected. I feel safe. So if there were any racial conflict [at work], I knew the Chinese here would all support me..." (Sharon)
>
> "The good thing is that we don't have to bother with the mainstream market. We are doing business as if we are still in Hong Kong..." (Clara)
>
> "The Chinese business people are very close to each other. Running our businesses in the same mall, we very much take care of each other. We are like a big family. We are so close probably because this is a *foreigner's* place." (Sarah)

Through various local and transnational co-ethnic networks, ethnic businesses were established serving the needs of the Chinese market. The privileges of a mature ethnic economy with a high degree of institutional completeness have extended even into everyday life, as reflected in the following quotes:

> "I don't have to deal with *foreigners* in my everyday life. When I am at work, I deal with *tòhng-yàhn* customers. The suppliers are all Chinese. My staff is Chinese. Wherever I go in my everyday life, I can go to places where I can be served by *tòhng-yàhn*. Even in banks and some major [mainstream] stores, they have Chinese speaking people to serve us. Richmond is like a little Hong Kong. I don't have to speak

> English here. I feel very comfortable, and I am leading exactly the same kind of life as I was in Hong Kong: eating Chinese food, watching Chinese TV, reading Chinese magazines, shopping at Chinese supermarkets and Chinese malls, etc." (Ivy)
>
> "I don't have many opportunities to deal with *gwái-lóu*. Here in Richmond, when you go to the bank, you are served by *tòhng-yàhn*. I patronize Chinese doctor, lawyer, dentist and accountant. I don't have much contact with *westerners*." (Robin)
>
> "Before when I worked for X [a mainstream organization] I had to speak English all the time. People were not close to me. Now I deal with mostly Chinese customers. I speak Chinese all the time. Even when I go home, I watch Chinese television. Now I feel happier and more comfortable. In Richmond you don't have to speak English any more. Wherever you go, there are bound to be some Chinese serving you. There is no difference between Hong Kong and Richmond. Here you can get whatever that is available in Hong Kong. So life is more comfortable now." (Mary)

Hence, racism was only experienced in situations when inter-racial contact was unavoidable, for example, on the street or in the bus, as these women took note:

> "I felt being discriminated against when I was driving. I remember one time when I was driving at 60 [km], the car behind me kept very close and honked at me to speed up. When I turned back I noticed it was a White man..." ((Man Lai-chen)
>
> "When I took the bus to work, I greeted the bus driver 'good morning'. But he [a White male] did not answer and pulled a long face at me. But when the other White people came on the bus, he became very nice and polite to them.... There was also one time when I was driving, a [White] man spit on the window of my car... Sometimes the kids yelled at me, 'you Chinese, go back to where you belong'... They stared at me with hate. But in running this business, I never experienced any racism. All the [White] customers were nice. I guess you only experience racism in your everyday life." (Alexis)
>
> "I do feel a little bit of racism. I remember once when I was walking down the street with my sister, a *westerner* woman

> yelled at us, saying 'you are in my way. Can't you move faster?'" (Mrs. Tao)

However, the possession of co-ethnic resources were perceived by some as potential barriers that would inhibit them from integrating into the dominant society or expanding their businesses to the mainstream market, as these women commented:

> "The good thing is that we don't have to deal with the mainstream market... dealing with *tòhng-yàhn* only. The disadvantage is that it has become extremely difficult to integrate into the larger society." (Clara)

> "The disadvantage is that you have to limit your business to the *tòhng-yàhn* market because you don't speak good English. You are stuck doing business with the Chinese, and cannot expand to the mainstream market. It is important to integrate into the mainstream society." (Sandra)

> "The real money is in the *gwái-lóu* market even though they are not big spenders as compared with the Chinese. But they are much bigger in size, and in the long run, if your business has to survive or to make it big, you cannot just depend on the *tòhng-yàhn* market. But too bad my English is not good enough. So I am stuck here." (Mrs. Tao)

For the 'old' immigrant women who were fluently bilingual in English and Chinese, and who were familiar with the mainstream market, they saw their ethnic resources as an added asset as compared with other uniligual British Columbians, as illustrated as follows:

> "I think being a Chinese is definitely an advantage. If you speak only a single language, say, English, you can only serve *gwái* customers. But when speak both English and Chinese, you are able to serve a mix of customers. My business is able to survive because I understand both cultures and I can deal with them accordingly. But I don't think the *lóu-fàan* can do it." (Ophelia)

> "The advantage is that I can speak both English and Chinese, so I can be the bridge between the Chinese immigrants and the *westerners*. I can help the Chinese people in their accounting

> matters. They usually do not want to patronize *gwái* accountants." (Ursula)

The above analysis points to the fact that ethnic resources may work differently for different groups of women. To the 'new' immigrants, these resources pampered them into a comfortable and self-contained business life, reducing contact with the dominant society and hence the possibility of racial conflict. To the 'old' immigrants, on the other hand, ethnic resources were viewed as an added asset to business, bridging between both worlds. Taking altogether, co-ethnicity provides more advantages than disadvantages for these women as a whole. Co-ethnic networks, both local and transnational, also contributes to the intensification and diversification of the Chinese community, leading to the globalization of institutional completeness, serving Chinese with both ethnic and multi-ethnic products and services. Inter-racial and intra-ethnic conflicts were rendered trivial and secondary, being managed with tolerance when profits became the priority.

The Impact of Age: A Forgotten Phenomenon

Even though the issue of age was not planned in the original research agenda, during the course of the interviews, its significance caught my attention. The power of youth consumerism facilitated by the recent arrival of children of wealthy immigrants or well-to-do *astrounauts* from Hong Kong and Taiwan was phenomenal. This pattern was particularly evident among young women consumers who patronized women-specific services such as beauty service, cosmetics retail, hairstyling, fashion and specialty gift items, and young male consumers seeking trendy video games and gift items. The following testimonies illustrate this powerful market:

> "Half of my clients were young girls or college students in their twenties whose parents were not here. One girl from Hong Kong came in almost every day and spent close to

$10,000 a month. Another Taiwanese girl came in and bought all the skin care products I displayed here. The parents did not care. They let them use their credit cards and paid for them without questioning." (Rosemary, skin care)

"There were many [female] students who came in for pimple problems and sensitive skin problems. Some were referred by their mothers. Most of them were very wealthy. I remember swiping a [credit] card once for the amount of $4000. These girls didn't care about spending money. Their parents allow them to do it. They didn't bargain. They were very easy to handle. I really like to serve these clients." (Audrey, skin care)

"There were these young customers who were supported by their wealthy parents. These were the people born with 'the golden spoon'. They would spend money without any consideration and hesitation. If they liked a particular product, they would buy it right away. They would spend money on highlighting [their hair] one day and then do the colouring the next day. They didn't care about money at all." (Ivy, hair salon)

"Many of our customers are teenage boys and girls. Their consumption power is very strong. They usually used the credit cards issued by their parents or pocket money from their parents to make purchases. Many [Chinese] parents have the idea that money means love. So the more you love your children, the more money you give them...These kids are very sensitive to trendy things. When they saw any trendy products in magazines, they would come in and look for them. If I did not carry them yet, I would place special order for them. Money was never a concern." (Sarah, gift items)

"Our clothes target young people. It's very easy to do business with them. They were usually children of *astronaut* fathers or students sent over by their parents [*satellite* kids]. They carried subsidiary [credit] cards from their fathers. So they didn't really care about price. They would buy the clothes they like and they didn't bargain." (Becky, fashion)

"My customers are all young kids, teenagers or in their early twenties. Most of them are boys who are crazy about video games. When they read about a new game in the magazine, they wanted to have it immediately... They didn't care how much the games cost. They usually used their credit cards to

> pay. They didn't bargain... When I told them that they could save a few bucks by paying cash, they still preferred to pay by card. They told me that their parents would pay for the credit card charge, so they did not bother. But if they paid cash, it would be out of their own pocket." (Fong Yin-yin, Video game retail)
>
> "Many of my customers are teenagers. They came in and order steaks and cold drinks. Some came every day. They were left here by their parents and did not know how to cook. So if they liked our food, they would come in everyday. They treated our restaurant as their own dining room." (Mary, restaurant)

Even though the *astronaut* and *satellite kids* phenomena have drawn major negative sentiments among the mainstream and ethnic communities, mostly in regards to the family and youth problems they generated, ironically, they helped to boost the economy, and notably in my study, the ethnic economy.

