

**Chinese Immigrants and Sustainable Community Development from a
Cultural Perspective**

by

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ABSTRACT

Greater Vancouver has experienced a dramatic influx of international immigration in the past three decades. This demographic change has two major implications for sustainable development in this region. First, the increase of population is placing great pressure on the environment and maintaining the current quality of life. Second, while it is critical to include the rapidly-growing immigrant population in the Greater Vancouver region's sustainability initiatives, the increasing ethnic diversity of this region raises issues of communication and cross-cultural understanding. This exploratory study examines Chinese immigrants housing preferences and explores their implications for sustainable community development in Greater Vancouver. This study focuses on Chinese immigrants because they have an increasing influence on the region's physical, cultural and political landscape.

Through 30 in-depth interviews with Chinese immigrants of qualitatively different backgrounds, this study examined preferences for home location, attributes of dwelling, and its proximal space. The study employed grounded theory approach assisted with picture comparison and trade-off game techniques. Results indicate that Chinese immigrants' housing aspirations are strongly influenced by a desire to assimilate into mainstream culture in North America. Further, considerations of traditional Chinese housing form and style are not a priority among the study group. However, an array of social and economic constraints and priorities inform their housing choices. Amenities that are important to Chinese immigrants are identified for various aspects of a community. A number of recommendations are drawn from these priorities and preferences, which may be applied by planners, policy makers, designers and developers of sustainable communities for Chinese immigrant populations. Additional observations on language barriers, civic involvement, and community outreach programs suggest challenges and opportunities to promote sustainable living among Chinese immigrants.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

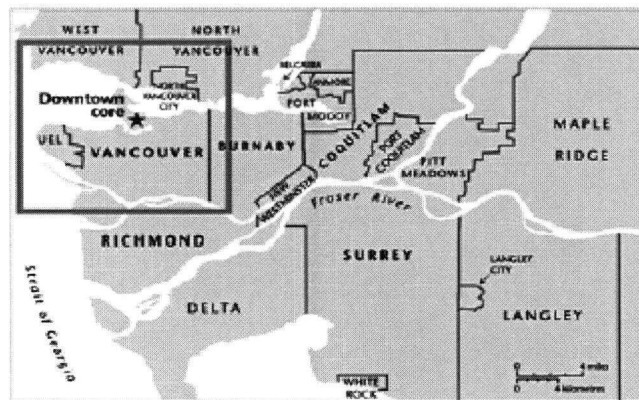
As international immigrants continue to enter Canada, the country has experienced dramatic demographic change. Since 1966, Canada's immigrant population¹ has almost doubled, increasing from 2.8 million in 1966 (15.6% of the total population) to 5.4 million in 2001 (18.4%) (Basavarajappa & Ram, 1999; Statistics Canada, 2001). Since then, Asia has accounted for an increasing proportion of Canada's total immigrants. As with other ethnic groups, Asians bring with them a set of culturally specific needs based both on their past experience of their homeland and their expectation of their new home. The majority of recent immigrants settled in one of the three major metropolitan areas in Canada. In 2002, Toronto attracted just under half of the total immigrants that year, while Montreal and Vancouver attracted smaller shares (14% and 13% respectively) (CIC, 2001). The result of this concentration of immigrants is a noticeable demographic change within each city's population. Given their variety of housing needs and preferences these immigrants bring, how Canadian cities manage the growing immigrant population and meet their diverse housing needs is critical to the form and dynamics of these cities.

The Greater Vancouver region (see Figure 1.1), which is considered as one of the most livable areas in the world, has seen considerable demographic change over the past three decades. The region's population has almost doubled since 1971 and its growth continues to be fueled by international immigrants. This demographic change has major environmental and social implications. The population expansion has placed great pressure on land use, energy consumption, air quality, and water and waste management. Over 80 percent of this growth occurred in the areas outside the metropolitan core, which consists of Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster. From 1979 to 1996, over 7,000 hectares of land were converted to urban uses in the region (Tomalty, 2002). Between 1994 to 2004, while the population of the region increased by 18%, the total number of

¹ In this study, Chinese immigrants are defined as people of Chinese origin who are or who have ever been landed immigrants to Canada. These include Chinese who have already gained Canadian citizenships as well as those who remain in immigrant status but do not include ethnic Chinese born in Canada.

registered vehicles in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) increased by 30% from 986,000 to 1,287,000 (GVRD, 2004). Although the Vancouver region is not a highly industrialized city, it has some serious air quality problems (Tomalty, 2002). One study suggests motor vehicles are the area's largest single source of air pollution (Seelig & Artibise, 1991). These figures and trends indicate that effective growth management needs to be in place to ensure the quality of life and environment will not be compromised in the face of rapid population growth and the use of automobile in the region.

Figure 1.1: Vancouver and its Metropolitan Region



Source: Edington, et al, 2003

The increasing proportion of ethnic immigrant population in the region also makes cross-cultural communication and understanding central to effective planning. According to the 2001 census, there are 15 languages spoken in the GVRD, each of which is the mother tongue of more than 10,000 people (GVRD, 2001a). Chinese, including Cantonese and Mandarin, is the most frequently used language, second only to English, in Greater Vancouver. As each ethnic immigrant group brings with them their culture, customs, values and beliefs, the way they view and experience the physical and social world may be drastically different from the Canadian-born residents. As immigrants, they may also make different priorities in adapting to life in a new country. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the values and motives underlying existing planning policy or design intention will always be properly understood and accepted by these new residents.

While the North American landscape is troubled, by and large, by auto-oriented urban sprawl, the Vancouver region strives to be a leader in sustainability and shift away from

this pattern. The oil-dependent, car-oriented suburban lifestyle has been questioned and debated widely by a growing number of academics, professionals, policy makers and average citizens in North America (Gillham & MacLean, 2002; Kunstler, 1996; Jacobs, 1969, 2004; Newman & Kenworthy, 1989; Putnam, 2000). An increasing amount of evidence shows that urban sprawl necessitates excessive automobile usage, contributes to global warming, erodes community life, results in traffic congestion, air quality problems, storm water runoff contamination, and health problems (Alexander et al, 2004; GVRD, 2002; Gillham, 2002; Kunstler, 1996; Ewing et al, 2003). Recognizing the negative consequences of urban sprawl, the strong desire of the region's planning authorities to preserve its ecological features and maintain a high quality of life has been one of the main and most consistent motivations behind the Vancouver region's highly progressive growth management policies. These policies will be introduced in Section 1.3.

This research is concerned with the potential impact of an ethnic immigrant population, specifically Chinese immigrants, on sustainable community development in the foreseeable future. The study focuses on Chinese immigrants because they have an increasing influence on the region's physical, cultural and political landscape. During 1992 and 2004, the region received 10,000 to 25,000 immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China each year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). Their settlement patterns, housing choices and travel habits have a direct impact on the region's development.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What preferences do Chinese immigrants to Greater Vancouver express in choosing their home environment?
2. How are these preferences influenced by their needs, values, culture and past experiences?

3. What are the implications of this study for design and planning for effective sustainable community development?

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To gain a better understanding of Chinese immigrants' expectations and preferences with respect to selecting a home;
2. To understand the influence of cultural and social backgrounds and their previous life experiences on Chinese immigrants' housing choices;
3. To understand how Chinese immigrants' preferences fit in sustainable community development and planning in Greater Vancouver.

The following discussion reviews the Vancouver region's policies and initiatives that promote sustainability and liveability. This is followed by a reflection on current trends in China that seem to contradict the vision created by and for the Vancouver region. The conflict of these two visions gives rise to the problem with which this research is concerned.

1.3 Towards a Sustainable Future

The current rapid population growth threatens the very environment and quality of life that draw people to the Vancouver region. It is in this context that the regional planning in Vancouver has, for the last 25 years, consistently concentrated on:

- Achieving more compact population growth;
- Encouraging more "complete" communities;
- Preserving agricultural, resource, and habitat lands;
- Favouring a modal shift towards transit and non-motorized means of transportation.

The GVRD began creating the Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP) in 1989. The plan was adopted in 1996. The LRSP is a voluntary guideline for regional planning that set out four main objectives: protect the green zone, build complete communities, achieve a compact metropolitan region and increase transportation choice. In 1995, the *Growth*

Strategies Act was passed by the provincial government. This Act defined three key variables for which quantitative targets were set in official planning documents: concentration of population growth in the metropolitan core, reduction of care dependency and preservation of green space.

In an effort to achieve these objectives and to foster a more sustainable lifestyle, the concept of creating a sustainable community² in the context of the Vancouver region has become increasingly tangible. Several projects are currently underway, including the Southeast False Creek (SEFC) development in the City of Vancouver, the East Clayton neighbourhood in the City of Surrey and the first project of Smart Growth on the Ground (SGOG) initiative in Maple Ridge, just to name a few. In March 2005, the SEFC Official Development Plan was approved by Vancouver City Council. The area was to be developed to be a model of a “sustainable community.” In the plan this is defined as “an urban neighbourhood that will integrate into its urban context while protecting and enhancing the social and economic health of its community as well as the health of local and global ecosystems” (City of Vancouver, 2005a). In addition, SGOG recently completed its first project in Maple Ridge in 2004. Working with the City of Maple Ridge, SGOG created a sustainable community vision to help ease population pressure and preserve agricultural land around the area. One of the SGOG partners, the James Taylor Chair in Landscape and Livable Environment at the University of British Columbia has been a leader in research and design of sustainable communities in the region since 1987. Although each development requires individual attention, the sustainable community projects in the Vancouver region have the following general principles in common. These principles include:

- Increase density to make a transit system a viable option and reduce the economic and environmental cost of infrastructure;
- Promote mixed-use land use policies to support a complete community;
- Encourage diversity in the community by providing housing for people of all ages, incomes and cultures;

² The concept of sustainable community may be universal, but the principles and strategies employed can be highly dependent on the physical and social context of each project. In this thesis, this term is used to describe the model created in and for Greater Vancouver as discussed in this section.

- Foster healthy social interaction and community life.

These planning policies and initiatives, as well as the principles they are based on, emphasize all three key aspects of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. They are geared towards developing and enhancing quality of life in a broader, more holistic sense than is commonly accommodated in development. In addition, these principles recognize the interdependence of nature and human being, and the social and environmental world we live within.

1.4 A Different Reality and Vision

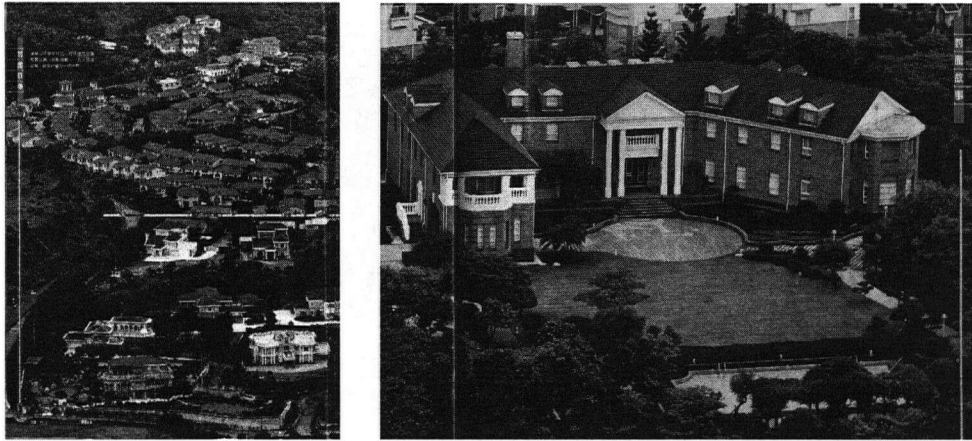
In the contemporary history of China³, the process of modernization has been intimately paired with westernization. The economic growth of Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1970's and 1980's and, more recently, Mainland China have certainly improved Chinese people's livelihood but also brought about complicated social and cultural problems. As Lu (2002) noted when speaking of the rapidly "modernized" Taiwan society, "modernization of the national economy has been accompanied by the westernization of cultural values" (Lu, 2000:3). Although Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China followed radically different paths towards modernization, their ideological revolutions "under the guidance of western thought and the economic miracle created with the aid of Western investments and technology have brought about radical changes in their respective societies" (Lu, 2002:11).

One of the most evident changes in these societies is probably the increasingly accepted pursuit of material wealth and a lifestyle that is modeled after western developed countries. The aspiration for a "superior" western lifestyle is evident in many facets of life and permeates Chinese people's minds and everyday lives. An image (see Figure 1.2) in the Taiwanese periodical *Next Magazine* (2004) revealed the most prestigious residential area where the most powerful figures in Taiwan have concentrated, including ex-president Li Deng Hui and current Nationalist Party leader Lian Zhan. The area is a quintessential suburban neighbourhood filled with either single-detached houses or

³ In this thesis, China refers to Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

mansions of enormous size, only accessible by cars. What is particular striking about these houses is that their architectural styles are detailed copies of American colonial houses, Spanish cottages, Tudor revival mansions and such. Further, these western houses are surrounded by well-crafted and maintained gardens with French or Italian styles. Although some houses might have followed the guidance of Feng Shui, few elements of Chinese culture were incorporated into the design of houses, gardens, or the entire neighbourhood. This example indicates, through architecture, that Chinese people in Taiwan associate prestigious socio-economic status and superior class with the Western culture and lifestyle.

Figure 1.2 Prestigious Residential Areas in Taiwan



Source: *Next Magazine*, 2004

A recent review of lifestyle column and real estate critiques in a Beijing newspaper suggested that prevalent western building typologies such as detached single-family houses, townhouses and even lofts have already entered the Chinese housing market and become sought-after choices for the newly formed middle-class and other affluent people in Beijing (Wang, 2005). Further, Shanghai's official plan of "one city, nine towns" rings the urban core with nine "commutervilles," each with its own international theme. These "towns" include "German Town," "English Town", and "Maple Leaf Town", which is modeled on Canadian precedents (Brown, 2004). This layout is strikingly similar to North American urban sprawl. In China, the term 'villa' has been widely applied to an assortment of low-density typologies that are styled on western themes. In Beijing, by the end of June 2004 there were 176 villa projects. A combined 40,000 villas have been

constructed in those developments and a further 20,000 were being planned (Jia, 2004). The majority of these projects were located on the outskirts of the city and marketed to middle or upper-middle class consumers such as professionals, businessmen, managers, celebrities and foreigners.

Indications of aspirations for western lifestyles are not only evident in housing, but also in consumption patterns of other goods. More and more Chinese people aspire to have their own cars and are optimistic about a future when average citizens can afford a private vehicle, which is a symbol of western living style people learn from numerous movies, books and their experiences of visiting or living in the west. In an interview on CBC radio, a Chinese girl who is a factory line worker in the largest state-owned beverage factory in China commented confidently that she believed that through her hard work she would one day own a car (CBC, 2004). In 2004, Shanghai, a city with an estimated 9 million cyclists, reportedly, banned bicycles in the city centre to clear space for private vehicles to ease the city's mounting congestion (BBC, 2004).

This growth and consumption oriented ideology can be seen not only at everyday personal levels, but also at the national government level. As a result of rapid industrialization and modernization, China is becoming one of the world's most resource and energy-demanding nations. Controversy arose when People's Republic of China proposed to takeover of Noranda – the largest mining company in Canada- by state-owned China Minmetals Corporation (Globe and Mail, 2004). In 2005 China's biggest off-shore oil and gas producer was the highest bidder for Unocal, the ninth-largest U.S. oil firm (BBC, 2005). These two take-over proposals reflect the emergence of China as a massive consumer of resources and energy due to rapid economic growth. However, given China's two current primary goals of economic development and social/political stability, it is very likely that economic goals are weighted much more heavily than environmental and social considerations in national, regional and local policies.⁴ Such

⁴ This is not to suggest that no attention has been paid to environmental well-being in China. However, these efforts can not override the basic economic and political goals. For descriptions of China's two primary goals, see Guan (2000).

policy orientation encourages Chinese people to pursue economic success with little consideration to environment and social justice.

The spread of low-density housing in the outskirts of major Chinese cities, increased use of private vehicles, and the other patterns described above, show signs of an unsustainable development pattern. However, this is not to suggest that oil-dependent, car-oriented suburban living has become a norm in China. Rather, it suggests that due to the rapid growth of material wealth in China, many Chinese people's aspirations are being modeled on unsustainable development patterns. For Chinese immigrants from such a social context, a vision for the future may be drastically different from what was described in the previous section as the vision for the Vancouver region.

1.5 Problem Statement

These two contrasting visions, one for the Vancouver region that emphasizes a balance of environmental, social and economic well-being, the other for China that prioritizes economic growth, triggered the question: Would Chinese immigrants be attracted to live in a sustainable community in the Vancouver region's context?

With the influx of Chinese immigrants to Greater Vancouver in recent years, how such immigrants make their housing decisions will have clear implications for the region's development. Unfortunately, it appears that our current knowledge about Chinese immigrants' housing preferences is rather fragmented and incomplete, as can be seen in Section 1.6. In addition, popular stereotyping of certain preferences that appear to be distinctively associated with Chinese people invariably misrepresents a large and heterogeneous population. A more complete view of Chinese immigrants' housing choices within the context of their lives is needed for effective planning and communication. The absence of such a view may also have implications for designers and developers of sustainable communities if they can not properly understand and comprehend Chinese immigrants' needs and the values underpinning their preferences.

1.6 A Critical Review of Home Location Pattern and Housing Preferences of Chinese Immigrants

The lack of systematic studies on detailed perceptions of specific immigrant groups prompted the search for relevant empirical data. In studies on the contemporary Chinese immigrants' lives and housing choices, most relevant discussions in the North American context seem to focus on two areas: the changing residential pattern of Chinese immigrants and their distinctive housing preferences that gave rise to controversies and racial tensions in 1980's and 90's. This review follows these two avenues to explore Chinese immigrants' preferences in home location and housing design.

1.6.1 The suburbanization of Chinese immigrant settlement

Chinese immigrants to the Lower Mainland in the early 19th century were historically isolated from mainstream society due to political, economic and racial constraints⁵. Small Chinese communities existed in the lower mainland, usually connected to the industries for which Chinese men were a major part of the labour force, but most were forced to live in Chinatown and the adjacent residential district of Strathcona. The economic and geographic isolation of this community resulted in the concentration of Chinese businesses and services still evident today. In contrast with this traditional concentration of Chinese immigrants in inner cities in areas of cheap, high density housing, current immigrants from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan reside throughout the metropolitan region. According to Statistics Canada 2001 Census, nearly 350,000 people of Chinese origin live in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). They are present in all its municipalities except for Bowen Island. The city of Vancouver is by far the most popular area to live among Chinese and is home to nearly half of the region's total Chinese population. The City of Richmond city is a distant second with almost 20% of the region's total Chinese population and the City of Burnaby city is third with about 15%. Despite the relatively smaller number of Chinese in the City of Richmond, they make up 40% of its total population, compared to 30% of Vancouver's total population and about 25% of Burnaby's total population (GVRD, 2001b).

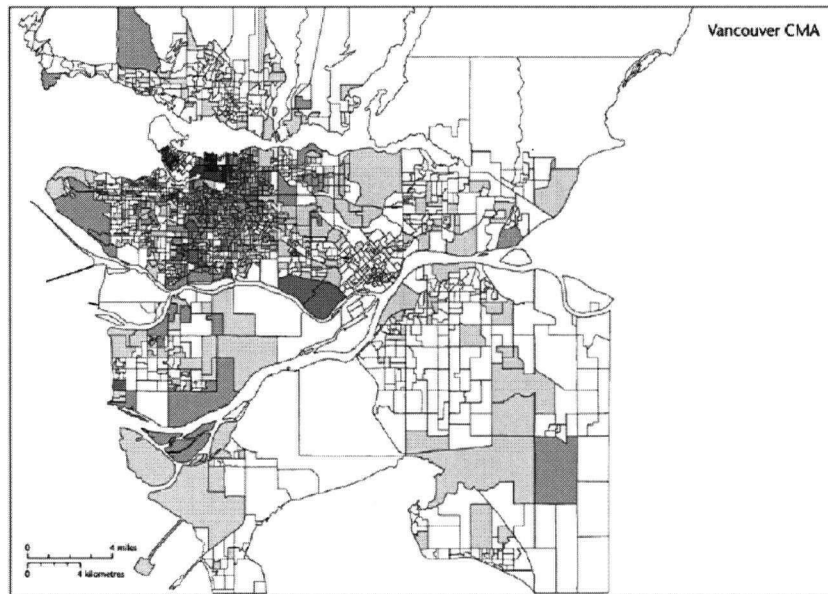
⁵ For more discussion on Chinatown in Vancouver, see Anderson (1991), Lai (1988, 2000, 2003), Cho & Leigh (1972).

Ray (1997) noted that the Chinese were not a suburban population in 1981. Instead, the majority of them located on the East Side of Vancouver, an urban area traditionally popular with immigrant populations. By 1986, the Chinese-Canadian presence in the suburbs and middle class Vancouver neighbourhoods began to grow. A comparison of the following two figures (Figure 1.3 and 1.4) shows the changing magnitude and location of Chinese residents between the census years of 1971 and 1996. The population data indicate that “dual processes of spatial dispersion and local suburban clustering have taken place simultaneously, giving rise to new areas of concentration (Edgarinton, et al, 2003).” These “local clusters” are located mainly in the inner suburbs in Vancouver such as the neighbourhoods of Oakridge, Victoria-Fraserview and Renfrew⁶, and the suburban municipalities surrounding Vancouver, notably Richmond, which is south of Vancouver. According to Burnley and Hiebert (2001), the suburbanization of the immigrant settlement occurs for a number of reasons:

- The cost of land and housing;
- The location of government and NGO services;
- The location of employment opportunities; and
- The existing presence of co-ethnic residents in suburbs.