While young wealthy Chinese immigrants, particularly girls, constituted a significant impact on the ethnic economy, young women entrepreneurs, on the other hand, faced barriers and disadvantages because of their age. Of the few women entrepreneurs in their twenties, all of them faced some level of ageism; and in many cases, such ageism was integrated with sexism. They were either not taken seriously as owners or were harassed by customers because of their age. As these woman recalled:

> "Many customers when they looked at me, a young Chinese woman, they would say, 'Oh, these days people really know how to do business. They know how to hire the right person [an attractive young girl] to serve the growing Chinese clientele.' Sometimes, they would ask me to go work for them. Then when I refused, they would offer me higher salary. Then I would tell them that I was the boss. When they knew about that, they would be alarmed. But then the next reaction would be: "So it's your Dad's money. Was it?" It's really funny how the Chinese would see things this way. It's simply because they could not believe why a young girl would involve in the wine making business. How could a young

> woman know anything about wine and beer? Sometimes, the *gwái-lóu* customers would say things like: "Your boss is very exploiting. He makes you work six days a week. Does he know this is against the law?" They could not make sense of a young Chinese woman being a partner in this type of business. Sometimes it's really funny how these customers [both Chinese and White] treated the two of us [another Asian woman partner] at the counter. They would approach the older woman first. Then they would turn to me and say, "I just talked to you Mom..." And then they would assume the other older male [Caucasian] partner as my Dad. So I was just the daughter helping out... Some customers would like to turn to the other 'older' partners for advice, especially on making beer..." (Chelsea)
>
> "I am very young, and I look very young. So people would not believe that I was the owner. I also did not want to admit that I was the owner. If people knew that I was the owner, they would force me to give them a better price. But if I told them I was just an employee, they would assume that I had no authority to do so. But then they would treat me as nobody because I was just a worker. I felt really hurt." (Becky)
>
> "I remember at one time a young girl around eight years old came in and buy a toy from me. After a while, her mother came in with her and yelled at me for selling to her daughter. She blamed me for being irresponsible, ripping off young kids. She wanted a refund and threatened to report this incidence to 'my boss'... Obviously she did not think I could be the boss because of my age, and she felt that she, as a customer, had the right to harass me, the worker. I did not bother to explain to her..." (Aileen)

Not only were they harassed by customers, sometimes they were ill-treated by large suppliers because of their age, as one woman recalled:

> "I remember once I went to X's [a brand name] agent. They could not believe that I was in the fashion business. They looked at me in a weird manner. They asked me how big my store was. When I told them, they said that my store was too small to carry their lines of products. I think they looked down on me because of my age. They did not trust me because I was young. I do not think this has anything to do with my gender or race... Many wholesalers realized the potential of the Chinese market, and many people in the

> fashion business are women. So I don't think this is a matter of my race and gender." (Becky)

Whether it is the mainstream society or the ethnic community, ageism against young people is prevalent. Young age is generally stereotyped to be irresponsible, immature and not trustworthy, which does not fit the hard working and achievement-oriented image of entrepreneurialism. The negative impact of age may be exacerbated with gender and race leading to additional barriers on these young businesswomen not likely to be counterbalanced by their advantageous class position. We need more detailed analysis and theorizing on this topic in future studies in order to grasp a better understanding when age is intersected with class, race, ethnicity and gender.

Conclusion: The Intersection of Class, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Age

In chapters eight and nine I reviewed the diverse business relations and positions Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs experienced relative to class, race/ethnicity, gender and age. As small business owners, these women occupied marginal class positions relative to large capitalists and labour. As quasi-bourgeois, they were limited in power and control over employees despite having autonomy over their own labour. Their limited control over labour was further the result of their position as women and their dependence with co-ethnic friends and kin. As semi-proletariat, they exploited their own labour and time with modest rewards and financial uncertainty. Yet as quasi-bourgeois simultaneously, they were able to maximize rewards by controlling labour costs and taking advantages of tax relief. As petty-bourgeoisie, they were exploited by large capitalists, which they were not aware. In general, most women entrepreneurs were not sensitive to power relations bestowed by class, seeing their entrepreneurial project rather

as the most desirable strategy for economic survival and status achievement, or as a means against discrimination and barriers after immigration.

Most women were brought up in traditional Chinese entrepreneurial families or were wives of middle-class or entrepreneurial husbands, and therefore had internalized traditional gender stereotypes in everyday life when doing business. They helped perpetuate gender stereotypes in the recruitment of workers and in assigning gendered work tasks. Despite their positions as business owners, partners and employers, many of them could not take full advantage of this class position, but became dependent on their husbands and fathers for financial support. They were submissive to the power and control of their male partners, and were unwilling to exploit male kin labour. However insensitive to gender issues, they were more willing to make use of female labour, taking advantages of mothers and sisters' free labour and hiring maids to help them out. Many worked a 'double shift' and, having to juggle between family and work in various ways, felt guilty for not having enough time for their families and children. Gender, however, also worked for them in establishing gender-specific co-ethnic businesses, providing employment, economic benefits and services for themselves and other co-ethnic women.

For ethnic minority groups to accomplish their business projects, ethnic resources were essential. Ethnic resources continued to play a major role after businesses were established, more in the form of co-ethnic networks and business connections. The significance of co-ethnic resources was escalated with the rise in Chinese immigration in recent years, providing not only an increase ethnic market demands but also co-ethnic labour. In addition, transnational strategy also became more prevalent in linking connections cross-nationally between Canada and Hong Kong, and across other national

borders, contributing to a more fully developed globalized ethnic economy thus making it more institutionally complete.

One notable pattern among these women was their inclination to consult informal networks than institutional support. Due to their class and gender positions, as female small business owners, they were intimidated from joining ethnic associations which were dominated by professional and entrepreneurial Chinese men. Besides, the labour and time intensity of small businesses and the cost saving strategy also refrained them from using ethnic media for business promotion and employee recruitment. The emphasis on personal trust further kept them from looking for formal support and consequently motivated them to turn to informal co-ethnic and gender networks. Such an approach applied not only to employee recruitment and information sharing, but also to building clientele and other business relations, highlighting the impact of social embeddedness.

While co-ethnicity was crucial to doing business in the ethnic market, it was not desirable in some non-ethnic businesses that catered to the general population. Such businesses could only survive when a de-ethnicization strategy was employed. These women owners used their class resources to disguise their businesses as mainstream, avoiding possible negative impact from race relations. Class also helped to ease off racial tensions when the business relations became primarily profit-oriented. Even so, racism was inevitable when these women were forced into contact with the Whites or the general public, in both business and daily encounters. In general, ethnic resources yielded more positive consequences than otherwise. A cohesive solidified ethnic

economy provided a safe haven for these Chinese women, minimizing opportunities of direct contact with the White mainstream economy and consequently racism.

Age is another factor that harms young women in business. Indeed due to age many did not receive equal attention and treatment. But many of them, on the other hand, used age to their advantage to avoid potential conflict with customers. The impact of age was particularly significant in the creation of an advantageous co-ethnic market.

In sum, the Chinese women entrepreneurs occupied multiple contradictory positions in the Canadian economy resulting from the interlocking characteristics of class, race, ethnicity, gender and age. While their positions were deconstructed to be marginal in most cases, their self perception was in general favourable. Doing business in the ethnic economy to most of them was one of the more desirable options in providing a safe and reasonable life after immigration.

Chapter Nine

Retrospect and Prospect

Summarizing the Research Findings

Women, in a male-dominated society, respond and adapt to life in many different ways. Some may respond with resignation, others with rebellion, and still others with the creation of their own world (Belcourt, 1986/7). While feminists challenge resignation and advocate collective action to improve the position of women, women entrepreneurs decide to use their resources to create their own world. Ethnic minority immigrant women entrepreneurs, facing adversities not only as women but also as minority immigrants, actively counter these disadvantages by creating their own businesses.