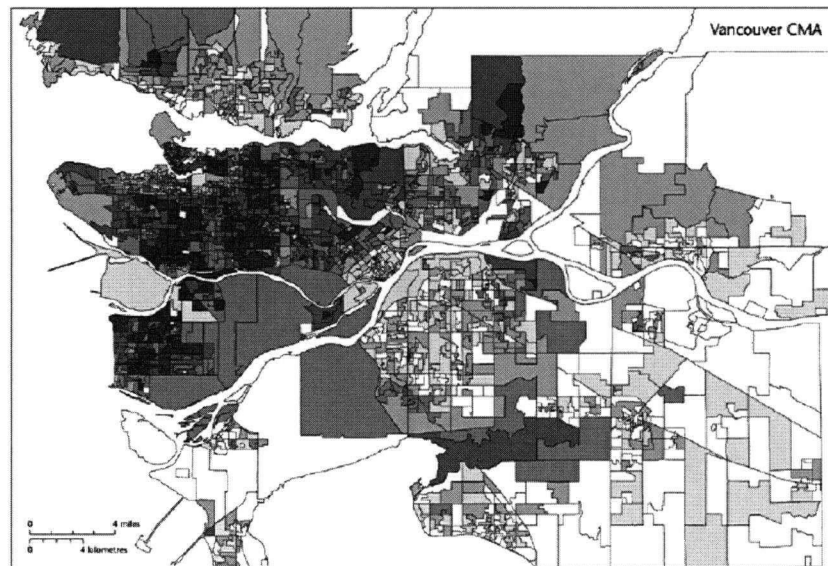
⁶ For a detailed report on proportion of Chinese residents in each neighbourhood in the city of Vancouver, see Community Web Pages (2001).

Figure 1.3: Distribution of Chinese Residents, 1971 (Metropolitan Vancouver) (darker shade indicates greater concentration)



Source: 1971 Census, special analysis conducted by G. Cunningham (Edgington, et al, 2003)

Figure 1.4: Distribution of Chinese Residents, 1996 (Metropolitan Vancouver) (darker shade indicates greater concentration)



Source: 1996 Census, special analysis conducted by G. Cunningham (Edgington, et al, 2003)

An additional observation on the suburbanization of Chinese immigrant settlement is that the Chinese concentrated inner suburbs or suburban municipalities are not necessarily culturally homogeneous. In fact, many of the areas commonly associated with single minority groups (e.g., Richmond) are actually multicultural. This means that “concentration and diversity are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can, and do, coexist” (Ibid: 19).

1.6.2 Housing preferences

A CMHC study (1996) indicated that some immigrant groups such as the Italians, Portuguese, and some Asian groups place a higher value on homeownership than non-immigrants. Ley (2001: 12) noted “the high levels of homeownership among many minority groups indicate an inflation of the value of the home to cover a range of psychological and cultural priorities.” Many immigrants hope that through hard work and sacrifice over a period of years they will “attain the ideal of a home with a garden, a place to demonstrate their economic success and sustain cultural and religious affiliations that may be less easily broadcast in the public realm. (Ley, et al, 2001:12)” A Chinese newspaper distributed in Greater Vancouver described a standard life that an immigrant can expect to attain through hard work in Canada is “one house, two cars, two children and one dog” (*China Journal*, 2004: 23). Similar descriptions exist in literature and in journalism broadcast to the Chinese-speaking audience in Greater Vancouver, which reinforces social expectations and benchmarks for success. Articles such as the one from *China Journal* reflect the Canadian norm that immigrants perceive and create a standard of success against which immigrants measure themselves. Many Chinese immigrants’ housing preferences might well be very close to those considered to be norms in Canadian context.

Much discussion has occurred when Chinese immigrants’ housing preferences seem to clash with pre-existing norms. A number of studies (Li, 1994; Majury, 1994; Ley, et al, 2001) contain detailed reports and analysis of the controversy over the demolition of older houses into what is referred as ‘monster houses’ and the reduction of trees and lawns in many established residential areas during a period of high immigration in 1980’s

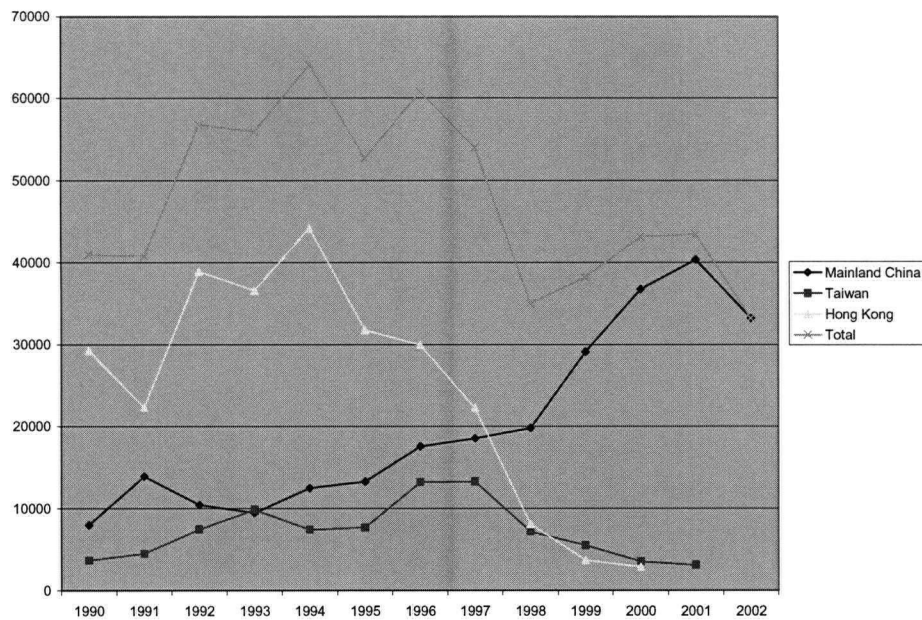
and 1990's. The common pattern of this redevelopment was that existing detached houses were demolished regardless of their state of repair, and replaced by new properties, often on clear-cut lots, that made maximum use of the dwelling size permitted by zoning. Large, square properties on minimally-landscaped lots best fit this objective, giving rise to the uncomplimentary moniker of the "monster house" (Ley, et al, 2001). They are often characterized by symmetrical proportions, the use of bright colours, a variety of building materials (especially brick), a large foyer and grand entrance way (Majury, 1994; Li, 1994). As the typical occupants of these houses are newly-arrived Hong Kong immigrants, the public and academics alike, often associate these preferences with immigrants of Chinese-origin.

A close examination of this correlation reveals such an argument might be a weak one as it assumed the homogeneity of the Chinese population in Greater Vancouver. The composition of the Chinese immigrant population has been in constant change and evolution. Figure 1.5 and 1.6 indicate the changes of flow of Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China. The characteristics of business class immigrants who made up a significant proportion of early Taiwan and Hong Kong immigrant populations are dramatically different from economic class immigrants⁷ that have made up most of the Mainland China immigrant population in recent years.

The strong presence and changing composition of the Chinese immigrant population in the region and the lack of literature on their housing choices suggest there is a potential need to readjust our perceptions of Chinese immigrants, as well as to renew and expand our existing knowledge of their housing preferences.

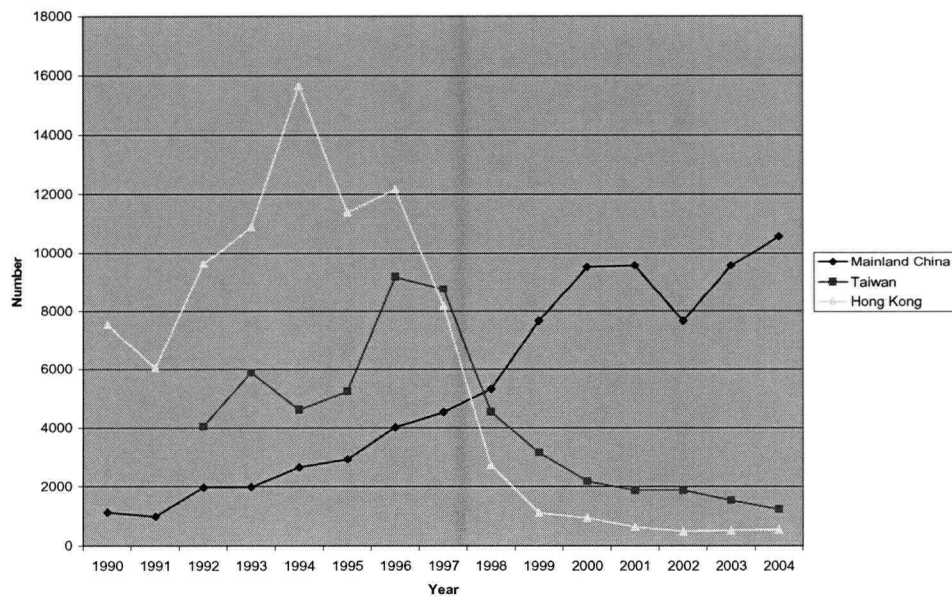
⁷ Business class includes managers, investors and entrepreneurs. Economic class includes skilled-workers and self-employed.

Figure 1.5: Chinese Immigrants to Canada



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Figure 1.6: Chinese Immigrants to Vancouver Metropolitan Area



Source: BC STATS

Data provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

The following chapter describes the research methodology employed in this study. It includes a discussion of a qualitative approach to sociological research and its appropriateness to this study. This is followed by a description of the data collection process and a detailed account how the qualitative interviews were used to address the research questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the methods of data analysis and the strength and limitations of the chosen study method.

2.1 A Qualitative Approach

Previous studies on immigrants' residential patterns and housing preferences in Greater Vancouver that employed quantitative methods mainly used census data available from Statistics Canada (i.e. Burnley & Hieber, 2001; CMHC, 1996; Bauder & Sharpe, 2002; Ray, B.K., et al., 1997). Although these quantitative studies are useful in identifying trends and patterns, they have several limitations. First, variables in the study are limited to the available categories in census data. The researchers cannot conveniently use variables beyond those already anticipated and defined. In these studies, only dwelling type and tenure are examined for immigrants housing preferences. Second, the results from these quantitative analyses typically explain very little about why the phenomenon under study exists. Strict quantitative research may prevent researchers from exploring beyond a set of pre-programmed questions. Qualitative research, however, is appropriate to explore complex social and human problems where variables cannot be easily identified and theories need to be developed (Creswell, 1998).

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the housing preferences among Chinese immigrants in Greater Vancouver from their perspectives. The need to present a detailed, holistic view of the topic calls for the qualitative approach. The qualitative researcher looks at settings and people holistically and "studies people in the context of their pasts and the situations in which they find themselves" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:8). In this study, I am interested in not only the participants' socio-demographic information

but also their experience, perceptions and emotions in the process of relocating their homes in Greater Vancouver. This approach allows me to look at their housing choices in the context of their overall lifestyle, constraints and expectations.

Another reason for adopting qualitative methodology is its flexibility in research design. As researchers spend some time in the field and learn about how participants view their experience, questions are modified accordingly to better serve the purpose of the study. The interview guide provides a framework while the questions are continuously evolving based on increasing knowledge and experience in the field.

A grounded theory study was chosen for this research. Grounded theory, first articulated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, is an inquiry process that generates new theoretical insights from field data instead of testing an existing hypothesis. The emerging theoretical insights are developed, verified and refined through systematic data collection and analysis. The intent of a grounded theory study is to generate a set of ideas that relates to a particular situation. The situation here is one in which Chinese immigrants make housing choices in the process of relocating their homes in Greater Vancouver. Concepts and categories are developed by a systematic analysis of primary interview data and multiple field visits. Researchers develop theoretical insights into the problem by establishing plausible relationships among these concepts and categories.

I have chosen this approach to investigate my research questions because Chinese immigrants' housing preferences have not been a subject of research for its own sake. Existing knowledge about Chinese immigrant's housing preferences is mainly drawn from secondary information sources. Since the waves of Chinese immigrants entered Greater Vancouver, considerable interest and attention has been paid to their housing choices both in academia and in public (Ley, et al., 2001; Rose, 2001; Majury, 1994). In these studies, data are collected from census, government documents, media reports, business records, or interview data with established residents. Maybe due to the cultural and language barriers, there is a noticeable absence of data directly collected from Chinese immigrants. It is my hope for this study to let my study group and their data

paint a more complete and comprehensive picture of how they make housing choices from their point of view.

2.2 Data Collection

In qualitative inquiry, the information-richness of the selected cases and the researcher's analytical skills are more important than the actual number of cases studied. Sample size is determined by the purpose of the study, what will be useful, and the available time and resources (Patton, 1990). Thus, interviews were conducted until the categories of information become saturated, where additional interviews yield little new information to help the researcher gain confidence in constructing theoretical insights. In grounded theory studies, the researcher typically conducts 20-30 interviews combined with multiple field visits in order to achieve detail in theory (Creswell, 1998).

In this study, I conducted 30 interviews to generate the primary data for the grounded theory study. I also chose to use a wide range of secondary data sources including local Chinese newspapers, public documents, radio programs and community events. An important way to strengthen a study design is through triangulation (i.e. the combination of methods or sources of data in a single study) (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Patton, 1990). These secondary sources of data not only help gain a broader perspective on the setting but also provide clues and references for me to address issues that may not have been covered in interviews.

2.2.1 Participants recruitment

All the interviewees are Chinese immigrants recruited from Greater Vancouver. The participants ranged from those have resided in Greater Vancouver for more than 20 years and become Canadian citizens, to those who have only been here for less than 3 years and still hold immigrant status. However, what is common in them is that they are all first-generation immigrant population (i.e., not Canadian-born children of immigrants). As "cultural resettlement and adaptation is central to the experience of immigrants (Chua, 2002, page 137)", it is essential for this study to capture the rationales and feelings

behind their housing choices in the process of adapting to a new cultural and physical landscape.

A Qualitative approach focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). The strategy for purposeful sampling employed in this study is a combination of maximum variation sampling and snowball sampling. Maximum variation sampling aims to “capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant” (Ibid). Chinese immigrants to Greater Vancouver come from a wide geographical distribution including Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. Each of these countries or regions has its own history, dialects, political structure and economic background. Individuals may be at different education and income levels. Diverse characteristics were identified for constructing the sample; and the ideal characteristics composition for the study group was mapped out. When the interview process began, participants were recruited purposefully to make sure the geographical, economic and social variations are represented in the sample by constantly comparing their characteristics with the ideal composition. Snowball sampling is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases (Ibid). In order to find cases that would greatly contribute to the study, I first started by asking people around me for potential participants. I talked to my family members, friends and colleagues, explained the purpose of my study and asked them to think of someone who shows a lot of interest in housing, just purchased a home, or had rich experience in renting or owning a place. In addition, four organizations were asked to recommend their members in participating in the study:

- Green Club (The largest Chinese environmental group in Lower Mainland);
- United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society (SUCCESS, the largest Chinese social service agency in British Columbia);
- Chinese Student and Scholar Association;
- BC Chinese Music Association

Interested persons from these organizations made the initial contact with the researcher but only those qualified members were recruited for an interview. After each interview,

the participant was asked to provide further potential contacts for the next round of interview process and so forth.

2.2.2 Interview structure and instruments

The interview structure takes advantage of two different approaches to qualitative interviewing: the 'interview guide approach' and the 'closed response approach'. The main style adopted was the interview guide approach, which serves to remind the researcher to cover key topics pertaining to the research questions. In each interview, the participant was encouraged to speak mainly on four topics: 1) their motivations to move and stay; 2) their housing experience in the home country or regions; 3) how they choose their residence(s) in Greater Vancouver; and 4) their ideal place to live. Each topic is started with an open-ended, descriptive question. Specific aspects of a topic that interest the researcher were written carefully before hand. Throughout the interviewing process, the researcher probes for details and constantly presses for clarification of the participant's words (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). This systematic process assures the researcher that the key topics will be covered consistently through the interviews but at the same time allows for flexibilities to adapt to interview situations. As participants come from different regions and sometimes have their own dialects, I made special efforts to change wordings and the way of asking questions depending on the situation in order to make communication more effective. Some questions evolved to better serve the purpose of the study. New questions were generated to illuminate a particular issue or to explore topics that were not originally included in the interview guide. Anticipated responses to some questions were included in the interview guide to help facilitate data collection and analysis. In doing so, questions and answers are easily located and thus able to be conveniently compared across all participants.

Closed response approach is characterized by pre-determined questions and fixed response categories from which participants select (Patton, 1990). It is employed in this study to collect strictly factual, socio-demographic information such as place of origin, education and family composition.

Two kinds of interview instruments were designed and used to assist exploring the housing choices among the study group: a picture comparison and a trade-off game. Given the visual aspects of the housing issue, fourteen pictures of homes and near home spaces in Greater Vancouver were selected to stimulate conversations on perceptions, thoughts and ideas generated by these images. This instrument allows the researcher to examine more subtle, subjective and symbolic meanings of spaces that are difficult to deliver in plain words. Moreover, the visual tool is very powerful and effective to gain information on participants' own interpretation, understanding and feelings towards what were depicted in these images.

The trade-off game is a special research tool designed for this study. The objective of the trade-off game was to create a situation in which participants had to choose from various options the dwelling and amenities that best suited their family needs and finances (Bell, 1974). Five categories were provided in the game: house, school, recreation, transportation and neighbourhood. These categories were chosen because they appeared to be important considerations for Chinese immigrants when allocating their financial resources. Each category contains two options. Participants were given 10 cards that represent these options with a thumbnail, a brief explanation and a conceptual price in each card. Participants were asked first to select a combination of options that could maximize their satisfaction within "\$390" (roughly the medium value of the sum of more expansive items in all categories and the sum of less expansive items in all categories). The participants were also asked to organize options in the order of importance to them, the first option being the more important and the last option the least. After they made their decisions under economic constraint, they were asked to choose again only this time they select their ideal combination regardless of attached prices of each option. The following is the illustration of the game cards used in the interviews.

Figure 2.1: Trade-off Game Cards



In most cases, participants chose one item from each category. They were also allowed to choose both items in a category in compromise of other options or an entire category as long as they could “afford” it with their given budget. Even though the options in this game are certainly not comprehensive enough to represent many options one would have in reality, it does create a situation in which participants were forced to make decisions and set priorities in choosing these options. The purpose is to learn what were important to the participants, what were more easily to be traded-off, and why they made such decisions. Furthermore, this game provides an opportunity to check for inconsistency in responses. As Taylor and Bogan (1998) have noted, qualitative interviewers “have to be alert to exaggerations and distortions in their informants’ stories”. In cases where respondents made choices that were not anticipated based on my understanding of their previous statements, I would probe for explanation of such contradictions or internal inconsistencies. This practice often prevented misunderstanding of their responses by the

researcher and led to the discovery of new issues. For example, some participants stated earlier in the interview the importance of quality education in their housing choices. However, in the trade-off game, they did not choose the 'reputable school' as was anticipated. Their logic was that they chose to place the neighbourhood choice in priority as prestigious neighbourhoods normally coupled with quality schools. Therefore, their choice did not mean that they placed a low priority on education. In addition, their responses revealed that they connected quality education opportunity with neighbourhood choices.

2.2.3 The interviews

Before the formal interviews, I spent some time talking with friends, relatives, colleagues in and outside of the Chinese community in Greater Vancouver on their views on housing issues and preferences. I also undertook research on the Chinese organizations in Greater Vancouver as potential contacts for future participants. I first conducted four pilot interviews with friends and colleagues. The purpose of this practice is two fold: first, to scope the interview questions and to test the images of a broad range of spaces for their effectiveness, contrast and representativeness; second, to familiarize myself with the procedures and to better prepare myself for the future interview situation. These pilot interviews were only for practice purposes, thus no information from these interviews were recorded, transcribed or used in the final report of this study.

In compliance with the agreement with the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the researchers are required to initiate contacts with the potential participants by sending a formal introduction letter stating the purpose of the study, interview procedure and compensation. People who were interested would contact me through the information provided in the letter. A total of thirty interviews were conducted between January and March of 2005. All but one interview was tape recorded. This participant didn't feel comfortable with tape recording but offered more time for me to take comprehensive notes. The interview typically took one to one and a half hours, though actual length varied from 45 minutes to three hours. Interviews were conducted either in a participant's

home or his/her place of business with one exception; a meeting room on campus. Twenty-four interviews were conducted in Mandarin and the rest in English.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the study. It started with the first interview completed and continued to the end of the study. After each interview, the data was carefully reviewed. I looked for concepts and meanings that were relevant to my research objectives and wrote notes to help make sense of the data. Then I took what I had learned to subsequent interviews in order to test emerging themes and patterns.

Three phases of interviews were conducted. Between these phases, preliminary analysis and reflection occurred. Emerging ideas were identified and taken to the next phase of interviews for further clarification and refinement using the zigzag approach of grounded theory (i.e. from interviews to analysis and reflections back to interview again).

“Researchers cannot expect unity across interviews; instead contradictions that arise during the interview process should be used to generate further questions for the next round of data collection” (Geddes, 2002: 23). During the interview process, there were several times when participants’ preferences appeared to be very different and even contradictory. By using an iterative cycle of interview and reflection I was able to modify interview questions and adjust my approach to address contradictions as the interviews were in motion. For example, during the first round of interviews, when participants were asked about their ideal home location, some explicitly stated that they preferred to stay in Chinese-concentrated areas while others either did not care or tried to live outside of the Chinese-concentrated areas. Questions were asked more specifically in the subsequent interviews in order to understand why Chinese immigrants would have such different views on this matter.

Formal data analysis occurred after all interviews were completed and transcription was finished. Grounded theory employs a particular set of structures in the analysis phase of the research, the first of which is coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Coding is the

operation by which “data is broken down, conceptualized, and put back together again” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:57). I started the data analysis by going through each transcript systematically, creating a category each time something arose that seemed important to my research questions (open coding). In order to identify themes and patterns, I reduced the number of categories by grouping together linked codes or categories (axial coding). I then constructed explanations that represented the major areas of theory development in each studied aspect: home location, dwelling attributes, and proximal space (selective coding). Each of these aspects is developed in detail in the following two chapters.

During data analysis, existing theories and insights from various disciplines including psychology, sociology, geography and ethnic studies were selected to help draw inferences from the data and to explain inconsistencies between the theory and the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 51) noted that “knowledge of philosophic writings and existing theories can provide ways of approaching and interpreting data”. In particular, Barrie Gunter’s book *Psychology of the Home* provided many valuable insights that facilitated data interpretation. In this book, he examines the psychological significance of home, and explores a wide range of preferences for various aspects of home evidenced around the world. His work references psychologist Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs⁸ to explain the relationship between the home and basic human needs. This led me to examine Chinese immigrants’ housing preferences in terms of their needs.

While participants were generally very conscious about their needs and priorities, they were much more limited in explaining their taste for space. Psychology studies regarding home environment and the meaning of landscape provide clues to interpret subtle messages from participants’ particular taste and preferences for space. The use of a wide range of literature also gives supplementary validation of the accuracy of the findings.

⁸ Maslow supposed that people have five types of needs which are activated in a hierarchical manner. These needs are biological or physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem and self-actualization needs. While the applicability Maslow’s hierarchy has been severely challenged his exploration of the nature of human needs provides a valuable tool for understanding human motivations.

2.4 Study Limitations

There are two major limitations to the chosen study method. The first limitation concerns the accuracy and appropriateness of the translation of interview materials from Chinese to English. 24 interviews were conducted in Mandarin and translated by the researcher. Cross-cultural communication is subject to misunderstandings since some words cannot be directly translated or contain various meanings in another language (Patton, 1990). For example, the word 'suburban' or 'suburbia' cannot be easily found in the transcribed interview data as there is no well-accepted term in Chinese for this concept. Thus, participants often used their own words to explain their understanding of the concept. Upon viewing the image that indicates a suburban neighbourhood, participants would use words that can be directly translated as 'new neighbourhood'. However, 'new neighbourhood' and 'suburbia' suggest very different ideas in English. While some meaning was inevitably lost when translating the Chinese interviews, the data were of great value as they provide insight into respondents' understanding of their living environment. The translation of important words related to the notion of 'sustainability' is presented in Appendix B for reference.

The second limitation concerns the bias that the researcher might take into data analysis and interpretation. The researcher's Chinese immigrant background and living experience in Vancouver provided a degree of familiarity with the Chinese community, the setting and the subject. However, this familiarity inevitably shapes the interpretation of the data. Rehman (2002) points out that researchers who share socio-demographic characteristics with their participants (e.g. race, ethnicity) "may be too quick to assume... similarity with (the) participants when, in reality, none or few may exist" (page 43). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) also suggest that researchers need to understand their own perspectives, logic and assumptions in order to understand their findings. Critical self-reflection is essential to avoid inaccuracies in data interpretation.

Sharing a similar background to the study group sometimes prevented me from gaining respondents' explicit description of their thoughts and feelings. The respondents perceived me as a member of their community and thus expected me to share their

understanding implicitly. As a result, the respondents tended not to mention things that they thought were typical or well understood in Chinese culture. However, it is essential for this study to recognize the underlying assumptions the respondents had when formulating their responses. It is precisely these assumptions that sometimes lead to misunderstanding by people who do not share the same culture. Between interviews, I frequently stepped back from the data and examined whether my own preconceptions prevented me from seeing underlying needs and values in the responses. Frequent discussions with my committee members (none of whom have a Chinese background) also helped me place the data in perspective.

2.5 Study Group Characteristics

The 30 Chinese immigrants who participated in this study were almost evenly divided by place of origin; 11 were from Mainland China, 9 from Taiwan and 10 from Hong Kong. The number of female participants exceeded the number of their male counterparts. This higher participation rate of female respondents is attributed to the greater interest female had shown to this study and the availability of their time. At the early stage of participant recruitment, the researcher noticed that it was mostly women who responded to the request. Special efforts were made to recruit male participants half way through the process so that the resulting sample has a more balanced female and male ratio. Most female participants not only showed their enthusiasm for the housing topics but also had more flexible schedules. The husbands of some female participants were away most of the time, working in their home region or country (i.e. Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) to support the family. Most of these women have children to take care of and don't have full-time paid jobs. This phenomenon, typical to Chinese immigrant families, is recognized in the literature as 'astronaut syndrome' ⁹(Skeldon, 1995). While in these

⁹ The term "astronaut syndrome" is used to describe the immigrants who migrates to another country, establishes a home there leaving his or her family and then commutes between this new destination and their home country or region.

‘astronaut’ families, husbands and wives are living separately most of the time; there was only one instance of single parent household in the study group¹⁰.

In terms of schooling, the majority of the study group (27 out of 30) had received post-secondary education. The high education profile corresponds with the high proportion of skilled worker class immigrants in the study group.¹¹ Despite the high education profile, however, only three skilled workers’ household incomes are more than the average household income of Greater Vancouver Regional District in 2001 Census¹² (GVRD, 2001c). The lower household incomes of highly educated skilled workers suggest that skilled worker immigrants are probably earning less than their Canadian counterparts. University of Toronto, Professor Jeffrey Reitz, (in “Canada: New Law”, 2000) released a study that suggested many recent immigrants have difficulty breaking into the knowledge-based economy and are suffering in low-paying jobs. What also needs to be noted is that some business class immigrants reported an earning much lower than the expected income range but have a much higher rate of property ownership. This may be due to the fact that most of the business class immigrants in this study are now retired but bought the property with the capital they brought from their home region or country. The researcher also noticed that the business and investor class immigrants tended not to include their income source from their homeland even though some of them admitted they still own or run overseas business. Therefore such figures should not be taken literally because they are prone to inaccuracy because of underreporting. Table 2.1 summarizes the sample’s demographic characteristics and provides a breakdown of demographics by place of origin.

Table 2.1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=30)

	Total	Mainland China	Taiwan	Hong Kong
Gender				
Female	17	6	5	6

¹⁰ This relationship pattern might be a reflection of shame associated with divorce in traditional Chinese value (Lew, 1998, p.213).

¹¹ People who immigrated to Canada as skilled workers had to demonstrate their education, work experience and language skills (CIC, 2004).

¹² The average household income in the GVRD in 2001 was \$63,000.

Male	13	5	4	4
Age				
20-29	3		1	2
30-39	7	2	1	4
40-49	10	6	3	1
50-59	7	1	3	3
60+	3	2	1	
Length of residence				
Less than 12 months	2	2		
1 – 2 years	1			1
2-3 years	1	1		
3-5 years	10	6	2	2
5-10 years	4	1	3	
10-15 years	4		1	3
15-20 years	6		2	4
20 years +	2	1	1	
Relationship status				
Single	3		1	2
Married	26	10	8	8
Divorced	1	1		
Highest level of formal schooling				
High school graduate	3		1	2
College graduate	8	6	2	
University graduate	14	4	3	7
Graduate or post-graduate degree	5	1	3	1
Gross family income				
\$6,000 and less	2	1		1
\$6,000 to \$10,000	4	3	1	
\$10,000 to \$20,000	5	2	1	2
\$20,000 to \$30,000	7	3	2	2

\$30,000 to \$40,000	2		1	1
\$40,000 to \$60,000	4	1	2	1
\$60,000 to \$80,000	1			1
\$80,000 to \$100,000	2		2	
\$100,000 to \$150,000	2	1		1
\$150,000 and more	0			
				(N/A 1)
Category of immigration				
Skilled worker	18	7	8	3
Business	8	3	1	4
Family	4	1	0	3

CHAPTER 3: FINDING THE RIGHT NEIGHBOURHOOD

This chapter examines respondents' neighbourhood preferences and choice of home location. It first explores the influence of the Chinese community in neighbourhood choices and describes the characteristics of immigrants that are attracted to live in close proximity to other Chinese. It traces the motives and preferences of the participants who consciously chose to live outside the Chinese concentrated areas. Finally, it discusses the importance of school and education that was found consistently influential to immigrant families with children in their home location decision.

3.1 The Emergence of a New Chinese Cultural Centre - a Case of Richmond

While Chinatown in Vancouver is considered the historical Chinese cultural centre, the City of Richmond has become widely recognized as the new centre of Chinese culture and business in Lower Mainland. Richmond was primarily an agricultural area from the 1860's to the early 1950's and then a bedroom suburb for Vancouver, but considerable population growth and the rapid expansion of its commercial sector since the 1960's has seen its emergence as a small, yet complete city (Ray, et al, 1997). However, it is probably the influx of Chinese immigrants in the 1980s and the subsequent commercial development that has reinforced Richmond's position as the new Chinese centre. During the 1990s, Chinese immigrants, mainly from Hong Kong, invested in the development of large-scale retail centres specifically for the Chinese population (see Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1).

Table 3.1: Major Chinese Shopping Centres in Richmond

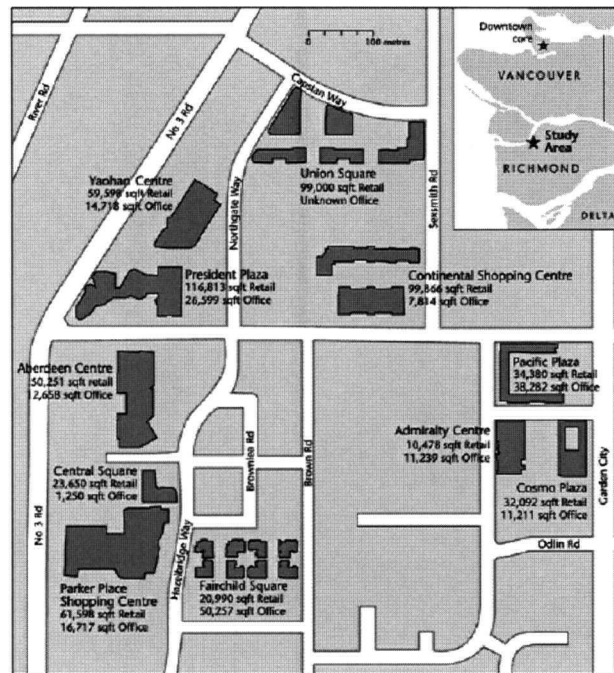
NAME	Date Opened	Floor Space (ft ²)	Characteristics
Aberdeen Centre	1990	120,000	60 retail stores; movie theatre; bowling centre; Chinese restaurant
Fairchild Square	1991		Mixed-use office complex with retail stores on the ground floor
Parker Place Shopping Centre	1992		140 stores; strata-titled
President Plaza	1993	3.73 acre site	Hotel-commercial-office complex; supermarket; 30 retail units
Central Square	1996		Retail units
Yaohan Centre	1995		Japanese supermarket; 14 units of food court; 44 strata-titled retail units
Central Square	1996		Retail units
Continental Centre	1997		Retail and office units
Pacific Plaza	1997	110,000	Retail and office units
Cosmo Plaza	1997		80 retail units
Admiralty Centre	1997	150,000	60 Retail and office units
Union Square	1998		Retail and office units

Source: Nan, (1999)

All projects, except the original Aberdeen Centre, contained strata-titled shops and office units sold or leased to new Chinese immigrants or established Chinese residents. The stores sell products and services catering towards ethnic Chinese customers. This trend has created concern regarding the communication problems between the Chinese sales people and English-speaking customers (Edgington, et al, 2003). With the large Chinese population in the region, these business centres seem to be able to operate largely self-sufficiently with clientele solely within the Chinese community.¹³ In addition, the concentration and variety of Chinese services available in Richmond shopping centres has proven to be a significant draw to the Chinese population throughout the lower mainland, making Richmond a retail destination.

¹³ Recent reports suggest that Hong Kong developers may be willing to change their marketing strategies towards more mainstream North American approaches (Edgington, 2003).

Figure 3.1: Major Chinese Shopping Centres in Richmond



Source: Edgington, et al. (2003)

The emergent Chinese commercial centres not only provide goods and service that made Chinese immigrants' life convenient but also creates employment opportunities for them. The relatively low cost of land and housing in Richmond also helps lower the cost of living. Therefore, it is not surprising that Richmond attracts many recent Chinese immigrants to settle in it.

3.2 The Role of Chinese Community

Currently there are over 300,000 Chinese residing in the Greater Vancouver region. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, three top municipalities with high percentage of Chinese are Richmond (40%), Vancouver (30%) and Burnaby (25%). The majority of the study group live in these three municipalities (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Distribution of Respondents' Current Residence

Municipality	Number of respondents
Vancouver	15
Richmond	6
Burnaby	7
Surrey	1
Port Coquitlam	1

The presence of specialty goods, business, services, and activities marketed towards ethnic Chinese in this region has made it very convenient for Chinese immigrants. Two participants cited the large Chinese population in Vancouver as one of their reasons for moving to the Lower Mainland of British Columbia as it provides a familiar and friendly social environment, as well as ethnic goods and services. Seven participants consciously chose to live in Chinese- dominated areas, mostly in the City of Richmond. The rest of the interviewees appreciated the availability of ethnic Chinese merchandise and services in the Vancouver metropolitan area; they indicated, however, that they were not attracted to live in areas dominated by Chinese businesses and services. These two contrasting attitudes triggered an exploration of the role of Chinese community in participants' housing choices.

3.2.1 Experience Richmond – the new Chinese centre

For the participants who chose to live in Chinese-dominated areas, age, social environment, employment, and social and family ties were critical considerations. The following is a discussion of these interviewees' preferences and their rationales.

Seniors

Familiar language environment, merchandise and services are important factors that make adaptation to immigrant life considerably easier for the elderly. The center of the Chinese community in Richmond is on No. 3 Road, a major commercial street with large shopping malls, countless restaurants, shops and banks, many of which have Chinese signage. One retired respondent who moved to Greater Vancouver with his wife about 4 years ago said one of the important reasons to choose Richmond as a place to live was

“definitely because there are more Chinese here” (MC23). Their new townhouse is located within a 10 minutes’ drive of Richmond Centre. When he and his family looked for a place for their retirement life, they wanted it to be convenient, quiet, and socially suitable for their age and cultural background. He admitted it was a relief that he didn’t have to speak too much English to be able to get around or run errands. Due to their age and limited English, they felt living in Richmond gave them a sense of security and independence. Two other participants in Richmond mentioned that the seniors in their households prefer to live there and that the seniors’ needs are the priority in the house (HK5 and TW14). In *Psychology of the Home*, Gunter suggested that for the older person, locations nearer to the city centre were preferred as “these locations offered proximity to more fundamental amenities, essential to their health and survival, at a time when their mobility was becoming more restricted.” In this case, living near a city centre that offers familiar culture and services fulfills elderly Chinese immigrants’ important psychological needs such as freedom of movement, well-being and togetherness.

Social environment

Some recent Chinese immigrants chose to live in Chinese concentrated areas to establish their social network quickly upon arrival. The process of taking on a new language and integrating into mainstream society is long and challenging. For some respondents, living in a Chinese centre is a means to avoid social isolation and loneliness in a foreign country and to surround oneself with social buffer to the transition from their home culture to the host culture. A female respondent who emigrated from Mainland China to Richmond less than a year before the interview, said:

I want to make friends, to live an active life. It is easier to participate in Chinese social activities in Richmond....I am taking an ESL course now. But I don't think I can use my English to relate to other people in a meaningful way this quickly. If I feel I can only stay at home all by myself, it is not interesting. I wouldn't have come [to Canada]. (MC 2)

This interviewee continues to run her own company in China. Meanwhile, her husband works as an engineer in Mainland China. She moved to Canada in the hope of giving her only daughter a better education. But at the same time, she didn't want to sacrifice her social life. For her, the choice of where to live is not limited by her financial means but by her language ability. The choice to settle in a Chinese-dominated neighbourhood was driven by the fear of social isolation.

Her response resonates with other participants in Richmond who immigrated to Canada very recently. The ability to relate to people of similar backgrounds and to form meaningful social relationships is perceived to be essential to keeping a positive life attitude in the early days of adaptation to the host society. When asked if she would move to other areas, one new immigrant from Shanghai said,

"It is of course possible. Too early to say. But I think I don't want to move out of this city [Richmond]. I may want to move closer to the community centre or library.... When I get used to an environment, I don't want to move somewhere else and start to familiarize with new environment all over again. Staying here is more convenient in terms of communication. Easier to connect with people. (MC 11)

For her, the opportunity to connect with the established social network was a main reason to stay in the area as it provides a sense of security and familiarity.

Employment

For some Chinese immigrants, especially recent skilled workers, Richmond is the place they found their first jobs in Canada. A respondent in her 40s from Mainland China said she and her husband were both working in the computer industry in China before moving to Canada. They found it very difficult to find equivalent jobs in Canada. The shrinking job market in the computer field is one obstacle. With no local work experience and limited English skills, they stood little chance of competing with their Canadian counterparts, even if there were work opportunities. This respondent's husband was

working part-time in a Chinese market in order to support their young family while she was advancing her English. At the same time, they were both continuing to seek opportunities in their field of expertise and were considering alternative careers. "We are hoping to gain some Canadian working experience in Richmond by getting a job without too much requirement for English to start with. One step at a time" (MC 11). For her, living in Richmond is a strategy for entering the Canadian labour force. Given their limited resources and language skills, taking advantage of immediate resources in the Chinese community may lead to employment opportunities, critical to her family's survival.

This respondent's case (MC 11) was certainly not unique in that many recent immigrants are working low-paying jobs well below their skill level. Ray (1997) reported that only 29.3 % of Chinese immigrants in Richmond lives in households earning over \$60,000 compared to 45.4% of Richmond's total population, with the remainder of Chinese individuals live in middle- (36.4%) and low-income households (34.3%). He believed that the high proportion of Chinese immigrants living in low-income households in Richmond is due to the fact that a large segment of this population only recently immigrated to Canada. China, Hong Kong and Taiwan were the top three source countries for Richmond's recent immigrants between 1996 and 2001 (City of Richmond, 2003). Normally it takes an average of 10 to 15 years for the household income of immigrants to match or exceed those of non-immigrants and, subsequently, to exceed them (CMHC, 1996). However, this pattern may not apply to business and investor's class immigrants. The recent decline in the business class immigrants from Hong Kong and the increase of skilled worker class immigrants from Mainland China (see Figure 1.6 Chinese Immigrants to Vancouver Metropolitan Area) may contribute to the large proportion of Chinese immigrants with lower incomes in Richmond as recent immigrants may be drawn to the Chinese community for support, resources and protection.

Social and family ties

A number of interviewees indicated that living in Richmond allows them to be close to their immediate families, relatives and friends. One participant, a UBC student, has to

commute an hour each way from home to campus every day. When asked if she would like to move, she appeared hesitant:

I probably want to live somewhere different when I graduate - have a small apartment in Vancouver or something, depending on my job - but at the same time, I still like living in Richmond. Maybe I am just getting really used to it. It's so convenient for shopping and family outings... My family is living there. So are our relatives and friends. All my close friends I can talk to are still mostly Chinese. (TW14)

Having lived in Canada since she was 11, she spoke both Mandarin and English fluently. It is not her inability to adjust to immigrant life that keeps her in the current area but rather the social and family network she is connected with.

Another participant, born in Hong Kong and educated in Canada, currently works in a prestigious software company in downtown Vancouver. He imagined his ideal place to live was Port Moody, where he cannot only be closer to the church he attends to but also enjoy a different social scene "with less Chinese" (HK24). Right now he and his wife live in an apartment in Richmond to be close to his in-laws and his wife's workplace. As a young professional, his economic status and language ability can afford much greater freedom to choose his home location. However, the family connection was considered more important than his personal preference (HK24). In both cases, family ties are weighted heavily into their consideration to live close to Chinese centres.

3.2.2 Perspective from outside of the Chinese-concentrated areas

A second group of interviewees chose not to live in Chinese-dominated areas. Many members of this group did state that these Chinese centres were important destinations, showing that they are still important in terms of residential choice. This second group of respondents either had not considered the presence of Chinese people or had consciously avoided it. These three phenomena are discussed below.

Chinese Centres as a Destination

Participants who live further away stressed the importance of major Chinese centres as destinations, for supply of specialty goods and services and for cultural activities. One participant from Taiwan recalls, "Before we had to ask our family [from Taiwan] to mail authentic Taiwanese food and ingredients. But now there are T&T supermarkets.... Even IGA has some Chinese food and spices now." Living in the West Side of Vancouver, she frequents Chinese markets, stores, and restaurants in Richmond. As a Buddhist, she goes to the Buddhist temple in Richmond at least once a week for meditation, exercise, and to learn Chinese brush painting (TW1). Another participant living in Vancouver close to a vibrant commercial street also visits Richmond for various Chinese goods at least once a week. In her response, the lack of Chinese groceries in the neighbourhood is a factor for her to make frequent trips to Richmond (MC6).

Thus, even immigrants who chose not to live in close proximity of Chinese centres showed that they found the presence of these centres important and even necessary. However, they chose, for their own reasons, to live elsewhere and commute farther to access these resources.

No preference

Of the interviewees who chose not to live in Chinese centres, some participants lived in the inner suburbs of the Vancouver metropolitan area where Chinese also make up a relatively high proportion of residents (see Footnote 6). However, when asked about their preferences for home location and the presence of Chinese, they hardly made a connection between the two. A Taiwanese immigrant in his 40's (TW3) said that the presence of Chinese or Chinese services did not effect his decision on where to live. Neither was work location a factor in the decision to settle in the Dunbar neighbourhood in Vancouver's West Side. He ran a construction company in Taiwan before the move and now he takes on small landscaping projects only in summers. Interestingly, more Chinese moved into his neighbourhood since he came 8 years ago. According to him, almost half of the properties on this street now owned or occupied by Chinese families. "Now the proportion of Chinese is high here," he said, "many families moved here

because of schools. We know quite a few Chinese neighbours whose kids go to the same school as my children do.” When asked about his thoughts of living with people of same ethnic origin, he said “well, we didn’t really think too much about it when we bought the house. We liked this residential area, the schools, the location of this house, and the quietness of the neighbourhood. When there are more Chinese, it is fine with me too. I guess this [whether he lives in a Chinese-concentrated area] is not an issue to us.”