Needless to say, these women's choices are influenced by the capitalist ideology of self-motivation, individualism and achievement. Being raised by mostly entrepreneurial fathers and traditional housewife-mothers and married mostly to entrepreneurial husbands, these women, moving from one entrepreneurial family to another, were nourished with the ideas of self-effort for success in life. Such an impact became even more pronounced after immigration when employment conditions became unfavourable. Many women with adequate capital and other related resources consequently initiated their own businesses as an option either to maintain their pre-migration status, to secure employment, to make a reasonable living, or to achieve upward social mobility.

However, the experiences of starting and doing business were not homogeneous and uniform among these women. They came to the situation with diverse values, education, expertise, past work and business experiences and connections, and

immigration experiences. Thus, their motivation for establishing a business, the processes they went through in business start-up, and the way they established and handled business relations were complexly different. My research on Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs, as a case study, explored such diversity and complexity. To begin with, I presented how these women's entrepreneurial projects after immigration to Canada were rooted in history, as a response to both the cultural and structural impact of Confucian patriarchy and paternalism, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Having done so, I proceeded to outline, discuss and analyze these women's multiple responses and experiences in their entrepreneurial pursuits in terms of class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and migration. In addition, I illustrated how these social divisions intersect in different ways to produce and reproduce diverse social relations embedded in entrepreneurship.

The fifty-eight women I interviewed came primarily from entrepreneurial backgrounds. Many of them came from traditional families raised by entrepreneurial/professional fathers and housewife mothers, and were married to entrepreneurial husbands. A few of them were entrepreneurs themselves prior to immigration. Otherwise, they had engaged in traditional female-specific (pink-collar) occupations working in clerical, secretarial and administrative occupations or as teachers, social workers, aestheticians, seamstresses, etc. Many of them came as dependant fiancees, wives and daughters with a few as principal applicants because of their entrepreneurial experiences. They were generally middle-aged and average in education. Those who came prior to 1986 had the advantage of receiving higher education locally and thus the opportunities to gain local mainstream work and business experiences, and

consequently were able to obtain better English language skills and knowledge of the local economy. They were also more likely to make use of their class resources to start their businesses and target the mainstream market.

Those who came after 1986, on the other hand, lacked the opportunity to work in the mainstream labour market to earn local business experience because of the downturn of the mainstream economy and the growth of the Chinese ethnic economy. The rapid increase of Chinese immigrant population had facilitated a growth in Chinese businesses, which provided ample job opportunities, albeit usually low-level jobs, to co-ethnic immigrants who, due to language barriers and a lack of local experience, found it difficult to find work elsewhere. Some of them did not look for work but started their own businesses shortly after arrival in response to the requirements of the entrepreneurial immigration program. As a result of a lack of familiarity with the local economy, and English language deficiency, they had to depend very much on co-ethnic informal networks for information, skills, knowledge and labour, both locally and transnationally. Their businesses were thus more likely to be confined to the ethnic community, targeting specifically new Chinese immigrants.

A great majority of the businesses these women engaged in were small businesses hiring less than five employees, many of whom were part-time workers. Many of these businesses were ethnic-specific, selling Hong Kong style products and services and targeting the Chinese market. A number of these businesses were women-specific, such as beauty-related services and clothing, again targeting Chinese women. But there were others who were involved in either ethnic or non-ethnic products and services catering toward the open market.

In order to understand how these women decided to become entrepreneurs, how they produced and managed business relations, and what kind of strategies they employed in their entrepreneurial projects, it is necessary to situate them in the historical contexts which played an important role in shaping their ideas, beliefs and behaviour. An understanding of the history of migration from Hong Kong to Canada in terms of cultural, imperialist and colonized hegemony helps to put these women in context.

Canadian immigration policy had long discriminated against people of colour from non-European sources. In order to maintain Canada as White, legislation was developed not only to exclude these people but also to prevent those who settled from propagating. Minority women, perceived sexually, were therefore barred from immigrating. Such sexist and racist practices were officially removed in 1967 when a supposedly non-discriminatory points system was implemented shifting the emphasis to meeting local economic demands. However, this points system and the subsequent entrepreneurial immigration programs were not free from class, race and gender biases. Women were still considered as dependents of men, and were encouraged to enter as fiancees, wives and daughters. The skill and education component exhibited male preference as the highest points were awarded to occupations dominated by men, except for a brief period of time when nurses, secretaries and domestic labour were preferred. Class biases became prevalent, as those with wealth and education were more welcome than the others. Besides, racist overtones continued when immigration officers were given the authority to interpret the suitability to adapt of potential immigrants. Furthermore, the processing procedures were longer on applicants from undesirable source countries. Under such an immigration system, the women in my study who all

immigrated after 1967 were more likely to have come from middle-class or wealthy background, as dependents as fiancees, daughters and wives. Those who became the principal applicants did not reflect power and control, or independence, but were more likely to be used by their husbands and families strategically for migration. Having immigrated as part of a family strongly reflected the familial orientation of these women and their degree of dependence on the male members of the family, which in turn contributed to their motivation for business start-up and subsequent entrepreneurial relations.

The impact of British colonialism and imperialism is immense on the people of Hong Kong. Raised in this British colony, Chinese women not only have normalized unequal relations between Whites and Chinese but also developed inferiority complexes relative to the Whites. Hence, for example, as reflected in my study, the choice of English speaking White settler society such as Canada, Australia and the United States for immigration, the view that Canadian school system is better for their children's education, the insensitivity to subtle racism, etc. all demonstrate the internalization of White superiority as the norm. In addition, Western imperialist hegemony led to the dichotomization of identities, resulting in the racialization between the Whites and 'them' and the Chinese as 'us', which further contributed to ethnic solidarity within the Chinese community. Such racialization had important consequences on how these women established and run their businesses, for example, involving in ethnicization when targeting the Chinese market and de-ethnicization when targeted the White market.

Closely associated with British imperialism and colonization is capitalism which, brought in and established by the British when ruling Hong Kong, has made most Hong

Kong Chinese suspicious of Communism. Raised in a capitalist economy, these women internalized individualism, competition, self-motivation and individual achievement as a way of life. This explains partly why these women decided to leave Hong Kong. They considered the 1997 reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty a threat both politically and economically, despite the fact that culturally they still identify themselves very much as Chinese. Such capitalist orientation also contributed partially to their selection of entrepreneurship as a viable option for personal career achievement amidst barriers and difficulties after immigration. In addition, these women, belonging to a relatively privileged class themselves, were also involved in the class-ification of target markets and location. For example, many targeted the 'new' wealthy Chinese immigrants relative to the 'old' and poor immigrants. And in selecting location for their businesses, they class-ified Richmond as middle class versus Vancouver Chinatown as lower class despite the fact that the land value of the latter is higher. Class-ification also happened in a racialized and gendered way when determining the target market with the White market class-ified less affluent than the Chinese, and 'new' Chinese women immigrants were class-ified as well-off conspicuous spenders.

The gendered culture is yet another determining factor. The legacy of Confucian patriarchy and paternalism contributed to the general traditional nature of these women who valued the importance of the family and normalized female dependence on men. Chinese men, on the other hand, when taking on a protective and supportive role, felt obligated to their wives and daughters and sometimes, even to daughters-in-law and sisters. Such strong co-ethnic familial solidarity explains in part the prevalence of family business and support in raising capital and running business.

Taken together, such predetermined ideologies and practices, impacted by colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and Confucian patriarchy and paternalism would eventually affect their decision to become entrepreneurs and how businesses should be established and operated. Simultaneously, the situation in the receiving society, Canada, such as the changing economic conditions, the state policies, and labour market opportunities resulting from racism, sexism and classism had also invited or pushed these women into entrepreneurship, and consequently led to complex ways in managing businesses and business relations.

The positioning of Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs was ambiguous, contradictory and diverse. Equipped with multiple levels and degrees of class, gender and ethnic resources, and facing different kinds of barriers and difficulties on the basis of class, gender and ethnicity, these women went through diverse experiences at various stages of their entrepreneurial project. While they were privileged in possessing class resources, only a few of them realized its existence. Many, on the contrary, did not perceive this but instead found themselves deprived of authority, control and/or capital. For instance, some felt the lack of control over labour because of their position as women or because of their dependence on co-ethnic family and kin support as employees. Others lacked decision-making power due to their status as wives and sisters of male family partners. Many others perceived themselves more as workers, exploiting their own labour.