His rather neutral response is not uncommon among those who live in affluent neighbourhoods. Other participants hold a similar opinion; they made their housing choices based on their individual preferences, regardless of the presence of Chinese. They believed it was similar goals and family priorities such as prestigious education opportunities for their children and a quality living environment that attracted many Chinese to certain areas. Many of them formed casual relationship with their Chinese neighbours only after they moved in. Their responses reveal that the Chinese concentration pockets in affluent neighbourhoods may be a result of Chinese immigrants’ shared values and goals.

Avoidance

Some interviewees explicitly indicated they would prefer to live further away from Chinese-concentrated areas. They believed that since they moved to Canada, they should live a more ‘Canadian’ life. For some, living a Canadian life means living in a diverse or a predominantly Caucasian community. For others, it means living in a country like place away from “the crowd.” One respondent in his 40’s from Hong Kong said that even though he worked in Chinatown as a social worker, he didn’t want to live in a Chinese concentrated area, be it Chinatown or Richmond. “So you can see many Chinese, you speak Chinese, buy Chinese stuff and eat Chinese food. Does it feel like in Canada? Not at all. Then why would I move here?” (HK30) Another participant in her 20’s said: “My parents have lived in Richmond since they moved here. But I couldn’t wait to move out for a different environment once I could support myself” (HK28). After she had graduated from a local university, she moved to Downtown Vancouver. Similar opinions

were expressed, especially among Hong Kong respondents who grew up in Canada and generally felt confident and secure enough in a culturally diverse environment.

3.3 Matching Status and Lifestyle

Ideally, most people would like to live in a neighbourhood they can identify with. The neighbourhood we live in often represents the culture we are familiar with, or the idea of home we long for. For some people, it is important to live with others of similar economic or social status, or to live with people of a class they aspire to join. The neighbourhood we choose often conveys an image that we would like to project onto ourselves. This section will trace the participants' desired neighbourhood attributes in terms of class, status and lifestyle. Some of the challenges of integrating into host societies that participants encountered were also illustrated.

Status

Many families that were more established and had high socio-economic status in their homeland appeared more conscious about class and status in their housing choices. Well-known affluent neighbourhoods such as Kerrisdale, Dunbar and Shaughnessy in Vancouver's West Side are sought-after choices for these families. The central location in the region and the relatively easy access to amenities certainly increases the attractiveness of these neighbourhoods. However, participants are also attracted to the class and status these neighbourhoods represent. Participants who lived in prestigious neighbourhoods expressed explicitly their great pride where they lived. They often remarked on the strong presence of greenery, the abundance of reputable schools, the relatively large size of lot and house, and the neighbours with high socio-economic status. One participant from Taiwan (TW7) who worked in the largest telecommunication company in the Lower Mainland noted one of the most important considerations for her is to live in a neighbourhood perceived to be middle class. Another participant from Mainland China (MC16) who was a manager in a joint-venture company in Shanghai decided to move to a new neighbourhood in Port Moody dominated by other managers and professionals.

In contrast to such explicit aspirations for a neighbourhood representative of a certain class, some preferences for a particular neighbourhood *feel* seem more symbolic and implicit. Therefore, the connection between these preferences and the images they represent requires a much more careful examination.

The response from a retired music and Mandarin teacher from Taiwan offers some insight into her motives to move to a prestigious neighbourhood by indicating her explicit interest in joining a class she aspired to. She and her family have lived in an upper-middle class neighbourhood in Burnaby for more than 10 years (TW4). Attracted to Vancouver's West Side but intimidated by the high prices of its properties, she was determined to find an equally respected and desirable neighbourhood with quality schools in proximity to the city of Burnaby. She found a humble-looking two-story house she and her family now live in. The house was what she could afford at the time. She insisted this was one of the most respected neighbourhoods in Burnaby. She then pointed to the outside of their living room window and gave a detailed account of what she knew about their neighbours.

The houses' humble looks from the street are a disguise. You probably won't believe most of these houses have heated private swimming pools in the backyards. You can tell they must have fairly well-off owners by the nicely maintained gardens in the front. They all seem to be one-story building on this side but in fact there was another story sit along the slope on the other side. They are more spacious and expensive than my house. That house on the far end [is home to] a Caucasian lawyer. Next to it, the owner is a business man [who] owns a big [corporation]. And then there is a retired school principal, a musician.... Nobody on this street rent their homes to other people. Very few Chinese live here. (TW4)

Her great satisfaction with the neighbourhood comes from the type of people she aspired to live with - accomplished professionals, well-educated elites and the like.

While her desire to live amongst people she aspired to join has been fulfilled, she found it difficult to relate to her neighbours. She said there was little interaction beyond nodding and saying “hello”. She reflected on the lack of interaction with her neighbours:

They [the neighbours] are friendly. But we don't get to know each other too much. I think people here are protective of their privacy. I think it is part of the culture here. People live far apart from each other. They feel kind of distant. It can be lonely to live here. Language barrier is definitely another reason for that [lack of interaction]. I miss the old times in Taiwan where people on the same street know each other better. Friends are close by and visit each other frequently. (TW4)

She and a number of other participants mentioned the loneliness and social isolation they experienced as a result of living in what they perceived to be mainstream or Caucasian-dominated suburbs. Some of them considered such isolation to be a necessary trade-off for satisfying their need for privacy and desire to live in a neighbourhood that reflects the prestige they aspire to.

Another participant (HK27) chose a neighbourhood that reflects her taste and style but she encountered unexpected difficulty in forming relationships with long-term residents. She and her husband lived in a Tudor style mansion in Shaughnessy, Vancouver. Shaughnessy is an elite neighbourhood that represents the image of privilege, high status and a distinctly ‘British’ Canadian cultural heritage. The residential landscape and house designs reflect a central image that was drawn from a romanticized notion of the English countryside (Duncan and Duncan, 1984). When asked why she chose to live in this neighbourhood, she said she felt at home with this area the moment she arrived in this neighbourhood: “The English style old houses, the winding tree-lined boulevards, the landscapes. I love them all...I really like things with history.” Born in Hong Kong, under British colonial governance and raised in London, England, she attributed her appreciation for this neighbourhood to the British influence on her education and earlier

life experience. Her house is set back from the street behind a tall evergreen hedge and a circular driveway. There is a small garden behind the house and a tennis court beyond. The house and its prime location speak of the wealth she and her family enjoys. She renovated the interior when they moved in more than 10 years ago but did not change a thing on the exterior. She admitted it was “the look and the feel of the house and this neighbourhood” that really attracted her. She wouldn’t change a thing about them. According to Duncan (1973), social scientists have suggested that the landscape in which an individual lives is a major factor in his self-perception and in the image he presents to society. Even though this participant did not correlate the elite nature of this neighbourhood with her motive to live in it, her very particular taste for residential landscape and housing style in Shaughnessy provides sufficient indications of the public image she would like to present.

Surprisingly, despite her perfect English, educational background in England and an economic status compatible with this elite neighbourhood, she considered herself to be viewed as an intruder by the long-term residents in this area. She said she never felt socially comfortable in her neighbourhood even though she had lived there for over 10 years. She also recounted rather unpleasant experiences with her neighbours.

They said rude things to my children when they were still very young... When we were doing our interior renovation before we moved in, some neighbours would invite themselves into the house or peek from the street. They had this look on their faces as if we need their approval for making any change in my own house!... We invited five families in the nearby houses, about our age with children, over for dinner right after we moved in, you know, trying to make a friendly gesture. To my surprise, after that dinner, all but one family didn't even make eye contacts with us when we encountered on the roads as if nothing had happened... I was so shocked that this could happen to me, to my family. We just didn't expect this at all. My husband and I grew up and were educated in London. All my children were born there. British culture is part of our identity. We never felt we

were intruders in England. I had never thought I could have this kind of experience in Vancouver! (HK27)

Shaughnessy has traditionally been an exclusive community. The social world of Shaughnessy is 'fairly homogeneous in terms of a white Anglo-Saxon composition, with a well developed sense of the boundaries of their social world and a strong sense of group identification' (Pratt, 1981). Families entering the neighbourhood may find it difficult to gain entry to the community if they are not viewed as a member of this social world. Exclusion from this community is strikingly evident in this interviewee's experience. However, when asked if she had wanted to move because the neighbourhood was unfriendly, she responded without hesitance, "No. I like the house and this area. This is the place I want to live. Why would I have to move because of other people's attitudes?" (HK27) For her, the image of their house and the area they live in represents the culture they identify with, and maybe more importantly the image they project upon themselves, despite their neighbours' attitudes. Her response suggests that she believed her housing choices have more to do with her social status and image than her ethnicity or race.

Lifestyle

In the study group, those who arrived at a young age in Canada often emphasize matching their housing choices with desirable lifestyle opportunities and were more receptive towards alternative housing choices. Three participants from Hong Kong in their 20's expressed their willingness to live in a culturally diverse neighbourhood close to urban centre. One participant from Hong Kong (HK13) lived with his wife and two small children in a condominium in Downtown Vancouver. As urban centers are often perceived to be unattractive to young families, I asked questions about the reasons for their choice. He noted:

My wife and I both grew up in Vancouver. We got married quite young. So we decided to live in downtown area where we can maintain a more exciting and urban lifestyle. But I don't think it is necessarily a bad environment for my children. There is a waterfront park our family always goes to. The elementary school in this neighbourhood is quite good. We

also have an excellent community centre where my daughter goes to dance class. We look out our windows and there are mountains and ocean in the view. We can see boats, airplanes and cars coming and going. It is a very stimulating environment. I think it is actually good for my kids. They often ask me questions regarding things they saw from the street and out of windows. That way they learn quickly and observe carefully. This is the benefit you don't get by living in a suburb. I know that kind of life. I grew up in a big house with my parents in a suburb in Burnaby.... In the future, well, I may move back to a house in Vancouver or Burnaby mainly considering my parents' need. When they get old and need to be taken care of, we may move in with them. Downtown is not really a suitable place for them. My dad has a typical Chinese lifestyle, you know, enjoys taking a walk, reading Chinese newspapers and having dim sum with his acquaintances. The downtown environment is overwhelming for my parents. (HK13)

In his mind, the downtown area not only is a place suitable for their desired lifestyle but also can be an ideal environment to bring up children. The availability of certain amenities, important to family life such as a park and a community centre, made it attractive to his young family. He also expressed his consideration of educational opportunities for the children and the needs of senior family members.

3.4 The Importance of School and Education

Home location preferences correspond to people's life-stage. Since most of the respondents moved to this region as part of a family with children under the age of 18, the first decision about housing location was often made based on the priority in the young families. The priority mentioned most frequently in responses was the quality of schools and education. Of 27 families, 22 suggested the promise of a better school and educational experiences for their children motivated them to move to Canada. The rest of the families came to Canada for other reasons such as family reunification or a more

relaxed political and social environment. However, even the families who didn't cite education as a primary reason to immigrate indicated that one of the important reasons to stay in Canada is the benefit to their future generations.

In Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China, students' success is mainly judged by their performance in exams. Some interviewees experienced great pressure going through school themselves and didn't want their children to have the same experience. A college graduate and successful business woman from Taiwan (TW1), remembered exams and homework being the major components of the school life in Taiwan. She said, "There is always so much homework to do...a lot of pressure on students to excel in exams. Every success is measured by score..... I don't agree with their teaching philosophy" (TW1). She and her husband decided to bring their three children to Canada when her eldest daughter was in elementary school. With her children's education and future in mind, she quickly located the target area she wanted to live in –Vancouver's West Side, not only because she identified with the family atmosphere in this area but also she felt confident that the neighbourhood was a great place for her children's education:

Upon arriving we heard from our friends that Westside Vancouver is a very desirable area and family oriented. Schools in this area are generally very good. So for us, the first thing is to decide on this area. We made the decision on the house really quickly. Our friends were all surprised because they thought we didn't see enough houses. But my philosophy is the environment is most important. There is no perfect house. You just need to find a reasonable house in a good area. We have lived here ever since for 20 years. There are very good schools nearby: Kerrisdale Elementary, Point Grey Secondary School and UBC... All my children went through schools very well. (TW1)

For her, the house itself was less important in her decision than proximity to quality schools. What gave her great satisfaction was the location that promised quality education opportunities for her children.

When asked to qualify a “good” or “quality” school, some respondents made their judgment based on word of mouth. The topic of schools and education is a favourite in the conversations of Chinese parents’. Others referred to the results from the *Annual Report Card on British Columbia’s Elementary or Secondary Schools*. The Report Card rates and ranks most of BC’s public and independent elementary schools and secondary schools. Each year when the report is released, the results are published in local Chinese newspapers. A few respondents said it was not uncommon that some parents used the results of school ranking as their guide for home location.

During the interviews, parents expressed the desire for their children to go to university and appreciated the less intense educational environment and a relatively flexible school system in Canada. One parent articulated the paradox most parents in her home country felt: “On the one hand, parents are concerned their children to be overwhelmed and burdened by homework. On the other hand, they think it is necessary for their children to study hard so that they can excel in schools” (MC 11). Many parents in the study group felt it was the pressure and competition from the society at large that made the parents concerned about their children’s future when they were still young. One interviewee, a mother to a 13 year old boy, expressed her frustration: “when you are in that kind of society and see what other children are made to do, what are you as a parent supposed to do? [We have] very few choices” (MC11).

For many immigrant parents, sending their children to quality Canadian schools is a primary interest. One respondent (HK 28), a young woman who moved to Vancouver from Hong Kong when she was in junior high school, said her family moved here for the sake of the children, herself included. She was not attaining high enough grades and her parents’ were concerned that she would not be admitted to university in Hong Kong. Consequently her whole family moved here 10 years ago. She said her father was one of those ‘astronauts’ who travel frequently between Vancouver and Hong Kong for his business. Now she is an SFU graduate. Her family is planning to move back to Hong Kong after her youngest brother goes to university. Another interviewee shared a similar

experience. He (HK 13) also moved here with his parents when he was in junior high and said his parents chose a place only minute away from SFU to inspire him to work towards the goal of going to university. Both of the respondents reflected that their families made sacrifices to create the best possible environment for them to pursue post-secondary education. The message from their parents' housing location choice is clear to them: the parents did everything they could to offer their children a good education.

While the quality of school is a significant factor to consider, the distance from home to school is also an important consideration. Most of the respondents express their desire to live within 15 minutes walking or bussing distance from their children's schools. All of the 16 homes visited by the researcher were home to children attending school or university and were located within 10 minutes walking distance to their children's schools or to a transit stop. Some respondents lived so close to schools that they used them as landmarks for directions when they arranged for the interview at their homes. Most of their children above elementary school level go to schools by themselves on foot or by bus.

The location of houses is also chosen very thoughtfully and strategically in terms of their convenient location to schools in the long-term. An engineer from Taiwan and a father to 3 children (one in elementary and two in secondary school) lives in a modest house in Vancouver. He explained to me how their choice of location can serve them over the long-term:

From here [his house], it only takes about 3 minutes walk to my daughter's elementary [it is half a block away from the school buildings]. I walk her over there every day. My other two kids are older and go to a secondary school just up on the hill, across the street. It is a little longer walk. But they are old enough to handle that. In the future, if they go to UBC, the number 25 bus goes directly to campus and its bus stop is only 2 blocks away from here...The location is great! We don't have to move even when our children grow up. (TW3)

For many interviewees who were looking to buy a property, school proximity is a long-term consideration. For other families renting homes, the consideration of access to schools reflects the immediate need of the family. MC 11, who lives in Richmond has been in Canada for less than a year. She and her husband chose to rent a ground level suite in a house close to the elementary school their son attends. When the family was new to the region and had not yet purchased a car, they found it necessary to be close to school.

When we first arrived, we were staying with friends. The first and most important thing for us was to find a school for my son immediately. Once we knew which school might take him, we decided to find a rental unit close to it, at least for now. We adults don't mind commuting a little further to work or school. But he is still young...We don't have a car yet. I am learning how to drive. (MC 11)

Another interviewee (TW 20), a father to two children in secondary school, takes transit to work from Vancouver to Richmond everyday. They too do not own a car as the father cannot drive due to his poor vision and the mother is in Taiwan for the most of the time. His family lives in a two- bedroom basement suite. His home location, however, makes it convenient for his two children to attend schools in Vancouver. Both families see their housing choice as a temporary situation. Both MC11 and TW20 felt that their current residences were "quite crowded" for their family and "far from ideal." But the overall satisfaction level for the home location was high. Many immigrant families in the study group felt a strong need to locate their home close to their children's schools upon their arrival when they could not drive or did not yet own a car. But it is interesting to note that when asked if they would still choose to live close to schools once they owned a car and driving was an option, they suggested they would rather stay in the same area and would not necessarily prefer to drive their children to school everyday unless the school happened to be on their way to work. They prefer not to drive their children to schools everyday because it "takes a lot of work", "adds to their stress", "affects the flexibility of their own schedules", and "costs gas money".

Just as school and education can be the reason for a family to stay in a neighbourhood, they can also cause a family to move, sometimes quite frequently. MC 16's family moved to Greater Vancouver from Shanghai in 2000. His only son was in junior high at the time. In the past five years, they have lived in five locations and in four different municipalities, mainly for the benefit of their son. He admitted it was a lot of moving in a few years but at the same time had no regret doing so:

We were not planning to move this much. But each time it just seemed to be the right thing to do for my son...I was working in Shanghai and Germany for the most the time. So my wife stays at home and takes care of our son mostly...Our hope for him is very simple: live a healthy life, enjoy school, master English and at least obtain a bachelor degree. Our life in Vancouver is pretty much centered on his life.(MC16)

With the clear priorities on their only son, the family sought the best measures to create an ideal environment for his learning and growing. Their first home was found by their friends before their arrival. It was located in the catchment of a reputable secondary school. However, they soon found it very inconvenient, as no bus directly ran to the school from where they lived. After driving him everyday for a few months, they found a new home close to the school. The problem of distance was solved, but there arose other issues:

It is a very quiet and safe neighbourhood but there are not many shops around. We found many Chinese families lived there just so their children can go to that school. When my parents came over, they found the place very inconvenient, since they don't drive. But they stayed there with my wife and son for almost a year. Then we realized a bigger problem: our son still couldn't get out of ESL [English as a Second Language] class. Part of the reason is that there are too many new students waiting in line to get into regular class. Also there are many Chinese kids in that school. Two thirds of his class is Chinese. He could easily speak to his classmates in Mandarin at

school! At the time, he was fast approaching to grade 10. If he couldn't be in regular classes, his course work wouldn't be weighted for college entrance. We were very concerned. (MC16)

While lack of shops and inconvenience to his parents were mentioned as disadvantages of their second home, the real motive for their next move was the concern that the school was not able to provide what his son needs – regular classes in a predominantly English speaking environment. After talking to another Chinese family that has the same concern, the two families decided to move together to West Vancouver- a predominantly Caucasian and wealthy area in Greater Vancouver. The move caused inconvenience for the family as he identified:

The school is located half way on the mountain on a really steep drive. No bus runs from home to the school. My wife has to drive him every day again. And she was really nervous in driving that road, I remember. In the morning, there is a lot of traffic to and from the highway on their way to school. We were not used to that kind of topography [driving on steep hills]... Most of the shops there are marketed towards westerners. But my wife soon learned to make delicious dishes by just getting groceries from the nearby Safeway. For things she couldn't get from local grocery stores, sometimes she would drive to T&T supermarket [a Taiwanese owned and operated supermarket] in Burnaby... West Vancouver is quite expensive to live. We rented a one-bedroom apartment by the beach. It is a lot smaller than the townhouse we used to live. But that summer my parents returned to China so it was all right for the two of them [his wife and son] to live there. When I came, it felt quite crowded. (MC16)

Unfamiliar geography, distance to ethnic groceries, and crowded living conditions are just some of the challenges his family faced upon their move. He also mentioned the time and effort to get to the airport from West Vancouver was

another disadvantage, as his job required frequent air travel. In addition, by moving to West Vancouver, his family inevitably experienced isolation from most of their known friends in Vancouver. However, despite all these challenges, the family adapted to the new environment quickly. For them, this move proved to be worthwhile: his son soon entered regular classes in the new school and his English started to improve. They resided at the same place until their son graduated from high school and was accepted in Simon Fraser University. After that, the family moved twice to be close to the campus, first Surrey campus for the SFU freshmen and then Burnaby campus when he was about to enter the second year. They had a rather unpleasant memory of living in Surrey. Although their apartment had the merit of being very close to the campus, he described the area they lived in as “messy”, “dirty” and “unsafe”. Their car was vandalized several weeks before the interview. He said if it were not for his son, they would never have lived there. At the time of the interview, they had just bought a townhouse in Port Moody and were planning to move in during the summer. After years of moving around in the region, he felt “it is time for the family to have a real home to settle down.” As for their new home, he was most impressed by the natural setting and the amenities available to the residents in that neighbourhood.

The place we are going to move in is a brand new neighbourhood. The environment is excellent. Very clean. Gorgeous views to the ocean. It's very nice to walk around. There are plenty of amenities provided for people in this neighbourhood: gym, theatre, guest room free of charge, conference room, swimming pool and canoe club... The shopping village is 15 minutes walk away. The new home is not that far from SFU Burnaby campus. It takes one transfer by bus. But when my son learns how to drive, he can drive to school by himself...(MC16)

Although the distance to the campus is still considered in their choice of home location, it is no longer the major reason for their housing choice. Factors such as views, clean

environment and available amenities that can benefit the whole family are also weighted into their consideration and thus reached a more balanced housing decision.

In *Psychology of the Home*, Gunter (2000) pointed out that “neighbourhood preferences often reflect those values and goals that are important to us at different points in our lives (Gunter, 2000:20).” In the same book, the study by Lindberg, Garling and Montgomery argues that “neighbourhoods are evaluated in terms of the attributes they contain that are regarded as instrumental for the fulfillment of significant life goals ” (Gunter, 2000:20). What became apparent from this research was that when deciding upon where to live, Chinese immigrant families place a high value on school and education for their future generations. For many families who initiate the move or stay here for the benefit of their children, they strive to find the best possible education environment, sometimes at the expense of other aspects of family well being (longer commute, social isolation, and lower standard of living condition) under economic constraint.

3.5 Findings

The pattern for home location preferences is complex. Three themes emerged from the study. First, immigrants with greater dependence on the Chinese community tended to live in neighbourhoods where many Chinese reside. Second, immigrants with fewer economic or communication constraints were more likely to prioritize matching socio-economic status and lifestyle with the neighbourhood they chose and ventured into what they perceived to be mainstream or host communities. Many immigrants chose a neighbourhood based on an image that they wanted to project themselves onto. Prestigious neighbourhoods were often selected, sometimes at the expense of living a more humble home than the family could otherwise afford. Third, immigrants with children preferred to live in a neighbourhood based on the merits of the area schools. This factor, in particular, can take precedence over all others. Families who were interviewed showed a great inclination to make enormous sacrifices in order to have access to a “good” school and educational opportunities that they desired. However, the presence of extended family connections is a significant factor that can bring variations to this

pattern. Some individuals considered providing support to their senior family members by living in proximity an important aspect of an ideal home location.

Bearing out Gunter's (2000) statement that neighbourhood preferences reflect the values and goals that are important to people at particular points in time, social factors were particularly important for Chinese immigrants when making home location decisions. In some cases, these social factors were even weighted much more heavily by the interviewees than a dwelling's physical attributes such as type or size. However, the next chapter explore interviewees' thoughts about variables related to choosing particular homes.

CHAPTER 4: PREFERENCES AND CHOICES

This chapter deals with the physical attributes of dwellings and their proximal space.

Dwelling refers to the physical structure that people inhabit and turn into their homes. For the purpose of this study, the term “proximal space” is used to encompass a wide range of territories that make up major components in a neighbourhood beyond dwelling. It ranges from the fields that surround a dwelling such as garden and back yard to the areas that are essential to community life such as public green space, neighbourhood streets and commercial areas.

The key variables of dwellings and proximal space that are important to the study group are identified through content analysis of their description of an ideal home as well as their comments on the following images of dwellings and proximal space in Greater Vancouver (Table 4.1 to 4.6). Some of the key words and phrases that recurred as participants described their impression are identified along with the images in these tables. These words are organized into positive and negative categories, depending on the participants' opinions and attitudes.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the trade-off game. A discussion of participants' constrained choices and the rationale for their choices is presented. It is followed by a detailed account and an analysis of their comments on the options in the trade-off game.

4.1 Dwelling

Participants were asked to identify the physical and architectural criteria that usually underpinned their personal housing preferences. The results show that the most important physical features influencing property preference were its size and age. In terms of architectural criteria, certain characteristics such as the perceived quality of natural light, housing style, and the appearance of the property would play a significant role in influencing their decisions to buy a home. This section will present mainly the emerging

ideas around these two physical features (size and age) and three architectural features (natural lighting, housing type and property appearance). Although the layout and quality of indoor space is perceived to be an important aspect to examine cultural differences, this study did not focus on it due to the scale of this research. However, because of the close relationship between exterior and interior of a dwelling, a brief discussion on indoor space occurred in the interviews and will be presented in the end of this section.

Table 4.1: Comparison Group 1






	Image 1	Image 2	Image 3
Thumbnail			
Interviewees' Perceived Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detached • Independent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New • Bright • Great sunlight • Tidy • Clean • Nice looking • Quiet • Organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private • Detached • Open • New • Sufficient sunlight • Big • Modern • Convenient • Orderly clean • Independent • Safe • Spacious
Interviewees' Perceived Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small • Narrow • Messy • Lack of sunlight • Dark • Shadow • View blocked • Old • Disorderly • Shabby • Worn • Old • Too close to the neighbours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached • Little vegetation • Poor soundproof • Fire concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too few trees • Bare

Table 4.2: Comparison Group 2

	Image 4	Image 5
Thumbnail		
Interviewees' Perceived Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large windows • High ceilings • Grand • Rich • Brick exterior • Lasting • Solid • Elegant • Spacious • Open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright • Practical • Cozy • Modern • New • Light exterior color tone
Interviewees' Perceived Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadow • Dull • Boxy • Monster house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclosed • Low ceilings • No character • Crowded

4.1.1 Physical Features of Dwellings

Size

Although large livable area is certainly desirable among the study group, many participants weighed the size of their ideal home with affordability and potential maintenance and upkeep. Many respondents stressed they would like to have 'enough' space for a home. The concept of 'enough' is no doubt highly subjective to each individual; thus a closer look into their articulation of this concept is required.

Families with children frequently placed emphasis on the number of bedrooms and bathrooms as a measure of 'enough'. For them, sufficient bedrooms for the parents and each child in the family were considered more important than the absolute physical area. A study or a guest room which could be turned to a bedroom for grandparents is considered an extra merit. Some participants defined the ideal size of their home with

actual livable area, the majority of which fall between 2,000 to 3,000 ft² (186 to 279 m²), largely depending on the family size.

Interestingly, several participants mentioned the home they would like to live did not need to be “too large”. They claimed they didn’t believe that ‘bigger is better’ and expressed concern over maintenance of a large home. One participant said: “I hate to be wasteful. Too large a house, unused rooms means waste of energy and time as you have to maintain it, clean it...(HK30)” Several years ago, this interviewee bought a 4,000 ft² (371 m²) house when his parents and relatives came to live with his own family. The house once accommodated a total of 9 people after his younger daughter was born. In 1993, his family moved into their current accommodation, a 1,000 ft² (93 m²) apartment. He said “[A size of] 1,000 ft² might sound a little small for a family of four. But we were lucky to find a very practical and well designed apartment. It was simple but comfortable. (HK30)” He and several other participants, whose earnings spanned a wide spectrum of income level, linked the size of their accommodation with waste and maintenance. Their responses suggested they took a practical and realistic attitude towards what was considered an appropriate size for their homes.

Dwelling Age

The majority of the study group considered the age of property another important physical criteria when buying a property. As Gunter (2000) noted in his book *Psychology of the Home*, people are attracted to new properties for a host of practical, financial and convenience reasons, as well as for some psychological reasons. According to Gunter, this preference is not particular to a specific cultural group. Some people simply don’t like the idea of buying ‘used’ goods. A new home is also perceived to have a greater potential to carry owner’s personality as one can start from outset in deciding the color schemes, style of décor, matching furniture and so on.

While most respondents generally commented they preferred a ‘newer’ property, some participants had a more specific preference for a property under 10 years old. The most cited reason for this preference is the time, money and efforts required to maintain a

property. Some participants said they felt intimidated by the amount of care a house required as they didn't have any experience in taking care of a wood framed single-detached house, given their experience living in concrete mid or high-rise buildings for the most of their lives. Even though several participants had their own detached properties in their home region or country, the nature and the cost of housing maintenance varied considerably due to different climate, building codes, building materials and market price for labour or material. Buying a new property is considered key to avoiding the amount of care that would otherwise required for an old property and at least allow some time for the new users to learn how to maintain it.

Some participants thought of the "unpleasant feel" and sometimes the smell of old structures when thinking about old houses. Such impressions may stem from their previous negative experiences when renting an old property in the Vancouver region. Old buildings were also perceived to have less investment potential. Even heritage houses may be of little interest to many Chinese perspective home buyers maybe because they, having grown up in a culture of 5,000 years old, have a very different sense of history and appreciation for what are considered "historic" in the Vancouver region. The styles of heritage houses in Vancouver are mostly characterized by their European heritage, which many Chinese immigrants may not find as culturally significant to them as European descendents may. Only one participant (HK27) expressed her preference for living in a heritage house and currently lives in a nearly 100 year old, Tudor style house. She attributed this preference to the cultural influence she received in her life as she had lived and was educated in England.

4.1.2 Architectural Features of Dwelling

Quality of natural light

Most participants were very receptive to the level of natural lighting that can be received on and in their properties. As one participant (TW12) commented, "it is best to have enough natural light so that no artificial lighting is necessary in the daytime." The concern of natural lighting is reflected in several aspects such as the size of windows, orientation, and vegetation and other obstructions near the house.

Some interviewees explicitly expressed their preference for large windows. Although not all the participants found the house style in *Image 4* attractive, many positive comments about the house are refer to the large area of glazing, which was perceived to allow large amount of daylight into the house. Some participants linked the large window with the indoor condition: “The natural light in the living room will be great (TW5)”; “Inside will be filled with sunlight (MC11)” and “The living room will be nice and warm (HK22)”.¹⁴

In terms of orientation, the majority of participants voiced their preference for a south facing dwelling, specifically to draw sufficient sunlight into the living areas. Some also referred to Feng Shui, an ancient Chinese tradition which balances the flow of energy and the forces of nature by following specific principals when placing buildings on the land or objects and furniture in a space. The others referred an old Chinese saying “zuo bei chao nan” (meaning situated in the north facing south), a common sense guideline for orientation of a traditional dwelling in China. One participant (TW1) has been a realtor in Lower Mainland for 20 years. She said many of her Chinese clients placed great importance on the orientation of their perspective properties. Some clients even asked her to seek only properties having south-facing living area. Another participant (MC23) preferred *Image 5* to *Image 4* based on his inference that *House 5* was south facing whereas *House 4* was north facing as *House 5* received more sunlight. Among all the participants at whose homes the interviews were held, those participants who owned south facing properties showed great satisfaction with the orientation and arranged the interviews in the sunny living rooms; some participants who were renting basements or living in a place that received little sunlight even apologized to the researcher for the insufficient natural light inside.

The vegetation near houses was also frequently mentioned in its relation to natural lighting. Although the presence of greenery enhanced the attractiveness of a place to the participants, the majority of them disliked much vegetation close to the building

¹⁴ Note that no information was provided about the interior conditions or room locations. All observations were based on perceptions of the exterior of the building in the picture.

structure. In terms of coverage of vegetation, *Image 1* was most criticized among the five images for its dense vegetation landscaping on the front porch as it blocked the sunlight into the interior space as well as the direct view from the house to the outside. The responses suggest perceived benefit of sufficient natural lighting can greatly improve participants' satisfaction with the dwelling.

Housing type

Single-detached housing was the most popular housing type among the study group. This type of housing fulfills important psychological needs such as "control", "independence", "ownership", "accomplishment", "freedom", "empowerment" and "privacy".¹⁵ One participant (MC 19), a retiree who had worked hard in various labour-intensive industries in Vancouver for almost 20 years, concluded his most significant accomplishment in moving to Canada, other than sending his children to universities, was having bought a brand new single-detached house upon his retirement. For many immigrants, owning a single-detached house is still part of their 'North American dream'. Several participants, most of whom were skilled worker immigrants, mentioned having a single-detached house was "unimaginable" for them as single-detached houses are not commonly available in their home region or country. Such type of housing is considered a luxury commodity for extremely wealthy people rather than the middle-class. However, they felt it was an attainable goal in Canada as single-family housing is the dominant housing form in Greater Vancouver and it is possible that normal people can afford.

As to other higher density housing types such as townhouse, row house and apartment, participants raised a number of concerns. Unfamiliarity with strata management, loss of sound privacy, and neighbour relations were cited as disadvantages. Even though the majority of the study group used to live in high density residences in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Mainland China, their housing units were free-hold rather than strata managed and thus afforded much more flexibility and control to the owners. The unfamiliar management structure, rules imposed on the tenants and sometimes ineffective

¹⁵ Words used by the participants who preferred single-detached housing.

communication with the managers due to language barriers discouraged the participants from pursuing higher density housing types in Greater Vancouver.

Many participants who lived or had lived in apartment buildings complained about their loss of sound privacy. One participant (TW12) remarked on his observation on the cultural differences on this matter:

Our Chinese generally talk and laugh very loud; maybe because we had so many people [in the home region or country] and it was always crowded, therefore you have to talk loud to make yourself heard. Then it becomes a habit. But people here talk gently. It is to show your respect to other people. It [i.e. talking gently] is considered polite. When we bring our habit to home [in Canada], we don't realize that we are not living in concrete buildings anymore. People next door can hear us and may complain. And to be fair, I had to say some Canadians turn on music just too loud for us. So we complain about them, too.

Some participants considered apartment buildings children-unfriendly as neighbours complained about children moving around and playing musical instruments. In some cases, playing musical instruments was not allowed in the buildings. However, it is very common in Chinese families where children were encouraged to take on music training.

The amenities and services provided in new residential buildings and neighbourhoods are attractions for some participants to live in higher density housing types. One participant who lived in a townhouse mentioned she would like to live in a well-managed condo rather than a single house in the future, so that she could “spend time doing exercise in the gym or swimming pool instead of caring for gardens and repairing the roof. (MC15)” Another participant who lived in a condominium also commented,

My husband and I are both busy at work. When we get home in the evening or in the weekend, we just want to relax or do something we enjoy

like going out or hiking.... There were a swimming pool, a sauna room and a gym on the ground floor shared by all tenants [in this building]. All these amenities wouldn't be at your convenience like this if you live in a single house. (TW7)

Five participants in their 20's and 30's who spent a significant proportion of their lives in Vancouver expressed their willingness to choose alternative housing types to single-detached housing. Having lived in a single-detached house before, they said their ideal was to live in a more compact and vibrant area and considered a condominium as an alternative that would be compatible with their lifestyle. One such participant (HK28) lived with her husband in a condo in Yaletown, a new neighbourhood in downtown Vancouver. Another participant (HK13) lived with his wife and two children in a residential tower in Coal Harbour, a new high-end residential neighbourhood developed at the southeast corner of Stanley Park in downtown Vancouver. Both HK28 and HK13 grew up in their parents' single-family detached houses in the Vancouver region and moved to their current residences with their own families to pursue a more vibrant urban living experience as well as to enjoy the amenities provided in the buildings.

Appearance

When asked about their preference for the "look" of their dwelling, many participants implied it was not a critical issue in their consideration of buying a property. Only two participants explicitly suggested the "look" of the dwelling would or had deeply influenced their housing decision. One of them was an interior designer from Mainland China (MC 10). She described vividly the characters and special details of a house she was attracted to. She said she didn't buy it in mainly because the price was beyond her reach. The other participant (HK27) who lives in a Tudor style house, as quoted earlier, was attracted to her current residence mainly because of the "feel" and the "look" of the house and its surrounding neighbourhood. Other participants gave rather general standards such as "clean" "modern" and "simple". Some mentioned they did not like "busy" or "decorative" façade design. The results from picture comparison provide more details in participants' preferences for the dwellings' appearance.

The images comparison stimulated discussions about the roofline, the exterior material and color, the presence of fence in the front yard, the orderliness and neatness of the look. Many participants compared and commented on the roof designs in the five images. Although they felt attracted to the look of the pitched roof (image 1, 2 and 5), they considered flatter roof (image 3 and 4) more practical as the space under the roof would be easier to use. The look of the house in *Image 4* gained considerable attention as it had a red brick-like exterior. Many participants suggested such an exterior reminded them of brick buildings in their home region or country. It looked “lasting” “solid” and “warm”, even though they knew the building was not constructed with real bricks. The presence of a fence in *Image 5* brought up some thoughts on the psychological meanings of such arrangement. Many participants recognized the fence didn’t serve a practical purpose but rather a psychological or aesthetic purpose. The presence of a fence in the front yard made them feel “safe” and “secure”. However, it also raised the concern among the study group as to whether the fence will make “passers-by think the owner are insecure or unfriendly” and “visitors feel unwelcome”. One participant said,

The fence seems to suggest the inside belongs to the owner and strangers are not welcome. I really don’t like it. It feels like calling people who come to your front yard intruders or thieves. It sends a hostile message. (TW4)

Most of the participants made their choices of fenced vs. unfenced yards based on the importance of their need to feel safe or the public image communicated by such design. Some suggested it would be ideal to have something between the two extremes shown in *Image 4* (open access) and *Image 5* (very limited access) to define semi-private and semi-public areas in the front yard.

Participants were also aware of the orderliness and neatness of the appearance of a house. *Image 2* and *3* gained popularity among the study group for their “clean” “orderly” “tidy” and “organized” looks; whereas many feel the house in *Image 1* was “messy” and “poor managed”. Some even associated the image in *Image 1* with rundown neighbourhoods

and unsafe streets. As Gunter (2000) pointed out in the book *Psychology of the Home*, orderliness and neatness are important to people not only because they are often associated with how well the property was managed but also indicated how much pride residents take in where they live. Therefore, the neat house or neighbourhood was perceived as a desirable place to live.

Indoor space

Although this study did not specifically focus on preferences for indoor space arrangements, some related discussion occurred during the interviews. Most of these discussions were around the “spacious feeling” inside of a dwelling. Many participants cited having lived in more crowded conditions made them want to experience large, open space at home. A foyer at the entrance, an open kitchen, high ceilings and a large living room area are attractive to them as these features fulfilled this psychological need. When talking about their feelings about these features, they used words such as “great,” “exhilarating,” “grand,” “modern,” “rich,” and “exciting”. They expected their visitors would feel the same towards these features, and therefore a home with such features was perceived as able to enhance their images in front of their guests. Interestingly, while many immigrants believed single-detached housing was the ideal option to pursue a spacious home, three participants in their 20’s and 30’s from Hong Kong who grew up in Vancouver mentioned specifically a penthouse or loft as their ideal place to live¹⁶. This difference in housing type preferences indicated that these younger immigrants were familiar with the available housing options in the market and also more receptive to alternative housing types.

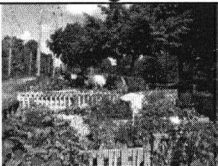

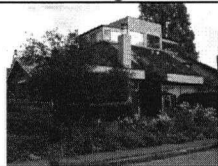
4.2 Garden

In addition to discussing the attributes of dwellings, interviewees also had clear preferences for garden design and layout, some of which were alluded to in the previous

¹⁶ A penthouse is an apartment or dwelling situated on the roof of a building. A loft is an apartment converted from a large, usually unpartitioned floor over a factory, warehouse or other commercial or industrial space. These words are also used in marketing similar types of living space in the recent residential developments in Greater Vancouver and are often associated with a host of embedded values about lifestyle and self perception.

sections. The images in Table 4.3 were useful for discussing garden-related preferences. Oft-repeated words used to describe each of the pictured gardens have been listed in Table 4.3. The study group has a clear preference for “clean,” “tidy,” and “organized” landscaping and responded positively to the garden in picture 7. In contrast, the group described *Image 6* and *Image 8* as “messy,” “chaotic,” and “wild” and considered these gardens to be unattractive.

Table 4.3 Comparison Group 3

	Image 6	Image 7	Image 8
Thumbnail			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic • Unattractive • Growing vegetables • Messy • Poor management • Practical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-managed • Attractive • Private • Tidy • Trimmed • Designed • Simple • Minimal • New • Consistent • Canadian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messy • Chaotic • Poor management • Crowded • Busy • Diverse • Natural • Abandoned • Irresponsible • Dim • Blocking sunlight

These preferences can be understood at a conscious and unconscious level. At a more conscious level, “tidy” and “organized” landscaping was perceived to be well taken care of and was associated with the owner’s image. During interviews, many participants departed from the description of these pictures and made their judgment about the owners based on the look of these gardens. They were convinced the owners of clean, tidy gardens invested a great deal of effort or could afford to hire someone to maintain the garden; therefore, people who live in such gardens were either “responsible” or “well-off”. Many participants linked the presentation of a garden with the personality and

economic status of its owner. One participant (TW12) said: "I like my garden to be neat and clean. The garden is like one's appearance. It makes an important impression on people." Other participants considered the well-maintained garden to be a Canadian norm and thus concluded that the orderliness of the garden was an indication of how well the owner was integrated into the host society. One interviewee (HK5) offered his position on this matter, "Taking care of your garden is no joke. It takes responsibility. This is a Canadian custom you have to take time to learn." He and some other interviewees believed maintaining a garden was an important aspect of the Canadian way of living. These responses indicate that participants are very conscious about the significant role gardens play in displaying oneself in public.

At an unconscious level, the aesthetic preference for highly organized over "messy" natural landscaping may reveal participants' psychological need for control over their territory. In Marcus' (1995) book *House as a Mirror of Self*, she references a California study that suggests people with little control in their outer lives (income, advancement, and so on) tend to create highly controlled gardens. These gardens were often clipped, pruned, raked and ordered. Those who had more control over their lives – more money, more freedom – often prefer more wild, "natural", low-maintenance or rambling landscaping around their homes (Marcus, 1995: 67). For many immigrants, taking on a new language, looking for employment, and adapting to new customs and cultures brought great instability into their lives and may make them feel their lives are not in control. The preference for highly organized gardens may reflect the need for control that is lacking elsewhere in their lives.

Image 6 presents an image of community garden in Lower Mainland. On a slightly different note, community gardening is recognized in Greater Vancouver as a valuable recreational activity that "can contribute to community development, environmental awareness, positive social interaction and community education" (City of Vancouver, 2005). About two thirds of the study group was not familiar with the concept of community gardening and only one participant had worked in a community garden before. After explaining the characteristics of a community garden to them, the majority

of the study group expressed their preference for private gardens. The most commonly expressed reason for this preference is the lack of ownership title. One participant expressed her concern regarding ownership: "So you work on it but cannot keep it to yourself? What if the land is taken back all of a sudden? You grow everything in vain....After all, it is not your own land" (HK21). Similar concerns were expressed by other participants. They felt it was more meaningful for them to invest on their own gardens instead of a community garden. Some participants believed a community garden would beautify the environment by organizing "unused" public space, but they considered the collaboration required to organize a community garden to be a troublesome obstacle. Some of them were worried they would not be able to communicate with other people effectively because of their limited language skills. The miscommunication might lead to frustration.