In another way, while they were disadvantaged as ethnic minority immigrants, the ethnic resources they possessed helped in many ways to turn these disadvantages into advantages. With co-ethnic support, primarily through informal family and friendship

networks within the local Chinese community or transnationally, they were able to go through easier channels in starting their businesses, gathering updated business information, getting referrals of employees and customers, and obtaining better prices from suppliers and wholesalers, etc. Establishing businesses within the Chinese community reduced the opportunity to deal with the Whites or the general market, and therefore the chances of inter-racial conflict or racism. Those with mainstream work and business experiences and better English language ability had an added advantage on the choice of market. They could use their class resources to de-ethnicize their businesses, hiring Caucasian workers to target the Caucasian market.

Being women, those under study possessed gender resources to help them do business and work with other women, as reflected in the co-ethnic gender-specific businesses they run, which dealt solely with women suppliers, labour and consumers. While some were able to obtain financial independence, autonomy and control at work, many depended on their husbands, brothers and fathers for assistance in their entrepreneurial projects. Yet they did not see such dependence in a negative way but as a form of privilege to accomplish their entrepreneurial goals. Many of them worked a "double day" taking sole responsibilities in home affairs despite help from domestics and family members. But again, they normalized the juggling between family and work and took pride in it as a virtue. Regrettably, they were not sensitive to gender issues and were not aware of sexism. In many cases, they were even responsible for perpetuating gender stereotypes and segregation in their businesses and exploiting female family labour.

Overall, Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurs occupied diverse positions, both privileged and disadvantageous simultaneously. They used

entrepreneurship in different ways as adaptive strategies to provide employment for themselves and/or their family members, to ensure continuity of their status and class position after immigration, or to achieve upward mobility.

Re-assessing the Intersectional Perspective

My research employed the intersectional perspective in analyzing the business experience of Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women, exploring the interlocking relations of class, gender, race, ethnicity, age and migration. The findings from the research draw attention to a couple of theoretical issues that need to be addressed: first, the question of generalization and prioritization, and second, the importance of status bestowed by class.

While the intersectional perspective rejects generalization and prioritization, and calls for the recognition of multiplicity of experiences resulting from the interlocking systems of power particularly pertaining to class, race and gender, the findings of my study demonstrated otherwise in some situations. The women in my study showed uniformity in many aspects in the course of their entrepreneurial pursuits despite the existence of intra-group differences and diversity. One common thread is the importance of social embeddedness in economic activities. Dependence on informal networks, both locally and transnationally, was common to a great majority of them in making migration decisions as well as decisions at different stages of business pursuit and business operation. This shows that social networks in terms of ethnicity and gender are uniformly integral to economic activities. Another commonality shared by these women was the insensitivity to the gender factor. Such unawareness not only numbed sexist experience but led to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in hiring and in business

relations. These common patterns inform us that while it is theoretically sound to pay heeds to diversity and difference to avoid over-generalization between and within groups, generalization in effect cannot be totally avoided.

In addition to the issue of generalization, prioritization, too, is undermined by the intersectional theorists to avoid a quantifiable and additive approach when accounting for the impact of various levels of disadvantages and barriers. Yet these women painted a quite different picture when they told and reflected on their experience from which certain factors were perceived to have priority over others. For example, racial barriers and ethnic resources were more crucial factors than class and gender when deciding on the kind of business, whether ethnic or not. As mentioned above, since they were in general insensitive to gender issues, the gender factor had most of the time been put as a lower priority when compared with race, ethnicity and class. Again, here we take note of a discrepancy between theory and reality. While the intersectional theory proposes that different inequality systems and structures should be perceived as of equal importance and to intersect in diverse ways, the women themselves interpreted their experiences quite differently. The experiences of these entrepreneurial women pose a theoretical question to the intersectional theory, which requires re-thinking on the issue of prioritization.

Another major theoretical question pertains to the conceptualization of class. This study discovers that these entrepreneurial women in general were relatively insensitive to their class position. While most women recognized classism and racialized classism when recollecting their past work experiences as employees, many of them were unaware of their class privileges when they became entrepreneurs and bosses. This can be

reflected by the way they commented on their relationship with their staff. Many perceived employer-employee relationship as egalitarian, and some even saw themselves playing an obliging role. By the same token, they failed to perceive their subordinate role relative to capitalist suppliers, again noting egalitarian relationship at work.

In the place of class these women were more conscious to status. For instance, many of them expressed how they started their businesses after immigration for the purpose of maintaining their pre-migration status, either for themselves or for their family members. Becoming a business owner after immigration served more the purpose of overcoming unemployment or status dislocation than pure investment and profit-making. One of the women's remarks summed this up eloquently: "The feeling of being respected as a boss, and to be called 'boss' is good. This feeling supercedes anything else especially when the profit generated from this business is so embarrassingly minimal."

Taking status for granted calls attention to the existing conceptualizing and theorizing of the intersectional perspective. The emphasis on class and the simultaneous neglect of status bestowed by class points to the theoretical bias against privileged groups such as professionals, managers and employers. Anti-racist feminists who adopt this intersectional perspective need to re-think the class issue, and re-work to incorporate status to make the theory more comprehensive and encompassing.

Re-assessing the Research Method

This research was the result of primarily qualitative analysis based on extensive interviews. Since not much was known about minority immigrant women entrepreneurs, this study was an exploratory one, with the intention of revealing in depth the entrepreneurial experiences of minority businesswomen using Hong Kong Chinese

immigrants as a case in point. A few issues have been noted throughout the process of research, which suggest careful methodological deliberation for future studies. One aspect is the issue of egalitarianism between the subjects and the interviewers. As most past research involved the study of people and groups of a lower status than the academics, the related Eurocentric and classist literature has been widely focussed on the problem of interviewing-down. The issue arising from interviewing-up has not been adequately addressed and thus I suggest that more attention should be paid on this in the future regarding, for example, to situations when women interviewing men, minority researchers interviewing White subjects, and students interviewing professionals, capitalists and policy makers.

Another major issue that has been neglected is the matter of transcription and translation. The experience I went through in transcribing audio-taped data into written format involved the process of transcribing from the Cantonese dialect to a written form in Chinese, and from which was translated into English. Going through these two separate procedures means that my construction of the subjects' narratives has to be constricted twice. As many proverbial expressions in the Cantonese dialect are non-transcribable and untranslatable, reality is easily twisted and distorted. This situation is exacerbated with a novice translator like me. In doing research of a different culture, more so in ethnography, very often the issue of translation is being taken for granted. Researchers usually assume that the insider or the informant who knows the language is naturally capable of doing the translation. This oversight poses the problem of realism when real meanings are inaccurately translated or hidden. My experience suggests that

we should be more cautious to the professionalism of the informants and translators when researching groups of a different culture and language.

Generally speaking, extensive interviews serve the purpose of collecting detailed information on experience, allowing the subjects to tell their stories from their own perspective. In this way, we are able to obtain complexity, intensity and depth. One of the major drawbacks of using this approach is the inability to measure quantitatively the relative significance of the different factors involved, despite the fact that these women showed their intention to prioritize. Another problem lies in the difficulty of making comparative analysis with previous research. Unlike quantitative data which are more precise and easily comprehensible, and subsequently readily to handle for comparative purposes, comparing qualitative data would be more general.

Connecting Transnational Networks and Institutional Completeness

Wong and Ng (1998) took note of transnationalism in ethnic business in their case study of Chinese business immigrants. Similarly, the importance of transnational networks was evident among Hong Kong Chinese women entrepreneurs in my study. From motivational factors to business start-up and to running the business, these women demonstrated how transnational relations in the form of informal social networks via families, relatives and friends were integral to their business projects.

Some women were motivated to enter business due to the availability of transnational networks that were both ethnic- and class-based. Others did so out of love for their transnational families, as wives and sisters. In particular, many wives of *astronaut* husbands started their businesses to create employment for their returning husbands. The use of transnational networks was also evident in the preparation stage

and during the process of business start-up, for example, in the course of acquiring new business skills and knowledge, choosing partners, generating capital, choosing business location and researching suppliers. In addition, running businesses through transnational relations were noted when these women had to move across national borders between Canada and Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States and be constantly aware of global trends on products and market information.