Although most participants stated their preference for private gardens, they also offered a number of positive comments on community gardening. They agreed that a community garden was a great place to grow vegetable and meet people. One interviewee said when viewing *Image 6*: "Neighbours can get together, talking and getting to know each other [while they are working in the field] like in countryside. Growing fruits and vegetables might be a good idea" (TW14). Other participants suggested this form of gardening was only for certain people. One of them indicated community garden might only appeal to "retired people" or "people who used to farm or came from the countryside" (HK26). Two participants (TW3 and TW12) from Taiwan recalled a similar form of gardening that existed in the outskirts of Taiwanese cities. These gardens existed for urban dwellers looking for a recreational farming experience. While confirming the benefits of a community garden, some participants defined in their minds the 'legitimate' user groups and detached themselves from these groups. In their views, the community garden is a place for people who have little else to do or have no garden in their homes to grow 'useful' things. Community gardens or urban agriculture is associated with survival needs, farming life and peasantry. To immigrants from a class-conscious society, community gardens are associated with the lower classes. Others claimed that community

gardens were appealing to them, yet often said they had “little time or energy” to get involved themselves.

4.3 Green Space

In addition to discussing private and community gardens, interviewees were also asked about their preferences regarding private and public green space. The images in Table 4.4 were used to provoke conversations on the meanings of private backyard and public green space. Participants were encouraged to compare and comment on the meanings and the use of a backyard and a public green space. Their responses suggested that a private backyard fulfills a significant need for privacy and offers a space for social gathering and physical activities such as holding parties and playing balls. While public green space adds to the value and desirability into a neighbourhood, participants were not likely to spend very much time in it.

Table 4.4: Comparison Group 4

	Image 9	Image 10
Thumbnail		
Interviewees' Keywords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private • Freedom • Safe • Play with kids • Relax • Hold BBQ party • Run dogs • Play balls • Sit and read • Plant flowers • Grow vegetables or fruits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Tidy • Self-conscious • Empty • Open • Take a walk • Beautiful • Walking dogs • Take a run • Exercise

The most frequently cited activities for backyards were holding parties, barbequing and playing with children. In addition, some more passive activities were mentioned such as

drinking tea or coffee, reading, and sunbathing. Very few participants expressed enthusiasm for gardening in the backyard. In contrast to the front yard, the backyard was perceived as playing a relatively insignificant role in displaying oneself in the public eye. Participants felt that they would have greater freedom to decide what to do in their backyard. Words such as "private," "your own," "freedom," and "control" recurred most frequently when participants commented on what the image of a private backyard was eyed to them. They were also much less concerned about how the backyard should look. Simple landscaping consisting of lawn and flower beds was the landscape most participants wanted. Some participants even suggested they would pave the backyard for convenience and alternate uses. One of them (HK22) said when viewing *Image 9*: "I'd prefer to grow flowers on the edge and paved half of the ground area. Another half for the lawn is enough for me. Better not to have all in grass. Too much work to cut it. On the paved ground, you can ride a bicycle or something." Other suggestions include making "a concrete path easy for people to walk on" (TW20) or putting in "a slide for children to play" (TW29). For her and most other participants, the backyard is a place that should be fully utilized, either as a private playground or a venue for gathering. Although a backyard's appearance was certainly recognized among the study group, it was considered to be secondary to its functionality.

In contrast, most participants appreciate the aesthetic value of public green spaces in Greater Vancouver and yet rarely visited them. Some admitted they had only been to Queen Elizabeth Park in Vancouver or Dyke Road in Richmond upon their arrival. The most commonly cited reason for this lack of interest in public parks is that they did not know what to do in these places. A study in University of British Columbia on Chinese-Canadian perceptions of wilderness suggests that Chinese immigrants, especially those from urban areas, often found the vast spaces, low population density and emphasis on green spaces in Canada to cause shock, disorientation, or disappointment (Geddes, 1998). Parks in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China are considered a much more stimulating environment than those in Canada. Several participants with children suggested they spent a great deal of time with their family or friends in the park in their home regions or country. These parks are often sites for fountains, sculptures,

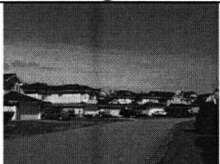

playgrounds, swimming pools, photo stands, tea houses and etc. Many of them have a much greater density of social activity with far more services for entertainment and socializing than Canadian parks. The differences may be due to the different ideological goal of parks and public space. Urban parks in China were created to be useful and beautiful (Cranz, 1979). Many participants were used to parks in their home region or country and had to adjust their expectations for Canadian parks.

Participants often expressed their surprise and excitement when first visiting parks and green spaces in Greater Vancouver: "I have never seen so much green in my life. It looks so nice" (TW4); "So open and beautiful. It is overwhelming" (MC18). After the initial excitement, however, these spaces often result in a sense of being lost in the study group. The frustration and disappointment were evident in their comments. When viewing *Image 10*, one participant said (MC8): "There are many places like that in Vancouver. I am not really a park-goer. I haven't thought about how to use it. Maybe take a walk? I would feel awkward and self-conscious in this kind of place. It is so open. I like practising Tai Chi. But this kind of place is too exposed to the sun, the wind and the passers-by. I will be distracted...If I could, I would like to add a pavilion, some chairs, or simple facilities to make it more attractive and sheltered." When asked what things they would like to change or add into public green space, some participants suggested things that are common in parks in their home region or country. "Fountains", one interviewee said, "can bring water, sound and color together. They will bring more dynamics to a place. Some recreational facilities; some hidden places; and sculptures that can add a sense of culture. Offer a comfortable place for people to sit under the trees. Design the views. Just make a space more interesting" (MC10). Another interviewee (MC16) from Shanghai compared the parks in his home town with those in Canada: "In Shanghai, now there are plenty of well-designed parks. Each of them has a theme, with fountains, bridges and beautiful landscaping. Canadian parks are natural and straightforward. Most of them are quite rough." In their eyes, public green space in Greater Vancouver seemed underdeveloped and offered little more than aesthetic value and places to walk.

4.4 Neighbourhood Streets

Study participants were asked about the design of neighbourhood streets and their preferences for the kind of street they would like to live on. The images in Table 4.5 were used to provoke discussions. Interviewees had a variety of responses to these images.

Table 4.5: Comparison Group 5

	Image 11	Image 12
Thumbnail		
Interviewees' Keywords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient • Quiet • Organized • Planned • Open • Clean • Lack of greenery • Absence of tall trees • New • Unified design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worn and old road • Poor infrastructure • Dirty gravel on sides • Crowded • More trees • Green • Look pleasant • Pretty • Older neighbourhood

The presence (or absence) of mature vegetation was one of the most commonly cited differences between these two images. Most participants found the overall landscaping in *Image 12* attractive but the trees looked “chaotic”. The rather organic road in this image made a very negative impression on them. Many participants noticed there was gravel on both sides of the street. One participant said: “There was no curb on the road. It looks sandy and dusty on the sides. There shouldn’t be gravel on the street” (HK5). Other participants expressed similar concern: “The road is unfinished. It needs improvement” (TW1); “... old and worn. Chaotic” (MC2) and “The road is not well paved. Poor infrastructure” (TW4). Even though there was no human being present in the *Image 12*, some participants still said it felt “crowded” as cars parking on the street seemed to suggest the lack of space and inevitably made the road narrower. Many participants suggested that if the road were improved and trees trimmed, they would find it more attractive.



In contrast, despite criticising on the lack of greenery in *Image 11*, many participants felt it was an overall well-planned neighbourhood. Its engineered and well-paved road, openness, convenience for driving and parking, and tidy look were attractive to them. The curved road seemed to indicate there was little traffic and therefore it was a quieter street than the one in *Image 12* with a straight through road. However, participants also commented on some aspects of this neighbourhood they did not like. Some participants mentioned that, although the attached garage was convenient, they were concerned about a fire in the garage potentially spreading to the house. The detached garage seemed better from the safety point of view. Some participants also suggested, maybe due to the lack of vegetation, that houses seemed to be clustered too close to each other. They raised concerns about loss of privacy. Several participants recognized that the neighbourhood in picture 13 was convenient for driving and poor for walking, as one participant (TW14) commented: "It is convenient for parking and driving; but cars and pedestrians are next to each other on the road. I have no desire to walk here. "

For the study group, the level of development, presence of greenery, safety and privacy were important factors that would determine the kind of street they prefer. In their eyes, *Image 11* represents the newer and more developed residential area in terms of infrastructure that is particular attractive to them; while more vegetation, and better senses of safety and privacy in *Image 12* were desirable among the study group.

4.5 Shopping Areas

The images in Table 4.6 were used to provoke conversations about the kind of commercial areas study participants preferred.

Table 4.6: Comparison Group 6

	Image 13	Image 14
Thumbnail		
Interviewees' Keywords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient • Easy parking • Diverse goods • Concentrated • Big • Practical • Weather proofed • Recreational shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowded • Chaotic • Disorienting • Tourism shopping • Inconvenient • Old-fashioned

Many participants recognized *Image 13* and expressed their preference for shopping in a big mall. Most prefer this for pragmatic reasons: convenient parking, comprehensive goods and services in one place, and easy navigation in the mall. Although these are common reasons for people to shop in malls, participants also explained this preference in the context of their own lives. One interviewee said: "Shopping mall is good for me because the goods are very concentrated; so I don't have to go very far or spend a lot of time to look for different things. It works for people like me who just want to get the shopping done in a limited time" (TW20). Many recent immigrants, especially skilled workers like TW20, take their career and livelihood very seriously. They are often busy studying or working to establish themselves in this new country. Shopping malls provide expedient and efficient services that meet their basic needs. The protective and weather-proofed environment also makes the shopping experience less stressful for them.

Going from store to store on the street to search for what they need seemed to be too romantic an idea for most participants like TW20 to afford. Most of the participants consider shopping streets like the one shown in *Image 14* to be places to "drink coffee," to "meet with friends," and to "do window shopping." They were places for "people who have time and money" to enjoy life in a leisurely way, or for "tourists" to visit and buy souvenirs.

The second reason for this preference is the predictable services the shopping mall offered. Many participants expressed their satisfaction with shopping malls as they were able to get around with the assistance of guiding maps; signs were easy to read, the prices were easy to know from the advertisements and they could quickly get a sense of where to get what they want. In contrast, on shopping streets many participants said they would feel “disoriented” and “lost”. Although many expressed their interest in and curiosity for shopping streets, they also admitted these environments seemed foreign to them and they rarely ventured into these kinds of places. Predictability seems to be central to their preference to shop in an environment that is controlled, mapped and marked with consistent signage. The predictable mall ‘format’ and presence of chain stores guarantees that there won’t be any surprises. This preference may be due to their need for control of their lives by reducing unpredictable variables in the process of integrating into a host society.

To many participants, shopping malls also represent the newer, more advanced mode of shopping, while shopping streets are old-fashioned and out of date. As one participant (MC17) concluded: “It [shopping in big malls] is definitely the future trend. These malls are better designed to serve people. Small stores are not competitive enough. ” Some participants referred to the newly developed shopping centres in China as a mark of advancement and development in a society.

4.6 Trade-off Game Results

The trade-off game exercise finds that under economic constraint, participants place priority on education and are willing to make trade-offs in the areas of living conditions and recreational needs. This tendency is described in the section *Importance of School and Education* in Chapter 3. This is further confirmed by the findings from the trade-off game conducted as part of this study. Since the trade-off game is designed as a tool to provoke discussion about constraint choices and examine participants’ decision making process, the final tally of choices for each item is relatively unimportant and therefore has

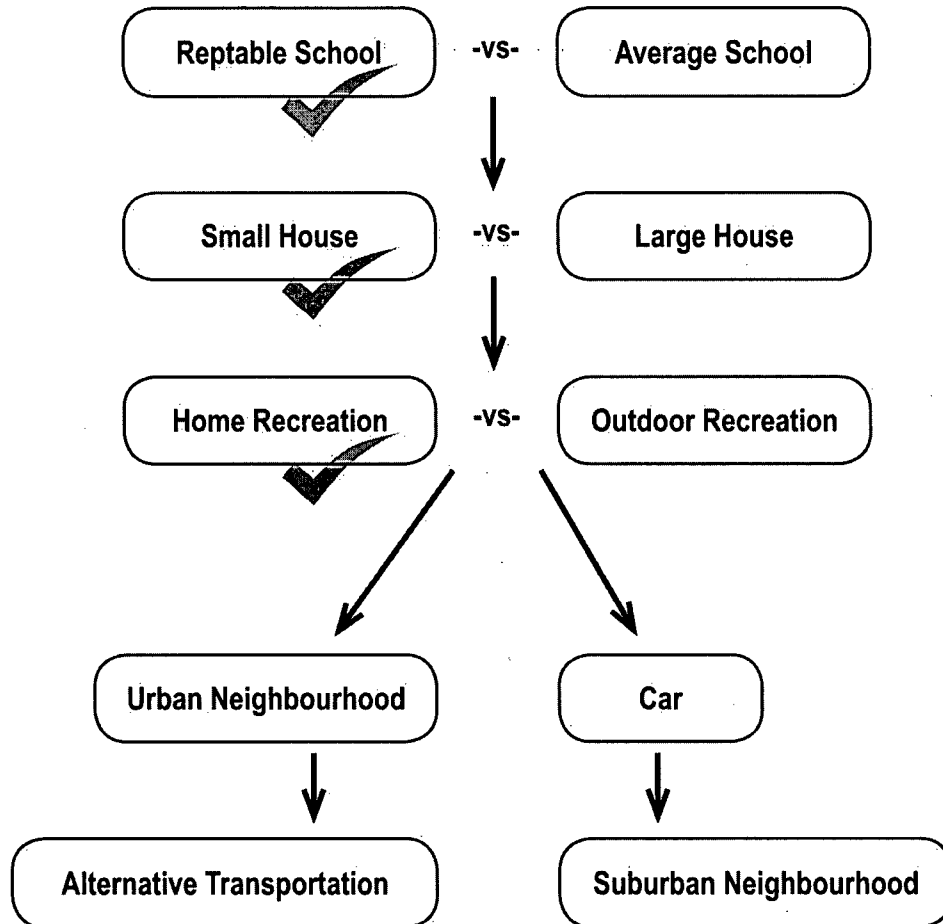
not been presented in detail.¹⁷ The following is a summary of the results of the trade-off game and an analysis of participants' choices.

Rationales for the Trade-offs

Through this exercise it was discovered that the rationale for the trade-off choices was fairly consistent among participants. Most participants, especially those with children, would first choose the "reputable school" card and then thought about how to allocate the rest of the resources. "Small house" was often chosen over "large house" to save enough resources for other items. Most participants gave up "outdoor recreation" easily, not only because it is a more expensive choice than "home recreation", but also because of a lack of interest. Some participants even gave up both "home" and "outdoor" recreation choices. Of the remaining transportation and neighbourhood categories, "car" vs. "alternative transportation" and "urban neighbourhood" vs. "suburban neighbourhood," both "car" and "urban neighbourhood" are expensive items. The available resources made it necessary for participants to choose between the "alternative transportation" - "urban neighbourhood" combination and the "car"- "suburban neighbourhood" combination. Some participants were more attracted to urban living and thus chose the former combination. This result was somewhat acceptable but not very satisfying for them. When making their choices the second time without resource limits, they would almost always add "car" and then maybe exchange for a large house. Recreation was still the last pick. Those who picked the "car-suburban neighbourhood" combination in the constrained resource situation made their decision in almost the opposite manner. This group was more convinced that they would definitely need a car to survive. Once they chose "car", the remaining resources only allowed them to pick "suburban neighbourhood". However, when making their choices the second time without resource limits, they would not necessarily switch to "urban neighbourhood", indicating their insufficient interest in living in an urban neighbourhood. The significance of these decisions is discussed below.

¹⁷ For a description of the design and use of the "trade-off" game in the study, see *Interview Structure and Instrument* in Chapter 2: Research Methods.

Figure 4.1: Decision Making Process
of Constrained Choices in Trade-off Game



The Significance and Characteristics of Educational Achievement to Chinese Immigrants

While many social and cultural groups would appreciate quality educational opportunities, the desire for educational achievement is particularly salient among Chinese study participants. Chua (2002) made a similar observation in his work on meaning of achievement for Chinese immigrants: "Initially I was interested in exploring the broader issue of how my respondents had adapted to a new environment and culture. What kept surfacing, however, was a motif of educational achievement, distinct and defining to the informant's mind, but elusive to me. (Chua, 2002: 8) " Chua's further

examination suggests educational achievement is intimately connected with a larger vision of achievement in life, even as a way of life from his respondents' perspective (Ibid). Given the important meaning of educational achievement to Chinese immigrants, it may not be surprising that participants in this study group are willing to make sacrifices to pursue quality educational opportunities.

In addition to the significant importance of educational achievement in Chinese immigrants' lives, their achievement motivation may also distinguish itself from that of most Canadians. Psychologists suggest that there are two distinct, basic types of achievement motivation: individual-oriented and social-oriented. In individual-oriented motivation, achievement-related behaviour, the standards of excellence, and the evaluation of the performance are defined or determined by the actor himself or herself. In contrast, social oriented motivation is defined by the individual's significant others, family, group, or society as a whole (Yang, 1982; Yang & Liang, 1973). Yang pointed out that "the Chinese are inclined to have a much stronger social-oriented need for achievement and a much weaker individual-oriented need for achievement than Americans" (Yang, 1986: 115). The implication of this inclination is that the "quality" education that Chinese immigrants look for in a neighbourhood is the one that is largely defined or approved by their respected others (i.e., teachers, ministers, etc.), their familiar social circles or the society. This at least in part explained why Chinese immigrants often rely on word of mouth from their friends or the *Annual Report Card on British Columbia's Elementary or Secondary Schools* (see Chapter 3) in choosing a neighbourhood to live in.

Outdoor and Home Recreation

A lack of interest in outdoor recreation among Chinese immigrants is evident in other reports as well. Hung (2003) suggested Chinese-Canadians had a much lower participation rate in wilderness-oriented recreation than their Canadian counterparts due to a host of practical and cultural factors such as difficulty of preparing Chinese food in campsites and perception of wilderness as unsafe. When Chinese immigrants do choose outdoor recreation, they prefer to go to more developed and better equipped parks and

resorts. Consequently, they may consider "outdoor recreation" an expensive luxury (Hung, 2003). Geddes (1998) examined Chinese-Canadian's perception of wilderness and discovered that while they appreciated the beauty of the nature, they often kept a distance from wilderness. Home recreation, on the other hand, is much more acceptable and popular. When speaking of Hong Kong immigrants' recreation consumption patterns, Johnson (1994) noted that for "certain recreational products, such as multiple televisions, video recorders, and other electronic equipment, Hong Kong immigrants (whether recent or long-term) appear to have a higher ownership level than non-Chinese consumers in Vancouver" (Johnson, 1994: 135).

Urban, Suburban or Countryside?

Study participants did not seem to be equally attracted to urban living. Very few participants had experience with suburban living before moving to Canada. In terms of urban living, interviewees stated that they have both negative and positive memories. They remembered noises, construction chaos, busy traffic and poor air quality, but also have fond memories of the convenience and excitement of an urban life. Some participants from Hong Kong suggested that the urban lifestyle was important to them. They prefer to have shops, amenities and activities around the corner or within several minutes' drive so that they are able to go shopping and have *dim sum* (Cantonese brunch) with friends easily.

Participants who live in the suburbs often commented that they find the life 'too peaceful' and had a difficult time adjusting to this situation. Some of these participants indicated they felt 'lonely' and 'socially isolated' to different degrees. Suburban living has its attraction to the study group mainly for its quietness, smaller volume of traffic, safety, simple population composition, and in some cases, more greenery. However, urban living also holds the potential to attract the participants. Easy access to major commercial areas or shops and restaurants that targeted Chinese customers is desirable. Living in an inner suburb just outside of the urban core accommodates their two dreams of quiet living and maintaining some of the urban life they are used to.

Some participants from major urban centres such as Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing commented, "Living in Vancouver was like living in countryside". One participant from Hong Kong (HK 21) said her husband was really surprised the first time he came to Canada and commented, "Vancouver is so backward. There are only some skyscrapers in downtown." For him, the concept of an urban centre comes from his experience with highly populated and developed cities like Hong Kong. Vancouver, in comparison, is an underdeveloped countryside in his eyes. With a preconceived image of metropolitan area in a developed country, he might have expected Vancouver was something similar to his perception of an urban centre.

Car or public transit?

While most participants utilized a variety of transportation modes before moving to Canada, they do not seem to maintain their old travel habits in Canada. This tendency may be contributed to by the following three factors. First, even though the public transit system in Greater Vancouver region is considered better than that in most other North American cities, its efficiency is probably not comparable to the system in those cities from which most participants originate. Many participants indicated that the public transit in Greater Vancouver is not a viable option for them and were convinced they needed to adapt to the private-automobile-oriented transit mode. A few participants owned cars and driver's licenses before the move to Canada. Consequently, they adapted to this mode with great ease and had no or little experience with public transit in Greater Vancouver. Others who did not drive or own a car before the move invested their time, money and efforts on learning to drive and on the purchase of a car. They considered that the car, as an efficient transportation option, is essential for their access to employment and recreation opportunities in Canada. Second, for many immigrant families, the car is not only a transportation option but also contains symbolic meaning. The mobility, independence, and freedom that owning a car brings them has had tremendous influence on their lives and has often improved their satisfaction with their living conditions in Canada. In their home country or region, owning a car often represents one's status. However, as private automobile are much more readily available in North America, this meaning can not be sustained through car ownership but rather through owning cars with

prestigious brand names. Third, driving also represents a lifestyle to which some immigrants aspire. A car is a major component of the 'North American dream' for many immigrants. Taking transit is considered a secondary choice. Therefore, immigrants are willing to pay more for a lifestyle that includes the freedom of driving.

4.7 Findings

The preceding discussions provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the features of dwellings and amenities that study participants prefer. The analysis of their responses with the assistance of existing theories offered explanations and rationales for their preferences and choices.

In terms of dwellings, participants preferred newer single-family homes with plenty of natural light. It was revealed that their preferences for large windows, scarce landscape close to the property and south facing orientation of living area were closely related to their desire for plenty of natural light. A tidy, groomed appearance was desired for both house and garden, while functionality was the most important consideration for backyard. There was a strong association between the care of house and garden and the home owners' self-image. Ease of maintenance, privacy and level of control over space were significant factors in determining the appeal of a home.