Transnationalism has major consequences on the degree and scope of institutional completeness. Through transnational networks, a Hong Kong cosmopolitanism was transplanted to the Chinese market in order to satisfy the needs of Hong Kong immigrants and transmigrants to the extent of maintaining self-sufficiency and a distinct ethnic boundary. The growth in number of Chinese businesses and the proliferation of business type including women-specific businesses with a Hong Kong and middle-class outlook also contributed to the substance and intensity of institutional completeness. Since the findings in my research on transnationalism and institutional completeness were preliminary and suggestive, future research is needed to focus on the increased prevalence of transnationalism in migration and to revamp the long neglected notion of institutional completeness.

Policy Implication

Even though entrepreneurs are usually seen as independent profit-seekers who possess entrepreneurial spirit of achievement and success, ethnic immigrant women entrepreneurs are not usually the case. Like many other women they are marginalized, disadvantaged and also isolated, and therefore require not only support from the government and other institutions but also collective effort to fight possible adversities in

the process of doing business. The findings here encourage policy makers to re-evaluate current strategies to accommodate the needs of these women.

An emerging issue I noticed among these women was the isolation and lack of organizational and institutional support. As the nature of their businesses demanded labour intensity and/or long hours, and their responsibilities as wives and mothers demanded time and energy, many were not able to join business-related associations. These women should therefore be encouraged to organize among themselves for information and experience sharing to enhance business success. At present, there is a lack of adequate venue for these businesswomen to address their specific needs: existing government-funded entrepreneurial training programs are gender-neutral, women's groups organized by ethnic organizations do not target businesswomen, and existing business associations tend to exclude women of small business. In my opinion, government, ethnic community organizations and business associations should *reach out* to them, bringing business community awareness to their doorsteps. Organizing these women informally in small groups for information and experience sharing in their place of business is one of the strategies that would provide the flexibility that appeals to them.

Perhaps the government should provide more funding to ethnic community organizations so that they could play a more involved liaison role in disseminating updated business information and related policies, and in providing more training programs to those, especially entrepreneurial immigrants, who have the need to start businesses. It would be even more accommodating if tax policies could be changed to create more incentive for small businesses, and financial institutions be more sensitive to

the limits of small businesses particularly those established by new immigrants and women.

A Final Note

This dissertation filled some of the gaps that have been missing in the understanding of ethnic entrepreneurship and ethnic communities. Regrettably yet, as a preliminary and exploratory case study, it fell short of providing a comparative agenda. Hence, many important questions remain unanswered and need to be addressed in future research. For example, how is this group of women doing relative to their male counterparts? Would other ethnic minority women entrepreneurs share similar experiences? What about Chinese women who came from other sources such as China and Taiwan? Would their experience be the same or different from the Hong Kong women? What about second-generation Chinese women entrepreneurs? How would their business experience be different from Chinese immigrant women? More so, how different would Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women entrepreneurship be across geographical and political contexts? These and many other questions could be subject to further research and the findings will provide answers that add richness to the literature on gender, class and race/ethnicity.

We rarely encountered accounts of the relatively privileged ethnic minority women in women's studies. Clearly, privileged women have been abandoned and their personal struggles largely ignored by feminist scholarship. Since the women entrepreneurs in my study were in general traditional in background, and subsequently were insensitive to their disadvantaged position as women, they need to be educated and empowered as women. Feminist sisters should be more inclusive and start to focus their

energies on identifying the oppression these middle-class women encounter. With proper awareness and empowerment, it is with the hope that eventually ethnic immigrant women entrepreneurs will use their class and ethnic resources to help contribute to gender equity and equality both within the ethnic communities and the society at large.

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APPENDIX A

Richmond's Ethnic Business Areas


ABERDEEN CENTRE


Yaohan


Galo
8 8'97


Parker Place II
SHOPPING CENTRE
金寶旅遊
ELEGANT LIGHTING LTD.


Cash
加拿大豐業銀行
Scotiabank


CITIBANK
DIM SUM
CITIBANK

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

(A) Personal and Immigration History

1. Where were you born?

2. How long have you lived in Hong Kong?

3. Please tell me briefly about your family background. (Probe for parents' major occupation, information on siblings, self-employment experiences, how many are in Vancouver?)

4. I would like to know about your background.

   a. What is your education level? (If university, ask about major area)

      i. Did you receive education in Canada?

      ii. (If yes), what kind?

   b. What is your marital status? (married, divorced, single, etc.)

      (If married)
      i.. How many children do you have (if applicable)? How many are boys and how many are girls? How old are they?

      ii. Is your husband Hong Kong Chinese? (If not), what is he?

      iii. What is his education? Is he working? What kind of work does he do? Does he work part-time or full-time? (Probe for self-employment experiences)

   d. Do you live in Richmond? (If not), in which area do you live?

e. How old are you? (Ask for approximate age)

5. Which year did you immigrate to Canada?

6. Who was the principal applicant for your immigration to Canada?

7. Under which immigration program did you or your family apply for immigration?

8. I would like to know more about your immigration history.

a. Why did you decide to leave Hong Kong?

b. Why did you choose Canada as the country of destination?

9. Please tell me why you decided to settle in Greater Vancouver.

(B) Work history

1. Did you work before you came to Canada?

a. (If not), what did you do? (For example, housewife, student).

i. Why weren't you working?

b. (If yes), please tell me the nature of your work before immigration. (Probe for job title, firm size, nature of business, nature of firm).

i. Why did you want to work?

2. Did you work after you came to Canada?

a. (If no), why weren't you working?

b. (If yes), please tell me in a chronological order your work history after you came to Canada.

(If employed)

i. (For each job), Please tell me
the nature of the job, job title, part-time/full-time, firm size,
nature of firm (probe for ethnicity and gender),
nature of business (probe for ethnicity and gender),
client (probe for ethnicity and gender).

ii. (For each job), please tell me how you got the job.

iii. (For each job), why did you leave the job?

c. (For those who have looked for work), In general, how do you feel about looking for work in Canada (mainstream and Chinese markets)? (Probe for job seeking priorities in mainstream and Chinese markets, and ask for reasons, probe for job seeking difficulties.)

(If self-employed)

i. How old were you when you start your first business? Were you married? Did you have any children?

ii. Please tell me a little bit about your business in a chronological manner (if more than one).

nature of business (Probe for gender, ethnicity)

partnership? (Probe for gender, ethnicity and relationship)

incorporated?

clientele? (Probe for gender, ethnicity)

iii. Why did you start your own business(es)?

(C) Current Business

1. When did you start your business? How old were you then?

2. Do you have sole ownership or do you share ownership with someone else?

   a. If you have partners, who are they? (Probe for gender, ethnicity and relationship)

   b. What were the reasons for having partners or not?

3. Is your business incorporated? Why? Why not?

4. What is the nature of your business?

   a. What kind of services or products do you provide? (Probe for ethnicity and gender)

   b. Who are the major customers or clients? (Probe for ethnicity and gender)

   c. What is your business hour?

5. Where is your business located? (mall, office building, street, home, etc).

   a. What were the reasons for choosing such a location?

6. Why did you choose Richmond as the location for your business? (Probe for ethnicity)

   a. Why didn't you choose Chinatown?

   b. Why didn't you choose somewhere else in Vancouver?

7. What motivated you to start your own business? (Why didn't you look for work instead?)
   (Probe for reasons such as financial, time flexibility, challenge, self-fulfilment, loss of my job, difficult to find job)

8. Why did you start your business in this industry? (Probe for ethnicity and gender)

9. Can you tell me, in some detail, how did you start this business?

   a. How did you get the capital? (Probe for self, relatives, husband, friend, bank, etc.)

   b. (If from bank)
      i. How did you decide which bank you went for a loan?

      ii. Did you apply yourself? or through husband, family members or relatives?

      iii. Did you get rejected? Why?

   c. Were you familiar with the procedures in starting a business?

      i. (If yes), how did you know about them?

      ii. (If no), how did you learn about the proper procedures?

iii. Did you face difficulties in the process of business start-up?

(If yes), what are they?

d. Did you have any business connections prior to setting up your own business?

i. (If yes), what kind of business connections did you have? (Probe for ethnicity, gender, overseas or local connections)

ii. How did you establish those connections? (Probe for ethnicity, gender)

10. Please tell me about your work in your business.

a. What kind of jobs do you do?

b. (If partnership), what is the division of labour among you?

i. Are you satisfied with this division of responsibilities?

ii. Do you work well together? Do you have a lot of arguments? Give examples. (Probe more for role of husband, family members and relatives if they are involved; probe for gender and ethnicity)

11. Can you take me through an average work day? (What is your working hour? Is it fixed or flexible? What time would you start? What would you do first? And then what would you do next ...?)

12. What kind of decisions do you usually make at work? (Give examples)

a. Would you consider most of your decisions easy to make?

b. Give me some examples of decisions that are easy to make, and some that are difficult to make?

c. What would you do to those difficult decisions?

13. What kind of work would you consider easy to handle?

14. What kind of work would you consider difficult to handle?

a. What do you usually do to solve these problems?

b. Would you seek advice from others? (If yes), from whom?

15. What kind of work do you like most in your business? What kind of work do you hate most in your business?

16. Do you have employees working for you?

(If no), why not?

(If yes)

a. How many are there?

b. What are their backgrounds? (Probe for gender, ethnicity, education, experience)

c. How did you recruit them?

d. What kind of work do they do?

e. Do they work full-time or part-time?

f. What do you usually have in mind when you are hiring? (Probe for

gender, ethnicity, experience, education) Why?

i. Is there a difference in criteria for different posts with respect to gender and ethnicity?

ii. Why? Why not?

g. What do you expect from your employees? What would you consider as good performance and bad performance?

i. Is there any difference in expectation with respect to gender, ethnicity?

ii. Why? Why not?

h. Based on what criteria do you pay them? (How well do you pay them as compared with others in ethnic market and mainstream market?)

i. Do you ever ask your employees to help out in your personal and private matters? (Probe for differences in gender and ethnicity)

i. (If yes), Give examples.

ii. (If no), Why not?

j. Do you ever discuss your personal and private matters with your employees? (Probe for gender and ethnicity)

i. (If yes), Give examples.

ii. (If no), Why not?

k. Do you hang out after work? (Probe for gender and ethnic differences)

i. (If yes), in what ways?

ii. (If no), why not?

k. Is the turn-over rate high? Why? Why not?

l. Would you consider yourself as a good boss? Why? Why not?

17. What are the major sources of your customer/client? What is the distribution in terms of gender and ethnicity?

a. By what means do you usually attract customers or clients? (ads, referrals, etc.)

b. What do you do to keep clients or customers?

i. (If multi-ethnic targets), Are there different strategies in handling customers or clients from different ethnic backgrounds?

(If yes), How?
(If no), why?

ii. (If male and female), Are there different strategies in handling customers or clients because of gender?

(If yes), how?
(If no), why?

c. What kind of clients or customers are more difficult to deal with? Why? (Probe for ethnic and gender differences)

d. What kinds of clients or customers are easy to satisfy? Why? (Probe for ethnic and gender differences)

e. How many of your customers/clients have been your friends and/or relatives?

i. How often do your customers/clients end up being your friends?

f. Would you consider your client base satisfactory?

i. (If Chinese and one gender), Would you like to extend your client base to a wider market (ethnic and gender wise)? Why? Why not?

18. Did you go for any business related training? (Probe for management training, skill and knowledge training)

i. (If yes), what are they? Why did you do so?

ii. (If no), why not?

19. Do you belong to any associations?

i. (If yes), What are they? What are the purposes of joining these associations?

ii. (If no), why not?

20. Who are you major suppliers? (Probe for gender and ethnicity)

a. How is your relationship with your suppliers? (How do you maintain relations with them?)

i. Is there a difference in your relationship because of ethnicity?

ii. Is there a difference in your relationship because of gender?

b. How often were they also your friends and/or relatives?

i. How many of them became your friends after dealing with them in business?

b. Do you have to maintain any business connections with Hong Kong?

i. (If yes), What type of connections? and Why?

ii. (If no), Why not?

21. Who are your major bankers for daily banking activities?

a. Based on what criteria did you choose to deal with these bankers? Did ethnicity and gender come into play in selecting the banker? Did friendship or relationship come into play?

b. Do you have a good relationship with your bankers?

i. (If yes) How?
Why? (Probe for gender and ethnicity)

ii. (If no) Why not? (Probe for gender and ethnicity)

22. Do relatives play a crucial part in your business?

a. (If no) Why not?

b. (If yes)
i. How are they involved?

ii. Why are they involved?

iii. Are they paid?

(If no), why not?

(If yes), how is the pay compared with employing others?

23. (If you are married), does your husband help you out at home?

(If yes)

a. What kind of work does he do at home? (What is the division of labour at home?)

b. Who is responsible for which decisions at home?

c. Are you satisfied with his performance? Why? Why not?

(If no)

a. Why not?

b. Who makes what decisions at home?

24. (If married), Does your husband help you out in business?)

a. What kind of work does he involve in the business? How often does he make decisions for you at work? Give examples.

b. Is he paid for his work?

c. Are you satisfied with his performance? Why? Why not?

d. Does he like you in business? (Or does he prefer you to stay home, or be employed?)

25. (If married), Would you consider your husband a good husband? Why? Why not?

a.. Would you consider yourself as a good wife? Why? Why not?

26. (If you have young children), how do you make arrangements for child care?

a. Are you satisfied with such arrangements?

b. (If seek help)
   i. Are they paid? Why? Why not?

   ii. Are you happy with their performance? Why? Why not?

(For all children)
c. Do they help out at home? Why? Why not?

d. Do they help out at work? Why? Why not?

e. Would you consider yourself as a good mother? Why? Why not?

27. How do you relate your private life to work?

a. How do you manage between family and work responsibilities? Do you have any priorities?

   i. Do you separate private and business activities completely? Give examples.

ii. Is it possible to concentrate solely on business at work without thinking about private and family matters? And vice versa? Why? Why not?

b. Do you hire any domestic help?

i. (If yes), ask for gender and ethnicity, nature of help. Why?

ii. (If no) Why not?

c. Do you enjoy much leisure time of your own?

i. (If yes), What do you do?

ii. (If no), why not?

28. How do you define success in life?

a. Would you consider yourself successful in life?

b. What would you do to improve it?

29. How do you define success in business?

a. Would you consider your business successful?
(If yes), In what ways?

(If no), Why?

b. What would you do to improve it?

c. Would you consider yourself a successful business woman?

(If yes), in what way?

(If no), why?

d. What would you do to improve yourself?

30. What have you gained from being self-employed? (Probe for financial gain, self achievement, independence, power and control, family relations)

31. What have you sacrificed?

32. What do you like most from being self-employed?

33. What do you hate most?

34. Are there any barriers you feel were unique to you as a Chinese immigrant doing business in Canada?

35. Are there any advantages as a Chinese immigrant?

36. Are there any barriers you feel were unique to you as a woman doing business in Canada?

37. Are there any advantages as a woman?

APPENDIX C

Feature Story
Interviewee Recruitment Advertisements
Interviewee Recruitment Notice

明報，1996年6月22日 星期六

蒐集資料爲寫博士論文

戚蔣瀟清探討新移民婦女營商苦樂

【本報專訊】卑詩大學社會學博士研究生戚蔣瀟清，將由七月起走訪列治文商界中來自香港的華裔移民婦女，移民婦女所承受的壓力及所作貢獻，期以一年時間，寫成博士論文。

戚蔣瀟清本身也是香港移民，早年在加拿大麥基爾大學(McGill University)取得社會學學士及碩士學位，八八年移民加國後，現時是列治文崑崙學院(Kwantlen University College)的社會學講師。她在學術上的最大興趣，主要是探索加國社會的族裔關係，男女性別的社會地位及移民工作等。

她這項研究的對象，是從香港移民加國的華裔婦女，她們必須是以全資或合資形式在列治文營商或提供專業服務公司，並積極參與運作。她說：「經營小生意或大企業、自僱以至擁有自己公司的專業人士，都是訪問對象。」