In terms of proximal space, respondents preferred public green spaces with easily-identifiable, programmed uses and expressed a desire for amenities. These preferences for groomed green space and a tidy, well-maintained, affluent appearance were extended to neighbourhood streets. Interviewees expressed a preference for shopping in malls and shopping centres, rather than on neighbourhood high streets. This preference was partially due to practical considerations such as expedient and predictable services but also influenced by their perception of shopping malls as a component of a modern western lifestyle.

Finally, the outcome of the trade-off game confirmed the priorities and patterns identified in their home location and housing preferences. Parents were willing to forego larger living space and recreation opportunities for a neighbourhood with better schools for their children. The private vehicle was the last option to be given up, even when alternative transportation means were readily available. This is due in part to their perception of private vehicle ownership as a symbol of freedom, status and a western lifestyle they aspire to.

The preferences and rationales presented in this chapter, together with the social and personal factors governing home location preference described in Chapter 3, provide a plethora of information about Chinese immigrants housing preferences. These are discussed in Chapter 5 and a series of implications for planners, developers, etc. are presented.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

In the western First World countries, we live in a social paradigm characterized by exploitation of natural resources, economic growth and an ever more excessive standard of consumption. It has become apparent that this pattern cannot continue or we risk destroying the precious natural systems on which all life depends. A new worldview, the New Environmental Paradigm (or Alternative Environmental Paradigm) first posited by Van Liere and Dunlap in 1978, is emerging, emphasising harmony with and stewardship of nature. The awakening of an environmental consciousness offers the hope that we, as a society might avert environmental catastrophe, but also reveals the power of individual choices to steer society towards a more sustainable future. Limits to growth, steady-state economy, and natural resource preservation come only after individual acceptance of a new way of living. While environmental ethics and sustainability are taking hold locally in Greater Vancouver, many immigrants to this region come on the premise of the old paradigm. Figure 5.1 shows a brief summary of major characteristics of each paradigm.

Shifting this paradigm means changing both the way we think and the way we live. The chapter will address some particular challenges to and opportunities of promoting positive attitudes and behaviours toward sustainable living to the Chinese immigrant population in Greater Vancouver.

Figure 5.1: Dominant Social Paradigm vs. Alternate Environmental Paradigm

Dominant Social Paradigm		Alternative Environmental Paradigm
	Core Values	
Material (economic growth)		Non-material (self-actualization)
Natural environment valued as resource		Natural environment intrinsically valued
Domination over nature		Harmony with nature
	Economy	
Market forces		Public interest
Risk and reward		Safety
Differentials		Incomes related to need/egalitarian
Individual self-help		Collective/social provision
	Society	
Centralized		Decentralized
Large-scale		Small-scale
Associational		Communal
Ordered		Flexible
	Nature	
Ample Reserves		Earth's resources limited
Nature hostile/neutral		Nature benign
Environment controllable		Nature delicately balanced
	Knowledge	
Confidence in science and technology		Limits to science
Rationality of means		Rationality of ends
Separation of fact/value		Integration of fact/value, thought/feeling

(Source: Taylor, 1992, p.32)

5.1 The Importance of Attitude and Behaviour for Paradigm Shift

Attitude

Attitude refers to “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Eagly, 1992: 693). Although attitudes may not necessarily lead to behaviour changes, attitudes can have some effect on policy. Many decision makers respond to lobbying in the formation of their policy. Opinion polls more often reflect attitudes than behaviours (Folz, 2004:105).

Chinese immigrants play an increasingly important role in politics. In the 2005 BC provincial election, eight Chinese candidates, mostly immigrants, competed seats in 6 ridings in Lower Mainland and four of them succeeded. Current Minister of State

(multiculturalism) the Honourable Raymond Chan is also a Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong. Most of these politicians have a strong and direct relationship with the Chinese community in Greater Vancouver. Through these representatives, the opinions and needs of the Chinese immigrants are heard and considered in the formation of policies. Therefore, as Chinese immigrants develop positive attitudes to sustainable choices, they will be more likely to support sustainability policies.

Behaviour

A shift in attitude is necessary to institutionalize a more sustainable society, but it will be ineffective unless it comes with behaviour change and user acceptance. Folz (2004) pointed out that increasing availability and accessibility¹⁸ are extremely effective in changing behaviour, even among those who do not hold pro-environmental attitudes. Blue-box recycling programs are examples of programs that initiate positive behaviour without necessarily changing attitude.(Derksen and Gartrell, 1993). Interestingly, it has been shown that people will exhibit more environmental concern if they are engaged in pro-environmental activities such as recycling. It is possible that behaviour change will ultimately lead to attitude change (Folz, 2004).

In many cases, a more dedicated effort to bind behaviour and attitude may be beneficial. The idea of building a complete community, designing a walkable neighbourhood and making multiple transportation options available are specific strategies employed to reduce automobile dependence. Unlike recycling, the provision of transportation alternatives is not always perceived to be a pro-environmental measure, despite the obvious environmental benefits acknowledged by many environmentally minded people. Walking, cycling and using transit come naturally to people raised in China and are considered normal. While familiarity may make it easier to adapt to transportation alternatives, the value may be diminished if the environmental benefit is not obvious to the user. If one of the goals of a sustainable strategy is to move people's attitudes toward

¹⁸ "Availability refers to the existence of opportunity for pro-environmental behavior. Accessibility refers to how easy it is to actually do it. For example, the existence of a recycling depot means that recycling is available. However, if the depot is located in a difficult to reach location, it may not be accessible" (Folz, 2004).

a more sustainable mindset, increasing accessibility and availability alone is not enough. Education must be in place to ensure that people understand their contribution to the environment every time they choose alternative transportation options.

Most interviewees in this research came from areas where alternative forms of transportation are readily available and accessible. However, there was little conscious consideration of the environmental benefit of their behaviour. The study participants did not typically make the cognitive connection between transportation choices and environmental impact. In fact, they had little appreciation for the broader consequences of personal choice or for their responsibility toward the environment. This attitude will be further discussed in the later section 5.4.2 *Individual Social Responsibility and Community Participation*.

Attitude and behaviour are both important aspects in shifting paradigms. The two can influence one another under certain conditions. Some strategies are more effective in changing attitudes and others in changing behaviours, but attitudes and behaviours can reinforce each other.

5.2 Implications

There are many limits to our current understanding of ethnic immigrant communities, their values and needs that inform their attitudes and behaviours. In this study, I have examined not only what preferences Chinese immigrants express in choosing their home environment, but how these preferences are informed and influenced by their values, needs and culture. It has become evident that they have a clear perception of what a western lifestyle ought to be. Their expressed housing preferences do not necessarily adhere to traditions or their past living experiences. Particular social and economic needs and priorities arise in their adaptation to a new life and influence their housing preferences.

5.2.1 The Power of Aspiration and Social Norms

One of the most fundamental challenges of promoting sustainability to Chinese immigrants may be their aspiration to a “First World lifestyle”, as Jared Diamond had put it. In the process of modernization and globalization, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China follow a strong desire to catch up with the living standard and consumption level of the First World countries (see Section 1.3 *A Different Reality and Vision* in Chapter 1). This is hardly surprising as North American consumerism is now available to a substantial population within these regions and countries. Inundated with new consumer experiences, there is little heed paid to the environmental or social cost. Diamond (2004) noted that potentially more important than China’s all other environmental impacts is the consequence of the aspirations of China’s people:

China’s people, like other people in developing countries, [aspire] to a First World lifestyle. That abstract phrase means many specific things to an individual Third World citizen: acquiring a house, appliances, utensils, clothes, ... travelling by motor vehicle (preferably one’s own car), not by walking or bicycle; and having access to other products manufactured elsewhere and arriving by motor vehicle transport, not just to local products carried to consumers. All Third World peoples of whom I am aware – even those trying to retain or re-create some of their traditional lifestyle- also value at least some elements of this First World lifestyle.

Given the magnitude of the Chinese population, even the relatively small proportion now enjoying material wealth may have a profound environmental impact. The aspiration to a First World lifestyle is reflected in local Chinese newspaper, literature as well as participants’ commentary on their housing preferences. Living in a single-family house with front and back yard, driving to work, shop and play, and going to shopping malls are considered typical components of a western lifestyle that they are “entitled” to enjoy.

The dominant social paradigm and over-consumption are still perceived to be the social norms of the western world today. From a Chinese immigrants’ perspective, adopting this worldview and behaviour pattern is often regarded to be a necessary step to integrate into

mainstream society and to gain social approval in this new country. Social norms are an extremely powerful force in determining behaviour. When entering an unfamiliar environment, it is natural for people to follow the majority and look for general rules to regulate and adapt their own behaviours. In a way, Chinese immigrants' behaviour is a reflection of the host society. This reveals the importance of promoting sustainability to the general public. Educating Chinese immigrants and changing their behaviours should be a component of a much larger movement toward a sustainable future.

5.2.2 Social and Economic Constraints and Priorities

As social and economic needs in the process of adapting to a new life in Canada are paramount for Chinese immigrants, their housing choices appear to have a qualitatively different orientation than those of the native-born population. Research from the United States suggests that "the distance of the housing location from the nearest city centre is a major factor when deciding upon where to live" (Gunter, 2000: 20) for the general American residents. Canadian studies also confirm that detached suburban housing is associated with a host of attributes that were regarded as "extremely important" to Canadian families such as safety, privacy, and sufficient indoor and outdoor space (Johnson, 1995; Perks, 1996; Boutilier, 1996). Although these attributes are also important to the study group, they did not consciously speak of their housing preferences in terms of distance to urban centres or urban vs. suburban living. By contrast, meeting their social and economic needs and goals took precedence in their housing choices.

The need for a stable life, predictable services and familiar environment is reflected in participants' home location and housing choices. In a new environment that contains many uncontrollable factors, immigrants may try to reduce unpredictable variables that cause stress in the early stages of their immigrant lives. Living within a Chinese community is one way for Chinese immigrants to gain support, familiarize themselves with the new environment and find assurance. Family connections also appear to be very important for participants as to share resources and gain social security. Choosing to shop in malls, having their own gardens, and looking for programmed uses of public space can also be seen in part as an effort to seek control over their living space. A higher level of

socioeconomic attainment and assimilation¹⁹ tends to ease the stress and dependence on resources from Chinese community. However, generally speaking, the assimilation process can take one generation or even longer. Furthermore, one study that compares the settlement experience of immigrants of European origin with those of non-European origin in Vancouver found that assimilation is much slower for the latter group (Hiebert & Ley, 2001). The influx of a large Chinese immigrant population to the Vancouver region within the space of one generation presents a challenge to change their behaviour and attitudes. Newer immigrants tend to have greater need for stability and thus resist adapting to behaviour that seems to contradict social norms. However, knowledge on their constraints and priorities would also reveal opportunities to change their behaviours and attitudes. This is further discussed later in Section 6.3 *Incentives to Change Behaviour and Attitudes*.

5.2.3 Traditions

While familiarity and predictability were extremely important to participants, during discussions of residential design, interviewees showed a surprising lack of interest in incorporating traditional Chinese elements into their dwellings. Most participants did not mention any traditional elements of Chinese architecture design in their preferences. Surprisingly, for most participants, *Feng Shui* was not a significant consideration. The majority of participants either did not consider it or suggested it was a low priority. Such a result may be attributed to the absence of extremely wealthy immigrants in the study group. One study, presenting a case study of Chinese immigrants' impact on residential development and design in California, suggested that developments that incorporated *Feng Shui* philosophy are appealing to wealthy Asian immigrants (Lynne, 2001). One participant (TW 1) who has been a realtor in Greater Vancouver for more than 20 years confirmed that most of her clients who have specific requirements according to *Feng Shui* are business and investor immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong or south China. While the practice of *Feng Shui* was officially determined to be superstition in 1975 in People's Republic China and thus outlawed, it flourished among overseas Chinese in

¹⁹ Socioeconomic attainment is often measured using household income, individual education and occupation of household head. Assimilation is assessed according to the degree to which immigrant group moves toward the characteristics of the native-born population.

such countries as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore (Braswell-Means, 1990). Immigrants from Mainland China rarely seriously consider it when choosing their houses. This finding implies that incorporating traditional elements to the design of sustainable housing and community may only be effective in attracting the very wealthy Chinese immigrants.

5.3 Incentives to Change Behaviour and Attitudes

Broadening acceptance of sustainable behaviour requires municipalities to adopt a range of strategies. Incentives such as rebates for reduced consumption of energy or HOV lanes and disincentives, like consumption-based taxes and fees, are both useful tools to change specific behaviour, although the former are more likely to be well received (Folz, 2004). New immigrants are less likely to be receptive to disincentives as they already tend to feel discouraged, marginalized, or disadvantaged in adapting to a new country.

Reviewing the findings of this research, as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, reveals patterns of recurring preferences and priorities. From these priorities it has been possible to derive a set of amenities that would attract Chinese immigrants to sustainable housing choices.

The amenities presented in Table 5.1 are selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) They are not in conflict with current best practices for environmental, social and economic sustainability;
- 2) They can improve social or economic satisfaction of the study group;
- 3) They reflect the study group's expressed preferences, desires, and needs.

For instance, in choosing a home location, much consideration is given to children and senior family members. Therefore, the presence of reputable schools and Chinese centres would entice participants to housing in the neighbourhood. These amenities do not require any compromise in sustainability, yet they can improve the target population's satisfaction. Table 5.1 summarises these amenities for each studied aspect of a community: neighbourhood, dwelling, garden and green space, shopping area and transportation.

These amenities can be used as incentives in building new communities as well as in improving existing communities. In some cases, amenities already exist in certain areas and can be capitalized on at little or no cost by changing the way these areas are publicized. Recognizing the value of existing amenities and using them properly can be very effective in raising awareness and changing behaviour. For example, study group's strong desire to live close to reputable schools and universities suggests that the neighbourhoods adjacent to these facilities would be ideal sites to implement sustainable pilot projects and to engage in outreach programs. The appeal of schools is so great to the study group that they may be willing to adopt behaviour that they would be unlikely to accept in other neighbourhoods.

An appreciation of cultural priorities can also lead to a very different understanding of a neighbourhood. For instance, it is common knowledge that Southeast False Creek is being developed as a sustainable neighbourhood. However, if SEFC is examined through a cultural lens, it can be seen to fulfill a number of needs for the immigrant Chinese community. Figure 5.2 shows amenities that are innate to SEFC including "Chinese centres surrounding or easily accessible", "convenient access to immigrant services", and "senior centres nearby".

Table 5.1 Important Amenities for Chinese Immigrants

Studied aspects of a community	Amenities
Neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reputable schools and universities ✓ Other quality education opportunities (extra curricular) ✓ Chinese centres surrounding or easily accessible ✓ Convenient access to immigrant services ✓ Near senior centres (better if there are Chinese senior centres) ✓ Clean, tidy, organized and orderly
Dwelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Independent, free-hold property ✓ Adaptable floor plan to accommodate extended family ✓ Sufficient indoor natural light ✓ South-facing apartment unit or living room in a house ✓ Open design that creates spacious feeling ✓ Shared amenities and services in a residential building or a neighbourhood
Garden and green space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sheltered public facilities where people can gather and rest, such as a pavilion ✓ Public space suitable for activities popular among Chinese such as outdoor badminton, Tai Chi, etc. ✓ Low-maintenance backyard that can accommodate a variety of activities
Shopping area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Relatively concentrated, diverse and expedient services ✓ Easy to navigate ✓ Weather-proofed environment ✓ Public rest areas
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More efficient public transit service ✓ Easy access to popular destinations among the Chinese immigrants such as UBC, SFU, Chinatown, Metrotown, and Richmond

Proposed and existing transit puts this neighbourhood within minutes of historic Chinatown, where many Chinese goods, services and amenities are available. Adjacent to Chinatown is the Strathcona neighbourhood, where several Chinese senior centres are located. The transit service along Main Street and Kingsway connects SEFC to Chinese goods and services, along with other ethnic stores. Immigrant Services Society of BC is also located within walking distance of the neighbourhood.

Figure 5.2: A Cultural Map of SEFC and Its Adjacent Area



By taking advantage of the existing transit network and/or creating easy access to these destinations, the amenities can easily become benefits associated with living in SEFC neighbourhood. Considering the social infrastructures and resources outside the designated boundary of SEFC also opens the potential of building a new dynamic between neighbourhoods and bringing positive changes to existing neighbourhoods. For instance, historic Chinatown may provide initial appeal as a destination for SEFC

prospective residents. The prosperity of SEFC can in turn benefit revitalization of Chinatown. Thus, SEFC could be tremendously attractive to Chinese immigrants for reasons that are incidental to its celebrated sustainable standards. It is likely that by choosing to live in SEFC, Chinese immigrants might develop sustainable attitudes and behaviour over time.

Some amenities require greater financial resources. Sharing low-use amenities such as swimming pools, fitness rooms, and meeting rooms in higher-density housing is considered to be desirable by young families in the study group. This type of shared amenity is especially attractive to small families (two to three persons) as it provides controlled recreation activities close to home that would not be available at lower densities. However, they still require considerable resources to realize.

Some amenities may require innovation. Attracting Chinese immigrants to public green space and pedestrian oriented shopping areas are problems that require planning and design innovation. Participants indicated that they engaged in very few activities in public green space and placed a very low value on it. This is surprising, since public parks are heavily used in China for a wide variety of activities. Some participants suggested that the reason they did not use such space more actively was because they did not feel comfortable engaging in their familiar activities in these places. Some parks are considered too open, making participants feel self-conscious, or too exposed to the sun and the wind, making it difficult to play outdoor badminton or to practise Tai Chi. Active use of public green space has significance in sustainability in that it not only encourages meaningful interactions and public life but also allows people to develop a deeper appreciation for nature in the city. Bringing cultural sensitivity to park design by creating space more suitable for their desired activities can be a means to draw more people out of their homes and into neighbourhood parks.

The items presented in Table 5.1 are not absolute criteria to evaluate the attractiveness of a neighbourhood to the target population, but rather are a guide to assist planners, designers or developers in understanding the costs and benefits of these amenities. They

are also designed to help these professionals communicate more effectively with Chinese immigrants, as well as to examine the sustainable community development roadmap of this region from a cultural perspective. The hope is that by incorporating this knowledge into planning process, planning and development professionals will be able to find and create more opportunities to expose Chinese immigrants to an environment where they can become more aware of sustainability issues and adopt more sustainable behaviours.

5.4 Additional Observations and Their Implications

In the course of this research, several additional findings became apparent. While these observations are not direct responses to the research questions, they do have important implications for promoting sustainability among Chinese immigrants. These observations, which concern language barriers and translations, individual social responsibility and community participations, and current community outreach practices, are discussed below.

5.4.1 Language Barriers

Given that language and the meaning of words are intimately connected with their cultural or social context, it is very likely that immigrants who are not familiar with this context are not aware of or do not learn the vocabulary that is particularly rooted in the host society. Fields (1989: 17) noted, "Environmental awareness, on a wide social scale, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the post-Industrial Age; so too is the language used to express it." The concept of sustainable community in this research is a notion that is most actively discussed in several highly-industrialized, developed Western nations. The language developed to discuss this concept may not yet have a counterpart in the languages of developing countries and rising economies such as Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Unfamiliarity with cultural or social context of regional environment and sustainability issues was evident in all participants' responses. When asked about their perceptions of Greater Vancouver's environment, participants often first discussed environmental

problems in their home region or country and compared the situation with Greater Vancouver. This was particularly common among the interviewees who used Chinese in the interviews. One reason might be that they had a better understanding of the issues in their home cultures and were more familiar with the language to discuss them. In making comparison of Greater Vancouver with their homeland, all participants decided that Greater Vancouver was in a far better environmental situation. Consequently, very few had attempted to learn more about the local environment problems, because in their minds there were none serious enough to pay much attention to. A lack of interest in or awareness of local environmental knowledge has also prohibited them from learning the corresponding language.

Although some participants had heard of or indicated they were familiar with the term “sustainability” or “sustainable development”, they also discussed it in the context of their home region or country and often stressed the seriousness of environmental degradation caused by rapid economic growth. When asked to discuss ‘sustainability’ in Canadian or Vancouver region’s context, many of them either gave no clear response or changed subjects. Other participants commented that the region’s natural environment was good enough but there were no sufficient opportunities for economic success compared to Hong Kong and Mainland China. As a result, they may find efforts to protect the environment in the region less worthy of appreciation and policies that balance economic growth with environmental health and social justice less relevant. Such comments suggest an ideology that separates economic success from environmental and social well-being and the influence of national policies of their home country (See Section 1.3 *A Different Reality and Vision* in Chapter 1).

The loss of the meaning of words in translation is another challenge in discussing sustainability issues. One example for this is the translation of “sustainable community”. The direct Chinese translation of this term is awkward and makes little sense. Most participants were puzzled when I said it in translated Chinese. Sometimes I had to use words such as “ecological community” (English translation of the Chinese words used in the interviews) to launch the conversation, as this word is more commonly used and

understood in their homeland. Certainly the term “ecological community” does not contain the same meaning as “sustainable community” in English, but its Chinese translation could help participants begin to understand the idea I was trying to convey.

Difficulty with the meaning of words is not only apparent among Chinese speaking interviewees. Even participants who had sufficient English skills did not necessarily grasp the idea of sustainable community easily. One participant (HK 13) who moved to Vancouver as a teenager and graduated from a Canadian university chose to use English in the interview and showed great interest in my research. Towards the end of the interview I showed my thesis title (in English) to him, he inserted: “I think you should study Richmond. That is a sustainable community.” Surprised by his comment, I asked him for explanation. He answered: “If you leave a Chinese person fresh off the airplane in Richmond, he will survive without a problem. He can sustain his life in this community.” His response clearly indicates that the words “sustainable”, “community”, and “Chinese” in the title suggested something entirely different to him from what they are intended to mean in the context of this research, even though he showed some familiarity to these words in English. Only after I explained in detail the intention of this research and answered many questions from him did he start to show some understanding of the nature of the study and commented: “This is a really good topic. I have never thought about it.”