選擇在列治文做研究，戚蔣瀟清認爲這地區近年發展跟華裔移民的貢獻有很大關係。「香港仔中心、百家店、統一廣場等大型華資商場相繼落成，帶動了第三路一帶的興旺。」

她又認爲華裔婦女在社會上經常受到傳統思想不公平對待，她小時候，父母在香港合力經營生意，但在社會上，母親的功勞卻大部分算在父親身上。

有不少華裔女性近年在列治文開展了自己的生意，充分發揮企業精神。戚蔣瀟清認爲她們的經驗很值得有系統地研究分析，其中許多女性過往亦未必有商業經驗，由個人、家庭、工作、文化適應與社會角色的扮演，都會有很多困難與憂慮。她希望可以透過訪問，蒐集資料和分析，印證移民婦女在加國體現企業精神背後的社會意義。

戚蔣瀟清將會由七月起走訪約五十位移民婦女，並且進行兩小時的個人訪問。而資料會絕對保密處理。預計整個研究報告會於明年夏天完成。有關該項研究計畫的查詢，可致電三二一·二零二七連絡。

戚蔣瀟清期以一年時間，探討華裔女性移民營商的社會意義。 (李德輝攝)

SING TAO DAILY 星島日報

B10 一九九六年七月六日 星期六

誠徵義務受訪者

卑詩大學社會學博士研究生現正進行研究有關香港華人女性企業人士在列治文營商的經驗作爲博士論文之用。鑒於華人女企業人士對加拿大的貢獻一直被忽略，我們希望通過這個研究能使社會人士對這些女性的經歷有進一步的了解。

爲了要得到眞實的資料，我們需要你的支持和參與。調查將會以訪問的形式進行。整個過程大概需要兩個小時，受訪者的身份會絕對保密，而所得的資料只會限於學術研究之用。

有意而又符合以下條件者：

- 華人女性
- 香港移民
- 在列治文擁有及經營生意或專業事務所（獨資或合資均可）

請電 **321-2027**
與 **Frances Chik（戚蔣瀟清）**聯絡

A5 明報

1996 年 7 月 7 日 星期日

誠徵義務受訪者

卑詩大學社會學博士研究生現正進行研究有關香港華人女性企業人仕在列治文營商的經驗作爲博士論文之用。鑒於華人女企業人仕對加拿大的貢獻一直被忽略，我們希望通過這個研究能使社會人士對這些女性的經歷有進一步的了解。

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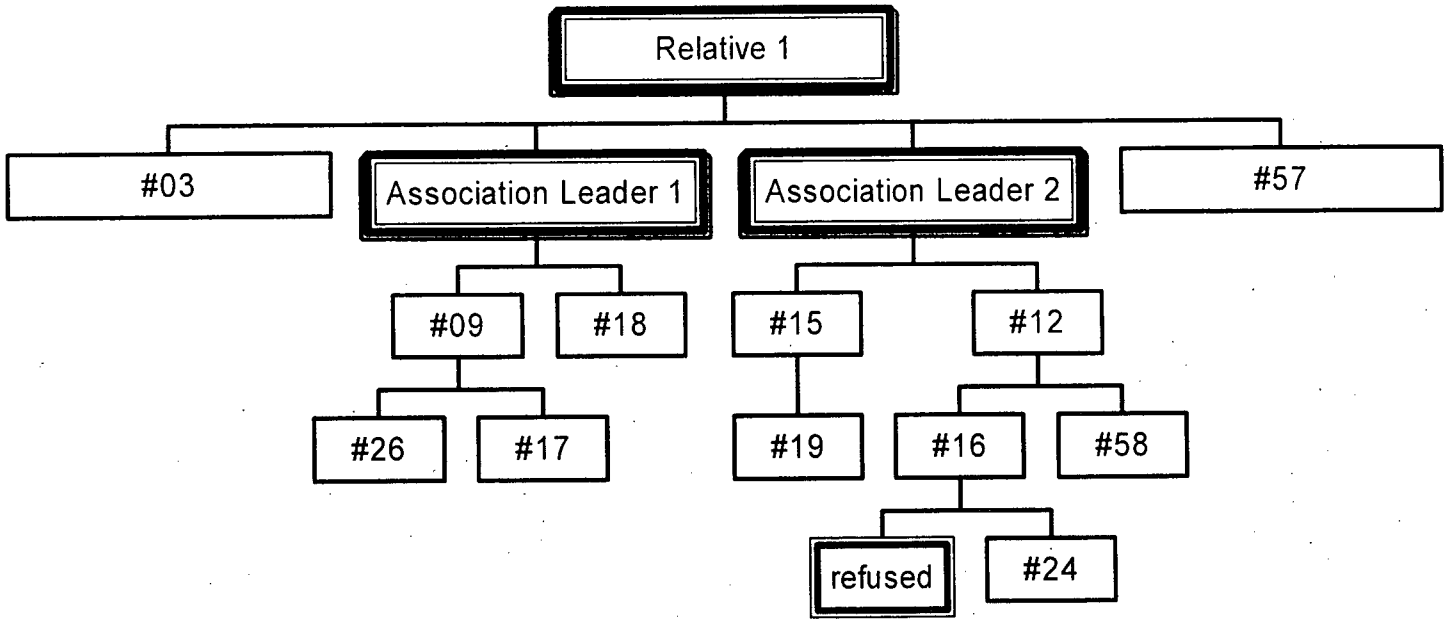
請電 321 – 2027 與 Frances Chik（戚蔣瀟清）聯絡。