The lack of vocabulary in both Chinese and English to discuss sustainability issues has serious implications for communication and dissemination of ideas in environmental education and planning processes. It suggests that direct translations of educational material or messages for social marketing of sustainability may not be properly understood by their intended audiences.

5.4.2 Individual Social Responsibility and Community Participation

Participants tend to think that environmental and social sustainability is the government’s responsibility and thus distance themselves from environmental solutions. Many participants also believed that governments would deal with these issues far more

effectively than individuals and that an individual's contribution was insignificant. This may be in part due to the long history of a centralized governing system in China. The top-down decision making approach of the Chinese government (Mainland China) has disengaged its average citizen from public policy decisions. Indeed, the unique political structure and top-down decision making has allowed China to operate on a far larger scale and produce a greater impact with its policies. For example, in order to reduce air pollution in Beijing, the municipal government is ordering city vehicles to convert to liquefied petroleum gas and natural gas. China also phased out leaded gasoline in a matter of months; an undertaking Europe and the U.S. took many years to achieve. However, in a democratic society like Canada, individual responsibilities can bring about many changes and influence to public policies. Adjusting to activated citizenship is one of the many challenges posed by the New Environmental Paradigm, a challenge that is particularly difficult for Chinese immigrants to adjust to and meet.

Generally speaking, Chinese immigrants are more accustomed to strict government regulations, have little knowledge of or interest in democratic processes and are not as civic minded as the Canadian counterparts (Jim & Suen, 1990). However, participation is necessary in bringing about sustainability (O'Riordan and Voisey, 1998). Moore (2004: 163) noted that "in order for change to take place in a democracy, it is necessary for different perspectives to be heard in the decision making process, and for individuals and groups to be willing to take action and commit time and energy to change". Therefore, a positive attitude to civic involvement needs to be promoted and fostered among the Chinese immigrants. For instance, planners should consciously make an effort to encourage Chinese immigrants to participate in civic activities. In addition, the reasons that their participations is needed should be explained, as should what will happened with their comments and as a results of their participation. In other words, professionals need to promote participants' feelings of efficacy as much as possible, as well as increasing participants' knowledge of how the Canadian system works.

5.4.3 Current Community Outreach Practice

There is clearly an increasing interest in engaging a Chinese audience in environmental education and community participation. In 2003 and 2004, I had the opportunity to observe and participate in several community outreach programs with Chinese audiences in Greater Vancouver. The first project was with the Georgia Basin Future Project team at the University of British Columbia. The second project was through a Community Vision workshop hosted by the City of Vancouver. The third was the translation of educational material for Greater Vancouver Regional District.

In 2003, the Georgia Basin QUEST workshop²⁰ at UBC organized a special session for a Chinese audience. In this workshop, participants discussed options with regard to environment, economic and social development. The majority of the participants were members of the Green Club - the largest Chinese environmental group in Lower Mainland and were mainly from Taiwan. This practise revealed that even within this environmental organization, there were opposing opinions about many decisions we had to make in the workshop. For instance, when deciding on land use, supporters of compact metropolitan development and supporters of suburban sprawl split the vote and initially consensus could not be reached. A similar situation occurred in deciding transportation and housing priorities. Since the computer model is able to simulate future scenarios, some preliminary understanding of the consequences of certain choices was gained among the workshop participants. This activity received very positive feedback. Many participants indicated this workshop was a valuable learning experience for them and had a taste of the complexity of brining about social change.

In 2004, the City of Vancouver's CityPlan Community Vision²¹ workshops in Riley Park/South Cambie (RPSC) and Arbutus Ridge/ Kerrisdale/Shaghnessy (ARKS) neighbourhoods held several sessions for Chinese residents.

²⁰ Georgia Basin QUEST is a user friendly computer model that will allow people to explore how the ecological, social and economic choices that we made today will affect our lives and the environment in 40 years.

²¹ CityPlan was adopted by City Council in 1995 to provide a framework for deciding City programs, priorities and actions over the next 20 years. It contains directions to guide Vancouver's future growth. The workshops are designed to draw information out from residents to aid in the preparation of Choices

Both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers were accommodated in the workshops. Each session attracted about 15 to 20 Chinese residents. What is interesting is that the Mandarin speaking group in RPSC were mainly composed of members of the Green Club. Cantonese speaking participants were mainly long-term residents of the area. There were only a few new Chinese immigrants in the ARKS workshop. Some participants brought invaluable knowledge to the table. For instance, one Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong worked with several senior centres in Lower Mainland and had valuable insight into the current situation of Chinese seniors who need special care.

Participants had a chance to learn about CityPlan directions and the background work presented in an open house prior to the workshop. The intention of the open house is to keep participants informed about the directions. In reality, many participants missed the open house. As a result, they sometimes voiced their individual needs and aspirations regardless of CityPlan directions. For example, in the RPSC workshop, participants were shown a series of drawings of mid-density housing typologies such as duplex, court-yard housing, in-fill housing, row-housing, etc. When asked about participants' thoughts on introducing these housing typologies to the neighbourhood, participants started to comment on the drawbacks of these types of housing such as poor soundproofing, loss of privacy, etc. and a negative opinion towards these typologies soon gained popularity in the discussion group. The benefit of greater land-use efficiency and the creation of a pedestrian friendly environment were not acknowledged. However, as this workshop was intended to draw ideas from the residents rather than to influence their thinking, planners refrained from leading participants to these answers, focusing instead on their role as organizer and facilitator rather than educator. The workshop I attended had a dynamic of reporting to the planner rather than one of discussion and communication within the group. While the limited public involvement is precious opportunity to both participants and planners, participants seem to take few new ideas home from these workshops.

In the fall of 2004, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) created the Chinese text of an environmental education flyer - *Home Pages: Choices for Wiser Living*. The material was designed to be one component of an environmental campaign targeted towards the Chinese community in the Lower Mainland. A temporary position for a Communication and Education Coordinator was created to initiate and organize the campaign that lasted for about 5 months. The main challenge for this task was to negotiate the translated Chinese words for an audience of both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. Nevertheless, the resulting quality of the material was satisfactory. Unfortunately, the printed copies of this material are limited in number and can only be obtained either in GVRD or the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society offices. The limited availability and accessibility has discounted its effect on the target audience.

These three examples represent efforts to reach a Chinese audience by an academic institution, a municipality and a regional governing body. These practices were made possible by some of the most progressive and forward thinking scholars, officials and decision makers, in recognition of the Chinese community as an integral part of the regional population. Without their participation and cooperation, the region's roadmap to a sustainable future is incomplete. These efforts can be seen as the beginning of the tremendous project of bringing diverse communities to the new paradigm. Nevertheless, there is certainly room for improvement. Based on observation of and involvement in government or institutional outreach programs, several key limitations of these practices are identified:

- Most of the outreach programs lasted for a relatively short time (from several months to a few years);
- They are often project based, one-time events;
- Although they are generally successful in finding participants, they had difficulty in reaching a representative audience within the Chinese community. A relatively stable but narrow group was repeatedly attracted to these practices;
- There have not been many opportunities or much room for discussion, learning or dialogue between the Chinese community and the host organizations;

- The information provided in these events is sometimes great in volume but not readily available or accessible to the Chinese immigrants elsewhere.

5.5 Future Studies

There is a great deal of room for further study. As an initial attempt to understand ethnic population's housing preferences and their implications to the region, this study demonstrates how qualitative interviews can capture nuances and produce rich, detailed insights that would not likely emerge if a quantitative approach was employed. The results were able to trace not only Chinese immigrant's preferences but also the degree of importance of their priorities. Only through in-depth conversation with the participants were factors such as motivations of living in or out of Chinese concentrated areas understood. However, there are still many questions remain unanswered and require further research.

1) The study group chosen in this research is homogenous in one sense - they were all Chinese immigrants from the Greater Vancouver. Would non-immigrant Chinese (i.e. first, second, or third generation Chinese Canadians) or Chinese immigrants in other Canadian cities or rural areas hold similar preferences and priorities? Studies in these areas would extend this body of research in addressing how my findings might vary and what lessons are transferable to other regions.

2) This study suggests that Chinese immigrants' home location choices are subject to their needs and priorities which can be determined by their demographic information such as income level, length of residence and family structures. Mapping of Chinese immigrants' residence distribution in Greater Vancouver in relation to their demographic information may reveal whether certain characteristics are correlated with suburban or urban living, or whether their place of origin (e.g. among Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China or urban verses rural) brings variations and differences to the general residential pattern.

- 3) This study has touched on the role of private vehicle to Chinese immigrants. A close examination of their commuting pattern will be very useful in identifying challenges to reduce car dependency. Commuting time does not appear to be an important factor in choosing a place to live maybe in part because it is subject to participants' particular occupations and family situation. Certain popular occupations among Chinese immigrants such as realtors and driving instructors require significant use of their private vehicles. Many wives in 'astronaut' families live in Greater Vancouver with their children for the most of the time. Since they often do not have a regular job and mainly rely on car to drive their children or run errands, they have a very different commuting pattern than those who commute to work every day.
- 4) Under-use of public park space among Chinese immigrants raises an issue: how can parks be more attractive to them? A comparative study of park use in China and Canada may be valuable in discovering the reasons for this phenomenon and offer inspirations for park design and management.
- 5) A limitation of the study is the lack of any local precedent for a complete sustainable community. As a result, it was very difficult to evaluate participant's receptivity toward sustainable community directly. Existing examples of houses, communities and proximal spaces were used in the picture comparison and trade-off game in this study. When a sustainable community project is finally realized, it will become a valuable resource to a research that further test participant's receptivity to a broader set of components and strategies implemented in those communities.
- 6) Indoor space is also an important aspect of housing preferences. As this study covers a wide range of aspects of a community, preferences for indoor space were not explored in detail. A study examining Chinese immigrants' preferences for indoor space arrangement could be useful in understanding their housing choices.

5.6 Recommendations

Promoting a sustainable lifestyle to Chinese immigrants in Greater Vancouver is a complex issue involving many parties. Citizens and professionals such as planners, developers, designers, educators, and policy makers all have a role in engaging this community. The following recommendations are general guidelines based on major findings and their implications in this study. Specific strategies and their appropriate applications should come with practitioners' professional experience and skills. Some examples are suggested as a starting point to stimulate further discussions in practical fields.

1) Continuous effort to change social norms is greatly needed. The results indicate that Chinese immigrants expected to normalize with the North American standard of consumption and lifestyle. Chinese immigrants' aspirations are greatly influenced by what they considered to be "mainstream" in North America. Promoting a sustainable lifestyle to Chinese immigrants should be a component of a larger societal movement of shifting paradigms and changing existing social norms that undermine the quality of our life and environment. The more often sustainable issues appears in major media, the more major events with sustainability focus are widely publicized, the more clearly and strongly the message is communicated by our municipalities, institutions and political and community leaders, the more likely Chinese immigrants will be aware and may become receptive to ideas and behaviours that leads to a sustainable future.

2) Programs and action plans that promote sustainable lifestyle should be framed within Chinese immigrant's needs and priorities. Results suggest that Chinese immigrants face many social and economic constraints and place a low priority on environmental concerns and civic involvement. Employment, social comfort, mobility, quality education opportunities for children, familiar groceries, predictable and expedient services are among the most important considerations of Chinese immigrants. Programs and action plans initiated by governments and other organizations should respect their needs and priorities. For example, high-density housing and small single-family housing with environmental features should be marketed in Chinese immigrants' desired

neighbourhoods. In order to promote alternative transportation, the personal benefits and savings should be clearly explained to Chinese immigrants.

3) Increase availability and accessibility of information and educational material to Chinese immigrants. Information about environmental solutions such as auto co-op, rain barrels or energy saving incentives should be properly translated. In addition, this information should be made readily available to its intended audience. In order to achieve this, the following suggestions are made:

- Distribute educational material in places frequented by Chinese immigrants such as immigrant services centres, community centres and libraries, and Chinese shops and malls where many local Chinese newspapers are distributed;
- Collaborate with local organizations within the Chinese community such as Chinese radio stations, television channels, newspapers, immigrant service agencies, environmental groups, and student and scholar associations to promote sustainability;
- Publish on-line information in Chinese and make it accessible and easy to find.

4) Diverse forms of education are necessary. Due to the language impediment, alternative education activities that can involve Chinese immigrants should be in place. Education forms that heavily depend on language and meaning such as textual material or lectures are less effective than those that involve participation and observation. Workshops, field trips and community events that encourage participation and dialogue must be included in education and social marketing for this population. Having staff and volunteers from the Chinese community involved in these activities would help overcome the language barrier. The following activities are suggested as a starting point:

- Green home and sustainable building tours;
- Mobile classroom on sustainable choices that are integrated into immigrant settlement programs or English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum;
- Use of trade-off games as a learning device in education program or community planning events;
- Community events that celebrate community garden/urban agriculture ;

- Practical workshops on home water and energy saving, green roof technology, solar panel installation, and so on.

5) Sensitivity for cultural preferences is needed to broaden the appeal of sustainable design to Chinese immigrants. This research provides information for broadening the appeal of sustainable design of a house, a street, a park, or an entire neighbourhood. The following findings about Chinese immigrants may have implications to sustainable design:

- Strong symbolic association between aesthetic design of a garden and the public image of the home-owner. They prefer a clean, organized, tidy appearance for dwelling, garden, streets and neighbourhood as such appearance reflects positively on the residents of a neighbourhood;
- Lack of use of parks due to discomfort with open space and deficiency of space suitable for their preferred activities;
- Desire for spacious feeling in the indoor space both for their own satisfaction and for impressing their guests;
- Strong desire for plenty of natural light within and on the property;
- Desire to accommodate multi-generational families in one home;
- Preference for ease of maintenance, sound privacy, shared amenities and control of their space.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although Chinese immigrants share some similar experiences, they are probably just as diverse as the native Canadian population. To understand their housing preferences without overgeneralization or stereotyping is an extremely complex and challenging task. I was once discouraged and intimidated by the diversity and complexity of this topic. However, this reveals a reality: there is no singular truth to Chinese immigrants; nor is there a unifying theory that can explain their every preference from home location, to dwelling and its proximal space. As one can imagine, carrying out a similar study on any diverse population will not necessarily lead to a unified theory so much as a collection of tendencies. This does not mean, however, that this study has not been worthwhile. On the contrary, many valuable lessons are learned through this inquiry process. Through participants' words and real stories, their aspirations, expectations, constraints and priorities become apparent. In seeking explanations for their preferences and choices, a greater understanding of this particular population has been achieved.

This exploratory study is only a starting point from which practice and theory may advance toward a multicultural society with a sustainable future. I hope this work will provide a jumping-off point for researchers and practitioners to explore related topics in depth, to test and implement these ideas in the real world, to inspire design innovation, and ultimately bring positive changes to the region and community we live in and treasure.

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APPENDIX A

Glossary

CHINESE CHARACTERS, LATINISED PHENETICS AND TRANSLATIONS FOR TERMS RELATED TO NOTION OF “SUSTAINABILITY”

Chinese Character(s)	Latinised Phonetics	Translation
永续性 可持续性	Yong Xu Xing (Taiwan, Hong Kong) Ke Chi Xu Xing (Mainland China)	Sustainability
永续性发展 可持续性发展	Yong Xu Xing Fa Zhan (Taiwan, Hong Kong) Ke Chi Xu Xing Fa Zhan (Mainland China)	Sustainable development
永续性社区	Yong Xu Xing She Qu	Sustainable community
郊区	Jiao Qu	Suburb
市区	Shi Qu	Urban
社区花园	She Qu Hua Yuan	Community garden
生态住宅区	Sheng Tai Zhu Zhai Qu	Ecological neighbourhood
纯住宅区	Chun Zhu Zhai Qu	Residential only area
城市农业	Cheng Shi Nong Ye	Urban agriculture
新社区	Xin She Qu	New neighbourhood

APPENDIX B

Interview guide

(Used by the researcher to guide interviews, but not strictly adhered to)

Part 1: Socio-demographic Information

First, I'd like to know some basic information about yourself.

1. Could you please tell me where you are originally from?

Ethnicity: Taiwan ☐ Hongkong ☐ Mainland China ☐ Other ☐ Specify_____

2. How long have you lived in Canada?

Months/years in Canada: less than 6 months ☐ 6-12 months ☐ 12-18 months ☐ 18 months -2 years ☐ 2-3 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 5-10 years ☐ 10-15 years ☐ 15- 20 years ☐ 20 years + ☐

3. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

4. How old are you?

Age: 22-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60+ ☐

4. Which is the following best describes your relationship status?

Single ☐ Married ☐ Common Law ☐ Divorced ☐ Widow ☐

5. What is the highest education you received?

Education: Primary school ☐ Secondary school ☐ (years) Postsecondary school:

Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ Ph.D ☐ Technical school/College ☐

Where? _____

6. What is your current residence (current address)

7. Where did you live before moving to Greater Vancouver?

8. What is your current occupation/specialization: Business ☐ Education ☐
Arts/Music ☐ Labor ☐ Finance ☐ Information Technology (IT) ☐ Other,
specify_____

9. What is your annual gross family income (before tax)? You can give me a range.

- \$6,000 and less ☐ \$6,000 - \$10,000 ☐ \$10,000 - \$20,000 ☐
\$20,000 - \$30,000 ☐ \$30,000 - \$40,000 ☐ \$40,000 - \$60,000 ☐
\$60,000 - \$80,000 ☐ \$80,000 - \$100,000 ☐ \$100,000 - \$150,000 ☐
\$150,000 - \$200,000 ☐ \$200,000 and more ☐

10. How many family members live in your household?

Family size ☐ dependents ☐

11. Which category of immigration did you fall into when you immigrated to
Canada?

Skill worker ☐ Business ☐ Provincial nomination ☐ Family ☐ International
Adoption ☐ Quebec-Selected ☐ Retiree ☐

12. Why do you move to Vancouver, Canada?

- ☐ For children's education and future
☐ For career/business

- ☐ For the partner's career/business
- ☐ For a better natural environment
- ☐ For higher education
- ☐ For political reasons
- ☐ Other, specify _____

13. How do you gain local information?

- TV ☐ English ☐ Cantonese ☐ Mandarin ☐
- Newspaper ☐ English ☐ Cantonese ☐ Mandarin ☐
- Magazine ☐ English ☐ Cantonese ☐ Mandarin ☐
- Radio ☐ English ☐ Cantonese ☐ Mandarin ☐
- Other ☐ Specify _____

Part 2: In the Past

Now, I'd like you to tell me about the place you lived in your home country.

14. Before moving to Canada, what type of dwelling do you live in?

- ☐ Apartment building ☐ Detached houses ☐ Traditional building ☐ Other, specify _____

15. Did you rent your place or own it?

- Tenancy: ☐ Own ☐ On mortgage ☐ Rent

16. Do you live in...

- Rural area ☐ Urban centre ☐ Urban fringe ☐

17. Can you describe the place you live in and its surroundings?

Amenities:

Number of rooms ☐

Courtyard Yes ☐ No ☐

Garden Yes ☐ No ☐

Farmland Yes ☐ No ☐

Balcony Yes ☐ No ☐

Garage for car Yes ☐ No ☐

Indoor plumbing Yes ☐ No ☐

18. What is your primary means of transportation to work, to shop and to play?
On foot ☐ Bicycle ☐ Public transit ☐ Car ☐ Other ☐ specify _____

Part 3: Aspiration

Here I would like to know you current residence and your ideal home.

19. Are you happy with your present accommodation?
Yes ☐ No ☐

20. Do you want to move? Yes ☐ No ☐

21(a). If yes, why? 1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

21(b). If no, why not? 1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

22. If you could have your ideal home, what would it look like?

23. When it comes to choose a location for your home, what kind of area would you like to live? _____

Why? 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

(Near good school ☐ Close to work ☐ Near services like shops, grocery stores, bakery, library, community center... ☐ With nice view ☐ Easy access to public transit ☐ Within a community of people with similar income level and background ☐)

24. You'd like to live in a community that is accessible primarily by (choose one)...

Car ☐ Public transit ☐ Bike ☐ Walking ☐ Mixed ☐

Part 4 Picture comparison

In this session, I will show you two pictures at a time.

Image 1



Image 2

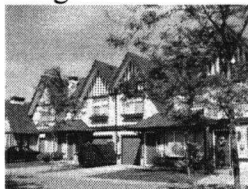


Image 3

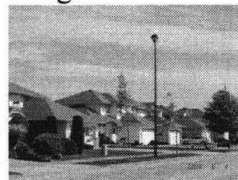


Image 4



Image 5



Image 6

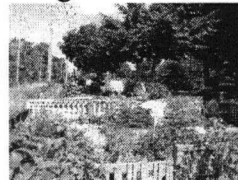


Image 7



Image 8

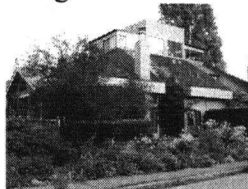


Image 9

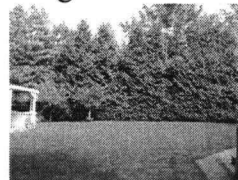


Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



(Typical questions asked when showing the pictures)

What are the differences do you see in these two pictures?

How would you describe the places shown in these pictures?

How would you describe your feelings and experience when you are in the kind of places shown in these pictures?

Which one do you like better?

Which one make you feel home?

Why do you like this one better?

Part 5 Trade-off game

Now I'd like you to play a game. I have a deck of cards here. Each card represents a place, an item or a condition you can pay to enjoy. For example, it might be a car you can purchase to drive. A price is given to each place, item or condition. Now I will give you \$400 budget. Here is your 'money'. Here are all the cards. Spread them before you in your preferred order. When you decide to 'purchase' a particular item, please put the required amount of 'money' on the corresponding card.

Part 6 Closing questions

What do you think of the environment in the Vancouver region?

How do you like living in Greater Vancouver?

Are you familiar with the term 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development'?