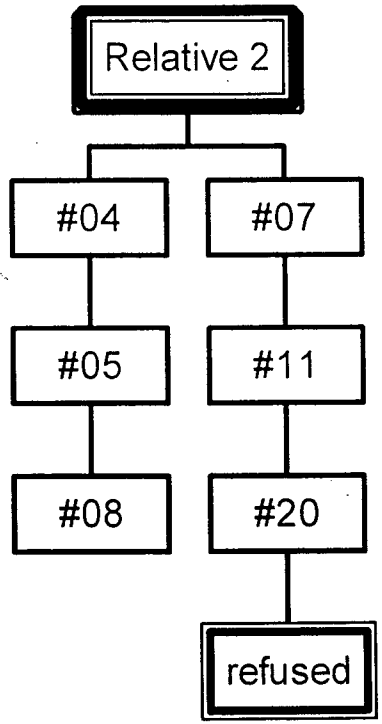
APPENDIX D

Interviewee Referral Networks

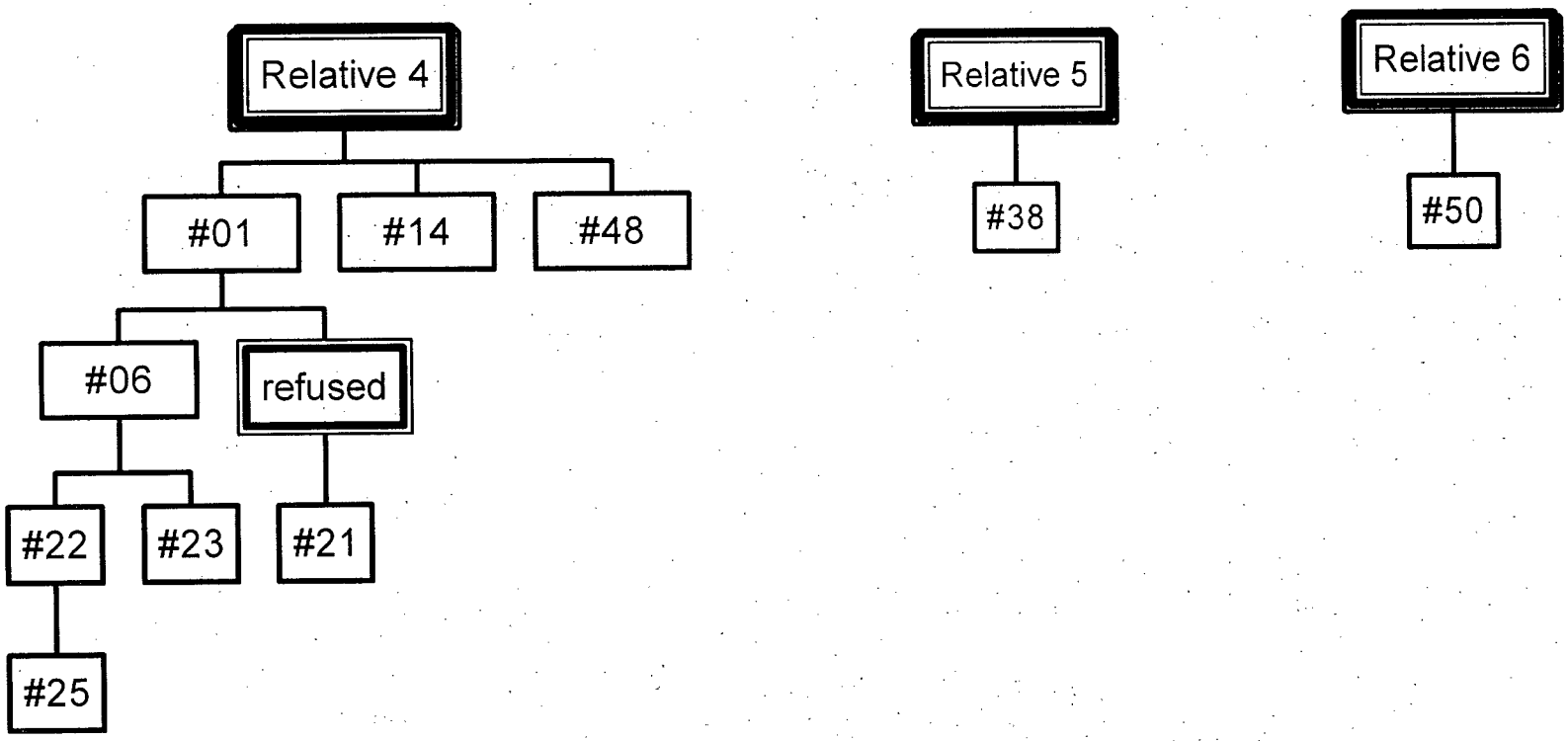
Referral Network #1



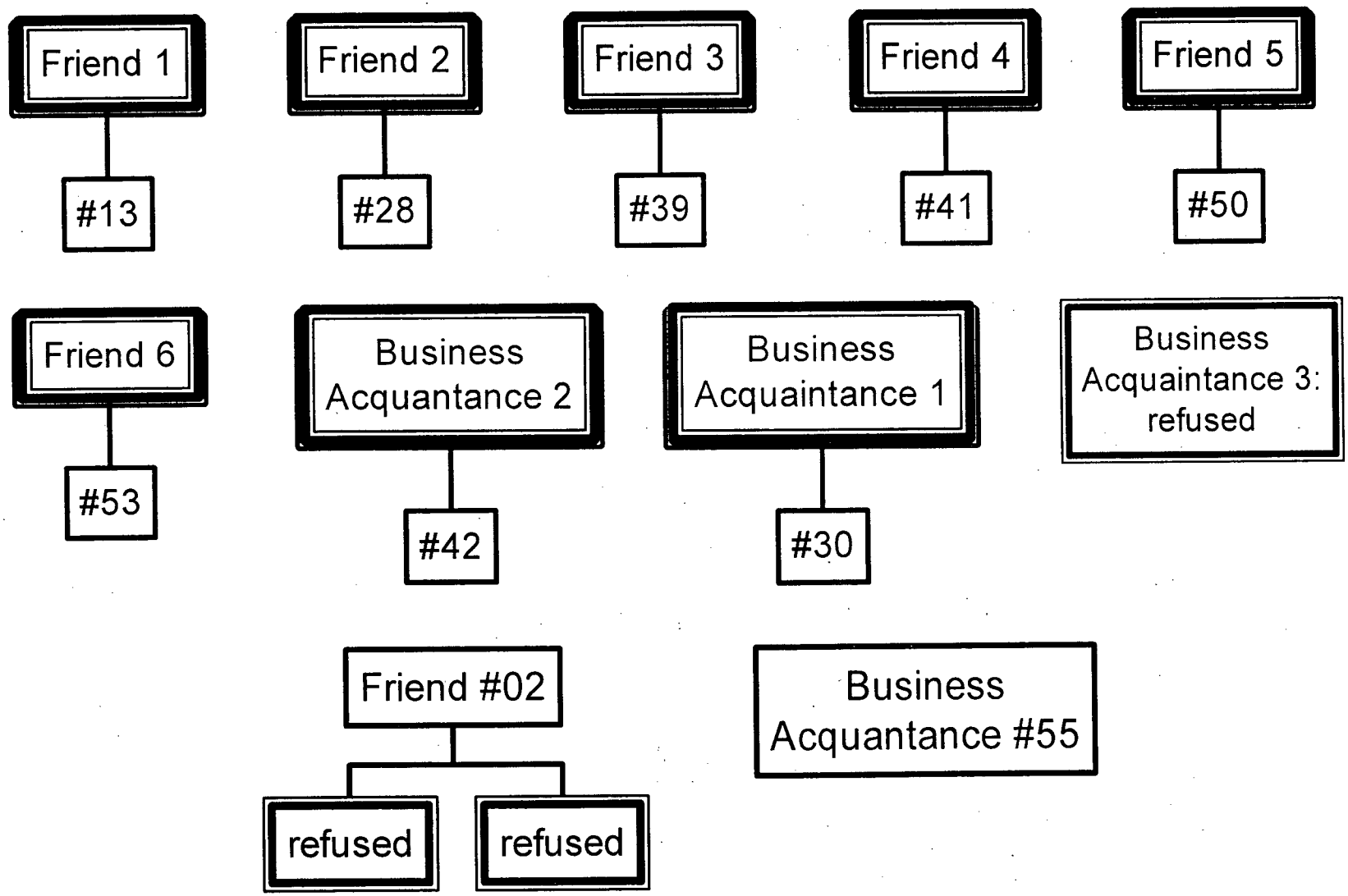
Referral Network #2



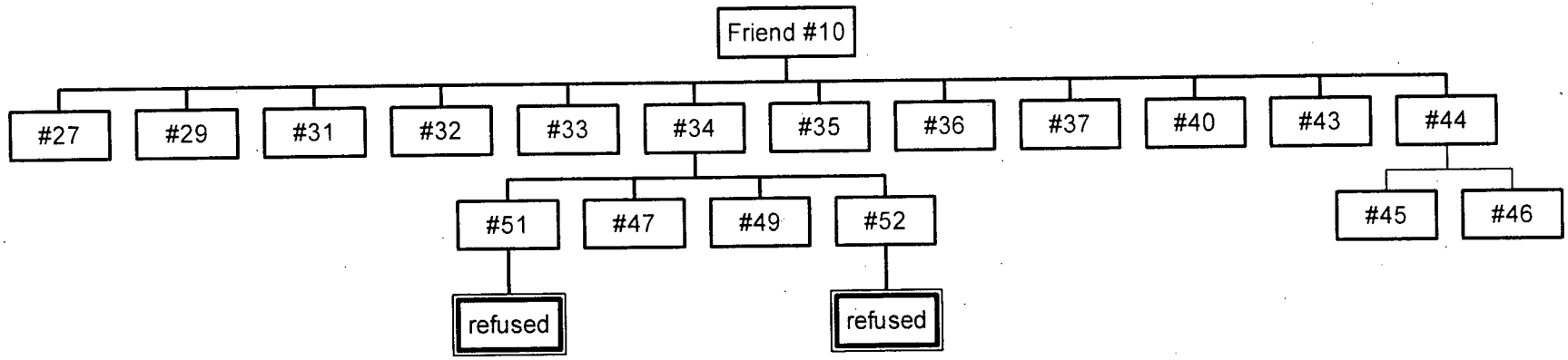
Referral Network #3



Referral Network #4



Referral Network #5



APPENDIX E

Interviewee Invitation Letter
Consent Form

APPENDIX F

A Glossary of Romanized Cantonese Terms

Romanized Cantonese Terms* Derived from the Interviews

Gwái 鬼	Caucasian
Gwái-lóu 鬼佬	Caucasian or Caucasian man
Gwái-múi 鬼妹	Caucasian girl
Gwái-pòh 鬼婆	Caucasian woman
Lóu-fàan 老番	Caucasian
Taai-hùng-yàhn 太空人	*Astronaut*
Tòhng-yàhn 唐人	Chinese
Wàh-kìuh 華僑	Chinese immigrant
Yám-chàh 飲茶	A kind of Cantonese cuisine consisting of bite size dishes also known as *dim sum*

* The terms used here are adapted from the Yale system (see Huang, 1977).